

**2014 JC2 GP Preliminary Examination  
Paper 2 Suggested Answers**

- 1. Explain the author's use of the word 'leap' in line 6. [2]**

| Lifted Answer  | Suggested Paraphrase   |
|--|--|
| .. make the <b>leap</b> to global empathic consciousness (l.6) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ (Literal meaning) Just as a leap entails having to make a <b>large</b> jump from one place to another, [1]</li> <li>▪ (Contextual meaning) the author suggests that it is <b>immensely</b> difficult/ challenging for us to develop empathy for the global community/ feel for everyone in the world. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>[Note: Contextual meaning must show the <b>extent</b> of the challenge.]</i></p> |

**Comment**

- The 'author' in the question refers to **Paul Bloom**, who states that the *task of having to make 'the leap to global empathic consciousness' is very difficult*, and **not the two authors of the books** mentioned in the paragraph, who wrote about how humankind *should make the effort to do so*. Answers must reflect an accurate reading of Bloom's use of 'leap'.
- 2. Give two reasons why the author believes that the enthusiasm towards empathy is 'misplaced' (line 9). Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

| Lifted Answer  | Suggested Paraphrase   |
|--|--|
| Empathy has some unfortunate features – it is <b>parochial, narrow-minded</b> , (l.9-10) | Instead of helping us to find solutions to our problems, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ empathy limits our perspective/ causes us to become close-minded/ insular/ myopic, not open-minded [1]</li> </ul>  |
| and <b>enumerate</b> . (l.10)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ leads us to view issues in isolation, [1]</li> </ul>  |
| We are often at <b>our best when we are smart enough not to rely on it</b> . (l.10-11)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ and lowers our performance/ prevents us from achieving full potential</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ (Inferred) stops us from thinking through issues intelligently/ wisely/ causes us to make unintelligent decisions/ impairs our judgment [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>[Award 2 marks for any 2 of the above 3 points.]</i></p> |

- 3. In paragraph 2, what is the author's intention in comparing the disappearance of the high-school American girl with the concurrent genocide in Darfur? [2]**

| Lifted Answer      | Suggested Paraphrase  |
|--------------------|---|
| when a high-school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ (Context) In showing that the predicament of one person</li> </ul> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| American girl disappeared, the story of her plight <b>took up far more television time</b> than the concurrent <b>genocide</b> in Darfur. (l.17-18) | takes up more attention than that involving a much larger number of people/ we selectively focus on some individuals instead of larger groups of people, [1]<br><br>▪ (Inferred) the author's intention is to highlight how empathy can cause us to behave illogically/ to have misplaced priorities. [1] |
|---|---|

4. (a) Which phrase in paragraph 3 has a similar meaning to 'the hum of traffic' (line 22)? [1]

The phrase is 'background noise' (l.28).

- (b) Why is this phrase an apt description of '99.9 per cent of other homicides' in line 27? [2]

| Lifted Answer   | Suggested Paraphrase  |              |         |          |         |
|---|---|--------------|---------|----------|---------|
| <p>...we become <b>oblivious</b> of <b>problems</b> that seem <b>unrelenting</b>, like... homicide...(l.22-23)</p> <p>However, mass murders get <b>splashed onto television screens, newspaper headlines and the Internet</b>. The <b>biggest ones settle into our collective memory</b>. The 99.9 per cent of other homicides are ... mere background noise. (l.25-28)</p> | <p>It is an apt description because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>(A)</b> (Literal meaning – explains background noise) just as we do not usually notice/ disregard/ are not aware of/ not conscious of background noise,</li><li>▪ <b>(B)</b> (Contextual meaning – explains homicides) we also do not pay attention to the majority of homicides</li><li>▪ <b>(C)</b> (Reason) which recur/ occur repetitively<br/>OR<br/>which the media does not focus on/ which are not covered by the media.</li></ul> <p><b>Mark scheme</b></p> <table><tr><td>1 – 2 points</td><td>1 mark</td><td>3 points</td><td>2 marks</td></tr></table> | 1 – 2 points | 1 mark  | 3 points | 2 marks |
| 1 – 2 points  | 1 mark  | 3 points     | 2 marks |          |         |

5. Using your own words as far as possible, explain what the author means by 'the identifiable victim effect' in line 29. [2]

| Lifted Answer  | Suggested Paraphrase  |
|--|---|
| 'Let a six-year-old girl with brown hair need thousands of dollars for an operation... post office will be swamped... to save her. | ▪ The author means that people are more likely to render assistance when they can connect with/ relate to/ recognise a particular individual who requires help, [1] |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| (l.30-32)<br><br>...hospital facilities... will deteriorate and cause... increase in preventable deaths – not many will drop a tear or reach for their chequebooks.' (l.33-35) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as opposed to a group of people who are unnamed/ anonymous/ faceless. [1]</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

6. Explain the author's use of the question 'Do you now feel ten times worse?' in lines 39–40. [2]

| Lifted Answer  | Suggested Paraphrase  |
|--|---|
| ...little <b>psychological difference</b> between hearing about the suffering of five thousand and that of five hundred thousand... (l.35-38) ...To the extent that we can recognise the numbers as significant, it is because of <b>reason, not empathy</b> . (l.39-40) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>(A)</b> He uses the (rhetorical) question to highlight/ make the point that one does not feel more empathy on knowing that a larger number of victims is involved/ wants readers to realise that they do not feel ten times worse/ how much empathy we feel is not measured by statistics. [1]</li> <li><b>(B)</b> In so doing, he establishes the point that it is logic, and not emotions/ feelings, that helps us evaluate the severity of a disaster. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>[Note: Answer need not state explicitly that the question is a rhetorical one, but it should explain its effect, i.e. his argument.]</i></p> |

7. In lines 74–75, what does the word 'plausibly' imply about the argument on moral progress? What is the author's view of this argument? [2]

| Lifted Answer   | Suggested Paraphrase  |
|---|---|
| Others have argued, plausibly, that moral progress involves expanding our concern from the family and the tribe to humanity as a whole. (l.74-75)               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The word 'plausibly' implies that the argument (that we need to extend our empathy to the entire human race) seems to be/ appears to be reasonable/ valid/ is possible. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>[Note: Answer does not need to specify the argument.]</i></p> |
| Yet it is <b>impossible to empathise with seven billion strangers</b> ... get people to think of all humanity as family, which is <b>impossible</b> . (l.75-78) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>However, the author does not support it/ dismisses/ rejects its possibility/ likelihood. [1]</li> </ul>  |

8. Using your own words as far as possible, explain the contradiction in lines 90–91. [2]

| Lifted Answer  | Suggested Paraphrase   |
|--|--|
| Empathy is a <b>measure of our humanity</b> . However, it will have to <b>yield to reason</b> if <b>humanity is to have a future</b> . (l.90-91) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>(A)</b> (Reason for desiring more empathy) Our ability to feel for/ empathise with others defines us as human beings/ defines our nature/ is a gauge of how civilised we are as a human race/ shows how much mankind has progressed. [1]</li> <li>▪ <b>(B)</b> (Reason for desiring less empathy) Yet to ensure the prospects/ continued existence of the human race, we should actually use less of our emotions/ use more logic. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>[No attempted contrast → 0 mark]</i></p> |

9. Using material from paragraphs 6–9 only, summarise what the author has to say about the limitations and consequences of empathy.

Write your summary in no more than 120 words, not counting the opening words which are printed below. Use your own words as far as possible. [8]

The limitations and consequences of empathy include ...

| FROM THE PASSAGE   |           | RE-PHRASE  |
|--|-----------|--|
| ...can <b>lead us astray</b> . (l.43) / ...pull us in the <b>wrong direction</b> (l.49)  | <b>A1</b> | ▪ <b>misguiding us,</b>  |
| When the <b>perpetrators of violence profit from aid</b> – as in the ‘taxes’ that warlords often demand from international relief agencies –... (l.43-44)  | <b>A2</b> | ▪ <b>allowing wrongdoers to benefit from the help rendered to them,</b>  |
| ...they are actually given an <b>incentive to commit further atrocities</b> . (l.44-45) ...similar to the practice of some parents in India who mutilate their children at birth in order to make them more effective beggars. (l.45-46) | <b>A3</b> | ▪ which in turn <b>encourages/ motivates more heinous/ immoral acts.</b>   |
| The children’s debilities tug at our hearts, but a <b>more dispassionate analysis of the situation</b> is necessary... (l.47-48)   | <b>A4</b> | ▪ Our sympathy for the victims leads to an <b>emotional/ illogical examination of their plight</b> ,<br><i>[Point here focusses on ‘analysis’; different from D4 which is action-focussed]</i> |
| ...if we are going to do <b>anything meaningful</b> to prevent them. (l.48)  | <b>A5</b> | ▪ (Inferred) resulting in <b>actions taken/ solutions that are not truly effective.</b>  |

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|---|-----------|--|
| The outrage that comes from adopting the perspective of a victim can drive an <b>appetite for retribution</b> . (l.49-50)   | <b>B1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The injustice we feel for victims can cause us to <b>seek redress/ vengeance/ revenge/ make wrongdoers pay for mistakes</b>,</li> </ul>   |
| However, the appetite for retribution is typically <b>indifferent</b> ...(l.50-51) ...Most people <b>did not care</b> ; they wanted the company fined heavily, whatever the consequence. (l.56-57)  | <b>B2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>without being bothered/ causing us to be unconcerned</b> (by the effects of our actions)/ impact <b>does not matter to us</b>,</li> </ul>  |
| ...(indifferent) to <b>long-term consequences</b> ... people were asked how best to punish a company... punishment would lead to more deaths... (l.51-56)   | <b>B3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>even when doing so <b>results in lasting/ indelible outcomes/ harmful effects in the future</b>.<br/>[Point focused on time element]</li> </ul>   |
| The government's <b>failure to enact prudent</b> long-term policies... (l.59-60)  | <b>C1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathy also results in <b>governments implementing unwise/ impractical policies/ programmes</b>.</li> </ul>  |
| ...our concern for specific individuals... means... <b>neglecting crises</b> that will harm <b>countless people</b> ... (l.62-63)<br><b>Eight deaths are worse than one</b> , even if you know the name of the one. (l.68-69)                           | <b>C2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We end up <b>focussing on a few whom we feel for/ wrongly prioritise the needs of an individual instead of those of the larger community/ ignoring/ disregarding/ overlooking disasters which hurt a huge number of/ innumerable people/ putting needs of individuals above all</b>.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Moral judgment</b> entails more than <b>putting oneself in another's shoes</b> (l.64) ...a reasoned, even <b>counter-empathetic analysis of moral obligation</b> and <b>likely consequences</b> ... than the <b>gut wrench</b> of empathy. (l.71-73) | <b>D1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Inferred) Empathy alone <b>does not enable us to discern/ differentiate good from bad/ may cloud our judgment of human behaviour</b>,<br/>[Answer should be linked to morality; 'moral' is an acceptable lift]</li> </ul>  |
| Many <b>good deeds</b> ... require us to <b>put our empathy to one side</b> (l.65-67)   | <b>D2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may <b>get in the way of us/ prevent us from doing the right thing</b></li> </ul>   |
| ... <b>disciplining</b> a child for <b>dangerous</b> behaviour (l.66)   | <b>D3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>leading us to <b>encourage bad/ incorrect/ undesirable/ unacceptable behaviour</b>.</li> </ul>  |
| ...and enforcing a <b>fair and impartial procedure</b> for determining who should get an organ transplant despite the suffering of those low on the list (l.66-68)  | <b>D4</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We may also <b>make biased/ unjust/ prejudiced decisions</b>.<br/>[Point here is action-oriented; different from A4 which focusses on 'analysis']</li> </ul>  |

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|--|-----------|--|
| Humanitarian aid can... be <b>counter-productive</b> . (l.69-70) | <b>D5</b> | ▪ Giving help in the name of humanity can <b>backfire/ do harm rather than good/ achieve the opposite of the desired outcome</b> . |
| ...is a <b>better guide to planning for the future</b> (l.72-73) | <b>D6</b> | ▪ An emotional response <b>may not help us achieve the goals of tomorrow/ does not help us tackle potential challenges</b> .       |

**Mark scheme (16 points)**

|            |         |             |         |             |         |
|------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
| 1 point    | 1 mark  | 5–6 points  | 4 marks | 11 points   | 7 marks |
| 2 points   | 2 marks | 7–8 points  | 5 marks | ≥ 12 points | 8 marks |
| 3–4 points | 3 marks | 9–10 points | 6 marks |             |         |

**10. In this article, Paul Bloom describes the limitations and consequences of empathy. How far would you agree with his observations? Relate your opinions to your own society. [10]**

**Marking Notations**

**R1:** Students should provide a clear stand which evaluates how far they agree with Bloom's observations.

**R2:** Students should specify and engage with at least two issues that reflect Bloom's observations of the limitations and consequences of empathy in their discussion. (R2A, R2B, etc.)

**EX and EG:** Discussion and examples should be contextualized within a specific society.

**EV:** In addition to providing a sensible evaluation of how far they agree with Bloom's observations, students could also provide an assessment of the relevance of his observations to their own society.

**Requirements**

| <b>Band A (8 – 10 marks)</b>   | <b>Band B (4 – 7 marks)</b>   | <b>Band C (1 – 3 marks)</b>  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ R1 – Clear and sensible stand, indicated with balance.</li> <li>▪ R2 – Each observation raised is clearly identified and students must be able to link the issue to the stand.</li> <li>▪ Support – Examples are relevant and each example is clearly linked</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ R1 – Stand is indicated, but may not have balance.</li> <li>▪ R2 – Each observation raised is clearly identified but link to the stand is not always clear.</li> <li>▪ Support – Examples are relevant but the link to R2 and R1 is not always clear.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ R1 – Stand is not indicated clearly. Not clear which society is discussed.</li> <li>▪ R2 – Observations from the passages are not clearly identified and not clearly linked to the stand.</li> <li>▪ Support – For lower end: no examples/ totally irrelevant examples; For higher end: examples</li> </ul> |

|               |  |   |
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| to R2 and R1. |  | are not clearly linked to R2 and R1/ link is not obvious. |
|---------------|--|---|

**Explanation/ Evaluation**

| <b>Band A (8 – 10 marks)</b>   | <b>Band B (4 – 7 marks)</b>   | <b>Band C (1 – 3 marks)</b>  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response identifies key observations from the passage and evaluates the extent of agreement with the observations, and their validity to his society and himself. Balance is considered in depth and refuted convincingly.</li> <li>Arguments are convincing with insightful examples that demonstrate mature understanding of issues.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response attempts to evaluate extent of agreement with the observations, and are applicable to his society and himself; not fully informed or convincing.</li> <li>Response shows adequate understanding of the issues but tends to be less thorough with limited development of ideas.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response tends to be a mere summary or restatement of the text instead of an evaluation.</li> <li>Response shows very limited knowledge/ understanding of issues and higher incidence of misinterpretation with very thin support.</li> </ul> |

**Coherence**

| <b>Band A (8 – 10 marks)</b>  | <b>Band B (4 – 7 marks)</b>   | <b>Band C (1 – 3 marks)</b>   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response shows high degree of coherence, organisation and clarity.</li> <li>Effective use of connectors to enhance the logical flow in the arguments.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response shows a fair degree of organisation, coherence and clarity.</li> <li>Connectors used may not always be appropriate.</li> <li>Some minor logical gaps, but do not lead to ambiguity in meaning.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coherence, organisation and clarity are in question.</li> <li>Inconsistency in arguments evident – points contradict the stand taken.</li> </ul> |

**Observation 1**

**I largely agree with Bloom's argument that empathy is 'parochial, narrow-minded and enumerate' (para 1, l.9-10). It seems that empathy can render us unable to see beyond our own interests and needs. In so doing, we are not able to comprehend the bigger picture, and consequently, we make poor decisions.**

- Singapore was not spared the effects of the 2007-2009 sub-prime mortgage crisis imported from America. Many Singaporeans lost their jobs and companies started to increase the employment of foreign workers who were cheaper than local labour. To make matters worse, the unveiling of the government's Population White Paper that mapped out its preparation for Singapore's population growth to 6.9 million (of which citizens would only form 55 per cent) by 2030 sent shockwaves across the country and sparked a major protest involving 4000 people at Hong Lim Park in February 2013. The attention drawn to the plight of fellow Singaporeans who have lost their jobs spiraled into anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes and reactions to the extent that some Singaporeans were vilifying foreigners and accusing

them of snatching away jobs from locals. They were not able to see beyond such a narrow-minded and biased perspective of the situation.

- In an attempt to understand citizens' sentiments on the ground, as well as to explain the government's proposals and policies, the National Conversations initiative was put in place. While Singaporeans wanted to give feedback to the government regarding their fears of losing the Singapore identity should foreigners and foreign-born citizens constitute almost half of the population, the government also needed to convey to Singaporeans that being anti-immigrants or anti-immigration would have a dire long-term consequence on the economy. Singaporeans were encouraged to take a longer-term view of the problem and not be too caught up with the here and now. They were also encouraged to look at the big picture as government policies will affect many sectors of society, and not just unemployed Singaporeans. The government, on the other hand, was encouraged to seriously consider sentiments on the ground and took the decision to scale back foreign labour and to work on improving Singaporeans' employability quotient.
- **This is a good instance which illustrates that when we exercise empathy, we can sometimes be driven to ignore other important issues that we need to consider.**
- **Conversely, the failure to empathise could also cause us to be parochial and insular.**
- In 2014, when a group of Filipinos in Singapore organised a Philippine Independence Day assembly on 8<sup>th</sup> June, it was loudly opposed by some Singaporeans who described the event as inappropriate and disrespectful. Filipinos were surprised by this reaction, given that there are 180,000 Filipino workers in Singapore and they have been celebrating the occasion in Singapore for several years. Angry Singaporeans who refused to understand the need of the Filipino community to celebrate their national independence day joined in the foray and flooded the social media with comments denouncing the event. They warned that holding the event in the iconic Orchard Road would 'seriously provoke' the national pride of Singaporeans. They questioned the 'insensitive intention' to fly the Philippine flag in Singapore, which they interpreted as an 'invasion' of their country.
- **As seen, it is not only empathy that causes us to be narrow-minded. The inability to put ourselves into the shoes of others could also result in us being biased and intolerant of their needs and perspectives.**

### Observation 2

There is also validity in Bloom's comment that '(w)e become oblivious of problems that seem unrelenting' (para 3, l.22) while the 'biggest ones settle into our collective memory' (l.26-27). It is true that we tend to empathise only when the media makes a huge story out of a tragedy while we often dismiss tragedies which do not get media coverage as 'mere background noise' (l.28).

- Indubitably, the media shapes and influences our thoughts and opinions on certain issues and pieces of news in two ways: firstly, it determines what information gets introduced into our consciousness, and secondly, how we should feel about the information that we are made aware of. This is because in a world overflowing with information, not all news is considered newsworthy, and the selection process will determine for readers what they should know about the world around them. Secondly, because all pieces of news are written by people, it may be argued that an ideological point of view will inevitably be conveyed no matter how objective or neutral attempts are to maintain impartiality in the communication of information.
- **Unsurprisingly, there is a tendency for particular stories to be at the forefront of our minds, while others are relegated to the back, causing us to empathise more with certain issues and groups than others.**



- As recent coverage of the recent Pink Dot event in Singapore shows, the media has much power in determining topics of discussion in Singapore. As the event held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 at Hong Lim Park drew nearer, calls by Pastor Lawrence Khong of Faith Community Baptist Church and Muslim teacher Ustaz Noor Deros to wear white in direct opposition of the event catalysed much public discussion and debate on Singapore's controversial penal code 377A that criminalises homosexual sex.
- In the lead-up to the Pink Dot event, articles published online and in the TODAY paper on the Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) move to reject an application by an affiliate of TOUCH Community Services to hold a pro-family event at the Padang also drew much public interest and attention.
- In addition, after Pink Dot 2014, news that the National Library of Singapore had decided to pulp three of its books that were deemed unsuitable for children and 'anti-family' because of its description of alternative family arrangements and values made headline news.
- Suddenly, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transexual (LBGT) minority rights were all that Singaporeans seemed to talk about, with many sympathizers and supporters of the pro-LGBT agenda speaking out for 'the freedom to love' and the plight of the LGBT community who has suffered much at the hands of bigoted pro-family supporters, self-righteous religious teachers and a silent but fearful majority.
- So powerful was the influence of the media and the voices of the pro-LGBT camp that the NLB decided to retract its decision to pulp the three books: 'And Tango Makes Three', 'The White Swan Express' and 'Who's In My Family: All About Our Families', and place the books in the Adult Section of the library instead.
- **Needless to say, during this period of time, the debate on the LGBT community in Singapore took precedence over a myriad of other issues of inequality suffered by other minority groups in Singapore today. These include persistent problems of income inequality, a continued lack of efforts to include those with disabilities in society, as well as the perpetual lack of representation of female directors in local companies and firms.**
- **However, it would be unfair to accuse the media of being deliberately manipulative and misleading.** Perhaps, in the face of an overwhelming amount of information, the prioritisation of some over others is a necessary evil that cannot be avoided. Furthermore, doing so has the added benefit of bringing to the fore issues of particular relevance and pertinence to society, encouraging an appropriate investment of empathy on specific needs that need to be addressed.
- **After all, for all the endless needs, issues and tragedies in the world today, we can only tackle a certain number given our limited and exhaustible resources and capacities as humans to feel for those around us. It may therefore be more practical and beneficial to focus rather than scatter our resources and emotions across a boundless amount of issues, problems and needs.**

### Observation 3

**I agree strongly with what Brown terms as 'the identifiable victim effect' (para 4, l.29), which leads us to show compassion only when we can pinpoint exactly who the victim is. We are more nonchalant when the victim is someone whom we cannot relate to or whom we are not familiar with.**

- This allows our feelings to be easily manipulated, making us act irrationally in light of information on 'victims' that we can relate to. Inexplicably, social problems are humanised, and become more than just statistics and findings, such that we find ourselves wanting to know more about the 'victims', their stories, their plight, and how we can help.

- **However, this blatant milking of emotions is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it may help meet more immediate needs by watering down complex social issues and problems to a tangible, more easily understandable concept. However, it may risk oversimplifying the issue, cannibalising long-term solutions, as well as overlooking others whose faces have been conveniently ignored because they have not been selected by the media to receive the public's sympathy.**
- **As empathy is a limited resource, there is a likelihood that investments of feelings and its corresponding behaviours towards a particular victim may bear opportunity costs on other victims, as well as a better understanding of the issue at hand. In other words, the identifiable victim becomes a distraction rather than a help to a cause, receiving help from others at the expense of fellow victims going through the same challenges and struggles. Additionally, this short-term milking of emotions and resources may only serve to placate the guilt and pity felt by an empathetic public without actually contributing to their understanding of the larger social issue at hand, thus causing them to miss the forest for the trees.**
- **When weapons systems supervisor, Military Expert 2 Jason Chee got caught between a motorised winch during a routine check on RSS Endeavour's quarterdeck in December 2012, he lost both his legs and left arm. His right arm only had two fingers remaining. As news of the freak accident spread, calls for blood donations of O+ blood for Jason Chee were quickly met by fellow servicemen and members of the public. While the incident has certainly raised some awareness of the importance of blood donations, it has not quite sunk into the collective conscience of society as evidenced by the continued low amounts of blood stocks in Singapore's blood banks. This is compounded by many Singaporeans' inability to overcome existing barriers to action, such as their fear of needles and the lack of motivation to take action.**
- **Hence, while empathy may help to meet an immediate need, it may not necessarily be an effective long-term strategy to tackle a problem that is much more than merely a representative face, story or identifiable victim.**
- **That said, this observation may not be entirely applicable in Singapore given Singaporeans' generally strong belief in giving back to the community and their altruistic practices.**
- **In 2009-2010, despite many charitable organisations coming under fire for misappropriation of funds, such as reports of a female employee of The Singapore Red Cross pocketing more than SGD90,000, and celebrity monk Shi Ming Yi of Ren Ci Hospital and Medicare taking more than SGD50,000 from the charitable organization he founded, it was reported by the Singapore Straits Times that an Individual Giving Survey administered by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre showed that Singaporeans actually donated a total of SGD1.07 billion in 2010, up from SGD958 million in 2008.**
- **This suggests that the identifiable victim effect may not actually result in a cannibalisation of donations in Singapore but may actually work to complement donation efforts instead, becoming an add-on rather than a hindrance to efforts and drives.**
- **It also suggests that Singaporeans may be more empathetic and compassionate or at least have been instilled with strong values and beliefs that centre on the community rather than the individual.**

#### Observation 4

**Bloom also observes that when we 'recognise the numbers (of victims) as significant, it is because of reason, not empathy' (para 5, l.40-41). He continues to argue that 'a more**

**dispassionate analysis of the situation is necessary if we are going to do anything meaningful' (para 6, l.46-47) for the victims. These observations are indeed spot-on.**

- It is when we are able to distance ourselves from the issue that we are able to be more objective. A sense of empathy can actually cloud our judgement such that we may not be able to assess the problem logically. A poorly assessed problem may lead us to take ineffective action to make a positive difference because we are carried away by our emotions. Sometimes a dispassionate look at the issue at hand is the best course of action.
- There are about 215 000 domestic workers but 320 000 construction workers (100 000 more than domestic workers). Many Singaporeans tend to be more sympathetic towards the plight of domestic workers rather than the plight of foreign workers in general. This could be because domestic maids literally live with us in our homes unlike other foreign workers. The local newspapers regularly publish stories of domestic maid abuse but we rarely read of stories about employers abusing foreign workers at the construction sites. So when it comes to the issue of improper housing for construction workers or the lack of compensation for industrial accidents, often NGOs, such as Foreign Domestic Workers Association for Support and Training, MARUAH Singapore and Transient Workers Count Too have to look into this matter rather than the police or ordinary Singaporeans. These NGOs have reported non-payment of workers, inhumane living conditions, as well as a lack of safety and medical coverage for construction workers.
- **Reason should dictate that the sheer number of construction workers compared to domestic ones should make us more cognizant of their plight, but the truth is we do not empathise with them the way we do for the domestic workers who live among us.** This will probably be worsened since the government has plans to accommodate foreign workers in specially built dormitories purported as convenient and equipped with good facilities. One wonders if we will go the way of Dubai which has a workers' ghetto, Sonapur, that houses 500 000 foreign construction workers.
- **Perhaps the problem with our inability to empathise with the huge numbers of 'unknowns' and concentrate our energy instead on the few is unavoidable because the 'unknowns' are unable to capture our attention or even if they do, we are too remote from their experience. This means that we need to make a conscious effort to be alert to this, our blind side.**

### **Observation 5**

**I largely agree with Bloom's observation that aid can actually provide 'an incentive to commit further atrocities' (para 6, l.44). It is likely that at times, in exercising our empathy, we might unknowingly be encouraging those who are guilty of certain misdeeds to continue their abuse and exploitation of other people's sufferings and problems for their personal gains.**

- Unwittingly, we become accomplices in the abuse and exploitation of other people's sufferings and problems for personal gain.
- There have been several instances of fake donation schemes in which syndicates masquerade as legitimate charity organizations to ask for donations and swindle people of their money. It was reported by the Straits Times in 2013 that two years after their misdeeds were first highlighted, fake fund-raisers are still soliciting donations under the name of the Yellow Ribbon Project. However, the project said it was not conducting any public fund-raising. Neither has it authorized anyone to do so.
- Similarly, a photo of a woman posing as a polytechnic student to collect donations for a fake fund-raising project called 'Singapore Young Hearts' was posted on the Ngee Ann Polytechnic's School of Health Sciences Alumni Facebook page in early 2014. This comes

after a warning from Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) Facebook page about the same fund-raising scam in October 2013. The hospital said the Facebook post at the programme called 'Singapore Young Hearts' was not registered under the hospital. The Singapore Red Cross has also advised the public not to fall prey to cheats who use its name to raise funds. It said that it has been informed of several cases of individuals claiming to be volunteers and soliciting donations on its behalf. They carry fake documents and collaterals that bear the organisation's logo and fake fundraising licenses. Even though it is mandatory for donation collectors to produce a copy of the collector's Certificate of Authority, issued by the police or the National Council of Social Service, it is often difficult for the donors to tell if the documentation is legitimate or otherwise. It is easy for these wrongdoers to exploit this loophole and forge the documentation proof to further their scams.

- **The presence of such instances in Singapore severely undermines the kind intentions of the empathetic donors as they unknowingly become accomplices of such undesirable behaviour.**
- **However, it is unfair to deprive the victims of the help they need and the empathy they deserve due to a few of such instances. The exercising of empathy should therefore be tempered by rationality as we work towards helping the victims without benefitting the perpetrators in the process.**

### **Observation 6**

**Bloom notes that the 'outrage that comes from adopting the perspective of a victim can drive an appetite for retribution' (para 7, 1.48-49) when we are empathetic. At times, when we are carried away putting ourselves in the shoes of the victims, we might lose sight of what is important and focus wrongly on exacting revenge instead. I generally agree with his comment based on my observations of Singaporean society.**

- An illustration is the vengeful responses of Singaporeans towards Anton Casey, a British expatriate who made several derogatory remarks about Singaporeans. As a result of his unthinking actions, he and his family received 'extreme emotional and verbal abuse online' and even death threats according to the Straits Times. He was also fired from his job and had no choice but to flee from Singapore.
- Similarly, Amy Cheong was fired from her position as the Assistant Director of NTUC as a result of great public controversy and pressure incited by her racially insensitive comments.
- These examples serve to show how exercising empathy can at times lead to blind hatred and desire for the wrongdoers to be punished. People can get emotionally carried away in wanting the wrongdoers to be punished without being able to rationalize that the revenge exacted does not, firstly, undo the misdeeds they committed or secondly, help the victims in any concrete manner.
- **In fact, such blind revenge and vehement diatribe only serve to generate more suffering and the supposed good intentions behind the empathetic response backfires instead. It is even fair to argue that the blatant irrational disregard for the consequences of their vengeful responses makes them no different from the wrongdoers. It is wiser to channel the energy spent on wanting to seek retribution to concrete actions that directly benefit the victims instead.**
- **However, this does not mean that one should not be empathetic at all. The problem lies with the excessive extent with which empathy is exercised in the above cases. Empathy can after all be a starting point for people to understand the situation and hopefully, subsequently provide adequate help, or in the cases mentioned, call for adequate restraint.**

**Observation 7**

**While there is merit in Bloom's claim that empathy leads us to be 'indifferent to long-term consequences' (para 7, l.50) and that 'our concern for specific individuals today means neglecting crises that will harm countless people in the future' (para 8, l.61-62), I still believe that a society that empathises is preferred over one that is cold and unfeeling. Moreover, empathy could move us to take action and effect necessary changes instead of settling for the status quo.**

- It is indeed true that we tend to be too focused on immediate problems which we face, such that we fail to realise the long-term consequences which our actions might result in. As such, responding intuitively based on empathy, without logical discernment, may cause us to make wrong priorities and to overlook critical problems that require careful thought and deliberation.
- For instance, in the wake of the influx of foreign immigrants and workers in the local work environment, Singaporeans reacted empathetically in support of fellow citizens who were unable to find employment, and were quick to blame foreigners for stealing the jobs of the locals and depressing their wages due to their relatively cheaper labour cost. In particular, anti-foreigner sentiment reared its ugly head in the 2011 General Elections, where many Singaporeans who felt for the economic plight of their fellow compatriots pressed the issue and brought it up to the forefront of the political debate.
- However, in pushing the government to tighten the inflow of foreign labour, what many Singaporeans did not have the foresight to see were the long-term implications, including the erosion of Singapore's cost competitiveness, compression of profit margins and the tendency for companies to pass on this higher cost to consumers, resulting in higher inflation.
- The response of the government in imposing quotas on foreign labour and the increment of the foreign worker levy in a bid to reduce the number of foreign workers in Singapore also resulted in many local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) struggling to survive or winding up their businesses which they found difficulty in sustaining due to the increasing labour cost.
- **Such dire economic consequences highlight the risks of acting on empathy without a thoughtful analysis of the long-term repercussions that would befall other groups in society.**
- **However, even though Singaporeans may generally feel for the plight of others without much thought of its long-term impact, their compassion is not always translated into action.**
- In fact, the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) syndrome has been growing among Singaporeans. Despite many locals proclaiming their compassion for, and desire to help, the ageing population, many vehemently objected to the building of eldercare facilities in their own neighbourhood. In Woodlands, for instance, 90 percent of the residents in one block launched a petition against the move to establish the Sree Narayana Mission Multi-Service Centre, a day care facility for the elderly, within the estate in 2012.
- **I would rather Singaporeans genuinely commiserate with the less fortunate and their fellow citizens, and act upon it, than to be indifferent, insensitive, callous and unsympathetic to the needs of others.**
- Even President Tony Tan mentioned in his address for the opening of the second session of the Twelfth Parliament in May 2014 that empathy should continue to be the core value of Singaporeans.
- Cases, such as the 2006 Wee Shu Min controversy when the Raffles Junior College student posted unsympathetically on her blog in response to a Singaporean voicing his concerns over job security and age discrimination, 'get out of my elite uncaring face', should be avoided.

- The fact that Singaporeans felt strongly enough about their fellow citizens' economic welfare to press the issue also led to the government being more mindful of, and taking more steps to mitigate, the escalating social tensions between the local and foreign communities. **Such civic action driven by empathy is preferred over apathy, and should be encouraged. Greater empathy and more appreciation for others, including the foreigners in our midst, could help us to establish more meaningful relationships within the community and nation.**

### **Observation 8**

**I agree with Bloom's assertion that 'the politics of empathy is also to blame' (para 8, l.61) for the 'government's failure to enact prudent long-term policies' (l.58). However, his observation is hardly pertinent in Singapore where the government is known for its pragmatic and hardnosed policies, and does not succumb to populist politics.**

- We may expect the governments of some democracies to pander to the demands of their electorate in order to ensure they continue to hold on to their seats of power. Such populist politics is often dismissed as strategic empathising with the public in the form of rhetoric and unrealistic proposals to increase appeal across the political spectrum. Consequently, unwise decisions that win the governments votes are made but they provide little real benefit for the country.
- This populist movement does not exist in Singapore though. The People's Action Party (PAP)-led government is always cognisant of the long-term survival of the nation and has no qualms enacting and enforcing unpopular legislation and policies. That the PAP has enjoyed uninterrupted political power since 1959, and that it has a near-monopoly of the Singapore Parliament, also reinforce its belief and confidence that it does not need to rely on populist politics to retain its mandate to rule.
- The existence of policies that are economically efficient, but politically unpopular, such as means-testing for government assistance which does little for the squeezed middle class, electronic road pricing (ERP) to control peak hour traffic, reduction of employers' taxes to cope with economic recessions and the Certificate of Entitlement (COE) to restrict car ownership, reflects the staunch belief that the PAP government has in implementing such painful measures for the overall benefit of the country, instead of adopting popular solutions or quick fixes to please the people whom it serves.
- **While the Singapore government is concerned with the needs of its people, it is not true that its ability to understand and empathise with the common people will render its policies unwise or a failure.**

***Marked and reported by:***

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