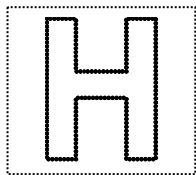


Candidate Name	Centre Number	Index Number
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DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL
General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
Higher 1
Preliminary Examination

GENERAL PAPER

8806/02

Paper 2

8th September 2008

1 hour 30 minutes

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your **name**, **centre number** and **index number** in the spaces provided at the top of this page.

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John Gray writes about attempts in history to create utopian societies and argues such a hope is dangerous, enduring and futile.

- 1 In many cultures and throughout most of history, humanity has been haunted by utopias, visions of ultimate harmony. The history of religion contains many examples of communities aiming to embody an ideal of perfection that has come to them as a divine revelation. Secular thinkers such as Marx and Fukuyama inherited the teleological purpose of history, which underpins their talk of 'the end of history'. Standing behind all these conceptions is the belief that history must be understood not in terms of the causes of events but in terms of its purpose, which is the salvation of humanity. Modern revolutionaries share this belief, holding that after a great struggle or spasm of "cleansing" and "redemptive" violence, the optimum social organisation would emerge for a chosen people – proletarians for the communists, Aryans for the Nazis. Whereas the traditional movements believed that only a celestial saviour could remake the world, modern revolutionaries imagine it could be reshaped by humanity alone. 5 10
- 2 Why do people hold on to the idea of a utopia? The very fact that all societies and peoples have a concept of what they would term utopia proves that it is intrinsically linked to the human condition: we want to believe in utopias because of hope. We believe in utopias because that is what makes us human. Deep inside, we all want to believe that we can, and will one day, live at peace, love and harmony with each other. Even the faintest strand of it has mobilized whole communities against seemingly impossible and inhumane odds in the dream of achieving a world of peace and perfection. However, hope, 'the quintessential human delusion', can deceive. The lure of hope can also make us deaf and blind to what is around us, and especially to the fact that the project to which we have embarked on is improbable. Sometimes, it causes sane man to abandon reason, morality and decency. In the hope of creating that Utopia, some had to give up these things which should be the hallmarks of such a society in the first place. 15 20 25
- 3 Since the French Revolution, a succession of utopian movements has transformed politics and society. Entire societies have been destroyed and the world changed forever. The alteration envisioned by utopian thinkers has not come about, and for the most part, their projects have produced results opposite to what they intended. The spectacular collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 demonstrated how wrong Marx was, when he advocated his beliefs that the arrival of communism would bring the end of the conflicts of values that had existed in all of human history. Society could then be arranged around a single, mistaken conception of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need", regardless of how much each individual contributes. It took more than thirty million lives for us to come to realize just what the costs of that great social experiment were. Now, the modern world is littered with the debris of utopian project, and there is the lingering suspicion that we will never be able to totally remove some of them from our psyche. The damage of such utopian projects remains long after the dust has cleared. That has not prevented similar projects from being launched again and again right up to the start of the twenty-first century. This can be seen when the world's most powerful state launched and initiated a campaign to "export" democracy, by bullets galore, to other parts of the world, the latest example being the ravaged Iraq, fuelling further carnage and fanaticism. American-style government is the model for the world, intertwining with America's self-serving and implicit agenda to have control over natural resources. In Fukuyama's conception, the end-point of history continues to be America, which he believes embodies the only type of government that can only be legitimate in contemporary conditions. 30 35 40 45
- 4 Today, the dangers of utopianism are still being denied. Now, as before, it is believed that there is nothing to stop humans from remaking themselves and their world, as they

please. This fantasy lies behind many aspects of contemporary culture. It seems that nothing has stopped or at least cast a shadow of doubt in our minds as to what such utopian projects have cost, and will continue to cost Mankind. Our misplaced faith in our abilities is one cause of this. We believe that we are so much better, wiser and advanced than those who have tried it in the past. If they failed, we are not bound by that same destiny. We can succeed because our technology is more powerful. There is increased understanding in a humanistic world... the list goes on and on. Precisely because of this, it is *dystopian* thinking that we need most. If we seek to understand our present world condition we should turn to Huxley's *Brave New World* or Orwell's 1984, Well's *Island of Doctor Moreau* – prescient glimpses of the ugly realities that results from pursuing unrealisable utopias.

- 5 Unrealisable utopias include Marxism and Thatcherism, Communism and anti-communism, the Enlightenment project and the project of counter-Enlightenment, the project of engineering a western-style market economy in post-communist Russia, the attempt to establish liberal democracy in post-Saddam Iraq ... The history of the world contains numerous examples of communities aiming to embody the ideal of perfection but the core feature of all utopian projects is a hope of ultimate harmony. Whether human needs are believed to be unchanging as espoused by Plato, or evolving as what Marx said, the normal conflicts of human life are left behind in a Utopian world. Clashes of interest amongst individuals and social groups, antagonism between and within ideals of the good life – conflicts, which are endemic in every society, are reduced to insignificance in utopias.
- 6 Conflict is a universal feature of human life. It seems to be natural for human beings to want incompatible things– excitement and a quiet life, freedom and security, truth and a picture of a world that flatters their sense of self-importance. A conflict free existence is impossible for humans, and wherever it is attempted, the result is intolerable to them for they soon find themselves wanting or needing different things, which ultimately leads to a state of tension once again. At the end of the day, we are faced with the grim prospect that a utopia cannot be achieved, because we, the proposed agents of such change, are fraught with temptations and weaknesses. A perfect world cannot be achieved by imperfect people. Fatalistic as it might sound, a little insight into human nature and history is all that is needed to be able to know in advance that utopian movements would end in a familiar mix of crime and farce.
- 7 Some of the greatest human advances were once believed to be impossible. The campaign to abolish slavery in the early nineteenth century was opposed on the grounds that slavery would always be with us. Yet, it was fortunately successful. These acts removed a barbarous practice and expanded human freedom. Does this not show the value of the utopian imagination? This is not the case. To seek to end slavery was not to pursue an unrealisable goal, while the utopian project is implausible. Many societies lacked slavery, and to abolish it as an institution was merely achieving a state of affairs that others have taken for granted. It was simply to hope to transpose one system that had worked somewhere else for some other people, to another culture and context.
- 8 The pursuit of utopia must be replaced by realism. A realism that accepts that life consists not of soluble problems but of irresolvable conflicts and that humans are mere animals with no more ability to shape our future than do whales or gorillas. There is little that politics can achieve, because human disorders cannot be remedied, only treated day by day.

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Copyright Acknowledgement

Gray, J., *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2007.