

General Paper – Essay Model

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Topic: Science & Technology

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'Science is no longer a good servant, but a cruel master.' How far do you agree?

Industrial Revolution, steam engine, light bulbs, the atomic theory of matter, combustion engine, electric cell, quantum mechanics, nuclear weapons – science have no doubt served humans well since the beginnings of scientific inquiry. It has served the needs of almost every aspects of mankind: economic, in the innovations in production methods; intellect, in the explanation of nature; health, in the breakthroughs of medical technology; lifestyle, in all the little gadgets that makes our lives easier; even spiritual for some, in assuring that diseases people suffer from is a result of random mutations in the gene and not because they have been possessed by some evil spirits. However, in penetrating all aspects of mankind, science has held us as hostages of our own creation. In the classic 'creation turn against creator' twist of a science fiction arc, man have become too reliant on science and products of science (ie. technology) to overcome the trivial inconveniences and allowed them to control us. Nonetheless, to say that science is no longer a good servant but a cruel master would be taking the personification of science a little too far and an oversimplification of the relationship between man and science.

Science is still a great servant, providing us with knowledge of things previously unknown and supplying us with possibilities of ever advancing technology that improves our lives. Recent innovative breakthroughs includes the discovery of more alternative fuels and methods of obtaining energy, namely the use of enzymes to catalyze reactions of bio-fuels that would release energy slowly, allowing more efficient utilization. Such technology no only serves to replace the combustion engine as a more silent way to travel; it reduces harmful emissions into the atmosphere that is responsible for global climate change. More significantly, scientist have discovered that dopamine, a type of chemical found in the brain is capable of regenerating Glial cells that would repair the damaged connections in the brain responsible for the Parkinson's disease. This can spawn a whole new therapy for victims of the disease, plagued with involuntary muscle movements.

The other glories of science in the field of material improvements of life require no further elaboration. It is perhaps the other aspects of mankind served by science that is rarely discussed. Science started out as a mere form of inquiry and apparently it has done its job of satisfying our curiosity rather well. It answers all our questions of how things works and we are no longer perplexed about the movements of celestial bodies or reasons behind volcanic eruptions. Although that means that we can no longer wish upon a shooting star and expect our wish to come true, it also implies that when the volcanoes erupt, we know it is not because of something bad we did to anger the mountain spirits. The new attitudes that science instills in us empower us to solve our problems with our minds and foster the zeal to strive for a better life.

Of course, the material enjoyment we gain from science and the products of science is at the expense of some freedom, but that is far from enough to declare science as a 'cruel master'. Gadgets and gizmos like hand phones and Personal Digital Assistance (PDA) sure provided us with ease of communications and connectivity but they have also become craws that grip us to our work like a vice. We have inadvertently 'hand-cuffed' ourselves to the social networks we belong, the projects we are working on; we have become obligated to remain contactable at anytime, anywhere when we possess a device which allows us to be contacted remotely anywhere. We are compelled to remain working on our PDAs or notebook computers when we are on the bus because the other users of technology are monitoring us and ensuring that we do not fail science by choosing to be less productive than science allows. We have surrendered our freedom from work when we decided that science is responsible for increasing our productivity. Science, in this sense, has become some sort of 'master' though 'cruel' is probably not the adjective to describe it.

The attitudes that science instills in us also control us subtly in our actions, lifestyles and expectations. In promising ever-increasing productivity, science has corrupted our minds with a preoccupation for speed. Looking around any modern cities, it is apparent that we have become servants of our preoccupation for speed and deprived ourselves of the idyllic lives we are ironically slogging for. A couple of seconds on the

connecting tone and we declare the person not contactable on his phone; if the MacDonalds' guy cannot serve you within 60 seconds he has to compensate you with an Apple Pie; teachers reprimand you for not completing your research assignment in a day when aided by the vast knowledge base of the World Wide Web - we are obviously frustrating ourselves with our expectations.

The possibility of a better life for all offered by science, and our empowerment 'against' nature, makes us less capable of accepting our vulnerable position in nature. We are enslaved by the notion that we can triumph over natural constraints and thus when someone dies because of some illness, we feel absolutely defeated. It's not like we didn't grieve when our kin passed away in the past but promises of medical technology today have caused us to take deaths too hard. We expected that something could have been done somehow.

Having said all that, the relationship between man and science cannot be simplified as a master-servant or servant-master. Man and science co-evolve and are influencing or controlling each other directly or indirectly. Man inquires, science answers, man expects, science hypothesize and make possible, man creates, and so on. This endless chain of action-reactions cannot possibly constitute the master-servant sort of ties that the statement proposes. Even if we were to insist on such simplistic relations, science is still a good servant, serving our needs and answering our questions. And while science has, in many aspects become a master of our lives, it is far from being 'cruel', whatever sort of brutality, hedonism or negative action that may constitute. Thus, no one can possibly agree to that statement.