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Pre-University 3

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 2

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1 hour 30 minutes

INSERT

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your name, class and admission number in the spaces provided at the top of this page.
This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

This insert consists of **3** printed pages.

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Frank Furedi writes ...

- 1 The rise of catchphrases such as the 'politics of fear', 'fear of crime' and 'fear of the future' is testimony to the cultural significance of fear today. Many of us seem to make sense of our experiences through the narrative of fear. Fear is not simply associated with high-profile catastrophic threats such as terrorist attacks, global warming, AIDS or a potential flu pandemic; rather, as many academics have pointed out, there are also the 'quiet fears' of everyday life. 5
- 2 The impact of fear is determined by the situation people find themselves in, but it is also, to some extent, the product of social construction. In other words, fear is determined by the self, and the interaction of the self with others; it is also shaped by a cultural script that instructs people on how to respond to threats to their security. So getting to grips with fear in contemporary society will require an assessment of the influence of culture. Instead of treating fear as a self-evident emotion, a taken-for-granted concept, we should explore the meaning attached to fear and the rules and customs that govern the way in which fear is experienced and expressed. 10
- 3 So, the meaning and experience of fear are continually shaped by historical and cultural factors. The historical fear of famine is very different, for example, from today's 'powerful fear' of being fat. The meaning that societies once attached to fear of God or the fear of Hell is not quite the same as today's fear of pollution or of cancer. Today, the role of culture is arguably more significant than it was in previous times. This is because individual fears are cultivated through the media and are less and less the outcome of direct experience. Fear is decreasingly experienced first-hand and increasingly experienced on a discursive and abstract level. There has been a general shift from a fearsome life towards a life with a fearsome media. Even Osama bin Laden seems to have grasped this trend. In an interview in October 2001, when asked 'why is the Western media establishment so anti-humane', bin Laden replied: '[Because] it implants fear and helplessness in the psyche of the people of Europe and the United States.' This indirect aspect of fear is the most distinctive feature of contemporary fear culture. 15
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- 4 However, the influence of fear today cannot be explained as a direct outcome of the power of the media. The rise of the individual means that fear is also experienced in a fragmented and atomised form. That is why fear is rarely experienced as a form of collective insecurity, as it often was in earlier times. The fear we sense today is no longer the fear of 'dangerous classes'; rather, fear has 'come home' and become privatised. The sensibility of fear is internalised in an isolated fashion such that we develop a rather 'ambient' fear towards life in general. This is a kind of fear that requires us to vigilantly monitor every banal minute of our lives since even mundane acts are now viewed as inherently risky and dangerous. 30
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- 5 Society is more fearful today than it was in the past. Some believe that today's magnitude and nature of fear is different from the past, since it seems that fear is everywhere. Studies on the fear of crime argue that there has been a growth of fear in everyday life. However, a useful starting point to gaining an insight into the socio-cultural nature of contemporary fear is to emphasise the quality and meaning of fear rather than its quantity. 40
- 6 A distinguishing feature of contemporary fear is that it appears to have an independent existence. Fear today seems to exist in an objectified form as a clearly identifiable social problem. Fear *in itself*, rather than the thing that we have become fearful in response to, is a distinct problem of our times. Classically, societies associated fear with a clearly formulated threat: the fear of death, the fear of a specific enemy, the fear of hunger. The threat was defined as the object of fear; the problem was not the feeling of fear, but the things that were feared: death, illness, hunger. Today, many see the very act of fearing as a threat in itself. Consider the debate about the fear of crime. Nowadays fear of crime is seen as a serious problem that is to some extent distinct from real acts of crime. Distinctive policies have been developed that aim to reduce fear levels, rather than reduce crime. Indeed, it 45
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seems that the fear of crime is now recognised as a more widespread problem than crime itself.

- 7 Fear today is a virus. It can attach itself to a wide variety of events and phenomena. Consider the fear of terrorism. Since 9/11, this fear has continually expanded to cover almost all aspects of modern life. Corporations must re-examine their definition of risk and take seriously the possibility of scenarios that only science fiction writers could have imagined possible one year ago. In the five years since 9/11, what were previously seen as fairly normal hazards have been turned into exceptional threats by their association with the action of terrorists. So we no longer worry about the apparently everyday hazard posed by a nuclear power station; we also fear that it may be used as a weapon of mass destruction against us by terrorists. 55 60
- 8 On top of that, public anxiety and concerns are discussed as material factors that can have a decisive impact on people's health and wellbeing. Many in contemporary medical culture claim that stress and fear are likely to increase the risk of heart disease, cancer and chronic lung disease. In Britain, the conclusion of an inquiry into the alleged health effects of using a mobile phone is now regarded as a model for how to respond to contemporary health fears, particularly those related to environmental health. There is always a potential for people's health anxieties to turn into a major problem. However, it is only fairly recently that fear has also been discussed as an autonomous cause of illness. 65
- 9 How then can we manage our feelings of fear, in order to offset their damaging impact, rather than focusing on the source of the problem? If people fear that their health is at risk, then this fear is often seen as actually posing a risk to their health. The legal systems in the US and the UK have internalised this view of fear; courts are now moving towards compensating people for their feelings of fear, even when there is an absence of a perceptible physical threat. In the past 'fright' – that is, a reaction to an actual event – was compensated, whereas now the fear that something negative *might* happen is also seen as grounds for making a compensation claim. 70 75
- 10 A proper sociological understanding of fear requires further research into the way in which this emotion is mediated through today's cultural outlook. The tendency to engage with uncertainty through the prism of fear, and therefore to anticipate the worst possible outcome, can be understood as a 'crisis of causality'. We must address not simply the emotion of fear and the threats to which it is a response, but also this crisis that shapes the fearful subject. As indicated previously, twenty-first century fear culture is increasingly being normalised as a force in its own right. In such circumstances, fear is a means through which people respond to and make sense of the world. 80 85
- 11 This stands in sharp contrast to the approach taken by US President Franklin D Roosevelt in his inaugural address in 1933, when he stated that the 'only thing we have to fear is fear itself'. Roosevelt was trying to assure the public that it is both possible and necessary to minimise the impact of fear. His was a positive vision of a future where fear would be put in its place by a society that believed in itself. Today, politicians are far more likely to advise the public to fear everything, including fear itself. 90

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