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Philosophy

Higher level

Paper 3

11 May 2026

Zone A morning | **Zone B** morning | **Zone C** morning

1 hour 15 minutes

Instructions to students

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the text and write a response.
- Answer both parts of the question.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[25 marks]**.

Unseen text – philosophy and contemporary issues

Read the following extract and answer **both** parts (a) and (b) of the question.

The spread of Western influence has brought both opportunities and challenges to non-Western societies. Throughout the last two centuries most Western industrialized countries have exported three goods packed in the same wrapping. The goods are technology, capitalism and political democracy, and the wrapping is Western culture.

5 I think that two of these: democracy and technology, are indispensable for a fairer social order and to improve well-being. But there are problems for democracy and modern technology in non-Western cultures. These problems have a common root.

On the one hand, the anti-capitalist ideas inspiring some political movements in third world countries sometimes go together with certain forms of fanaticism or extremism. On the other
10 hand, most advanced technologies are sold as packages which are ready to be used without any changes. This means that they will only work if the social and cultural environment in which they are used is identical to that for which they were designed and developed.

These two problems can both be explained by an inflexible adherence to a particular system or ideology. Anti-capitalist ideas and fanaticism are linked to a cultural, political or
15 religious inflexibility. The way advanced technologies are packaged shows a technological inflexibility. And the remedy to any form of inflexibility is tolerance.

Indeed, tolerance is a virtue that consists of respecting and accepting values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours different to our own. In other words, tolerance is respect and recognition of cultural diversity. The opposite of tolerance is inflexibility. Tolerance is essential for democratic
20 social life, although in order to be effective it should be rational. This means that there exist certain restrictions on tolerance. The most important is that one cannot be tolerant with the attitudes, behaviours, ideas and values that put basic moral principles in danger.

What I intend to argue is that a climate of tolerance is not only important for democracy, but also for technological development. This is because technological development interacts
25 with culture in at least two ways.

1. Cultural diversity can be a source of technological innovation.
2. Technological culture can enrich other cultures, without destroying them.

First, different social groups with different cultural resources can conceive and evaluate the objectives and results of a technical system in different ways. As a consequence, they can
30 introduce modifications and variations that would not be functional in other contexts.

Second, scientific discoveries are a constant source of new beliefs and representations of reality. Technical inventions lead to new patterns of behaviour and new values in many different cultures. Together, the interaction between cultural content and technical systems creates new interpretations that can generate significant variations in technical systems.

35 However, there are limits to these processes of cultural transfer. There are cultural features that are not compatible with certain technical systems. For example, members of some religious sects cannot be efficient surgeons, or an illiterate operator cannot manage a system of complicated control. Similarly, there are technical systems that cannot spread in societies in which certain cultural features prevail. For example, the magicians of a tribe cannot
40 substitute the engineers of an industrial factory.

Technology is culturally sensitive. A climate of tolerance is required for its development. To effectively transfer technology between cultures, both the cultures themselves and the developers of technologies must be tolerant and flexible. Aspects of other cultures will need to be incorporated into technological culture itself, and inflexible attitudes will need to be
45 abandoned. Tolerance is not only a civic and political virtue it is also a technological virtue.

- (a) With reference to the text and your own knowledge, explain how culture shapes and is shaped by technology. [10]
 - (b) With reference to the text and your own experience of doing philosophy, discuss the claim that philosophy serves as a tool for understanding how culture shapes and is shaped by technology. [15]
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References:

Quintanilla, M., 2000. Tolerance and technological culture. *Philosophica*, [e-journal] 66(2). Available at: <https://www.philosophica.ugent.be/article/82270/galley/202084/view/> [Accessed 30 September 2024]. Source adapted.