

A mistakenly cynical view of human behavior holds that people are primarily driven by selfish motives: the desire for wealth, for power, or for fame. Yet, history gives us many examples of individuals who have sacrificed their own welfare for a cause or a principle that they regarded as more important than their own lives. Conscience—that powerful inner voice that tells us what is right and what is wrong—can be a more compelling force than money, power, or fame.

Assignment: Is conscience a more powerful motivator than money, fame, or power? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

1. Life without memory is no life at all, just as an intelligence without the possibility of expression is not really an intelligence. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.

—Luis Buñuel

2. Many a man fails to become a thinker for the sole reason that his memory is too good.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Assignment:

Is memory as central as Buñuel believes, or does it merely hold us back? In an essay, support your position by discussing an example (or examples) from literature, science and technology, the arts, current events, or your own experience or observation.

The well-known proverb “ignorance is bliss” suggests that people with knowledge of the world’s complexities and its limitations are often unhappy, while their less-knowledgeable counterparts remain contented. But how accurate is this folk wisdom? A recent study showed that well-informed people were more likely to report feelings of well-being. In fact, more knowledge leads people to feel better about themselves and more satisfied with their lives.

—adapted from Lee Sigelman, “Is Ignorance Bliss? A Reconsideration of the Folk Wisdom” (1994)

Assignment:

What is your view of the idea that more knowledge makes people happier? In an essay, support your position by discussing an example (or examples) from literature, the arts, science and technology, current events, or your own experience or observation.