

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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Summary:

Society is an umbrella term used to capture a great many of individuals - us. We need to know and face the real causes – greed and ignorance – behind today’s concrete problems in order to handle this home-made crisis and to improve our well-being.

Every single one of us has to take on responsibility for improvement: we need to work up the courage to face ourselves and change our attitudes, namely via gaining true knowledge and maturing mindfulness. This process will ultimately tear out the roots of the crisis and thus improve our well-being.

Essay:

If improving the well-being of society is understood in terms of bettering living standards, then any attempt to solve this crisis will fail. It will reappear in the long run, if the focus is only on our personal, material well-being and the true causes behind the problem are not dealt with. In order to work out most efficiently how improvement is possible, we have to consider who is in charge of championing a change for the better, which crisis we actually face and what its main causes are; this knowledge may ultimately allow us to take on responsibility and enable us to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, as Wittgenstein put it.

You might think “society” is confronted with this crisis, and if you do, I’m afraid you are wrong: Society is an abstract entity to refer to human gatherings, and therefore it naturally can’t improve anything – it’s just a word to alleviate our daily speech. To improve the whole, its constituents have to begin: Since society consists of individuals, improved well-being must have its origin in the individual lives - the lives of you and me. Therefore, we have to start with the one thing we can really change – ourselves (people in poorer regions suffer more than we do, but we can only change their situation by changing our own).

Materially speaking, the crisis is this: some people have neither food nor energy, others have both, but eat deteriorated food and use adverse energy, which, as you can clearly see, shows that the crisis is mainly one of health – of personal health and of a healthy environment, to be exact. Although we know the vital link between food and health, most of us mainly eat for pleasing the palate. But to be the foundation stone to health it is supposed to be, food must not only be delicious, but also wholesome, which the statistics of diet-related diseases such as obesity or heart attacks show impressively. As if this is not crisis enough, the vicious circle magnifies: a lot of energy is needed to produce the junk most people nourish on as well as the goods that raise our living standards. This energy is preferably taken from countries that are easily defeated by the military or produced by nuclear power plants – both dreadful threats to mankind and altogether the second drawback on health.

I am convinced that greed is the driving force behind this crisis threatening our and the world’s health; greed embraces our physical and mental attitudes towards life: we not only

want to eat, we want to stuff ourselves. We not only want to have an occupation that fulfills us, we want to make a fortune out of it. We not only want to inhabit the earth, we want to shape and adjust it to our needs.

Following the philosophical teachings of Buddhism, I think ignorance is the reason for greed and therefore also the even more fundamental cause of our problems: We are greedy because of the lack of knowledge about ourselves and about what is good for us. Note, that these are two kinds of knowledge combined into one: the first concerns ourselves, the second one deals with facts in the outside world; facts that are not dependent on you, i.e. the consumption of artificial sugar as the direct source of diseases like diabetes, which can only be prevented by stopping this consumption.

If we really understood, we could not act contrary to our insights. If we had at least a partial grasp of the right knowledge, we wouldn't eat what destroys our health; we wouldn't act against the principles of sustainability and build, say, nuclear power plants; we simply wouldn't want to profit from the misery of others. Some ancient Greeks already understood and coined the phrase: "Know thyself". Following the above written, I'd like to adapt this dictum a bit: "Know thyself and know the facts." And that's all that there is to it, since you alone can get rid of your rotten routines – by actualised, deepened knowledge. Both kinds of knowledge go hand in hand, so by gaining a grasp of one of them, the other one automatically profits as well. It doesn't matter if you start with meditation, or contemplating ethics or art, or if you ask yourself which branch of industry might profit from telling you not to eat butter, but the cholesterol-free, artificial, inferior margarine. What matters is that you make a move: To face the crisis means to face yourself, and by starting to see your true nature, your way of life will automatically change, too. By daring to discover your true nature, you will develop something called mindfulness, towards you and towards others, which will enable you to see more clearly what your own and the world's needs are. Mindfulness, the way to gain true knowledge, is the natural antagonist to greed and step by step, you will be able to finally let it go. It often is an uncomfortable and demanding process, but yet along the way you will live a much happier life and by improving your own well-being, society will also highly benefit. For this purpose we don't have to create an Uebermensch, but simply to take responsibility, gain knowledge and develop mindfulness.

How can society improve its well-being facing any crisis whatsoever? It can't, just like you can't plant a whole forest but only a single tree; and the same grass-root manner goes for us: only every individual can improve his or her own life and consequently the well-being of a larger entity, namely society. If the roots of the crisis are torn out in such a way, they will eventually decompose. However, if people cling to their old ways, avoid facing themselves, keep on relying on others, then these others will go on tampering superficially with our world; just like many medical doctors tampering with doomed-to-death bodies by using live-supporting actions without realising what would be best.