

# 2020 VCE Philosophy examination report

## General comments

In 2020 the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Philosophy Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*, which provided a range of different question types designed to give all students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. Many students revealed a detailed and expansive knowledge of the set texts and, in their essay writing, drew on these and broader philosophical sources to show insights into what they had learned throughout the year.

Section A focused on detailed textual knowledge and the ability to recognise specific passages and concepts, while also requiring students to display an understanding of the context and purpose of these ideas and arguments. Many students scored highly in this section, with the structured questions providing clear scaffolding for them to express themselves without repetition. However, there were students who clearly struggled to pinpoint the specific ideas in question. Moreover, many students were unclear about what was being asked when they were required to present an argument rather than statements or ideas referenced by the philosopher. It is also worth noting that the plausibility of an idea rests in the reasoning a student uses to support their thoughts. Merely restating or expanding upon a philosopher's position without providing some development of why the philosopher's position is a reasonable approximation of reality demonstrated a lack of understanding of what was being asked.

Section B contained extracts that encouraged broad thinking and demanded that students engage in the act of philosophy. For many students, this involved thinking quickly and extrapolating ideas from the set texts in order to best gauge the way they would interact with and comment on the stimulus. Responses needed to be consistent with the guiding instructions given for Section B, and it was important for students to carefully read the extracts, questions and the included instructions before writing their response. It was common for students to provide partial answers in this section of the exam, meaning that even while they clearly understood the material, missed instructions resulted in incomplete responses.

Finally, Section C offered two prompts that encouraged students to consider the role of two different technological influences on what it means to live a good life. Students clearly had things to say about the ideas raised by the extracts, but in some cases, there was a lack of genuine discussion of ideas in light of the texts they were directed to use. Most students opted to generalise the stimulus material so that they could make use of textual ideas in the form in which they were originally presented. Students clearly found it difficult to reconcile the thoughts and ideas of ancient philosophers with the modern concerns of technological addiction and the impacts on the way we think and operate within the world today. This meant that most of the discussion of the philosophers was uncritical and delivered as though the final words had been said on their ideas almost two-and-a-half-thousand years ago. Despite the limited development of philosophical discourse on display, many students had a good understanding of the content they had been taught, although there are some clear concerns with Aristotle, which will be discussed below.

## Specific information

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

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

### Section A

Many students made a strong attempt at all questions in Section A, with many of them scoring highly. However, as all questions in this section were made up of distinct parts, often requiring students to establish knowledge of a concept before asking them to delve deeper, there were occasions where a limited understanding of what was being asked led students to make mistakes in follow-up questions.

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	34	54	1.4

This question required students to provide an outline of Socrates's Leaky Jar analogy. To this end, students needed to explain the analogy itself – a story of two men with two different sets of jars representing discipline and hedonism. One of these men possesses jars that are intact and is able to fill them, while the other has jars that are cracked and is forced to perpetually work in order to store anything. Alternately, students could discuss the first iteration of the jars story, in which Socrates describes a single man who struggles to fill his jars not only because they are leaking but because his mind – the utensil he uses to fill them – is like a sieve. No marks could be awarded for discussion of the purpose or problems with this analogy for this part of the question.

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

*Socrates implores us to imagine two jars: one which has cracks and is unable to retain its liquids when filled, the jar of the man who engages in self-indulgence, and the jar which is able to remain full, the jar of the man with self-discipline.*

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	44	19	37	0.9

The second part of Question 1 asked for a specific piece of knowledge, which many students unfortunately explained at great length in Question 1a. The analogy of the jars is offered by Socrates as a response to Callicles's quip that discipline defines the lifestyle of a stone or a corpse. Students here were being asked to explain why Socrates offers the analogy of the jars in response to this. Socrates accepts Callicles's commentary on the life of discipline not because he thinks that we should all be dead but rather because a life of meaning and value, to Socrates, is one in which desire has no hold over us. As such, the leaky jar analogy offers the counter-position – what of a life devoted to the pursuit of pleasure? In delivering his stories, Socrates hopes to convince Callicles that he is wrong about a life of discipline, and more than that, that a life devoted to the endless pursuit of pleasure is not only deeply unsatisfying, because one is always wanting, but also truly terrifying.

Unfortunately, many students explained Callicles's comments about the stone and corpse at great length, misreading the purpose of the question, which was to detail how Socrates's jars analogy responded to Callicles's ideas.

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

*Callicles claims that the man who has no desire, no pleasure or pain, has a life comparable to that of a stone or corpse. However, Socrates' analogy shows how the one without needs is truly satisfied, whereas the one who always has needs must constantly work to satisfy them resulting in a life that seems hardly desirable.*

## Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	39	25	19	17	1.1

Many students extrapolated from a vague understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy that 'fear of the neighbour' would have something to do with mechanisms of control. But this was only part of the answer. As Nietzsche understands fear to be the 'mother of morality', his discussion of the neighbour demonstrates how moral systems are born not of love, as the herd would proclaim, but fear. Thus, students were required to identify that fear brings about morality and that 'fear of the neighbour' generates the social mores that lead to the system of rules and regulations that govern community life. Further to this, a student who scored highly may have gone so far as to explain that Nietzsche's herd-men are convinced that they act out of love and care rather than self-preservation and a desire for personal safety from all that could threaten them.

Most students offered some generic comments about the herd itself, as Nietzsche understands it, and missed the opportunity to look at how Nietzsche views the world and the construction of the systems he thinks define day-to-day life.

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

*Nietzsche argues it is fear of the neighbour that forms the basis of herd morality. Nietzsche contends that herd morality aims towards a world in which there is nothing to fear, and thus its moral codes change according to utility, or what will protect the herd. As such, in times of peace the herd will fear their neighbours and independent spirits because of the danger they may pose to the herd and thus it is fear which drives the morals of the herd in order to best protect it and aim it towards a time 'where there is nothing to fear'.*

## Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	57	15	14	14	0.8

As Question 2b. is a direct evaluation of the ideas developed in Question 2a., students were required to have delivered ideas worthy of evaluation in part a. before they could achieve marks here. Students were awarded for some insightful evaluation of Nietzsche's ideas presented in part a., even if those ideas were not entirely correct. However, rather than offering a discussion of the merits and limitation of the Nietzschean worldview in question, most students simply provided commentary on how such a perspective is easily observed in reality. This is not evaluation until it is turned into a discussion of whether such a perspective provides insight or merit. To merely agree that what Nietzsche said is observable offers no argument about the validity of such a view.

Moreover, students were required to offer an example to complete their response. Some students used this instruction to highlight the limitations of Nietzsche's commentary by exploring something that clearly contrasted or contradicted his position. However, many forgot that they were evaluating the way 'fear of the neighbour' leads to herd morality and gave examples that had little to do with the ideas under examination.

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

*Nietzsche's view is plausible for two reasons. First, if we observe the close alignment between morality and laws created by democracies out of fear, it does indeed seem that morality arises from this fear also. For example, we ban assault legally out of fear of being assaulted, and so the moral unacceptability of assault likewise appears to arise from this fear. Second, Nietzsche also appears justified in arguing that certain drives are made immoral. If we observe Ancient Greece and today, fear has caused us to make immoral the sort of brutality espoused by the traditional 'Homeric' hero, demonstrating society does indeed over time come to quash the traits which could come to harm the herd.*

### Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	46	14	40	0.9

Aristotle is very clear about the role of money-making and the good life. He argues that life should be focused on the most final of ends – the thing at which all things aim – which he takes to be 'happiness'. Money-making, he explains, is a pursuit of something for the sake of something else. Money is only valuable for what it allows us to purchase; it is not valuable in and of itself. Therefore, while it might play a role in the good life, it certainly should not be the focus of how one lives. He does comment later in Book 1 that although being wealthy might be beneficial to living well, the pursuit of wealth is not important to a good life.

Many students answered this question briefly and accurately. However, several responses argued, incorrectly, that the pursuit of wealth was part of Aristotle's discussion of the 'mean', wherein focusing one's life on it would take one into excess, while not pursuing it at all would lead one into deficiency. This is not the argument in question. Moreover, it is a misreading of Aristotle's 'mean', which is focused on the pursuit of virtue. Aristotle explicitly discusses how money itself is not a virtue and how the use of it can be managed virtuously through a reasoned application of his principle of the 'mean'.

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

*The good life will have a final end, as do all things, such as medicine having the end of health. Such a 'good' end must be self-sufficient and chosen for its own purpose, but wealth is a subordinate end, chosen for other extrinsic reasons. Thus, wealth is not the 'good' end, or self-sufficient intrinsically, so it cannot be the best life.*

### Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	42	20	19	19	1.2

Question 3b. required students to respond based on their answer to Question 3a. Instead of offering an evaluation of Aristotle's viewpoint on the value of money-making, students were asked to assess the plausibility of Aristotle's perspective. The difference is that rather than assessing the merits and limitations of the argument that Aristotle is putting forward, students were required to comment on whether Aristotle's viewpoint actually reflects the lived experience of the average person.

Unfortunately, many students struggled to identify exactly what it meant to comment on the plausibility of the argument put forward in Question 3a. Students who simply agreed with Aristotle's assessment could earn some marks here; however, to receive full marks, a level of development in their thinking was required to support whether his view was plausible.

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

*Aristotle's argument that devoting ourselves to money-making is not the good life is plausible. As can be seen by many billionaires around the world, such as Jeff Bezos, devoting one-self to money making not only entails the poor treatment of workers, but does not serve as an end. Jeff Bezos would likely partake in money-making to obtain more power, making it a means, not the aim of the good life.*

### Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	16	31	53	1.4

Many students answered this question briefly and succinctly, and the nature of the question encouraged the simplest rendition of how Descartes describes the mind and body in Meditation Six (a thinking non-extended thing, and an extended non-thinking thing, respectively). Such a direct response was completely adequate. However, there were many responses that provided far more detail than was necessary, many of which discussed at length various arguments that Descartes offered without ever actually stating the nature of the mind or body. Students who tried to argue that the nature of the mind was to be known and the body to be doubted were misreading the term 'nature', as the way we conceive of something is distinct from what that thing fundamentally is.

### Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	18	68	1.5

As with Question 4a., students could answer this question with two concise statements. Smart describes the nature of the mind to be the same as that of the body: physical. However, the same issues seen in Question 4a. were in play here as well. Many students offered elaborate retellings of Smart's thinking without answering the question at hand.

### Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	35	29	36	1.0

This question required students to demonstrate the argument that Descartes used to draw his conclusion that mind and body are distinct. In the set readings, Descartes only provides one clear argument for the separation of the mind and body, which he offers in Meditation Six. Descartes argues that he can understand his body as an extended non-thinking thing and his mind as a non-extended thinking thing, and that if these things are separable, at least in the mind of God, then it is reasonable to accept them as being distinct. Without the premise regarding God, this would be an incomplete argument. Despite this being the only clear argument in the set reading for the conclusion that the mind and body are distinct, many students did not use it. Efforts to extrapolate an argument for distinction from Meditation One or Two required a lot of work on the student's part. However, many students did not frame Descartes' ideas in the form of an argument or failed to provide all the required premises to complete his reasoning.

The following response, despite being somewhat unclear, demonstrates an understanding of the general argument that Descartes is attempting to make.

*Descartes argues that everything that can be clearly and distinctly understood as separate was brought about by god to coincide with my understanding. Given I clearly and distinctly understand my mind as a thinking non-extended thing and myself as a thinking thing, and my body as an extended non-thinking thing and thus distinct, God brings it about that my mind is distinct from my body and therefore I am distinct from it.*

### Question 4d.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	40	26	34	0.9

Hypothesising how Smart might respond to Descartes's argument as presented in Question 4c. required students to have delivered an argument in the previous response and to use Smart's reasoning or perspective to challenge Descartes's thinking. There were many options here and a fair number of responses made use of Smart's reasoning that the pursuit of parsimony makes dualism redundant and, more than that, that the limitations of what can be explained by dualism require the use of nomological danglers (concepts outside of the present scope of scientific knowledge) to remain consistent.

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

*Smart might argue that just because the body and the mind have a different logic, does not necessitate a substantial, ontological distinction, for example whilst lightning and electrical discharge have different logic, they are the same thing, and thus just because Descartes describes the mind as being different from the body, does not mean it is.*

### Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	31	29	40	1.1

The quote provided for Question 5a. describes how Hume reasons that there is no way to draw the link between objects through time, just as there is no clear link between a given cause and a potentially subsequent effect. Hume concludes that all efforts to connect these things represent an association of ideas rather than any tangible link. Most students recognised the passage or were able to unpack Hume's somewhat convoluted language and provide a reasonable explanation of what he was saying.

### Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	24	20	25	31	1.6

Students generally showed a good understanding of Hume here, and if they were able to unpack the quote in the previous question, they could extract the implications of this reasoning for notions of personal identity. However, some students made the incorrect claim that Hume does not believe in personal identity. Hume argues that personal identity is momentary, but clearly exists. Further to this, he challenges the idea that personal identity exists over time on the grounds that links between cause and effect, not to mention objects in subsequent moments, are ultimately unclear and therefore cannot be proven to be more than an association of ideas. Finally, he claims that rather than recognising genuine connections through time, all we can be sure of is that we have distinct perceptions and that we claim coherency rather than observe it – this makes personal identity over time a fabrication rather than a demonstrative fact.



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

*Hume uses this idea to illustrate why we see ourselves as having a personal identity when we are really just a bundle of perception in a constant flux. That is, he argues that the relation of causation gives rise to an identity, as we see our previous experiences as causing the next. He uses the Republic Analogy to draw this out; arguing that even with a change in a Republic's laws, ministers and constitution, we see it as the same, as we see one event causing the next. Yet, as Hume argues that this idea is fictitious and unjustified, he claims that it does not provide real justification for personal identity, which he argues is simply a bundle of perceptions, rather than constant and invariable.*

## Question 5c.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	49	23	29	0.8

Students had clearly worked on examining the limitations of Hume's theory of personal identity and used a variety of ways to highlight his inconsistencies. The most common response was to comment that for there to be an association of ideas, there must be a thing doing the associating and this thing might be considered a consistent identity over time because it is clearly able to draw connections between objects at distinct points in time. Students who did not score highly were either generally unsure about what Hume was saying or unclear about what constituted a fair critique of his position.

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

*Hume's theory relies on the fact that due to us being unable to perceive a fixed identity it does not exist. However, an objection to this can be drawn upon by black holes, just because we cannot perceive them, this does not mean they do not exist. Thus, perhaps Hume is wrong to contend that due to use not perceiving fixed identity, it does not exist.*

## Section B

The two questions for Section B provided some challenges for students as well as ample instructions so that students knew what was expected. Both extracts offered nuance for students with strong textual understanding and good practice in applying philosophical views to a given concern. The design of the questions encouraged students to think carefully about their writing choices and develop a response that showed the implications certain lines of philosophical reasoning might have about what it means to have consciousness or what is essential to a person's identity. However, most used the suggested directions as a checklist when constructing their response and relied heavily on what they had been taught about the set texts rather than considering for themselves how the writers might respond to the ideas proposed by the stimulus.

## Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	9	6	9	12	12	14	14	9	8	4	3	4.5

Many students relied heavily on their understanding of central ideas from both Smart and Nagel to construct their response for this question. It is important that students think critically about what is specifically being asked of them, as in this case students were required to engage with a question regarding claims about the consciousness of plants and animals.

When grappling with Smart, student responses had a range of issues. Many rightly identified Smart's position that consciousness, if it is anything, is a kind of brain state and is therefore physical. However, the wide array of conclusions attributed to Smart beyond this were inconsistent with Smart's initial position. Many became obsessed with the notion that Smart's viewpoint hinges on an organic human brain and denied plants access to consciousness on these grounds. However, while Smart identifies sensations as brain processes, this does not necessitate a human brain. A machine that measures precipitation could be said to be having a kind of brain process because it is having a sensation of sorts. By extension, it is reasonable to argue that plants have brain processes of a sort because they clearly have some sensation of light. This is a nuanced reading of Smart, which very few students identified or explored, but the fact that many students who did not get to ideas of this kind instead launched into a staunch denial of consciousness in all flora suggested that students were not genuinely thinking about the philosopher or his ideas. This was not the only way to read Smart regarding this question and there are perfectly reasonable arguments for why Smart might arbitrarily deny the consciousness of plants, perhaps even on the grounds that it is simply ridiculous to imagine. Close reading and careful planning aided the students who approached this question as a philosophical puzzle for them to complete rather than a call for a specific and uniform response.

While neither philosopher addresses the idea of plant consciousness directly, Nagel comes closest when he suggests that the scientific way of measuring what it means to have a mind is overly reductive and potentially ignores important things that cannot currently be observed or weighed in an objective manner. Moreover, he uses his discussion of what-it-is-like to be a thing to highlight that if there is a what-it-is-like-ness, then there is a kind of consciousness even if we do not understand it. This is an inconclusive viewpoint because it is impossible, by Nagel's own reasoning, for a human to understand or experience the what-it-is-like-ness of something that is not human, and in fact we are only ever granted access to our own experiences, which makes it impossible to be certain that any other human has a conscious state similar to our own. This certainly opens a doorway for a potential future science that may be able to recognise the conscious state of non-human things, or it might pave the way for a serious attack on the scientific method (and by extension certain reductive forms of physicalism) regarding questions of this nature. Either way, this means that Nagel likely agrees with Maher, that 'the claim that plants don't have minds ... is based on a prior decision to exclude them in the first place', this being a particular scientific prejudice in favour of the human perspective.

This being said, many students did not read Nagel in this way and started by correctly arguing that the line between conscious and non-conscious things is to do with this what-it-is-like-ness, but then arbitrarily denied plants access to this kind of experience. This demonstrated that they were engaging with the extract but that their reading of Nagel's work and the application of his thinking was lacking.

Finally, many students ignored the last requirement of the question, which was to justify their own view on the question, given the ideas presented in the passage. Most responses did not even attempt this aspect. Whether this was because students did not know how to approach such a request, did not have a viewpoint or simply missed this line in the instructions, did not change the fact that it was required in order to access full marks.

The following is an example of an exceptionally detailed response, which clearly addresses all aspects of the question.

*Smart would contend that we should draw the line between conscious and non-conscious living things on the basis of whether they have physical structures comparable to that of the human brain. He would argue such a point given that the ever-increasing power of science and the principle of Occam's Razor ... that consciousness, or the mind is simply brain processes. To prove the explanatory adequacy of physicalism he defends it against a number of physicalist claims, including the argument that brain processes are public and fallible whereas sensations are private and infallible, responding that this distinction is merely an issue with language and one which could be solved by developing the logic and language of sensations. Thus, he would answer this question to say conscious beings are those who have complex structures comparable to that of a human brain and therefore a plant would have no mind. Comparatively, Nagel would argue that the consciousness of something is defined by whether there is something that it is like for that entity to be itself.*



*He argues that this subjective character of experience, while likely stemming from the physical is one inaccessible through objective facts, just as we can understand all the facts of bat neurology without knowing what it is like to be a bat. However, to deny their conscious experience would be like a Martian denying our own. Thus, Nagel would contend that we should draw the line on whether there is something that it is like for an entity to be itself, and while physical structures may well be the origin of such experience more work is needed to discern whether plants have a subjective character of experience.*

*Examining Maher's criticisms and the merits of Smart and Nagel's responses reveals that Nagel's theory is far more helpful in answer the question of where to draw the line between conscious and non-conscious living things. Smart faces two problems, firstly, he falls victim to the criticism Maher puts forwards. Smart forms the basis of his theory on the fact that humans have consciousness and we assume animals do as well, but not plants. As such to say consciousness can only stem from the brain, or something similar on the basis of our beliefs about consciousness and then to apply this theory as the criteria for consciousness is the problem of circularity Maher notices. Secondly, Smart claims the explanatory adequacy of physicalism on the grounds that we could develop logic to make sensations public and fallible, however little progress has been made in this area or in showing that brain functions are a sufficient criteria for consciousness, such as disproving the consciousness of plants and as such physicalism does not seem explanatorily adequate. Comparatively, Nagel accounts and sidesteps the criticisms Maher poses by acknowledging the difficulties in drawing the line for consciousness. He correctly asserts that consciousness is irreducible to physical terms, as while I can know all the facts of red it is not the same as the experience of seeing red. Additionally, identifying that physical structures do likely have a role to play in determining consciousness, a compelling assessment given the physical causes and effects of consciousness, as in the case of traumatic head injuries. As such Maher's criticism applies much more to Smart than to Nagel and Nagel's response to the question seems an accurate one. That more work must be done to accurately identify where the line of consciousness must be drawn, as objective facts give us little insight into the experience of other living organisms and thus we cannot determine whether they are conscious or not.*

## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	2	5	6	7	10	13	17	17	11	7	6.1

For the most part, Question 2 was handled well. Students generally had a firm grasp of both Locke's and Michaels's positions on personal identity, and it was clear that the concept and implications of uploading a person into a computer was well understood.

Most students clearly identified Locke's position that personal identity is the continuity of consciousness over time supported by memory, and that if the uploading involved the wholesale upload of a person's memory, then Locke must admit that the digital person does, in fact, satisfy the requirements of what it means to be a person for him. Further to this, students rightly identified that any shortcomings in the process that resulted in memory disruption or loss would also create issues for 'jumping out of the biological brain and into virtual reality', even for Locke.

Students recognised that Metzinger's position paralleled Michaels's and were often well-detailed in their unpacking of one of Michaels's thought experiments to demonstrate the importance of the body for personal identity. It is worth noting that students were asked for a thought experiment that Michaels offers. Discussions of Schwanda or Dr Nefarious were generally used to great effect. However, it is worth pointing out that the comment Michaels makes about how it is not a brain that learns to ride a bike but a body is not a thought experiment in and of itself. It is an assertion about the nature of personal identity, but it does not pose a question in the way that Schwanda or Dr Nefarious do. Students who used this example on its own were at risk of not satisfying the criteria of the question. However, there were many who used it as a kind of conclusion to Schwanda or developed it into a thought experiment by using elements that the Schwanda thought experiment explores.

As with the previous question, many students missed or ignored the final instruction to justify their own view, considering the ideas presented in the passage.

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

*Locke contends that body is insufficient as a basis for personal identity, as we only consider it a part of ourself insofar as we are conscious of and concerned for it. Thus, personal identity is based on a continuity of consciousness, or memory. As memory is a brain process, it would therefore appear in an 'avatar' if the brain data was uploaded into it. Michaels, on the other hand, does not entirely dismiss the importance of memory to personal identity, however she contends that it cannot be the basis, as it is unreliable and susceptible to deception. Instead, she argues that the body is more important. This is demonstrated through her Dr Nefarious thought experiment, in which she invites us to imagine that an evil scientist tells us he will torture us tomorrow at 5pm. Of course, we will be worried. Even when Dr Nefarious says that he will remove all our memories at 5:57pm and replace them with Ronald Reagan's memories at 4:58pm, we are still worried, despite the fact that Locke's theory would assert that it is not ourselves who will be tortured, but rather it is Reagan who will be tortured. In this thought experiment Michaels aims to show how we are concerned for our body in the future, regardless of our consciousness, and thus it is important to identity. Like Metzinger, Michaels would say 'that a large part of the human self-model is grounded in the body', and thus it is impossible to upload an identity to an 'avatar', as it only uploads the contents of our brain, which is merely one aspect of our identity.*

*In my opinion, the body is significant to our identity, and it is impossible to 'upload a self'. Perhaps my memories have some importance, however the possibility that I am right now susceptible to being deceived about the essence of my being, suggests that it cannot possibly be the sole basis. Furthermore, if I imagine my brain being transferred to a vat, there is certainly a large aspect of myself that is gone: 'gut feelings... the sense of weight and heaviness.' In essence, when I imagine my brain without a body, there is something foundationally missing that influences who I am. Without a body, my connection to humanity is severed as I lose bodily sensation, and therefore it seems impossible that my identity could truly be uploaded to an 'avatar'.*

## Section C

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	5	2	4	4	5	5	6	8	7	8	7	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	2	1	1	9.0

The essay section made use of two contemporary technological concerns: whether our habits and addiction to technology makes us unhappy; and whether or not technology is designed to help us live well or merely exploit our most basic impulses. On the surface, these two concerns are quite similar and, based on student responses, the key difference that many identified was simply which philosopher/text they had to make use of. However, the purpose of the essay stimulus is to inspire creative philosophical exploration; the students who scored highly selected an element from their chosen stimulus, interrogated the issues raised by it and discussed how the proposed philosopher might grapple with those concerns. While the philosophers present relatively concrete suggestions to students regarding what it means to live or pursue what can be called a good life, students who recognised that these views are far from static and can instead be wielded to carve through the modern concerns of the essay topics were in the best mindset to achieve high marks in this section.

Many students only offered a pedestrian reading of the stimulus material, which often led to essays that focused too much on specific ideas expressed by the philosophers in their writings without applying those ideas to the concerns of the stimulus. Similarly, students who made use of the work of multiple philosophers often lost sight of the question they had chosen. They used the essay as an opportunity to examine or comment on a perceived shortfall in the philosopher's views rather than present a discussion of how the philosophers might interact with the concerns of the question and offer insights or lead us to greater

problems. In this section of the examination, more than any other, it is essential that students be willing to develop a discussion rather than regurgitate rhetoric from the prescribed texts.

Students who opted for Question 1 often hinged their essays on Aristotle's notion of the mean and the pursuit of balance in the way we live. This was rarely handled well, with many responses arguing that Aristotle would recognise the use of technology itself as something to be filtered into the mean – too much technology being excessive, too little being deficient. However, technology itself is not a virtue and the right amount of it will not reveal virtue or generate good character in and of itself. Some recognised this and discussed how technology and the way we use it might often be considered as a parallel for pleasure. This opened the discussion up to Aristotle's assertion that pleasure is something to be mindful of because it is neither bad nor good but gives rise to bad and good actions because we do not think clearly when presented with it. Other interesting and nuanced takes on this question went into detail regarding the development of habits and states of character, making note of ideas similar to the pleasure argument.

For Question 2, students generally fared better due to the relatively transparent views of Callicles's unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and Socrates's designs on a life focused on grander things, such as truth and organisation of the mind. However, simplistic readings of these ideas did not lead to high-scoring responses; it was often the case that students equated the reptilian impulses to Calliclesian hedonism without much commentary on whether or not this kind of 'emotional slavery' and the desire to make us 'buy stuff' or 'react angrily to stories' really satisfied what Callicles was interested in when he expressed that pleasure was all that mattered. There was room to explore whether these things are even pleasurable and whether there might be something to salvage of the old politician's ill-conceived viewpoint when considering modern technology. Similarly, students regularly used Socrates's response to hedonism as a means to argue that modern technology is bad for us. This provided some opportunity for a student to explore the ideas in question, but they rarely considered any solution to the issue, merely succumbing to Rushkoff's assertion that 'we're in deep trouble'. Without any solution, or even a gesture towards a solution, students were ignoring some of Socrates's most poignant comments about the importance of philosophical self-defence. Pleasure is not bad in Socrates's view, but it is not good either. As such, it is the management of this – the organisation of the mind by means of discipline away from the rhetoric of 'behavioural finance' or appeals to our 'reptilian impulses' and towards the only rhetoric that matters – that betters us as a people towards a good life.

To this end, while many students attempted the essay topics with gusto, often their ideas lacked the necessary breadth to clearly develop a critical discussion of the ideas presented in the extracts.

The following essay is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1. It is not perfect but manages to genuinely interrogate the concerning way our obsession with technology could impede our pursuit of the good life. Moreover, while the student could be clearer in their use of Aristotle's 'mean', the sophisticated way they explore how it is the management of the way we act, and what we choose, that enables the pursuit of living and faring well makes for an insightful and reasonably nuanced discussion.

*How does our use of technology effect our happiness? The passage presents the view that technology itself may not affect happiness directly, but the way we use it may do so. Aristotle would most likely agree, and possibly view our present use of technology as one that threatens our happiness, and thus our ability to 'live and fare well'. I will argue that whilst the perspective of the passage is largely accurate, certain technologies are too difficult to 'use well' and may possibly threaten our happiness entirely. I will introduce the perspective of philosopher Michael Sandel to support my conclusion that humans must not become beholden to technology, for such a type of use would threaten happiness, human progress and the good life.*

*How would Aristotle respond to this perspective? The Aristotelean good life is one in which humans achieve the 'final end' of self-sufficient eudaimonia. Thus, he would respond that the best use of technology would be one that allows us to achieve this final end of happiness, to 'live and fare well'. The passage, however, presents the view that some excesses of technology (such as addiction to Facebook) may threaten our happiness, so we would be happier if we simply restrained 'intention' and used self-discipline to use it well. This is very much in line with the perspective of the Aristotelean good life, since his view is that our function*

*is to use reason in accordance with virtue in order to select a 'mean' in the way we act, and to form such 'habits and rituals' (as Akbari references) will allow the soul's state of character to perform its function and live well. However, it seems that technology disposes us to extremes, which in turn threatens the Aristotelean good life. For example, social media addiction has caused a 22% increase in depression among people aged 14–23 (compared to 2000), and this excess clearly threatens happiness, so Aristotle would say that we should avoid it, or act to judge when to use it well. Aristotle, however, has the view that the mean of how we do things is subjective for each person. For example, he may add to the view of the passage, saying that some people who are disposed to extremes (e.g. addictive) should not try to 'balance' but instead avoid entirely, since he thinks that there cannot be a mean of an excess.*

*In select cases, some technology – if used in this temperate way – could maximise happiness. For example, the use of online forums to mitigate depression.*

*How compelling is the passage and Aristotle's view that we gain the most happiness from our own autonomous, 'intended activity' and choices surrounding technology? On the one hand, this appears compelling, because we do not derive fulfillment or happiness from acts that are not the product of our rational will. This is because, as Aristotle says, our passions and capacities cannot be controlled. However, I believe that true happiness comes from decisions we make, and thus ones that we believe to affirm our character. To illustrate this evaluation, consider how an individual would probably feel deeply fulfilled when playing an instrument in the way they choose, or playing their own song that reflects their character – than one who plays a song by someone else heteronomously. This shows that the autonomous choice to use technology well and in a balanced way can make us happy. Moreover, the view that we should avoid using certain technologies that are possibly extremes in and of themselves is compelling because we cannot derive higher, fulfilling pleasure from indulging in a vice. For example, one cannot only do 'a little cocaine' or 'a little killing', just as one cannot, and ought not indulge in other harmful technologies, such as extremely violent video games.*

*However, I believe that even if active choice gives rise to happiness, such choice could be harmed by technologies, and Aristotle and the perspective of the passage too readily assume that humans can use reason in such a way. As Michael Sandel posits, the rapid growth of technology leaves some without the choice of how to use it, effectively making human objects of technology. For example, in a connected world, it may be impossible to escape the vices of online performances or the constant bombardment of technology and live happily. Thus, whilst the way we use things does give rise to happiness, there are some technologies that harm our judgement or are so addictive that our rational will cannot respond logically to know how to use them well, which Aristotle possibly overlooks by assuming too much of our rational capacities.*