

1. Can having too much knowledge in today's world be dangerous?

This was not a popular question. Those who attempted this question gave rather parochial answers and did not score.

In order to come up with an in-depth answer, one has to define 'too much knowledge' in the context of how and why it is 'dangerous'.

Need to define knowledge, and what is meant by dangerous.

Dangerous- ignorance, misconceptions, information that can harm, misapplication

Students can refer to different types of knowledge – that gained from school, from life experience, from the Internet as well as scientific Knowledge, private information etc...

Another important word to keep in mind is 'today's world'. Which world are you referring to? Western world, Muslim world (Afghanistan), India/China etc...knowledge-based economy?

What one does with the knowledge is also important.

As for structure, one could take on the impact knowledge has on the political, social, economic and scientific aspects

War on terrorism- depending on whom you are, knowledge can be dangerous. Too little knowledge on terrorism can be a problem. You underestimate the strength of these groups as how USA had done before 9/11. Students can also discuss the Patriot Act, where the USA govt has the right to certain private knowledge with regards to the threat of Terrorism. Is this appropriate or dangerous? On the other hand, knowledge in the hands of these terrorist groups can be deadly. Thus the need to curtail what they know and to prevent the spread of knowledge on fundamental beliefs.

On the other hand, not having enough knowledge can be dangerous as it can lead to cultural Ignorance – In multi cultural societies like Singapore or for that matter in a global world today, being ignorant of other races and culture can have great backlash. For example, racial antagonism based on ignorance and stereotyping. History has shown how ignorance has been used as a strategy for power play – eg colonialism, apartheid etc...where the Western world had created a culture of dependency on themselves by promoting themselves as the experts in all fields from politics to culture while suffocating the 'Other' as ignorant and poor.

Poverty is associated with lack of education= lack of knowledge. Thus knowledge seems to be the answer to some problems , eg women's upward mobility is a result of knowing their rights etc..., importance of children receiving education is important, to be knowledgeable about safeguarding oneself from illnesses and diseases like HIV, TB etc...

Knowledge based economy- important to keep abreast with the world. Rising economies like India and China- need to be knowledgeable about these cultures in order to do business with them etc...

Scientific knowledge –is important. We need to know how science and technology functions and in order to make ethical decisions, we need to be knowledgeable. Example, what's happening to the environment, medical alternatives available to us. As this is part of our lives, we need to be

aware and not simply leave it to the experts and scientist. However, knowledge that can cause harm must be kept clear of, eg how to make bombs, destructive weapons etc...knowledge on cloning (controversial).

A distinction between facts and knowledge, between knowledge and wisdom might be useful. Students consider whether children today are "too" knowledgeable, whether they are acquiring knowledge too early.

They can discuss whether young people may be schooled in academic knowledge but lack street smarts

-Can discuss whether the dangers of being able to get easy access to knowledge today.

-Can consider whether knowledge is too easily attainable, too freely available – eg. on the Internet.

What is it about today's world which makes it dangerous to have "too much" knowledge?

Limited understanding? Lack of insight? Ignorance?

2. 'Tourism is all about exploitation.' How true is this in your country?

IT WOULD BE VERY HARD TO FAIL THIS ESSAY. It is of a relatively restricted theme in one spatial context.

The context is typically Singapore but foreign students are encouraged to offer their own country's perspectives.

'Exploitation' has obvious negative connotations but the competent student should be able to posit the merits of judicious exploitation of both human and natural resources for common benefit.

A sense of being exploited being such a broad concept, students should come up with their own deductions and analyses of how people or other resources are being exploited, willingly or otherwise. This should be augmented by actual examples, not 'suppose this happens...' scenarios.

Singapore context (not exhaustive):

- Tourism is a major source of revenue; heavily geared towards a 'hub status' for anything and everything
- Focused on MICE(meetings, incentives, conventions & exhibitions) concept of tourism; see <http://www.mice4asia.com> for elaboration
- STB has offices in many major world cities
- The reputation of Changi Airport and the iconic Singapore Airlines attracts all sorts of travelers, even just to transit here for a day or two

Yes, & criticisms :

- Waste of funds on artificial cultural areas, especially those restored at high cost, e.g. Chinatown. At a cost of over \$90 million in refurbishments, it hardly brought impact. Package-deal tourists are being routed there just to cater to the businesses there and justify the infrastructure and maintenance expenses. Is this exploitation?

- Unnaturally biased towards the Western & Japanese tourists; giving a subservient mentality (ironically, visitors from the Indian sub-continent are the biggest spenders in Singapore)
- Exploiting tourist ignorance to artificially sustain trades like trishaw-pulling to give 'cultural experience'
- Exploiting gambling culture of the well-heeled East Asians to set up Integrated Resorts; exploiting the ignorance and trusting nature of citizens to promote casino employment as a promising career, even with major religious and cultural/moral organizations against it

No, there are effective win-win strategies for both locals and tourists:

- Idea of 'clean and green' city
- Well-placed exchange rate (neither a British pound nor an Indonesian rupiah)
- Promotion of multi-lingual behavior
- Promotion of good social etiquette
- Good employment prospects for locals (not necessarily casino jobs) and quality service for tourists (Singaporean service industry employees have won plenty of commendations from foreigners)
- Successful running of WTO, IMF meetings, established only F1 Night Race in the world, upcoming YOG...

3: Can terrorism ever be eradicated?

This is a fairly straightforward essay question, which implies that the problem of terrorism can never be eliminated. The best essays not only featured wide-ranging, deep knowledge on the topic, but skilful organisation of essay content as well. Thesis statements were confidently articulated, and convincingly supported with cogent arguments and ample examples. Weaker scripts were limited in discussion scope and characterised by difficulty in managing different strands of discussion. Some responses started off by stating that terrorism can only be eradicated if its root causes are addressed, and then went on to describe the (in) effectiveness of counter-terrorist measures (with no reference to root causes), only to return to briefly describe poverty and social injustice as root causes of terrorism, before hastily concluding that terrorism cannot be eradicated because terrorism's root causes have been ignored. There is a need for students to restrain from putting down copious facts and examples on the page, to confidently manage content, guided by a clear mental schema.

Some pointers:

A working definition of terrorism: 'Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.' (FBI definition)

A sensible response to the essay question will be: while counter-terrorist measures can minimise the occurrence of terrorist attacks and curb the spread of extremist ideology, the uncompromising nature of terrorists, and enduring ideologies that fuel their cause make terrorism difficult to eradicate.

Some types of terrorism: state-sponsored terrorism (Abu Nidal Organisation), religious terrorism (Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Aum Shinrikyo), nationalist terrorism (Irish Republican

Army, Basque), cyber-terrorism (LTTE, Aum Shinrikyo), right-wing terrorism, left-wing terrorism (Weathermen, Baader-Meinhof Group).

Counter-terrorist measures have been successful, to a certain extent, in curbing terrorist activity through: heightened homeland security, international/regional cooperation (intelligence sharing, training of counter-terrorism personnel), policy making (the Obama Administration's use of diplomacy and development assistance in countering terrorism), military strikes (drone strikes, removal of the LTTE by the Sri Lanka Army), political concession (Northern Ireland conflict), alerting communities to the terrorism threat, etc.

Despite counter terrorist measures, why is terrorism so difficult to eradicate?

Some reasons:

- a. severe counter-terrorist measures encourage further radicalisation (indignation of sympathisers towards mistreatment of terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, The Patriot Act)
- b. such measures fail to address grievances (growing discontent of Tamil diaspora towards Sri Lanka government's marginalisation of Tamils)
- c. some terrorists (e.g. religious extremists) are not open to compromise, given their fervent belief that their activities are divinely sanctioned
- d. the persistent existence of radical governments that believe in using military might to pursue political agendas will ensure the survivability of state-sponsored terrorism
- e. new media channels like the Internet have been used to perpetuate subversive messages, which have led to self-radicalisation

Students are required to intelligently weigh the effectiveness of counter-terrorist measures against the nature of terrorism and an understanding of the development of terrorism in order to arrive at a logically defensible stand. This is a content-heavy question. Students who choose to attempt this question should have substantial knowledge of the topic.

4: To what extent can international aid be truly effective?

This question was highly popular among students as it is related to one of the main Global Issues most recently discussed in Term 2. There was a wide range in the quality of answers produced. What separates a well-considered answer from the mediocre ones is the student's ability to marry an analytic discussion of the subject of international aid and an evaluative discussion of the true effectiveness of aid 'at the end of the day', as indicated in the question via the key word 'truly'.

"To what extent...be truly effective"

The question prompt "To what extent" requires students to **judge or evaluate** the efficacy of the existing international/foreign aid by **looking at the current policies and implementation** of the various types of assistance that are available to the international community. One may wish to begin by discussing the existential subject on the justification for international aid (i.e., reasons such as those based on humanitarian grounds, achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, etc) but students are expected to

weigh in on the other term – ‘truly’ – in the dominant section of their essays. The better essays are able to show if it is possible/feasible for international aid to be effective **in the long run given the weaknesses and inherent problems in designing, delivery and accounting for international aid packages**.

The effectiveness of aid can be examined at different levels. First, one can begin by discussing how foreign aid can meet and have effectively fulfilled the **short-term** and **medium-term** needs of the recipient countries, without which such countries are much worse off. This is especially efficacious in situations where:

- a) humanitarian assistance (e.g. food and medical aid from **countries or NGOs/private or international organisations**) is crucial for daily human subsistence in countries devastated by natural disasters;
- b) military aid in the form of peacekeeping forces are needed for political and social stabilities (e.g. quelling insurgencies, etc);
- c) economic aid gives an immediate reprieve for a country, which is on the brink of economic debacle (cue the Greek debt crisis), in need of a kick-start for its languishing economy (e.g. Eastern European nations, such as Poland and Hungary in the late 1980s and 1990s) or in a dire need of infrastructural rebuilding efforts, etc (related to point 2(a) and e.g., Singapore's involvement in post-tsunami reconstruction programmes in Meulaboh and Medan, Indonesia)
- d) development aid (in the form of skills training, education and awareness programmes for HIV/AIDS, etc).

Second, and this is where most, if not all, were able to point out that there are major **obstacles** that prevent people and countries from making full use of the aid given or pledged, and thereby render certain aid packages and policies ineffective or less effective. These include abuse of aid such as widespread and endemic corruption in the socio-political system that pillages the given resources for personal profit, problems associated with certain types of conditional/tied aid (e.g., aid given to a country on the condition that public services are privatised and the domestic market opened up, and that these demands often result in devastating effects for the country's economy), the lack of NGOs' transparency in accounting for the disbursement of the aid leading to consequences such as over-diversification of aid, and so on. Collectively, these problems can be said to point towards the lack of effective governance and accountability in designing and delivering the aid to communities that require the assistance.

Third, the **long-term**, and thus true efficacy of the various forms of short-term aid is called into question when we apply the caveat: **Too much of a good thing can be bad**. The 'bad' effects of long-term economic and development aid come in the form of:

- a) bolstering corrupt or oppressive regimes (e.g. the recent World Bank loan to Eskom in South Africa is perceived by many to abet corruption and entrench the ruling African National Congress);
- b) shielding recipient governments from repercussions arising from policy failures and weaknesses;
- c) fostering the recipient country's dependency on skilled workers or expertise from external sources who then create skill gaps in the workforce or market when they depart;
- d) discouraging enterprise and thereby yielding a dampening effect on the health of a domestic market that could have been buoyed by cost-efficient and profit-maximising SMEs.

In fact, point 4 is only mentioned and explored with some details in **very good essays**. These essays feature a **strong personal voice** albeit with necessary qualifications (e.g.,

'While international aid can indeed go a long way towards providing food necessities, etc, to people in need, I will provisionally make a stand that international aid can never be truly effective, at least in the long term.'). Some even went to the extent of explaining why in the long run, because of the Machiavellian nature of countries and how corruption is such an entrenched problem in many societies, true effectiveness *may never be achieved*, at least in the foreseeable future (e.g., 'In this final analysis, international aid, while necessary, can never be truly effective, at least in the foreseeable future, due to the innate Machiavellian nature of donor states, and the inherent problems faced by... Though it has proven to be ineffective in a number of instances and contexts, foreign aid is still necessary, due to a lack of viable alternatives.' Adapted from essay written by Tan Kai Wen Aaron from 10S030).

Mediocre essays contain inaccuracies (e.g., Grameen banking as a type of 'foreign' aid in Bangladesh, provision of solar-powered 'woks' (?) in Bangladesh, etc). Some lauded the US coalition forces that invaded Iraq and Afghanistan and simplistically concluded that this is a demonstration of effective military aid in force. This is inapt, given that the reasons for these interventionistic measures were not entirely noble! Bad essays feature a predictable but narrow discussion on the general problem of corruption and protectionist measures employed by donor countries without examining and evaluating how these and other wider issues could hinder ultimate effectiveness of the various types of aid. Average essays simply offloaded a laundry list of effective aid policies and a litany of ill effects of badly implemented aid policies and ineffectual delivery of assistance. Other essays also tended to be one-sided in argumentation by focusing only on the ineffectiveness of aid and nothing else. The weak responses also tended to give examples of economic and humanitarian aid and the manner in which aid is administered was usually construed as country-to-country. But what about NGOs/private and international organisations (e.g., NGOs such as the Mercy Relief Mission in Singapore, OXFAM, International Rescue Committee, World Vision; private international organizations such as the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society; international organizations such as the UN humanitarian agencies that comprise the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, The World Food Programme, UNICEF, etc)? Essays that lack specific details and facts tended to lose credence and persuasiveness in argumentation here. The lesson to be drawn here is that if students are unfamiliar with the topic and have little or superficial knowledge of issues related to foreign aid, they are to stay away from this question.

Language errors (across all scripts, **NOT** question-specific):

'habitating' – 'The number of indigenous species habitating there are countless.' (There's no such word! Use 'that exist' or 'that live', etc instead)

'truely' instead of 'truly'

'acheive' instead of 'achieve' (highlighted for the umpteenth time!)

'receiipient' instead of 'recipient'

'media' without definite article 'the' as in 'the media'

'US' and 'UK' without definite article 'the' as in 'the US' and 'the UK'

'these corrupted governments' instead of 'these corrupt governments' (especially for Question 4)

Additional point to note: quite a number of scripts came untied. We may need to organise an elective module titled "How to tie exam scripts effectively" for students???

5. 'We have become a people unable to comprehend the technology we invent.' Discuss

This was not a popular question. More importantly, this is NOT an easy question, so unless you have adequate knowledge of technology, steer clear of this topic. Students who did answer this did not have a strong personal voice but simply went on listing examples of technology that has become a problem in today's world. The question clearly requires you to have a strong argumentation. So if you are also weak in your language skills, avoid this question.

KEY- This is Not an example driven essay where you simply list examples of complicated technology which people cannot understand. The question also calls for you to evaluate people. They are complacent, addicted to technology, mindless dependency and thus are handicap when you no longer have it.

'unable to comprehend'-The question implies that man is short sighted, greedy, and thus does not comprehend the consequences of his actions – long term implication of using these technology

There is an implicit suggestion in the question about the future – man is not thinking about the long term consequences of his action (use of technology)

Examples – cars, air-conditioning, biomedical ethical issues, the use Internet, stem cell, DNA manipulation, creation of artificial life, weapons of mass destruction

The use of cars – addiction

Air cons- addiction

Stem Cell- not thinking about consequences

Weapons of mass destruction – can turn against you, thus shows we do not comprehend it. (eg terrorist groups using it in their efforts to create fear)

Indicators to show that we are unable to comprehend– exploitation, the setting up of Bioethics Advisory groups, Political/Independent groups etc...to oversee exploitation

Balance- people questioning it shows that there are awareness, but we think of short term issues thus we do not see the implication until it becomes a problem- eg how our cars have become bad for environment

The question provides ample room to discuss the question holistically – i.e exploring human nature and what is meant by 'unable to comprehend'.

Over the past century, the lives of people have changed greatly. Today, in the developed world, it is normal for people to drive automobiles powered by gasoline, often driving many miles every day to get to and from work. We travel even longer distances on airplanes powered by fossil

fuels. We have a large network of computers, created by processes involving fossil fuels that we use to find information and communicate with each other. Have we become too dependent on technology, addiction, mindless usage etc...

We live and work in buildings built to be cooled by air conditioners which need power generated from fossil fuels. We have incorporated a huge amount of new technology into our lives. All these action s have a great effect on our environment. When the technology was invented and

then implemented, it was impossible for us to know all of the positive and negative effects that would arise. However, it is important that we do all that we can to consider the short-term and long-term effects of our actions. Mindless dependence.

Automobile as an example. It may allow people to get from one place to the other more quickly, saving time that could then be used for other things. This may be considered good. However, because they can travel further in a shorter amount of time, people may choose to spread out more. When something negative results from the application of technology, the technology is not to blame. To blame the technology would be to deny that people have free will in their application of it. Rather, the negative effects result from people not seeing or understanding the consequences of using the technology in the way they are using it. Our mindless use of technology brings about the degradation of our environment ...but it's too late (?)

There are some, especially in positions of political power in the United States, who will say that it is not certain that our actions are causing the Earth to warm. The Kyoto Protocol can testify that we do not comprehend the tech we use. We must ask whether this decision was made because, all things considered, it was thought to be best for the world, or if, rather, their judgment was clouded by technological addiction and the consequent difficulty in comprehending the tech we use.

What are the costs? Include environmental damage resulting from manufacturing it and generating power for it and harm caused by a forced withdrawal (caused by depletion of oil, for instance).

Our society's relationship with technology is somewhat similar, among other things eg a person's need to having a car. But now we must understand the long-term costs and consequences, of its addiction to technology. When choosing how to proceed, we can now act from a mature perspective having been informed by our mistakes. History can, and does, repeat itself, but, if a critical mass of people recognize that they are on a course known from the past to be destructive, then the course can be changed. We must, therefore, learn from our present situation in order to survive in the future. The choice is ours to make.

6. "At the end of the day, government is all about teamwork and partnership." Comment

Very few attempted this question. Those who attempted this question did not score at all because they did not answer the question which clearly states, 'at the end of the day'. Students need to really think about this.

This would be an ideal situation cos' it would solve lots of problems like unequal distribution of wealth, eradicate illnesses etc...better security for all. Thus it may not be happening now but it is an ideal situation. IMPT TO ADDRESS 'AT THE END OF THE DAY'.

Not about style of govt. Whatever the style, you must discuss teamwork and partnership. Govt is not only about politicians but includes grassroots, organizations etc..

Roles in economic, social and cultural (harmony), politics (democracy) etc should be addressed. You can agree that it is possible to leave Politics to the government under certain circumstances, esp when Singapore is concern, but that under any circumstances in anywhere, Politics should not be left to the government only but should include the people, other organisations (NGOs, private/international organisations etc...) should include teamwork and partnership.

Intro- An attempt to explain what the Government's role is. You can make reference to representative Democracy and hence the issue of teamwork and partnership to run the nation. It's an innate right and responsibility to be involved and not leave it to the Government alone (politicians).

Students are encourage make reference to Singapore's situation –Paternalistic Government. Singapore is an exception and the ordinary man in the street can leave it to the politicians. Important for partnership and teamwork – pooling together of the world's collective resources would be able to provide a solution to many of the social, economic and political problems that we face today. Cynics may argue that the obstacles to setting up and running a world where partnership and teamwork of various governments are insurmountable. The reality is that the potential benefits should want us to make it a reality.

You could structure your argument according to various areas of discussion (social, political, economic) OR various levels of impact (individual, societal, global)

-Better resource allocation would be possible. Nearly 1.5 billion people live on less than 1 US dollar a day, while WHO can try to alleviate the problem etc... they cannot compel any nation to do so nor can they have a significant impact without the partnership and teamwork of other nations.

-ensure global goals are met , Kyoto Protocol, The Geneva Conventions, Nuclear Non – Proliferation Treaty...need partnership and teamwork to ensure such legislation are effective. Pushing regions for non-compliance to compliance ...Global goals for peace and security, the safeguarding of human rights, protecting the environment and economic prosperity, amongst other concerns (EU, ASEAN,UN) all show the importance of teamwork and partnership.

-counters the trend of insularity – while democracy and globalisation appear in the mainstream consciousness in a largely positive light, increasingly more people and countries feel disenfranchised by them as they find that developed countries and MNCs benefit at the expense of other countries. Evident in diverse groups like anti-globalisation, anti-consumerism movements to Al-Qaeda. Such trends are not healthy as it can lead to extremism and conflict. Teamwork and partnership can address these problems and ensure a sense of inclusiveness of all nations...

Obstacles to realizing such teamwork and partnership include:

-The difficulty of securing the agreement of all (if not, a large majority) of nations as they would have to relinquish some of their sovereignty (esp if they are rich and self-sufficient/ do not share the same political ideology as most nations)

-The difficulty in arriving at a consensus with regards to some issues given that there are usually no decisions that will benefit all parties involved.

Once again, you should only attempt this question if you have specific content knowledge on world politics and if you have strong linguistic ability to put forth a strong argument. Personal voice is very important. You will not get away by just listing why it is important for teamwork and partnership. Neither is this question about the pros and cons of teamwork and partnership. The bulk of the students made the biggest mistake by devoting half the essay to why teamwork and partnership is important and then went on to say that there are other aspects to the government and started listing other factors like being corrupt free etc...

7. “Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions.” Discuss this with reference to your society.

Few students attempted this question, and those who did fell at opposite ends of the scale: the question was either done badly, or excellently. Candidates need to note that there are several key qualifiers which need to be addressed in order for the response to have sufficient depth; commonly the term "all subversions" was inadequately discussed.

The terms, "free thought" and "free speech" can be split up for more in-depth evaluation and analysis. Candidates should note that it is imperative to adopt a working definition of both terms in order for the essay to have some semblance of structure and clarity. Moreover, the term "restriction" can be split up as well: who is restricting thought/speech, the individual himself, society at large, or the government? What forms of restrictions are there?

Questions which should be considered:

- How and why may restriction of free thought/speech be dangerous?
- Who or what is the danger to?
- The qualification of "most" à which hints to the further scope possible in the essay: if a candidate argues that restriction of free thought/speech is not the most dangerous, what, then, is the most dangerous of all subversions? Note that this is not a cue to launch into an example-driven essay of listing one subversion after another without qualification. Rather, it is on evaluation—a clear comparative analysis based on concrete facts—upon which marks will be given.
- What, exactly, constitutes subversion? To consider: is there a difference between the subversion of an individual, and the subversion of society at large? Which is more dangerous, an overt attempt at subversion (e.g., propaganda flyers), or a deliberately subliminal attempt at influencing one's opinions (e.g., advertising and marketing)?
- It is important for candidates to realize that every argument brought up must be made in the context of "your society"; this essay depends hence on the amount of concrete knowledge a candidate has about his/her country. An argument made solely on philosophical and/or general points will not stand, as candidates are in effect not addressing the question in its entirety.

Some Possible Approaches and Areas of Discussion:

1) It is not the most dangerous, in fact is necessary

Singapore's tenuous social balance requires citizens to prioritise public good over individual rights to freedom of thought and expression.

Approach towards freedom of speech has been influenced by the Chinese saying "a single spark can start a prairie fire".

As a highly-wired society, Singaporeans' freedom to express their thoughts and ideas have greater potential of destabilizing society with wider and faster reach. Restriction of free thought and free speech protects society from other more pertinent dangers (social, political, economic instability resulting from racial/religious conflict, protests, riots, strikes, anti-government sentiment, etc)

2) It is the most dangerous

Restriction of free thought and free speech undermines individual rights and can be viewed as a form of oppression.

Also undermines the basic tenets of democracy—without freedom of speech, journalists, artists, citizens practice self-censorship to avoid violating regulations. Government cannot be kept accountable by a system of checks and balances, transparency compromised. Could promote/allow for corruption, nepotism, etc. Worse yet, the tyranny of authoritarian rule.

Under such a system, political debate is muted and people have little say in government decision-making which over time can lead to political apathy, stagnation.

Some possible examples:

Repeated jailing and suing of opposition members for defamation (Chee Soon Juan, Chee Siok Chin, J.B. Jeyaretnam)

Repeatedly suing journalists, press for defamation (International Herald Tribune in 1994, Wall Street Journal Asia in 2008 and 2009, New York Times in 2010, The Economist)

In December 2008, a Singaporean couple was charged with sedition for distributing the tracts *The Little Bride* and *Who Is Allah?*, said to "to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between Christians and Muslims in Singapore"

Films Act bans the making, distribution and exhibition of "party political films" (*A Vision of Persistence* about J.B. Jeyaretnam, Martyn See's *Singapore Rebel* on Chee Soon Juan, etc)

Mandatory registration of all political and religious websites

In September 2008, US citizen Gopalan Nair was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for insulting a public servant after he accused a Singapore judge of "prostituting herself" in his blog.

Internet services provided by the three major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are subject to regulation by the Media Development Authority (MDA), which blocks a "symbolic" number of websites containing "mass impact objectionable" material

In September 2005, 3 people were arrested and charged under the Sedition Act for posting racist comments on the Internet. Two were sentenced to imprisonment.

Popular blogger Lee Kin Mun's (aka "Mr Brown") weekly column in state-owned Today newspaper which had satirized the high cost of living, would be suspended.

Arts Entertainment Licenses issued by MDA are required for any performance accessible by the public. Applications must include full scripts, song titles and lyrics, stage layout plans, etc.

A final point which stronger candidates may like to consider for nuance of argument: the term "freedom" is actually linked with the concept of responsibility—in which case, may it be considered that it is not the restriction, but free thought and speech instead which are the most dangerous of all subversions, given how the former is almost a definite (is it truly possible to control another's thoughts in this highly interconnected world of fast-flowing media?), and the latter is deemed a right?

8. Infidelity is a biological imperative. Discuss.

This question was not a popular choice with candidates, and with good reason. Those attempting this question should note that the discussion needs to be based on fact, not anecdotal examples of Tiger Woods and Jack Neo, or sweeping assumptions along the lines of "it is in the nature of men to be promiscuous. Hence, infidelity is a biological imperative." Also, the question did not specify men alone.

Key concepts which need to be addressed: the notion of infidelity, which can encompass physical or emotional infidelity; the term "biological", which hints to a nature-vs-nurture debate; the concept of an imperative: i.e., is it a must-do? A top priority? An urge which cannot be controlled?

Hence, a good discussion will centre on:

- Whether or not infidelity is a biological imperative,
- If it is the only imperative in nature,
- Are there other imperatives in life?

- What are the consequences or implications of this?

As the term “biological imperative” is a key focus, candidates need to have sufficient knowledge of scientific research done in this particular context. Namely:

- It should be noted that only 3% of all species are purely monogamous. And the hormone, testosterone, has been conclusively proven in many studies to be a dominant reason for risk-taking behaviour, which includes infidelity. Hence, it is actually undeniable that infidelity is one imperative in nature: Darwinian principle holds true here: the more offspring one has, the greater the chances of passing on one's genes.
- However, present in most species as well are two other hormones, oxytocin, commonly referred to as the “love hormone”, and vasopressin. High levels of these hormones results in fidelity, and species which mate for life—e.g., prairie voles, swans, barn owls, albatrosses—tend to have more neurological receptors for and/or higher levels of these hormones. (refer to landmark studies on prairie voles by James Winslow, Thomas Insel and Larry Young etc)

In summary, it is scientifically undeniable that infidelity *is* a biological imperative. An excellent essay would then go to discuss the finer points:

- just because something is inherent in nature, does it mean it is the *sole* biological imperative (considering that there are two competing hormones present?)
- What, exactly, does an imperative mean? Is mankind so wired by his genes, that social conditioning can do nothing to change what is instinctive? Here, it should be noted that a key argument where genetics is concerned, is that just because one has the gene for a trait, does not mean one will **definitely** show that trait: it only indicates a **greater propensity** for it. An excellent essay would be able to pick up on this distinction, and argue that the propensity for infidelity can be mitigated, aggravated or counteracted by *other* imperatives: e.g., family considerations, religion and societal objections/allowance, legalities and the financial cost of infidelity.
- The final conclusion can then be drawn: that ultimately, even if infidelity is a biological imperative, there are other competing instincts in biology. Moreover, genetic propensity is not a dictate: Man still has rationality and free will; there is social conditioning to consider, just as there are multiple imperatives in life. Ultimately it has to do with the complex weighing of an individual's own priorities, before the act of infidelity is committed. Biology may be an excuse, but it alone is not a reason for everything.

9. Do you think there is much ambiguity and confusion about what it means to be a man in today's world?

Pitfall 1 (rare) : To interpret ‘man’ to be a generic person, i.e. Do you think there is much ambiguity and confusion about what it means to be a citizen/human in today's world?

Pitfall 2 : To write generic essays on gender imbalances being redressed in so many spheres and conveniently ending the paragraph ‘.. therefore there is no confusion. The men can see what the women can or have achieved.’

This is clearly a question to probe on the male identity. Of course, the female perspective (of the man) is important but the essay should lean towards men.

‘Come on, be a man!’ – this oft-repeated phrase in many contexts is alone enough to ponder on for meat in this essay – how have things changed?

Contexts

Today's world – all demographic, political, socio-economic changes attributed to globalisation are acceptable.

Man – traditional gender roles (political, economic, socio-cultural, spiritual) & sexual orientation/behavior can be discussed.

Possible strains of argument

Who are confused? The man, the young boy looking for cues to shape himself? The women (mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, professional associates)?

Who are causing the ambiguity? The women (possibly through emergence in many dimensions) or men themselves (possibly by social behavior).

Observations

Economy - more women in workplace, leading positions, thus confusion about men always being the leaders

Home - Is the notion of fatherhood evolving? Stepping out of their traditional roles and becoming acceptable – women becoming the breadwinners, house-husbands becoming common

Homosexuality – male numbers are more visible; some thrive on ambiguous identity

Biology – men were essentially hunters, women gatherers. Where does the testosterone and aggression find avenues today in an automated, push-button, gender-neutral economy? Or is it being diminished? If so, what consequences?

No need for society or culture-based comparison UNLESS having good observations about Chinese or Indian society which makes for almost 40% of the world population. The cultural effects these two societies spread to the rest or absorb from the rest is not insignificant either.

Perhaps there is confusion in large societies like India & China where men dominated in almost all areas. In both countries, there is evidence of women using the education route for many areas of recompense or holistic progress.

Please do not give sweeping examples about the Middle East gender behaviour. It is far more diverse than the press depicts it to be.

OR – there is very little confusion

Family - Forms may have changed but substance remains. There is increased call for fathers to play a prominent role.

Cultural/spiritual - e.g. The world's one billion Catholics still have a male Pope. No one is clamouring for a female.

Politics - Strong women have always been present throughout history. Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Rani of Jhansi, Joan of Arc – across cultures. Capable men served under them.

10. 'In today's world, diversity is the new conformity.' Do you agree?

The essays on this question did not show full understanding of the question; there was no understanding of the negative implications of the question, of the phrase "the new conformity". One student thought that it meant "unity".

The quotation suggests that people are embracing diversity in a mindless, unquestioning manner – students need to discuss whether they agree with such a view.

Interpretation of "diversity" - being different, not the same – whether differing viewpoints, multi-ethnic composition of people within a society, alternative lifestyles, schools taking in more foreign students and taking "a broader, global perspective" ...

Students need to argue whether they agree with the view expressed in the quotation: that diversity is being widely touted as something desirable, like a sort of trend (everybody is doing it).

They should discuss whether the benefits/advantages/features of diversity are being too hyped up, or whether diversity is genuinely worth embracing as a way of improving society.

11. 'The media does not require more freedom; rather it needs to exercise more responsibility.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

General comments:

Students who attempted this question generally passed but their essays were just average. The following is a list of what they did and did not do.

1. did not identify the assumptions in the questions
2. there was no clear understanding of 'freedom' and 'responsibility', let alone '[less] freedom' and 'more responsibility'.
3. it became an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of the media, and that too in a listing fashion.
4. quite a handful merely listed the functions of the media without linking these functions back to the question and especially whether this meant more or less responsibility
5. apparently there is COMPLETE media freedom in the USA
5. in most of the scripts, the focus was mostly on the media's function to entertain, hence the examples were largely limited to the paparazzi and celebrity culture. The better essays not only examined this function of the media, but they also brought in good examples related to political censorship and propaganda.
6. what was interesting (for want of a better word) is that adolescents (ie a number of our students) think the world revolves around them only (surprise, surprise). In quite a few essays, the students argued that the media needs to exercise more responsibility because young people are vulnerable to media images and messages because they cannot think for themselves. While this is true to some extent, they should understand the media's role in the larger context of society, the individuals and communities which make up a particular society, and the norms and mores shaping a society.
7. Overall, the general sense is that while students have some knowledge on the media, they do not know how to manipulate whatever knowledge they have to answer this question.

With regard to the question, I'm proposing **one** way of answering this question

General:

1. Identify assumptions in the question and establish what they understand by the key terms
2. Consider general trends in terms of media freedom:
 - is there a trend towards greater media freedom in the last 15 or 20 years, especially in democracies (both developed and developing)?
 - is the situation different in illiberal democracies and authoritarian regimes?
 - what indicators can they provide to show evidence for the above?
 - which agent accords the media greater freedom?
 - which agent is responsible for placing limits on the media? Media's self-censorship?

More Freedom

Why do some quarters strongly believe that the media needs greater freedom?

a. The active and rational audience

Much trust is placed in the individual; not only are they capable of manipulating the media, they have access to the plural values of society, thus enabling them to conform, accommodate or reject what the media offers both in terms of production choices and values. It is only when the media has greater freedom can it provide a wider range of choices for the audience about what to consume, in the process offering more autonomy to the individual and making them more media-literate.

If the media were not given the freedom

b. The media as fourth estate

There are various ways in which the first three estates of a democratic society are defined but essentially they are seen as the government, legal system and the church (in the West) in various combinations. The role of the media is seen as being that of the fourth estate, whose role is to keep the public informed about what is happening in each of the other three. For instance, the media fulfils this role by reporting political events in the newspapers or on broadcast television. The media's reporting of the Catholic priests' sex abuse scandal renewed the debate on whether only unmarried men are, as a rule, to be ordained to the priesthood and whether mandatory celibacy was responsible for the abuses.

If the media is not given more freedom, two things are then compromised: the media's role as a public watchdog and the public's ability to use the media as a tool to influence the government.

c. More freedom leads to a free society, especially in authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies.

- the rise of citizen journalism can be brought up here

More Responsibility, Less Freedom:

Why is it that world opinion is divided on giving greater responsibility to the media?
All media products have an ideological dimension to them and are constructed within the context of a dominant ideology or a series of common sense values that are generally shared and understood by all members of a community.

In a survey conducted by the BBC in 2007, 56% thought that freedom of the press was very important to ensure a free society. But 40% said it was more important to maintain social harmony and peace, even if it meant curbing the press's freedom to report news truthfully. Most of the 14 countries surveyed, press freedom (including broadcasting) was considered more important than social stability. The strongest endorsement came from North America and Western Europe, where up to 70% put freedom first, followed by Venezuela, Kenya and South

Africa, with over 60%. In India, Singapore and Russia, by contrast, more people favoured stability over press freedom. In those countries, around 48% of respondents supported controls over the press to ensure peace and stability.

source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7134918.stm>

a. Media is not value-free

The media is not value-free therefore we cannot make the assumption that the information provided and disseminated by the media is objective. Whose interests do the media represent? The media baron's interests? The general public's interests? (Compare different newspaper companies in the UK and US and consider their political affiliations). Is the audience then active as discussed earlier or are individuals passive consumers? Any media institution will have particular ideologies that affect the construction of its products. Ideologies are promoted in many ways, for instance the ways that women are portrayed in films, on television and in magazines. This portrayal of ideologies then becomes important in shaping general societal attitudes.

b. Commercial media institutions are profit-motivated

Commercial media institutions have to make money to survive - newspapers have to sell advertising space; broadcasters have to generate advertising revenue, etc. So they cannot create products that will attract small audiences as the advertisers will want access to large and stable audiences. This is why most commercial institutions will target a 'mass' audience rather than risk losing the advertisers.

Students should then consider what points (1) and (2) mean for the quality of choices available to the audience and how this negatively impacts the individual and the society at large. Given that the media is both a ubiquitous and influential presence in every aspect of society, the need for greater responsibility then becomes pertinent.

c. Nature of today's world

Racial, religious and socioeconomic fault lines are very pronounced in this post 911- and recession era. Given that a typical state today could possibly be made up of different nations and communities, the media's function to inform then becomes more important, especially in terms of responsible reporting (e.g. Newsweek's reporting of the alleged desecration of the Koran in 2005 and its repercussions).

Implications of new media technologies

Discussion points:

- can greater media freedom co-exist with greater responsibility or are they mutually exclusive?
- which agent accords the media greater freedom?
- which agent is responsible for placing more limits on the media? media's self-censorship?
- More responsibility could possibly lead to a safer society but at what costs and for whose benefits?
- where do you draw the line between greater responsibility and excessive censorship?

12. 'One ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' Discuss this statement with reference to the role of modern medicine in the world today.

Basically this question is asking candidates to take a stand on whether prevention is better than cure in today's society paying close attention to modern medicine.

This is not a popular choice among the candidates as I suspect they were put off by the reference to modern medicine.

Better candidates were quick to agree that prevention is better than cure and some of the arguments include the following;

Economic and social drain on the patient and family members.

Medical costs have increased exponentially over the years. In 2009, the main items responsible for the increase of 2.9 percent in health care cost were hospitalisation fees, dental treatment charges and medical insurance premiums. Most people find it more feasible to take better care of their health through good nutrition and regular check-ups than to fall sick and be warded in hospitals.

On the social level, anxiety levels increases which can result in tension in the family, dysfunctional families.

Uncertainties of modern medicine

People are more aware of the uncertainties of modern medicine. Many believe that not everybody will be cured and in some cases, disaster will occur. There has been an increase in fatal use of drugs which result in the death of patients. Cases highlighted were the Slim 10 saga in Singapore involving Selvarani Raja who died from liver failure after consuming the diet pills and Michael Jackson's death.

There is always a fear of misdiagnosis or fear of complications arising from failed surgeries especially for illnesses such as HIV, diabetes, and cancer.

Modern medical practices are based on trial and error

The contention is that a substantial number of patients suffer from treatment-caused disorders and adverse drug reactions. These harmful effects can be serious and even lethal and they are associated with modern medicines which include drugs, other medical therapies, diagnostic procedures and surgery.

Dependency on high technology, both in diagnosis and treatment has been shown to be a source of injury with machine failure or misapplication of technology. This can happen in the intensive care unit.

Marketing strategies by pharmaceutical companies

Pharmaceutical marketing also puts a great pressure on physicians to use new products. The pharmaceutical company competitions are aggressive. Physicians are inundated with data supporting the use of each drug. Such marketing may dilute opposing scientific information that is not as well published. Ultimately, drugs may be withdrawn, but only after substantial harm has been done. For example, Benoxaprofen, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agent was introduced and marketed in 1982, but then withdrawn after cases of fatal liver toxicity were reported in Britain.

However, physicians and patients have come to accept medical hazards as a necessary price to pay for modern diagnosis and therapy even though they may be seriously debilitating or lethal.

The emphasis today is on healthy lifestyle, work life balance, exercise, good nutrition and taking healthy supplements to keep the doctor at bay. Some candidates discussed the role of the Health Promotion Board in Singapore as one of the examples used to promote this. Others discussed the role of self-help groups to educate the public on the dietary requirements for a healthy life-style.

Emphasis is on individual responsibility especially with many modern diseases going around.

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