Being human

IB DP Philosophy core theme: being human, and Paper 1 Section A

Being human

- analyse an argument: premises, **conclusion**, **validity**, soundness and common fallacies;
- compare theories of **personal identity** and test them on problem cases;
- explain the difference between a human being and a person, and why it matters;

Being human (2)

- compare **hard determinism**, **libertarianism** and **compatibilism**;
- compare dualism and physicalism about the mind;
- answer a Paper 1 Section A question on a stimulus.

Arguments: the philosopher's tool

- An argument is **valid** if the **conclusion** must be true *when* the premises are true. **Validity** is about form only.
- An argument is **sound** if it is **valid** *and* its premises are actually true.
- **Deductive** arguments aim at certainty; **inductive** arguments move from many cases to a probable conclusion.

Personal identity

- **Personal identity** asks what makes you the same person as the child in your old photographs.
- Reid's case shows that memory alone fails: identity must carry over (if A = B and B = C, then A = C), but memory does not.
- Parfit answers that what matters is not strict identity but continuity, which can come in degrees, as Phineas Gage's story suggests.

Personhood

- **Personhood** is a moral idea, not a biological one.
- A **human** is a member of our species; a **person** is a being with certain abilities: consciousness, reason, self-awareness, communication, moral responsibility.
- The two groups may not match exactly.
- Some philosophers argue that great apes or future AI might be persons; others ask whether newborn babies or people in a coma meet the criteria.

Freedom

- The **free will** problem: if every event has a cause, can any choice be free?
- *The three positions answer two different questions: is determinism true, and could **free will** exist if it were?*
- Harry Frankfurt's "unwilling addict" helps the compatibilist: the addict takes the drug, but wishes he did not want it.
- He is unfree not because his act was caused, but because he acts on a desire he rejects.

Mind and body

- The **knowledge argument** (Frank Jackson): Mary is a scientist who knows every physical fact about colour but has lived all her life in a black-and-white room. When she first sees red, does she learn something new? If yes, not all facts are physical.
- Phineas Gage supports **physicalism**: damage to the brain changed the person.

Answering a Section A question

- Issue: does **personal identity** depend on **psychological continuity**?
- Positions: the **body theory** (same person, same body); Parfit's psychological continuity (identity weakens as character changes).
- Objections: the body theory ignores what we care about in a person; Parfit's view makes identity vague.
- Conclusion: the case supports Parfit; the person is partly, not wholly, the same, and we should judge their new behaviour with care.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *__Philosophy__ guide* (first assessment 2024) and subject brief.
- J. M. Harlow, "Recovery from the passage of an iron bar through the head", *Publications of the Massachusetts Medical Society* (1868).
- J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (2nd edition, 1694), book II, chapter 27; T. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785).

Sources for this lesson (2)

- H. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", *Journal of **Philosophy*** (1971).
- F. Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia", *Philosophical Quarterly* (1982).

Common errors

- Calling an argument "**valid**" because you agree with its **conclusion**; **validity** is about whether the conclusion follows from the premises.
- Listing theories of identity without testing them on a problem case.
- Treating "human" and "person" as the same word; the difference is the point of the debate.

Common errors (2)

- Saying determinism means people have no choices; compatibilists argue that free action is acting on your own desires, even if they have causes.
- Describing a **thought experiment** without saying what it is meant to show and whether it succeeds.
- In Section A, describing the **stimulus** instead of naming a **philosophical issue** and arguing about it.

Key terms

- **Valid argument**: an argument in which, if the premises are true, the **conclusion** must be true.
- **Sound argument**: a **valid** argument whose premises are actually true.
- **Psychological continuity**: the view that a person stays the same person through overlapping chains of memory, character and intention.

Key terms (2)

- **Person**: a being with a moral status that comes from features such as self-awareness and reason, not only from being biologically human.
- **Compatibilism**: the view that **free will** and determinism can both be true.
- **Dualism**: the view that the mind is not the same thing as the body or brain.
- **Physicalism**: the view that everything about the mind is physical.

Check yourself

- 1.
- Is this argument **valid**?
- Is it **sound**? "All birds can fly; penguins are birds; so penguins can fly." 2.
- After his injury, friends said Phineas Gage was "no longer Gage".