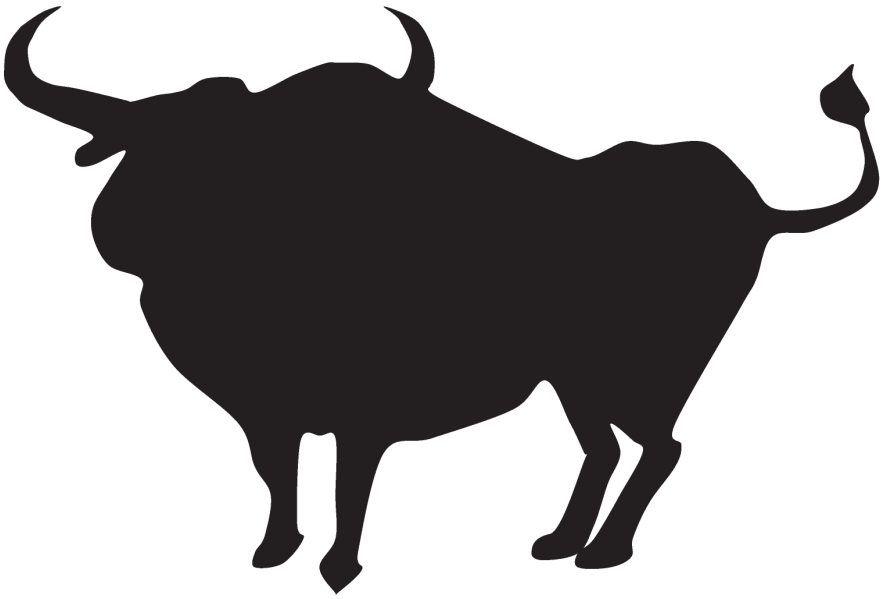
KS Bull 2019

Issue 1



Raffles Institution

The views expressed in each essay are purely for the academic purposes of crafting a viable argumentative response. They do not necessarily reflect the personal opinions of any student or staff member, nor do they necessarily represent the perspective(s) of Raffles Institution.

No portion of this collection may be reproduced or shared for any reason and by any means whatsoever.

Note: The comments that follow each student response include both markers' and editors' comments.

CONTENTS

2018 Year 6 GP Preliminary Examination

1 **Assess the view that international organisations are mostly ineffective.** **4**
Jeremy Xiao Zhenyang | 18A01B

2 **Consider the view that the world would be a better place if people put their faith in science rather than religion.** **8**
Lee Shu Hui | 18S03G

3 **'Women have never had it better." How true is this?** **11**
Ashley Tan Yuyi | 18A13A

4 **'Women have never had it better." How true is this?** **16**
Ella Tan Ray Ing | 18A01B

5 **Paper 2 – Passage** **20**

6 **Paper 2 – AQ Response** **22**
Reuben Suherman | 18S03L

7 **Paper 2 – AQ Response** **25**
Shannon Tan Tze Ern | 18S03L

2018 Year 5 KI Promotional Examination

Paper 1 – Section A

8 **"Science is just a fancy word for trial and error; he who places his trust in it is a fool." Discuss.** **27**
Joshua Yong Zhi Hao | 19S06D

9 **"The rise of quantitative methods has made the social sciences more rigorous." Discuss.** **30**
Xuan Zihan | 19A01A

2018 Year 5 GP Promotional Examination

10 **"Consumerism is a curse on the environment." Discuss.** **34**
Gu Jiahao | 19S03D

11 Do monarchies still serve any purpose in today's society? 38
Eugene Chua Weiheng | 19A01B

12 "New media has made us more superficial than before." Do you agree? 42
Joshua Ong Yong Kiat | 19S02A

13 "The surge of global tourism is starting to feel overwhelming." Is this reflective of tourism today? 46
Ian Tay Rongde | 19S06H

2019 Year 6 GP Common Test 1

14 Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern. 51
Goh Jing Han Cameron | 19S03D

15 "Science and business should never mix." How far do you agree? 55
Izavel Lee Shu Yih | 19S03D

16 "Talent matters most." How far is this true of your society? 59
Isaac Lai Yin Chung | 19S05B

2019 Year 6 KI Common Test 1

17 "We can't make moral judgements because we don't even know what is moral." Discuss. 63
Xuan Zi Han | 19A01A

Editorial Team 67

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 **Jeremy Xiao Zhenyang | 18A01B**

Assess the view that international organisations are mostly ineffective.

Brian Urquhart, a former UN official, once described the UN as a "quixotic, and fundamentally superfluous organisation." It is tempting to extend this damning criticism of the UN to the vast range of international organisations who have been mired in ineffectiveness, and almost banished to irrelevance. The fact is, the aims of these organisations are fundamentally aspirational, to make the world a better place whether through political, economic, social, or environmental means. These organisations have constantly been limited either by the reckless agency of nations, or their lack of resources and firepower. Yet despite this, organisations have occasionally defied the odds, and have not only impacted the world in tangible ways, but also intangible ones. Thus, while many organisations are fundamentally limited, many have still borne fruit and have impacted the world for the better. International organisations have hence had mixed effectiveness, but their ability to do so despite being "fundamentally superfluous" is perhaps what makes these organisations intrinsically successful and effective.

One of the overarching criticisms of international organisations stems from Urquhart's criticism: international organisations are intrinsically superfluous in a world run and governed by nations. Countries have the inherent ability to defy international organisations at will, often with little consequence. In the political sphere, the UN has been widely criticised for its ineffectiveness in intervening in inter-state conflicts and in restraining the aggressive impulses of states. Notably, the UN did little to intervene in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and more recently Russia's aggression towards Ukraine or China's advances into the South China Sea. Similarly, ASEAN has been criticised for its lack of intervention in Myanmar's Rohingya crisis, becoming mere bystanders to a humanitarian catastrophe. Such international organisations thus have no role to play and are highly ineffective when states choose to defy them, as countries' sovereignty allows them to act independently from international intervention. Similarly, in the economic sphere, despite efforts by

the WTO to promote an environment of economic cooperation and trade, countries have freely defied these directions and rendered such efforts futile, notably the US' recent withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the ongoing trade war between the US and China. In the social and environmental spheres, the US has dealt a significant blow to international organisations' effectiveness in combating climate change through withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. A common trend thus emerges: countries ultimately have the right to render international organisations ineffective and superfluous. These organisations have hence been limited in effectiveness because of the defiance and agency of individual nations.

Not only are the actions of organisations made ineffective due to the actions of individual nations, but these organisations are limited in their physical and even moral capacity to act in the first place. International organisations have struggled with garnering adequate resources or support, thus limiting their effectiveness in intervening in crises. The UN's feeble attempt to maintain peace in Rwanda was defeated by a global reluctance to contribute peacekeepers for example. Environmental organisations such as the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) rely also on voluntary contributions, which have limited their effectiveness in going beyond advocacy to intervene in environmental crises such as the depletion of habitats or the loss of marine biodiversity. Hence, organisations are made ineffective and feeble as they lack the physical resources and capability to act. Moreover, some organisations lack the moral legitimacy and capacity to be able to intervene in cases. For instance, environmental organisations have to rely on advocacy and indirect forms of engagement as they lack the legitimacy to act against nations who are perpetuating environmental destruction, for instance with respect to the scale of deforestation in Australia with 3 million hectares of forest estimated to vanish by 2030. Similarly, ASEAN has been toothless in acting against Indonesia's haze issue, rather limited to gentle suasions and often futile promises of collaboration. Hence, organisations are often ineffective as they lack physical resources and capability, as well as moral legitimacy and capacity, rendering them powerless in acting effectively.

Evidently, the view that international organisations are mostly ineffective has merit and validity, evidenced by their outright failures across time. Yet, one cannot deny that international organisations have managed to make some tangible impacts on the world. In the political sphere, the UN has had a significant

impact in so called "peace-building" and helping developing nations regain political stability, for instance in East Timor and Namibia. Similarly while the WTO's legacy has been marred by major incidents in recent years, it has been largely successful in promoting free trade and economic cooperation, evidenced through the multitude of Free Trade Agreements which countries like Singapore rely on. ASEAN may have been ineffective in its political aspirations, but has been more effective in promoting economic cooperation and partnerships. Humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam, Red Cross, or the UN's other organs have also managed to occasionally directly intervene and provide vital aid to those in need, for instance in their responses to natural disasters. Hence, we do need to recognise that international organisations have managed to make tangible impacts through their intervention.

Furthermore, while international organisations may not be empowered to create tangible impacts in all cases, they have been successful in creating intangible impacts. For instance, while the UN and ASEAN have been largely ineffective in direct intervention, they have had a significant role in promoting peaceful interactions between nations, in the case of the International Court of Justice's arbitration, or the "ASEAN Way" characterised by civility and cooperation. Similarly, while humanitarian and environmental organisations are limited in actual intervention, many such as Amnesty International and the WWF have been highly successful in advocating and raising global awareness for key issues, such as the refugee crisis or through WWF's Earth Day. These campaigns and outreach have undoubtedly had some impact on the global conversation and people's personal convictions. Thus, international organisations have found ways to be effective despite practical limitations, turning to advocacy and other intangible means of impacting the world.

In closing, a scholar once described French President De Gaulle's criticism of international organisations: "For him, in the last analysis the history of the world is the history of nations". In other words, our world is essentially governed, driven, and shaped by individual nations, thus rendering international organisations "superfluous". This becomes evident in how organisations are limited by nations' defiance, and their lack of resources from voluntary contributions. Yet one must acknowledge that despite these constraints, organisations across domains have found ways to have both tangible and intangible impacts on the world. Thus, have international organisations been

mostly ineffective? Certainly if we expect organisations to be able to act like nations, with the power and capability to intervene in any conflict or crisis, or if we expect organisations to be some sort of panacea, magically solving humanity's greatest issues. But if we remove such lofty and aspirational ideals, and recognise the practical limitations of organisations, one cannot deny that international organisations have been effective in some forms of action, as limited as they are. Therefore, international organisations have been effective, as despite their "fundamentally superfluous" nature in a world driven by "the history of nations", they have forged their own unique and essential role and relevance.

Marker's comments:

A thoroughly balanced analysis that gives a realistic view of the performance of IOs. The evaluation has also managed a wide range of IOs that indicates an ability to use the term "IO" in a coherent and relevant manner. I'd wished for a deeper analysis of case examples alongside the citing of evidence.

Unauthorised copying, sharing & distribution prohibited

2

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 **Lee Shu Hui | 18S03G**

Consider the argument that the world would be a better place if people put their faith in science rather than in religion.

The author Stephen Jay Gould postulated the view of 'Non-overlapping Magisteria', which propounds that science and religion constitute 2 entirely different realms of human experience. This seems to suggest that we should trust in science just as much as we trust in religion. Indeed, people could live healthier and longer lives if more trust was placed in science as opposed to religion, given that religious considerations can impede scientific developments that have the potential to catalyse the betterment of human lives. However, creating a world with less violence and more love is better achieved when people put their faith in religion rather than science, because values such as altruism and benevolence are universal across all faiths. Additionally, believing in religion equally as much as we believe in science ensures that scientific developments are used to ameliorate rather than perpetuate the ills of our world.

The world could be made a more desirable place to live in if greater trust was placed in science over religion, since religion can sometimes obstruct the work of scientists. For example, scientists have uncovered the mechanisms utilised by embryonic stem cells to undergo extensive proliferation and self-renewal. This in turn entails that embryonic stem cells can be used to replace virtually any tissue or organ in the human body, bringing humanity one step closer to a world without neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, and genetic diseases such as cystic fibrosis, all of which can be cured using stem cells. However, staunch religious groups have actively opposed embryonic stem cell research because they have averred that humans should not be creating, and then destroying, embryos for the sole purpose of extracting embryonic stem cells. In the light of such religious considerations, which view embryonic stem cell research to have violated the sanctity of human life, the European Court of Justice made a decision to legally recognise the human embryo as a sacred life form. This resulted in scientists within the European Union being unable to

commercialise their research on embryonic stem cells in markets, meaning that potential treatment methods that utilise embryonic stem cells cannot be developed. Undeniably, this makes our world a worse place since the suffering of people would be prolonged owing to the lack of effective treatment methods that utilise embryonic stem cells. Hence, believing too much in religion may cause us to overlook and thus lose out on the benefits that science can bring to humanity. Therefore, it would be more likely that a healthier world could be created if people trusted in science more than religion, since scientific advances would be less hindered by religious considerations.

However, given that desirable values such as love and kindness are universal across all religions, the world would be made a better place if people trusted more in religion than science since scientists themselves sometimes cannot agree on what constitutes scientific fact. As adduced by the Buddhist injunction 'radiate boundless love toward the entire world', and the Commandment of Jesus to 'love thy neighbour as thyself', as well as the Jewish teaching from the Book of Mishnah that 'the universe is built on kindness', moral values like altruism and benevolence are imparted to the followers of all religions. If people dutifully lived by such values, our world could potentially be transformed into one with less bloodshed and more kindness. In contrast, scientists are unable to come to a consensus on what actually comprises the truth. For instance, Darwin's theory of evolution and Gregor Mendel's pea plant experiments highlight 2 very different aspects of evolution. According to Darwin, individuals with favourable traits that made them better suited to the environment they lived in could survive the longest, whereas Mendel's experiments revealed the role of genetics in the expression of physical characteristics which would confer advantages to an organism. Initially, the 2 theories seemed completely antithetical to each other, meaning that the scientific community was unable to come to a consensus on how evolution really occurs. Since there sometimes lacks a universally-accepted basis for the explanation of scientific phenomena, this entails that scientists do not have a foundation upon which to develop their theories and inventions, thereby delaying scientific progress. Hence, since scientists are unable to come to a unanimous conclusion about certain processes that account for the natural world, trusting in religion as opposed to science could better propel us towards a better world because its ethical teachings are applicable to all religions, meaning that humanity as a whole can strive together for a kinder and more forgiving world.

Instead of putting more faith in science rather than religion or vice versa, the world is more likely to become a better place in the long term if people believed in science and religion equally. This is because religion's system of ethics can guide scientific developments towards the ultimate goal of benefiting mankind. For example, sarin gas was developed in Germany in 1938. It was meant to better our world by acting as a pesticide to increase crop yields, therefore increasing the supply of food available to people across the globe and hence, possibly eradicating world hunger. Believing too much in science without taking into consideration religious beliefs could ultimately culminate in scientific developments being used to the detriment of people instead. In 2018, sarin gas was released near a hospital in Douma, Syria, causing dozens of innocent patients to die after being exposed to the toxic nerve agent, as part of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's attempts to eliminate rebel groups. Without believing in religious teachings such as non-malice and loving-kindness, it is easy to see how being overly trusting in science and the developments it brings could be deleterious to people. Hence equal faith should be placed in both science and religion. Believing in the power of science to help us develop efficacious methods to help people live longer and healthier lives is just as important as trusting in the moral values taught by religion to ensure that scientific developments ultimately translate into boons for humanity.

In conclusion, the world could be made a better place temporarily if greater trust was placed in science rather than religion since religious considerations can pose an obstacle to the research of scientists, therefore delaying improvements in health brought about by science. As the aphorism by Albert Einstein goes, 'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.' Ultimately, the world is most likely to be alleviated of its problems if equal faith was placed in both science and religion insofar as religion helps to direct scientific advancements towards positively impacting our world.

Marker's comments:

Thoughtfully written with strong awareness of key issues that drive this long-running debate. Good attempts at establishing balance for such a difficult thesis/real world issue. Language is well-controlled in most parts with critical attention given to question keywords throughout. Exemplary case of thoughtful discipline at its best.

3

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 **Ashley Tan Yuyi | 18A13A**

4. "Women have never had it better." How true is this?

From the Time's Up movement, to the United Nation's championing of gender parity by 2030 under its Sustainable Development Goals, to Hillary Clinton being the first woman to run for President of the United States, the world has seen a paradigm shift in the treatment of women. In retrospect, it would appear that women have been emancipated from the shackles of patriarchy – while the first feminist wave in the 1920s focused primary on women's suffrage, the fourth feminist wave that the world is currently experiencing has expanded its reach to include bodily autonomy, body positivity and intersectional feminism. The mere fact that the focus of the feminist movement has been broadened appears to indicate that women's status in contemporary society has been elevated in an unprecedented manner. Because of the aforementioned trends and observations, some may argue that women have never had it better, for reasons including a conspicuous shift in mindsets in terms of women's roles in society, as well as the provision of more comprehensive legislative rights which have appeared to empower women. However, I would view this perspective to be rather quixotic, and instead argue that it is fallacious to claim that women have never had it better, due to reasons including the entrenchment of beliefs in society which has actually impeded and precluded further progress, and the reversal of women's liberties and rights.

Some would contend that women have never had it better because of the shift in societal mindsets vis-a-vis the definition of women's roles in society, which has engendered more favourable outcomes for women today. Compared to the past, women are arguably less restricted and are largely free to do as they please, without social or institutional barriers to obstruct them. The age-old shibboleth that "a woman's place is in the kitchen" no longer appears to hold true, especially with the evolution of societal attitudes, which has reasonably led to the conclusion that women have never had it better or easier, at least in that specific area of concern. Gone were the days when women were expected to confine

themselves to the domestic sphere – in today's world, women have been empowered to seek employment and join the workforce, which has seen a wave of female leaders in the corporate sphere. This is exemplified by the rising numbers of female employees, and even the numbers of female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of large corporations. Female leaders such as Sheryl Sandberg (Chief Operating Officer of Facebook), Sharon Price John (CEO of Build-A-Bear), and Indra Nooyi (outgoing CEO of Pepsico) have become household names, and seem to have achieved what was impossible five decades ago, thereby appearing to provide evidence that women have never had it better in terms of possessing the ability to assert themselves in society. Moreover, the number of women in politics has also been on the rise – according to UN Women statistics, the number of female parliamentarians has risen from 11.3% in 1995 to 22.8% in 2016. In Nordic countries such as Iceland and Sweden, female representation in parliament stands at 48% and 44% respectively, placing these countries well above the world average of 23%. Western nations such as Canada and France have also implemented 50-50 gender cabinets, thus providing women with a voice in politics that was previously muted or non-existent. With such marked progress in two key spheres of human existence – the workplace and politics – there is good reason for us to hold the optimistic notion that women have truly never had it better, since their status in society today stands in stark contrast with where they were in the past.

Naturally, with increased representation in the political sphere, some have proffered the idea that women have never had it better because of the increase in legislative rights that have been accorded to them, which has only served to empower them and change their lives for the better. Many societies around the globe which had previously only granted these rights to men, leaving women fettered to the legal structures of patriarchy and discrimination, are now shrugging off the shackles of gender discrimination on a constitutional basis. A case in point would be Saudi Arabia, which granted women the right to drive earlier in 2018, as well as the right to join the political arena by canvassing for a seat in the Shura Council. Women in Saudi Arabia have now been granted rights which assist in liberating them by enabling them to fulfil basic, run-of-the-mill desires and political aspirations which they had never even dared to conceive of in the past, thus appearing to prove that they have never had it better. Similarly, Jordan recently repealed a law which recused males who were accused of rape if they married the women whom they assaulted. For women in developing

countries like Jordan, this could be perceived as an extension of social rights through the construction of a society that provides women with more civil rights and liberties, rather than causing them to be constrained and subjugated by men. Hence, these instances of legislative change ostensibly prove that women have never had it better than in contemporary society, where they are seemingly treated as equals and provided with sufficient opportunities to achieve their ambitions.

However, this argument that women have never had it better because of increased legislative rights that have been extended to them is fundamentally flawed, in that these are basic human rights that ought to have been given to women right from the outset. In fact, even recognising these developments as a marker of significant progress is problematic, as it acknowledges the existence of the archaic mindset that led to their prolonged enforcement in the first place. Thus, while it may be true that the provision of these rights has elevated women's status and place in society compared to the past, the argument still fails to consider that entrenched social attitudes might preclude the enforcement of these rights due to society's firm and vehement resistance against these progressions.

The entrenchment of patriarchal beliefs, which is exemplified through religious practices that continue to subjugate women to the most abominable and inhumane conditions as well as the unconscious biases which pervade several societies, continues to play a ubiquitous role in preventing women from being truly empowered, since the way that they have been treated has not truly changed, or improved significantly compared to the past. Countries like Pakistan are still steeped in deep observation of religious practices, where acts such as honour killings continue to occur despite the government outlawing them. In theory, it might appear that women have never had it better, but the truth of the matter is that religious practices such as these which seek to shame women for bringing dishonour to their families for the simplest things such as "dressing inappropriately" continue to exist and relegate women to demeaning positions in society. Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation in countries such as Egypt, while outlawed in many countries, continue to occur because of the entrenchment of beliefs and the innate, inexplicable desire to maintain the status quo by ensuring that women continue conforming to traditional roles and expectations. These ingrained prejudices and beliefs are not limited to the

developing world; in fact, unconscious biases continue to pervade the developed world too, and thus preclude women from truly having it better. For instance, women who assert themselves in the workplace by raising their opinions during board meetings are viewed as "bossy" and "domineering", whilst men who do the same are viewed as "confident" and "capable". A 2016 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that these unconscious yet deeply ingrained biases against women ultimately cost them promotions and impede career advancements in spite of legislative policies which forbid gender-based discrimination. Thus, many individuals are unable to recognise their prejudices in the first place because the entrenchment of archaic values and beliefs has conditioned them to think and act in ways that are unfavourable to women. This makes it extremely difficult to make the unabridged claim that women have never had it better, when significant progress has failed to be made.

Furthermore, it would be an overstatement to claim that women have never had it better because of the regression of progress. In certain societies, women, in fact, used to have it better, and instead are now experiencing even greater marginalisation through restrictions introduced in contemporary times due to socio-political developments or increased expectations that have been thrust upon them as a result of the mistaken assumption that enough has been done in the name of gender equality. A case in point would be the increased constraints foisted on women in Afghanistan in recent times. Prior to the takeover by the Taliban, women used to be able to exercise greater liberties and rights. This was illustrated visually by photographs taken of everyday men and women in the 1960s by Dr Bill Podlich, an American university professor who worked in Afghanistan for two years under a stint with UNESCO. In the pictures, women were spotted donning short skirts and trendy blouses, and primary school-aged girls attended classes alongside their male classmates. When contrasted with the present, the landscape in Afghanistan appears foreign and almost unrecognisable. In today's world, women in Afghanistan are required to be clad in burqas at all times as the exposure of skin is deemed "sinful" and a "moral transgression", and girls are frequently deprived of an education. This indicates a regression of women's status in society, where political conflict and the manifestation of even more backward beliefs has resulted in a rollback of progress. Similarly, women in several modern societies are currently suffering from the "double burden" of having to simultaneously work to support their families and care for their children as their primary caregivers. This is the case in China, where the modern,

educated woman is made to juggle between career and family. One would expect that economic empowerment initiatives which have been advocated since Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution would liberate women and enable them to "have it better", yet this is simply not the case, as women are now not only expected to care for their children and elderly parents as they did in the past, but also earn an income to support the household financially, alongside their husbands. Here, we see the danger of partial measures: as society looks at gender equality as a job well done, not enough is being done to continue to push the needle for women further forward and this has led to a backsliding that only damages their cause further. Thus, the regression of women's rights and increased expectations on women in society illustrates how women currently suffer even more than they used to in the past, thereby refuting the claiming that women have never had it better today, since they used to have it better.

From there, we can clearly observer that to assert that women have never had it better would be exaggerated, considering the word "never" insinuates a sense of absolutism. It fails to consider the prodigious number of struggles that women continue to face, both because of the continuity of practices which stem from gender-based beliefs imbued in our societies, and the increased burden that women are made to shoulder. While it may be true that women have experienced empowerment in some ways, particularly in the developed world, the continued communal suffering of women outweighs the liberation that they have received. This ultimately proves that it is fallacious to claim that women have never had it better, especially since there is so much more to accomplish.

Marker's comments:

Very lengthy but fluent writing style made for a slightly pleasant read. Language is well handled with a variety of structure and vocabulary. Apt use of illustration with a balanced discussion. Fully relevant.

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 Ella Tan Ray Ing | 18A01B

4. "Women have never had it better." How true is this?

Throughout the entirety of human history, one major issue that has plagued virtually every community is the issue of gender inequality. Gender inequality refers to the prejudice and discrimination a group might face because of their gender, leading to an unfair treatment of or unequal opportunities offered to this group. The gender inequality scale has always been tipped in favour of men - there is a stereotype that pervades historical narrative, claiming that males are inherently more worthy than females. Whether evident in how men are assumed to be the breadwinners of the household or in how family names and noble bloodlines have mostly been passed down through men, the issue of gender inequality has existed for centuries, even up to this day and age. Comparing the treatment of women in the past to that in the modern day, there indeed has been much improvement in the issue of gender equality in society. Some might even say that women have never had it better, in terms of treatment as individuals and opportunities given to them. While I do agree that women have seen much progress from the past till now, I believe that women actually can have it "better" - in terms of the gender-based mistreatment that still exists, the institutionalised discrimination of women, as well as the inequality women face in the working world, there is still a long way to go in achieving a better and fair world for women.

Certainly, women of the world have seen vast improvements in their living conditions as well as in the advancement of their rights. In the past, women faced severe discrimination with regard to voting rights – for instance, only men were allowed to vote and make decisions regarding politics and state affairs. However, through the suffragette movement and ensuing generations of organised protests, in the modern age women have been accorded basic voting rights in all countries, with the most recent widespread change occurring in the late 1990s. This proves that women have taken significant steps forward particularly in the sphere of political participation and civil rights. Similarly, the right to education has been

given to women in majority of countries in the world. Previously, only boys were assured of the right to attend school regardless of social class and circumstance as they were deemed to be able to benefit more, since their education journey would enable them to seek jobs and climb the social ladder, unlike women who had no place in the workforce and no right to schooling. However this has changed drastically: just taking a look at Singapore, all girls are afforded the same opportunities in primary, secondary and tertiary education; in fact, more than 50% of students enrolling in tertiary institutions in 2017 were female. While there have never been legislative restrictions against women receiving an education in Singapore, what is notable is the sea change in attitude that has accompanied the passing of time, as even the most traditional families have realised the value of allowing their female members to attain social mobility through education. These are just a few of the many major developments in the pursuit of gender equality, and are compelling to support the claim that women indeed have the most advantageous position in the present.

Yet, simply comparing the present situation to past conditions is limited in evaluating if women ever had it better; while it is true that women today enjoy many rights that women of the past did not, the fact remains that gender inequality still does exist today and still has a great impact on a woman's life. In other words, women may have it better compared to the past, but they have not reached the point of having it the best - that is, to achieve true gender equality. In today's world, the context for women have changed, and this brings on a different set of challenges that they have to face.

First of all, the flip side to the past progress towards equal rights for women that we have outlined above is that it is hardly evenly distributed worldwide and not all women across the world are treated equally. In certain regions and countries, females are still thought of and subsequently treated as less worthy than men. This is a big problem especially in developing countries, where many women are still judged by and only valued for their virginity and eligibility to be married. This has resulted in the blatant mistreatment of and violence against women. For example, in Afghanistan, girls are put through "virginity exams", which are supposed to be medical exams that test a girl's chastity and hence ability to marry. These exams violate girls' bodies and put them through unnecessary pain and trauma, clearly violating their basic rights. Elsewhere, many girls in Africa between the ages of 5 to 14 face female genital mutilation, where they do not

even have agency over their physical body as these practices are "important" to prove their virginity, which is all they are worth. Severe and blatant abuse of women physically and sexually not only shows how many still lack the basic rights that should be accorded to them, but also that there still exists the thinking that women are less than men. As we realise the scale of this issue, even in the twenty first century, we must concede that until this base objectification of women is acknowledged and a collective effort is made to resolve it, we cannot satisfactorily claim that women have never had it better.

Furthermore, much of the discrimination faced by women is institutionalised, further entrenching gender inequality and preventing the path to equal rights. This is due to the still gaping lack of legislation by governments to protect women's rights, or the complicated and painful process that women have to take to gain that protection. For instance, Japan has a culture of silence on rape; its processes to protect Japanese women from sexual violence are also regressive and actually perpetuate the issue instead of solving it. Most cases regarding sexual assault are dismissed and not taken up in court; hence, most women are not offered the opportunity to fight for their legal rights. Additionally, when women want to report such cases to the police, the police require them to re-enact how they have been violated on a toy doll. This sort of procedure heaps excessive trauma on the victim and further deters them from reporting any acts of violence against them. This counteracts the good work that has been done in the area of basic human rights, as every step toward progress seems to require a mounting ordeal for the women who continue to suffer under archaic legislation. Hence, it is clear that even if certain legal measures have been put in place, the accessibility to and nature of these measures may not be guaranteed, and this perpetuates discrimination against women on an institutional level, and even in developed countries such as Japan.

Finally, women in this modern day still face discrimination and unfair treatment in the form of their opportunities being limited. This is most evident in the inequality women face in the workforce. A highly protested and widely known issue is the gender wage gap - on average, a woman will earn only 80% of what a man earns for doing the same job. This can go as low as 50% in certain occupations such as mechanical engineering and scientific research that are still thought of as that are thought to be traditionally male. Research shows that this is due to the inherent difference in value of a female's and a male's effort: the

work that is done by a woman is often regarded as less valuable or important than a man's, even if they accomplish the same task. Also, other stereotypes pervade the workforce that prevent women from gaining equal opportunity to men. For example, a woman who speaks up is often seen as assertive and pushy, while a man who voices his opinion is seen to have leadership skills. These skewed perceptions of women make it extremely difficult for a woman to get the same opportunities as men, let alone climb the career ladder. As such, even as women have achieved the basic right to work, many challenges lie in their way of achieving more in the workforce.

All in all, can it truly be said that women have never had it better? Ultimately, it depends on what we judge against that qualifies a woman's situation in society to be "better". Compared to the past, women indeed have it a lot better - today, many women have access to equal rights as men in various spheres (albeit to varying degrees), such as the right to basic human rights, to vote, to education, and to work. However, comparing to the rights men enjoy, as well as to the ideal of having equal rights in all aspects, there is still much improvement that has yet to be seen. Women still face discrimination and mistreatment in many forms, from the violation of basic human rights to the denial of various opportunities. This is further complicated by institutionalised discrimination or convoluted legal processes that, in failing to provide access to assistance and justice in upholding equal rights, perpetuate the problems faced by women today. The context of modern society has also changed the problems that women face today as compared to the past. Hence, while women have had it better in some aspects, there is still need for progress for women to have it best, to achieve a world that provides women the security of equal rights and the chance for equal opportunity.

Marker's comments:

Ella, you have been able to negotiate the minefield in the phrase "never had it better" quite intelligently and your evaluation of gender inequality presently was integrated intelligently into your manipulation of the phrase. Well done!

5

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ Passage

John Gardner writes about issues to do with leaders and leadership.

Why do we not have better leadership? The question is asked over and over. We complain, express our disappointment, often our outrage; but no answer emerges.

When we ask a question countless times and arrive at no answer, it is possible that we are asking the wrong question – or that we have misconceived the terms of the query. Alternatively, asking a question repeatedly may simply be convenient shorthand to express deep and complex anxieties. It would strike most of our contemporaries as embarrassingly old-fashioned to cry out, "What shall we do to be saved?"

And it would be time-consuming to express fully our concerns about the social disintegration and the moral disorientation of our time. So we cry out for leadership.

To some extent, the conventional views of leadership are shallow and set us up for endless disappointment. There is an element of wanting to be rescued, of wanting a parental figure who will set all things right. Such fantasies for grown-up children should not lead us to dismiss the need for leaders nor the insistent popular expression of that need. A great many people who are not given to juvenile fantasies want leaders – leaders who are exemplary, who inspire, who stand for something, who help us set and achieve goals.

Unfortunately, in popular thinking on the subject, the mature need and the childlike fantasies interweave. One of the tasks which we need to do is to untangle them and to sketch what is realistically possible. Leadership is such a gripping subject that, once it is given centre stage, it draws attention away from everything else. But attention to leadership alone is sterile. The larger topic of which leadership is but a subtopic is the accomplishment of group purpose, which is furthered not only by effective leaders but also by innovators, entrepreneurs, and thinkers; by the availability of resources; and by questions of morale and social cohesion.

This notion of – and a need for – a greater purpose is even more pressing today, when we are faced with immensely threatening problems: terrorism, AIDS, drugs, depletion of the ozone layer, the threat of nuclear conflict, toxic waste, the real possibility of economic disaster. Even ill-informed citizens could extend the list. Yet, on none of the items listed does our response acknowledge the manifest urgency of the problem. We give every appearance of sleepwalking through a dangerous passage of history: many see the life-threatening problems but do not react; others are anxious but immobilised.

Could it be that we suppress our awareness of problems – however ominous – because we have lost all conviction that we can do anything about them? Effective leaders heighten both motivation and confidence, but when these qualities have been gravely diminished, leaders have a hard time leading. Suppose that fragmentation and divisiveness have proceeded so far in a society that the people can no longer lend themselves to any worthy common purpose. Suppose that shared values have disintegrated to the point that a society believes in nothing strongly enough to work for it as a group. What then? Shared values are the bedrock on which leaders build the edifice of group achievement: leadership cannot be effective without attention to the decay and possible regeneration of the values framework. And thus, that is what leaders must do: adapt

and renew themselves continuously, to stay relevant to and ahead of the human institutions they lead.

The development of more and better leaders is another important objective. The first question is who should think about it. It is not just people already in power. It is all of us: neighbourhood organisations that want to train their future leaders, young people who dream of leadership, and all kinds of people who just want to comprehend the world around them.

Indeed, as citizens, we must understand that the leaders we choose and how they perform are very much in our hands. We must be able to see through the leaders who are exploiting us, playing on our hatred and prejudice, taking us down dangerous paths, or disregarding lawful processes. If we fail to do so, then we shall get and deserve the worst.

We must also see that leadership need not be confined to a rarefied few. Rather, leadership is dispersed throughout all segments of the society: government, business, organised labour, the professions, the minority communities, the universities, social agencies, and so on. Leadership is also dispersed down through the many levels of social functioning, from the loftiest levels of our national life down to the school principal, the local union leader, the shop supervisor. Indeed, there is no possibility that centralised authority can call all the shots, whether the system is a corporation or a nation. Individuals in all segments and at all levels must be prepared to exercise leader-like initiative and responsibility, using their local knowledge to solve problems at their level. Vitality at middle and lower levels of leadership can produce greater vitality in the higher levels of leadership.

Fortunately, the development of leaders is possible on a scale far beyond anything we have ever attempted. As one surveys the subject of leadership, there are depressing aspects but leadership development is not one of them. Although our record to date is unimpressive, the prospects for improvement are excellent. Many dismiss the subject with the confident assertion that “leaders are born not made”. Nonsense! Most of what leaders have that enables them to lead is learnt. Leadership is not a mysterious activity. It is possible to describe the tasks that leaders perform. And the capacity to perform those tasks is widely distributed in the population. Today, unfortunately, specialisation and patterns of professional functioning draw most of our young potential leaders into prestigious and lucrative non-leadership roles.

We have barely scratched the surface in our efforts toward leadership development. In the mid-twenty-first century, people will look back on our present practices as primitive. Most men and women go through their lives using no more than a fraction – usually a rather small fraction – of the potentialities within them. The reservoir of unused human talent and energy is vast, and learning to tap that reservoir more effectively is one of the exciting tasks ahead for humankind.

Among the untapped capabilities are leadership gifts. For every effectively functioning leader in our society, I would guess that there are five or ten others with the same potential for leadership who have never led or perhaps even considered leading. Why? Perhaps they were drawn off into the byways of specialisation... or have never sensed the potentialities within them... or have never understood how much the society needs what they have to give.

We can do better. Much, much better.

6

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ Response **Reuben Suherman | 18S03L**

John Gardner makes some observations about leaders and leadership in society. How far do you agree with his views, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

In lines 39-40, John Gardner argues that "shared values are the bedrock on which leaders build the edifice of group achievement". In lines 42-43, he further argues that leaders must "adapt and renew themselves continuously, to stay relevant to and ahead of the human institutions they lead." I feel that Gardner's views apply to our Singaporean context to a large extent. Common values build up an understanding between the government and its people. So long as the government fights for those common values, the people will reciprocate and cooperate with the government, often to successful results. This was apparent in newly independent Singapore. Then, Singapore was a country mired in poverty. Thus, the common agreement was that everyone would sacrifice and work hard in order to attain economic prosperity. The government and the people were on the same page. This allowed Singapore's rapid industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s to be a huge success and Singapore went "from third world to first", which has become a proud quote used by many a Singaporean.

However, Gardner also argues that "leadership cannot be effective without attention to the decay and possible regeneration of the values framework (lines 40-41)". This becomes plain to see in modern day Singapore. The 21st century brought about different ideals and demands for Singapore which our leadership has been slow to react to[1]. Since we have achieved a comfortable standard of living, Singaporeans are starting to prioritise other values such as building a common identity and having more freedom. This is apparent in Singaporeans' views on immigrants. Singaporeans are deeply fearful that immigrants will alter our social fabric and are also resentful that they are outsiders who may dilute Singaporean culture. Singaporeans' rejection of immigrants shows that it now values a strong Singaporean identity over the economic benefits that migrants may bring. The ruling People's Action Party was unfortunately slow to appreciate

[1] Link to the author's quote is not clear here.

this shift in values, which led to its worst electoral showing in the 2011 General Election and much discord over this thorny topic. Thus, it is clear that having common values is important in building up group achievements in Singapore and that our leaders have to be cognisant of any changes in our society's values[2].

In addition, Gardner also argues that "individuals in all segments and at all levels must be prepared to exercise leader-like initiative (lines 61-62)". I feel that this argument is applicable to Singaporean society to a small extent. There have been commendable efforts by civil society to support the government in its efforts. For example, when the government proposed a plan to redevelop the Chek Jawa area, civil society came together to convince the government that the area was worth protecting. Volunteers, including experts in marine biology and biodiversity in Singapore, went to Chek Jawa on their own accord to document the biodiversity there so as to convince the government and the public of Chek Jawa's value. After much public lobbying, the government acknowledged that Chek Jawa was worth protecting and decided not to redevelop it. This was made possible by individuals "using their local knowledge to solve problems at their level" as they can provide expert opinions to the government to help them make better decisions. However, this only represents a minority of Singaporeans and does not reflect the general lack of civic engagement here. While other countries boast many non-governmental organisations that lobby the government for change, Singaporeans have generally been content with letting our government operate on its own, especially given that our government is seen as a model of excellence and efficiency. Though the Chek Jawa case shows that "leadership need not be confined to a rarefied few", Singaporeans see it as just that. The extremely high wages for members of parliaments (MPs) and ministers are testament to that as high wages are needed to encourage people to be MPs instead of working in the private sector. Having said that, there is a rising trend in civic participation. Singaporeans now are more willing to question the government as we are transitioning away from our traditional values. Peaceful demonstrations such as the Pink Dot Rally have gained popularity over the years, with activists and organizers demonstrating leader-like initiative and responsibility.

[2] While there is some link to regeneration of values in this paragraph, the link to decay of values is lacking.

Marker's comments:

Second point clearly has more convincing arguments and better illustration. Some personal insights which are well supported. Cogency is achieved better in 2nd than 1st point.

7

2018 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ Response Shannon Tan Tze Ern | 18S03L

John Gardner makes some observations about leaders and leadership in society. How far do you agree with his views, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

Gardner claims that "shared values are the bedrock on which leaders build the edifice of group achievement: leadership cannot be effective without attention to the decay and possible regeneration of the values framework." (Para 6, Line 39-41) This is true of my society to a large extent. Gardner is claiming that for leaders to effectively motivate a group to achieve a common purpose, leaders must first be able to unite the group based on shared values[3]. Hence, due to the importance of shared values contribute towards group unity, leaders cannot overlook any possible destruction of these shared values, and must try to re-establish a set of shared values to unite this group again. This is especially true of Singapore, where students are taught from a young age a set of shared values as part of National Education. The National Pledge also encompasses a set of shared values and common beliefs, and the recitation of the pledge every morning for school-going children serves as a platform to instill these beliefs and values in citizens. Such measures are implemented as the government recognizes the importance of having a common set of beliefs, such as meritocracy and equality, to unite Singaporeans to achieve a common vision, and progress for the nation. However, in recent years, there has been a decrease in confidence towards certain values, such as meritocracy, due to the increasing income divide. Hence, the government has to look for ways to re-instill this confidence and has done so by implementing measures such as more government pre-schools to level the playing field[4]. Hence, this is true of my society to a large extent.

[3] Marker's comments: Correct interpretation.

[4] Marker's comments: Why build preschools? How does this help achieve meritocracy? Ideas are well understood but evaluation needs more development

Gardner also claims that "today… specialization and patterns of professional functioning draw most of our young potential leaders into prestigious and lucrative non-leadership roles." This is largely untrue of Singapore. Gardner is claiming that today's economic structure tends to draw young people away from organizations due to pursuit of better economic gains, and this reduces their chances of having leadership gains. On the surface, while this may seem so with the rise of the gig economy and entrepreneurship, this is not actually true. Although young Singaporeans are increasingly self-employed or starting their own start-ups such as HonestBee, this does not necessarily mean they are no longer fulfilling leadership roles. Instead, by being their own bosses, perhaps more of them are becoming leaders, whether it be leading a small group of people in their start-ups ,or managing the different people they work with as a self-employed worker. While they may no longer fulfill the traditional roles within an organization, this does not lessen their ability to effect change within society. For example, start-ups such as HonestBee have capitalised on technology to make grocery shopping more convenient. Hence this is largely untrue of Singapore.

In conclusion, Gardner makes largely accurate claims about leadership that is relevant to Singapore's society.

Marker's comments:

Overall, the second paragraph demonstrates clear understanding of the issue and makes convincing evaluation with good personal insights and apt illustration. Coherence achieved with very clear shape and paragraph organization, although cogency is much better in the second paragraph. Balanced treatment, with systematic reference to question and context of Singapore.

8

2018 | Y5 | KI Promo | Paper 1 **Joshua Yong Zhi Hao | 19S06D**

'Science is just a fancy word for trial and error; he who places his trust in it is a fool.' Discuss.

Since human prehistory, most people believed that the universe had a beginning. Then came the scientific discovery of the conservation of mass and energy in the scientific revolution, and science boldly proclaimed that an outdated ancient myth. That is, until Edwin Hubble discovered the expansion of the universe, and the scientific consensus embarrassingly returned to the idea of a cosmic beginning. Could it be that the science responsible for all this is just a fancy word for trial and error, and that he who places his trust in it is a fool? I believe otherwise, for all of its reliance on falsification by experiment and its struggle to distinguish one theory's supremacy over another on any other grounds, science remains a useful guide to the world.

The reliance of science on trial and error is all but written int the scientific method itself. A hypothesis must make predictions about how the external, physical world behaves, and will not be accepted as theory until experiments are made, the world's actual behaviour is observed, and the observations are found to agree with the predictions. Moreover, the predictions must be of such a nature that certain observations would conflict with them, falsifying the hypothesis. A negative example is superstring "theory", which for the elegance of its mathematical foundations will not be accepted as a scientific theory until the superstrings or their effects (which would not occur in their absence) can be observed.

The many revolutions in science's history seem to provide clear evidence that the above-described scientific method is how science really is and has been practiced. Scientific theories have been revised time and again in the light of observations which agreed with the new theory's predictions better than the old ones. For example, Newtonian physics replaced Aristotelian physics in part because Galileo dropped two objects of equal mass from the leaning tower of

Pisa and they took the same duration to fall to the ground, an observation consistent with Newtonian proportionality of gravitational force to mass but inconsistent with Aristotelian proportionality of mass to speed of falling. These scientific revolutions show that unlike the proofs of math, the theories which constitute scientific knowledge remain open to testing and subsequent falsification, or in other words, trial and error.

While the above highlights the role of trial and error in science, however, it fails to show that science is nothing more than trial and error. Indeed, if that were the case, why have numerous hypotheses been denied even consideration by most of the scientific community, despite being as testable and falsifiable as the established scientific theories they dispute? For instance, where evolution accounts for sediment layers as the product of prolonged deposition, creationism accounts for them as evidence of a global flood; where evolution accounts for differing carbon-14 levels in fossils as proof of their very varied age, creationism argues that the Earth's magnetic field used to be stronger and thus deflect more of the radiation responsible for carbon-14, thus exaggerating the age range determined by carbon dating. It seems that in this and other cases of underdetermination, agreement with the other theories constituting the scientific paradigm of the day as well as an individual's religious or other non-scientific beliefs decided between hypotheses, but not trial and error. It would thus seem unreasonable to say science is just trial and error.

Moreover, even if science were just a form of trial and error, its effectiveness at describing and predicting the physical world gives us great pragmatic justification for it as a form of knowledge. Newtonian physics may have turned out to be an "error" upon the birth of relativity, but it still tells us how projectiles will move with sufficient detail to send man to the moon and back. Thus the layman's decision to trust in a potential scientific "error" is not foolish, but very useful for his daily life because he can know that the "error" is extremely close to the truth in terms of the predictions it makes. Life would be worse if we did away with clocks because they cannot tell time at the same rate due to the Earth's rotation and relativistic effects.

In conclusion, trial and error's role in science is not total, and it helps science correspond to reality and be useful to us far more than its errors may hinder us.

short conclusion

Marker's comments:

Good piece here, Joshua!

Succinct and concise piece that deals with the heart of the matter – the role and implications of trial and error in the scientific method. Good range of examples as well, with supporting explanation that is well linked to the argument. More can be done to better detail the issue of trust and how the lack of certainty in science could potentially undermine trust in it. Good job overall!

9

2018 | Y5 | KI Promo | Paper 1 **Xuan Zihan | 19A01A**

"The rise of quantitative methods has made the social sciences more rigorous." Discuss.

The development in social science, an enterprise seeking to understand and potentially improve human behaviour, has begun with the positivist approach and its focus on quantitative research to add precision to data and observations. Ever since, more approaches such as interpretivist and critical social science have emerged, but in recent decades there has been an increased desire for social science to emulate the rigour, certainty, and objectivity of the natural sciences, so as to become a more credible and trustworthy discipline. However, if rigour is dependent on objectivity, certainty, and comprehensiveness, then even if the rise in quantitative methods has made social sciences more precise, it may not increase the comprehensiveness of social scientific knowledge as certain human behaviour is too complex for quantitative assessment. Furthermore, depending on the user of quantitative methods, social science may not even be more precise and may not even have to strive for that rigour. Therefore, this essay disagrees with the statement that the rise of quantitative methods has made the social sciences more rigorous.

First, positivists who largely rely on quantitative research may argue that the rise of quantitative methods has made the social sciences more precise, and by extension objective and rigorous. This is because when utilised by positivist social scientists who are value-free, quantitative methods clearly highlight certain behavioural tendencies of human beings. For example, extensive studies by Alfred Marshal of the price at which consumers are willing to purchase a certain product underpin the foundations of classical economics and the laws of supply and demand. Therefore, quantitative methods inject greater certainty into social science as they provide a general and universal prediction of the majority or average person's behaviour under certain circumstances. Furthermore, this certainty can be improved by utilising the various tools that come with quantitative methods, such as the analysis of statistical significance with ANOVA

tests and the control of sample size to reduce margin of error. Therefore, it can be argued that quantitative methods add greater certainty and significance to social science research, and hence make it more rigorous.

However, it must be noted that quantitative methods are not used in isolation, and hence human factors may taint the objectivity and rigour social scientists hope to achieve. Indeed, the administration of many quantitative surveys inherently come with human biases that hinder objectivity. For instance, while some psychological surveys use quantitative numerical measurements to judge living conditions, they inevitably run into the problem of self-reporting and subject biases. Most significantly, test subjects may have rather distorted understandings of the relative value that each number on the scale occupies, hence leading to varying interpretations that ultimately affect objectivity. Although it is theoretically possible for such surveys to only contain questions that can generate monolithic interpretations, this is largely an ideal, and cannot be achieved without the questions becoming too trivial or meaningless for a comprehensive study of human behaviour.

This then raises the issue of comprehensiveness, which quantitative methods may not achieve since human behaviour is simply too complex to be solely treated and analysed as statistics. While statistics may add precision to social scientific research, it cannot capture even basic human emotions and motivations, which are an integral part of social science. For instance, Teo You Yenn's ethnographical book "This is What Inequality Looks Like" is based on the researcher's use of Clifford Geertz's "thick description" to interact with the low-income, understand their actions in the broader context of underlying social structures, and hence explain their behaviour. In fact, she explicitly recognises that while it is possible and necessary to depict poverty as a number or rate (such as the use of Gini coefficients), the understanding cannot be dependent on quantitative methods alone, as a lived experience is necessary to fully capture their agency (or lack thereof). Therefore, quantitative methods do not necessarily make the social sciences more rigorous in terms of scope, since it cannot represent human behaviour as a complex interplay of qualitative data and social contexts, which is what determines it to a great extent, hence the prevalence of qualitative methods like focus group discussions to attach meaning and significance to what is otherwise "neutral" data.

Moreover, whether quantitative methods inject greater rigour to social sciences also depends on the researcher's position vis-à-vis his or her research and test subjects. First of all, the innate nature of social scientific fields is such that they are prone to theory-ladenness. Therefore, even if the research seeks to attain objective knowledge through quantitative methods, he is susceptible to his pre-existing beliefs and theoretical conceptions, which may colour the phrasing of the question and result in data which seems objective but has already been tainted by the researcher's inadvertent transmission of his own assumptions to the questions asked. Therefore, quantitative methods alone cannot supply objectivity as the usage of such methods is largely within the broader context of a researcher's pre-existing beliefs that may distort the ability of the test subject to interpret and answer the question. Furthermore, the researcher may himself or herself occupy a certain value position, which drives his or her agenda and taints the objectivity of the data, since questions are in this case deliberately framed and crafted to attain a particular outcome. For instance, questions asked by political groups in various parts of the world are deliberately tailored based on the researcher's political affiliations. Pro-choice groups are more likely to ask whether the respondent believes in gender equality and female agency to support their stance on allowing abortion, while pro-life groups tend to ask whether the respondent believes in the indiscriminate killing of an individual to justify their stance against abortion. In both cases, while quantitative methods are used to judge the percentage of population in favour or against abortion, the very agenda of the critical social scientists, whose objective is to smash myths and help people change the world, results in flawed and un-representative data that cannot be deemed rigorous or objective social science.

Hitherto, this essay has discussed whether quantitative methods have made the social sciences more rigorous, and concluded that it is only under rather limited circumstances that the statement holds. Finally, it will consider the implication of the statement, being that prior to the rise of quantitative methods, social science is less rigorous. In response to this claim, interpretivist social scientists will object to the underlying perception that their approach of describing the meaning that social beings attach to the world is somehow not fully and completely rigorous. In fact, this can be challenged given the different objectives of social scientists in the positivist and interpretivist arena. If the researcher aims to understand how different social beings behave, using tools such as Weber's ideal types as constructed categories to judge similarities and deviances in

behaviour is already the most rigorous and ideal way to understand human behaviour. Furthermore, it is only through qualitative research that we can come to appreciate the language that we use as the medium to communicate, hence the use of quantitative methods is simply irrelevant for the researcher who aims to uncover what exactly a person means when certain words are used, a critical part of social scientific fields like linguistics and psychology. Therefore, to interpretivist social scientists, the implication of the statement that the social sciences will be less rigorous without quantitative methods cannot stand, as they are mainly interested in describing meaning. Therefore, not only do quantitative methods not make social sciences more rigorous due to the complexity of human behaviour, they are in fact not significant with regard to the rigour of social sciences if we consider the interpretivist point of view.

Ultimately, this essay concludes that quantitative methods are capable of increasing precision under a rather strict set of conditions, when the positivist researcher is value-free, when the test subjects objectively respond to the research method, and when the aim is to uncover certain generalisations that can probably hold true in reality. However, if we consider (as social scientists do) consider rigour to be more than just precision but also scope, then quantitative methods may not inject greater rigour. Furthermore, when social scientists have varying objectives such as to describe meaning and help people change the world, the very rigour or precision that quantitative methods bring conflicts with their goals and agenda. Therefore, it can be concluded that the rise of quantitative methods largely does not make the social sciences more rigorous, and even if it does, this may not be for the better.

Marker's comments:

Excellent piece here, Zihan! Well-structured essay that systematically dealt with the key issues raised in the question, with sufficient explanation and examples of how quantitative methods affect rigour in social science. Explanations of what rigour means to the different approaches in social science were adequate. Great job overall!

10

2018 | Y6 | GP Promo | Paper 1 **Gu Jiahao | 19S03D**

'Consumerism is a curse on the environment.' Discuss.

From the powerful tech executives in Silicon Valley to the *nouveau riche* in China's coastal megacities, the world has never been more affluent and the population endowed with more of the comforts and luxuries of modern life. With this increasing wealth came a surging demand for consumer products, which have silently taken their toll on the environment. This trend of consumerism, broadly encompassing our excessive demand for material goods and overconsumption, has been likened to a curse on the environment due to the extent of harm caused and also its long-lasting effects, which are difficult to escape from. I largely agree with the comparison of consumerism to a curse on the environment since, with the exception of consumerist trends that have brought about positive change, consumerism results in both direct and indirect harm to the environment.

To the credit of detractors, it can be conceded that not all consumerism is detrimental to the environment. Some consumerist trends such as the craze for organic products have actually spurred change for the better in adopting production methods that are beneficial for the environment. For example, the belief that organic fruits and vegetables are healthier has caused an increase in the number of firms pledging to use synthetic fertilizer-free, pesticide-free growing methods. This has resulted in a significant decrease in the amount of pollution in rivers due to agricultural runoff that had previously affected local marine ecosystems negatively in the United States, demonstrating that consumerism need not cause repercussions for the environment. Instead, it can be instrumental in discouraging environmentally damaging methods of mass production by providing monetary incentive for producers to choose a more eco-friendly way to produce their products. As such, the assessment of consumerism being a "curse" on the environment may be unnecessarily harsh and one that does not take into account the positive effects, even if such positive effects are relatively rare.

However, consumerism drains the Earth's resources, thus causing direct harm to the environment. Consumerism, being characterized as excessive demand for goods, naturally requires more resources to be devoted to producing consumer goods at a rate where we are burning through finite resources and leaving our renewable resources with no time to regenerate. For example, the popularity of convenient foods in the form of canned tuna and other fish-related products has led to the problem of overfishing. This is especially apparent in the fishing areas of the North Pacific Ocean, where, according to the Pacific Fisheries Commission, tuna populations have fallen to just 2.6% of their mid-20th century levels. Even more concerning is the fact that fishermen are using nets with smaller holes in an attempt to catch younger fish, leading to a population crisis that has landed several species of tuna on the endangered species list. As an integral part of ocean ecosystems, systemic overfishing has threatened the food sources of other species, leading to extinctions in some cases. Thus, direct harm is done to the environment as a result of our consumerist habits. Furthermore, this trend has no signs of stopping due to the nature of consumerism in that it is, in part, driven by companies who engineer their products to fail after a specific period of time in a tactic known as planned obsolescence. This is especially so in technology companies, with Apple CEO Tim Cook having admitted to using this strategy. Given the non-recyclable nature of the main components of such devices, for example circuit boards, this strategy causes an excessive demand for raw materials such as gold and rare earth metals. To meet demands, mining companies are often forced to conduct rapid, large-scale excavations in remote locations which results in pollution due to poorly managed runoff from mines as seen in China, and destruction of local ecosystems as seen near gold mines in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both of these effects contribute to damaging effects of consumerism.

Secondly, consumerism generates excessive waste, which is often non-biodegradable. This leaves the waste we generate to slowly decompose over millions of years, directly harming the environment in the process. One of the hallmarks of consumerism is the number of plastic bags we use, since shops often give them out free of charge. This has resulted in astronomical amounts of waste generated. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States estimates that 31 million tons of plastic waste, mainly plastic bags, are generated each year, yet only 2.55 million tons are recyclable. This means that almost 30 million tons of waste are left in landfills to remain for millions of years.

Irresponsible disposal often causes the plastic bags to end up in oceans, where sea creatures can accidentally ingest them and suffer from internal injuries and death, demonstrating the risk that excessive waste poses to ecosystems. In countries where waste is incinerated, noxious fumes are often released, which pollutes the atmosphere. This clearly demonstrates the toxic and damaging effects of our consumerist tendencies on the environment die to the amount of waste generated as a by-product.

Lastly, consumerism often has invisible side effects that contribute to the long-lasting harm that it causes to the environment, thus being described as a "curse". This mainly originates from two adverse side effects of consumerism, namely pollution and destruction of physical environments. Firstly, various forms of pollution are generated as a by-product of manufacturing processes, such as runoff from factories or air pollution from exhaust gases, which remain in the environment for long periods of time. For example, manufacturing booms in China have caused air pollution indices to rise 130% from 2000 to 2010, bringing with it a host of negative effects such as increased mortality rates of 0.4%. Rivers in Bangladesh also frequently contain more than 5 times the safe amount of toxic dyes due to local textile factories discharging waste water into the rivers. These two examples show that the process of mass producing goods driven by consumerism leads to a myriad of other environmental problems that are long-lasting and damaging. Additionally, consumerism has necessitated the destruction of our physical environment to meet demand for resources, feeding ever-growing production lines. An example of this would be the deforestation in Brazil to clear land for cattle ranching and rubber plantations, which has led to the destruction of over 80% of the Amazon rainforest, causing massive loss of biodiversity. Demand for crude oil has also led to increased use of hydraulic fracturing techniques in Oklahoma, where the frequency of earthquakes has increased from just one per year in the early 2000s to more than 900 in 2015 alone. These side effects are irreversible in terms of damage done and can trigger more serious impacts such as a runaway global warming effect due to air pollution and deforestation. Hence, it is clear that consumerism spurs production, which inevitably results in harm to the environment to an extent that is severe, lasting and irreversible, thus qualifying as a curse on the environment.

In conclusion, I mostly agree with the claim that consumerism is a curse on the environment due to its direct effects, namely the draining of resources from the

environment and the excessive waste generated, as well as its indirect effects which can be more severe and significant. Despite this, trends in consumerism such as demand for organic products may benefit the environment, leaving us to question if the judgement of consumerism as a "curse" on the environment is entirely appropriate. In order to combat the impact of consumerism on the environment, we can cut down on excessive demand for desired but unnecessary products such as extra pairs of shoes or additional electronic gadgets. Environmentally-friendly practices such as bringing a cloth bag instead of using plastic bags can help address the issue of waste generation as well. Together, we can lift the curse of consumerism on the environment without abandoning it altogether.

Marker's comments:

Engaging and nuanced! Well done!!

11

2018 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 1 **Eugene Chua Weiheng | 19A01B**

Do monarchies still serve any purpose in today's society?

Monarchies come in many shapes and sizes. Some, like the House of Saud, are vast family trees that control much of the wealth of a country. Others, like Japan's, serve more as a figurehead in a state that follows a constitutional monarchy. Yet others, like the Thai monarchy, wield both clout and influence despite legal limits on their power. Detractors opposing the claim that monarchies serve some purpose in our society today cite the freedom we enjoy and the rapid growth of the modern era as reasons for monarchies being on their death knell; to them, monarchies represent but a time of repression and serve but a ceremonial role. I disagree. The king is not dead; monarchies can be powerful national symbols and play a unifying role that is in fact even more necessary today.

Detractors often argue that monarchies are a vestige from a time of serfdom and repression, making them incompatible with the freedom that we enjoy today. As figureheads and leaders of nations, these detractors feel that monarchies are unable to represent the new era of freedom and democracy we live in. After all, how can there be power to the people when there still exists a figure who rules absolutely? Mass movements and revolutions have led to the overthrowing or the abdication of many monarchs in the past, from Russia's Tsar Nicholas II to Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II. These monarchs ruled absolutely for the most part; with the exception of some token concessions made to appease the people in the case of the Tsar, most monarchs of the past ruled with an iron fist. This trend has appeared to continue even today, where monarchs - especially in the Middle East - continue to run their countries with little heed to what their populace desires. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an oft-cited example of such absolutism, as the House of Saud occupies Riyadh and controls most of the political mechanisms within the oil-rich nation. Human rights abuses, strict press censorship and repressive laws against women and homosexuals appear to evince this repression, which is seen as incompatible with the freedom we extol today. Since such leaders do not embody and encourage freedom, they may be seen to not serve any purpose today.

Furthermore, the ceremonial role played by constitutional monarchs can be seen as yet another reason for the lack of purpose they have in today's society. In a world as uncertain as ours, effective leadership is what all nations need. However, since monarchs rarely play a role beyond that of a figurehead, they can be viewed to be less relevant in our society, thus serving little purpose. While Japan's Emperor may have been more influential in the past in guiding the policy of an Imperial power or a burgeoning Asian nation, today he is but a symbol that holds little real power in comparison to his Prime Minister Abe. This apparent purposelessness has led to some Japanese citizens calling for the abolition of the monarchy; perhaps, the Chrysanthemum Emperor serves little purpose in a fast-paced and hectic Japanese society. Moving from Orient to Occident, even the role of the Queen of England has been called into question by some members of the British public. They cite the burden on the taxpayer's wallet of funding royal ceremonies and paying rent for royal lands as reasons why the monarchy can even be detrimental to a country in today's society. Since the monarch has been relegated to the margins and left playing but the role of a figurehead, their role can be construed to serve little to no purpose today. Such ceremony appears unnecessary when leaders of governments who wield true power are dealing with real and tangible issues.

However, when considering the purpose of monarchies today, we must be careful to not generalise about and not oversimplify the role of the monarch. The British Queen, for one, also brings in tourism dollars for her country from tourists visiting events such as the Diamond Jubilee or for attractions such as the Tower of London and Buckingham Palace. The Japanese Emperor is also a spiritual and religious guide for many citizens, while the Saudi King still sets the direction for the country to advance toward. In a world that is as divided and polarised as ours, and one that is moving away from tradition and towards modernity, monarchs play the role of a symbol not to the detriment of a country, but to its benefit. Monarchies also embody national ideologies and unify people from different parts of a country or even across national borders; they thus very much serve a purpose within today's society.

Monarchies can enshrine what a nation values and allow the people to follow a national ideology that can advance a country's interests rather than hampering them. They embody the values that governments want their people to strive toward, and can help facilitate the creation of a more harmonious society. The Thai government is in a constant state of flux with coups and counter-coups abounding. A figure who had stayed the face of Thailand throughout this chaos was King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Whether his Prime Minister was Sarit or Thaksin, the Thai King continually embodied the third tenet of Thailand's national ideology, the "kasat", or king, of "chat, satsana, kasat". His efforts at helping the

poor and at mediating differences represents what the Thai government wanted its citizens to strive towards. The King's role in facilitating the creation of such a harmonious and compassionate Thailand must not be understated. Brunei's Sultan is expected to be a staunch and pious Muslim, symbolic of the direction that the Bandar Seri Begawan government would like its citizens to follow. Brunei had hopes of being the first country to have all its citizens practise Islam, and the role of the Sultan who represent piety and faith somewhat aided progress towards this goal. Monarchies can very often be aligned with what nations and what people value, making them not obsolete in today's world. As global cultural powerhouses export their own ideologies to other countries, it remains vital that nations safeguard their own to provide citizens with a goal to work towards. A monarchy greatly facilitates this, and therefore still serves a vital purpose.

Additionally, monarchies can be agents within society that people unite behind, as the tradition and culture they represent help bring people from different backgrounds together. When society is fractured and divisions within countries abound, the banner of the monarch can rally citizens from all walks of life. The Malaysian Yang di-Pertuan Agong, for example, is elected by Sultans from different Malaysian states. Traditional Malay and Islamic stronghold states like Kelantan and more commercial and diverse states like Johor can both be represented as the kingship rotates, helping unite Malaysians even as democracy divides. The House of Saud has family members who believe in different ideologies and who have different inclinations on the political spectrum. While some like the Crown Prince advocate reform, others remain staunchly and stridently conservative, respectively attracting the following of those whose views align. While there may have been controversy surrounding the decision to ignore the convention of primogeniture by awarding the Crown Princeship to Prince Salman, the stability of the monarchy can again be seen in the lack of outright challenges to the House. During the Arab Spring, the monarchy was able to withstand political challenges and mass movements angling for democratisation due in no less part to its ability to unite citizens behind the traditional Islam it represented. While they may divide some especially when it comes to those who fervently oppose absolutists or the excesses that monarchs may have, monarchies - constitutional or absolute - by-and-large do serve a unifying role, a calming presence in the sea of discontent and division in which we may struggle to stay afloat.

The pressures and challenges that come with living in today's society have led some to highlight the apparent obsolescence of monarchies. They trumpet the perceived archaic role of monarchs and the lavish ceremony - bordering on excess - that we associate with nobles to be reasons for the lack of purpose that they serve. However, it is the very fact that our society can be detached from

tradition and divided by democratic voices that monarchies are still relevant today. In our world where the red-blooded pursuit of egalitarian ideas can often clash with those purple with envy towards the privileged, it is the blue-blooded monarchy that can bring stability and unity.

Marker's comments:

A thoughtful response, which consistently provides relevant points, examples and analysis. Examples tend to be wide-ranging and there is evaluation of 'today's society'. However, some points can be more clearly explained.

Use of language is effective with vocabulary / sentence structure variety throughout. Personal voice is conveyed through various uses of language although there are some minor errors.

12

2018 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 1 **Joshua Ong Yong Kiat | 19S02A**

"New media has made us more superficial than before." Do you agree?

The Internet is often heralded as one of mankind's greatest inventions. A millennium ago, no one could have possibly envisioned a world where people were so interconnected, where people from across the world could communicate in an instant, without having to wait for a telegram. This was all made possible with new media. However, despite all the perks that new media has brought about, it is not without its critics. Some critics may criticise new media for making us more superficial than before, which is the topic that this essay will discuss. While new media has exposed us to the perspectives of many people, this essay will argue that the accessibility it brings about can overwhelm us, and even narrow our world view. Coupled with the concept of 'likes', this essay hopes to make clear that indeed, new media has made us more superficial than before.

Detractors of the stand that new media has made us more superficial than before claim that new media now grants us unprecedented accessibility to the perspectives of others. In the past, we were more likely to only understand what our experiences were like, with little or no concern given to people from other races, religions, sexualities or countries. Today, anyone can share their experiences on social media, and through this, we gain a deeper empathy for others, as we can better understand their plights. In addition, people have used social media as an avenue to spread awareness of injustices occurring in the world today: the hashtag movement #MeToo was started by women who were powerless against the sexual advances of Hollywood figure Harvey Weinstein . This movement allows women to share their stories of how they had been abused but were unable to speak up for themselves. In fact, TIME magazine even named "#MeToo" as its 2017 "Person of the Year", testament to its power. Such movements allow people around the world to understand the problems and injustices others go through, which was only possible through the use of new

media. Thus, far from making us more superficial, new media has instead made us more human.

This essay concedes that indeed, new media has allowed us to gain new perspectives and understand the lives of other people better. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the accessibility that new media provides us with is a double-edged sword: it can potentially overwhelm us, rendering us unable to use our critical thinking skills, instead retreating to our superficial human instincts. The accessibility that new media has provided us with has the side-effect of overloading us with news and information. Unfortunately for us, due to profit-making or political agendas, these news can be sensationalised, or even faked. As a result, we are unable to rationally evaluate the validity of the multitude of headlines that burst into our feeds as it simply takes to long to fact-check these articles. The author of the book "Factfulness", Hans Rosling, points out that our human instincts are very inaccurate. He cites the case of violent crime in the US: From 1990 to 2012, the number of crimes reported fell from 14.5 million to 9.5 million. Yet, he notices that news agencies, which need to choose the most sensational stories, tend to report such crimes, and even coin it as a "crisis", even though in actuality, the number of violent crimes is falling. Coupled with our human inability to recall historical trends, we accept what we see as the truth. Rosling found that 70% of the people he surveyed thought that violent crime rates had actually increased, and only 10% knew that the number of people dying from natural disasters has more than halved in the past 3 decades. Rosling's example shows us that when exposed to a flurry of information, we are unable to critically think about the information presented, and hence fall back to our human instincts to decide what to believe, which, as Rosling showed, are very inaccurate and cause us to have a superficial understanding of the world today.

Next, the fundamental way in which new media works can manipulate us and render us unable to see the perspectives mentioned in the first point. Sites like Facebook use an algorithm to filter what we see in our feeds based on the content we usually view, in order to elicit more clicks from users. For instance, if we are particularly interested in the actions of American president Donald Trump, our feed will also start showing more snippets of news about him. However, this algorithm is in fact very detrimental to our ability to see the world from the perspectives of others. A widely-shared Wall Street Journal graphic illustrates this point: titled "Red feed Blue feed", this graphic offers a side-by-

side comparison of the Facebook feeds of a liberal and a conservative, which are, as it turns out, vastly different. As a result, this algorithm turns new media into an echo chamber of sorts: a person with certain beliefs and political leanings will only 'hear' the 'voices' of people who agree with him. In this case, liberals and conservatives were unlikely to see the perspectives of the opposing party, thus rendering them unable to weigh all the information to draw a rational conclusion. In another instance, it was found that Facebook, the main social media site used in Myanmar, exacerbated the hate against the Rohingya as it served as a platform to propagate hate speech. While traditional media such as newspapers do at times have their political leanings, these biases are usually circumvented by the spirit of journalism to report objective news. Contrary to what the first point argues, new media can thus be seen as a blindfold: a piece of cloth that covers one's eyes to the existence of other beliefs, making us even more superficial than before as it creates a lack of understanding of other people.

Finally, the concept of 'likes' on social media has made us even more focused on appearance than before. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter all have a system where users can react to the posts of other users, either through 'liking' it or by posting an emoji. However, this system subconsciously adjusts our priorities to that of acquiring likes, as studies have shown that seeing our posts being liked releases endorphins in our body, which are hormones that provide the feeling of happiness. This is embodied in two phenomena: the first of which being the practice of taking selfies which put one's life at risk : in order to get more likes on their posts, people actively seek out ways to make their photos even more stunning, which results in some very dangerous activities at natural areas. Just a few days ago, a teen fell to his death while trying to take a selfie at Yosemite National Park. The second is the concept of body image: studies have shown that most social media sites had a negative effect on body image, with the exception of Youtube. This means that browsing these sites is likely to cause someone to become insecure about how his or her body looks. In fact, a study conducted amongst Australian women aged 18-24 showed that it only took half an hour of browsing Instagram to elicit this effect . Even though traditional media has had some effect on body image, through magazines or television shows, the sheer accessibility of new media today renders us even more vulnerable to such insecurities, making us focus on appearances, thus neglecting the human connection, and in that sense, become more superficial.

In conclusion, while new media can expose us to a greater range of human experiences, it can also, at the same time, block us out from such perspectives and force us to rely on our inaccurate instincts by overwhelming us with information. Moreover, the concept of 'likes' on social media has also bred an overemphasis on appearances, and thus this essay concludes that new media has indeed made us more superficial than before. While this conclusion seems like a bleak one, many of the reasons why social media causes us to become more superficial can be circumvented through education: by inculcating people with solid critical thinking skills, these people are more likely to think objectively, escaping the superficiality that they were previously condemned to.

Marker's comments:

Joshua, a wonderful piece of writing: engaging, thoughtfully argued and exciting with the use of relevant and rather original examples. It was very easy to follow your train of thought and you show great maturity in your essay. The only thing I thought you could have worked better on is the definition of 'superficial', and to have it clearly established at the start of your essay. Nonetheless, it was a well-written response! Language is smooth and topic sentences are very clearly written. Clear organisation of ideas and a beautiful end to your essay.

13

2018 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 1 **Ian Tay Rongde | 19S06H**

"The surge of global tourism is starting to feel overwhelming." Is this reflective of tourism today?

Why do we travel? Is it a form of psychological escape from a monotone and boring reality, one where we wake up every day just to face mountains of tasks to do at work and at school? Or is travel a romantic escape to an exotic destination, where couples in love forge new memories in sun-drenched locations in far-flung Europe and the Americas? Or is travel to us something more, a chance to expose oneself to the cultures of other societies, to immerse ourselves in the heritage and history of glorious ancient civilisations? Whatever the motive of travel may be, the surge of global tourism in recent decades is undeniable. Usually taking the form of mass tourism to the usual Instagram-friendly destinations such as Rome and Paris, mass tourism has in recent years reached the shores of developing countries in Africa and South Asia as well. And as the tourist horde "conquers" the world, a particularly pertinent question emerges – is the surge of global tourism beginning to feel overwhelming? In other words, is the surge of mass tourism starting to put strain on the environment, local communities and natural resources? This essay would argue that this is indeed the case for tourism today, although global tourism has brought about refreshing benefits to local communities as well.

Firstly, the surge of global tourism is overwhelming the natural resource capacity of many communities around the world. As people from more affluent countries arrive as tourists to less developed countries, they usually bring along their expectations of comfort with them – that is, air-conditioned rooms, hot running water from taps, et cetera. These tourists often expect a standard of living far higher than that of the locals, and in the attempt to supply tourists with these luxury amenities, strain is placed on the infrastructure and natural resources of the host community. One example is the large scale of mass tourism to the Indonesian resort island of Bali. To cater to the needs and wants of the tourists - many from more affluent countries such as countries in Europe - there has

been construction of many resorts and golf courses. However, this has placed great stress on water resources in Bali. It is calculated that the amount of water consumed by a golf course in a single day is a thousand times more than the amount of water used by a local Balinese in an entire year. Thus, while tourists continue to enjoy tap water flowing freely in their hotel bathrooms, and the luscious green lawns of golf courses continue to be irrigated, the local community is facing an acute water shortage. This is a clear illustration of how the surge of mass tourism in recent decades has begun to overwhelm local infrastructure and resources.

In a similar vein of thought, the surge of global tourism has also overwhelmed the natural environment, and caused damage to both natural and historical sites. Due to the sheer footfall of millions of tourists at popular tourist sites, and the inconsiderate behaviour of some tourists, many sites of natural beauty and historical significance are being damaged. While many of these sites have been destinations for domestic tourism for centuries, the surge of global tourism aided by revolutions in air travel has increased the number of visitors exponentially, placing these sites at risk of damage. Last year, the BBC reported on how the scenic national parks in Scotland and England are being damaged by an increase in the number of visitors; the erosion of footpaths has led to the widening and deepening of these gravel paths, leading to them appearing as ugly scars on the otherwise scenic countryside. Another example to illustrate this point is the Safari parks in Kenya. While African safaris may not be the most common of mass tourism destinations, global tourism to such attractions have surged in recent years due to an increase in demand for the "exotic". However, the use of jeeps has led to the erosion and destruction of mud paths. The use of hot air balloons for scenic safari tours have also been shown to affect the behaviour of animals in the park by casting shadows which scares the animals away. The disruption caused by the surge in tourists numbers have led to the disruption of mating patterns among the wildlife, and has put greater stress on the native fauna. These examples illustrate how the rise in visitor numbers brought about by the rise in global tourism has started to become overwhelming for the natural environment. In addition, historical sites have begun to sustain damage as well due to the effects of global tourism. The caricature of the inconsiderate, vandalizing tourist has led to the government of China creating a blacklist for its citizens who display inconsiderate and destructive behaviour overseas, with a recent example being that of a boy who carved his name into a

stone pillar while visiting a historical site in Egypt. The Great Wall of China has also seen vandalism along those stretches that are open to tourists, and a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites are being considered to be dropped out of the list due to the damage they have incurred. While evidence of "historical graffiti" shows that vandalism is far from a new problem, the sheer rise in visitor numbers caused by the rise of global tourism means historical sites are under threat like never before, overwhelming efforts to preserve them.

Lastly, on the social aspect, the surge of global tourism can leave local communities feeling overwhelmed. One example that has made the news would be the case of Split in Croatia. Containing priceless architectural ruins from the Roman era and having a unique old town charm, Split is perhaps better known as being the location where the wildly popular television series "Game of Thrones" was filmed. As a result of this film connection, hordes of tourists from all around the world have descended upon Split, and local businesses are quick to capitalize on this by selling Game of Thrones merchandise. However, many locals have not been welcoming of the changes, as the number of tourists in summer now outnumbers the number of locals. Locals are quick to complain that the city has lost its quiet charm. This is but just one example of how the large number of visitors brought about by the surge of global tourism can have a negative impact on local communities. In addition to the direct impacts of tourists on the host nations, governments and companies have begun to build tourist attractions to ride upon the surge in global tourism, but this often involves the displacement of local communities. An example of a community affected in such a way would be the Masaai tribe in Kenya. In order to clear land for the gazetting of a national park the government hoped could draw in tourists, the Masaai people were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands and forced to settle along the periphery of the national park. While some later found work as tour guides, this represented the loss of a centuries-old way of life, and a loss of livelihood for many of the Masaai people. This illustrates how governments and companies, in an attempt to cater to the rising trend of global tourism, often make decisions that are detrimental to local communities. Thus from a social point of view, the surge of global tourism is indeed overwhelming.

However, the impact of global tourism is not always negative. A refreshing positive that comes out of global tourism is the revival of local cultures. In Thailand, silver working is a trade passed on from generation to generation, with

small workshops making intricately beautiful silverware for the Thai royal family. In recent decades, this trade has been declining, with the newer generation seeing there is much patience required but not much money to be earned, and leaving to search for better job prospects in the cities. However, the surge of global tourism in recent years has seen a revival of silver working in Thailand. The craftsmen, seeing that tourists are interested in buying their wares, have realised that there is now money to be made in this previously dying industry, and this has led to more people being interested in learning the tools of the trade. This example shows how tourists, being interested in the exotic and culturally unique, often inadvertently lead to a revival in traditional crafts and art by providing a new demand for them. Another sample can be seen in the island of Bali. With a large population of Balinese being Hindu, Bali has a unique culture greatly different from the rest of largely Muslim Indonesia, a cultural remnant of the once glorious Majapahit Empire. Without mass tourism to Bali, it is likely that the influence of Javanese culture would prevail, diluting the cultural uniqueness of Bali. However, with the arrival of international tourists interested in the unique culture of Bali, there has been a preservation of Balinese culture. Dances that otherwise might become lost with the passage of time are now being performed before an appreciative audience of tourists, and the age-old Balinese temples are now well-maintained for tourists to visit. This shows how global tourism can revive local cultures and give the traditional arts scene a much needed breath of life. As much as a unique culture is needed to attract tourists, the arrival of tourists helps to sustain this unique culture.

In addition to the positive impact of global tourism, its negative impacts as mentioned earlier in the essay can be reduced through eco-tourism. Eco-tourism is a form of tourism that aims to reduce its impact on the natural environment and on local communities. Due to a rise in social and environmental consciousness, many global travelers are now opting for eco-tourism options, and eco-tourism has seen a surge of its own. Examples include a new railroad tour of the nature parks of Ecuador, designed specially to reduce its carbon footprint. The tour also brings tourists to local establishments for meals and accommodation, in an attempt to let the locals themselves benefit from the influx of tourists. The rise of such alternative tourism gives us hope that in the future, the overwhelming negative effects of global tourism can be relieved.

Since the 1950s, air travel has become far more efficient, comfortable and quicker, with the launch of aircraft capable of long distance flights without refueling truly revolutionizing the industry. One of the main results of the air travel revolution is the rise of global tourism, with visitors from all around the world congregating at destinations of natural, cultural or historical interest. And the rise of global tourism comes with it the rise in voices supporting it, or condemning it. The current reality today seems to support the point of view that the surge of global tourism is indeed starting to feel overwhelming, but one also cannot ignore the benefits global tourism has delivered, or the reprieve that alternative travel offers to bring.

Marker's comments:

You need to scale back on the rhetoric in your intro –– wholly unnecessary and you write very confidently so you don't need to rely on these questions to give you an edge. You may also want to be more succinct. Nonetheless, this is a very competent essay with a wide-range of examples.

2019 | Y6 | GP CT 1 | Paper 1 Goh Jing Han Cameron | 19S03D

Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern.

The Javanese political culture of Mufakat and Musyawarah, consensus and compromise, is often held as a standard for decency and clean politics based on reaching a consensus, where political participants agree on a common set of the best ideas and govern the country in an enlightened and beneficial manner. Consensus-building embodies a sense of respectful and mutually beneficial politics that is often lacking in modern governance, with leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Viktor Orban bringing the bitter taste of acrimony in their populist rise to power. Proponents of consensus-based governance often claim that it is the ideal way to govern, as it fulfils the social contract between a government and its people, and engenders political and social stability. In reality, regrettably, reaching a consensus in government is not ideal, but rather idealistic, lending itself to inefficiency, inaction, or even impossibility. As a common proverb goes, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions".

Some theorists have argued that there is no good governance without consensus. As John Locke discussed in his magnum opus The Social Contract, government exists to carry out the will of the people, and unilateral moves from those in power without achieving the consent of the masses is unethical and should be revolted against. The social contract between the governed and the governors is contingent on reaching a consensus, where mutually agreed boundaries of rights and privileges are put into policy. One does not need to look far back in history to see the ash heap of rulers consigned to ignominy when they attempted to impose their will without achieving a consensus. Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe – all these totalitarian despots have had their regimes condemned, examples of leaders whose opaque, top-down governance styles have been proven to be flawed.

These idealistic thinkers also claim that consensus-building fosters greater social stability, as the governance of the country is based upon the will of the masses. By diligently collecting feedback and suggestions from all levels of society, and

ensuring that no group is marginalised by policy or legislations, governments can pre-empt the genesis of social divisions, inequality and strife. Switzerland is an example of a country which works on consensus, with regular referendums and national discussions on every issue, major or minor. This has made Switzerland one of the most harmonious countries in the world, as every citizen can voice their opinion and engage in discussion before arriving at a universally-accepted outcome. In Singapore, the People's Action Party's use of consultation and consensus-building has regularly reaped electoral gains, in a show of support for this form of government. Consultative politics in 1991 under Goh Chok Tong and the Our Singapore Conversation in 2012 under Lee Hsien Loong in both cases drastically improved the PAP's electoral popularity by over ten percentage points, preventing major social issues from threatening the stability of the country. As can be seen, the desire for consensus in governance is popular and can be highly beneficial.

Alas, countries like Singapore and Switzerland are exceptions to the norms. Such notions of reaching a consensus and having an enlightened people's democracy are but a fantasy in the modern political climate. Consensus-based governance is rather defined by three 'i's: inaction, inefficiency and impossibility.

The first 'i' – inaction. Consensus-building is susceptible to be jeopardised by rogue individuals who have interests contrary to that of the larger group. The necessity of achieving multilateral agreement breeds paralysis, as despite the wishes of a vast majority, beneficial actions cannot be taken. For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an organisation built upon the very basis of reaching a consensus. The requirement for all member states to agree upon any action taken by ASEAN has made it passive to pressing geopolitical demands. The dispute over the Spratly islands in the South China Sea, between the Philippines and China, is a case in point. ASEAN would ordinarily have supported the Philippines' rightful claim to the islands, which lie far closer to the Philippines than East Asia. 12 of the 13 member states agreed, but were hampered by Cambodia's refusal to sign any declaration due to Chinese influence. ASEAN became a victim of the malaise of feel-good politics, rendered a bystander to this territorial dispute. Similarly, the veto power of the USA and Russia has often been used to obstruct the United Nations in carrying out its role as the peacemakers of the world, with instances such as the USA vetoing sanctions on Israel or Russia vetoing UN intervention in the Crimean crisis. The

desire to achieve consensus creates a situation where international governance bodies cannot act, lest their principles and legitimacy be eroded.

The second 'i' – inefficacy. Building a consensus requires time and resources, and does not always produce long-term beneficial results. Elections and constant referendums pose a fiscal burden on countries that only the rich can meet. The temporal nature of the mandate of consensus causes short-sightedness in political thought. And along with consensus must invariably come compromise, diluting the impact of a government's actions to appease opponents and reach a consensus. Drastic action cannot be taken for fear of offending minorities who possess ardent and flawed views. Across the globe, measles is seeing a resurgence, with cases on the uptick and a major epidemic in New Zealand. The cure has existed for decades – the simple and effective vaccine, protecting humans for a lifetime. Mandatory vaccination would allow for the complete eradication of many harmful diseases. Yet, resistance from anti-vaccination groups fuelled by misinformation has prevailed over the advice of medical professionals, due to the need for consensus in our political systems. Governments can only 'strongly encourage' vaccinations, helpless to pursue a decisive course than can solve a problem in one fell swoop. Consensus too often acts as a restraint upon governance that limits social welfare.

The third 'i' – impossibility. It is all very well to talk about reaching a consensus in matters where a clear 'best' solution can emerge. However, in many matters of the heart and soul, the very nature of the conflict precludes consensus. Is am embryo a living organism at conception, birth, or somewhere in between? Is Jesus or Allah the true god? Is marriage only between a man and a woman, or can it take on other definitions? There is no easy answer to these questions, no simple calculus that can be performed after which the result is acceptable to all parties. In areas of such diametrically opposed and contradictory viewpoints, attempting to reach a consensus would be an exercise in futility. If one were to depend on a consensus to dictate how to govern, it would be impossible to govern such pressing social issues. The result of such an approach to governance would be its polar opposite, anarchy.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche opined, "You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist." Nietzsche's nihilist worldview is often criticised to be overly pessimistic and cynical. However, it is more attuned to the conundrum of

governance, exposing the flaws in the naïve aspiration of striving for consensus in governance. In a world of amoral realpolitik, governance often requires an authoritarian not afraid to step on others' toes, in the vein of Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore or Park Chung Hee in South Korea.

Marker's Comments:

A thoughtful response. Fully relevant points are raised throughout and analysis / use of illustration is consistently developed. Some examples can be better developed, but overall a solid response.

Use of language is organised with some evidence of personal voice.

Unauthorised copying, sharing & distribution prohibited

15

2019 | Y6 | GP CT 1 | Paper 1 **Izavel Lee Shu Yih | 19S03D**

"Science and business should never mix." How far do you agree?

When Elizabeth Holmes, founder of medical company Theranos, announced that her firm was working towards a new type of blood test that would only need a miniscule amount of a patient's blood, the medical industry and media became ecstatic about this "game-changing" invention, and investors poured millions into this promising new start-up. It all turned out to be a lie, unfortunately, when it was soon discovered that Theranos' work turned out to be a fraud. Incidents like these, which seem so commonplace nowadays, often lead people to wonder whether we should really be allowing the "greedy" hands of business to taint the wonders that science can achieve. However, concerns about companies like Theranos should not lead us to turn a blind eye to the benefits of bringing science and business together. In fact, business can catalyze the scientific process and the benefits it brings to society.

One of the main fears that people have when science and business comes together is that the scientific research process could lose its integrity and rigor if placed under the influence of business. Several years back, a meta-analysis of research articles that were sponsored by soda companies found that, unsurprisingly, the majority of these articles showed positive conclusions that favoured the soda industry. As scientists require funding for their research, it is inevitable that some may turn to industry for financial support. At the same time, businesses seek to improve the public's image of their goods by providing supposedly robust and evidence-based support for the benefits of their products. However, what really happens in the end is that industry scientists often come under pressure to publish something favorable for the company, or risk losing their jobs. This compromises the public's trust in scientific research, which is harmful to the scientific community in the long run. To prevent this, some believe that science and business should hence never mix.

Another fear regarding the meshing of science and business together is that the profit motive of businesses is simply incompatible with the aims of science, which is to discover new knowledge and to benefit society through its applications. Drug companies are notorious for this. In many countries around the world, "Big Pharma" has often been criticized for jacking up prices to profit from their new drug discoveries, which limits access to life-saving medicine. While the pharmaceutical science that industry scientists carry out tend to be beneficial, these benefits are restricted due to the company's business priorities. Indirectly, such businesses may be responsible for the loss of thousands of lives by pursuing a profit rather than the greater good. Furthermore, as evidenced by firms like Theranos, some companies may take advantage of investors' perception of science as rigorous and trustworthy, in order to receive dollar after dollar of investment without actually producing anything. Or, in pursuit of profit, companies may fail to take into account ethical considerations while selling their goods, for example tech companies that make use of data science to analyze large databases of information that they then sell to other firms, invading consumer privacy. Such incidents certainly bring into question whether business should be allowed to influence science.

While these are all valid concerns, to say that science and business should never mix seems too myopic a view. There are unscrupulous companies in the world, that is true, but that does not mean we can ignore the benefits that business has brought to science as well. Take the criticism that companies only pursue profit, for example. Scientific research is a costly and risky process, as not all research produces successful results, and not all inventions find wide usage in society. Governments cannot possibly fund all these important research projects as their own as given their many competing economic priorities. This is where firms come in. As businesses are able to make profits and spread their risk over many sales, they are capable of providing the financial support needed to fund ambitious research. One needs only to compare the difference in research pace of NASA and SpaceX to see how a business can speed up research. Thanks to Elon Musk's business savvy and ability to diversify risk among his consortium of companies, SpaceX has been able to advance far forward in its development of new space technologies and research on outer space. Funding for scientists and engineers in SpaceX is generous, giving them more room to be creative. Even researchers working under the government often have to find industry

partnerships to make their research financially viable. Clearly, there is a case for business and science to work together.

In addition, businesses have the ability to commercialize scientific discoveries and turn them into something useful and applicable, to benefit wider society. While scientists may be brilliant at discovering new knowledge and proving hypotheses, they may not necessarily have the skills to turn their discoveries into viable products that can be used by the public. No one cares about the blood content of obscure Amazonian frogs unless they can be applied to solve current issues. This is another reason why scientists often team up with businesses to bring their knowledge to wider society. For example, Singapore's Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology has created many spin-off companies and partnered with commercial labs worldwide to fund uses for their discoveries, including the creation of new cancer drugs and disease testing kits the size of a small chip. Ultimately, science cannot only exist in a vacuum for our intellectual entertainment. The knowledge it creates should be applied, and businesses, with their desire to attract consumers and investment, are uniquely qualified to turn scientific ideas into real products. The allure of profits and exclusive patents may even inspire companies to innovate, even if the costs of such innovations are high initially, allowing science to progress and benefit more people.

Moreover, business not only benefits science, but science can benefit business as well, which should encourage their working together. For example, many companies now hire consumer psychologists and data analysts to provide better service to their customers. In the American firm Target, for example, consumer research has allowed it to better target their products to consumers who may actually need them, and consumers benefit from the greater convenience of having products suggested to them. Research and development allows companies to push out innovative products that appeal to consumers and turns over greater profit for them. Again, this is why scientists and firms often partner up to sell their innovations. The scientific process creates knowledge that firms can utilize to improve their sales and market to consumers, which especially benefits small start-ups looking to disrupt the market. Hence, science and business can mix together beneficially.

Finally, science and business may mix together to positively influence policy decisions. The scientific community and business community are both valuable sections of all societies that politicians would do well to listen to. Although the interests of the science lobby and the business lobby may clash – particularly over health and the environment – sometimes they can align to create a powerful force for change. For example, the recent legalization of marijuana in the United States can be attributed both to scientific evidence of medical marijuana's benefits and the potential profits that can be made in the marijuana industry. Legalization of LGBT marriages in countries around the world can also be credited to scientific evidence of homosexuality's biological basis[5], and the growing acceptance of LGBT employees or CEOs like Tim Cook that have funded and encouraged LGBT rights groups. Ironically, the very existence of some businesses has helped the scientific community make their case over flash points like climate change. For instance, the increasing lucrativeness of the solar energy industry in places like California or India have encouraged governments to turn away from fossil fuels and improve their use of renewables, much to the delight of climate scientists. With business and scientific interests working together, policies can be crafted that are both evidence-based and beneficial.

Science and business should not always be seen as conflicting entities, but rather as partners that are constantly intertwined. Cases like Theranos and Martin Shkreli should be viewed as messages of caution, but should not stop us from working to forge more partnerships between science and business, which can complement and augment each other. In their essence, science and business are all about innovation and filling in gaps in society, whether those gaps are in knowledge or in fulfilling consumer needs. As problems in society grow in complexity, it may take the combined efforts of both science and business to deliver the solutions we need today.

Marker's comments:

A thoughtful response. Fully relevant points are raised throughout and supported by analysis and examples. While the evaluation can be more in depth at times, overall this was a solid attempt at the question which covers a scope of issues. Use of language is organised. Intro and conclusion are effective, but personal voice can be more evident.

[5] Editor's note: Qualify this overly certain assertion for accuracy e.g. it can also be credited to mounting scientific evidence that sexual orientation is at least partly biologically determined.

16

2018 | Y6 | GP CT 1 | Paper 1 **Isaac Lai Yin Chung | 19S05B**

"Talent matters most." How far is this true of your society?

"Geniuses are made, not born." Or so the Hungarian psychologist Laszlo Polgar concluded after conducting his famous experiment on his three daughters, where they were subjected to intensive chess training for a large portion of their early lives. Perhaps Polgar thought that the results – three Grandmaster titles and a long list of tournament wins – spoke for themselves; but in reality, and especially in Singapore, talent still comes into play, and should not have its impact dismissed in such a sweeping manner. However, it is inaccurate to claim that talent matters most, because the development of talent is contingent on a wide spectrum of other factors that determine if one will go far in our society.

Nevertheless, let us first venture to consider why some might believe that talent indeed matters most. We often see talent directly pitted against hard work, and it would thus prove valuable to examine situations in which society judges people mostly based on their talent due to their inability to work hard. Hence, the foremost reason why detractors would put forth such a statement in Singapore's context is the prevalence of streaming and categorization in our education system. Many generations have come to accept this as part and parcel of schooling life here, and it would be foolish to deny that this culture has permeated the rest of our societal institutions. Now, you might argue that streaming is based on academic results, which in turn are based on the amount of work one puts in in preparation for examinations, and therefore, in this case, talent does not matter most. But the fact of the matter is that streaming at such a young age does not give many students enough time to develop the notion that hard work is important, and thus the impact that innate ability has on the young is greatly increased. Perhaps the most extreme instance of this is the Gifted Education Program (GEP), where high-performing students are identified at the tender age of nine and placed in an accelerated program offered only at a select few schools. With only a few years of schooling under their belt, one wonders what the most likely reason behind success at such a young age could be. For

many, this would be pure talent, as these students would appear to demonstrate reasoning skills well beyond their age. Hence, with such a short runway meaning very little time for meaningful hard work to be done, talent might matter most in the early years of our education system due to our penchant for streaming students.

However, this line of argument is an over-simplification of our education system and Singaporean society as a whole. Our leaders are very proud of the meritocracy that Singapore has come to be, where there is a strong sense that everyone has the potential to achieve anything they want to, and people are judged solely on merit alone. This means that talent works in tandem with hard work and other factors, and thus what matters to society is the sum of all these components. Furthermore, Confucian values often manifest themselves in the form of working hard to achieve success given that we are an Asian society, best encapsulated in basketballer Kevin Durant's saying that "Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard". Once again, we see this to be most prevalent in our education system. From young, students are trained to study as hard as they possibly can, to attain the best possible examination results, to take up enrichment activities till their schedules are full, to get into the best school possible… all for the purpose of "succeeding in life", however one wants to define that. This results in many of our success stories attributing their achievements to hard work that paid off. On the flip side, as Teo You Yenn mentions in her book "This is What Inequality Looks Like", many of those who fail to achieve success and fall down the social ladder believe that they have not worked hard enough. As such, for a society that takes pride in its meritocratic tendencies and values hard work so much, talent surely does not matter most.

We would not be viewing the complete picture if we said that talent does not matter most only because of our idealistic focus on the value of hard work though. There are less rosy reasons behind this, one of them being the background and environment where one grows up. What happens during the formative years have been shown to have a very large impact on one's future life, and thus how these years are spent is key to deciding the extent to which one's talent is fulfilled, if at all. Consider Joseph Schooling, arguably our most celebrated sporting talent in recent times. It is undoubtedly so that he possessed immense talent in swimming from a young age, but whether this mattered most when it came to why he succeeded is debatable. Much of his intensive training

came during his time at Bolles School, a specialized private school in Florida famed for producing champion American swimmers. It is very likely that he would not have made it to the top of the Olympic podium had his parents not possessed the means to send him to the USA in the first place. Contrast this with the case of Ang Peng Siong, also an Olympic swimmer but from a generation ago. Not only was he unable to gain access to specialized training, he also had to serve National Service in his prime, even getting arrowed for more intensive physical training on the basis of him being a swimmer, which prevented him from performing at his best. It suffices to say that in many cases, talent does not matter most, for the environment and socio-economic background that one is in has significant bearing on whether the talent can be fulfilled, and by extension, how far one goes in our society.

Lastly, talent surely does not matter most in our society as we do not recognize many talents on an equal footing as others. It is no secret that the early years of focusing on rapid economic growth have caused a great amount of importance to be placed on education. Thus, academic high-fliers are handsomely rewarded with book prizes, scholarships, and job offers which often give an important head start to one's post-schooling years. However, non-academic talents are recognized to a far lesser extent, and this has only begun to change in recent years, as we attempt to diversify our national interests. Traditionally, sporting and artistic talents have been seen as inferior because of a lack of direct manner in which trained professionals in these areas can contribute to the country. For instance, prior to the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music's establishment at the turn of the millennium, there were no opportunities in the country for budding local musicians to develop their talent at such a high level, and many either resorted to migrating or giving up their profession altogether. This can be seen from the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, which is over 40 years old but still has a foreign majority. Hence, the unequal weightage that Singapore gives to different talents means that talent does not matter most.

Polgar was right in his assertion, for everyone, whether genius or not, is made of so much more than just their innate talents. In a sense, it is good that Singapore recognizes this, and we are given some time to offset the circumstances thrust upon us by the lottery that is our birth into this world. Nonetheless, what replaces talent in mattering the most is surely still not ideal,

and we still have a long way to go to achieving a satisfactory version of this statement.

Marker's comments:

Content: A very sharp response overall, having a clear plan at the beginning that you then followed through with clarity and some conviction, providing strong examples at many points. There are a few gaps that needed bridging, but on the whole, this addressed the question proficiently and with a strong sense of balance too.

Language: Lack of conclusion aside, your control throughout the essay was very good, in terms of both organization/flow of ideas and the mechanics (e.g. grammar, sentence structure). The intro was lucid.

2018 | Y6 | KI CT 1 | Paper 1 Xuan Zihan | 19A01A

"We can't make moral judgements because we don't even know what is moral." Discuss.

Over many centuries, the study of morality has troubled many philosophers. The competing moral theories, from consequentialism to deontology, seem to suggest that we do not know what is moral, threatening our ability to make moral judgements. However, this essay argues that our inability to achieve consensus about what is moral does not mean we do not know what is moral, and that there are multiple sources from which we derive moral codes, hence we can make our moral judgements accordingly. Furthermore, even if we do not know what is moral, this does not mean we cannot make moral judgements, as some non-cognitivists argue that moral judgements may simply be an expression of our emotions or attitudes towards a moral act. Therefore, the statement cannot be accepted, as the reason, conclusion, and link between them are all questionable.

First of all, some may argue that we do not know what is moral at all. They may cite competing moral theories and our inability to reconcile them as evidence that we cannot agree on basic moral codes. The famous trolley problem, for instance, has fervent advocates for both consequentialism (pulling the lever) and deontology (not pulling the lever and allowing five to die). Furthermore, theories like deontology are not inherently homogeneous; conflicting duties may arise, between the need to save a life from a murderer and telling the murderer the truth, and we are unable to decide between them. Therefore, it may be suggested that we do not know what the right thing to do is.

However, just because we cannot agree on a single definition of morality does not mean each theory fails to provide us with some form of moral knowledge. Ethical naturalism, for instance, posits that our definition of moral properties may be reduced to non-moral properties such as what is natural (Aquinas), what abides by the duty (Kant), what is pleasurable (Bentham), or what maximises

happiness (Mill). While there may arise tensions between the definitions, our definition of morality is at least significantly narrowed down, allowing us to know what can be considered moral. In fact, we can subscribe to a moral anti-realist view and still retain some understanding of what is moral. Ethical subjectivism, for instance, asserts that what is moral is shaped by societal consensus, and we take our cues from social and cultural mores. Therefore, while we may not be able to achieve a singular definition of what is moral, we can still attain a general understanding of what morality may entail.

Suppose, however, that we in some cases are truly unable to establish what is moral. For instance, it has been argued that our sense of morality does not, in reality, seem to serve as a compass for our actions. On the one hand, for instance, we are clearly able to tell that walking past a drowning child without attempts at saving when we have the capability to do so is immoral to some extent. However, most people do not seem to take issue with our day-to-day actions that may seem immoral upon closer scrutiny – when we choose to use our funds for online shopping rather than donating to a charity organisation that alleviates child poverty, majority of society's population hesitate to judge whether such a case constitutes an immoral act. Given such a situation, are we as moral agents simply immobilised to pass judgement?

In fact, we can still make moral judgements even if we do not know what is moral. This is due to moral semantics – and our different understandings of the term 'moral'. In particular, non-cognitivists argue that moral statements do not express truth-apt propositions about the world. Rather, they serve as vehicles or containers for our own emotions and attitudes. For instance, emotivism suggests that our claims about an act being immoral is simply reflective of our affective states and of our negative emotions towards the act in question. In the context of abortion, this means that pro-life advocates justify their position in terms of how abortion violates their innate faith with regards to the value of the embryo. To cite another example, universal prescriptivism allows moral agents to make moral judgements on the sole basis of their opinions about whether the act should be universally approved or condemned. This moral judgement, therefore, does not necessarily require a specific definition of what is moral. Rather, the judgement is premised on its perlocutionary force, in recommending a negative attitude towards an act that is deemed as immoral. Therefore, it has been shown that non-cognitivist positions allow for moral agents to make moral judgements without a prerequisite of a shared understanding of what is moral.

Prior to this, it has been established that we often have an understanding and intuition of what is moral, which can serve as the basis of our moral judgements. Yet, even if we do not know what is moral, we can still make moral judgements on the basis that they do not represent truth-apt propositions about the world, but rather serve as an outlet for our emotions and prescribed attitudes towards a moral act. This therefore seems to completely invalidate the statement. However, what is also significant here, and what the author of the quote may allude to, is the idea that we cannot truly make moral judgements of significant force if we do not have a shared foundation of morality to start with. Leaving aside the non-cognitivist view now and assuming that moral judgements are intended to convey some form of truth-aptness and serve as the basis for our appraisals of moral acts, we must then accord some value of a shared morality to our ability to make moral judgements that will convince and compel action. In particular, this is because of the counter-argument against moral relativism. If we do not know what is moral, then we effectively leave the arbiter of morality to individual cultures and societies to determine. In that case, then, one cannot make moral judgements that can be universally accepted and adopted. However, this is clearly not how moral discourse is usually engaged in. In international debates at the UN about human rights issues, such as female genital mutilation and freedom of speech, ambassadors are only able to defend their position and extend it to the global community if it is assumed that we do have a shared understanding of what is moral. Even Macintyre, one of the fiercest critics against rationalist and universalist morality, argues that there are basic moral virtues such as courage, honesty, and justice, that any human society with sufficiently complex social activity and customs subscribes to. Therefore, if moral judgements are intended to serve as truth-apt propositions that in turn may be turned into universal moral standards, then we do need to have some form of shared understanding of what is moral to begin with, so that the content of such judgements can accordingly be accepted.

Overall, this essay has argued that while it may be difficult to pinpoint the definition of morality, we do know what is moral to some extent due to the various sources of morality, therefore allowing us to make moral judgements. Furthermore, even if we do not know what is moral, we can adopt the non-cognitivist position and employ moral judgements as an expression of our emotions and attitudes towards a moral act. That said, we must recognise that

our inability to collectively establish what is moral does have corrosive effects on our ability to deliver moral judgements that can be universalised. Given that moral debates are likely to endure in the future, the type of moral judgements we can make must hence be qualified, leaving us to accept that completely objective and timeless moral judgements will be few and far between.

Marker's comments:

Excellent piece here Zihan! You took the claim apart and delved into each clause, examining the truth of the proposition and its implications, while maintaining a good overview of the overall issue. Strong argument given, with strong personal voice too. Great rejoinder (at the end) on how a shared understanding of what is moral is necessary for any moral discourse in the first place.

KS Bull 2019 | Issue 1

Editorial Team

Ms Edlyn Ang

Ms Sharon Chan

Mr Ariffin bin Farid

Mrs Ruth Koh

Ms Michelle Kwok

Ms Lim Ai Lin

Mr Steffen Toh