

# Question on Paper 3

John McCuan

December 14, 2023

Below is an email response to a student who asked for feedback on what he wrote for Paper 3 which was about the usefulness of statistical information given by a doctor to help in making a medical decision. I saw elements of the same kind of thinking in many of your papers and specifically in the papers of students of whom I would have expected a higher level of critical thinking. Perhaps my view is worth considering.

Let me emphasize that the question was “Have you received any useful information?” In my view, this question could be answered in a variety of ways, almost none of which could be considered “wrong.” But if a student refuses to answer the question but decides to try to answer a different question instead, then it seems to me it becomes immediately very difficult to say anything that is not quite obviously just wrong. And indeed it will be noted that these inherent contradictions and errors usually do not give doctors the slightest pause or reason to slow down and think about what they are saying and doing. This, it seems to me, is purely the result of indoctrination and especially indoctrination to produce individuals who are incapable of critical thinking.

## **Subject: Paper 3**

Hello Student C,

...I took a look at your paper 3, which you said was your favorite. I disagree with your conclusion. You state in your first sentence that I have “definitely been given useful information about the decision” I should make. I disagree with your conclusion on several levels.

First of all the question that was asked was the following:

Have you been given any useful information?

Rather than answering the question that was asked, you turned it around and attempted to apply your evaluation to me. I find this to be exceedingly presumptuous, arrogant, and misguided. If the question is about me and I am to make the decision, then I am the one (and the only one) who can determine if the information is useful to me. You might have some hope to answer the question I posed, but there seems no possible way the unrelated assertion you have made can be justified.

In point of fact, you have not justified that assertion in any way. This is largely because I reject your assumption that probabilities and statistics have any relevance (whatsoever) and in particular any relevance to an individual case such as described in the statement of the question. I could, of course, go through each of the statements you make and explain why I reject it. I will only mention one thing.

You contradict yourself when you write “the statistics are useful as they allow individuals to make their own decisions...” Applying what you have said, I should be able to make my own decision and I should be aided by the statistics and your description of it. On the other hand, you do not seem to allow any possibility that I have made the decision that statistics are entirely irrelevant to the question and that I have received no useful information. Thus, in your view I, as an individual, am not allowed to make my own decisions. In point of fact, I have made that decision in defiance of your conclusion, and nothing you have written is particularly useful in that regard. But what you have written does constitute a contradiction. It is somewhat comforting to disagree with a person who is presumptuous and arrogant and continually makes obviously false assertions and gives no indication of the ability to read a question carefully or apply any critical thought to it, but at the base of things neither the statistics nor contradictory assertions related to statistics are very useful.

John