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# January 2023

## Car Ownership

Car ownership has increased so rapidly over the past thirty years that in many cities around the world there are constant traffic jams.

How true do you think this statement is?

What measures can governments take to discourage people from owning cars?

It has become increasingly common in recent years for cities to be inundated with cars and, consequently, increased levels of traffic. In my opinion, this is a very real phenomenon and governments could do more to encourage other modes of transport.

There is little doubt that the main cause of traffic is more cars in urban areas. One natural consequence of a burgeoning global middle class is a rise in automobile ownership. This is reflected not only in statistics but also in the day-to-day reality of millions living in densely populated cities such as Los Angeles, Beijing, and London. The average person living in those cities must choose between sitting in traffic, using public transport, or residing near to their workplace. There is little chance this pattern will change in the future as many people see owning a car as a sign of social status and a mark of success in life generally.

Since most car owners will not be dissuaded by higher prices, the best method to combat traffic is to stimulate other kinds of transportation. Since most cities already possess public transportation in the form of buses and subways, governments can simply commit to maintaining and expanding existing options. A standout example of this would be the London Underground which has dozens of lines and is maintained to a high standard. Another pragmatic solution would be to encourage the use of bikes and motorbikes. Many European countries do this by providing free bicycles for short rides. In Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, urban planners provide lanes specifically for compact motorbikes where there is far less traffic than in the lanes for bulky cars.

In conclusion, there is clear evidence that cities are more crowded than ever before and the state can curb this trend by enacting policies to promote bicycles and motorbikes in cities. This is a crucial reform not only for quality of life but also the environmental impact.

## Newspapers and Other Media

Some think newspapers are the best method for reading the news while others think other media is better.

Discuss both sides and give your own opinion.

In recent years, many have argued that the best way to read the news is no longer in newspapers. In my opinion, though there are sentimental reasons to prefer newspapers, newer forms of media are far superior.

Those who continue to value newspapers tend to be older individuals. They have typically maintained this habit for years or even decades. Over such a long period reading newspapers, it is logical that they will have developed an emotional attachment to the act of buying and reading a physical copy of the news. For example, The New York Times continues to publish and sell physical copies of their paper in select markets. The people buying these papers could save time and money by reading the same articles online, but might be attracted to the feel and memories surrounding physical newspapers.

However, new forms of media allow audiences a wide range of choices that enhance the overall experience. A user accessing a media website can not only read an article from the convenience of their phone or laptop, but also take advantage of features like automatically generated text-to-speech, videos, links to related content, the ability to share an article, and more. All these features are also complemented by the ability to select a diversity of news sources. Instead of reading a single news outlet that might have a liberal or conservative bias, a discerning reader can seek out multiple viewpoints and find the news that is most trustworthy over time.

In conclusion, despite the respect due to the history of journalism, there are now a wide array of better options online. Individuals should nonetheless be wary of less trustworthy sources.

# February 2023

## Neighbors

Today, many people do not know their neighbors.

Why is this?

What can be done about this?

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for individuals to be less connected with their immediate neighbors. In my opinion, this is largely a result of a more insular society and can be somewhat alleviated through initiatives that encourage more community interaction.

The main reason that many residents today do not often speak with their neighbors is that the world is more physically isolated. In past generations, people were more in the habit of going outside and occupying their time by talking with those living nearby. Today, the rise of technology allows the average person to do a variety of activities online including talking with friends, watching movies, playing computer games, and listening to music. These habits now occupy the vast majority of a person’s time and there is no longer a need to interact with one’s neighbor out of boredom or a feeling of connection.

This modern tendency can be countered by more communal activities. Since there is no reversing technological advancement, it must be countered through proactive measures. An example of this would be a local government organizing a festival or musical performance in a park. Neighbors who meet at such events are likely to form connections and thereafter remain in contact as either casual acquaintances or actual friends. If governments are unwilling to undertake such initiatives, then local citizens can also organize various events. The result over time will be a gradual thawing of relations between neighbors.

In conclusion, the way people live today leads to less interaction with one’s neighbors and this phenomenon can be mitigated with more community events. If nothing is done, society will only become more fractured and alienating.

## Science

Nowadays, not enough students choose science subjects at university in many countries.

Why is this?

What effects does this have on society?

It has become increasingly less common in recent years for individuals to major in STEM-related subjects. In my opinion, this is the result of the growth of more business-oriented fields of study though the actual effects on society are marginal.

Greater numbers of young people now opt to major in subjects related to economics and finance rather than science. Over the past century, economies globally have grown and can now support white-collar professions such as those in marketing, banking, investment, and finance. These occupations allow an individual to engage directly in earning a high salary without requiring the hard work or talent that is needed for intensive scientific jobs. It is therefore only natural that individuals will increasingly gravitate towards work that guarantees them the greatest possible rewards with the least possible effort.

However, this shift to more lucrative fields only moderately impacts the field of science. The reason for that is that there is still substantial demand for innovation in scientific fields being driven by both private and public interests. A strong example of this situation would be the worldwide response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid development of viable vaccines. The main areas where science is hurt by interest in other majors is at the fringes where the average worker is more likely to pursue a job at a bank or marketing firm rather than an engineering or manufacturing company. Although this has led to a decrease among certain segments of the population in their passion for scientific endeavors, there is still great work being done by professionals in a variety of fields.

In conclusion, it is a logical consequence of more developed economies that many students are now less likely to major in the sciences. However, the impact on society is largely imperceptible and compensated for in various ways.

## Money

In many countries, people increasingly talk about money such as how much they earn or how much they pay for things in their daily conversations.

Why?

Is this a positive or negative trend?

It has become increasingly pervasive in recent years for individuals to discuss money matters on a daily basis. In my opinion, this is due to changes in what individuals consider polite and is a decidedly negative trend on the whole.

The reason people now talk about money is that it is socially acceptable. In past generations, discussing money was considered “in poor taste” and most people were reserved in order to not appear arrogant or desperate. Today, many social norms from the past have disappeared and this includes ones related to the discussion of one’s finances. This enables the average person to discuss money with friends and family as a way of coping with anxieties about the future or insecurities about their own status in society. For instance, it is common for some wealthy individuals to show off by talking about their investments, property, and so on to impress friends and elevate their own self-esteem.

Discussing money is overall a negative trend as it exacerbates an unhealthy mindset. There are situations where it can be positive, such as when discussing potential investments and helping friends. These contexts are the exceptions, however, as most people simply talk about money to relieve their own nervousness or as a form of bragging. Once a person becomes addicted to the minor dopamine bursts that accompany seeking self-pity or self-aggrandizement, they will have a difficult time transitioning to more productive and fun topics of conversation. Over time, a person may ironically increase their anxieties and insecurities by seeking to cope with them.

In conclusion, people talk about their finances as it is no longer considered rude and it is an unhealthy habit. It is better to talk about to more important topics.

# March **2023**

## Kids and Technology

New technologies have changed the way children spend their free time.

Do you think the advantages of this trend outweigh the disadvantages?

There is little doubt that technological advances have greatly altered the free time activities of children around the world. In my opinion, this is a decidedly negative phenomenon since the far-reaching effects of technology on the human psyche are still largely unknown.

Proponents of children using technology contend that it can be used for a variety of purposes. This applies not only to traditional usages such as sending emails, doing research online, and watching educational videos but also burgeoning innovations like artificial intelligence. The recent emerge of applications like ChatGPT now enable all individuals, children included, the opportunity to make their lives more efficient, productive, and enjoyable. If children are taught responsible usage habits, then they can take advantage of the many benefits and become more well-rounded learners and future members of society.

However, the psychological ramifications of habits centered around technology are potentially severe. Humans have not evolved the ability to properly interact with a digital world and children are especially vulnerable. A child who becomes addicted to a social media application such as TikTok might be less physically active and start to see the world through a virtual perspective. This can lead to the development of mild mental conditions related to anxiety and self-esteem, or more extreme ones related to disassociation and depression. The evidence for this is clearly expressed in the often-cited statistics on the rising number of suicide attempts among teenagers and children since the introduction of social media platforms.

In conclusion, regardless of how technology can be used as a tool, its drawbacks in terms of general mental health make it a negative overall. Parents must therefore carefully manage their children’s screen time.

## Change

Some people prefer to spend their lives doing the same things and avoiding change. Others, however, think that change is always a good thing.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

While many people are justifiably resistant to the idea of change, others embrace it as a driving force for growth. In my opinion, change is not inherently progress and should not be pursued in all situations.

Those who argue in favor of change point out that when a person changes, they are likely to grow in a positive direction. This is evident as a person grows through stages of childhood and adolescence and becomes more mature and intelligent. The same fact applies when a person is an adult as reconsidering one’s biases, opinions, and habits can lead to healthy, upward personal development. One further instance of this relates to relationships. A person who has experience with multiple relationships will likely have developed their emotional intelligence and ability to be a healthy partner to someone else.

However, change is not necessarily related to personal growth. This fact is best illustrated through the everyday examples. A person who changes jobs is not guaranteed to learn more in a new position or company and may even come to regret moving on. It is more likely that someone who remains at a single job will be able to progress at that company into a variety or roles and grow. This is also the case when it comes to travel or moving to a new home. Individuals who travel learn more about the world but may neglect their own personal growth as a consequence. By staying in one city or country, a person can better understand themselves and their neighbors and make deeper and longer-lasting personal progress.

In conclusion, despite the fact that change can be a catalyst for healthy personal growth, it should not be regarded as intrinsically positive. Individuals should seek to grow as people but not always alter the material circumstances around them.

# April 2023

## Early Language Learning

Some believe that students should begin learning a language very early in school while others think these subjects should be taught later.

Discuss both sides and give your own opinion.

Many have argued that the earlier students begin learning a language in school the better. Although this can pose challenges for schools, I am in complete agreement with this opinion.

Those against early foreign language courses contend it is not always practical. In many school systems, the cost of such courses can be prohibitive. More specifically, in more remote areas, teachers will often not have the ability to teach another language and it may be difficult to recruit foreign native language speakers. If the schools teach a foreign language anyway, then they will have to rely largely on textbooks and the classes are not likely to be as productive. This reality can create a situation where wealthier school districts receive a disproportionately superior education.

However, even when the conditions are not ideal, there is tremendous value in learning a language early relative to learning it later in life. Studies have shown that languages can be acquired far more easily early in one’s education. As a person gets older, the muscles in the mouth become more fixed making it more difficult to pronounce sounds from another language similar to a native speaker. Their brains are also less flexible and this is clearly evidenced in the considerably slower progress for adults when learning a new language. Attempting to acquire another language younger therefore has greater overall value for any given individual.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of early language acquisition justifies its inclusion in curricula at all schools. This educational reform should be a priority.

## Attention Spans

Many today feel that attention spans are becoming shorter due to the prevalence of social media.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Some today have argued that individuals now possess generally shorter attention spans largely as a result of the growth of various social media platforms. In my opinion, though this claim might be slightly overstated, it is true on the whole.

Those who argue that shorter attention spans are not due to social media point out the influence of other new forms of media and technology. The length of a person’s attention span was never a topic of consideration for debate before the onset of the digital age and the development of television, radio, the internet, and so on. The stimulation from these technologies represents unprecedented challenges for humans who have not evolved to live in a digital world. Although modern kinds of media lead to over-stimulation and an addictive craving for more, constant stimulation, social media is merely one distraction among many.

However, social media is the greatest single cause of declining attention spans due to their unique design features. Social media companies have specifically crafted their applications to provide momentary bursts of pleasure. For instance, an application like TikTok is specifically designed to provide a stream of addictive videos under 10 seconds in length. As their algorithm perfects a curated feed for any given user, individuals easily become hooked on short entertainment and their attention spans concomitantly suffer. This is in marked contrast to the focus required to watch a film or listen to a radio broadcast.

In conclusion, I agree social media has caused the average person to struggle with concentration for extended periods due to the manner in which these websites have been constructed. Governments should therefore regulate them in order to mitigate the harms they cause for society as a whole.

# **June 2023**

## Laws to Limit Working Hours

Fossil fuels are the main source of energy around the world today. In some countries, the use of alternative sources of energy is replacing fossil fuels.

**Is this a positive or negative development?**

Many nations are now supporting the adoption of various energy alternatives in order to reduce fossil fuel consumption. In my opinion, though there may be short-term economic downsides, this is a decidedly positive development due to the implications on the environment generally.

Those who feel the sudden adoption of alternative energies is a negative point out the financial repercussions. There are economies around the world that are currently dependent on exporting fossil fuels, in particular in The Middle East, South America, and Eastern Europe. Many of these countries are still developing and have few other natural resources or industries that could replace a decline in the energy sector. The economic effects will extend far beyond exporters though. Both developed and developing nations ranging from The United States and Vietnam to China and Russia exploit oil for private vehicles and various industries. Substituting cheap oil for a more expensive alternative might result in economic catastrophe with wide-ranging repercussions.

However, the environmental effect is overwhelmingly more important for the long-term health of the planet. The economic results of less dependence on fossil fuels will cause short-term problems but the issues caused by climate change are also becoming a present reality. For instance, there has been a rise in the number of cataclysmic natural disasters related to rising ocean temperatures and deforestation. Even more troubling are the less noticed problems such as habitats being destroyed in remote areas like Antarctica and the Amazon Rainforest. Beyond the animals becoming endangered and extinct, it is only a number of years before human life is affected. This existential threat is the reason alternative energies are a pressing need.

In conclusion, despite the economic drawbacks of a sudden shift to alternative power sources, this reorientation will have a markedly positive long-term impact on the environment. Governments should therefore implement and bolster alternative energy initiatives.

## University Students and Main Subjects

**Many university students want to learn about different subjects in addition to their main subjects. Others feel it is more important to give all their time and attention to studying for their qualification.**

**Discuss both views and give your opinion.**

Many university students are now inclined to divide their time between studying for their major and pursuing interests in unrelated subjects. In my opinion, it is crucial for undergraduates to learn about a wide range of disciplines in order to best prepare themselves for the future.

Those who support prioritizing one’s major argue the importance of specialization. At university, there are a range of potential distractions related to social life and living on one’s own. If a graduate wants to be successful in a future career, the most logical pathway is to prepare diligently in a one specialization. For instance, an undergraduate learning about chemical engineering will be a better potential candidate for well-paid positions if they have acquired a solid theoretical foundation and accumulated whatever practical experience is available in their courses. Any diversions that detract from this focus could hinder their early career progression.

However, it is in fact more valuable long-term to view learning as an interdisciplinary experience. Many graduates will change or at least alter their professions as they begin working. Even those who remain in the same industry will benefit greatly from studying a variety of subjects. The above-mentioned engineer might be able to study about figure drawing outside their main courses and come up with more creative ideas that combine multiple subjects in their main work. Even if the other subjects are not directly applicable to work, at the minimum they are likely to feel they have become a more diverse and well-rounded individual on a personal level.

In conclusion, though time spent on one’s university major can lead to an improved discrete skillset, there is far greater value in possessing a breadth of knowledge. This range of information will serve as the foundation for a potentially more creative and fulfilling career and personal life.

## The Most Important Aim of Science

**The most important aim of science ought to be to improve people’s lives.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

Some have argued the most crucial aim of science is to improve the lives of ordinary people. In my opinion, though science might have grander aims at times, this simple goal is in fact its primary purpose.

Those who contend that science is not simply a means to improving ordinary life point out scientific inquiry can be a goal in itself. Many scientists do not imagine how their discoveries will benefit the general populace and are instead concerned with discovery and exploration. A standout example of this would be the theories of Charles Darwin, which had little immediate practical purpose other than to understand the origins of the human species. For the average researcher, concentrating solely on learning more about the natural world is a valid and potentially productive mindset. However, this interpretation of science does not reflect the real-world demands placed on science.

Historically, science has always been a platform to improve the daily lives of average individuals. This can be understood in a number of different senses. In terms of medicine, procedures and pharmaceuticals are designed with the explicit purpose of lengthening and elevating quality of life. When it comes to technology, science can be seen as subordinate to the arts and the enjoyment of the average person. The entire purpose of developing technologies such as mobile phones and computers is to allow users to listen to music, watch movies and televisions shows, edit their own videos, engage in word processing, and so on. Therefore, the highest aim of science is ultimately only to provide humans with the means to express themselves and reach others.

In conclusion, since improving life can be interpreted widely, it is decidedly the main aim of science. Those who argue for a more idealistic interpretation are not considering the pragmatism that should be the foundation of all scientific endeavor.

## Rural People Moving to Cities

**Around the world, rural people are moving to cities and urban areas, so populations in the countryside are decreasing.**

**Is this a positive or negative development?**

It is becoming increasingly common for residents to concentrate in urban areas, rather than the countryside. In my opinion, this is a decidedly negative phenomenon for human society as a whole despite the economic benefits.

Those who support the current prioritization of city life point out how it positively impacts the workforce. When the majority of a population is concentrated, this makes it easier for businesses to operate. For example, in cities such as Tokyo, there are millions of residents in the city itself and the outlying districts. The people support restaurants, cinemas, malls, arcades, parks, and various other recreational areas. These businesses in turn provide jobs for locals and this creates a positive feedback loop and greatly enriches the quality of life for the average person living in a big city. The best evidence for this is the number of people willing to move to cities for superior employment options.

However, the drawbacks associated with city lifestyles are more significant. In past generations, there was greater diversity in terms of where residents lived that enabled more varied lifestyle options. People living in the country were more likely to work outdoors and possess skills related to farming, hunting, and raising livestock. Today, most people live in cities and work corporate jobs and are experts in terms of marketing, finance, business, and customer service. These industries have a place in a healthy society but should not predominate over healthier, more active forms of gainful employment. As the world continues to transition to online-based jobs, the situation will only worsen.

In conclusion, although there are legitimate economic arguments to be made for urban migration, I would argue the effects on how humans live are overwhelmingly negative. Governments should therefore implement policies to encourage more rural infrastructure and economic activity.

## Living Longer / An Ageing Population

**Around the world, people are now living longer than ever before in the past. Some say an ageing population creates problems for governments. Others believe there are benefits to society having more elderly people.**

**To what extent do the advantages of possessing an ageing population outweigh the disadvantages?**

It has become increasingly common today for individuals to live longer than they did in past generations. Although many point out that ageing populations hinder a nation economically, I would argue that the benefits for society as a whole overshadow these perceived drawbacks.

The main reason that many fixate on the negatives associated with an ageing population relates to the financial implications. Governments and companies must both take into account the age of their population and plan accordingly. For instance, Japan has a famously old population that requires the government to make budgetary allowances for better healthcare and shortages in the labor force. The economy more generally in Japan must overcome a shrinking consumer market as young people are more likely to shop, travel, and spend freely. This same situation applies to varying degrees in nearly every country around the world at different moments in their history.

However, the economic effects of an ageing population are less important than the value of older generations. In most societies globally, young people are more progressive and push society forward. Older generations typically serve as a stabilizing ballast that keeps forward momentum from becoming too chaotic. This can take the form of advice given by elders within families to young people or more broadly across the entire political spectrum of a country. Although this conservatism can feel limiting to younger generations at first, most would admit as they get older that the influence of more experienced and wiser family members was generally positive on an individual and societal level.

In conclusion, despite the economic repercussions of older population demographics, I believe that the less tangible benefits for families make this a positive development. Naturally, there are legitimate downsides that must be collectively managed by governments and individuals alike.

# **July 2023**

## Prioritizing Healthcare

**In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of oil drilling operations in remote locations around the world. This has brought economic benefits to some countries, though it has also raised concerns about the environmental impact of these operations.**

**Discuss both sides and give your own opinion.**

There is ongoing debate about whether or not nations should drill for oil in remote locations. While some argue that it is necessary to meet our ever-increasing energy demands, I would side with those who contend that the potential environmental damage to local communities outweighs any economic benefits.

On the one hand, drilling for oil in remote locations can facilitate energy production. For example, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is estimated to contain up to 12 billion barrels of oil, which could help to reduce America’s dependence on foreign oil. Other nations have similar reserves that can meet pressing demands for the average person. The drilling operations in these remote locations will simultaneously create jobs and stimulate economic growth in the surrounding area. As economic conditions improve, energy needs will concomitantly rise and increased drilling can potentially create a cycle that benefits both locals and a given country at large.

On the other hand, drilling for oil in remote locations has significant environmental consequences. The process of extracting oil can lead to the release of greenhouse gases and other harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change. For instance, the Canadian oil sands, which are located in unpopulated areas of Alberta, are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the world. Relatedly, drilling can have negative effects on the health and wellbeing of nearby communities, particularly indigenous populations. In the above-mentioned example, some of the oil has been extracted through the controversial practice of fracking which contaminates local water supplies where native population rates are high.

In conclusion, while drilling for oil in remote locations may provide temporary economic benefits, the long-term costs to the environment and local communities are too significant. Instead, governments should prioritize the development of sustainable energy sources that will help to ensure a cleaner, healthier future for all.

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## Prioritizing Healthcare

**Some feel that governments should prioritize healthcare instead of other important areas.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

In recent years, the issue of whether the government should prioritize funding for healthcare above all other areas has been a topic of debate. I would argue that healthcare should take precedence, as it is a fundamental human right and essential for a healthy and productive population.

Certain interested party contend that there are other areas that are just as important as healthcare. One such area is [education](https://howtodoielts.com/ielts-essay-prioritizing-healthcare/). Education is often rightly seen as a key factor in social and economic development. For example, in developing countries, a lack of education can result in high levels of poverty and unemployment. Countries that invest in education have seen the results permeate throughout society, including the well-known examples of Japan after the Second World War and Finland in recent decades. Educational quality can in turn lead to sustained economic growth and higher standards of living for the average citizen.

Despite these valid arguments, I believe that healthcare should still be given priority in terms of state budget allocation. One reason for this is the fact that healthcare is a universal need. Unlike education, which can benefit some people more than others, everyone requires quality healthcare at some point in their lives. For instance, in the United States, the lack of affordable healthcare has resulted in many people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds being unable to afford necessary treatments. The consequences of this can be seen in the high number of preventable deaths each year, which could have been avoided if the government had prioritized healthcare funding.

In conclusion, it is clear that healthcare is an essential human right and deserves precedence above other critical areas such as education. Ultimately, the key is to find a sustainable and equitable approach that benefits everyone.

# August 2023

## Meat

**Some people think eating**[**meat**](https://howtodoielts.com/ielts-essay-meat/)**is bad for health.**

**Do you agree or disagree?**

Many individuals eat less meat compared to previous generations as there is clear evidence it may not be nutritious. In my opinion, although meat is often eaten in unhealthy contexts, it is generally healthy if prepared correctly.

Those who argue that meat is inherently unhealthy point out modern insights into nutrition. Many meats, most infamously red meats such as pork and beef, contain fats that can build up and contribute to the leading cause of death globally: cardiovascular disease. Added to this is the fact that meaty dishes are often saturated with heavy carbohydrates, salt, sugar, and other unhealthy fats like butter. One standout example of this would be the cheeseburger, one of the most eaten meal items globally. Not only is the red meat bad for heart health but the buns, cheese, and potentially other toppings only hinder short and long-term nutritional goals.

However, meat on its own is crucial due to high protein levels. Many vegetarians and vegans would argue that protein can be sourced from a variety of nutritious and vitamin-dense nuts and vegetables. Though there is some truth in this, the levels of protein in other foods are low and there are certain essential compounds that can only be found in meat. The best evidence for this comes not only from nutritional studies but also human prehistory. For thousands of years, people have been subsisting on diets high in meat that have greatly contributed to the flourishing of the human race generally and civilization more specifically. Consumed without unhealthy ingredients, there is simply no greater source of energy for the average person.

In conclusion, though many meat dishes are high in fat, salt, sugar, and carbohydrates, meat itself is an excellent and healthy source of protein that has historically been a part of the human diet. Individuals in this case as in all others should therefore pursue a more moderate approach.

## Friendship

**Friendships that take place online are not as meaningful as those where people meet each other face to face.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

Certain concerned parties today would argue that there is inherently less value in online friendships. In my opinion, despite the unique features possible when making friends online, in-person friendships are more meaningful due to the human element.

Supporters of making friendships in the virtual world point out the diverse possibilities for communication. In the past, an individual had little choice other than to make friends within a generally narrow range. Today, the average social media user can contact individuals with more varied interests. For instance, people who are passionate about playing old board games can locate each other on a Facebook group or through an Instagram page and become friends as a result of a shared affinity. Using the internet, these people can stay in contact and sustain a potentially rewarding intellectual friendship.

Nonetheless, it is only possible to have a truly meaningful friendship when meeting face to face. Research has shown that the body produces endorphins that elevate one’s mood through touch and in-person conversation. These are signs that there is tremendous value in real life friendships based around physical proximity. The benefits of such relationships extend to the ability to communicate with body language, eye contact, and physical contact. These features are the intrinsic value and meaning most assign to quality friendships and are completely lacking in superficial online friendships that ultimately do little more than a waste of one’s valuable time and energy.

In conclusion, although being online affords the average person a number of conveniences that can enhance a friendship, there is indeed far greater value in connecting with a person in real life. Few would dispute this claim even as many friendships become increasingly situated in online contexts.

## Free Education

**The best way to reduce poverty in developing countries is by giving up to six years of free education, so that they can at least read, write and use numbers.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree?**

Poverty remains a pressing issue in most developing countries, and one proposed solution is a provision of up to six years of free education, aiming to equip individuals with essential literacy and numeracy skills. In my opinion, I agree with this approach.

While free education is a crucial step towards poverty reduction, it is not a standalone solution. Equally essential are adequate infrastructure, trained teachers, and quality educational resources. Merely providing free education without ensuring its quality may result in a system that fails to deliver the desired outcomes. Therefore, governments could focus on holistic educational reforms, including teacher training programs, school infrastructure development, and curriculum enhancements, to maximize the impact of free education initiatives. For example, in China, alongside the introduction of free education policies, the government invested in teacher training programs and improved school infrastructure, leading to enhanced learning outcomes and noticeably higher student retention rates.

However, free education itself can significantly increase access to schooling, particularly for marginalized communities and children from low-income backgrounds. Financial barriers often prevent children from attending school, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. By eliminating tuition fees at young ages, developing countries can remove one of the major obstacles to education and ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn. For instance, in India, the implementation of free education policies has led to a rise in school enrollment rates among girls from disadvantaged communities, encouraging them to escape unfair conditions and pursue better futures through improved employability. This inclusivity in education can help bridge social and economic gaps, fostering a more equitable society.

In conclusion, I strongly agree that offering up to six years of free education can be a powerful tool for overcoming poverty in developing countries. By prioritizing education and implementing necessary reforms, developing nations can better empower their citizens and reduce poverty levels in the long-term.

## Low-Cost Airlines

The increasing availability of low-cost airlines now lets people travel around the world. Some feel this is a positive development while others think it is negative overall.

Discuss both sides and give your own opinion.

The rise of low-cost airlines has made it possible for the public at large to travel abroad with relative ease. In my opinion, despite the advantages this creates for less affluent citizens, it is a net negative given the repercussions of the tourist industry to local nations.

One positive aspect of this development is the increased accessibility of travel. In the past, air travel was mainly reserved for the wealthy and the middle class, however, with the advent of low-cost airlines, even those on a more limited budget can afford to go on vacation domestically or to foreign countries. For example, a round-trip flight from London to Barcelona can now be purchased for as little as £20, making it possible for even students and young adults to explore new places. This equitable phenomenon is particularly valuable in less developed nations where in past generations only the truly wealthy could afford to travel regularly.

Nonetheless, the expansion of low-cost airlines has also led to issues of overcrowding and overtourism in certain destinations. For example, locales like Ha Long Bay in Vietnam and Boracay in the Philippines have struggled to cope with the influx of domestic and international tourists, leading to concerns about the impact on local communities and cultural heritage. Many of these communities now almost exclusively cater to tourism and there is less interest in older means of making a living, such as by producing a local handicraft or traditional garment. This has led to calls for more sustainable tourism practices and greater regulation of the industry to ensure that it benefits and sustains local communities.

In conclusion, although increased accessibility is an equitable development, it has also contributed to issues of overcrowding and overtourism. It is important for the aviation industry and governments to collaborate to address these negative impacts while continuing to make travel available to a wider range of residents.

# September 2023

## Standard of Living

**Nowadays, most countries can improve the standard of living through economic development, but some social values are lost as a result.**

**Do you think the advantages of this phenomenon outweigh the disadvantages?**

The pursuit of economic progress often comes at the expense of certain social values. In my opinion, though economic development undeniably engenders numerous benefits, it is key to prioritize tradition.

There are several undeniable advantages to flourishing economic conditions. Firstly, it creates job opportunities and improves the employment rate, leading to reduced poverty levels and enhanced living standards. For example, in countries like China and India, rapid economic growth has lifted millions out of poverty through industries such as manufacturing and tourism services. Economic growth results in increased tax revenue, which can be allocated towards public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development. In developing nations, these improvements create a sustainable cycle that can lead to improved overall societal well-being.

However, economic prioritization can sometimes harm social values. In the race for rapid growth, societies may witness a decline in traditions, cultural heritage, and community cohesion. For instance, the rise of consumerism and material wealth in marginalized communities such as on Native American reservations in the United States often leads to the erosion of cultural practices and traditions as people value material possessions over cultural preservation. Additionally, the focus on personal success and material gain may overshadow the importance of human relationships, leading to a decline in social interaction and a rise in individualistic attitudes. This ultimately widens economic inequalities as certain groups benefit disproportionately from development, exacerbating social divisions and creating social unrest.

In conclusion, although economic development is undoubtedly advantageous, it is crucial to recognize that social values are more important. Governments and societies must take proactive measures to balance economic growth and the preservation of cultural heritage, community values, and social well-being.

## Media Instead of Books

Schools should use films, computers and games instead of books.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

There has been recent debate about whether classrooms should replace conventional books with more modern media such as movies, games, and computers. Although multimedia tools in education are engaging and interactive, it is crucial to prioritize the enduring value of books.

Films, computers, and games offer unique advantages in educational settings. For instance, films provide a dynamic platform to present complex concepts and historical events, making them more accessible to students through visual storytelling. Many students learn more about issues such as slavery through movies like “Twelve Years a Slave” than from textbooks. Similarly, interactive computer programs and educational games can promote active learning, problem-solving skills, and teamwork. Engaging in technology-based activities often heightens motivation and interest in a given subject compared to traditional book-based learning methodologies.

Despite the benefits of multimedia tools, books have greater value in classroom contexts. Reading books cultivates critical thinking, language proficiency, and analytical skills. Books encourage students to develop their imagination and form independent thoughts, fostering more nuanced understanding. They provide a wealth of information and perspectives that may not be readily available in multimedia formats. A well-known example of this would be Huckleberry Finn, a 19th century novel by Mark Twain that most American high school students must read. Reading such an old novel requires students to engage their mental faculties more actively than more passive contemporary media formats and therefore better advances academic and intellectual development.

Integrating films, computers, and games in education can enhance engagement and motivation, however, the lasting value of books must be given greater weight in curriculum design. By employing multimedia tools alongside traditional resources to an extent, schools can cater to different learning styles and simultaneously prioritize and preserve traditional methods of learning.

## Peer Pressure

Young people are often influenced in their behaviors by others in the same age group. Some argue that peer pressure is important while others feel it has distinct disadvantages.

Do the disadvantages of peer pressure outweigh the advantages?

Peer pressure refers to the influence young individuals experience within the same age group, affecting their behaviors. This essay will critically evaluate the drawbacks and benefits of peer pressure on young people.

Peer pressure often leads young individuals to engage in risky behaviors. For instance, teenagers may feel compelled to experiment with drugs due to the effect of their peers who engage in such activities. The desire to fit in and be accepted can override their better judgment, exposing them to serious short-term health risks and potential addiction later in life. Moreover, succumbing to negative peer pressure can adversely affect academic performance, as students may prioritize social acceptance over their studies. This desire for approval can result in poor grades, limited educational opportunities, and long-term negative consequences.

On the other hand, positive peer pressure can inspire young individuals to set higher goals, adopt healthier habits, and strive for academic excellence. Many teenagers are pressured by their peers to join a study group, leading to improved learning outcomes and academic success. Relatedly, supportive friends can inspire young individuals to engage in physical fitness activities or pursue positive hobbies and talents, promoting a healthier and more well-rounded lifestyle. This sense of camaraderie and mutual encouragement fostered within positive peer groups can contribute significantly to personal growth and self-confidence. Actively seeking out positive and active peer groups and engaging in behaviors aligned with one’s personal values can help mitigate the adverse effects of negative peer pressure while harnessing the advantages of positive influence.

In conclusion, although peer pressure encourages risky behaviors and hinders personal growth, the motivational and emotional advantage make it a positive on the whole. Ultimately, striking some degree of balance between independence and positive peer interactions is crucial to minimizing the disadvantages and embracing the benefits.

## Celebrities’ Private Lives

Some people feel that the private lives of celebrities should not be openly shared by the media.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Certain concerned parties today contend that celebrities’ private lives should not be publicized on social media. In my opinion, the general citizenry has the right to be aware of the lives of various public figures.

Some hold the opinion that each individual has an unalienable and basic right to privacy. If one’s idols are not engaging in illegal activity, there is no clear justification to publicize their personal lives to the public other than as a form of entertainment or gossip. For instance, if a celebrity begins a new relationship, it is common for the paparazzi to photograph them in public and report private details online. This is an invasion of privacy and may harm their relationship even though the celebrities have done nothing wrong. The only injury in these cases is to the mental health of those being reported on in public forums with little cause.

On the one hand, celebrities have a social responsibility to set a good example for the general public. Modern media consumers, especially younger people, these days spend more time online than ever before, and therefore are increasingly vulnerable to extreme views and the easy of adoption of thoughtless political stances and bad habits. For that reason, celebrities should regulate their personal behavior, including staying away from drug abuse, not espousing dangerous viewpoints, and focusing on socially beneficial actions. Social media can in this way serve as a “watchdog” for celebrities by reporting negative press, which will deter public figures from misbehaving.

In conclusion, I think celebrities should allow citizens to learn about their personal lives though social media, since fame is a privilege and they have a responsibility towards society at large. Citizens should only respect their privacy when it is a personal matter with little public relevance.

# October 2023

## Athletes as Role Models

Some people believe that professional athletes serve as positive role models for young people, while others argue that their behavior both on and off the field has a negative influence.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

While some argue that athletes are positive role models, inspiring young individuals to pursue their dreams and excel, others contend that their behavior is harmful on the whole. In my opinion, despite the negatives, sports professionals are still generally positive role examples for younger people.

One legitimate criticism of athletes concerns incidences of aggressive behavior and substance abuse. These high-profile stories can have outsized influence on young and impressionable minds. Well-publicized scandals involving certain NFL players, for example, have highlighted the importance of addressing the anti-social behavior exhibited by athletes and its potential impact on fans. A fan who reads articles about athletes arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs or charged for domestic violence assaults may over time become desensitized as to the serious nature of such offenses. In rare instances, they may even intentionally or unconsciously emulate these actions.

However, a more compelling argument in favor of professional athletes serving as positive role models relates to their character. Athletes generally possess unwavering dedication and perseverance. For instance, Serena Williams, a tennis legend, showcases her relentless work ethic and determination to overcome barriers in a public setting, inspiring countless young athletes to push past obstacles and achieve greatness. Moreover, athletes often demonstrate the importance of teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play. Kobe Bryant, a basketball icon, was renowned for his commitment to team morale and his ability to uplift his teammates in pressure-filled moments. His leadership qualities and dedication to the game have left an indelible mark on aspiring basketball players and ordinary fans alike, encouraging them to embrace the values of collaboration and respect.

After considering both perspectives, I firmly believe that professional athletes do serve as positive role models for young people. Nonetheless, by providing specific examples of inspiring athletes and addressing any drawbacks, a balance between admiration and critical thinking can be maintained.

## The Function of Music

Some argue that music mainly serves as a way for individuals to reduce their stress and anxiety.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Many would argue that the purpose of music is to help individuals de-stress and relax. In my opinion, although this is a key function, it is more important for music to uplift.

Those in favor of considering music a form of relaxation points out how it is used by most listeners. Though this is impossible to verify empirically, most would concede on an anecdotal level that music is primarily used to relax. Students and workers on their daily commute and after a long day listen to music to forget about their anxieties. Scientific research has shown that listening to any genre of music results in reduced blood pressure and increased heart rate volatility, key indicators of lower stress levels. Though music is also used at parties as a way to celebrate and have fun, these situations are less common overall for the average subscriber to an application such as Spotify or Apple Music.

However, there is a higher function of music that relates to raising one’s perspective on life. When a person listens to a beautiful and meaningful song such as “Jealous Guy” by John Lennon or “No Woman, No Cry” by Bob Marley, they are being lifted by the melody and lyrics. Similar to other forms of art, they present a way of seeing the world that transforms ordinary life into an aesthetic experience. Some of these aesthetic interpretations by artists may not always be positive, such as when a singer sings about loss or addiction, but they nonetheless ennoble and allow for greater understanding of the darkest elements of the human condition.

In conclusion, though music is one way of relaxing for many people, I would contend that it’s most crucial aim is to enrich the world through a particular artistic interpretation. It is still possible for particular listeners to enjoy music as they see fit.

## Declining Plants and Animals

In many countries, the number of animals and plants is declining.

Why do you think this is happening?

How can this issue be solved?

The decline in the number of animal and plant species is a pressing issue facing many countries worldwide. In my opinion, this is a result of human activity and can be countered by adopting sustainable policy initiatives.

Fewer animal and plant species is mainly a human problem. Firstly, there is now rampant deforestation for agricultural expansion, logging, and infrastructure development. In the Amazon rainforest, pristine habitats are being cleared for cattle ranching, depriving countless species of their natural homes. Relatedly, pollution, including industrial discharge and agricultural runoff, poses a significant threat. The global release of toxic chemicals into rivers and oceans leads to the death of marine life and disrupts delicate aquatic ecosystems. An additional human activity that deserves attention is illegal wildlife trade. This practice is driven by high demand for exotic pets, traditional medicine, and animal parts, pushing many species towards endangerment and potential extinction.

The keys to reversing natural degradation are conservation and restoration efforts. Biodiversity conservation programs should focus on preserving and restoring specific habitats. For instance, reforestation initiatives can aim to replant native tree species in deforested areas, providing crucial habitats for various wildlife species. Marine protected areas can be established to safeguard vulnerable marine ecosystems and promote sustainable fishing practices. Captive breeding and reintroduction programs can help revive endangered species. Evidence for this approach comes from initiatives to breed and release critically endangered species like the black rhinoceros. Complementary sustainable practices in agriculture, forestry, and fishing can also be promoted to minimize human impact on ecosystems.

Decreasing population figures for animal and plant species is a critical issue that demands immediate attention and action. It is humanity’s collective responsibility to protect and restore the natural world given the origin of these issues.

## Value of Preserving Old Buildings

Some people think that certain old buildings are more worth preserving than other ones.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

While some argue that certain historic structures hold more value and should be carefully preserved, others contend that all old buildings warrant equal attention. In my opinion, there are particular buildings with cultural and community value that deserve prioritization.

There is tremendous value to maintaining buildings with significant historical importance. These structures serve as tangible links to the past, showcasing architectural marvels and preserving ancestral links. For instance, ancient castles and palaces symbolize the grandeur of bygone eras, offering a glimpse into the lives of kings, queens, and nobles. By safeguarding these structures, we ensure that future generations can appreciate and connect with their cultural heritage. These buildings also often showcase the craftsmanship and artistic vision of renowned architects and craftsmen. Take, for example, the iconic Taj Mahal in India, a testament to the exquisite beauty of Mughal architecture. Similarly, Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance villas, and Art Deco skyscrapers are not merely bricks and mortar; they are enduring artistic monuments.

Moreover, preserving certain old buildings can contribute to the flourishing of a given community or locale. Historic town centers, with quaint buildings and cobblestone streets, create a sense of place and give residents a shared heritage to cherish. These spaces foster strong community bonds and attract tourists, boosting local economies through heritage tourism. Further restoration and adaptive reuse of these old buildings can generate local economic opportunities. Repurposing a historic building into a boutique hotel, a museum, or an art gallery not only revitalizes the structure but also stimulates job creation and economic growth. Such projects often attract private investors and public funding, injecting resources into the local economy and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

In conclusion, certain structures serve as living testaments to the past, encouraging feelings of identity and pride. Therefore, buildings should be selected that have inherent value and they should be maintained by governments.

# November 2023

## Environmental Damage

Environmental damage is a problem in most countries.

What is the cause of this damage?

What should be done about this problem?

Environmental damage has become a pressing issue in numerous countries worldwide. The main causes of this problem relate to human expansion and industry and must therefore be tackled by relevant authorities and corporations.

The factors contributing to environmental damage stem from human activity. Firstly, industrial activities and the burning of fossil fuels release harmful emissions, such as carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere, leading to climate change. For instance, the excessive use of coal and oil in power generation contributes significantly to rising temperatures and poor air quality. Secondly, deforestation, driven by logging and agricultural expansion, destroys crucial ecosystems and disrupts the delicate balance of the planet. The loss of forests not only reduces carbon absorption but also leads to soil erosion and the endangerment and potential extinction of numerous plant and animal species.

To address the problem of environmental damage requires a multifaceted approach from governing bodies. Governments should prioritize the implementation of stringent environmental regulations and promote sustainable practices across industries. For example, imposing strict emission standards on factories and incentivizing the use of renewable energy sources can significantly reduce air pollution and combat climate change. Relatedly, funding sustainable land management practices, such as reforestation and afforestation programs, can help restore vital ecosystems and preserve biodiversity. Governments can apply these solutions together with companies that are heavily involved in environmental degradation.

Environmental damage poses a significant threat to the planet, but large organizations must work collectively to mitigate this issue. Implementing sustainable practices, enforcing environmental regulations, and encouraging corporate involvement are key steps toward preserving our environment for future generations.

# December 2023

## Responsibility for Plastic Packaging

Some people think the manufacturers and shopping malls should sell fewer packaged products while others argue that people have the responsibility to buy products with less packaging.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

The issue of excessive packaging has sparked debate regarding the responsibility for its reduction. While some argue that corporations and retailers should lead by selling fewer packaged items, others contend that the onus lies on consumers to make conscious choices.

Advocates for reducing packaging assert that manufacturers and shopping malls have the most significant role in addressing this issue. For instance, manufacturers can enforce sustainable packaging practices by using biodegradable and recyclable materials, such as compostable plastics or cardboard. They can also employ innovative packaging designs that minimize materials while ensuring product safety. Relatedly, shopping malls can collaborate with manufacturers to establish refill stations, where customers can bring their own containers and refill products like detergents, spices, or personal care items, reducing the need for excessive packaging. By taking these initiatives, those who sell consumer products can effectively reduce waste and contribute to a more sustainable future.

On the other hand, proponents of consumer responsibility emphasize that individuals have the power to drive change through their purchasing decisions. Consumers should actively seek out products with minimal packaging, such as bulk foods, where items are sold in loose quantities, allowing customers to bring their own containers. They can also support businesses that offer alternatives to single-use packaging, such as stores that provide reusable bags or incentivize customers to employ reusable bags. These lifestyle changes may also involve actively participating in recycling programs and supporting initiatives that promote waste reduction, such as community composting or zero-waste campaigns. Truly dedicated individuals can even join local environmental groups or online communities to share tips and strategies.

In conclusion, the reduction of packaged products necessitates effort from primarily consumers. Through specific actions like seeking out minimal packaging options, and supporting businesses with sustainable practices, consumers can collectively contribute to a healthier planet for future generations.

## Value of Preserving Old Buildings

Nowadays, there is more and more competition for getting into university.

Is this a positive or negative development?

As the number of university applicants continues to rise, a debate has emerged regarding whether this growing competition yields positive or negative consequences. In my opinion, competition is positive in this case despite the increased emotional burden it engenders.

One of the major drawbacks of increased university competition is the mounting pressure it places on students. Intense competition often leads to heightened stress levels, anxiety, and mental health issues. Countless students face sleepless nights, burnout, and compromised well-being due to the overwhelming pressure to outshine their peers. For instance, research conducted by the American Psychological Association revealed that high-stakes academic competitions and examinations can contribute to elevated levels of stress and anxiety disorders. Consequently, this negative impact on mental health can hinder students’ overall development and well-rounded growth.

On the other hand, intense competition can also act as a driving force that motivates students to strive for excellence and unleash their full potential. When faced with a highly competitive environment, students are incentivized to become more focused, disciplined, and goal-oriented. They are then more likely to develop a strong work ethic, perseverance, and resilience, which are essential qualities for success in various aspects of life. There is therefore an increased likelihood that students who have overcome intense competition during their university admissions process will display higher levels of determination and tenacity in their future endeavors, leading to potentially greater achievements in their careers.

In conclusion, escalating competition for university admission increases stress levels among students, yet more importantly fosters personal growth. Individuals must learn methods to manage their anxiety as it will prepare them for greater achievement later in life as well.

# January 2024

## Fixed Income to Support Charity

Everybody should donate a fixed amount of their income to support charity.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

The concept of philanthropy and charitable giving has gained significant attention in recent years. One prominent viewpoint suggests that everyone should contribute a fixed portion of their income to support charitable causes, although I would side with those holding the opposite opinion.

Charitable donations play a pivotal role in addressing poverty. When individuals allocate a fixed portion of their income, it ensures a steady flow of resources to organizations dedicated to poverty alleviation. For example, groups like Oxfam and UNICEF rely on public donations to implement projects that provide food, clean water, and healthcare services to impoverished communities. The consistent support from individuals enables these organizations to make a lasting impact, uplifting vulnerable populations and offering them a chance for a better future.

While the recommendation of mandatory donations has its merits, it is essential to acknowledge that individuals have diverse financial situations and priorities. Forcing every individual to donate a fixed portion of their income can be seen an infringement on personal freedom. In placing this burden on citizens, there may be a resultant backlash that does more harm than the originally intended good. Relatedly, it is important to recognize that there are alternative ways of supporting charitable causes, such as volunteering time and skills. Encouraging a culture of giving without imposing strict regulations may allow individuals to better choose the method that aligns with their personal circumstances and values.

In conclusion, the contention that everyone should donate a fixed amount of their income to support charity aligns with the ideal of an equitable society. However, it is crucial to consider individual circumstances and preferences, ensuring that the act of giving remains a voluntary and personally meaningful endeavor.

# February 2024

## Writing by Hand

Fewer and fewer people today write by hand using a pen or pencil.

What are the reasons for this?

Is this a positive or a negative development?

Today, the act of writing by hand using a pen or pencil has become increasingly uncommon. This essay will delve into the reasons behind this trend and evaluate whether it is a positive or negative development for individuals and society as a whole.

One primary reason for the dwindling use of handwriting is the pervasive presence of technology. In an age dominated by computers, smartphones, and tablets, individuals find it more convenient to type their thoughts and ideas rather than engaging in the laborious process of writing by hand. The speed and efficiency offered by digital devices have made it easier to edit, store, and share written content, rendering handwriting seemingly obsolete. To illustrate this, consider the rapid rise of communication platforms such as email, instant messaging apps, and social media. These platforms provide users with the ability to effortlessly send and receive messages, eliminating the need for handwritten letters or notes. This convenience extends to practical considerations for professionals in various fields, such as journalists, researchers, and writers, who often rely on digital platforms and word processors for their work. The ease of editing, revising, and sharing digital content outweighs the traditional pen-and-paper approach.

While the decline of handwriting may offer certain advantages, it also brings forth potential negative consequences. Handwriting is an essential skill that fosters cognitive development, improves memory retention, and allows for creative expression. The act of physically forming letters and words engages different areas of the brain, promoting better comprehension and critical thinking skills. Losing this skill may hinder individuals’ ability to think and express themselves effectively. Most importantly, the personal touch and emotional connection associated with handwritten letters or cards cannot be replicated by digital alternatives. Handwritten messages convey sincerity, thoughtfulness, and a sense of intimacy. Losing the art of handwriting may irrevocably erode these meaningful human connections.

In conclusion, the decline of handwriting can be attributed to the prevalence of technology and practical considerations. While there are advantages to digital communication and typing, the negative implications for cognitive development and personal connections are more significant and must be mitigated by the relevant authorities.

# March 2024

## Old Towns and Cities

The world has many towns and cities constructed in previous centuries that were more suitable and livable for people in those times than they are now.

What problems will this cause?

What can be done to solve these problems?

There now exist numerous towns and cities that were constructed centuries ago. While these places were once considered livable, they often face challenges in meeting the needs and expectations of contemporary society that can only realistically be resolved by local authorities.

One of the primary challenges associated with old towns and cities is outdated infrastructure and limited accessibility. Many of these places were designed before the advent of private vehicles and modern transportation systems. Consequently, narrow streets, lack of parking facilities, and insufficient public transportation options pose significant challenges for mobility and convenience. Similarly, outdated sewage and waste management systems may not be equipped to handle the needs of a larger population, leading to environmental and health hazards. One well-known example of this would be in developing cities such as Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam where older buildings that collapse are common and there are geographical challenges that limit the development of other areas. Since local authorities have few options, this means many less privileged residents must live in conditions that are not ideal.

To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive revitalization plan is crucial. Local governments should invest in infrastructure upgrades, such as widening roads, improving public transportation networks, and implementing smart traffic management systems. Additionally, the integration of sustainable solutions, including renewable energy sources and eco-friendly waste management systems, can contribute to the long-term livability of these areas. By prioritizing infrastructure development and accessibility enhancements, old towns and cities can adapt to modern demands without compromising their historical integrity. Local governments can also, in collaboration with residents and stakeholders, organize cultural events, festivals, and initiatives to celebrate the heritage of these areas. This holistic support will prolong and support revitalization efforts long-term.

In conclusion, by adopting a balanced approach to preservation, investing in infrastructure and accessibility, and fostering local engagement, older cities can overcome inherent challenges and regain their livability. Only through such concerted efforts can old towns and cities be restored and cherished for generations to come.

# April 2024

## City Planning and Zoning

In many cities, planners tend to arrange shops, schools, offices and homes in specific areas and separate them from each other.

Do you think the advantages of this policy outweigh the disadvantages?

One common approach employed by city planners involves the separation of various establishments such as shops, schools, offices, and homes into distinct areas. While this zoning policy offers certain advantages, the notable drawbacks outweigh the positives.

One significant advantage of zoning is the promotion of efficient land use. By grouping similar establishments together, cities can optimize the allocation of resources and infrastructure. For instance, commercial areas can be designed with adequate parking spaces and easy access to transportation, making it convenient for both shoppers and business owners. Zoning similarly allows for the creation of specialized zones, such as industrial areas, which can enhance productivity and economic growth. This is the case in many newer cities such as Shenzhen in China where urban planners had the opportunity to fashion a more efficient and livable environment for residents due to the lack of previous development in the area.

However, a notable concern is the potential lack of vibrancy and diversity in strictly zoned cities. When different establishments are mixed within neighborhoods, it fosters a sense of community and generates vibrant social spaces. Mixing residential and commercial areas can lead to the development of lively streets with a variety of shops, cafes, galleries, and parks, creating a more engaging and inclusive urban experience. This is evidenced in contrast to newer cities like Shenzhen with older cities throughout the world that are famed for their cultural vibrancy. The list of such cities is innumerable but includes some of the most well-known and desirable urban areas on the globe such as London, New York, Paris, Kyoto, and Barcelona.

In conclusion, zoning policies that group areas by their purpose can lead to efficient land use though the likelihood of a lack of vibrancy within neighborhoods is a more significant factor. To strike a balance, city planners must carefully consider the specific context and needs of their communities, adopting a flexible approach that combines the benefits of zoning with the promotion of mixed-use areas.

# Cambridge 19!

## Competition

Some people think that competition at work, at school and in daily life is a good thing. Others believe that we should try to cooperate more, rather than competing against each other.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Many argue that competing in a variety of daily environments is a positive, while others feel a focus on cooperation would be ideal. In my opinion, although competition can yield transformational results, it is more valuable to embrace cooperation as a guiding principle.

Those who argue in favor of competition contend that it serves as powerful motivation. Examples of the impact of competition extend to many segments of life, including school and work. In schools, the desire to compete can lead a student to study harder than their classmates in order to achieve better grades and secure esteem from teachers and family members. At work, competition for promotions and higher compensation packages is the entire reason that individuals work diligently in the majority of company contexts. However, at home, competition rarely has positive ramifications. Family members that are consistently competing for admiration and recognition are likely to suffer from some degree of poor mental health.

Indeed, there is greater value in fostering a cooperative environment. When individuals work together in teams, whether it be at school, work, or in the home, they are more likely to experience high levels of motivation, and more crucially, enjoyment. Competition can serve as a catalyst for achievement but is unlikely to engender the same heights of unifying satisfaction. A standout example of this would be the dynamics present on a sports team at any level of competition. Even though the players on the team are engaged in a competition, the most memorable and lasting memories of their experiences are more likely to come from small moments of comradery shared with teammates. This is the reason that many cite times spent working in groups towards a common goal as the highlights of life.

In conclusion, although competition can encourage innovation, cooperation provides a more vital environment of mutual respect and enjoyment of life. Depending on the situation, it is therefore imperative to seek cooperative understanding.

## Working Week

The working week should be shorter and workers should have a longer weekend.

Do you agree or disagree?

Many today make the argument that the average work week should be shortened in order to allow for longer weekends. In my opinion, though there would be potential economic drawbacks, this approach is both sensible and advisable.

Critics of reduced working days point to the repercussions for productivity. Shortening the number of workdays in a week would logically entail a decline in the amount of work a person can complete. In the majority of industries, this would result in lower sales and earnings figures. The result for the entire economy of such a drastic step could be potentially disastrous as companies would have to reduce profit forecasts and revisit investment models. In developed nations, such a sacrifice for the sake of more free time might be feasible but developing countries would certainly struggle to compete on a global scale.

Nonetheless, there are more significant advantages to a longer weekend related to quality of life. Current weekends make it challenging for individuals to enjoy enough free time to take trips, engage in long-term projects outside of work, and spend enough time with family. An additional day would allow for greater flexibility in all these respects. For instance, the average worker who is occupied at an office or company for the majority of the week, might only think of resting and relaxing on the weekend. Given an extra day on the weekend, this person might be more encouraged to take a more active role in family life or develop an interest outside of work, such as making art or playing a sport, that requires more energy and commitment.

In conclusion, despite the possible implications for productivity, a shorter working week would engender a variety of significant benefits for the average person and should therefore be considered by policymakers. In an age of increased automation, longer weekends are becoming a more realistic possibility.

## Save Money for the Future

It is important for everyone, including young people, to save money for their future.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Many contend that securing financial stability is essential for individuals of all ages. I am generally in agreement with this contention though I would concede that saving money can be taken to illogical excesses.

Undue emphasis on saving prioritizes satisfaction in a possible future over enjoyment of the present moment. In most countries, individuals begin to save and plan for retirement as young adults. This approach means that by the time they have enough time to enjoy themselves, they are likely older, unhealthy, and less capable of living an active life. A person who saves for a comfortable retirement by abstaining from travel, going out with friends regularly, and spending on luxuries might discover later in life that a sizeable savings account is no substitute for a full life. However, this assumes an extreme approach to saving that is rare for the vast majority of people who can typically balance basic fiscal responsibility with freer spending habits.

Moreover, saving money allows individuals of all ages to safeguard the flexibility to pursue a variety of passions in life. Those who have not inherited generational wealth and do not commit themselves to saving, will almost undoubtedly have to work long hours for many years. Yet, if a worker slowly accumulates savings, then that allows them to make investments and generate passive income streams. These alternative ways of earning money can give them options in life. They might decide to quit or work fewer hours and pursue a passion project. They might also be more inclined to be entrepreneurial or adventurous in their choice of vocation. All these options lead to a richer and more varied life that contrasts markedly with working diligently towards retirement.

In conclusion, despite the possible risks of fixating on savings to the detriment of quality of life, there is value in saving wisely for all individuals. These savings will likely vary in size depending on the needs and circumstances of each person.

## Supermarkets

In many countries nowadays, consumers can go to a supermarket and buy food produced all over the world.

Do you think this is a positive or negative development?

In recent years, food imported from various parts of the world in supermarkets has become prevalent. While some view this trend as positive, I would argue that the repercussions for local producers are a negative overall.

One compelling argument in favor of the availability of globally sourced food in supermarkets is the increased variety it offers consumers. In the distant past, shoppers were limited to consuming locally grown produce, which could result in a monotonous diet lacking diversity. Nowadays, however, supermarkets provide an extensive range of fruits, vegetables, spices, and other food products from different corners of the globe. This enables consumers to explore new flavors and experience diverse culinary traditions, enriching their gastronomic experiences. For instance, in most supermarkets, one can find exotic fruits such as dragon fruit from Vietnam, mangoes from India, and avocados from Mexico. By having access to such diverse options, consumers can broaden their palate and enjoy a more varied and exciting diet.

On the other hand, the easy availability of food produced globally is detrimental for local farmers. When consumers prefer imported goods over locally grown products, it can lead to a decline in demand for local agricultural produce. Local farmers may then face financial difficulties and struggle to sustain their livelihoods. For example, in a study conducted in the United Kingdom, it was found that the demand for imported strawberries during winter had a negative impact on local strawberry farmers. Due to the availability of strawberries from warmer climates, consumers were less inclined to purchase locally grown strawberries, leading to a decline in sales for local producers. This situation not only affected the farmers’ income but also disrupted the local economy in a variety of subtle ways.

In conclusion, although the availability of food produced worldwide in supermarkets offers consumers a wider variety of food choices and experiences, the challenges to local farmers are more significant. Policymakers should promote local farming operations rather than encouraging the imported food industry.

# July 2024

## Health Services

Health services are a basic necessity. However, private companies have made them quite costly for ordinary individuals.

Do the advantages of private health care outweigh its disadvantages?

Today, the cost of basic health services due to privatization has risen dramatically. In my opinion, although this can lead to greater innovation in the medical field, it is a negative burden overall for the average person.

Those who argue in favor of private medical care point out the benefits for medical knowledge generally. There is significant evidence in a wide range of industries as to the efficacy of privatization in driving innovation. The medical field is no different as hospitals in countries such as the United States compete to develop innovative therapies and procedures that can enhance their reputations and generate higher revenues. These efforts in turn encourage the hiring of the brightest medical minds in the world. Without such competition, it is unlikely that many current advances in medical technology would exist at all.

However, these advances do little to alleviate the dramatic financial repercussions for ordinary citizens. In the United States, a person without medical insurance is likely to owe at least thousands for relatively simple procedures such as repairing a broken bone or conducting a simple non-invasive surgical procedure. Contrast this approach with many western European nations that function on a socialized approach to medicine. In these countries, a person is comforted by the knowledge that a trip to the hospital or consultation with a doctor will be largely paid for by the government. The result of this more equal system is that there is little disparity in the care given to the wealthy and less affluent segments of the population.

In conclusion, despite the value of stimulating competition among medical institutions, there would be greater impact in a scheme wherein the individual could receive medical care without incurring excessive expenses. In many countries, this is already the situation.

## Crime Technology

Some people think technology development decreases crime, while others believe it actually encourages crime.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Many today are of the belief that advances in technology have done more to combat, rather than aid, criminal behavior. In my opinion, although there are certain novel avenues now available to criminals related to online fraud, technology generally benefits law enforcement.

Those who argue as to the negative implications of technology on crime point out the increased prevalence of cybercrimes. These crimes range from online fraud and fishing schemes to political crimes and the selling of illicit substances. In the early stages of the internet, such crimes were common online and difficult for enforcement agencies to combat. As advances have spread, both law enforcement agencies and criminals have become more technologically-savvy. A clear example of this would be the occasional news article reporting on a large-scale theft of passwords that warns users to update passwords and be more wary of storing private information online.

However, the crimes mentioned above are rare and technological innovations now help prevent many crimes before they even occur. The strongest instance illustrating this point would be the deterrence resulting from security cameras in private and public spaces. Countries and cities that emphasize the value of these cameras over personal privacy concerns are significantly safer than unmonitored locations. A more specific example of this would be cameras that take photos of individuals speeding and send them speeding tickets through the mail or electronically. This simple and effective innovation can greatly reduce traffic infractions and as a result the number of accidents on a given road.

In conclusion, despite the marginal downsides related to exploitation of new technologies by a small percentage of total criminals, the deterrent effect of security cameras has made the world considerably safer. There is always a balance between safety and security that must be carefully maintained.

## Having Children at an Older Age

Some people choose to have their first child at an older age.

What are the reasons?

Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

In recent years, an increasing number of individuals have opted to start their families later in life. This trend raises the question of why more people are choosing to have their first child at an older age and whether the benefits of doing so justify the drawbacks.

One of the primary reasons for delaying parenthood is the pursuit of career stability in a worrying economic climate. In today’s competitive job market, many individuals, particularly women, prefer to establish themselves professionally before starting a family. By focusing on their careers in their twenties and early thirties, they can achieve financial security and attain higher positions, which often translates to job satisfaction and greater resources for their future children. This growing trend is reflected in how mainstream society now places significant emphasis on personal development and achieving personal goals before embarking on parenthood. For that reason, many young adults prioritize their own personal and financial welfare, a situation that engenders an atmosphere less conducive to having children early in life.

There are legitimate disadvantages connected with having children later in life. One of the primary concerns is the potential health risks for both the mother and the child. Advanced maternal age is often associated with a higher risk of complications such as gestational diabetes, hypertension, and chromosomal abnormalities. However, despite these drawbacks, the advantages of having children later in life due to greater maturity overshadow the hypothetical drawbacks. The emotional maturity and life experience that older parents bring to child-rearing can result in a more stable and nurturing environment. Older parents are likely to be more financially secure and better prepared to provide for their children’s education and well-being. The ability to make well-considered decisions and the patience developed over time can contribute to a more thoughtful and deliberate approach to parenting.

In conclusion, while there are valid concerns regarding the health risks associated with having children later in life, the benefits, such as financial stability, emotional maturity, and better preparation for parenthood, outweigh these disadvantages. As societal norms and medical advancements continue to evolve, the trend of delaying parenthood is likely to remain prevalent, reflecting the changing priorities and values of modern individuals.

# August 2024

## Financial Matters

In numerous nations, there is a growing trend for individuals to frequently discuss financial matters, such as their earnings or expenditures, in everyday conversation.

What are the reasons behind this phenomenon?

Is it advantageous or detrimental?

There is an increasing tendency for individuals in the modern world to openly discuss their finances in daily conversation. In my opinion, this is a result of a general lack of self-awareness and is decidedly negative given the opportunity cost it engenders.

The primary reason many people today are prone to talk about their financial dealings originates in society generally. In the past, a sense of modesty or concern for decorum might have compelled reticence. Today, some of the most widely discussed topics in the media, online, in film, and in literature concern cryptocurrencies, the real estate market, stock equities, the price of gold, and other investments. A person discussing these matters is likely only interested in subtle boasting or venting frustrations without awareness of the emotions or engagement of their interlocutor. The result over time has been that many people have developed a shameless habit.

In my view, discussion finances often preclude a number of more worthwhile topics of conversation. Since the majority of useful financial research can be conducted online or done in professional settings, there are more pressing areas that should be discussed in daily life. For example, two friends having a conversation at a cafe would derive greater value from telling stories, joking with one another, or delving into a more serious topic related to politics, the arts, or psychology. Such discussions are likely to develop their understanding of the world and their emotional intelligence. Discussion of money, on the other hand, wastes valuable time and energy for little concrete outcome.

In conclusion, the inclination to speak of one’s personal finances stems from a fundamentally modern self-indulgence and often prevents the discussion of more enjoyable or meaningful topics. Naturally, these generalizations do not apply to all individuals.

# September 2024

## Choosing a Job

Some people believe that young people should choose the jobs that they want, but other people think they should be more realistic and think more about their future.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Today, the debate over whether young people should follow their passion when selecting a career or adopt a more pragmatic approach is increasingly pertinent. In my opinion, it is a wiser option to select an occupation that is most likely to provide for the future.

Proponents of pursuing one’s passion argue that job satisfaction is crucial for long-term career success. When young individuals choose careers based on their interests, they are likely to experience higher levels of motivation and commitment. Consider the case of Steve Jobs, who famously dropped out of college to pursue his interest in computing. His passion for technology led to the creation of Apple Inc., demonstrating how following one’s passion can lead to extraordinary achievements. As one grows older, jobs that align with personal interests can contribute to a more fulfilling life. A study conducted by the American Psychological Association revealed that individuals who work in fields they are passionate about report higher levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being compared to those in less satisfying roles.

Critics of the passion-driven approach highlight that not all interests are financially viable or offer long-term stability. For example, a young person with a passion for arts may find it challenging to secure a stable income, especially in highly competitive fields. In contrast, pursuing a career in fields like engineering or medicine, while possibly less exciting to some, often provides greater job security and financial stability. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, careers in engineering are projected to grow substantially over the next decade, offering quality job opportunities and security. Similarly, a passion for environmental science might lead to additional qualifications in data analysis to increase employability and career prospects. Therefore, a pragmatic approach recognizes economic factors and the long-term viability of a chosen career path.

In conclusion, while pursuing a career based on personal passion has its advantages, a realistic approach that considers market trends and financial stability better ensures long-term career success and security. Therefore, young people should prioritize practical considerations when choosing their careers, even if it means incorporating their interests in a more balanced manner.

# October 2024

## The Main Benefit of International Cooperation

Some people think that the main benefit of international cooperation is in the protection of the environment, while others believe that businesses mainly benefit.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Many today argue that international collaboration mainly serves to benefit businesses while others feel there are greater advantages overall for the environment. I would side with the former viewpoint due to the concrete and tangible outcomes.

Proponents of the environmental benefits of international cooperation emphasize the global challenges now being met by collective action. Climate change, for instance, is a quintessential example of an issue transcending national borders. The 2015 Paris Agreement, which saw nearly 200 countries commit to limiting global temperature rise, illustrates how international cooperation tackles environmental crises. This agreement, borne out of multilateral negotiations, demonstrates how countries now work together to implement emission reduction targets, promote sustainable development, and support climate resilience efforts in vulnerable regions. These efforts along with various wildlife protection treaties, underscore the reality of cross-border efforts to conserve natural habitats and endangered species.

Conversely, the global economy is intricately linked through trade agreements, investment treaties, and multinational corporations. Free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union’s Single Market, demonstrate how countries collaborate to facilitate trade, reduce tariffs, and stimulate economic growth. These agreements benefit businesses by opening new markets, enhancing supply chain efficiencies, and fostering innovation. As a result, international business partnerships can drive technological and economic development. For instance, collaborations between tech giants and global firms enable the sharing of resources, knowledge, and technology, accelerating progress in various sectors, from information technology to renewable energy. Such partnerships illustrate how business interests have been a significant driver of international cooperation, with economic gains often translating into tangible improved living standards.

In conclusion, while international cooperation undoubtedly benefits both the environment and the business world, the latter, unfortunately, enjoys the greatest general advantages. Nonetheless, balancing economic interests with environmental stewardship is crucial for fostering a sustainable and equitable future.

# December 2024

## Neighbors

Today, many people do not know their neighbors.

Why is this?

What can be done about this?

These days, there is increasing disconnect among neighbors, leading to a situation where many individuals are unfamiliar with those living nearby. In my opinion, this is largely a result of advanced technologies and the optimal solution relates to fostering community interaction.

One primary reason for this lack of acquaintance is the rise of technology and social media. In today’s digital age, many people prefer to interact online rather than face-to-face. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow individuals to connect with friends and family from a distance, often at the expense of local relationships. For instance, a person may spend hours engaging in online discussions while neglecting the opportunity to engage with their neighbors over a cup of coffee. This virtual interaction, while beneficial in certain respects, can lead to social isolation in physical neighborhoods. There is supporting statistical data that evidences the contention that more time spent on addictive digital devices fulfills a human’s social needs to a bare minimum and discourages in-person meetings.

One effective solution for this modern phenomenon would be organizing community events. Local councils or neighborhood associations could host gatherings such as block parties, picnics, or holiday celebrations. For example, a community could set up a monthly potluck dinner, where residents bring a dish to share. This not only provides an opportunity for neighbors to meet but also fosters a spirit of cooperation and camaraderie. Another related example would be community gardening, which could serve to encourage collaboration among residents, as they work together to cultivate plants and vegetables. This type of initiative not only enhances a neighborhood’s aesthetic appeal but also instills a sense of responsibility and ownership among its members. A community garden can become a focal point where neighbors meet regularly, share gardening tips, and even exchange produce, further strengthening local bonds.

In conclusion, the disconnect among neighbors is a multifaceted issue stemming largely from technological reliance. However, by implementing community-oriented initiatives such as social events and gardening projects, it is possible to cultivate a more connected and engaged neighborhood. In doing so, we can foster a sense of belonging that enriches the lives of individuals and enhances communal well-being.