

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2014 Philosophy examination was handled well by most students and there were many strong responses. Most students attempted all questions and had a reasonable understanding of what was being asked of them.

It is imperative that teachers read the VCAA text list closely when it is published each year and ensure that they have the correct texts and all of the pages required.

Areas of strength and weakness

Students endeavoured to demonstrate their knowledge of the course texts and often made use of outside sources when attempting to critique the philosophers' views. Some of the older texts – Plato's *Gorgias*, in particular – proved to be a strong foundation upon which many students developed much of their thinking. Peter Singer's ideas were also regularly used in Section C and students showed a good general ability to reflect on their implications in the contemporary world. Much of the new examination format encouraged deeper exploration of the philosophers' views and arguments, and there were some insightful papers that made great use of the increased scope of Sections B and C. Section C held the potential for students to really apply philosophy to their everyday lives, and some exceptional responses handled this in a mature and insightful manner.

Students must be very careful when they evaluate philosophers. Too often, students are using sweeping assertions to discredit whole philosophical traditions and there remain some dangerous gaps in student knowledge and understanding. In addition, students need to avoid making simplistic and uncritical assertions about philosophers' arguments.

It is important that VCE students of Philosophy understand the implications of critiquing the views put forth in philosophical sources related to the 2014–2018 study design. Philosophy is concerned with analysing whether arguments or viewpoints are valid, or sound. In determining soundness, for example, it may be the case that there are logical errors or that premises are strong/weak rather than true/untrue in an outright way. For example, it may be the case that a philosopher's views are limited, inconclusive or contain fundamental problems or unjustifiable assertions, and in an examination these should be identified and explored as appropriate, rather than a view simply being dismissed out of hand. The nature of the philosophical discipline is one of discussion and exploration rather than heavy-handed dismissal or attack. Students who realise this will gain access to the great fount of insight and inspiration that this discipline has to offer.

There is still a misunderstanding of what is expected from a philosophical essay, and this must be carefully monitored and avoided in future. It is not enough for a student to merely reference an issue from one of the prompts and then write everything they know about the philosophers who they feel most comfortable with into a series of disparate paragraphs, yet this was often the case in the 2014 examination. Philosophical essays should be developed from an argumentative standpoint. With this in mind students should consider potential philosophical viewpoints (for example, those that are hypothesised by the student regarding how an Ancient Greek mind might interpret contemporary issues of consumerism or technology) as springboards from which they can develop a detailed discussion of the general contemporary concerns of what it means to live a good life. In order to create this kind of discussion, students should always be thinking of both the merits and limitations of any given viewpoint and be constantly exploring points of critical comparison to further their own vision of what the good life means in the contemporary world.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding errors resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Section A responses were generally well focused and demonstrated reasonably secure knowledge of Plato's *Gorgias* and the Aristotle and Singer texts. The Buddhist and Nietzsche set texts and Plato's *Phaedo* proved to be more troublesome for many. Students seem to be reading too far outside of the course – with Nietzsche, in particular – and there was a gratuitous use of concepts that were either irrelevant or poorly understood. The *Übermensch* in particular is

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a Nietzschean concept that should be avoided in the study of the good life, because students are wrongfully attributing the pursuit of this ‘super-man’ to that of a person living well, which is not what Nietzsche implies in any of his writing.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	22	12	18	10	37	2.3

Students demonstrated some knowledge of *Phaedo* as a text but were largely unsure about which section of the text they should be referring to when answering Question 1. Many utilised elements from much later in the text, which, while generally supporting the same ideas put forth by Cebes, were not the actual argument used by Socrates to directly support Cebes’s assertion. As such, suggesting that the soul can survive death is an argument that Socrates uses later in the *Phaedo* excerpt, but in the context of the question it does little more than restate the prompt (that the soul is immortal and divine). Some discussions of the master–servant relationship held between the divine soul and the mortal body were excellent, and students who demonstrated a detailed understanding of the various characteristics attributed to the soul and the body and who were able to effectively relate this to the notion of divinity (the argument from Affinity) were able to claim full marks.

High-scoring responses might have included the following.

- Characteristics of the soul that it shares with the divine: intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, ever self-consistent and invariable.
- Characteristics of the body that it shares with the mortal: more like the human, multi-form, unintelligible, dissoluble, never self-consistent and variable.

In addition to these points, some students chose to discuss the differences by way of analogy, relating the soul to Plato’s conceptual Form of Beauty in order to emphasise its unearthly and divine characteristics. This, with some exploration, was perfectly acceptable.

The following is an example of a highly detailed response.

Socrates says that the body is more like the particulars in the physical world, tangible, changing and can be destroyed very easily as seen by the death of our bodies when we die. However, the soul appears to be more like the Forms, which are intangible, unchanging and can only be perceived of by our psyches. In addition, because the Forms are indestructible and divine, they are eternal regardless of what happens in the physical world (e.g. if all the circular things in the world were destroyed, the concept of a circle would still exist), then the soul must also have these divine and eternal properties within its nature.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	50	22	28	0.8

This question, about Nagasena’s stolen mangoes, proved to be divisive, with a wide range of interpretations of what was meant by the final section of the King Milinda text. It was important for students to understand the causal relationship between the planting of the seeds and the resulting mangoes and then to apply that causal relationship to the moral responsibility of the thief, in that his crime would linger with him long after the event had occurred. This example demonstrates Nagasena’s understanding of how moral responsibility can still be transmitted via psycho-physical parts between one moment and the next, even while the self has been reduced to a mere appellation.

References to the notion of ‘karma’ were irrelevant, and it is worth noting that the term ‘karma’ is only present in the heading of this last section of the text. Students should be mindful of reading too much into this and feeling that using the word is the equivalent of detailing an explanation.

The following is an example of a well-phrased, high-scoring response.

Nagasena presents the example of the stolen mangoes to highlight how moral responsibility is still a coherent concept despite there being no fixed self. Although mangoes which one man has stolen are not the same as the mango seeds which were planted originally, they exist because of the seeds and are causally linked as part of the same process. Thus, the mangoes belong to the man who planted the seeds originally, and the man who stole them should be punished.

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Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	18	16	26	21	19	2.1

Most students understood the purpose of this question and endeavoured to explore specific similarities and differences between Nagasena and either Hume or Santideva. This being said, there were still students who seemed to think that they needed to discuss all three viewpoints, but this was unnecessary. There were others who did not read the question carefully and delivered what they felt would be Hume's and Santideva's positions on the analogy of the mangoes.

Students who chose to compare Nagasena and Hume generally demonstrated a good understanding of the two texts but were often unclear on the finer details of Hume's position. Those who compared Nagasena with Santideva often struggled to express any distinction between the two viewpoints, thus undermining the core focus of the question.

For Nagasena, the self is little more than a label applied to an amalgamation of parts, none of which are anything in particular. For Hume, identity is a convenient grouping of diverse and questionable phenomena that are momentarily knowable as a specific person. Hence, the two of them differ in their understanding of identity: for Nagasena there is no self, but for Hume there is, even if it is only knowable in the moment of present observation. Further to this, the causal relationship that Nagasena proposes with the mango analogy might be denied by Hume due to his problem of induction. Hume suggests that moral responsibility is ascribed in the same fashion as identity in that it is convenient to attribute it to the person who intuitively is committing the crime, but there is no way to prove that any one person is directly responsible for any given crime due to our inability to demonstrate that the same specific being exists between different observations of their actions.

For Santideva, section 97 suggests that the future self is not the same as the current self, and so we have no more reason to concern ourselves with our own future suffering than with the suffering of others. In addition to this, in the intervening sections (98–101) Santideva mentions concepts similar to Nagasena's Chariot by explaining the nature of identity by way of useful but unimportant labels. The fundamental difference between Nagasena and Santideva lies in their conception of responsibility: Nagasena highlights a kind of causal relationship while Santideva denies individuality and instead ascribes responsibility (regarding suffering at least) to all beings.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response that was very clear and succinct.

Nagasena believes that an identity is merely a designation to a collection of parts, such as where the constituent parts of a chariot are present, we use the term 'chariot'. The self is nothing more than the term we use when the five skhandas are present. Hume's view of self is similar in that he believes there is no fixed self, merely a collection of parts, which he believes are a bundle of perceptions. While they both believe that identity is mistakenly attributed to these collections of parts, they differ as Hume hints that there may be an owner of the bundle of perceptions; a perceiver.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	16	11	18	55	2.1

Most students handled this question quite well, as there was a variety of arguments that students could draw on from the text in order to effectively demonstrate how Socrates critiques Callicles's view that a life of pleasure is the good life.

Socrates uses an argument from opposites to demonstrate that pleasure and displeasure can coexist while good and bad cannot. He supports this through the analogy of drinking when thirsty.

He also suggests that the life of pleasure is a dissatisfying one because it is unfulfilling. This is expressed through the leaky jar analogy or the example of perpetually scratching an itch.

Some students used Socrates' passing reference to a male prostitute to highlight different kinds of pleasure, and with sufficient detail this was an acceptable answer.

Others used Socrates' extended analogy of the hero and coward in order to express how adopting the belief that pleasure is the good life will result in a contradictory understanding of accepted social roles and standards in Ancient Greek society.

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The following is an example of a good and clear response.

In responding to Callicles' claim, Socrates employs the argument of the brave man and the coward. He argues that, in the face of an enemy's advances, the coward would find more pleasure in retreat than the brave man would. Thus, according to Callicles' claim that pleasure is a sufficient condition of living the good life, the coward would be a better man than the brave man. As the traditional Greek view places value on the heroic figure, Callicles could not accept the conclusions of this argument and was forced to redefine his definition of the good life.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	33	25	24	18	1.3

This question about Aristotle proved to be challenging for many students. The phrasing of the question blended several concepts within the Nichomachean Ethics in order to create a scenario that students could explore. However, many students were unsure about how to use the text effectively to explore how Aristotle might judge the person in the stimulus. This question required careful reading and there were many students who missed elements of the prompt. A number of students neglected to mention, or did not know, any of the virtues that Aristotle explores in some depth in the Nichomachean Ethics (Book 2, Section 7).

Students needed to refer to one of Aristotle's specific virtues (courage, temperance, etc.) and then unpack how Aristotle might ascribe judgment based on action. Some exploration of the importance of good habits with regard to the pursuit of the mean and Aristotle's belief that it is the strength and quality of these habits that define whether or not we possess a virtuous character was the ideal path to a good answer.

The following is an example of a strong response that effectively supports the conclusion it draws from Aristotle's philosophy.

A virtuous act does not occur by chance. For an act to be considered virtuous the agent must: be under a certain condition at the time of the act, they must have knowledge of virtue and it must be based on a firm and unchangeable character. Therefore, a person who acts courageously, but was tempted to act in a cowardly way, did not act virtuously. They must have a firm and unchangeable character that wanted to act courageously. Therefore this person was not virtuous.

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	21	32	47	1.3

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) acknowledged an error in the Philosophy set text list for 2014, which provided an incorrect citation for the Singer article. The incorrect citation was sourced from a widely available revised version of the article, which includes a postscript. Question 5 in Section A of the 2014 Philosophy examination referred to 'John Arthur', who is referenced only in this postscript. Assessors ensured that no student was disadvantaged, realising that some students may not have been familiar with the reference to John Arthur.

This question was assessed with a general focus on Singer's philosophical position. Students who explored how Singer might handle a view such as John Arthur's – demonstrating an understanding of how Singer believes that we should feel obliged to help others to the point of marginal utility – received full marks. Provided that they mentioned why Singer would dislike the principle of self-interest and noted that Singer's interpretation of selflessness has boundaries (marginal utility), students were seen as demonstrating a sufficient general knowledge of Singer's philosophical position in the set text.

The following is an example of a strong response.

Singer responds by saying that if it is within our power to prevent suffering, without sacrificing anything morally comparable, we morally ought to do it. This fundamental principle is adhered to by Singer in every way, which means that we are more morally obliged to help those who are suffering, rather than pursue our own interests such as by buying luxury goods. Hence we are not entitled to put ourselves first.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	23	29	48	1.3

The Nietzsche question used Arthur's principle as stimulus material and did not require knowledge of the Singer text. Students often made simple errors with this question. Some applied Nietzsche to Singer's position regarding John

Arthur, which was a misreading of what was being asked. Others suggested, wrongly, that Nietzsche was only interested in selfish pursuits and that for this reason he would embrace Arthur's principle. It is an ongoing problem with Nietzsche that students are misconstruing the value that he gives to personal growth and creativity as a wholly selfish endeavour. In addition to this, while Nietzsche discusses the importance of suffering for personal growth students should be wary of suggesting that Nietzsche's good life involves inflicting suffering on all those who cross his path.

Answers that focused on Nietzsche's reasoning for self-worth (that it allows for a free spirit to grow and create without the restrictions of herd values) in highlighting how he might agree with Arthur, demonstrated a clear understanding of the text and the question. However, responses that utilised simplistic, misleading and undeveloped interpretations of Nietzsche, such as 'Nietzsche desires strength and power', demonstrated a poor understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy or how it might be applied to Arthur's comment. Similarly, a student who suggested that Nietzsche might disagree with Arthur on the grounds that the principle acts as a moral framework, which he would strive to reject, were also capable of acquiring full marks, provided there was some explanation of this position.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Nietzsche would agree that we have a right to pursue our own interests above that of others, as sharing and selflessness are merely moral values that act to promote mediocrity and stability of the 'herd' – they have no real value. Instead, we should 'reevaluate' our morals and follow our own drives – go beyond established morals. The individual thus has the right to serve their own interests over that of others, but should only do so if they themselves decide that this is right.

Section B

Section B allowed students some opportunity to fully grapple with some of the big ideas in Unit 3, Areas of Study 1 and 2. Because of the ten-mark allocation for both questions there was a lot of room to give marks to a variety of responses, but a high level of depth and detail was required to achieve the top scores.

Some students found the two questions quite challenging and there were some specific problems with differentiating between the intended focus for each set text, which resulted in responses focused on personal identity for Descartes and some focused on the mind/body dilemma for Locke. This is something that should be carefully monitored by teachers and students in future.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	5	7	10	12	14	14	11	9	6	5	5.1

The Descartes question was generally handled well and it was good to see that many students appear to have taken extra time to explore some of the inherent limitations of Cartesian scepticism. This being said, there were still many responses that reverted to a list of everything that the student could remember about Descartes' philosophy, introducing many concepts that were unnecessary for the question at hand. In addition to this, it was frustrating to see how many responses did not fully address the question, often leaving out either the distinct conclusion of the wax argument (that the mind is better known than the body) or failing to address Armstrong in any meaningful way.

A complete explanation of the wax argument was required, detailing the experiment that Descartes describes in meditation two and the conclusion he believes that it supports. This needed to be clearly evaluated by exploring some of the problems that could be suggested by Descartes' eventual solution. The strongest responses utilised Armstrong in their evaluation of Descartes' work.

The following are some possible pathways to evaluations.

- The wax argument does prove that the mind is 'better known' than the body because there is some knowledge of the mind through the conception of wax (it is a thinking thing whenever it conceives of anything at all) while the body is still wholly doubtful due to the problems raised in meditation one.
- Knowledge of the wax as any kind of physical thing is very difficult for Descartes to justify because of the limitations of the information provided to the mind. Thus, it is reasonable to question whether 'purely mental scrutiny' serves any grand purpose.
- It could be suggested that while there is primary knowledge of the mind as a thinking thing there is no purely mental knowledge of the wax without some kind of physical perception of it. Isn't it then reasonable to suggest that the physical senses are just as likely to provide possible truths as the mind is when it conceives of anything beyond itself as a thinking thing?

- There was room to critique whether or not Descartes could have any conception of the wax as the same when solid versus melted without some kind of spatio-temporal awareness. If he had not watched it melt, would he have been capable of determining it to be the ‘same’ substance?
- Armstrong would suggest that Descartes’ conclusion, that the mind is better known than the body, makes little sense because science provides us with the best source of answers and developments in neuroscience and molecular biology suggests that the mind is the product of extremely complex chemical interactions within the brain. Therefore, the mind is a physical thing and is just as knowable as the body and the wax argument does little to suggest otherwise once the definition of ‘mind’ has been altered.

The following is an example of a strong response that falls short only in that it implies how Armstrong might respond rather than detailing how his philosophy might support his questioning of Descartes’ conclusion.

Descartes’ wax argument aims to establish multiple conclusions. It begins by posing the question of how we may know a hardened piece of wax, and that piece of wax when melted, to be the same object. Descartes rules out the possibility that the senses gave us this knowledge, because the hardened piece of wax shares no sensible qualities with the melted piece; it looks, sounds, smells, feels and tastes different. (How Descartes knew they taste different is unfortunately not specified.) He also rules out the imagination as a source of this knowledge, as melted wax can take the form of a virtually infinite number of shapes, of which the imagination cannot conceive. Thus, Descartes says, it must be the faculty of judgment that exists in our minds which gave us this knowledge. From there, Descartes concludes further that the mind must be better known than all physical things, including the body, because every time we come to understand something physical, we confirm further this knowledge we have gained about the mind’s nature. A weakness in this argument is that it may deny the importance of the senses too hastily. The main reason we can tell the two pieces of wax are the same seems intuitively to be that we watched one change into the other. As a counter-example, if we found someone who had never before encountered wax, and presented them with the hardened piece, then took it away and came back with the melted piece, without the change having been observed, they would likely say the two things are indeed different. Without having observed the change for the first time, and having that experience for our intellect to draw on, we cannot use “judgment alone to understand the wax” so, the argument’s dismissal of the senses is an unwise one. Armstrong would likely draw more issue with Descartes’ conclusion that the mind is better known than the body, as this assumes the two are different things; this may simply be an inaccuracy in Descartes’ perception, to say that one can doubt the body but not the mind, akin to saying that Lois Lane loves Superman but not Clark Kent; in reality the two are the same, but her knowledge of them is wrong.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	10	6	5	8	10	11	12	12	12	8	7	5.2

Students had a reasonable grasp of how Locke was trying to define personal identity but many were confused about how he detailed this definition. Of particular importance was the student’s ability to explore the importance of ‘continuity of consciousness’ and memory over time and why this differed from mere physical continuity. Consciousness and memory provides an identifiable ‘self’ that can be located within each moment of recollection and rationalised as a specific person, while physical continuity merely denotes the presence of a same or like object at differing moments – no identity is required to place the same body in a different place every few minutes.

In addition to this, students needed to provide one thought experiment that Locke utilises (a list is provided below) and then to evaluate the merits and limitations of his philosophy. With this question in particular, students were very keen to be extremely critical of Locke’s philosophy without providing any reason as to why it is still even remotely relevant. While Locke’s personal identity is undoubtedly flawed, the way that it accounts for a conscious and continuous self should not be wholly discredited on the grounds that we treat his assumptions as fact on almost every day of our lives. This is important because it is difficult to construct any detailed and plausible evaluation without some acknowledgment of the value of the theory in question. If it had no value there would be no need to critique it.

Critical evaluations of Locke were abundant and focused on the problems with making memory sufficient for identity. Many students made use of Thomas Reid’s ‘Brave Officer’ thought experiment to highlight the problem with forgetfulness, but there was often a lot of room to further explain why this was a great problem for Locke. Some students discussed Alzheimer’s disease and the general flippancy of day-to-day recollection to highlight Locke’s limitations, and there were a couple of insightful responses that questioned how Locke’s ‘drunkard’ example undermined individual responsibility in the eyes of the law (even though Locke provides a weak justification to maintain consistency in the practice of law by focusing on physical identity).

The following thought experiments could be evaluated.

- The Prince and the Cobbler: that the mind of a prince might be swapped into the body of a cobbler and that the prince's personal identity would be in the cobbler's body even though his physical identity would remain elsewhere.
- Socrates awake and Socrates asleep: that if Socrates had no awareness of his consciousness while asleep he could not be considered to be the same person.
- Noah's Ark and the flooding of the Thames: that a person who has conscious recollection of Noah's Ark and the flooding of the Thames last winter would be the 'same person' and responsible for the actions of the physical identity that died long ago and the physical identity housing the consciousness today.
- The Drunkard: that a man who commits a crime while drunk and has no recollection of it should not 'in the great day, wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open' be punished for that crime. Locke here acknowledges that because of the difficulty in identifying and punishing the distinct culprit of the drunken crime the physical identity would be punished due to the way human judicial systems work and that this is the best the system can manage.

It is worth noting that the story of the Brazilian parrot does nothing to highlight the importance of continued consciousness or memory and should not be considered an appropriate example to support Locke's greater theory. The parrot merely highlights that physical identities separate beings and that no matter how humanlike a parrot may be, without a human consciousness it could never attain the personal identity of a man.

The following is an example of a strong and well-reasoned response.

Locke maintains that personal identity is our ability to recognise ourselves as the same rational thinkers across time – a phenomena achieve by continuity of consciousness and thus memory. For Locke a change in substance – either mental or physical – does not effect personal identity so long as it does not interrupt continuity of consciousness. Locke gives the thought experiment of the severed limb to further illustrate this point. From the moment a hand is severed from a body and its consciousness – it ceases to be, and doesn't effect, the personal identity of the body's consciousness. In the case of a severed limb, I find this to be a fair analogy, however there seem to me to be instances in which a change in physical substance affects the nature of one's consciousness. For instance, if a man were to lose both eyes and thus his ability to see, he would be unable to experience and form new memories with sight. Reflecting on his old memories in which he could see – it seems reasonable to me to suggest that the man's consciousness has changed if he no longer identifies with his previous self who could see – thus, I find Locke's statement that physical substance does not effect identity to be a weakness of his theory. Philosopher Perry further attacked Locke – accepting that while memory seems to be a sufficient condition for personal identity, so strongly requiring it as a necessary condition seems absurd. For instance, it does seem ridiculous to suggest that because I cannot remember putting my socks on this morning, I am a different person. Reid's 'brave soldier' paradox further reveals holes in Locke's account. In it, Reid gives a situation in which a soldier remembers being a boy whipped at school for stealing, and an old officer remembers being the soldier, but not the boy. If memory is a necessary condition for personal identity, this would require Locke to accept that $A=B$ (boy and soldier), $B=C$ (soldier and officer), but $A \neq C$ (boy and officer) – an absurd statement. Thus, as it fails to understand the impact physical substance can have on the nature of consciousness, and is exposed by Reid to have inconsistencies, I do not find Locke's account of personal identity to be sufficient.

Section C

Question chosen	none	1	2	3
%	2	35	32	31

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	3	1	2	4	5	7	8	6	8	7	7	7	8	5	5	5	3	3	3	1	1	9.5

The general nature of the topics proved to be problematic for many students and often resulted in unfocused essays that contained general observations about technology, consumerism and how people should act. Students were often unsure about what was expected, and they regularly referenced the central issue of their selected prompt in the introduction only, which severely limited their ability to develop a discussion of the topic. In addition to this, students commonly included too many different ideas within their essays and this generally resulted in minimal evaluation of the ideas and arguments referenced. In future, it would be worthwhile for students to be directed towards some practice of the process of selecting fine points within a wider topic and developing those ideas into a detailed and specific line of discussion.

Evaluation was rare, in that many students seemed to think that they were evaluating merely by presenting differing perspectives on the issue they were discussing. This is not evaluation. Evaluation requires the student to critique the perspectives that they provide. If a student suggests that Callicles would promote consumerism, an evaluation would require them to critique the reasoning that Callicles might propose for why consumerism would be worth promoting. Furthermore, simply making a statement that a philosopher has committed a simple error or that they are guilty of

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fallacious logic is poor evaluation. Why is the error or fallacy relevant and how is it damaging to their philosophical standpoint? Students should endeavour to fully detail their thought processes so that it is clear that they understand the issue that they are referring to.

Rhetorical questions were used by many students as a method to engage the reader and ‘frame’ their discussion; however, many of these rhetorical questions were never discussed after they were raised or considered with regard to the student’s ideas. It is advisable to not include questions unless they are absolutely pertinent to the discussion at hand. In addition to this, students are not being encouraged to persuade, they are being encouraged to critically discuss and justify – these require quite different sets of skills and it is important that students understand this difference.

Of the three prompts, Question 2 was handled most commonly in a rudimentary and undeveloped fashion. The prompt framed the discussion and gave the students two opposing positions, which resulted in many polemic essays that merely highlighted that Brock and Abigail disagreed rather than a detailed exploration of the merits and limitations of either of the viewpoints.

Questions 1 and 3 were generally more open-ended, which gave stronger students the opportunity to choose which aspects of the prompts they felt most comfortable discussing and to develop their essays in individualistic ways.

It is worth noting that Callicles’s and Nietzsche’s philosophical positions, while highly relevant to the topics offered in Section C, were often used poorly to disregard compassion for and awareness of others or to promote self-indulgence with little exploration of why they might value this.

Below are the criteria with which all essays were assessed.

Knowledge and understanding of philosophical concepts, viewpoints, arguments and debates relevant to the topic

- To what extent did the student demonstrate knowledge of philosophical viewpoints and debates?
- How well did the student understand and explain philosophical arguments and concepts?

Very high	The student demonstrated knowledge that was comprehensive and in-depth and was used incisively to support arguments. Philosophical arguments and concepts were fully understood.
High	The student demonstrated a secure knowledge of this material. Philosophical arguments and concepts were largely understood.
Medium	The student demonstrated knowledge of philosophical issues, and concepts were generally understood.
Low	The student displayed some knowledge of philosophical issues and there was a basic understanding of the concepts used.
Very low	The student demonstrated a superficial knowledge of philosophical issues but the student displayed only limited understanding of the concepts used.

Critical evaluation of ideas and arguments relevant to the topic

- Did the student evaluate the merits and limitations of selected arguments?
- How relevant was the evaluation?
- To what extent did the student express a relevant, personal response?

Very high	The student developed focused and critical ideas and arguments from a consistently held and well justified perspective relevant to the topic. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was compelling or subtle, with strong evidence of personal reflection.
High	The student developed ideas and arguments from a consistently held perspective. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was appropriate, thoughtful and convincing.
Medium	The student developed ideas and arguments in a sound way and there was a consistent attempt to evaluate them, even if this was not fully developed.
Low	The student developed some ideas and arguments but the development was simple or was asserted without support or reference. There may have been some basic evaluation of the ideas and arguments that were relevant to the selected topic.
Very low	The student developed ideas and arguments in a basic way but there was little or no evaluation.

Selection and use of relevant material and appropriate examples to support the response

- To what extent did the student provide relevant supporting material?
- To what extent did the student provide appropriate examples?

Very high	The student made astute selections of philosophical material and examples.
High	The student selected philosophical material and examples that were mostly relevant.
Medium	The student made some use of relevant supporting material and examples.
Low	The student made use of some supporting material and examples that were not always relevant or appropriate.
Very low	The students included little, if any, philosophical support material.

Development of a coherent and well-reasoned response that addresses the specific demands of the topic How well did the student understand the specific demands of the question?

- How relevant was the argument or discussion to the demands of the question?
- Was the argument or discussion coherent and was it developed in a meaningful way?
- To what extent did the student provide appropriate examples to support their line of reasoning?

Very high	The student showed a full understanding of the specific demands of the question by identifying material that was always relevant. The implications of this material were drawn out in a detailed analysis that provided coherent and meaningful development of the response. Examples were well chosen and compelling in their support of the argument. Counter-arguments were presented in a convincing way.
High	The student showed a clear understanding of the specific demands of the question by identifying relevant material and analysing it in a thoughtful way. Arguments linked together and were largely coherently developed in support of the student's contention. Examples directly supported the overall argument in a persuasive manner. Some counter-arguments were presented.
Medium	The student showed understanding of the specific demands of the question and identified material that was nearly always relevant but it was not always clear how it was being used to support the student's contention in a meaningful way. There was a sound analysis of this material. Examples were appropriate and gave support to the argument.
Low	The student showed some awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified and analysed some relevant material. There was some development of arguments but they were not always focused or coherently expressed. Some appropriate examples were used.
Very low	The student showed little awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified relevant material in a limited way. The discussion was generally undeveloped and often irrelevant to the line of argument. There was little analysis and few or no examples were given.

Use of clear and precise language appropriate to philosophy

- Did the student present the argument in an organised way?
- How clear and precise was the language used by the student?
- To what extent was the language appropriate to philosophy?

Very high	The student presented ideas in a coherent and incisive way, insights were clearly articulated and the argument was focused and sustained. The use of language was precise and fully appropriate to philosophy.
High	The student expressed ideas in a clear and coherent way and insights were clearly articulated. The use of language was effective and appropriate to philosophy.
Medium	The student presented ideas in an organised way and the development of the argument could be followed easily. The use of language was appropriate to philosophy.
Low	The student presented some ideas in an organised manner. There was some clarity of expression, but the argument could not always be followed. The use of language was not always appropriate to philosophy.
Very low	The student expressed some basic ideas but it was not always clear what the argument is trying to convey. The use of language was not appropriate to philosophy.

Despite some repetitive content, the following is an example of a high-scoring response for Question 3 that clearly demonstrates some of the evaluative self-reflection that is so important to philosophical writing.

The prompt quotation asserts boldly that “technology was supposed to make a positive difference,” however this is perhaps not the case. By examining the proposed good-life philosophies of Peter Singer and Nietzsche, I plan in this essay to contest whether or not technology and its progress are apt for making a “positive difference” in the world.

Peter Singer’s good life philosophy is centred on the idea of making a positive difference on the surrounding world; particularly, the difference Singer has in mind is the alleviation of suffering and death caused by famine. In a seemingly watertight three-premise argument, Singer proposes that, given that suffering and death incurred by famine are morally wrong, it is our moral responsibility to use whatever wealth we don’t need to prevent ourselves from dying or suffering of famine to help alleviate the suffering of others. For Singer, progress in technology is inadequate by itself to make a positive difference; it is a moral reevaluation that Singer needs, because without a societal shift in moral values, the progression of technology simply becomes another distraction from the problems at hand, another waste of wealth. According to Singer, then, technology certainly has the potential to make a positive difference, but first society must shift its values: the opinion that donating is praiseworthy and not donating is not blameworthy needs to be shifted to donating being conceived of as expected, and not donating as blameworthy, in order for the world’s resources, including technology, to be put to use and make a positive difference. Technology to Singer has the potential to make a positive difference, however without the moral reevaluation that Singer desires, it may just become another distraction from serious moral problems. However, Singer’s good life is not infallible; he asserts that immediate action must be taken in order to make a positive difference when this is not necessarily the case. A commonly raised issue with Singer is that if I have \$1000 now, I can donate it to save x amount of suffering, but if I invest it wisely or use it to create a technology, cure cancer, etc. I can save x^2 suffering later, shouldn’t I try to save the most suffering possible? Singer disagrees, preferring immediate action to delayed actions, however he also asserts that we should donate to 3rd-world countries in order to make the biggest difference. Singer proposes preferring individuals based on place to help others, what gives him the right to differentiate between present and future individuals’ suffering?

Another important facet of Singer’s philosophy that must be inspected, which ties in nicely with technological progression, is the concept of future prospects. Singer’s philosophy and the progress of technology alike seem to aim towards making life easier, providing an existence that is free of suffering. As a thought-experiment, let us suppose that Singer’s good life was entirely adopted, and all suffering due to famine thereby alleviated – how then can we live a good life? A life without suffering points towards a bland existence, void of any tumultuous excitement or reason to live. Now, while I understand it’s impractical to assume suffering to never exist in the world, I think this thought experiment points out the inadequacy of both Singer’s good life and the conception of technology as simply something designed to make a positive difference; both are simply a means to an end, and the end prospect itself seems to be underwhelming as a state of existence. I place my hope instead in a more tumultuous existence of challenges, suffering, growth and excitement, and look towards a more teleological good life than Peter Singer’s and the progress of technology, if such a thing can exist at all.

Singer’s good life, and the view of technology’s progress towards ultimate convenience, are not dissimilar to Friedrich Nietzsche’s conception of the slave morality. The slave morality, Nietzsche argues, is a morality of utility, that exalts qualities of humility, selflessness, modesty and an underpinning lack of self-affirmation in order to construct a world of equality, built out of fear of pain, inadequacy and power. It is a philosophy built on pity, pity for Man the creature who suffers, needs to eat, and sustain himself. This is quite transparent in Singer’s position, as it does not prioritise the individual but rather the suffering of other less-fortunate individuals, and the progress of technology is very similar in that it aims towards “remov[ing] the need to work much.” However, while Nietzsche sees the slave morality’s pity, claims his pity is of a higher order; where the progress of technology is born out of pity for man the creature, Nietzsche’s pity is for Man the creator. Nietzsche understands that suffering is actually quintessential for the flourishing of man, and Socrates agrees in suggesting punishment is necessary to purge the individual and allow for growth. It is from suffering that the greatest spirits of mankind emerge, and in witnessing technology’s progression towards a life of supreme comfort, he laments that this very comfort will diminish the creative spirit of man. In this sense, technology and its progress is exactly the inverse of the good-life; while it shares the goal of Singer and his slave morality of a progress towards stifling comforts it also lamentably crushes the opportunity for the best in man to flourish. Diamonds are forged under great pressures, and the progression of technology as the quotation suggests, towards “a positive difference,” is destroying the potential for Man to redeem himself in art, or excellent of any form beyond living or aspiring to a comfortable life, rid of suffering which is actually integral to an exciting, burning existence of passion.