2021 VCE Philosophy external assessment report

General comments

The 2021 Philosophy examination was an accessible paper with lots of opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. To this end, the clear instructions across all three sections made for generally direct responses from students. Students who completed the examination rarely left questions unanswered, indicating that what was being asked was accessible to all ability levels.

Section A required specific knowledge of the VCE Philosophy set texts but also provided some opportunities for reflection on ideas and perspectives. The inclusion of questions requiring outlines of thought experiments in particular set students on a path to reflect on how the goals of these philosophical analogies worked to express or deepen authors' positions. Finally, the inclusion of a scenario in Question 7a. represented a departure from traditional short-answer questions and required students to briefly and adeptly express their knowledge of Susan Wolf's general theory, while applying it to a specific situation. It was good to see how students approached many of these questions. For some of the more specific questions that required students to recall and unpack precise philosophical thoughts, students made consistent errors. There were clear shortcomings around justifying positions and understanding that the language of presenting a justification is distinct from merely repeating the position preferred. A justification should always accompany answering why a view or argument is better, more meritorious, preferable or plausible, even if these concepts are explored in the negative (that something is worse, less meritorious or unrealistic). Lastly, it is important that students read questions carefully and make specific note of who or what is being asked about so that their answers are as precise as possible.

Section B made use of two clear extracts that encouraged students to develop a philosophical position. Both questions were couched in the same language and both required students to present their own view on the subject matter. Unfortunately, despite the clear framework encouraging students to develop their thinking on the extract presented, using the philosophers as support for their thinking, most simply commented on what the philosophers might think and missed the opportunity to do some philosophical thinking. It is important to note that while a philosopher might agree with the extract or represent a seemingly 'stronger' argument, this doesn't, in and of itself, make their view the same as the student's view. As mentioned in the comments above for Section A, any presentation of a personal position should involve an effort to explain why that view is held.

Section C presented students with two extracts targeting virtual reality for the underprivileged and the role social media plays in modern connectedness, respectively. Both extracts offered a wide scope for students to explore, and the directions to make specific use of one of two philosophers for either question meant that there were options available for students.

Many students struggled to work through the process of presenting a position with clear and accurate philosophical information as support and justification for their argument.

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 presented directly worded questions with clear instructions regarding what was required. Several questions (Questions 4, 5, 6 and 7) had interconnecting parts but only Questions 4c. and 7b. required students to specifically make use of ideas they had developed in earlier parts. Thus, while responses that repeated ideas written from previous questions could still achieve full marks, this was often achieved through the general malleability of the subject rather than the intention for repetition within the question.

Generally, students handled this section well, although students were often less confident in the questions that required the justification of ideas, or the comparison between philosophers or ideas.

Question 1

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	13	36	52	1.4

The scope of the first question was reasonably large, asking for one of the many reasons Descartes offers for why he is not his body. Answers making use of his argument for the veracity of thought as an alternative to the dubitability of his body were generally clear and incisive. Many responses stated that the body could be doubted, which was not an argument for why Descartes could not be his body and thus needed some other element to separate Descartes' sense of himself. Similarly, statements that God tells him so lacked the detail of a complete reason for Descartes' view.

Most students handled this question quite well and many demonstrated a thorough understanding of Descartes' thinking.

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

> One reason why Descartes believes he is not his body is that his bodily senses have deceived him many times throughout his life, leading him to be skeptical about everything he once knew, including his body. Descartes later resolves that he cannot doubt he has a 'mind' in some capacity as the action of doubting in the first place, confirms that he is a 'thinking thing'. Thereby proving he is his mind but not his body.

Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	33	32	34	1.0

This question required students to consider the distinction between Descartes' awareness of his mind and his awareness of physical objects. It prompted students towards use of the wax argument in the development of their response by referencing the wax as an example of a physical object. An ideal response would have explored how Descartes' sensory uncertainty regarding the wax leads him to greater certainty of his mind, concluding that his awareness of his mind is far greater because at the very least it is known and is the thing that knows, while the wax is only measurable through potentially fallible sense data.

Many students offered a far less detailed commentary, stating merely that the mind was better known, or that the senses were doubtable while the mind was not. Note that the question was about awareness, thus the active understanding of a thing. It was not asking which was less doubtable, but rather how the awareness of the two differs. Students often missed the subtlety of this in developing their answers.

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

> *According to Descartes he does not know the forms of the wax through his senses but rather through his intellect or mind, as his mind is a better knower than the senses Descartes concludes that his mind is better known to him than things in the physical world. That is whenever he is thinking, perceiving, imagining, or affirming he is certain of and understands his mind to exist. When he sees things in the physical world, such as the wax, he cannot say there is wax but rather 'I know my mind to be perceiving wax'. Hence, he understands his mind better than the physical world.*

Question 3

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	16	12	27	44	2.0

Most students handled this question adeptly with a clear overview of both Smart's lightning analogy and the role it played in developing his view that sensations are nothing over and above brain processes. Students appeared to be quite confident with the content. The common issues with their responses usually related to not fully reading the question and sometimes failing to link the analogy to Smart's broader thinking about sensations and brain processes. Many clearly understood the semantic and ontological differences, highlighting how different words might be used to describe things that are fundamentally the same, in this case, according to Smart, lightning and electrical discharge.

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

> *Smart demonstrates that lightning and electrical discharge are ontologically identical – they are the same thing, even though we speak about these terms in different ways. Similarly, he asserts, sensations and brain processes could be identical ontologically – with sensations being nothing over and above physical brain processes. The terms have semantic differences in the way we talk about them, but this does not mean that they can't be identical. There may therefore be no need to bring in dualism if we can say the mind is merely physical.*

Question 4a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	8	27	65	1.6

Most students handled this question well, with many recognising that an outline of the thought experiment required little more than a brief description of the memory/consciousness swap between the prince and the cobbler and the revelation that the identity travelled with the memory/consciousness. Some confused the thought experiment with Michael's Schwanda thought experiment, or failed to mention the importance of memory/consciousness to personal identity within Locke's thought experiment.

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

> *According to Locke, the soul and consciousness of a prince inhabit and inform the body of a cobbler, the soul and consciousness of which have been removed. We would call the prince a "different man" because his physical human form has changed, but the "same person" because his consciousness, extended backward in time through memory, is identical.*

Question 4b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	5	29	66	1.6

Similar to the previous question, Question 4b. required students to only outline the thought experiment and didn't require the drawing of extensive conclusions regarding personal identity. Many students provided extensive retellings of the disastrous walk undertaken by 'Wanda' and 'you' without recognising that the story itself is less important than the uncertainty regarding how one defines the personal identity of the newly constructed 'Schwanda'. While many students handled this question well, there was often superfluous content in their answers.

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

> *Michaels proposes that, after an unfortunate accident, your friend Wanda's brain is placed into your intact body, forming 'Schwanda'. The question is, is Schwanda you, Wanda, or someone else entirely?*

Question 4c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	11	24	34	21	2.5

Responses were generally poorly handled, with much repetition of the previous two responses rather than a careful consideration of why the two thought experiments, while similar in style (brains/consciousnesses changing bodies), are designed to demonstrate dramatically different things. Michaels' thought experiment in particular is constructed as a direct challenge to the Lockean focus on memory as the basis of identity, emphasising that the identity of Schwanda cannot be clearly established via memory unless one has already presupposed Schwanda as Wanda for her possession of Wanda's memories. This is referred to by Michaels as the 'Lockean Circle' and is the clearest point of comparison between these two thought experiments. More often than not, responses highlighted that the two thought experiments were different without detailing what specifically about them created the important differences: that is, that Locke set out to demonstrate that identity is held in the consciousness/memories while Michaels specifically set out to challenge that perspective.

Many students demonstrated a simplistic understanding of what it means to 'compare' ideas, relying on the use of 'however' or 'in comparison' to do all of the heavy lifting in their responses. Genuine comparison requires an exploration of similarities and differences and how those similarities and differences take the philosophers or their theories in distinct directions. Merely stating that they offer different thought experiments is not comparison.

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

> *The prince and the cobbler thought experiment serves ultimately to contend that, because we would no longer consider the prince the prince with the consciousness and memories of the cobbler, or the cobbler with those belonging to the prince, it cannot be the sameness of ones living organism that constitutes personal identity.*
>
> *Contrastingly, Michaels' Schwanda scenario attempts to prove that identity is not such an all or nothing concept, but rather one of degrees of relation between the physical and the psychological as they jointly contribute to Schwanda's sense of self. In this way, she advocates for the authority of body theory of self as something that should not be dismissed in our conceptions of personal identity. Thus, while Locke would believe Schwanda to be merely Wanda, as they possess her continuous conscious memories, Michaels would consider the Prince and Cobbler a new and complex amalgamation of their two identities, as some of self remains in their living bodies.*

Question 5a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	28	36	36	1.1

The number of students who clearly remembered the language and intention behind Aristotle's comments on the young studying political science was impressive. It is worth noting that Aristotle does addend this in his work, where he explains that it is specifically those young in learning, not necessarily young in age. Regardless, he gives two clear criteria for the good student: life experience, which enables one to know and judge the situations they face well; and an ability to control and manage the passions that so often drive the actions of the young.

Some students tried to substitute pleasure for the passions, but this is not entirely true of what Aristotle argues even though it entails an element of the passions. Unless the student extended their argument beyond just pleasure, they did not achieve the two marks available.

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

> *Aristotle argues that young people are too inexperienced to study moral philosophy, which means that they will not be good listeners and will act according to passions, not to virtue. Older people, by contrast, are more experiences and thus will listen well and act in accordance with reason and virtue.*

Question 5b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	49	32	20	0.7

Responses were very mixed. Many students had forgotten Callicles' views on the value of studying philosophy while young, namely that:

- it helps one to become cultured
- it shows an open mind
- neglect of philosophy in the young signifies pettiness and condemns one to a low estimation of their worth and potential.

Many also forgot the numerous reasons given by Callicles for why philosophy when older is not valuable, such as that they:

- miss out on essential experiences and accomplishments
- miss out on social status and prestige
- will be 'completely out of touch with human nature'
- will lack social skills and practical know-how because of their general cluelessness
- will seem ridiculous and immature because philosophy is childish
- will be socially isolated because of the pointless conversations philosophy is interested in
- will avoid the heart of the community where a man earns distinction
- will prove incapable of defending themselves in court.

Students were generally more comfortable with the numerous reasons why philosophy is not valuable in adulthood according to Callicles. A not-insignificant number of responses completely misattributed other philosophical ideas to Callicles.

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

> *For young people, Callicles acknowledges that philosophy can broaden their minds or increase their cleverness and social or political understanding – useful for later conquests. But for older people, Callicles believes that philosophy limits their ability to socially interact, as they begin to overthink everything instead of taking action in life and making decisions about how to run the community (as superior people would do).*

Question 5c.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	20	34	46	1.3

Many students opted to repeat answers given in Question 5a. or Question 5b., which generally did not elaborate into a justified reason for their agreement with a specific philosophical perspective. This style of response demonstrated little thinking about the question that was being asked or the potential implications of age restrictions on philosophy study. Students were required to offer a valuation on the ideas presented in Question 5a. or Question 5b. (or both) supporting their position. A student who supported Callicles' view that the young should study philosophy because of its broadening capacities would therefore have had to reconcile with Callicles' tandem position that it is ridiculous or wasteful for adults because they should be focused on more important pursuits like rhetoric or social standing. Many students argued simply that they thought the study of philosophy was valuable for young people as well as adults without ever justifying why. Similar responses were regularly given by students aligning with Aristotle. Some students opted to offer their

own position on whether young people are well-suited to the study of philosophy; however, if they did not explicitly address the views of Aristotle or Callicles in their response, they would have been unable to achieve full marks for their response.

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

> *I agree with Aristotle as it can be understood that if you are young, and inexperienced, it is likely that you will not truly understand how to achieve or be good.*
>
> *Such knowledge is cultivated through experience which essentially comes with age. For example, when we are young, say 12, we believe what is good is possibly getting an iPad. However, at 28 we usually come to understand that good is associated with giving back to our community.*

Question 6a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	18	30	33	18	1.5

Despite this question's scaffolding – inviting students to speak specifically about the 'noble, individual commander', how one might discover the good life through their example, and how this distinctly differs from the goals of the 'herd instinct of obedience' – many students left out one or several of these ideas in their responses. Students generally demonstrated a strong grasp of the herd instinct of obedience and why that might be concerning for Nietzsche's lofty vision of a good life. General comments about the commander's perspective and how that might be considered 'good' in Nietzsche's view were often referenced. But it was rare for all three concepts to be expressed accurately or in the one response. A lot of vaguely 'Nietzschean' words and ideas were used that lacked clarity of language and understanding to show genuine insight. Phrases like the 'will to power' or the 'Übermensch' do little to demonstrate a knowledge of what Nietzsche is trying to say about the individual commander and the pursuit of a good life. Students should be very careful about using these terms without explaining them within the framework of the ideas in question, in this case the 'noble, individual commander'. As Übermensch is not mentioned in the prescribed reading for Unit 4 Philosophy, it should be avoided, as the noble, commander or master are not aspirants to this Nietzschean overman.

The commander embodies ideals that Nietzsche values. As such, one might discover the self-affirmation, independence and resistance to herd restrictions as essential to the creative growth of the individual. Alternatively, the 'herd instinct of obedience' is about restriction of individuality, safety in community and morality, and the neutralising of those who are too dangerous, creative or different. Students needed a clear grasp of these ideas within Nietzsche's writing. Many responses did not convey the subtlety of Nietzsche's thinking or ventured off into unrelated ideas.

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

> *Becoming part of the 'herd' by following the 'herd instinct of obedience' leads to human mediocrity, believes Nietzsche. The herd seeks only to protect their own safety, and therefore discourages any qualities that would cultivate individual greatness. Instead, one should become a 'free spirit', breaking away from the herd and discovering what leads them, as an individual, to greatness, like a noble, individual commander.*

Question 6b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	49	25	26	0.8

Many argued that Socrates would respond precisely the way he had to Callicles: that the strength should be with the masses or that Nietzsche is offering a nature-versus-convention style of argument. While both responses may gesture vaguely at a reading of Nietzsche, students were required to make those connections explicit. As Nietzsche is not specifically arguing for brute strength but rather an ideal of intellectual freedom, this first Calliclesian link doesn't present as Socrates actually responding to Nietzsche. Similarly, the nature-versus-convention suggestion is a simplification of Nietzsche's worldview that self-actualisation defines genuine individuality and, in turn, creates commanders who are indifferent to the power they wield and instead present as examples of inspiration. Trying to frame Socrates' response to Callicles – that it is natural for people to band together to form conventions – as a reasonable critique did not reconcile the glaring differences between nature for Callicles (physical strength) and the Nietzschean concept that builds from what is perhaps naturally within 'man' but goes against the natural inclination of 'man' (to follow). For these reasons, many responses lacked the precision to achieve full marks.

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

Socrates would be concerned with Nietzsche's perspective on the superior individual who desires solitude and to separate him/herself from 'herd' values. Socrates strongly values the community and the ability to communicate justly with others in the good life. As such, Socrates may perceive Nietzsche to be a "predatory outlaw", someone who only cares about his own personal agenda and not anyone else's. However, Socrates would value Nietzsche's advocacy for self-discipline in one's life, as for Socrates that creates order and organisation in the mind.

Question 7a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	13	19	69	1.6

Most responses were handled very well and demonstrated the necessary insights into Wolf's two-fold approach to the pursuit of meaning. Responses were not required to fully unpack Wolf's conceptions of subjective or objective meaning, but rather recognise that Tom's obsession with video games likely fails to capture objective value and could raise questions about their worthiness of love. There were some clear gaps in student knowledge when they examined Wolf's conception of 'love' and what is 'worthy of love', which often did little to help in the quality of a response.

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

Wolf would state that Tom is not leading a good life as playing video games is not worthy of love. As for something to be worthy it must have subjective attraction and an objective attractiveness. Therefore, Tom doesn't lead a good life.

Question 7b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	22	40	38	1.2

Despite students generally recognising the framework of Wolf's views on a meaningful life, many did not handle this question well. Much time was spent repeating ideas delivered in Question 7a. Rather than justifying why a position was agreeable, some students simply repeated the philosopher's views. Students regularly failed to provide reasons for their position, and it was rare to see genuine discussion of the merits and/or limitations of Wolf's potential reading of Tom's great satisfaction from playing video games. While some responses considered the ideas carefully and considered the broad scope of what might be understood as objective meaning, many claimed that Wolf had no scope for this concept, which rendered her view untenable. Wolf spends much time in her essay detailing what is meant by objective value and it is incorrect to claim that she has little sense of it or that it is an entirely amorphous concept. This is not to say that there were not problems to explore with the limitations of her view, such as societal variety and how this might alter seemingly 'objective' valuations. Students who were able to manage the nuance of Wolf's work often performed very well in their responses.

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

No, as Wolf's criteria that an activity must also be objectively meaningful is misleading, as assertions of objective meaning are mostly based on social norms and convention – which is also subjectively determined. Thus, in truth, there isn't any valid reason to hold oneself to the subjective conventions others espouse to lead a life meaningful to you that Wolf proposes.

Section B

Section B used two extracts that were accessible and well-targeted for students to explore. The provided framework of what should be covered in student responses was mirrored across both questions. The language of the questions clearly pointed students towards the development of a reasoned and justified perspective on the proposed question, using the prescribed philosophers for breadth and support. Most students attempted these questions and did well to interpret and understand the unseen material in light of what they had studied. Many responses rehashed the philosophical perspectives rather than exploring how such perspectives might shed light on, or interact with, the question and ideas expressed in the extract.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	4	7	9	17	17	14	11	8	4	3	4.9

Many students demonstrated a good understanding of the ideas expressed by Massimo Pigliucci in the extract and recognised the parallels between his views and those of Smart. Some did not pick up on the sarcasm Pigliucci directs towards theories that are interested in how experience raises concerns about scientific reductions of the mind/body problem. While some students might have misread Pigliucci's intention, many managed the question admirably by developing a detailed exploration of consciousness and how terms like 'experience' and 'explanation of how and why' generate a healthy discussion of the hard problem of consciousness.

Unfortunately, many responses focused on explaining the positions studied without addressing the question: Must an account of the mind tell us what it is like to be conscious? Students were required to judge whether the actual experience of consciousness is essential to an account of mind, or whether the analysis of how

and why we have consciousness is enough. It was rare for students to frame their responses entirely around this central directive; those who did often achieved high scores. This skill of developing a viewpoint has always been at the centre of the study of philosophy. It is important that students recognise that the development of a position is not the same as agreeing with a position. Reasonable and well-argued supports are required to demonstrate why the position adopted by the student is one that they have considered, given all they have learnt. Students who scored highly recognised the need to not only state a viewpoint but justify why they thought that viewpoint was necessary given the question being considered.

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

Central to Nagel's conception of the relationship between body and mind, directly contrasting Pigliucci, is his rejection of reductionist approaches to such a nuanced concept, as he contends that they are insufficient accounts of phenomenological consciousness. It is the subjective character, the certain first-person quality or "what-it's-likeness" of our experience that Nagel accentuates as an essential and defining feature of the mental realm and in this way negates the ability for materialist, scientific approaches to move towards some "greater objectivity". It is likely Pigliucci's assertion that our "explanation" and "experience" are two entirely separate categories that Nagel would reject, as while recognising the ability of concepts like "colours and triangles" to be explained in objective terms, he defends the intangible quality of a subjective viewpoint that makes it impossible for humans to truly comprehend about universally, something physicalist often claim to achieve. He uses the analogy of a butterfly to detail this sentiment, as while someone may observe that caterpillar, upon being locked away for some time, emerges as a butterfly, they cannot confirm "how or why" such a metamorphosis has occurred. In much the same sense, he considers that these materialists observe physical causes and events and use this to mistakenly confirm physical explanations and descriptions when such a conclusion is beyond their reach.

Alternatively, J.J.C Smart is of the opposite believe. Instead positing essentially that sensations or mental phenomena can be completely explained by brain processes or physical phenomena. While he recognises that our intricate and greatly differing linguistic conceptualisations of these two ideas confounds the way we understand them, he nonetheless defends that this semantic identity does not reveal true ontological identity. Appealing to the authority of science alongside Pigliucci, they agree that a "complete explanation" may be constructed despite such confusion. Smart uphold that an individual's knowledge of two things as different, like the morning and evening, does not prove that they are in fact separate, as both "stars" are actually the planet Venus. The same goes, through his lens, for sensations and brain processes, as while we attribute different logic and descriptions to them, they are not "over and above" each other. In this sense, he appeals to the principal of Ockam's razor to ultimately dismiss the unnecessary complication of the mind body problem, as the simplest answer, which to him excludes "what it is like", is the best.

However, Smart himself confesses that, despite being a theory underpinned by science, there are aspects of his ideation that cannot be empirically proven, as no experiment or investigation can provide deciding data on the supremacy of his reduction over that of a dualist theory. Additionally, his appeal to Ockam's razor is inherently problematic, as if we were to apply such a rule in other facets of life we may have sufficient reason to consider the earth flat or deny the complex laws of physics and gravity. While both Smart and Pigliucci have avidly defended the authority of science, they both run the risk of generalising these simple concepts to the very intricate problem of the mind, something I see as mistakenly dismissive considering their lack of real supporting evidence. Thus, corresponding with Nagel I am inclined to believe that some aspect of what it is truly like to be conscious is missing from reductionist approaches such as Smart and Pigliucci's, or at least further evidence must be gathered before they can be considered trustworthy.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	5	8	9	15	17	15	12	8	4	2	4.9

The quality of responses to this question was largely similar to those for the previous question. Many students presented the same issues as in their responses to the first question of this section. Most demonstrated a firm understanding of the ideas expressed by Joshua Knobe in the extract and followed this with often highly detailed explanations of the viewpoints held by Hume and Locke. In particular, it was excellent to see some very nuanced thinking about Hume's position on personal identity. Things were often less well-expressed regarding Locke but this might be explained by some difficulties with the notion of future selves expressed in Knobe's passage.

As with the previous question, many students did not focus on the actual question, but delivered generalised comments on the nature of personal identity as Locke or Hume see it, rather than interrogating whether we should 'care about, and take responsibility for, our future selves'. Despite their evident knowledge, students were not answering the question. Many responses did little to offer or justify reasonable positions on the question, often opting to agree with one of the philosophers without explaining why.

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

Locke argues that it is very plausible that our personhood persists through time in as such as our consciousness can be extended. Through the Prince and Cobbler, wherein the consciousness of a Prince is implanted into the body of a cobbler, Locke argues that we would consider this person the Prince because he has the same consciousness. Knobe's suggestion is that consciousness undergo transformation through time such that we are more cognisable. Locke would concede that this is possible, but not inevitable. It seems perfectly reasonable, for Locke, to have a concern for the future, for the pursuit of happiness, which the person undertakes, because we reflect on ourselves as the same consciousness through that person. In line with this, Locke would consider it reasonable to save money for the future self, to care and take responsibility for them, for we are on the same pursuit of happiness.

Hume disagrees. He is a strict empiricist, arguing that when we look inwards we only find a fluctuating bundle of perceptions, not a self which persists into the future. For Hume, no impression can indicate a persisting self, for our impressions are inconsistent. This is in conflict with Locke who argues when we look within we do perceive a self, and Knobe, who isn't so radical in his acknowledgement of the changes of personhood. As such, Hume argues that if we save money for a future self, it won't be for reasons of identity that such an act is justified; it is not a future self we would be caring for, but ra different bundle of perceptions.

Hume's strict empiricist claim that when we introspect we find no evidence of the persistent self is implausible, corroborating Locke's contention. For example, it seems that our senses are geared to recurrent impressions, like the tastelessness of water, thus rendering us sensitive to variability like poor-tasting water. As such, it seems evident that there is a persistent perceiver behind our impressions.

It could still be the case, however that this self changes through time, if not with the rapidity Hume observes. Knobe's argument, that our values and beliefs can change, and this damages our sameness, seems worthy of being taken seriously. For example, a reformed alcoholic without the goal of being drunk seems to have changed significantly. This doesn't mean we can't be concerned for him if we are an alcoholic, because he is an evolution from us. It thus seems plausible to reconcile Locke's concern for ourselves despite the possibility we can go through change of personhood. All that needs to be confirmed is that we have some kind of persistence and this has been established.

Ultimately, we should take responsibility and show love for our future selves; the fact that we persist moment to moment is enough to warrant the concerns Locke promulgates.

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
%	4	1	2	4	5	6	8	9	10	10	8	8	6	5	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	9.0

Both extracts for the essay questions directed students to explore specific contemporary concerns regarding technology and the good life. It was clear from the responses that the vast majority of students understood the ideas in the extracts and were able to examine how the philosophers might interact with them. This being said, much of the use of the philosophers was poorly developed with regard to the content, which in turn encouraged generic and uncritical responses. Students who understood the philosophers – and also had a good sense of how to critically examine the merits, limitations and implications of their ideas regarding the issues in their chosen question – scored highly. The scope for critical application in these questions was broad. Those who were able to think through the specifics of the extracts gave themselves a strong framework to examine the question of a good life today.

Some students clearly took the grand technological goals presented in the extracts as a challenge to reflect on the merits and limitations they may create for everyday lives. Often in these more reflective and creative responses there was great insight regarding how the set philosophers might offer perspective on managing or reframing the most threatening or damaging implications of these developments. However, responses of this kind were rare, with most students 'info-dumping' their knowledge of the philosophers with little consideration of the question or critical reflection on the implications of such views in the modern world. It was common for students to veer off on extensive tangents of opinion regarding the central issues raised by the extracts with little philosophical (or indeed personal) justification for their views.

Some students appeared to have rote-learned responses and then 'regurgitated' them with little, if any, attempt to address the questions being asked. Only a student who thoroughly and insightfully retargeted the views they'd memorised could develop an effectively focused response. Most of these types of essay were wildly unfocused on the issues at hand and, despite some strong insights, did not adequately address the question.

Some responses gave tokenistic explanations of philosophical ideas delivered with little effort to apply the views to the question. Similar to the responses in Section B, students largely ignored the need to reflect on the views they were putting forward, if they were developing any arguments at all. Given the specifics of the extracts, there was a lot of opportunity to think about and develop a viable perspective on the issues. This was often ignored and substituted with generic comments about the philosophers studied or personal beliefs, with little effort to develop a critical and insightful discussion. The study of technology and its role in the good life is designed for exploration with the support of the content studied. Thus, merely stating that Nietzsche would dislike virtual reality and then writing about the value of suffering rarely demonstrated the critical enquiry required for a genuine exploration of the philosophical concerns raised by Palmer Luckey and John Carmack in their goals for the new technology.

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

Would virtual reality for the underprivileged masses promote their best life? Wagner James Au argues that there is a moral imperative to serve the common food of the masses, indicating that there is something common about the best life. As such, he argues we must bring them virtual reality such as holidays. Moreover, he indicates that there is no inherent value of reality in the best life, evidenced in his willingness to render it virtual. Furthermore, we see a suggestion in his argument that the best life derives from control of the outer world, explicitly through technologically fabricating it, rather than the best life being an interior phenomenon. Through a critical discussion of Nietzsche's response to Au's perspective, I will argue that the best life entails an individual's encounter with reality oriented by their inner life, so virtual reality may harm the best life for the underprivileged insofar as it precludes this.

Nietzsche's founding axiom is that we are willing creatures, who thus live well when that will is exercised – he envisages a future dependent on the human will. Because the will is an individual phenomenon, Nietzsche is concerned by moral imperatives to aid the masses, for they reek of a herd morality that deadens one's noble capacity to command ourselves. Moreover, Nietzsche argues that we must meet reality for what it is, for if we do not we become consumed by fear of it, that infects the volitions vitality of the best life. Whilst Au seems to find no value in reality, Nietzsche argues our encounter with it honours our drives of courage and adventure, strengthening us to overcome. In this process, Nietzsche also seems to intimate that we attend to our inner drives and desires so that we fully honour them in how we live. Thus, Nietzsche argues that the best life is fuelled by will, typified by vitality and imbued with the vigour to command oneself.

The ramifications of these good life claims for Au's perspective on virtual reality are profound. He would argue that this project of pseudo-holidays tries to reduce our individual needs to that which is good for the masses. Moreover, Nietzsche would be disturbed at this drive to be insulated from reality, for it is in reality that all our drives are called out, thus lamenting the escape to another realm which virtual reality promises. Moreover, he would condemn that by seeking to manipulate the world which we face, we are likely to forget the needs within us, spanning security to solitude. Thus, Nietzsche would be troubled by how virtual reality, in play on this mass level, detracts from our capacity to command in accordance with the will.

Is Nietzsche's critique of this good for the masses justified? I will argue that it is, because the masses are and unreal abstraction of the individual. When Au describes how Oculus Rift can serve the underprivileged, he is really referring to how it can serve individuals – after all, individuals not groups pull on the headset. When we admit this, what is meant by a moral imperative becomes murky. What is good for one individual's life is different to the next individual. For example, some people may not wish to escape on a luxurious virtual holiday to the Bahamas, because they would rather continue their simpler life at home. So when we attempt to calculate the common good, we unacceptably but inevitably reduce it, compromising the best life for many people. The good is different depending on the individual, so solutions for the masses may well do harm.

Furthermore, I argue that Nietzsche provides a more helpful account of the place of reality in the best life. Evin if we accept Au's contention that reality has no intrinsic value, it still remains the case that we cannot outrun reality forever. We are finite, with limited technological prowess, so malfunctions will happen, normal life will have to continue. Nietzsche's view that we must meet reality is persuasive because if we are in virtual hibernation, our resilience to cope with reality is eroded. For example, although one might be able to enjoy the virtual experience of elitist space travel, one will come crashing down to Earth when their friend passes away. The elimination of life's imperfections means we are unaccustomed for these inevitable moments in life. In order to handle this as best we can, it is important that virtual reality does not supplant true reality, so that we can meet with it, as Nietzsche argues, in the best way we can.

Moreover, even if we do not accept the importance of reality, it is also the case that the ethos which virtual reality foments, of controlling the outer world, can preclude us from honouring our inner life. For example, under an Oculus Rift plan, we will come to value how perfect the outer world is, such as what beauty it has, rather than 'listening' to our inner life. Why is this listening important? Moreso that exterior phenomena, it is empirically true that most people gain more value from their inner phenomena, like love. The long-running Harvard case study found that 94% of people identify their quality of life with how much they have loved. We should be deeply troubled, therefore, that the underprivileged masses may become consumed by controlling the outer world of conditions. The best life must detach itself from this attitude and attend to these inner concerns, whatever they may be for the individual. This seems to chime with Nietzsche's position that we must honour all of the different drives within us, rather than surrender them.

The contemporary philosopher of technology, Neil Postman, argues we should judge technological development by what it "giveth" to and "taketh away" from the best life. In the case of virtual reality, it thus seems that it "giveth" us a miscalculated notion of the good, and "taketh away" our ability to meet with

reality, promoting the resilience to encounter the tribulations of existence. Moreover, virtual reality, "taketh away" our attention from our inner life, compromising our capacity to honour what is within us. It thus seems that on a host of levels, virtual reality undermines the best life, largely owing to Au's claims about the good life which Nietzsche persuasively responds to. Ultimately, in order to have any place, it must become unyoked from these beliefs.

Essay assessment criteria

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

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

10-9	The student demonstrated knowledge that was comprehensive and in- depth and was used incisively to support arguments. Philosophical arguments and concepts were fully understood.
8-7	The student demonstrated a secure knowledge of this material. Philosophical arguments and concepts were largely understood.
6-5	The student demonstrated knowledge of philosophical issues, and concepts were generally understood.
4-3	The student displayed some knowledge of philosophical issues and there was a basic understanding of the concepts used.
2-1	The student demonstrated a superficial knowledge of philosophical issues but the student displayed only limited understanding of the concepts used.

Critical evaluation of ideas and arguments relevant to the topic

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

10-9	The student developed focused and critical ideas and arguments from a consistently held and well justified perspective relevant to the topic. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was compelling or subtle, with strong evidence of personal reflection.
8-7	The student developed ideas and arguments from a consistently held perspective. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was appropriate, thoughtful and convincing.
6-5	The student developed ideas and arguments in a sound way and there was a consistent attempt to evaluate them, even if this was not fully developed.
4-3	The student developed some ideas and arguments, but the development was simple or was asserted without support or reference. There may have been some basic evaluation of the ideas and arguments that were relevant to the selected topic.
2-1	The student developed ideas and arguments in a basic way but there was little or no evaluation.

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

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

5	The student made astute selections of philosophical material and examples.
4	The student selected philosophical material and examples that were mostly relevant.
3	The student made some use of relevant supporting material and examples.
2	The student made use of some supporting material and examples that were not always relevant or appropriate.
1	The students included little, if any, philosophical support material.

Development of a coherent and well-reasoned response that addresses the specific demands of the topic

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

10-9	The student showed a full understanding of the specific demands of the question by identifying material that was always relevant. The implications of this material were drawn out in a detailed analysis that provided coherent and meaningful development of the response. Examples were well chosen and compelling in their support of the argument. Counter-arguments were presented in a convincing way.
8-7	The student showed a clear understanding of the specific demands of the question by identifying relevant material and analysing it in a thoughtful way. Arguments linked together and were largely coherently developed in support of the student's contention. Examples directly supported the overall argument in a persuasive manner. Some counter-arguments were presented.
6-5	The student showed understanding of the specific demands of the question and identified material that was nearly always relevant but it was not always clear how it was being used to support the student's contention in a meaningful way. There was a sound analysis of this material. Examples were appropriate and gave support to the argument.
4-3	The student showed some awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified and analysed some relevant material. There was some development of arguments but they were not always focused or coherently expressed. Some appropriate examples were used.
2-1	The student showed little awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified relevant material in a limited way. The discussion was generally undeveloped and often irrelevant to the line of argument. There was little analysis and few or no examples were given.

Use of clear and precise language appropriate to philosophy

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

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