**GP Term 4 2018 – Comprehension – Topic 1: Reflective Issues (Positive) – Happiness**

*Hugh Gugh writes about happiness.*

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| 1 | More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle begins the Nicomachean Ethics, one of his most  widely read and influential works, by asking what the final good for human beings is. He  identifies this final good with happiness, and claims that human good (that is, happiness) is  activity of the soul in accordance with the best and most perfect virtue, he believes that  happiness depends on the cultivation of virtue, though his virtues are somewhat more  individualistic than the essentially social virtues of the Confucians. Hence, Aristotle enshrines  the ultimate goal of human life, which is simply happiness: finding a purpose in order to realise  your potential, and working on your attitude to attain excellence so that we can find happiness. | 5 |
| 2 | Our current obsession with finding happiness today may not be too different from Aristotle’s  quest for meaning. Today, however, the emphasis on meaning and virtue seems to be at  odds with our culture. Modern attitude reveal that we no longer appreciate the cultivation of virtues. Instead, we are now more interested in the frenetic pursuit of a self-gratifying version  of happiness than in the disciplined searched for meaning, even if contemporary research  constantly reminds that having purpose and meaning in life increases overall well-being and  life satisfaction. Happiness without meaning characteristics a relatively shallow and self-  absorbed life. This life typically allows things to go well as our needs and desires are easily  satisfied, and difficult or taxing entanglements are also conveniently avoided. On top of that,  the single-minded pursuit of happiness today is unsurprisingly leaving people less happy, and  it is very pursuit of happiness that thwarts happiness. | 10  15 |
| 3 | This desperate attempt to be happy has led to the rise of the billion-dollar self-help industry.  We seem to think that happiness is an object that can be purchased, whether in a book, a pill,  a work-out plan, or a simple to-do list prescribed by a life coach. The self-help industry will  pour forth books promising to make us happier. But the very demand for such books is a  strong indication that they are not working. Here is an important fact: unhappy people make  these companies a lot of money. This is because unhappy people are easy to control. Our  society’s emphasis on productivity and work ethic – two by-products of a capitalist and  materialist system – keeps people unhappy and then convinces them that the only way out is  to spend their money on “quick fixes”. The truth is that you create suffering each time you  imagine that happiness is an object. You elicit unhappiness each time you search for  happiness. And the mechanism of this seeking for unhappiness is what reinforces your isolation from its presence. | 20  25  30 |
| 4 | Perhaps, instead of sending people out on a wild goose chase for happiness, we should  acknowledge that they just need to be treated better. There are benefits to be happy, and  economists, behavioural scientists, policy makers and employers are starting to realise that  happiness is actually good for business because it makes people more productive. When  researchers took Fortune’s annual list of ‘Best Companies to Work For’ and compared it over  time with how peer companies performed on the stock market, they found that the top best-  to-work-for firms outperformed the others, and also that investors often undervalued the  intangibles of employee well-being. It is an important piece of research because it shows that  the potential cost of raising well-being is more than matched by productivity and increased  performance. | 35  40 |
| 5 | With this awareness, a number of modern workplaces that offer fun things to do during their  lunchbreak have also started growing from strength to strength, often citing the ‘work hard  play hard’ work ethic as part of their success. Google was among the first large firms to  incorporate games tables and fun distractions into its offices. Apart from improving  productivity levels, happiness has also helped software developers get better at problem-  solving – a skill highly-prized by businesses today. Another way to nurture happiness is to  have bosses who value their employees, which in turn generates trust. Google’s willingness  to trust their employees is the factor that has resulted in a small search engine company  developing into the global conglomerate it is today. More companies can start targeting  melancholy at work. There can be a stronger engagement of employees to tackle the problem  of a lack of purpose at work, and a sense that work is impinging too much on other aspects  of life. | 45  50 |
| 6 | The realisation of the importance of happiness in modern societies can also prompt  policymakers to shift their priorities from the creation of wealth to the creation of good feelings.  As we study the World Happiness Report each year and marvel at Denmark’s remarkable  achievement, we inevitably start to wonder if the Danes have the formula for happiness. The  rising popularity of Hygge, a Danish concept for a feeling of comfort and wellness, is indeed  hard to miss, and it has become a notable cultural movement with Hygge-lovers all around  the world. But perhaps happiness is not found in an abstract and foreign concept. Happiness  can instead be measured using objective indicators, such as data on crime, civic engagement,  and health. Not only do the Danes have Hygge, they have a stable government, low levels of  corruption, and access to high-quality education and healthcare. Even if the country has the  highest taxes in the world, the vast majority of Danes happily pay these taxes as they believe  higher taxes can create a better society. Indulging in abstract ideas can be fun. But policies  that are empowering and inclusive can help us in more tangible ways. | 55  60  65 |
| 7 | But we cannot confuse such systemic unfairness with self-imposed misery. Some choose to  believe that there is nothing they can do to solve their problems and this victim mentality leads  them to blame others for their problems, or blame outside circumstances. What if we all had  a very practical formula for happiness? After 40 years of research, social scientists can now  attribute happiness to three major sources: genes, events, and values. Before we start  blaming our parents and the society for our misery, we should ask ourselves if we have  worked hard enough to cultivate personal values. It turns out that choosing to pursue four  basic values of faith, family, community and work is the surest path to happiness. While the  first three are fairly uncontroversial, work, though, seems less intuitive. Popular culture insists  our jobs are drudgery. However, throughout our history, flexible labour markets in developed  countries and the dynamic society have also given us a unique say over our work – and made  our work uniquely relevant to our happiness. With greater say over our work, we learn that it  is unbelievably important for work to be rewarding, and this is emphatically not about money  but a sense of fulfilment. | 70  75  80 |
| 8 | Aristotle’s practical recipe for happiness is ripe for rediscovery. The challenge for society as  we move forward will be how to ensure that people are patient in their pursuit of happiness.  We need to develop happiness as a virtue, because today’s frenzied quest for happiness will  fail us for the simple reason that emotions never last. Perhaps it’s time to hop off the hedonic  treadmill and gain some perspective. After all, overinvesting in the search for happiness will  not result in any real change. This is a difficult pill to swallow. We like the idea that there’s  some form of ultimate happiness that can attained (We just need to go to the self-help  section, or let our governments and employers create happiness for us). We like the idea that  we can alleviate all of our suffering permanently. We like the idea that we can be fulfilled and  satisfied forever. But we cannot – and it’s time to embrace a counterintuitive approach to  happiness. Work for it. | 85  90 |

**Questions**

Q1) Suggest reasons for the author beginning the passage with a reference to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. [2]

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Q2) Why does the author use the word ‘enshrines’ (line 6) with reference to happiness? [1]

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Q3) In lines 15-17, how does the author support his idea that people are now more interested in a ‘self-gratifying version of happiness than in the disciplined search for meaning’ (lines 12-13)? **Use your own words as far as possible**. [3]

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Q4) Suggest why the author uses the word ‘unsurprisingly’ in line 18. [2]

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Q5) What is the author’s purpose in using the word ‘very’ in line 23? [2]

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Q6) Why has the author placed the term ‘quick fixes’ (line 28) in inverted commas? [1]

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**Summary Writing**

Q7) Using material from paragraphs 4 to 6 only (lines 32–66), summarise how and why happiness is significant to society.

Write your summary in **no more than 120 words**, not counting the opening words which are printed below. **Use your own words as far as possible.** [8]

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Q8) Explain why the author says that work is ‘less intuitive’ (line 75) than faith, family, and community in achieving happiness? **Use your own words as far as possible**. [2]

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Q9) In lines 76-78, what reasons does the author give to explain why our work can bring about happiness today? **Use your own words as far as possible**. [2]

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Q10) In lines 81-86, what contrasts does the author make between what happiness should be and what it is today? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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**Application Question**

Q11) In this article, Hugh Gugh makes a number of observations about happiness and our modern-day pursuit of it. How far would you agree with his observations, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society? [10]

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