VCE PHILOSOPHY

THIRD EDITION

A STUDENT TEXT FOR UNITS 3 & 4

LENNY ROBINSON-McCARTHY
ANNA SYMES

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DAVID BARLOW PUBLISHING
AUSTRALIA

To Justin – my love and favourite friend,
and Mum – for making all things possible.
– A.S.

To Ruby Rose and Big Bill – for your infinite patience and love.
– L.M.R.

With gratitude to the authors' students – past and present – who have taught them so much.
And with thanks to David, Eric and Thijmen for their patience and support.

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Introduction

There is much to love about Philosophy. It provides us with the opportunity to grapple with the big questions, to speculate, to debate and to hypothesise. It demands that we be rigorous and creative in our thinking, and it reminds us of the significance of our own voice. Philosophy is not a discipline to be passively received, but a conversation to be entered into.

And yet, Philosophy is daunting. Maybe it's all those voices, or maybe it's simply the fact that it appears to demand so much of us. Either way, whether you are a veteran of VCE Units 1 and 2 Philosophy, or you have taken the bold step of picking it up at Units 3 and 4, you may be feeling a little apprehensive about the year ahead.

There is no doubt that Units 3 and 4 Philosophy is different from Units 1 and 2. To begin with, there are the texts. Whereas previously text probably performed an adjunct role in your studies, used to illuminate a problem or demonstrate a way of responding to a question, in Units 3 and 4 text takes centre stage. A large proportion of your time will be spent trying to understand, articulate, analyse, compare and evaluate the viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts, and most of your thinking about contemporary debates – at least in Unit 3 – will come back to them.

Secondly, there is a tightness in focus. In many ways, Units 1 and 2 Philosophy are like a tasting plate, an opportunity for you to sample a range of ideas from a large selection of thinkers, usually sketched in general terms. In Units 3 and 4, the number of thinkers diminishes, depth replaces breadth, and the questions asked are reduced to just a handful. You are expected to have a rich, *sustained* engagement with a philosopher's work or a key question, rather than just a fleeting encounter.

However, this does not mean that the space for more general investigation has disappeared completely. Alongside your understanding of the texts, you are also invited to explore concepts relevant to each Area of Study and how these concepts are related to one another. Some of these concepts will be explicitly relevant to the texts, but others will be more general, providing you with an opportunity to engage with the bigger questions the texts explore.

Finally, there is the exam. Covering a year's worth of knowledge and drawing on the skills you have spent up to two years developing, the exam demands you have not only a detailed understanding of the concepts, viewpoints and arguments expressed in the texts and the capacity to evaluate them, but that you can think about the big questions each Area of Study engages in, and the interplay between relevant viewpoints, arguments and contemporary debates.

Looked at in this way, Philosophy *is* daunting. But it's also exciting. This is your opportunity to sink your teeth into ideas, to spend a sustained amount of time with a philosopher's work or big question, and really pull it apart, grapple with it and make it your own. Then you have the opportunity to show the world (or at least, your examiners) what you know.

Although Units 3 and 4 Philosophy is largely text-based, it would be a mistake to view it as a course in comprehension. While it is crucial to have a detailed understanding of the viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts, the texts are simply a starting point. This is still a conversation, a testing site, a place for debate. Indeed, 'doing' philosophy rather than just learning about it is the key to success in this subject.

Good luck. You are in for a wonderful year.

Lenny Robinson-McCarthy
and Anna Symes

About This Book

VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 3 & 4 Third Edition is written for both students and teachers as a companion to, and starting point for, VCE Units 3 and 4 Philosophy. It has been constructed to respond to the key knowledge and skills for each Area of Study described for Units 3 and 4 in the *VCE Philosophy Study Design* accredited for 2019-2023 (https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/philosophy/PhilosophySD_2019.pdf).

VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 3 & 4 Third Edition is arranged into five chapters, four of which correspond to the four Areas of Study: Minds and Bodies; Personal Identity; Conceptions of the Good Life; and Living the Good Life in the Twenty-First Century. Each of these chapters is further arranged into Parts. Although there is some variation between the chapters, generally each commences with an introduction to the Area of Study followed by a series of text studies that correspond to the set texts for that Area of Study. The chapters conclude with Review Questions and Activities, Suggestions for Assessment and a list of Useful Resources. Chapter 4, 'Living the Good Life in the 21st Century,' is the exception to this structural approach. It is arranged according to debates rather than texts. This Chapter also concludes with Suggestions for Assessment and a list of Useful Resources.

Just as each chapter coheres to a similar structure (with the exception of Chapter 4), so too do the Parts of the chapters that correspond to the set texts. Each of these Parts commences with a discussion of the historical and/or philosophical context of the text and then moves into a close analysis of the text. It should be noted that some of the historical and contextual information is provided for interest only. For assessment purposes, students are required to demonstrate knowledge of historical and philosophical context only insofar as it directly informs the set texts. Biographical information about philosophers (such as that included in the *Famous Philosopher Files)* is interesting but irrelevant to the assessment criteria.

Each of the text analyses commences with an activity designed to encourage students to undertake a complete, independent reading of the text. Although many teachers will choose to read some, or all, of the texts in class, this activity is highly recommended to ensure students are familiar with the text before they commence their study of it and are therefore able to have a richer experience during their second reading. After completing this activity, students will then be guided through a close study of the text that includes a comprehensive summary of the text and a range of activities designed to respond to the key knowledge and skills relevant to the corresponding Area of Study, with a particular emphasis on understanding the concepts relevant to the Area of Study and on the fundamental skills of analysing, comparing and evaluating arguments. Aside from cultivating the key knowledge and skills, these activities are also designed to move students beyond simple comprehension of the concepts, viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts and in the Area of Study more generally, to deeper, more complex engagement with the material, thus preparing them for the rigours of both internal and external assessment.

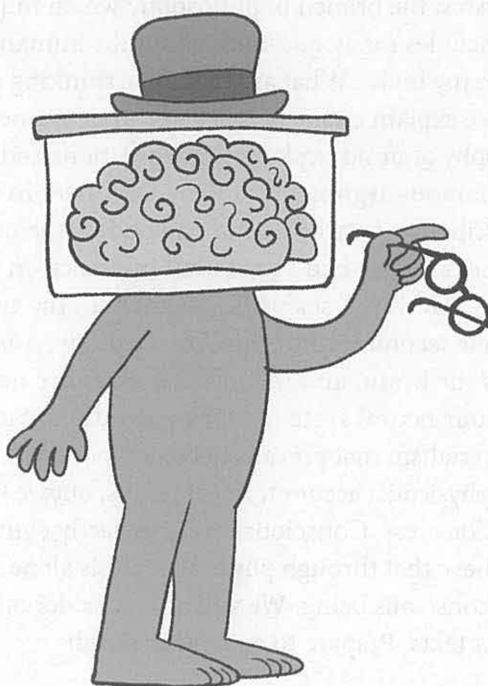
Advice regarding how to prepare for these assessments, as well as more general study advice, can be found in Chapter 5: Suggestions for Study. Ideas for internal assessments are provided at the end of each chapter ('Suggestions for Assessment'). Teachers should note that the suggestions offered are general and when planning assessments it is vital to work closely with both the key knowledge and skills described under the relevant Area of Study in the *VCE Philosophy Study Design* and the Performance Descriptors from the *VCE Advice for Teachers 2019-2023* (https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/adviceforteachers/philosophy/perfdescriptors.aspx). Teachers should also note that more than one task may be used to assess the relevant key knowledge and skills; however, all students must complete at least one essay for each Unit.

For further tips on preparing for assessments, teachers are referred to our companion volume, *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 1 & 2 Third Edition*, which includes detailed information on skills relevant to the philosophy classroom and a comprehensive chapter on logic and reasoning, which we consider prerequisite knowledge for this course. Students who retain their Units 1&2 text will find much of its material useful for their studies at Units 3 and 4 level. For students and classes commencing Units 3 and 4 without previous Philosophy studies, we particularly recommend using Chapters 1,2 and 7 of *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 1 & 2 Third Edition* to provide an introduction to, and grounding in, the distinctive elements of philosophical studies. We also provide more detailed suggestions for assessment tasks in *VCE Philosophy: Assessment and Examination Supplement for Units 3 & 4 Third Edition*. This guide provides general advice for success in VCE Philosophy, suggested approaches to the various styles of assessment tasks and examination questions, worked answers and sample examination papers.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this text accurately reflects the requisites of the current Study Design (2019-2023), the Study Design should always be the first port of call and a continuing reference point when developing a course. Teachers are also reminded to stay up to date with changes to the list of prescribed texts via the VCAA website.

CHAPTER 1

Minds and Bodies



PART A

About Minds and Bodies

What are we? From earliest times and across many cultures, this question has been a philosophical starting point. **Metaphysics,** the branch of philosophy which inquires about the kinds of things there are in the world, includes many questions about the human self. What kind of thing am I? Is my mind distinct from my body? What are thoughts, thinking and consciousness? Is my mind just my brain? Can science explain all the mysteries of consciousness? Will I live on after the death of my body? The philosophy of mind explores these questions and more. This Area of Study takes as its starting point the famous arguments of René Descartes in the seventeenth century. These arguments about the distinction between mind and body – themselves heavily influenced by the views of the ancient Greeks – have had a profound influence on thinking in the Western world throughout the centuries. However, scientific advances in the twentieth century cast doubt on Descartes' theories. In our second text for this Area of Study, Australian philosopher Jack Smart argues that the mind is the brain, and mental processes are nothing more than the physico-chemical operations of our neural system. Our final author, American Thomas Nagel, offers a sceptical view to the materialism that prevails in contemporary thinking. Smart may (or may not) be right in presenting a physicalist account, Nagel grants, but we have barely begun to fathom the great mysteries of consciousness. Consciousness is so vastly complex that Nagel says we make a serious mistake if we believe that through physical analysis alone, we can give a complete account of what it is like to be a conscious being. We will also consider other arguments and debates that have bearing on these set texts. Prepare to open your mind!

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

DO

1. Working by yourself, arrange the following terms in the way that makes most sense to you. Use a large piece of paper (A3 or poster size) and bold pens so that classmates will be able to see your work when finished. Spend no more than 10-15 minutes. Of course, your ideas may be influenced by your studies in Unit 1 Philosophy.

MIND	BODY	BRAIN	SOUL	THINKING
THOUGHTS	CONSCIOUSNESS	SELF	PHYSICAL	FREEDOM
MENTAL	SPIRITUAL	LIFE	DEATH	SPIRIT
BEHAVIOUR	PERSONALITY	SENSES	REASON	IDENTITY

2. Share your ideas about the words, their meanings and relationships with your classmates. Give reasons for your placements of each word. Allow classmates to ask questions.
3. Follow this activity with a class discussion. Was there a degree of consensus reached in students' understandings of the words? Did students' ideas divide into distinct groups or categories?
4. Finally, write a reflection of around 400 words in which you discuss your ideas about the words above, their meanings and relationships.

TIP

Note that most terms we discuss in philosophy have contestable meanings. That means that a dictionary will not give us the 'correct' answer; a dictionary can only report on how a word is commonly used. Much of the history of philosophy is about debates over definitions. And likewise, much of your classroom discussion this year will focus on possible definitions and interpretations of terms.

Souls, Minds and Bodies in Western Thought

There have been several shifts in the way people in the Western world (see box below) have understood the mind and its relationship to the body.

Looking back to Ancient Greece (which is where we derive our earliest philosophical writings about such matters), we find writers such as Plato using the word ***psyche.*** This is best translated as 'soul', but for Ancient Greeks it more specifically meant 'the life principle' or the thing that makes something alive. A living thing is that which has a soul; a dead thing has no soul. This applies to animals and plants as much as to humans.

In Ancient Greece, the *psyche* was also considered to give a living thing its **identity** – that is, the principle or *essence* that makes that thing *that thing* and not something else. Many Greeks believed in the **transmigration** of souls, or *metempsychosis,* whereby a soul may pass through many different bodies (including of different species) and manifest different personalities. However, that soul is still considered to be *the same soul* or life principle, rather than a series of different souls. In Plato's *Phaedo,* Socrates speaks of the soul's transmigration to Hades, the afterlife, where it is watched over by a benevolent god. He also speaks of reincarnation, whereby the soul transfers to new bodies. The soul of an unjust man may return to life in the body of a stubborn ass, while a just soul may return as another good man or as a gentle creature (for example, a bee or an ant).

The Greeks used a different word to refer to the mind: *nous.* This was considered the part of the *psyche* that enables thinking and reasoning. As with the *psyche,* it was not necessarily considered to express an individual's personality. However, Socrates (Famous Philosopher File p.205) and Plato (Famous Philosopher File, p.206) taught that a soul could be improved by the exercise of reason and the practice of philosophy, and that such practices could prepare the soul for a more favourable afterlife.

Our Judeo-Christian heritage has also fed powerful ideas into the mix of what we consider the 'soul' to designate. For a Jew or Christian, the soul is something spiritual and linked to God. Jews and Christians both speak of 'saving' one's soul. The idea of the resurrection of soul is fully celebrated in Christianity, more than any notion of the body's revival (despite the physical resurrection of Christ). Followers of Christianity, after the death of Christ and through medieval times, associated the soul with purity and communion with God, while the flesh is earthly, tempted to sin, and relatively dispensable.

It was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the birth of modern science, that thinkers started to consider the conscious mind as synonymous with the soul, and as the holder of identity and personality, as well as rational thought. A key figure in this development was René Descartes (Famous Philosopher File, p.15).

The last 150 years have witnessed huge advances in the sciences devoted to studying the mind. Increasingly, contemporary scientists have identified links between the physical brain and our mental processes. Thus, for a majority of scientists and philosophers, the brain and the mind (or soul) are seen as identical, physical substances. As you may have found from completing the activity above and comparing your views with those of classmates, this view has become a popular, commonsense one in our modern, secular society. However, it should be realised that this is a radical departure from what has been the dominant view in the West for at least 2500 years: that the immaterial soul and mind are separate from the physical body.

Key Terms in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy of mind seeks to understand the nature of mind as well as its relationship to the body. The word **mental** refers to that which pertains to the mind. Philosophers of the past few decades have pondered the question of what the mind does, and what we mean when we ascribe **mental states** to it. For example, willing, deciding, believing intending, desiring, thinking, imagining and knowing are all examples of mental states. We tend to regard these as invisible and conceptual, unable to be captured for direct observation. However, the theory of **behaviourism** posits that mental states might just exist in our observable behaviour. And one of the quests of neuroscience is to locate and account for mental states within the brain. But what analysis of the physical brain could show us that the brain's owner currently believes it is Wednesday? The complexity of the mental realm means that much of what we regard as mind or consciousness remains unaccounted for in specific, observable physical terms.

The word **consciousness** is another much-debated word in philosophy. Many philosophers take consciousness to be some state or quality of awareness. So, if there is awareness of an external world or of something within oneself, then that is a state of consciousness. For influential theorist of consciousness, Thomas Nagel, consciousness has an essentially subjective character, or a "what it is like" dimension. "An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism," Nagel writes in his famous paper, 'What it is Like to Be a Bat'.

However, there are many questions that arise from this idea. How are conscious states related to the body? Can they be explained by the workings of the brain? Are all mental states conscious mental states? Given that scientists have now discovered much about the operations of the brain, philosophers have questioned whether there might be any aspect of mind or consciousness that escapes physical investigation. Even if we discover everything about the brain's physical workings, might there still be important things missing from this physical account? How is it that objectively observed, physical processes in the brain can give rise to subjective experiences? This is what contemporary Australian philosopher David Chalmers calls the **hard problem of consciousness**, referring to this **explanatory gap** between the external material world and interior, subjective, mental experience.

It is clear that, 'soul', 'mind' and 'consciousness' can all be slippery words. This should not be a cause for worry, but rather, a small warning: that when you are using these terms, you should be clear what your precise understanding of them is, in the particular context in which you are reading or writing.

WRITE

What do you understand by the terms 'mind' and 'consciousness'? What do you think of as the "mental realm" of experience? What is a 'mental state'?

Write a brief reflection on these questions. Return to it later in your studies of philosophy of mind. Have your views changed? Compare your ideas with those of others in your class.

KEY CONCEPTS: *'THE WESTERN WORLD'*

The 'Western tradition' or 'Western culture' are terms which broadly refer to customs, beliefs and heritage that have originated from Europe. 'The West' is usually understood as having its beginnings with the Greek and Roman civilisations and Christianity as its major influence. Its ways of thinking have been shaped by the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution and the colonial expansion which occurred from 1400 onwards, as European nations established control over new lands.

Thus, the 'Western world' covers roughly the geographical region of Europe, plus the nations which have inherited its traditions (including Australia, the U.S., Canada and New Zealand). The current list of prescribed texts for VCE Philosophy draws from the Western philosophical tradition.

The Mind/Body Problem: Dualism Versus Materialism

As your participation in the introductory activity above will probably have shown, views about the mind and body tend to split into two broad camps. On the one hand, some of you may imagine the mind as ethereal and spiritual in nature, unable to be seen or touched. On this view it may be easy to explain the possibility of life after death; perhaps if the mind is non-physical it is able to escape the body after death and ascend to heaven or paradise, or be reincarnated.

For others, the mind may be synonymous with the brain, the physical organ whose appearance we are all familiar with, a version of which resides within each of our skulls. On this view, mind, soul and consciousness are words we use to describe aspects of the physical body.

The **mind/body problem**, a central debate in the branch of metaphysics known as **philosophy of mind,** wrestles with these questions. What kinds of things are the mind and the body? How are they related? Where does body end and mind begin? How do body and mind interact?

Some philosophers make the case that mind and body must be separate, with mind quite distinct from brain. This theory is called **dualism** and argues that there are *two* things operating. This view was famously held by Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato, and then inherited by Christianity. It can also be found in Hindu traditions. René Descartes, in the seventeenth century, put forward some of the best-known dualist arguments.

Other thinkers argue that mind and body are one and the same. This view is a form of **monism,** believing that mind and body are *one* thing. In fact, there are two types of monism: firstly, the more common one, that there is *only body*, and secondly, that there is *only mind.* **Materialism** or **physicalism** are terms used for the first view that there is just the physical body, of which the mind is just one aspect, located in or identical to the brain. **Idealism,** associated mainly with the theories of George Berkeley (1685-1783), argues that there is only a non-physical mind, and that the brain is a purely mental phenomenon, an idea in the mind. However, it is the **dualism versus materialism debate** which is of most interest for our Unit 3 studies.

WRITE

Write definitions of the following:

MONISM	DUALISM	PHYSICALISM
MATERIALISM	IDEALISM	MIND/BODY PROBLEM

The Appeal of Dualism

We do commonly speak about our minds and bodies as quite different entities. This distinction is embedded in our language, in many common-sense ideas, and in our religious and spiritual understanding.

The belief in dualism permeates Western culture very strongly via Platonism and Christianity, and is reaffirmed by all the major world religions. If we believe mental substance not to be destroyed by the same forces which may assail the body, then life after death is possible: the soul may persist into its own afterlife. This is a major premise of most religious views and carries obvious appeal.

Spiritual experiences or **'out-of-body' experiences** are cited by many people as evidence for dualism. An out-of-body-experience involves the sensation of floating above one's body and in some cases looking down on the body from outside it. These phenomena have been described by numerous survivors of near-death experiences, some of whom have reported witnessing things that were not known to them beforehand. If it is indeed possible for someone's consciousness to move outside of their body, particularly when that body has been pronounced clinically dead, then it seems as though the mind and the body must be two different substances.

Cartesian dualism is also persuasive when compared with our common way of seeing ourselves. Seeing our self identity as held within the mind, rather than identifying ourselves with our bodies, allows our sense of who we are to transcend our physical state. We see ourselves as having bodies but as being quite distinct from them. This problem is fundamental to Area of Study 2: Personal Identity.

Dualism also meshes with the way we ordinarily experience the world, compared with scientific explanation. According to physics, the world is colourless particles jumbled together. But that is not the way I experience a tree, or a book, or my mother. Sounds are vibrations in air, but that is not how I experience a Beethoven symphony. Dualism makes sense of these clashing ideas. It is perhaps difficult to accept that a purely physical thing, such as the porridge-like substance we call the brain, could produce the complexities of thoughts and feelings which define the human experience. How could something purely physical fall in love or create a masterpiece? Can we really say that these complex mental phenomena amount to nothing more than chemical interactions and neurons firing?

Complexity of human thought and feeling has been attributed by many religious traditions to the presence of a God-given soul. According to this belief, humans are set apart from other animals by virtue of this non-physical component. The Old Testament states that in this way, God gave man dominion over every living thing. However, if humans and other species are all purely physical beasts, and if humans therefore lack a special, spiritual connection with the divine, then the view of human superiority may be challenged. If humans and animals are equally material creatures, it may be less clear that humans are entitled to use animals for our purposes, including for meat production.

There are many other arguments, some of them complex and abstract, that have been made in favour of dualism. Consider the essential properties of physical things. One such property is extension in space; all physical matter, however small, takes up space. However, it seems that mental phenomena **lack spatial features.** For example, when you attend a live concert, the musicians are nearby, striking or blowing their instruments, and this in turn produces physical sound waves and physical processes in your eardrums. But what of your *experience* of the music? Could a neuroscientist find it in your head? Would it be long, short, skinny, wide, or weigh anything? There really do seem to be important properties of physical events that make no sense when we consider mental events.

Another property of the mental which does not seem true of the physical is **privileged access.** Other people cannot access your thoughts in the way that you can. You have a special first person authority over them. By contrast, your body is a public entity, and other people, for example a doctor, can even know more about your body than you can yourself.

These ideas have been debated through the centuries, and contemporary philosophy is still yielding arguments to support the dualist view. Consider for a moment the particular **phenomenology** of our mental lives that doesn't seem able to be described by materialism alone. All sensations and feelings have particular qualities as we experience them, from how it feels to have chocolate melt on the tongue, to the brightness of the grass after it has rained. Purely physical things don't have this phenomenology or '**qualia**' – that is, 'what it's like-ness'.

Another point about mental states that doesn't seem to be captured in any physical bodies, is **intentionality.** Thinking, willing, understanding, imagining, desiring and so on, are all directed at something. They all have an 'aboutness' to them, in a way that physical states do not share. Qualia and intentionality have been given extensive analysis by philosophers over the last fifty years or so.

Another suggestion about what is distinctive of the mind is American philosopher Donald Davidson's view that the mind seems to operate in a way that places it outside of physical laws and is thus **anomalous**. It doesn't seem to fit with the chains of cause and effect that material objects obey. If I drop a stone out my window, the next events can be predicted and calculated through the laws of physics. However, minds are unpredictable and don't seem to be governed by those same laws. Indeed, if we accept a purely materialist account of the mind, it is very hard to preserve a place for any human free will at all.

This has been a brief introduction to some of the most-discussed ideas lending weight to a dualist view. Many of these will be expanded upon in later parts of this Chapter.

WRITE

1. Select one of these arguments for dualism (given above) and write it in standard form. *Hint: remember to write the conclusion first! Try this: 'Therefore, mind and body must be two separate substances.'*
2. Of the arguments for dualism offered above, which seems to you to be the strongest and why? Can you add an example to bolster your response?

The Appeal of Materialism

The view of materialism describes everything in the world in terms of physical objects. Materialists deny views, such as Plato's and Descartes', that there are any things that cannot be accounted for in physical terms. For the materialist, the word 'mind' refers to nothing more than the brain. For the materialist, it is the physical matter in our heads – including all its complex hormonal chemistry and electrical activity – that is responsible for all our thoughts and feelings. Therefore it follows that the human self is to be identified with the body.

In contemporary philosophy the materialist view is overwhelmingly favoured, as you will gather from your studies of J.J.C. Smart and his place in twentieth century philosophy of mind. There are many reasons why materialism has become the mainstream view of the mind, particularly in scientific communities.

The field of neuroscience – the scientific study of the brain and nervous system – has expanded enormously over the last hundred years or so, vastly increasing its knowledge base and making use of ever-more sophisticated technology. Neuroscientists continue to demonstrate links between specific parts of the brain and our mental functions. Areas of the brain used in such processes as language, numeracy, creativity and humour have been located. Experiments have shown that when surgery deliberately damages a particular site in a monkey's brain, the precise nature of the mental changes in the monkey can be predicted. Scientific developments are increasingly able to describe our mental lives in terms of the same cause and effect patterns demonstrated in the physical world. All of this challenges the dualist's conviction that mind and brain are separate substances.

Further, the material mind can be argued for on the basis of our biological development. Humans start life as single cells which then divide, redivide and so on. Physical processes such as nutrition enable the foetus to continue growing into a baby capable of existing outside the womb. So at what point, asks the materialist, does a non-physical element become apparent or necessary in this story? The same question arises if we consider our development from an evolutionary perspective. Our species evolved over millions of years from single-celled organisms, through simple vertebrates, fish, reptiles, mammals and then from the great apes. Have all of these species had a non-physical soul or mind? Or only humans? It remains difficult to discern at what point in evolution a non-physical element could have intervened in the process of physical development, and how and why such a mysterious element could have done this. From a physicist's point of view, energies cannot be created from nowhere without violating the fundamental law of conservation.

For some, the dualist argument just seems far too complicated. It is surely a whole lot simpler, argue many materialists, to simply accept that there is one substance, and that it is physical. Why argue for this additional, spooky, ethereal substance if we can explain the mental world without it? This is based on the principle of **Ockham's Razor** – the idea that the simplest explanation is usually the best – named after William of Ockham (1288-1347). Translated more literally it is the principle that 'entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.' This idea has been held as a basic rule of thumb by numerous philosophers and scientists over the centuries and it has been used to argue against dualism.

The dualist view also continues to face a major stumbling block: the question of interaction. If mind and body are such radically distinct and independent substances, how can they possibly interact and have effects on each other? Descartes himself recognised this considerable challenge to his **interactionist** view that mind and body must interact causally. He offered, as a solution, that mind and body might be plausibly linked to each other by the pineal gland, a tiny structure in the brain, which he suggested might relay causal messages from mind to body and back again. But how could a physical site, such as a gland, communicate with the immaterial world in this way? Later dualist thinkers proposed various ways out of this conundrum. The view of **parallelism** had it that physical and mental events are perfectly coordinated by God. For Leibniz, this coordinated system could have been activated by God at the point of origin of the physical and mental worlds, producing two parallel universes operating in perfect, mutually-causal, **pre-established harmony**. Malebranche's theory of **occasionalism** argued that a more plausible idea would involve God intervening with every occasion of mental-physical or physical-mental causality (for if physics cannot overcome the divide, surely God can). However, these views attract few adherents in modern philosophy and the problem of interaction continues to challenge dualism.

For many, the assumption that our thinking can be explained in purely physical terms opens up exciting possibilities. One of these is that humans might one day be able to build a thinking brain. Of course, computing and robotics are fields which over several decades have already had enormous success in creating 'intelligence' of increasing complexity. The question of whether machines will ever be capable of thought to rival that of humans is still open to speculation, but it certainly seems more likely if we accept a materialist rather than a non-physical view of the mind.

Fields such as neuroscience, psychiatry and psychology routinely assume materialism, enabling mental illnesses to be attributed to chemical imbalances rather than to ethereal imperfections of the soul. On this model, mental illnesses can be treated with drugs and other chemical therapies. Mental illness has traditionally carried stigma associated with the belief that a sufferer is to blame for afflictions of their mind, that they should supposedly be able to control. On the other hand, if illness of the mind is a physical problem on par with any other physical ailment, attitudes may shift accordingly.

A physical account of mind gives rise to the hope that science will one day be able to fully explain the workings of human thought in terms of the causal patterns that govern our physical world. We have a long way to go in this; the vast majority of the brain and our mental lives are still out of reach of scientific explanation. But if we are one day able to entirely define, describe and account for all aspects of the mind in physical terms, the dualism/materialism debate may be over.

THINK

Will it ever be possible to prove materialism right and dualism wrong? What kinds of evidence would be needed to prove that there is no such thing as a non-physical mind?

WRITE

1. Select one of these arguments for materialism (given above) and write it in standard form. *Hint: remember to write the conclusion first! Try this: 'Therefore, mind and body must both be physical.'*
2. Of the arguments for materialism offered above, which seems to you to be the strongest and why? Can you add an example to bolster your response?

DO

Research some recent findings in neuroscience. You may wish to work in a pair. Share your findings with the class. See which pair of class members can locate research to support most convincingly a materialist view of the mind.

TIP

We will return to consider many of these arguments for dualist and materialist views of mind and body, and their implications for a range of debates, in Part E of this Chapter. However, it will serve you well to bear these ideas in mind throughout your studies of the set texts. You are also encouraged to review your Unit 1 studies in philosophy of mind. *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 1&2 (Third Edition)* includes an extensive discussion of this topic.

PART B

René Descartes: First, Second and Sixth Meditations from *Meditation on First Philosophy*

Historical and Philosophical Context

From Pre-Science to Modern Science

For most of Western history, the fields of science and philosophy have been synonymous. René Descartes (Famous Philosopher File, p.15) can be claimed as much by science's hall of fame as by philosophy's. Indeed, he begins his most famous work, the *Meditations,* by setting out his aim: 'to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.' Descartes was one of the key figures in the **Scientific Revolution,** which ushered in modern science as we still understand it today (see box below), but he stands out among scientific thinkers for his distrust of the senses and **empiricism**, and his emphasis on the importance of **reasoning** to achieve certainty in science.

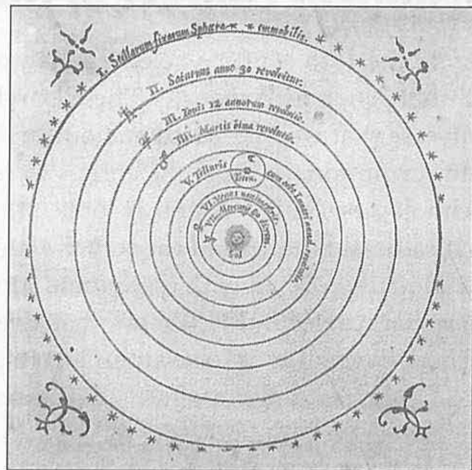
Descartes' work is traditionally also said to mark the beginning of **modern philosophy**, as he represents a shift away from the Classical Greek thinking of Plato (Famous Philosopher File, p.206) and Aristotle (Famous Philosopher File, p.224) and also departs from the Christian teachings which permeated all enquiry during the Middle Ages.

KEY CONCEPTS: *RATIONALISM, EMPIRICISM*

Rationalism is the view that truths can be discovered through use of reason alone as the senses can deceive us.

Empiricism is the view that it is only through direct sensory observation that truth can be discovered as the imagination can delude us.

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION



The sky according to Copernicus

Free enquiry into the workings of the universe flourished in ancient Greece and Rome, but the thousand years or so that followed in Europe can be very broadly said to have been characterised either by wars or by the strict control of the Catholic Church. Neither of these contexts allowed for open exploration of ideas. The Church adopted much of Aristotle's account of nature, combined with a heavy emphasis on the powers of God which must not be called into question. This is why it was under threat of condemnation by the Church (and in Galileo's case, of death) that thinkers such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) dared to suggest that their observations of the heavens revealed a different picture from the geocentric (earth in the centre) one endorsed by the Church. However, this is not to say that the key figures in the scientific revolution were not devout in their faith. Typically the quest for scientific truth and awe for God's creation went hand in hand for these thinkers.

The Scientific Revolution was not marked by one single change, but rather a combination of factors which gradually shifted European society towards acceptance of a new way of looking at the world. The invention of printing presses, the replacement of the earth-centred model with a sun-centred model of the universe and the gradual recession of Aristotle's theories were important, alongside the societal needs which prompted these things, such as the need for more accurate calendars to assist in production of resources and trade.

Between 1550 and 1800, dramatic shifts took place as reason started to replace religion and superstition, and science became a central plank of Enlightenment thinking. The contribution of Isaac Newton (1643-1727) was arguably more significant than that of any other person in this overthrow of the old ways. Newton's *Principia* set out the **scientific method** which came to define the very meaning of science and to distinguish it from philosophy. To be termed scientific, a method of enquiry must be based on empirical observations which are measured, recorded and replicated, and subjected to a particular process of reasoning. A formal process of hypothesis, to experiment, to testing, to conclusion, was established, and this continues to define what it is to do science.

Gradually, science was held in increasingly higher esteem. As society become more secular for a variety of other reasons, the authority of science started to overtake even that of the Church. In the twentieth century, rightly or wrongly, in the mind of the average person the notion of 'scientific proof' started to be equated with truth.

Historical Context of the Meditations

Before the 16th century, science – as we now call it – had not advanced much since ancient thinkers such as Aristotle. The Church held huge power and taught that the view of the universe that we find written about in the Bible was the final truth. But Descartes was born into revolutionary times. Scientists were increasingly using experimental methods and new technologies. Galileo famously looked through his newly invented telescope to discover things that radically challenged the way the universe was traditionally thought of. He observed that the moon is covered with craters and mountains rather than being a perfect sphere. And even more controversially, Galileo saw that several moons orbit Jupiter, opposing the biblical belief that all heavenly bodies revolve around Earth. Discoveries such as these placed thinkers like Galileo and Descartes, and the whole scientific enterprise, in a precarious position. They risked severe punishment for contradicting the biblical view of the world.

In his own time, Descartes was best known as a philosopher of science. He had also produced a significant theory of matter, in competition with the atomic theory that Isaac Newton would later champion. Descartes' work set him in opposition to Scholasticism, the philosophy which had reigned in Europe since Aristotle. Scholasticism taught that the Church and Aristotle were the two supreme authorities on the nature of the universe, and presented an ordered vision with the planets, moons and stars all orbiting our central earth in perfect circles. The four elements – fire, water, earth and air – were responsible for the movement and nature of all material things; for example, fire tends upward and earth tends downward, which is why smoke rises and rocks fall. But many central elements of this harmonious picture were starting to be questioned, by Descartes and others, and this was the beginning of the Enlightenment (see box, chapter 2, Part B).

Just imagine how it might have felt to be part of a fringe group which was discovering that so much of what had been taught and accepted by great minds for thousands of years was, in fact, false. It is no wonder that Descartes was disturbed in the middle of the night by nagging questions – about what we can be certain of and whether we can be certain of anything at all – if the old authorities were no longer regarded as a supreme and incorrigible source of truth

In the *Meditations* we can see Descartes trying to find a way to resolve the tensions between the Church and new sources of knowledge. He insists he is on the Church's side, and one of the certainties he develops a proof for – in Meditation Three – is the existence of God. In the preface to the *Meditations,* he dedicates his book to 'the learned and distinguished men, the dean and doctors of the sacred faculty of theology at Paris.' However, he declares at the outset in Meditation One that his project is to establish a firm foundation – both in terms of knowledge claims and methodology – for the discovery of truth in the sciences. His methodology makes clear that the *Meditations* give primacy to the powers of reason rather than faith or instinct. This is why Descartes is spoken of as a great *rationalist* in the history of philosophy.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

René Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes was born in a little French town now called La-Haye-Descartes. Descartes showed great talent as a student and studied classics, Aristotelian physics and mathematics. Then he committed to seeing the world firsthand through travel with the military. He made his home in Holland for his most productive years as a mathematician, scientist and philosopher.

In his early twenties, Descartes solved several problems that had frustrated mathematicians for centuries. Next he turned to the great mysteries of physiology. Aided by dissections of sometimes live animals, and examinations of human corpses he obtained from the local hospital, Descartes made remarkably accurate hypotheses about the mechanisms of the human body, in particular the workings of the eye, the limbs and the digestive system. Turning then to meteorology, Descartes is credited with producing the first correct explanation for the formation of rainbows. During these years, Descartes fathered an illegitimate child; he was shattered when she died at just age five.

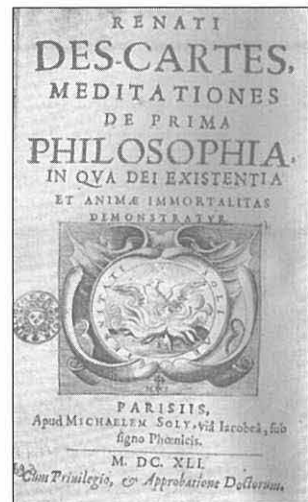
However, Descartes is probably most famous as "the father of modern philosophy" because he revised many of the ideas that had held sway since Aristotle. His *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) is compulsory reading on most first-year university Philosophy courses around the world. Other important works include *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and *Principles of Philosophy* (1644). Descartes' account of the mind has perhaps received more attention than any of his other philosophical ideas, largely because most twentieth century notions of mind have formed in opposition Descartes' theory.

In 1649 Descartes went to Sweden to become a personal tutor to Queen Christina. She insisted that the lessons start at 5am, and the early mornings spent trudging through snow to the palace eventually brought on the pneumonia that caused his death.

Descartes with Princess Christina of Sweden

Studying Descartes' *Meditations*

Introduction


RENATI
DES-CARTES,
MEDITATIONES
DE PRIMA
PHILOSOPHIA,
IN QVA DEI EXISTENTIA
ET ANIMÆ IMMORTALITAS
DEMONSTRATVR.
PARISIIS,
Apud MICHAELEM SOLY, via Iacobea, sub
signo Phœnicis.
M. DC. XLI.
Cum Privilegio, & Approbatione Doctorum.

Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* is one of the most important texts in Western philosophy. In it, Descartes attempts to establish the basis for the entirety of human knowledge and by so doing, provide the foundations for the development of the sciences. Some of the most interesting of the arguments in the *Meditations* are those bearing on the central questions in philosophy of mind. How are the mind and body related? Are they the same or completely different kinds of substances? Descartes' responses to these questions have been provoking philosophical debate for centuries.

Our extract is from John Cottingham's translation of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies.* It is worthwhile reading more of this text, including the whole of the Sixth Meditation. Bernard Williams' Introductory Essay, Cottingham's General Introduction and the Preface by Descartes himself are all recommended. The selected Objections and Replies are also essential reading for anyone trying to deepen their understanding of Descartes' intentions (as Descartes advises in his Preface). The Objections were made by various eminent philosophers and theologians, including, most famously, the English, atheistic philosopher Thomas Hobbes, and were published with the original *Meditations.* In his Replies, Descartes gives further examples to clarify his intentions in the *Meditations*, and the Objections often help us to see problems in Descartes' writing we might otherwise have overlooked.

THE STYLE OF THE MEDITATIONS

One of the immediately striking aspects of the *Meditations* is its style.

It is interesting to note that meditations were a well-established genre in religious writing in Descartes' time. They were typically written in the first person and allowed the reader to travel with the writer on a spiritual journey, including thoughts of religious wisdom to accompany each day. However, no-one had ever used this format to write about philosophy. You will notice that Descartes wants you to make this voyage of discovery with him as he invites us to share his inner thoughts.

Through this diary-style format, we learn that he is no longer young, he is alone in a house, sitting by the fire in his dressing gown late at night. He has put aside time to devote to this new philosophical project in which he will begin from absolute scratch to build a system of **indubitable** (beyond any doubt at all) knowledge. Having reached the realisation that what has been taught as the incorrigible truth for around 1900 years, and upheld by the great minds of Europe through that time, is actually untrustworthy, Descartes now looks to himself and his own inner mental resources to discover the answers to the question, 'What can I know?'

The First Meditation

READ

Read Descartes' Meditation One.

Jot down any thoughts that occur to you about Descartes' approach to his enquiry and the main points of progression in his ideas. Put a star beside any conclusions that you notice being drawn.

This famous sequence of thought will have resonances for anyone who has seen *The Matrix*, and you will probably have read the First Meditation – and possibly viewed this film – if you studied Unit 1 Philosophy.

Cartesian scepticism

KEY CONCEPTS: *SCEPTICISM*

Scepticism is an attitude of questioning or doubt in response to things usually taken for granted, or to views accepted as fact by others. Philosophical scepticism requires an extreme level of rigour in argument and that all statements must be supported by indisputable evidence.

You will often see the American spelling: skepticism.

DO

THINKING LIKE DESCARTES

1. Working individually, classify the following claims:

   a. Claims you are sceptical about

   b. Claims you think are probably true

   c. Claims you accept as indubitable certainties

   i. It is very cold in the Arctic circle.
   ii. All people will experience some kind of after-life.
   iii. My mother loves me.
   iv. I am a student; therefore I am studying.
   v. Lightning is produced by electrical activity in the sky.
   vi. People can be possessed by demons.
   vii. Miracles happen.
   viii. Christianity offers more hope than any other religion.
   ix. My senses give me reliable information about the world.
   x. If there is a God, he/she/it would not deceive me.
   xi. There are clear differences between the state of being awake and the dream-state.
   xii. 2 + 3 will always equal 5.
   xiii. A triangle has three sides.
   xiv. In 2017, the President of the United States of America was Donald Trump.

2. In a small group, discuss your classifications of these claims and present your justifications. What characterises the claims you have classed as A, B and C?

3. Now take the claims you have decided to label as C – the absolute certainties. Are there any you could possibly be persuaded to give up, or to demote to the B list of high probabilities? Can anyone in the group persuade you to be more sceptical? Which items in the list is the group most reluctant to regard as anything less than absolutely certain? Playing devil's advocate, can you come up with any arguments that could potentially budge these out of the certainty pile?

A sceptic is someone who questions whether we can have any genuine certainty about the world. A hardline sceptic argues that all we can have is belief rather than true knowledge. (Have any sceptics in your class revealed themselves through the exercise above?)

Of course, it is difficult to make progress in a given field if you deny that any degree of truth can exist. However, much of the progress made in philosophy and science has been derived from the practice of scrutinising claims carefully and sifting them according to their trustworthiness.

The *Meditations* describe with great immediacy Descartes' journey through a process of radical doubt, or so-called Cartesian Doubt. His tactic is to distrust every belief as long as there is any chance it may be mistaken. In the First Meditation he writes:

I realised that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable.

It might seem paradoxical that in seeking to find certainty, you would choose to doubt everything first. But Descartes thinks that is the only way to find whatever things there might be – if, indeed, such things exist – that cannot be doubted at all. In his Reply to the seventh set of Objections, Descartes explains it by means of a metaphor:

Suppose [someone] had a basket full of apples and, being worried that some of the apples were rotten, wanted to take out the rotten ones to prevent the rot spreading. How would he proceed? Would he not begin by tipping the whole lot out of the basket? And would not the next step be to cast his eye over each apple in turn, and pick up and put back only those he saw to be sound, leaving the others?

Descartes' aim is to discover which beliefs are absolutely certain by examining and doubting all his beliefs. The absolutely indubitable beliefs will deserve to be called truths, or knowledge.

WRITE

Describe Descartes' 'Method of Doubt' in your own words.

Notice that Descartes' method is to engage in dialogue with himself. There is the affirming Descartes (let's call him D1) who gives positive commentary about what he thinks he knows and draws definite conclusions. Then there is the doubtful Descartes (D2) – the one who insists on being sceptical about even the most fundamental and cherished beliefs. The Doubtful Descartes acts like a strict club bouncer or airport official, ensuring that every belief is fully strip-searched before it is allowed entry. By this process, Descartes trusts that he will end up either with a set of certainties that it is impossible to doubt – or potentially with nothing, if he has to refuse entry to all knowledge candidates. It will be up to us to evaluate whether his processes are logically valid, and whether the claims he ends up adopting as knowledge are indeed sound.

THINK

Is scepticism a helpful approach to knowing the nature of the mind? Consider this question as you work through Meditations 1 and 2.

WRITE

Fill in the following chart as you read 'Meditation One'.

D1 (Affirming Descartes) ***Tries to salvage whatever certainties he can out of the debate***	D2 (Doubtful Descartes) ***Tries to cast doubt upon even the most cherished beliefs***
Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses.	But...
Well, then, I will judge it prudent to never completely trust my ___________ .	
But while there are some cases where the senses can deceive, surely there are cases when we can be sure that they tell us the truth.	But I can think I sense things with great clarity and afterwards it turns out that I am just ___________. There's no way of knowing that I'm dreaming when I'm in a dream.
Well then, as I could be dreaming at any time without knowing it, I shall have to accept that I may be mistaken at all times about what my senses tell me is true.	
But even though the particular things you think you see may not exist, even dreams still use general elements – colours, shapes and so on – that we must have sensed originally from which to create illusions.	But surely any composite thing could be invented. Even in dreams, we can imagine almost anything.
But surely even when dreaming, there are some basic truths that can never be doubted, such as ___________. Whether awake or dreaming, 2+3 must always equal 5, and a square must always have ___________.	But an omnipotent God could be deceiving me, so that even those apparently necessary truths could be false.
But as much as God is omnipotent, he is also omnibenevolent. Therefore God would not deceive me about such things.	But there could be an ___________ deceiving me, even about things such as maths and geometry.
So I close this First Meditation having discovered no certainties at all! Every single thing around me could be an illusion.	

Paragraphs 1-2 The Method of Doubt

We have already discussed Descartes' sceptical approach, which he sets out in these two paragraphs.

WRITE

1. *'It will not be necessary for me to show that all my opinions are false,'* writes Descartes. Why not?
2. *'I will not need to run through (all my beliefs) individually, which would be an endless task…'* Why not?
3. How do these two points make Descartes' sceptical process *unlike* the apple basket analogy (described above, from the Replies)?

Paragraphs 3-4 Doubting the Senses

A foundational principle of many our beliefs is that our senses give us accurate information about the world. Think about how much you are believing *right now* about what is true for you, based on the perceptions of your senses. Perhaps you are sitting at a desk, wearing a school uniform, a pen in your hand, classroom noises around you. Descartes' first sceptical argument undermines our usual confidence in this sense data.

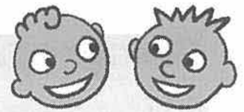
THINK

To what degree do you ordinarily believe you can trust your senses?

Descartes notes that we are often deceived with respect to objects 'which are very small or in the distance'. Therefore, at least some of the time, the truth of reality is not as it appears to the senses. Descartes concludes that 'From time to time I have found that the senses deceive and I have found that it is prudent never to trust completely those have deceived us even once.'

WRITE

Reconstruct Descartes' argument about the senses in standard form.



DISCUSS

To what extent should we doubt our senses?

1. Descartes gives a few examples of the kinds of unfavourable circumstances when confidence in sensory data is undermined. Can you think of more?
2. Are these unfavourable circumstances enough to throw doubt on all of our sensory perceptions?
3. If not, how are we to know whether circumstances are favourable or unfavourable?

Descartes now offers an example to cast further doubt on sense data. Consider the case of the madman, who considers himself clothed when he is naked, or imagines he is actually a pumpkin. He cannot distinguish favourable from unfavourable circumstances for judging sense data. And who's to say Descartes is not mad? But if he is mad, by what principle might he judge himself this way? Like sense data, the data upon which we might judge ourselves sane perceivers or not, has no trustworthy arbiter. Therefore we have not found a way to defend the senses against doubt.

THINK

If you were mad, how would you know?

WRITE

How is Descartes' example of the madman important to his argument about doubting the senses?

THINK

Should Descartes take more seriously the idea that he, himself, might be mad?

Paragraphs 5-6 Dreaming

We have all had the experience of believing ourselves to be immersed in a particular experience, only to wake up and realise it was merely a dream. But are there any ways to know, while in the middle of a dream, that it *is* a dream, and not reality? Descartes thinks not.

THINK

How do you know that you are dreaming?

WRITE

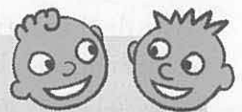
What is the argument that Descartes is making about dreaming? Reconstruct it in standard form.

Paragraphs 7-8 Universals, Mathematics and the a priori

Even if Descartes is dreaming, he thinks perhaps there are elements of the dream that could still be considered real and trustworthy. Dreams are perhaps like paintings: copies of reality. And even when paintings give distortions of reality, there are still general elements which one could not just concoct independently of some reality – such as the basic elements of persons and beasts (eyes, heads, hands and so on). But then there are other painters who do create things which are entirely fictitious. Is there anything in these which we would have to say is real and true?

There is surely a class of things – such as colour, shape and quantity – which, dreaming or awake, persists and endures, writes Descartes. Indeed, there must be foundational truths in the fundamental disciplines such as mathematics and geometry, even if falsehoods start to pile up when more composite experiences comprise the discipline, such as in physics, astronomy and medicine.

For there are certain ***a priori*** truths – things which are necessarily true, awake or asleep, that cannot be doubted in any way. Surely 'two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides.'



DISCUSS

Consider those things Descartes has suggested as candidates for enduring truth: colour, shape, size, quantity, mathematics.

Are any of these indubitable, in your view?

WRITE

1. What are ***a priori*** or **necessary truths**? Use a philosophy dictionary or *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 1 and 2* to help you formulate definitions.
2. Do you think there is any way of doubting truths such as these?
3. What kind of truth is given by deductive logic? What is the significance of the possibility that even processes of logic and reasoning could be called into doubt?

Paragraphs 9-10: God the deceiver?

So Descartes thinks momentarily that he has now arrived at some piece of truth he cannot doubt. But remember that the point of his method is that he will try his hardest to come up with a way of doubting even the things that seem furthest beyond doubt, such as mathematics. So beyond mathematics, is there not a God, who could deceive us about anything at all? God is, by definition, omnipotent (all-powerful), so he must be able to convince us even when we add two and five or count the sides of a square. On the other hand, God is also, by definition, omnibenevolent. So surely he would not seek to deceive. However it has already been established that deception occurs – through the senses, madness and dreaming – so it is indeed possible that God could deceive about mathematics. The option of atheism is not much help here, either, as without the principle of God by which to imagine some guiding order in the world, there is only likely to be more rather than less falsehood and uncertainty, Descartes reasons.

WRITE

Is imagining that God could deceive even about necessary truths, a reasonable hypothesis? Why or why not?

Paragraphs 11-12 The Evil Genius

Disturbed that the hypothesis of God as a master-deceiver runs contrary to all the accepted features of God, Descartes adjusts the hypothesis, replacing God with a malicious demon. '*I will suppose...some malicious demon of utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external thing are merely... delusions.*'

The range of this deception is all-encompassing; nothing can escape the grasp of the evil, deceiving genius, who goes out of his way to make everything other than it seems. The senses, reasoning, necessary truths... all are now looking worthy of the same bin as the rotten apples. And if logic itself is unreliable, what is the point of this entire enterprise? On this disturbing and defeated note, Descartes decides it is time for bed.

WRITE

Does Descartes actually believe there is an evil genius deceiving him? What is the point of this thought experiment?

Evaluating Meditation One

You may already have discussed lines of evaluation that have arisen through your discussion of the text.

Here is a line of criticism to Descartes' dreaming argument, suggested by English philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his book, *Dilemmas* (1960).

Let's suppose Descartes has shown that any experience at all could be a dream. Does that mean that all our experiences could be dreams? Let's relate this to a lottery. In a fair lottery, any number has an equal chance of winning as any other number. So anyone can win the lottery. But it does not follow that *every* person can win the lottery. And, indeed, if everyone won the lottery, it wouldn't be a lottery.

Ryle's original formulation uses counterfeit money as the example. A country with no currency would offer nothing to counterfeiters because there would be nothing to make counterfeits of. We can wonder whether some of the money that comes into our possession is counterfeit. But it makes no sense to wonder whether *all* the money is counterfeit. For counterfeits to exist, they must be counterfeits *of something.*

Ryle applies the same reasoning to the senses argument. Can you see how he might do this?

WRITE

Explain Ryle's counterfeit objection to Descartes' sceptical arguments. How convincing is it?

Review Questions: Meditation One

WRITE

1. Describe how Descartes' method of finding knowledge is one of rationalism rather than empiricism.
2. Why can't knowledge from the senses be trusted as a basis for knowledge? Can you supply examples to support Descartes' argument here?
3. Outline Descartes' dreaming argument.
4. Why does Descartes reject his God hypothesis in favour of the evil genius thought experiment?
5. Is Descartes justified in assuming that because our senses sometimes deceive us, and we are sometimes dreaming, that therefore we may *always* be deceived by the senses and by dreams?
6. 'To what extent can the mind be known by the self and others?' What progress does Descartes make towards answering this question in Meditation 1?

The Second Meditation

The next evening, Descartes returns to the matters which perplexed him the night before. Having deconstructed every source from which he previously derived knowledge, he is keen to find just one certainty he can use as a foundation stone on which to build further knowledge.

READ

Again, Descartes' method is to debate with himself. Read once slowly through the text.

Then reread it, coding it with the symbols D1 and D2, as in the table on p.20, where D1 is the affirmative Descartes and D2 is the sceptical Descartes.

DO

1. Make a list of Descartes' main points in this Meditation.
2. What conclusions does Descartes reach in this Meditation? Make a list.

Share your lists with others in a small group.

Navigating Through Meditation Two

This Meditation can be divided into three main sections:

1.	'The Cogito'	Do I exist?
2.	'Thinking Thing'	What am I?
3.	'Perceptions of Mind	How do I perceive myself and objects in the world?

DO

Identify the sections of Meditation Two that correspond with the headings above and annotate your text accordingly.

Some of the main points of Descartes' 'Meditation 2' which you may have listed include:

- If I am thinking I must exist.
- What I can be certain of is that I am a thinking thing.
- It seems that physical entities are perceived by the senses.
- Actually the senses are products of the mind about which we can be in error.
- As physical objects are all perceived through the mind, the mind is clearer to us than anything else.

Among the conclusions you may have listed from 'Meditation 2' are:

1. The evil demon cannot deceive me about everything.
2. I exist.
3. I am a thinking thing.
4. I can be certain of my essence as a thinking thing more clearly than I can know an object in the world, such as a piece of wax or my body.
5. My mind knows things with greater certainty than body (that is, my sensory perception) does.
6. I can know my mind better than I can know my body.
7. My mind is a different substance from my body.

DO

Working in a small group, try to reconstruct Descartes' arguments to each of the arguments above, in standard form. Or perhaps each group could be assigned an argument or set of arguments to work on. Share your efforts with other groups, and invite others to annotate your interpretations. You will refine these efforts as we work through the text more closely.

Section 1: The Cogito (Do I exist?)

Meditation 2 begins where Descartes left off the previous evening: with no certainties about anything at all. His body, the physical world and even mathematics have been brought into doubt. Perhaps an evil genius is just deceiving him into believing these things. So now Descartes wonders whether he can call even his own existence into doubt. And here is where he reaches his most famous insight. If he is being deceived, he reasons, then he must exist.

At last Descartes has arrived at a basic certainty. This is known as **the cogito.** In another of his books, *Discourse on the Method,* Descartes formulates this certainty slightly differently: 'I am thinking, therefore I exist', or in Latin, 'Cogito Ergo Sum', as it has come, more famously, to be known.

What Descartes hopes is that from this one basic certainty, he will be able to build other certainties. Archimedes (287BC-212BC) claimed that he would be able to move the whole earth if given a long enough lever and a fulcrum on which to turn it. Thus Descartes hopes to rebuild an indubitable system of knowledge from this one point of certainty.

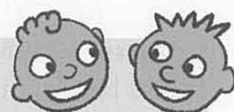
WRITE

1. What are Descartes' major causes of doubt from his deliberations on the previous evening?
2. Why does Descartes suppose that 'everything (he sees) is spurious'?
3. What is the significance of Descartes' evil genius thought experiment?
4. The realisation that he must exist is Descartes' first – and very famous – certainty. Reconstruct the argument which leads to this conclusion.

EVALUATION OF THE COGITO

For hundreds of years, the world's greatest thinkers have puzzled over this argument and attempted to pick holes in it. Here we shall consider a few possible lines of criticism. Note, this is just a taste of some of the simpler objections among the multitude that have been raised against the Cogito by various philosophers at various times. Researching further, you may find others that impress you more than these.

Criticism 1: Circular Argument
A circular argument has the form: A proves B and B proves A; therefore, nothing is proved.
For example: The bible can be trusted because God says it is true; you can trust God because the bible says God tells only the truth.

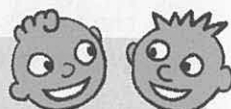


DISCUSS

Think about the statement, 'I think, therefore I am.' Can you see why some people argue that this is circular? What do you think? How might Descartes defend the Cogito against this criticism?

Criticism 2: Tautology

A tautology is any statement that is true by definition. Consider this start to a student's creative story: *'My fantasy island is surrounded by water on all sides.'* Why is this an unintentionally amusing opening sentence? Because to be surrounded by water is the definition of an island, so the description adds nothing to our image of this fantasy place. The writer may as well have said, 'My fantasy island is an island.' The other thing to note about a tautology is that it cannot be disagreed with successfully because it already contains its own truth.



DISCUSS

How might the Cogito be seen as tautological? What could be replied in its defence?

Criticism 3: The Cogito Not an Inference

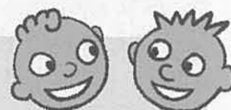
As mentioned above, Descartes doesn't actually use the famous formulation, 'I think, therefore I am' in the *Meditations.* To do so would imply an argument, and to form the argument properly – that is, as a deductive argument or *syllogism* – he would need to supply a second premise:

P1: I am thinking
(P2: Anything that is thinking must exist)
C: Therefore, I must exist.

But where could Descartes pull P2 from? If he is being faithful to his method, shouldn't he submit this claim to the same rigorous doubt as everything else he has considered?

Descartes himself agrees with this point. Indeed he states in the second set of Replies (which follow the *Meditations)* that he is not entitled to assume P2 and therefore we should not regard the Cogito as the kind of inference constructed above.

But what status can the Cogito have, then? Descartes argues in the Replies that existence in this example is something which must be recognised as 'self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind.'



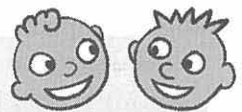
DISCUSS

What does Descartes mean by 'self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind'? Does he mean something like common sense that requires no further process of proof, or something else? Is this satisfactory, in your view?

Criticism 4: Hume's Objection

David Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature,* argues that when we focus in on our own thoughts, we can't be aware of anything else except the thoughts themselves. We can't actually simultaneously be aware of a self that has the thoughts. Therefore, Hume argues that Descartes can only derive from the statement 'I think', that 'thinking is going on' or 'there are thoughts'. In other words, for Hume, Descartes is going too far by positing a self that exists beyond the thoughts he is undoubtedly aware of.

Note that this is the central argument of the set extract from Hume that you will be studying in Unit 3, Area of Study 2.



DISCUSS

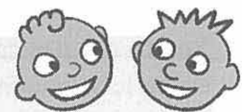
This has proved a very popular line of objection to Descartes through the centuries, and has taken on more sophisticated formulations in the hands of thinkers such as Wittgenstein.

What do you make of this objection? What might Descartes have replied to Hume?

Criticism 5: Russell's Objection

Here is what English philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) had to say in his book *The Problems of Philosophy:*

> *But some care is needed in using Descartes' argument. 'I think, therefore I am' says rather more than is strictly certain. It might seem as though we were quite sure of being the same person today as we were yesterday, and this is no doubt true in some sense. But the real Self is as hard to arrive at as the real table, and does not seem to have that absolute, convincing certainty that belongs to particular experiences. When I look at my table and see a brown colour what is quite certain at once is not 'I am seeing a brown colour' but rather, 'a brown colour is being seen'. This of course involves something (or somebody) which (or who) sees the brown colour, but it does not of itself involve that more or less permanent person whom we call 'I'. So far as immediate certainty goes, it might be that the something which sees the brown colour is quite momentary, and not the same as the something which has some different experience the next moment.* [1]



DISCUSS

1. Reconstruct Russell's argument to the conclusion that *"Therefore, 'I think, therefore I am' is doubtful."* in standard form.
2. What do you think of this criticism of Descartes?
3. How might Descartes have replied to Russell?

---

1 B. Russell 1998, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.8.

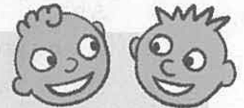
Criticism 6: Find anything funny here?

Descartes' Cogito has proved a source of humour over the centuries. For example, here is a joke that has done the rounds of the internet:

> *René Descartes walks into a restaurant and sits down for dinner. The waiter comes over and asks if he'd like an appetizer.*
> *'No, thank you,' says Descartes, 'I'd just like to order dinner.'*
> *'Would you like to hear our daily specials?' asks the waiter.*
> *'No!' says Descartes, getting impatient.*
> *'Would you like a drink before dinner?' the waiter asks.*
> *Descartes is insulted, since he's a tee-totaller.*
> *'I think not!' he says indignantly, and POOF! he disappeared.*

And another:

> *How many Cartesians does it take to change a light bulb?*
> *None. Unfortunately, when the bulb blew out, they were all so shocked that they stopped thinking for that brief moment, and 'poof', they all just blinked out of existence.*



DISCUSS

Within the humour lies a possible line of criticism. Can you articulate it? What might Descartes reply? How effective do you find this criticism?

Section 2: 'The Thinking Thing' (What am I?)

Whatever you make of the Cogito, Descartes has now accepted his own existence, but does not yet know what he is. Who is this I who exists, he now wonders. Having established existence, the question of *essence* is now his problem, and this section produces for us in VCE Unit 3, the most crucial material in relation to the Mind/Body problem.

Descartes starts with his 'former opinions' about himself. He lists four potential answers:

1. 'I am a man.' However, this leads to too many complicated problems about what a man is, and therefore to too many chains of further doubts.
2. 'I am a rational animal.' This is a reference to the notions we will encounter in Aristotle's *Ethics* (Unit 4, Area of Study 1) that humans are like animals in our capacities for feeling sensation but we are not animals because we can reason. However, Descartes rejects this candidate too, as it requires definitions of 'animal' and of 'rational' and so does not yield any simple truths.

3. 'I am a body.' Descartes defines the body as 'Whatever has a determinable shape and a definable location and can occupy a space in such a way as to exclude any other body; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever else comes into contact with it.'

   Descartes concludes that he cannot identify himself with his body, as he cannot be entirely sure of the existence of that list of physical attributes. All of them could have been fabricated by an evil demon aiming to deceive him. So as much as his body feels distinct and present to him, its existence can still be called into doubt.

   What is more, Descartes asserts that movement, sensation and thought are not powers of which a mere body can be capable. Consider a corpse, which can do none of these things by itself. It can only move if shifted by another entity.

4. 'I am a soul.' Traditional Ancient Greek and Christian teaching has the soul responsible for the difference between a corpse and a live body. Again, this idea references notions we will encounter in Aristotle in Unit 4, via the 'function argument – that is:

   - Plants have a *nutritive/vegetative soul,* giving them powers to be nourished and to grow.
   - Animals, in addition to the powers they share with plants, have a *sensitive/volitive soul,* giving powers to feel sensations and to move.
   - Humans, in addition to the powers they share with plants and animals, have a *rational soul,* giving powers to think and reason.

   However, when considered in this way, the soul poses problems for Descartes. There are several complex capacities attributed the soul, and the aspects of soul that humans share with plants and animals seem too closely linked with assumptions of the body's existence to be able to grant them certainty in this process of rigorous doubt.

5. 'I am a thinking thing' is the next option Descartes considers to describe himself. This seems to be getting much closer. After all, the only characteristic that is certain about the 'I' of the Cogito is thinking. But the term soul is too loaded with the other features that are dependent on physicality. And so Descartes is led to embrace the view of himself as a 'thinking thing.' 'I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason.'

   This moment has been identified by some philosophers as the birth of the modern mind: 'I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. What kind of thing? As I have just said – a thinking thing.' Or in Latin: *Ergo Sum Res Cogitans.*

   Note that Descartes is not saying that thinking is the *only* part of the self. Nor is he actually denying the existence of the body. He is establishing, however, the *essence* of the 'I', which is indubitable.

In the next paragraph he considers what other candidates there are for inclusion in this essence: 'What else am I? I will use my imagination.' The problem is, anything new he comes up with can either be reduced to the notion of a 'thinking thing' that he's already distilled, or it presupposed sensory data which can be doubted. Descartes writes, 'imagining is simply contemplating the shape or image of a corporeal thing. Yet now I know for certain that I exist and at the same time that all such images, and in general, everything relating to the nature of the body, could be mere dreams… I thus realise that none of the things that the imagination enables me to grasp is at all relevant to this knowledge of myself which I possess.'

WRITE

1. Reconstruct the argument in paragraph 6 in standard form.
2. What is your view on Descartes' findings here?

On the other hand, though, Descartes continues to affirm in paragraphs 7 and 8 that even though the contents of the imagination can be doubted, the actual act of imagining 'is something which really exists and is part of my thinking.' And likewise, it is the same 'I who performs all these other acts: the 'I' which 'doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.' Thus he expands the definition of thinking as follows:

THINKING

Occurs within SUBJECT 'I' and *includes:*

- DOUBTING
- UNDERSTANDING
- AFFIRMING
- WILLING
- IMAGINING
- PERCEIVING

Why does Descartes regard all these mental acts as having the same certainty as the Cogito? Because he asserts, "it is the same 'I'" who does all these things. Even though he can be mistaken in the contents of his perceptions and imaginings, he can still be sure it is his own mind doing the perceiving and imagining. Thus he reaches the insight that to say 'I see a cat' is a dubious claim, whereas 'I seem to be seeing a cat' is an act of the mind and is therefore certain.

WRITE

To what extent can the mind be known, according to Descartes? Is he right?

Write a reflection in response to this question, drawing on Descartes' arguments and evaluating them.

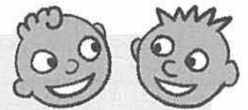
EVALUATIONS OF DESCARTES' ARGUMENT TO THE CONCLUSION THAT HE IS A THINKING THING

Cartesian Dualism: Some Initial Comments

We thus see that by this point in the text, Descartes has divided his world clearly into two parts. The first is indubitable but unable to actually be pictured because it is his own mind. The second is the extended corporeal world which appears distinctly in his imagination and perception but is able to be doubted.

His argument to this point in the text can be reconstructed very simply thus. Let's call this **Descartes' Argument for Substance Dualism.**

P1 I can conceive of myself without a body.
P2 Any part of me that I can conceive of myself without, cannot be a part that is essential to me.
P3 Only the fact that 'I think' is inseparable from me.
P4 Therefore, it must be my essential nature to be a thinking thing.
P5 This thinking thing cannot be a body, as I can conceive of myself without that.
P6 However, my thinking part is not nothing and must be something.
C Therefore, my thinking part – my mind – must be different from my body.
C My mind must be a purely mental substance.



DISCUSS

1. What do you think about this rendering of the argument? Is it faithful to the text? Would you prefer to construct or express it otherwise? What changes would you make?
2. What are the implications of this argument?
3. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this argument.

Substances, Essences and Modes

This is one stage of the *Meditations* where Descartes is making use of concepts that were recognised in his day, but are not familiar to a modern audience. Even though he does not use these words in our translation (instead we find words such as 'attribute'), Descartes is drawing on distinctions between the metaphysical categories of **substances, essences** and **modes.** So we will now take a moment to explain these distinctions and to see how they are significant in Descartes' thought.

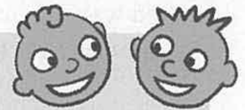
For Descartes, a *substance* is anything that can exist independently, without relying on anything else for its existence. Mind is such a thing. It is non-material and its *essence* (or principle attribute) is thinking. The *modes* are the various forms thinking can take, including the doubting, affirming and so on that Descartes lists. In the same way, the body can exist as an independent *substance.* Its *essence* is extension in space, while its modes can include properties such as shape, size, colour, texture, appearance and so on.

These distinctions are helpful for us to grasp as they carry important implications for the conclusions Descartes is drawing about mind and body. For example, using these metaphysical categories allows Descartes to locate the essence of himself, which is to think. There has been much written in analysis of these categories, which you may wish to research further. However, the key point here is that Descartes has identified mind and body as separate kinds of metaphysical substances, each independent from the other. That is why Descartes' name has become synonymous with the view known as **substance dualism.** We will return to this view, its implications and its problems, a bit later.

Personal Identity

Descartes' argument from this section can also be examined for its conclusions about personal identity. Personal identity is our topic in Unit 3, Area of Study 2 (Chapter 2 of this book), but it is worth considering how Descartes' *Meditations* present a view on what it is that constitutes the central self of a person, and makes them the same person over time. Consider this interpretation of the text:

1. I consist of a mind and a body.
2. I can doubt whether I possess a body, including my sensory perceptions.
3. I can doubt where my thoughts come from (for example, so they come from me, or has an evil demon put them there?).
4. However, I cannot doubt that I have a mind where my thinking occurs.
5. Therefore, my self or essence must be my mind.



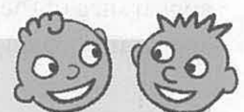
DISCUSS

1. What do you think about this rendering of the argument? Is it faithful to Descartes' text? Would you prefer to construct or express it otherwise?
2. What are the implications of this argument?
3. Evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.
4. 'I am beginning to have a rather better understanding of what I am,' writes Descartes. But how can he know it is the 'same I' who does all these things? Is it possible that he is mistaken in this claim? Explore this is in a reflection of a paragraph or more.

The Homunculus Fallacy

The homunculus fallacy occurs when a philosopher relies on one part of the mind to solve a problem about another, and leads to the problem of an infinite regress.

'I know that I exist' → 'Who is this I who exists?' → 'Who is the I who knows the I whom I know?' → etc



DISCUSS

Could Descartes be falling into this problem?

Section 3: 'Perceptions of Mind' (How do I perceive myself and objects in the world? / 'The Wax Argument')

1. THE MIND IS A BETTER KNOWER THAN THE SENSES

Having established himself as essentially a 'thinking thing', Descartes turns his attention to the material world. Descartes has reached a point of certainty regarding his mind. And yet, puzzlingly, it is his body, and the other physical things in the world perceived through the senses, which actually appear most distinctly to him.

And so Descartes decides to take one physical item as an example to explore for answers. How is it, he wonders, that he has knowledge of a piece of beeswax, taken straight from the honeycomb? Does he know it through his senses, or through some other means?

First, Descartes considers what he knows about the piece of wax through his senses: he knows details of its shape, colour, smell, taste, hardness and so on. Then he considers what happens to the wax when it is melted. All the qualities that it had before are changed, so that none of its original qualities perceived by the senses remain. The wax now has a different size, shape, colour, smell and taste. So, how is it, then, that he is so convinced it is the same piece of wax?

What does Descartes know about this piece of wax? He decides that he can only know that it is extended, flexible and changeable. Descartes proposes that his certainty that the solid wax and the melted wax are one and the same thing, even while none of the features perceived by his senses is the same, proves to Descartes that it cannot be the senses which perceive the wax.

So he wonders, is it his imagination which is responsible? But it seems possible that the wax could mutate into an infinite number of shapes and sizes, even though his imagination cannot possibly run through them all.

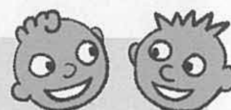
Thus Descartes concludes that he must know the wax through his understanding or intellect, in other words through his mind. His mind judges the essence of the wax to be extension in space, and the many details not adequately provided by the senses are filled in by mental intuition. Thus the clear truth about the wax – that it occupies space and takes on different shapes and sizes – is a product of the intellect rather than just purely of sensory perception. This is what he means by saying that the wax 'is perceived by the mind alone.'

To illustrate this point, that the sensory element of perception falls short of giving us the whole truth, Descartes offers an analogy. If he looks out into the street, he may see people walking about in hats and coats. And yet if he asks himself more critically just what, precisely, he has 'seen' with his eyes, the answer must honestly be that he has seen some hats and coats; he hasn't actually seen the people under them. It is actually his mind that has 'seen', in the sense of 'understood' that there must be people under the hats and coats. Similarly, his senses have perceived the superficial appearance of the wax, while his mind has understood its essence which persists even when the appearance changes.

Thus Descartes reflects that it is very easy to be deceived in such matters, but that the senses are more likely to be deceived than the mind.

WRITE

1. Can you reconstruct Descartes argument so far, to the conclusion that the mind is a better knower than the senses, in standard form?
2. What do you make of this argument? Assess its strengths and weaknesses.



DISCUSS

To what extent are the senses necessary for knowing the nature of the world?

2. THE MIND IS BETTER KNOWN THAN THE BODY

From this point, Descartes makes a further claim. He suggests that as his mind knows things more clearly than his body/senses, he must therefore know his mind more clearly than he knows the physical world. After all, his perceptions of the piece of wax may be entirely illusory; however, when he is perceiving the piece of wax, he cannot doubt that he is perceiving, nor that he is understanding those perceptions through acts of the mind. And both the perceiving and the understanding prove that he exists. Whenever we consider the outside world, we can doubt the truth of our findings about the outside world, but just the act of considering it must confirm our existence and tell us something about the nature of our minds.

What do you think about this move? Perhaps it is all right if Descartes just wants to reiterate that the existence of the mind is more certain than the existence of the body. But it seems he wants to say that the *nature* of the mind is better grasped than the nature of the body.

WRITE

1. Reconstruct Descartes' argument to the conclusion that the nature of the mind is better known than the nature of the body.
2. Evaluate this argument.

WRITE

Compare the extent to which we can know the physical world to the extent to which we can know the mental world, according to Descartes. Is he right?

Review Questions: 'Meditation Two'

WRITE

Fill in the gaps in the following reconstructions of Descartes' arguments from 'Meditation 2':

1. I am a thinking thing.

P1 I ______________. (from the Cogito, paragraph 3)

P2 'Man' and '______________' are too complicated to be accepted as definitions of my mode of existence.

P3 My body is distinct, but nonetheless, everything I say about my ______________ could be illusory.

P4 The qualities of 'soul' which we find in plants and ______________ (as described in Aristotle's theory) of nourishment/growth and movement (e.g. walking) could therefore also be illusory.

P5 Likewise, my sensory perception of the outside world (another aspect of how that 'animal soul' was traditionally thought of) could also be illusory, or even the product of ______________.

P6 However, my capacity to ______________ cannot be illusory. Indeed this capacity is what confirms that I have any ______________ at all.

C Therefore, it is ______________ that defines the nature of my existence.

C **Therefore, I am essentially a ______________ thing.**

2. The wax argument

P1 A physical object – e.g. a piece of wax – can give a completely different set of inputs to the senses when it is solid compared with when it is molten.

P2 And yet I am certain that the solid wax and the molten wax are one and the same physical thing.

C **Therefore my grasp of a physical object is the result of** mental scrutiny **rather than purely physical, sensory input.**

3. The mind is a better knower than the senses

P1 All the properties of the piece of ______________ that we perceive with the ______________ change as the wax ______________.

P2 This is also true of its primary properties, such as shape, ______________, and ______________.

P3 The ______________ cannot process the infinity of possible transformations of the wax.

P3 Yet we know the wax remains the ______________ piece of wax as it ______________.

P4 Therefore, insofar as we know the wax, we know it through our ______________ and faculty of judgment, not through our ______________ or ______________.

P5 Evidence of the primacy of the mind's judgement of the physical world is clear even when the mind may be in error – for example, when I judge there to be ______________ in the street after sensing ______________.

P6 But even this is evidence, like the wax, that it is the ______________ which *understands* the physical world, while the senses receive only the most basic, primitive input.

C **Therefore, the mind is a better knower than the senses.**

4. The mind is known with more certainty than the body:

P1 It is possible that all knowledge of external objects, including my ______________, could be false as the result of the actions of an evil ______________.

P2 However, it is not possible that I could be ______________ about my existence or my nature as a ______________ thing.

P3 Even physical objects, such as my ______________, are known much more distinctly through the mind than through the ______________.

C Therefore, every act of clear and distinct knowledge of ______________ matter also provides even more certain evidence for the existence and nature of ourselves as ______________ things.

C **Therefore, our ______________ is much more clearly and distinctly known to us than our body.**

5. Construct a mind map which illustrates how Descartes uses the following terms in Meditation Two: soul, thinking, perception, mind, physical, non-physical, behaviour, dualist, physicalist, mental, spiritual.
6. What is Descartes' essence (and yours), according to Descartes?
7. How does Descartes use his 'wax argument' to show that we do not know the nature of material things as well as the nature of our own mind?
8. How does the wax argument show that we know of the existence of bodies (if they do exist) more by the understanding than by the senses?
9. Why does Descartes conclude that he is a thinking thing? What does mean by this? Do you find his arguments for this convincing? Why or why not?
10. Why doesn't he conclude that he also has a body?
11. Having established beyond any doubt that he exists (at least so long as he is thinking), Descartes asks what kind of thing he is, i.e., what is his nature. Why does he view 'a human being' and 'a rational animal' as poor answers to this good question?
12. What other attributes (qualities, or faculties) does Descartes rule out as not necessarily belonging to his nature? And why?
13. Of what one attribute does Descartes say 'it alone cannot be separated from me'?
14. What things does Descartes include in the attribute that is inseparable from him?
15. Why does Descartes think that having a body and doing things that necessarily involve the body – for example, walking – are not part of his nature, of what he is essentially? In what way does he invoke the Evil Demon to make these points?
16. Why does Descartes think that he can be more certain that he has a mind than that he has a body? Do you agree?
17. Many contemporary philosophers and psychologists think that there is no such thing as 'mind' or 'soul' but that these are names we give to operations which are ultimately only motions of bodily parts or transfers of chemical or electrical energy within the central nervous system (as the 'thought' of a computer is only a series of operations consisting of electrical activity among its miniature circuit elements). Descartes has a radically different view, obviously. What sort of evidence can be given for these opposing positions?
18. What does Descartes take a thing that thinks to be? How are doubting, willing, understanding and so on, explained by Descartes?

19. How does Descartes distinguish between seeing and seeming to see, or between smelling and seeming to smell? How is this insight useful to him?
20. Could I really be a body even though so far as I can tell I am only a thinking thing? That is, might not a body and a thinking thing really be one and the same?
21. How does Descartes use the piece of wax example to show that the soul (the mind) is better and more distinctly known than the body?
22. What is the point of the story about looking down at men wearing hats and coats in the street?
23. In what way does everything we learn about the body teach us something more fundamental about the mind?
24. What, according to Descartes, does reflection on the wax show about (a) the wax itself, and (b) the human mind?
25. Why is there a puzzle concerning Descartes' belief that reflection on the wax can tell us about the human mind?

The Sixth Meditation

In Meditation 6, Descartes is mainly concerned with the potential existence of the physical world and the objects within it. You are only required to study paragraph 9 of this Meditation (beginning *First, I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly...*). However, it is useful to have some understanding of Descartes' reasoning before this point.

Descartes begins the Meditation by noting the strong possibility that material objects exist since they are the subject matter of pure mathematics, which can be perceived clearly and distinctly. Descartes then goes on to provide two arguments for the existence of material things: one based on the faculty of imagination and the other on the senses.

Descartes commences the first of these arguments by drawing a distinction between imagination and understanding using examples of shapes. Descartes tells us that when he considers a triangle, he both *understands* the triangle (as a figure bound by 3 lines) and 'sees' the triangle with his imagination. However, when he considers a chiliagon (a figure with 1,000 sides), although he is able to *understand* it with the same clarity with which he is able to understand the triangle, he is not able to *imagine* it. Because imagination requires a 'peculiar effort' that understanding does not, Descartes concludes that imagination and understanding are different.

Descartes goes on to reason that imagination isn't an essential property of the mind for if he lacked it he would still remain the same individual. Thus it must depend on something other than the mind for its existence. It therefore seems reasonable to conjecture that the body exists.

Descartes then turns his attention to what he perceives by way of the senses: that he has a body, that this body is located amongst other bodies and that on account of this body he experiences sensations. Given that these perceptions are involuntary and are qualitatively different to those experienced in meditation or in remembrance, it seems reasonable to conclude that these perceptions are not produced by the mind alone, but by objects outside of it.

Recalling Meditation 1, Descartes notes that he has good reason to doubt the testimony of the senses. However, he also notes that over the course of the Meditations he has achieved a clearer understanding of both himself and God and so, just as he should not accept everything he has acquired from the senses, nor should he necessarily call everything into doubt.

READ

Read the set excerpt from Meditation Six.

Annotate your text to identify any CLAIMS and CONCLUSIONS Descartes is making.

It is at this point that we arrive at our paragraph for study. Descartes begins our paragraph with the claim that whatever can be understood clearly and distinctly is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly to the way it is understood. Descartes says that the fact that he can clearly and distinctly understand two things as being distinct from one another, is compelling evidence that they are in fact distinct (for God is capable of making them in the way they are understood). Descartes clearly and distinctly understands himself to be a thinking thing. Another distinct idea that he has is of the body. Thus he concludes that he is distinct from his body and can exist without it. In this paragraph Descartes clearly articulates his argument for substance dualism, which we first encountered in Meditation 2.

Review Questions: Meditation 6

WRITE

1. Reconstruct Descartes' argument for the conclusion that he is distinct from his body in standard form.
2. How does Descartes define the mind and how does he define the body?
3. Has Descartes provided a persuasive argument for the distinction between mind and body?

WRITE

1. Locate the parts of the text where Descartes reaches the following conclusions. Highlight and annotate these places.
   a. We are made up of two different substances:
      Mind: Like the soul, this is non-physical, non-extended, immortal, unchanging.
      Body: This is physical, mortal, changing, extended (takes up space).
   b. Mind and body interact causally with each other.
2. Locate the parts of the text where Descartes presents the following arguments. Highlight and annotate these places to identify where each argument and their premises appear in the text.
   a. P1. I can be sure I have a mind.
      P2. I cannot be totally sure that I have a body.
      C Therefore, mind and body are two different substances.
   b. P1. The mind must be permanent and unchanging or we could never know it with certainty.
      P2. Physical things are always degrading; they are not permanent and unchanging.
      C Therefore, the mind cannot be a physical thing but must be some kind of other, non-degrading substance.
   c. P1. I have ideas in my mind that result in physical behaviour. *[For example? What is an example that Descartes gives?]*
      P2. I have physical experiences that produce ideas in my mind. *[What is an example that Descartes gives?]*
      C Therefore, mind and body must causally interact with each other. The mind causes the body to do things and the body causes the mind to believe things.
3. How convincing are each of the above arguments? Can you find any problems with them? Rank them from most to least convincing and give reasons for your ranking.
4. Can you think of any problems Descartes might run into with this theory? List all the problems raised by members of your class.

Thinking Further About Substance Dualism

Two Distinct Realms: Physical versus Mental

We have now considered Descartes' proposal that physical objects are only properly understood by the intellect, which shows their essential quality to be extension in space (Meditation Two) – and seen how he furthers this notion of the distinctness of mind and body (in Meditation Six). This is Descartes' theory of **substance dualism**: that the material universe is one single kind of stuff, changeable, dubitable and extendable in space, while the mental realm is a completely different, immaterial, indubitable, immutable, non-extended phenomenon. For Descartes – taking up the categories of understanding typically applied during his time – the principal attribute, or *essence* of mind is thought, and the essence of matter is extension in space. Further, the *modes* of thought are doubting, understanding, affirming, willing and so on, while the modes of extension are shape, size, position and local motion.

DO

You may wish to Google 'primary and secondary qualities', important aspects of how the physical world was understood in Descartes' time.

What do we know about the nature of the mind from Descartes' investigation? Descartes has described the mind as lacking the spatiality of the physical world. He has also concluded that we cannot find out about the nature of physical things without using our minds. On the other hand, he thinks we can learn about our minds by examining how we get to know physical objects: '... *every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the wax, or of any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind.*'

In other words, Descartes finds that thought is much more accessible to knowledge than the physical world: '*Surely my awareness of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than my awareness of the wax, but also much more distinct and evident.*'

This idea that we have direct and unchallengeable knowledge of our own mental states is described by philosophers as 'privileged access.' Descartes describes his mind as 'distinct and evident,' asserting his belief that it is impossible to have false ideas about one's mental states. He believes our own minds are transparent to our inner selves.

THINK

How does this idea strike you? It is not accepted by modern psychology, and you may be familiar with Freud's theories of the unconscious mind.

Even if we don't agree with Descartes' notion that all mental states are accessible to consciousness, we can still acknowledge the peculiar 'privateness' of our own minds. Observations about my physical state – for example a bruise on my leg – are equally accessible to you as to me (and indeed, a doctor may be able to tell me more about the nature of that bruise than I know myself). However, I know the contents of my own mind in a way no-one else can know them. The mental experience of pain, and memories about the embarrassing way I obtained that bruise, are accessible only to me. Even if I talk to you about these things, they remain my private experiences, largely inaccessible to you. Even if a neuroscientist one day manages to track my neural activity when my bruise is examined, she will still not have precise access to my thoughts in the way that I do.

THINK

Does the notion of privileged access prove that bodies and minds have entirely different properties and are therefore entirely different kinds of substance?

If you are interested in this argument about privileged access, you may wish to investigate Wittgenstein's theory of the 'beetle in the box.'

Descartes' Big Challenge: The Problem of Interaction

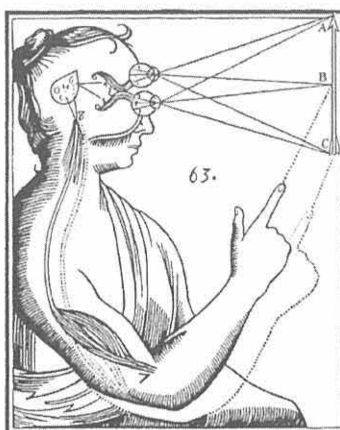
THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM AND INTERACTIONISM

Consider this argument:

1. The mind is a spiritual substance (essentially thinking).
2. The body is a physical substance (essentially extended).
3. Therefore, the mind is not the body.
4. But the mind and the body are intimately connected; they interact causally, in two directions.
5. Yet material substance and spiritual substance cannot interact causally as they can have no point in common.

We are familiar with points 1-3 of this sequence, as Descartes' argument for substance dualism. Point 4 captures Descartes' view that minds and bodies causally interact, presented in Meditation Six. For example, my stomach signals hunger to my mind, so my mind instructs my hand to reach for an apple, and so on. The interaction occurs in two directions, from mind to body and from body to mind. The two realms have causal effects on each other. This view that mind and body – mental and physical substances – can interact causally in this way is known as **interactionism.**

Point 4 just sounds like popular common sense. However, the **mind-body problem** is: how we can possibly resolve point 5? This has proved a philosophical conundrum worthy of attention from some of the greatest thinkers over the centuries. Descartes himself offered that perhaps minds are linked to bodies by way of the pineal gland, a small structure in the middle of the brain. The mind stimulates the pineal gland, which sends messages to the body, and receives physical signals which it then relays back to the mind, ran Descartes' hypothesis. It seems that Descartes' selection of the pineal gland was fairly arbitrary as there was no explanation for its function during his time. (We now know it as an endocrine gland of the brain that secretes melatonin, is regulated by light stimuli and is an important component of the circadian timing system.) However, how is it plausible that any part of the body could do what Descartes proposed – whether the pineal gland or anywhere else – when to do this it would have to be both immaterial and material? Descartes' theory has it that the mental and physical are totally distinct and separate, yet also has them interacting and causing effects on one another. The way scientists describe it, the physical world is causally closed. If we regard the intervention of non-material minds in the material world as implausible, we should regard Cartesian dualism as implausible.



Drawing by Descartes explaining the function of the pineal gland. Could this be the link between the mental and physical realms and the key to their interaction?

OTHER DUALIST SOLUTIONS TO THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

Many attempts have been made to show how mind and body could act together while preserving the thesis that they are separate substances. The theory of **parallelism** suggests that physical and mental events are coordinated by God. Leibniz argued that this coordinated system could have been activated by God at the point of origin of the physical and mental worlds, producing two parallel universes operating in perfect, mutually-causal, **pre-established harmony**. Malebranche's theory of **occasionalism** argued that a more plausible idea would involve God intervening with every occasion of mental-physical or physical-mental causality.

Drawing more serious recent attention than either of these theories is the dualist theory of **epiphenomenalism.** On this view, mental events are caused by the physical brain, but they do not in turn have effects on the physical world. Epiphenomenalism gives a purely physical account of behaviour: sense organs generate neural impulses which generate muscular responses. Mental events, on this account, are effects or by-products of physical processes. However, the mental realm is incapable of causing anything. The appeal of epiphenomenalism is that it maintains dualism while answering the problem of how the physical and mental can interact. However, to most thinkers, the epiphenomenalist's account of the mental realm is so unsatisfying that he may just as well do away with it and adopt materialism.

None of these dualist views attracts many serious adherents in modern philosophy. The problem of interaction remains dualism's largest hurdle.

WRITE

1. What is the Mind/Body Problem in philosophy and how is Cartesian thought at the centre of it?
2. What seems to you the most plausible way to resolve the problem of interaction?

More Evaluations of Descartes' Substance Dualism

1. LEIBNITZ'S IDENTITY THEORY

One way to summarise Descartes' argument is:

> I can imagine that my body does not exist.
> I cannot imagine that my mind does not exist.
> Therefore my mind is not my body.

Here Descartes is drawing on the version of Leibnitz's Law which states:

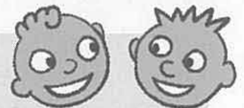
> *For any x and y, if x and y differ with respect to some property, then x is non-identical to y.*

THINK

What are some examples of how you could apply this law?

However, there may be problems with applying this law. For example:

> Lois Lane loves Superman.
> Lois Lane does not love Clark Kent.
> Therefore, Clark Kent is not Superman.



DISCUSS

What is going on here? Why isn't Leibniz's Law working in this case? Does this destroy Descartes' argument?

2. MORE ON IDENTITY AND NON-IDENTITY

Descartes concludes that because the concept of his mind is different from the concept of his body, they must be quite separate kinds of stuff, or have a different kind of being – a different **ontology.** However, this can be questioned. Think about all the associations you make when I suggest to you the concept of 'water.' You could argue that this is a different concept from 'H_2O,' or that things can be said about 'water' which make less sense when said about 'H_2O.' The same argument could be made about 'lightning' versus 'electrical discharges.' Or 'Ayers Rock' versus 'Uluru.' Or 'my mum' versus 'my dad's wife.' Or 'Clark Kent' versus 'Superman.' And yet while all these things may be *conceptually* different, they turn out to be *ontologically* one and the same thing.

This argument about identity claims will be of particular interest when we study Jack Smart's materialist theory.

THINK

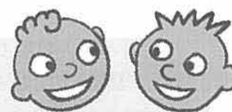
How does this argument have bearing on the premises of Descartes' Argument for Substance Dualism, as rendered above?

3. CATEGORY MISTAKE

Consider this argument:

> *'Perhaps Descartes should be making a clearer distinction between a thing and what it does. If I run, it doesn't follow that I am a run, or even essentially a runner or running thing. Yet Descartes seems to want to conclude from the fact that I think, that I must essentially be thought, or a thinker. But all he should be able to say is that I have the capacity for thought, whatever I am. And he hasn't actually proven that whatever I am, with the capacity for thought, I cannot be physical.'*

This is similar to the objection that Gilbert Ryle runs against Descartes in his famous book, *The Concept of Mind.* Chapter 1 is recommended reading.



DISCUSS

What do you think of this argument? Is it coherent? Does it miss the point of Descartes argument or does it actually strike him a blow? Are there any changes you would make to the way this argument progresses, to strengthen its power?

4. BUT WHAT EXACTLY *IS* THIS 'MIND'?

Perhaps you find it a problem that Descartes defines the mind *negatively.* He tells us all the things the mind *isn't*: not a body, not the senses and so on. It can be questioned, therefore, whether Descartes has offered us sufficient detail of what the mind *is* to prove its independent existence.

DO

Develop this line of criticism of Descartes' dualism. How convincing can you make it?

5. THE DISAPPEARING MIND

Reconsider the Descartes jokes on page 31. They rely for their humour on the bizarre consequence of Descartes' argument, that if I the essence of my being is thinking, and I stop thinking, then I must cease to exist. How can this be resolved? It is absurd to suggest that if I stop thinking – for example, when asleep – that I am dead. Descartes suggests in his *Replies* that I am just not always aware that I am thinking. But is this contradictory? Another possibility is to say that I have the *capacity* to think even if I don't always use it, just like a pen has a capacity to write, even if it's not always demonstrating it. But if my mind is just something with the capacity to think, that will not always be demonstrated, then what's to stop me suggesting that a physical thing could have this capacity? Why couldn't my pen be capable of thought, but just not have demonstrated it?

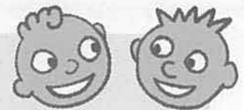
THINK

Do you think this line of reasoning gets rid of special mental substances altogether?

6. THE ELEPHANT TEST

Read the following description of the Elephant Test[2].

> *The term **elephant test** refers to the ability to recognise something while being unable to describe it. It may be derived from a version of the Indian tale of the Blind Men and an Elephant, possibly from the John Godfrey Saxe poem, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant'. The poem explains how six blind men each feel only one part of an elephant and come to argue that it is similar to a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan, and a rope, respectively: each has a completely different interpretation of what an elephant is like, and the complete description can only be derived by combining their information.*



DISCUSS

Does this suggest any useful lines of criticism against Descartes' arguments?

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_test (accessed 20th November, 2013)

Review Task

WRITE

How plausible is Descartes' substance dualism as a solution to the mind-body problem? Write an essay in response to this question.

Your essay should include the following:

- Outlines of key arguments from the *Meditations* concluding that mind and body are separate substances;
- Definition and discussion of the mind-body problem, and outline of Descartes' proposed solution to it;
- Evaluations of Descartes' arguments for substance dualism;
- Overall assessment of the plausibility of these arguments as solutions to the mind-body problem.

RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

You may wish at this point to apply Descartes' views on the mind and body to a relevant contemporary debate such as those outlined in Part E of this chapter.

PART C

J.J.C. SMART: 'Sensations and Brain Processes'

Historical and Philosophical Background

Advances in Neuroscience

Human understanding of the brain and nervous system has come a long way since the time of Descartes. You probably learnt in middle school science classes that brains and nervous systems consist of long cells called neurons. Electrical charges – themselves the products of chemical signals – occur along neurons, and hence brain events can be described as electro-chemical events.

Between 1800 and 1950 huge advances were made in neuroscience, increasingly suggesting that events of the mind could actually be located in the brain. Fifty years ago it looked likely to many that before long, neuroscience would be able to pinpoint the precise brain location of every mental function.

There is still much that is undiscovered or unexplained about human consciousness, but recent advances in neuroscience suggest that one day it may be possible to completely map mental states by measuring the brain's electrical and chemical activity. Finer and finer distinctions are being made between areas of the brain and the zones responsible for subtly different emotions and thought patterns. It may be only the limitations of current technology that hold us back from complete explanations of human consciousness in terms of physically-measurable brain activity.

DO

"Science is increasingly giving us a viewpoint whereby organisms are able to be seen as physicochemical mechanisms," writes Jack Smart.

Research some specific examples of findings in neuroscience which seem to show that the physico-chemical states of the brain cause particular behaviours or mental states.

Identity Theory and 'Australian Materialism'

In the 1950s, papers published by Herbert Feigl in the United States, and by U.T. Place, J.J.C. Smart and David Armstrong in Australia, argued for what has come to be called the Identity Theory of Mind (also known as 'Australian materialism'). This theory argues that mental properties are *identical* with brain (that is, physical) properties.

For identity theorists, every mental state can be matched to some description of the brain. For the philosopher it doesn't matter that we don't yet know quite what that brain state is or how to describe it precisely. If experiencing pain means that C-fibres are firing in particular ways in my brain, then the identity statement is: *Pain = C-fibres firing*. Neuroscientists can fill in exact details in due course. Hence, for the identity theorist, being in love is a particular kind of electrical and chemical event. Having a belief means that electrical activity is occurring in a particular part of my brain.

Explanations of identity theory are often linked to other cases where updates in our scientific understanding have revealed two entities to be identical. For example, we now accept 'H_2O' as the correct account of the molecular structure of water. This does not mean that we now commonly speak of showering in H_2O, or would ever request a drink containing two hydrogen molecules for every molecule of oxygen. Similarly, we now understand that scientifically, lightning can be described as 'electrical discharge'. Venus, the Morning Star and the Evening Star are now realised to be one and the same planet.

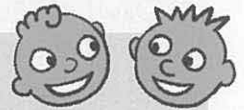
Identity theorists argue that falling in love will always be thought of as falling in love, but this doesn't mean that its state cannot be identical with electrical activity in a certain part of the brain combined with particular chemical releases into the bloodstream and so on.

However, it is important to ask, what do identity theorists mean by 'identity'? Do they mean that any person experiencing bright red will be in exactly the same brain state as any other person experiencing bright red? This is the strongest version of the identity theory, known as **type-type identity**, linked to the hope that neuroscience will one day be able to map out human mental experience in the form of universal brain activity. On this account, my thought that this is a lovely day to take a walk in the park will correspond to 'Neural State 35678120' on this and every other time I, or any other person, has that thought. A weaker form of identity theory is known as **token-token identity**. In this version, I might have a slightly different brain state each time I think it is a lovely day to take a walk in the park. And my friend will have a different brain state again.

The identity theory seems intuitively plausible. It certainly has little trouble explaining how damage to the brain, or taking drugs, can cause changes in people's mental states and personalities. It also boasts simplicity: why believe there are two substances if we can explain things with one substance? This is the principle of **Ockham's Razor** (see Key Concept, p.54) However, identity theorists are still challenged by problems of **qualia** and **consciousness**, to be outlined later in this Part.

THINK

1. Progress in neuroscience has been much slower than most identity theorists expected in the 1950s and 60s. For the most part, 'type-type' identities have not been established. Do you think this undermines the identity theory?
2. A pain may be sharp or burning, but a brain event wouldn't be described as sharp or burning. Is this a problem for the identity theory of mind?



DISCUSS

How plausible do you find it that being in love, having spiritual experiences and being in pain each correspond to particular patterns of chemical and electrical activity in the brain? Does it diminish these experiences to say they are *nothing more than* electro-chemical events?

WRITE

Neuroscientists advise that: *Severe injury to the frontal lobe area of the brain causes dramatic personality changes.*

1. Construct an argument in standard form, with this statement as the conclusion, and using the reasoning of Identity Theory in the premises.
2. Does this argument convince you that identity theory is correct? Can you think of any ways it could still be incorrect?
3. How might substance dualism explain brain injury and its effects on personality?

KEY CONCEPT: *OCKHAM'S RAZOR*

William of Ockham
By self-created (Moscarlop) [GFDL (http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html) or CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], from Wikimedia Commons

Ockham's (sometimes spelled *Occam's*) Razor is named after medieval philosopher and theologian, William of Ockham (1288-1347). It is the idea that the simplest explanation is often the best, or more literally from the original Latin, that 'entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.' It has been held as a basic rule of thumb by numerous philosophers and scientists over the centuries (for example, Smart uses it as the basis for his argument against dualism). Employing Ockham's Razor to help solve a problem means choosing the hypothesis that makes the fewest assumptions, or that has the fewest "bits" to it. One can think of this process as like using a razor to shave away unnecessary components, producing a leaner, neater solution.

There have been many different versions of Ockham's Razor arising in different fields over the centuries. One example is the 'Zebra Principle' in medicine: that a doctor should reject an exotic or rare diagnosis if a more common one is likely. That is, she should first assume that your blocked nose indicates a cold, rather than a rare form of nasopharyngeal cancer. The Zebra Principle is derived from the saying, "When you hear hooves, think horses, not zebras." When medical researcher Theodore Woodward said words to this effect in 1940, cars had not yet entirely replaced horse-drawn carriages, even in the urban, Western world. So to hear hooves would not have been surprising, and identifying horses as their source would rely on a simple set of obvious (rather than far-fetched) assumptions. Whereas what trail of explanatory assumptions would one have to concoct for zebras to be the most convincing hypothesis? That there had been an outbreak from the local zoo, and an unstoppable stampede of zebras had chosen your street down which to flee? In other words, Ockham's Razor urges us towards accepting the most streamlined hypothesis as the most likely.

THINK

Is Ockham's Razor a good principle by which to support or reject a theory? Why or why not?

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

J.J.C. 'Jack' Smart (1920–2012)

John Jamieson Carswell (Jack) Smart was born in Cambridge, England. When he reached university age, his father was appointed to Glasgow University as a professor of astronomy. The family moved to Scotland in time for Smart to commence study at the same university, starting with mathematics but changing to logic and philosophy. Soon after, Smart was called up to fight in the Second World War, spending years in India and Burma. After repatriation, he completed his Master of Arts in Philosophy at Glasgow and then went to Oxford to study for his doctorate.

At the age of just 29, Smart was offered the Chair of Philosophy at Adelaide University. There he would build an outstanding philosophy department. A colleague – Ullin Place, a psychologist – developed a controversial theory that all our conscious thoughts might actually be processes occurring in our brains. Smart and Place spent years in intense discussion of this theory, resulting in Place's 1956 essay from a psychological point of view, 'Is Consciousness a Brain Process?' and Smart's famous philosophy paper, 'Sensations and Brain Processes' (1959). Sydney philosopher David Armstrong took this identity theory of mind further again. The theory – dubbed 'Australian Materialism' or sometimes 'the Australian Heresy' – quickly captured the attention of philosophers worldwide and indelibly reshaped discussions in philosophy of mind.

During his time in Adelaide (1950-1972), Smart made hugely influential contributions to the philosophy of time, philosophy of science and normative ethics, as well as to philosophy of mind, and was made a fellow of multiple international universities. He took up further appointments in Melbourne (La Trobe University), Canberra (ANU) and Melbourne again (Monash University), before his retirement. He was made a Companion in the General Division in the Order of Australia in 1990.
Smart is fondly remembered by colleagues as a friendly, humble and loveable character. His great passions aside from philosophy included taking long, challenging walks in the Australian bush ('I do my best thinking as I walk," he said) and cricket. He was known to frequently press a small radio to his ear during philosophy seminars, to ensure he didn't miss the latest cricket scores.

Behaviourism

J.J.C. Smart is *not* a behaviourist. Early in our set text he rejects the hypothesis that our sensations can be adequately explained by behavioural theory. But behaviourism was a popular theory during the 1950s and 1960s and Smart was deeply influenced by it, having studied with one of its major proponents at Oxford University, Gilbert Ryle.

Behaviourism originated in psychology and was famously developed by figures such as J.B. Watson and B.F. Skinner in the early twentieth century. It was a response to the difficulty of verifying the kinds of psychological practices that relied on descriptions of people's inner, mental lives. Mental states, such as beliefs and desires, are not directly observable. It was thought that if psychology were to remain a science of mental states, its subject matter would be unobservable. Behaviourists reasoned that the focus of psychology should therefore shift to what is observable to third persons – that is, to outward behaviour rather than inner thoughts and feelings. Hence, under the behaviourist model, psychology shifted from being a study of inner mental states to being a study of behaviour.

Behaviourist psychologists study patterns of stimulus and response. A behaviourist does not ask why the mind produces this behaviour. Indeed, it treats the mind as a 'black box' in which we are not interested. A very strict behaviourist won't even acknowledge contents of mind beyond behaviour at all. It makes no attempt to try to account for our first person experience.

You may think this makes behaviourism sound profoundly anti-intuitive. But while psychological behaviourism might sound strange, you encounter aspects of it every day, particularly in your schooling. Consider the nature of tests and exams, which are interested only in the behaviour you produce. Your protests that 'I knew it, I just forgot', for example, count for nothing.

Philosophical behaviourism is a theory about what our speaking about the mind actually means. It retreats from the assumption that when we talk about beliefs, desires, emotions and so on, we are referring to inner states and events. Instead, behaviourism recasts mental phenomena as simply physical phenomena. 'Enjoying studying' is about studying at any given opportunity with a wide smile on your face. 'Feeling angry' is shouting, slamming doors and banging tables. 'Pain' is groaning and wincing and rubbing a part of your body. 'Being intelligent' means scoring highly on tests. There is no experience of enjoyment, anger, pain or intelligence over and above these publicly exhibited behaviours.

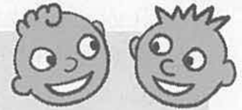
However, Ullin Place, a psychologist and colleague of Jack Smart at Adelaide University in the 1950s, was troubled by the behaviourists' insistence that we should not acknowledge the inner workings of the mind. From a first person perspective, Place thought – and in this he was quickly joined by Smart – it does seem Descartes was right: I do experience an inner, mental arena, and any plausible theory of mind should acknowledge this vital fact about my experiences. So, even though Place and Smart ended up rejecting Descartes' dualism and positing a material source for our mental experiences, they sided with Descartes against the behaviourists who wanted to ignore our mental lives altogether.

DO

Play the behaviourist game! Translate each the following sentences into a behaviourist statement.

So, for the first one, you could offer behavioural details such as, "Hamish often watches medical programs on TV. He reads medical books in his spare time. Throughout childhood he would regularly play doctor role-plays." Remember, statements such as "Doctor role-plays were his favourite activity" or "he loves reading medical books" are not behavioural because they posit an internal mental state that an outside observer cannot know for sure.

1. Hamish wants to be a doctor.
2. Jack is a talented film-maker.
3. Craig is a very funny man.
4. Krissie loves yoga.
5. Zoe is curious about other cultures.
6. Ash has a strong sense of justice.



DISCUSS

1. Do you think behaviourism offers satisfactory ways to understand our desires, states and dispositions? Why or why not?
2. Should we suppose that there really is an inner arena of mental experience common to humans? If so, on what grounds?
3. Is there a significant difference between supposing there to be an inner, mental arena for oneself, compared with supposing this to be true of other people? Why or why not?

Logical Positivism and the Linguistic Turn

It should be mentioned that Behaviourism arose within the **Logical Positivist** movement which dominated philosophy in the English-speaking world in the first half of the twentieth century and during the time Smart wrote his 'Sensations and Brain Processes'.

Logical positivism contrasted with the other main philosophical tradition of influence at that time, Continental Philosophy, which is associated with Continental Europe. Logical Positivism sees philosophy as quasi-scientific, with logic as its chief tool, and seeks to understand the true meaning of our world by examining the language structures we use to talk about it.

A group of gifted Austro-German scientists, mathematicians, social scientists and philosophers, who gave themselves the name 'Vienna Circle', are the origins of this movement in philosophy. The group was led by physicist-philosopher Moritz Schlick and included Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Victor Kraft, Kurt Godel, Carl Hempel, and several others. The work of Oxford philosopher A.J. Ayer carried this tradition to its extreme in the English-speaking academies. Ludwig Wittgenstein is loosely associated with the movement. It should be noted that while the influence of this 'logico-linguistic' turn in philosophy is still very apparent in philosophy departments in England, US and Australia, hard-core Logical Positivism has become extinct. It ultimately suffered from internal inconsistencies and a counter-intuitive account of science.

Studying J.J.C. Smart's 'Sensations and Brain Processes'

Introduction

Ever since Descartes' meditations on the relationship between the mind and the body, scientists and philosophers have been wrestling with ways to explain our minds and brains and the connections between them. Descartes' substance dualism – his conviction that mind and body are two radically different kinds of substance – has held a strong place in Western thinking throughout the centuries. While enormous progress has been made in understanding the workings of our physical body, the human mind and brain have remained relatively mysterious to scientists. It has seemed, consistent with the arguments of dualism, to float free from the physical realm.

However, in the twentieth century, brain science started to come into its own, thereby bringing consciousness, thoughts and sensations into a material world view. As Smart wrote in 1959 in our set text, "science is increasingly giving us a viewpoint whereby organisms are able to be seen as physicochemical mechanisms". This progress of brain science fuelled the idea that physical brain states might in fact be identical with states of the mind. Even though we have come to use different language to express mental experiences compared with our language for physical experiences, perhaps they might be one and the same. And if our minds can be considered part of the physico-chemical universe, they too could potentially be explained by scientific laws.

"I cannot believe that mental events, like having sensations, are outside of the physical realm," writes Smart. He argues that if mental events are left outside of the physical realm, they are "nomological danglers" – somehow, absurdly, existing outside the laws we use to explain everything else. Isn't it more likely, argues Smart, evoking Ockham's Razor, that mental events are just, simply, physical events?

In this paper set for study, J.J.C. Smart's aim is to produce a convincing refutation of dualism by offering this identity theory of the mind. He will argue that sensations and consciousness are nothing over and above brain processes.

READ

Complete an initial reading of the set text, 'Sensations and Brain Processes'.

Aim to grasp an overall sense of the structure of the paper, as well as the position Smart is taking on the mind-body problem, the challenges he anticipates to taking this position, and the examples he is drawing on.

THINK

"Our sensations and our consciousness are the workings of our physical brains. Nothing more."

Take a moment to write down one statement or example in *support* of this claim, and one statement or example to *challenge* it. Share with a partner.

The Case of the After-Image

Have you ever experienced an *after-image*? Perhaps you've looked into a camera flash and afterwards seemed to see a bright glow or patches of colour on the walls. It's a kind of optical illusion whereby an image continues to appear briefly, even after your exposure to the actual image has ended.

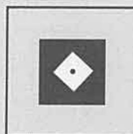
DO

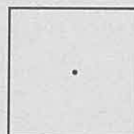
Here are some after-images to play with.

In this first one, stare at the four little spots in the centre of the picture for at least 30 seconds. Then quickly close your eyes and look at something bright (e.g. a blank page, a white wall, a window with sunlight coming through it). Share with a friend what you see!

And another:

With this one, stare at the frame on the left for 30 seconds. Then shift your gaze to the frame on the right.





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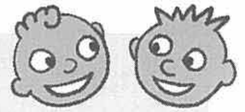
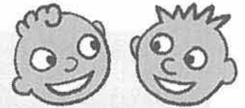


DISCUSS

Discuss in pairs and then share with the class:

1. What kind of thing is an after-image?
2. Is it physical or mental?
3. When I report that I see an after-image, what am I reporting?



DISCUSS

Discuss in pairs and then share with the class:

1. When I say I have a pain in my leg, what is going on?
2. Compare reporting that you can see an after-image with reporting that you have a pain in your leg. How are these cases similar and different?

DO

Look up the scientific explanation for why we see after-images. What is happening to the retina of the eye? Summarise the explanation in your own words. Does it sound convincing to you?

SMART'S ANALYSIS OF REPORTS OF AFTER-IMAGES: FOUR HYPOTHESES

READ

Read 'Sensations and Brain Processes', pages 141-143, up to *"In any case it is the object of this paper to show that there are no philosophical arguments which compel us to be dualists."*

TIP: Read carefully! Don't confuse the word **psychical** (pertaining to the psyche, consciousness, the mind or soul) with the word **physical** (pertaining to the body and the material world)!

Smart opens his paper with the example of the after-image. When one reports, "I have a yellowish-orange after-image," what is actually going on? he asks.

Smart considers four hypotheses:

1. Perhaps we are not reporting anything (p.141). Smart thinks this is something like the view of the philosopher, Wittgenstein. Perhaps these kinds of reports are like the "oohs", "ahs" and winces we might emit when experiencing pain. They don't actually *describe* anything.

2. Perhaps we are exhibiting a behavioural disposition (further down p.141). That is to say, we are in a condition apt for bringing about kinds of behaviour such as exclaiming about after-images, or crying out in pain. On a behavioural account, all that interests us is the exhibited behaviour. (See section on **Behaviourism**, pp.55-57).

3. Perhaps we are reporting an "irreducibly psychical something" (p. 142) – that is, something that is purely spiritual or of the mind, not able to be translated into physical terms and to which none of the laws of the material world can be applied. This view would fit with dualism, arguing that something like experiencing an after-image is a mental event.

4. Perhaps we are reporting a process of the brain – in other words, a material event involving the mechanisms of our physical body. This would fit with an identity account of our sensations, arguing that they match – and indeed are one and the same thing as – the workings of our brain.

Smart proceeds to dismiss the first three of these hypotheses[3]. Hypothesis 1, the expressivist view, he rejects because when we report an after-image, there is something actually going on. He rejects Hypothesis 2 because the sensation of having an after-image (perhaps unlike cases of experiencing pain) is a peculiar, outlying kind of condition to be in. While we can grasp pain as a behavioural category under which humans tend to exhibit similar, typical behaviours (crying out, wincing, etc), we don't recognise a similarly stable category of "seeing after-image" behaviour. Smart invokes Ockham's Razor to dismiss Hypothesis 3, objecting to the idea of the "nomological dangler".

The view Smart will adopt is, of course, Hypothesis 4: that to report an after-image is to report a physical, brain process. Our next section will explore this further.

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3 NOTE: The Prescribed Text List advises that not all of 'Sensations and Brain Processes' is set for study. There are chunks of text to be omitted for study and assessment purposes. Smart's discussion and rejection of Hypotheses 1 and 2 is elaborated in the omitted section on pp.143-144. It can therefore be assumed that Wittgenstein and behaviourism are not intended for close study or detailed assessment. However, the term, 'behaviourism' is included in the list of terms considered to be Key Knowledge in the Study Design.

DO

Mark up your copy of the text, identifying where Smart presents each hypothesis, as outlined above.

What questions do you still have about this section of the text?

WRITE

1. What do you think Smart means by a "nomological dangler" in Hypothesis 4? HINT: *nomological* means relating to laws, especially laws of nature.
2. Using Ockham's Razor and the idea of the "nomological dangler", outline Smart's argument (pp.142-143) to the conclusion that it is unlikely that an after-image is a purely mental event.

WRITE

How convincing is Smart's argument (pp.142-143) that the idea of the after-image being purely mental is implausible? Write an evaluation of this argument, based on the reconstruction of it you have already prepared.

DO

Divide your class into four groups. Assign each group to Smart's After-Image Hypotheses 1-4 respectively.

Each group has the task of presenting the strongest possible case to the rest of the class for why their hypothesis is the most likely.

The audience should offer objections to the presenting group, to which the presenting group should try to respond.

Smart's Identity Thesis

PRESENTING THE IDENTITY THESIS

READ

Read from *'Why should not sensations just be brain processes of a certain sort?'* (p.144) until *'(...does not insure that A's are anything over and above B's.)'* (p.145)

NOTE: As per advice in the Prescribed Text List, not all parts of 'Sensations and Brain Processes' are set for study. Be sure that you have marked up your copy of the text so that omissions are clear.

It is in this section that Smart presents his **positive thesis** of identity (that is, his affirmative, rather than negative, statement of what he does believe; his central argument, if you will): that **sensations are brain processes**.

Smart seems to understand the term *sensation* very broadly, to include any event that involves sensory perception and/or consciousness.

Smart's identity statement may be rendered thus:

Any *mental state X* is identical with *some kind of brain state Y.*

For example, he is claiming that the mental state of experiencing an after-image is identical with some state of the physical brain, such as a neuron firing.

Or to take another example:

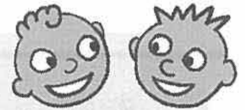
Pain mental state = neuron firing

Smart then proceeds to clarify what this thesis statement does and does not mean.

He is *not* claiming that the *words* "after-image" or "pain" have an identical meaning to the word "brain process". His claim is that our reports of sensations happen to be reports about brain processes. For that reason, we cannot assume to be able to make direct translations of sensation statements into brain-process statements. They have a different logic to them; there are different rules about how they work in language. So Smart is not claiming **semantic** identity (that is, with regard to meaning in language) but rather **ontological** identity (that is, with regard to the kind of *being* of something, or *what something is*).

Smart explains this point with an analogy about nations. Nations are nothing more than their citizens, just as sensations are nothing more than brain processes, argues Smart. He cautions that this analogy should not be pressed too far: the nation/citizen relationship is *not* the same as the sensation/brain-process relationship. However, the point he wants to make is that these relationships are similar insofar as they demonstrate ontological identity yet different semantic logic. Statements about nations cannot be simply translated to statements about citizens.

For example, we might describe China as a powerful nation, but that does not translate to an implication that every Chinese citizen is powerful.



DISCUSS

1. Smart writes, *"...in so far as 'after image' or 'ache' is a report of a process, it is a report of a process that happens to be a brain process."* What does he mean?
2. How does it follow that Smart's identity claim does not imply that sensation statements can be translated into brain-process statements?

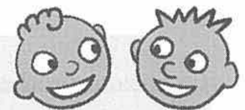
DO

Explain to a partner what Smart says his identity thesis *does* claim in this section, and what it *does not*.

REMARKS ON IDENTITY

READ

Read the single paragraph with this heading on p.145.



DISCUSS

"I wish to make it clear that the brain-process doctrine asserts identity in the strict sense," Smart writes in summation of this paragraph. Discuss with a partner: What is your understanding of what Smart means by "identity in the strict sense"?

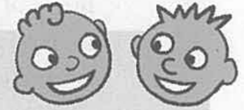
Smart explains in this paragraph that he is arguing for a "strict" sense of identity between sensations and brain processes. He draws on two examples:

- 7 = the smallest prime number greater than 5
- lightning = electrical discharge

Smart takes the latter as a useful model for the sensation/brain process identity thesis. As he will elaborate on page 146, "Science tells us that lightning is a certain kind of electrical discharge due to ionisation of clouds of water vapour in the atmosphere." So "electrical discharge" and "lightning" are not two separate entities that just happen to co-exist in the world. Rather, they are *the same thing at the same time in the same place*. The phenomenon we observe and call lightning is actually the physical process of an electrical discharge. It is not a magical, mysterious flash of light in the sky that we don't understand; it is rather a physical process explainable by science.

Similarly, the sensory experience we might have of viewing an awesome flash of lightning across the sky, can be described in physical terms as a brain process.

There is, then, an important condition placed on this identity: x and y are identical in the strict sense *iff* (if and only if) *x and y are spatially and temporally coexistent.* That is to say, they must occur in the same space and at the same time. So, things possessing only *continuity* in space or time – for example, such that the 'you' who went to primary school is the same 'you' who is now doing VCE – do not possess the kind of strict identity Smart demands.



DISCUSS

How might Smart explain the following in purely physical terms:

Stubbing my toe?

Hearing a dog bark?

Possible Objections to the Identity Theory of Mind and Smart's Replies

Smart now proceeds to anticipate several potential objections to his identity thesis and to argue for why each should be rejected.

Note that there are eight objections considered in the paper, but Objections 3, 7 and 8 are *not* prescribed for study.

OBJECTION 1

READ

Read Objection 1 and Smart's Reply, pp. 146-147.

Note: The planet Venus has traditionally held nicknames both as 'the Evening Star' and 'the Morning Star'. Of course, it's not a star at all. It is a planet with an orbit inside that of Earth as it circuits the Sun. When it is on one side of the Sun, Venus brightens into view shortly after sunset and is the first "star" to be seen in our sky, thus nicknamed the Evening Star. When it is on the other side of the Sun, it leads the Sun and can be seen brightly in the morning before sunrise: the Morning Star. The ancient Greeks thought that Venus was actually two separate bodies, a morning star ('Phosphorus' – bringer of light) and an evening star ('Hesperos' – star of evening). Several centuries later it was realised these were one and the same object.

WRITE

1. Present this objection in your own words. It should take the form of an argument – that is, a set of reasons leading to a conclusion.
2. Start a series of entries in your notebook in which you summarise – as arguments – each of Smart's objections (excluding objections 3, 7 and 8) and his replies, also as arguments. You should then leave space for your own evaluations: how convincing is each objection and each reply? Which objection do you think is strongest and why? Can you add anything (perhaps an example?) to further support Smart's response to each objection? Can you think of a way to counter-object to any of Smart's replies? Building these notes will be a class project. Be sure to write down any good ideas from your classmates!

The first objection Smart anticipates is that any ordinary person can talk about their sensations but know nothing about brain science. Doesn't that show that therefore sensations and brain processes are two very different things?

REPLY TO OBJECTION 1

In brief, Smart's reply is that in the statement 'A is identical with B', someone's knowledge of A yet ignorance of B does not mean that A and B are not one and the same. People's observations of the morning star and the evening star (let's say in two different countries at the same time, so that we avoid temporal differences) don't mean they are not both observations of the single planet, Venus. Similarly, anyone can talk about lightning without knowing it is electricity.

WRITE

1. Why are the burglar and the footprint *not* cases for which Smart would claim identity?
2. How does the burglar/footprint point clarify Smart's identity argument?
3. Why are Venus and lightning good examples of strict identity?
4. Think of another example Smart could use to argue against Objection 1 and outline it.
5. How effective is Smart's refutation of Objection 1?

OBJECTION 2

READ

Read Objection 2 and Smart's Reply, pp. 147-148.

NOTE 1: A **contingent fact** is one that could logically be otherwise. Necessary truths such as '3+4=7' or 'triangles have three sides' cannot be conceived otherwise. Whereas contingent truths – even of the most unlikely order (e.g. the sun suddenly not rising tomorrow; the earth suddenly reversing its orbit around the sun; lemons that taste like beef; ...) – are based on our experience, such that we can imagine possible worlds in which they are not the case.

NOTE 2: The "Fido"–Fido theory of meaning says that a word means the thing that it stands for. The name "Fido" refers to a particular dog.

Assumed Knowledge: Epistemological Terms

To grasp the basis of Smart's Objection 2, we need to review our philosophical understanding of different kinds of knowledge. This involves recalling some key terms of **epistemology** (the philosophical study of knowledge) that you were introduced to in Unit 1 Philosophy.

Let's first consider mathematics. Knowledge in mathematics is based on **axioms** – or what philosophers tend to call **necessary** or ***a priori*** (before experience) truths. Propositions such as that a triangle has three sides, that 7+5=12, that parallel lines will never meet, or that a bachelor has never married, do not have to be re-tested in experiments over and over; rather we recognise these as the kinds of definitional, foundational facts that in all possible worlds must be true. It is impossible to imagine them otherwise. Just try imagining a triangle with five sides!

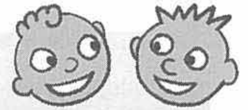
Necessary truths are usually regarded by philosophers as the strongest, or most certain, kind of knowledge, from which infallible **proofs** can be derived. However, most of what we consider to be fact is not of this kind at all. How do you know that it's a fact that your school is located on a particular street? Because you've been there multiple times and seen it for yourself? Is this how you make the prediction that it will have the same location tomorrow? But this fact of experience could have been otherwise, and could yet become otherwise in the future. You would be very surprised if you arrived for school tomorrow to find the buildings relocated to the opposite side of the street or the next suburb, but these are *conceivable* possibilities or we wouldn't even be able to contemplate them.

Almost all of science is like this: it is ***a posteriori*** (after experience) and **contingent** (could be otherwise; only this way by chance) knowledge. Hypotheses become regarded as scientific "fact" when they have been tested **empirically** (by sensory experience or observation) enough times to show a consistent result (this is **evidence**), and have resisted all attempts to falsify them (that is, to make the tests produce a different outcome). But the facts of science remain based on experience and are therefore contingent rather than necessary. It is *conceivable*, if extraordinarily unlikely, that they will one day be shown to be false.

THINK

Think of five things that you regard as "proven by science". That the sun will rise tomorrow, that paracetamol will ease your headache, that the bridge you drive over every morning will continue to hold your weight, … Perhaps run your mind over all the scientific, experiential facts you have placed your trust in so far today.

How do you *know* those things are true?



DISCUSS

Science observes and records things that have happened. On this basis it produces hypotheses about the nature of things in the world and how they operate. This enables predictions about what can be expected to happen in the future.

1. Is this a sound basis for knowledge?
2. Should science be considered to be "proven"?
3. Are there any "facts" in science?
4. Some climate change sceptics run an argument that says data about what *has happened* can't be used to predict what *will happen*. Are they right?

DO

Update your glossary with the following epistemological terms: epistemology, necessary, contingent, *a priori, a posteriori*, deduction, induction, proof, evidence, empirical, axiom.

Make a mind map to show the relationships between these terms.

Back to Objection 2

Smart's anticipated Objection 2 argues that, at best, it can only be a contingent fact that sensation is a brain process. We cannot know this as necessary, a priori truth. It is indeed possible that current scientific theory about sensations could in the future be shown to be wrong. Therefore, "it follows that when we report a sensation we are not reporting a brain-process" (p.147).

DO

1. Reconstruct this argument in standard form.
2. Has Smart done justice to the argument? Has he exercised the Principle of Charity? (see below)
3. Revisit your reconstruction of the argument and exercise the Principle of Charity to make any modifications you see fit.

TIP: *THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY*

The **principle of charity** is an important convention in philosophical discourse, requiring that whenever we are interpreting someone else's claims or arguments, we should interpret them in the most charitable and rational way possible. In the case of an argument by someone else, we should try to present it in the strongest and most convincing way we can, ironing out any logical inconsistencies if we can do so while still preserving the essence of the argument.

This is not only an important principle of respect and courtesy toward our philosophical colleagues but it also enables us to strengthen our own arguments. Consider: if Smart presented only the weakest arguments in objection to his theory, would he really be demonstrating strength in his own theory? Good philosophy is about getting closer to the truth, not about winning! If Smart wishes to show his theory to be robust enough to withstand the toughest opposition, he needs to challenge it with the strongest objections he can muster.

Similarly, in your own study of Philosophy, you should always try to render an argument in its strongest form before you evaluate it.

WRITE

How strong is Objection 2? Evaluate the argument.

REPLY TO OBJECTION 2

Objection 2 does not show that what we report (the sensation) is *not* in fact a brain process, replies Smart. Indeed – and here he returns to his earlier distinction between semantic and ontological identity – he agrees that when we report on a sensation, we do not *mean* the same thing as a report on a brain process. But that does not show that in fact the sensation is not a brain process. The same can be said for lightning and electricity, or for the morning and evening star. That is, the *meaning* of an expression is not the same thing as *what it names*.

Smart suggests that maybe behind this objection is a "Fido"-Fido theory of meaning, which he says does *not* apply here. This theory states that the name "Fido" has meaning because it's applied directly to my dog, Fido, such that there is a direct match between the two. If the meaning of an expression *were* always what it named, then sure, it would follow that 'sensation' and 'brain process' would be different things. But when I say, "I have an after-image", I do not *mean*, "I have such and such a brain-process" – and yet it still may *be* a brain process! The two expressions can *refer* to the same thing.

WRITE

1. Outline Smart's reply to Objection 2 in your own words.
2. How well does Smart's reply answer Objection 2?
3. Evaluate Smart's reply.

OBJECTION 4

READ

Read Objection 4 and Smart's Reply, pp.150-151.

Objection 4 takes a fairly straightforward form:

P1	After-images are not in physical space.
P2	Brain processes are in physical space
C	Therefore, an after-image is not a brain process.

THINK

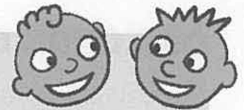
Consider the above presentation in standard form.

Evaluate the argument.

REPLY TO OBJECTION 4

Smart responds that this objection is an *ignoratio elenchi*, the fallacy whereby the argument presented (even if it is valid), does not match the situation, rendering its conclusion irrelevant.

Smart clarifies (again) that he is not arguing that after-images *themselves* are brain processes, but the *experience* of having an after-image is a brain process. He says this fourth objection is akin to arguing that his after-image is yellow-orange but the brain process is not ("a surgeon looking into your brain would see nothing yellowy-orange" – p.151). Smart responds to this in the same way: it is the *experience* that is a brain process. The experience itself is not yellow-orange. We describe the experience by saying it is like a "yellow-orange-patch-on-the-wall experience", using the language of the material world, because we don't have a phenomenal language to express "what it is like" in any other way.



DISCUSS

How convincing is Smart's reply to Objection 4?

OBJECTION 5

READ

Read Objection 5 and Smart's Reply, pp.151-152

WRITE

Reconstruct Objection 5 as an argument in standard form.

Compare your version with a classmate's.

Discuss and then write down some points of evaluation.

Smart's anticipated Objection 5 is similar to Objection 4. It argues that a brain process may be slow or swift, but my experience of seeing yellow cannot be so-described. Therefore, experiences and brain processes cannot be the same.

REPLY TO OBJECTION 5

Smart's reply is along the same lines as previous replies. Our terms for experiences and brain processes may not mean the same thing or have the same logic, and yet they may still refer to the same things. He compares this with an argument about "someone" and "the doctor". There are many things we might say about "someone" that cannot be said of "the doctor". Yet this does not mean that when I say there is someone on the phone, it cannot be the doctor. Smart also makes the point here that if we so desire, we may adapt our language conventions so that we speak about experiences in terms appropriate to physical things. The fact that our semantic patterns are out of step with what we now understand about the nature of things in the world, does not prove anything about the actual nature of things in the world.

WRITE

1. How does Smart use the example of "someone" and "the doctor" to refute the suggestion that brain processes and experiences cannot be the same?
2. How effective is this example in the context of this refutation?

OBJECTION 6

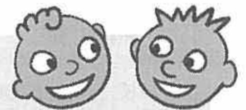
READ

Read Objection 6 and Smart's Reply, p.152.

Sensations are private and infallible. Brain processes are public and fallible. Therefore, sensations cannot be brain processes. So runs Smart's Objection 6.

REPLY TO OBJECTION 6

Again, Smart's reply is that reports of our experiences have different logic and language compared with the way we speak of material processes in the brain.



DISCUSS

Which other Objections have drawn essentially this same reply from Smart?

Do you agree with him that the cases can be refuted by the same reply?

REVIEWING SMART'S OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

DO

Construct a table as follows and fill it in collaboratively with your classmates:

Objection number	Objection summary	Reply summary	Comments, Questions, Evaluations, Comparisons
1			
2			
4			
5			
6			

WRITE

Write a 200-word analysis in response to the following:

Which of the objections that Smart anticipates do you think is the most threatening to his thesis, or most challenging for him to refute? Why?

COMPARE

Select one of Smart's Objections. How might Descartes account for the problem it raises?

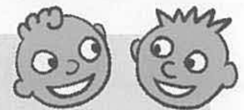
Smart's Conclusion

Smart concludes by reflecting that the basis of his thesis is empirical in one sense, and non-empirical in another. He says there is certainly empirical evidence to show sensations are not processes of the liver, heart or kidneys. However, empiricism – that is to say, the experiments of science – will never solve all disputes about Smart's identity theory. For example, if the debate is between Smart's materialism and the dualist theory of **epiphenomenalism** (the view that mental events are caused by physical events in the brain, but have no effects on any physical events – see p.46), then no experiment can give us the deciding data.

Smart makes an analogy here with the difference between the way the creationist, Gosse, explained fossils compared with evolutionary accounts. For Gosse, Earth was created with fossils already in it. As fanciful as this seems to any modern scientist, there will never be one single fossil discovery or observation that will decide the truth of this matter empirically.

Rather, we have to return, Smart says, to Ockham's Razor ("parsimony and simplicity"). The hypothesis that the world sprang into being just as it is in 4004 BCE leaves "far too many brute and unexplained facts. Why are pterodactyl bones just as they are? … We would have millions of facts about the world as it was in 4004 BC that just have to be accepted."

Smart sees the dualism-materialism debate as similar. He thinks it is clear that simplicity and parsimony decide in favour of materialism – indeed, by these principles, dualism seems absurd. Just as the creationist has the facts of pterodactyl bones, river sediments and eroded cliffs "dangling" in search of robust explanation, so is the dualist burdened with "a large number of irreducible psychophysical laws … of a queer sort, that just have to be taken on trust." Considering all of that, dualism is "difficult to swallow", Smart concludes.

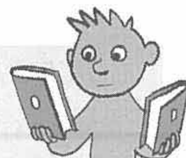


DISCUSS

1. How does Smart use the analogy of Gosse and the pterodactyl bones to argue that dualism strains rational belief?
2. How convincing is this argument?

THINK

Will the dualism-materialism debate ever be settled empirically? Why or why not?



COMPARE

Compose a dialogue between Descartes and Smart, in which each challenges the other with objections, and seeks to logically refute those objections. Present your dialogue to the class. Afterwards, reflect on the key points of difference between Descartes and Smart. Is there anything they agree on?

Evaluating Smart's 'Sensations and Brain Processes'

The Authority of Science

One line of objection to Smart's thesis is his appeal to the authority of science. We do tend to trust what science tells us – and with good reason: medicines tend to heal us, bridges tend to hold our weight, and aeroplanes remarkably carry thousands of people to faraway destinations every day. And yet almost all that science tells us is based on inductive logic. Thus we don't have scientific 'proof' as such – in that a 'proof' is, strictly speaking, a piece of leak-proof deduction. What science tells us is based on experience: this has happened this way one million times, therefore it must happen in the same way again. But there is always the possibility that the millionth-plus-one time will be an exception.

WRITE

1. Explain the 'problem of induction'. You may like to look it up.
2. How might the problem of induction undermine Smart's argument? Do you think it does?
3. Is science ever wrong? Research to find details of recent cases where scientists have been in error. Does this undermine Smart's argument? Why or why not?

The Problem of Qualia or 'what it is like'

Consider the smell of melting chocolate that I experience when I bake cookies. What, physically, is it? There would seem to be two places for a materialist to look: outside my brain and in it. Outside my brain there are molecules floating around and entering my nasal passages and stimulating specific nerve endings. But there is no actual smell there. Inside my brain there are lots of neural firings, but no chocolate smell there either. The special quality of the smell of chocolate, which arises when the physical processes just described occur, seems to have no physical location. But it is perfectly real, and it therefore seems that materialism does not give the full story about the world, after all. Someone with no sense of smell could know all about chocolate molecules and all about what they do in my nasal passages and all about how my brain processes the information, yet still not know the smell of chocolate. Similarly, all the chemical and electrical properties of falling in love could be measured in my brain by a scientist. But could that observer know the precise experiential qualities, for me, of falling in love? How do I paraphrase my 'recollection

of my first day at school' in terms of a certain brain state? To emphasise this point, consider the difference between the purely physical aspects of a physical pain – in terms of behaviour of nerve cells and so on – and the actual excruciating feeling of pain. The physical description fails to completely capture what it is like to experience this state.

The subjective, supposedly non-physical, phenomenal quality of sensory experiences is commonly referred to as **qualia** (for example, the qualia of tasting chocolate, of seeing white, of hearing music). Some philosophers believe that any argument that shows the existence of qualia may undermine materialism if it can show there are nonphysical entities.

THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT FOR QUALIA

Mary is a colour scientist. She has dedicated her life to knowing every physical thing there is to know about colour. She knows every physical feature of the experience of colour in other people. This includes every detail of the neurological activity that occurs in other people's brains when they experience colours, and the behaviours they exhibit when exposed to different colours. However, Mary has been confined from birth to a room that contains only black and white. Her experiences of the outside world have occurred only through a black and white monitor. What will happen when Mary leaves the room? Will her new experiences add anything to her knowledge of colour?

THINK

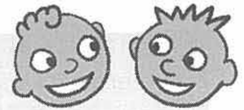
What do you think? Will Mary's expertise in colour be enhanced by her first-hand experiences?

What does this thought experiment contribute to our consideration of qualia, and the mind-body problem, do you think?

In his article 'Epiphenomenal Qualia' (1982), Australian philosopher Frank Jackson offered this so-called 'knowledge argument' for qualia. He thinks that if we agree that Mary learns something when she experiences colours firsthand, then qualia must exist. Furthermore, the knowledge argument challenges materialism. Before her release, Mary knew every physical detail about colour. Yet if she learnt something more about colour after her release, this must show that there is something non-physical about our experiences of colour. Therefore, human consciousness is not entirely physical.

DO

Can you reconstruct the 'knowledge argument' for qualia in standard form?



DISCUSS

1. Does the 'Mary's Room' scenario persuade you that qualia must exist? Why or why not?
2. Does it persuade you that qualia are non-physical? Why or why not?
3. Has Jackson created an effective argument against Smart's materialism? Why or why not?

RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Materialism implies that we could potentially create robots or computers that are capable of thinking and feeling all the things that humans can experience. This is because if the mind is completely a material thing the like the brain, it is logically possible that we should be able to create a replica of the human brain. Even though the brain may be so complex that this may take a long time or it may always be beyond us, we should still, in theory, be able to build artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence is one of the debates that links well to this text study. You can read more about it in Part E of this chapter.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. Outline four hypotheses that Smart considers in the opening of his paper to explain what is going on when I report an after-image.
2. What is the essence of Smart's identity theory? What does he tell us it *doesn't* do?
3. Refer back to some different theories of mind outlined on page 46: parallelism, epiphenomenalism, interactionism. In what way does each of these challenge Smart's identity theory? How might he respond to each?
4. Why is it so important to Smart's theory to distinguish between the *after-image* and *my experience of the after-image*?
5. *"I know nothing about neuroscience but I can tell you all about the pain my leg. It's in my leg, I tell you, Mr Smart! Not in my brain!"* How would Smart respond to this objection? Who is right – the objector or Smart?
6. What does it mean to say that Smart's theory is *contingent*? Does this weaken his theory? Why or why not?
7. Science tells us that lightning is an electrical discharge. How is this analogy useful to Smart's defence of his thesis? Explain how he uses it to respond to two objections.
8. Explain the analogy of the morning star and the evening star as Smart uses it to defend his thesis. To what extent is this a fitting analogy for brain processes and sensations?
9. *"To report a sensation is the same thing as reporting a brain process."* Does Smart agree with this? Why or why not? *HINT: the word 'report' is important here!*
10. *When I say "Fido", I mean my dog! A word means the thing it refers to. If I say "I see an after-image", I don't mean "I have a brain process"!* How would Smart respond to this objection? Would he be right?
11. *"My experience of seeing the evening star is different from seeing the morning star."* Is this a good objection to Smart's thesis? Why or why not?
12. *"I'm looking at my cat. My cat is furry and purrs loudly. But if you look in my brain, you won't find fluffiness and you won't hear purring. How can my sensory experience of my cat be the same as my brain process?"* How would Smart respond to this objection? Present his likely response as an argument in standard form and then evaluate this argument.
13. Explain the distinction between *semantic* and *ontological* identity. How does Smart's thesis rely on this distinction?

14. What do you think is the strongest challenge to Smart's materialism and why?
15. Smart claims that neuroscience is bound to discover explanations for our experiences in mechanistic, brain-process terms. However, the progress he anticipated has not happened yet. Does this undermine his thesis?
16. Explain Ockham's Razor. To what extent do you think it is a sound principle on which to assess a theory?
17. How is Ockham's Razor important to Smart's refutation of dualism and defence of his own theory?
18. What does Smart mean by a "nomological dangler"? How is this notion important for defence of his argument and refutation of dualism? Do you agree with Smart that a "nomological dangler" is problematic?
19. Smart's paper relies on making several key *distinctions*. Select two key distinctions made by Smart. Outline each distinction and then explain how each plays a crucial role in the presentation and/or defence of his thesis.
20. *"Sensation reports are not translatable into brain process reports."* Explain what this claim means and why it is important in Smart's defence of his thesis.
21. *"Over and above brain processes, there is nothing called sensations."* What does this claim mean? Would Smart agree with it? Why or why not?
22. Explain Smart's analogy of nations and citizens. How does he employ it to clarify his theory? To what extent is it useful?
23. *"The brain process thesis is not an empirical claim,"* says Smart. Why not?
24. *"The suggestion I wish if possible to avoid is... that 'I am in pain' is a genuine report, and that what it reports is an irreducibly psychical something. And similarly the suggestion I wish to resist is also that to say 'I have a yellowish orange after-image' is to report something irreducibly psychical."* Why does Smart wish to refute these suggestions? Is he right?
25. Select one analogy used by Smart to defend his thesis. Explain the analogy and then explain the purposes to which Smart uses it. Assess the effectiveness of the analogy in this case.

PART D

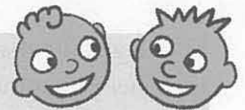
Thomas Nagel: 'What is it like to be a bat?'

Philosophical Context

Introductory Activities

DO

- Imagine you are a dog. What would it be like to be a dog? What would you do? How would you feel? What would your world be like? Close your eyes to imagine this, or if you like, take to the floor and act like a dog.
- Now close your eyes and imagine you are the classmate next to you for one minute.
- Now choose the member of your family to whom you feel closest. Take a minute, with your eyes closed, to imagine what it might feel like to be them.



DISCUSS

- To what extent can a person imagine what it's like to be a dog? How about a lizard or a spider?
- Was it easier to imagine being your classmate? Why or why not?
- What are the challenges of trying to imagine the experience of being another person – even someone you know extremely well?
- Will it ever be possible for someone else to know what it is like to be you?
- Is the person sitting nearest you conscious? How do you know?
- How do you know that the colour of this book's cover looks the same to you as to the person sitting next to you? Could they be seeing it as quite a different colour, though calling it by the same word? For example, could they be seeing this book as your 'red', but calling it yellow?

THINK

Is it ever possible to give a neutral, objective, third-person account of an experience?

The Problem of Consciousness

Perhaps you have concluded that Smart's account of the relationship between our experiences and the processes of the brain is a sensible solution to the mind/body problem. But even if it seems plausible that our experiences correspond to events in the brain, does that physical account tell us the full story? In accepting that our mental experiences are identical with our brain processes, should we assume that our inner worlds are constituted by *nothing more* than neurons firing?

By the 1970s, a variety of materialist theories of mind had gained favour among philosophers. These included theories such as **behaviourism** (see pp.55-57) and **functionalism** (see p.84), whose accounts of the mental are compatible with objective, physicalist views of the world. **Reductionist** theories of mind such as Smart's – which posited that consciousness can be 'reduced' to nothing more than physical, brain processes – were also widely accepted. But for Thomas Nagel, such theories leave out something important: *what it feels like* to be a particular, conscious being.

Nagel has argued consistently since the publication of his famous paper, 'What is it like to be a bat?' (1974), that the extraordinary phenomenon of consciousness poses a major challenge to reductionist, physicalist theories of mind. Nagel does not deny that there *might* turn out to be some way of reducing consciousness to patterns that are purely physical in origin, but we are a long, long way from knowing how this might be done. And crucially, what remains *distinctive* about consciousness, no matter to what degree of detail we ever manage to map it to physical states, is its *subjective, first person quality.* For any organism that has consciousness – be it human or non-human – *"there is something that it is like to be that organism – something it is like for that organism."*

For Nagel, if consciousness is by its very nature a *subjective* phenomenon – in a way that is so for no other phenomenon that we know of in the universe – then it is surely impossible to analyse it completely within the same terms as objective, physical phenomena. If we take the example of a bat – a creature very different from us – it seems impossible that we could ever offer an objective account of the subjective experience of *"what it is like for a bat to be a bat."*

Nagel does not attempt to *disprove* the physicalist claim that mental states are brain states. He simply argues that the two terms of this alleged identity are so different, and our grasp of what we are actually comparing so limited, that we lack grounds to make the physicalist claim with confidence.

THINK

Subjectivity implies a single point of view, while objectivity suggests a more universal point of view. Do you think Nagel is right to treat this distinction so seriously when considering the nature of the mind? Is he right that this is the major "thorn in the side" of materialism? Why or why not?

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Thomas Nagel (1937–)

By Nagelt [CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)], from Wikimedia Commons

Thomas Nagel was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia) in 1937 but his family joined the mass migration of Jews to the United States after the Second World War. His philosophy studies began at Cornell University, continued at Oxford and culminated in a PhD at Harvard in 1963. Nagel is currently University Professor of Philosophy and Law Emeritus at New York University, where he has taught since 1980.

Nagel was mentored at Oxford by John Rawls, widely considered the most important political philosopher of the twentieth century. In turn, Nagel has trained many well-known thinkers including one of our Unit 4 philosophers, Susan Wolf (see Famous Philosopher File, p.261).

Nagel was just 22 when he published his first academic paper and he has been one of the most influential philosophers of the past fifty years. His work across a wide range of areas of philosophy – in particular, the philosophy of mind, ethics and political philosophy – has highlighted an ongoing concern with how to reconcile objective and subjective views of the world. 'What it is like to be a bat?' (1974) remains Nagel's most famous paper, but its concern with the special nature of consciousness continues nearly forty years later in *Mind and Cosmos* (2012). This most recent book of Nagel's has attracted controversy for its argument that even from an atheistic point of view, Darwin's theory of evolution cannot possibly account for the emergence of consciousness in all its subjective complexity.

We know that Descartes wrote his *Meditations* while sitting by the fire in his dressing gown. Less well known is that Nagel wrote 'What is it like to be a bat?' while living in a house in which bats were frequent visitors.

Studying Thomas Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?'

READ

Complete an initial reading of the text.

Aim to grasp an overview of: what position Nagel is taking on the mind/body problem, what issues he is highlighting as contentious, and his key arguments and examples.

Introduction: Why the mind/body problem is harder to solve than reductionists like Smart suppose

READ

Read closely the first two paragraphs of the text (pp.435-436).

WRITE

1. According to Nagel, there is a factor that makes the mind-body problem extremely difficult to solve, it is ignored by materialists like Smart, and we know very little about it. What is this factor?
2. According to Nagel, why is the mind-body relationship different from other cases of identity such as water = H_2O, or lightning = electrical discharge, or temperature=motion of molecules, and so on?
3. Is Nagel right to select this as a significant point of difference? Can you think of any other important points of difference that he could have identified?

Why consciousness complicates matters

READ

Read paragraphs 3-6 (p.436 – top of p.438).

THE SUBJECTIVE CHARACTER OF EXPERIENCE: "WHAT IT IS LIKE"

Nagel explains that conscious experience – where a creature has an awareness of its existence – exists in a multitude of forms of animal life and may indeed exist beyond our planet. It is difficult to say what provides evidence of consciousness because by its nature, it is a phenomenon of subjective, rather than objective, experience. There is less evidence for the presence of consciousness in the simplest organisms such as microbes, than there is for consciousness in grasshoppers, for example. And there is less evidence for consciousness in grasshoppers than there is in fish. However, it is an extreme position to maintain that humans are the only conscious creatures, and it is uncontroversial to suppose that at least other mammals have consciousness. But none of this really matters for the key point that Nagel wants to make about consciousness, which is that where it occurs, *"there is something it is like to* be *that organism – something it is like* for *the organism."* Nagel terms this "what it is like" as the **subjective character** of experience.

DO

Do animals have consciousness? How about invertebrates?

Take a little bit of time to look into some research on animal consciousness. What are taken to be indicators of consciousness in animals? What are the challenges of investigating animal consciousness? Is it sensible for scientists to draw inferences about likely conscious capacities in insects from the fact that they have neural structures similar to ours?

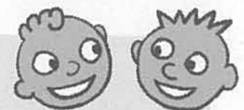
See, for one example:

https://theconversation.com/what-it-is-like-to-be-a-bee-insects-can-teach-us-about-the-origins-of-consciousness-57792

Don't be surprised to find biologists and neuroscientists making reference to Nagel! His influence has been profound in studies on consciousness.

MATERIALIST THEORIES AND THE MATTER OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Nagel continues to argue that the subjective character of experience – the "what it is like", or **phenomenal consciousness** as philosophers often call it – is not captured by reductionist theories. For a start, he argues, such theories are "logically compatible with its absence". In other words, consciousness could be removed from the concept of mind without altering a theory such as Smart's.



DISCUSS

To what extent do you think Nagel is right in claiming that Smart's identity theory ignores consciousness?

Secondly, argues Nagel, consciousness cannot be analysed adequately in terms of functional states or intentional states, since these can be ascribed to robots that behave like us yet experience nothing. Nagel is referring here to the theories of **functionalism** and **intentionality.** Both these theories have been offered as ways to account for the peculiar nature of the mind and consciousness.

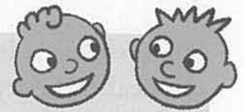
Functionalism considers a thought, desire, pain, or any other type of mental state, solely in terms of how it functions, or the role it plays, within a larger cognitive system of inputs and outputs. In this way, it sidesteps the question of what substance a mental state might be made from. The theory of functionalism is compatible with materialism and has proved useful in the development of artificial intelligence.

Intentionality is the idea that mental events (concepts, desires, thoughts, pains) are *about* things, or *stand for* things, that are located externally in the physical world. Intentionality is thus a theory that distinguishes between the mental and physical worlds: mental states have "aboutness" but physical states do not – they just "are". This is why the notion of intentionality, sometimes seen as a key feature of – or even as synonymous with – consciousness, has been considered to refute materialism.

We are reminded here that Nagel is seeking to align himself neither with dualism nor materialism. Rather, he seeks to: highlight the importance of consciousness to the mind-body problem; note the neglect of consciousness by reductionist philosophers; point out our ignorance of the nature of consciousness; and argue that we are therefore unable to draw firm conclusions in the philosophy of mind. To those who would contend that there *has* been attention paid to consciousness in the form of the theories of functionalism and intentionality, Nagel says that these theories do *not* adequately address the nature of consciousness, whose crucial, anomalous feature is its *phenomenal /'what it is like'/subjective character.* After all, functionalism and intentionality can be applied to the cognitive processes of robots, which he claims have no subjective experience at all.

DO

In pairs, take turns to (1) explain the theory of functionalism and why Nagel thinks it does not adequately account for consciousness, and (2) explain the theory of intentionality and why Nagel thinks it does not adequately account for consciousness. You may wish to conduct some further research into these terms.



DISCUSS

1. Is Nagel right in thinking functionalism and intentionality do not adequately account for consciousness? Why or why not?
2. Nagel gives a reason why we should agree that functionalism and intentionality do not adequately account for consciousness: *"since these [theories] could be ascribed to robots or automata that behaved like people though they experienced nothing"*. Is this a good reason? Why or why not?
3. Read Nagel's second footnote. What is he saying? Is this significant for your views just expressed in response to question 2?

Thirdly, and unsurprisingly, Nagel rejects **behaviourism** (see pp.55-56) as an adequate account of consciousness. You may remember that behaviourists avoid the question of inner, first person experience altogether, only acknowledging its public, objectively observable demonstrations via behaviour.

DO

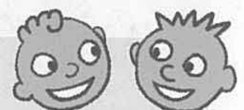
Form a pair. One of you should take the role of Nagel, and the other the role of a behaviourist. Discuss for three minutes: what matters in the philosophy of mind?

Still in character, report back to the class.

Whose view do you agree with, and why?

Note again, Nagel's concern is not so much to dispute the claims of functionalism, intentionality and behaviourism, as to argue that whatever merit they may have as *partial* accounts of consciousness, they do not *completely* account for it. This is his criticism of reductionism. To reduce mental states to something else, one ought to analyse exactly what it is that one is reducing. If one leaves out the subjective character of mental states, the exercise is incomplete and cannot claim to prove anything. Nagel says we shouldn't find reductionist theories plausible if consciousness is excluded or the theory doesn't seem able to be extended to include consciousness.

REDUCTIONISTS NOT ONLY DON'T, BUT *CAN'T,* ACCOUNT FOR CONSCIOUSNESS



DISCUSS

Nagel writes, *"It is impossible to exclude the phenomenological features of experience from a, reduction in the same way that one excludes the phenomenal features of an ordinary substance from a physical or chemical reduction of it – namely, by explaining them as effects in the minds of human observers."* What does he mean?

So, to Nagel, it is the subjective character of experience that is the most difficult thing for a physicalist theory to explain. This cannot be excluded in a reduction in the same way we might exclude an "after-image" as merely how something is experienced by the human mind, because in this case, the human mind is the very thing we are trying to explain! It would seem impossible to give a physical explanation of the subjective character of experience; mental events are tied to single, specific, first-person experiences, yet that is precisely what an objective, physical account leaves out.

Nagel signals that to further explain the difference between the subjective (*pour soi*) and the objective (*en soi*), and to show the importance of subjectivity and point of view, he will turn, in his next section, to an example.

WRITE

Why, according to Nagel, are reductionist theories unable to account for consciousness?

Try to reconstruct his argument in standard form. Compare your work with classmates.

DO

Create a mind map that includes the following terms and theories. Aim to show some differences and similarities among them in your visual arrangement. Include brief notes on the meanings of the terms. Are there other terms that should also be included here?

- DUALISM
- MATERIALISM
- IDENTITY THEORY
- BEHAVIOURISM
- FUNCTIONALISM
- INTENTIONALITY
- PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS THEORY

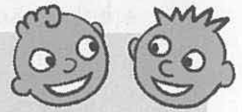
A Thought Experiment: Bats

READ

Read paragraphs 7-12 (p.438 – top of p.441).

WRITE

Write down all the reasons why Nagel has chosen bats as his central example.



DISCUSS

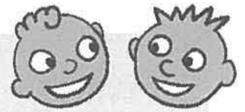
Is the bat an effective example for Nagel to have chosen? Why or why not?

For the thought experiment central to this paper, Nagel asks us to assume that bats, being animals, have conscious experience. If we accept this, then there must be *something it is like* to be a bat. However, the sensory system and activities of a bat are very different from ours. For example, a bat perceives the distance, size, shape, motion and textures of things through sonar, or echolocation. Thus we have no reason to believe that the experiences of bats are subjectively like our own.

So, how can we understand what it might be like to be a bat? How about if we imagine flying around at night listening to echoes and catching bugs in our mouths? Nagel says this is not helpful, since our imagination draws on our own experience. We would only be imagining what it would be like for *us* to be bats, whereas what we want to know is what it would be like for a *bat* to be a bat. As long as our "fundamental structure" remains the same, says Nagel, our experiences would not be those of a bat. Some might suggest that we could adapt our neuro-physiological structure to resemble that of a bat. But even if we could imagine being gradually transformed into a bat, there is nothing in our present makeup that would allow us to imagine what that would be like. Sure, we share various general types of experience with bats (hunger, fear, pain, lust), but we cannot know the subjective character of these experiences *for a bat*. In the case of conscious aliens, we would not even be able to characterise their experiences in these general terms.

As Nagel clarifies in footnote 6, in speaking of what it is "like", he doesn't mean what it resembles, but how an experience is *for* the experiencing subject – for him, her or itself. This is not a problem limited to bats and aliens, but exists even between human beings. This so-called "problem of other minds" was of concern to Descartes and has been debated for centuries in philosophy. For example, it is difficult to know what it is like to have been deaf or blind from birth, and a deaf or blind person would have trouble imagining the life of a non-sensory-impaired person. But that does not prevent us from thinking there is something it is like to be that other person.

Similarly, bats and aliens would struggle to know what it is like to be a human being. But the alien would be mistaken in supposing that since it cannot imagine what it would be like to be us, therefore humans do not have conscious experience. Likewise, we would be mistaken in thinking that because we can't imagine what it would like to be a bat, therefore the bat must have no conscious experience.



DISCUSS

Science can tell us a lot about echolocation, such as what sizes of objects it detects, how a bat directs its ears to a stream of sound data, and how a bat's senses operate to tell it about its world. With the right equipment, we can even experience echolocation ourselves.

1. In Nagel's view, is this enough for us to claim that we *can* understand bat experience?
2. In *your* view, is this enough for us to claim that we can understand bat experience?
3. Nagel says that even if we could turn into a bat, we still couldn't understand bat experience. Do you agree?

THINK

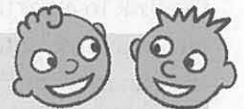
The bat example is a particularly vivid one, but would it alter the argument if Nagel had used a human example? How about if the example was your identical twin?

FACTS AND CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

Nagel now confronts the idea that there may be facts that lie beyond the reach of human concepts. This is philosophical territory famously analysed by Kant. Consider that much of our conscious experience concerns raw sense data. Many philosophers have argued that raw sense data alone is incomprehensible to us and we must process it in some way: it must be organised and categorised somehow in order that we can understand it. Kant used the term **conceptual schemes** for the mental systems that organise what we sense. He thought these frameworks – including things like time and causation – must be innate, or part of the apparatus we are born with.

Nagel's line of argument so far, in relation to the conscious experiences of bats and aliens, has implied a belief in the existence of facts which we will never have the conceptual schemes to understand. So, when he says there are things we will never comprehend, this isn't because he thinks we'll all be wiped out by an epidemic before we work them out. He means that even if humanity were to last forever, there are concepts that will remain beyond our reach (including, for example, the subjective character of bat consciousness) because we are simply not made in a way that would permit that understanding.

Thus, Nagel's reflection on what it is like to be a bat leads him to the conclusion that there are things we can express in language but cannot know in terms of facts. And here it is clear that for Nagel, there are facts – actually existent realities – about the external world, that lie outside of our grasp of them. These are important points about Nagel's **metaphysics** – or how he conceives of what there is in the world: that is, that there are minds, and there are things outside of minds. Nagel doesn't pursue these topics further here, but he has gone far enough to be able to claim that facts about the subjective character of experience may be linked to a particular point of view. By that, he is not talking so much about the privacy of individual experience, but about a type, or species, point of view. There is a sense in which an individual human can say that he/she knows what the experience of another human is like. But as a creature becomes less like us, the task is more challenging. As Nagel clarifies in footnote 8, he is not just raising the *epistemological* problem that we cannot know what it is like to be a bat, but the deeper problem that we cannot even form a *concept* of what it is like to be a bat in the first place, in order to know something of a bat's subjective, conscious experience.



DISCUSS

Nagel's discussion of the subjective domain implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts. Do you agree with him that we are limited by our own conceptual apparatus when it comes to trying to understand consciousness? Why or why not?

WRITE

1. Read back over this section (paragraphs 7-12) a second time (and perhaps more).
2. Identify what you take to be the **conclusions** that the bat thought experiment allows Nagel to reach. Write these down. Compare your list of conclusions with a classmate.
3. Now go back and identify the **reasons** Nagel uses to build his arguments towards each conclusion you have written down. Write down these reasons.
4. Choose an argument to reconstruct in standard form from this section.

The Mind-Body Problem

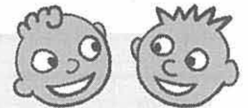
OBJECTIVITY VERSUS SUBJECTIVITY

In terms of the mid-body problem and his distrust of reductionism, Nagel has so far established that facts about the subjective character of experience can be known only from a particular point of view. Therefore, he says it is hard to see how they could be observed in the physical processes of an organism.

Physical facts about an organism are objective. They can be understood from many different points of view by different types of organisms. We don't have to be bats to understand the neurophysiology of a bat. It is conceivable that a non-human could have an objective understanding of human neurophysiology.

But by itself, this distinction between the subjective and objective point of view is not an argument against reductionism or the identity theory. We can imagine that an alien without sight might nonetheless be able to give an "objective" account of a rainbow, or lightning, or clouds. Even though the concepts of these things may be linked to the human point of view and human experiences, the physical events highlighted by them are not.

For Nagel, objectivity and subjectivity are matters of degree. We might consider them to be poles on a continuum. He argues that in the case of something like lightning, there is no reason not to see it as far as possible as an objectively observable occurrence. However, in the case of experience, the link to a particular point of view is much closer. How could it even make sense to speak of an "objective" character of experience, separate from the point of view of the subject who had the experience? For example, what would remain of what it is like to be a bat if we removed the bat's point of view? Yet, if experience did not have, in addition to its subjective character, some objective aspect that could be observed by outsiders, then how could we say that an alien – or even a human neurophysiologist – could study my mental processes? It seems that even experiences may be granted *some* objective existence, according to Nagel.



DISCUSS

1. How could a blind alien give an objective account of a rainbow? Why is this significant to Nagel?
2. Why does Nagel not place experiences at the "entirely subjective" end of the continuum? Is he right about this?

THINK

What *would* remain of what it is like to be a bat if the bat's point of view were removed? Why is this significant for Nagel?

THE PROBLEM FOR MIND-BRAIN REDUCTION

This discussion of subjectivity versus objectivity highlights a problem for the mind-brain reductionist. In other types of reduction in science, whose accuracy Nagel does not question, we move toward greater objectivity, and away from a human point of view. For example, "water" becomes "H_2O", and "lightning" becomes "electrical discharge". In these cases, members of different species can refer to a common reality and only leave behind their species point-of-view.

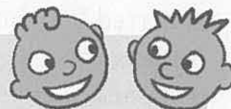
However, it does not seem that we can follow this pattern – from subjective appearance to objective reality – when it comes to experiences. It does not seem that we get to the underlying reality by abandoning the human point of view and instead taking up a characterisation of our experiences that even aliens could grasp. This would seem to take us further from, rather than closer to, the real nature of human experience.

WRITE

1. What is the distinction that Nagel makes between other reductions and mind-brain reductions?
2. Outline Nagel's argument for why mind-brain reductions seem to fail to capture the underlying reality of an experience.
3. Evaluate this argument.

Nagel continues his criticism of contemporary philosophers of mind, whom he sees as trying to substitute an objective or behavioural account of mind for the "real thing" so there is nothing left over that cannot be reduced. If we believe a materialist theory of mind *should* be able to account for the subjective character of experience, we should admit that there is no theory that currently does this. Even if we find it plausible, or even probable, that mental processes are physical brain processes, it remains true that there is *something it is like* to undergo such brain processes. And this "what it is like" remains unexplained.

However, Nagel is not aiming to conclude that materialism is false. Rather, he is pointing out that if a materialist hypothesis begins with a faulty or incomplete analysis of mental events, then we cannot conclude anything from it with confidence. We should say, instead, that materialism is an incomprehensible position because we cannot conceive of how it might be true.



DISCUSS

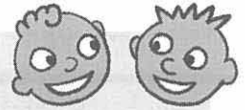
What does Nagel mean when he says of physicalism that we "do not at present have any conception of how it might be true"? Is he right?

A POSSIBLE OBJECTION

At this point, Nagel anticipates that the physicalist could object that "mental states are brain states" is not incomprehensible. We just need to know which brain states are involved. It then comes down to some kind of identity – an "is" or an "are". Shouldn't that be simple?

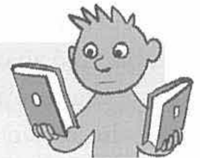
But, Nagel replies, the little word "is" is deceptive. In statements like "X is Y", our understanding of what is meant depends on our knowledge of X and Y, rather than the word "is". When X and Y are quite different things, we tend to be confused by such sentences. For example, if I know nothing about physics, a statement like "Matter is energy" is very confusing. Knowing what "is" means doesn't help me.

Nagel compares our present understanding of the claim that "mental states are brain states" to the ancient Greeks trying to understand that "matter is energy". Much more than the meaning of "is" is required. Nagel contends that we don't really know how a mental and a physical term could refer to the same thing. If we *pretend* they can, we end up either: (i) not actually referring to the physical states and reverting to the subjective mental terms by which we know them; or (ii) accepting a false account of how mental states operate, such as a behaviourist account.



DISCUSS

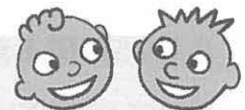
1. What is the objection that Nagel anticipates to his contention that physicalism/ the identity theory is an incomprehensible position?
2. What is his reply?
3. Who is right – the imagined, objecting physicalist or Nagel?



COMPARE

A fundamental principle on which Smart's paper is based is that of parsimony – or the rule of Ockham's Razor. How would Nagel respond to Smart's contention that the simplest explanation is most likely to be the true one in philosophy of mind?

Nagel does grant, however, that we may have evidence for many things we do not understand. For example, you might know nothing about caterpillars, lock one away in a safe one day, and then be very surprised to take out a butterfly weeks later. You may not understand what had occurred but you would have evidence that the caterpillar may have turned into a butterfly. Perhaps, says Nagel, we are in this position with respect to mind-body identity. We have evidence that sensations are physical processes, although we really don't understand how this is so. Nagel cites Donald Davidson, the author of a complex theory that argues if mental events have physical causes and effects, they must have physical descriptions. But Nagel says we are a long way from understanding how we might form satisfactory physical descriptions of this nature.



DISCUSS

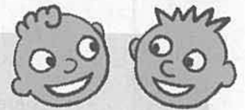
Consider the metaphor of the person, "ignorant of insect metamorphosis", who is surprised to find a butterfly in place of the caterpillar. To what extent is this an effective metaphor for the mind-body problem?

A Concluding Proposal

Can we make any sense of the notion that experiences might have an objective character? That is, does it make sense to explore what our experiences are really like, as opposed to how they seem to us? In Nagel's view, this question deserves more attention, as we cannot attempt to give physical accounts of mental states unless we first understand how they can have an objective nature. This is, of course, closely connected to the question of the existence of other minds.

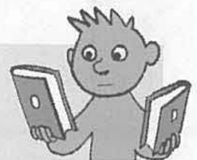
Nagel makes a proposal: that we should temporarily put aside the question of the relationship between the mind and the brain, and aim to achieve a more objective understanding of the mental in its own right.

To achieve this, we will need new concepts and a new method: an "objective phenomenology" which does not depend on taking the point of view of the subject of an experience. Our aim would be to describe the subjective character of experience in a way that could be understood by those not capable of such an experience. For example, we would need such a method to describe the experience of being a bat. But we could begin with humans; for example, how would we explain to someone blind from birth what it is like to see? We might eventually reach a "blank wall", but Nagel thinks we should at least pursue this idea as far as we can. He thinks it wouldn't take much to go further with this than we have so far, possibly by giving objective descriptions of the structural features of perception. In Nagel's view, this kind of objective phenomenology would enable questions about the physical basis of experience to make more sense.



DISCUSS

1. Do you think it might be possible to turn the phenomenological features of experience into an objective account?
2. Would the essential subjectivity of conscious experience thereby be lost, rendering the objective account incomplete anyway?



COMPARE

Is Nagel a dualist like Descartes? Why or why not?

Is he a materialist like Smart? Why or why not?

DO

Divide into four groups. Each group is to consider one of the arguments below.

ARGUMENT 1	ARGUMENT 2
P1 Essential to conscious experiences is the fact that there is something it is like to have them, for the subject who has them. P2 Bats have conscious experience C/P3 Therefore, there is something it is like to be a bat, for a bat. P4 Humans cannot ever understand what it is like to be a bat, for a bat. C Therefore, there are facts about bat consciousness that humans can never understand.	P1 Subjectivity is an essential and defining feature of consciousness. P2 Reductionist arguments – e.g. Smart's identity theory – neglect subjectivity. C/P3 Reductive arguments fail to capture an essential and defining feature of consciousness. P4 For an argument about the mind to be convincing, it must capture the essential nature of consciousness. C Reductive arguments – e.g. Smart's identity theory – do not provide a convincing account of the mind.
ARGUMENT 3	**ARGUMENT 4**
P1 Physicalism claims to offer objectivity in its theories. P2 Subjective experiences are always had from a single point of view. C Therefore physicalism cannot account for my subjective experiences.	P1 If I wish to know about the subjective conscious experience of a bat, I need to know what it is like to be a bat. P2 I can only know what it is like to be a bat if I am a bat. P3 I cannot, as a human, know what it is like to be a bat. C/P4 Therefore, there are limits to what I, as a human, can know about subjective conscious experience beyond my own. P5 Physicalist theories claim that we humans can know universally about conscious experience C Therefore physicalists must be wrong in their claims about what humans can know about consciousness.

For the argument your group considers, work through the following activities:

1. Locate this argument in Nagel's paper, 'What is it like to be a bat?'
2. Does this construction of the argument *accurately* represent what Nagel has argued in his paper? Are there any changes you would propose?
3. Is this an effective rendering of the argument? Is there any way it could be strengthened (remember the Principle of Charity, p.69)?
4. Assess each of the premises in the argument. If you agree with a premise, state a reason why (this could be an example to confirm that this premise must hold true). If you disagree, state why.
5. Evaluate the argument overall. Do you agree with Nagel's conclusion? Why or why not?

Discussing Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?'

Nagel and Science

Science always aims at objectivity. It observes phenomena from the *outside looking in*, rather than the other way around. However, Nagel argues that consciousness is an anomalous case: it does not fit with the kinds of things science tends to observe and hypothesise about because it is essentially a subjective arena, only knowable from the *inside looking out*.

Does it therefore follow that Nagel is sceptical about science? No. Nagel does not question that science does admirably well in describing the world that exists independently of minds. Rather, he contends that an objective way of understanding something should not necessarily be considered superior, if the kind of thing being studied – that is, consciousness – is of an essentially subjective nature. The objective viewpoint of science leaves out something very important when it turns toward the mind, and therefore science is fundamentally unable to tell us the whole story of the mind. A thinker's point of view cannot be looked at objectively by that very thinker, because he *is* the point of view. Being conscious is to have a subjective perspective on the world; to leave out this perspective when studying consciousness is to leave out the very thing you are trying to explain.

So, while Nagel is not sceptical about science and the scientific method for making analyses for things outside of our minds, he does raise doubts about what he sees as false objectification, or an incomplete analysis, of consciousness. To Nagel, attempts by identity materialists to reduce all mind events to brain processes, are oversimplifications of the mind.

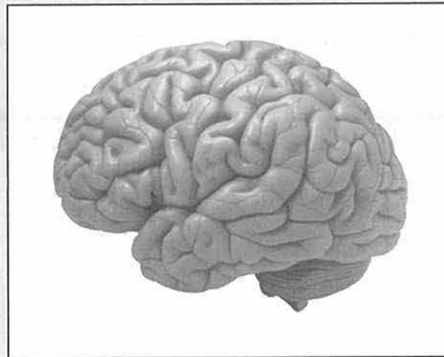
COMPARE

Compare Nagel's and Smart's views on science. Whose view do you prefer in relation to the philosophy of mind?

Qualia and the 'Hard Problem of Consciousness

THINK

Is this an image of your mind?



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Consider this quotation:

"You can look into your mind until you burst, and you will not discover neurons and synapses and all the rest; and you can stare at someone's brain from dawn till dusk and you will not perceive the consciousness that is so apparent to the person whose brain you are so rudely eye-balling." (Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame,* 1999)

Is this how you think about the mind and the brain? Why or why not?

Physicalist theories of mind dominated the philosophical landscape in the second half of the twentieth century. Australian Materialism, in particular, had changed the conversation worldwide. However, Thomas Nagel was one philosopher who remained troubled by analyses which posited that there is nothing more to the mind than brain processes, and he was not alone.

Eight years after Nagel's landmark essay came another, by Australian philosopher, Frank Jackson. In 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', Jackson delivers a bluntly dualist thesis, arguing that consciousness is simply *not* a physical phenomenon, and materialist theories of mind are just false. Jackson's "knowledge argument" against physicalism – based on Mary in her black and white room – is outlined in Part C of this chapter (pp.75).

The knowledge argument, like Nagel's bat argument, highlights the incompleteness of a purely physical theory of the universe. Supporters of these arguments maintain that to account for everything, we must acknowledge the subjective character of experiences, or their **qualia** (singular – quale). Qualia refers to the subjective *qualities* of our conscious experience. The smell of freshly cut grass, the sparkling quality of dewdrops on leaves, the sound of a running stream, are all examples of my immediate experience of the world, or of *how it feels* to be a conscious being. Qualia are problematic for materialist philosophers of mind, because they seem to resist capture by descriptions of what is going on in the brain. Qualia are *under-described* by the language of physics.

Australian philosopher David Chalmers (1966–), was inspired by Nagel and Jackson's arguments when he decided to tackle the subjective nature of our conscious experience for his PhD thesis. Why does consciousness feel the way it does? Why does it feel like anything? he wondered. Chalmers called these questions, including qualia, the **Hard Problem** of consciousness. He turned his PhD into a book, *The Conscious Mind*, which sold many more copies than philosophical publications are usually expected to, and earned its long-haired author something of a rock star reputation. Chalmers' book builds an argument that consciousness is not a physical phenomenon and that therefore the Hard Problem will never be solved in objective, physical terms. Chalmers calls this position "naturalistic dualism". He agrees with Descartes that there must be two kinds of substances in nature, and he denies that to do so is ignorant or out-of-date, or somehow unscientific. Chalmers argues that consciousness should be considered a fundamental building block of reality. Without it, he says, our theories of reality will remain incomplete. He reminds us that in the nineteenth century, scientific theories were unable to account for electromagnetic phenomena, and it took Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism to enable physicists to build a more complete picture of reality. He thinks consciousness is an analogous case.

CHALMERS' ZOMBIE ARGUMENT

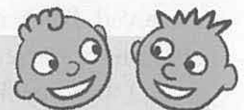
We will briefly consider one of the better-known ways that Chalmers argued against dualism. Let's meet Dave. Dave is a conscious human. However, there is also Zombie-Dave. Zombie-Dave is a perfect physical replica of Dave – down to the very last molecule – but he is not conscious at all. There can be "nothing it is like" to be Zombie-Dave.

A dualist for our times: Australian philosopher David Chalmers
By HerbertErwin [CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], from Wikimedia Commons

Where does this thought experiment lead us? Well, if to be conscious is simply to be in certain physical states – as a physicalist like Smart would have us believe – then one could not be in those states without being conscious. Zombie-Dave could not be logically possible.

However, Zombie-Dave *is* clearly and distinctly imaginable. There is nothing logically incoherent about him, argues Chalmers. We can't imagine two and two adding to five, nor a square with three sides, but we can imagine that Hillary Clinton defeated Donald Trump in 2016, that some unicorns may have metre-long horns and that Zombie-Dave exists.

In a neat argument, then, and with echoes of Descartes, Chalmers can conclude that consciousness is not entirely physical and dualism must be true.

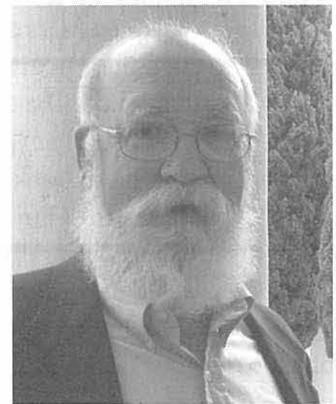


DISCUSS

1. As a class, reconstruct Chalmers' Zombie Argument in standard form. What do you think of it?
2. Which of Descartes' arguments for dualism does the Zombie Argument resemble?
3. Has Chalmers convinced you that dualism must be right? Why or why not?

DANIEL DENNETT: THERE IS NO HARD PROBLEM

On the other hand, another leading contemporary philosopher, American Daniel Dennett (1942-), contends that physicalism is true, the notion of qualia is empty, and the Hard Problem *can* be solved.



Daniel Dennett: qualia are overhyped.
By David Orban, davidorban on flickr.com [CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

Dennett is a kind of **eliminativist** in that he thinks qualia should be eliminated altogether from our concept of the mind. He dismisses qualia as a hazy and under-developed idea. Dennett argues that when we realise how confused our notions of qualia are, we will be happy to reconsider them simply as properties of an entirely physical consciousness.

In 'Quining Qualia' (1988), Dennett offers several arguments against qualia in a series of thought experiments which he calls 'intuition pumps'. These are designed, he says, to 'flush out' our mistaken 'intuitions' about qualia. Dennett isolates four features commonly ascribed to qualia: qualia are *ineffable, intrinsic, private,* and *directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness.* Through the course of his thought experiments, he seeks to dissolve any significance we might see in these features.

Dennett's intuition pumps include rebuttals to Jackson's knowledge argument and Chalmer's zombie argument. Perhaps his most well-known is the coffee-taster case. Imagine two coffee-tasters, Chase and Sanborn, who are charged with ensuring that the taste of Maxwell House coffee remains consistent. At some point, the men realise that they no longer enjoy the taste of Maxwell House coffee. Chase thinks the coffee itself tastes exactly the same as always – he is getting the same quale – but he just doesn't like it now. However, Sanborn believes the taste of the coffee itself – and therefore the quale – has changed.

The question for Chase and Sanborn is: how much of the change in their judgments arises from the qualia themselves, and how much from their judgments of the qualia? If qualia exist, this is a sensible question, and there is a real difference between Chase, whose qualia have stayed the same while his judgments have changed, and Sanborn, whose qualia themselves have changed. But Dennett argues that there is no way of anyone – including Chase and Sanborn themselves – ever determining a real difference between these cases, which hinge on unreliable memories. Therefore, there is no meaningful difference between what Chase claims and what Sanborn claims, and therefore there are no 'facts' about qualia. There is no need to postulate 'qualia' to explain some perceived difference in Chase and Sanborn's experience; there are just the judgements made, which have perfectly acceptable physical explanations. Therefore, argues Dennett, there is no special 'hard problem' of consciousness. We just need to give neuroscientists time to come up with a more detailed and nuanced physicalist account of the mind.

DO

How might Dennett's argument be used to refute Nagel's?

Working in pairs, use Dennett's ideas to come up with line of argument to refute Nagel's view.

Take turns to share these with the class. After each pair delivers their argument, the rest of the class should try to defend Nagel.

At the end, take a class vote on the strongest Dennett-inspired refutation of Nagel. Write down this argument in your notebook.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. According to Nagel, what is it that poses the greatest challenge in the mind-body problem?
2. According to Nagel, what is neglected by materialist analyses of the mind?
3. How would a functionalist account of a mental event leave out its subjective character?
4. Why does Nagel think a bat is an effective choice of organism on which to base his argument?
5. Imagine you spend a week hanging upside down in your room, eating mosquitoes. According to Nagel, would this help you with the question of what it is like to be a bat? Why or why not?
6. Explain how Nagel's distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is important to his argument that materialist theories of mind make little sense.
7. Does Nagel think we should conclude that materialism is false? Explain your answer.
8. Why does a mind-brain reduction not work as convincingly as other types of reductions in science, according to Nagel?
9. What does Nagel mean by the term "subjective character" in relation to consciousness? How is this notion crucial to his thesis?

10. Nagel argues that consciousness has an essentially subjective character. Yet he also acknowledges some objective components to our experiences. Explain how this can be so, in Nagel's view. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
11. Why does Nagel think physicalism is a position we can't understand? Do you agree? Why or why not?
12. *"If the subjective character of experience is fully comprehensible only from one point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity – that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint – does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us farther away from it."* What does Nagel mean by this and how does it support his scepticism about reductionist theories of mind?
13. "There is a persistent temptation," Nagel wrote in his book *The View from Nowhere*, "to turn philosophy into something less difficult and more shallow than it is." How is this comment consistent with Nagel's argument regarding reductionism in 'What is it like to be a bat?'?
14. Refuting the quote above, other thinkers, such as Wittgenstein, have suggested that some philosophers have a tendency to see a profound problem where there is none. Does Nagel's rejection of mind-brain reductionism see a profound problem where there is none? Explain why or why not.
15. Science aims at objectivity. Does it follow that something as elusive as consciousness must escape its grasp?

RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The problem of free will (see pp.105-106) and the question of how we should regard animals (see p.103) are two contemporary debates which link well to study of Nagel's paper. These debates are discussed further in Part E of this chapter.

PART E

Debates, Comparisons and Review Activities

Philosophy of mind is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of the mind, mental events and consciousness, and the relationship that these have with the body and brain. Through your study of three significant authors – Descartes, Smart and Nagel – you have confronted many of the central debates in philosophy of mind, including the mind-body problem. For Descartes, the mind is separate from the body yet interacts with it. Smart's view, aligned with many contemporary philosophers, is that the mind is the brain, and mental states are physical states. In rejecting Descartes' view that our thoughts and feelings must arise out of something non-physical, Smart joins the consensus of twentieth century science, that thoughts and feelings are electrochemical states of the brain. However, challenging the view that this is all there is to the matter, Nagel asks us to consider the complexity of first-person experience of consciousness. Surely there is something it is like to be a conscious being, for that conscious being, and this quale escapes a purely physical account, Nagel argues.

You may have found yourself wondering why all this should matter so much. Why should you care whether your thoughts arise from a physical or non-physical source? Well, there are many serious consequences for the view of the mind and body you favour. These include whether you and your loved ones will survive the death of your body, whether animals should be regarded as having thoughts and feelings like us, whether machines might be considered to think, and whether humans have genuine free will or whether science has the capacity to predict everything about us and our world. We will consider each of these debates in this Part, although you are not expected necessarily to immerse yourself in all of them.

As well as relating the set texts to a range of debates, this Part also considers the broad questions raised by this Area of Study and invites you to make comparisons across all three texts. You are now ready to tackle assessment tasks which draw on all three authors to address the mind/body problem and to assess the implications of the set texts in the context of at least one debate.

Applications of the Mind/Body Problem to Relevant Debates

Debate 1: Is There Life After Death?

Kelly's lifeless body lies on the operating table. She has been pronounced clinically dead and the instruments show activity in her brain has definitely ceased. However, minutes later she is pronounced alive. Later in the recovery ward, Kelly tells of her extraordinary experiences while 'dead'. She felt herself float above her body. She felt herself travelling down a tunnel towards a bright light. Then she heard the doctors discussing her case. Most interestingly of all, she was able to describe details of their conversation that only someone present in the room could have known. But that conversation took place when she was dead, with none of the signs of life that could have made consciousness possible.

Is Kelly's case proof of an afterlife? Is it proof that there must be a soul that survives the body, thus demonstrating the truth of mind/body dualism? Or are there materialist explanations for what happened to Kelly?

A **near-death experience (NDE)** refers to an experience reported by an individual who has been close to death or pronounced clinically dead. There is marked commonality among the thousands of such cases that have been documented, insofar as people describe a sense of escaping the body, sensations of rising upwards, feeling deep peace and serenity, encountering lost relatives and seeing an intense light.

Modern medicine has increasingly effective techniques of resuscitation and hence the number of cases of NDEs is on the rise. Of particular interest to researchers are the cases where patients report knowledge of things which occurred after they were pronounced dead, such as conversations between medical staff.

Some scientists are persuaded to the view that this must be evidence that consciousness can function outside of the brain, and therefore that mind/body dualism must be possible. Those arguing from a religious perspective have cited NDEs as evidence of an afterlife. The prevailing sceptical view insists there must be a materialist explanation for NDEs. For example, perhaps our instruments for measuring brain activity lack sensitivity and patients who have reported NDEs were not clinically dead at any stage after all.

In any case, the phenomenon of NDEs is a fascinating one, with clear relevance to the mind/body problem.

DO

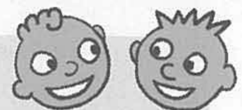
Research the phenomenon of NDEs and complete the following.

1. Describe the most persuasive of the near death experiences you have discovered from your research.
2. How might Descartes, Smart and Nagel each account for this phenomenon?
3. To what extent do you accept near death experiences as good evidence for substance dualism? Give reasons for your answer.
4. How might a materialist respond to cases of near death experiences?
5. To what extent do you accept the materialist account of these phenomena? Give reasons.
6. Do near death experiences offer strong support to Nagel's argument? Why or why not?

Debate 2: How Should We Regard Animals?

Traditionally, philosophy has not been strong in its defence of the moral status of animals, and this can be traced largely to the ontological views – in relation to the mind and body – that have held sway. Aristotle argued that animals are living things with the capacity to grow (shared with plants) and the capacities to move and to register sensations, but he claimed reasoning to be a capacity unique to humans and the hallmark of our superiority. For centuries afterward, the Christian tradition continued to reflect Aristotle's views with the belief that animals, unlike humans, have no immortal soul and therefore (in the words of the medieval theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas) 'it matters not how man behaves to animals.' Descartes, around 1000 years after Aristotle, echoed the same belief in his *Discourse on Method,* arguing that animals are entirely physical machinery, lacking the non-material mind that gives humans consciousness. An implication of this view is that animals are incapable of feeling pain, and to Descartes this justified performing experiments and dissections on live animals without sedation.

This dualist view that human beings consist of physical body and non-physical soul, contrasted with the view of other animals as physical body only, has been very significant in the formation of Western values which for centuries have asserted the superiority of human over animal lives. This value system has justified practices such as the eating of meat, the use of animals for medical experiments and testing of goods, and the use of animals for sport and entertainment purposes.

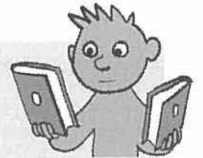


DISCUSS

Does substance dualism necessarily lead to the view that animals shouldn't have rights? How can dualism be maintained alongside rights for animals?

DO

1. Research a religious tradition to discover their views about animal souls. Then examine how these ontological views about the soul are linked to the tradition's approach to animal ethics.
2. Are animals capable of reasoning? Conduct some research, including the latest advances with chimpanzees or bonobos and language use, and write at least a page on this topic, giving reasons and evidence for your view. What are the implications of your view on animal reasoning for the mind-body debate?



COMPARE

Compare the implications of Descartes, Smart and Nagel's views for our views on animals and their capacities. What are the implications for animal rights of each of these views?

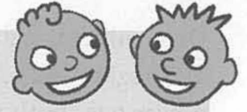
Debate 3: Can Machines Think?

One consequence of materialism – that is, that everything we call the mind is entirely physical – is the possibility that humans will one day be able to build a mind capable of all the complexities and subtleties of the human mind. This is the goal of scientists working in the field of artificial intelligence. Many people believe that it will one day be possible to build a computer which has emotions, is creative, is self aware, can learn, can tell a joke, and can make decisions.

In Unit 1 you may have encountered the work of Alan Turing, a mathematician and computer scientist, who predicted in 1950 that by now we would have created a computer which can think. He initiated the famous Turing Test, which challenges people to converse with a computer and a human through text messages. Turing believed that before too long, someone would build a computer whose conversation would be indistinguishable from the human's.

Despite a $100 000 prize on offer as part of the annual Loebner competition, no computer has to date passed the Turing Test. Indeed, we are constantly discovering new evidence that the human brain really is the most complex thing in the known universe, and the kind of computer power that would be required to match it has so far not been conceived of.

You can try conversing with some advanced bots yourself, including some of the recent entrants in the Loebner competition, via a number of websites. While you may be impressed with the cleverness of many of these bots, you will also probably think they have a long way to go before they could be passed off as humans. Why is that? What particular aspects of their conversation "unmasked" them as mere machines? For the committed dualist, Turing's goal is a doomed enterprise. Of course computers will never think like humans, claimed Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method,* because they lack the rational soul – a non-material substance that humans themselves will never be able to artificially replicate – which makes thinking possible.



DISCUSS

1. Is the failure of robots built to date to pass the Turing Test good evidence for substance dualism, in your view?
2. Do you think it will ever be possible to build something close to the mind of a human? Turing was wrong in his prediction that by 2000 we would have created a machine which could pass the Turing Test, but do you think that perhaps the next 50 years might fulfil his dream?
3. Even if a machine can't pass itself off as a human, or fails to measure up to typical human levels of intelligence, does that mean it should be deemed not to think? Does a calculator think? Does your mobile phone think? Does your computer think? Why or why not?
4. Research the latest developments in the field of artificial intelligence and share your findings with the class. How close are we to creating machines which think? How do the latest developments in AI contribute to the mind-body debate, and what are your personal views on the nature of body and mind?
5. Critically compare the implications of Smart and Nagel's views for the creation of artificial intelligence.

Debate 4: Do We Have Free Will?

We tend to cherish our freedom as one of the most important features of our lives. In Western democracies we value being able to make choices about whom to marry, what job to take, where to live, who our friends are and so on.

This is what it is to exercise **free will.** We can detach ourselves from any antecedent factors, be they psychological, emotional, or in our prior experience, and take any available alternative. While we may be *influenced* by innumerable things, free choices are still ours to make. Our futures are open and full of possibilities.

But science presents a conflicting picture of our universe. Predictable laws of cause and effect govern the behaviour of all physical objects. All events are causes and effects and thus the physical universe is a gigantic system of interactive causal chains. This is what enables us to predict things in science: 'If A then B'; 'If B then C'; and so on. It is impossible for water not to boil if heated to a high enough temperature. You rely on these chains of cause and effect every time you get on a train, take medicine to cure an illness, use an oven and so on. We assume that the floor won't collapse under us, our bodies will use food for energy, and cars won't suddenly fly into the air. We assume that our physical universe is **determined**; present circumstances are determined by prior conditions.

Now, if we consider humans to be entirely physical beings, some interesting implications arise. We, too, must be subject to universal causation. That means all our thoughts and behaviours are part of the predictable causal chains that govern all matter. And on this view, it appears as though we don't have the capacity to choose after all.

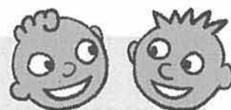
Determinism is different from fatalism and predestination. Fatalism says that whatever happens, and regardless of laws of nature, a particular end is inevitable. Predestination relies on God's power over both natural law and human choices. However, determinism says that an event will necessarily happen *if* antecedent conditions are met.

Thus, determinism can be defined as the theory that all events are caused or determined by antecedent conditions. The argument for determinism follows from the **principle of universal causality**, that is, that every event in the world must be caused by some other event. If human actions are events, then it follows that they must also be caused by other events. And if an action is caused (that is, determined and brought about) by other events, then it is not free. At no point in this process can there have been a genuinely free choice or decision.

If human beings behave as part of the physical world, then it is logical to view us, too, as part of these causal chains, and therefore our behaviour must be determined by causes and able to be predicted.

For many philosophers, the only coherent way to argue that we are not part of the causal chain, and may therefore have free will, is to take a dualist position about mind and body. If we consider the mind to be non-physical and therefore beyond physical laws, it perhaps becomes easier to believe humans have choice. Certainly, it seems that the findings of physics about all the other physical things in the world are not consistent with our ordinary understanding of people as able to choose. If our brains control all our actions and our brains are purely physical, following all natural laws, then humans cannot be free. All brain events must be caused by antecedent brain states or other physical factors.

However, there is still much to be understood about the brain. Physical determinism of brain events has not yet been completely proven. Nonetheless, it stretches to the limit our understanding of physics when we try to account for how a physical system could have a place in it for free will.



DISCUSS

1. If humans are determined, along with all other things in the physical world, what are the implications for our sense of what it is to be human?
2. If we have no free will, what are some implications for moral responsibility and our concepts of guilt, blame and praise?
3. What might be some of the legal implications if humans are found to have no free will?
4. How could it ever be proven that humans have no free will?
5. Does a materialist view of the mind lead necessarily to a denial of free will?
6. Does an entailment of determinism make materialism less convincing?
7. Does Nagel's view of the mind allow for free will? Why or why not?

THINK

For centuries, philosophers and physicists have speculated that if determinism is true, perhaps humans lives can be predicted.

Imagine a central database contains a detailed map of your past, present and future.

1. Is this a coherent idea? Why or why not?
2. Would you seek access to this map? Why or why not? (And what is problematic about the terms of this question, from the viewpoint of hard determinism?)
3. Would your life change if determinism turned out to be true?

Thinking Through Debates

DO

Give an oral presentation on one debate relevant to the mind/body problem.

Include in your presentation:

A broad overview of the debate and its relationship to questions associated with mind and body;

A brief outline of at least two perspectives in the debate, as they relate to issues of mind and body as explored in the set text/s, and including an account of the arguments used to support these perspectives.

The implications of adopting perspectives on the debate for evaluation of viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts and/or how viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts may respond to perspectives in the debate.

An evaluation of these perspectives.

Comparison Activities

WRITE

	DESCARTES	SMART	NAGEL
What does he MOST want to say about mind and body? (What is his central claim?)			
What is his central argument?			
What is the BEST thing about his theory?			
What is the WEAKEST thing about his theory?			
What is the most convincing supportive evidence he offers for his view?			
What would he think of the views of his fellow philosophers on this table?			
What would most keep him awake at night about his theory? (What are its niggling problems, the things it finds hardest to explain?)			
How does this theory reflect the scientific paradigms of the day?			
Is there life after death?			
What is the nature of our consciousness?			
Are animals sentient beings capable of reason, and what are the implications for animal rights?			
Do humans have free will?			
Could we ever create a machine that thinks like a human?			

DO

CLAIMS ABOUT MIND AND BODY

Consider the following claims. What do you think about them? What do each of the set texts think about them? If they could meet up for a chat, which two authors on our course would have the most interesting discussion about each of these claims?

1. The mind is different from the material body.
2. The mind is non-physical and therefore potentially immortal.
3. The human brain is a complex physical machine and we could therefore potentially create a machine which thinks.
4. All mental events are physical events.
5. The mind is the same as the brain: it is physical and part of a causally closed universe.
6. Modern science is the best source of knowledge about the nature of the mind.
7. The complexities of consciousness cannot be explained merely as physical happenings in the brain.
8. First person experience is the best place to start for exploring the complexities of consciousness.
9. The powers of consciousness can be explained by the possession of an extremely complex physical apparatus.
10. Enough distinctions can be made between mind and body to show that they must be entirely different kinds of entities.
11. Freedom of thought, which defines human beings, would not be possible if the mind was purely physical.
12. We still know too little about human thinking/consciousness to provide a convincing account of it.

Do one of the following:

a. Write a dialogue between two or more of the authors of our set texts, in which they discuss one of the claims listed above.

b. In groups of two or three, in which each member is asked to play the role of one of our set text authors, have a discussion about one or more of the claims above.

c. Use one or more of the claims above as the basis for a reflective journal piece. Make sure your refer to the viewpoints and arguments in at least one of the set texts.

PART F

Suggestions for Assessment

The following Assessment Tasks are suggestions only. Teachers should always consult the VCAA Study Design for Philosophy before setting tasks to ensure coherence with the appropriate Outcome descriptors. ***Further suggestions for assessment can be found in*** **VCE Philosophy: Assessment and Examination Supplement for Units 3 and 4 Third Edition.**

Unit 3, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

'On completion of this unit the student should be able to examine concepts relating to the mind and body, analyse, compare and evaluate viewpoints and arguments concerning the relationship between the mind and body found in the set texts, and discuss contemporary debates.'

Teachers should note that all students are required to complete at least one essay for assessment purposes in Unit 3.

Assessment Task One: Short Answer Responses

Complete a series of short answer questions that invite students to analyse and evaluate the concepts, viewpoints and arguments expressed in one or more of the set texts.

Assessment Task Two: Written Analysis

Complete a written task that asks students to reconstruct accurately the arguments from one or more of the set texts and to evaluate these arguments.

Assessment Task Three: Written Reflection

'I must be something more than just my physical body and brain.'

Discuss the statement above, making detailed reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts.

Assessment Task Four: Dialogue

Write a script for an imaginary meeting in which Descartes, Smart and Nagel (or a selection of these) come together to critically discuss one or more key questions relating to minds, bodies and their relationship. Don't forget to make detailed reference to the arguments and viewpoints expressed in the set texts to support the thinkers' comments.

Assessment Task Five: Presentation

Prepare a presentation for the class in which you describe a relevant contemporary debate related to the nature of the mind and body. Outline and evaluate relevant responses from the set texts to these debates (see 'Thinking Through Debates' activity in Part E of this chapter, which may be adapted for this task).

Assessment Task Six: Essay

Suggested topics:

- 'An immaterial mind is the only way to explain the complexity of human consciousness.' Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts and with reference to a contemporary debate.
- 'Modern science makes it clear that it is time for us to accept a materialist view of the mind.' Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts and a contemporary debate.
- 'A separate mind and body, and therefore the possibility of life after death, is an entirely plausible account of human ontology.' Do you agree? Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts.
- What is the relationship between the body and mind? Assess the strengths and weakness of at least two different theories from the set texts, and refer to at least one contemporary debate in your response.

Make sure your essay engages in analysis, comparison and evaluation of the viewpoints and arguments you discuss and provides a judgment in terms of the question.

PART G

Useful Resources

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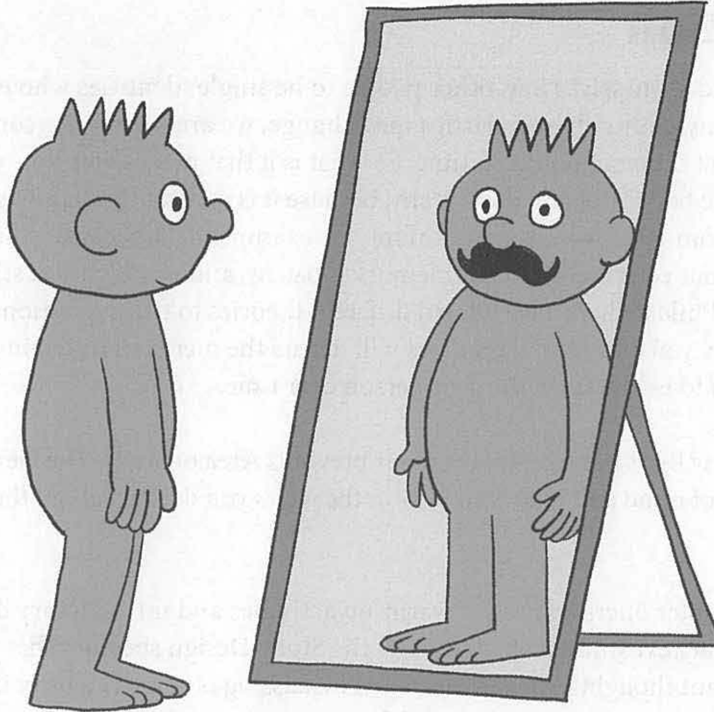
CHAPTER 2

Personal Identity



PART A

About Personal Identity

Introduction

We tend to consider ourselves and other people to be single identities who exist through time. Even though many of our characteristics may change, we are known personally and legally as the same person at different points in time. So what is it that makes you 'you' over time? Is it that you have the same body? But you don't really, because it is constantly changing and you now look quite different from when you were an infant, for example. Is it because you have memories of yourself throughout your life? But your memory is patchy, and wouldn't you still be you if you lost your memories? Philosophers have offered different theories to these questions of identity, and in this Area of Study you and your classmates will debate the merits of different criteria for judging a thing or person to be the same thing or person over time.

You will find many links between this and our previous Area of Study. The views you have formed about the nature of mind and body will inform the views you develop about the nature of personal identity.

Part A of this chapter offers a series of warm-up activities and introductory discussion points to prepare you for the text studies which follow. The Study Design specifies that you must be able to draw upon relevant thought experiments when discussing issues of identity in relation to the set texts. This Part will introduce you to one of the most famous of these, and more will be suggested in response to specific text studies in later Parts.

Going back to the Greeks, many philosophers have discussed the issue of identity over time. However, English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) was the first to address extensively the specific problem of the identity of *persons* over time. His ideas have been enormously influential, establishing the problem of personal identity as a central one in the Western tradition. Half a century later, Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) made a dramatic and controversial rejection of Locke's view, challenging ideas that had been part of Western thinking since the Greeks. The article by contemporary American philosopher, Meredith W. Michaels, shows that the problem of personal identity is still ripe for philosophical debate. Even though ordinary experience assumes that you are still the same person as you were when you started reading this page, making a philosophical case for this is trickier than it first appears.

As always, we ask what bearing these philosophical theories about the self might have on our lives today. Returning to an important debate considered in our previous chapter, the issue of life after death is again relevant. If survival beyond the death of the body is possible, any speculations we might make about the nature of that survival depend upon our views about personal identity over time. There is also a close connection between personal identity and moral responsibility. Being able to accept praise or blame for past actions depends upon you being the same person now as you were then. Addressing the question of what makes you 'you' will also lead us to consider metaphysical implications of new biomedical capabilities such as organ transplants, cloning and memory erasure.

The Philosophy of Identity

The philosophical term 'identity' is a *relational* term. That means it refers to the relation that two things, *x* and *y*, stand in. Various kinds of relation are discussed in philosophy, including *causal* relations (when *x* causes *y*), moral relations (when *x* has a responsibility to *y*), and most obviously, relations of similarity and difference, sometimes referred to as **identity and diversity relations.** Are *x* and *y* different from one another, or are they actually the same thing?

Metaphysical questions about identity can be broad and puzzling. One type of identity question asks, what does it mean for something to be that thing and not some other thing? This is a **synchronic** question, about what makes something that thing at a particular time. However, issues of identity are complicated by the passing of time, as changes can happen. Such **diachronic** questions are of most concern to us in this Area of Study, and in particular the questions we can ask about the identity of *persons* over time. How much can a person change and yet still be regarded as the same person?

Philosopher/mathematician Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) is one thinker who was famously keen to settle questions of identity. Leibniz's Law, as it is referred to, states that '*x* is the same as *y*, *if and only if* every predicate true of *x* is true of *y* as well.' This is useful for mathematical identities, but what about when we want to address issues of personal identity over time?

THINK

How useful is Leibniz's Law for deciding whether you are the same person now as you were when you first started reading this chapter?

Introductory Activity

THINK

Consider the following questions. Write down answers first for yourself and then discuss them as a class. From the answers that emerge, can your class make a list of possible criteria for a person having – or not having – the same identity over time?

1. Are you the same person now as you were when you were born? Why or why not?
2. Are you the same person now as you were yesterday? Why or why not?
3. If you had been to a different school, would you be the same person?
4. If you had your limbs amputated and replaced with synthetic ones, would you still be you?
5. If you lost your fingerprints would you still be you?
6. What is it that stays the same through all the changes you go through?
7. What links your past self with your future self?
8. How can **you** be distinguished from other selves?
9. How do others identify you as you, and is this any different from how you identify yourself to yourself?
10. Imagine you and your friend are involved in an accident. Tragically, you are pronounced braindead but your body is virtually unharmed. Your friend's body is crushed but her brain is fine. Doctors decide to transplant your friend's brain into your body. Who would this person be – you, your friend, or someone else? And whose parents should this person go 'home' to?

KEY CONCEPTS: *THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS*

A thought experiment invites us to ponder some scenario, hypothesis or theory and to consider its consequences. It may not always be possible to actually enact the circumstances of a thought experiment; frequently we wouldn't want to, and some of the most entertaining thought experiments are pretty far-fetched. But their purpose is to get us thinking, to engage with the scenario described and to untangle all the possible implications of holding certain views.

A Thought Experiment: The Problem of the Ship of Theseus

This is a classic thought experiment, apparently referred to as early as 75 CE by Plutarch and discussed famously by Thomas Hobbes (in his *De Corpore* of 1655). This is an adaptation based on many retellings.

The Ship of Theseus is a grand, old, wooden battle ship. After sailing out to war, she returns damaged. Various small parts of the ship are replaced. This happens after all her ventures, and eventually large beams and other major structural features are replaced. Ultimately, over a period of many years, every part of the Ship of Theseus has been replaced.

THINK

QUESTION 1: Is it the same ship after all of this?

1. Consider your own response to this question. Take a few minutes to jot down the strongest argument you can come up with to support your view.
2. Now share your point of view and supporting reasons with your class.
3. Following a class discussion of this question, make some notes. What were the most compelling arguments to emerge for both the 'SAME SHIP' and 'DIFFERENT SHIP' viewpoints?

There is a further twist to this tale. At the port where the ship was repaired, there is a shed in which an old man has been storing all the screws, nails, planks, beams and other parts that were removed from the ship and replaced over many years. One day, the old man decides that he will put all the parts back together to make a ship. And this is the result: we now have a very battered, worn ship, just built, docked at the same port. Interestingly, although it has been newly put together, it looks much older than the other, and in fact every one of its parts is older.

THINK

QUESTION 2: Which ship should be called the Ship of Theseus?

1. Working with a partner if you wish, try to make a case for both ships. What are the strongest reasons you can come up with for *each* ship to be considered 'The Ship of Theseus'?
2. Reflecting on these arguments just prepared, which ship do *you* consider has greatest claim to being called 'The Ship of Theseus'?
3. What if one of the boats is destroyed. Would it make a difference?

WRITE

Write a reflection in which you:

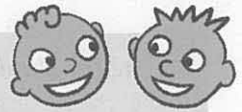
1. Set out your considered responses to the Ship of Theseus problem, including the arguments you judge to be the most convincing answers to Questions 1, 2 and 3, above.
2. Compare your responses to the Ship of Theseus problem with your responses to the questions about human identity in the Introductory Activity. What makes a human being the same person over time? Do you know that the human body completely changes all its cells every seven years? Does knowing this fact affect your responses? Do consistent criteria apply to human and non-living entities?

THINK

The activities completed so far in this Part have considered cases of human identity and identity of non-living things. What about animal cases? Animals like butterflies and frogs go through metamorphoses. Can a caterpillar be considered to have the same identity as the butterfly it transforms into? Is it appropriate to demand the same criteria be applied in cases of non-living identities as to animal and human identities?

Testing Criteria: Tricky Cases of Personal Identity

Cases of identity, such as the famous Ship of Theseus, have fascinated philosophers for centuries. And now, advances in biomedical technologies might lead us to ask some new, fascinating and related hypothetical questions. For example, might we do things like saving cells discarded from one person and put them together to make another person? There are many profound questions to consider about what makes a person the same person over time, and our answers to such questions have significant ethical, legal, personal and medical implications.



DISCUSS

In a small group, consider the following four cases.

1. War criminal

Kurt was recruited into the Nazi party as a young man, full of passionate impulse and a desire to impress. He was directly involved in the torture, execution and imprisonment of hundreds of Jews. For the past 60 years he has lived an unremarkable life as a farmer, escaping any scrutiny for the atrocities of his past. He is still happily married, adored by his twelve grandchildren and respected for his many contributions to his local community. Now frail and gentle, when he thinks back to his youth, Kurt can barely remember the two years he spent with the Nazis and feels no identification with the young man who committed such heinous crimes. However, Kurt has recently been identified as a Nazi and there are calls for his condemnation and even execution. Yet in punishing the old man, how would we be punishing the young man? Should they be considered the same person after all these years?

2. 'Not the woman I married'

Peter marries a kind, generous and good-humoured young woman named Isabella, and the couple lives happily for fifteen years, raising a family and each pursuing successful careers. Tragically, at age 40, Isabella is involved in a serious accident after which she seems completely changed. She is snappy and rude to friends, neglectful of her children and is no longer capable of maintaining competence in her job. Peter eventually loses patience and despairs that Isabella is a different person from the woman he married.

3. No memory

Jonah grows up in a Melbourne suburb, is the star pupil at a well-known school and proceeds to excel in his Medicine course at university. By age 24, he is married with a child. Keen to pursue an opportunity to complete a two-month stint of humanitarian work in Africa, Jonah leaves his wife and child. One day while collecting fresh water for the local hospital, Jonah is dragged downstream by a powerful current and loses consciousness. He wanders into a remote village with no memory of his previous life, not even his name, former profession or family in Australia. He lives in the new village, takes an African wife and has a child with her. Eventually, he is found by his Australian wife, but does not recognise her or anyone else from his Australian youth.

4. The child killer

In a case which shocked the world, two-year-old toddler James Bulger was abducted and murdered in February 1993 by two 10 year-old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. Thompson and Venables were released on a life license in June 2001, after serving eight years of their life sentence (reduced for 'good behaviour'), when a parole hearing concluded that public safety would not be threatened by their rehabilitation into society. An injunction was imposed shortly after the trial, preventing the release of any details of their new identities and locations. There has been much speculation about this case, with the young age of the two perpetrators the main focus. Can Venables and Thomson ever be considered rehabilitated? Should their new identities be considered exactly that, after they have served their sentences, received intensive psychological treatment, and presumably gone on to lead relatively uneventful adult lives?

5. Body replacement

At the age of 27, Lara is so badly injured in a car accident that her major organs – heart, lungs, kidney and liver – are no longer functional. She is fortunate that suitable organs – from, as it happens, three different, compatible donors – become available at the right time and her life is saved. However, the road to recovery is more complicated. Lara's left leg and right hand were severed in the accident, so doctors have fitted her with prostheses, including the latest triumph of robotic technologies – a bionic hand that is able to respond to Lara's own brainwaves. Perhaps the most devastating consequence of Lara's accident is that her facial features were almost entirely incinerated. As the final stage in her rehabilitation, doctors have recommended that she consider the option of a facial transplant. What will be left of the original Lara?

In each of the cases above, you must think carefully about whether a person in an earlier time is the same as a person at a later time. Consider each case with reference to the theories of human identity indicated below. In your group, discuss the merits and disadvantages of applying each of the theories. Note whether the theories suggested give you a possible answer, a wrong answer, or no answer at all. Can we rely on one theory to give a solution to all the cases? Does one theory emerge as the strongest contender for deciding identity over time? How do these cases compare to the Ship of Theseus and other questions previously considered? Present your findings to the class. (Note: you will need to draw up a separate table for each case your group considers.)

Theory of Identity	Points in favour of applying this theory	Objections to applying this theory	Overall comments about applying this theory: does it give a possible answer, a wrong answer or no answer at all?
'If it is the same body it is the same person.'			
'If it is the same mind it is the same person.'			
'If someone can remember a person's past, then they are that person.'			
'If everyone else thinks it is the same person, then it is.'			
Your own theory: would you like to propose a different theory to use in this case (perhaps one you developed in relation to previous problems posed in this Part?)			

Some Philosophical Theories on the Problem of Identity Through Time

1. Same Body Theory

The most obvious way that we recognise other people is by their physical characteristics. One theory of personal identity is that having the same body is what makes someone the same person. Those who defend this theory may argue that someone's personality can change radically, depending on their experiences and circumstances, but they remain the same person because they inhabit the same physical self.

Yet, scientists tell us that every cell in the human body is replaced over approximately a seven-year period. This means that no parts of the current physical 'you' existed as 'you' a decade ago. But we still talk about your body as the one physical organism that has existed since your birth and will continue to exist until your death, undergoing the changes of maturity and the degenerations of ageing. However, if there are such dramatic changes occurring to everyone's bodies, how can we say that the body of a baby is the same body as that of a sixteen year-old girl? What qualifies the body of a sixteen year-old boy to be considered the same identity as that boy's body when he is a sixty year-old man? And yet, it doesn't seem problematic to assume that my body now is the same body as I had five minutes ago. Indeed, it would be very disconcerting if this were not the case!

So there must be some important factors of physical continuity that are important in identifying someone's body as the same through time. Some philosophers propose that it is important to be able to trace the existence of one body through a continuous spatio-temporal path. Me typing this sentence and me making a cup of coffee ten minutes ago are the same body if at every point in between there is a similar human body at consecutive points of time and space. There would be no gaps for any observer of my body during this period. The same applies to longer periods of time; a continuous path through space and time will connect your current body to the body you will have in forty years' time. And philosophers also point to the factor of causal continuity: that is, what happens to the earlier body will have effects on the later body.

CHALLENGES FOR THE SAME BODY THEORY

This is all very well, but is modern technology challenging some of these theories of physical continuity? Cosmetic surgery is becoming an increasingly popular way for people to alter their physical selves, sometimes quite dramatically. Is it a trivial matter for someone to have their nose or breasts altered, or should they be considered a different person after such procedures? Of course, lives can be saved through organ transplants, and recent campaigns have encouraged all of us to join the organ donation registry as a matter of civic conscience. But does this raise some interesting metaphysical conundrums? Am I the same person if I carry the kidney, liver or heart that used to belong to someone else? An even more controversial kind of organ transfer is that of facial transplants. Some serious accidents may entirely remove a person's facial features, sentencing them to a life of isolation and misery. Isabelle Dinoire, a 38-year-old mother of two, received the world's first successful face transplant in 2006 after being mauled by her dog. Should someone like Isabelle be allowed to have a recently deceased person's face grafted on to the front of her skull, or does this profoundly challenge our metaphysical beliefs about whether the resulting person would still be Isabelle?

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke proposed the classic objection to the same body theory of personal identity. His objection is that in principle, it is possible for one person to switch bodies while remaining the same person. Of course the technology to do this wasn't available in Locke's time any more than it is now, but the scenario still operates instructively as a thought experiment, and countless science fiction and fantasy narratives have allowed a person to somehow inhabit a body different from one they previously had. Furthermore, the day is approaching when it may be possible to transplant someone's brain into a different, healthier and younger body. In the case of a brain transplant, do we think that this is a case of the same person being inside a different body? If so, then being the same person cannot be just a matter of having the same body.

Another objection to the same body theory of identity is that the same body could be home to two or more persons at the same time. There are rare cases of multiple personality disorder where it makes sense to ask whether there is more than one person – or more than one complete and coherent psychological system – inhabiting the same body.

2. Same Brain Theory

Some philosophers have proposed that being the same person over time is a matter of having the same brain. Notions of brain transplants remain hypothetical, so real cases of a person having the same body always entail having the same brain as well. However, the advantage of the same-brain theory over the same-body theory is that it covers the future possibility of brain transplants. This theory argues that if the brain in one body were switched with the brain in another body (that is, a double transplant), the person or identity would follow the brain.

CHALLENGES FOR THE SAME BRAIN THEORY

Some of the same challenges already encountered with the same-body theory also arise here. What if the self is not carried in the brain? What if, as a dualist would argue, the mind and the self amount to more than just the physical substance of the brain? Are 'you' nothing more than the electrical impulses and chemical activity of your brain? Or do you think that there is some kind of soul, or essence of 'you', that could not be captured and transplanted physically? Then again, even if you believe that there *is* more to the self than the brain, you might still make a case that the non-physical soul might follow the physical brain should it be transplanted to another body. You can see that your responses to many questions about personal identity rely on your views about the nature of the mind.

3. Same Mind/Soul Theory

Many people argue that what gives someone identity over time is their possession of the same mind. Some philosophers of mind believe that the mind or soul is a different substance to any material thing – that is, it is not physical like the brain and the body. If a person is a mind, it would, as suggested above, be possible in principle for people to switch bodies and brains, and the mind to take up a new interactive relationship with a new body and brain. This idea is the basis of many theories of reincarnation after death. Indeed, the same-mind theory of personal identity makes life after death very plausible: there seems no logical reason why the death of the body should harm the person – that is, their mind – in any way.

CHALLENGES FOR THE SAME MIND THEORY

Neuroscientists are producing more evidence all the time that everything we associate with the mind has a physical explanation – that is, can be located and accounted for within the brain. For example, brain damage can radically alter someone's personality, removing some traits and capacities and adding others (for example, the famous case of Phineas Gage). If there is no distinct mental substance, it cannot be the basis of our identity.

John Locke argued that even if there were a mind or soul distinct from the brain, it could not be the basis of personal identity. He claimed that what makes you 'you' is your personality and self-awareness, rather than the kind of substance in which these might occur. If your personality and your self-awareness were to somehow switch from one mind-substance to another, whether this be physical or non-physical, 'you' would follow your personality and self-awareness.

4. The Mental Connections/Memory Theory

This theory is similar to the same-mind theory, but tries to sidestep the issue of whether the mind is a physical or non-physical substance. The mental connections theory emphasises the mental and psychological characteristics of a person, including memories and experiences. This theory argues that personal identity over time is a matter of being able to trace coherent connections between a person's psychological characteristics over time.

Locke famously argued for the importance of memory in first-person identity. If you can remember being yourself as a seven-year-old, then you are the same person as that seven-year-old. The film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* explores the relationship between our selves and our memories, and raises a number of philosophical questions. How do memories shape personal identity? Would you still be you if you had your memories erased? Our responses to these ontological questions will guide our treatment of arising ethical questions: if memory erasure were possible, should it be permissible?

There is more, of course, to mental coherence than just our memories and experiences. The continuity of a person's character is created by chains of causal connections; someone's personality at a later stage is formed on the basis of how it was at an earlier stage. People have intentions and plans for the future, for example. For this theory of identity, being able to trace such mental connections is crucial to ascertaining whether someone is to be considered the same person over time, or not.

CHALLENGES FOR THE MENTAL CONNECTIONS THEORY

Do we end up committing the fallacy of circularity when we trace mental connections? That is, do we presuppose mental identity when we find mental connections? For example, perhaps we assume mental identity when we try to remember something or suppose someone else to be able to remember something. And of course, there are many things in our past that we cannot locate in our memories at all. Does this mean we are not that person who had those experiences of which we have no recollection?

5. Other Possible Candidates, Questions and Challenges

- Does *perspective* matter in these issues of identity? Which has greater authority – a first person account of identity or a third person account?
- What role does *naming* have in cases of identity? If a thing or person carries the same name, is it necessarily the same thing? No.
- Is *gender* essential to identity? Various operations and hormone treatments are available to people who desire gender reassignment. Do such procedures change someone's identity? And back to the brain and face transplants; how important is it for gender to be kept consistent in these cases?

WRITE

1. Complete the following table:

Theory	Summary of what this theory claims	Points FOR this theory	Points AGAINST this theory
'Same Body' Theory			
'Same Brain' Theory			
'Same Mind/Soul' Theory			
'Mental Connections' Theory			

2. Which of these theories has been most helpful, do you think, in deciding cases of identity already considered in this Part? Explain your answer.
3. Consider the questions raised above (in dot points above this box). Write an answer to at least one of these questions, drawing on at least one example from cases previously considered in this chapter.

Problems of Identity in Literature and Film

Many examples from literature and film sources raise questions on the problem of identity. You may wish to turn your philosophical ponderings to thought experiments from such sources.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is the classic fictional treatment of the problem of identity. The central character of this short story, Gregor Samsa, faces an identity crisis of a radical kind. He wakes up in bed transformed into an insect. But how can Kafka insist that this creature that wakes up in Gregor Samsa's bed actually is Gregor Samsa? Samsa is a human being and this creature is not. It has the body of a bug. What reason, if any, is there to identify this thing as Kafka suggests? Even Gregor's sister finally gives up on the idea that it is Gregor. And yet, the creature seems to have Gregor's feelings and to think like Gregor used to. Even though he wakes up as a bug, its main concern on waking up is making the five o'clock train. And after all, we all undergo physical changes in our lives, in spite of which we are considered the same person.

Another excellent source for discussion material is the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* which takes up the notions of mental continuity and the importance of memories in human identity.

FURTHER EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IN FILM AND LITERATURE

- *Freaky Friday*
- *Switch*
- *Memento*
- *Being John Malkovich*
- *Total Recall*
- *Robocop*
- *All of Me*
- *Whose Life is it Anyway?*
- *The Return of Martin Guerre*
- *Olivier, Olivier*
- *The Passenger*
- *Europa, Europa*

PART B

John Locke: 'On Identity and Diversity' from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

DO

Try to obtain a photograph (or a copy of one) of yourself as a toddler or young child. Bring it into your philosophy classroom and pin it on the wall alongside similar photos of your classmates.

Then discuss the following with your classmates:

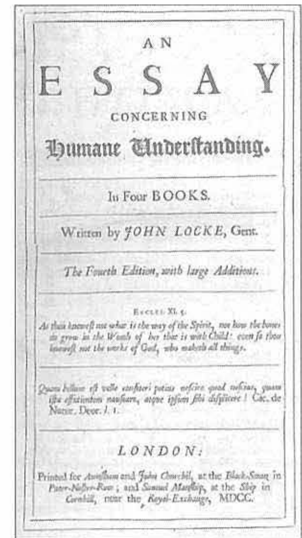
1. In what ways are you similar and different from the small person in this photograph?
2. To what extent do you remember being this small person?
3. Do you consider this small person to be 'you? Why or why not?

These photos may remain a talking point in your classroom throughout this Area of Study. How would the philosophers represented in our set texts answer these questions?

Historical and Philosophical Context

The classic discussion of the identity problem in Western philosophy is found in the work of John Locke, an English philosopher of the seventeenth century. As you will find, Locke was strongly influenced by the theories of Descartes, which we discussed in our previous chapter, as well as by Isaac Newton's scientific thought.

Locke's account of personal identity was revolutionary when it first appeared in the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). It has inspired many further theories, both supporting and refuting its thesis. It has also produced divergent interpretations; there are a number of points on which Locke's account can be taken to mean different things, so it will be up to you and your classmates to arrive at what you believe is the most coherent and convincing interpretation of this theory. You will also find it necessary to clarify what exactly Locke means when he uses particular terms. For example, the term 'consciousness' is central to Locke's argument, but precisely what he intends this term to cover is a matter for dispute.


AN
ESSAY
CONCERNING
Humane Understanding.

In Four BOOKS.

Written by *JOHN LOCKE*, Gent.

The Fourth Edition, with large Additions.

ECCLES. XI. 5.
As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the Womb of her that is with Child: even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all things.

Quam bellum est velle confiteri potius nescire quod nescias, quam ista effutientem nauseare, atque ipsum sibi displicere! Cic. de Natur. Deor. l. 1.

LONDON:
Printed for *Awnsham* and *John Churchil*, at the *Black-Swan* in *Pater-Noster-Row*; and *Samuel Manship*, at the *Ship* in *Cornhill*, near the *Royal-Exchange*, MDCC.

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was certainly lengthier than the kind of essay you will be expected to produce in VCE Philosophy! It consists of four books, each of which contains up to 33 chapters. It is Locke's most significant contribution to philosophy, addressing the fundamental principles of human knowledge, and exerted a strong influence on the thinking of the Enlightenment (see box) and the development of Western philosophy.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The **Age of Enlightenment,** often called the **Age of Reason,** was an intellectual movement in Europe, which emphasised reason and the individual. It spanned approximately 1650-1800 and aimed to change society by promoting the use of reason and scientific method rather than reliance on tradition, religious faith or superstition.

The key figures of the Enlightenment came from the generations that immediately followed, and were influenced by, Descartes. They included Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, Francis Bacon, John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Voltaire, Isaac Newton, Gottlieb Leibniz, Adam Smith, George Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Denis Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Our Western, secular culture has been profoundly shaped by the values of the Enlightenment, including democratic politics; racial and sexual equality; individual freedoms; freedom of thought, expression, and the press; removal of religious authority from the law and education; and the complete separation of church and state. The Enlightenment directly inspired the American Revolution, the American Declaration of Independence, the United States Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Its influence can be seen in the art and literature of the period, too.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE #6

John Locke (1632–1704)

John Locke was born in Somerset, England. He completed his Bachelors and Masters degrees at Oxford University in both philosophy and medicine. Aristotle had a big influence on him. Like Aristotle, Locke was fascinated by scientific questions and he completed a medical degree in 1674. His talents didn't end here: Locke also had interests in political philosophy and diplomacy; he was both personal doctor and political advisor to the Earl of Shaftesbury, one of the leading politicians in London at the time.

At the age of 50, Locke published the two books of philosophy for which he is best known. *Two Treatises of Civil Government* would become so influential that its principles can be credited with shaping the American constitution. However, it is *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* for which Locke is most noted in modern philosophy, as the influence of this book on the next 100 years of Western thought was profound. Berkeley, Hume and Kant all developed their theories on the basis of Locke's *Essay.* In it, Locke explored the nature of human knowledge and the way in which the mind organises and judges sensory data. Having read Descartes' *Meditations,* Locke was impressed by Descartes' vow to provide science with firm epistemological footing. However, Locke disagreed with Descartes' rationalism, arguing famously that the human mind is like a "blank slate" or *tabula rasa.*

In 1683 Locke fled to the Netherlands under (probably false) suspicion of being part of a plot to assassinate the King. While there, Locke associated with free thinkers and intellectuals of Europe, and spent considerable time writing revisions to his books. On return to England, Locke continued the interest in politics which had flourished during his association with Lord Shaftesbury, a founder of the Whigs movement that opposed absolute rule by the monarchy. In these later years, Locke became the Whigs' intellectual hero, and he regularly discussed politics with contemporaries such as scientist Isaac Newton and poet John Dryden. He never married or had children.

Theories of Personal Identity Before Locke

Before Locke, there were two main theories of the human self. As we have seen already, Descartes defined the self as an immaterial soul. Opposing this view, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) defined the self in purely material terms. However, as you may have concluded in Part 1 of this chapter, there are problems with both the 'same body' and the 'same soul' theories. Locke argues for a continuity of self which avoids reliance on any substance, whether body or soul. Instead, and drawing on empiricist appeals to the ways we experience ourselves, Locke develops a theory of **psychological continuity**. For Locke, continuity of psychological states is both **necessary** and **sufficient** for being the same person. (See the box later in this Part for an explanation of these terms.)

KEY CONCEPTS: *RATIONALISM* AND *EMPIRICISM*

Rationalism is a school of philosophy which believes that problems can be solved by use of reason and argument alone. Truths can be established through the exercise of logical thought. René Descartes is probably philosophy's most famous rationalist.

Empiricism is the view that we can only discover truth from what we have experienced. John Locke is probably philosophy's most famous empiricist.

THINK

As you read the text, consider in what ways Locke's theory of personal identity reflects his empiricism.

Studying Locke's 'Identity and Diversity'

READ

Read through all of the set extract from Locke's 'Identity and Diversity'. If possible, read all of Book 2, chapter 27, even though our focus will be on paragraphs 8-26 only (and as per the Prescribed Text List, omitting paragraphs 12, 13, 16, 21, 23, 24 and 25).

Make notes in the margins as you go. See if you can identify places where there are:

- definitions of key terms
- reasons and conclusions (i.e. arguments)
- examples and thought experiments
- anticipated objections

Paragraphs 1-7

Our extract from Book 2, Chapter 27 of Locke's *Essay* commences at paragraph 8. However, it is worth briefly addressing the ground he covers in paragraphs 1-7, and you will see how this links to the material set for study.

Firstly, Locke defines **identity** as when a thing is one thing rather than another. Your pen has a particular identity; you can say it is *this* individual thing rather than *that* thing. Locke notes that: (1) an individual object cannot be in two places at once, and (2) two distinct individuals cannot occupy the same place at the same time.

What Locke is trying to establish is the **Principle of Individuation** (PoI), or what it is that makes something the same thing over time. To do so, he first distinguishes between three types of entities: **substance, man** and **person.** He believes that different PoIs may be appropriate for each of these categories of entity.

By the term substance, Locke is referring to non-living things that are purely their material stuff, such as rocks, particles and chairs. By terms such as 'man', 'elephant', 'parrot' or 'tree', Locke refers to living organisms. It may make more sense to a modern audience to think of Locke's use of 'man' as meaning 'human' or 'human animal', in the biological sense. From here he goes on to make the important distinction between a 'man' and a 'person': by 'person' he means the rational, thinking and self-aware being that we call the 'self' or 'me'.

Locke considers in turn what the PoI might be for inanimate objects (which are only substance), living things and persons.

For inanimate objects, Locke argues that the only thing at issue is material stuff. Therefore, any change to the substance makes the thing a different thing. If a leg breaks off your chair, according to Locke's strict account it will be a different chair.

For non-human living things, it does not seem to be its material stuff which gives it its identity, because this material stuff is constantly changing. Rather it is the organisation of this matter into a continuous *life* that makes a seedling the same plant as the tree it grows into. Although the material composition of all living things will change entirely through its lifespan, the shared goal of all the parts in relation to the whole will remain the same.

It is the next part of Chapter 27 that we are particularly interested in, when Locke addresses the PoI of persons, from paragraph 8 onwards.

Paragraphs 8, 9-11, 14-15, 17-20, 22, 26

We will now review the set extracts in broad brushstrokes. From paragraph 8 onwards, Locke addresses the PoI of persons, or what it is that makes someone the same person over time.

We would usually take terms such as 'man', 'human' and 'person' to be equivalent, but Locke's distinction is one which many other philosophers have found useful also. For example, a very severely disabled person may be termed a man, but – sadly – have less self-awareness or rationality than a caterpillar. In such a case, Locke would say there is a man but not a person present. Along the same lines, if there were to be a highly intelligent and self-aware chimpanzee, Locke would describe the chimp as a person, though not as a man.

WRITE

How does Locke define 'person'? How does he distinguish between 'man' and 'person'? Is this distinction a useful one?

Next, Locke considers three possible candidates for what makes someone the same person over time, and he rejects each one.

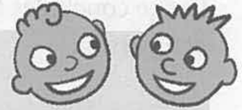
Firstly, he takes the 'same body' theory, or the view that if someone has the same material substance over time, then they must be the same person. He argues that if someone loses a body part, they are clearly still the same person. You can lose your hand without being regarded as a different person. Therefore it is not sameness of matter which determines sameness of person.

WRITE

1. What is Locke's argument against 'same body' as the PoI for persons? Write this in standard form.
2. Is Locke right to reject the 'same body' principle? If your answer is yes, provide another reason to bolster Locke's view. If your answer is no, provide a reason to support your argument that the 'same body' principle is useful.

Locke also rejects the PoI that he takes to be sufficient for living organisms, in the case of persons. To illustrate why sameness of living organism cannot be a sufficient indicator of sameness of person, Locke offers his now-famous Prince and the Cobbler thought experiment.

Imagine that overnight, a prince has all his memories transferred to a cobbler, and the cobbler has all his memories transferred to the prince. When the cobbler wakes, he thinks he is the prince because all his memories are of being the prince. And likewise, the prince claims to be the cobbler, because all he can remember is of being the cobbler and leading the cobbler's life.

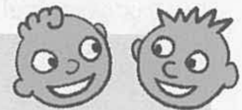


DISCUSS

Who should we say is the prince and who should we say is the cobbler? Why? What should we say is the PoI in this case?

Discuss this thought experiment with a partner and then share your arguments with the class.

To Locke, it is clear that we should say the prince is now inhabiting the living body of the cobbler, and that the cobbler is in the body of the prince. Therefore, he concludes, the 'continuity of life' principle cannot be applied to cases of persons in the way that it was apparently unproblematic in the cases of other living organisms.



DISCUSS

What do you make of the 'continuity of life' principle? Is Locke right in arguing that it is appropriate for living organisms, but not those which are persons?

So, can it be the *soul* – that non-material part of a human, as discussed by Descartes – that supplies the PoI for persons? Locke gives two reasons why he thinks it cannot be the unchanging, immaterial soul which makes someone the same person over time.

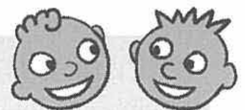
Firstly, he says we can imagine the same **consciousness** being transferred from one immaterial soul to another. For example, the prince's consciousness could be transferred into the cobbler's body *and* into his soul. The ancient Greeks considered the *nous* to be the part of the soul containing reason, self-awareness and memories – that is, the parts of the soul which we use for our intellectual functioning. Perhaps Locke is referring to a similar idea when he uses the word consciousness and distinguishes it from soul.

Secondly, Locke says that we can imagine a single soul being shared by two or more persons in cases of reincarnation. For example, if Socrates so happened to be reincarnated as you (that is, if his soul had found its way into your body), that wouldn't make you and Socrates one and the same person. Locke further suggests that we consider reward and punishment, and anticipation of pleasure and pain, to bolster this argument. It would make no sense to punish *you* for any crimes committed by Socrates, any more than it would make sense for Socrates to look forward to a pleasurable experience soon to be enjoyed by you.

Locke concludes from these objections that the 'self' does not seem to be identical with the soul of a person.

WRITE

Create an argument in standard form to the conclusion that the principle of identity for persons is not the soul.



DISCUSS

Do Locke's two objections to the 'Same Soul' principle of identity refute it convincingly? Can you think of any further objections not mentioned by Locke, or any counter-objections with which to respond to his two objections?

LOCKE'S CONCLUSION ABOUT PERSONAL IDENTITY

Locke's concludes that **consciousness** is the key to personal identity. True to the methodologies of an empiricist, for Locke, identity must be found in how we identify our self to ourselves. Since we find our own continuity of self through our memories of past events, Locke, concludes that **memory** is the source of personal identity.

We could therefore conclude from Locke that memory is both a **necessary and sufficient condition** of self, and thereby of personal identity (see box below).

LOCKE'S MEMORY THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY
If x and y are persons, then x=y *if and only if* x has memories of being y, or y has memories of being x.

KEY CONCEPTS: *NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS*

When exploring complex questions of definition, a strategy philosophers sometimes use is to try to set out the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for something to be the case.

Sufficient conditions are what is *enough* for something to be the case.

Necessary conditions are what is *required* for something to be the case.

Consider the following examples to clarify your understanding of these important philosophical concepts.

Example 1: Being over 18 years of age is a *necessary condition* for being eligible to vote in federal elections in Australia. However, this is not a *sufficient condition* because a number of other conditions must be satisfied to produce eligibility: including that someone be an Australian citizen, that they are of 'sound mind', that they have not been convicted of treason or treachery, that they are not serving a prison sentence of three years of more, and that they have enrolled to vote.

Example 2: Being divisible by six is a *sufficient condition* for something to be an even number. However, this is not a *necessary condition* because there are even numbers that are not divisible by six. Being divisible by two is a *necessary condition* for something to be an even number.

Example 3: We often describe conditions as **individually necessary** and **jointly sufficient.** This applies to cases where *each* criterion is necessary for something to be the case, and when *all* of those criteria are collected, then that thing can be the case. For example, the necessary conditions for a figure being a square are that it has four sides, that each side is straight, that it is a closed figure, that it lies in a plane, that the sides are of equal length, that the interior angles are equal and that all four sides are joined at their ends. By itself, none of these conditions is sufficient for something to be a square, but each is *individually necessary.* When combined together we say these conditions are *jointly sufficient.*

Try the following yourself.

What might be the necessary and sufficient conditions for someone to be:

A bachelor?

A mother?

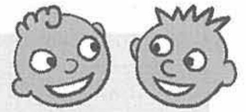
Prime Minister of this country?

A licensed driver in your region?

A successful student?

WRITE

1. Working in a pair, try to reconstruct Locke's central argument – that is, the argument to the conclusion that consciousness – and more specifically *memories* – determine the identity of persons over time.
2. What is Locke's understanding of the term **consciousness?** How does he explain **memories?** Take two large pieces of poster paper – one headed 'Locke on Consciousness' and the other headed 'Locke on Memory'. Hang them up in your classroom. Go through your copy of the set text and highlight all the sentences which directly address the nature of consciousness, and in a different colour do the same for memory. Then take it in turns with your classmates to write all these passages on the posters. You may wish to take a photo of the posters for inclusion in your study notes.



DISCUSS

1. What does it mean to consider memory a *sufficient* condition for personal identity? What does it mean to consider memory a *necessary* condition for personal identity?
2. Do you think memory should be considered *both* a necessary and sufficient condition for personal identity? Explain your response.

LOCKE'S OBJECTIONS AGAINST HIMSELF

Locke anticipates two objections that may be raised against his central argument.

Firstly, there is the issue of memory loss. Clearly, our memories of our lives are only partial and we can forget entire episodes. Yet it would seem absurd to say, as Locke's argument might seem to imply, that we should consider the person trying to remember, and the person in the forgotten episode, to be two separate persons.

Here Locke sticks to his guns, and says that they are indeed two separate persons. However, they would still be the same *man* or living organism.

Secondly, Locke anticipates the objection that by his theory, a sober man should not be considered the same person when drunk, if he forgets what he has done while drunk. Yet we still punish people for what they did while drunk, thereby regarding them as the same person, both sober and drunk.

Locke's reply is that strictly, by his theory, it is not fair to punish the sober man for his actions while drunk. However, we have no way of entering into another person's consciousness to find out what they do and don't remember (or indeed that they may be lying about memory loss). Therefore, from a third person perspective, we need to treat this case of identity as one of 'man' alone – that is, to use the PoI appropriate to a living organism. Therefore, we identify the 'same man' in this case and punish accordingly, even though we have no way of determining 'same person' or not.

WRITE

1. Summarise in your words the two objections Locke anticipates to his own central argument, and the responses he makes to these anticipated objections.
2. Working in a small group, respond critically to Locke's responses to these objections. Are his responses satisfactory? Why or why not?

Close Study of the Extract

Use the following questions to guide preparation of your notes and to clarify your understanding of the text.

WRITE

Section 8 'Same Man'

How do we recognise someone as a man, as opposed to a parrot, or some other animal?

Section 9 'Personal Identity'

1. What is Locke's definition of a person?
2. Compare Locke's view of personhood with that of Descartes.
3. What distinction does Locke make between a 'man' and a 'person'?
4. Is this a useful distinction? Why or why not?
5. Where does the self reside, according to Locke?

Section 10 'Consciousness makes personal identity'

1. What difficulty does Locke anticipate to his claim that identity resides with consciousness?
2. What claims does Locke make about first person experience and personal identity? Where does this leave third person experience and personal identity?

Section 11 'Personal Identity in Change of Substances'

1. How does Locke reject the notion that a change in substance produces a change in identity? Outline his argument.
2. Evaluate this argument.

Section 14 'Whether the same immaterial substance remains, may there be two distinct persons?'

1. What is Locke's conclusion in this paragraph?
2. Outline the argument he makes to reach this conclusion.
3. Evaluate this argument.

Section 15 'Soul'

1. What is Locke's conclusion in this paragraph?
2. Outline his argument in standard form.
3. Evaluate this argument.
4. How useful is the Prince and Cobbler thought experiment in arguing Locke's case that personal identity is determined by consciousness? Give detailed reasons.

Section 17 'Self depends on consciousness'

1. What is Locke arguing with the example of the little finger?
2. Locke says, 'the same principle applies to substances remote in time.' Can you give an example of what he means here?
3. Outline the theory of self that Locke offers in this paragraph.

Section 18 'Objects of reward and punishment'

What are the implications of Locke's forgoing arguments for issues of reward and punishment?

Section 19 'Wherein personal identity consists'

1. Clarifying his central argument, what does Locke argue here about Socrates awake and Socrates asleep, and identical twins?
2. Do you agree with him?
3. What is Locke saying here about first and third person perspectives on personal identity?

Section 20 'Memory loss'

1. What objection does Locke anticipate in this paragraph and how does he respond to it?
2. Evaluate Locke's response to this objection.
3. Why should we take care when using terms such as 'I', according to Locke?

Section 22 'But is not a man drunk and sober the same person?'

Is it fair to punish people for crimes they commit when 'not themselves', according to Locke? What is your view?

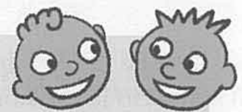
Section 26 'Person, a forensic term'

1. What does Locke mean when he says that 'person' is a 'forensic term?'
2. What is the relationship between the person and past actions?
3. What does Locke believe in regards to persons and the rewards and punishments of Judgment Day?

The Moral Significance of Personal Identity

It is the moral implications of personal identity that Locke is most keen to explore. In Section 26 he describes 'person' as a 'forensic term', indicating his interest in the legal and moral judgments which flow from acceptance of one theory of personal identity over another. There are also theological implications, and during Locke's time there were heated debates over whether people would be eternally punished or rewarded after death for their conduct in this life.

You should note Locke's agnosticism about both the immateriality and immortality of the soul. He does not commit to either of these positions and nor does he refute them. Thus, it is possible to accept Locke's theory of psychological continuity while holding *either* a materialist *or* a dualist view of the soul. Therefore his theory keeps the door open for discussions of both moral responsibility during one's earthly life and judgment by God.

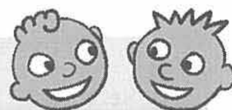


DISCUSS

1. What is meant by the term moral responsibility?
2. What are the consequences of Locke's theory of personal identity for moral responsibility? Include examples in your contributions to a class discussion of this question.

Thought Experiments in Locke's 'Of Identity and Diversity'

Locke uses several examples and thought experiments in this extract, to argue that personal identity is held in consciousness, and thus survives changes in substance.



DISCUSS

As a class, make a list of all the examples and thought experiments used by Locke in this extract.

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one (or more, depending on the size of the group) of these examples and thought experiments.

For each example or thought experiment, your group should discuss the following and then present findings to the class:

1. Outline this example or thought experiment.
2. What does Locke intend to demonstrate by this example or thought experiment?
3. How effective is this example or thought experiment in achieving Locke's aims?

Comparing Descartes and Locke

Both Descartes and Locke try to explain the nature of the self and the relationship between mind and body. Although the Study Design doesn't explicitly compel you to make comparisons between texts across Areas of Study 1 and 2, it is certainly a good exercise for clarifying your understanding of each.

Descartes' understanding of the self is clear: 'I am a thinking thing.' He takes this thinking to be his essence, as opposed to the extended substance of his body, without which he would still be him. Identity, therefore, for Descartes, resides in the immaterial substance of the mind and is continuous, immortal and unchanging.

Locke's empiricism commits him to consider only what it is that we already experience: our conscious memories. He does not speculate about the immateriality of the soul as we cannot experience substance and we cannot know about immortality from experience. Locke believes that the consciousness we have of our experiences, brought into the present by memory, is what gives us identity with our prior selves. Because memories are constantly being made and we remember different things at different times, our identity is a fluid, changeable thing. And at the point we lose our memories, our identity with our past self dies also.

WRITE

1. How is Locke's account of the self similar and different from Descartes' account? Use quotations from each text to support your response.
2. Which account do you find most convincing and why?

Evaluating Locke's Theory

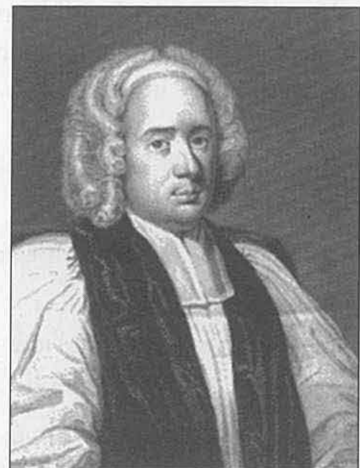
The lines of criticism which follow – and which include several thought experiments – are offered here for their particular relevance to Locke's arguments, but they are also worth returning to later for comparison with other set texts in this Area of Study.

In terms of time constraints you may be feeling acutely at this stage of the course, note that several possible lines of evaluation of Locke will already have arisen from your discussions of the set extract and activities in this Part. You have also already studied at least two thought experiments: the Ship of Theseus (from Part A) and Locke's Prince and the Cobbler (from paragraph 15 of the set extract). This means you may already have covered the Study Design adequately if minimally at this stage, and much of the following material may be returned to later. You may want to consider Butler and Reid's objections as a priority, and then choose any others that appeal.

Joseph Butler's Objections

Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) – English philosopher and theologian – is perhaps best known today for his criticisms of Locke's theory of personal identity. He wrote in 1736:

> *One should really think it self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute personal identity, any more than knowledge... can constitute truth, which it presupposes.*[4]



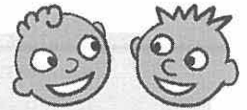
Joseph Butler

Butler suggests that Locke's argument commits the **fallacy of circularity**. Locke says that continuity of memory is a necessary criterion for personal identity. But Butler argues that personal identity is a necessary criterion for having continuity of memory – that is, it is not possible to speak of memories without presupposing a person who has those memories. Therefore the argument is circular.

Imagine you walk past your old kindergarten and suddenly have a distinct memory of playing on the swings. According to Locke, this makes you identical with that child in your memory who played on those swings. But how can you be sure that your memory is a genuine one? Butler says that to remember being that person in the past doing those things, you need to be identical to that person. And you can only remember being that person if you really are the same person in your memory.

4 Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), online at http://anglicanhistory.org/butler/analogy/dissertation1.html (accessed November 20, 2013)

But if the memory depends on the personal identity, it cannot be also the basis for that personal identity.

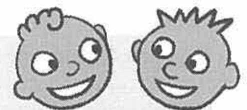


DISCUSS

1. What is Butler's Circularity Objection? Explain it to a partner. Then see if you can write it in your own words, using an example of your own.
2. Can you see any way around Butler's Objection? What reply might Locke give?

As your discussion may have picked up, Butler's argument also highlights a problem with false memories. Locke could protest that personal identity is constituted by real memories only, but what makes a memory genuine and how can I tell if my memory is real or imagined? You can see the problem of circularity clearly here: when I ask myself if my memories of the kindergarten swings really happened to *me*, I have to use a previously laid-down criterion for personal identity that is independent of those memories, or else be trapped in a circular loop which tells me nothing.

Memory may be one demonstration of a person's identity over time, but that does not make it its essence, Butler is saying. A person must be a fixed substance over time; it is absurd, he says, to think that losing memories destroys one's identity. Butler further argues that Locke's argument is a slippery slope which will eventually destroy the concept of personal identity altogether. He also thinks Locke's argument – concluding that there is no fixed identity, just the flux of memories – is a dangerous one in terms of its consequences for moral responsibility.



DISCUSS

1. Is Butler right to reject Locke's notion that personal identity is in flux rather than fixed?
2. Should personal identity be tied to substance – or at least to a property of substance – as Butler suggests?
3. Is it absurd to suppose that personal identity is destroyed when memories are lost? Why or why not?
4. (a) In what ways might a theory in which personal identity is not fixed have undesirable consequences for moral responsibility?

   (b) Do such undesirable consequences undermine a metaphysical theory such as Locke's? Why or why not?

SAVING LOCKE FROM THE FALSE MEMORY PROBLEM: SYDNEY SHOEMAKER AND Q-MEMORY

Philosopher Sydney Shoemaker (1931–) suggested that we can preserve Locke's emphasis on memory without running into circularity if we replace the concept of memory with something he called q-memory. You may wish to carry out your own research into Shoemaker's proposed solution.

Thomas Reid's Objection: The Brave Officer Paradox

Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796) presented the following thought experiment, commonly referred to as the Brave Officer Paradox, in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, 'Essay Three: Of Memory' (1785):

> *Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life; suppose, also, which must be admitted to be possible, that, when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that, when made a general, he was conscious of his taking the standard but had absolutely lost consciousness of the flogging.*[5]

Thomas Reid

Let's unpack this thought experiment. We shall call the person in question 'Oliver': there is Oliver at age 12 (flogged for stealing apples), Oliver at 28 (who captured the enemy's flag and still remembers the flogging he received at 12 for stealing apples) and Oliver at 55 (who is made a general and recalls capturing the enemy's flag but has forgotten his flogging at age 12).

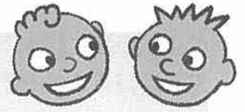
In mathematics classes you may have encountered the logical axiom of transitivity:

If A=B and B=C, then A=C

What are the consequences if we apply this axiom to Reid's Brave Officer thought experiment?

Applying the principles Locke defends – that identity resides in memories – and this axiom to the Brave Officer, we find that the general and the boy who was flogged share personal identity, despite the general having lost all memory of the flogging. Reid concluded that because Locke's theory ignores the transitive axiom and denies identity to the boy and the general, it is a flawed theory.

5 Thomas Reid 1785, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, 'Essay Three: Of Memory', online at http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/reid1785essay3.pdf (accessed November 23, 2013).



DISCUSS

Use an example of your own to explain Reid's objection to a partner. Then in your pair, discuss the extent to which you believe Reid's objection undermines Locke's theory of personal identity. Share your ideas with the class.

SAVING LOCKE'S THEORY FROM THE BRAVE OFFICER: H.P. GRICE

Reid's thought experiment certainly highlights a significant problem with Locke's memory theory. Various thinkers have tried to make amendments to Locke's account in order to preserve some version of it which fixes the problem of transitivity. Memory theorist H.P. Grice (1913-1988) is one such thinker whose solution to the Brave Officer you may wish to research.

MORE OF REID'S OBJECTIONS

Reid's essay offers further comments about the problem of personal identity. Consider the following:

1. Personal identity must be a fixed thing; at least, if it isn't, it's a waste of time even using rational arguments to work it out, as making such arguments presupposes the same rational identity operating from the beginning to the end of the argument.

2. A sufficient explanation of personal identity over time is contained in Locke's definition of a person (that he offers in Book 2, chapter 27, paragraph 9). He needn't have gone any further.

3. In third person cases, we do judge people by their bodies – that is, as substances – so why should be reject substance as a marker of identity in first person cases?

4. Personal identity should be something fixed in order to explain that a person is one thing throughout their lifetime (in the way that Locke allows for in the cases of all other animals). Consciousness – particularly in the sense of memory – changes too much to be the marker of sustained identity over time.

5. Personal identity doesn't admit of degrees – one either is or is not a particular person – whereas there are degrees of remembering (a clear memory, a patchy memory and so on).

DO

1. Divide the class into five groups. To each group, assign one of the objections listed above. It is the task of the group to develop this point into the most convincing argument against Locke that they can mount. They should use original examples to help develop their case.
2. In turn, each of groups 1-5 will present their objection (up to a maximum of three minutes) to the rest of the class, who now sit at the table of Learned Lockeans. The Learned Lockeans will respond to each small group's presentation (for up to three minutes), defending Locke's theory as best they can against the criticism being made. The small group may respond (one minute) and the final word goes to the Learned Lockeans (one minute).
3. When all the groups have completed their debate with the Learned Lockeans, write a reflection which includes your thoughts about:
   - Which was the strongest objection to Locke and why?
   - Which was the weakest objection to Locke and why?
   - Has Locke's theory survived this exercise or is it irreparably damaged in your mind? Why?

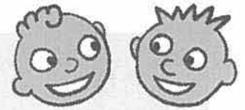
Make sure you record any other arguments, comments or examples from your classmates that may prove useful in future.

Parfit's Teletransportation Problem

More recently, philosopher Derek Parfit (1942-2017) has proposed some objections to Locke not dissimilar to the one proposed by Reid. Consider the following thought experiment.

THE TELETRANSPORTER

You have always wanted to visit another planet, so when the opportunity arises for members of the general public to make quick and easy trips to Mars, you grasp it immediately. However, when you investigate the method of travel, you start to have second thoughts. The teletransporter works by scanning every cell in your body, including your brain. You are then destroyed, while your cellular data is beamed to Mars and you are reconstructed there. Countless others have used the teletransporter and claimed it is safe, efficient and just feels like losing consciousness momentarily (or going to sleep) and then waking up on Mars, complete with all your memories.

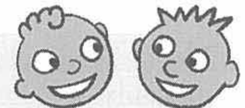


DISCUSS

1. Would you take the teletransporter to Mars?
2. Is taking the teletransporter a form of suicide?
3. Suppose you travel to Mars and then return to Earth by the teletransporter . How many 'yous' will there have been – one or three? Defend your answer.
4. How do you think Locke would respond to questions 1 and 2 and 3, above?
5. What theory of personal identity do you think gives the most accurate account of this scenario? Why?

THE NEW SCANNER

Let's say that you do elect to use the teletransporter and enjoy many trouble-free return trips to Mars, over several years. One day, you arrive at the Centre for Teletransportation, looking forward to your next interplanetary adventure. You pay your money to enter the booth and press the button. But this time things are different. You do not lose consciousness. The attendant explains that a new process is being used, which records a blueprint of your brain and body without then destroying them. She tells you that you now have the option of speaking to yourself on Mars if you would like to. 'But I can't be on Earth and Mars at the same time!' you object. Just then, a white-coated man appears and asks to speak to you in private. He informs you there has been a problem in the scanning process: your heart has been damaged and you will suffer a fatal heart attack within days. However, the you that is now on Mars is undamaged. The attendant calls you to look at a screen and there you are, on Mars and ready for a conversation with yourself.'



DISCUSS

1. Can you be on Earth and Mars at the same time? Why or why not?
2. In the scenario described, is it consoling to know that despite your impending death, there is a replica of you on Mars? Why or why not?
3. What do your answers to these questions reveal about your beliefs on the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity over time?

The New Scanner thought experiment in fact offers three versions of 'you' to consider: (1) the original you, (2) the you that exits the scanner with heart damage, and (3) the you that appears on Mars. Most people would probably want to argue that (2) and (3) cannot be the same person, as not only do they not occupy the same body, they are also now accumulating different, independent experiences and memories.

However, it is uncontroversial to suggest that (1) and (2) are the same person. And if you accept Locke's memory theory of identity, then (3) must also be identical with (1). You can probably see how Parfit's teletransportation problem runs us into the same problem of transitivity as Reid's Brave Officer paradox.

WRITE

1. Outline Parfit's teletransporter and new scanner thought experiments.
2. How well does the 'same body' theory fare in these scenarios?
3. How well does the 'same memory' theory fare in these scenarios?
4. Overall, what can you conclude about the nature of personal identity from consideration of these scenarios?

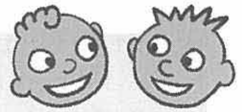
THINK

Thought experiments such as Parfit's Teletransporter describe scenarios which are currently – and indeed may always be – beyond our technological capabilities. Are such scenarios – the stuff of science fiction – still useful for uncovering our views about personal identity?

Parfit's Fission Problem

Many people reconsider their previous scepticism about the 'same body' theory when faced with Parfit's teletransportation scenarios. But Parfit has another challenge for us: cases of fission.

Imagine that you undergo a new type of surgery. Before the surgery, a perfect replica of you is created. Then both you and your replica are sawn in half. Your left half is joined to your replica's right half, and your right half is joined to your replica's left half. Two perfectly functioning persons result from this operation, each with the memories of you before the operation.



DISCUSS

1. Calling these two resulting persons 'Left You' and 'Right You', which one really is you?
2. How might a materialist, 'same body' theorist respond to this scenario? How much of the 'same body' should be required for personal identity to be sustained by this theory?
3. Let's say that Left You contains a bit more of your original body than Right You (for example 51% : 49%). Does this make any difference to your response to this scenario? Would any ratios alter your response?
4. Now consider what would your judgment be if only one resulting 'You' survived the operation – is this 'You'? Is this judgment consistent with your previous responses to this scenario?
5. Suppose you are a dualist who believes that personal identity is carried by an immaterial soul. How might you respond to the fission scenario?

NOTE: This discussion may lead you to consider transplants including brain transplants. This is among topics you will be invited to consider further in Part E of this chapter.

Parfit's own response to this thought experiment is to suggest that personal identity is just a question of finding interesting similarities between persons and that is all. Consider your philosophy class. Would it be the same class if the students in it were to slightly change in each term? How many students would need to change for it to be considered a different class? Parfit would say that the classes are similar in some ways, and different in some ways, and that perhaps the question shouldn't be considered any more deeply than that. But if we relax our sense of the importance of personal identity, what of the implications for moral responsibility?

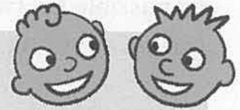
Williams' Mind and Body Swap

There are numerous other thought experiments which further challenge our views on the best determinant of personal identity. Consider the following from British philosopher, Bernard Williams.

CASE 1

Archie and Boris are told that tomorrow at 9am, their mental states are to be read, copied and preserved by a special device. Then, those states will be 'deleted' from their brains, so their brains are ready to receive new data. The new data for Archie's brain will be Boris's mental states, as recorded by the device, and the new data for Boris's brain will be Archie's mental states.

After the switch has occurred, one man will receive $100,000 and the other man will be tortured. The two men are further instructed that they must choose which body is to be given the money and which body is to be tortured.

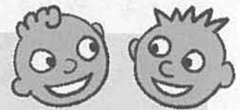


DISCUSS

Suppose you are Archie or Boris. What would you choose?

CASE 2

Suppose that Case 1 never occurred. Instead, Archie is told he will be tortured the next day. However, he has nothing to worry about because after the torture his memory is to be wiped so he will have no recollection of his suffering. In addition, before the torture Archie's mental states will be replaced by the mental states of a stranger called Boris.



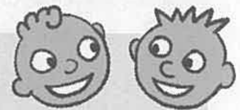
DISCUSS

1. Should Archie be fearful about the promised torture of his body, as described in Case 2?
2. What do your responses to these two cases tell you about your views on psychological continuity, physical continuity and personal identity?

Williams' Guy Fawkes Problem

A man called Charles wakes up one morning, exhibiting some strange behaviour and personality changes. He claims to have done and witnessed things which he previously had never spoken of. When questioned, he says he has no recollection of things which, the day before, he had referred to.

Before long it becomes apparent that all these things Charles claims to have done and witnessed belong to the life of Guy Fawkes, the sixteenth century Catholic activist who plotted to blow up the British Houses of Parliament. All Charles's memories seem to match what historians know of Guy Fawkes' life.

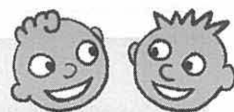


DISCUSS

Has Charles become Guy Fawkes? Or has Guy Fawkes come to life again in Charles's body? Give reasons for your view.

Williams says that Charles is not Guy Fawkes, arguing that physical continuity is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of personal identity. The reason he gives for this is that while it is not logically impossible for two people to claim to remember the same things, it *is* logically impossible for two people to remember being the same person. Also, we cannot establish for certain anything about first person memories.

Imagine this further complication to the thought experiment. The next morning, Charles's brother, Robert, wakes up in the same strange condition, also claiming Guys Fawkes' memories.



DISCUSS

1. Should we say both Charles and Robert are Guy Fawkes? Why or why not?
2. What would Locke's response be to this thought experiment?
3. Williams says it is absurd to imagine that both Charles and Robert are Guy Fawkes, and that he has thereby shown Locke's memory theory of identity to be false. Is Williams right?

Review Questions

WRITE

1. Which of the following do you think Locke includes in his concept of 'consciousness'? Memory, self-awareness, rationality, mental states, thinking, mind, soul, spirit. Justify your responses with close reference to the set extract.
2. How does the 'self' come about, according to Locke?
3. According to Locke, what is the relationship between personal identity and substance? How does he argue for this? Evaluate this argument.
4. What, for Locke, is the relationships between human identity and consciousness?
5. What is Locke's purpose in presenting the analogy of the Prince and the Cobbler? What argument about human identity does he present through this analogy? Do you think this is an effective analogy? Why or why not?
6. Does Locke's Prince and Cobbler example satisfactorily destroy the 'same body' thesis?
7. Is the Prince and Cobbler a different kind of case from the Ship of Theseus? Why or why not?
8. What relationship does Locke think the body has to identity?

9. What is the relationship between soul and identity for Locke?
10. What does Locke believe is the answer to the problem of changing mental states? What do you think about this? Is someone the same person if they are afflicted by mental illness? Should a person be punished for actions they committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Why or why not?
11. The philosopher Antony Flew captures how Locke is generally interpreted: 'X at time two is the same person as Y at time one if and only if X and Y are both persons and X can remember at time two (his doing) what Y did or felt or what have you at time one.' Assuming this interpretation of Locke is correct, what possible problems arise for Locke – that is, what might his theory have difficulty explaining?
12. According to Locke, how do cases of sleep, forgetfulness, amnesia and drunkenness affect personal identity? Do you agree with the accounts he gives of such cases?
13. I can't remember putting on my socks this morning but I am wearing socks now. Does that mean it wasn't me who put on my socks this morning? What would Locke say and why? What do you say and why?
14. Philosopher John Perry (1943 –) argues that memory as a *sufficient* condition for personal identity is plausible: 'If I can remember going to the store yesterday then I really must have gone to the store.' However, he argues that memory as a *necessary* condition is far too strong: 'That I cannot remember going to the store yesterday does not mean that I did not go. Forgetting, even beyond the possibility of recall, is possible.'
    a. See if you can construct Perry's argument in standard form.
    b. Is Perry right? Why or why not?
15. What does Locke mean when he says that 'person' is a 'forensic term'?

RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Refer to Part E of this chapter for relevant contemporary debates that link to Locke's text.

PART C

David Hume: from *A Treatise of Human Nature*

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

DO

Close your eyes wherever you are and try to do this one thing: *identify yourself.* Try to catch the essence of *you.* Where is the 'I'? Can you capture it in your consciousness? Turn your mind inwards and find your true self. Take whatever time you need...

You certainly exist, so where are you? What is the essence of you? On the one hand, these sound as though they should be simple questions, and yet they can seem among the most puzzling in the world. Can you capture your own thoughts? Yet thoughts are thoughts, and what we are looking to find is the *you* that has those thoughts and is aware of them. You are having an experience of reading this book, but where is the you that is doing that? Beyond your physical presence, what can you say about the self that has awareness of letters, words and meaning from this page? Or is the problem really that a self cannot look in on itself? Perhaps the self is a point of view which cannot escape its own perspective. It is thus describable only in reference to what it experiences.

These are the kinds of ideas which led David Hume to a startling conclusion in his *Treatise on Human Nature:* that there is no self we can be certain of, and therefore no such thing as personal identity over time.

Historical and Philosophical Context

Hume's controversial response to the problem of personal identity came fifty years after John Locke published his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Scotsman Hume was another leading Enlightenment thinker who built upon the **empiricism** of Locke and of Irish philosopher George Berkeley.

Hume rejected the views of rationalists such as Descartes, arguing that all our knowledge must come from sensory experience and we should distrust everything else. His arguments led to some sceptical conclusions and to controversy. His questioning of God caused a public scandal but would have cost him his life a century earlier.

At age 27 Hume published *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1738), in which he tried to get rid of false metaphysical assumptions and to found a science based on accurate, fundamental principles of human psychology. The legacy of this work is still recognised in cognitive science today.

The full title of the *Treatise* is *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.* It contains three books, each of which is divided into several Parts and then further into Chapters. Book 1 'Of the Understanding' deals with human cognition, Book 2 'Of the Passions' with emotions and free will, and Book 3 'Of Morals' with justice, responsibility, obligations and kindness.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

David Hume (1711-1776)

Scottish thinker David Hume (1711-1776), the most influential of all philosophers to ever write in English, is the hero of empiricists and sceptics alike. The impact of his ideas has been enormous, notably in the work of his friend, economist Adam Smith, philosopher Immanuel Kant and naturalist Charles Darwin. Many of the major philosophical problems he posed are still regarded as unsolved, notably the problem of induction. He also continues to be admired for the clarity of his writing style.

Born near Edinburgh, Scotland, Hume showed exceptional talent at an early age. He was just two when his father died and his mother dedicated herself to educating her children. When his older brother went to university, it was decided that 12 year-old David should go too, as he was already widely read in history, literature, philosophy and classics, and precocious in mathematics as well.

Hume was just 23 when he began his masterpiece, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* after a period spent living in France. He removed some controversial sections which suggested an atheistic viewpoint to get the book published four years later, but was disappointed by poor sales. It was Hume's *History of England* which instead became a bestseller, and he became well-known as an economist and essayist as well as a historian.

The focus of Hume's formidable intellect was always on philosophical matters, yet he was repeatedly denied an academic post due to his reputation as an iconoclast. Consequently, Hume held a variety of positions, including as a librarian and diplomatic secretary. He continued to write philosophy: a rewriting of the earlier *Treatise* was combined with several essays to become the volume today titled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), followed by *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). However, Hume's fame as a philosopher came after his death, with the publication of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* which questioned all the standard arguments for the existence of God.

After a period in Paris, where he kept company with leading intellectuals of the day, Hume settled back in Edinburgh, enjoying billiards, drinking and conversation with a wide circle of mostly younger friends. When in his fifties, he fell in love with Nancy Orde, an intellectually brilliant and fun-loving woman in her twenties, and the two were reputedly lovers for many years. Hume died of intestinal cancer, aged 65.

Hume's Scepticism

DO

1. Read through the following and give the first response that comes to you.
    a. A cricket ball lies a small distance in front of a smashed window. What has happened?
    b. You are out shopping and happen to see your friend, Tanya, entering a shop some distance away, wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. Twenty minutes later, you see from behind a young woman wearing jeans and a white T-shirt, and with Tanya's hairstyle. Is it Tanya?
    c. 2, 4, 6, 8, ... What is the next number in this series?
    d. The sun has always risen in the east. Where will it rise tomorrow?
    e. Tasha is a giraffe. What colour is Tasha?
2. Compare answers with your classmates. Then consider the following questions:
    a. Are any of the answers you gave above *necessarily* the case? Why or why not?
    b. What do your answers suggest about how our minds habitually operate?

Among the claims that Hume is best known for is that our minds have a tendency to link together certain ideas. We form associations and relationships in our minds and become very attached to them as ways of making sense of the world. However, Hume famously calls these associations into doubt, pointing out that most of the beliefs we hold about our world are probabilities at best. As you will remember from your studies of Descartes, this position – of distrusting conclusions others accept or take for granted – is called **scepticism.** Hume was sceptical about logical **induction** (he said there is nothing in the universe which necessarily compels the future to resemble the past), **causation** (we posit causal relationships between events, with insufficient basis for doing so, he argues) and other relations, including identity.

DO

1. Write down the first ideas that come to mind to make a list of *five things you have been certain of today.*
2. Are any of these necessary truths, which could not conceivably be otherwise?
3. Of those things which are *not* necessarily true, what processes in your mind have convinced you that they are the case?
4. What would it do to your attitudes to the world if you were to call these things into doubt?

Hume's Empirical Approach in the Treatise

For Hume, the only knowledge we can rely on in philosophy is empirical knowledge, and, for him, this is derived from *impression-based ideas.*

A central idea in Hume's philosophy is that there are two types of perceptions: **impressions** and **ideas.** Impressions are perceptions derived from sensory experience. For example, as you read this you have an impression of the book in front of you. You are also aware of the sounds around you, the feel of the pages under your fingers and so on. For Hume, these are the strongest and most vivid of our experiences.

Ideas – or what we would commonly call thoughts – are the result of our reflection upon impressions, according to Hume. For example, I have an idea of pain, which is derived from my impressions of its immediate sensation. Hume says we develop ideas either directly from impressions or by combining ideas. So while I have never seen a unicorn, I can have an idea of one by combining my ideas of a horse and of a horn, each of which is derived from my sensory impressions. In Hume's account, ideas are mere shadows of impressions.

Having outlined the origins of our ideas, Hume then proceeds to show how they are connected. As described in the section above, Hume believes we make associations between certain kinds of ideas, which are not logically justified. He identifies causation, resemblance and contiguity as the major culprits here, with causation being the main offender. Hume famously challenges our tendency to posit cause and effect relationships between present and past impressions.

In the section of the *Treatise* before he deals with personal identity, Hume has denied the existence of the soul as a substance. If a substance is something which exists by itself, argues Hume, then each one of our perceptions might be considered a substance, as each of our perceptions is distinctive. From this Hume concludes that it is not necessary to posit any mental substance that supports the perceptions, because they can quite easily stand alone.

WRITE

Explain the central concept in Hume's empiricism: the distinction between two kinds of perceptions – impressions and ideas.

Studying Hume on Personal Identity

We will be examining two extracts from Book 1, Part IV, Chapter 6 of Hume's *Treatise:*

Extract 1	Paragraphs 1-8	An outline of the problem The bundle theory of self Why we believe in the identity of thing even though they change
Extract 2	Paragraphs 15-23	Why we believe in the identity and simplicity of the self

READ

Read through the set extracts, numbering the paragraphs and marking the sections described above.

Make notes in the margins whenever you notice:

- a conclusion being drawn,
- reasons offered to support a conclusion,
- an example given.

Take note of any questions that arise during your reading.

Extract 1

NO CERTAIN SELF

Hume begins our first extract from 'Of Personal Identity' in his *Treatise*, with a characterisation of what was then, as now, the prevailing view of the self in the Western world. This is the view of Descartes and Locke, positing a single, enduring self at the centre of all our experiences.

But Hume immediately rejects this view of the self, claiming that it is directly contrary to experience. If there is such a self that we can pinpoint, says Hume, it must be a single, changeless *impression*, lying behind all other experiences. But there is no one impression like this:

> *Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never exist all at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is derived, and consequently there is no such idea.* (paragraph 2)

In other words, because the 'self' must be a constant, stable thing, and yet all our knowledge comes from changing, shifting impressions, it follows that we cannot have knowledge of a 'self'. Therefore, there is no self, or at least it is not something we can be certain of.

WRITE

Hume presents a clear, logically valid, central argument here. Reconstruct this argument in standard form and share your rendering with your classmates.

KEY CONCEPTS: *PERCEPTIONS*

Perceptions, for Hume, are all that is present to us, whether we are sensing, thinking or feeling.

Hume separates perceptions into **impressions** and **ideas**. Impressions are direct sensory experiences and are thus vivid and powerful. Ideas are our reflections upon these impressions and are thus fainter.

THE BUNDLE THEORY OF SELF

But if there is no one self to unite all our experiences, perceptions and impressions, then how are they connected to us? Hume describes an experience which might sound familiar if you tried the Introductory Activity which opens this Part. He says that whenever he tries to look into his own consciousness, he finds there is always a perception of some kind going on – whether a sensory impression, a thought or an emotion – but he cannot catch himself without a perception. A fixed, continuing self behind those perceptions remains elusive, as we are never without perceptions. He claims, too, that when we lack self-awareness during stages of deep sleep, we should at these times be said not to exist, just as if we lose perceptions after our death, we should be considered to also lose existence.

Hence Hume ventures to conclude that the human self is *'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.'* (paragraph 4)

WRITE

Write in standard form Hume's argument to the conclusion that the self is a bundle of perceptions.

THINK

'The self is just a bundle of perceptions, like bricks in a wall. To look for a self beyond the perceptions is like looking for a wall beyond the bricks that constitute it.' Is this a good analogy for the view Hume is expressing? Why or why not?

WHY DO WE POSIT IDENTITY IN CHANGING THINGS?

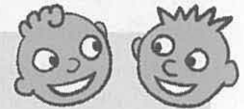
Next, Hume tries to explain why we might feel the need to posit a fixed, enduring, uninterrupted identity in the things we observe in the world, despite the fact that they are clearly changing.

There are non-living entities which will, indeed, exhibit no changes detectable to our senses, and these can be considered the same over time. Place your pen on a table and stare at it for ten minutes. During the ten minutes, nothing happens to the pen: nothing is taken from or added to it, and it does not move. Hume allows us to consider this a case of strict identity.

However, Hume suggests we have a natural tendency to assume sameness in entities, even though we know them to be changing all the time. We run together the notion of an object that remains that same over a period of time, with different, interrupted but related objects which succeed each other. *'Thus we feign the continued existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption: and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation.'* (paragraph 5)

So there is not only a linguistic problem of us using the wrong words to describe reality. It is also a problem in the way we *imagine reality.* Hume says we attribute identity when in fact there is just a succession of different and changing, though related, things. Hume's strict view is that when anything is added to or subtracted from an entity, it becomes a new entity.

Regarding the bodies of plants and animals, Hume acknowledges that all cells of living things are united in a single goal. However, Hume's view is that given change is constant in living things, their bodies should be regarded as different entities with every change. For example, it is clear that the trees outside your window are changing all the time. They now look nothing at all like the seeds or the saplings that they once were. So there is no strict identity between a tree at Time 1 and the tree at Time 2; there is only a *relation of parts.* Because we perceive a tree's continuity in space and time, we tend to ascribe identity to it. However, Hume argues that we *falsely imagine* identity, while *perceiving* only relation.



DISCUSS

Explain to a partner Hume's account of our false attributions of identity to things in the world, using the following prompts:

1. Use your own example of a living thing to outline Hume's account of why we tend to call them the same cat, dog, fish and so on.
2. According to Hume, are we able to say we have physically the same body from one minute to the next? Why or why not?

Extract 2

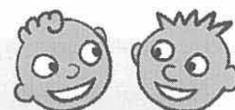
WHY DO WE ASSUME IDENTITY AND SIMPLICITY OF THE MIND?

Hume's next task is to explain why it is that we ascribe identity to the shifting perceptions – that is, the bundles – that constitute the mind or self. Why do we call the human self the *same* thing over time? He also wants to answer why we ascribe *simplicity* to this thing – that is, why do we think there is one *single* mind or self continuing through time rather than many, even though our experience is one of multitude and flux. It is clear to Hume that there is no *impression* in our experience that indicates either identity or simplicity of self.

Hume has already given an account of how our minds erroneously infer identity over time in objects, plants and animals. He says the same thing happens with respect to our minds. Our perceptions are distinct experiences, but when we reflect upon them we give them 'union in the imagination' to produce 'fictitious' notions of identity. He says this union occurs along lines of *relation* – the 'uniting principles in the ideal world' (meaning the arena of ideas that reflect on our impressions). Hume has previously discussed these three forms of relation: resemblance, causality and contiguity. He rejects contiguity as not relevant in this case, but says that by principles of **resemblance** and **causation,** the mind is able to link perceptions and create easy transitions among impressions and ideas. These smooth transitions give us the illusion of oneness and continuity.

Resemblance and causation

Hume suggests that in our imaginations we readily find relations of resemblance between past perceptions and the ideas we form of them, due to **memory**. He defines memory as 'a faculty by which we raise up images of past perceptions'. So, on Hume's model, consciousness consists of a succession of distinct perceptions, many of which are past copies of current perceptions. This ability of memory to constantly produce copies, then inserted into the train of thought, is why we find continual resemblances in this train. And we have already read Hume's account of what the imagination does with resemblance: it falsely attributes sameness. We thereby assume the whole system to be one continuous object and call it the self. So memory creates the resemblance to which we impute sameness, which gives rise to assumptions of personal identity.



DISCUSS

Explain to a partner Hume's account of how the principle of resemblance, in company with the faculty of memory, creates the illusion of personal identity.

Then write down the clearest outline you can.

Turning next to the principle of causation, Hume draws on what he has already shown in a previous section of the *Treatise:* we tend to infer a cause-effect relationship between two things that are constantly conjoined. So, because a cricket ball moves after being struck with a bat, we assume that the bat *caused* the ball to move, even though there is, strictly speaking, nothing to confirm a necessary causal relationship within our observations.

Now Hume adds that our constant inferences of causality among our perceptions – our imagining that objects cause responses by our senses, and our imagining that prior impressions affect future impressions – lead us to infer identity. Our perceptions are constantly creating and replacing one another, he says: 'one thought chases another, and draws after it a third, by which it is expelled in its turn'. Because we imagine constant causal relations linking actually distinct perceptions, a misleading sense of a smooth and coherent train of ideas arises. And thus we impute personal identity.

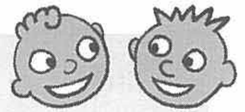
DO

1. Produce a visual representation (a drawing, diagram or model) of Hume's account of consciousness. You may wish to collaborate with classmates. Attempt to show the following:
   - Perceptions occur in clusters and bundles.
   - Each perception is entirely distinct and discrete from the next.
   - The illusion of oneness and sameness in this system occurs because we imagine relations/associations between perceptions.
   - One kind of relation is resemblance, arising from the memory's creation of copies of perceptions.
   - Another kind of relation is causation, whereby we imagine cause-and-effect links between perceptions.
2. Explain your representation to the class. Which model do you think best demonstrates Hume's account of consciousness?
3. Now discuss as a class:
   a. Is this model of consciousness a plausible one? Why or why not?
   b. Is Hume's explanation for why we have the illusions of oneness and sameness among perceptions – and therefore the illusion of personal identity – plausible? Why or why not?

Analogy of the Republic

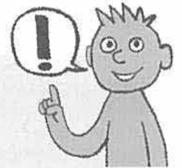
Hume next compares consciousness with a republic or commonwealth, which would seem to have a particular identity over time. On this analogy, the members of the republic are the different perceptions and the government is the relational principle of causation, seeming to link the members and create a coherent whole. The members are separate and constantly changing, as well as constantly producing new members – just like perceptions, Hume would argue.

Perhaps Hume's point here is easier to grasp if you consider another body of people with which you are familiar. For example, does your school have a particular identity? Is this something that is separate from the individuals who make up the school? Hume would argue that it is not, and that this is a fitting analogy for our bundles of perceptions.



DISCUSS

1. Outline to a partner Hume's analogy of the commonwealth. What is it intended to demonstrate?
2. How effective is this analogy in explaining Hume's view of the self? (Note: this is different from asking whether you agree with Hume's account of the self!)
3. Now, with reference to this analogy, how plausible do you find Hume's account of the self?



TIP

To evaluate an analogy, you need to think of all the characteristics of the two things being compared. Firstly consider all the features which are the same, and which the analogy's creator wishes you to associate. Secondly, consider all the features which are *not* shared by the two subjects of the comparison. Then you need to decide whether the resemblance is strong enough for the analogy to be effective. Your evaluation might point out the things which are the same or similar, but also highlight one or more points of difference where the analogy starts to break down.

Memory

Hume further defines the role of memory in his model of consciousness, writing that 'a memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions'. In other words, memory is the primary thread linking perceptions to one another. Not only is memory responsible for the resemblances we find between perceptions, it is also responsible for our notion of causation – for if we did not remember prior perceptions, we could not suppose them to affect present perceptions.

Hume observes that on this account, memory should be considered the chief source of the identity of persons. Why should we not at this point, then, accept Locke's view of memory as constituting personal identity? Because Locke supposes a fixed self in which memory is seated. He confused the *means of inferring* identity with identity itself. The tool by which we discover identity cannot *be* identity, Hume argues.

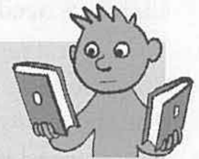
For Hume, 'memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity': that is, the faculty of memory just contributes perceptions which make our false ideas of continuity seem plausible. Also we remember the merest fraction of our pasts. What proportion of your detailed experiences yesterday do you remember now? What about Wednesday last week? Or the 17th May last year? Hume says those who affirm that memory produces identity – and he has Locke in mind here – must explain how we can extend our identity beyond our memory.

So for Hume, memory is a necessary condition of us *seeming to have* a fixed personal identity through time, as without memory we would observe no continuity among our perceptions. But it is not a sufficient condition. Memory highlights to us the relations of causality and resemblance. Therefore memory *combined* with causation and resemblance are jointly sufficient for the *illusion* of personal identity.

KEY CONCEPTS: *MEMORY, RESEMBLANCE, AND CAUSATION*

WRITE

1. Explain Hume's understanding of the three concepts above.
2. How are these concepts important in Hume's account of personal identity as illusion?



COMPARE

How do Hume and Locke differ in their accounts of the role of memory in personal identity? Whose account do you find most convincing and why?

Rejection of the soul

Hume thinks we are so determined to find sameness in successive but different things, we have attempted to give persons identity via an immaterial soul – something that, by definition, we cannot observe or experience. Hume finds this traditional notion of the immaterial soul – tightly held in Western philosophy since the Greeks and then upheld powerfully by Descartes – to be absurd and in defiance of logic, but he sees it as nonetheless understandable given the imagination's natural tendency to invent connecting principles between related things.

Thinking Back Over Hume's Arguments

How is my future linked to my past, according to Hume?

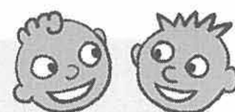
THINK

If you are not the same person as the one who will sit VCE exams in November (by Hume's account), why should you bother studying now? What would Hume's response be to this question?

Even if we grant Hume that identity is a bundle of perceptions, it seems pretty obvious that you are a different bundle compared with your classmates' bundles. There must be some degree of identity which makes your studying for your exams a coherent idea, and an idea distinct from you studying for your friend's exams. Hume's account will not seem satisfactory if you assume that your November self is different from your May self, and from that claim conclude that you therefore needn't study at all.

We need to remind ourselves that Hume is not denying any relation at all between our perceptions. The succession of perceptions you experience is different from the successions of perceptions experienced by each of your classmates. And the you which will sit exams in November is not entirely removed from the you in May, because there are links of succession between the bundle of perceptions that is you in May, and the bundle that is you in November. Hume says we claim far too much for the relationship that exists between these bundles when we use terms such as 'I' and 'you' and imply fixed personal identity through time, but he does not deny that linking threads run between bundles of perceptions through time. Thus personal identity for Hume is a relation between one bundle and the next, and the linking thread is memory.

But what about when we forget things? If the link between bundles of perceptions is memory, won't memory failure destroy the self? Hume is talking about links that occur from one second to the next, so you could be extremely forgetful – even an Alzheimer's sufferer – and still have some link between one bundle of perceptions and the next.

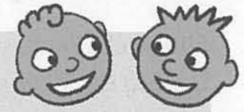


DISCUSS

Return to your responses to the question above (in the 'Think' box).

1. Outline Hume's response in your own words in your notes.
2. Now, in discussion with a partner, evaluate Hume's response.
3. Share highlights of your discussion with the whole class.
4. Write down any useful points or arguments.

Hume and the Self



DISCUSS

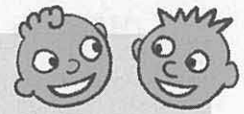
Does Hume think there is no self?

Discuss as a class.

Sometimes Hume's scepticism about the self leads him to be described as a 'no-self' theorist. However, this is not really correct. Certainly he denies that we can observe any fixed, unchanging substance lying beyond our perceptions. He does not believe we have enough experiential basis for a belief in a personal identity that persists over time.

Therefore, in the Cartesian sense, Hume is a 'no-self' theorist. But don't forget that Hume describes the self as existing in bundles of perceptions. And through memory, we discover identity in resemblance and causation among those perceptions.

We may even go so far as to interpret Hume as suggesting that there may indeed be an 'experiencer' of these bundles of perceptions. Perhaps he is ultimately agnostic on this point. It is just that, on Hume's view, we have no knowledge of the nature of this subject of experience. And for Hume, what cannot be experienced cannot be granted.



DISCUSS

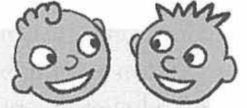
1. Work in a small group to decide what you think is the most accurate description of Hume's view of:
   - Whether there is a self constituted by our perceptions.
   - Whether there is a self behind our perceptions – that is, who does the perceiving?
   - Whether there is an identity that persists through time.

   Use the text closely to support your views.
2. Share your group's views with the class. Discuss any differences among groups' ideas.
3. Finally, make your own notes on what you believe to be the most accurate reading of Hume.

Moral Implications For Hume's View

Hume challenges us to support the traditional view of the self with actual observations and it is hard to deny the difficulty he points out, of 'capturing' oneself in an observation.

However, there are some serious implications of abandoning the traditional view of an enduring self. From a pragmatic point of view, it is hard to see how we can do without assumptions of enduring personal identity. Even if the self is only an illusion, it forms the basis of notions of moral responsibility.

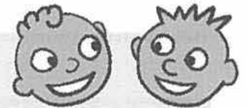


DISCUSS

What are the consequences for moral responsibility of Hume's view of personal identity?

If Hume's account of personal identity has objectionable moral consequences, is that a good reason to reject it?

Evaluating Hume on Personal Identity



DISCUSS

For this activity, divide the class into three teams. Each team will spend a designated period – perhaps up to 20 minutes – working on a making as strong a case as they can for the objection (1, 2, 3 or 4) assigned to them. Each team will then present their objection to the class.

Following each presentation, the rest of the class should try to defend Hume's thesis against the objection, with the presenting team doing their best to sustain their objection.

When discussion of the objections has been exhausted, don't forget to make notes and record any useful ideas.

1. Hume insists we are mistaken – or at very least that we lack necessary evidence – when we suppose things that change to be the same. But are we really mistaken? Examine the argument Hume presents to support his view. The job of your team is to convince the class that it is Hume who is mistaken here, not our traditional, intuitive view.
2. Hume argues for a 'bundle theory' of the self, yet this self for Hume has no subject – that is, there is no owner of the bundles.
   Is this view of Hume's a coherent one? The job of your team is to convince the class that, contrary to Hume's view, these bundles of perceptions must be owned by a unified consciousness and, indeed, they presuppose an enduring 'experiencer'.

3. Hume argues that our thoughts resemble and cause one another, with smooth transitions between various kinds of perception. But do they really? Or do our thoughts – at least sometimes – leap about? And do we have some thoughts simultaneously with other thoughts?
   The job of your team is to convince the class that Hume's description of one thought seeming to resemble or cause the next thought, is not an accurate account of consciousness. (Perhaps you could draw a contradictory train of thought in pictures to show this.) Try to make your case strong enough to undermine Hume's answer to the question of why we are mistaken in believing our mind to be a single unified identity.
4. Hume's empiricism commits him to admit something exists only if it can be perceived by the senses. But just because we do not perceive the 'self' during our perceiving does not mean there is no such thing as self.
   The job of your team is to convince the class that Hume's empirical arguments should not convince us there is no self.

HUME'S OWN OBJECTION

It should be noted that Hume himself, in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, confessed to having made mistakes in his theory of personal identity. However, he did not articulate what these mistakes were, and there is little consensus among scholars about what they are likely to have been. So regarding Hume's objections to himself, you will have to make your own speculations.

COMPARE

1. Which of the two theories of personal identity studied so far – Locke's memory theory or Hume's illusion theory – do you think is stronger? Give detailed reasons.
2. How do Locke and Hume differ in their accounts of memory?
3. The Cartesian would respond to Hume that there is no way we could make sense of a flux of perceptions without an underlying soul to *experience* these perceptions. Which view of the soul and self – that of Descartes or Hume – do you think is most convincing?

SOME CONTEMPORARY SUPPORT FOR HUME

It is interesting to note some emerging scientific backing for the view that a fixed self is illusory. For example, in *The Self Illusion*, cognitive scientist Bruce Hood explains how the self emerges during childhood and how the developing brain enables us to become inter-dependent social animals. Hood argues that humans spend a long time in childhood compared with other species, because they learn to construct themselves for different purposes and different roles. As adults we continue this process, bringing into play different selves for different situations, making use of very different neural processes in each role, and constantly changing our responses depending on those around us. The self is a constantly changing and evolving phenomenon, Hood argues, as our daily lives require constantly different forms of interaction and response from us. Hood says this process is becoming even more fluid as social media activities increase and see us drawing on simultaneously different and shifting social roles. On this view, supported by neural imaging, the self is a constantly shifting and transforming thing, never characterised by one particular state or another. This is an interesting dimension of the personal identity debate that you may like to research further.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. Explain what Hume means in the following quotations and their significance to his view about personal identity.
   a. 'When I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some particular perception or other....and never can observe anything but the perception.' (*Treatise*, 1.4.6. paragraph 3).
   b. 'My hopes vanish when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions.....all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.' (*Treatise*, Appendix, paragraphs 20-21).
2. What does Hume mean when he says that human beings are a 'bundle...of different perceptions'?
3. Why is Hume's theory often called illusion theory?
4. a. Hume says we are intent on mistakenly ascribing an identity to ourselves throughout our lives. There are two parts to his answer about why we do this. Explain each.
   b. How convincing do you find this account?
5. We seem to observe unity among our perceptions. Why does Hume think we do this? Do we really observe unity or is the unity a projection of imagination? What does Hume think and what do you think?

6. According to Hume, how does memory trick us into seeing unified personal identity?
7. How is our mistaken supposition of causality responsible for our false notions of personal identity?
8. How does Hume's analogy between a person and a republic demonstrate his view of personal identity?
9. How does Hume respond to Locke's memory theory of personal identity? Be specific.
10. 'Our beliefs about identity are determined by the workings of our minds rather than by the nature of objects.' Would Hume agree or disagree with this claim? Explain your answer.

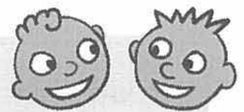
RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Refer to Part E of this chapter to make links between Hume's paper and relevant contemporary debates.

PART D

Meredith W. Michaels: 'On Personal Identity'

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES



DISCUSS

Consider the following questions with a partner. Then see what broad conclusions you can draw, to share with the whole class.

1. Are you the hairs on your head?
2. Are you your skin and your bones?
3. Are you your heart?
4. Are you your feelings?
5. Are you your thoughts?
6. Are you your consciousness?
7. Are you your brain?
8. Are you a combination of body, feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness?
9. Are you something outside all the things above?
10. What are the features essential to being the person you are and which distinguish you from other people?
11. If you were to swap brains with your partner, who would be whom?
12. If you think you are "you", does that mean you are right?
13. How do you know your memories are your own?
14. If you know how to ride a bike, is it your brain that knows this, or your body?
15. Do you worry about your body getting old? Why or why not?

Historical and Philosophical Context

As we have seen, Hume suggests personal identity through time may be only a "fiction" - a cultural illusion that we perpetuate through our language and customs. After all, this notion we have of an enduring, discoverable self is not supported by any observation we might make. Looking deeply into ourselves, we find "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."

In contrast, it is in this very capacity to be a "thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection" and *is capable* of considering "itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places", that Locke says we find personal identity. For Locke, "continuity of consciousness through memory" constitutes personal identity through time. In holding this view, Locke sustains Descartes' argument that the ever-changing, material body cannot be the thing that identifies us through time. Rather, our identity lies in the immaterial realm - for Descartes, the soul, and for Locke, the mind and its memories.

These three great thinkers of the Enlightenment offered what have come to be seen as the definitive arguments of personal identity in the Western tradition. And in the centuries since, the problem of personal identity has continued to attract the brightest minds in philosophy. Derek Parfit (a contemporary philosopher best known for his work on personal identity) here describes its rational and moral significance:

> *"It is the fact of identity which is thought to give us our reason for concern about our own future. And several moral principles, such as those of desert or distributive justice, presuppose personal identity. The separateness of persons, or the non-identity of different people, has been called 'the basic fact for morals'...*
>
> *Many people would (say that) what gives us a reason to care about our future is, precisely, that it will be our future. Personal identity is what matters in survival."*

from Parfit, D. 2011,'The Unimportance of Identity', in Gallagher, S. (ed.)
THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE SELF, OUP, Oxford, p.304.

Philosophical theories of personal identity fall into roughly three camps. Descartes and Locke represent the aligned viewpoints of, respectively, the **soul theory** and the **mind/memory theory.** Hume's sceptical view is often termed the **illusion theory.** There is another, third category of theories that explains personal identity in terms of continuity of our **bodies** or our **brains**. It is to this latter theory that Meredith Michaels' paper speaks. While she does not go so far as to claim that the body is the only determining feature for personal identity, she makes a strong case for it to at least not be dismissed entirely.

It can be added that Western thinking has a long history of devaluing the body. Going back to the ancient Greeks, Plato in particular presented several arguments for why the physical should be considered inferior to the mental. This belief was carried through Christianity, with the body and its needs and desires condemned as sinful or as the devil's domain. Since Descartes, the notion of the mind's superiority over the body has been even further embedded in our thinking. So Michaels' suggestion that the body might make some contribution to personal identity goes against the grain of Western tradition.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Meredith Wilson Michaels (1950-)

American writer and philosopher, Meredith Michaels, teaches philosophy at Smith College, Massachusetts. She completed her doctoral thesis, entitled 'The Persisting Problem of the Ship of Theseus', in 1980 and has since published further on the problem of personal identity. More recently, Michaels' main interests have been in feminist philosophy, social expectations of women, and the ethics and epistemology of reproduction. She advocates for the rights of women to exercise control over their reproductive lives and has written openly about the abortion she had at the age of 15. She has five children with her husband, the philosopher Lee Bowie.

Studying Meredith Michaels' 'On Personal Identity'

According to Michaels, the traditional answers to the philosophical problem of personal identity (that is, those from Descartes, Locke and Hume), raise as many questions as they answer.

THINK

What are some of the main weaknesses of Locke and Hume's accounts of personal identity, that Michaels may have in mind? Write these down. Refer back to them after reading the Michaels' passage. To what extent does Michaels' discussion respond to these weaknesses?

READ

Read Michaels' paper.

Note its structure, key examples used, problems identified with other theories, and identify the position Michaels takes on the issue of personal identity.

Part 1: Who is Schwanda?

THE SCHWANDA SCENARIO

READ

Read Section 1: Paragraphs 2-5. That is, from "One night…" to "That is, Schwanda is self-identical to you."

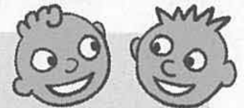
WRITE

Write an outline of the Wanda/Schwanda scenario. What do you think Michaels is trying to show by it?

Through Locke's example of the prince and the cobbler, we have already encountered a thought experiment where one consciousness is swapped for another. In Michaels' Wanda scenario, it is a brain that is transferred. In common with many thought experiments, you may find Michaels' examples to be fanciful. However, the point is not whether Michaels believes that a brain transplant as described might ever be possible; the point is that as we think through her carefully developed scenario, we may come to some realisations about the plausibility of certain positions on personal identity. In particular, Michaels exposes for critique Locke's position that identity consists entirely in memories of a self.

In essence, Michaels asks us to consider that you and your friend receive severe injuries simultaneously. Your friend's body is crushed by a steamroller but his/her brain remains intact. On witnessing this, you suffer a stroke, which destroys your brain function. Luckily, neurosurgeon Dr Hagendaas is on hand to perform emergency surgery: he places your friend's unharmed brain in your unharmed body. The successful surgery results in a fully functional person on the hospital bed. But is it you, your friend, or someone else altogether? From this metaphysical question, there follow ethical and legal questions of responsibility: for example, whose parents should pay college tuition fees – yours, your friend's, both or neither's?

Note that Michaels leaves it open for us to determine the gender of "you" and your friend, who could be either Wanda or Walter (and the person on the hospital bed either Schwanda or Schwalter). Michaels is giving us the opportunity to consider gender as an interesting dimension in our deliberations, or to exclude it as an unnecessary distraction if we prefer.



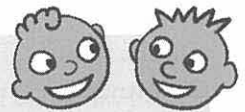
DISCUSS

So, who is Schwanda? (A) You; (B) your friend, Wanda; or (C) neither A nor B?

1. What is your intuitive response to this question, prior to further thought and discussion? Take a class vote on this.
2. Divide into three groups. Each group is responsible for developing an argument to support one of A, B or C. What are the presuppositions, or principles of identity, that underpin each conclusion?
3. Each group should present their cases to the class, exposing all assumptions that might underpin the view being explored.
4. Is your view now the same as it was originally? Take another class vote. Do any interesting insights arise from this exercise?

TIP: "FENCE-SITTING" IN PHILOSOPHY

Note that in this exercise, to argue for option C is not fence-sitting, if fence-sitting is understood to be "passing" or refusing to take a position. In philosophy, fence-sitting in this sense is not an option! However, it is perfectly acceptable to adopt a neutral, undecided or agnostic position, as long as it is defended with as much rigour as any other position might be. For example, you should be able to explain why all the options on the table are implausible to you if this is the case. Or perhaps you wish to point out that there are balancing merits – which you are able to fully explicate – on both sides, and that it is therefore not clear to you that one position trumps the other. Or perhaps you wish to argue that you have insufficient information on which to base a firm conclusion, and to suggest what further information might make a conclusion reachable.



DISCUSS

Who should pay for Schwanda's tuition: (A) your parents? (B) Wanda's parents? (C) neither your nor Wanda's parents? (D) both sets of parents?

1. To what extent does each position on this question need to follow the positions (A), (B) and (C) explored above (in the DISCUSS activity on p.175)? Which combinations are logically plausible and which not?
2. Which position do you take on this question? Defend it in a class discussion.
3. What implications does your position on this question have for your views about personal identity and moral responsibility?

WRITE

Who is Schwanda and who should pay for her college tuition? Write a reflection on this, drawing out the implications of your view for the problem of personal identity.

SCHWANDA AS A TEST OF LOCKE'S MEMORY THEORY

As your class discussions have no doubt brought to light, the Schwanda thought experiment raises the issue of memory and its importance to personal identity. Your friend Wanda, whose brain wakes up to find itself connected to your body, may well believe she is Wanda. Nevertheless, the fact that Schwanda believes she is Wanda does not guarantee that she *is* Wanda. The outside world will most likely regard her now as someone other than Wanda – perhaps as *you*, because she looks like you. Or perhaps she will be too different from you to be regarded as you, and too different from Wanda to be regarded as Wanda. But if Schwanda has Wanda's memories, is this a sufficient reason to regard Schwanda as Wanda?

THINK

- Does my belief that I am me, with memories of being me, guarantee that I am me? Why or why not?
- Does my belief that I am Donald Trump, with memories of being Donald Trump, guarantee that I am Donald Trump? Why or why not?

Michaels' Schwanda experiment exposes problems with the memory theory of personal identity. Tying personal identity to first person experience makes it vulnerable to self-delusion and deception. Crucially, the **Lockean Circle** (an objection famously made by Joseph Butler, discussed on page 143-144 of this book), is highlighted in the Schwanda case. Is Locke's memory theory guilty of putting the cart before the horse, as it were? Using the concept of memory to establish self-identity, and then using the concept of self-identity to explain memory, would seem a logically flawed way to build a theory. Linking to Michaels' example, when Schwanda says, "I remember walking to the College Haven with my friend," we are tempted to presuppose, rather than establish, that this Wanda is self-identical with pre-steamroller Wanda.

Let's explain this another way. The circularity criticism of Locke's theory says that memory fails as the criterion for personal identity because it presupposes the existence of personal identity. Locke claims that identity consists in consciousness (including self-awareness and memory). So the claim, "Wanda is the same person who was my friend and walked with me to the College Tavern", is true if and only if Wanda has the memory of doing these things. But how can we tell if the memory is genuine? Most obviously, like this: for a memory to be genuine, the person having the memory must be the same person who had the experience that is being recalled. But reread that last statement. If the only way a memory can be genuine is if the person having the memory had the experience in question, then are we not *presupposing* the existence of the person in order to check the authenticity of the memory? That is problematic, because the point of checking the authenticity of the memory was to check the authenticity of the person! If we are presupposing the very thing we are trying to discover, our reasoning is circular and therefore logically invalid.

DO

Form a pair. Take it in turns to:

1. Explain to a partner the problem of circularity in Locke's memory theory.
2. Explain to a partner how the Schwanda scenario highlights a circularity problem for the memory theory of identity.
3. *Write down* the clearest versions you can of these two explanations.

WRITE

Write a detailed critical reflection on this topic:

To what extent is the memory criterion for personal identity useful in the Wanda/ Schwanda case?

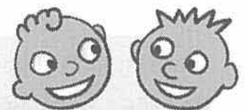
BRAINS, BIKES AND THE BODY THEORY

Attempting to fend off the circularity problem, Michaels introduces a hypothesis based on a **brain theory** of identity: "*Why couldn't we say that Schwanda's Wanda memories are genuine because the* ***brain*** *that is remembering is the same as the brain that had the original experiences? Thus the experiences are preserved in the very organ that underwent them.*"

THINK

Does the brain theory of identity solve the Schwanda case? Why or why not?

At first glance, this looks like a solution. However, Michaels rejects it, using the example of riding a bicycle. Imagine that Schwanda recalls learning to ride a bike. What does this show us? That Wanda's brain recalls Wanda learning to ride a bike. However, Michaels argues, it is "clear to all of us that brains alone do not learn to ride bicycles. Nor, indeed, do brains alone remember having done so. *People* learn to ride bicycles and *people* remember having done so."



DISCUSS

1. Explain to a partner Michaels' reasons for rejecting the brain theory.
2. Do you agree with Michaels that the brain theory fails to solve the Schwanda case? Why or why not? Share your views in a class discussion.

It is at this point of her argument that Michaels invites us to consider that the body theory – rejected, as you will recall, by Locke – might be deserving of some attention after all. She attributes the view that self-identity is essentially body-identity to Aristotle. If the body theory is true, then Schwanda is *you*, tricked by the organ of Wanda's brain into believing you are Wanda.

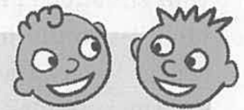
We should not at this stage read Michaels as arguing that she has shown the body theory to be entirely true. She has merely paved the way to seeing it as less readily dismissible that it first may have appeared.

DO

Michaels doesn't develop her bicycle example very far. Try this. Take the bicycle example and extend an argument from it to the conclusion that the body matters – at least to some degree – in attributing personal identity. Share your argument with your classmates. How plausible do you find it?

WRITE

Compare the brain theory with the memory theory of personal identity. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?



DISCUSS

Are your parents only paying to send your brain to school? Is the brain the only part of your personal identity? Why or why not?

Have a class debate on this topic.

Part 2: Dr Nefarious and the terrible tortures

THE DR NEFARIOUS SCENARIO

READ

Read Section 2: Paragraphs 6 – end of extract. That is, from "You might wonder…" onwards.

WRITE

There are four stages to Dr Nefarious's outline of what will happen to you tomorrow: 5.00pm; 4.55pm; 4.57 and 4.58. Write a brief summary of each.

Michaels introduces her Dr Nefarious thought experiment as one "designed to persuade you that there is at least *some* plausibility to the Body Theory." The experiment focuses on suffering of the flesh – but whose flesh? Yours or someone else's, and what has memory got to do with whose flesh it might be?

5.00, 4.55 AND 4.57PM: HOW SIGNIFICANT IS MEMORY?

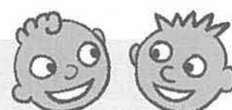
Surely you are worried when Dr Nefarious tells you of the terrible tortures he will perform on you at 5pm tomorrow. According to our ordinary sense of personal identity, you will be *you* at 5pm tomorrow.

COMPARE

What account of your anticipatory dread might be given by Locke and Hume, regarding Dr Nefarious's promises for 5pm tomorrow?

Michaels now plays with the notion of memory's significance in our personal identity. If your memory of Dr Nefarious's threats will be erased at 4.55pm, will you still be concerned about the events promised for 5pm? The concession of a five-minute memory erasure appears not to ease your situation at all. And yet, taking theories which argue for memory's significance in personal identity, would not a memory gap of this kind be disruptive to your identity? Going beyond Michael's scenario, how about if the erasure of Dr Nefarious's conversation with you occurred not over five minutes, but over an hour prior to 5pm? How about for 24 hours prior?

You might object that erasure of just the parts of memory concerned with Dr Nefarious's conversation with you, will do nothing to disrupt all the other memories that contribute to continuity of your personal identity. Anticipating this objection, Michaels' next move is to erase *all* of your memories at 4.57pm. This is Michaels' strongest challenge to the memory theory so far. After all, if Locke is right, then after 4.57 it won't be *you* in the torture chamber. The fingernails you might now take a last look at, won't any longer be *your* fingernails. It won't be *your* face being eaten by rats. Or will it? Michaels thinks that at this point, you will surely find grounds to reject the memory theory and reconsider the significance of the body to personal identity.



DISCUSS

1. To what extent would erasing memory of the conversation with Dr Nefarious at 4.55pm affect your sense of who is to be tortured at 5pm? What would Locke say? What would Hume say? What do you say and why?
2. Would extending memory erasure of the conversation – say, to 24 hours prior to the torture – affect the sense of dread you feel right now? Why or why not?
3. What is your response to the 4.57pm scenario?
4. What would be Locke's response to the 4.57pm scenario?
5. How effective is this thought experiment so far as a challenge to the memory theory of personal identity? Why?
6. How effective is this thought experiment so far in suggesting that the body has significance to personal identity?

4.58PM RONALD REAGAN'S MEMORIES: ANOTHER CASE OF SWITCHED IDENTITY?

Michaels' final move harks back to Wanda/Schwanda with a memory implantation scenario. All the memories of Ronald Reagan (a former president of the United States) will be implanted in your brain. So, who will lie in the torture chamber – you or Ronald Reagan? Whose fingernails will be pulled? Michaels believes that regardless of whose memories are behind the face, you will feel that it is *your* face scheduled to be eaten by rats at 5pm tomorrow, and that this shows "not the conclusive superiority of the Body Theory over the Memory (or Brain) Theory, but rather the importance of our bodies to our self-identity."

Furthermore, Michaels makes the point that in light of this final scenario, it is no longer far-fetched to argue that Schwanda is *you*. If you think *you* are to be tortured, rather than Ronald Reagan, then you should also maintain that Schwanda is you, just deluded into believing she is Wanda.

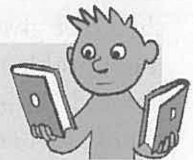
THINK

Michaels says her 4.58pm scenario shows "not the conclusive superiority of the Body Theory over the Memory (or Brain) Theory, but rather the importance of our bodies to our self-identity." Explain her distinction here. Do you agree with it?

CONCLUSIONS

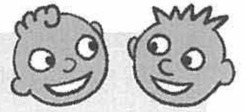
"There are reasons for believing that our bodies are, at the very least, important to who we are," Michaels concludes.

Michaels further concludes that her scenarios have undermined the memory theory of personal identity, at least as its exclusive marker: "we have seen that we lack a concept of self-identity that allows us to predict when we would or wouldn't persist through time." She suggests that perhaps identity is not an "all or nothing concept" but rather one of degrees, such as a "relation of psychological and physical connectedness." Certainly, she thinks the question of who should pay Schwanda's tuition is not clear-cut, nor easily solved by any of the traditional theories of personal identity.



COMPARE

1. What would be Locke's likely response to the Ronald Reagan scenario?
2. What would be Hume's likely response to the Ronald Reagan scenario?
3. What is Michaels' response to the Ronald Reagan scenario?
4. What is your response to the Ronald Reagan scenario and why?



DISCUSS

1. Is it *your* face or Ronald Reagan's face, scheduled to be eaten by rats at 5pm tomorrow? Why?
2. What implications do your views on this question have for a theory of personal identity?
3. Suppose you form the view that it is *you* who will be tortured. What conclusions can follow from this about the significance of the body for personal identity?
4. What are the implications of your views on the Ronald Reagan scenario for your views on the Schwanda scenario?

WRITE

Write a two-page reflection on the impact of Michaels' thought experiments on your view of personal identity.

Evaluating Michaels' 'On Personal Identity'

Unlike Locke and Hume, Michaels does not produce a strong positive case for a particular theory. Her thought experiments do not force us to conclude that the theory of "same body equals same person" must be entirely right. Nor does she push the strong negative case that Locke's memory theory has nothing going for it. Michaels argues that the matter is murkier than this. The closest she gets to presenting a positive theory of personal identity that might arise from her thought experiments, is the suggestion that "some relation of psychological and physical connectedness" must be involved.

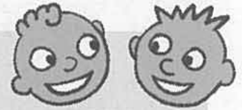
These observations are not a criticism of Michaels. (See also our tip about when a bet-each-way argument is not fence-sitting, on p.175.) There is nothing wrong with arguing, as Michaels essentially does, that: "Here are some reasons why the Memory Theory is problematic; we've been told for centuries that the Body Theory is also problematic; however, here is why the Body Theory should be given more credit than it usually receives and shouldn't necessarily be considered any more problematic than the Memory Theory. Maybe some combination of the two is the way forward." This means that to disagree with Michaels' view, you need to either show that the body is not at all relevant, or that the mind and memories are not at all relevant, or that neither is relevant, when deciding cases of personal identity.

There is some middle ground where Michaels' case can be further interrogated: that of the brain. Should the brain be considered as body or mind? Michaels' bicycle theory takes on this theory and links brain to both body and mind, yet denies it the power to confer identity. Is Michaels' dismissal of the brain theory sufficiently justified? Your response to this question will also inform your view of whether drawing direct comparisons between the Schwanda and Ronald Reagan cases is fair. Schwanda is formed through a transplant of Wanda's entire brain into your head. However, in the Ronald Reagan example, it is just the memories of the former President that are

transferred to *your* intact brain, presumably over-writing your memories. Does this distinction matter? How might Michaels respond to a suggestion that the cases are significantly different?

Another avenue of critical assessment of Michaels – and one you should not neglect – is evaluation of the thought experiments themselves. How effective are they in pushing us to share Michaels' conclusion that the body has some role in conferring personal identity? Note that to find Michaels' thought experiments far-fetched is not a useful evaluation; thought experiments, by definition, occur in thought rather than actuality and their point is to draw out views and assumptions that might have been previously obscured or unexamined.

Michaels' paper ends with the claim that the answer to the question of who ought to pay for Schwanda's tuition (that is, the implication for moral responsibility arising from our view of personal identity) is unclear. Would Michaels lean to the view that it is the responsibility of neither parents, or of both parents, if she believes both body and mind are implicated in personal identity? Her "bet-each-way" view seems to settle on Schwanda – a new person altogether – having been formed from the union of your body with Wanda's brain. Or does she consider both you and Wanda to in some form be continuing life as Schwanda? Your response as to whether these views are plausible will draw in your views on the philosophy of mind as well.

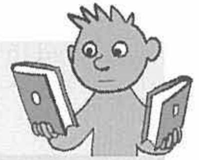


DISCUSS

1. Is Michaels right that the body has a role in conferring personal identity? Why or why not?
2. To what extent has Michaels succeeded in eroding the case for the Memory Theory?
3. Is Michaels' dismissal of the Brain Theory sufficiently justified? Give consideration to the bicycle example, as well as Michaels' view that we should consider Schwanda and Ronald Reagan as parallel cases, in your response.
4. How effective are Michaels' thought experiments in advancing her conclusion that both body and mind are implicated in personal identity?
5. How plausible are the views that (a) Schwanda, a completely new person, has been created from the union of Wanda's brain with your body, and both you are Wanda are dead; or (b) in the person called Schwanda, both you and Wanda live on and neither of you is dead? Is Michaels suggesting either (a) or (b) is more plausible than the other?

WRITE

Choose any topic from the 'DISCUSS' box above as the basis for an extended critical reflection.



COMPARE

Compare Locke's Prince and Cobbler thought experiment with Michaels' Schwanda thought experiment. Outline each case and explain what their authors intend them to show. Which case is most effective and why?

Review Questions

WRITE

1. How does Michaels' Schwanda thought experiment challenge Locke's memory theory of personal identity?
2. Schwanda believes she is Wanda. Is this a good enough reason for us to accept that Schwanda is Wanda and that Wanda's parents should pay her tuition fees? Why or why not?
3. What are three problems with the memory theory of personal identity highlighted in Michaels' paper?
4. *"Brains alone do not learn to ride bicycles Nor, indeed, do brains remember having done so. People learn to ride bicycles and people remember having done so."* What is Michaels arguing here about minds, brains and bodies?
5. Why does Michaels believe that the brain theory "does not offer us a way out of the Lockean circle"?
6. Who is to be tortured at 5.00pm tomorrow – you or Ronald Reagan? Give reasons for your response.
7. *"While it is true that we tend to identify ourselves with and by our thoughts, beliefs, inclinations, and feelings, our discussion of the Body Theory of Identity should remind us that there are reasons for believing that our bodies are, at the very least, important to who we are."* What is the most effective example in Michaels' paper for persuading us to this conclusion? Why?
8. Explain the problem of the 'Lockean Circle'. How does the Schwanda case highlight this problem? Does Michaels' paper offer us any way out of it?
9. Should a funeral be held for you, Wanda, both or neither? Justify your response.

RELEVANT CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Refer to Part E of this chapter to make links between Michaels' paper and relevant contemporary debates.

PART E

Debates, Comparisons and Review Activities

Comparison Activities

So, do we really remain the same person over time? We have now considered a range of views on the philosophical problem of personal identity. Looking back to our first Area of Study, Descartes argued that a permanent, indubitable, immaterial soul is responsible for making us what we are. Locke didn't regard immateriality as very important; he found personal identity to be carried by consciousness and by memory in particular. Our next text offered a sceptical view of the self. For David Hume, the self is a bundle of constantly changing perceptions and the continuities we perceive in those perceptions are illusory. A contemporary viewpoint from Meredith Michaels led us through a series of thought experiments, to consider that the physical body might be as important as our memories when it comes to attributing personal identity.

Thought Experiments

Throughout this Area of Study, we have studied a range of thought experiments, some of them supplied within the set texts and some offered to supplement and challenge our thinking about the texts. As part of your revision process, you should go back through the various thought experiments you have encountered, and think through what the likely response of each set-text author might be. For assessment purposes, you should be prepared to outline and evaluate at least two thought experiments, and to propose what might be said about them by different thinkers.

You may wish to keep a log of your work on thought experiments in a table like the following:

	Thought Experiment 1	**Thought Experiment 2**	**Thought Experiment 3**	**Thought Experiment 4**
Outline of thought experiment and its implications				
My views on this thought experiment				
Locke's likely response and relevant arguments				
Hume's likely response and relevant arguments				
Michaels' likely response and relevant arguments				
Other thoughts				

Making Comparisons and Critical Comparisons

Use the following table to organise your thoughts about how our thinkers compare across various dimensions of the personal identity debate.

	LOCKE	HUME	MICHAELS
What is the nature of the self?			
What constitutes identity in persons over time?			
What is the significance of memory?			
What is the significance of the soul?			
What is the significance of the body?			
What are the implications of this theory for moral responsibility?			
Key arguments			
Strengths of this theory			
Weaknesses of this theory			
Illustrative examples or thought experiments			

Applications of the Personal Identity Problem to Relevant Debates

As you have already seen, matters of personal identity have significant implications for real-life scenarios in the modern world. While many of the thought experiments we have considered present far-fetched scenarios, some are not as fanciful as we might first imagine. Advances in science and technology make it likely that within the next decades we will be contemplating the implications of cloning, transplants, memory erasure and gender re-assignment, to name but a few possibilities of relevance to personal identity.

Advancing Technologies and their Implications for the Problem of Identity

Our studies of the set texts have already touched on how the philosophical problem of identity has significant legal, medical, social and technological implications.

In the following activity you will focus on the applications of views on human identity in the context of medical breakthroughs of various kinds.

DO

Modern Medicine and Changing Identities: A Symposium

We are on the verge of breakthroughs – in genetic engineering, in pharmacotherapy and in the replacement of biological tissues, either by cultured tissues or by electronic prostheses – which may result in human physiologies being increasingly replaced or altered.

For many this is deeply controversial territory, reaching to the heart of our assumptions of what constitutes human identity.

Your classroom is going to be the venue for a symposium at which experts will present their findings in relation to a number of medical procedures. Some of these are already commonly practised and others are still being researched.

Divide into expert teams to research the medical procedures below (1-10). Present your findings to the symposium as follows (A-E). After each presentation, the whole group is invited to ask questions of the expert team and to debate its findings.

1. What is involved in this procedure? What are its most extreme or controversial forms?
2. What implications do such procedures have for the problem of human identity?
3. What might be the likely responses of Locke, Hume and Michaels to these procedures and their implications for personal identity? What relevant arguments can be found in the texts?

4. What assessment does your group make of the usefulness of these theories and arguments with regard to these procedures?
5. What recommendations does your group make to the Symposium about how these procedures are regarded in relation to identity? Should such procedures be permitted in any form? In all forms? Should the subject be considered the same person following this procedure?

MEDICAL PROCEDURES FOR INVESTIGATION:

a. Cosmetic surgery to alter physical appearance;

b. Organ transplants – from human and animal donors;

c. Electronic/robotic human parts;

d. Neuropharmacology – drug treatments that alter the way the brain operates, including personality traits, e.g. anti-depressants, 'smart pills', ...;

e. Genetic engineering – e.g. alteration of genes that predispose a person to conditions including various diseases such as cancer, socially unacceptable tendencies such as violence and aggression, or aptitudes such as athleticism and intelligence;

f. Anti-ageing drugs with the capacity to radically lengthen human lifespans;

g. Memory erasure;

h. Stem cell technologies – e.g. growing tissues to replace those damaged by accident disease or ageing, or to satisfy cosmetic preference;

i. Cloning;

j. Sex-change and gender re-assignment procedures, including hormone therapies and surgery.

The Importance of Memories

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind is a science fiction film. It takes as its basic premise the proven success of a medical procedure which in real life we have not discovered how to perform yet, or at least we have not approved that it may ethically be performed. Struggling to move on after the breakdown of their relationship, the main characters elect to have their memories of this relationship targeted and destroyed so they will have no recollection of each other. The commercial clinic which performs this procedure has the slogan, 'Why remember a destructive love affair if you can erase it?'

This may not be exclusively the stuff of fantasy. *Scientific American* magazine reported in its issue of April 2, 2009, that a new therapy may be able to remove painful memories in rats and humans. Would this be an appropriate treatment for patients suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome? Should some criminals be sentenced to memory erasure to aid their rehabilitation? These are interesting dilemmas and at the heart of them lies the question of whether a person remains the same if their memories are altered.

WRITE

1. To what extent do you identify yourself with your memories?
2. If you were given the chance to have certain memories eliminated, say ones that make you unhappy, would you take it?
3. To what extent would you be the same person if you had memories erased?
4. To what extent would you be the same person if all those who knew you had their memories erased?
5. 'Memories fade over time.' To what extent is this helpful or a problem when considering cases of identity?
6. Would you consider the characters Clementine and Joel, in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* different people after they have their memories erased? In other words, have their identities changed in some meaningful way?
7. What are the implications for personal identity of medical conditions which affect memory (for example, amnesia, Alzheimer's disease, coma)?
8. Do your answers to the previous questions help confirm or deny Locke's theory of identity?
9. What implications would memory erasure have for the theories of personal identity of (a) Hume and (b) Michaels?

THE PROBLEM OF FALSE AND IMPLANTED MEMORIES: SOME STUDIES

A significant study was carried out by Loftus and Pickrell (1995) to investigate false memories. Twenty four participants were told stories about their childhoods, three of which were true (as supplied by participants' relatives) and one false (described by relatives as plausible but concocted). In each case, the false but plausible scenario was about getting lost in a shopping centre.

The participants were told they were part of a study to assess their abilities to recall details of childhood events. Each participant was sent a written description of the three real and one fake memory. They were asked to write down all they could remember of the memories. Soon after, they were interviewed about the memories. A second interview sometime later asked for more details again. At the end of this interview participants were each told that one of the memories was false. Of the 24 participants, five nominated the fake memory as one of the real ones.

Although the proportion was low, there was also a low level of coercion in the interviews. It suggested to researchers that it might be easier than previously supposed to 'implant' memories. Another study with more participants by Hyman and Pentland (1996) concluded that false memories could be implanted in 20-40% of people. In a more recent experiment, Wade, Garry, Read and Lindsay (2002) doctored a picture of a hot air balloon flight so that participants appeared to be flying in it. Fifty percent of participants created false memories around the picture.

WRITE

1. How do studies such as these constitute an objection to John Locke's theory of personal identity?
2. How might Locke respond to such studies?
3. How might Hume respond to these studies? Would they support or refute Hume's account of personal identity?
4. How might Michaels respond to these studies? Would they support of refute Michael's account of personal identity?

PART F

Suggestions for Assessment

The following Assessment Tasks are suggestions only. Teachers should always consult the VCAA Study Design for Philosophy before setting tasks to ensure coherence with the appropriate Outcome descriptors. ***Further suggestions for assessment can be found in*** **VCE Philosophy: Assessment and Examination Supplement for Units 3 and 4 Third Edition.**

Unit 3, Area of Study 2, Outcome 2

'On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse, compare and evaluate theories of personal identity in the set texts and discuss related contemporary debates.'

Teachers should note that all students are required to complete at least one essay for assessment purposes in Unit 3.

ASSESSMENT TASK ONE: SHORT ANSWER RESPONSES

Complete a series of short answer questions that invite students to analyse and evaluate the concepts, viewpoints and arguments expressed in one or more of the set texts.

ASSESSMENT TASK TWO: WRITTEN ANALYSIS

Complete a written task that asks students to describe a thought experiment relevant to personal identity, outline the arguments from the set texts which could be applied to it, and evaluate the usefulness of the set texts for finding a solution to the thought experiment.

ASSESSMENT TASK THREE: WRITTEN ANALYSIS

Complete a series of written exercises that ask students to analyse and critically compare the implications of the viewpoints and arguments of the set texts for questions of moral responsibility.

ASSESSMENT TASK FOUR: WRITTEN REFLECTION

Are you the same person now as in your first year of primary school?
Discuss the question above, making detailed reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts. Reach conclusions through a critical comparison of these viewpoints and arguments.

ASSESSMENT TASK FIVE: DIALOGUE

Write a script for an imaginary meeting in which Locke, Hume and Michaels come together to critically discuss one or more key questions relating to personal identity. Don't forget to make detailed reference to the arguments and viewpoints expressed in the set texts to support the thinkers' comments.

ASSESSMENT TASK SIX: PRESENTATION

Prepare a presentation for the class in which you describe a relevant contemporary debate in which new scientific developments raise issues of personal identity. Outline and evaluate relevant responses from the set texts to these debates (see Symposium activity in Part E of this chapter which may be adapted for this task).

ASSESSMENT TASK SEVEN: ESSAY

Suggested topics:

- 'Memory is the most significant factor in the problem of personal identity.' Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts.
- 'A rock will always be a rock, but people change too much over time for the body to be considered their identity.' Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts.
- 'A sceptical view of the self has disastrous consequences for our treatment of others and moral responsibility.' Do you agree? Discuss this statement with reference to one or more of the set texts.
- What gives a person the same identity over time? Assess the strengths and weakness of at least two different theories of identity, using relevant examples to test each theory.
- Are Locke and Hume well enough justified in rejecting the body theory of personal identity? Do Michaels' thought experiments convince you that the body theory is plausible?

Make sure your essay engages in analysis, comparison and evaluation of the viewpoints and arguments you discuss and provides a judgment in terms of the question.

PART G

Useful Resources

- Baggini J 2010, *The Pig that Wants to be Eaten and 99 Other Thought Experiments*, Granta Books, London.
- Bowie G., Michaels, M. & Solomon, R. (eds) 2000, *Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*, Harcourt Brace, Orlando, Florida.
- Cohen M 2013, *101 Philosophy Problems*, Routledge, London.
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- Hume, D. 1986, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book 1, part 4, section 6, Penguin Classics, London.
- Kafka, F. 2009, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Law S 2003, *The Philosophy Gym*, Headline Book Publishing, London.
- Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* chapter 27 'On Identity and Diversity', sections 8 (first paragraph) and 9-22 in Perry, J. (ed.) 2008, *Personal Identity* second edition, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Martin, R.M. 2001, *There Are Two Errors in the the Title of This Book: A Sourcebook of Philosophical Puzzles, Problems and Paradoxes* (revised edition), Broadview, Peterborough.
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- Searle, J. 1986, *Minds, Brains and Science,* Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.
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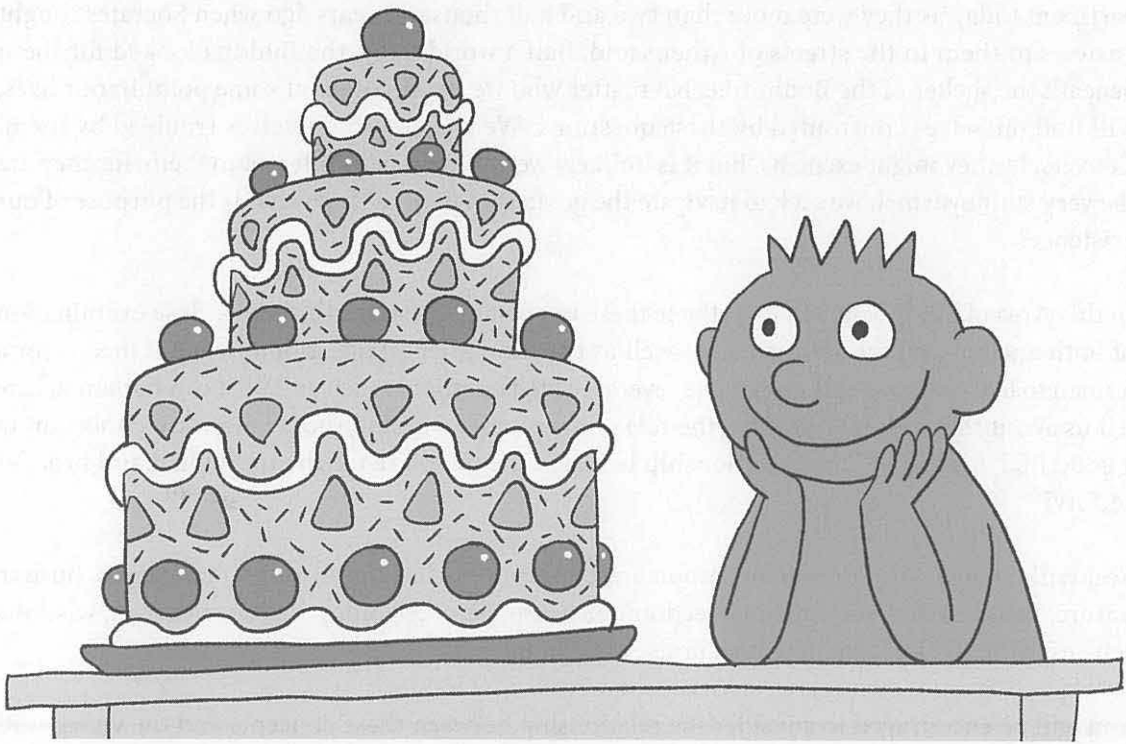
CHAPTER 3

Conceptions of the Good Life



PART A

About Conceptions of the Good Life

What is the nature of the good life? What does it mean for a human being to live well? What should be the proper goal of life and how does one set about achieving it? These questions are as pertinent today as they were more than two and half thousand years ago when Socrates sought answers to them in the streets of Athens and, half a world away, the Buddha looked for them beneath the shelter of the Bodhi tree. No matter who we are, all of us, at some point in our lives, will find ourselves confronted by these questions. We might find ourselves troubled by them. Conversely, they might excite us. But it is unlikely we will remain indifferent to them, for they are the very stuff by which we seek to navigate the greatest of life's riddles: what is the purpose of our existence?

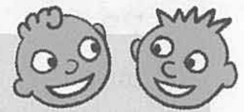
In this Area of Study, you will investigate these important questions through a close examination of both ancient and modern texts. As well as the fundamental question of what it means for a human to live well, you will investigate several related questions, such as: What can human nature tell us about the good life? What is the role of happiness in a good life? Is morality important to a good life? And what is the relationship between the good life for the individual and broader society?

You will engage with a range of important concepts, including morality, happiness, human nature, value, hedonism, egoism, freedom, pleasure, pain, teleology, virtue, altruism, wisdom, self-restraint, justice, equality, duty, praise and blame.

You will be encouraged to consider the relationship between these concepts and the viewpoints expressed in the prescribed texts as well as the merits and shortcoming of the arguments expressed in these texts. As always, you will be expected to work closely with the arguments: identifying premises and conclusions, assessing reasoning, comparing arguments and viewpoints, and reflecting on the implications of accepting these arguments and viewpoints.

We hope you enjoy this exploration of what it means to live well. Who knows what you will discover and where these discoveries will lead you?

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES



DISCUSS

What does the phrase 'living well' mean to you?

DO

Imagine that it is your 80th birthday. Although in robust health, you have decided to mark the occasion by writing your own obituary – just in case.

Give yourself no more than 20 minutes to write a plan for this document. Your plan should include:

- Your career achievements
- Any travel or study that you did during your life
- The important relationships you had
- Activities that you enjoyed and any achievements relating to these activities
- The qualities that you hope others will remember you for

When you have completed this task read over what you have written and try to identify what values are suggested by what you have written (for example, does your imagined life suggest you value security? Family? Adventure? Knowledge?).

Share the **values** that you have identified with the whole class and then, as a whole class, discuss the following questions:

1. In what ways is this vision of the good life shaped by your cultural context? Would the same results have been produced if this activity was done in other school? In another area? In another country? With another age group? 100 years ago? How might it differ?
2. What are some of the things that this vision of the good life omits? How do you explain these omissions?
3. What qualities would a person need to live this good life? Who is excluded from this good life?
4. Does this vision of the good life accord with how you think contemporary society views the good life? Why or why not?

DO

Interview a friend or relative about their views on the good life and what it means to live well. Share the results of the interview with your classmates.

DO

Over a period of 24 hours examine portrayals of the good life in the media you engage with. What vision of the good life is being perpetuated by the media? Share the results of your investigations with the class.

WRITE

1. What are some of the ways we conceive of the good life and what it means to live well in contemporary society?
2. Do any of these understandings represent a life lived well in your opinion? Give reasons for your response.

PART B

Plato: *Gorgias*

Historical and Philosophical Context

When you reflect on the last thirteen years of your life it may seem hard to believe that you share anything in common with young people who existed 2,500 years before you were born. The streets you walk through, the technology you use, even the clothes you wear and the food you eat are so vastly different as to be unimaginable to those who walked the streets of Classical Athens during the fifth century BCE. And yet, there is one constant between you and them: education.

Like our society, the society of Classical Athens placed a high premium on education. At the age of around seven, male children who were not from poor backgrounds (poor children and girls were largely educated at home) commenced their elementary education either at one of the many public schools or with private tutors. Much like today, these children learned to read, write, count and draw. In the later years of primary school, once their basic literacy and numeracy skills were developed, students would start to study a more diverse range of subjects and would spend a great deal of time reading and reciting the works of Homer, whose speeches and epic poems (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*) were considered both a vital educational tool (the speeches were used to teach the art of **rhetoric**) and the preeminent record of Greek history and wisdom. Indeed, it was these works that served to define Greek ideas of morality and virtue.

DO

Working in pairs, find summaries of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* online. Read through the summaries independently (one person can work on *The Iliad* and the other on *The Odyssey*) and try to elicit some of the values expressed in these works. Share your findings with your partner.

Once these young men were around fourteen years of age they had the option of attending some form of secondary education. Some would attend permanent schools, whereas others would study under itinerant teachers known as **Sophists.**

These Sophists, who were patronised by the wealthy, moved from place to place, teaching rhetoric and public speaking as well as other knowledge deemed necessary for a successful life, for a considerable price. Alongside the income they made from their work as mentors for the sons of the elite, the Sophists capitalised on their status by giving public exhibitions of their talents.

While the Sophists were hugely popular among the wealthy, they were not so well regarded by the general populace, who believed that both their fees and their beliefs were immoral; the Sophists were largely sceptics and agnostics or atheists who specialised in teaching their students to argue for any position. Gorgias of Leontini, for example, used to invite members of the audience during his public exhibitions to offer arguments specifically for him to argue against.

A number of philosophers, such as Aristotle (Famous Philosopher File, p.224) and his teacher Plato (Famous Philosopher File, p.206), were also critical of the Sophists. In *Gorgias* and in other works, Plato tries to create a clear distinction between the Sophists, whom he regards as making a living from deception, and philosophers, whom he believes seek only knowledge and truth. His desire to create this distinction is unsurprising given that his mentor, Socrates (Famous Philosopher File, p.205), although also an itinerant teacher, was famous for being both self-effacing (it is said that he always professed to know nothing) and never charging for his services. No doubt you will also be aware, from your reading of *Phaedo*, that Socrates' primary concern was to separate true knowledge from the plethora of beliefs that surround questions about what we are and how we should live.

Yet, despite criticism from both philosophers and other members of the populace, it is undeniable that the Sophists played an important role in their society and that the services they offered could result in particular political and economical advantages. For Athenian men, life in Classical Athens was highly participatory. From private events such as the **symposia** (gatherings held in private homes in which men discussed ideas, engaged in entertainments and shared wine) to public forums such as the **Assembly** (the organ of government responsible for political decision making) and the courts of law, men were expected to actively contribute. In such a climate, the capacity to speak persuasively was not only essential, it could result in considerable power and wealth.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the political arena. For most of the Classical Age, Athens was a direct democracy. All adult male citizens were expected to attend a specific number of meetings of the assembly (at one point up to 44 per year) and to cast their votes, usually via a show of hands, on matters as diverse as decisions to go to war and electing magistrates. All governing positions in the Assembly – of which there were 500 – were determined by lot. This meant that anyone from a nobleman to a farmer could find himself in a position of power.

Likewise, the skill of persuasive speaking was essential if one needed to defend oneself in a court of law. Unlike our own law courts, Athenian law courts were devoid of lawyers. Instead, both the defender and prosecutor were each granted an equal amount of time measured by an hourglass to put forward their case to a jury of citizens who would then cast their votes on the case, also by a show of hands. Although the court was presided over by a magistrate, his role was purely administrative. As Callicles claims in *Gorgias*, the inability to speak well in front of a jury could well mean the difference between life and death.

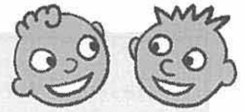
Classical Greece is the term used to refer to a period in Greek history spanning approximately 500-300BCE. This was a time of extraordinary flourishing in many areas including politics, the arts, architecture, science, mathematics, philosophy and literature. The culture and achievements of Classical Greece have had an enormous influence on the Western world, beginning with their impact on Roman civilisation.

DO

In pairs or small groups, undertake some further research into life in Classical Athens. Areas for research could include:

- Political organisation
- Education
- Culture (for example, the festivals of Dionysia and Olympia and their significance to Greek society)
- Social organisation
- Social participation (particularly for Athenian male citizens)
- Military life
- Daily life
- The role of the family
- Greek identity

Present your research to the class.



DISCUSS

1. Reflecting on the above exercise, what are some of the things Classical Athenians may have thought necessary for a good life? Why?
2. What attributes would a person need to live this good life?
3. What are some similarities and differences between this version of the good life and the life you are living in the twenty-first century?

WRITE

Write a reflection (approximately 500 words) on Classical Greek conceptions of the good life based on your classroom discussion.

Plato's Dialogues

'All philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato,' wrote the philosopher A.N. Whitehead. It is true that Plato (Famous Philosopher File, p.206) addressed nearly every philosophical question we have cared to explore since. Perhaps no other philosopher can match the depth and range of his philosophical probings, with the possible exceptions of his student, Aristotle (Famous Philosopher File, p.224) and the eighteenth century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant.

Another of the many striking things about Plato is that he wrote nearly all his philosophical works in **dialogue**. (The one exception is *The Apology*, which reports on the events of the trial of Socrates.) The Platonic Dialogues are philosophical discussions among a small group of **interlocutors** (participants), many of whom were actual historical figures. In all but one, the main speaker is Plato's teacher, Socrates (Famous Philosopher File, p.205).

Socrates is considered the father of Western philosophy. It is not the case that there was no philosophy in the Western world before Socrates; certainly big questions about life, existence and the world were being debated by so-called Pre-Socratic ('before Socrates') thinkers living in the area of modern Greece and Turkey. However, little of this work has survived. Indeed, Socrates himself wrote nothing down. Plato dedicated himself to recording – as well as extending upon – the ideas and philosophical methods of his great teacher.

For that reason, we can often wonder: how much of Plato's writing simply records the words and ideas of Socrates, and how much reflects his own philosophical genius? For Plato was much more than a skilful scribe; he increasingly filled his dialogues with his own philosophical theories, even while using Socrates as his preferred mouthpiece. Scholars tend to agree that the later dialogues reflect more of Plato's own thinking, and consider the earlier dialogues more faithful records of Socrates' actual conversations.

TIP

When writing and talking about Plato's *Gorgias*, it is best to refer to the characters in the dialogues rather than their author. Although it may be sensible to assume that Plato endorses the views of his mouthpiece, it is clearer to always write 'Socrates argues…' and 'Socrates believes…'.

KEY CONCEPTS: *SOCRATIC DIALOGUE AND ELENCHUS*

Do you like to encourage other people to disagree with your ideas? 'Of course not!' many would retort. Yet, this is exactly what occurs in **Socratic dialogue** or **dialectic,** the form of philosophical discussion that is fundamental to this discipline. It would seem that for Plato, philosophy, by its very nature, can only emerge from a process of dialogue in which one has one's ideas tested to their limits by other thinkers. In this way, philosophical dialogue is different from debate, as participants work together with the aim of discerning truth, rather than trying to 'win' or be right.

You might consider, too, as you read *Gorgias,* how reading a dialogue, rather than a straightforward explanation of theory, helps us as readers to think about a problem for ourselves and to weigh up possible objections and counter-examples.

The Socratic Method is also an ideal model for philosophical discussions in your classroom, and for how to 'do philosophy with yourself', in your own thinking and writing.

You will notice a typical pattern in Socratic dialogues, whereby a statement is made by an interlocutor, who is then cross-examined with regard to that statement. This process of questioning – known as **elenchus** – aims to remove any ambiguities, exceptions, falsehoods or controversies in the statement and then to either discard the statement or refine it.

DO

You will note as you read *Gorgias* that Socrates' method of inquiry follows the **Method of Elenchus** or the **Socratic Method**, after Socrates.

Watch Episode 1: 'Socrates on Self Confidence' from Alain de Botton's *Philosophy: A Guide to Happiness* [see *Useful Resources*].

Pay particular attention to the section on Socratic Method (the visual sequence follows the making of a vase on a potter's wheel).

Find a section of *Gorgias* where use of the Socratic Method is clearly evident. Write a brief description of the Socratic Method in your workbooks and then below it, glue in a photocopy of your section. Annotate the section to show the various stages of the Method.

Studying *Gorgias*

Introduction

Plato is believed to have written *Gorgias* around 380 BCE, approximately five years after founding his school, The Academy, in Athens. Scholars tend to regard *Gorgias* as one of Plato's 'pre-middle' or transitional dialogues. Thus the views expressed within the dialogue represent a movement away from the views espoused by the historical Socrates towards the positive teachings of Plato as expressed in his middle period dialogues, such as *Republic, Phaedo* and *Symposium.*

While the *Gorgias* may superficially be understood as an enquiry into the nature and value of rhetoric, on a deeper level it is, as translator Waterfield suggests, 'an investigation into human nature and ways of life.' Broadly divided into three parts according to which of Socrates' three interlocutors is speaking, the dialogue begins with an exchange between Socrates and Gorgias on the definition and value of rhetoric. From there it moves into an examination of moral issues and the question of how one ought to live, by first addressing Polus' claim that the value of rhetoric lies in its ability to facilitate power over others – thereby raising the question of whether happiness is compatible with unjust or immoral behaviour – and then Callicles' claim that happiness is synonymous with a life of **hedonism**, a view that he believes is endorsed by nature.

It is from this third section of the dialogue that the excerpt for study (480a-509c) has been selected. In the excerpt, Socrates and Callicles, using the framing question of whether it is more disgraceful to do wrong or to suffer it, debate a variety of issues, including:

- The relationship between natural and conventional law;
- The significance of philosophy to a good life;
- The role of pleasure in a good life and whether or not a life of pleasure is preferable to a life of self-restraint;
- The relationship between pleasure and good;
- The nature of rhetoric;
- The relationship between the good of the individual and the good of society.

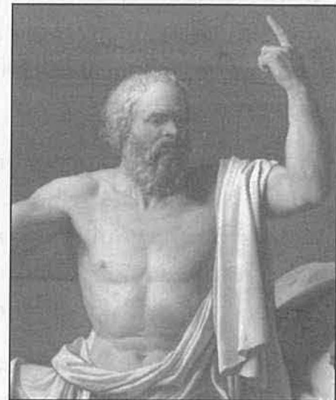
READ

Read all of the prescribed text from *Gorgias* (480a-509c).
Using annotations, note:

- What you don't understand
- Any questions you have pertaining to the text (these may be questions of comprehension or questions to do with what the interlocutors are claiming.)

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Socrates (c.470-399BCE)



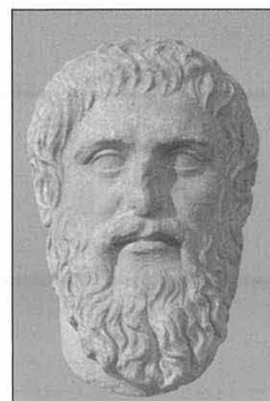
Socrates was born in Athens, the son of a stonemason and midwife. He would only have received a basic education and would have been apprenticed to his father from an early age. He probably worked for many years as a mason before committing to full-time philosophising. Plato wrote that Socrates refused to take payments for his work as a philosophy teacher. His wife, Xanthippe, did not approve of this, and she seems to have raised their three sons almost single-handedly, on meagre income. Socrates also served as a soldier, as was required of all Athenian men, and he distinguished himself with exceptional bravery on the battlefield, saving the life of popular general, Alcibiades.

This was despite Socrates having a far from athletic build. He was short, stocky and frequently described as ugly, with bulging eyes and an upturned nose. However, his charisma was legendary, and he attained a cultish following among the young men of Athens who became enraptured by his quick mind and talent for argument. Socrates' philosophising aimed at very practical results: more genuinely fulfilling and ethical lives for everyone. Not everyone came under his spell, however. Following its defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, Athens was attaching itself to increasingly superficial attitudes, in Socrates' view. Socrates challenged the views and values of this time by directly interrogating men of power and influence. Fragile egos felt humiliated by Socrates' dialectical method, even though Socrates claimed he knew nothing and that was why he asked endless questions.

Eventually Socrates was committed to trial and sentenced to death by hemlock poison. Given the opportunity to advocate for a different outcome for himself, Socrates proposed that he be paid and honoured by Athens for showing its citizens the way to greater wisdom. This only riled his judges. It would have been easy enough for his friends to bribe the guards so Socrates could flee to exile, but he refused this, and drank the hemlock without hesitation. In his dying hours, he reassured his friends that his soul would escape his body to enjoy the eternal life his philosophical life had been preparing for, as recounted in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Plato (c427-347BCE)



Plato was born into an aristocratic family and his inherited wealth allowed him to write, unhindered, in Athens. He would have been educated by Athens' finest teachers, and had strong knowledge of the metaphysical theories of Parmenides and Pythagoras. The major turning point of Plato's life was meeting Socrates. Socrates' dialectical method impressed him, and he committed his life to following Socrates' explorations of virtue, justice, beauty, equality, politics, theology, cosmology and epistemology. Encouraged by Socrates' exhortations that he criticise his own teacher, Plato increasingly developed his own independent viewpoints and arguments.

Another major influence on Plato was the changing political landscape in Athens. After its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, democracy was replaced briefly by the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, a group which included two of Plato's relatives. Democracy was soon restored and Plato considered a political career, but the sentencing of Socrates – decided by the votes of ignorant citizens – cemented his negative view of democracy.

After the death of Socrates, Plato spent 12 years travelling and studying, including Pythagorean mathematics in Italy, and astronomy and religion in Egypt. During this time, he began the extraordinary writing career that has shaped Western culture more than any other in our history. His later works, in particular, are as highly regarded for their literary brilliance and stylistic flair as for their philosophical ideas.

In around 385BCE, Plato founded his own school in Athens, known as the Academy, in the hope that he could educate future leaders in critical thinking, and thus ensure more promising government for future generations of Athenians. He was a subversive educator, encouraging his students to question cultural assumptions and unexamined opinions. Among his most talented students was Aristotle (Famous Philosopher File, p.224), who would in turn disagree with many of Plato's theories and also profoundly influence the course of Western thought.

Plato's Academy continued to operate until 529 AD, when it was shut down by Roman Emperor Justinian I, who believed the school challenged Christian teachings. Plato himself is thought to have continued teaching and writing until his eighties.

480a-484c

KEY CONCEPTS: *PHYSIS AND NOMOS*

One of the central debates in Greek thought during the Classical Age was whether social and moral norms were part of reality or simply the products of human custom. Many thinkers, including many of the Sophists, supported the view that such norms were simply a matter of convention, or what the Greeks termed **nomos**, which they believed was in opposition to the prescriptions of **physis**, or nature. When Socrates and Callicles debate the question of whether it is more contemptible to do wrong or to suffer wrong they do so within the framework of this fundamental Classical debate. Like most thinkers of the period, neither man questions the authority of nature to prescribe what is best for human beings. Rather, their disagreement relates to whether moral prescriptions are the products of nature or of convention and the implications of their respective claims for appropriate human conduct.

This section commences with the conclusion of Socrates' discussion with Polus. Having previously agreed that one should avoid doing wrong as it will result in negative consequences for the individual, Socrates asks Polus what an individual who has done wrong should do. Socrates' answer to this question is that he or she should seek out punishment as soon as possible to help make them 'well' again. Socrates goes on to claim that, as a consequence, the proper use of rhetoric is not to defend ourselves but to denounce ourselves and those we love. Socrates then asks Polus to consider the converse situation – where someone is doing wrong to someone else. In this case rhetoric may be used to ensure one's enemies avoid punishment for the crimes they commit.

These comments incite Callicles to engage in the conversation and he commences his involvement by questioning the seriousness of Socrates' claims. Socrates replies by accusing Callicles of being swayed by the opinions of the public and suggests that his own opinions, although perhaps discordant with the opinions of others, remain the same for their source is philosophy. Callicles disagrees and instead suggests that Socrates, rather than steering the discussion towards truth, instead steers it towards an ethical ideal that reflects conventional law through argumentative trickery – a claim that he believes is supported by Socrates' previous discussion with Polus where, according to Callicles, Polus made a critical error by agreeing with his interlocutor that doing wrong is more contemptible than suffering wrong.

Callicles does not agree with this as he believes it is simply a convention decided by the masses who, due to their weakness, make up such rules to protect themselves and their interests from the strong. Callicles claims that these rules are antithetical to the view endorsed by nature where, he says, observation demonstrates that it is the right of the strong to dominate and have more than the weak. Callicles then goes on to briefly explain how conventional law is indoctrinated into the young with the rider that, 'if a man is born in whom nature is strong enough, he'll shake off these limitations and win his freedom […] then natural law will blaze forth.'

WRITE

1. What are some of the circumstances in which Socrates believes rhetoric is of some use?
2. Can you think of any positive uses for rhetoric? Make sure you support your answer with examples.

THINK

Callicles claims it is more contemptible to suffer wrong than to do wrong. Socrates claims it is more contemptible to do wrong than to suffer wrong. What arguments can you think of to support each view?

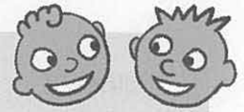
DO

Photocopy from the second paragraph of 482d to the beginning of 484c onto A3 paper.

Working in pairs, and using a highlighter and annotations, identify any premises, conclusions and examples that specifically relate to Callicles' arguments that nature and convention are invariably opposed and the strong deserve more than, and have the right to dominate, the weak.

On a separate piece of paper, create a diagram of the structure of the arguments, identifying the links between them. Your diagram should be created in such a way as to allow plenty of room for annotations. You may wish to present your diagram in **standard form**.

When you have completed this task you can commence annotating the arguments with evaluations. Remember your evaluations should test both the plausibility of the premises and how well the parts of the argument fit together to form a piece of reasoning.



DISCUSS

1. Callicles claims that nature endorses the view that it is right for the better to have a greater share than the worse and the superior to dominate the inferior and have more than them. Does nature actually endorse this view? What evidence can you think of to support Callicles' argument? What evidence can you think of against Callicles' argument?
2. Even if we accept Callicles' claim that in nature the better have a greater share than the worse and the superior dominate the inferior, must we accept the further claim that it is *right* for them to do so?
3. Has Callicles provided a persuasive argument for domination by the superior? Why or why not?
4. How do Callicles' arguments regarding nature and convention fit into the greater argument regarding doing and suffering wrong?
5. In what ways do Callicles' views reflect his historical context?

THINK

Which is more likely to cultivate individual freedom – equality or the pursuit of one's own interests at the expense of others?

484c–486d

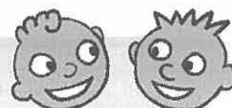
In this section, Callicles once again addresses the purpose and value of rhetoric through an attack on what he perceives as the inappropriate use of philosophy. According to Callicles, the pursuit of philosophy is fine in one's youth, but as an adult, philosophy, unlike the practice of rhetoric, deprives the individual of the capacity to interact with his community and thereby to earn distinction – the hallmark, according to Callicles, of 'real men.' Callicles then attacks Socrates for his attachment to the practice of philosophy and invites him to 'practise the culture of worldly affairs instead,' as through so doing, Socrates will be able to earn the kind of prestige necessary to achieve appropriate social standing.

THINK

1. How do Callicles' views regarding philosophy and the good life reflect his historical context?
2. How do Callicles' views regarding philosophy fit with his earlier arguments about the superior person?

WRITE

Create two lists, one that documents the reasons why Callicles believes philosophy is an inappropriate pursuit for grown men and another that documents all the reasons why it is an appropriate study for the young.



DISCUSS

1. Callicles claims that the pursuit of philosophy will lead to certain deficiencies. Do you agree? What evidence can you think of to support your conclusions? Make sure you address all of the deficiencies that Callicles lists.
2. Callicles' argument against philosophy rests on particular presuppositions about what constitutes a good life. What are these presuppositions? If we hold a different view of the good life might we also hold a different view about the significance of philosophy in a good life?
3. What role do you think philosophy can play in helping us to live a good life?

DO

Callicles claims that a man who spends too much time engaged in philosophy will end up without the skills necessary to achieve standing within his society. Do you agree?

Use the internet or a book containing biographies of philosophers to try to find a counter-example to this claim.

Share your counter-example with the class.

486d-491d

This section commences with Socrates expressing his delight at finding an interlocutor who possesses the knowledge, candour and affection that will allow him to test the truth of his beliefs and engage in the 'finest work in the world.'

Socrates then turns the discussion to the claim that Callicles raised earlier – that nature endorses the right of the superior man to dominate, and have more than, those who may be considered inferior – and begins by asking Callicles to clarify his terms. Callicles responds by affirming Socrates' suggestion that he is using the terms 'superior,' 'better' and 'stronger' as synonyms. Socrates pounces on this, suggesting that if this is the case, then surely the masses, given their collective strength, are superior to a single individual. Furthermore, if it is to be conceded (as Callicles grudgingly grants) that the masses are stronger and therefore superior, then according to Socrates, and using Callicles' reasoning, the laws prescribed by the masses are in accordance with nature for nature endorses the law of the superior.

This motivates Callicles to redefine, with some obvious prompting from Socrates, superior as being synonymous with clever. Again, Socrates pounces on the argument, demonstrating, through the term's ambiguity, that equating 'superior' to 'clever' forces Callicles to grant superiority to those whom he believes clearly are not. Callicles finally settles the argument by offering a clear and unambiguous definition of what he means by superior. It is, he says, a term to be affixed to an individual who has applied his cleverness to politics and who possesses the courage, or is brave enough, to see his policies through.

WRITE

1. Socrates expresses delight at having found in Callicles an interlocutor who possesses knowledge, candour and affection. Why might these traits be helpful if one is seeking to test the truth of one's ideas?
2. According to Socrates, what is the 'finest work in the world?' Do you agree that inquiring into such questions is important? Why or why not?
3. Outlined below is the structure of Socrates' argument against Callicles. Rewrite the arguments, filling in the missing propositions:

   P1: Superior, stronger and better are synonyms.
   P2: The masses are better and stronger than a single individual.

   ____
   ∴

   P1: Any regulation prescribed by the masses is being prescribed by the superior group.
   P2: The masses prescribe that the equal distribution of goods is right and doing wrong is more contemptible than suffering wrong.

   ____
   ∴

   P1: Nature endorses the prescriptions of the superior group.
   P2:

   ____
   ∴ Nature endorses the prescription of the masses.
4. In light of Socrates' arguments, Callicles redefines superior as clever. Outline Socrates' argument against this claim.
5. In arguing against Callicles' claim that superior is synonymous with clever, Socrates uses an argumentative technique called **reductio ad absurdum**. Using the internet, find a definition of this term. Write the definition in your own words and briefly describe how Socrates uses the technique in the relevant argument.
6. Socrates' argument against Callicles' claim that the superior are the clever leads Callicles to redefine the term superior once again. What is his final definition?

DO

Divide into groups of three or four students. You will need at least two groups to complete this task.

Half of the groups will focus on the section that commences at 488b and concludes with the end of Socrates' dialogue at 489b. The other half will focus on the section that commences at 489e and concludes with 491d.

Two students from each group will perform the roles of Socrates and Callicles respectively, reading aloud from their assigned section. As the students perform these roles, the other member or members of the group should listen closely and consider how Callicles might better defend his views against Socrates. In addition to Callicles' responses, listeners should take note of the tactics used by Socrates.

When you have completed this task, spend ten to fifteen minutes discussing your observations. During your discussion you should consider how you might rewrite Callicles' contributions to the dialogue to better address Socrates' arguments. Make brief annotations to reflect these changes.

Share your thoughts on how Callicles' contributions to the dialogue could be revised to better address Socrates' arguments with the whole class. Then discuss, as a whole class, the following questions:

1. What are the mistakes that Callicles makes in his discussion with Socrates?
2. Are Socrates' counter-arguments/counter-examples entirely successful? Why or why not?
3. Is Callicles justified when he claims that Socrates 'picks on people's mere words'? What other criticisms might be made of Socrates' approach to argument?
4. What are some of the things that can be learned about argument from this example?

When you have completed your discussion make sure you write down any good evaluations of the arguments.

THINK

How do Callicles' different definitions of the superior person reflect his historical context?

491d-495b

KEY CONCEPTS: *HEDONISM*

The word **hedonism** comes from the ancient Greek word for pleasure. Although the word is commonly used to describe a particular kind of lifestyle (think Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, or more recently, Pete Doherty of the Libertines), in philosophy it refers to a group of theories that view pleasure (and the avoidance of pain) as either the motivational force behind human action or the sovereign value to be pursued.

In this section of the dialogue Callicles expresses a sensual hedonism that incorporates both of these perspectives.

This section commences with Socrates asking Callicles whether the 'rulers' he has identified in the previous section are capable of ruling themselves or whether they are subject to the control of their desires. Callicles responds incredulously, saying that the self-rule Socrates is proposing is the very antithesis of freedom because it entails enslavement to others, an idea that is incompatible with a life of happiness. Instead, Callicles proposes a life of hedonism, wherein the individual makes every effort to fulfil every passing whim or desire. Callicles says such a lifestyle is in accordance with nature, whereas the lifestyle Socrates is proposing reflects the views of the masses, who are too timid to win 'satisfaction for their pleasures' – thereby revisiting his earlier claim that the laws of nature and convention are invariably opposed. Callicles clarifies his position by stating that a life of self-restraint such as Socrates proposes is not a real life at all, but that of a 'stone or a corpse.'

Socrates responds to Callicles' argument by stating that the life that Callicles is proposing is a terrifying life as well. He then proceeds to illustrate this point by drawing two analogies, one of a man whose mind is like a sieve (the mind of a fool ruled by his desires) and that of two jars, one which retains its liquids when filled (the jar of the self-restrained individual who is master of his desires) and one which leaks and needs to be filled incessantly (the jar of the individual who is ruled by desire). Callicles remains unconvinced by the analogies, making the point that the individual who has filled his jar can no longer feel pleasure, thereby highlighting a difference of perspective with regard to pleasure that will be taken up in the next part of the dialogue.

Socrates then tries to convince Callicles of the futility of such a life by first equating it to the life of a gully-bird and then to a life spent itching and scratching, which he believes can hardly be conceived of as happy. Callicles, however, remains firm in his resolve, telling Socrates that such a life could indeed be considered both pleasant and happy. Socrates then responds with the example of the catamite, or male prostitute, thereby trumping Callicles by showing him that his inability to distinguish between good and bad pleasures will necessarily lead him to approve of a lifestyle he would hardly view as good or happy. The section concludes with Callicles sulkily maintaining for the sake of consistency, and despite what he sees as Socrates' 'distasteful' example, that pleasure and good are synonymous.

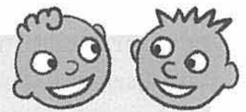
THINK

Which is more conducive to freedom – self restraint or following our desires?

WRITE

1. In your own words, outline Callicles' argument for his version of the good life.
2. Construct a visual representation of the analogies used by Socrates. Your representation should include an explanation of the analogy and what the analogy is intended to demonstrate. For example:

The Jars	The gully bird	Itching and scratching	Male prostitute
Analogy for / illustrates	Analogy for/ illustrates	Analogy for / illustrates	Analogy for / illustrates



DISCUSS

1. Callicles claims that the best kind of life is one where the individual allows her desires to expand 'until they can grow no larger.' Do you agree that doing this would result in a happy life? Why or why not? Try to use examples to support your arguments.
2. Callicles also claims that such a life is endorsed by nature. Do you agree? What evidence can you think of in favour of this claim and what evidence can you think of against this claim?
3. Using the analogy of the leaky jars, Socrates claims that the life Callicles advocates is a terrifying life and suggests that a life of self-restraint is preferable. How effective is Socrates' analogy? Do you agree that such a life is a terrifying life? Why or why not? Do you agree that the life of self-restraint is preferable? Why or why not?
4. Socrates also implies, via the analogies of the gully bird and of itching and scratching, that the life Callicles is advocating is meaningless. Is this an effective criticism of Callicles' good life?
5. Socrates' analogy of the male prostitute places Callicles in a **horned dilemma**. What is a horned dilemma? How could Callicles have avoided this?

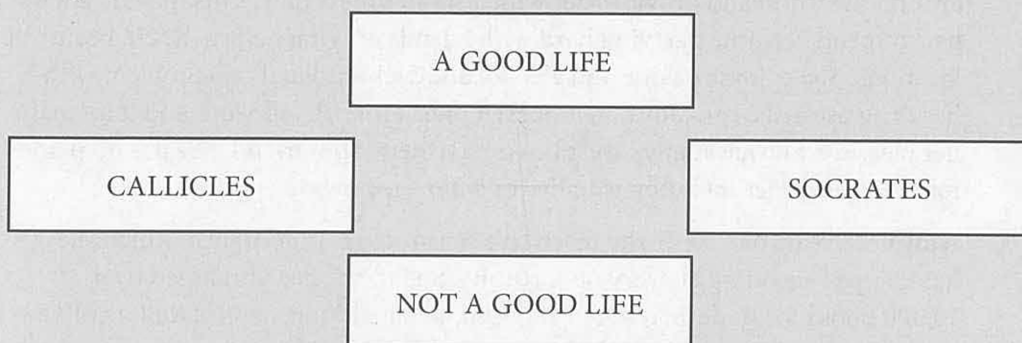
When you have completed your discussion, make sure you write down any good evaluations and examples for future reference.

THINK

Do you agree with Callicles' hedonistic understanding of human nature? Why or why not?

DO

Construct four signs and place them on the floor in the following configuration:



Divide the class into pairs or small groups and allocate one of the following scenarios to each group:

- **John** is a 30-year-old merchant banker. He earns a seven-figure salary, which allows him to pursue his two greatest passions – classic cars and collecting fine art. Since childhood John has loved the sea. At 25 he bought a five-room apartment overlooking Sydney Harbour and every morning he wakes to the sounds of the Manly ferry. On weekends he pursues his third great passion – surfing – on the Northern Beaches, where he has a second home. John likes to spend his money liberally but is indiscriminate in his purchases. John's work leaves little time for friends and he has no partner. On the upside, John has already achieved a major objective – to hold a significant corporate position and earn a seven-figure salary.
- **Mala** is eighteen years old. Since the age of four he has lived in a Buddhist monastery at the foot of the Himalayas. His days begin early – at 4am – and are divided between silent meditation and reading of the scriptures. The order he is part of caters for its members' basic needs but beyond this the monks are bound by vows of asceticism. Mala owns nothing, nor has he spoken to anyone outside of the monastery for years. As part of his vows, his life is dedicated to enlightenment and the pursuit of Nirvana for all living creatures.
- **Fabian** is 68 years old. He lives in a boarding house and suffers intermittently from schizophrenia. Given his meagre income (his pension mainly goes to the boarding house operators) he has become quite thrifty, smoking half-smoked cigarettes off the street rather than buying new ones, looking for extra food in garbage bins and avoiding alcohol. He has many friends in his boarding house and at least two of them he considers his dearest companions.

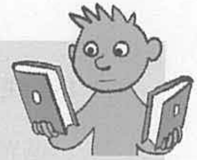
- **Marjorie** is 36 years old. Long ago she turned her back on conventional society and instead lives with her 'tribe' in a teepee village in the hills outside Bellingen in Northern New South Wales. Her home has no running water and her meagre furniture has been scavenged from flea markets and hard rubbish days. She does not work but lives on government benefits and occasionally sells clothing at markets. During summer her life is spent moving from festival to festival where she allows herself to be entirely free, indulging in sex, friendship and drugs as the mood takes her. She has partners that come and go and a ten-year-old son whom she adores.
- **Cassandra** is 22 years old. Her work as a model for high-end fashion takes her around the world and provides her with a six-figure income. This income allows her to spend her time partying hard with friends or lying on beaches in beautiful locations. She enjoys cocaine and alcohol and sees absolutely no problem with her drug use – she can afford it, it doesn't interfere with her work and it increases her pleasure. She has many lovers but no partner or boyfriend. She has no plans for the future. Her intention is to live only for the now.
- **Amy** is 28 years old. At 21 she received a seven-figure inheritance, which she has enjoyed spending at every opportunity. So far, she has purchased over 10,000 books for underprivileged children, donated thousands of dollars of new clothes and bedding to the homeless, opened a women's shelter and permanently supported two mobile soup kitchens. Next month she will use her money to fund an indigenous literacy program. She is greatly admired in the wider community and has even won Australian of the Year. She has an adoring partner and a handful of really great friends, but her munificence means she can barely cover her costs. Indeed her personal debts are significant.
- **Kathy** is a widowed pensioner. She is an excellent manager of her finances, ensuring that she is always able to cover her costs of living. Indeed, so carefully has Kathy managed her money she has been able to add to the modest nest egg that was her inheritance after her husband's death. Despite her extra finances, Kathy refuses to spend money on what she deems 'unnecessary' extras, choosing to stay at home rather than lunching with friends or going to the movies, and consuming simple, plain meals rather than the occasional treat.

In your pair or small group, discuss the case scenario that you have been assigned and then place it where you think it best belongs on the floor (for example, if you believe the scenario is best described as what Callicles believes is a good life place it above the case scenario for Callicles and to the left of the sign for a good life). When you place your sign down, read it aloud to the rest of the class and explain why you are placing it in that position.

When this task is complete, consider as a whole class each of the scenarios. Do you agree with Socrates' and Callicles' assessments of these lives? Why or why not?

Finally, consider, as a whole class, what this activity reveals about the strengths and weaknesses of the life of pleasure and the life of self-restraint.

COMPARE



1. What are the similarities and what are the differences between Callicles' and Socrates' views on the relationship between pleasure and the good life?
2. Which view do you find more persuasive? Why?

495c-499b

This section commences with Socrates asking Callicles to confirm his belief that unrestricted pleasure is good. Socrates then asks Callicles to confirm whether or not courage and knowledge are different, before proceeding to demonstrate, through several examples, why Callicles' attendant claim about the synonymity of pleasure and good is flawed.

Socrates begins his demonstration with the claim that good and bad may be understood as opposites because they cannot co-exist – a point that he illustrates through the examples of living well and living badly, and good health and ill health. Socrates then proposes that if two things can be found which can co-exist or be lost simultaneously, they cannot be considered opposites and are therefore neither good nor bad. He then asks Callicles if he would agree that the feeling of desire is distressing. Callicles, in something of an about-turn from his former position, agrees that this is the case. Socrates then asks whether the sensation of thirst may be understood as distressing and whether satiating thirst may be understood as pleasant. Callicles agrees. Socrates points out that if this is the case and pleasure and distress can co-exist (the thirsty man feels pleasure and distress simultaneously and loses pleasure when distress is satiated), then pleasure and good cannot be synonymous.

Socrates notes that Callicles is not convinced by this example and so, after asking Callicles to agree to the claim that the possession of good qualities is what makes us describe a person as good, proposes another. Who, he asks, is more pleased by the enemy's retreat during a military campaign, the coward or the brave man? Callicles replies that while both would be pleased, the coward would perhaps feel greater pleasure. Socrates then asks who would feel more upset when the enemy advances, the cowards or the brave men? Again, Callicles replies that although both would feel distress, the coward would perhaps feel it more intensely. Socrates seizes on this and points out to a somewhat recalcitrant Callicles that if both thoughtless and clever people, cowards and heroes feel pleasure and distress to the same degree, there is little to tell the difference between good and bad people. Furthermore, Socrates adds that if Callicles equates the possession of a good quality to being good and the possession of a bad quality to being bad, there is little to tell the difference between good and bad people in terms of the pleasure and distress they feel.

WRITE

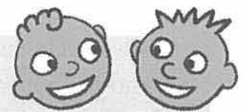
1. Rewrite the following argument, filling in the missing proposition:

   P1: Good and bad cannot co-exist.

   P2:

   ∴ Pleasure and distress are neither good nor bad.

2. How does Socrates support premise one?
3. How does Socrates support premise two?
4. Describe the example of the cowards and brave men in your own words. What are the two things this example is meant to demonstrate?



DISCUSS

Discuss the following questions in pairs, writing down your responses.

1. The first premise of Socrates' argument (good and bad cannot co-exist) is relatively uncontroversial. But what of his second premise? How persuasive is his claim and the example he uses to support it?
2. In his example of the cowards and the brave men Socrates once again places Callicles in a horned dilemma. What is Callicles' dilemma? Can Callicles get out of this dilemma? How?

499b-505c

This section commences with Callicles conceding that there are better and worse pleasures, by which he respectively means – thanks to some prompting from Socrates – pleasures which are beneficial, or which have good effects, and those which are harmful, or which have bad effects. Callicles also concedes that both pleasant and unpleasant experiences can have good or bad effects and we should always pursue those experiences whose end is the good. These admissions lead Socrates to propose that good should be the goal of every action and that all activity should aim at good. Thus pleasure should be pursued for the good rather than vice-versa.

Socrates then asks Callicles if anyone is capable of distinguishing between good and bad pleasures or whether it takes an expert. Callicles agrees that it does. Socrates then reminds Callicles of a previous conversation during which he suggested that there are some procedures, such as cooking, whose sole object is pleasure, and others, such as medicine, which are concerned with good. Socrates calls the former procedures knacks and the latter, expertise.

Socrates then brings the discussion back to the question proposed earlier regarding what kind of life one should live. He begins by claiming that of those procedures concerned with the mind, some are concerned with what is best for the mind, while others are concerned with bringing pleasure to the mind. According to Socrates, procedures of the latter kind might be described as flattering the mind. He then asks Callicles for examples of activities that aim at this. To help Callicles along, Socrates makes several suggestions –playing the reed pipe, playing the *kithara*, training choirs to sing dithyrambic poetry and the composition of tragedies –all of which Callicles agrees serve the sole purpose of bringing abut gratification, and thus pleasure, to their audience. Socrates then asks Callicles what would be left if poetry was stripped of its music, rhythm and metre. The answer is, of course, words which are performed before a large crowd of assembled people –in other words, popular oratory or rhetoric. Therefore, according to Socrates, rhetoric is no different to poetry. Its aim is pleasure through gratification or 'flattery.'

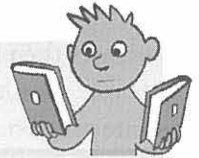
Callicles interjects and suggests that this is not the aim of all popular orators, but when prompted by Socrates to give a concrete example, he cannot immediately think of one. He later puts forward the names of four popular statesmen from the 5th century but, as Socrates demonstrates, even these individuals are not necessarily better than their lesser counterparts. The goal of a speech delivered by a good man, says Socrates, should be like the goal of a tradesman –to organise his materials in such a way that what is created is good. A mind that is organised in this way is in a state of health, which the self-indulgent mind cannot reach. Hence an orator who is not engaged in 'flattery' but in the betterment of minds is practicing an 'expertise' not a knack for he is aiming at good rather than pleasure. Socrates goes on to claim that the process of rendering a mind healthy is 'discipline,' thus he concludes that self-discipline is better for the mind than self-indulgence.

WRITE

1. Describe Socrates' distinction between better and worse pleasures in your own words.
2. Rewrite the following argument, filling in the missing proposition:

   P1: Knacks are concerned with flattering the mind.
   P2:

   ∴ Rhetoric is a knack.
3. Socrates supports the second premise of the above argument by drawing an analogy between poetry and rhetoric. Is this analogy persuasive? Give reasons for your response.
4. Do you agree that the aim of poetry is 'flattery?' Give examples to support your response.



COMPARE

How would Aristotle respond to Socrates' claim that distinguishing between good and bad pleasures requires an expert? Why would he respond in this way?

505c-509c

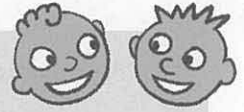
This section commences with Callicles sulkily conceding defeat by bowing out of the discussion and suggesting that Socrates answer his own questions. Socrates takes up Callicles' suggestion, beginning his monologue with an overview of the discussion so far. Socrates points out that as a specific state of organisation is necessary for something to be deemed good, a mind that is self-disciplined is good, for such a mind is orderly. According to Socrates, one who possesses such a mind is able to act justly, religiously and bravely, making him a 'paradigm of goodness.' Socrates adds that such an individual would have a happy life for he is 'bound to do whatever he does well and successfully.' Hence the goal of the community should be to ensure justice and self-discipline. Socrates points out that anyone who lives a life of intemperance will not be happy for not only will they lack the kind of mind that cultivates happiness, they will be like an outlaw, unable to sustain relationships with others and with the gods. This leads him back to where the discussion began: it *is* more contemptible to do wrong rather than suffer wrong for doing wrong is reflective of a disorderly, intemperate mind, and the best thing that can happen to such a person is to be brought to justice.

DO

In pairs and using a highlighter, identify all of they claims Socrates makes in this section.

WRITE

1. Socrates claims that he has demonstrated that the pleasant is not the same as the good. Where in the text did he do this?
2. What is Socrates' argument for the conclusion that a self-disciplined mind is a good mind? How does this argument relate to others expressed within the text?
3. How does Socrates arrive at the conclusion that a good person is a happy person?
4. According to Socrates, why should society focus on cultivating justice and self-discipline?
5. How does Socrates arrive at the conclusion that an unhappy or bad person is an intemperate person?
6. How does Socrates arrive at the conclusion that doing wrong is more contemptible than suffering wrong?



DISCUSS

1. Do you agree with Socrates that the cultivation of justice and self-discipline will produce a happier society? Why or why not?
2. How persuasive is Socrates' claim that happiness depends upon justice and self-discipline?
3. In your opinion, how well has Socrates argued for his conclusion that doing wrong is more contemptible than suffering wrong?

Review Questions

WRITE

1. How does Callicles understand human nature? How does this understanding shape his views on the nature of the good life?
2. According to Callicles, how do moral and social norms come about?
3. Outline Callicles' argument for the claim that the strong should dominate and have more than the weak.
4. Outline Socrates' response to this argument. Is this a good response? How would *you* evaluate Callicles' argument?
5. What is Callicles' argument against the study of philosophy into adulthood?
6. Why does Callicles support the study of philosophy in one's youth?
7. Does Callicles present a good argument against the study of philosophy into adulthood? Why or why not?
8. Do you think philosophy has a role to play in a good life? Why or why not?
9. According to Callicles, what is a happy life? What is a happy life according to Socrates?
10. How does Socrates argue against Callicles' view of a happy life? How effective are these arguments?
11. Do you think a life of pleasure is a happy life? Why or why not?
12. Callicles contends that pleasure is synonymous with good. How does Socrates argue against this claim? How effective is this argument?
13. Callicles also claims that the more pleasure one feels, the better one's life is. How does Socrates argue against this claim? How effective is this argument?
14. What is the distinction between better and worse pleasures? According to Socrates, which should we pursue and why?

15. What is the difference between a knack and an expertise?
16. How does Socrates argue to the conclusion that rhetoric is a knack?
17. Why does Socrates believe that self-discipline is essential for a happy life?
18. According to Socrates, why should society focus on cultivating justice and self-discipline?
19. Do you agree that justice and self-discipline are important goals for a society? Why or why not?
20. Why, according to Socrates, is doing wrong more contemptible than suffering wrong? Why does Callicles disagree?
21. Do you think it is more contemptible to do wrong rather than suffer it? Why?

TIP

Always remember when you are asked 'do you agree?' not to simply provide a list of personal reasons for your response but to instead provide arguments to show the reader why they should agree with your response.

PART C

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*

Historical and Philosophical Context

Of all the students who studied at Plato's Academy, no doubt the most famous and most significant was Aristotle. And yet, despite their long association, marked differences exist between the two men's work. These differences are succinctly encapsulated in Raphael's (1483-1520) Renaissance masterpiece, *The School of Athens.*

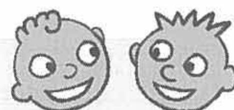
If you look closely at this detail from Raphael's painting you will note that the figure on the left, who is Plato, holds in one a hand a copy of the *Timaeus* (360 BCE), a dialogue discussing the nature of the universe, change and the Theory of Forms, while his other hand points to the sky. The other figure, Aristotle, holds a copy of the *Ethics* and presses his palm towards the ground.

Although both Plato and Aristotle were interested in the question of how one ought to live, Aristotle believed that the best way to answer this question was not through abstract notions like the Theory of Forms, but by looking at the world around him.

This is unsurprising if one considers that, in addition to his work in philosophy, Aristotle was fascinated by the study of biology. Indeed, Aristotle's collected writings on zoology, which represent approximately 25 percent of his surviving work, are widely regarded as the first systematic and comprehensive study of animals. In these works Aristotle attempts to answer the question of why various creatures are the way they are. Unlike Plato, who might have answered this question with reference to the Forms, Aristotle believed the answer lay in the internal organisation of the organisms themselves. A child, for example, comes to know what a cat is not because the cat participates within a particular Form, but by observing a number of cats and noting what they share in common.

Aristotle felt that this understanding of how we come to know things could also be applied to concepts such as justice, virtue and good. Through our encounters with, and observations of, others we gradually build up an understanding of what justice or virtue means.

Aristotle's observations also led him to another important conclusion: it isn't only a thing's physical characteristics that make it the kind of thing it is, but what it does and how it behaves. While this will in part be dictated by the thing's composition (its physical aspects and how they are arranged), it is also the result of its purpose or function (what the Greeks termed ***telos***). An eye, for example, does what it does because its function is to see. A good eye is an eye that sees well, a bad eye is an eye that sees poorly. Thus, Aristotle concluded, if we are to know what it means to be a good human we need not look to abstract ideas but to the kind of thing a human being is, for like things in nature, humans too are composed of particular elements and have a particular function which dictates their good.

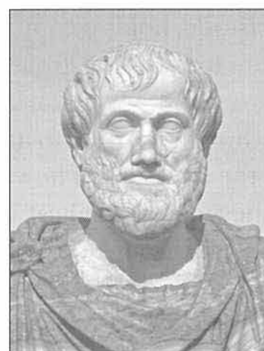


DISCUSS

1. Aristotle claims that we can establish a purpose or function for all things. Is this true? Can you think of any counter-examples to this claim?
2. Aristotle also claims that by understanding how a thing is constructed (its composition and its function), we can establish if it is a good thing of its kind. Do you think this is true of humans? Why or why not?
3. If we agree that it is possible to identify a human function and that good resides in function, what might be the function of, and good for, human beings? Why do you think this?

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Aristotle (384BCE–322BCE)



The son of a physician to the Macedonian court, Aristotle was born in Stagira, in the northeast of modern Greece. When he was a child his father died and so he was brought up by a guardian who sent him, at the age of seventeen, to study at Plato's (Famous Philosopher File, p.206) Academy in Athens. Aristotle remained at the Academy for almost twenty years as a student and later as a teacher. During this time, the kingdom of Macedonia had begun to grow in strength under the leadership of Aristotle's childhood friend, King Phillip II. Phillip's campaign of military expansionism was gradually creeping towards Athens and anti-Macedonian feeling ran high in the city. In 347 BCE Phillip waged a brutal and murderous campaign against Athens' close ally, the city of Olynthus, and just a few months later Plato died.

Whether it was the political climate or the fact that Aristotle's philosophical views were beginning to depart from those of his colleagues at the Academy, Aristotle was overlooked for leadership of the Academy. Aristotle decided to go into exile, first to Assos, a city on the north Aegean coast of what is now Turkey and then, after the Persians attacked the city and killed the king, to Lesbos. While in Assos he married his first wife, Pythias, with whom he had a daughter. From Lesbos the couple returned to Macedonia at the request of Phillip to tutor his thirteen year old son, Alexander.

In 336BCE young Alexander, who would later conquer a vast stretch of territory encompassing Turkey, Egypt and Western Asia and become known as Alexander the Great, ascended to the Macedonian throne. Under the protection of Antipater, the regent appointed by Alexander, Aristotle returned to Athens where he founded his own philosophical school, the Lyceum, in a public exercising park just outside the city (the site of which was discovered during an archeological dig in 1996). Aristotle taught at the Lyceum for thirteen years and it is from this period that his surviving writings date. In 323BCE, the year which marks the end of the Classical Age, Alexander died in mysterious circumstances while visiting the court of Nebuchadnezzar III in Babylon. His death resulted in a strong anti-Macedonian backlash in Athens. As part of this backlash Aristotle found himself indicted on charges of impiety not unlike those levelled at Socrates three generations earlier. Fearing, it is said, that Athens would 'sin against philosophy one more time,' Aristotle went into exile at a family home in Chalcis where he died, one year later, at the age of 62.

Aristotle's legacy to philosophy is profound. In the seventh century he was translated into Arabic and widely disseminated through the Islamic world. In the thirteenth century the philosopher Thomas Aquinas braved a ban on his work by integrating his ideas into Christian philosophy and Aristotle's views about the importance of experience over reason as a source of knowledge would have a profound influence on the debate between rationalism and empiricism in the eighteenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century that additions were made to the systems of logic he laid out during his lifetime and his work continues to influence philosophy via the renewed interest in virtue ethics.

Studying *The Nicomachean Ethics*

Introduction

Historians believe that *The Nicomachean Ethics* dates from the period during which Aristotle headed the Lyceum (around 350 BCE). Rather than a complete work like Plato's *Gorgias*, *The Nicomachean Ethics* are thought to be either academic treatises or notes from lectures Aristotle was giving or working on which were later collated and edited by his son, Nicomachus. Perhaps for this reason the writing can at times appear dry or to jump from one topic to the next.

Nevertheless, *The Nicomachean Ethics* is widely considered to be one of Western philosophy's most important philosophical works, influencing everything from medieval philosophy to modern virtue ethics. In it, Aristotle attempts to provide an account of the good life for human beings, including how society should be structured in order to make such a life possible.

The text commences with an investigation into the nature of happiness and from there proceeds to a discussion about moral and intellectual virtues, including justice, and the role of pleasure and friendship in the good life. Because one's capacity to live the good life is intimately tied to the kind of society in which one lives, Aristotle concludes the text with a brief discussion of the importance of education in helping to facilitate the kind of disposition required to live well.

The sections of the text selected for our study are from Book I (chapters 1-5 and 7-8) and Book II. Aristotle commences Book I by asking what is the good for man and concludes with the answer that it is happiness, or ***eudaemonia***. In Book II, Aristotle sets out to discover how this state of happiness might be achieved via an investigation into moral excellence. Within the context of this discussion, Aristotle contemplates a variety of issues, including:

- What is good;
- The suitability of the young for moral philosophy;
- Human nature and its relationship to the good life;
- The nature of virtue;
- How a good character is cultivated;
- The relationship between virtue and the good life.

DO

Read all of the set text from *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Book I, chapters 1-5 and 7-8, and Book II).

Together with a partner discuss what you think Aristotle's responses are to the following questions:

- What is the good?
- How does Aristotle understand happiness?
- How does Aristotle understand human nature and what is the link between human nature and happiness?
- What is virtue?
- What is the Mean?
- What are the characteristics of the good person?

Write down any answers that you did not agree on or were unsure of.

Book I

SUBJECT OF OUR INQUIRY (CHAPTERS 1 AND 2)

KEY CONCEPTS: *POLITICAL SCIENCE*

For Aristotle, political science is both the study of how to organise societies so as to achieve their good and the study of how to secure the good for individual citizens. Thus the term may be considered to encompass moral philosophy as well as political philosophy.

In the first two chapters of Book I Aristotle sets up the question for his inquiry (what is the Good?) and provides a rationale for this inquiry. His first answer to his question is provided in the first line of Chapter 1: the Good is 'that at which all things aim.' However, Aristotle immediately recognises that this answer is insufficient: our aims or ends are diverse in nature. Some are instrumental, desired only because they make the achievement of higher aims or ends possible, and some are intrinsic, meaning they are desired only for themselves ('the products apart from the activities that produce them'). According to Aristotle, it is these latter aims or ends that are to be preferred. This leads Aristotle to assert at the beginning of Chapter 2 that if there is an end or aim to our actions and if every aim is not chosen for the sake of something else, there exists a chief, or final, good. Knowledge of what this final good is, is important for it will increase the likelihood of us hitting upon what is right. This is Aristotle's rationale for his inquiry.

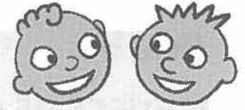
Aristotle then asks which of the sciences the good is the province of. Aristotle's answer is political science because it ordains which of the sciences should be studied, by whom and for how long, it umbrellas all of the most esteemed sciences, it decides what we can and can't do and its end includes others: in short, it is concerned with securing the good for the citizens of the society that is its focus.

THINK

How do Aristotle's views on the role of political science reflect his historical context?

WRITE

1. What is the final definition of the Good given by Aristotle by the end of Chapter 2?
2. Construct two examples to illustrate what Aristotle means by the claim, 'a certain difference is found among ends: some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them.'
3. According to Aristotle, why is political science the science of the Good?



DISCUSS

A well-known fallacy that is often used to evaluate Aristotle's claim for the existence of a chief, or final, good is the **Roads to Rome fallacy**:

1. Every road leads to some town.
2. Thus there is a particular town (Rome) to which all roads lead.

Discuss with a partner how the Roads to Rome fallacy might be used to evaluate Aristotle's claim.

What further evidence can you think of to support the view that there is not one final Good?

NATURE OF THE SCIENCE (CHAPTER 3)

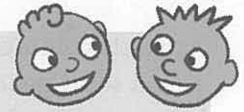
Aristotle commences Chapter 3 with a warning: we can only expect as much precision from this inquiry as the subject matter will allow. Given that what constitutes a noble or a just action exhibits 'much variety and fluctuation,' Aristotle tells us that we must be content with approximations rather than precise answers.

Aristotle then moves on to discuss the characteristics of the appropriate student of political science. He begins by telling us that what makes someone a good judge of a subject is that he knows his subject well. Young men and those 'youthful in character' cannot be considered appropriate students of political science because they are inexperienced in the actions of life (which is the subject matter of political science) and because they have a tendency to follow their passions, which makes their studies 'vain and unprofitable.' Aristotle tells us that unless the individual acts in accordance with reason, such knowledge that comes from political science will be of little benefit.

WRITE

1. A good judge is someone who knows his subject well. What ensures that he knows his subject well?
2. What prohibits a young man or one 'youthful in character' from being a 'good judge' of the questions addressed by political science? What reasons does Aristotle give to support his claim? Make sure your answer relates to the one given for Question 1.

DISCUSS



1. Aristotle claims that someone inexperienced in the actions of life is an inappropriate 'hearer of lectures on political science.' What arguments can you think of to support this claim?
2. Could someone inexperienced in the actions of life still benefit from studying political science? Why or why not?
3. Why might following one's passions make the study of political science 'vain and unprofitable'?
4. Could someone who follows his or her passions benefit from studying political science? Why or why not?

When you have completed your discussion make sure you write down any good evaluations for future reference.

COMPARE

How might Socrates respond to Aristotle's claim that to be a good judge of something, such as political science, one has to know the subject well? What exact arguments from *Gorgias* have led you to this conclusion?

WHAT IS THE HUMAN GOOD? (CHAPTERS 4 AND 5)

KEY CONCEPTS: *ENDOXA*

Endoxa is a Greek word that refers to commonly held beliefs or opinions. Throughout *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle uses *endoxa* as a starting point for his ethical investigations.

KEY CONCEPTS: *EUDAEMONIA*

When the word happiness is used in the text, what is actually being referred to is *eudaemonia*, a Greek term which literally translates as 'good spirit.' Unlike the word 'happiness,' which we commonly use to describe a feeling (of pleasure perhaps, or contentment), *eudaemonia* refers to what one has made of oneself and one's life. Thus a more appropriate translation might be something along the lines of 'human flourishing' or 'reaching one's full human potential.' As you read the text it is important that you keep in mind this definition of happiness rather than the one you may use in your day-to-day life.

Aristotle commences Chapter 4 by restating what he has thus far established: that all pursuits aim at some good. Aristotle then claims that there is general agreement that the highest good is happiness, which, it is further agreed, is living well and faring well. However, Aristotle immediately recognises a problem with this definition: people have different views with regard to what is meant by living well and faring well. The many tend to identify it with pleasure, wealth or honour, or define it according to their circumstances (for example, when they are sick they identify it with health), or, out of their ignorance, identify it with 'some great thing that is above their comprehension'. Some take the Platonic view that there is a further good that is 'good in itself' (which Aristotle later rejects). Aristotle acknowledges that any attempt to examine all of the different views on what constitutes happiness would be pointless and so instead chooses to examine those that he believes are the most prevalent or controversial.

From this point, the chapter diverts into a discussion about method. Aristotle makes a distinction between arguments that work from, and those that work to, first principles. Aristotle claims that while we must begin our inquiries with what is evident, things are evident in two ways: 'some to us, some without qualification.' Aristotle favours beginning with what is evident to us. He ties this claim to his remarks in Chapter 3 regarding the student of political science: one must be brought up in good habits (in other words, already knowing such things as what is cowardly and what is generous) if one is to engage in political science because such an upbringing capacitates one to easily find 'starting points' for his understanding of ethical ideas. Aristotle ends the chapter with a quote from the Greek poet, Hesiod, which suggest that the individual who has neither insight nor obeys the counsel of those wiser than him is 'useless.'

In Chapter 5 Aristotle returns to his discussion of what constitutes happiness and examines three 'prominent kinds of lives' – the life of pleasure or sensual enjoyment, the political life and the contemplative life. He says that many people prefer the life 'suitable to beasts' (the life of pleasure) because they are slavish in their tastes, whereas people of 'superior refinement' tend to see happiness as synonymous with honour because it is the end of the political life. Aristotle rejects this latter view because honour is dependent on those who bestow it rather than those who receive it, and because people who pursue honour do so because it assures them of their merit. Aristotle also rejects virtue, which he suggests is the reason why people seek honour and might also be thought of as the end of the political life. The final life that Aristotle rejects is the life of money making. Aristotle concludes the chapter by claiming that although the aforementioned ends (pleasure, honour, and so on) appear to be loved for themselves, they are not the final end, despite the fact that 'many arguments have been wasted on the support of them.'

THINK

How are Aristotle's views regarding method reflected in his approach in *The Nicomachean Ethics*?

WRITE

Construct a chart like the one below that shows Aristotle's views on the 'prominent kinds of lives.'

Kind of Life	Why it is mistaken for happiness/the good life	Why Aristotle rejects it
The life of pleasure		
The life of honour		
The life of virtue		
The life of moneymaking		

Answer the following questions:

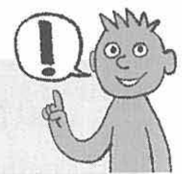
1. Later on in *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle will argue that pleasure is part of a eudaemonic life. This would suggest that Aristotle is only dismissive of certain kinds of pleasures and particular attitudes towards pleasure. From Aristotle's comments in this section, what kinds of pleasures do you assume he is referring to?
2. Why might such pleasures be considered at odds with a eudaemonic life?
3. Because virtue is synonymous with the possession of a good character (see Book II), in rejecting the life of virtue Aristotle implies that simply possessing a good character is not enough for a good life. What do we learn about happiness / the good life and the good person from his rejection of virtue?
4. What else do we learn about Aristotle's view of happiness from his rejection of the other prominent kinds of lives?

DO

Divide the class into four groups. Each group will focus on one of the prominent kinds of lives described by Aristotle. Members of each group will work independently to construct an example to interrogate Aristotle's rejection of the kind of life that is their focus (for example, a student who is focusing on pleasure might construct an example of a pleasurable life that might also be considered a good life).

When this task is completed, students will form groups of four in which each of the four prominent lives is represented. Students are to share their examples and discuss the following questions:

1. How might Aristotle respond to each of these examples and why?
2. In light of your responses to Question 1, do any of these examples provide a good criticism of Aristotle's arguments?
3. How else could Aristotle's dismissal of these lives be evaluated?
4. Putting aside Aristotle's views, do you think a person could live any of these prominent lives and still live a good life? Why or why not?



TIP: AVOIDING NAIVE RELATIVISM

When asked to evaluate questions about values such as 'could a life of sensual pleasure be a good life?' it is tempting to refuse to take a position on the grounds that 'no one can judge anyone else because everyone has their own standards and opinions.' This is a common response often heard in philosophy classrooms. It is not, however, a very good response. Although it may be true that there are a great diversity of views on, for example, the role of pleasure in the good life, we *can* make judgments about the persuasiveness of these views by looking at the reasons why people hold them. Indeed, one might argue that examining reasons and making judgments is the business of philosophy. Therefore, as you work through the questions asked in this Unit, try to avoid this kind of response (commonly referred to as **naïve relativism**) and instead think critically about the reasons that are used to support particular views and opinions.

WHAT IS THE HUMAN GOOD? (CHAPTERS 7 AND 8)

KEY CONCEPTS: *ARETĒ*

This important term in Greek philosophy is sometimes translated as 'virtue.' However, this translation can prove confusing to modern readers, as we often think of virtue in distinctly modern terms. For Aristotle, *aretē* meant something akin to 'excellence' expressed in terms of purpose or function. Thus being fast and adept with a ball might be the *aretē* of a football player, and sharpness might be the *aretē* of a knife. In human terms, we might think of *aretē*, or virtue, as doing what we are meant to do well.

Although Aristotle only briefly touches on this concept in Chapter 8, it will take on particular significance in Book II, when he discusses moral virtue.

KEY CONCEPTS: *TELOS*

Loosely translated, the word *telos – from which the word 'teleology' is derived –* means 'end' or 'aim' or 'purpose.' According to Aristotle, all things have a *telos* which, together with their physical attributes and the organisation of these physical attributes, makes the thing what it is and defines its function. Although the notion of *telos* is significant throughout Book I, it takes on particular importance in Chapter 7 when Aristotle seeks to discover the purpose of human life by first establishing the human function.

THINK

Is a function or purpose a necessary condition for the existence of a human nature? Why or why not?

Aristotle begins Chapter 7 by once again highlighting the diversity of ends and pointing out that what is common between them, despite this diversity, is that the good of each is why all else is done. Thus the end that he seeks is one that is achievable by action. Aristotle goes on to raise a distinction made earlier in Book I: that not all ends are final ends, but the chief good must be final. Aristotle then adds a further feature to the chief good: it is desired for its own sake and not for the sake of something else.

According to Aristotle, happiness fits each of the criteria he has established for the final good. It is desired for itself, rather than for the sake of something else, it is self-sufficient in that it lacks nothing, it is considered the most desirable of all things, and it is the end of action.

However, as Aristotle points out, these criteria still tell us very little about the nature of happiness and 'a clearer account of what it is, is still desired.' To develop this 'clearer account' Aristotle says we must first consider the function of man, for good resides in, or is defined by, function (for example, a good flute-player is one who performs the function of playing the flute well). Aristotle reasons that humans must have a function for craftsmen have functions as does each part of the human body. Aristotle dismisses life, as well as nutrition and growth, as possible candidates for the human function for these are things that we share with plants. He also dismisses the life of perception, or sentience, for we share this with animals. He then concludes that our function is an activity of the soul that implies reason (thus happiness may be identified as an activity rather than a state or capacity). Aristotle goes on to say that if we define good in accordance with function, then the human good, or the good life, involves the performance of a distinctly human activity or activities in accordance with virtue or excellence. Aristotle adds that this must occur across a whole life, not just at a particular moment.

Aristotle cautions that what he has provided is simply an outline of the good, the details of which can be filled in later, and reminds his readers of his earlier claims regarding the degree of precision possible in different disciplines. According to Aristotle, we should always seek to establish our principles in a way best suited to their nature.

At the beginning of Chapter 8 Aristotle assesses his conclusions regarding happiness against commonly held views. Goods, he says, are divided into three classes: those that are external, those that are related to the body and those that are related to the soul. Aristotle claims that goods of the soul are generally regarded as 'most properly and truly goods,' and that happiness is considered to be a good of the soul. It is also commonly believed that happiness is a kind of living well and faring well, that it may be identified with virtue and philosophic or practical wisdom, that it is accompanied by pleasure and involves some degree of external prosperity.

Aristotle believes his account of happiness accords with the view that it is a kind of living well and faring well and that happiness may be identified with virtue 'for virtue belongs to virtuous activity.' This leads Aristotle to remind his readers of the significance of activity: just as in the Olympic Games it is those who compete who are crowned, so too in life it is those who *do* that may be regarded as having eudaemonic lives. Aristotle adds that his account of happiness also accords with the view that happiness is accompanied by pleasure, for virtue is both inherently pleasant and pleasurable for the virtuous man, who also finds such actions good and noble. He concludes by making the point that such a life requires external goods for such goods facilitate noble actions and preserve the 'lustre' of happiness. Because of this, people often mistake happiness for good fortune.

WRITE

1. What qualities do happiness and the final good share?
2. Can you think of anything else that shares the qualities of the final good?
3. Rewrite Aristotle's Function Argument and the Argument for the Human Good as outlined below, filling in the missing propositions:

   P1: Human beings have a unique function.
   P2: The human function is not life because life is shared by plants.
   P3:

   ___

   ∴

   P4: Good resides in function.

   ___

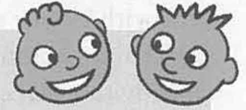
   ∴

4. Aristotle supports the first premise of the Function Argument in two ways. The first is to draw an analogy between humans and craftsmen. Is this a good analogy? What are some possible criticisms of it?

5. The second way Aristotle supports the first premise of the Function Argument is to draw an inference from body parts to human beings. Is this inference effective? What are some possible criticisms of it?

6. Aristotle concludes that reason is the human function because it is unique to humans. How persuasive is this claim? What evidence can you think of to contradict it?

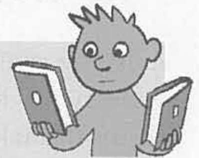
7. Even if we accept that the human function is reason does it necessarily follow that to live a good life we must use our reason? Why or why not? Can you draw an analogy with other human behaviour to illustrate your argument?
8. In what ways does Aristotle believe that his view of happiness accords with common perceptions of happiness?
9. What are the external goods that Aristotle believes help facilitate a good life?



DISCUSS

Aristotle claims that there are particular external goods which help facilitate a good life:

1. How do these goods help facilitate the good life?
2. Do you agree that these goods help facilitate a good life?
3. Could possession of these goods result in a bad life?
4. To what degree does Aristotle's list of external goods reflect his historical context?
5. If Aristotle were to produce a list of external goods today, would he include the same goods? What might be added to, or subtracted from, this list and why?



COMPARE

Aristotle and Callicles have very different views on human nature, which result in very different views of the good life.

Imagine that you are a talk show host who will be conducting an on-air interview with Callicles and Aristotle. The purpose of the interview is to showcase the differences between the two views of the good life and how these differences stem from different views of human nature. It is also important that you find aspects of each argument where the men might be in agreement and that you encourage them to respond to each other's views and provide reasons why they are responding in the way they are.

Write a list of interview questions (five to seven). Join with a partner and share your lists. Select from these two lists five questions that best serve the purposes of the task and write a transcript for the imagined interview.

Share your interview with the rest of your class.

Book II

MORAL VIRTUE, HOW IT IS ACQUIRED (CHAPTERS 1-4)

Aristotle commences Chapter 1 by identifying two kinds of virtue – moral virtue and intellectual virtue. Intellectual virtue, Aristotle tells us, is cultivated through teaching, whereas moral virtue is the result of habit. Aristotle believes we are capacitated for virtue, however if these capacities are to be realised it requires training. Using the example of lyre players and builders, Aristotle goes on to claim that virtues are both produced and destroyed in action: just as one who plays the lyre well is a good lyre player, one who plays poorly is a bad lyre player. This is also the case with virtue: one becomes good-tempered or self-indulgent according to how they behave in particular circumstances. Aristotle thus concludes that states of character arise from our actions or activities. Hence the importance of forming good habits, by which Aristotle means appropriate responses to given situations, in our youth.

In Chapter 2 Aristotle reminds us once again that we should not expect precision in this inquiry: the given circumstances in any situation will vary widely, thus it is impossible to arrive at fixed rules to guide behaviour. Nevertheless, he believes it important to try to come up with something. Using the examples of health and strength, and the virtues of courage and temperance, Aristotle begins by stating that virtues are destroyed by the vices of excess and defect (too much or too little) and preserved by the mean (or intermediate). Aristotle goes on to claim that just as virtue both originates from and is destroyed by our actions, the sphere in which virtue is actualised is also the same. Thus temperance is not only destroyed by being either self-indulgent or insensible and preserved through a proportionate response to pleasure, but by habituating ourselves to abstain from pleasure we become temperate. And by becoming temperate we are better able to have an appropriate response to pleasure.

Aristotle continues this discussion of the formation of states of character in Chapter 3 via a discussion of how people respond to particular feelings. At the beginning of the chapter Aristotle claims that taking pleasure in good acts is a prerequisite of virtue, which leads him to the further claim that moral virtue is concerned with pleasure and pain. To support this claim he provides a simple argument: virtues are concerned with actions and passions and every action and passion is concerned with pleasure and pain (pleasure and pain motivate action), thus virtue is concerned with pleasure and pain. Because we often do bad things on account of pleasure and abstain from noble acts on account of pain, Aristotle says it is important that young people are brought up in such a way as to ensure they have appropriate responses to pleasure and pain, delighting in and being pained by the things they ought.

If it is because of pleasure and pain that men are made bad, it makes sense, says Aristotle, to conclude that virtue is doing what is best in relation to pleasure and pain. Thus both virtue and vice are concerned with exactly the same thing – our responses to pleasure and pain.

Aristotle continues this line of discussion by identifying three objects of choice and three of avoidance: the noble, the advantageous and the pleasant, and the base, injurious and painful. Aristotle says that what separates the good man from the bad man is that the former tends to do right when confronted with each of these, whereas the latter tends to go wrong. And this is particularly the case, Aristotle says, with pleasure, for it has been ingrained in us since our infancy to assess actions in terms of the pleasure and pain they may cause us.

In Chapter 4 Aristotle looks at the role of action in the formation of states of character. Aristotle commences the chapter by pointing out what could be seen as a conundrum of his argument thus far: by positing that virtue is the outcome of action, surely this means that virtue is synonymous with action. Thus 'virtuous' is not something we come to be but something we are at any time we are engaged in virtuous action. However, Aristotle believes that just because an action is characteristically virtuous, it doesn't follow that it is a virtuous act. For an act to be truly virtuous it must be done as the virtuous man would do it. In other words, in addition to having the characteristics of a virtuous act, the act must be performed with knowledge (the individual knows they are behaving in a virtuous way), must be chosen for its own sake, and it must 'proceed from a firm and unchangeable character' (in other words, from a virtuous disposition). Thus it is not enough to do, for example, just and temperate acts if one wishes to be virtuous. One must also do them as the virtuous man would do them and through so doing, one shall become virtuous (hence the significance of *doing* to the development of a virtuous state of character).

Aristotle concludes the chapter by suggesting that this is not what most people do. Rather they retreat into theory and, like a patient who listens attentively to a doctor and then abides by none of her instructions, are not made better.

WRITE

1. What are the similarities and differences between moral and intellectual virtues? Which kind of virtue is Aristotle concerned with in this Book and how would you define it?
2. What is the relationship between good habits in youth and the formation of a virtuous character?
3. Using one of Aristotle's examples, describe what he means when he says that virtue is destroyed by excess and defect and preserved by the mean.
4. How does Aristotle arrive at the conclusion that virtue is concerned with pleasure and pain? How would you define virtue in light of this argument?
5. What are the three objects of choice and the three objects of avoidance and exactly how would the good man respond to these?
6. What are the criteria for an action to be deemed virtuous? Are these criteria problematic? Why or why not?

COMPARE

How might Aristotle respond to Callicles' prescriptions for the good life? Make sure you draw from the four chapters discussed above to support your claims.

DEFINITION OF MORAL VIRTUE (CHAPTERS 5 AND 6)

In Chapter 5 Aristotle turns his attention to the question of what exactly a virtue is. He begins by identifying three kinds of things that are found in the soul: passions, capacities and states of character. He dismisses passions as a possible candidate for virtue, for people are not called good or bad, or praised or blamed because of their passions, but they are on the grounds of virtue. He also dismisses capacities, for capacities are not matters of choice whereas virtue is believed to be a matter of choice (hence the reason we can be praised or blamed on the basis of it) and capacities are things that we are endowed with by nature, whereas virtue is something that we develop, either by training or habituation. Also, like the passions, we are not praised or blamed, nor called good or bad, because of our capacity for various feelings. Thus Aristotle claims that virtues must be states of character.

In Chapter 6 Aristotle discusses what kind of state of character virtue is. Using the example of an eye and a horse, Aristotle says that the excellence of a thing makes both the object and its work good (an eye that performs its function with excellence both sees well and is a good eye). This is also true in the case of humans, for the excellence or virtue of a human being is a state of character that makes him do his work well.

To make plainer how this state of character is developed, Aristotle provides further detail on his idea of virtue as a kind of mean. Aristotle begins by stating that of all things 'continuous and divisible' it is possible to take more, less or an equal amount either of the thing itself (for example, I can take a couple of chocolates from the box, or all of them, or an appropriate amount) or relative to us (what is more, less or an appropriate amount will differ if I am sharing the box of chocolates with a group of friends, or with my students, or with my best friend). The equal, or intermediate, point lies between the vices of excess and defect.

Aristotle clarifies that what he means by 'intermediate' is a point equidistant between the two vices and what he means by 'relatively to us' is according to our situation. Thus while it is the case that all wrestlers must eat neither too much nor too little food (a point equidistant between excess and deficiency), what exactly that amount will be will be different for the beginner and for a great wrestler, such as Milo.

Aristotle goes on to say that just as in art, where goodness is judged according to the intermediate and where excess and defect is destructive, so too with virtue: we can feel pleasure and pain too much or too little but when we 'feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way', we have hit the mean or virtue. This intermediate point, Aristotle tells us, is both praised and understood as a form of success (whereas we are blamed for both excess and defect, which are viewed as forms of failure), thus it fits with Aristotle's claim in the previous chapter about states of character.

Before briefly summarising his understanding of virtue as a state of character concerned with choice lying in a mean relative to us as determined by reason, Aristotle points out that virtue is difficult, for, given the scope of vice and the precision of virtue, it is possible to fail in many ways but to succeed only in one.

Aristotle finishes the chapter by pointing out that there are some passions and actions that do not have a mean, such as shamelessness, envy, adultery, theft and murder. These passions and actions already imply badness, for they are, by definition, vices.

WRITE

1. What does Aristotle mean when he refers to passions, actions and states of character?
2. Is virtue a passion, action or state of character? Why?

DO

Construct a diagram of the mean and explain the concept to a partner using the information in this chapter and the other chapters in Book II that you have read so far. Make sure your explanation includes each of the following points:

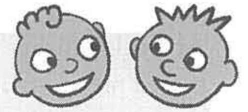
- A description of the mean in relation to the vices of excess and defect
- The role reason plays in determining the mean
- The relationship between passions and actions, and pleasure and pain, and the mean
- The role of the mean in the formation of a virtuous state of character

As you are explaining the concept of the mean to your partner, your partner should listen carefully. When you have completed the task, it is the job of your partner to fill in any gaps in your explanation and clarify any ambiguities.

Finish the activity by joining with another pair to check your understanding. Then write a detailed explanation to accompany your diagram for your notes.

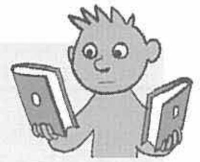
THINK

Aristotle says that there are certain passions and actions that have no mean, for they are, by definition, vices. What exactly does he mean by this? Consider the concept of the mean when pondering your answer.



DISCUSS

1. Would Aristotle endorse the expression of strong feelings, such as anger, joy, aggression or excitement? From which of his arguments do you draw your conclusions?
2. Does pleasure have a role to play in Aristotle's good life? What kind of role?
3. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean implies that all ethical conundrums are susceptible to quantitative analysis. Is this necessarily true? Can you think of a situation where the doctrine of the mean would prove unhelpful to the deliberations of the ethical agent? How might Aristotle respond to your example?
4. Putting aside any criticisms arrived at in answering question 3, how useful do you think the mean would be when applied to real life situations? What are its strengths and what are its weaknesses?
5. The doctrine of the mean implies that moral excellence is simply neither overreacting nor underreacting in a given situation. Is this too simplistic? Why or why not?



COMPARE

1. Drawing on Book II, Chapters 5 and 6, and relevant arguments in *Gorgias*, what are the similarities and differences between Socrates' and Aristotle's views of the good life?
2. How might Callicles respond to the claims Aristotle has made in Book II, Chapters 5 and 6? Why would he respond in this way? Are you inclined to agree with him? Why or why not?

DEFINITION OF MORAL VIRTUE (CHAPTER 7)

In Chapter 7 Aristotle attempts to give more precision to his notion of virtue by developing it through examples. By moving from the general to the particular, Aristotle hopes to give us guidelines that are 'more true,' which resonates with his desire to provide his audience with a philosophy that moves beyond the theoretical to the practical.

At the very beginning of the chapter Aristotle makes reference to a table. Commentators assume that at this point in the lecture Aristotle probably exhibited a chart to help illuminate his examples.

DO

Using the information contained in Chapter 7, reconstruct and complete the following table:

Action / passion	Defect	Mean	Excess	Additional notes
Fear and confidence (P)*				
Pleasure and pain (P)				
Giving and taking of money (small sums) (A)				
Giving and taking of money (large sums) (A)				
Honour and dishonour (P)				
Anger (P)				
Words and actions (truth) (A)				
Words and actions (pleasantness in giving amusement) (A)				
Pleasantness in life generally (A)				
		Modesty Modest		
Response to the fortunes of others (P)				

*Passions/Actions

THINK

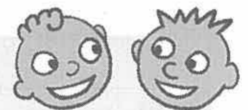
Are there any virtues that don't have accompanying vices?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXTREME AND MEAN STATES: PRACTICAL COROLLARIES (CHAPTERS 8 AND 9)

Aristotle commences Chapter 8 by clarifying that the three kinds of dispositions or choices are virtue and its two accompanying vices. While each is opposed to the other, the greatest contrariety is that of the vices to each other, for they are further from one another and closer to the mean. Yet, while both are closer to the mean, some vices will bear a closer resemblance to the mean they accompany and some will be more opposed. For example, rashness bears a closer resemblance to bravery than cowardice, whereas self-indulgence is more contrary to temperance. The reasons for this, according to Aristotle, are twofold: virtues are more one of their accompanying vices and we tend to naturally gravitate towards the vice that is least like the virtue.

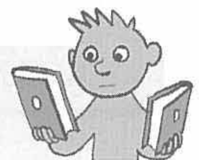
Given the problems of our natural inclinations and the nature of virtue, it is not surprising that Aristotle claims, at the beginning of Chapter 9, that it is 'no easy task to be good' and for this reason goodness is 'rare and laudable and noble.' Yet despite the inherent difficulty involved in choosing the virtuous action, Aristotle provides us with some tips to make it easier. First, he advises always departing from what is more contrary to the mean – in other words, always seeking to avoid cowardice or self-indulgence. He also suggests we consider our own natures. What kind of response do we more naturally gravitate towards? By considering our own responses to pleasure and pain we can have a clearer idea of the vices we are more inclined to and so push more towards their contraries with the ambition of hitting the mean. Finally, Aristotle cautions us to always be on our guard against pleasure because, given that we have a tendency to gravitate towards pleasure, we are less likely to go astray if do.

Aristotle concludes the chapter by pointing out that although we sometimes praise those who incline towards vices (which makes distinguishing right action difficult), we rarely blame the individual who deviates little from goodness. Of course it is not easy to determine just how far one can deviate before one becomes blameworthy. Aristotle says the best we can do is incline sometimes towards excess, sometimes towards deficiency, as the situation requires and, through so doing, put ourselves in a better position to hit the mean.



DISCUSS

Which of Aristotle's tips do you think would be most useful for helping us to find the mean? Which would be least useful? What are your reasons for these responses?



COMPARE

How might Callicles and Socrates respond to the prescriptions Aristotle gives in these two chapters for living a good life? Which of their arguments from *Gorgias* has led you to your conclusions?

THINK

Aristotle advises us to consider our own responses to pleasure and pain as a means of working out what vices we are more susceptible to. Using your chart of examples of deficiencies, means and excesses, what vices are you more likely to incline towards and why? How difficult would it be for you to hit the mean in relevant situations and what light does this shed on Aristotle's claim that goodness is 'rare and laudable and noble?'

WRITE

Complete a brief (500 word) written analysis that explains the relationship between Aristotle's findings in Book I regarding the human good and how it is achieved and his discussion of the doctrine of the mean in Book II. Conclude with a brief summary (100 words) that explains Aristotle's good life in terms of this relationship.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. What does Aristotle mean when he uses the phrase 'political science?'
2. Why is political science the 'science of the good?'
3. Reflecting on Aristotle's arguments for the claim that political science is the science of the good, how do you think he would understand the relationship between the good life for the individual and broader society?
4. Why is political science unsuitable for the young or those 'youthful in character?' Do you agree that youthfulness makes one unsuited to the study of political science/moral philosophy? Why or why not?
5. According to Aristotle, why can we not expect precision in ethical inquiry?
6. Is this lack of precision a strength or a weakness? Give reasons for your response.
7. According to Aristotle, why aren't pleasure, honour, virtue or moneymaking synonymous with happiness?
8. What characteristics are shared between happiness and the final good?
9. Using Aristotle's criteria for happiness, is it possible to argue that any of the candidates listed in question 7 could be synonymous with happiness? If possible, use an example to illustrate your argument.

10. What is Aristotle's argument for the conclusion that the human function is reason? How good is this argument?
11. What implications does the function argument have for human happiness?
12. What similarities and differences are there between Aristotle's and Callicles' accounts of human nature? Which of these two accounts is more plausible and why?
13. Aristotle identifies two kinds of moral virtue. What are they and how are they cultivated?
14. What is virtue? Use two of Aristotle's examples to illustrate your answer.
15. What are the characteristics of a virtuous action according to Aristotle?
16. Could an action have none, or only some, of these characteristics and still be considered virtuous? Why or why not?
17. How does one establish what the virtuous action is in a given situation according to Aristotle?
18. What is the relationship between virtue and pleasure and pain according to Aristotle?
19. What is the relationship between reason and virtue? What does this tell us about the significance of reason in Aristotle's good life?
20. Would Socrates and Callicles agree with Aristotle's views on the role of reason in the good life? Make sure you draw upon the set texts to illustrate your response.
21. How does Aristotle arrive at the conclusion that virtue is a state of character?
22. What is the relationship between virtuous action and the formation of a virtuous character?
23. Why is a virtuous character important?
24. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the mean as a moral decision making tool?
25. Aristotle provides several tips for helping us to choose the virtuous action. What are they? Which do you think are the most and least useful and why?
26. According to Aristotle, what is the role of pleasure in the good life? How would Callicles respond to Aristotle's claims and why?

PART D

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*

Historical and Philosophical Context

In many ways, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy is a radical departure from everything else you will study in Unit 4, Area of Study 1. Unlike Socrates, Callicles, Aristotle and, arguably, Wolf, Nietzsche does not believe that absolute values exist. Indeed, he would reject any attempt to articulate the nature of the good life and what constitutes right action as nothing more than the expression of personal prejudices by thinkers so arrogant as to believe that they can prescribe for all human beings. For Nietzsche, there are no absolute values, only perspectives.

To understand this view it is perhaps useful to understand how Nietzsche sees reality. For Nietzsche, reality is fundamentally amoral. Existence is characterised by a constant striving for dominance in which each entity attempts to assert its will over other entities. In nature this may manifest as a striving to increase territory. Among human beings it is expressed as a desire for power over others.

According to Nietzsche, morality is one means through which humans can exert this power. Many human beings, however, fail to understand this. Rather, they view moral beliefs as 'facts.' But for Nietzsche, moral beliefs are simply manifestations of the will in action. This is why the meaning of moral concepts can change over time: different dominant wills appropriate moral concepts and reconfigure them to suit their needs.

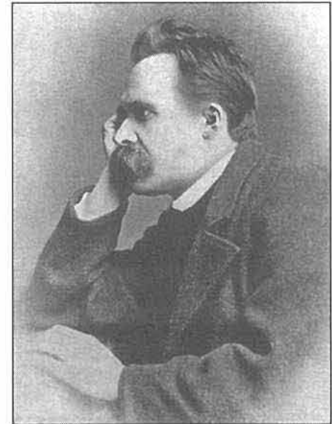
For Nietzsche, what is most insidious about this situation is that it encourages mediocrity and thwarts human potential. Nietzsche felt this was particularly the case with his own society. During the nineteenth century, democratic ideals were replacing religion as a dominant source of morality. Although Nietzsche disliked the dogmatism of religion and its deceptions regarding the nature of reality, he did not believe the democratic ideals which had stemmed from it and were now replacing it were any better. The notions of equal representation and equal rights represented, for Nietzsche, an attempt to subvert the reality of human nature and to homogenise it. Under these ideals humans would become mediocre, tame herd animals in whom the will is perverted.

This criticism of democratic ideals may be extended to moral philosophy. According to Nietzsche, moral philosophy ignores the fact that morality is a problem, reduces it to simple dichotomies like 'good' and 'bad', and then assumes particular principles can be applied to all people. For Nietzsche, this is simply not the case.

Instead of these 'ready made' values, Nietzsche advocates moving 'beyond good and evil.' The individual who understands that such values are simply perspectives and, rather than accepting particular dogmas or ways of being, seeks to craft his or her own identity through an authentic engagement with the will and through self-examination is, for Nietzsche, the exemplary human being.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



The son of Karl Ludwig, a Lutheran minister, and Franziska Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche was born near the city of Leipzig in Prussia. Not long before his fifth birthday Nietzsche's father died and shortly thereafter, his younger brother. Together with his mother and sister, he moved to his grandmother's house in Naumburg. Nietzsche attended the local boys' school where his intelligence saw him offered a place at the prestigious *Schulpforta*, an elite boarding school with a renowned classical syllabus. In 1864 Nietzsche entered the University of Bonn to study theology and philology (the study of classical and biblical texts and languages), although his interest in theology quickly waned. Inspired by one of his lecturers, the classics scholar Friedrich Ritschl, Nietzsche transferred to the University of Leipzig in 1865 where he set about establishing himself as an up-and-coming star of classical scholarship, publishing several papers on sixth century poets, Theognis and Simonides, and on Aristotle. At the age of 24 and still to write his doctoral thesis, Nietzsche was appointed Professor of Greek Language and Literature at the University of Basel in Switzerland.

Although he briefly interrupted his employment in 1870 to serve as a medical orderly at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the next decade of Nietzsche's life was spent working at the University. During this period Nietzsche also developed a close, and ultimately tempestuous, friendship with the composer Richard Wagner and encountered two books – Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) *World as Will and Representation* (1818) and F.A. Lange's *History of Materialism* (1866) – that would prove influential to his philosophical work. During this time Nietzsche also completed his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which, like all his subsequent works, was poorly received. Both the ridicule directed at this work by other important philologists and his declining health (Nietzsche suffered a variety of problems, including chronic migraines that could leave him incapacitated for days at a time), saw his retirement from the University at the age of 34.

During the next decade of his life Nietzsche led a gypsy-like existence, moving from one European city to the next according to the seasons. Although he continued to be afflicted by poor health, this was a highly productive period of Nietzsche's life during which he completed some of his most important works, including *The Gay Science* (in which he first proclaims the death of God), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (which he believed was his masterpiece and in which he developed the idea of the will to power and introduced the *ubermensch*), *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality.*

In the latter part of the 1880s Nietzsche's health worsened, culminating in an irrevocable mental breakdown in the winter of 1889 in Turin, Italy. Apparently he collapsed outside of his apartment while embracing a horse being whipped by its owner. After spending time in psychiatric clinics in Basel and Jena, Nietzsche was released into the care of his mother, who cared for him until her death in 1897. His care was then taken over by his sister, Elisabeth, who devoted the rest of her life to ensuring her brother's lasting fame and to reshaping his legacy to accord with her own political purposes (Elisabeth was a supporter of German Nationalism and the wife of a notorious anti-Semite named Bernhard Forster).

Nietzsche died in his family home, Villa Silberblick, in Weimar in 1900. Sadly, just a few months before his collapse in Turin, the first lectures on Nietzsche's work were given at the University of Copenhagen by the literary critic Georg Brandes. The recognition that Nietzsche so believed his work deserved had finally arrived. Unfortunately he was too unwell to ever be aware of it.

Studying *Beyond Good and Evil*

Introduction

Nietzsche wrote *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) during a period of debilitating ill-health that would culminate in a complete and irrevocable mental breakdown in 1889. And yet, this was also one of the most productive periods in Nietzsche's life. If the space of just two years he completed more than half a dozen works, including *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), *Twilight of the Idols* (1888) and *Ecce Homo* (1888) in addition to *Beyond Good and Evil.*

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche rejects the views of past philosophers and philosophies as dogmatic and instead champions those whom he calls 'free spirits,' individuals who recognise themselves as creators of value and have no desire for the so-called certainties of the herd. Nietzsche also explores and evaluates morality and in particular the distinction between what he calls master morality and slave morality.

The excerpts selected for study have been drawn from three different chapters: Part Five: On The Natural History of Morals (199, 201, 203); Part Seven: Our Virtues (225, 228); and Part Nine: What is Noble? (260, 284). Although the excerpts are predominantly focused on the problem of morality, Nietzsche explores a variety of related issues, including:

- What morality is;
- The origins of moral judgments;
- The relationship between the decadence of Europe and the ascendance of herd morality;
- The problems of moral philosophy;
- Master and slave morality;
- What is noble.

READ

Read all of the prescribed sections from *Beyond Good and Evil*. For each section write:

- A very brief summary of what you think Nietzsche is trying to say in the section
- Any questions you have in relation to the section (for example, questions relating to terms or comprehension)

You can then use these notes as a starting point for class discussions.

DO

Beyond Good and Evil employs a number of concepts and terms specific to Nietzsche's writing. As you work through the prescribed sections, create a glossary of these concepts and terms, with definitions, for your reference.

Part Five: On The Natural History of Morals

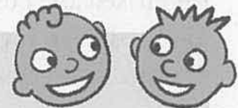
SECTION 199

Nietzsche begins section 199 with an observation about human behaviour: nothing, he says, has been cultivated among men better or longer than obedience. As a result of this long history of submission, the need to be commanded has become ingrained in most human beings and so most humans will eagerly and indiscriminately seek out some 'thou shalt' to follow. Nietzsche believes that this 'herd instinct' is largely responsible for what he sees as the decadence of his own society: 'its hesitations, its delays, its frequent retrogressions and rotations.' Nietzsche goes on to claim that if this situation were to be taken to its 'ultimate extravagance' there would be no commanders at all, or, if they did exist, they would do so as a perversion, daring to command only in the name of something else, such as a constitution, God, the law or even the people. Nietzsche claims that this situation of what he calls the 'moral hypocrisy of the commanders' characterises the Europe of his day.

Nietzsche then turns his attention to the 'herd man.' The herd man, he says, elevates those traits that are the result of his weakness – public spirit, benevolence, consideration, industriousness, moderation, etc – as 'real human virtues.' Notwithstanding this, Nietzsche believes that when a real or unconditional commander, such as Napoleon, appears, this is a blessing not only for the herd, but for society.

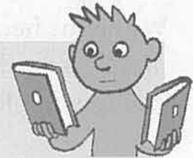
WRITE

1. According to Nietzsche, why do most people seek to be commanded?
2. What are some of the implications of this need for obedience?
3. What does Nietzsche mean when he says that to be able to command, the commander 'would have to practise a deception upon themselves'?
4. Why is an 'unconditional commander' a blessing for the herd?



DISCUSS

1. Nietzsche claims that the majority of human beings are submissive and will indiscriminately seek out some 'thou shalt.' Do you agree with Nietzsche? What evidence can you think of to support your view?
2. Nietzsche claims that those who command in the name of something else are engaging in moral hypocrisy. Do you agree? Even if this is the case, should the commanders be condemned for it? Why or why not?



COMPARE

How might Callicles respond to what Nietzsche says in this section? Why?

SECTION 201

KEY CONCEPTS: *MORAL RELATIVISM*

Moral relativism is the view that moral values are cultural constructs relative to particular times and/or places. In this section of the text Nietzsche expresses this view when he discusses how moral values have changed over time and how these changes are linked to social conditions.

Nietzsche begins this section with the observation that what is usually considered moral is that which preserves the community and what is considered immoral is that which threatens the community. Thus moral judgments, rather than absolute, are intimately tied to what the community views as threatening; in other words, moral judgments arise out of fear. When a society becomes stable and 'safe' from external dangers, drives that were once considered neither moral nor immoral, such as pity, take on new meaning. So, too, do drives that were once valourised and cultivated because of their usefulness to the community, such as 'enterprisingness, foolhardiness, revengefulness, craft, rapacity [and] ambition.' These drives come to be considered dangerous because they now threaten the group and are thus branded 'immoral.'

Nietzsche goes on to say that when an individual acts on drives other than those sanctioned by the herd, 'the self-confidence of the community goes to pieces' and it will condemn such behaviour and call it 'evil.' Nietzsche says that when a society is rendered safe there is less need to cultivate the more dangerous, 'sterner' drives and that such drives begin to trouble the conscience. Thus the passive herd values come to be regarded with greater respect. Nietzsche claims that when this 'morbid mellowing and over-tenderness' comes to dominate, passivity towards even those who perpetuate harm results. Punishment is considered unfair, even 'dreadful.'

While the herd, in their timidity, may crave the complete annihilation of fear, which they call progress, such a situation would render their morality redundant. The morality of the herd requires fear for its existence.

DO

Working with a partner, construct a detailed explanation of the evolution of moral values over time according to Nietzsche. Share your explanation with the class.

After listening to other explanations, adjust your explanation as necessary and write it down for further reference.

DO

Divide the class into two groups. One group will discuss the following questions:

1. What evidence can you think of to support the view that moral beliefs are relative?
2. What evidence can you think of to support the view that morality is synonymous with that which supports the community and immorality is synonymous with that which threatens the community?
3. What evidence can you think of to support Nietzsche's claims that 'fear is the mother of morality'?

The other group will discuss the following questions:

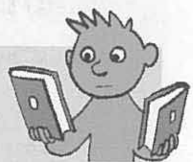
1. What evidence can you think of against the view that moral beliefs are relative?
2. What evidence can you think of against the view that morality is synonymous with that which supports the community and immorality is synonymous with that which threatens the community?
3. What evidence can you think of against Nietzsche's claim that 'fear is the mother of morality?'

When you have completed this task, join with a partner from the other group and discuss your group's answers to the questions. Consider which answers – those from your group or your partner's group – you consider more persuasive and why.

Finally, discuss the following questions:

1. Although Nietzsche believes that morality is a response to what a community finds threatening, he also approves of some moral values and disapproves of other moral values. Is this problematic?
2. How might Nietzsche respond to your answer for Question 1? Why would he respond in this way?
3. Are you persuaded by his response? Why or why not?

Don't forget to write down any useful answers for future reference.



COMPARE

How would Nietzsche respond to Socrates' views on punishment? Why would he respond in this way?

SECTION 203

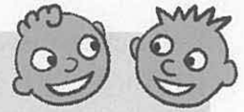
KEY CONCEPTS: *WILL TO POWER*

The will to power is a central concept in Nietzsche's philosophy. Although it is developed across a number of his preceding texts, it receives its fullest articulation in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nevertheless, there remains some dispute in academic circles as to what exactly Nietzsche means by the term. What is agreed upon is that will to power is a fundamental motivational drive towards power. In one interpretation this fundamental motivational drive is characteristic of all things in the universe: a tree, for example, unconsciously strives to increase its foliage and the stretch of its roots, whereas humans strive to increase their power via dominance over other wills. In another interpretation will to power is understood as a psychological principle characterising human behaviour (in which terms Nietzsche most often describes it). In its unrefined form this may manifest as dominance over others (a harshness towards others or, more insidiously and as it manifests in slave morality, through a morality that makes others feel guilty). In its more refined form it may manifest as **self-overcoming**, where our instinct towards dominance is turned back on ourselves and, through a process of struggle and self-examination, we make ourselves stronger and more powerful.

Nietzsche begins by posing a question: where should those who do not share the herd's faith in democracy, who instead see it as indicative of man's decay and increasing mediocrity, look to for hope? Nietzsche's answer is immediate: the 'new philosophers,' those individuals with the strength to re-evaluate prevailing values and 'teach man the future of man as *will*.' Nietzsche reminds those who he calls the 'free spirits,' that the failure of such leaders to materialise is their proper concern. Without these leaders, and under threat from the ideals of democracy and European-Christian morality, man is in danger of degeneration into the 'perfect herd animal'. Nietzsche says this knowledge, together with the knowledge that 'the greatest possibilities in man are still unexhausted' is a source of anxiety 'with which no other can be compared.' Such degeneration, Nietzsche tells us, is of course possible and anyone who has actually realised this will not only 'know one more kind of disgust than other men do', but may perhaps also realise their task is to do something about it.

WRITE

1. Why does Nietzsche view democracy as a 'form assumed by man in decay'?
2. What are the characteristics of the 'new philosophers' and how do they differ from philosophers past?
3. Why is it concerning that these new philosophers/commanders might not eventuate?
4. Why would the man who has thought through the ultimate conclusion of the dominance of democratic ideals 'know one more kind of disgust than other men do' and what is the 'new task' that Nietzsche refers to?



DISCUSS

1. Nietzsche views democracy and democratic ideals as indicative of human mediocrity. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Even if you do agree, do you also agree that this is necessarily a bad thing? Why or why not?
3. Does Nietzsche have a pessimistic view of humans? Why or why not?

COMPARE

Consider Callicles' arguments regarding nature and convention in *Gorgias*. How might Callicles respond to what Nietzsche has to say in this section?

Part Seven: Our Virtues

SECTION 225

KEY CONCEPTS: *SELF-OVERCOMING*

Self-overcoming describes the process through which the individual, via self-examination and inner struggle, strives to become greater. Nietzsche engages with this idea when he discusses the significance of suffering in forging a noble character.

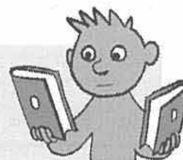
In this section of the text Nietzsche discusses the value of suffering for facilitating human greatness. The section begins with Nietzsche questioning the usefulness of those philosophies, or 'modes of thought', which reduce assessments of value to pleasure and pain. These modes of thought fail to recognise the significance of suffering to human greatness and it is for this reason that Nietzsche's 'free spirits' look down upon them with both derision and pity. Of course the pity felt by the free spirits is quite different from the pity of the herd, which is reserved for the sick and unfortunate. The pity of the free spirits is instead directed towards the way in which the pity practised by the herd serves to diminish man. The herd wishes to abolish suffering (as if such a thing were possible) and replace it with wellbeing. Such a possibility horrifies Nietzsche, who believes that the 'discipline' of great suffering serves to make humans better.

Nietzsche believes that human beings are both creature and creator. When the herd express pity their pity is directed towards the creature – that which 'has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, refined' – in short, that part of us that is remade through suffering into something greater. Nietzsche's pity, and that of the free spirits with which he identifies, is more concerned with that part of us which is the creator. Nietzsche ends the section by commenting that there are higher problems than pleasure, pain and pity and any philosophy that believes otherwise is, at best, naïve.

WRITE

What reasons does Nietzsche give for the following views:

- *'All these modes of thought which assess the value of things according to pleasure and pain...are foreground modes of thought and naiveties which anyone conscious of creative powers and an artist's conscience will look down on with derision.'*
- *'There are times when we behold your pity with indescribable anxiety.'*
- *'We would rather increase [suffering] and make it worse than it has ever been!'*



COMPARE

1. Callicles claims that a good life involves allowing one's desires to expand until they can grow no larger and then employing all one's efforts to fulfil these desires. How would Nietzsche respond to this view and why would he respond in this way?
2. Socrates claims that the life of desire advocated by Callicles is a terrifying life and that it is instead better to practise self-restraint. How would Nietzsche respond to this view and why would he respond in this way?
3. Aristotle claims that the life of sensual pleasure is a life fit for beasts. How would Nietzsche respond to this claim and why?
4. Aristotle also claims that a good life is synonymous with eudaemonia, a kind of living well and faring well in which we employ our unique human function to ensure the appropriate or mean response in given situations. Would Nietzsche agree that this is the good life? Why or why not?

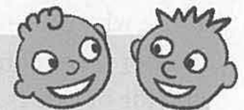
COMPARE

Callicles, Socrates, Aristotle and Nietzsche all have very different ideas of what makes a person good or noble. Working closely with the relevant texts, create a 'character portrait' that describes the views of each thinker. Underneath your character portraits make some notes that make explicit the similarities and differences between the portraits. You should also note *why* the thinkers have these different views – in other words, how do their views relate to their wider philosophy and in particular, their views of human nature.

Although the approach you use for presenting the material is up to you, you could use a chart like the following:

Comparing views of the good or noble character

Callicles	Socrates	Aristotle	Nietzsche
Similarities and Differences • • • •			



DISCUSS

1. Nietzsche values suffering because he believes it can make us better. What evidence can you think of to support this claim? What evidence can you think of against it?
2. Do you think suffering can make a person better? Why?
3. Is all suffering beneficial? What are some examples of suffering that are difficult to reconcile with Nietzsche's views of suffering?
4. Nietzsche believes it is wrong to pity those that suffer. Why does he believe this? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

SECTION 228

Nietzsche opens this section by claiming that 'all moral philosophy hitherto has been boring and soporific' (sleep-inducing) and, as a result, so too is virtue. For Nietzsche, morality, when treated as a problem rather than reduced to a philosophy, is in fact dangerous, even immoral, in its questioning. Yet, the moral philosophy he observes in his time fails to understand this. These tired philosophies (he cites the example of utilitarianism) maintain that moral philosophy should aim towards securing happiness, but what they fail to understand is that no single moral principle can be applicable for all human beings. Nietzsche claims that there exists an order of rank between men and consequently what is right for one man cannot be right for another. This is particularly the case for Nietzsche's 'higher man', for whom such moral ideals are detrimental. Nietzsche claims that despite the boringness and mediocrity of prevailing moral philosophies, perhaps they should not be discouraged, lest people actually begin thinking about morality.

WRITE

Using a highlighter, identify all of the criticisms Nietzsche makes of existing moral philosophies. Use these notes to write a detailed explanation in your own words of why Nietzsche is critical of existing moral philosophies.

Part Nine: What Is Noble?

SECTION 260

In this section Nietzsche draws a distinction between what he calls 'master morality' and 'slave morality.' He says that when it is the masters, or ruling order, that determine what is good, noble states of being are held in high regard and so are those individuals who exhibit them. For such individuals, good and bad are synonymous with noble and despicable, and what is despised are those who abase themselves and are cowardly and timid. This does not mean that the master cannot show compassion towards those who are less fortunate. Indeed as the self-conscious creator of values, abundant in power and plentitude, the master is perfectly capable of aiding those less fortunate if he should so choose. However, if he does so his behaviour does not stem from pity, but from the knowledge of his own power. The master always remains separate from those opposite to him and holds a mild contempt towards those soft of heart. Thus he is not only powerful, but exerts power over himself. The masters also have a deep respect for age and tradition – which, according to Nietzsche, demonstrates the 'ignoble origins' of the values of men who exalt modern ideas and progress and disdain age and tradition.

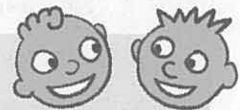
Nietzsche goes on to claim that the morality exhibited by the masters, and in particular their view that one has duties only to one's equals and one can act as one pleases towards those of other ranks (to go 'beyond good and evil'), is completely at odds with contemporary tastes, which are governed by slave morality. This morality regards with suspicion all that the master holds as good and maintains that the happiness of the master is not genuine happiness. Rather than holding in high regard the noble values of the master, it elevates and calls good those qualities which serve to alleviate suffering: 'pity, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility and friendliness.' Evil, which is a product of slave morality, is all that is dangerous and threatening to the group. And yet, for the noble, the individual that inspires fear, or wants to inspire it, is good. Thus, for the slave, the harmless man, who is also the stupid man (Nietzsche claims that when slave morality dominates, the words 'good' and 'stupid' are brought closer together), is the good man. These men yearn for freedom and happiness, whereas the nobleman values reverence, devotion and enthusiasm. Nietzsche concludes the section by saying that this is why love as passion must have aristocratic origins – it bears a much closer resemblance to the master's value system.

WRITE

Using two different highlighters, identify the characteristics of both noble and slave morality. Use this material to construct comparative notes on master and slave morality.

THINK

What is the relationship between master morality and slave morality, and commanders and the herd?



DISCUSS

1. Nietzsche claims that there are two basic types of morality: master morality and slave morality. Is this view too reductive? Why or why not?
2. For Nietzsche, master morality is clearly superior to slave morality. Considering his reasons for this view, do you agree with him? Why or why not?
3. More generally, do you agree with the view that master morality is better than slave morality? Why or why not?

THINK

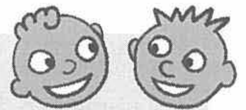
Nietzsche seems to dismiss altruistic values as important to the good life as they weaken both the individual and society. Do you agree with this?

SECTION 284

In this section of the text, Nietzsche celebrates those qualities which he perceives as noble: self-possession, to be in control of one's emotions, to be both open and closed, to *choose* politeness and to 'remain master of one's four virtues, courage, insight, sympathy, solitude.' Nietzsche makes a point of highlighting solitude as a virtue that keeps the individual above the contamination of 'society.'

WRITE

Complete a written analysis (approximately 800 words) that synthesises Nietzsche's arguments against herd morality and prevailing moral philosophy and his arguments in favour of commanders / new philosophers.



DISCUSS

Together with a partner, discuss what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of Nietzsche's various arguments. Share the main points from your discussion with your class.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. According to Nietzsche, why do the majority of people seek to be commanded?
2. What is the 'moral hypocrisy of the commanders' and how has it come about?
3. What is the origin of moral values? What is the relationship between these origins and what Nietzsche sees as positive and negative values?
4. What is the relationship between fear and morality?
5. How does the herd respond when individuals act on drives that go against it? Why does it respond in this way?
6. What is an example of an individual going against the herd in our own society? Does the majority of society respond in the way that Nietzsche suggests?
7. How does Nietzsche explain the rise to dominance of herd values?
8. Why is Nietzsche critical of democracy?

9. Who are the free spirits and why do they despair of herd values?
10. Why is Nietzsche critical of pity?
11. Can a noble express pity? How does noble pity differ from the pity of the herd?
12. Why does Nietzsche value suffering? How do Nietzsche's views on suffering differ from those of Socrates, Callicles and Aristotle?
13. Why is Nietzsche critical of existing moral philosophies?
14. On what grounds would Nietzsche be critical of the philosophical views of Socrates, Callicles and Aristotle?
15. What are the respective features of master morality and slave morality? Which does Nietzsche favour and why?
16. How does Nietzsche understand human nature? How do his views of human nature inform his views of morality and the good life?
17. What are the similarities and differences between Nietzsche's views on human nature and Socrates', Callicles' and Aristotle's?
18. What is a good life according to Nietzsche? Does his view share any similarities with Callicles, Socrates or Aristotle?
19. Is happiness important in Nietzsche's understanding of the good life? How might Nietzsche view happiness?
20. What is the relationship between a good life and moral goodness for Nietzsche? Why does he hold this view?
21. What is the relationship between the good life for the individual and broader society for Nietzsche? (Hint: consider this in terms of both the master and slave moralities.)

PART E

Susan Wolf: 'Meaning in Life'

Historical and Philosophical Context

Although Wolf's essay is predominantly concerned with the problem of meaningfulness – what it is, how it is attained and the kinds of activities that both produce and are expressions of it – Wolf's starting point is the question of human motivation. Why is it that we do the things we do?

At the beginning of the essay Wolf identifies two common philosophical positions in relation to this question. One of these views is **psychological egoism.** Psychological egoism is the view that what motivates our behaviour is self-interest. Even acts that seem to be other-regarding, such as putting oneself in mortal danger to save one's comrades during a battle or sacrificing one's own freedom to care for a sick child, are, according to the psychological egoist, really done for our own benefit.

Although psychological egoism is a view that has traction across a range of disciplines, such as psychology and economics, it hasn't been particularly popular with philosophers. Perhaps the reason for this is that it doesn't really accord with our intuitions regarding human behaviour. There are many examples, such as when one endangers one's own life to save another, where it seems implausible to believe that the motivation behind the behaviour is self-interest.

Psychological egoism is often contrasted with **psychological altruism.** This is the view that at least some of the time our motives are **altruistic**, or other regarding. Although psychological altruism does seem a more plausible explanation of human motivation in some circumstances, it doesn't square with the commonly held view that **human nature** is essentially self-regarding.

When Wolf outlines her second view of human motivation she isn't necessarily referencing psychological altruism, although it is certainly a view of motivation that can be accommodated within the description of her second view. It is, nonetheless, an important concept when considering understandings of the Good Life.

FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER FILE

Susan Wolf (1952-)

Susan Wolf is an American philosopher. She began her career in philosophy at Harvard University after completing her PhD at Princeton under the supervision of Thomas Nagel (see Famous Philosopher File, p.81). She subsequently held positions at the University of Maryland and John Hopkins University before assuming her current role in 2002 as the Edna J. Koury Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Wolf has worked primarily in the field of ethics, specifically addressing problems relating to freedom, happiness, morality and meaning. In 2002 she received a Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award and in 2006 was elected a Fellow of the American Philosophical Society. Her most well known work is the essay 'Moral Saints' in which she argues against the view that the morally perfect person is an attractive ethical ideal.

Studying 'Meaning in Life'

Introduction

'Meaning in Life' was originally presented as a lecture at Princeton University as part of the Tanner Lectures on Human Values. These lectures are presented annually around the world at a select list of universities by scholars who are considered to have made a significant contribution to the field of human values. 'Meaning in Life' is published, together with the accompanying lecture 'Why it Matters,' in the book *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters* (2010).

The essay begins with Wolf identifying the two common accounts of human motivation and with her suggestion that, while underpinning many of our justifications for action, these accounts leave out a very important human motivation – what she calls 'reasons of love.' The proclaimed goal of the remaining essay is to produce a clearer understanding of these 'reasons of love' and the role they play in making life meaningful. Wolf will do this by considering two common accounts of meaningfulness, why each is insufficient when considered in isolation, and how each may serve to rectify the insufficiencies of the other. The resulting account of meaningfulness she will produce will be a synthesis of the two views that also takes into account the quality of the project or activity that is the subject's focus.

DO

Identify a life that you consider to be meaningful. It could be someone famous or it could be a relative, friend, acquaintance or someone in your community.

Write a paragraph that outlines what features of this life have contributed to your evaluation that it is meaningful.

Share your example with the class. Nominate a class member to record on the whiteboard the different features of a meaningful life the class has identified in its examples.

When you have completed this task, discuss the following questions:

1. What common features do these lives share?
2. What do these common features suggest about how we conceptualise meaningfulness?
3. Considering your responses to the previous question, is meaningfulness different from other qualities we might consider important to a good life, such as happiness or pleasure? How?
4. Do the features of meaningfulness you have identified presuppose a certain kind of character? A particular cultural context?
5. Considering your responses to the previous question, to what degree is our understanding of meaningfulness (and perhaps our concern with it) culturally and historically specific?
6. Is a meaningful life necessarily a good life? Why or why not?

READ

Read all of Wolf's essay, 'Meaning in Life.' When you have completed this task, write a brief (500 word) reflection that identifies and briefly describes the different ways meaningfulness is understood in the essay and your responses to these understandings.

A False Dichotomy

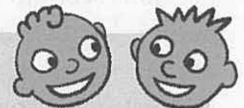
Wolf begins her essay by identifying two philosophical models of human motivation: **psychological egoism**, and a second unnamed motivation, which Wolf terms the 'dualistic model.' This model suggests that, in addition to self-interest, humans can also be motivated by 'something higher,' such as reason or morality. Attending these two *descriptive* models of human motivation are, according to Wolf, two *prescriptive* models: rational egoism, which holds that 'people are only rational insofar as they seek to maximise their own welfare,' and a view that is unnamed but which holds that both the perspective of self-interest and the impersonal view ('from the point of view of the universe') provide equally compelling reasons to act.

Wolf says that, although these models generally appear to underpin our justifications for action, they leave out reasons and motives that she believes not only play a fundamental role in shaping our lives, but which, through motivating us towards particular activities, give our lives meaning and make our lives worth living. Wolf calls these reasons/motives, 'reasons of love.' She identifies two different kinds of activities towards which these reasons/motives are directed and provides several examples of each. The first are interpersonal in nature and find their genesis in our love for others for whom we care particularly and deeply. Visiting a sick sibling, helping a friend to move house and staying up late at night to perfect the wings on her daughter's costume are all examples that Wolf gives of such activities. The second sort are non-personal activities for which we feel a particular passion. Writing philosophy, playing the cello and keeping one's garden free of weeds are examples of such activities.

Although these activities may differ significantly, Wolf claims that in both cases our motivation to engage in them is not reducible to self-interest ('I do not believe that it is better *for me* that I spend a depressing hour in a drab, cramped room, seeing my brother irritable and in pain'), or because it is what reason or morality demands. Rather, we do these things because of love.

DO

1. Drawing on your own life, construct a list of examples of activities that you would consider expressions of 'reasons of love.' You list should include examples of both 'interpersonal' and 'non-personal' activities.
2. Write a paragraph describing the distinctive qualities of these activities. In other words, how do these activities differ from activities done out of self-interest or because of a sense of duty or morality?



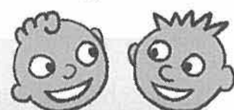
DISCUSS

1. Reflecting on the activity above, do you agree that there are activities that we pursue for reasons not easily reducible to self-interest or reasons of duty or morality?
2. What particular qualities do these activities have that makes them different to activities pursued out of self-interest or because of duty or morality?
3. Reflecting on your answer to the above question, how might you define 'reasons of love?'

COMPARE

How is Wolf's account of human motivation similar to and different from the accounts offered by Callicles, Socrates, Aristotle and Nietzsche?

After she has defined this important idea, Wolf goes on to say that the aim of her essay is to tease out the distinctive character of these 'reasons of love' and to examine the important role they play in making life meaningful. Wolf acknowledges that not all actions motivated by 'reasons of love' are good; our love for something or someone does not ensure that we will do what is best by it or them, and our love may be misguided or misplaced. Thus she wishes to defend in particular those actions, guided by reasons of love, that engage *positively* with a *worthy* object of love, as well as the claim that such activities are justifiably important even if they don't maximally promote the individual's welfare or the greater good of the world, 'impartially assessed.' Through so doing, Wolf hopes to show that meaningfulness is a third kind of value a life can possess, one that cannot be subsumed by either happiness or morality but which may inform our understanding of both.



DISCUSS

Wolf warns us that although she hopes to offer a view of what it means for a life to be meaningful, what she has to say is of no *practical* use. In other words she does not intend to advise her reader on how to obtain such a life. Do you consider this a problem?

A Conception of Meaningfulness in Life

In this section of the essay, Wolf attempts to tease out the concept of meaningfulness by considering what are generally held to be the characteristics of a meaningful life. She commences the section by identifying a variety of contexts in which the term is invoked and notes a certain indeterminacy that accompanies it – 'although it calls something to mind, it is not clear what.'

In lieu of a fixed conception of meaningfulness, Wolf proposes her own, introduced in the previous section: meaningfulness is that which 'arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way.' Wolf notes that such a conception is contentious – some of the terms employed are 'misleadingly specific,' others vague or provocative – so she proceeds to unpack this conception by examining in further detail the notions of 'loving' something and being 'worthy of love.' The first, she says, is at least partly subjective: to love something involves particular feelings with regard to the object of love. When we consider meaningfulness in terms of our own lives (for example, when we complain that our lives lack meaning) it is this subjective aspect that we are invoking. The second, however, implies an objective standard. This objective standard is what is usually invoked when we consider the worth of others' lives, particularly those lives we consider exemplars of meaningfulness.

THINK

How might we decide whether something is 'worthy of love?'

While it seems intuitively obvious that meaningfulness should be intimately connected to our feelings of personal engagement, Wolf claims that the second element is also vital. She uses the examples of smoking pot and doing crosswords to illustrate this. Although an individual may enjoy and have the liberty to smoke pot or do crosswords (or, indeed, both) as much as he or she wants, the fact of their sustained enjoyment does not, according to Wolf, make their life meaningful. While these examples may seem contentious, consider the example of eating chocolate. I may thoroughly enjoy consuming chocolate. In fact, I might enjoy it so much I devote my entire life to it. Would we really consider such a life meaningful? One could well imagine that even I may still wonder if my life is meaningful in spite of the fact I am engaged in an activity I enjoy.

THINK

Despite the fact of their own enjoyment, Wolf considers neither the activity of the pot smoker nor the activity of lover of crosswords to be meaningful because such activities are not 'worthy of love' insofar as they do not fulfil an objective standard. Is such a judgment problematic? How?

Wolf then goes on to clarify the final part of her conception, that meaningfulness requires engaging with the object of love in a positive way. She says that this is meant to make clear that for meaningfulness to arise one must 'actively affirm in some way or another' the object of one's attentions.

Wolf claims that her conception of meaningfulness represents a synthesis of two popular beliefs regarding the necessary ingredients of a good life. The first belief, which coheres with the subjective condition of her conception (meaningfulness arises from 'loving something)' is that a good life involves doing what you love. Most of us are familiar with this belief. No doubt you will have encountered it during your final years of study. 'Find your passion,' or 'do what you love' are common mantras typically recited by parents, teachers and friends in response to the question 'what should I do with my life after school?'

The second belief, which coheres with the objective condition of her conception (meaningfulness arises from loving something 'worthy of love'), is that a good life involves being part of something 'larger than oneself,' which Wolf interprets as 'participating in or contributing to something whose value is *independent* of oneself.' Again, this is a view that most of us would be familiar with: the emphasis placed on participating in sports, community service or other extra-curricular activities in school is a perfect example.

Although Wolf's view endorses (at least partially) these common conceptions of meaningfulness, Wolf believes that each leaves out something crucial. Although she does not elaborate on this immediately (beyond saying that her view is offered as a refinement or alternative to these views), this concern will be a central preoccupation in the remainder of the essay.

DO

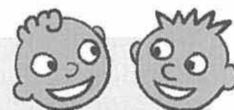
Construct a visual representation to show the relationship between the following ideas:

- Reasons of love
- Loving objects
- That which is worth of love
- Subjective value
- Objective value
- Finding your passion
- Getting involved in something 'larger than oneself'

You may also find it useful to identify the following in your visual representation:

- Wolf's definition
- The two aspects of meaningfulness
- Popular conceptions of meaningfulness

You may also find it helpful to annotate your visual representation with definitions / explanations.



DISCUSS

1. Are you convinced by Wolf's definition of meaningfulness and in particular her claims that meaningfulness arises from **loving something** that is **worthy of love**?
2. How might the worth of an activity be decided? Is this problematic?
3. By aligning her view that meaningfulness (in part) arises from engaging in activities 'worthy of love' to the recommendation to get involved with something 'larger than oneself,' Wolf implies that such activities will provide some guide to understanding what is 'worthy of love.' Is this necessarily the case?
4. Is meaningfulness (as Wolf understands it) enough for a life to be good? Why or why not?

KEY CONCEPTS: *'ENDOXA'*

In considering the ways in which her own view fits with commonly held views of what constitutes a meaningful life, Wolf notes her indebtedness to Aristotle (Famous Philosopher File p.224) who uses **endoxa** (commonly held opinions or beliefs) as the starting point for his inquiries. We have already encountered this concept on p.229.

The Fulfillment View

In the next two sections of the essay, Wolf considers in more detail the two popular views of meaningfulness previously identified and further articulates her claim that, although offering persuasive accounts of meaningfulness, neither, when considered in isolation, is sufficient.

The 'fulfillment view' refers to the popular conception of meaningfulness as that which is discovered through 'finding one's passion.' Wolf acknowledges the appeal of this view, which she believes rests on a plausible supposition that doing what one loves will engender positive feelings. Because these positive feelings are distinctive in nature, Wolf says it is easy to see why the life that brings about such feelings would be associated with meaningfulness and further, why one might be inclined to identify a meaningful life as a life spent pursuing one's passions.

Wolf names these positive feelings, 'feelings of fulfillment'. Although the opposite of negative feelings, such as boredom or alienation, feelings of fulfillment are not synonymous with feelings of pleasure. Nor do they guarantee happiness in the conventional sense. This is because the kinds of activities that tend to produce such feelings also make us vulnerable to pain, stress and disappointment. Consider, for example, learning the violin. One may find it intensely fulfilling, however it requires hours of practice during which one must struggle against one's own limitations and frustrations. And the time spent engaging in these struggles diminishes the time that can be spent on other, perhaps more pleasurable, activities. Indeed, the very fact that we continue to pursue such activities, despite the suffering that can often attend them, seems to substantiate the view that fulfillment is 'a great and distinctive good in life' that constitutes a realm of value independent of pleasure or happiness in the conventional sense.

THINK

Consider an activity that you find fulfilling. Do you agree with Wolf's claim that fulfillment is not synonymous with pleasure or happiness?

How does your consideration of this activity help you to better understand Wolf's concept, 'reasons of love?'

Yet despite the persuasiveness of the fulfillment view, Wolf argues that it is inadequate because its prescription for the best possible life is exclusively concerned with the subjective quality of the individual life. In other words, it implies that the activities that give rise to such feelings are inconsequential as the only thing that matters is the subjective feeling of fulfilment. To illustrate why this may be considered problematic, she gives her two previous examples (the pot smoker and the crossword devotee) as well as two new ones: a man devoted to the task of producing handwritten copies of *War and Peace* and a woman dedicated to her pet goldfish. Even if we can agree that these individuals are experiencing genuine fulfilment, would we further agree that these individuals' lives are the best they can be?

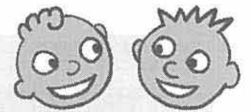
Wolf notes that we may feel hesitant about describing such lives as meaningless because of a broader reluctance to criticise others' lives. Thus she introduces a thought experiment from the philosopher Richard Taylor, based on the myth of Sisyphus. In Taylor's thought experiment, Sisyphus, the Grecian king condemned for eternity to roll a huge boulder up a hill only to have it roll down again, is given a drug by the Gods that makes him enjoy this previously futile and meaningless task. Sisyphus has found his passion (or, as Wolf notes, 'his passion has found him'). Yet despite the fact he is clearly fulfilled, Wolf argues that his existence remains meaningless for the change of Sisyphus' perspective on the activity of stone-rolling doesn't change stone-rolling itself – it is just as meaningless as it was before Sisyphus' view changed. Given that from Sisyphus' point of view his life 'is as good as it can be', the thing that is lacking from Sisyphus life – the reason why it isn't a meaningful life – must be objective in nature.

DO

Wolf's claim that a sense of personal fulfilment is not enough for a life to be considered a meaningful life, implies that the judgment of meaningfulness is, at least in part, decided by others.

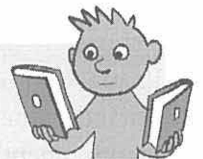
In pairs, construct ONE example that supports this claim and ONE example that demonstrates why this claim is problematic.

Share your examples with the class. Make sure you explain how your example supports / problematises Wolf's view regarding the objective component of meaningfulness.



DISCUSS

Drawing on the activity described above, do you agree with Wolf's claim that subjective fulfillment is not enough for a life to be considered a meaningful life? Why or why not?



COMPARE

Would Callicles, Socrates, Aristotle and Nietzsche agree with Wolf's claims regarding fulfilment? Why or why not?

The Larger-than-Oneself View and the Bipartite View

When Wolf speaks of the objective element that is missing from Sisyphus' life, she is referencing the common view that to have a meaningful life one must get involved in something 'larger than oneself.' Wolf cautions us in regards to how we interpret this recommendation. It is, of course, not to be taken literally. Nor should we necessarily interpret it as a recommendation to involve ourselves in something of greater value than our own lives. Such a view would be difficult to reconcile with non-personal pursuits such engaging in art-making or playing a sport, and would be difficult to square with the incommensurability of human life (is one's life worth less than the disabled partner or child with additional needs that one cares for?). Rather, Wolf invites us to interpret it as getting involved with something *other* than ourselves, something 'the value of which is independent of, and has its source *outside* of oneself.'

This view, together with the view that meaningfulness involves a subjective sense of fulfillment, are, according to Wolf, the two conditions of meaningfulness. Although constituting two criteria, Wolf argues that we should not consider them in isolation, for if considered separately it is not clear that they contribute to the goodness of a person's life at all. One *requires* the other.

Having already demonstrated the poverty of the fulfillment view as a complete account of meaningfulness in the previous section, Wolf goes on to demonstrate a similar weakness in the larger-than-oneself view. She invites us to consider the claim that a life in which a person is contributing to something larger is more meaningful than a life that serves only the subjective interests of the individual whose life it is. It is difficult to see how, if the individual has no sense of engagement with this larger thing, their involvement with this larger thing makes their life any more desirable. For example, just because the pot smoker's secondary smoke eases the suffering of an ailing neighbour, it doesn't necessarily make his or her life more meaningful. Even in cases less accidental and in which the individual may well be aware of the value of their work (Wolf uses the example of a housewife, a conscripted soldier and an assembly worker), if he or she is not engaged with the work in which they are involved nor see its value, we would hardly call their experience meaningful.

THINK

Is this necessarily true? While it may be easy to agree with Wolf given the examples she uses to support her argument (the housewife, soldier and assembly worker), what if we consider other examples, such as a person engaged in legal advocacy for refugees or a writer producing important, critically acclaimed plays? Would we still be inclined to agree that such lives aren't meaningful even if the individual whose life is the subject of our judgments does not feel personally fulfilled by these projects? Even if you agree with Wolf, how do these examples work to problematise her claims regarding the importance of both subjective fulfillment and objective value?

Furthermore, Wolf suggests that when the recommendation to get involved with 'something larger' is offered as a panacea for meaninglessness, implicit in the suggestion is the notion that something of subjective value will be found in such a pursuit. For Wolf, this is further support for her claim that rather than understanding these two views as bipartite, or as two separate elements of meaningfulness, they should be considered as operating in conjunction: to return to her claim at the beginning of the essay, 'meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness.'

Wolf then returns to the example of Sisyphus and reflects on whether his transformation from alienated to avid stone-roller has made him better or worse off. Wolf says it is clear that, from a hedonistic view, Sisyphus must be better off. However, she questions such a conclusion. Why, she asks, does Sisyphus find stone-rolling so fulfilling? One possible answer is the drug that he has been given has deluded him into believing something about rolling a stone that simply isn't true. Another possible answer is that the drug has dulled his imaginative capacities to such a point he is unable to realistically assess the dullness and futility of his labours. Wolf tends to favour the first answer. Fulfillment, she says, seems to include some recognition of the object or source of fulfillment as worthwhile in some independent way. In other words, when I play the violin, my feelings of fulfillment, at least to some degree, result from the fact that I see some value in this activity. This is, of course, Sisyphus' delusion. He sees in his activity a value that isn't there.

For Wolf this shows that it is not enough for a life to simply satisfy the condition of personal fulfillment to be considered meaningful. Such fulfillment could not be considered as *more* desirable than fulfillment generated by a more appropriate source.

DO

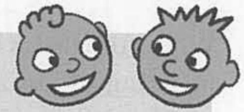
How do we decide if someone is *deluded* in regard to the value of their projects?

In pairs or small groups, develop a checklist that could be used to help us to make such an assessment.

Share your checklist with the class.

WRITE

Drawing on the activity above, write an evaluative paragraph in response to Wolf's claim that meaningfulness requires subjective fulfillment *and* objective worth.



DISCUSS

At the beginning of the essay Wolf claimed that there are two kinds of projects or activities which we pursue for 'reasons of love' – those interpersonal in nature and those of a non-personal nature. Given that a person may find subjective fulfillment in non-personal projects and that such projects may be considered objectively valuable (for example, playing the violin), a life that is entirely devoted to one's own concerns and interests may be considered a meaningful life.

1. Do you agree with the above claim?
2. Would you agree that such a life is also a good life?
3. Reflecting on your responses, is meaningfulness all that is required for a life to be good? Why or why not?

The Fitting Fulfillment View Defended

Wolf begins this section by noting that the conception of meaningfulness offered at beginning of the lecture (that meaningfulness 'comes from loving something… worthy of love and being able to engage with it…in some positive way') is one that is supported by the endoxic method insofar as it brings together the two common conceptions of meaning that she has discussed. 'When people talk about meaningfulness,' Wolf claims, 'they have roughly the thing I have identified in mind.'

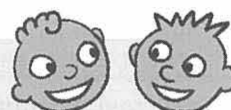
Wolf notes that a further advantage of her conception (which is here described as the 'fitting fulfillment view') is that it recognises that what is important to meaningfulness is not just the state of fulfillment experienced by the subject, but the knowledge that one's projects have an objective value. Wolf believes that the desirability of such knowledge reflects a particular human need to see one's life as valuable from a point of view other than one's own. Wolf supports this claim by citing the human tendency to try to see oneself from another point of view – what Nagel refers to as a 'view from nowhere' – as well as the general human need for self-esteem. Wolf believes these in turn are products of the fact we are social animals and desire not to be alone.

Furthermore, Wolf notes that engagement in such projects may also serve as a panacea to the despair that comes when we recognise our own mortality and cosmic insignificance. They provide our lives with a sense of purpose and connection, even if that connection is indirect or imaginary. However, Wolf also notes that our desire for and admiration of such projects is not simply relegated to those times when our existential despair becomes overwhelming. Such projects also compel us because to be occupied by something that we perceive as having independent value can be *thrilling.* They allow us to connect with others and be part of a community that share our values, or, at the very least, they sustain us with the idea of such a community where our work will be appreciated.

Wolf concludes her discussion by considering the accusation that her concern with meaningfulness is a bourgeois preoccupation. Wolf notes that while it may be true that the problem of securing basic needs tends to take precedence over an interest in meaningfulness, this doesn't diminish the value of that concern. Nor is it diminished by the fact that an individual may not be consciously interested in the degree to which his or her projects might be considered independently valuable. Most human beings share the desire to see their lives as valuable from a point of view other than their own and most desire to be part of a community that shares their point of view. Engaging in projects of independent value allows us to fulfil these needs (indeed, Wolf claims 'it would be hard to see how we could fulfil them in any other way') and so meaningfulness, whether consciously realised or not, must be considered a fundamental element of a successful human life.

THINK

In this section of the essay, Wolf makes explicit particular claims about our human nature. What are these claims? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?



DISCUSS

Wolf defends her concern with meaningfulness against the charge that it is a bourgeois preoccupation. Even if we agree that a concern with meaningfulness *per se* is not bourgeois, could the way in which she has conceived of meaningfulness and the arguments that she has proposed regarding its nature be considered bourgeois? Is this a problem? Why or why not?

READ

In the philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus uses the story of Sisyphus as a metaphor for the meaninglessness of existence. However, his response to how we construct meaningfulness, both in an inauthentic and authentic sense, is quite different.

Read a synopsis of the essay online. Alternatively, you may like to listen to a podcast (http://philosophizethis.org/sartre-and-camus/ provides an excellent overview of Camus' thought in relation to the essay).

How might Camus' thinking about meaning help us to critically assess Wolf's arguments?

COMPARE

In your workbook, note the ways in which Wolf's views regarding human nature are similar to or different from those proposed by Socrates, Callicles, Aristotle and Nietzsche.

Review Questions

WRITE

1. What are 'reasons of love'? How do reasons of love different from other kinds of human motivation?
2. What are the two kinds of activities that reasons of love are directed to? Give examples of each.
3. How does Wolf define meaningfulness?
4. In what ways does Wolf's conception of meaningfulness cohere with common conceptions?
5. What is the fulfillment view of meaningfulness?
6. How is fulfillment different to pleasure and happiness?
7. Why does Wolf believe that fulfillment alone is inadequate for meaningfulness? Do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?
8. How does Wolf use the fate of Sisyphus to demonstrate the inadequacy of the fulfillment view for meaningfulness?
9. What is the 'larger than oneself' view of meaningfulness?
10. Why does Wolf believe that the 'larger than oneself' view alone is inadequate for meaningfulness? Do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?
11. According to Wolf, how does her view of meaningfulness correspond with our natures and needs? Do you agree that with this view of human nature and human need?
12. How does Wolf defend her concern with meaningfulness against the claim it is a bourgeois preoccupation? Has she defended her argument against this accusation adequately? Give reasons for your response.

PART F

The Good Life: Comparison and Review Activities

Now that you have finished your study of the Unit 4, Area of Study 1 texts, you should spend some time analysing the similarities and differences between the viewpoints and arguments expressed within them and considering their relative merits and shortcomings. Choose one or more of the following activities to help you to do this.

WRITE

Divide the class into five groups. Each group will represent one of the philosophers (Callicles, Socrates, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Wolf). Each group will write an appraisal of the arguments expressed by the other four philosophers from the perspective of their assigned philosopher (for example, the Callicles group writes appraisals of Socrates', Aristotle's, Nietzsche's and Wolf's arguments).

Share your appraisals with other members of your class in an online forum.

DO

Arrange the class into groups of six. In your group produce a script for an imaginary talk show in which Socrates, Callicles, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Wolf and an interviewer come together to discuss some key questions relating to the good life. Make sure when developing your script, that you work closely with the texts and try to bring out points of similarity and difference. Perform your script and film your performance to show your classmates.

Alternatively, if you have a smaller class and limited time, choose five students to take on the role of the philosophers in a panel discussion. Give the students time to prepare and while they are preparing other members of the class can prepare questions to ask the panellists. Audience members should compose questions that will bring out the similarities and differences between the panel members.

Once this activity is completed consolidate your learning by clarifying, as a whole class, what similarities and differences were made apparent through the activity. You can also discuss what you perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of the various thinkers' arguments in relation to one another.

WRITE

As a whole class and using the *Philosophy Study Design* (http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/philosophy/PhilosophySD_2019.pdf pp.26-27) to help you, create a list of the main questions and concerns addressed in the Unit 4 texts.

In pairs, choose one of these questions/concerns and write a philosophical dialogue between a selection of the relevant thinkers. Share these dialogues in an online forum in which students can add comments on the relative merits and shortcomings of the philosophers' arguments.

DO

Construct a table like the one below that makes explicit the similarities and differences between the arguments and viewpoints expressed in the set texts:

	Callicles	Socrates	Aristotle	Nietzsche
Wolf				
Nietzsche				
Aristotle				
Socrates				

Don't forget to annotate your table with some comparative evaluations.

You may also like to create a master collaborative table by sharing tables electronically and merging individual contributions into one table. Set up an accompanying forum to share comparative evaluations of the arguments and viewpoints or use the comment/review/sticky note function in relevant programs to annotate the chart with these evaluations.

PART G

Suggestions for Assessment

The following Assessment Tasks are suggestions only. Teachers should always consult the VCAA Study Design for Philosophy before setting tasks to ensure coherence with the appropriate Outcome descriptors. ***Further suggestions for assessment can be found in*** **VCE Philosophy: Assessment and Examination Supplement for Units 3 and 4 Third Edition.**

Unit 4, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

'On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss concepts related to the good life, and analyse, compare and evaluate the philosophical viewpoints and arguments in the set texts in relation to the good life.'

Teachers should note that all students are required to complete at least one essay for assessment purposes in Unit 4.

Assessment Task One: Short Answer Responses

Complete a series of short answer questions that invite students to analyse, compare and evaluate the concepts, viewpoints and arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts.

Assessment Task Two: Written Analysis

Complete a written analysis that compares the arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts in relation to one of the general questions identified in the *Philosophy Study Design* (p.27).

Assessment Task Three: Written Reflection

Choose one of the concepts identified in the Key Knowledge described on p.26 of the Study Design. Discuss this concept with reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts. Ensure that your judgments in relation to the concept proceed from a critical comparison of these viewpoints and arguments.

Assessment Task Four: Dialogue

Write a script for an imaginary talk show in which Socrates, Callicles, Aristotle, Nietzsche and Wolf (or a selection of these) have come together to critically discuss one or more key questions relating to the good life. Don't forget to make detailed reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts to support the thinkers' comments.

Assessment Task Five: Presentation

Construct a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation that discusses the arguments in a selection of the set texts in relation to one or more of the concepts identified on p.26 of the Study Design.

Assessment Task Six: Essay

Suggested topics:

- 'A good life is one which minimises suffering and maximises happiness.' Discuss with reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed in two or more of the set texts.
- 'A good life involves recognising our moral obligations to others.' Discuss with reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed by two or more thinkers from the set texts.
- 'To live a good life we must first understand human nature.' Discuss with reference to the viewpoints and arguments expressed by two or more thinkers from the set texts.

Make sure your essay engages in analysis, comparison and evaluation of the viewpoints and arguments you discuss and provides a judgment in terms of the question.

PART H

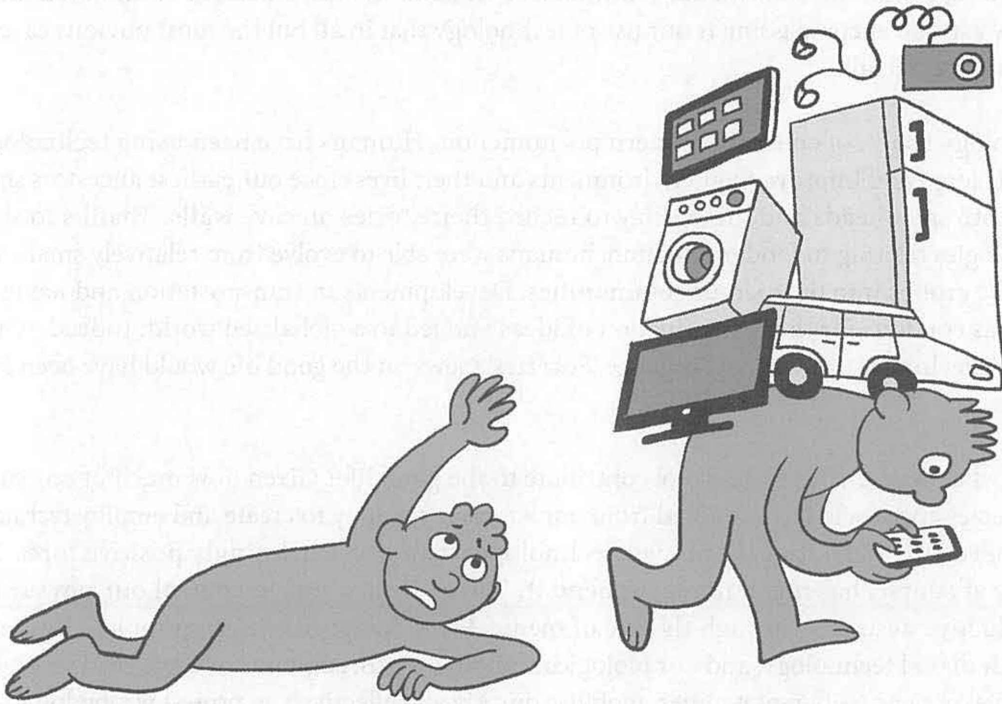
Useful Resources

- Annas, J. 2000 *Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Aristotle 2009 *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Ross, D. (trans.) & Brow, L. (ed), Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, Book I, chapters 1-5, 7-8, Book II.
- Boardman, J, Griffin, J, & Murray, O. (eds) 1995 *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Cavalier, R. 2007 *Plato for Beginners*, Writers and Readers Publishing, New York.
- Cooper, D. 1996 *World Philosophies: An Introduction,* Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Massachusetts.
- Copleston, F. 1993 *A History of Philosophy Vol. 1: Greece and Rome,* Image Books, New York.
- DeBotton, A. 2007 *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Penguin, London.
- DeBotton, A. *Philosophy: A Guide to Happiness. Series 1, Episode 5* http://www.channel4.com
- Hollingdale, R.J. 1999 *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hughes, G. 2001 *Aristotle: On Ethics*, Routledge, London.
- Jackson, R. 2001 *Nietzsche: A Beginner's Guide,* Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Kaufman, W. 1974 *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Kraut, R. (ed), 2006 *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Magnus, B. & Higgins, K. 1999 *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Nietzsche, F. 2003 *Beyond Good and Evil*, Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) Penguin Classics, Sections 199, 201, 203, 225, 228, 260, 284.
- Palalu, M. 2005 *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Plato 2008 *Gorgias*, Waterfield, R. (trans.) Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 480e-499b, 505c-509c

- Stauffer, D. 2009 *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice and the Philosophic Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Urmson, J. 1988 *Aristotle's Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wolf, S. 2010 'Meaning in Life' in *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, Princeton University Press, pp.1-33

CHAPTER 4

Living the Good Life in the Twenty-First Century



PART A

Technology and the Good Life

Introduction

Although the question of what it means to live well is no less important now than when Socrates and Callicles debated it nearly two and a half thousand years ago, the context in which we ask it is substantially different. From the time we get up in the morning until when we go to bed at night, we have literally dozens, if not hundreds, of encounters with technology. We use it to complete our studies, communicate with our families, teachers and friends, entertain us and even dispose of our waste. So encompassing is our use of technology that in all but the most obvious cases, we barely notice it at all.

Technology is not, of course, a modern phenomenon. Humans have been using technology to control, adapt and improve their environments and their lives since our earliest ancestors shaped rocks into spearheads and mixed clay to record their stories on cave walls. Thanks to simple technologies relating to food production, humans were able to evolve from relatively small, semi-nomadic groups into prosperous communities. Developments in transportation and navigation served as conduits for the dissemination of ideas and led to a globalised world. Indeed, without the basic technology of written language, Socrates' views on the good life would have been lost to history.

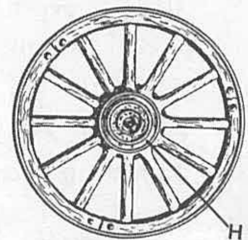
But to what degree does technology contribute to the good life? Given how much of our success as a species appears to have resulted from our superior capacity to create and employ technology to achieve our goals, it's easy to view technology as an overwhelmingly positive force. Such a view, of course, has much to recommend it. Today, we are able to control our physical and reproductive destinies through the use of medical technologies, our geographical limitations through digital technology, and our biological inheritance through pharmacological technology. We can experience different realities, mobilise quickly and effectively to protest wrongdoing, share knowledge, buy and sell products, and help the less fortunate, all with the click of a mouse.

And yet, technology also has its dark side. By creating the conditions for the mass production of goods, it has contributed overwhelmingly to climate change, species extinction and the depletion of natural resources, and instigated the exploitation of those in the Third World. It has provided us with the capacity to cause death and destruction on an increasingly large scale, and decreased our capacity for empathy by desensitising us to such horror. Some critics have even argued that our relentless pursuit of, and untiring affection for, technology has diminished the value of work, made us more isolated, more self-centred and even less intelligent.

This inevitably invites the question: does technology enhance or undermine our ability to live a good life? In this Area of Study you will consider this question by examining a range of relevant contemporary debates expressed in a variety of sources. In examining these debates you will consider how technological development influences our understanding of the good life (and, conversely, how views of the good life may shape our thinking in regards to technological development), and the interplay between technological development and how we might respond to questions regarding happiness, morality, human nature, and the relationship between the individual and broader society. Along the way, you will develop an understanding of several important concepts in relation to technology, including progress, reality, control, dependency, freedom and creativity.

As always, you will be expected to work closely with viewpoints and arguments, identifying premises and conclusions, assessing reasoning, and reflecting on the implications of accepting particular viewpoints and arguments in relation to technological development and the good life. You will also need to exercise your skills of critical comparison by considering the similarities and differences between viewpoints and arguments you encounter.

Although there are no prescribed texts for this Area of Study, you are expected to draw on a range of sources such as newspaper and journal articles, podcasts, YouTube clips, philosophical texts (including those from Area of Study 1) and contemporary media, to inform your discussions and written work. Although this may seem challenging, it is also a wonderful opportunity to follow you own interests. Read, watch and listen widely, and discover what arouses your curiosity. The contemporary debates identified in the following pages are only suggestions and starting points. The possibilities are numerous. Enjoy!



Does technology improve our lives? Why or why not?

DO

Decide on the number of contemporary debates that the class will focus on (see the following pages for suggestions). Divide the class into groups and assign a debate to each group. Members of the group can focus their reading and research on the assigned debate and become the classroom 'experts,' contributing information and examples during classroom discussions.

DO

Create a shared document or weebly (www.weebly.com) where members of the class can share links to interesting sources they have come across. You may like to divide your document/weebly into sections for different aspects of technology.

What Is Technology?

Like many of the concepts we examine in Philosophy, the concept, 'technology,' seems relatively straightforward at first. No doubt you are already thinking of examples as a means of addressing the question, 'what is technology?' But take a minute to think a little harder. What comes to mind? Mobile phones? The internet? What about simple tools, like hammers and nails? Or large scale constructions like skyscrapers or railway networks? What about everyday objects, like cars, microwave ovens or dishwashers? Or the flavouring in the packet of chips you ate after lunch? Or the paracetamol you took for your headache? Are the constructions of animals, such as beehives, spiders' webs and beavers' dams, also examples of technology? What about the sticks used by animals like primates or birds to harvest food?

DO

Arrange the classroom so students can sit on a circle on the floor. Nominate a member of class (or the teacher) to make notes throughout the discussion.

Using A4 paper, construct three signs ('not technology', 'not sure', 'technology') and place these signs at intervals in the circle, ensuring that the 'not sure' sign is in the centre.

Write the following examples on slips of paper, divide among the class and ask students to place their example/s near the sign which they think best describes it.

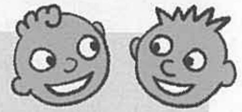
- A toaster
- A gun
- An oil refinery
- Hot water
- A text book
- Instagram
- A pen
- Vaccinations
- An ant's nest
- An apple
- Michelangelo's David
- A rabbit's burrow
- A fence
- A tapestry
- A horse's bridle
- A stick
- Einstein's General Theory of Relativity
- Aristotle's function argument

You may like to add your own examples.

Once the examples have been placed, you can start your whole class discussion. Begin by either considering the reasons why individual students have placed their slip of paper in a given position or by considering if there are placements that students disagree with and why.

As you proceed through discussion, considering the reasons why examples have been placed in certain positions and whether or not the placement of examples can be debated (and on what grounds), listen closely to what claims are being made about technology.

- Are there any distinctive qualities or properties that all the examples that are agreed to be technology share?
- How do the examples that the class agrees are not examples of technology differ from the other examples?



DISCUSS

Reflecting on the activity described above, discuss the following questions:

1. What are some of the problems you encountered when trying to identify the distinctive characteristics of technology?
2. Can anything be considered technology? If not, why not?
3. Imagine that an alien life form arrived on earth and wanted to know what technology was. The alien would not be able to make sense of your examples. Would you be able to provide a definition? What would it be?
4. Does hearing this definition enable you to picture what technology is?
5. How does your response to Q4 help you to reflect further on Q1?

THINK

Consider the following dictionary definitions of 'technology':

- 'Machinery and equipment developed from the application of scientific knowledge.'
- 'The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry'. *(Oxford Living Dictionaries. 'Technology'. Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/technology)*
- 'A manner of accomplishing a task especially using technical processes, methods or knowledge.' *(Merriam-Webster. 'Technology.' Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technology)*
- 'The branch of knowledge that deals with the creation and use of technical means and their interrelation with life, society and the environment, drawing upon such subjects as the industrial arts, engineering, applied science and pure science.' *(Dictonary.com. 'Technology.' Retrieved from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/technology)*

Is any one of these definitions sufficient? Why or why not?

In considering the sufficiency of these definitions what else have you discovered about the nature of technology?

Is it possible to produce a sufficient definition of technology? Why or why not?

Were you able to come up with a satisfactory definition of technology? It's certainly a difficult task, given the vast array of objects we consider to be examples of it. And yet, despite the problems we may encounter when trying to describe what exactly technology is, we generally understand what someone means when they use the word and can accurately use it ourselves.

Perhaps then, rather than search for a definition as a means of helping us to understand what technology is, we should consider the ways in which it exists in the world – how it is used, how we think about it, how we talk about it and how we relate to it as individuals and communities. By thinking about it in this way – which is at least part of the task in Area of Study Two – we may not be able to provide an alien visitor with a one-sentence definition, but we will have a much better grasp of the concept ourselves.

DO

Listen to episode #97 (Wittgenstein, ep.1) of the podcast *Philosophize This!* (http://philosophizethis.org/wittgenstein-pt-1/). In particular, pay attention to the final 15 minutes of the episode.

How can Wittgenstein's views on language be used to help us understand the problems we encounter when seeking to define technology?

Thinking About Technology and The Good Life

In your quest to produce a definition of technology, you have no doubt cited an extraordinary range of artefacts to illustrate your claims. Some of these you would probably consider to be overwhelmingly positive in terms of the contribution they have made to human life. After all, it is difficult see how innovations such as the bionic ear, the defibrillator and the small pox vaccination could be regarded as anything other than worthy contributions to human existence. However, you may consider other technologies to be more controversial. Nanotechnology, embryonic stem cell research, pre-implantation genetic editing, the genetic modification of crops and even social media are all examples of technologies that have generated heated public debate.

While at first glance it may appear that what is at issue when discussing such technologies is something intrinsic – that the technology is positive or negative *in itself* – closer consideration usually reveals that these debates are at least partly grounded in, and arise from, competing views about the good life.

Take, for example, pre-implantation genetic editing. While there are certainly concerns about the safety and efficacy of this technology, people are also concerned that the technology will be used for non-therapeutic, enhancement purposes. Opponents of the technology argue that, were pre-implantation genetic editing to be used in this way, it would result in the devaluation of human diversity and cultivate greater prejudice towards the physically disadvantaged. However, proponents of the technology argue that the capacity to eradicate disability and disease, as well as the capacity to select for desirable traits like intelligence, will allow people to live happier, healthier lives. While both views agree that securing a good life is important, they differ markedly in terms of what the good life looks like, and it is this difference that underpins their divergent perspectives.

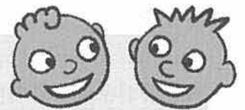
This is not to say that such artefacts and technologies are value neutral. Technology, by its very nature, mediates our interactions with the world. In this act of mediation, it shapes how we behave and how we perceive things. This is because embedded within technology and technological artefacts is a kind of 'script' that endorses specific behaviours and disagrees with others. To illustrate, consider the example of a paper cup. The paper cup, via its construction, is 'scripted' as disposable and so we throw it away (rather than wash it and put it back in the cupboard to be used again later). Thus our behaviour is directed by the 'script' of the paper cup.

While it might appear that this directly contradicts the claim that debates regarding technology are really debates about the good life, this is not the case. My views regarding paper cups are not simply a matter of whether I endorse or reject the 'script' of disposability. Rather, my endorsement or rejection of that 'script' is grounded in particular values and particular views regarding the good life, which are thus necessarily the basis for my views regarding paper cups. In other words, what I am endorsing or rejecting are the values and behaviour inscribed within the artefact or technology and I do so because of the set of beliefs I bring to that artefact or technology.

As you consider different perspectives on various technologies, it is important to remember that these perspectives are grounded in particular conceptions of the good life and to try to identity what these conceptions are. Understanding the assumptions that underpin perspectives on technology represented in your reading and classroom discussions will make for richer, more sophisticated analyses.

THINK

Consider examples of technologies and technological artefacts that have aroused debate in your class. What perspectives on the good life underpin these debates?



DISCUSS

Just as our views regarding the good life shape our responses to technology, so too does technology shape our view of the good life.

In pairs, identify two or three examples of technology and discuss how you think these technologies have changed/shaped our view of what constitutes a good life.

Share your thoughts with the class.

DO

How does technology shape the way we view the world?

Listen to episode #101 (Heidegger pt.2 – Science and Technology) of the podcast *Philosophize This* (http://philosophizethis.org/heidegger-technology/). If you would like to learn more about concepts mentioned in the podcast, like *dasein*, you may like to listen to episode #100 (Heidegger pt.1 – Phenomenology and Dasein' http://philosophizethis.org/heidegger-dasein/).

Using a series of dot-points, summarise Heidegger's view that technology changes our relationship with the world. Include any information that will help you to understand this view.

If we accept Heidegger's views regarding technology, what are the implications for the relationship between technology and the good life?

Important philosophical concepts

As you work through Area of Study 2, you are required to develop some understanding of six important concepts: **progress, reality, control, dependency, freedom** and **creativity**. You should understand how these concepts intersect with the interplay between technological development and the good life, and how they connect with one another. Although these concepts are considered independent of the debates in which they are grounded in this section, we will come back to them throughout the chapter.

You are also invited to draw on the concepts you have explored during Unit 4, Area of Study 1, when developing your responses during your study.

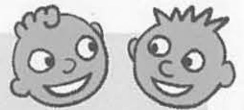
DO

Divide the class into six groups and allocate one of the six concepts to each group.

Each group will develop a mind map relating to their concept. The mind map could include:

- A definition of the concept
- Sentences to demonstrate the different ways the term is used and/or examples of the concept
- Questions that show how the concept fits with discussions regarding technology and the good life.

Invite each group to present their mind map to the rest of the class. Pin the mind maps on the wall so they can be explored together by the whole class.



DISCUSS

With reference to the activity described above, what connections can you make between the six key concepts?

WRITE

For each of the key concepts write an inquiry question focused on the interplay between technology and the good life in relation to the chosen concept. For example, 'to what extent is **freedom** necessary to the good life and does technology facilitate or diminish our freedom?' For each question identify an example or examples of technology that could be used when constructing a response.

Use these questions to create a question bank that can be used by the whole class.

DO

Working in groups, create 'bumper stickers' for each of the six key concepts. These 'bumper stickers' should provide a brief slogan to capture the concept.

Pin these concepts across the top of the whiteboard or around the room to ensure they become a reference point throughout your study.

PART B

Debate 1: Human Enhancement Technologies and The Good Life

Introduction

Whether we are aware of it or not, most of us spend a great deal of our lives trying to make ourselves better. We use diet and exercise to increase our life expectancy, improve our health and modify our bodies. We participate in an education system that, at least in part, is designed to improve our cognitive abilities. Some of us use cosmetics to modify our appearance, or engage in practices such as therapy or meditation to improve our thinking. Some of us use pharmaceuticals to change our behaviour, modify our biology, or even to improve our performance of various tasks.

The desire for enhancement seems very human and yet, in recent decades, with the emergence of new technologies that allow us (or will potentially allow us) to transcend the limitations imposed by our bodies, it has attracted significant controversy. Of particular concern are the long-term effects of these technologies; what will be the consequences, not only for individuals, but for humanity as a whole?

Those in favour of such technologies point to the fact that they will allow us to live longer, healthier, happier and more productive lives by allowing us to substantially improve our cognitive functioning and our physical health. Indeed some thinkers, such as those identified with **transhumanism**, believe that such technologies may even allow us to transform ourselves so radically that we will eventually become **post-human**.

Others argue that such technologies, in spite of their obvious benefits to the individual, may have dangerous consequences for humanity as whole. For example, the capacity to improve one's cognitive abilities exponentially through the use of technology may undermine the value of accomplishment and remove the potential for developing a range of other virtues, such as persistence, self-discipline and patience, that are often cultivated when we work hard to achieve a goal. Another concern is that such technology will exacerbate and entrench social disadvantage. How will individuals who cannot afford to artificially enhance their cognitive capacities compete for jobs or places at university? How will they fare socially or even romantically? Furthermore, in a world where human enhancement is the norm rather than the exception, we might wonder if the **freedom** implied by being able to control our physical and cognitive destinies is apparent rather than actual. After all, if I live in a society where enhancement is necessary to participate in its institutions, am I really free?

Whether one is in favour of or against technology in the service of human enhancement, it is generally agreed that the use of such technology needs to be approached with caution. We need to carefully weigh up the short-term gains (for example, improving and extending human lives) with the long-term consequences (the impact of an ageing population on the work force, the health system and the economy). We also need to consider how these technologies may shape individual lives (for example, the expectations parents have of their engineered children, or of how we perceive ourselves in relation to ever increasing standards of mental and physical achievement) as well as society as a whole.

Part of deciding the value of such technologies is deciding what the best kind of life is. While it is undeniable that being happy and healthy is significant to living a good life, how we achieve these things is also important. As the saying goes, often the journey can be just as important as the destination. We might also wonder if a superabundance of physical and cognitive ability is synonymous with health and happiness. Or if a society in which the individual members are improved in these ways is actually a better society.

Introductory Activities

DO

'Flash research' is a great way to get a broad overview of a topic quickly.

Using the internet, spend fifteen minutes researching human enhancement technologies. Your goal is to find one or two examples of human enhancement technologies (depending on the size of the class), learn something about what the technologies do and establish whether the technologies are actual or potential technologies.

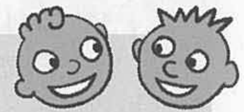
When you have completed this task, write your example/s on the whiteboard alongside those of your classmates. As a class you should avoid duplicating examples.

When all the examples are on the whiteboard you can discuss with your classmates what you discovered about your technologies.

TRANSHUMANISM

Transhumanism is a term used to describe an intellectual movement that both affirms the desirability of radically enhancing human intellect and physiology through the use of technology, and studies the potential ramifications, dangers and ethical consequences of such technologies. In his seminal essay, 'Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy' Max More, a key figure in the transhumanist movement, described transhumanism as 'a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life promoting principles and practices.'[6]

Key figures in the movement include: Alexander Chislenko, Max More, Ray Kurzweil, Anders Sandberg, Natasha Vita-More, James Hughes and Nick Bostrom.



DISCUSS

Arrange two rows of chairs (enough to seat all members of the class), facing one another and with reasonable spaces between. Borrowing from the idea of 'speed dating,' sit in pairs and spend three minutes discussing a question. When the three minutes is up, all students sitting in one of the rows will move one place and start a new three minute conversation. Continue until all students have had the opportunity to converse once.

The purpose of the task is to get a general overview of different perspectives on human enhancement technology and its relationship to the good life. Questions suitable for discussion include:

- In what ways can human enhancement technologies improve our lives?
- Could human enhancement technologies undermine our capacity to live good lives? If so, in what ways?
- In what ways may human enhancement technologies improve society and/or humanity?
- In what ways may human enhancement technologies be disadvantageous to society and/or humanity?
- Should the benefits of human enhancement technologies for the individual outweigh the potential risks for society? Why or why not?
- Should the benefits of human enhancement technologies for society and humanity outweigh the potential risks to the individual?

6 'What is Transhumanism?' retrieved from https://whatistranshumanism.org

- Should we be free to enhance ourselves in any way we please or should there be restrictions? Why?
- If you could use any actual or potential human enhancement technology, what would you use? Would this technology make your life better? In what way?

You may decide to use one of these questions for all of the discussions or start each discussion with a new question.

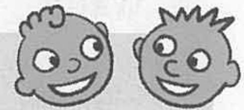
When you have completed this task, discuss the following questions as a whole class:

1. What are some of the reasons we are attracted to human enhancement technology?
2. What aspects of human enhancement technology concern us?
3. Are there some technologies that concern us more than others? What do we find concerning about these technologies?
4. What do our responses to human enhancement technology tell us about how we conceive of the good life?
5. As these technologies become more readily available, do you think our views about what constitutes a good life will change? In what ways and why?

WRITE

Under the heading 'Human Enhancement Technology', construct two columns, one headed 'pros', the other, 'cons.' Reflecting on the previous activities, fill the columns accordingly.

Further Activities



DISCUSS

Read the following thought experiment:

One evening you overhear your mother, who is a researcher in the pharmaceutical industry, discussing with a friend a secret discovery that could change the world. Her lab has created a drug that, if taken once, will make the user more empathetic, more cooperative and more capable of reasoning beyond his or her own interests. In short, the drug will make people more morally aware. There is a problem however. By making people more morally aware, the company risks losing the millions of dollars it makes from people's immoral behaviour. Thus there is a strong likelihood the drug will never be released on the market.

In three days' time your city will be hosting an important international summit that will be attended by world leaders. It just so happens that you work for the catering company that will be supplying the food for this event. You often visit your mum at the lab and could probably steal the drug without too much trouble. Given that your job is to wait on tables, you are in the perfect position to spike the drink of every world leader in attendance.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Should you steal the drug and spike the drinks?
2. Do you have a moral obligation to steal the drug and spike the drinks?
3. If we have the technological means to make people more morally aware, should we use them?
4. Is a more morally aware society better than a society in which people are free to make their own choices?

DO

In his TedTalk, 'Pills that Improve Morality', Australian philosopher Julian Savulescu argues the case for using technology for the purposes of moral enhancement.

Watch Savulescu's TedTalk (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhtIFTrJQJ4)

In pairs, try to map Savulescu's argument. Remember to include the evidence he uses to support his claims.

When you have completed this task, and working together as a whole class, reconstruct an agreed upon version of the argument on the whiteboard.

Nominate a speaker to 'teach' the argument back to your teacher.

WRITE

Reflecting on the previous task, and using your skills of evaluation, write a mock letter to Julian Savulescu in which you contest his argument in favour of moral enhancement.

You might like to start by first identifying, as a whole class, what you perceive as being the problems with the argument and then discussing the counter examples/ arguments you could use to demonstrate why these aspects of the argument are problematic.

When you have completed your letter, you can share it with the rest of the class.

THINK

Would the use of moral enhancement technology represent moral progress? Why or why not?

THINK

Would Aristotle approve of the use of moral enhancement technology? Why or why not?

DO

How could cognitive enhancement affect our views of moral responsibility and, in turn, our views of what constitutes a good person?

In the Philosopher's Zone podcast 'A Super Dilemma' (http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/a-super-dilemma/5442346), philosopher Nicole Vincent and host David Rutledge discuss cognitive enhancement and the various issues it raises for our views regarding moral responsibility.

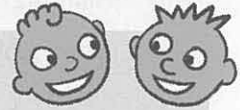
Listen to the podcast. As you listen, take note of the various issues that Associate Professor Vincent raises, the questions she identifies as pertinent to these issues and the positions that can be taken on these questions.

In pairs and using your notes, create a mind map of the discussion. Share your mind map with the class.

WRITE

Drawing on the resources you have encountered in your examination of moral and cognitive enhancement, write a 500-800 word reflection on the following prompt:

- *'Enhancement is a threat to the responsibility one bears for one's own life and one's moral choices.'*



DISCUSS

Should we engineer ourselves for happiness?

Place a chair at the front of the class. This is the 'hot seat.' Whoever is in the hot seat must provide an argument in response to the question asked. Whoever follows, must provide a contrary argument. After each question has been answered twice (providing two perspectives) a new question is asked. Students remain in the hot seat for two minutes. You may like to go through several rounds, depending on time and the size of the class. Questions suitable for this activity include:

- Should we use technology to eliminate psychological suffering?
- Should we use technology to increase our happiness?
- Is a life without suffering a good life?
- If a life with increased happiness a good life?

When you have completed this task, discuss the following questions as a whole class:

1. Are you convinced by the view that using technology to eliminate suffering is a good thing?
2. Are you convinced by the view that using technology to engineer happiness is a good thing?
3. Are you convinced by the view that suffering is not important to the good life?
4. Are you convinced by the view that happiness is synonymous with the good life?
5. To what extent are your views regarding the engineering of happiness shaped by the views and values of the society in which you live? How might your views change if this technology was readily available and more accessible?
6. Would life be better if we could all make ourselves happy?

READ

Read Katherine Powers' article 'The End of Suffering' (https://philosophynow.org/issues/56/The_End_of_Suffering)

Using a highlighter, identify arguments in favour of the engineering of happiness. Include arguments that support the engineering of happiness by contesting arguments to the contrary.

Using a second highlighter, identify arguments against the engineering of happiness. Include arguments that support the importance of suffering in a good life.

Create a table like the one below to document these different perspectives:

	Arguments to support	Counter-arguments
Engineering for happiness		
Against engineering for happiness		

WRITE

Write a philosophical dialogue between a supporter and an opponent of engineering happiness.

OR:

Write a philosophical dialogue between David Pearce (see the article used in the previous activity) and Nietzsche in response to the question, 'should we engineer human happiness?'

OR:

Complete a written reflection in response to the following prompt:

- 'Happiness is necessary for a good life. We should therefore put our energies into developing technologies that will eradicate suffering and cultivate happiness.'

THINK

Would Nietzsche approve of technology to enhance happiness? Why or why not? What about Callicles? Why or why not? Who provides a more compelling argument when it comes to thinking about engineering happiness?

THINK

Does the capacity to control happiness make us more, or less, free?

DO

Nature, nurture or design? Should we use technology to engineer our offspring?

Read the dialogue 'Are Designer Babies Our Future?' (https://philosophynow.org/issues/119/Are_Designer_Babies_Our_Future)

Highlight claims/arguments that you are particularly intrigued by and would like to discuss further.

Create a Google doc and invite each member of the class to add a couple of the claims/arguments that they have highlighted (as quotations) to this document. Your teacher can then use this document to select a claim/argument (or a couple of related claims/arguments) as a stimulus for a Community of Inquiry.

Arrange the class into a circle. Write the claim/argument on the whiteboard (or display it on a PowerPoint slide). Nominate a class member to take notes. Alternatively, your teacher may like to assume this role.

Spend two minutes discussing your response to the claim/argument with the person sitting beside you. Once you have completed this discussion, you will be ready to share your thoughts with the whole class in a discussion facilitated by your teacher.

DO

Divide the class into pairs or small groups. In your pairs/small groups spend five minutes discussing the kinds of things you believe a parent would want for their children. For example, you might think that most parents generally want their children to be successful in their careers, or capable of making friends easily.

Once you have done this, discuss the attributes that you think are conducive to these outcomes. For example, you may have identified wealth as something parents would want for their children. Given that men statistically earn more than women, being male is statistically more conducive to this outcome.

When you have completed this task you will be ready to design your baby.

Drawing on your discussions, create a visual representation of your 'designer baby.' Identify the outcomes that you think parents would generally want for their children and the attributes that you believe are conducive to these outcomes.

When the class has completed these visual representations, pin them together on the wall. Take some time to peruse the representations. Then discuss the following questions:

- Were there any attributes that stood out for you? Why?
- If people were to genetically select for this attribute, what might be the positive consequences for the individual and for humanity as a whole?
- If people were to genetically select for this attribute, what might be the negative consequences for the individual and for humanity as a whole?
- Were there particular attributes that were noticeably absent from these representations?
- What might be the consequences of the fact that such attributes may not be considered during genetic selection, both for the individual and for humanity as a whole?

THINK

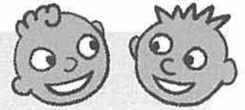
Are engineered offspring more, or less, free? What are the implications of your answer to this question in terms of the relationship between genetic engineering and the good life?

DO

Complete some further research into the debates surrounding 'designer babies.' You may like to use the following resources as starting points for this research:

- Julian Savulescu on Designer Babies. Philosophy Bites podcast (http://philosophybites.com/2012/04/julian-savulescu-on-designer-babies-.html)
- There's Nothing Wrong With Designer Babies. Radio National Big Ideas podcast (http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/there27s-nothing-wrong-with-designer-babies/4307966)
- Editing Human Embryos with CRISPR is Moving Ahead – Now its Time to Work Out the Ethics: The Conversation (https://theconversation.com/editing-human-embryos-with-crispr-is-moving-ahead-nows-the-time-to-work-out-the-ethics-81732)
- Why the Case Against Designer Babies Falls Apart: The Conversation (https://theconversation.com/why-the-case-against-designer-babies-falls-apart-45256)
- Designing Babies: SBS Insight program (https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/tvepisode/designing-babies)

Use your research to construct a visual representation (for example, a table or a mind map) showing different perspectives on designer babies. Don't forget to include the arguments for these perspectives.



DISCUSS

Do we have a moral obligation to permit the genetic enhancement of offspring?

An excellent way of testing different perspectives on an issue is to participate in a panel discussion.

Allocate the role of 'expert' to five members of the class. These experts will represent different perspectives on the issue (you may like to use the research undertaken in the previous task to help you with this). Depending on the number of students in the class, each 'expert' could be allocated a 'research team' who will work with them to develop the case for their position.

When the experts are ready to present their cases, arrange them as a panel at the front of the classroom. A student from the class or the teacher can facilitate the presentation of the panel discussion. Each panel member should be asked to present their case but also be given the opportunity to interrogate the cases presented by other members of the panel. As appropriate, the facilitator of the panel should invite questions from the audience.

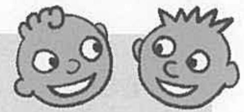
When this task is completed, take some time, as a whole class, to reflect on the points raised during the panel discussion. Questions to consider include:

- What did this activity make you think about in relation to this issue?
- What more did you learn about the issue through this discussion?
- Were you particularly convinced by any of the arguments presented during this discussion? Why did you find these particular arguments convincing?
- Were there any arguments you found particularly unconvincing? Why did you find these arguments unconvincing?
- Did your views on designer babies alter as a result of this activity? If so, in what ways?

WRITE

Write a 500-word reflection in response to the following prompt:

- *'The capacity to control our genetic inheritance will not only improve individual lives but humanity as a whole.'*



DISCUSS

What is the relationship between body enhancement and the good life?

Using large pieces of paper, construct two signs, one reading 'approve' and one reading 'disapprove.' Place these signs at opposite ends of the classroom.

Imagine there is a line between these two signs. As each of the following body enhancement technologies are read out, position yourself on the line in relation to the degree to which you approve/disapprove of the technology.

- Make up
- Tattooing
- Non surgical cosmetic procedures (botox, dermal fillers etc)
- Surgical cosmetic procedures (facelifts, breast enhancement, etc)
- The use of natural performance enhancing agents (naturally occurring substances, blood doping etc)
- The use of synthetic performance enhancing agents (anabolic steroids etc)
- The use of prosthetics in cases of disability
- The use of prosthetics that enhance physical performance
- The use of technologies to significantly increase lifespan

Once the whole class is positioned, students should be invited to share the reasons for their placement before re-positioning themselves in relation to the next technology. Make sure you listen carefully to your classmates' reasons and try to be alert for any contradictions in their reasoning.

When you have completed the activity, discuss the following questions:

1. What are some of the reasons that were offered against physical enhancement?
2. Were these good reasons to disapprove of the respective enhancement?
3. Did you notice any contradictions in our thinking around physical enhancement?
4. What do you think are the bases for these contradictions?
5. What did our responses to the various physical enhancement technologies suggest about our views regarding the good life

DO

Watch the documentary *Fixed: The Science/Fiction of Human Enhancement* (http://www.fixedthemovie.com/)

Working together as a whole class, construct a list of pertinent questions, relating to the key concepts (see p.289), that you think the film raises. An example of such a question is, 'Can technology help us to live freer lives?'

Reduce this list to 5-6 questions and discuss these questions as a whole class, making sure you refer back to the film to support your discussion.

When you have completed this task, write a brief reflection (approximately 500 words) in response to the following prompt:

'By facilitating our capacity to be free, technology enables us to live better lives.'

READ

In their article 'Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement,' (https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/human-enhancement.html) Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache consider many of debates discussed in this chapter.

Allocate sections of the article evenly across the class. If possible, allocate according to student interest.

Read your allocated section and using a highlighter, identify the key claims made in the section and the reasons provided to support these claims.

Write an exposition and evaluation of the arguments presented in your section (approximately 500-600 words). Create a shared document in which you can present your writing to other members of the class.

PART C

Debate 2: Social Media Technologies and the Good Life

Introduction

Aristotle famously declared, 'man is a social animal.' Thus it is no surprise that humans should harness technology for social ends. Since the 1980's, when the ARPANET, the precursor of the internet used by the US military, gradually evolved into the chat rooms that would pave the way for 'Web 2.0' technologies, which were specifically designed to facilitate user-generated, collaborative and shared internet content, we have been using digital technologies to connect with others and share our ideas. By 2018, approximately 15 million Australians were active users of Facebook, nine million were active users of Instagram, and four million were active users of Snapchat. One in two Australians used Facebook on a daily basis.[7]

Without a doubt, social media is re-shaping the ways in which human beings interact with one another and initiate and maintain relationships. By mediating our self-presentation to the world, social media is also re-shaping how we think about our own identities and the identities of others. How we understand the good life is increasingly moulded by what we see in our news feeds and by the tweets and posts of those we 'follow.'

This inevitably raises questions about the relationship between social media and the good life. Even as early as the 1980s and 1990s, philosophers and social theorists were starting to examine how digitally mediated social interaction affected our perception of reality, ourselves, and others. Albert Borgman, a philosopher specialising in philosophy of technology, raised concerns that social media may diminish the fullness and complexity of our identities and make us resentful of the 'hardness of reality' when compared to the 'glamour of virtuality.' Others cautioned against the possibility of online friendship supplanting face-to-face interaction.

These issues are still of concern to some theorists. However, as it has become increasingly evident that social media, rather than supplanting offline relationships, is often used to instigate, maintain and enhance these relationships, philosophers and social theorists have turned their attention to other matters. These include the ways in which the capacity for increased connectedness can diminish our attentiveness to those around us, how we negotiate the relationship between our real and virtual identities, and how, paradoxically, social media offers us the freedom to construct our identities (and

7 'Social Media Statistics Australia – January 2018' retrieved from https://socialmedianews.com.au

yet, through this construction, concretises these identities), and the question of whether social media diminishes our sense of empathy and social responsibility. As always, where one stands on these issues depends a great deal on what one considers a good life to be.

Introductory Activities

DO

Log on to your social media account. If you do not have a social media account, work with a partner.

Spend 15 minutes examining the news feed, posts and your own time line. As you are browsing, jot down notes to the following questions:

- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What do you feel?

Share your responses with the class. What issues, regarding the relationship between social media and the good life, do these responses raise? Create a list of these issues on the whiteboard.

Divide the class into small groups. Each group may choose one of the issues from the whiteboard for discussion. In your discussion you should try to identify various perspectives that could be taken on the issue and some arguments to support these perspectives. You may also discuss evaluations of these perspectives. One member of the group should scribe the discussion.

When you have completed this task, using the scribe's notes, construct a visual representation of your discussion. Your visual representation should include the issue under discussion, the perspectives that could be taken on the issue, arguments that could be used to support these perspectives, and evaluations of the arguments used to support the perspectives.

Display these visual representations in the classroom so your classmates can view them.

DO

Create a resource bank of relevant materials.

Spend some time researching current debates surrounding social media. A good place to start is https://theconversation.com/au/topics/social-media-109.

Find three articles presenting three different debates/issues. Write a brief summary (one paragraph) of each article and add to shared document. Don't forget to include links to the articles.

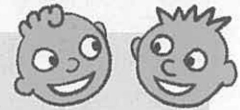
WRITE

Drawing on the two activities described above, construct a written reflection (800 words) discussing the issues social media raises for our understanding of the good life.

Further Activities

THINK

What is the relationship between friendship and happiness? How important is friendship to the good life?



DISCUSS

As a whole class discuss the following questions:

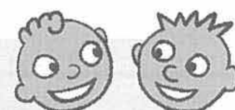
1. How do you know if you are friends with someone?
2. Are friends different from acquaintances? In what ways?
3. Are there different kinds of friends? What are the similarities/differences between these friendships?
4. Could a person without friends have a good life? Why or why not?
5. Could a person without particular kinds of friendships have a good life? Why or why not?
6. Does social media cultivate certain kinds of friendships? If so, which ones?
7. Does social media enhance or undermine friendship?
8. Does social media transform our understanding of friendship? Do we expect more, or less, or something different from our friends because of social media?
9. Considering the answers to the previous question, do you think social media enhances or undermines the good life?

READ

In Book VIII of the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle discusses the nature and purpose of friendship.

Read Book VIII, chapters 1-6 of the Nicomachean Ethics (http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.8.viii.html) and answer the following questions in your workbook:

1. In the beginning of Chapter 1, Aristotle claims that.. 'without friends, no one would choose to live.' What are some of the benefits that friends provide? To what extent do these benefits cultivate a good life?
2. What are the characteristics of friendship according to Aristotle?
3. What are the three kinds of friendships identified by Aristotle and what are their characteristics?
4. Why is 'perfect friendship' superior to other kinds of friendship?
5. What does Aristotle say about the effect of distance/proximity on friendship?
6. Why can we only enjoy a few 'perfect' friendships according to Aristotle?



DISCUSS

How can Aristotle's views help us to think about the nature of friendship in the context of social media and, in turn, the capacity of social media to help us to live good lives?

As a whole class discuss the following questions:

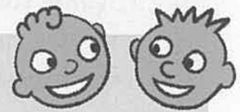
1. Aristotle claims that 'without friends, no one would choose to live though he had all other goods.' Do you agree that friendship is a necessary condition of the good life?
2. Of the three kinds of friendship Aristotle identifies, which kind dominates our social media interactions? What implications does this have for how we think of friendship and its role in the good life in the 21st century?
3. How does social media affect our 'perfect' friendships? Does it allow us to cultivate such friendships? Maintain them? Enhance them? Do perfect friendships require social media to survive in the 21st century or does social media undermine such friendships? If so, how?
4. Aristotle believes that proximity/distance can affect our friendships. What implications does social media have in this regard and what are the consequences for our capacity to live good lives?
5. If, as Aristotle claims, it is only possible to have a few really good friends, what does this mean for understanding of friendship and social media?

THINK

In what ways has social media changed the way we view friendship? Are these changes a good or bad thing in terms of the quality of our lives?

THINK

Aristotle claimed that 'man is a social animal.' To what extent does social media confirm this view of human nature?



DISCUSS

Watch the following short clip on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozFstJHqaVI (please note, this clip contains coarse language).

Discuss the following questions as a whole class:

1. How accurate is this clip in depicting our relationship to social media?
2. Do you agree that social media is making us less attentive during social interactions?
3. Reflecting on your answer to Q2, is our attentiveness to social media compromising our capacity to live good lives?

WRITE

Listen to the Radio National *All in the Mind* podcast, 'Hooked on Social Media' (http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/hooked-on-social-media/7885492).

Construct two columns in your workbook. Reflecting on the discussions contained in the podcast, list all of the advantages of social media in one column and the pitfalls of social media in the other column.

Drawing on the information contained in these columns, write a 500-750 word reflection in response to the following question:

- Does social media enhance or undermine our capacity to live good lives?

THINK

In *Gorgias*, Socrates argued that an organised mind is a self-disciplined mind. How would Socrates respond to the question of whether social media can help us to live a good life and why would he respond in this way?

DO

Read the article 'When You Love Your Friend But Hate Her Social Media Presence' (https://www.thecut.com/2017/05/social-media-friendship-impact.html)

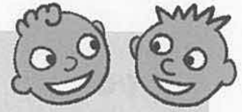
Log into your social media account and scroll through your time line/posts. Pretend you are a stranger. What do you learn about this person by looking at this material? What kind of person do they appear to be? What kind of life do they appear to live?

Join with another classmate and discuss the differences you noticed between your online and offline selves. What is the relationship between your online and offline selves? How are they similar? Different? Of the two selves, which do you prefer and why?

WRITE

How does the fact we can curate our lives and manufacture our identities on social media affect how we understand the good life and, in turn, what effect does this have on our capacity to live a good life?

Construct a mind map that shows a range of possible responses to the above question. Annotate your mind map with concrete examples to illustrate your points.



DISCUSS

Read the article 'For the First Generation to grow up on Facebook, Online Identities Hold Both Promise and Pitfall' (https://theconversation.com/for-the-first-generation-to-grow-up-on-facebook-online-id).

As a whole class, discuss the following questions:

1. To what extent does the capacity to control our self-representation on social media enhance our freedom?
2. To what extent does the fact that social media archives this self-representation limit our freedom?
3. To what extent does social media transform how we understand reality? Is the self presented on social media more or less real than our offline self?
4. Can social media improve our lives? Why or why not?

THINK

Does the capacity to decide our self-representation on social media make us more, or less creative?

DO

Research the relationship between social media and empathy OR between social media and social action. Make sure you consult a range of resources representing a range of perspectives.

Share your findings with the class.

THINK

The combination of social media and crowd funding platforms such as gofundme and kickstarter allow us to help others with greater ease than ever before, either through setting up fundraising initiatives or by donating to others. Can engagement with social media therefore help us to live better lives?

DO

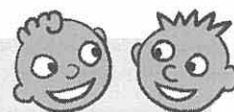
Conduct a debate on the following topic:

Social media helps us be better people and lead better lives by improving opportunities for social action.

Team 1 will argue that social media does help us be better people and lead better lives by improving opportunities for social action. Team 2 will argue that social media does not help us be better people or lead better lives by improving opportunities for social action.

WRITE

Reflecting on the above activity, produce a short written reflection (500 words) on whether or not social media helps us to lead better lives by improving opportunities for social action.



DISCUSS

Discuss the following questions in small groups:

1. What is the relationship between truth and the good life?
2. Is it important to know what is true to live well?
3. How can untruths undermine our capacity to live well?

Share an overview of your discussion with the class.

READ

Read the blogpost 'Post-Truth and Philosophy' (https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/06/25/post-truth-and-philosophy/)

Write a paragraph-long definition of post-truth in your workbook.

READ

Read the article 'What Does Post-Truth Mean For A Philosopher?' (https://www.bbc.com/news/education-38557838).

Answer the following questions in your workbook:

1. What is post-truth and why is it so dangerous according to Professor Grayling?
2. What has led to the rise of post-truth according to Professor Grayling?
3. What is the relationship between social media and post-truth?
4. How may the rise of post-truth affect our capacity to live a good life?

DO

Read Plato's Allegory of the Cave from Book VII of *The Republic* (514a-517b). In pairs, write a summary of the allegory. Join with another pair to check your interpretation and to discuss how the allegory may be used to help us think about the dangers of post-truth in relation to the good life.

WRITE

Drawing on the activity outlined above, complete a written task that includes:

- A description of Allegory of the Cave
- A discussion of how the Allegory of the Cave may be used to help us think about the dangers of post-truth
- An evaluation of social media and its capacity to help us live good lives within the context of post-truth.

WRITE

Select ONE of the issues explored in the activities related to social media in this chapter. Construct a question that invites you to discuss this issue within the context of the good life.

Add this question to a class question bank and then select one of the questions from this bank to write an essay in response to this question.

Make sure your essay contains exposition and evaluation and includes examples to support your arguments.

PART D

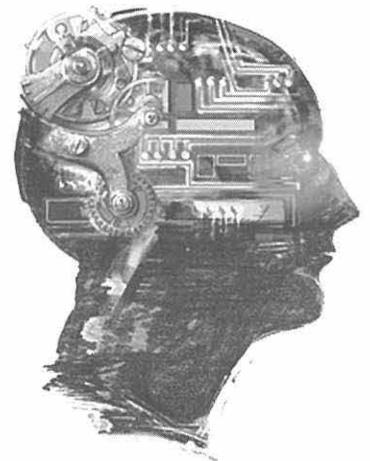
Debate 3: Artificial Intelligence and The Good Life

Introduction

No doubt you have already encountered artificial intelligence during your study of Philosophy. Perhaps you have considered the ways in which artificial intelligence can be used to evaluate different views of the nature of mind or how perspectives on the nature of mind can help us think about artificial intelligence.

In this Area of Study you have the opportunity to revisit your learning on artificial intelligence by exploring the relationship between artificial intelligence and the good life. Does artificial intelligence enhance our opportunity to live a good life by providing us with the mechanisms to facilitate human wellbeing and happiness? Or will the rise of artificial intelligence diminish our good lives or even threaten our very survival?

Certainly, humanity is already reaping the benefits of developments in this area. Artificial intelligence is currently used in medical diagnoses, to fly planes and to assess large areas of difficult terrain to find survivors during natural disasters. In our daily lives we use artificial intelligence to guide our travel routes and alert us to traffic hazards. We can even control the lighting and temperature in our homes with our smart phones.



Will the rise of artificial intelligence enhance or diminish our human lives?

In the near future, artificial intelligence could potentially release us from the tyranny of paid labour and the drudgery of housework, thereby increasing our leisure time and making our lives far easier. But some thinkers warn that the development of artificial intelligence could also have unforeseen consequences of diabolical proportions; what will intelligence far greater than our own do if it acquires autonomy?

Whatever the future, one thing is certain. Artificial intelligence is reshaping the world we live in and with it, our understanding of what a good life is.

Introductory Activities

WRITE

Using the internet find several definitions of weak ('narrow') AI and strong AI. Use these definitions to help you compose your own definitions in your workbook.

DO

Research current and future examples of artificial intelligence. Share your examples with the class and, as a whole class, create two, large collaborative posters – one displaying examples of current artificial intelligence and one displaying future examples of artificial intelligence. Put these up in your classroom.

DO

Remove the chairs from the classroom (or place against the wall) and arrange four tables in the room. On each table place a large piece of butcher's paper and several markers. In the centre of each piece of paper is a question. Examples of questions that could be used for this activity include:

- What will life be like 50 years from now?
- In what ways will artificial intelligence improve our lives?
- Will artificial intelligence help us to be happier?
- If artificial intelligence makes our lives easier, will our lives be better?
- How might artificial intelligence change us morally?
- What are the moral implications of the rise of artificial intelligence?
- Will artificial intelligence make us freer?
- How might our values change with the rise of artificial intelligence?

Divide the class into four groups and allocate a table to each group. Each member of the group will spend three minutes responding to their question. As the goal is to produce as many ideas as possible, members may find that the question prompts other questions, or contradictory responses, or simply a series of statements. All of these can be written around the question.

Once the three minutes have passed, groups should rotate to new tables. Repeat until all students have visited each table.

Collect the pieces of butcher's paper. Select one of the pieces of paper and use the question and responses as a starting point for a class discussion.

WRITE

The influence of artificial intelligence on our future lives will certainly be wide-ranging and significant. Should we be concerned or excited?

Drawing on the previous activities, write 500 words reflecting on this question.

Further Activities

READ

Read the article 'The Future of AI: Two Experts Disagree' from The Conversation (https://theconversation.com/the-future-of-artificial-intelligence-two-experts-disagree).

As you read the article, click on the links that explain the different artificial intelligence technologies.

Create a table in your workbook like the one below that lists the technologies described in the article. Include in your table the possible advantages and disadvantages of the technology. These advantages and disadvantages may be ones you have identified or ones identified by the authors. Once you have completed the task, and based on these advantages/disadvantages, draw some conclusions regarding the relationship between developments in artificial intelligence and the good life.

Examples of technology	Advantages	Disadvantages
Conclusions regarding the relationship between developments in artificial intelligence and the good life.		

DO

Choose one of the artificial intelligence technologies from the previous activity. Research this technology in more detail and construct a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation that explains the technology and discusses how the technology may transform both how we live our lives and the way we think about what a good life is. Draw on one of the key concepts (progress, reality, control, dependency, freedom and creativity) in your discussion.

Share your presentation with the class.

DO

Listen to the Philosophy Bites podcast on The Singularity (http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/b/1/4/b142dac332c9b94b/David_Chalmers_on_The_Singularity.mp3?c_id=1832963&cs_id=1832963&expiration=1534053094&hwt=57df245ec9de0c657ce1f0c29454eae8).

As you listen, take notes on the challenges singularity presents.

READ

Browse the article 'Benefits and Risks of Artificial Intelligence' on the Future of Life Institute website (https://futureoflife.org/background/benefits-risks-of-artificial-intelligence/).

At the bottom of the article are links to other resources exploring the potential risks and challenges of artificial intelligence. Select one of these resources for reading.

Hold a class forum and share a summary of the claims made in the resource with the class.

READ

Select one of the following essays for study:

- John Danaher's 'The Case Against Work' (https://www.philosophersmag.com/essays/184-the-case-against-work)
- Bertrand Russell's 'In Praise of Idleness' (https://harpers.org/archive/1932/10/in-praise-of-idleness/)
- Caroline West's 'Work Four Hours, the Rest' (https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/work-four-hours-then-rest-20090803-e770.html)

Using a highlighter, identify the arguments provided in the essay against work. If the article discusses any advantages to work, identify these also.

Create a visual representation of the argument, such as a flow chart or argument map. Identity any sites for evaluation and annotate these with your evaluations.

WRITE

Drawing on the previous activity and your other research into artificial intelligence, write an essay in response to the following prompt:

'Artificial intelligence technology will result in a better life by relieving us of the need to work.'

Your essay should include:

- An exposition of arguments against work, as described in one of the articles from the previous activity;
- A discussion of how artificial intelligence technology will transform our working lives;
- An evaluative discussion as to whether or not such a transformation will result in a better life.

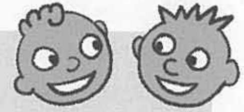
Your essay should be between 1,000-1,200 words and make use of examples.

THINK

Would a life without work be a good life? How might Susan Wolf respond to this question?

THINK

Could artificial intelligence cultivate more creative lives? Would such lives be better lives?



DISCUSS

Read the article 'Friendly Robots' from Issue 15 (The Future) of New Philosopher magazine.

What are some of the moral challenges that the development of AI presents?

DO

Research 'friendly robots.' Using this research and the classroom discussion from the previous activity construct a poster showing the moral challenges presented by the development of 'friendly' AI.

Display your poster, alongside those of your classmates, in your classroom. As you peruse the posters discuss the following questions:

- How may our moral views need to change to accommodate the development of 'friendly' AI?
- How, if at all, will this change our views of what constitutes goodness and a good life?

PART E

Suggestions for Assessment

The following Assessment Tasks are suggestions only. Teachers should always consult the VCAA Study Design for Philosophy before setting assessments to ensure coherence with the appropriate Outcome descriptors. ***Further suggestions can be found in the* VCE Philosophy: Assessment and Examinations Supplement for Units 3 & 4 Third Edition.**

Unit 4, Area of Study 2, Outcome 2

'On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss contemporary debates related to technological development and the good life, and examine the interplay between technological development and conceptions of the good life'.

Teachers should note that all students are required to complete at least one essay for assessment purposes in Unit 4.

Assessment Task One: Short Answer Responses

Complete a series of short answer responses that invite students to describe a relevant area of debate and critically discuss the interplay between the debate and conceptions of the good life.

Assessment Task Two: Written Analysis

Complete a written analysis that compares and critically discusses different perspectives on a relevant contemporary debate (see the activity boxes throughout the chapter for suggestions).

Assessment Task Three: Written Reflection

Construct a blog that critically reflects on various perspectives in one of the areas of contemporary debate and the interplay between the perspective and the good life.

Assessment Task Four: Presentation

Construct a PowerPoint presentation that explains and critically examines the interplay between a contemporary debate in technology and the good life (see the activity boxes throughout the chapter for suggestions).

Assessment Task Five: Essay

Engage in further research in a particular aspect of one of the contemporary debates in technology (for example, friendship and social media, or designer babies). From your research, develop an essay question. Critically discuss this question, drawing on the work of at least one philosopher (see the activity boxes throughout the chapter for suggestions). Make sure your essay:

- Provides some overview of the debate in relation to the good life;
- Uses the philosophical material to examine the debate;
- Provides some evaluation of the debate and its relationship to the good life;
- Comes to some kind of judgment on the question in light of these evaluations.

PART F

Useful Resources

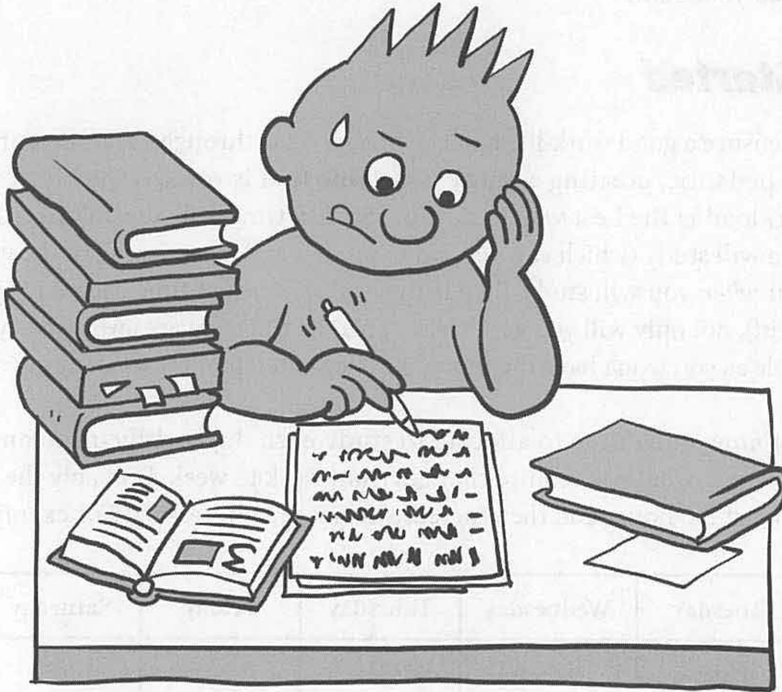
- Boag, Z. 2017, Technology, *New Philosopher Magazine,* Issue #11
- Boag, Z. 2017, Future Thinking, *New Philosopher Magazine,* Issue #15
- Borgmann, A. 1984, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Jansanoff, S. 2016, *The Ethics of Invention: Technology and the Human Future,* W.W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Kaplan, M. (ed) 2009, *Readings in Philosophy of Technology,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland.
- Lewis, R. 2012, The Ethics of Human Enhancement, *Philosophy Now,* Issue #91
- Stevenson, M. 2011 *An Optimist's Tour of the Future,* Penguin, London

Websites

- http://theconversation.com/au
- http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/
- http://www.philosophybites.com/
- http://blog.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk/

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for Study



Successful Study Habits

Most students know they need to study. Parents, teachers and even the media regularly remind them of this fact and many schools attempt to habituate students to study by incorporating study periods into their timetable. And yet, the issue of *how* to study is less often discussed.

Good study habits are important for academic success, but they are also important for ensuring that this success doesn't come at the cost of health and wellbeing. This is why it is important to understand *how* to study, to know what to prioritise, how to manage time and how to engage with your learning in the most efficient way possible. A good study program is one that ensures you get your work done but also allows you to have some time to be with friends and engage in other activities that feed your soul.

Getting Started

The best way to ensure a good work-life balance in Year 12 is through careful planning. Although it might sound pedantic, creating a **study timetable** that is revised weekly according to the foreseeable workload is the best way to do this. Such a timetable doesn't necessarily need to include *what* you will study (which can be hard to predict at the beginning of the week). Rather, it should show you *when* you will study. By putting aside a block of time each day to do your work (and sticking to it!), not only will you get things done, the time you are away from your books will be more enjoyable as you won't have the thought of neglected homework hanging over your head.

The question of *how much* time to allocate to study each day is difficult to answer. You will certainly discover that what you require changes from week to week. Probably the best tactic is to begin with blocks of 2-3 hours and then increase/decrease as necessary. For example:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7-10pm	11am-12.40pm 7-9pm	4-6pm	8.30am-10.30am 7-10pm		1-4pm	10-12pm 7-9.30pm

When creating your weekly timetable you should make good use of any spares, study periods, late starts or early finishes that you have during the week, and accommodate for family meal times and sporting, cultural or other family and extra-curricula activities. You should also include reasonable time for friends (you will note that in the above timetable, Friday night is study free) during most weeks.

As well as structuring your time throughout the week, you should also try to structure your study periods. To enable you to do this effectively, it is important that you know what work needs to be done when. Use a diary or your smart phone to record what work is required for each class, and refer to it when planning your study sessions. You will also find it helpful to put important dates into a calendar.

DO

Construct a study timetable like the one above. Print out a copy and stick it above your works pace for easy reference. Store a copy on your computer desktop for weekly revision.

Studying for VCE Philosophy

Reading

Once you know *when* you will study, you can begin to think about *what* you will study. In Year 12 Philosophy, a great deal of your study time will be devoted to understanding the set texts. Although it is almost certain that you will engage in a detailed examination of these texts in class, to truly understand the concepts, arguments and viewpoints expressed within them, you will need to read them several times and engage in intensive, detailed, independent study.

The first time you read a text should be *before* you study it. The purpose of this reading is to get an overview of the viewpoints and arguments. Although it is tempting to start underlining and highlighting, you should try to keep such activity to a bare minimum. This doesn't mean that your reading should be passive. You may, for example, like to note down key points or any questions you have. But you should try to have as little disruption as possible to the *process* of reading.

The next time you read the text, it should be within the context of a close reading. A close reading involves identifying and analysing the arguments presented in the text. As you read, you will need to look for the claims being made and the reasons used to support the claims, as well as any examples. It can certainly be helpful to highlight or underline this information, but it is also wise to take notes as notes will allow to see the structure of the reasoning and alert you to the fact you might have missed, or misinterpreted, something. In addition to identifying arguments, it is a good idea to identify sites for evaluation and any links you can see to the concepts described in the relevant Area of Study (see *VCE Philosophy Study Design 2019-2023).* This can be done by annotating the text or your notes.

Just as you should read the whole text before undertaking a detailed study of it, it is also useful to read it again once you have completed this study. This will allow you to consolidate your understanding by providing you with a global view of the viewpoints and arguments. During this reading you can make additional notes, including with regard to how the arguments fit together to form the viewpoints expressed in the text.

The final time you should read the texts is in the lead-up to the exams. This will serve to refresh your memory and provide you with new perspectives on the texts in relation to each other and in relation to key knowledge for each Area of Study (see *VCE Philosophy Study Design 2019-2023).*

Note Taking

As you study the texts you will come across information that will add to the depth and sophistication of your knowledge. A great deal of this information will be received during classroom activities and discussion. It is therefore vital that you come to class appropriately prepared and focused.

While it is certainly important to make sure you write down any information your teacher puts up on the whiteboard, it is equally important to pay careful attention to what your classmates have to say. It is usually during classroom discussion, and other activities that involve verbal interaction, that you will come across interesting evaluations, perspectives on the links between the texts and contemporary debates, and insights into the relationship between the texts and the concepts. You should try to take notes on these things as well as the thoughts, insights and questions that arise for you as you listen.

Trying to take notes during these interactions can sound daunting – particularly if you keep in mind that you need to be able to understand what you have jotted down later! It can therefore be helpful to first work out what is *worth* taking notes on. A good place to start is to read the VCE Philosophy Study Design (https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/philosophy/PhilosophySD_2019.pdf), which lists the assessable knowledge and skills for each of the Areas of Study. You could try teaming up with a partner with whom you can share notes after class or, if your teacher and school are amenable to it, you could record classes on your smart phone.

After each class it is a good idea to look over your notes. You can correct or clarify information while it is still fresh in your memory, or add annotations. You may also like to extend your knowledge of arguments and evaluations with further research. Both the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (https://www.iep.utm.edu/) and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online (https://plato.stanford.edu/) are excellent general resources.

WRITE

Download the *VCE Philosophy Study Design* (https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/philosophy/PhilosophySD_2019.pdf). Read through the Key Knowledge and Key Skills for each Area of Study in Units 3 and 4. For each Area of Study create a list of what you need to pay attention to for the purposes of note taking, during class discussions and activities.

Creating Study Resources

Given the amount of work you put into your class notes, it is tempting to think that these will suffice when it comes to study. But even the most carefully transcribed, detailed notes will not necessarily serve you well when it comes to preparing for assessments. This is because notes are piecemeal, tend to contain information that is extraneous and lack the global perspective that comes when a text study is completed. Thus it is a good idea to consolidate your notes into a set of documents that are responsive to the Key Knowledge and Key Skills described in the *VCE Philosophy Study Design.*

Text summaries are an excellent way to synthesise your knowledge of the set texts. The best time to do a text summary is right after completing your study of a text, when all you have learned is still fresh in your mind. Completing summaries at this time is also less of a chore: it is far easier to do a single text summary, rather than several, at a given time.

Although how you do you summary is entirely up to you, there are some basic rules that are worth following to ensure that your summary will be of maximum use to you when you are revising for school-assessed coursework tasks or the exam:

- Your summary should always be word processed as opposed to handwritten and be formatted in such a way as to be easy to navigate.
- All arguments should be expressed in such a way as to reveal their logical structure (you may, for example, choose to express them in standard form).
- You should include evaluations of arguments and, where possible, concrete examples to support them.
- You should include notes regarding connections to concepts (or bold these concepts within your summary to draw your attention to when the text is engaging with them) and the implications of arguments where relevant.

You might try using the following format:

- Start with a brief overview (one short paragraph) in which you identify the central preoccupations of the text.
- Outline each argument in the text in point form or standard form, bolding words that relate to relevant concepts from the *VCE Philosophy Study Design*.
- Underneath each argument write out any relevant evaluations in point form and italics (to distinguish it from the argument). Be sure to include examples to support your evaluations.
- Where relevant, and after evaluations, add any additional notes (such as remarks about evaluations).

When you have completed each Area of Study, you should also consolidate your comparison, contemporary debate and concept notes.

A **comprehensive comparative table** is one method you can use to consolidate your knowledge of the similarities and differences between the arguments and viewpoints expressed in the set texts for each of the Areas of Study. You can do this independently or as a whole class, but if you choose this latter option, you should ensure you have your own copy to refer to when you need it. Although there are various ways of composing such a table, you might like to use the following structure based on Unit 4, Area of Study 1:

	Socrates	Callicles	Aristotle	Nietzsche
Wolf				
Nietzsche				
Aristotle				
Callicles				

To make your table both comprehensive and easy to navigate, use different coloured texts for agreements, disagreements and comparative evaluations.

In addition to being able to critically compare viewpoints and arguments, the two Areas of Study in Unit 3 require you to have knowledge of relevant contemporary debates and to understand the implications of the viewpoints and arguments you have studied for these debates. It may therefore be helpful to consolidate your learning in relation to the contemporary debates. One way to approach this task is as follows:

- Construct a one-page set of notes for each contemporary debate. Briefly describe the debate and identify the different positions that are taken on the debate. Include some examples of relevant research or innovations.

- Identify the arguments from the set texts that are relevant to this debate and include these in the set of notes.

- Identify concepts relevant to the debate and include them in the set of notes. Don't forget to indicate how they are relevant.

If you can, research at least two debates for each Area of Study. You may like to team up with a partner and share notes on different debates.

To conclude the process of creating study resources, you may also like to develop a document that relates to the concepts described in the Key Knowledge for each of the Areas of Study. This document should provide explanations of the concepts and identify the links between the concepts and the arguments and viewpoints expressed in the set texts. Obviously, these links may not always be explicit. You may discover that a particular concept relates to criticisms that can be made of the arguments and viewpoints or to questions that the argument (or, indeed, a relevant contemporary debate) raises. From the perspective of the study design, this is all relevant and so should be included in your document.

As you complete these documents, put them into a plastic display folder to create a **study package**. This study package can be used to prepare for school-assessed coursework tasks and for the exams.

DO

Purchase two display folders and divide the folders into two sections – one for each area of study. Label the folders Units 3 and 4 respectively. As you complete each of the documents described above, add it to the relevant folder.

CREATING STUDY RESOURCES FOR UNIT 4, AREA OF STUDY 2

Given that there are no set texts for Unit 4, Area of Study 2 the prospect of creating study resources may seem daunting. But it simply requires a different approach.

Throughout your study, you will have encountered a variety of contemporary debates at the intersection of technology and the good life, and have examined a variety of resources that explore these debates. In your classroom discussions and activities, you will have considered different perspectives within these debates, and how these debates engage with the relevant concepts and questions from the Study Design. You will also have considered how our understanding of the good life shapes, and is shaped by, the technologies at the centre of these debates.

Your consolidated notes should provide you with an overview of this learning. Much like the text summaries described above, the documents you create will be most useful if they are specific in focus and provide an outline of the debate and an overview of the key arguments, or perspectives, articulated in the debate. You should also include:

- Notes on the interplay between the debate and the key concepts.
- The ways in which the contemporary debate can be used to reflect on the questions about the good life identified in the *VCE Philosophy Study Design* (p.28).
- The ways in which perspectives on the debate shape, and are shaped by, particular views of the good life.
- A list of useful resources.

It is recommended that you should try to create study notes for more than one relevant contemporary debate. You can add these notes to your study package.

THINK

Consider the range of contemporary debates described in Chapter 4 of this book. Which two would you like to learn more about?

The Importance of Staying Curious and 'Doing' Philosophy

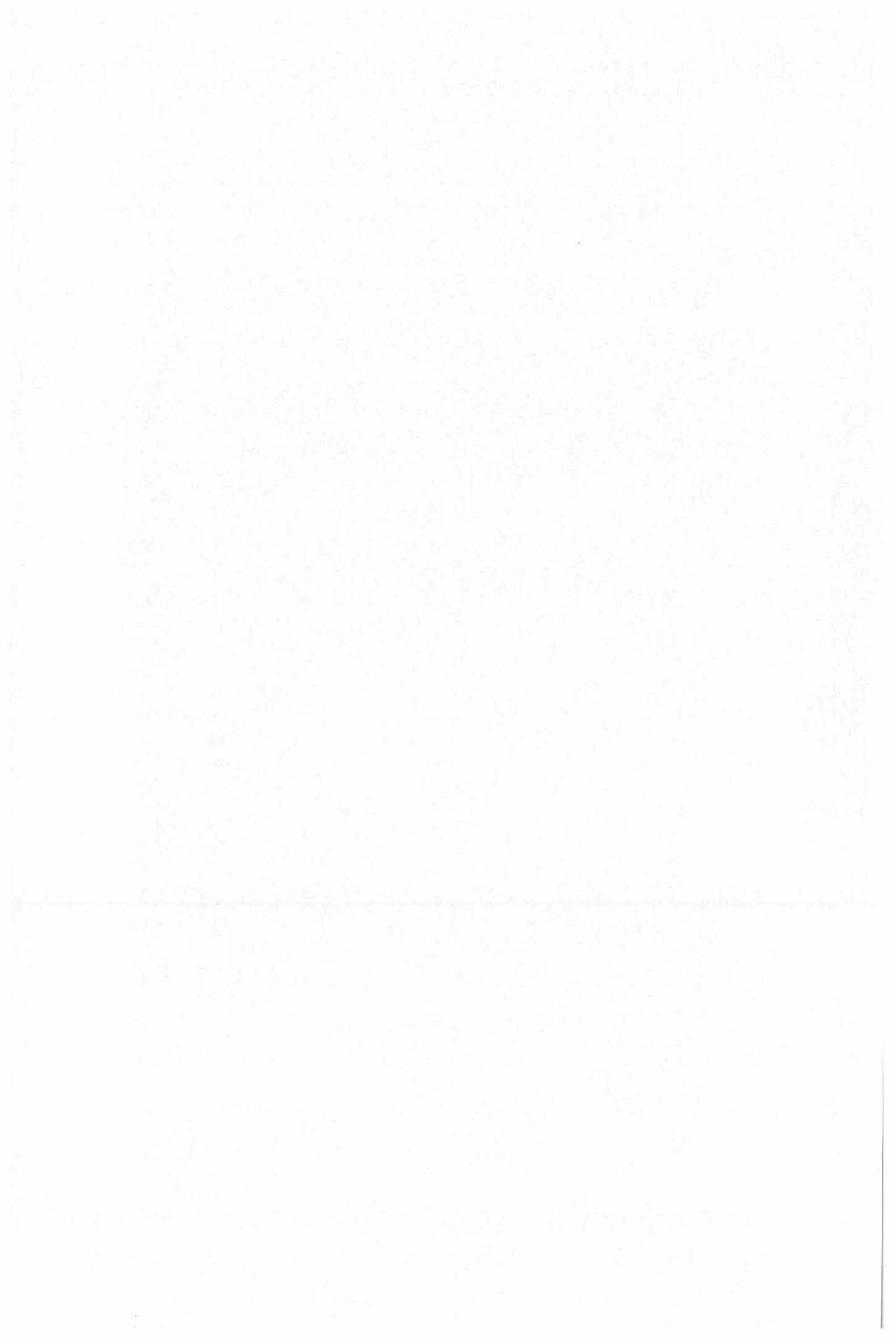
Reading the texts, taking detailed notes and consolidating your learning using text summaries, comparison charts and overview documents, are all important to ensuring your success in Philosophy. But to do *really* well in the subject, you need to truly engage with it.

It's easy to forget, given the amount of content you are required to study, that Philosophy is much more than a list of concepts, arguments and viewpoints to be memorized and regurgitated. Philosophy involves thinking, both critically and creatively. The very best philosophising happens when we truly *grapple* with ideas, either alone or with others, when we try to make sense of things we don't quite understand or don't quite agree with.

To 'do' philosophy requires conversation. This can occur in our own heads, when we critically reflect on the ideas and arguments we have encountered, or it can occur in interactions with others, when we work together to try to understand what we have read or discussed in class.

These conversations are vital to success in Philosophy, for it is in these conversations that we are prompted to clarify, deepen and extend our understanding. They provide us with fresh perspectives and allow us to test our knowledge by inviting us to share it with others. They may even prompt us to engage in further research and reading which will, in turn, add to our understanding and to the sophistication of our analyses.

So, alongside your formal study, make sure you take the time to think about philosophy *informally*. If you see an article online or in print media relating to neurotechnology or the relationship between happiness and giving to charity, read it. If a particular question from class has intrigued you, go for a walk and turn it over in your head. Start a study group or join an online conversation. Go out for coffee and philosophy. It might not seem like work, but it just might be some of the most important work you do.



About the Book

Revised to reflect changes to the Study Design for 2019-2023 and based on the prescribed text list for 2019 onwards, this new edition of *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 3 & 4* is specifically designed for students and teachers of VCE Philosophy.

Drawing on nearly two decades of teaching and assessing experience, *VCE Philosophy: A Student Text for Units 3 & 4* invites students to do philosophy. At the same time, it provides comprehensive grounding in each of the six Areas of Study, and tools and advice necessary for success in the subject.

Through a variety of stimulating classroom activities and discussion questions, students are encouraged to critically reflect on arguments and ideas from the set texts, and to develop their skills of analysis and evaluation.

The inclusion of suggested assessment tasks and resources at the end of each chapter, together with advice on course design and planning, makes this an equally valuable resource for classroom teachers.

The text covers both core and optional topics. It also includes:

- Clear and concise explanations of philosophical concepts and theories
- Highlighted key terms and definitions
- Profiles of major philosophers
- Questions for whole and small group discussion and individual reflection
- Written exercises
- Guided analyses of primary texts
- Whole class and small group activities
- Visual material and discussions of film, literature and contemporary debates
- Assessment Tasks
- Teachers' Notes
- Lists of Useful Resources
- Tips for success in Assessment Tasks
- Entirely new chapter on Technological Development and the Good Life
- Suggestions for Study

With its lively and stimulating approach, and inclusion of a plethora of new material and activities, this book will prove an essential classroom resource, an indispensable guide to success in the VCE, and a stimulating companion in the exciting world of philosophical inquiry.

About the Authors

Dr Lenny Robinson-McCarthy has worked as a Philosophy teacher for over two decades and with the VCAA in areas related to VCE Philosophy curriculum development and assessment for 18 years. From 2014-2018 Lenny co-ordinated the popular Preshil Philosophy conferences, which brought together international and Australian philosophers, teachers and high school students to share ideas and engage in philosophical dialogue.

Anna Symes has 25 years of teaching experience in primary, secondary and tertiary settings. During a decade at St Leonard's College, Melbourne, she established a VCE Philosophy program whose strengths she shared in professional development sessions for Philosophy teachers around Victoria. Anna has been a consultant to the VCAA in its development of VCE Philosophy curriculum and assessment since 2005, and has worked on state and international examination panels since 2001. She has tutored and lectured at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education and is currently working on her doctoral thesis in philosophy of education.

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