

# 2024 ASSESSMENT REPORT

## PHL315118 PHILOSOPHY

### General Comments

The 2024 Philosophy exam was undertaken by a cohort of critical minds who engaged with a rich tapestry of philosophical perspectives, ranging from the timeless insights of the ancients to the progressive ideas of modern thinkers. Their reflections wove together the threads of ideas, highlighting philosophy's ongoing importance for contemporary existence. The most compelling essays were those that chose a clear path and walked it with purpose, delving deeply into a few central ideas. Indeed, given the time constraints of the exam format, students are again encouraged to focus on two or three philosophical positions.

A defining feature that separated strong essays from weaker ones was the delicate balance between explanation, analysis, and evaluation. Essays that faltered often contained too much description, recounting the thoughts of philosophers with little more than a name-check, missing the opportunity for deeper engagement. Some responses, influenced by resources like Crash Course Philosophy, resorted to retelling content rather than actively engaging with the material. Excessive listing of names, positions, and arguments, or offering dictionary definitions of metaphysical concepts without analysing their meaning or relevance was unhelpful and detracted from the strength of the response. To reach greater depth, students should strive to condense their explanations and use the remaining time to dissect the reasoning behind the arguments and assess their validity. As suggested in the previous year's examiner's report, a guiding principle might be to allocate one-third of the space to explanation, one-third to analysis, and the final third to evaluation. Only with this balance can one move from surface-level description to the art of critique—questioning, considering objections, and crafting replies that reveal the strengths or flaws of an argument.

Indeed, the most successful essays presented a clear philosophical position, underpinned by reason and evidence, not simply declarations that sounded persuasive. Weaker responses often leaned on unsubstantiated claims, such as asserting an argument was sound merely because it seemed “rational” or “scientific”. The logical principle of Occam's razor, often cited, was typically employed without much scrutiny, with its simplicity taken as the ultimate indicator of truth. However, the simplest explanation is not always necessarily the correct one. Logic provides structure but does not imbue an argument with truth on its own. Furthermore, while the scientific method can lend weight to certain philosophical discussions, it is never the final arbiter of metaphysical or ethical questions—these realms reach beyond what can be observed, measured, or proven.

At the heart of these reflections lies a simple truth: philosophy is not just a repository of knowledge but an act of intellectual creation. It is a dialogue with oneself and others, a journey of articulating beliefs and tracing their roots with reasoned thought.

# Written Component

## Question 1

The responses to the question were generally of a good standard, showcasing a solid understanding of key philosophical positions. Most students adopted either Substance Dualism or Material Monism/Reductive Materialism as their primary stance to defend. In doing so, most candidates included significant discussions of René Descartes and his influential *Meditations on First Philosophy*. This demonstrated familiarity with classical sources in the field of philosophy of mind.

The exploration of Mary's Room as a thought experiment was notably prevalent among those defending a dualist position. This example effectively served to illustrate the arguments for the mind's distinct and non-physical properties. Additionally, Thomas Nagel's influential essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" was also commonly cited, albeit with varying levels of quality in the analysis and application to support dualist viewpoints.

However, there are areas in which improvement is needed for a more comprehensive evaluation of the philosophical positions:

- **Clarification of Positions:** A number of responses failed to explicitly state that, under Substance Dualism, the mind and body are metaphysically distinct substances. This omission weakened the clarity and depth of argumentation.
- **Exploration of Core Issues:** Discussions surrounding the Hard Problem of Consciousness and the Problem of Interaction were insufficiently addressed in many papers that focused on substance dualism. More robust engagement with these problems would have strengthened the students' analysis by demonstrating a deeper understanding of the challenges facing dualist theories.
- **Analytical and Evaluative Depth:** It is essential that assessments go beyond a mere description of various philosophical arguments. The most successful papers distinguished themselves by presenting thorough analyses and evaluations, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of different positions. These papers demonstrated critical insight, showing how the arguments are sound or unsound and explaining why this is the case. Effective argumentation should naturally lead the reader to a conclusion, supported by well-structured reasoning and persuasive evidence.

In conclusion, while the general understanding and engagement with core topics were commendable, the strongest responses demonstrated more nuanced analysis, a clearer articulation of key positions, and a rigorous evaluation of the arguments involved.

## Question 2

Nearly all students were able to give a brief explanation of what thought experiments are and give 1-2 examples. Whilst the question specifically asked students to discuss two thought experiments, some only wrote about one and some managed to include three or more. The Turing Test, Chinese Room and Mary and the Black and White Room were popular choices for this question. Some students became a little distracted in their essays considering AI and the possibilities of artificial consciousness/sentience. Whilst many students were able to discuss various mind and body theories (such as monism, dualism, substance dualism, property dualism, functionalism, physicalism, biological naturalism, panpsychism and Identity Theory), some only focussed on

presenting one theoretical position on the mind and body problem, rather than contrast this with counterarguments or subsequent ideas.

Weaker responses tended to spend much of the essay space describing the thought experiments leaving only a small amount of time/space to discuss the implications they posed to mind and body theory. Weaker responses also tended to name and define theoretical positions on mind and body but did not analyse the positions by assessing strengths and weaknesses or looking at counter claims. The explanation of arguments behind theoretical positions or the thought experiments themselves were also brief in weaker responses. Stronger responses were able to briefly describe two thought experiments but then provided detailed discussion on the philosophical questions and theoretical implications of the thought experiments. Stronger responses also gave a clear and well-argued evaluation of thought experiments within their essays.

### Question 3

This question was quite challenging, and student responses to it were largely detailed, well-considered and sophisticated in their expression. The strongest examples demonstrated a precise understanding and use of terminology that balanced in-depth discussions of physicalist explanations of consciousness with appropriate critiques from proponents of qualia, drawing clear evaluative distinctions between the two. These students explained key positions using famous examples from philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, detailing arguments and thought experiments supporting physicalism clearly and accurately, such as advances in neuroscience correlating brain activity with mental states, or Dennett's claim that qualia are illusory, and countering them with other arguments such as those of Frank Jackson or expressing ideas in their own unique way.

Some weaker essays in this section demonstrated confusion about even key terms such as "qualia" from the question, using vague or incorrect terminology and occasionally overlooking the explanatory gap altogether. They offered superficial or one-sided arguments, falling into the trap of oversimplifying physicalist positions by simply stating that they seemed most likely, or that it was "just a matter of time" before science proved them true. Candidates should be reminded that as much as they might strive towards the best understanding of what "the truth" might be, the focus of their essays should be to demonstrate the depth and complexity of their philosophical thinking.

### Question 4

In the problem of free will Baron D'Holbach's notion of human life as a line—one that nature commands us to trace across the surface of the earth—stands as a powerful and unyielding metaphor. This line, perhaps observed by the invisible hand of LaPlace's all-knowing demon, insidiously whispers that every moment, every choice, follows an unalterable path, an inevitable consequence set by the laws of nature and the cosmos. It reflects the deterministic view that we, like cogs in a machine, move within the boundaries set for us, unable to swerve, even for an instant.

Many responses to this question embraced the challenge before them through earnest reflection, linking D'Holbach's line to the unyielding course of hard determinism and the longing for the different forms of freedom Libertarianism and Compatibilism promise. Still, many essays fell into the trap of listing ideas without delving into them, presenting a tour of arguments rather than a journey of deep analysis. These explorations often lacked strong evidence and critical evaluation, leaving the true complexity of the debate unexamined.

The realm of Libertarian philosophy, where freedom dares to assert itself against the lines drawn by nature, could have been explored with more depth. But instead of dissecting the reasoning of such thinkers as Peter Van Inwagen, Jean-Paul Sartre, Robert Kane, or Helen Steward, some essays merely skimmed the surface, failing to connect these philosophical threads meaningfully.

The essays that succeeded were those that moved beyond description and engaged with the reasoning behind each position. They pointed out that the threat to our sense of moral responsibility posed by hard determinism does mean that we are necessarily free and instead offered a sense of degrees of freedom through Compatibilist thinkers such as Hume, Hobbes, Frankfurt and Dennett. Indeed, the latter's thought experiments on nefarious neurosurgeons, wasps, model airplanes, and soup were used to illustrate that even if our agency feels constrained, and the reality of determinism persists, human freedom may yet be woven into the fabric of existence itself. To strengthen their arguments, responses would have benefited from clear evidence, such as Libet's studies on the readiness potential or 'free won't' or Searle's exploration of causality and the subjective experience of choice that links quantum indeterminacy, consciousness, 'free' and 'will'.

The best essays embraced the dance of reason, questioning the very notion of causation and freedom. They juxtaposed Newton's clockwork universe with the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, urging us to consider whether true freedom could exist within a world that may be determined yet inexplicably unpredictable. They grappled with the powerful objections of father and son philosophers Peter and Galen Strawson, exploring whether freedom is merely an illusion. These essays did not simply accept the line life demands but examined, questioned, and reimagined it, daring to see where the path might lead beyond the shadow of LaPlace's demon.

## Question 5

This question required candidates to engage with a determinist and compatibilist position in the free will debate, which most candidates did. Weaker essays misconstrued compatibilism as the view that human behaviour is only partly determined, which simply isn't the case. Compatibilist fully endorse determinism (or sometimes indeterminism) and then argue that freedom is compatible with a deterministic world.

Many students successfully acknowledged that the central differences between these positions concern moral responsibility and how we should understand/define freedom. However, quite a few candidates seemed to think about this definitional issue as trivial or subjective or simply asserted that the 'could have done otherwise' conception of freedom was 'real' freedom. This strategy failed to acknowledge the centrality of definitional debates to the discipline of philosophy. What is freedom? What is knowledge? What is goodness? 'What is justice?' These are all important definitional questions that don't have a self-evident answer – definitions matter. Some candidates rose to this challenge by using ethical arguments, such as Dennett's 'nefarious neurosurgeon,' to make arguments about how we should understand freedom. These responses were rewarded on Criterion 3 and Criterion 4.

It was pleasing to see fewer essays taking the 'tour of ideas' approach – most candidates limited their discussion to two or three arguments and were able to better emphasise justification and evaluation of arguments as a result.

## Question 6

While this question asked a lot of the responses it invited, stronger students offered clear and concise expression on this issue that utilised precise philosophical terminology from multiple perspectives on free will in a very efficient way. Their responses offered smooth integration of evidence from philosophers like Hume, Dennett, and the Churchlands to support their arguments, examples such as the Frankfurt cases, and a clear focus on the question's request for a detailed and accurate explanation of how each philosophy justifies restrictions on freedoms, e.g., the hard determinist's appeal to causality, the compatibilist's balance of free will with moral accountability, and the libertarian's focus on individual agency. Although the question didn't explicitly mention the legal system, candidates often found it effective to offer insightful critique of the strengths and weaknesses of each position in regard to the restriction of individual freedoms, discussing the practical implications of philosophies like determinism on notions of justice and the law.

Weaker responses used vague language or superficial descriptions, avoiding key terms and occasionally not mentioning any philosophers by name. They demonstrated a disorganised structure with unclear flow, making comparisons between positions difficult, and overgeneralised or misrepresented key concepts, such as conflating libertarian viewpoints with political ideologies rather than focusing on free will. Candidates should avoid offering simplistic or "gut instinct" evaluations that lack depth and could benefit from ensuring that even in a question covering so many different views that they take the time to explore at least one of these in sufficient detail.

## Question 7

Most responses identified a relevant ethical issue and applied one or more ethical theory to the issue. Weaker responses tended to offer a simplistic 1-2 sentence 'sound-bite' account of an ethical theory and then offer a largely descriptive account of the ethical issue; these essays tended not to score as highly on Criterion 4, as they included little evidence to support arguments. Stronger responses developed supporting evidence and reasoning behind ethical theories and applied them to issues in a nuanced way.

It is always advisable to discuss a specific issue rather than a generalised one and also to discuss a specific ethical theory (E.g. Jeremy Bentham's act utilitarianism) rather than a general class of ethical theory (E.g. consequentialism, deontology, feminism).

Some candidates evaluated their chosen ethical issue by considering other ethical theories as a counter-argument – this was a perfectly acceptable strategy. Other essays successfully evaluated a single ethical theory by considering objections and replies to that theory in detail.

Candidates should remember that Criterion 5 requires the essay to develop 'a coherent philosophical position' and to consider the implications of this position. A number of responses either presented an incoherent argument (agreeing with multiple incompatible viewpoints) or did not actually defend a clear personal position.

## Question 8

The question posed in this section invited students to venture beyond the boundaries of abstract theory and engage with the raw, urgent reality of our world; an endeavour that required more than recitation; it demanded understanding, application, and critical insight. And yet, beneath the weight of this intellectual challenge lay the echoes of a world teetering on the brink, its heart heavy with the crises of our age: from the shadows of climate change, the smoke of deforestation in the

Amazon or the Tarkine/takayna, to the turbulent questions of gender inequality, whether wars can ever be just, and even the rapid encroachment of artificial intelligence.

The strongest essays were those that chose a clear, specific path, illuminating a particular issue in considered detail. For instance, rather than making broad opinionated statements about climate change better essays engaged with the particulars of the environmental damage wrought by, as an example, salmon farming in Tasmania/Lutruwita, including the economic justifications offered by the industry, the questionable legitimacy of its social licence, and how the practice impacts people, ecosystems and the biosphere. Their essays did not flinch from grappling with the inherent tension between moral duties and the real-world stakes that cloud our decisions.

But all too often, students drifted, scattering their thoughts across a poorly defined issue or stepping back into the abstract realm of thought experiments, such as the trolley problem amongst other hypothetical scenarios. Such detours, though intellectually intriguing, often left their analysis superficial and imprecise. For philosophy to speak in the language of relevance, it must speak to the particularities of tangible issues that demand consideration not as an abstraction, but as an echo of human lives and choices. Students are encouraged to provide specifics of the tangible issue at hand.

Another striking flaw in some responses was the absence of a robust framework to anchor the analysis. Without outlining the essential principles of ethical theories, such as Kant's categorical imperative or Bentham's hedonic/felicific calculus, responses floundered, unable to anchor their claims in reasoned application. This lack of foundation often compounded another issue: an inability to connect the theory to the chosen issue with sufficient detail or nuance.

Normative ethical theories bear the strength of clarity, with principles and rules that lend themselves to application. By contrast, Metaethical positions, which question the nature of morality itself, proved more challenging to apply and often resulted in responses that carried a sense of ethical ennui, where "it's all relative" was a sad pessimistic conclusion rather than an argument about how we should value the world and act towards it and others.

The weaker essays struggled to weave evidence into their analysis, relying instead on opinion, assertion, and personal values. Their arguments echoed hollow, failing to show why a given theory might offer a compelling way forward in the face of the moral quagmire they sought to navigate. Some topics, such as the ongoing conflict in Gaza, women's bodily autonomy, and euthanasia, were addressed in ways that bordered on the insensitive or the reductive, with claims made in haste and evidence sorely lacking, undermining the depth and care that such complex issues warrant.

Even when theories were applied, Kant's categorical imperative was often misinterpreted, or perhaps oversimplified to the point where its unique power—to illuminate duty and the intrinsic value of humanity—was lost. And in discussions of environmental ethics, what some labelled as "shallow ecology" was mistaken for a genuine framework, when in truth, it is a way in which Deep Ecologists identify methods of environmental management that seek to maintain the status quo whilst appearing to act in the interests of the natural world; what is more colloquially known now as 'green washing'.

Most importantly, philosophy, when practiced with care and commitment, becomes more than an academic exercise; it is a mirror that reveals the choices we make, the values we hold, and the

responsibilities we bear in a world defined by both the tragedy of our failings and the potential of our virtues.

In the end, the most successful essays embodied the art of the discipline: a dialogue between ideas and the world, rooted in reason, guided by evidence, and committed to the pursuit of understanding. For it is not enough to know what is true; one must show why it is true and how it touches the lives not only of moral agents, but upon all of those with whom we share the world.

## Question 9

A small number of candidates chose to explore this question, and within that group, the quality of responses varied. Weaker answers often skimmed the surface, summarising cosmological arguments and recounting the 'Big Bang' theory without delving into the reasoning and evidence behind the positions or exploring how the theory could challenge or support the existence of God. Those who tackled the 'challenge' aspect of the question were more successful, earning higher ratings.

Some responses simplistically dismissed religious belief in general rather than engaging with specific philosophical arguments, often reading like impassioned atheist declarations rather than reasoned analysis, a flaw often identified with faith-based moreso than scientific positions historically.

Stronger responses focused on the core of cosmological reasoning—causation and the idea that the universe's existence demands an origin—examining the principles and evidence with clarity. They applied logical structure to analyse how the 'Big Bang' theory intersected with metaphysical views.

Philosophy is not merely academic; it reaches beyond theory into the real world. Unfortunately, this year's exam question did not prompt students to do this. Nevertheless, the best responses explored how their conclusions could foster tolerance and empathy in society, cautioning against dogmatic extremes that lead to conflict. These reflections, tying philosophy to personal and societal impact, were richer than those which chose a side and denigrated their 'opponent' as if engaged in a political debate, rather than a philosophical dialogue.

## Question 10

While this question drew more interest than Question 9, only a limited number of candidates chose to engage with Question 10, reflecting that most classes across the state are choosing to teach the alternative unit: Contemporary Conflicts in Moral Theory. Many essays discussed one or more key design arguments, frequently citing (and too often merely reciting) Paley's watchmaker analogy. Weaker responses tended to offer a surface-level recounting of the arguments, overlooking the underlying reasoning and failing to critically assess the arguments' strengths and limitations.

Stronger essays, however, skilfully outlined the main features of teleological arguments, presenting design as evidence of a creator's existence. They took care to dissect the logic of specific arguments, including insightful evaluations of the watchmaker analogy. For instance, some candidates pointed out that even a watch is not crafted by a single creator, but is instead a product of gradual adaptations, much like the process of evolution. This perspective highlighted that complexity could emerge not from a single, deliberate act, but from a series of incremental changes suited to their environment.

Candidates who considered the implications of their arguments for contemporary society added depth to their responses. A few noted that even if rational or empirical approaches fall short of confirming the existence of God, this does not negate the place of faith-based beliefs in the modern world. This awareness enriched their arguments, showing an understanding that the debate is not confined to logic alone but extends into the fabric of human experience and belief.

## Question 11

Weaker responses were characterised by two main issues. One was focusing almost exclusively on the quotation in the question and the issue of longevity, bringing little knowledge of Montaigne's philosophy to their discussion. The other was writing a memorised essay that did not engage with the question at all. Candidates who were able to link Montaigne's arguments about the judgment concerning the body, reason, culture and death to the question were rewarded on Criterion 1 and Criterion 2.

There was a tendency for some students to offer a very brief account of Montaigne's position, summed up as 'don't worry, be happy'. Though this is not the worst possible four-word summation of Montaigne's philosophy, candidates need to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the philosophical reasoning behind Montaigne's view to achieve higher ratings on Criterion 2.

Candidates who discussed Montaigne's scepticism toward reason's ability to ground ethical truths and his autobiographical style as an implication of this scepticism were rewarded. It was good to see some responses engaging with specific essays by Montaigne, such as 'To Philosophise Is To Learn How To Die' and 'On Experience'; however, there was a tendency to quote assertions from Montaigne without analysing the reasoning supporting them.

Most candidates were able to establish the relevance of Montaigne's views for Year 11 and 12 students with reference to one or more contemporary social issues. Some examples discussed by students included flaws in contemporary schooling and examinations, social media and body image, body positivity movements and the wellness industry.

## Question 12

The quotation "I wish that every human life might be pure transparent freedom", invited candidates to engage with Simone de Beauvoir's powerful vision of existential liberation, challenging the notion that biology or society should define the purpose, capacities, and autonomy of human lives. Most responses captured Beauvoir's critique of essentialism and her view that while the body is not our destiny, it shapes our experiences. As Beauvoir said, "the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects", emphasising that human freedom lies in transcending our circumstances.

Overall, the responses to this question were very strong and demonstrated a clear passion for Beauvoir's feminist project. The best essays explored existentialist themes such as freedom, authenticity, and bad faith, illustrating how they apply to contemporary struggles. These students captured the essence of Beauvoir's thought—acknowledging that freedom is both a gift and a challenge.

However, some answers shifted toward biographical, sociological, psychological, or historical analysis, losing focus on philosophical inquiry. The task was not to recount Beauvoir's life or the evolution of feminist thought but to apply her ideas thoughtfully to modern contexts. Candidates who engaged directly with her key concepts, such as Othering, Objectification, and Liberation, showed deeper understanding and were rewarded accordingly.

Many candidates connected Beauvoir's work to current issues, noting how women continue to face oppression through wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, unequal domestic labour, and objectification in all forms of media. Stronger responses also identified ways in which Beauvoir's project would liberate others (including men) from the constraints of patriarchal capitalism, which enforces essentialist expectations on all people to some degree. These examples demonstrated that Beauvoir's vision of freedom remains relevant.

Some responses critiqued Beauvoir's lack of intersectional analysis, pointing out her focus on white women. While valid, such critiques need nuance. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* did engage with intersecting oppressions, including class, race, and age. Recognising the limitations of an argument should inspire deeper application, not dismissal. Indeed, Beauvoir's work to dismantle the ideologies that oppress us, paired with her existentialist definition of the good life as defined by liberty rather than happiness, is a framework that can be applied to any and all forms of oppression.

The strongest responses embraced the challenge of existentialist freedom—an ongoing quest for authenticity and transcendence in a world that often resists it. These essays spoke of freedom not just as an idea but as a lived struggle, embodying Beauvoir's vision of human potential and the continuous pursuit of liberation.

## Question 13

### Common Errors to Avoid

Several recurring issues were noted in student submissions, which impacted the effectiveness and depth of the analyses provided:

- **Spelling and Accuracy:** Proper spelling of Nietzsche's name was often neglected, which detracted from the professionalism of the papers.
- **Application of Theories:** A notable lack of engagement with contemporary issues was evident in many essays. Several responses read as a mere overview of Nietzsche's ideas without applying them to relevant, real-world contexts. This resulted in a lack of critical insight and reduced the overall impact of the analysis.
- **Relevance to the Question:** A number of submissions failed to directly address the central question or offer a focused response. This oversight compromised the clarity and purpose of the essays.
- **Misinterpretation of Nietzsche's Philosophy:** Some responses mistakenly depicted Nietzsche as a pessimist by associating him with Schopenhauer's philosophy, portraying him as a figure who was fundamentally negative. While Nietzsche did challenge imposed moral values and embraced a critique of traditional meanings, it is more accurate to categorise him as an ethical subjectivist rather than an ethical nihilist. This misinterpretation was further contradicted by his key themes of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence, which position Nietzsche as a radical optimist who advocates for embracing life through the individual will to power.

## Strengths of Well-Executed Papers:

In contrast, the strongest essays demonstrated significant strengths in the following areas:

- **Understanding of Nietzsche's Stance on Suffering:** Successful papers effectively examined Nietzsche's complex perspective on suffering and its crucial role in personal development. These analyses were insightful and demonstrated an understanding of suffering as an essential component of growth and self-overcoming.
- **Addressing Key Philosophical Themes:** High-quality responses incorporated and analysed core Nietzschean concepts, such as amor fati (love of one's fate), eternal recurrence, resentment, and the Übermensch (overperson or superman). These themes were tied back to Nietzsche's life-affirming philosophy, illustrating his belief in the transformative power of individual will.
- **Individual Will and Greatness:** Strong essays linked Nietzsche's idea of the will to power to the notion of embracing one's individuality and striving for greatness, often in the face of suffering. This demonstrated an understanding of Nietzsche's life-affirming approach, which contrasts sharply with misinterpretations that cast him as pessimistic.
- **Connections with Schopenhauer:** A few papers accurately discussed the differences between Nietzsche's will to power and Schopenhauer's will to life, showcasing an understanding of Nietzsche's break from Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy and his subsequent emphasis on the potential for growth through personal strength.
- **Slave/Herd Mentality:** The few responses that referenced Nietzsche's critique of the slave or herd mentality provided insightful links to the concept of individuality and the rejection of societal impositions. This was an effective way to illustrate Nietzsche's advocacy for personal freedom and authenticity.
- **Perspectivism:** While less commonly addressed, some papers highlighted the role of perspectivism as a central aspect of Nietzsche's ideas. This was an advanced and commendable insight, showcasing an understanding of Nietzsche's belief that knowledge and truth are always influenced by individual perspectives.
- **Positive, Life-Affirming Meaning:** The strongest essays emphasized Nietzsche's perspective that the search for individual meaning is a positive and empowering process, contributing to a broader understanding of his life-affirming philosophy.

In conclusion, to improve future assessments, students should focus on addressing the central question with clarity, incorporating contemporary applications of Nietzsche's theories, and accurately representing his philosophical positions. The best responses demonstrated depth by analysing key themes, linking Nietzsche's ideas to broader philosophical contexts, and presenting a nuanced view of his thoughts on suffering, individuality, and the will to power.

## Question 14

Responses demonstrated an understanding of Henry David Thoreau's central themes, particularly the importance of nature and simplicity in shaping a meaningful life. However, too many essays veered into biographical recounting, recounting the details of Thoreau's life, and at times dismissing his philosophy because of the brevity of his 'life in the woods' without sufficiently exploring the philosophical essence of his ideas. While this biographical information was informative, it often overshadowed deeper analysis and critical engagement with his theories.

Essays that examined Thoreau's core philosophical ideas, such as his transcendentalism and emphasis on the ethical dimension of perception, were notable and were rewarded for their clear

explanations. Unfortunately, fewer responses ventured into the subtler aspects of his philosophy. How does he define “nature”, and what moral weight does it carry? What is the significance of “civil disobedience”, and how does it differ from mere defiance? Addressing these questions would have enriched the depth of the analysis and allowed interesting contrasts with contemporary critiques or concerns, such as that Thoreau’s Romanticisation of the wilderness has been itself commodified under capitalism, or overlooks the ways in which these environments were already shaped by First Nations peoples, prior to their displacement.

Thoreau’s famous directive to “simplify, simplify” is more than just a call to reduce external distractions—it is a pathway to uncovering what is essential and good in life. This principle was often linked to Thoreau’s advocacy for nature, nonviolent resistance, and a life free from unnecessary complexity. Candidates who connected these ideas to contemporary challenges, such as environmental crisis, social movements, consumer culture, and digital dependence, effectively showcased Thoreau’s relevance today.

A recurring critique among responses was the argument that Thoreau’s ideas are limited in application because not everyone can retreat from society as he did. While practical challenges, such as economic and social limitations, are undeniable, it is important to resist dismissing an ethical argument simply because it is difficult to put into practice. This simplistic, and dismissive perspective overlooks the potential for adapting Thoreau’s principles to modern circumstances, demonstrating that the value of his philosophy lies in the thoughtful application of it to our lives today.