

“Governance not technology, is the answer to many of the problems faced by the world today.” What is your view?

By Foo Yiew Min (16A11)

Einstein once said “I do not know what World War Three will be fought with, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones”. He meant that growth in technology had been so exponential such that it was nigh impossible to predict what kinds of new weaponry humanity would possess, except that these weapons would be so advanced that they had the potential to destroy everything, for us to begin once again as primitive beings. Beyond the military sector, technology today has clearly been growing at an unprecedented rate. It took thousands of years for Man to conquer the sky in the form of the Wright brothers’ inventions, yet it has barely been a century and we have already transcended the sky to enter space. Smartphones are getting smarter yearly, with larger and larger capacities. These amazing advancements have led proponents of science to believe that technology can solve everything. However, I disagree. While technology has solved countless problems for mankind and will continue to do so, many problems in today’s world, such as global terrorism, discrimination and the lack of food in poor countries, are unable to be solved and sometimes even exacerbated by technology. These problems, which have their roots in society, cannot be solved by technology. However, governance, the method by which one governs a country, can be the answer.

The problem of starving, hungry people in poor countries such as Ethiopia or Zimbabwe can be better solved by poor governance than the improvement of technology. There are those who would claim that better technology can increase yield and production, ensuring there is enough food for everyone. Better technology, such as the genetic modification of food, can help people to grow crops in these arid and unsustainable environments. The use of technology in producing crops that are rich in yield to increase production, or crops so hardy that they can be planted in the barren wastelands of the country are all plausible long-term solutions. However, people often forget that the problem is not a lack of food in our world today. In fact, research has shown that our current food production is enough to comfortably feed the world population. The problem lies within food wastage, with millions of tons of food being thrown into the trash daily. People in developed countries have been pampered, and grown ignorant of their starving counterparts. Technology can do nothing to solve this problem, with all of its capabilities in spreading messages through the mass media, resulting in people turning off the TV because the starving child is making them lose appetite, or pressing a ‘like’ on Facebook to bless the hungry and dying. Concrete actions taken by governments to reduce food wastage are instrumental in solving this problem. Governments have to undertake regulations, controlling amounts of food wasted by businesses, and they have to organise campaigns, in schools and workplaces, to remind people not to waste food as well as recommend food-saving methods in cooking. Governments should also encourage philanthropists or aid organizations to channel excess food to poorer countries. While this is a temporary solution, the shift in mindset will be extremely beneficial and will alleviate the suffering of many, at least until technology succeeds with a long-term solution. For now, governance is the answer.

Furthermore, governance can be used to change perceptions and stereotypes by taking concrete measures, whereas technology is unable to do so. This means that in order to change the perspective of people in a country, a government has to show its seriousness in the form of policies. For

instance, racial discrimination has been a perpetuating problem across the globe. Technology is not only unable to solve such problems which stem from the perceptions of people, but has instead perpetuated them. While there are countless anti-discrimination messages online, confirmation bias has rendered them ineffective as people with deep seated prejudices reject these messages and look for those which they agree with. This has perhaps led to a domino effect, evident in the increasing trend of hate crimes against certain racial groups in America. While America has tried to pass anti-discriminatory laws such as those forbidding employers from choosing or rejecting job-seekers based on race, governance has largely been ineffective, due to the segregation and lack of interaction between people of different races. However, this does not show that governance is not effective. It simply shows that more stringent and thoughtful governance is necessary. For instance, Singapore's Ethnic Integration Policy requires the racial composition of people living in government flats to reflect that of the general population. The increased interaction between people of different races has led to Singapore being a harmonious society, despite the multitude of different races. This shows that effective and well-planned governance can solve problems that technology cannot, simply because these policies force people to confront their false stereotypes and perceptions which can lead to a change in mindset. This does not only address racial discrimination, but other forms of discrimination such as sexism and ageism. As such, because governments can better reach out to the people and be more forceful in sending out a message, governance is a better answer to the social problem of discrimination as compared to technology.

Sometimes, governance can also be a better answer than technology, because it was poor governance that led to the problems in the first place. In such cases, technology is unable to solve the problems. It can only superficially attempt to treat the symptoms on the surface, and may actually exacerbate the issue. For instance, the issue of migrants and refugees that has been plaguing many countries, leading to a rise in xenophobic sentiments. Some of these reasons are not unfounded. The capacities of national economies have simply not been able to support the influx of refugees. Governments have to properly assess and evaluate what is best for the country, and decide how many more refugees to take in before social problems start arising. Furthermore, governments have to appease their people and soothe their fears, especially when these worries are irrational. For example, the rise in the number of refugees in America has led many to blame these migrants for unemployment, but unemployment in America has in fact been at an all-time low. As such, proper governance is needed to make people more aware of their incumbent problems, while ensuring proper utilization of its resources. When countries do not make use of their resources properly, the shortage of such resources is bound to cause unhappiness. Furthermore, the root cause of the refugee problem is terrorism, which is also caused by poor governance. Poor governance has also allowed for the growth and spread of these extremist ideas, especially within the home countries of terrorist groups. While technology can provide stronger weapons and better surveillance, it does not solve the root cause of the issue. ISIS was a result of poor governance in Syria, along with the interference of the US and Russian governments. Killing more insurgents with better weapons only gives the rest a reason to fight harder, and convince others to join their cause. As a Middle Eastern leader once said in a UN speech, the world has to choose between an olive branch or a freedom fighter's gun. Governments with proper governance have to solve this problem they created; technology will only worsen the situation.

With that said, there are problems that only technology can fix, due to the sheer ability of current science to solve these problems. For instance, the problem of diseases, especially currently

incurable ones like cancer or HIV, require the furthering of technology to provide the solution. However, this does not mean that proper governance has no part to play, as the appropriate amount of funding by governments still has to be channelled to these areas for research, while the appropriate policies have to be taken to encourage more young talent to enter such industries. Hence, while some problems have to be solved by technology, governance still maintains an important role in helping to solve these problems.

In conclusion, many of today's problems can be answered by governance rather than technology. This could have been a result of technology's rapid advancement, which has expediently solved the many problem we faced in the past, leaving us with social problems that require government intervention. With that said, the fact is that these two are not mutually exclusive; almost all problems require the involvement of both governance and technology. Areas exclusive to technology and science need the government to channel funds and resources. While most of the world's problems today are social problems, governments need to utilize technology to carry out proper and appropriate governance to create long-lasting solutions.

Comments:

Good points raised but some paragraphs were too long.