2016 VCE Philosophy examination report

General comments

The 2016 VCE Philosophy examination was accessible for many students. Many students displayed detailed and insightful understanding of the course material and there were genuine attempts to evaluate philosophical ideas and develop positions regarding their various merits and limitations. Most students completed the examination to a high level and demonstrated thorough knowledge of various philosophical viewpoints.

The primary concerns that arose were related to comprehension of the intricacies of the examination questions, and pinpointing of the specific concepts required for each question. Many students struggled to discern the difference between critical comparison and simple evaluation. It is important for VCE Philosophy students to consider all questions from a critical mindset as this encourages them to interrogate exactly what the questions require and how best to develop a response that satisfies those requirements. There are ongoing concerns about basic philosophical language and what is meant by the most fundamental terms utilised by proponents of the subject. Use of 'sound' and 'valid' or 'unsound' and 'invalid' as points of evaluation are not enough without deeper exploration about what makes the argument sound or unsound, valid or invalid. Moreover, these terms are regularly being used when they are irrelevant. Suggesting that an analogy is valid is an inaccurate use of philosophical language and is something that students should avoid. It is fundamental that these terms are used correctly as they have a specific meaning. More often than not, what was intended when such language was poorly employed could have been effectively described by the student in their own words to much greater aplomb, as it would have forced them to explain their reasoning.

Students should endeavour to make astute and precise selections from their knowledge when responding to questions of a specific nature. Exorbitant detail about unrelated issues within a text rarely, if ever, results in marks. Answering the question at hand should be the student's primary concern and doing so in a concise and focused manner should be considered the most efficient way to complete any examination. While many students obviously possessed thoroughly detailed knowledge of the course material there was often confusion about how the various philosophical positions worked in tandem with the range of arguments a singular philosopher has developed, and this concern only grew when students tried to connect philosophical positions together in order to form an argument. Knowing the material is undoubtedly good philosophical practice, but understanding what the material means and where it fits within the wider concerns of the study design, and within the philosophical context of the course's central questions, is essential to 'doing philosophy' and, by extension, responding to the examination most effectively.

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Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.
This report provides sample answers or an indication of what 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

Section A focused specifically on content knowledge of the set texts. Many simple mistakes made in this section were primarily the result of misreading the question or failing to effectively identify the necessary textual information.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	17	16	67	1.5

This question required specific knowledge of how Simmias's attunement analogy worked. Understanding the terms of the analogy and how they relate to Socrates's position within the *Phaedo* extract was the essence of the question. Students were required to unpack the analogy that Simmias establishes – that the relationship between the soul and the body is akin to that of attunement to a lyre. Simmias implies that the instrument itself, with its physical qualities, is just like the body, while the attunement, as something beyond the physical properties of the lyre, is like the soul. Further to this, students needed to explain why this analogy acts as an attack on the immortality of the soul. If the relationship of the soul/body and the attunement/lyre were adequate then it would indicate that just as the instrument loses its tune upon destruction, so too would the body lose its soul. This, in turn, would suggest that the soul was not immortal. Many students failed to clearly articulate the analogy, opting instead to merely repeat phrases from the prompt.

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

> *Simmias compares a lyre and its attunement; that is the harmonies that are produced from playing it, with the body and the soul. Simmias argues that like how an attunement is formed after the lyre is made, so too is the soul a byproduct of the body. Thus, similar to how the attunement is affected, and ultimately will be destroyed when the lyre is broken, the soul will also perish along with its body, and therefore the soul is also mortal, like the body.*

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	24	16	23	38	1.8

Students had a wide array of possible responses available to them in order to evaluate Simmias's argument by analogy. Socrates provides several options (of varying strength) and some astute responses made the connection between Simmias's suggestion that the attunement is a product of the lyre, and Armstrong's notion that the mind is quite specifically a product of the body.

However, there were many responses that did not understand that the evaluation was to be directed at Simmias's analogy rather than Socrates's assertions regarding the nature of the soul. While a high-scoring response might have critiqued Socrates's position, it could only have satisfied the requirements of the question if it connected that critique to issues raised by the attunement analogy, therefore evaluating by way of the merits of Simmias's suggestion.

Several of the potential evaluative claims that Socrates made were:

- The theory of attunement is incompatible with the theory of recollection.
- It is an inadequate analogy as there can be degrees of attunement but there cannot be degrees of soul.
- The theory is also inconsistent with the fact that souls can be well or badly 'tuned' themselves. Simmias's suggestion that the soul is attunement is contradictory to the notion that attunement can be good or bad; attunement merely is.
- Simmias's theory is also inconsistent with the soul's role as the leader of the body as set out by the argument for affinity, which he has already agreed upon.

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

> *I argue that this is unconvincing for three reasons. Firstly, the lyre/attunement and body/soul are dissimilar in that a lyre can have 'degrees' of attunement whereas a body cannot have 'degrees' of soul. Secondly, attunement cannot be good or bad whereas a soul can be good or bad. Thirdly, Simmias' argument is not cogent as he accepts the Recollections Argument which establishes that immaterial ideas precede material things, undermining his claim that the immaterial attunement is dependent upon the physical lyre to exist. Thus, like Socrates argues, I find Simmias' argument unconvincing.*

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	6	15	79	1.7

This question was generally answered quite well. It required students to identify why an inconsistency in memory could cause problems for Locke's theory of identity. Students who drew the connection that Locke makes between memory and continuity of identity were on the right track, because although this relationship might be implied by the prompt it is not stated, and to clearly demonstrate an understanding of Locke's work students were required to be explicit about this connection. Given that continuity of memory is essential to Locke's notion of personal identity, analysing this relationship and connecting it with the remainder of the prompt (that a person who is 'so drunk that they have no memory of what they did') directed students to make a comment about a problem of responsibility. However, many students completed only one of these two comments: either clearly articulating the memory/personal identity relationship, but ignoring the remainder of the prompt, or highlighting the problem of responsibility without identifying why this scenario would create such a problem. Moreover, there seems to be some language confusion with Locke where students are making incorrect use of 'person' and 'man'. Locke is quite explicit about the meaning he ascribes to these terms and it is important for students to have a clear notion of the distinct difference between them. 'Man' refers only to the body of the individual – their physical identity; whereas 'person' refers to a continuity of consciousness over time that is supported by memories – their personal identity. These terms were not required for a high-scoring answer to this question and their use regularly caused problems due to poor understanding. The concern that Locke is exploring with regard to the drunkard is focused exclusively on the problem of personal identity, as that is the thing that would be disrupted.

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

> *Locke considers this a problem as his theory is reliant on the individual remembering their actions to be considered the same person. Thus, strictly speaking, these drunk individuals cannot be charged as they are not the same person who committed the crime.*

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Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	61	39	0.4

This question was often misread or misunderstood, resulting in many low-scoring responses. The question specifically requested a justification that Locke provided in order to alleviate concern regarding the punishment of a drunkard who can't remember. Continuing from some of the concerns raised by Question 2a., students who suggested that Locke's justification was simply that the same body or 'man' was present did not understand that this is not an acceptable justification for the concern that Locke is trying to explore. If this were an acceptable response, it is worth questioning why Locke has bothered to establish the notion of personal identity in the first place. The fact that the same 'man' was present does nothing to justify relevant punishment, it merely explains that something exists that might be punished. This comment has no bearing on the legality or the moral value of the punishment that Locke is certainly concerned with. Instead, Locke only gives two relevant justifications: he asserts that there is no way to effectively determine the continuity of a person's memories or lack thereof and that, by extension, it is reasonable (though perhaps not morally good) to punish what can be known – the body or 'man'. Further to this, in Section 26 of the VCE Philosophy selection from 'Personal Identity', Locke states that no one shall be held accountable by God for actions that they were not truly conscious of regardless of how the human judiciary system has handled the issue previously. While this may be an unsupportable assertion for Locke, it does act as a justification for why he believes the punishment of the body should be acceptable even when it cannot be clearly established that the 'person' was present – moral ambiguity aside, Locke asserts that God will sort it all out in the end.

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

> *Locke says that punishment must be given anyway as the person could be lying about their inability to recall their actions and we would have no way of knowing.*

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	35	26	23	16	1.2

Given the problems that students faced with Question 2b., many students made the mistake of evaluating Locke generally in this question, rather than evaluating the justification he provided for how punishment may still be ascribed. Additionally, students who did not identify either of Locke's justifications in Question 2b. struggled to effectively answer this question. Students who questioned the ethical implications of Locke's justification, suggesting that the law would effectively be punishing people who were not in fact guilty, were on the right track and some deeper discussion of how this might affect society or the way we understand criminality was often helpful. Challenging the existence of God was a weak evaluation insofar as it sidelined the issue of moral responsibility and the role of the law when handling identity concerns. Those who argued against Locke's suggestion that those unjustly punished should take comfort from the inevitable pardoning from God often provided insightful reasoning as to the failure of justice should it turn out that God did not exist in order to provide amends. Those hoping to support Locke's position may have explored how the problem of lying, and general forgetfulness, would seem to be an unsatisfactory excuse to avoid punishment, given that victims would still exist and that their testimony, not to mention the crimes they have endured, would seem to have been ignored if no punishment were administered to those who had been bodily identified as the wrongdoer.

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

> *I find his justification unconvincing despite having some merit. Firstly, it appears that, if only those who 'remembered' committing crimes were punished, this would lead to a dysfunctional system as all criminals could lie about their memory and be deemed 'not guilty' as people. Yet, I find Locke's justification unconvincing as he himself argues that only 'persons' are moral agents accountable for their moral conduct and not the 'man'. Thus, if Locke truly wanted to punish 'men' for their actions, his theory and his man/person account as a whole would need to change for this claim to be justified.*

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	10	11	11	39	14	9	6	2.9

The style of responses given for Question 3 indicated that the majority of students had a fairly clear understanding of both Callicles's and Aristotle's positions regarding self-restraint. However, being able to relate their various comments to the notion of self-restraint was only a small part of what was required for a high-scoring response to this question, and this is where many students struggled. Students who did not pay close enough attention to the phrasing of the question regularly ignored the fact that they were being asked for a critical comparison of the philosophers' views regarding self-restraint. Merely stating their views independently and evaluating those views independently was not what the question required. As such, there were numerous responses that were articulate and obviously knowledgeable but failed to connect the philosophers together and were thus not satisfying what was being asked of them.

A basic critical comparison in response to this question could have involved taking one philosopher's viewpoint on an idea and critiquing it from the position of the other philosopher, in effect exploring why varying positions on the issue might exist and have value. Merely stating Callicles's position and joining it to Aristotle's position with 'however' was not considered a critical comparison unless the link was further developed into a comparative commentary. Stating that Callicles dislikes self-restraint but Aristotle would think it necessary is only a comparison as there is no critical development. A further statement about why their two positions differ so greatly because of their alternate interests and agendas, coupled with commentary on why one position might be stronger or weaker than the other and why, would have constituted a thorough critical comparison. Students who demonstrated a nuanced understanding of both viewpoints scored most highly for this question as they were able to explore why, for example, Callicles's lack of restraint in the pursuit of pleasure could be quite dangerous to society as we understand it and how society is at the centre of Aristotle's suggestion that it is man's function to be rational, implying that self-restraint would be a sensible methodology for managing our pleasures and excess or deficient tendencies in favour of the rational pursuit of virtue.

Many students struggled with the critical comparative elements of this examination and instead opted for individual evaluation. There were many students who wrote about Callicles and Socrates, again suggesting that students need to pay further attention to the phrasing of the question.

Students who chose to discuss Aristotle's notion of the 'mean' often made trivial mistakes about the nature of the guidelines he explores. The mean specifically refers to virtue. It does not refer to eating too much or too little food even though he uses the Milo analogy to highlight how the central point between excess and deficiency might be met – in fact, the Milo example exists more to highlight how all people are different and how their means will undoubtedly vary. It is a simple mistake that is remarkably common. The virtues may include things like the management of wealth, but they are not about wealth itself, rather the attitude we have towards it. He does not discuss consumerism or buying 'just enough' as a suitable mean because it is irrelevant. Instead, he highlights that good habits regarding temperance, courage and liberality (among other things)

would effectively manage the way one operates. Finally, the mean itself has very little to do with the acquisition of pleasure, which is Callicles' central interest. The mean, instead, assists one in the pursuit of eudaimonia, or happiness (although not happiness in the way we normally understand it), and that pleasure may or may not be a by-product of such an existence.

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

> *Both Callicles and Aristotle view pleasure as one of the utmost desires of human nature. Callicles, however, believes we should pursue this desire unrestrained so as to maximise our pleasure – what he deems to be at the heart of living the good life. On the other hand, Aristotle views pleasure as that which draws people away from the virtuous mean of temperance and instead towards the vice of self indulgence. Aristotle believes that in order to live a good life we must exercise our unique function of reason to determine the virtuous mean between vices of excess and defect, and consequently advises us to restrain our desire for pleasure, as this so often leads us astray. Aristotle provides a more compelling account of how we should exercise self restraint. If we behaved as Callicles endorses – wildly striving to satisfy every passing whim – we quickly inhibit our ability to live a good life. Such lack of restraint results in credit card debt, mortgages, and obesity, surely none of these things could be said to enable a good life. Aristotle's advice of guarding against and restraining ourselves from exorbitant pleasure avoids such inhibiting consequences, and this it seems clear he provides a more compelling account of the role of self restraint in the good life.*

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	15	29	48	2.2

Generally Question 4, which asked for an explanation of why Nietzsche saw the herd attitude as an obstacle to the good life, was answered well. Students were required to demonstrate clear knowledge of what the herd attitude involved, such as a life of restriction or communality and a lack of individual thought, a reduction in growth-inspiring suffering and a general sense that a utilitarian mindset is of greatest benefit to mankind. Additionally, they needed to draw the connection between said attitude and why it might prove to be an 'obstacle' to the good life. Although Nietzsche never expresses what a 'good life' is in any distinct terms, it is not a large stretch to infer that what the herd represents is not what he envisions as a valuable mindset for humankind. Further to this, Nietzsche promotes individual thought and endeavours, and he encourages people to define their own morality so as not to be diminished by the group mentality of the masses, which he saw as a fundamental restriction of Man.

For full marks, it was not necessary to refer to viewpoints and arguments of a philosopher beyond the set text, but students could have chosen to do so to support their responses. However, many such responses referred to superfluous material that was misleading or damaging to the clarity of a response. For example, discussion of the Übermensch was outside of the scope of any conception of a Nietzschean 'good life' for humankind, as the Übermensch is not human in the sense that we would normally understand, hence it is not something that humankind can 'become' as it is beyond human. It is important to understand that in the context of the VCE Philosophy examination, these terms, if used at all, must be unpacked and detailed for relevance before they can be usefully applied to the response at hand.

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

> *Nietzsche sees the attitude of the herd man as of seeking well being, pleasure and comfort, criticizing their propensity towards weakness and passivity. Suffering, a primary fertilizer for growth, and the realisation of one's own higher purpose and authentic values/attributes, is suffering and is vital to human flourishing. However, suffering is sought to be eradicated by the herd. For example, an overprotective mother whose child will likely grow up childlike in passivity,*

weakness, unable to face challenges. Nietzsche's good life consists in rising above convention and embracing unique drives, values and ambition which, out of fear, is condemned by the herd and thus Nietzsche opposes this collective indoctrination, fearing its adverse consequences to attaining the good life.

Section B

Section B was, for the most part, not answered well. The fundamental focus on critical comparison highlighted that this skill was one that students did not understand particularly well. As with Question 3 in Section A, both of the questions in Section B relied on a student's ability to critically explore how two distinct philosophers might interact and challenge or applaud one another's positions on a select issue. Students generally understood the various philosophers' viewpoints quite well and often spent far too much time supplying thoroughly detailed overviews of those views. There is a skill in unpacking the expectations of an extended-response question and few students provided the necessary elements to score in the higher range for either of the questions in this section.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	9	5	9	17	19	13	11	7	5	3	2	4.2

Question 1 asked students to compare the viewpoints of Descartes and Armstrong regarding the prompt that the mind could not be reduced to something wholly physical. In addition to this, students were required to make use of a relevant contemporary debate. In terms of understanding the philosophers, there were very few students who could not identify the fact that Descartes's viewpoint was that of a dualist who separates the mind from the body through the act of rational scepticism and that, on those grounds, the mind could not be reduced to something merely physical. Students provided various elaborations on this point, drawing on almost every aspect of the set text, but much of it was unnecessary unless it was used in a comparative fashion with Armstrong. Similarly, the majority of responses clearly identified that Armstrong was a physicalist for all manner of reasons and that due to this he would disagree with the prompt.

Very few students effectively highlighted how the two philosophers might interact on this issue, and some did not suggest that the two philosophers hold opposing views. However, this critically comparative discussion was the central concern of the question. The question required students to reason about what the various merits and limitations of their theories were with regard to one another. There were many responses that clearly understood that each theory had merits and limitations, but the process of simply highlighting the triumphs and pitfalls in isolation failed to address the question that was being asked.

Students might have explored how, as Descartes suggests, the mind cannot be reduced to the merely physical because the nature of the physical realm is doubtable while the mind is not. Moreover, while Armstrong believes that scientific consensus is enough for science to generate a 'raft of truths', which he then hypothesises will one day be enough to account for a purely physical mind, the fundamental truth that Descartes establishes is non-scientific. Descartes's undoubtable thinking thing benefits in no way from the scientific method and actually serves to highlight that the consensus that science achieves is only valuable while we are willing to work with what is possible or probable rather than what is.

This kind of intertwined critical exploration automatically addresses several aspects of the prompt and is generally an effective way to evaluate the merits or limitations of any particular philosopher's viewpoint.

Lastly, students struggled to clearly identify relevant contemporary debates. The most important aspect of this was to delineate between merely identifying something contemporary, and actually focusing in on a contemporary debate. Contemporary things do not always have anything to do with the mind/body problem or the issues raised by the prompt. As such, 'science' as a blanket term was not, and should not, be considered a contemporary debate. Whereas, something more specific within the scientific field such as the development of MRI scanners or neurosurgical procedures and how they impact on our understanding of the mind, were much better choices. Students who discussed artificial intelligence as a challenge to the Cartesian notion of dualism, or to highlight that it was likely that machines would never think in the way that we do, were also effectively making use of a relevant contemporary debate.

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

> *Descartes argues that the mind is distinct from the body which is different from Armstrong who uses science to establish an account for the mind in purely physico-chemical terms. Thus, while Descartes and Armstrong both agree that the mind is an inner arena which is in command of and is superior to the body, they differ in their accounts of this inner arena. For Descartes, the mind is both a better knower and better known as illustrated by the wax analogy as only the mind is able to perceive the changes in a melted piece of wax and even if there was no wax, the mind itself would remain as the perceiver and thus, since the mind is better known than the body, they are different entities. Unlike Descartes, Armstrong argues that this inner arena arises from the central nervous system (CNS) and is able to 'scan' the other mental states which provides the 1st person experience of consciousness. Since for Armstrong mental states are causal states in the same way that the brittleness of glass is caused by the physical molecular structure of glass, this allows Armstrong to explain how the mind is superior to the body while everything that happens to it can be accounted for in physical processes of the body, unlike Descartes who argues for an immaterial mind. A current debate is the possibility of Artificial Intelligence with universities such as Harvard investing large amounts of money into such technological advancements. For Descartes, it would seem impossible that we could ever give robots artificial immaterial minds, although perhaps God could. However, unlike Descartes it would seem that a purely physical account of the mind such as Armstrong's would allow for artificial intelligence to be developed. However, I am not convinced by either of their arguments regarding the nature of the mind. Firstly, Descartes has committed the masked man fallacy as epistemic properties do not confer ontological ones and thus it is not obvious that the mind is distinct from the body as it is possible for two entities to have different properties and still be the same (Clarke Kent is the same as Superman). Secondly, Armstrong has not been able to explain how self scanning works nor how physical states were able to become self-aware and furthermore his account suffers from the explanatory gap as experiences such as a pang of jealousy and a broken heart cannot be observed from the 3rd person. Lastly, even his method is flawed as empirical observations could never prove nor disprove the existence of immaterial substances. Thus, Descartes appears to be able to give a better account of the nature of consciousness, however, Armstrong's account would not necessarily result in artificial intelligence being possible either as Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment reveals that although machines might be able to mimic human functions, they would be unable to ever possess consciousness and thus artificial intelligence does not seems to be possible.*

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	11	8	9	14	19	15	11	5	4	2	1	3.9

Many students demonstrated a firm grasp of either Hume or Nagasena, but few responses clearly understood both of their positions on whether or not there was an 'unchanging core' to the self. Neither philosopher believes in an unchanging core but for very different reasons. Hume's position highlights that nothing is effectively unchanging, not even our sense of self, and that any sense of self over time is mere fabrication brought about through our ability to rationalise that who we were

before is 'like' who we are now. This does not mean that there is no self, simply that the self is a momentary bundle of perceptions that is in a constant state of flux. Hume goes to great lengths to explain how this works but students really only needed to identify that this was the case in order to demonstrate their understanding of the philosopher's viewpoint. Moreover, Nagasena also believed that there was no unchanging core, but this was because he held that the self was a fabrication in and of itself. He goes on to highlight that there is nothing in particular that we can identify as fundamentally us, and by extension we are also not any of the individual parts that we attribute to this self with which we identify. Therefore, Nagasena suggests that there is in fact no self, meaning that there can be no unchanging core.

Confusions arose for many students when they tried to explore Nagasena's notion of dharma and how punishment might be ascribed because of some kind of continual transferral of energy. This does not constitute a self, nor an unchanging core, it merely highlights a connectedness that is not based around identity but rather a kind of causal connection that one thing results in another.

High-scoring responses explored how Hume and Nagasena understand the problem of identity in similar yet different ways. They both deny the notion of an unchanging core but for differing reasons. Further exploration of the merits and limitations of the two theories in light of one another was an effective way to satisfy much of what the question required.

Lastly, relevant thought experiments were accepted on the grounds of how the student managed to relate it to their discussion. Any thought experiment outlined by one of the two philosophers in question was considered relevant unless the student failed to identify how it related to the ideas in question. Hence, the Chariot and Hume's church analogy were both common options that were easily connected to the topic. Whereas, Nagasena's mangoes analogy, while not irrelevant, was often poorly related to the question and regularly led students far off-topic. Alternately, thought experiments studied outside of the study were often used well, but students must be acutely aware of how the experiment relates to the topic because there were many responses that struggled in that regard.

Section C

Question chosen	none	1	2	3
%	0	11	57	32

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	1	3	4	4	5	7	8	8	7	8	8	8	6	6	5	4	3	2	2	0	9.6

The essay prompts were accessible and dealt with elements of the study design that all students should have been very familiar with. What is most important for VCE Philosophy students when constructing an essay under examination conditions is to clearly plan their response so that it covers all aspects of a prompt. There were many occasions where students did not identify specific elements of what they were being asked to explore and this always led to underdeveloped ideas and incomplete lines of discussion. Some students offered unsupported commentaries of the philosophers' views (which may or may not have been clearly understood), and it is deeply important for students to realise that this kind of discussion is not considered evaluative. An opinion is not valuable in and of itself. This is not to suggest that students should not take the time to develop opinions regarding what it means to live a good life, or whether or not they are partial to particular philosophical viewpoints, but it does mean that their opinions only form the beginning of a valuable commentary once they have been supported and explored within the confines of the chosen topic. Simply saying that something is good or bad because they think that it is, or for very

trivial reasons (such as, 'I like philosopher X's views because they align with my own or how I think people should live'), is again, non-evaluative. If opinion is to be used, students must think about why their opinion should be considered above any other opinion and to demonstrate their reasoning for said opinion.

Question 1 was the least popular question. Students who answered this question well had obviously thought quite carefully about how best to manage how the philosophers might weigh in on a discussion of whether or not technology is just in the way that it might benefit the affluent. It was the nuances of justice and the role of the affluent minority that most high-scoring responses focused on in order to expand the prompt and move beyond simple assertions that technology should be considered good or bad.

In contrast, Questions 2 and 3 were far more popular. Students who handled these well made use of the whole prompt throughout their discussion. For Question 2 this meant devoting time to the issue of purpose and the value of happiness, while for Question 3, this meant exploring the role of self-interest and whether this necessarily makes people 'worse off'. Students who only discussed these seemingly peripheral parts of the questions in passing often struggled to generate an informed and insightful essay. Moreover, by focusing merely on the reduction of suffering in others, or that consumer culture is bad, student responses were often repetitive in their discussion. These more limited approaches, or responses that only mentioned the other elements of the prompts in the introduction and/or conclusion, often did little to evaluate their philosophical comments. By addressing only one element of a prompt students were liable to believe they had written a philosophical essay by merely stating the philosophers' views on whichever issue without any discussion of the value and implications of those views. Students must evaluate; that is, discuss the merits and limitations of the views and arguments that they think are valuable enough to include in their essays. The importance of this skill cannot be stressed enough for the creation of detailed and nuanced essay responses.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1.

In an age of increasing production capacity and advanced scientific knowledge, it is only natural that technology has become an increasingly larger part of our lives. Technology is everywhere - it produces the food we eat, the resources we utilise, and, most obviously, is all around us in the form of information technology. However, is it right that only the most affluent should be benefitted by technology? This essay will consider this issue with reference to the philosophy of Peter Singer.

Singer's view of morality, and the way in which we should evaluate worth, is clear. What is moral, is responding to the needs of others, and fulfilling our moral obligations to alleviate their suffering. What is immoral is to refuse to acknowledge these responsibilities. Singer argues that it is unjustifiable for our more affluent societies to be ignoring the needs of others, or to be spending on "trivia" when money could be used to aid "famine relief". His principle states that "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it". This clearly defines the unjust as failure to fulfill obligations when we would have been capable of fulfilling them.

In terms of technology, then, it is clear that Singer's view would be that if we have the capacity to aid others through our use of it, it is wrong not to do so. However, the reality is that technology <u>does</u> only benefit the most affluent in our society. We have the ability to genetically modify plants to grow in communities that are starving, to distribute HIV medication throughout sub-Saharan Africa, to provide clean energy to remote communities and to engineer robots capable of performing surgeries in areas too dangerous for medics. However, these projects are not being pursued or funded. Instead, the affluent societies utilise advanced medical procedures for cosmetic purposes, advanced communication software to allow us to text friends, and medication to control even the most trivial illnesses. Under Singer's view, this is unjust. Our consumer society trivializes technology in order to make the lives of the affluent more

comfortable, when it really has the capacity to significantly improve the lives of developing societies.

However, it is also the case that the advanced technology in affluent societies is robbing us of our ability to lead individual, creative lives. As the amount of technology within our society grows, our level of suffering decreases accordingly. Rather than wait in line for a coffee for five minutes, we can pre-order on our phones and eliminate the wait time. Rather than go to the shops, we can order online. Rather than putting up with a second-rate appearance, we can have our bodies surgically altered to reflect our desires, or the conventions of our society. In a Nietzschean sense, this elimination of suffering is an overwhelming negative. While he would doubtless not argue that we ought to suffer on a fundamental level, such as through starvation or serious illness, the alleviation of every minor cause of discomfort would, to his view, only pamper the "creature" and not the "creator" within us. This appearance of technology predominantly in our affluent societies for essentially trivial purposes not only disregards the moral obligations we have to others, but causes the "degradation" of our own societies in terms of our ability to live meaningful, and merely super-comfortable, lives.

So why does technology remain in our already privileged societies? Essentially, the forms of technology that have allowed our lives to become so comfortable and forced us to ignore our obligations to those less fortunate, are intrinsically linked with our power as consumers. Whether it's a phone, a laptop or cosmetic surgery, this technology is intended to serve as an expression of our consumptive power, and economic freedom. Western-liberal modes of thought have long held that the freedom to purchase equates to our freedom of political and social expression; countries under dictatorial regimes tend to afford their citizens less liberties in their spending power. So, our ability to have the newest, best-looking technology, even at the expense of providing it to other countries, is seen as an intrinsic manifestation of our democratic, egalitarian societies.

But is this an acceptable justification of our implicit refusal to allow the countries most in need access to technology that could intrinsically change their quality of life? No. As Singer begins his argument, "suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care are bad". The consequences for our society, if we reduced the amount of technology we hoard, would be minimal, and the outcomes potentially extraordinary. We have no justification for funding new models of existing technology over vaccinations that could change the lives of millions, other than that we enjoy, in the most superficial of senses, our ability to use and consume technology as we see fit.

So, it is unjust that technology benefits only the affluent minority. Not only this, but it reduces our capacity to 'live well', both in the Nietzschean sense of practising the "discipline of suffering", and under Singer's view of the imperative that requires us to uphold the moral obligations we have to alleviate the suffering of others.

The following response, although overly repetitive, explores several strong arguments and is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 2.

Recent crises in our world, such as the recent Syrian refugee crisis, have reaffirmed the importance of our moral responsibility to other in living our lives, and prompt us to question if the 'purpose of our lives' or our means to achieving 'happiness' lies in 'reducing the suffering of others' and serving the interests of others, or alternatively in serving our own interests. In light of this issue, I will examine the views of Singer and Callicles to argue that whilst we do indeed have a moral obligation to help others in our lives, a moral life is not necessarily a happy life, and the 'true purpose of our lives' and the 'means to our happiness' lies in serving our own interests primarily.

Singer would agree with the notion that the 'purpose of our lives' is to 'reduce the suffering of others' arguing that it is our moral obligation to do so. He argues that if it is within our power to prevent bad things from happening without sacrificing something of comparable moral value, then we ought, morally, to do it. He also defines suffering and death from lack of food, shelter

and medical care as being bad, and so advocates 'reducing the suffering of others', such as Syrian refugees or people living in poverty in the developing world. He demonstrates the uncontroversial nature of this moral obligation to prevent the suffering of others in his example of the pond, in which it is uncontroversial that it is our moral duty to save the drowning child and reduce their suffering, and extends this uncontroversial moral obligation to reducing the suffering of others. Whilst he does not argue that such a life will bring us happiness, he does argue that we will find satisfaction in fulfilling our moral obligation to prevent the suffering of others. Thus, Singer would strongly agree with the notion that the 'purpose of our lives' is to 'reduce the suffering of others' arguing that it is our moral obligation to do so and would even argue that we will find satisfaction in living such a life.

Whilst Singer's principle and the life of altruism that he advocates would lead to a moral life in which we fulfill our moral obligations, and would certainly lead to an appealing world, it is questionable if such a life will bring us 'happiness'. It is clear that if everyone were to follow Singer's principle and donate money to Syrian refugees and to famine relief programs for developing nations in poverty, it would result in a world devoid of preventable death and suffering, which is a very appealing notion. However, by looking at the issue of the 'purpose of our lives' and 'the means to our happiness' in a third person perspective, Singer's principle fails to adequately account for the extent of personal and individual sacrifice required for such a vision. Indeed, whilst the sacrifice of my money and the opportunity to fulfill my desire for a smartphone would certainly make the life of the Syrian refugee better, it is questionable how my own life is improved in any significant way as a result of my sacrifice. Whilst clearly, the moral significance of preventing the suffering of the Syrian refugee far outweighs whatever satisfaction or pleasure the fulfillment of my desires brings, nonetheless, it is only through serving my own interests that I am able to achieve my own happiness. A moral life in which I fulfill my obligation to 'reduce of suffering of others' is not necessarily a happy life, and so the fulfillment of my moral obligation is not necessarily the true 'purpose of our lives'. Thus, the real 'purpose of our lives' is to serve our own interests primarily as it is the 'means to our happiness'.

I will next turn to the views of Callicles on the issue of whether the 'purpose of our lives' is to serve the interests of others. Callicles would disagree with Singer and the notion that happiness is achieved by 'reducing the suffering of others'. He argues that happiness is achieved through the fulfillment of our desires, as the fulfillment of our desires creates pleasure which for him is synonymous with happiness, and so advocates a life of hedonistic self-indulgence. For Callicles, if buying a smart phone and serving your own interests bring you more pleasure than helping the Syrian refugee, then happiness is achieved by serving your own interests. Indeed, he would even disagree with the notion that we have a moral obligation to help others, arguing that the notion that the 'purpose of our lives' is to 'reduce the suffering of others' is a social convention created by the weak to 'cow' the strong and have more than them. For Callicles, such views are morally wrong as they are antithetical to the views of nature which hold that the strong have the natural right to dominate the weak and have more than them. Thus, Callicles would disagree with the notion that we should 'reduce the suffering of others in order to achieve happiness' arguing that the 'means to our happiness' is the fulfillment of our own desires, meaning that the 'purpose of our lives' is to serve our own interests rather than 'reducing the suffering of others', and that we have no moral obligation to help others.

Whilst there is an intuitive appeal to the life of self-interest that Callicles endorses, it is very compelling that we have a moral obligation to help others. Certainly, it is only through serving my own interests and fulfilling my own desire for a new smartphone that I am able to directly improve my life in any significant way. Yet, Singer's argument for our moral obligation to prevent the suffering of others through his example of the child in the pond, in its uncontroversial nature is a very compelling. Indeed, if I were to live my life selfishly, only fulfilling my own desires and not putting the terrible suffering people living in poverty go through in any consideration, I would certainly feel very guilty and go to donate money to help them. However, this only demonstrates how in giving to others, we are truly only serving our own interests primarily, whether to relieve guilt and make others think highly of us or even because we take pleasure and happiness in 'reducing the suffering of others'. Whilst we certainly have a moral obligation to help others and

can find happiness in 'reducing the suffering of others' if it within our own interests, nonetheless as earlier demonstrated, a moral life is not necessarily a good life, and the true 'purpose of our lives' should be to serve our own interests primarily, as it is the 'means to our happiness'.

In conclusion, whilst we certainly have a moral obligation to help others, a moral life is not necessarily a happy life, and the 'purpose of our lives' is not to 'prevent the suffering of others' but rather to serve our own interests, as it is the 'means to our happiness'. Whilst we can certainly fulfill our moral obligation to reduce the suffering of others, in order for it to facilitate happiness, we must take pleasure or happiness out of doing so, meaning that 'reducing the suffering of others' must accord with our own interests, as it is only through serving our own interests that we can achieve happiness.

The following response, although lacking a clear conclusion, explores several strong positions and is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 3.

The rise in consumer culture in modern society has led to the increasingly popular belief that the acquisition of material goods is the key to living a life of happiness. This viewpoint has been so ingrained in our individual, family, and community life, as so success is regularly measured upon the possessions they have, or the amount of money one has available to purchase more consumer items. However, this modern axiom invites us to ask the question; are we "worse off" living such a life of self-interest? I will be examining this question, while drawing on the philosophical viewpoints of both Callicles and Nietzsche, and contend that while serving our own interests in fundamental to the good life, we indeed are better off voicing our alternative forms of happiness.

Callicles would disagree outright with the statement, arguing that in order to go live the good life one must further the self-interested facets of their nature. He argues that living the life of pleasure is synonymous with the good life and therefore advocates for us to allow our desires to expand, unchecked, and then to use all that is within our power in order to satiate them. In doing so, we will be leading a life in the pursuit of our pleasures, ultimately what Callicles condones. Therefore, he would likely applaud consumer culture, advocating for its widespread adoption in society, as it allows our desires to swell and ensures that they remain bottomless. Indeed, the 7,800 advertisements, coupled with the continual renewal of goods - my new iPhone will soon be upstages by a faster, sleeker model - aligns with the hedonistic existence of which Callicles promotes.

Ostensibly, such a life of self-indulgence seems immediately attractive. As Callicles expresses, when we satisfy our desires we feel pleasure, and as a result luxuriate in a state of happiness. By reinforcing these links between desire, pleasure, and happiness, consumerism seems to promise a good life. However, this shallow allure of consumer culture quickly dwindles upon further examination. If we simply allow ourselves to be dictated by the most self-interested parts of our nature, this inevitably leads to enslavement to what we desire pleasure from. It is as if happiness is simply one purchase away, not dissimilar to running a marathon in which the finish line continues to more further away. By allowing our own self-interests to dictate our actions and choices, we are essentially "worse off". This was encapsulated in a University of Melbourne study, which found that the most prevalent reason as to why individuals elected to work more than 50 hours a week was to have more spending money - this "work-and-spend" trap that characterizes many affluent lives. Surely the good life doesn't entail working hours and hours on end to afford the new trendy clothing - this simply seems like artificial, short-term happiness.

Furthermore, consequences of consumerism ensure that even if one remains content with what is at hand, this is short lived. Planned obsolescence is a marketing strategy employed by many large corporations that deceive consumers into a perpetual cycle of throwing away and buying goods. A prime example is that of Apple, in which the company plans for the batteries of iPhones to become redundant after a specific amount of time, and utilise unique "star-shaped" screws to ensure that the use cannot perform maintenance on the device. Upon requesting Apple to replace the battery, the consumer soon realises that the cost of maintenance is almost

equivalent to that of a new phone. Therefore, participating in consumer culture ensures that by indulging in our own basic self-interests, we remain constantly insatiated - as corporation have ensured that consumer goods must be renewed.

Anti-consumerism and downshifting are phenomena that have arisen against consumerism - argues that consumer culture is essentially a source of constant dissatisfaction, insatiability, and ultimately leads to feelings of distress and anxiety. This has led to the creation of trends such as “Buy Nothing Day” and ideologies in which those who participate attempt to remain self-sufficient by pursuing desires that remain distinct from those of consumer culture.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is a useful tool here to ensure that what we ultimately desire is not simply serving the most self-interested facets of human nature, but ourselves as a whole. Nietzsche argues that in order to live a good life, one must revaluate prevailing values of the “herd”, and instead follow one’s own drives. This particularly resonates with notions of both downshifting and anti-consumerism, as both seemingly go against existing beliefs - that material possessions equate to living the life of happiness. Nietzsche would ostensibly go against a doctrine - that acquisition of goods allows us to live better off - and claim that when politicians argue that we must “spend more to grow the economy” they are essentially prescribing what to do in order to benefit the herd. By revaluating consumerism, it allows us to determine our own set of values, and we can then look to further that which makes us individuals better off, rather than the herd.

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