INNOVA JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC 2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2
in preparation for
General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
Higher 1

# GENERAL PAPER 8807/02

Paper 2 **4 September 2013**

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**1 hour 30 minutes**

**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

*Gary Gutting writes about happiness.*

**1** Happiness studies are booming in the social sciences, and governments are moving towards quantitative measures of a nation's overall happiness, meant to supplement traditional measures of wealth and productivity. The resulting studies are not all useful, but we can expect that work with an aura of scientific rigour on something as important as happiness is going to be taken seriously. Still, our first-person experience and reflection can catch crucial truths about happiness that escape the quantitative net.

**2** As I see it, happiness involves four things, and the first one is mostly a matter of luck. You have to be sufficiently free of suffering – physical and mental – for happiness to be even possible. Suffering can be noble and edifying, but it can also reduce us to a state where there is nothing beyond our distress that can make it meaningful. Of course, we can fit an occasional bout of even extreme suffering into an otherwise happy life, but there's a level of sustained misery that wipes out happiness. It is true that money cannot buy happiness, but it can buy many necessary conditions of happiness: food, shelter, medicine, security. Our modern age has achieved a level of material resources that in principle should allow almost everyone to meet these conditions. The great scandal is the paltry extent to which we have used our massive wealth to extend necessary conditions of happiness to many more people.

**3** There are ethical systems that confuse happiness with coping with unhappiness. Some versions of stoicism, for example, recommend adjusting your desires to what is in your power, to try, for example, to accept pain that you cannot avoid. This is a reasonable strategy for mitigating pain, but it quickly reaches its limits in the face of overwhelming suffering. It may reduce unhappiness, but it cannot bring happiness. Similarly, some religions provide hope for future happiness that may reconcile us to present suffering. But – apart from questions about the basis of the hope – being reconciled to, say, severe pain is not being happy.

**4** So the ancient Greeks were right: good luck is one essential element of a happy life. For a second element, I look to Voltaire's philosophical tale 'Candide'. Most of its chapters show the hero, Candide, and his companions living through a horrific series of catastrophes: earthquake, violent storms, torture, rape, war. It all seems absurdly unrealistic – how could so few people suffer so much? – until we realize that Voltaire is merely condensing into a few lives the massive sufferings that the human race endures, many of which are recounted in news reports every day. In the final chapter, the characters escape their suffering and form a stable community in rural Turkey. But now boredom poisons their existence, and they almost long for the painful adventures of their past. After consulting some local wise men, Candide realizes that what they need is meaningful work. Everyone takes up some task that contributes to the community's welfare, and all are happy. Candide concludes with the famous maxim: "We must cultivate our garden."

**5** This simple maxim expresses what I see as the second requirement for happiness: fulfilling work. Since humans are distinct persons but with essential ties to a community, my work must be fulfilling both individually and socially: I must do something that satisfies me as an individual and that I regard as producing significant good for others. Of course, unless I have the luck of being born rich, my work must also generate enough income to provide me the minimal goods without which happiness is not even possible. The challenge is to find satisfying work with an adequate income.

**6** Our capitalist system makes this difficult. First, it encourages workers to sacrifice work satisfaction to higher income. People who would, say, find teaching or social work especially satisfying instead opt for higher paying jobs as lawyers or accountants. The pressure on those with artistic inclinations is particularly intense, since it is almost impossible to earn an adequate living as an actor, visual artist, writer or musician. The idea is often that the extra money will support more enjoyable leisure activities – travel, concerts, luxurious homes. But jobs, especially high paying ones, easily take over our time and our identities, and the leisure fun does not outweigh the distress of not being who we really want to be. Second, the trend towards 'disposable jobs', which expects a worker to run through, over a lifetime, a series of quite different positions to meet market requirements, destroys the satisfaction of a sustained vocation. With planning, skill and luck, it is possible to navigate the currents of capitalism to a lifetime of satisfying work. But the system itself is geared more to profit than to worker satisfaction.

**7** A third feature of happiness is what the ancient Greeks called the proper 'use of pleasure'. Here I am using 'pleasure' to refer not to just any feeling of satisfaction but to the immediate gratification of the senses: not only the five physical senses but also the aesthetic sensibilities directed to art and nature. All of these diverse pleasures are important aspects of happiness. They typically come to us fairly randomly as we move through life and are a delightful supplement to the more diffuse and less intense satisfactions of our work. The danger – particularly for a society as rich as ours – is making pleasure the central focus in the pursuit of a happy life. This is done explicitly in some versions of utilitarian ethics, which regard happiness as simply the maximal accumulation of pleasurable experiences. But pleasures themselves often induce a desire for their repetition and intensification, and without moderation from a reflective mind, they can marginalise the work that lies at the core of true happiness.

**8** A pathology of pleasures is often signalled by an obsession with not 'missing out' on particularly attractive pleasures and strong disappointment when a highly anticipated experience does not meet expectations. (Examples from the world of food and wine are widely available.) In my view, the best strategy to avoid 'hedonic corruption' of happiness is to welcome wholeheartedly the pleasures that come our way but not to make the explicit pursuit of pleasure a dominating part of our life project. The same, of course, applies to the money that is so often the price of pleasure.

**9** Finally, and often most important, there is the happiness of human love, where my happiness arises from and contributes to the happiness of my spouse, my children, my friends – even perhaps of all humankind. Such love can take us beyond the domain of mere happiness, into the world of moral and religious values. It can even lead to sacrificing my happiness for another's. Love is both the culmination of happiness and a reminder that there is more to life than happiness.

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