

ST ANDREW'S JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION



GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

Paper 2

28 AUGUST 2013

1 hour 30 minutes

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This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

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Why Fairness Matters *By Lynne McTaggart*

- 1 Recently, an article in the *New York Times* provided evidence that human beings, even in primitive hunter-gatherer societies, have an enormous distaste for hierarchical extremes and have a deeply and finely honed sense of fairness. The Ache hunter-gatherers in South America routinely give away up to 90 per cent of the food they gather to needier members of the tribe. Even young children will punish other children who grab for a larger handful of candy than their fair share. The story concluded that fairness burns deep within us because it has evolutionary roots and is felt in the primitive portion of our brains. 1 5
- 2 Fairness is a central motivating force in our private and public lives. It is deeply enmeshed with questions about who gets what and how it is distributed, with how we feel about the ways in which power, resources, access, even attention are divided. When allocation and distribution lead to indignation, the results can be explosive: witness the civil rights movement in the United States or the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa. Current examples abound, from the struggle for a Palestinian state to questions of how to handle taxation, health insurance, and social security in the United States. 10
- 3 In fact, study after study of ethnic societies find only mild differences in our perceptions of fairness. Most societies have a similar idea of what exactly constitutes fairness. Deep inside us we instinctively know what is fair or unfair; fairness is hard-wired within us. Scientists have discovered an “it’s not fair” spot in the human brain that is there from the time we were babies. Studies show that people are less interested in making money for themselves than in rectifying financial inequality to the point where they are willing to give up their own material pay-off if that will bring about a more equitable outcome for all. In our hearts, we will accept a smaller piece of cake so long as we know it is going to mean that everybody else gets a slice. In our hearts, we know what is fair. 15 20
- 4 In theory, fairness is a sacred concept to most people. A sense of fairness in a group appears to evolve automatically as an inherent part of working together outside our immediate families. The roots of this impulse appear to run very deep and are primal in many living things. Fairness is crucial to us. The soul of any successful society is turn-taking, or reciprocity, a sense of fair play. The moment individuals begin to cluster in a group larger than the nuclear family, they appear to evolve a strong, built-in sense of fairness. But cooperation can be maintained only to the extent that individuals are fair with each other. Our survival depends upon our ability to give each one of us a turn, and the society begins to fray when there is deterioration in fairness and basic reciprocity. All of us hold the understanding, deep within all of us, that we are best off in every way by taking a far larger and more all-embracing view of what constitutes self-interest. 25 30
- 5 *So, whatever happened to fairness?* If we all know what is fair, why is life so unfair right now? Bankers have paid themselves record bonuses while the recession they helped to create has caused vast numbers of people to lose their jobs and their savings – even their homes. On the other hand, some individuals resent paying higher taxes either for healthcare of those not contributing or to bail out the banks that have gone on to generate record profits with no immediate payback. In short, life feels more unfair than it ever has. Presently we have strayed from our birth-right as human beings. America and indeed every society in the West are now at our most unfair in history – at grave cost. 35 40
- 6 Studies show that in countries with giant income disparity between the very rich and the very poor, both the most affluent and the very poorest suffer from higher rates of ill health, crime, mental illness, environmental problems, lack of education, suicide, violence and 45

disease of all varieties. When life is unfair, you and I both lose, no matter how wealthy either of us is. Our sense of taking and giving has been replaced with taking whatever you can get for you and yours alone.

- 7 Besides income disparity, most Western countries are blatantly unfair to consumers. The individualistic, winner-take-all zeitgeist of modern times is to be blamed for many of the crises we presently face in our society, particularly the excesses of the financial sector, with its insistence on a bigger and better profit every year, at any cost. This mindset is responsible for the raft of deceit that now goes on in every sector of society, from the 50 per cent of college students now known to cheat on exams to corporate cheating, even in sectors designed for public interest. 50
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- 8 Up to three-quarters of all research published in the medical literature about pharmaceutical drugs, for instance, is now believed to be ghostwritten by public relations firms hired by drug companies, with serious and even potentially fatal side-effects routinely concealed. When profit rather than fairness is the only consideration, a company will seldom notice the ripple effect of every action on an entire chain of beings — the living things, the natural world, the consumers of the product, the people from other countries whom they harm by what is being sold or produced. 60
- 9 What exactly does fair mean? Fair is a word with many meanings. According to the dictionary, 'fair' means impartial, free from dishonesty, and law-abiding. Life is fair when someone is given an equal chance, when a decision is even-handed, when something is simply and wholly right. Fairness is not sameness or redistribution – but an equal chance, an equal possibility, an equal say in areas that affect our society, a reward commensurate with contribution, a reward that does not come at someone else's expense. Fairness does not mean redistribution of wealth or a socialist-style, across-the-board equality. It is not about making society completely equal - to do so would be excessive. It is about creating and ensuring that there are opportunities there for all. 65
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- 10 Throughout history the fact that there is a wealthy group of individuals at the top of a society has not automatically made for revolution. As studies show, even children have a nuanced understanding of fairness – that a child who worked harder at school deserves a better grade than a slacker. Poorer levels of society are usually prompted to rise up in rebellion only when conditions are manifestly unfair, such as when food is deliberately made scarce. In the wake of the worldwide financial crisis of 2008 the fury that most ordinary citizens felt – and still feel – toward bankers and traders had nothing to do with income resentment but a deep and compelling sense of unfairness that investment houses like Goldman Sachs still pay record bonuses after the recession they had helped to create caused so many others to lose their jobs. 75
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- 11 In the midst of all of our current crises, re-establishing fairness is crucial to the survival of our societies. As we come to understand what is considered fair and what is of importance now, there is greater impetus to act on the perceived injustice. We not only expect that a democratic government be just but also that it be fair. If it is perceived as not being so, it is essential to find out why and try to figure out what do about it. It is possible – indeed most beneficial – for us to live our lives taking into account what is both good for our world and what is good for ourselves. 85