Sample Position Paper: High (score of 6)

Although papers in the 6 category differ in approach and have slight differences in quality, they stand out from other papers in a set by their clear and consistent competence in critical thinking, organization, development, and facility with written English. They address the writing task effectively and insightfully, evidenced, for example, by original and relevant strategies, ideas, examples, or expressions. Their writing shows sensitivity to style and tone appropriate for a general (rather than a technical or academic) audience. Papers in this category are not perfect, nor are they expected to be, for each is only a first draft written in the allotted time. The paper below is an example of responses in this category. The author has critically examined the given statement. The essay is well organized, with transitions emerging from the content to move forward the writer’s compellingly argued position.

To explain what the statement “The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right” means one needs to define the terms in the quote. Principle among those are the terms “majority” and “right,” although we also need to investigate what is meant by “opinion” and “final proof.” My interpretation is that this statement discusses the way that society comes to a moral consensus. Given that, while the word “majority” means “most” or “more than half,” when talking about the majority of a society, it most often refers to those who have the power to represent their views, since there are always subgroups of people whose opinions are not solicited or valued. “Opinion,” then, in this context refers not just to a set of individual points of view but, instead, to the reasoned thinking about what constitutes the moral definition of what is “right,” or what is defined as morally good. The point of debating moral issues is that there is a pluralism of moral systems and attitudes that can be used as the “final proof,” or arbiter, of what is “right.” I would argue that any given society is always working towards a consensus on what is right, even though that doesn’t mean that every member subscribes to those views. It also doesn’t mean that a consensus doesn’t evolve or, sometimes, devolve. Based on my interpretation, I accept this statement and will use examples from American history to support my position.

The first example that provides a valid argument to support the assertion that the majority opinion is not proof of what is right is America’s history with slavery. The majority of people who had the authority to articulate their opinions during the 18th and 19th centuries argued that increased productivity from slave labor was essential to a growing nation and that African peoples were better off being managed by land-owning whites than trying to live and work on their own. In hindsight, a majority of Americans would argue that the majority was not right in perpetuating policies and practices of slavery. This shows that the U.S. “evolved” on the issue of African slavery immediately after Emancipation, however, this history was marked by “Two steps forward, one step back.” We saw a course of “devolution” in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in which the majority opinion of the Supreme Court codified segregation. About sixty years later the majority of the Supreme Court then voted in Brown v. Board of Education that segregation was unlawful. What this shows is that the majority opinion is often not “right” even though it may be the law of the land and that majority opinions shift over time.

The second example of the majority opinion not being right is the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. In this case the majority of white citizens with authority to shape public opinion argued that Japanese Americans were incapable of more loyalty to their country of citizenship than to the country of their cultural heritage, despite the fact that there was a division in the U.S. army air force of Japanese fighting against Axis. This is also evidenced by the fact that no Germans or Italians were incarcerated despite the fact that the U.S. was at war with those two countries at the same time. The majority now acknowledges that this was not right and that the internment was based in stereotypical thinking about a specific social group. While the end of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Japanese internment in the 1940s indicates an “evolution” of notions of what is right when it comes to the treatment of Asians in America, there is still no “final proof” of this evolution because continuing antipathy toward Asians and Asian Americans also indicates a devolution for some parts of the “majority” on this topic.

Majority opinions shift back and forth over time and in this case we are now seeing a resurgence of political support for detaining immigrants who enter the U.S. illegally. Should the majority of lawmakers or the majority of those polled be a valid indicator of what is right on this issue? In fact the politician most in favor of detention camps is one who lost the popular vote but won the presidential election based on electoral college votes, which did not represent the majority of Americans. What this means is that a minority decided on what is “right.”

The opinion of the majority is often a poor indicator of what is right in most historical scenarios.
Sample Position Paper: Low (score of 2)
The score guide describes papers in this category as demonstrating limited competence or some incompetence. These papers are generally not well developed and are flawed by such problems as failure to address the writing task appropriately, poor organization, insufficient or inappropriate support, inappropriate style and tone, or lack of facility with written English. The essay below is representative of papers in this category. Beyond displaying flaws in writing skills, the essay does not directly address the writing task.

“The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right.”
I accept this statement. Each person has a different opinion about a story, a joke, or a poem. Essentially no one has the same opinion. Opinions are never wrong or right. You are the one who can decide whether the opinion is strong or not. For instance, if you are a boss of a company, what do you do to perform others to work well in your company? You have to listen to their opinions, but sometimes you have to share your opinion with them. You may accept their opinions or you may not accept their opinions. The final decision may decide by you or your employees. Opinion is a key strategy to the future success to your firm. This exercise is to identify your key employees and create a development plan for them. Moreover, you need to make a shift and learn how to support them by sharing the majority opinions, but the opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right. You must understand that successful companies don’t limit development to their key employees, and use opinion as a tool to recruiting and retaining the best employees in all categories. So opinion should be share with each other and feel free to have your opinion all the time. You should remember that opinion is never right or wrong.