2019 VCE Philosophy examination report

General comments

The 2019 VCE Philosophy examination presented a range of questions that were approachable while still offering opportunities for students to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their understanding. Several questions in Section A drew on core textual knowledge and highlighted that a well-versed understanding of each set text is essential. Most students responded to every question in this section.

The inclusion of external stimulus in both Section B questions gave students the framework to apply their knowledge to an unseen scenario. In addition to this, changes to the format of Section B meant that students were given direction in developing their extended response answers. For the most part this section was handled well with many students grappling with all aspects of the question and making good use of the philosophers in supporting their discussion. Students who spent time carefully reading and considering the extracts and paid particularly close attention to the wording and directions of the questions scored highly. However, there were many students who made simple errors of comprehension in this section of the examination.

Section C consisted of two questions that both made use of large pieces of stimulus material. The construction of these questions required students to critically consider the way their Unit 4 knowledge could play out when applied to an unseen philosophical concern relating to Area of Study 2. With the questions directing students to make use of particular philosophers, the examination demanded a thorough knowledge of the textual. Moreover, the focus on Area of Study 2 meant that students who applied their knowledge to modern developments in technology and their impact on what it means to live well could make the most of what was being asked of them. Both questions had scope to reward students who were able to think through the philosophical concerns raised by each piece of stimulus and consider the interaction between philosophical perspectives on meaning and value in conjunction with the changing world. Essays that genuinely engaged with the question being asked and considered the philosophers' ideas as dynamic pieces of reasoning subject to evaluation, were well-positioned to score highly in this section. However, many students approached this task in the way that it had been framed in previous study designs, which often led to responses that did not fully respond to the task at hand.

Section A

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	24	17	59	**1.4**

This question was generally handled well with many students offering a clearly expressed overview of Descartes' decisions to reject sensory information. There was limited scope to what the question was asking and students who lost focus on the ideas of Meditation One and the various sceptical arguments put forward by Descartes were not answering the question. Discussion of the fact that the senses have clearly deceived Descartes at various points throughout his life, or that he might

be asleep even though he feels as though he is awake, or that a malicious demon might be leading him astray about even the most rudimentary facts, were all perfectly acceptable answers.

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

Descartes ascertains that many of his former beliefs are based on experience which can be doubted, such as the senses which can 'deceive' in how they portray distant objects. Thus, doubts may be raised against his former beliefs if he is to truly uncover the truth.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	22	67	**1.6**

Descartes has only one conclusion about what cannot be doubted within the scope of the set readings and that is that he is a thinking thing. Students who argued that Descartes cannot doubt God were ignoring the overarching concerns of the thought experiment of the malicious demon. To achieve full marks for this question students needed to be very clear that the reason Descartes cannot doubt his own thinking is that the process of doubt is a form of thought and thus that he thinks is self-affirming.

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

Descartes ultimately concludes that what cannot be doubted is that thoughts occurring and he is having them, as a 'thinking thing'. He argues this because he realises that, while he is doubting many other things, his ability to think and to doubt remains true and real. He then ascertains that since something is capable of these thoughts and of being deceived, he is a 'thinking thing'.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	41	20	21	19	**1.2**

Many students presented a clear discussion of the problem of circularity in Descartes' conclusion that he must be a thinking thing. However, some responses evaluated arguments that had been incorrect answers for Question 1b., or arguments unrelated to what they had expressed in that part of the question. Students should read all questions carefully so they are responding precisely to what is being asked of them and don't get caught making simple errors related to specifications expressed by the question. Moreover, any study of Descartes' *cogito* would entail examining some of the inherent problems with this argument and students who offered a purely positive evaluation were only providing a limited demonstration of their understanding. While there are positive aspects to the thinking argument, there are clear problems and limitations, and thus a complete response to this question required an understanding of at least some of those.

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

It may be objected to Descartes' conclusion that whenever he thinks he 'must exist', that he has not proven that there is any certain self that exists. While Descartes has proven that there are thoughts, this fact does not make it necessary that there is a single, continued self that thinks all of his thoughts. Therefore, Descartes does not prove his claim that he 'must exist' as something, because he assumes the premise that if there are thoughts, there must be a single thinker.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	49	15	36	**0.9**

There was a mixture of responses to this question, which highlighted some good knowledge of Locke but often a limited understanding of what students were being asked to draw on. The Lockean Circle referenced in Michaels's work is an extension of her Schwanda thought experiment in which she highlights how knowing the authenticity of Schwanda's Wanda memories is impossible without already accepting that it is Wanda who has the memories. This creates a loop whereby basing personal identity on memory presupposes that the person already exists in order to have, or possess, the memories. Many students understood this and expressed a version of this idea, often without the use of Michaels, which was perfectly acceptable. However, there was a significant portion of students who made obtuse references to ideas within Locke's text or his central argument for personal identity. Responses of this kind were not addressing the question.

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

The problem with Locke's theory is that by arguing that memory is the defining feature of personhood, he presupposes an "I" that had the memories. This is problematic as the "I" is the very thing that is trying to be explained. Thus, by claiming that continuity of consciousness constitutes personal identity, Locke is assuming the "I".

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	37	19	20	24	**1.3**

Hume's rationale for how memory works to make connections, via causality or resemblance, in order to incorrectly justify the notion of an enduring identity was often poorly understood. Many students misread the question and outlined Hume's understanding of what resemblance and causality are, rather than how memory works with them. This question required a precise and nuanced understanding of Hume that couldn't be simplified to an assertion that he doesn't believe in identity because resemblance and causality are false sources of justification. The link to memory's role in this mistaken process is stipulated in the question and was thus central to being awarded marks.

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

Hume argues that personal identity is an illusion as we are a 'bundle of perceptions' in 'perpetual flux' with no constant impression of a self; thus, there is not continuous self over time. Hume argues that such a notion (personal identity over time) is a trick of the mind. He states that memory causes us to see our perceptions as linked by causality, resemblance and contiguity. Yet this is false for Hume; memory discovers, and does not produce, identity. Our mind has a will to uninterruption/invariation that causes us to create identity through resemblance. Furthermore, causality is a customary association of ideas, not a matter of fact for Hume. Thus, memory (in accordance with resemblance and causality) discovers a continuous self over time; empirically, however, this identity over time doesn't exist.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	18	18	31	32	**1.8**

Students had a good understanding of this question and how they should go about answering it efficiently. Locke clearly states in his text that because the continuity of identity is based on

consciousness and supported by memory a man accused of a crime can be held accountable if he has memories of his actions. Few students explained the nuance of Locke's position here – that it is impossible to verify the authenticity of someone's memories and thus a court of law will likely ascribe punishment on the grounds of bodily identity (or identity of man, as Locke calls it). Furthermore, from this Locke asserts that God knows the truth of our thoughts and will thus only hold us accountable for the crimes for which we are personally responsible.

For Hume the notion of responsibility is less clear. Taking his argument to the logical extreme, which most students chose to do, would mean that as there is no justifiably continuous identity over time there can also be no responsibility over time. However, at the conclusion of the set reading Hume does assert that:

> '…all nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties.' [David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, pp.310]

It could be reasonably argued that as Hume understands the ways in which the human system connects ideas and creates enduring identities as a means to make sense of the world, so too it is reasonable to argue that responsibility should be allocated to those we recognise through the process of causality and resemblance.

Lastly, this question required students to make use of an example in support of their response. Importantly, students who referenced an example without using it to illustrate or explain how one or both of these theories might work were not awarded a mark. Many examples were acceptable either drawing from the texts – most notably Locke's example of the drunkard – or drawing from a real-world scenario.

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

> *Locke argues that responsibility lies with the 'person' (conscious, intelligent, self-aware being) and not the physical 'man'. A person's identity is formed in their consciousness and memory of consciousness. Hume, in contrast, argues that a conscious self over time does not exist; thus, there is no basis for responsibility of past actions. This contrast can be illustrated by an example: if I committed a crime last week and remembered it, I would be responsible (according to Locke) as I am the same person, whereas I wouldn't be responsible (for Hume), as my identity is ever-changing.*

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	50	18	32	**0.9**

It was clear from the responses to Question 3 that many students were unable to explain the specifics of Socrates's comments about the difference between a *knack* and an *expertise*. A great number of responses offered general comments about what it takes to be an expert (hard work) and how a knack would be something that requires much less (because it is natural to us). However, this is not Socrates's conception of these ideas as stated in the *Gorgias*. For Socrates, the difference between these ideas is less focused on what they are and more on how they develop us as people. Hence, a knack is focused on pleasure and the self while an expertise is focused on the good and the benefit of humankind.

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

> *According to Socrates, a knack is an activity that aims at immediate gratification and does not consider what is good (for example cookery). On the other hand, an expertise is an activity that aims at the good and involves reason, and does not necessarily involve pleasure (medicine – a doctor knows what is good for the body and employs reason)*

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	31	14	21	18	16	**1.8**

Question 4 required students to find both a point of similarity and a point of difference between the criticisms that Callicles and Nietzsche level at conventional morality. The specificity of the question meant that many students misread what was being asked of them, opting to explain how Callicles and Nietzsche differ in their views on what makes a good life, or how they agree on the importance of individuality. However, neither of these ideas is entirely accurate, nor do they address what was being asked.

Callicles and Nietzsche have clear criticisms of conventional morality. The morality of the masses is, according to them, designed to protect the weak and suppress the strong. Moreover, they have wildly different conceptions about who makes up these categories of weak and strong. For Callicles the weak are physically weak and the group mentality of conventional morality protects the majority at the cost of what he understands to be natural right. Thus, conventional morality is against nature. He even goes on to suggest that those who devote their natural intelligence to the pursuit of power are restricted by this weak majority. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is not interested in numbers, nor is he interested in human nature. While he might agree that the slave class, or the herd-men, make up the majority, it is not their numbers which make their morality insipid. Instead, it is their efforts to conform, think alike and do alike, and create a system by which they might restrict and control all people. Nietzsche's problem with conventional morality is the same problem that he has with all morality: it is a fabrication. Hence, any efforts to generate a morality for all are efforts to control and restrict those who can forge their own rules.

The complexity of this question lay in the student's ability to draw out these subtle distinctions; that one is interested in himself, while the other is interested in the collective desolation of humankind. Too often, students appeared unaware of the focus on conventional morality and opted to highlight how the philosophers' views as a whole have similarities and differences.

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

> *Callicles and Nietzsche both condemn conventional morality. However, a difference between their respective criticisms is that Callicles condemns the way conventional morality contravenes natural law, as nature and convention are, to him, opposed and what is natural is right. In contrast, Nietzsche dismisses convention as 'herd morality' which is derived out of fear of one's neighbour though under the guise of love of one's neighbour. A similarity between Nietzsche and Callicles is that they both denounce utilitarian based calculations as Nietzsche suggests there are bigger issues than 'pleasure and pain' to consider and Callicles positing that the strong deserve a larger share than the weak, irrespective of what brings the greater good.*

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	50	18	16	16	**1.0**

Sisyphus's struggle was a central concern of Susan Wolf's text and the challenge for students in Question 5 was to consider whether or not a love of philosophical reflection, aided by the necessary boulder pushing, could constitute a good life. Students were asked to consider this in the light of Aristotle's philosophy and the responses yielded mixed results. Many responses demonstrated a limited and unfocused understanding of Aristotle's central concerns. Moreover, there was a general lack of nuance or contextual awareness of how Aristotle's suggestions fit within the grander scope of the section of text specified in the study design.

Aristotle is interested in a virtuous life, whereby each person not only understands virtue and how best to pursue it but recognises that in order to pursue virtue, understanding is not enough. Aristotle is explicit in his discussion of how becoming virtuous requires a person to **be** virtuous, which means to make active choices in their effort to refine and improve their way of life. Sisyphus, despite his philosophical reflection, is incapable of such activity. His only activity is to push the boulder and, in this case, to think philosophically. Aristotle comments that without activity one might be virtuous while asleep, which makes little sense to him. Thus, Sisyphus's deep philosophical reflection means little in terms of his living a good life because he cannot act on his thoughts. Moreover, Aristotle indicates that to be a virtuous person is great, but to be a virtuous person working within a polis, to benefit all in their understanding and pursuit of virtue, is better. Sisyphus is incapable of this as well.

Students who tried to argue that Sisyphus might satisfy the virtuous mean in some capacity demonstrated a gross misunderstanding of Aristotle as there can be no mean of a compelled task, and certainly not of a punishment handed down for eternity.

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

> *Aristotle would argue Sisyphus is not living the good life. Aristotle observes the good life to be fulfilling the function of man well (being a good man) which he determines to be the application of reason. Sisyphus is observing reason, through philosophical reflection, but as it is reflection, he is not applying reason, therefore not fulfilling the function of man, and thus not living the good life.*

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	15	16	29	40	**2.0**

Unlike Question 5a., students handled Question 5b. quite well. Many demonstrated a good understanding of Wolf's assertion that living a meaningful life requires the meeting of subjective and objective values and that Sisyphus would certainly struggle to satisfy an objective valuation. Comments that elaborated on the limited scope of Sisyphus's life and the repetitiveness of his efforts being akin to solving Sudoku puzzles or copying out Tolstoy showed a great understanding of Wolf and her work. However, there were some more nuanced responses that highlighted Wolf's understanding of objective value is unclear at best and that the world might consider philosophical reflection to be objectively meaningful, resulting in Sisyphus satisfying a form of Wolf's philosophy. Often students made generalised mention of these ideas without being able to clearly identify why Wolf thinks these things or how they fit into her conception of a meaningful life.

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

> *Wolf would argue Sisyphus is not living the good life, as he lacks 'meaningfulness': which she believes is an aspect of the good life. Wolf observes that to get meaningfulness, one must positively engage in something they love that they believe is of moral worth.*
>
> *Sisyphus is doing what he loves, but, as per her definition of moral worth of doing something independent of oneself, which Sisyphus is not doing, he doesn't fulfil the moral criteria of meaningfulness, and therefore does not experience meaningfulness and is lacking this aspect of the good life thus he is not living the good life.*

Question 5c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	32	29	27	12	**1.2**

While most students attempted this question and offered opinions of varying merit to support their comments about which philosopher offers a better response, there was little understanding of how to approach a question about the 'plausibility' of an argument. The use of this term indicates that the question is not asking for a mere assertion of personal support but requires a reasoned discussion of what these views mean for the pursuit of a good life. Simply commenting that one philosopher is better because they mention virtue while the other does not, says nothing about why virtue is valuable to what a good life is and thus why it is important for any truly plausible theory. Similarly, stating that both objective and subjective qualities must be fulfilled does nothing to explain why these qualities are necessary for a life to be considered good.

Students should be aware that the discussion of plausibility is a discussion of why, given the state of the world, a theory makes more sense or works better, than another.

Personal assertions of preference without any deeper discussion were awarded no marks.

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

> *Whilst both Aristotle and Wolf agree that Sisyphus is not living a good life, Aristotle's view is preferable as a lack of virtuous, rational action is more important (in my view) than a lack of objective value. Aristotle would argue that Sisyphus is not using his function for reason to perform virtuous action; this is convincing. In contrast, Wolf argues that Sisyphus lacks objective value in his actions; whilst this is convincing, it is less plausible, as objective value may be unimportant. In other words, rational virtuous action makes your, and other people's, lives better, whilst objectivity (in the sense of meaning) may be irrelevant; after all, does the possibility of cosmic heat death not make all objective 'meaning' thus meaningless? Due to this, I view Aristotle's argument as more plausible.*

Section B

The scaffolding of the two extended response questions, directing students to address certain ideas and develop their responses along a particular trajectory, meant that answers to these questions were generally well-focused. There were some concerns with students misreading what was being asked of them, with many mistakenly applying the same structure from Question 1 to Question 2. Students should also bear in mind that the extracts serve the purpose of framing and contextualising what is being asked and thus to ignore them was to risk constructing an overly vague response.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	9	4	7	9	11	16	12	13	10	6	4	**5.0**

The extract for Question 1 provided some background on how colour is measured scientifically, highlighting that the ability to register colour is seemingly different from being conscious of colour. The comparison offered is that of a spectrometer, which can accurately measure wavelengths and thus the data of colour, and that of a conscious being, which not only perceives colour but is aware of such a perception.

Most students demonstrated a very limited reading of the extract, focusing purely on the final question: 'So what then, does it mean to be 'conscious' of colour?' While the task of this extended

response was to examine whether Nagel offers a plausible argument against how Smart might answer this question, the decision by most to ignore the rest of the extract meant that many didn't understand that the difference between the two philosophers was actually outlined in it. Moreover, many misread the question, taking it instead to be a discussion of colour itself being conscious, or a spectrometer itself being conscious.

The directions for this question meant that students were required to show a clear understanding of how Smart would respond to the idea of consciousness using colour as a focal point, explore how Nagel would challenge the position presented by Smart, and offer a perspective on the plausibility of the philosophers' responses. All of this needed to be handled in a clear and well-organised response. Many students presented a good understanding of Smart's position and the way his reductivist thinking works to sideline the issue of consciousness as distinct from perceptual awareness. Some even went so far as to highlight that, for Smart, the spectrometer could be considered to observe blue in a form that is effectively the same as the way humans observe blue. Moreover, students largely understood Nagel's criticisms of Smart and how he would respond to the question. Students who merely outlined Nagel's views without directing them at those expressed by Smart were not fully addressing what the question required.

Often students struggled to discuss which view was more plausible. Discussion of plausibility requires students to consider the merits and/or limitations of a position as applied to the way the world works. Thus, a discussion of plausibility in this question is asking whether or not Smart's or Nagel's perspectives on the nature of consciousness and perception make sense given our understanding of the world. Arguing for either of the philosophers was entirely acceptable but required specific and well-reasoned support and justification.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response that clearly develops a response to all aspects of the question.

> *This passage points out the disconnection that seems to be present between the physical aspects of a phenomena e.g. electromagnetism, and the sensory experience of it, within our consciousness. JJC Smart, a materialist (the view that the mind is a material thing) argues that we should accept that consciousness, and perceptions, are simply brain processes. When we see colour, we have a certain brain process, which Smart would argue is our perception. He claims that any attempt to explain the mind and consciousness as "psychical", i.e. non-physical, presents a "nomological dangler", that is, something that sits outside all known natural laws. Everything, Smart argues, has been found to consist of "smaller physical constituents", and according to the principle of Occam's Razor, "the principles of parsimony and simplicity", we cannot accept that consciousness is the one thing that cannot be explained this way. To be 'conscious of colour', according to Smart, is a "brain state".*

> *Thomas Nagel, in his essay "What is it like to be a bat?" seeks to problematise this view of the mind presented by materialists like Smart. He argues in trying to explain mental experiences as simply brain processes, materialists ignore the subjective "what-it's-likeness" of an experience. In stating that the perception of colour is simply a brain process of some sort, we ignore the fact that there is "something it is like to undergo this brain process". To be conscious of colour is an essentially "subjective experience", and it cannot be so easily reduced to physical processes. This physicalist explanation, Nagel argues, in trying to explain consciousness as physical, attempts to move away from the particular viewpoint of the subjective, moving towards "greater objectivity", but in doing so ignores consciousness itself as an essentially subjective phenomenon. Materialists like Smart, may object that what they are arguing is simple, conscious experiences are simply some brain states. Whatever conscious states are, they must be contained in the brain. Nagel, however, does not argue that this is impossible (he in fact thinks it likely), only that we have no idea how this can be true, how a subjective experience can be explained as something objective. We lack, as he claims, the "conceptual framework" to understand this.*

Nagel's view is thus the strongest. It seems that whatever it means to be 'conscious of colour', it is something that, it seems, cannot simply be explained as physical processes interacting.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	3	8	11	15	16	14	11	8	5	3	**5.0**

The second extended response question made use of the case of Molaison, who could remember how to function in the world via muscle memory despite having an 'almost complete inability to form new conscious … memories'. The central concern of this extract focuses in on the concerns that Michaels raises about Locke's focus on 'continuity of consciousness' supported by memory as the basis of personal identity. Most students understood this and their understanding of how Locke would require 'declarative' memories in order to support his notion of personal identity was largely well-expressed. Similarly, students showed a solid understanding of Michaels' position on the extract and could largely express it clearly.

However, while the textual knowledge was generally sufficient to begin constructing a high-scoring response, students often ignored the nuance of the extract to show how the philosophers would answer the question about Molaison's identity. Such responses ignored the nuances of the philosophers, particularly Michaels, when offering a rudimentary understanding of Locke's view that Molaison doesn't maintain consciousness, and thus personal identity, because his conscious memories are lost, and asserting that Michaels argues that the body appears to play some role in what makes up personal identity because of the limitations of a memory-based theory. Michaels does not simply say that the body plays a role in personal identity and neither do either of her thought experiments. Instead, she argues that to reduce personal identity to that of pure conscious awareness supported by memory is to ignore the extent to which what we are is unconscious and contained within the system of the body. Some students made excellent reference to Michaels' comments about how 'brains alone' do not learn to ride bicycles but that 'people do'. This effort by Michaels is designed to broaden the scope of what a person is – not just memory, not just body.

Moreover, the final aspect of the question, which asks for some discussion of the implications of Molaison's case for a theory of personal identity, was often either not addressed at all or was given only token commentary. Students who merely stated that this case makes it even more difficult to define personal identity were on the right path but had lost sight of the essence of the question itself: to 'develop a response'. It was this requirement to develop that proved difficult for many responses in Section B, with students opting to follow the listed suggestions about things to consider rather than interrogating the extract with that list in mind.

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

Locke would assert that Molaison was a different person after the surgery as he has lost the ability to retain 'declarative memories'. Though he is still able to access 'procedural memory', his inability to access these 'declarative memories' would result in a significant change to who he is as a 'person' to Locke, who dismisses body continuity as a condition for personal identity, instead asserting that memory is a 'necessary and sufficient condition' for personal identity.

On the other hand, Michaels would perceive the changes Molaison has undergone, but would not conclude that he is thus a different person entirely. The 'muscle memory' mentioned in the passage is explained also in Michaels theory where she suggests the body's role in personal identity as possibly quite important; as it is 'people' as a whole who learn how to ride bikes and remember having done so, not simply brains. Thus, Molaison's memory changes would not result in a complete change of identity for Michaels, as he remains in the same body which contains muscle memory.

Though Locke dismisses the body entirely in his writings, Molaison's case reveals the issues present with attributing identity entirely to memory alone. While memory may appear the most intuitive marker for who we are, this case highlights the importance of the body in personal identity theory as Molaison, who can remember to 'walk and talk and mow the lawn' is not likely a completely different person after surgery.

Section C

Question chosen	none	1	2
%	2	65	33

Questions 1 and 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	3	1	3	4	6	7	10	8	8	8	7	5	6	5	5	4	3	3	2	1	0.5	**8.9**

Section C of the 2019 examination was different from previous years. With only two questions instead of three and with large pieces of stimulus material to draw on, students were required to carefully consider and organise their response in order to perform well. Both questions focused on Unit 4, Area of Study 2, which involved the interaction of the good life set texts with the way technology has influenced and changed how we live and what we value. This meant that the task for students was to grapple with specific technologies, as defined by the stimulus materials, and consider how the effects of such developments might problematise the philosophical perspectives studied. They were required to apply what they had learned. Many students made an admirable attempt at this, but many responses fell into the traditional, and less effective, style of presenting large passages of philosophical knowledge before making a generalised link to the idea of technology as stipulated by the stimulus or question. While it is beneficial for students to know their texts inside out, the design of these questions was clearly to encourage them to make use of their knowledge and interests in developing a fresh perspective on the issue. Hence, responses that demonstrated little awareness of the wider scope of the question often did not score highly.

For Question 1, students could select between Nietzsche and Wolf, and were required to refer to at least one of the philosophical concepts indicated (progress, reality, control, dependency, freedom or creativity), while discussing the 'interplay between technological development and the good life' as outlined in the stimulus. Many students handled aspects of this task with great aplomb, but it was rare for a student to cover all the necessary elements. A number of responses that made use of very rudimentary knowledge of Nietzsche, which often led to confusion or excessive focus on the extent to which he might be critical of technological developments. Students often handled Wolf with much more caution and precision, demonstrating a solid understanding of her central concerns and applying them admirably to the task. Many students made insightful selections from the extract, but it was rare to see these developed beyond mere points of reference. Lastly, there was a lot of scope for students to make use of the philosophical concepts and most clearly tried to incorporate at least one of them in a significant way.

For Question 2, setting transhumanism as a concept, the extract used this school of thought to encourage students to explore how the modification of human beings could lead to more than just medical advances, but also improvements in quality of life. Students were directed to specifically make use of Plato's *Gorgias* in the development of a critical discussion of the transhumanist concepts described in the extract from Mark Stevenson's book *An Optimist's Tour of the Future*. Requiring that responses make use of Plato meant that students had to think quite laterally about the ideas explored by Socrates and Callicles. Students who chose Question 2 clearly had a firm

grasp of Callicles' interest in the hedonistic lifestyle and often used this knowledge to great effect. However, it is worth mentioning that the extract makes no distinct reference to pleasure and that this gave room for more nuanced writers to consider what the transhumanist Nick Bostrom could interpret 'enjoy living' to mean. Similarly, while student understanding of Socrates was often less confident, there was some clarity about Socrates's view that a good life is one of discipline and that this certainly does not align with Callicles' interests but also may not align with the transhumanist creed. The general reading and comprehension of the extract was good, but often lacked nuance by reducing transhumanism to a technological form of hedonism. Strong responses explored the benefits a transhumanist might enjoy through life extension and enhancement beyond pleasure, and often developed some fascinating conclusions about human nature and the risks of such technology in the face of present socionormative values.

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

In response to the development and proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), debate has arisen regarding whether this 'liberate us' or in fact cultivate a widespread dependency on this technology to the detriment of authentic human relationships. Though a conservative on the benefits of AI, Carr presents the perspectives of Etzler and Andreesen who are similarly optimistic about the capacity for AI to render our future world a 'Utopia' full of 'pleasures, novelties, delights and instructive occupations'. In this essay, I will critically discuss the perspective of the passage in relation to Susan Wolf's notion of the good life to determine whether the rise of AI will ultimately be to our detriment or benefit.

Within her essay on the Meaning of Life, Wolf identifies the 'false dichotomy' between happiness and morality, instead purporting that there is a third domain of value which accounts for when we act out of 'reasons of love', that is, meaning. As a result, she forms her bipartite fitting fulfilment view where she insists that meaning and hence, fulfilment arises when 'objective attractiveness meets subjective attraction' in activities 'worthy of pursuit'. By satisfying the subjective and objective criteria of her view, a good, meaningful life can be obtained.

In response to the passage, Wolf would question what the 'objective attractiveness' is in a life of 'superabundance' which the AI could potentially provide us. Indeed, this sort of existence may 'grip' and 'excite…' us, fulfilling the passion criteria of her fitting fulfilment view, however a hedonistic life does not have objective value and hence, to Wolf, is an arbitrary pursuit. This is analogous to her example of Sisyphus fulfilled, who though gripped by his rock rolling, still represents the very paradigm of a pointless existence as to perpetually roll a rock up a hill has no objective value. So, though Sisyphus may experience 'pleasures' (as humans would freed from work due to AI) this does not necessitate fulfillment or meaning according to Wolf.

However, so long as we do not grow unduly dependent on AI, Wolf may support its rise if it allows us to direct our time towards more worthy activities. The listed examples in the passage of 'arts, sciences, creativity, experimentation' all may satisfy Wolf's fitting fulfillment criteria. Thus, if we can safely and effectively engineer technology which takes care of laborious monotonous tasks – our 'physical constraints' it would free our time to allow for greater involvement in things we are both passionate about and know are deserving of our attention. Despite this though, Wolf would caution against a reliance and investment in 'computers and robots' at the expense of human relationships as man ultimately has a 'social nature' and the desire to be seen as fulfilled by an 'impartial observer' which cannot be substituted even in a 'technological paradise'. Thus, Wolf's description of our human needs highlights how for 'humankind… to express its full and true nature' we need to maintain our human bonds.

As Wolf's dismissal of a life of leisure, provided by AI, is based on her fitting fulfillment view, we must first evaluate this view. Wolf unnecessarily mandates there be a specific emotional core to our lives in her passion criteria for fulfillment which is not always required as people may be detracted from their objectively worthwhile work yet not alienated (like her example of the alienated housewife). However, her view finds its support in human behaviour as individuals

may seek a career change, moving out of the corporate sector, due to a lack of meaning they feel they have in their lives.

Is Wolf accurate and cautioning against the rise of technology for the good life? A study done in Beijing found that in 63 adolescents who were clinically diagnosed as addicted to gaming the rate of depression was twice as common in comparison to the national standard. This speaks to the veracity in two of Wolf's arguments. Firstly, that the activities we pursue must be of objective worth (depression is often described as a feeling of pervasive meaninglessness) which video games are not. Secondly, that we have an inherent need for socialisation which computers and inauthentic bonds with robots cannot replace. This simultaneous rise in mental illness and development of AI highlights that the Panglossian perspective of the passage in which the respective authors praise its ability to enhance our lives is short-sighted. Instead, we see the dangers of AI which is enticingly addictive yet at once deficient, depriving adolescents and human-kind from the human bonds which Wolf astutely prescribes we depend on.

Indeed, Wolf's 'fitting fulfillment' criteria is somewhat limited, however her characterisation of our human requirements for flourishing are accurate. As such, only technology which does not compromise our ability to form relationships would be accepted by Wolf, as AI designed purely to increase free time for frivolous 'delights' would create an epidemic – an unfulfilled society.