

ESSAY REVIEW 2023

Global Essay Competition 2023: The best or worst legacy from previous generations: How to preserve or replace it?

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Introducing the Top 25 Essays of the St.Gallen Symposium Global Essay Competition

Each year, the Global Essay Competition of the St. Gallen Symposium receives hundreds of submissions, out of which twenty-five stand-out contributions are selected by a Jury. These essays are authored by a promising generation of future leaders from across the globe. The participants respond to a thematized call that revolves around the primary theme of the annual St. Gallen Symposium. As a result, these young talents delve into a range of interconnected topic areas that are seldom discussed in such combinations outside of the Symposium. The essays present innovative ideas that tackle some of the significant challenges that we confront today. Their problem statements are thought-provoking, and their solutions are inventive and forward-thinking. These writings spark vital conversations about our future during and beyond the Symposium. Facilitating this dialogue every year and connecting

these young, inspired thinkers with today's decision-makers and influential organizations are among the primary objectives of the St. Gallen Symposium.

A great deal of our lives is influenced by when we were born. As those currently alive, we have inherited a world built by previous generations. We owe a great deal to the efforts of our forebears, but we also inherit problematic legacies. This year, 700 participants of the Global Essay Competition examined the most relevant legacies in our world today. The authors of these essays distinguished between three types of legacies. One group of essays focused on legacies from the past that are no longer serving us or have perhaps never served societies at large. A second group of essays examined legacies that need to be transformed and updated to reflect the complexities and interdependencies of our world. Finally, the third group of essays provide food for thought on future legacies that we should proactively create today to ensure the

prosperity and wellbeing of future generations.

The significance of legacies

The authors of the top 25 essays define "legacy" as the impact or influence that an individual or group leaves behind, often in the form of achievements, ideas, or values. Legacy can also refer to the tangible or intangible assets that an individual or group leaves behind, such as works of art, literature, or scientific discoveries. In many cases, a legacy is passed down from generation to generation, shaping the future in significant ways. Different generations have different ideas about legacies, which can result in tension and conflicts about what is considered valuable and worthy of passing down. The fact that the authors approached the topic of legacy in different ways signals the deep uncertainties they are observing in our globalized world. Some legacies, such as climate change, fundamentally affect every living being on Earth and have long-term consequences that will shape the future. Other legacies, such as the impact of social media, may only affect small groups but still have significant impact. Ultimately, the concept of legacy encompasses the idea of responsibility and sustainability, particularly with regards to how one's actions and decisions affect future generations.

Leaders of Tomorrow Call for Immediate Action

The essays show how legacies shape our world and influence our future. While they often highlight positive legacies that enabled growth, they also reveal shortcomings. Good legacies can be overlooked, outdated, or ignored due to societal needs or advancements. For instance, modernizing public libraries and

restoring universal healthcare were proposed to meet changing societal needs. Legacies can be politicized, weaponized, or abused for future resources, whereas bad legacies entail discrimination, environmental damage, and exploitation. Limited knowledge, like social media's health risks, makes some legacies ambiguous. For instance, an essay on artificial intelligence (AI) calls for open-source research and an expanded ethical understanding of AI use cases. The authors agree that renewing legacies is our responsibility, requiring collaboration from individuals to global institutions. Interdisciplinary approaches allow a holistic understanding of legacies' impact on society.

Preserving our legacies by embracing diversity and inclusion

A key theme that emerges from the essays is the importance of preserving and updating our legacies through embracing diversity and inclusion in our ever-evolving societies. Some ideas are worth preserving, while others need to be updated to fit the changing times. For example, authors suggest that philanthropy is a good legacy that however needs updating. The authors caution that philanthropy needs to evolve to address the root causes of societal issues rather than just treating their symptoms. One actionable idea is to create a new model of philanthropy that focuses on systemic change rather than individual aid. Another good legacy worth preserving is healthcare, but it also needs updating. The respective authors suggest that healthcare systems need to be more accessible and affordable, especially for marginalized groups. One actionable idea is to increase the availability of telemedicine and digital health solutions to reach people in remote or underserved areas. Finally, corporate social

responsibility (CSR) is an idea that needs both preserving and updating. While CSR initiatives are important, the authors argue that they need to go beyond tokenism and become integrated into a company's core values and operations. One actionable idea is to create diversity and inclusion training programs for employees and to increase the representation of diverse voices in leadership positions. By embracing diversity and inclusion in our legacies and updating them to fit the changing times, we can create a more equitable and sustainable future.

Confronting uncomfortable truths: abandoning harmful legacies

The essays in this year's competition have also touched on the issue of harmful legacies that must be abandoned. There are various reasons why such legacies should be left behind, including their detrimental impact on society and the environment. One example of such a legacy is the use of fossil fuels as a primary source of energy, which has been linked to climate change and its adverse effects on the planet. Another example is the perpetuation of systemic racism, which has led to the marginalization and oppression of certain groups. The authors of the essays have pointed out that abandoning such legacies is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for building a sustainable future. Another legacy that needs to be abandoned is the exploitation of labor in various industries, particularly in developing countries. This legacy perpetuates poverty and inequality and goes against the principles of fair labor practices. The authors of the essays have suggested various actionable ideas to address these harmful legacies, including investing in renewable energy sources, promoting diversity and inclusivity, and

implementing ethical labor practices in the supply chain. The essays have emphasized that abandoning harmful legacies requires a collective effort and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about our past practices.

Legacies for the future: tools and technologies

In today's rapidly advancing technological age, legacies for the future are often closely tied to tools and technologies. Many of the authors in this year's essay competition recognized the critical importance of these tools and technologies in shaping our future. One area where tools and technologies can have a significant impact is in the realm of sustainability. For example, some essays discussed the potential of green technologies to reduce our carbon footprint and mitigate the effects of climate change.

However, there were also concerns raised about the potential risks and drawbacks of certain technologies. Several essays warned about the potential negative consequences of advanced technologies such as AI and genetic engineering if they are not properly regulated and implemented with ethical considerations in mind. Other essays focused on the importance of preserving traditional technologies and knowledge, particularly in indigenous communities.

The question of who controls these tools and technologies also emerged as a significant theme in the essays. Some authors argued for the importance of democratizing access to technologies, ensuring that they are not monopolized by powerful corporations or governments. Others emphasized the need for ethical considerations in the development and use of technologies, with a focus on promoting human values and well-being.

One essay specifically emphasized the need for open-source research to ensure that the development and use of AI is guided by ethical considerations and promotes human values and well-being. This essay argues that AI development should prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness, and that access to AI tools and technologies should be democratized to prevent monopolization by powerful actors. Additionally, the author calls for the establishment of regulatory frameworks that promote responsible AI use and mitigate potential negative consequences, such as job displacement and algorithmic bias.

Overall, the authors of all essays recognized the significant impact that tools and technologies can have on shaping our legacies for the future. While there is great potential for these tools and technologies to enable a more sustainable and equitable future, there are also significant risks and concerns that must be addressed. Ultimately, the

future of our legacies will depend on how we choose to harness and regulate these powerful tools and technologies.

Conclusion and Outlook

One important idea put forth by the authors of this year's top essays is that we do not necessarily need to start with a blank slate. While there are certainly significant challenges that we face, there are also a multitude of valuable ideas and legacies that we can build upon. The goal of the essay competition, then, is to carefully examine and interrogate our legacies, avoiding the trap of path dependence and instead continually challenging ourselves to ask: where can we improve? How can our legacies evolve? And how can we create truly future-proof legacies that are inclusive of all groups? As the authors of these essays demonstrated, taking a balanced yet critical view of our legacies is key to achieving these goals.