

“Independence? That’s middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.” – Bernard Shaw; do we put too much emphasis on self-reliance and independence, and are we afraid of admitting that we need other people in our lives?

Many people tend to think that humankind is too dependent on one another; however, both history and literature demonstrate that humankind actually places too much stress on self-reliance. John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men,” Li Cunxin’s autobiography “Mao’s Last Dancer,” and current day China are all proof that mankind need one another and should not be too independent.

In “Of Mice and Men,” John Steinbeck creates two very interesting main characters, Lennie Small and George Milton. Despite his last name, Lennie is actually very big in stature and is physically very strong; however, he does not have much intellectual due to his mental disability. George, on the other hand, is a little more intelligent and much smaller in size. From the start of the book, readers can see that they have a strong friendship and rely on each other a lot. Because of his mental disability, Lennie lives in fear of always doing something wrong, and therefore relies strongly on George and does whatever he is told. Meanwhile, George is dependent on Lennie because of his strength and his big heart; George knows that when someone takes advantage of him, Lennie will always be there to protect him. Unfortunately, as the book continues, George decides to go out and have a drink with their other colleagues, leaving Lennie alone at the workplace and allowing for him to be independent for one night. This is where things turn upside down. At first, Lennie does a good job of taking care of himself; he sits and the barn, playing with the pups. Not knowing his own strength, he accidentally kills one of the pups. Scared, he starts crying over the little pup. As this is happening, the boss’ wife walks in and sees this. She, herself craving for some sort of affection, goes to him and talks to him, trying to comfort him. Lennie confides in her, telling her about his little fetish with petting anything with fur and playing with anything that feels smooth under his hand. Sympathetically, she offers him her hair to play with. Gratefully, Lennie takes up on the offer and starts petting it, pulling at it even. The woman cries out in pain, frightening Lennie and causing him to pull even harder. This, regrettably, kills the lady. Realizing what he had done, Lennie runs off into the woods to his hiding place. When the others return to the workplace and find the woman dead, they set up a lynching party. George, wanting to save Lennie from the lynching, immediately leaves and searches for Lennie. Ultimately, George shoots Lennie in the back of his head as he was murmuring about his dream, so that Lennie would not have to suffer even more and be lynched. This story shows negative results will appear when humankind does not depend on one another.

Another novel that demonstrates the importance of dependency is Li Cunxin’s “Mao’s Last Dancer.” In his autobiography, Li describes his life as a child, growing up in Lady Mao’s Dance Academy. He had been chosen from his village to participate in the academy, where he would train to be one of Lady Mao’s dancers. At first, Li was very lonely at the school and did very poorly, as he did not have any motivation and was very homesick. Then, after speaking with one of his teachers about his troubles, Li realizes that he should not allow for this opportunity to be wasted in vain. He motivates himself, telling himself that he had to do well in order to make his family proud; he used his homesickness as his motivation to work hard at the academy. In the end, Li becomes one of the best dancers at the academy, after hours and hours of extra self-practice. Because of the level of his expertise and skill, Li was even given opportunities to go to America, to learn even more about dance. Without his inspirational teacher and his family, Li would not have been able to be so successful in life. This instance illustrates that reliance on others is essential; independency does not create as much success and productivity as dependence does.

Current day China is the perfect example of dependency as well. Long ago, China had used the policy of isolationism, and kept everything to itself. Gradually, China began to open up to different nations; countries were allowed to send delegates to China with a tribute in order to learn more about China and its technology. This led to a strong network of international trade between China and several nations around the world. Not only did trade improve China's technological innovations, trade also paved the way for cultural diffusion in China. From India, entered Buddhism, and from Eurasia, came Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrian, and whatnot. If China had not opened up during the dynastic ages, China may be much slower in advances of all areas. Deng Xiaoping's decision to use the Open Door Policy in 1978 only led to even more interaction, creating China today. If one were to pick out a random product from a furniture store today, the product would probably have a sticker that says "Made in China." This demonstrates the efficiency that is gained through China's interaction with the outer world. Without trade, all nations would not be as advanced as they are now. Trade and dependency on other nations has only brought benefits to the world. This is another reason why mankind should put less emphasis on independence and focus more on interdependency.

Self-reliance has gained too much support over the last few years as the essentiality of dependency has been diminishing. However, the classic "Of Mice and Men," the novel "Mao's Last Dancer," and the growth of China all clearly demonstrate and support dependency. Mankind needs to realize the importance of interaction and dependency before it loses all of its significance.