

Read the following text and complete the sentences 1-7 by choosing the right option (a, b, c, or d) according to what you have read. Write the letter of the option you choose in the corresponding white box. Item 0 is given as an example.

MARK

THE EARTH'S LEARNING CURVE

The scientific revolution that began 300 years ago has accelerated exponentially. Nations that learn faster will prosper. But it will take something else—wisdom—to endure.

Issues 2006 - Imagine a chart that begins when man first appeared on the planet and tracks the economic growth of societies from then forward. It would be a long, flat line until the late 16th or early 17th century, when it would start trending upward. Before then the fruits of productive labor were limited to a few elites. For most of humankind life was as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously described it in 1651—"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." But as Hobbes was writing those words, the world around him was changing. Put simply, human beings were getting smarter.

People have always sought knowledge, of course, but in Western Europe at that time, men began to search systematically for ways to understand and control their environment. The scientific revolution, followed by the Enlightenment, marked a fundamental shift. Humans were no longer searching for ways simply to fit into a natural or divine order, they were seeking to change it. The rise of machines drove the Industrial Revolution, and created a whole new system of life. Today the search for knowledge continues to produce an ongoing revolution in the health and wealth of humankind.

If the rise of science marks the first great trend in this story, the second is its diffusion. What was happening in Britain during the Industrial Revolution was not an isolated phenomenon. A succession of visitors to Britain would go back to report to their countries on the technological and commercial innovations they saw there. Sometimes societies were able to learn extremely fast, as in the United States. Others, like Germany, benefited from starting late, leapfrogging the long-drawn-out process that Britain went through.

This diffusion of knowledge accelerated dramatically in recent decades. Over the last 30 years we have watched countries like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and now China grow at a pace that is three times that of Britain or the United States at the peak of the Industrial Revolution. They have been able to do this because of their energies and exertions, of course, but also because they cleverly and perhaps luckily adopted certain ideas about development that had worked in the West—reasonably free markets and open trade, among them.

The diffusion of knowledge is the dominant trend of our time and goes well beyond the purely scientific. Consider the cases of Turkey and Brazil. If you had asked an economist 20 years ago how to think about these two countries, he would have explained that

they were Third World economies. Today they are both remarkably well managed. And this shift is happening around the world. Countries are far better managed economically than they have ever been.

We are sometimes reluctant to believe in progress. But the evidence is unmistakable. Every day one reads of a new study comparing nations in everything from Internet penetration to inflation. All these studies and lists are symbols of a learning process that is accelerating, reinforcing the lessons of success and failure. Call it a best-practice world.

I realize that the world I am describing is the world of the winners. There are billions of people, locked outside global markets, whose lives are still accurately described by Hobbes's cruel phrase. But even here, there is change. The recognition of global inequalities is more marked today than ever before, and this learning is forcing action. There is more money being spent on vaccines and cures for diseases in Africa and Asia today than ever before in history. Foreign-aid programs face constant scrutiny and analysis. When things don't work, we learn that, too, and it puts a focus either on the aid program or on local governments to improve.

This may sound overly optimistic. There are losers in every race, but let not the worries over who is winning and losing the knowledge race obscure the more powerful underlying dynamic: knowledge is liberating. It creates the possibility for change and improvement everywhere. It can create amazing devices and techniques, save lives, improve living standards and spread information. Some will do well on one measure, others on another. But on the whole, a knowledge-based world will be a healthier and richer world.

The caveat I would make is not about one or another country's paucity of engineers or computers. These problems can be solved. But knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom. Knowledge can produce equally powerful ways to destroy life, intentionally and unintentionally. It can produce hate and seek destruction. Knowledge does not by itself bring any answer to the ancient Greek question "What is a Good Life?" It does not produce good sense, courage, generosity and tolerance. And most crucially, it does not produce the farsightedness that will allow us all to live together—and grow together—on this world without causing war, chaos and catastrophe. For that we need wisdom.

By Fareed Zaharia

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0. According to Hobbes, life in the 17th century was

- a) *challenging*
- b) *dark*
- c) *illiterate*
- d) *savage*

d
✓

1. The changes in the world since the 17th century were due to

- a) education
- b) elites' labour
- c) intelligence
- d) poverty

2. The Industrial Revolution was possible thanks to

- a) adaptation to established order
- b) human understanding of natural forces
- c) humans' will to change their environment
- d) religion

3. The Industrial Revolution in Britain was

- a) incomplete
- b) isolated
- c) lengthy
- d) precipitated

4. China's development is due to

- a) free markets
- b) global economy improvement
- c) its natural resources
- d) the expansion of knowledge

5. The positive effect of comparative studies in world economies is

- a) decrease of inflation
- b) economy's acceleration
- c) Internet development
- d) the sharing of economic best practices

6. Knowledge helps Third World economies because

- a) it has led local governments to constant analysis
- b) it has made them healthier
- c) more vaccines have been invented
- d) their inequalities are recognised

7. According to the author, knowledge

- a) is less important than wisdom
- b) is the door to wisdom
- c) means nothing without wisdom
- d) requires wisdom for a better life
