RAFFLES INSTITUTION
2023 Year 6 Term 3 Common Test
Higher 2

Knowledge and Inquiry

9759/02

17 May 2023

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Paper

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Do not turn this sheet over until you are told to do so.
Write your name and CT group on all the work you hand in.
Write in dark blue or black ink.
Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid/tape.

Section A

Answer **Question 1**.

Section B

Answer **any two** questions.

At the end of the examination, fasten your answers to each section separately. You will be asked to submit your answer to each section separately.

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part question.

This document consists of **4** printed pages.

Section A

You **must** answer question one.

1. Morals are not objective. What you think is right may not line up with what someone else thinks is right. But morals do not appear to be subjective either – we clearly generally agree that it is wrong for me to burn down your house, kill your loved ones, and give you a horrible disease, for no reason. Understanding these two positions is key: we treat "don't burn houses down" as more or less an objective moral principle, even while many of us actively claim not to have objective moral principles. And this is the great tension of the 21st Century: we don't want to give our morals any sort of objective nature for fear of ethnocentrism, but we can't help noticing that there might just be something objective about them.

    There are three main ways of thinking about whether moral knowledge is subjective or objective. Examining the consequences of both positions is one way. If an immoral act is happening, and we do not speak up because we are afraid of being ethnocentric (in other words, we fear that we incorrectly evaluate other cultures based on our own values and beliefs), then we have no interpersonal morals at all and we fall into mere subjectivism. But if we do not speak about morality, then this element of morality ceases to exist in the practical world, and morals disconnected from a practical world do no good at all.

    If the consequentialist argument cannot give us an answer to whether moral knowledge is subjective or objective, then we should perhaps appeal to scientific authority. Some philosophers argue that moral facts are analogous to scientific facts and can be discovered through empirical investigation. For example, they may point to evolutionary psychology as evidence that certain moral beliefs are universal and grounded in human nature. However, this argument is fallacious because it assumes that science has a monopoly on truth and that scientists are impartial observers of the world. In reality, scientific research is influenced by social and political factors, and scientific consensus can change over time as new evidence emerges.

    If appealing to scientific authority doesn't work, maybe the appeal to religious authority will. Many religious traditions claim that their moral beliefs are based on divine revelation and therefore objective. For example, the Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity are often cited as evidence of objective moral truths. However, this argument is also fallacious because it assumes that religious authorities have access to a unique source of moral knowledge that is inaccessible to non-believers. In reality, religious beliefs are shaped by cultural and historical factors, and the moral teachings of different religions often conflict with each other. Moreover, the idea of divine revelation is itself controversial and depends on one's metaphysical beliefs about the nature of the universe.

    So, since the consequentialist argument and the appeals to scientific and religious authorities cannot conclusively prove that morality is objective, morality must be subjective. The idea of objective morality has also led to ethnocentrism, which has led to discriminatory practices that we now vilify. Clearly, morality is not objective, but subjective. Let's be our own moral boss.

    Adapted from "Morality is neither objective nor subjective", by Anthony Draper

    Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.   [30]

Section B
Answer any **two** questions.

2   A recent parliamentary debate featured a suggestion to give young local entrepreneurs a leg-up in the e-commerce space, prompted by the changes in which consumers – including Singaporeans – buy things in the post-covid era. Many praised the move, claiming that the government's proposal to set up a subsidized platform for small, local creative businesses to advertise and market their products will help entrepreneurs hone their business acumen. But as with every government policy – even very good ones – there will always be losers. Just because entrepreneurs can succeed in an artificial environment doesn't mean that they will survive in the real world, having been blinded to the harsh realities of the e-commerce world. Today's winners might become tomorrow's losers. And boosting their ego only to have it come crashing down later will result in more fragile youngsters who will then be too afraid to do any kind of business in the future. Not to mention the fact that the years spent investing in the artificial environment will be wasted. Who will the winners be then?

Even the best intentions behind state policies cannot compensate for the fact that the government can never truly understand young people – who account for a large majority of local entrepreneurs. Think about it: your family member and best friend do not even precisely understand everything about you, so how can the government understand you when they don't even live in the same house? Those in government live in an ivory tower and are completely detached from the lives of ordinary people. In any case, the nature of a government policy is that it is for the general populace, not the specific individual. There will always be some who lose out on the benefits that the policy is meant to provide – it's the young this time, but next time, it could be the elderly.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s). [15]

3   The recent case of a 10-year-old boy who punched a primary school senior sparked an online debate on who was at fault. Some argued that because he threw the first punch, he should be classified as the bully. Others argued that because he was merely responding to his classmate's verbal taunts, it is the classmate who should be labelled the bully.

Something is considered bullying only if it involves some aggressive behaviour that is intentional, repeated, and intended to harm another individual. If the boy was provoked, and there was no intention to harm the classmate prior to the provocation, then that action of punching should be seen as an act of self-defence. But where do we draw the line when it comes to intentions? Surely the act of punching signals an intention to harm another person – even if for a split second before the act.

Something is considered bullying if it is motivated by an exertion of power over the other person, so, it is the older boy who clearly is the bully. But did not the younger boy, in defending himself by throwing the first punch, exhibit the motivation to exert his power? It is precisely because, being younger, he knew he would not have won the verbal match that he used physical force to assert control over the situation. A pre-emptive strike can be seen as an act of self-preservation but also an act of bullying, for the goal of the strike is to exert power and control. What, then, is the difference between self-defence and bullying?

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s). [15]

4   The many benefits to digital technology give us good reasons for why should continue using it. It has promoted seamless communication and collaboration across the world, performs tasks faster and more efficiently than manual methods, and increased productivity and reduced the amount of time and resources needed to complete tasks. Automation, for example, can do the work of three to five people – and be better at it – and also improve worker safety in dangerous environments.

But these benefits alone are insufficient to justify the continued expansion of digital technology. Firstly, the negative consequences of such usage outweigh the benefits. Technology like social media and computer games perpetuates addictions because that's what drives profit. Such addictions result in a vast wastage of time that we could otherwise use to do more productive and meaningful things, like spending quality time with our families and friends. The growing problem of social alienation will then worsen, as human contact gradually reduces to nothing, and loneliness becomes the norm. Moreover, digital technology impedes basic living skills – someone who has always relied on GPS to find his way around town would be in deep trouble when his mobile phone is out of battery!

Secondly, an overreliance on digital technology will inevitably compromise individuality, as plagiarism and copyright laws are increasingly harder to enforce. People will soon no longer value creativity as a culture of "sharing" will reduce the value of the original creator's work.

Thirdly, and more significantly, life will become something that is experienced through the prism of digital media rather than first-hand. Many people no longer experience real-life events directly, since music concerts or live shows are recorded on mobile devices and uploaded onto social sites. If we say that there is a difference in the way we live our lives now versus when we are hooked up to an experience machine, then surely, we cannot allow digital technology to erode everything we understand about how to fully live life!

I would much rather have a world with lower productivity and less efficiency if that means that humans get to keep being human.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s). [15]

END OF PAPER