



RIVER VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL
Year 6 Preliminary Examination

General Paper

PAPER 2

3RD SEPT 2010
FRIDAY

INSERT

NAME _____

CLASS _____

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INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

DO NOT OPEN THIS BOOKLET UNTIL INSTRUCTED.

Passage 1

A C Grayling writes...

- 1 Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei had to auction his possessions after the collapse of his business empire in 1998, leaving him with debts of three billion dollars. It is unclear why a member of one of the world's richest families chose to engage in business in the first place (to describe the Brunei royal family as rich is like saying Mount Everest is a pebble), but he did it anyway, perhaps for fun. When bankruptcy followed, he quarreled with his family, who would not rescue him. In the end, he had to accept the sale of his possessions, and an allowance from the Sultan of Brunei of a mere 300,000 dollars a month. 1 5
- 2 Hundreds flocked from all over the world when news of the prince's auction spread, to buy a piece of royalty and to slake their fascination with the idea of the mammoth luxury involved. On sale were gold-plated toilet-brush holders, gigantic marble jacuzzis, several grand pianos, dozens of huge television sets, and thousands of items of jewellery. An unkind observer might say that what the purchasers and the prince thought of as luxurious was what others would describe as ostentatious and excessive – invariably the way, so such an observer might say, with those who have more money than taste. 10
- 3 Citizens of ancient Sybaris on the Gulf of Tarentum became a byword for luxury, so wealthy and easeful was their life. They demanded their dinner invitations one year in advance so that they could properly choose what to wear. As imperial Rome waxed fat on its conquest, it followed the Sybarites' example, wealthy citizens holding stupendous banquets at which guests periodically quit their couches to vomit and make room for yet more food and wine. Seneca criticised not just the excess of his contemporaries but the effect on their sensibilities. In the third book of his *Questions about Nature*, he describes the way Roman epicures liked to watch surmullets die on the dinner table before them, so that they could enjoy the beautiful changes of colour displayed as the fish suffocated. 15 20
- 4 The idea of luxury as excess – and later, under Christianity, sin – was marked in the distinction drawn by Roman thinkers between *luxus*, meaning abundance and pleasure, and *luxuria*, meaning grossness. It is the latter that weakens minds as it does bodies, pulping the tissues of thought as it softens and bloats flesh. Indeed, *luxuria* results from a failure to see that refinements of sensuality are not the same as ostentation and excess, and are indeed negated by them. 25
- 5 By sensuality is accurately meant the physical pleasure taken in colours and textures, tastes and sounds – things that delight the senses, charm and heighten them, offer them the best of what they are apt for. The eye enjoys light, tonalities, hues, shapes; the sense of touch loves silk, skin, warmth and coolness, the roughness of sand and the gliding face of marble; the ear loves harmonies and concords, melodies and rhythms, and the calmer sounds of nature such as falling water, air stirring among leaves, birdsong. 30 35
- 6 When the pleasures of the other senses are added to gustation, the result is as writer Christopher Isherwood describes in recognising that the little dishes and delicate instruments of a Chinese banquet are like artists' materials, as if the assembled company were going to paint rather than eat. Among the dishes are various types of food present for texture more than taste, such as water chestnut and bamboo. At informal dinners, the Chinese are not so restrained; they relish instead the sight and aroma of rising steam, glistening edibles, abundance – as *luxus*, not *luxuria*. 40
- 7 But the senses are only conduits, and their work would have little lasting value if it did not serve something of greater significance – as materials of mind. The senses' pleasure in colour and melody is the mind's pleasure in pictures and music, and they in turn most often (though not invariably, because the mind enjoys abstraction too) prompt thought. And thought is the greatest luxury of all. It fills immensity, as Blake said; and as Emerson said, it sets you free. 45

Adapted from *Luxury, The Reason of Things*

Passage 2

Peter Singer writes...

- 1 Is the global financial crisis an opportunity to forge a new form of capitalism based on sound values? French President Nicholas Sarkozy and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair appear to think so. At a symposium in Paris entitled “New World, New Capitalism,” Sarkozy described capitalism based on financial speculation as “an immoral system” that has “perverted the logic of capitalism.” He argued that capitalism needs to find new moral values and to accept a stronger role for governments. Blair called for a new financial order based on “values other than the maximum short-term profit”. 1 5
- 2 It is surprising how readily politicians of all parties – even strong ideological defenders of the unregulated market – accepted the idea that the state should bail out banks and insurance companies when they get into trouble. With the exception of a small number of ideologically committed defenders of free enterprise, few were willing to take the risks inherent in letting major banks collapse. Many feared mass unemployment, a tidal wave of bankruptcies, millions of families evicted from their homes, the social safety net strained to the breaking point, and perhaps even riots and a resurgence of the political extremism that brought Hitler to power in Germany during the depression of the 1930’s. 10 15
- 3 It is no accident that the “New World, New Capitalism” symposium was held in France. The French have always been less likely to go into debt – when they pay with plastic, they tend to use debit cards, drawing on funds they already have, rather than credit cards. Now they see the current crisis as a vindication of the value of not spending money that you don’t have. 20
- 4 That means, in many cases, less luxury spending – something that is hard to reconcile with the image of France as the country of fashion, perfume, and champagne. But excess is out of style, and there are reports of cutbacks in luxury goods everywhere. But does this mark an enduring change in values, or just a temporary reduction, forced upon consumers by investment losses and greater economic uncertainty? Could the crisis remind us that we buy luxury items more because of the status they bring than their intrinsic value? Could it help us to appreciate that many things are more central to our happiness than our ability to spend money on fashion, expensive watches, and fine dining? Could it even make us more aware of the needs of those who are living in real poverty and are far worse off than we will ever be financial crisis or no financial crisis? 25 30
- 5 The danger is that the potential for a real change in values will be co-opted, as has happened so often before, by those who see it as just another opportunity to make money. The designer Nathalie Rykiel is reportedly planning to show the new Sonia Rykiel collection not in the usual vast rented area, but in the smaller space of her own boutique. “It’s a desire for intimacy, to go back to values,” she told the *International Herald Tribune*. “We need to return to a smaller scale, one that touches people. We will be saying, ‘Come to my house. Look at and feel the clothes.’” 35
- 6 Ah yes, in a world in which ten million children die every year from avoidable, poverty-related causes, and greenhouse-gas emissions threaten to create hundreds of millions of climate refugees, we should be visiting Paris boutiques and feeling the clothes. If people were really concerned about defensible moral values, they wouldn’t be buying designer clothes at all. But what are the chances of Nathalie Rykiel – or the affluent elites of France, or Italy, or the United States – adopting those values? 40

Adapted from *Capitalism’s New Clothes*, Project Syndicate