

Philosophy syllabus for 6th and 7th years

(Approved by the Board of Governors on 27 and 28 January 1998 in Brussels)

Meeting on 27 and 28 January at 9.30 in Brussels

Will enter into application

in year 6 in 1998/1999
in year 7 in 1999/2000

1.0 Teaching objectives

1.1 General objectives

Excerpt from document 92-D-192.

Committee on Secondary Education/Meeting 10 March 1992:

1.0 Teaching objectives

1.1 General objectives

The responsibility of the secondary section may be generally characterised as fulfilling the dual purpose of the mandates of teaching and education.

In this context, the term "education" refers above all to the promotion of knowledge and understanding, and of the abilities and techniques of learning: when presented with the themes and subjects selected in the different courses, the students learn to grasp the fundamental issues, to present and judge questions and problems, to develop methods of problem solving and to apply their knowledge and skills in new contexts. The term "education" on the other hand refers above all to how the students interact and behave in a social context: confronted by themselves and what surrounds them, that is to say, by the inheritance of history, current problems and duties, and the resulting perspectives and tasks, students must learn to find and develop their own identity and to act independently yet as responsible members of society.

In practice, in the classroom situation, these terms belong together; the exercises which they imply overlap and influence each other.

The importance and dynamism of these two major objectives which characterize all secondary education result from the European context thanks to a greater awareness of the reality of Europe's cultural wealth. This awareness and the experience gained from the European framework will lead to behaviour which will simultaneously respect the traditions and uphold the identity of each European country.

1.2 The objectives and specific goals of the teaching of philosophy

The teaching of philosophy, unlike university teaching, is aimed at students who, for the most part, are not destined to become specialists in philosophy, but who are all going to become responsible and free agents capable of justifying their behaviour and judgement. The goal of the teaching is therefore the harnessing of freedom through judgement.

If one accepts philosophy as a reflection on the fundamental principles of human thoughts and actions then the objective of teaching philosophy is to teach students to how deal with problem according to the scientific methods of the discipline, they should learn how to analyse the constituent elements of a problem and to clarify the concepts and develop an argument accordingly. Philosophy should also teach them to come to rational and individual conclusions on the fundamental questions of life and the values which are its foundation, without ignoring questions raised by current affairs which need philosophical reflection. Clearly, this requires regular updating of the syllabus.

Because philosophy belongs to the cultural and intellectual heritage of Europe its teaching must aim at the development of young Europeans and priorities the bringing together of their different ways of thinking thereby promoting mutual understanding and tolerance.

The aim of teaching philosophy is not simply to impart knowledge of history and philosophy to the students but above all to lead them to reflect on the major questions of life and the problems of contemporary society, while displaying sound judgement and a critical and self-critical approach.

2.0 Content

Contemporary philosophy is characterised by the increasing suppression of its classical disciplinary limits (metaphysics, epistemology,...). Because philosophical questions are interdependent, authors are no longer seen as confined to any one of the classical disciplines. In this way, philosophy is involving towards an interdisciplinary which is internal but also external in the sense that it displays a concern for the contribution the sciences may bring to its self questioning.

The lessons are based on themes from which the fundamental problems of human life (both individual and social) can be formulated. The themes are organised according to their defining analytic fields. They are conceived according to the established philosophical disciplines while remaining independent from them:

- anthropology: man, nature, culture;
- metaphysics: the search for the principles of reality;
- ethics: man, moral and social being;
- epistemology: the conditions, means and limits of knowledge;
- aesthetics: art and the concept of beauty;
- political and legal philosophy: the legitimacy and limits of political power;
- the philosophy of history: what does history mean?

The analytic fields defined by these themes constitute the compulsory part of the course. The teacher is free to establish the order in which the themes are taught, to supplement them and is encouraged to focus on some more than others depending on his/her philosophical interests and concerns as well as those of the pupils. It is possible to combine themes within a single field or to work across different fields.

In contrast to 2 period courses, which allow an introduction to the major philosophical questions, the 4 period course constitutes a different philosophical approach: a more systematic treatment of the themes, a detailed reading and methodical interpretation of texts, the development of a more technical philosophical language, the learning of how to present philosophical arguments.

Syllabus for the 2 period course:

Each theme begins with a question which suggests a method of approaching that theme.

Fields to be analysed

1. Perception, knowledge and truth

Themes:

- What do I know? knowledge of the senses and knowledge of the intellect.
- Why do I make mistakes? Truth, naive certainty and scientific certainty.
- Beauty and truth: does art give privileged access to reality?

2. Man: cultural and moral being

Themes:

- Who am I? Man an integral part of nature, cultural product, free agent?
- Why do I exist? Do I have a right to happiness? The meaning of life.
- What are my duties? The nature of goodness.
- What can I hope for? The finite and the infinite.
- Are others like me? Cultural identity and the universality of man. Communication.

3. Society and politics

Themes:

- Why do we respect the law? The foundation of the legal state.
- Who can restrain me? Legitimacy and limits of political power. The extent of human rights.
- Why do we strive for power? The nature of law and the demands of justice.

The teacher will include in this course the presentation of three philosophers; one from Antiquity, one from Modernity and one from contemporary society.

Syllabus for the 4 period course:

Each theme begins with a question that suggests an approach to that theme.

Fields to be analysed

1. Perception, knowledge, truth

Themes:

- What is held to be true here, is considered to be false elsewhere. Universal reason and cultural horizons.
- Why do I make mistakes? Naïve certainty, rational certainty and scientific certainty.
- Knowledge: a mental act? Conditions and limits of knowledge. Artificial intelligence.
- How can one think logically? Elements of logic.
- How can we be sure of what we know? Scientific methods, their range and their limits.
- Getting to the bottom of things. How does metaphysics work and what does it deal with?
- Art and beauty: do they give privileged access to reality?
- The world of the media: a new approach to what is real or an immense "trompe l'oeil"?

2. Human beings, others, values

Themes:

- Who am I? Man an integral part of nature, cultural product, free agent?
- Why do I exist? Do I have a right to happiness? The meaning of life.
- What are my responsibilities? Good and evil. Values.
- What are the limits of my responsibility? Conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary.
- Who am I responsible to? Others? Society? God?
- Do we understand each other? Inter-subjectivity and language.
- Are others like me? Cultural identity and human universality.
- What can I hope for? The guidelines offered by myth, religion, metaphysics, science, pseudo-science

3. Society and the State, law and politics

Themes:

- Why do we respect the law? The foundation of the legal state. Political institutions.
- Natural law, social law, positive law.
- Who can restrain me? Legitimacy and the limits of political power. The limits of human rights.
- What does being a citizen mean? Homeland, nation, and supra-nationality. European citizen - world citizen?
- The material conditions of our life: work, ownership, alienation.
- Why do we strive for power? Equality and justice.
- Why have we become what we are? Society and history.

4. Nature and technology

Themes

- The scientific and aesthetic conception of nature.
- Do we own and control nature? Technology and ecological concerns.
- Development, growth and progress: what is their respective significance?
- Is there necessarily a conflict between local culture and the globalisation of information technology, economics and ecology?

The teacher will include in the course the reading of one philosophical work per year and will introduce students to the thought of the major philosophers.

3.0 Organisation and methods of teaching

Methodological principles

The focus of the philosophy course is the problems and objects of philosophical reflection and critical study. The teacher may choose the formulation of these and the approach to them. This approach might be:

- the students' experiences and questions;
- current events in the worlds of politics, society and science;
- the deployment and systematic study of a philosophical or scientific problem;
- the study of authors;
- the history of philosophy;
- myths, tales, popular wisdom.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive but are designed to complement one another.

The study of an author must take into account his/her historical context; without this context a proper understanding of the author's work is not possible.

In the class itself, the socratic method has definite educational advantages notably in stimulating the students' minds.

However, the problems which philosophy attempts to solve are generally of such complexity that the socratic method is insufficient in making the students aware of their breadth and full implication. In such cases it will undoubtedly be necessary to resort to traditional teaching methods to impart to the students knowledge of the contexts of the issues under scrutiny.

The teacher will involve the students as much as he/she can in thinking through the issues; this will involve presenting this thinking as a process of discovery rather than as a finished product. This method will provoke links between ideas, will allow students to discover examples and will also raise questions and objections. However, the class must never become a lecture in which the students remain passive listeners.

The teacher will also encourage the students to write up their ideas in essay form.

4.0 Evaluation

4.1 The function and principals of evaluation

The Baccalaureates part examinations as well as its written and oral examinations will allow the evaluation of:

- the ability to analyse a text or a problem;
- the ability to make use of what the student has learnt;
- the ability to reflect and pass personal judgement.

The criteria for evaluation are:

- how fully and amply the analysis is performed;
- the degree of knowledge;
- how nuanced the argument is;
- the originality and depth of individual reflection;
- the clarity and precision of the language used.

4.2 Written examinations

4.2.1 The part of examinations for the two-period course are based on a text accompanied by questions.

4.2.2 The part examinations for the four-period course give students a choice between a text accompanied by questions and a dissertation.

The questions accompanying the texts must guide students in their comprehension of the text and should allow an evaluation of the student's work according to the criteria outlined above.

4.3 Oral performance in class

As well as participating in class discussion students may demonstrate their oral ability by giving presentations (exposes, organised discussion, etc.) which call for a coherent exposition of their ideas and logical argument conducted in clear and precise terms.

4.4 The Baccalaureate

4.4.1 The written examination

The candidate has a choice between three subjects from the four fields of analysis. These subjects may be presented in the following formats:

- a text accompanied by questions;
- a quotation accompanied by questions;
- a major question together with sub-questions.

These questions should not inhibit the candidate's freedom of thought. They are meant to direct the candidate's work and to formulate precisely what is being asked of him/her. The questions should provide a fair basis for analysis that is as objective as possible.

The candidate does not have to answer questions in the order in which they are presented.

The subjects must not give the student the opportunity simply to repeat the course content or to rehearse knowledge learnt by heart. They must be presented in such a that the student must demonstrate a capacity for reflection and individual philosophical analysis.

The texts must present an idea or philosophical proposition sustained by an argument and they must be intelligible without necessitating specific knowledge of the thought of their author on the part of the student. The language of the texts must not include vocabulary that is overly specific. The length of the texts must take into account the duration of the examination.

4.4.2 The oral examination

- 4.4.2.1 The oral examination for the two-period course will include a summary and commentary of the text accompanied by questions which will guide the candidate in his/her comprehension of the text. The oral examination will be based on a theme covered in the 7th year.
- 4.4.2.2 The oral examination for the four-period course will include subjects which relate to themes covered in the 7th year and which, in their form and content, relate to the themes of the written examination. However, the length of the examination must be taken into account.

5.0 Appendix 2.4.4

Subjects for examination (examples)

1. Question followed by sub-questions:

- Can science provide objective knowledge of the world?
- 1. Describe the elementary methodical steps of scientific research.
- 2. Consider to what extent these steps dictate the results of scientific research.
- 3. Consider the following: does science offer a real alternative to philosophical thought?

2. Text accompanied by questions

Indeed, nothing that relates to human law could go against natural or divine law. Therefore, according to the natural order instituted by divine providence, all that exists and is inferior to man is subordinate to him so that man uses these things for his own needs. The result is that the share of goods and their appropriation according to human law does not rid man of the necessity to use this share for the common good. Consequently the goods that some possess in over-abundance are destined, by natural law, to help the poor. For this reason Saint Ambrose wrote:

"The bread that you keep belongs to those who are hungry, the clothes that you hide away belong those who are naked, and the money that you hoard is the due and deliverance of the unfortunate. It follows that the number of those who are needy is so great that they cannot all be helped with the same resources, but everyone who is able to dispose freely of his own goods can help the unfortunate. And even so, in the event of obvious and urgent need, when it is clear that what is to hand must be taken to sustain vital need, as for example, when one is in danger and there is no alternative, it is legitimate for one to use the goods of others for oneself; one may take the goods openly or in secret without truly committing theft or larceny".

Thomas Aquinas Theological Summa IIa, IIae, q.66, a.7 (Lyon, A.88) (Edition du Cerf, 1984, vol. III).

Questions:

1. What is the question that this text answers?
2. What are the ideas on which Thomas Aquinas bases his answer? How does he argue his case?
3. Do you agree with Thomas Aquinas' position? In your answer you can cite authors of your choice.