Optional themes and the prescribed text

IB DP Philosophy: the optional themes (Paper 1 Section B) and the prescribed text (Paper 2)

The runaway train

> Should you pull the lever?

- Pull the lever: one dies instead of five.
- Philippa Foot described the case in 1967.

The bridge

The lever

Redirect the train.

Most people: yes.

The bridge

Push a large man.

Most people: no.

Themes and papers

One theme at SL, two at HL; one prescribed text for all.

- Seven themes: aesthetics, **epistemology**, ethics, religion, science, political, social.
- Paper 2: 1 hour; 25% at SL, 20% at HL.

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Three ethical theories

Theory	Judges	Key idea
consequentialism	results	most happiness for most people
deontology (Kant)	the act	a rule everyone could follow
virtue ethics	the person	what a wise person would do

Each theory's burden

Every theory has a classic problem.

- Kant: never treat people only as a means.
- Name the burden when you evaluate.

The trolley, three ways

	Pull the lever?	**Push the man?**
Utilitarian	yes: five outweigh one	yes: same numbers
Kantian	may: a side effect	no: only a means
Virtue	perhaps	a decent person would not

Justified true belief

> **Knowledge** = justified, true, believed?

- **Epistemology**: what is knowledge, and how do we get it?
- The traditional answer needs all three.

The stopped clock

> Justified, true, believed, and still not **knowledge**?

- Gettier, 1963: true by luck.
- An example from Bertrand Russell.

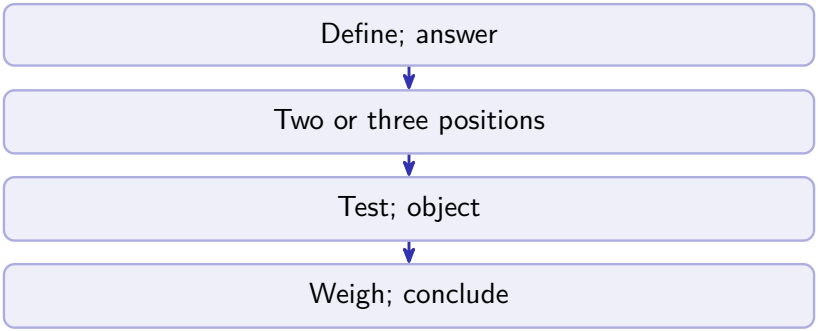
Where knowledge comes from

Position	**Claim**
rationalism (Descartes)	some **knowledge** from reason alone
empiricism (Locke, Hume)	all knowledge from experience
scepticism	perhaps everything is an illusion

The other themes

Theme	Key question	Two positions
aesthetics	what is art?	imitation; the art world
religion	can God be proved?	design; the problem of evil
science	how is truth reached?	induction; falsification
political	what is justice?	Rawls; Nozick
social	how are we shaped?	Marx; de Beauvoir

A theme essay



Reading the prescribed text

Context, claims, arguments, critique.

- Read it as an argument, not a story.
- Find the hidden premises too.

Mill, On Liberty

1. **Claim** power only to prevent harm to others
2. **Argument** even wrong opinions hold part of the truth
3. **Critique** what counts as "harm"?

Decision

Mill means clear harm to others; the line is still debated.

Paper 2: two parts

Explain for 10 marks, evaluate for 15.

- (a) Explain an idea from the text.
- (b) Evaluate or discuss it.

(a) The Tao Te Ching on the state

> Govern by **non-action**.

- The best ruler interferes as little as possible.
- People hardly notice him.

(b) Too positive about people?

For the claim

It trusts people left alone

to live in peace.

Against the claim

Heavy government creates

the conflicts it controls.

Check yourself

