

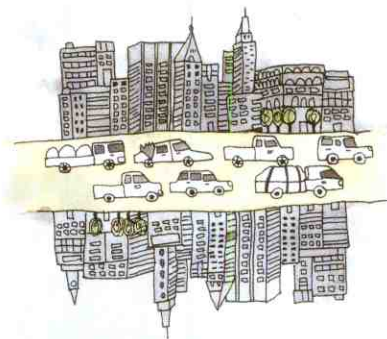
ISSUE 36

The Quality of Our Lives

For many people in many parts of the world, life has seemingly never been better. They live longer, healthier lives in considerable comfort, with air conditioning, effective heating and sewage, easy transportation and communication services, and a plethora of labor-saving devices. However, this level of ease and luxury has by-passed many areas except for the privileged few, and even in the affluent sectors people seem to realize that a price has been paid for this comfort. The automobiles destroy our air, overcrowding deprives people of the space they need to breathe and think, and materialism undermines morality. One must wonder whether there is some kind of happy medium at which progress can be balanced with the past.

What most degrades our quality of life?

- (1) Pollution
- (2) Poverty
- (3) Materialism
- (4) Modern technology
- (5) Health problems
- (6) Dysfunctional family
- (7) Declining morality
- (8) Apathy
- (9) Lack of common sense
- (10) Crime
- (11) Other _____



→ **considerable** : a lot of; much → **sewage** : waste matter that passes through sewers

→ **plethora** : large amount, number, or quantity → **affluent** : having plenty of money

→ **deprive** : take (sth) away from (sb) → **undermine** : weaken or destroy by degrees → **degrade** : lower the quality of (sth)

→ **dysfunctional** : not working correctly or normally → **apathy** : lack of feeling or interest; indifference

Sample Answers

(A) If our families still worked, many of other problems would be more manageable. Not long ago, people got married for life, had many children, and lived close together across many generations. There was always someone close, both geographically and psychologically, whenever a problem needed to be dealt with. But today, *divorce* rates climb, families become bitterly divided, and parents and siblings live far from each other. No wonder there is so much confusion and uncertainty in our lives.

(B) I asked someone once what the difference was between ignorance and apathy. He responded, "I don't know and I don't care." He probably didn't realize it, but he was right *on both counts*. And that is the deepest cause of our social *discontent*. Most things are pretty easy nowadays. We can travel around the world, use our computers to find any information we seek, and make a lot of money without even leaving home. This has made us lazy, so that nothing is worth struggling to obtain or to know. We are used to getting *superficial* answers and have no desire to do better.

Speak Your Mind

1. Do you think technology has upgraded or degraded our quality of life?
2. Why are people becoming more selfish and *indifferent* toward each other?
3. How does money play a role in our life quality? Is life better when one has more money or less?
4. Some people stay married and others get divorced quickly and perhaps repeatedly. Is there any difference between them?
5. Do you think the future guarantees us a better life? Why or why not? What will *determine* our life quality in the future?

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. Do you think technology has upgraded or degraded our quality of life?

(A)

People seem to have a romantic *nostalgia* for the “good old days” when life was simpler and people were more *virtuous*. When *life expectancy* was 40 years of age. When even a simple medical problem was *fatal*. When few opportunities were available and hope was a rare commodity. The next time someone complains to you about the air pollution caused by cars, ask him what kind of pollution horse- or ox-drawn carts made.

(B)

If you live in a city, have you even seen the stars? In most urban areas, the nightly *haze* permanently *obscures* the sky. Do you know who your neighbors are? Apartment *dwellers* are *notoriously* unconnected with the lives of the people who live right next to them, even though they live closer together than people from *adjoining* farms (who usually know each other on a first-name basis as well as being familiar with their spouse, children, and habits). How much time do you spend at home with your family? Most of us leave early in the morning, and at different times from each other, spend all day at work or school, entertain ourselves with our colleagues, and then go home to a house full of strangers, just before going to bed. So, in light of my answer to the question, I say yes, definitely, technology has degraded my life.

2. Why are people becoming more selfish and indifferent toward each other?

(A)

We are all under a lot of pressure to compete and succeed. The “labor-saving” devices that have been imposed upon us mean that we can spend more time at work and less time relaxing with others. We are becoming more *self-absorbed* in our careers and less involved in the lives of other people.

(B)

Because there are more lives around us, each one is worth less. When our circle of acquaintances was smaller, every one was a precious commodity to be *nurtured* and sustained. But now we can afford to be *picky*; if one relationship does not develop or last, there seems like an infinite number of other possibilities waiting.

3. How does money play a role in our life quality? Is life better when one has more money or less?

(A)

A wise person should be able to *capitalize* on his wealth, no matter how little or great that is. There is no need to be in debt or do without anything that is vital to us such as good health or medical care, love and friendship, and comfortable living. But most of us are not wise. We spend our *surplus* on foolish, *transitory* things that we have no permanent need for, and waste precious moments trying to recover what we have lost. Modern life has become a never-ending cycle of *desperation*.

(B)

A truly wise person needs nothing in excess. We all need to eat a balanced diet in sufficient quantities to sustain our health; we need water and air; we need space and freedom of movement; and we need to maintain ourselves within a fairly wide temperature range. Besides these minimal physical needs, all else is foolish *vanity*. We should use our excess time and energy to develop our human relationships, not to *bloat* ourselves with empty possessions.

4. Some people stay married and others get divorced quickly and perhaps repeatedly. Is there any difference between them?

(A)

People who stay happily married for a long time are willing to be patient as they either grow toward one another or learn to live with each other's *peculiarities*. The ones who can't do that want a perfect, lasting relationship immediately without putting in sufficient care or work to achieve it.

(B)

It is easy to criticize those who do not stay married. But in fact, they are like anyone else. Most long marriages are as unhappy as the ones that break up, but the couples involved in them usually lack the resources, imagination, or courage to seek something better.

Speak Your Mind Helpers

5. Do you think the future guarantees us a better life? Why or why not? What will determine our life quality in the future?

M : Every day I get up thinking that today life is going to get a little better.

F : And when you go to bed, how do you feel then?

M : Some days, of course, are filled with bad news. And some days don't seem any different than the one before. But that doesn't discourage me. I wake up the next morning with the same feeling of optimism. And, indeed, although tomorrow may not be better than today, I'm sure that things will be a lot better in a thousand tomorrows. That's only about three years.

F : It's all a matter of chance and luck. We all have good times and bad times, but they are not evenly distributed throughout our lives. Many of my friends never seem to get a break and are *plagued* by bad luck day after day, while others just *sail through* life with no major worries.

M : It is not a matter of intelligence or character, that's true.

F : Absolutely not!

M : But it is entirely a matter of attitude. I am convinced we make our own *fortune*, whether good or bad.

F : *Explain yourself.*

- M** : A pessimist will never be content with his *lot*, no matter how well he does. But an optimist will maximize the benefits of every situation. When we are optimistic of success, we work harder because we expect more, and over time this becomes a *self-fulfilling prophecy*.
- F** : But maybe, since the pessimist expects bad things to happen, he *works harder* at preventive maintenance. So, over time, fewer negative events occur and he has fewer failures as a result.
- M** : Exactly! So life gets better for them both, optimist and pessimist alike.
- F** : Yes, but my real point is that it does not matter whether one is optimistic or pessimistic; good things and bad things happen to us all, at the most unexpected times. No one is guaranteed a better tomorrow, but if he is lucky he will have one. If he is unlucky, tomorrow will cause the *collapse* of all he has.



→ **lot** : general situation in life

→ **self-fulfilling** : achieving fulfillment as a result of having been expected or foretold

→ **prophecy** : statement that (sth) will happen in the future

→ **work at** : try hard to develop or improve (sth) → **collapse** : sudden complete failure; breakdown