Course Companion

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Philosophy · SL

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

Contents

1. Being human 2

2. Optional themes and the prescribed text 7

3. The philosophical analysis 12

Being human

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Philosophy · SL

IB Diploma Programme Philosophy SL (the guide first assessed in 2024). This topic covers the **core theme**, *being human*, which every SL and HL student studies. It is examined in Section A of Paper 1, where you answer one question on a **stimulus** (a short text or an image) by finding a philosophical issue in it and discussing it. Paper 1 lasts 1 hour 45 minutes at SL (50%) and 2 hours 30 minutes at HL (40%); the rest of the paper is essays on the optional themes (topic 02). The core theme's ideas (identity, personhood, freedom, mind) appear in every other part of the course.

In September 1848 an explosion drove an iron rod through the head of Phineas Gage, a railway worker in Vermont. Amazingly, he survived and could walk and talk. But his doctor reported that his friends said he was "no longer Gage": the polite, careful worker had become rude and unreliable. Was he still the same person? If his character changed because his brain changed, is a person just a brain? Could he be blamed for his new behaviour? These are the questions of *being human*.

Must-know for the core theme:

Area	Key content
arguments	premises and conclusion; valid and sound; deduction and induction; fallacies; thought experiments
identity	what makes you the same person over time: body, memory, psychological continuity
personhood	what makes a being a person; who is included
freedom	hard determinism, libertarianism, compatibilism; moral responsibility
mind	dualism and physicalism; the knowledge argument
Paper 1 Section A	find the issue in the stimulus; argue; answer objections; conclude

Arguments: the philosopher's tool

Philosophy works by **argument**: reasons, called **premises**, that support a **conclusion**.

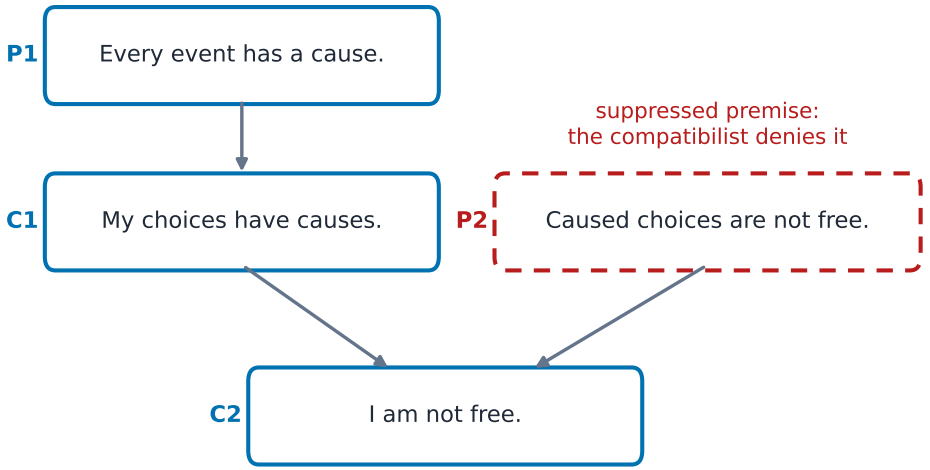
- An argument is **valid** if the conclusion must be true *when* the premises are true. Validity is about form only.
- An argument is **sound** if it is valid *and* its premises are actually true.
- **Deductive** arguments aim at certainty; **inductive** arguments move from many cases to a probable conclusion.

Common **fallacies** (errors in reasoning):

Fallacy	What it does	Example
begging the question	assumes the conclusion in a premise	"God exists because the Bible says so, and the Bible is true because it is God's word."
straw man	attacks a weaker version of the other view	"Determinists say we are robots, but we are not robots."
false dilemma	offers only two options when there are more	"Either we have total free will or none at all."
appeal to authority	uses a famous name instead of a reason	"Einstein believed it, so it must be true."

Philosophers also use **thought experiments** : imagined cases that test a concept. Read each one twice: once for what it shows, and once for what it assumes.

> **Worked example.** "Every event has a cause. My choices are events. So I am not free." The argument needs a hidden premise: "caused choices are not free". That premise is exactly what compatibilists deny, so the argument does not prove its conclusion against them.



The inference to 'not free' needs a hidden premise, and that premise is what is in dispute

Personal identity

Personal identity asks what makes you the same person as the child in your old photographs.

Theory	Answer	Problem case
body theory	the same living body	the ship of Theseus: replace every plank over time; is it the same ship?
memory theory (John Locke)	the same memories and consciousness	Thomas Reid's brave officer: the old general remembers being the young officer, who remembers being a boy, but the general has forgotten the boy
psychological continuity (Derek Parfit)	overlapping chains of memories, beliefs and character	a teleporter that makes two copies of you: which one is you?

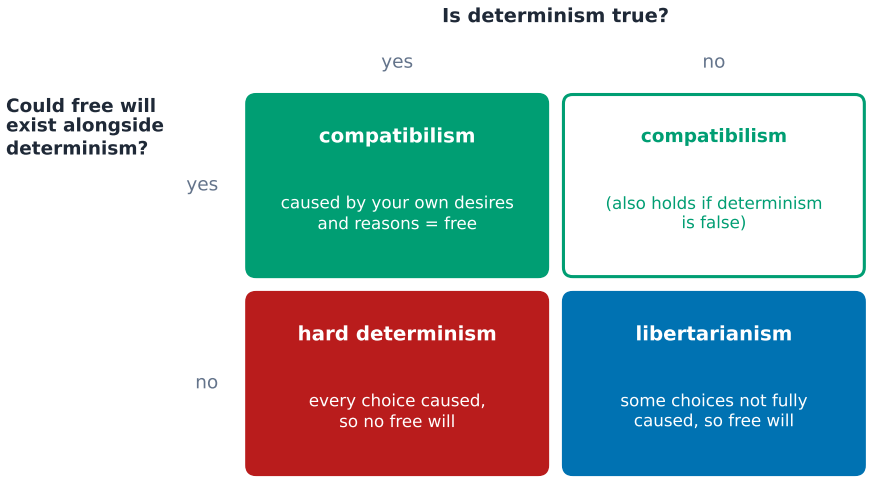
Reid's case shows that memory alone fails: identity must carry over (if A = B and B = C, then A = C), but memory does not. Parfit answers that what matters is not strict identity but continuity, which can come in degrees, as Phineas Gage's story suggests.

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. This is why personhood matters in debates on abortion, the end of life, animal rights and artificial intelligence.

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?

Position	Claim	Main problem
hard determinism	every choice is caused, so there is no free will and no real moral responsibility	punishment and praise seem unfair, yet we cannot stop using them
libertarianism	some choices are not fully caused; the agent starts them	an uncaused choice looks random, not controlled
compatibilism	a free act is one caused by your own desires and reasons, without force	if your desires were themselves caused (by genes, upbringing), are they really "yours"?

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. Freedom, on this view, means acting on desires you accept.

Mind and body

Dualism (associated with René Descartes) says the mind is different from the body: thoughts and feelings are not physical things. **Physicalism** says everything, including the mind, is physical: a thought is a brain process.

- 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

1. Identify the **philosophical issue** in the stimulus and link it to the core theme ("the stimulus raises the question of whether ...").
2. Explain two or three positions with named philosophers.
3. Evaluate: give the strongest objection to each and a reply.
4. Reach a clear conclusion that follows from your arguments.

Worked plan. *Stimulus: a news report about a person whose personality changed after a brain injury.*

- 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.

Checklist

- Arguments: premises and conclusion; valid and sound; deduction and induction; four fallacies; thought experiments; hidden premises.
- Identity: body, memory and psychological continuity theories with their problem cases (Theseus, Reid's officer, the teleporter).
- Personhood: human versus person; why the idea matters ethically.
- Freedom: hard determinism, libertarianism, compatibilism, and Frankfurt's unwilling addict.
- Mind: dualism, physicalism, Jackson's knowledge argument.
- Section A: issue, positions, objections, conclusion.

Optional themes and the prescribed text

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Philosophy · SL

IB Diploma Programme Philosophy SL (the guide first assessed in 2024). Besides the core theme, schools choose **optional themes** from seven: aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, political philosophy and social philosophy. SL students study one theme and HL students two. You write one essay on each theme in Section B of Paper 1. Every student also studies one **prescribed text** from the IB's list, examined in Paper 2 (1 hour; 25% at SL, 20% at HL).

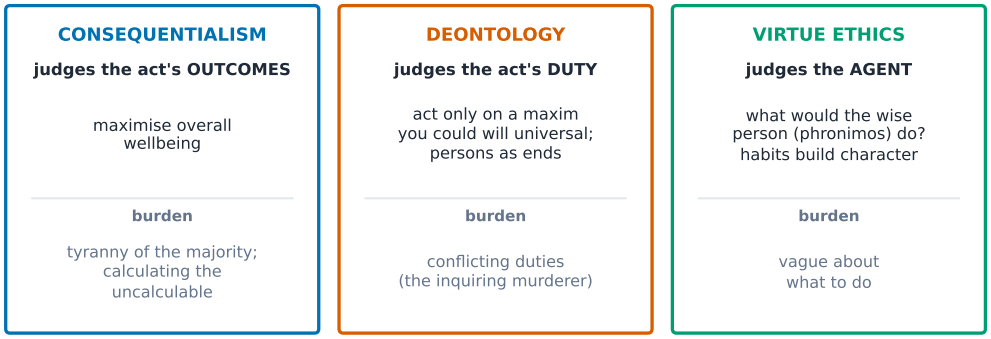
A runaway train is heading towards five workers on the track. You can pull a lever and send it onto a side track, where it will kill one worker instead. Should you pull it? Most people say yes. Now imagine you are on a bridge, and the only way to stop the train is to push a large man onto the track. Most people say no, although the numbers are the same. The philosopher Philippa Foot described the first version in 1967, and it has been argued about ever since. Why do our answers change? Each ethical theory gives a different explanation.

Must-know for the themes and the text:

Area	Key content
ethics	consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics; applied cases
epistemology	knowledge as justified true belief; Gettier; rationalism and empiricism; scepticism
other themes	the key question and two positions for each
prescribed text	context, claims, arguments, critique
papers	Paper 1 Section B essays on the themes; Paper 2 on the text

Ethics

Theory	What it judges	Key idea	Main problem
consequentialism	the results of an act	**utilitarianism** (Bentham, Mill): do what produces the most happiness for the most people	it can allow harming one innocent person to help many
deontology	the act itself and its rule	Kant's **categorical imperative**: act only on a rule you could want everyone to follow; treat people never only as a means	duties can conflict; Kant says you must not lie, even to a murderer asking where your friend is
virtue ethics	the person's character	Aristotle: become honest, brave and fair through practice; do what a wise person would do	it gives little clear guidance in hard cases



Each theory judges something different, and each carries a classic burden; run applied debates all three ways.

The trolley cases three ways. A utilitarian pulls the lever *and* pushes the man: five lives outweigh one. A Kantian may pull the lever (the death is a side effect) but not push (that uses the man only as a means). A virtue ethicist asks what a good person could live with, and may say that pushing someone to his death is something a decent person would not do. An essay that compares all three, and then judges which

explains our intuitions best, shows the analysis examiners reward.

Epistemology

Epistemology asks what knowledge is and how we get it. A traditional answer: **knowledge** is **justified true belief** . In 1963 Edmund Gettier showed cases where a person has a justified true belief that is true only by luck. A simple example (from Bertrand Russell): you look at a clock that says 3:00 and believe it is 3:00. It is 3:00, but the clock stopped exactly twelve hours ago. Your belief is true and justified, but is it knowledge?

Question	Position	Claim
where does knowledge come from?	**rationalism** (Descartes)	some knowledge comes from reason alone
	empiricism (Locke, Hume)	all knowledge comes from experience
can we know anything at all?	**scepticism**	Descartes's evil demon: perhaps everything I see is an illusion

The other themes

Theme	Key question	Two positions
aesthetics	what is art?	art as imitation; art as whatever the art world accepts (the institutional theory)
philosophy of religion	can God's existence be proved?	the design argument; the problem of evil against it
philosophy of science	how does science reach truth?	induction (Hume's problem); falsification (Popper)
political philosophy	what makes a state legitimate, and what is justice?	Rawls's veil of ignorance; Nozick's entitlement theory
social philosophy	how do societies shape who we are?	Marx on alienation; Simone de Beauvoir on women as "the Other"

Writing a theme essay

A Section B essay discusses one question in depth:

1. Define the key terms and state your answer.
2. Explain two or three positions with named philosophers.
3. Test each with an example or thought experiment, and give the strongest objection.
4. Reach a conclusion that weighs the positions.

The prescribed text

Read your text as an argument, not a story. Use four steps:

Step	Question
context	what problem was the author trying to solve, and when?
claims	what does the text say, in its own terms?
arguments	what reasons does it give? (premises, conclusion, hidden premises)
critique	what is the strongest objection, and how might the author reply?

> **Worked example: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859).** If your school studies a different text, use the same four steps.

- Context: Victorian Britain; Mill feared that public opinion, not only governments, could crush individual freedom.
- Claim: the **harm principle** : "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."
- Argument: free discussion helps us find the truth, because even a wrong opinion may contain part of the truth and forces us to defend our beliefs.
- Critique: what counts as "harm"? Offence, or harm to oneself (such as drug use), may also affect others. Mill can reply that he means clear harm to others' interests, but where to draw the line remains debated.

Paper 2 questions

Each Paper 2 question has two parts: (a) **explain** an idea from the text (10 marks), then (b) **evaluate** or discuss it (15 marks). The IB's own examples include Plato's *Republic* and the **Tao Te Ching** .

Worked plan. A sample question from the IB: *(a) Explain the view of the state found in the Tao Te Ching. (b) Evaluate the claim that the view of the state found in the Tao Te Ching assumes an overly positive view of human nature.*

- (a) The best ruler acts through **non-action** : he interferes as little as possible, so that people hardly notice him (chapter 17). More laws create more crime (chapter 57), and governing a large state is like cooking a small fish: stir it too much and it falls apart (chapter 60).
- (b) For the claim: the text seems to trust that people left alone will live simply and peacefully; Hobbes, who thought life without a strong state would be "nasty,

brutish, and short", would disagree. Against the claim: the text does not say people are good, only that heavy government creates the desires and conflicts it then tries to control. Judgement: the view is less naive than it looks, but it fits small, simple communities better than large modern states.

Checklist

- The seven optional themes; one at SL, two at HL; Paper 1 Section B.
- Ethics: the three theories with their problems; the trolley cases three ways.
- Epistemology: justified true belief; Gettier; the stopped clock; rationalism, empiricism, scepticism.
- The key question and two positions for each other theme.
- The theme essay plan.
- The prescribed text: context, claims, arguments, critique; Mill's harm principle as a worked example.
- Paper 2: (a) explain, 10 marks; (b) evaluate, 15 marks; the worked *Tao Te Ching* plan.

The philosophical analysis

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Philosophy · SL

IB Diploma Programme Philosophy SL (the guide first assessed in 2024). The internal assessment is the **philosophical analysis**: a piece of writing of up to 2,000 words in which you analyse a **non-philosophical stimulus**, something from everyday life that is not itself philosophy. It is worth 25% at SL and 20% at HL, and the course gives about 20 hours to it.

Imagine an advertisement for an AI companion app. A smiling young person sits alone at night, talking to a phone. The slogan says: "Always there. Always understands you." The advert is not philosophy, but it hides philosophical questions. Can a machine *understand* anything? Can a relationship with a program be friendship? Is it wrong to sell lonely people the feeling of being understood? The IA asks you to find one such question in an ordinary object and to think it through carefully.

Must-know for the philosophical analysis:

Area	Key content
format	up to 2,000 words; 25% SL, 20% HL; the stimulus is attached
stimulus	non-philosophical: an advert, photo, cartoon, news story, song lyric, game
issue	a philosophical question that the stimulus raises
analysis	concepts explained, applied to the stimulus, argued, objections answered
voice	your own developed argument, not a summary of philosophers

Choosing the stimulus and the issue

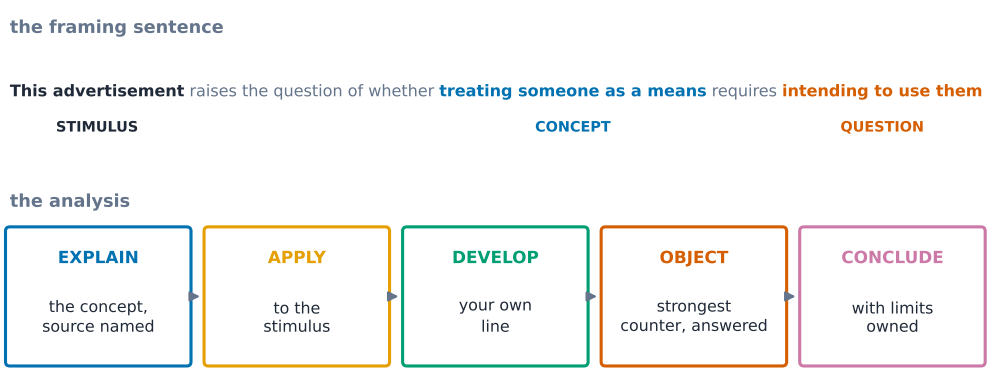
The **stimulus** must not already be philosophy: no textbook extract, no famous thought experiment. Good stimuli are specific and rich: a news photograph, an advertisement, a cartoon, a scene from a film, the rules of a game.

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.

Not philosophical	Philosophical
How many people use AI companion apps?	Can a relationship with an AI be a real friendship?
Do adverts make people buy more?	Is it wrong to persuade people by using their emotions?

Write a **framing sentence** that joins the stimulus, a concept and the question:

”This advertisement raises the question of whether friendship requires two beings who can both understand each other.”



The framing sentence names stimulus, concept and question; the analysis then makes five moves.

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 understands you”; the person alone at night).
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: the AI companion advert above.
- 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.
- Application: the app can give pleasure and usefulness (company, advice), the two lower kinds; the slogan claims more, “understanding”.
- 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 advert sells the feeling of it.
- 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 advert's promise of being “understood” is misleading; the conclusion depends on the open question of machine minds (topic 01).

Common mistakes: the “gallery” (five philosophers, no argument of your own); the report (all explanation, no position); drifting into psychology or sociology instead of reasoning.

Checklist

- The format: up to 2,000 words; 25% SL, 20% HL; stimulus attached.
- A non-philosophical, specific stimulus; a philosophical question; a framing sentence.
- The five moves: concept, application, argument, objection, conclusion.
- The worked AI-companion analysis.
- Your own voice; avoid the gallery, the report and the drift.