



PIONEER JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

GENERAL PAPER
Higher 1

8806/2

Paper 2

8 September 2008
1 hour 30 minutes

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet

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This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

This question paper consists of **3** printed pages.

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Courage

Steve Pavlina writes in 'The Courage To Live Consciously'...

- 1 Courage is so many things, and yet only one. In being a sort of endurance of the soul and hence, the willingness to bear unflinchingly what the heavens send, courage becomes the ladder on which all other virtues mount. Without courage, we can deem ourselves to, perhaps, have the perfect sensibility of the measure of danger *sans*¹ the mental willingness to incur it, or vice versa. It is, in the end, as Helen Keller once put it, what makes life a daring adventure, or nothing. Keller's conviction is not without reason. Her life struggle as a blind and deaf woman in a time when technology was far less advanced and society far less inclusive, drove her to become the epitome of that free spirit she herself described – to keep one's face towards change and develop strength undefeatable. Yet, courage could be the very thing we now lack. 10
- 2 The absence of moral courage – our conscience and the imperative to act in accordance with it – manifests itself so often. Vanity asks the question: is it popular? Conscience asks the question: is it right? We heed Vanity's whispers as we mute the call to speak up for the less fortunate even though we are told that there is nothing so potent as an act of courage performed at the right moment on behalf of the weak. This is the horror of our human condition. 15
- 3 Interestingly, moral courage has been called the inner voice that warns us that someone is looking. The Vain's adulteration of this definition is that it is the anticipation of the opinions of others. Of course, this sort of interpretation works well for them, whose actions can now be conveniently augmented by justifications that their 'honorable' deeds were born of their 'conscience'. Their bravery leans on the pillar of popular support which merely lends them a sense of accomplishment and righteousness. It comes as no surprise that the conscience-less world is what persists when such arguments permeate society. A more fundamental question also emerges: who is to say that courage is even linked to inherent moral judgment? Some may try to distinguish the former from the latter, even though they are inextricably linked. And so, we find that criminals fall into this category of people, who are strong enough to stomach a risk but without the heart to restrain themselves from committing injustice. 20 25 30
- 4 The exposure to other ways of thinking in this age of literacy has also made it difficult for us to agree on this issue. The spiritual dimension supports the view that our courage has waned. Bertrand Russell held the view that obedience to one's conscience is synonymous with obedience to God, while Emmanuel Swedenborg expounded on how the conscience is God's presence in Man. Thus, piety should reinforce courage. Yet, how deep an impression can such ideas have if religiosity varies from one society to another, or between persons for that matter? 35
- 5 On top of that, our innate need for security makes us avert any hint of risk. Perhaps, we were taught to avoid being too bold or too brave. It's too dangerous. Don't draw attention to yourself in public. Follow family traditions. Don't talk to strangers. Stay safe. We may find ourselves playing it safe, instead of setting our 40

¹ '*sans*' means 'without'

own goals, then making plans to achieve them, and going after them with gusto. We are paralysed by imaginary fears. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of going broke. Fear of humiliation. Fear of regret. Fear of success. We may be even feeding them, while they devour the more empowered life we were meant to have.

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6 However, courage is not the absence of fear. It is the judgment that something else is more important. It is the mastery of fear. Those who lack courage will give in to fear more often than not, which actually has the long-term effect of strengthening the fear. When you avoid facing the fear and then feel relieved that you escaped it, this acts as a psychological reward that reinforces the mouse-like avoidance behaviour, making you more likely to avoid facing fear in the future. Such avoidance behaviour causes stagnation in the long-run. You go with the flow and don't rock the boat. Your only hope is that the currents of life will pull you in the right direction. You begin to take your fears for real. You cocoon yourself into a life that insulates you from all these risks. Then you rationalise your behaviour: You have a family to support, and can't take risks, you're too old to shift careers, you can't lose weight because you have 'fat' genes. Five... ten years... twenty years pass, and you realise that your life hasn't changed that much. You settle down. All that's really left now is to live out the remainder of your years as contently as possible and then settle yourself into the ground, where you'll finally achieve total safety and security. Those with courage do a different kind of rationalising. Thus, they saddle up anyway despite being scared to death, thinking if there is nothing else that can be gained, at least they have gained strength and confidence by every experience in which they really stop to look fear in the face. They simply do the thing they think they cannot. Inadvertently, the courageous dare to be what they truly are.

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7 The fulfillment of a destiny that was meant to be is never easy, what with naysayers and the possibility of one kind of loss or another. The prospects of fame, fortune and achievement beckon those who plant themselves firmly at the vanguard of uncharted frontiers. Incurred losses become easier to bear because of such prospects. Better to have failed than not to have tried at all, goes popular wisdom. However, on an extreme, sombre note, making decisions that have an irreversible end, such as seeking the right to die in the name of dying with dignity (contentious as this already is), surely makes fear more palpable. Pessimists, too, seem to relish shaking their heads at what they perceive to be recklessness or immaturity. The assumption is that the person who takes the courageous step forward has been incompetent in weighing the consequences of his plans. Hence, the need for temperance and prudence, though not in a sense that dampens courage. Instead, we ought to be looking at courage not simply as daring deeds, but as the Aristotelean point of virtuous equilibrium. Too much boldness but too little reason, caution or knowledge makes a person rash. When the reverse holds true, an irresolute coward is made.

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8 What is irrefutable is that there can simply be no change without courage. Back in 1978, Alexander Solzhenitsyn attacked the West's weak confrontation of communism. His words remain instructive today as America faces a different ideological threat. He lamented that, "No weapons, no matter how powerful, can help the West until it overcomes its loss of willpower." And rhetorically asked, "Should one point out that, from ancient times, decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?"

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