

---

# Philosophy

## Changes for 2002

**A**t the Authority meeting on 24 October changes to Unit 4 in VCE Philosophy were approved for 2002. The changes affect both school-assessed coursework and Outcomes 1, 2 and 3.

During the year, the implementation of VCE Philosophy was carefully monitored. An evaluation of the implementation of the study was undertaken through a survey and a workshop with teachers of the study. As a result of this consultation Outcome 1 and Outcome 2 of Unit 4 have been rewritten and the assessment tasks for Outcome 2 and Outcome 3 have been transposed. Teachers reported that Outcomes 1 and 2 were too broad by assessing both areas of study. The breadth of each outcome has been reduced by focusing each outcome on only one area of study. The changes to Unit 4 are published in Liftout 2 of this Bulletin. Teachers should note that the key knowledge has been changed accordingly under each outcome. Principals have also been advised of these changes via memorandum. Copies of the replacement pages for the Philosophy Study Design are also available on the VCAA website.

These changes will be effective from 1 January 2002 until the accreditation period of the study expires on 31 December 2004. Principals will be required to certify that the Philosophy teacher/s at their school have received notification of the changes for 2002

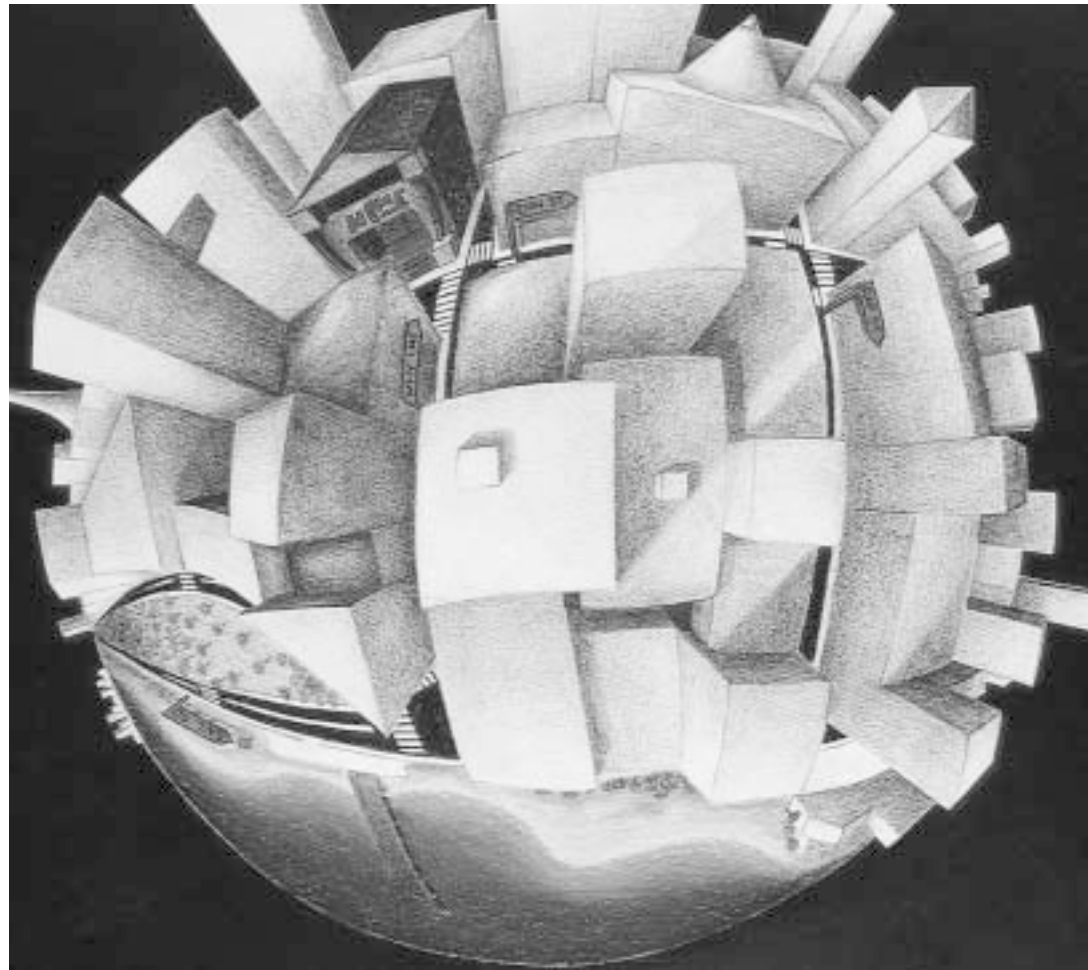
Teachers should also note that a VCE Philosophy Text panel has been established to advise on abridging the core of prescribed texts. The texts will remain the same as 2001 but will comprise shorter passages. The texts will be published in the December VCE BULLETIN.

# VCE Study design Philosophy

**Changes to VCE Philosophy  
2002–2004  
Unit 4**

The following pages should  
replace Unit 4 pages 23 to  
27 in the VCE Philosophy  
study design,  
accredited  
1 January 2001 to  
31 December 2004

Accreditation period ends 31 December 2004



## Unit 4: Mind and knowledge

This unit looks at two areas of contemporary philosophical debate and their historical development. It involves the study and evaluation of contemporary arguments in these debates and the relationship of the contemporary arguments to historical ones. The first area of study looks at a topic from metaphysics: What is the mind? The second looks at a topic from epistemology: Does science provide us with knowledge or merely with dogmatic belief? Since it is by using our minds as well as our senses that we are capable of acquiring knowledge, and since theories about what we can know will influence what we think the mind is, these two questions are inter-related. In some cases the same text makes an important contribution to both these questions.

Prescribed texts for Unit 4 will be published annually in the *VCE Bulletin* and are listed in the resources section of this study design.

### AREAS OF STUDY

#### 1. Mind, body and soul

Philosophers often argue over whether everything can ultimately be explained by the laws of physics or whether there are mental events which fall outside physical and causal explanation. This area of study looks at different notions of the soul and the mind, and at the views of those who deny the existence of anything that falls outside the scope of physics. Many philosophers, including Plato and Descartes, have argued that the mind is the soul and is something quite different from the physical body, and can exist independently of it. Both Descartes and Plato were impressed by the fact that we can have certain knowledge of important truths, including the eternal truths of mathematics and geometry, which, they argued, we could not have acquired through our material sense organs. Many philosophers continue to believe that the mind is something non-physical, but science suggests that everything that happens is a physical event that can be explained in terms of the laws of physics. If this is so then even the mind's capacity to acquire knowledge about non-physical things, like numbers, must be able to be explained as a capacity of the physical organ that we call the brain. Physicalists believe that the mind is the brain and so can be thought of as a large organic computer. Others argue that not everything the mind does can be explained in terms of physics. Historically, humans have distinguished themselves from other animals by asserting that we, unlike other animals, have souls. If our minds are just highly evolved brains then we may have to rethink our relations with other animals and our place in nature.

This area of study will include:

- the questions ‘What is the mind?’ and ‘What is the relationship between the mind and the body?’;
- arguments both for and against the view that the mind is just the brain;
- the relationship between theories of knowledge and theories of the mind;
- implications of different views concerning the nature of the mind for our conception of ourselves and our place in nature.

## 2. Science, knowledge and dogma

What is science? What is knowledge? What differentiates science from dogma? This area of study looks at various ways in which knowledge has been conceptualised, from Plato’s view that knowledge requires timeless unchanging truth, to Kuhn’s claim that science is not a rationally justified progress towards the truth. Kuhn’s data has been taken to support recent claims that what is called ‘knowledge’ is just accepted belief, and so is not fundamentally different from dogma. One area in which we seem to have certain knowledge is mathematics. The truths of mathematics do not change over time, and it seems impossible that simple statements like  $2+2 = 4$  could be false. Philosophers like Plato and Descartes accept that in order for us to have knowledge of some proposition, its truth should be indubitable. Descartes attempted to show that some indubitable truths existed, and that we could prove that our well-founded beliefs must be true. Most modern philosophers think that Descartes’ attempt failed, and that while we have scientific knowledge, science is not indubitable. We may revise our scientific theories, and we can doubt them, but we nevertheless think that it is rational to believe them. What then, if anything, distinguishes science from non-scientific belief systems such as astrology? Some have argued that science involves a rational progress towards the truth, but historians of science have questioned this. Others have suggested that science uses a method of falsification and subjects its theories to testing, and this makes it rational to believe it. Yet others question the high status of science in contemporary society and think that our faith in science is simply a contemporary religion. The belief that science gives us the whole truth is one of the reasons for doubting the existence of souls, so the questions raised in this area of study also bear indirectly on those dealt with in the first area.

This area of study will include:

- the questions ‘What is knowledge?’ ‘Does science provide us with knowledge?’ ‘How can we justify our beliefs?’;
- arguments both for and against the conclusion that we do have knowledge, and that modern science does provide us with knowledge;
- nature of knowledge, belief, dogma, the justification of belief and scientific method;
- implications of adopting a view about the nature of science and knowledge.

## OUTCOMES

For this unit students are required to demonstrate achievement of three outcomes. As a set these outcomes encompass both areas of study for the unit.

### Outcome 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain the concepts relating to the nature of the mind and analyse arguments concerning the relationship between body and mind.

*Key knowledge*

In achieving this outcome the student will draw on knowledge described in area of study 1.

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate knowledge of

- What is meant by the various terms ‘soul’, ‘mind’, ‘thinking’, ‘body’, ‘physical’ ‘non-physical,’ ‘mental’ and ‘spiritual’ that occur in these debates, and the ways in which the uses of these words can vary and develop over time;
- the impact of the development of science on the ways in which we conceptualise thought and the mind as well as the body;
- the central arguments that have been developed for the view that the mind is something quite distinct from the body and that mental events cannot be explained as physical events;
- the central arguments that have been developed for the view that the mind must be a part of nature that can be explained in terms of physics.

*Key skills*

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate the ability to

- read carefully and think about the use that is being made of key notions in the text read;
- relate historical developments in science to changing concepts of the mind and our place in nature.

**Outcome 2**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain the concepts and analyse the arguments concerning the nature of knowledge.

*Key knowledge*

In achieving this outcome the student will draw on knowledge described in area of study 2.

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate knowledge of

- what is meant by ‘knowledge’, ‘opinion’, ‘belief’, ‘science’, ‘dogma’ and ‘truth’ and the ways in which the uses of these words can vary and develop over time;
- the central arguments that have been developed for the view that there is knowledge and that it is different from mere opinion, and that science may be included in this knowledge;
- the central arguments for thinking that science does not provide us with knowledge.

*Key skills*

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate the ability to

- comprehend and communicate arguments philosophers have given on the status of science.

### **Outcome 3**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to evaluate contemporary arguments which use concepts of the mind, body, knowledge and belief.

#### *Key knowledge*

In achieving this outcome the student will draw on knowledge described in areas of study 1 and 2.

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate knowledge of

- historical debates on the concepts of the mind, body, knowledge and belief;
- the ways in which answers to the questions concerning the nature of the mind relate to social issues such as our treatment of animals, the way in which we think about computers and our attitudes to death and dying;
- the ways in which answers to the questions concerning the status of science relate to social issues such as the value of astrology or alternative medicines.

#### *Key skills*

To achieve this outcome the student should demonstrate the ability to

- apply the historical concepts and arguments studied to evaluate issues of contemporary interest.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on a decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the set of outcomes specified for the unit. This decision will be based on the teacher's assessment of the student's overall performance on assessment tasks designated for the unit. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) will publish annually an assessment guide which will include advice on the scope of the assessment tasks and the criteria for assessment.

The key knowledge and skills listed for each outcome should be used as a guide to course design and the development of learning activities. The key knowledge and skills do not constitute a checklist and such an approach is not necessary or desirable for determining the achievement of outcomes. The elements of key knowledge and skills should not be assessed separately.

#### **Assessment of levels of achievement**

The student's level of achievement for Unit 4 will be determined by school-assessed coursework and an end-of-year examination.

#### *Contributions to final assessment*

School-assessed coursework for Unit 4 will contribute 25 per cent to the final assessment.

The level of achievement for Units 3 and 4 is also assessed by an end-of-year examination, which will contribute 50 per cent to the final assessment.

#### *School-assessed coursework*

Teachers will provide to the VCAA a score representing an assessment of the student's level of achievement.

The score must be based on the teacher's rating of performance of each student on the tasks set out in the following table and in accordance with an assessment guide published annually by the VCAA. The assessment guide will also include advice on the scope of the task and the criteria for assessment.

# Changes to VCE Philosophy 2002–2004

Assessment tasks must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and must not unduly add to the workload associated with that program. They must be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe. Where optional assessment tasks are listed teachers must ensure that the tasks they select are comparable in scope and demand.

Outcomes	Assessment tasks	Marks allocated*
<b>Outcome 1</b> Explain the concepts relating to the nature of the mind and analyse arguments concerning the relationship between body and mind.	Short-answer responses to a set of questions or A test.	20
<b>Outcome 2</b> Explain the concepts and analyse the arguments concerning the nature of knowledge.	A written exercise.	40
<b>Outcome 3</b> Evaluate contemporary arguments which use concepts of the mind, body, knowledge and belief.	An essay.	40
<b>Total marks</b>		<b>100</b>

\* School-assessed coursework for Unit 4 contributes 25 per cent to the final assessment.

## ***End-of-year examination (Units 3 and 4)***

### **Description**

The examination requires each student to respond to

- short-answer questions related to the texts;
- an essay.

The examination will be set by a panel using the criteria published annually by the VCAA.

### **Conditions**

The examination will be completed under the following conditions:

- Duration: two hours.
- Date: end-of-year, on a date to be notified in the *VCE Bulletin*.
- VCAA examination rules will apply. Details of these rules are published annually in the *VCE Administrative Handbook*.
- The examination will be marked by a panel appointed by the VCAA.

### **Contribution to final assessment**

The examination contributes 50 per cent to the final assessment.



Published by

**VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY**

41 St Andrews Place East Melbourne Victoria 3002 Australia

TELEPHONE +61 3 9651 4300 FACSIMILE +61 3 9651 4324

EMAIL [vcaa@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:vcaa@edumail.vic.gov.au)

WEB [www.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)

