

2015 VCE Philosophy examination report

General comments

The majority of questions on the 2015 VCE Philosophy examination were answered well and there were genuine attempts by students to address all aspects of the questions.

Areas of strength and weakness

When students were encouraged to address contemporary implications and applications for the philosophers studied, they often produced insightful comments that highlighted a real interest in the way the philosophy in the set texts interacts with the world around them. General knowledge of the study was reasonable and many students addressed the precise requirements of the questions. Students demonstrated particularly good knowledge of the set texts by Locke and Singer, and Singer was used for many of the essay responses.

Many responses were overly general and were not focused on the specific requirements of the questions. It is important that students make effective use of reading time to organise their thoughts regarding the terms and ideas raised by each prompt. Students made simple errors regarding which philosopher raised which idea, and many responses failed to identify who explored which idea and the purpose the idea served in the wider field of their enquiry. There is still some confusion regarding the difference between assertions that philosophers make and arguments that they use to support those assertions. When asked to deliver an argument from a philosopher, students must endeavour to provide the reasoning process that the philosopher has used to support their original assertion or their conclusion. While there were only a few cases of incorrect text use, some students mistakenly discussed the mind/body philosophers (Descartes, Plato [Phaedo] and Armstrong) with regard to identity and/or similarly confusing the identity philosophers (Locke, Hume, Santideva and Nagasena) with regard to the mind/body problem.

A number of students mistakenly believed that a mere statement of opinion was enough to garner marks. It is important for students of Philosophy to work to explore why they hold the beliefs they do, how they can be supported given the ideas covered by the philosophers, and attempt to rationally justify their position. Simply agreeing with the ideas of a philosopher (those on the selected text list or those who are not) is not justifiable reasoning. If students use the ideas of philosophers, either by expanding on them with personal insights or by merely agreeing, they must detail what is convincing about these views. This problem was particularly apparent in the essay responses.

Specific information

Note: Student responses herein 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 resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Students must be well versed in the excerpts from the selected texts. There is certainly room to explore additional material from the philosophers prescribed for the study, but these ideas should be flagged to all students as additional. The questions in this section encouraged a precise response but also one in which students could express good general knowledge of nearly all of the texts from the study design.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	Average
%	35	65	0.7

Armstrong's philosophical position regarding the mind/body problem is entirely dependent on the value of science. He emphasises this at some length at the beginning of the text allocated by the *VCE Philosophy Study Design*. Because science can achieve consensus regarding specific issues while other fields (philosophy, literature, religion) cannot, he believes that science should be given 'peculiar authority' in the pursuit of answers. Students who understood the role of consensus in the authority that Armstrong wants to give science were rewarded.

However, there were many students who mistakenly believed that Armstrong's faith in science was to do with its ability to achieve 'truth'. This is entirely misleading for the sake of Armstrong's work (more importantly, it is flagged by Armstrong in the footnote referring to Thomas Kuhn). Armstrong is aware of science's distinct limitations. He merely believes it is more likely to provide us with insight due to its testable nature and the agreement it can generate.

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

Armstrong places faith in the authority of science because he believes it provides our "best clue", as it is the only field wherein a universal consensus is agreed upon by educated professionals after close examination of evidence.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	32	24	25	19	1.3

Students showed a good general knowledge of Armstrong's understanding of the way the mind works and its existence as a product of the central nervous system. However, many students did not address the specifics of the question. Many students were unclear about the purpose of the driving example or how it fits within Armstrong's philosophical framework, and there were many answers that failed to correctly identify that the prompt was specifically interested in the way Armstrong understands consciousness and perception.

To this end, Armstrong provides an account of what he considers to be a major criticism of his physicalist stance. He does this to detail his awareness that his position 'cannot deal with the consciousness that we normally enjoy'. For students to answer this question fully they needed to understand that Armstrong's conception of consciousness is a process by which the brain is aware of its perceptions. In this sense he suggests that one may drive in a subconscious state – unaware of the actions required to keep the car on the road, but performing them nonetheless (incidentally, a subconscious state is distinctly different from an unconscious state and it is important that students understand this distinction). Consciousness occurs when the driver becomes acutely aware of driving and they 'come to'. Armstrong explains this as one part of the mind observing another part – the conscious part looking at the subconscious part.

Students often mistakenly discussed perceptions as observations of the real world, where Armstrong's link between perception and consciousness is one of internal observation. The conscious state might be considering external stimuli but the perceptive element is specifically related to awareness of the processes that the brain states are enabling.

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

Armstrong argues that there are two levels of mental processing that occur in our minds, and he uses the driving example to show this. The first level is the basic perception of the outside world, it is this basic level of mental processing that allows us to drive the car, however he then explains how, as we are not consciously aware we are driving the car, something else must be missing. This is what he labels consciousness, our awareness of our own awareness of the road. He describes this consciousness as a "self-scanning mechanism" of the brain that allows us to be aware of our own thoughts and perceptions. Both of these processes he claims are purely physico-chemical processes occurring in the brain as we perceive and think.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	26	33	41	1.2

Many students understood the connection between identity and a continuity of consciousness maintained through memory over time, and that the separated finger example is a challenge to bodily identity (much like the prince and the cobbler) but not personal identity. The problems that arose with this question were more often a result of poor content knowledge (not knowing the example at all) or clumsy phrasing of how the example related to personal identity. Students could discuss either the first iteration of the example, where consciousness travels with the separated finger resulting in the finger maintaining the identity of the person, or the second version in which Locke highlights simply that if the finger does not contain the memories and consciousness of the person then it is no longer the person. Which version was used was unimportant, provided there was some discussion of one of them and that the connection was made between the separating of the finger and the maintenance **or** disruption of personal identity.

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

Locke argues that personal identity consists in continuity of consciousness for which memory is necessary. If my finger was severed, but the memories and thus consciousness remain in my central being, I am still the same person – the loss of matter does not impact on my continuity of memory. Thus, Locke concludes that personal identity depends not on continuity of substance but on continuity of consciousness.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	18	18	22	20	22	2.1

Many students responded to the precise requirements of the question and endeavoured to give thorough and insightful responses. A student who spoke only of one of the two philosophers required could not score any marks as an explanation of either Locke or Hume in isolation did not address the question. Most responses discussed differences between the two philosophers, often using the majority of the space provided to emphasise that Locke sees memory as fundamental to the maintenance of identity, while Hume sees it as a product that individuals create as a justification of identity. However, it was the similarities between the philosophers that were more problematic. Often, when students set out to identify a similarity they ended up exploring a difference instead. In fact, the similarities that the two of them possess are quite subtle and do not allow for the depth of discussion that their differences enable.

Both Locke and Hume understand that identity exists in some sense. For Locke it is the continuity of consciousness over time as supported by memory and for Hume it is the awareness that in any distinct moment of perception there is an identity that is aware. Hume does not think that this necessitates an ongoing identity, merely that there is a bundle of perceptions that in that fleeting moment would be an identity of sorts.

The other subtle angle on this relates to the idea that memory plays a role in the two philosopher's understanding of personal identity. This may be more difficult to explain because their understanding of memory is quite different, but many students opted for this kind of response. Memory for Locke is essential to the maintenance of a self, whereas for Hume it is only as valuable as any other perception and just as unreliable for the continuity of identity over time, but it can act as a method by which an identity may be temporarily defined.

It is important that if students use words such as 'necessary' or 'sufficient' in the philosophical sense they must understand what they mean. A necessary condition is one that is required for something else to be the case but there may be other things that are also required. Whereas, a sufficient condition is one that enables something else to be the case but it is not the only method by which this may be achieved.

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

Locke and Hume both agree that personal identity arises from our memories. Locke illustrates this view in the prince and cobbler thought experiment, and Hume similarly argues that personal identity is the result of resemblance, contiguity and causation, which all arise out of memory. However, the philosophers differ in their views on this concept of self's verifiability. Locke believes that self does exist, as long as we have a continuity of consciousness and remember being our past self. Hume, however, believes we wrongly prescribe identity where there is none. Because the human perceptions are in a "perpetual flux and movement," Hume believed it was impossible to possess a continuous self because the "bundle" of perceptions we are made up of are constantly changing. Self, Hume argued was only present in a single instant, and then becomes a new self as seen as our perceptions changed, thus this self is not continuous.

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	59	41	0.4

Socrates's views on why 'doing wrong is more contemptible than suffering wrong' are central to the Gorgias excerpt prescribed in the study design, which meant that students who were well versed in the text handled this question quite well. Answers that recounted various views and arguments that Socrates gives throughout the text were generally unfocused, which was unacceptable given the precise nature of the question. At its essence, Socrates gives three reasons for upholding this belief – the first two reasons are early on in the excerpt, while the third is near its conclusion.

Socrates states that those who do wrong taint their soul, leading to internal disorder, and that they require punishment in order to learn from their error and to realign themselves in the pursuit of the good. Similarly, he infers that the rules and conventions decreed by society exist by virtue of the good of the people; hence to do wrong is out of sync with the accepted views of society. Lastly, Socrates, who is interested in the value of order and discipline, highlights that these qualities align one with the ordered universe and that wrongs, which lead to disorder, undermine this alignment. All three of these positions are additionally supported by the notion that to suffer does not disrupt the soul or damage one's personal pursuit of the good.

Many responses contained a misunderstanding of what Socrates means by suffering and what is often understood by the term. Socrates is not endorsing suffering, nor is he suggesting that one cannot seek to limit or avoid their own suffering. He merely wants to emphasise that to choose to

do wrong is personally damaging and, in this sense, for example, theft is worse than starvation. This does not mean that he is promoting starvation. He is trying to educate Callicles to understand that, in this case, theft for good reasons does not change the fact that it is still theft and it is still the action of someone who lacks discipline. In contrast, he believes that there is likely no case where one could suggest that the person who suffers is at fault and needs to be further punished so that they might learn from their mistake.

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

Socrates believes that doing wrong reveals a disorderly, disorganised mind, a bad mind which, in turn, reveals a bad life. Thus, it is better to suffer wrong than to know one is in a state of disorder.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	12	36	35	17	1.6

There were many high-scoring responses to this question and most students understood the importance of taking a stance on the issue. However, many responses relied entirely on assertions of unsubstantiated or unjustified beliefs rather than providing a detailed exploration of the student's reasoning for taking their particular stance. Merely agreeing with a philosopher's views without any exploration of why those views are better than any alternative is a case of poor reasoning, and students should be encouraged to develop their answers accordingly so as to best demonstrate critical thinking and reflection.

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

I agree that it is more contemptible to do wrong than to suffer it, as for it to be less contemptible to do wrong would allow for willfully destructive acts to be considered less contemptible than the suffering and negative results they cause. For example, it is better than a mother bird to feed its young to its own suffering in order to care for those weaker than it and allow for the continuation of the species. It would surely be contemptible for the mother bird to deny its young their food, causing them to suffer and condemning the species of bird to extinction.

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	17	38	46	1.3

Students answered this question reasonably well, and there were genuine efforts to consider Nietzsche's response to Singer's position in a measured and well-considered way. Some of the subtlety of Nietzsche's philosophy was understood and many students understood that while Nietzsche would have problems with the views expressed, he might not disregard them completely. Many highlighted that Nietzsche values the individual's ability to make their own decisions and that he could not deny giving to the point of marginal utility, provided the person involved has made that decision without any sense of bad conscience. Students who fixated on Nietzsche's interest in suffering as a means for growth also raised some strong concerns; however, it is important to remember that Nietzsche does not value suffering in and of itself – it is a means to promote personal growth and self-actualisation. Suffering for the sake of it or in the sense that it will lead inexorably to death, as was the case for many Bengali refugees, is not valuable to Nietzsche's philosophy and is certainly not something that he would endorse.

Furthermore, many students focused too closely on wider concepts from Nietzsche's other works. While these may serve to elucidate the intricacies of his philosophy, students should be mindful that they are often used in very specific ways for very specific reasons. Merely adopting a concept

like the Übermensch, without some detail to demonstrate the student's understanding of such an idea, is unlikely to assist in the quality of the answer they provide.

Students who opted to simply attack Singer, or endorse Nietzsche without relevance to the ideas discussed in the quotation, missed the purpose of the question.

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

Nietzsche would see the ideas above as an example of herd morality, rejecting the ideas. Nietzsche argues the herd as come to value pity, obedience, and equality as they protect the herd from danger. Due to this emphasis on comfort and safety the herd pities those who suffer and seek to eradicate the causes of it, just as Singer is suggesting by advocating our moral obligation to reduce the suffering of the Bengali child. This is a problem as this attitude means suffering loses its place as a fertilizer for growth in pursuit of higher ideals.

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	18	35	26	16	2.3

Students generally understood the importance of developing a stance and their responses regularly worked to explore the merits of a particular position. Students should be mindful of supporting any distinct philosophical position without awareness of its limitations. It is uncritical and unsophisticated to accept a viewpoint with no knowledge of the reasons why that viewpoint is not universally held. This question required critical, well-reasoned recognition of what is valuable in a particular viewpoint and, by extension, why that value makes the viewpoint more convincing regardless of other shortcomings.

Students who were less confident of the philosophy in question provided unsubstantiated opinions with little rational exploration as to why that opinion might lead to a position regarding whose philosophy is more convincing. There were also many responses that started by stating that one philosopher's view was more convincing and then proceed to attack the theoretically opposing position without providing any clarification for why the first position was any good. Additional problems that arose in this style of response were those that sought to isolate singular remarks without context from a particular philosopher in order to demonstrate why an opposing position was better.

It is perhaps worth reminding students that their choice of who is most convincing was not integral to scoring highly. Rather, it was the ability to rationally develop reasoning and support a standpoint that was rewarded.

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

Nietzsche's view appears to be more compelling as it is more focussed upon the individual rather than a global responsibility to suffer in order to alleviate some suffering of others. Nietzsches account of the good life places the locus of growth and positivity on oneself and our actions. Singer seems to dismiss the role that personal identity has in a good life instead focussing on responsibilities to others, which is doubtful as to whether or not can provide a 'good life' for the person originally. Secondly, Nietzsche's account of morality as "birthed in fear" seems to align with modern day morality for example peoples fear of death therefore anything that makes one look young is good and any signs of age (grey hair, wrinkles) are bad/evil. What follows is that such a morality system is inconsistent with a "good" life and as such Singer's argument for a normative change more aligned with this flawed system, is less appealing than Nietzsches account.

Section B

Section B of the 2015 examination provided scope for students to display their philosophical knowledge in some depth. Both questions involved several distinct parts that required students to demonstrate both knowledge of the selected texts and an ability to apply that knowledge to advancements in scientific understanding or contemporary issues that related to the ideas in question. This style of questioning made for some truly insightful responses and required students to carefully consider the various points of discussion raised in each question and how they might best address them all in a succinct and nuanced fashion.

Many students overcommitted to some of the requirements of the question, such as outlining a philosophical position, at the cost of fully developing other aspects of the question. In particular, there were many responses that gave only a cursory mention to developments in modern science for Question 1 and relevant contemporary debate for Question 2.

It is a skill to learn how best to unpack what is required by these types of questions. Even though there were responses that provided limited detail for aspects of the prompts, the majority of students attempted all of the aspects of both questions.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	10	6	7	8	11	13	15	12	9	6	4	4.9

To address this question effectively students needed to outline one argument from Socrates and one argument from Descartes that were connected to the relationship between the mind or psyche and the body. They were then expected to discuss the plausibility of these arguments with regard to some kind of specific scientific development.

Most students handled the outline quite well and highlighted how the various arguments provided a position on the relationship between the mind or psyche and the body. However, it was the second half of the question that was more difficult for students.

Students were asked only for an outline of an argument from Socrates and one from Descartes. Outlining an argument is comprehension rather than philosophy. Students were not required to evaluate the arguments but many spent too much time on this part of the question.

Furthermore, cursory comments about science in general did not satisfy the specificity of the question, which asked for one or more developments in modern science. The specificity of this request undermined responses that merely stated that science is a physical medium which undermines any argument for a non-physical mind. Similarly, appeals to Armstrong's text without any specific notion of the science that enabled him to develop his position were not acceptable. Alternatively, students who wanted to make use of Armstrong's position should have mentioned developments in neuroscience or the ability to scan the brain and draw correlations between activities or emotions with the distinct stimulation of areas of the brain. These ideas could have been used to bolster the position that science has made inroads in support of the belief that the brain and the mind are fundamentally identical.

However, it is worth noting that Armstrong is posing an argument that relies on supposed science rather than demonstrative examples – for him, the consensus that science achieves is helpful for giving us a reason to believe in it and, as such, Armstrong gives us a sufficient explanation of a form of mind that he believes is detailed enough. At no point does he demonstrate that this explanation or the methods used to achieve it are necessary for an understanding of the mind, although he certainly believes they could be. Both Descartes and Socrates would highlight, with

varying degrees of success, that knowledge of ‘something’ that could be called the mind can be had without scientific assistance.

The students who made use of scientific examples and connected issues raised by those examples for the relationship between the mind or psyche and the body as expressed by Socrates and Descartes were in a strong position with regard to the latter half of this question.

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

Socrates’ “Argument of Affinity” outlines the different respective natures of the “soul” and “body”. The soul is “akin” to the Forms, so it is “divine”, “eternal”, “invisible”, “incomposite” and intangible, whereas the body is “composite”, “visible” and variable. The body, being physical can be destroyed whereas the soul is “immune to destruction”, and the soul is the “master” of the body (“slave”). In light of the advent of modern science, particularly the proliferation of neuroscience, the plausibility of Socrates’ arguments have been challenged, as evidenced has been produced suggesting the physicality of the brain. However, evidence against this is also prevalent. Anecdotes of near death experiences, and out of body experience seem to support Socrates’ conception of the soul. It also seems unlikely that mental events, such as experiencing music, can be accounted for in terms of physical laws. Could a neuroscientist capture this empirically in your mind? It seems impossible. Plato’s arguments are still plausible as they resonate with many people, they permeate western culture as well as affirming many religious beliefs. They provide purpose in the lives of many and seem to account for first person experiences greater than any third person, scientific account could. Descartes’ Wax Argument asserts that, through the observations occurring during a piece of wax melting, we can conclude that our certain “minds” are better known than the rest of our bodies, and that through “mental scrutiny” and “judgement” we can know things to a greater extent than we could through the dubitable “senses”. In light of the advances in neuroscience, advocating for the physicality of the brain, Descartes’ arguments are still plausible as we have an intuitive privileged access to our thoughts, whereas our bodies can be better understood by scientists as it is an outward arena. Cartesian dualism is highly plausible as it allows our sense of who we are to transcend our physical states, as we know intuitively that our minds can know things to a greater extent than the senses, as they can be wrong. For example, we see a straw in a glass of water appearing bent, however we judge it to still be straight even though our sense tell us otherwise.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	14	8	11	11	12	13	12	8	6	4	3	4.1

Responses to this question regularly gave a good outline of one or both of the Buddhist conceptions of identity, and many answers made good use of the Santideva excerpt. There was also a genuine attempt to evaluate the internal logic of the Buddhist views.

Students who made use of Nagasena generally used the chariot example to great effect. However, there were many responses that discussed the transference of dharma, as outlined by the milk to ghee, the light through the night and the stolen mangoes examples in order to explain Nagasena’s conception of identity. These examples are not concerned with the Buddhist conception of identity but rather the transference of energy in the development of a framework for explaining moral responsibility, and as such, students who did not couple these examples with earlier comments in the text regarding the ‘no self’ had difficulty attaining marks for the first part of the question. Santideva’s position, that suffering is something that is universally considered bad and in the process of eliminating all suffering one necessarily removes the concept of identity, was generally well handled.

Even though Santideva’s position was often explained quite well, there was generally little evaluation of the merits and limitations of his view. On the other hand, Nagasena was often

evaluated with some detail and many students appeared to have a strong grasp of the problems that arise within the dialogue with King Milinda.

The second half of this prompt caused similar problems to those apparent in Question 1 of Section B. Students often did not discuss the implications of the Buddhist conceptions of identity for a relevant contemporary debate. Those who did attempt this often ignored the implications and merely used a contemporary debate to challenge the Buddhist viewpoint. Furthermore, there was much confusion about what was meant by the term 'relevant contemporary debate'. A relevant contemporary debate for identity could focus on, for example, issues of moral responsibility related to specific events such as the refugee crisis or the justice system, or they might relate to the way that individuals are identified for means of travel or payment – in no way are these examples exhaustive. It was also important for students to understand that generalisations, such as 'moral responsibility' without any distinct focal point, were not considered contemporary points of debate.

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

Nagasena offers a sceptical view of personal identity suggesting that in ultimate reality, there is no self. In breaking down and examining the part of a person, no person itself is apprehended, either as the sum of the parts or any one of the parts. This is analogous to breaking down the parts of a chariot and finding that there is no chariot in ultimate reality, as the chariot is not any of the parts nor the sum of its parts. For Nagasena, a 'person' is like a 'chariot', in being a conventional designator for a group of functioning parts which in reality have no identity. Nagasena argues that despite the lack of persons however, there nevertheless exists moral responsibility, illustrating this through an analogy where a man steals mangoes and plants them. Though the planted mangoes are not the same as the stolen ones the man still deserves punishment, as the planted mangoes have arisen because of the stolen ones. Hence, moral responsibility is confirmed in the causal links between phenomena. Nagasena's view has implications for the contemporary debate over whether we sought to punish elderly former Nazis, who have little recollection of the crimes they committed, and are considered by some to be no longer morally responsible as they are not the same person as in their youth. Nagasena's view implies that these former Nazis nevertheless must be punished, as they are causally linked with their past actions and still responsible. Is Nagasena's view of identity convincing? I suggest that it is not for 2 reasons. Firstly, there seems to be a disanalogy between objects like chariots and subjects like persons, such that a person cannot merely be separated into distinct parts. While physical objects are constantly in flux and have no essence, for a person what persists is the subjective standpoint that is not reducible to various unrelated parts. Hence, persons, unlike chariots, can be said to have an essential and persisting element. Additionally, Nagasena's empirical method of looking at the parts of a person assumes that the skandhas comprehensively encompass all the parts of a person. This may not be true, such that the person itself is not apprehended in the skandhas precisely because it cannot be apprehended in the skandhas. As Hindu philosophers argued, the self may not be the object of perception because it is doing the perceiving. Hence, Nagasena's argument is unconvincing, and its implications for whether formers Nazis should be punished is undermined.

Section C

Question chosen	0	1	2	3
%	1	41	19	38

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

The essay topics for 2015 provided much scope for students to think about and discuss the ways that philosophy relates to issues facing the world today. The general nature of the prompts meant that much of the construction and development of the student's contention relied on their ability to effectively frame their thoughts into a cohesive and coherent argument.

Given the general nature of the prompts, essays that did not develop a distinct contention or develop into a full argument were generally unfocused, lacking in both specificity and depth. It was not enough to merely recite the ideas or arguments given by philosophers from the study design with no attempt to relate their views to the prompt selected. This is an ongoing issue in Philosophy and the number of students who constructed their essays in this uncritical manner continues to be a concern.

In addition to this, many responses failed to address the whole prompt, often providing generic discussions of self-interest without exploring the 'real purpose of life', or technology without discussing its potentially 'dehumanising' characteristics and how that might influence a person's ability to be virtuous, or consumerist culture without any allusion to how this challenges the way a person understands 'true wealth and freedom'. Carefully reading the question is integral to the development of a relevant and insightful essay.

Many essays relied too heavily on unsubstantiated opinions in the development of a bold stance. Philosophy students should be aware that a stance can only be bold and effective if it is also supported by reasoning and discussion. The philosophers were often used in unsophisticated ways rather than as relevant points of reference in support of a greater line of discussion. There is real skill involved in the development of a philosophical essay. Essays that merely parroted ideas without evaluative and critical discussion did not score well.

Question 1

The following is an example of a high-scoring response that demonstrates a good, clear understanding of the philosophical positions referenced, and the student demonstrates a genuine effort to relate their discussion to problems facing the contemporary world. There are certainly areas in which the student might have tightened up their discussion in favour of better focusing their response to the specifics of the prompt. However, it is clear that the student decided to focus on the topic in the broad sense of self-interest as expressed through the pursuit of individual recognition and satisfaction, and they handled this very well.

In the 21st century, the attention of most of the human population is overwhelmingly focused inwards. Many of us seek nothing more than to make money and satisfy our own individual interests. But is this the best way to live? Ancient Greek Philosopher Callicles believes that it is, and would disagree with the statement's condemnation of "self-absorption", for he argues that the good life is one where we seek to indulge and fulfil our own desires and interests. In contrast, Australian philosopher Peter Singer believes that in order to live a good life we must go beyond "self-interest" and fulfil our moral obligation to help others. In this essay I will affirm the statement that "egoism is dangerous" by showing the pitfalls of a life of self-interested hedonism, that Callicles promotes. In turn, I will purport to show that we have an obligation to help others, as Singer suggests, and that fulfilling this duty can be tremendously rewarding and help us to discern the true "purpose of life".

Firstly, let us consider the self-interested hedonistic lifestyle proposed by Callicles. According to Callicles, the good life is one in which we seek to maximise our potential to feel pleasure through the expansion of our desires. Hence, Callicles would say that we have no obligation to help others and should only do so if it brings us pleasure and aligns with our desires. For, Callicles points out that the idea of this duty to help those less fortunate than ourselves, is only a convention created by the weak, in order to protect themselves from being dominated by the strong. However, in nature might is right; that is, in nature the strong take more and dominate the weak. Callicles suggests that humans too should abide by this natural law. Thus, Callicles

would disagree that those who focus on themselves and their own desires are “missing” the point of life, as for Callicles the good life is one where we do only look at our own desires.

However, there are many pitfalls to the self-interested lifestyle Callicles is suggesting, particularly when we consider the extent of the suffering of other. The lifestyle Callicles promotes is not unlike what we see many people living in reality. Many people in affluent society are using their wealth to indulge their own materialistic desires, rather than to help to relieve famine and suffering. For instance, while many people in the western world focus on accumulating personal wealth, approximately 1.3 billion people are living in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 US dollars a day. Moreover, while many people in affluent society are fixated with keeping up with the latest trends and having the newest gadgets, many people in the developing world lack basic human needs, such as access to safe drinking water. As a result, there is a high prevalence of water-borne diseases, such as diarrhea, pneumonia and tuberculosis, affecting the health and lives of people in the developing world, which would otherwise easily be prevented through donations from people in affluent society, going toward cost effective solutions, such as vaccines and simple antibiotics. Instead we largely continue to spend our wealth on ourselves. This is absurd and morally unjustifiable, for surely the right for basic human needs, such as water, shelter, food and healthcare, takes precedence over the rights of others to accumulate wealth and property. Thus, the self-interested life Callicles’ suggests is highly destructive and morally unjustifiable.

Now, let us consider the view of Singer who argues that we do have a moral obligation to help others. Singer begins by establishing that suffering and death from a lack of food, shelter and medical aid is inherently bad. He then argues that we have an obligation to prevent something bad from happening, if we can do so without sacrificing something of comparable moral importance. Singer further illustrates this point by asking the reader to imagine that they are walking by a pond and see a child drowning. Singer highlights that it is relatively uncontroversial that we should be considered morally obliged to help the child, even if it means getting our new clothes dirty. He then draws a parallel case to all the people suffering from famine and hunger on the other side of the world and argues that there are no important differences between the two cases. If we accept Singer’s principle then the traditional distinction between charity and duty no longer stands. For the good life, according to Singer, is not simply one where we don’t harm others, don’t kill others, don’t steal from others – it is also one where we help others if we have the ability to do so.

Many of the world’s religions recognise altruism as an important ideal. Indeed, despite the differing world views among religion, helping others, is something that they all seem to agree upon. For instance, one of the most renowned Christian teachings, “you shall love your neighbour as you love yourself”, emphasises just how important considering the needs of others is. Also, the notion in the Bible that it is “more blessed to give than to receive”, indicates not only should we help others, but by doing so we are leading more purposeful lives, as altruism can also be tremendously rewarding. Although, any religious doctrinal set of rules comes with the difficulty of having to justify a belief in God, the widespread consensus among world religions and their endorsement of altruism adds great weight to the notion that part of living a good life must include looking beyond our self and our own interests and consider the needs of others.

The obligation to help others is often seen as highly demanding and onerous, however perhaps we are looking at it in the wrong way – for there is evidence to suggest that helping others can also be genuinely rewarding. An scientific experiment conducted by Elizabeth Dunn demonstrates that giving to others can be pleasurable. In the experiment Dunn gave each of her test subjects \$20 and asked them to either go spend it on themselves or on someone else. The subjects who spent the money on others, rather than themselves, reported higher levels of happiness. Thus, indicating that giving to others can also be personally rewarding. For simply knowing that our actions can amount to something positive can enrich our lives.

In addition, helping others can also be financially rewarding for the donor as well as the recipient, in the long term. For example, after a devastating war, South Korea was in ashes and

had become one of the poorest nations in the world, with a per capita income of \$64 US dollars. After this, South Korea became one of the biggest recipients of foreign aid, receiving financial support from many countries internationally, including Australia. Since then, South Korea has become one of Asia's largest economies and a major global trade partner with Australia, buying millions of dollars worth of our products each year – boosting our economy and our international relations. Thus, highlighting that whilst giving to others may be an obligation, it can also be rewarding.

Ultimately, in this essay it has been affirmed that a life of self-interest that Callicles promotes, is highly destructive and morally unjustifiable, and hence not the best way to live. Instead, it has been shown that in order to live a good a more purposeful life, we should look beyond our own individual desires and seek to help others and fulfil our moral obligation to prevent the suffering of others as Singer suggests. Finally, it has also been highlighted that giving to others can also be tremendously rewarding for the donor, as well as the recipient. Thus, in order to live a good life in the 21st century we must abandon the self-interested culture and consider the needs of others, so that we may live more purpose filled and meaningful lives.

Question 2

The following is a mid- to high-scoring response that highlights the type of analysis and evaluation that students should be striving to achieve. There are many problems with the essay, but the student makes a good attempt to fully grapple with the ideas as presented in the prompt and there is a genuine effort to explore the problems within each philosophical position raised – even though some of these details are overly simplistic and undeveloped.

Although Aristotle asserts that our excessive reliance on technology is dehumanising us and compromising our capacity to be virtuous participants in society, I believe that technology is not dehumanising us but instead enables us to better achieve a good life. This is supported by the philosophical ideas of Peter Singer, who believes a good life is one of helping others. Aristotle believes the key to a good life is happiness which we achieve through virtue, however our ability to act virtuous is hindered by our use of technology. Whereas Singer would believe technology helps us in helping others and therefore act in virtue.

The ongoing developments in technology continue to provide the world with greater access to desired things with ease. Technology has allowed society to greatly increase their consumerism habits through online shopping. It is predicted that in 5 years Australia's expenditure online will grow by \$3 billion. Whilst although to many this may be perceived as a good thing, Aristotle is likely to argue that the fast easy access to material goods is hindering our ability to act virtuously and is dehumanising. Aristotle contends in "Nicomachean Ethics Book I and Book II" that although some external goods are required to help us live a virtuous life, we must focus not on material goods and consumerism which is promoted by technology, but enacting virtuous. Aristotle argues that for every action & feeling there are two vices, one of excess & one of deficiency. In order to act virtuous we must find a mean between the two vices. For example for courage, the deficiency is cowardice and the excess is rashness. Once we find the mean and acting in virtue becomes a disposition, Aristotle believes that we will achieve happiness and thus a good life. Thus, Aristotle is likely to believe that technology is merely a distraction from finding the mean and instead leads individuals towards to vice of excess as they participate in consumerism & become reliant on technology. Therefore Aristotle's philosophy holds the view that technology is a distraction which is dehumanising and compromises our ability to act in virtue.

I find the views of Aristotle in relation to technology and its effect on our ability to live a good life to be problematic. Although technology may be a distraction to some, it does not hinder the quality of human life and one's ability to achieve a good life. I do not find Aristotle's account of the good life to be plausible as acting in virtue does not lead to a good life. Individuals may live a life of acting virtuous however they may never achieve happiness and live a good life, whereas others may never do virtuous acts however achieve happiness and thus live a good life. For example, Nelson Mandela lived a life of virtue and avoided both excess and deficiency

however was imprisoned for a crime he never committed for a majority of his lifespan. Nelson lived in horrible circumstances whilst in prison and was not happy not living a good life despite a life time of acting in virtue. Whereas in comparison someone such as reality tv star Kim Kardashian, is not a virtuous person and lives a life of external goods and is happy. Therefore a virtuous life is not always a life of happiness and ultimately a good life. Consequently Aristotles viewing of technology hindering the good life is unsound as a good life is not one of acting in virtue.

On the other hand Singer's philosophy supports the view of technology enhancing individuals to help others through websites such as Free Rice in which individuals are asked a series of basic questions and each question which is right donates 5 grains of rice to help famine. There are also many other means in which technology can assist us to help others who are suffering. Singer is likely to take a critical view of society and its morals rather than a critical view of technology. Singer contends that if we have the ability to help relieve the suffering of others than we ought, morally to do so. However the real problem with society failing to help others and living a good life is not due to the increase reliance on technology but the morals of society. Singer argues that our ideals on charity and duty and the line between the two is not morally correct. We see helping others as charity which we should be praised for rather than a duty for should be condemned for not doing. If the morals within society were changed and giving to others who are suffering is considered a duty than technology would be used appropriately to significantly aid individuals in living a good life rather than dehumanising. Therefore, Singer is likely to believe that it is not our reliance on technology, but our morals that hinder us from being virtuous participants of society.

Singer's argument for a good life being one of helping others is problematic as not all suffering is bad, but instead can be beneficial to growth. Singer makes the assumption that suffering is bad and that we must avoid it for ourselves and others as we should prevent bad things. However, not all suffering is bad and can instead contribute to an individuals personal growth. For example, suffering from drug addiction is beneficial to the individual with the drug addiction as once they over-come drug addiction which is often considered the lowest point in their life, the individuals develop ambitions for their life that they never had before. Although drug addiction creates suffering for all those involved it does result in growth of the individual and becomes beneficial. This is supported by Nietzsche's philosophy as he contends that suffering should not be avoided but used by the individual to become a master. Thus, Singer's argument for technologies positive effect on a good life is problematic as not all suffering should be avoided.

However, Singer's assertion is ultimately sound as without viewing suffering as a bad thing and having help from others to over come suffering, individuals would not benefit from suffering. As discussed previously someone with drug addiction can use the suffering caused by the addiction to their benefit by becoming ambitious to do something productive with their life. However, the person with drug addiction first needs the help of others such as family and doctors in order to overcome the addiction and suffering in order for it to become beneficial. Therefore although some suffering is beneficial and should not be avoided we should still help alleviate suffering of others to the best of our ability in order to allow the person who suffered to be benefited as well as live a good life. Consequently although Singers argument is problematic, his view of the good life and technologies influence is plausible.

It is established that although Aristotle contends that technology has a negative effect on humans lives as it hinders our ability to act in virtue, I believe that when used for the right reasons technology assists individuals in living a good life. This is supported by Singer who gives the most compelling response to the statement "Excessive reliance on technology is dehumanising us and compromising our capacity to be virtuous participants in society".

Question 3

The following high-scoring response demonstrates a good understanding of the philosophical material coupled with a relatively insightful and well-reasoned personal reflection on the ideas

represented in the prompt. There is a clear effort to develop the ideas presented into a complete discussion and the student's ability to critically explore the positions raised is commendable.

In the 21st Century an increasingly desperate desire to acquire possessions, and an exponentially growing consumer culture, has led to the belief that 'he who dies with the most toys wins!' The idea that material prosperity and possessions can provide us with true happiness and freedom has now become ingrained in our individual, family and community life. However, we must question such a doctrine, and consider whether consumerism really does increase our chances of living a good life. In this essay I will consider Callicles' likely support of consumer culture, and demonstrate how it is fundamentally flawed. I intend to illustrate how ultimately our wealth is found in things that we cannot buy or own; this is what we should pursue in order to live a fulfilling and meaningful existence.

Let us first consider why Callicles would likely applaud consumer culture, and why he may think that it provides us with more 'freedom' than ever. He argues that the best possible existence for a human being is one where we 'expand' our desires as much as possible, then devote the remainder of our lives to fulfilling them. This maximises our ability to feel pleasure and so be happy. The extensive range of products which a consumer culture offers its affluent citizens, such as perfumes, make-up, branded clothing and fancy cars, certainly makes it easy for individuals to indulge and receive instant gratifications. Callicles would thoroughly endorse this. Moreover, rhetoricians in the advertising industry, in addition to the 3,500 ads we are exposed to each day allow our desires to grow at a previously unprecedented rate. Not long after we buy the latest iPhone for example, do we crave the newer and more sleek model. Thus, Callicles would agree with the given statement, arguing that consumerism allows our desires to swell, and provides more opportunity and 'freedom to fulfil them'.

It is evident that many people in affluent Western societies share Callicles' belief that material possessions and on demand products can provide us with more pleasure and consequently more meaningful lives. Ostensibly, this view is very appealing, especially when we consider the joy a great deal of people derive from shopping sprees, and the concept of 'retail therapy'. Consumerism allows people to fulfil their wants rather than just their needs, and this is commonly perceived as a privilege. As a result, we often hear friends or family members speak of 'wealth' and fulfilment as if they were directly dependent on the amount of material things they possessed.

However, we must remember that beyond the shallow allure of a 'consumer culture' there are many dystopian aspects to it. Indeed Socrates does appear right in suggesting that such a life where we are constantly craving pleasure appears futile and meaningless, like a gully bird that eats as it excretes. When we reflect on our own tendency to be wound up in the consumer lifestyle we should always remind ourselves of the lessons we were taught during our upbringing, or in primary school... What happened to the emphasis we used to place on leaving a legacy with the world, on 'making our mark'. It seems that consumerism, and Callicles' hedonistic lifestyle, only promotes leaving the biggest pile of junk at the end of our lives. Surely, as the statement suggests this is not true wealth. This simply seems like artificial, temporary satisfaction.

One may also question the 'freedom' which some, such as Callicles, believe that the consumer lifestyle provides us with. With the introduction of easier access to credit people are now able to finance a lifestyle far beyond what they are actually capable of. However, this has left countless individuals crippled by debt; figures suggest that Australian's have a cumulative debt of approximately \$32 billion. Surely this is not a 'freedom' – having been roped into the relentless cycle of purchasing and throwing away goods it seems that those who unthinkingly participate in a consumer culture are condemned to a life of enslavement.

The city of Ladakh, a town in the Himalayas, is a prime example of how introducing commercialisation and industry in the 1970s destroyed the delicate balance of a community where the majority were once happy. Parallel to the growth in the consumer culture was an

increase in depression and unemployment rates. The ethos of consumerism continues to encroach upon such communities, inhibiting their ability to thrive culturally, spiritually and mentally; the true riches in life.

Whilst philosopher Kate Soper recognises, like many other people, that pleasure is the end of human life, her theory of alternative hedonism is a useful one to consider here. Soper argues that consumerism leads to overwork and stress, evidently things which do not ensure our freedom or happiness. Instead, she suggests that we should look for alternative sources for pleasure; ones which are more considered and ecologically sustainable. Instead of going out and buying the latest T.V., for example, one should instead look to spend time with family and friends, and devote more of our lives to working, leisurely, on personal projects. Such a suggestion ensures that we avoid the pitfalls of consumerism, and does still seem to align with how we are instinctively drawn to a pleasurable lifestyle.

Indeed, as I sit in this exam room, considering what it means to me to be 'truly wealthy', the conclusion I reach is not one of material indulgence, which Callicles' advocates for but a view similar to Soper's. What does it mean to me to live a good life, and how will I spend my next 80 or so years? Hopefully, not in a shopping centre. Not working endlessly to purchase goods to satisfy desires which will only keep springing up. I don't want to accept, or stay in, jobs simply because the employer pays good money, or is offering me a raise. To me, being financially wealthy, and owning countless material items will by no means ensure a rich life. 'True wealth' is found, not in the consumer culture, but in unique human experiences; travelling to a foreign country, making friends with strangers, falling in and out of love, and going surfing or camping. I think freedom is not being able to shop, without restraints, but having the opportunity to express you mind and connect with others. So whilst a great many people are swept away by their immediate attractions to this 'work and spend' culture, I think they have been 'mistaken'.

In this essay I have considered, and consequently dismissed, why the consumer culture is so often seen as a key to opening a door to a good life. Whilst Callicles' view does resonate with many, and seems immediately attractive, there are so many dystopian aspect to such a life style which are frequently overlooked. Ultimately, I have established that 'true wealth' and 'freedom' are not possessions which can be bought. If we are trying to find value in our lives in things which have a price tag then indeed we are, sadly 'mistaken'.