



TEMASEK JUNIOR COLLEGE
2022 JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
Higher 1



GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

Paper 2 Insert

23 August 2022

1 hour 30 minutes

No Additional Materials are required.

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

Caroline Baum discusses ageism in society.

- 1 You see them in most aged-care facilities, seated on pastel-coloured lounges, being babysat by a TV they are mostly not watching. Some are asleep, some are sedated, some are cognitively impaired. Seeing them like this, it is hard to remember they were once young, vital and independent. What is harder is thinking that it might one day be you. 5
- 2 “The staff call them the Os and the Qs,” says a seasoned nursing home visitor, describing residents with their mouths hanging open and those with their tongues hanging out. The staff mean no disrespect, but reducing someone to a letter of the alphabet is just one effect of the unconscious dehumanising that happens often in the treatment of the elderly. Some older people take extreme measures to avoid this kind of lingering scenario: joining Exit International or taking steps to enable them to end their lives at a time of their choosing. Guilt and shame – often tempered with unspoken relief – colour many children’s lives when their parents go into aged care. Contrary to popular perception, it is an option chosen by a relatively small percentage of the population, although this is likely to grow as we all live longer. 10
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- 3 So why have we failed to do better by our elderly needing care? Why do we put them in conditions that leave many of them bored, lonely and poorly fed in a way we would never tolerate for ourselves? One underlying cause could be deeply entrenched ageism. It often begins with the language we use. Even the term ‘the elderly’ is problematic. ‘The’ implies a homogenous group, when nothing could be further from the case. If we diminish our regard for the senior members of our society verbally, we are likely to do the same when it comes to the way we frame policy – removing their dignity and sense of agency in condescending generalisations that assume vulnerability and dependence instead of resilience and independence. No prejudice is rational, but with ageism, we have internalised it. It will require active consciousness-raising to correct that, just as the women’s movement did. 20
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- 4 One of the reasons ageism is so embedded in our culture and hard to eradicate may be because it expresses decades of accumulated and deep-seated fear. Consumerism urges us all to ‘fight’ ageing as if it were a battle we could win, even though we know in our hearts that it is a lie. Mantras like ‘70 is the new 50’ emphasise the need to be vigorous and vital for as long as possible, yet offer no alternative scenarios for those with degenerative diseases, loss of cognition or suffering from loneliness. For those who can afford it, the latter phase of life is marketed as a ‘lifestyle’ promising coastal, gated communities where well-groomed residents play bridge and endless rounds of golf with new chums. But we want those who cannot afford it parked out of sight. 30
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- 5 We reset our expectations of what constitutes meaningful living, satisfied with the thought that their basic needs for safety and personal hygiene are being met. We try not to think too long or hard about how they spend their days. We further disassociate ourselves from their needs, delegating their fate to aged care workers and nursing homes (rebranded as residential care facilities to sound more upbeat). 40
- 6 When the former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said that those employed in aged care should aspire to better jobs, was he echoing a widely held sentiment? Is the ugly truth that prejudice underpins our complicity in accepting the low status of aged-care staff as one of those inevitable inequities of 21st century capitalism in a country more concerned with tax cuts than social justice? If we held the elderly in higher esteem, would we fight harder for their rights and those of their carers? 45

- 7 That said, we tend to romanticise other cultures as valuing the elderly more than we do, but if we look closely at the evidence, it presents us with scenarios we find confronting. For example, the Inuits value older people highly. So much so that they put them out to die in the snow – at their own request. Ageism has been found to be all-pervasive across Eastern as well as Western cultures, including Confucian-based Asian cultures where respect for elders and filial piety are social norms. It is possible that ageism is one of the main features of global ageing among modern, capitalist nations in which individualistic views dominate traditional collectivist views. 50
- 8 I am encouraged by increased interest in initiatives such as intergenerational housing and friendship networks in Europe and the US. Because younger people have grown up in a more mixed world, they know that diversity is here to stay and that this is a good thing. It is a much smaller request for them to include age in the quest for social justice for all. Furthermore, the #MeToo movement has also helped. It has been a catalyst for universal equality. In that sense, activism feeds activism. Even Hollywood is getting better. We are seeing more active and positive portrayals of older people. Films like ‘The Intern’, starring Robert De Niro as a 70-year-old widower returning to work at an online fashion company, addressed important issues. The workplace is where ageism awareness is definitely on the rise. While there are genuine challenges to mixed-age workforces regarding retraining and seniority, all the research shows that such workforces are the most effective. 55
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- 9 In the UK, there has been a backlash against the elderly, who are being blamed by some members of the younger generation for Brexit. To counter more long-term unconscious bias against the elderly, a change in perspective is needed. Unlike other prejudices such as racism and sexism, which are manifestations of fear of the other, ageism is unique in targeting our future selves. Each time we see an older person, we need to imagine them as our future self, and rather than recoil from their wrinkles or infirmities, applaud their resilience. We need to re-humanise older people. 70
- 10 We need to recognise ageism in ourselves and come together with others to effect social change. The rewards are real. I hear regularly from people who have begun to reject age shame that they feel instantly relieved and empowered. We need to enlist young people in this battle too. They are the ones who are going to create and live in the culture of the future. 75