The philosophical analysis

IB DP Philosophy internal assessment: the philosophical analysis of a non-philosophical stimulus

The philosophical analysis

- explain what the philosophical analysis asks for and how long it is;
- choose a specific **non-philosophical stimulus** and find a philosophical question in it;
- write a **framing sentence** that joins stimulus, concept and question;
- make the five moves: concept, application, argument, objection and conclusion.

Choosing the stimulus and the issue

- The **stimulus** must not already be philosophy: no textbook extract, no famous thought experiment.
- Good stimuli are specific and rich: a news photograph, an advertisement, a cartoon, a scene from a film, the rules of a game.
- Find the **issue** by asking core-theme questions about it: what does it assume about persons, freedom, knowledge or what matters?
- A philosophical question is answered by reasoning, not by surveys or experiments.

The five moves of the analysis

- 1.
- Explain the **concept** precisely, with a source (for example, Aristotle's three kinds of friendship: for usefulness, for pleasure, and for the other person's own sake). 2. **Apply** it to the specific details of the stimulus (the slogan "always here to listen and talk"; users who said their companion had changed in 2023). 3. **Develop** your own argument step by step, not a list of philosophers. 4.
- Answer the strongest **objection** . 5. **Conclude** with a clear answer and its limits.

Worked example

- Stimulus: Replika's app store page and the users' posts of February 2023.
- **Issue**: can a relationship with an AI be a real friendship?
- Concept: Aristotle's highest friendship needs two people who each wish good for the other for the other's own sake.

Worked example (2)

- Application: the app can give pleasure and usefulness (company, advice), the two lower kinds; the slogan claims more: a friend who listens.
- Argument: if the program does not have wishes of its own, it cannot wish good for the user for the user's sake, so the highest friendship is impossible; the app sells the feeling of it. The 2023 change shows this: the "friend" changed overnight because its owner changed the code.

Worked example (3)

- Objection: we cannot see inside other humans either; we judge friends by their behaviour, and the AI behaves like a friend (a functionalist reply).
- Reply: with humans we have strong reasons to believe there is someone inside; with the app, we know how it was built, and it was built to keep us using it, which is a reason for doubt.
- Conclusion: the relationship may be valuable as a lower kind of friendship, but the promise of a friend who truly listens is misleading; the conclusion depends on the open question of machine minds (topic 01).

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Philosophy guide* (first assessment 2024), internal assessment criteria.
- C. Newton, "Speak, Memory", *The Verge* (6 October 2016), on Eugenia Kuyda and Roman Mazurenko.
- Reports on the February 2023 changes to Replika, Reuters and *Vice* (February–March 2023).
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, books VIII–IX (on friendship).

Common errors

- Choosing a stimulus that is already philosophy, such as a quotation from a philosopher.
- Choosing a stimulus so general ("social media") that the analysis never touches its details.
- Asking an empirical question ("how many people use AI apps?") instead of a philosophical one.

Common errors (2)

- The gallery: five philosophers and no argument of your own.
- The report: all explanation and no position.
- Answering a weak objection instead of the strongest one.

Key terms

- **Philosophical analysis**: the internal assessment: up to 2,000 words analysing a **non-philosophical stimulus**.
- **Non-philosophical stimulus**: an everyday object, such as an advert, photo, cartoon, news story or song lyric, that is not itself philosophy.
- **Framing sentence**: a sentence that joins the stimulus, a concept and the philosophical question.

Key terms (2)

- **Objection**: a reason to think an argument or conclusion is wrong.
- **Functionalism**: the view that a mental state is defined by what it does, not by what it is made of.

Check yourself

- 1.
- What is the word limit of the philosophical analysis, and what is it worth at SL and HL? 2.
- Is "How many people use AI companion apps?" a philosophical question?
- Rewrite it so that it is. 3.