

Jane Gatley (2023): *Why Teach Philosophy in Schools? The Case for Philosophy on the Curriculum*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

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Which subjects should be taught in schools? And more particularly, should philosophy be included in this list? These general questions are addressed in the philosophy of education. When applied to specific curricula, they are political questions that require political decisions. As philosophers, we think and hope that the answers to the general questions have a bearing on the politicians' decisions. This is one of the motivations behind Jane Gatley's book '*Why Teach Philosophy in Schools?*'. During her time as a Religious Education teacher in the UK from 2010 to 2017, Gatley experienced the continuous loss of philosophy in the syllabi of Religious Education. In her book, based on her PhD thesis under supervision of Michael Hand, she makes a case for integrating philosophy into the school curriculum in a manner which is resistant to political, economic, and societal influences (p. 2).

The need for such a mission may be especially important in countries where philosophy does not have a standing as a regular school subject, but a philosophically founded answer to the question is required independently of the present situation or a particular region. Gatley's claim is "that at some point during a person's education, they ought to be taught some philosophy" (p. 2). She does not specify when this should happen. Although this is most likely once students are old enough to engage with philosophical thinking, the claim could potentially be fulfilled by attending a Philosophy with Children class (P4C) in primary school. But this would not be in the spirit of Gatley's argument. Given her understanding of philosophy (as essentially involving conceptual analysis) and her arguments for including philosophy in the school curriculum (which relies on philosophy providing tools for clarifying ordinary concepts and on making sense of the curriculum), it is fair to assume that she claims that philosophy should be taught at high school level.

Gatley presents an argument that is impressive both for its breadth and its depth. After a brief survey of the situation of philosophy in schools (ch. 1), she presents and counters existing arguments for teaching philosophy in schools (ch. 2). She then examines educational aims and argues that none of these offer an adequate account (ch. 3). Her own account, which appeals to the utility of theoretical education (ch. 4), serves as the basis of the two arguments she develops for teaching philosophy in schools: first, philosophy is best suited to help in thinking clearly about pressing questions concerning ordinary concepts (ch. 5), and second, philosophy is most adequate in making sense of the different conceptual schemes that students encounter while studying the content of different disciplines (ch. 6). It is to Gatley's great credit that she approaches the question in an analytical way and attempts to provide a sound argument based on the ideals of argumentative strength and conceptual clarity. Anyone concerned with this question should read her book.

I will now proceed to analyze some parts of the book in greater detail and make some critical comments. In the first chapter, entitled "A History of Philosophy in Schools", Gatley wants to introduce "the role that philosophy has previously played and currently plays in schools around the world" (p. 7); she does so by referring (almost exclusively) to reports of the

UNESCO since 1953, and by presenting the situation in catholic countries such as Italy, Spain and former Spanish colonies in Latin America, the French Baccalaurat, the situation in Anglo-American countries, and the movement of Philosophy for Children (P4C).

This chapter may not be essential to Gatley's argument. But given the chapter's aspiration to provide a "history" of philosophy in schools "around the world", some critical remarks are in order (which, as I want to stress, do not affect her argument). First, it should be noted that the history of philosophy in schools does not start in the 20th century but goes back at least to teaching practices in European monasteries since the Middle Ages – a point which Gatley is of course well aware of but which she seems to restrict to "higher education" (without explaining this notion) and to the catholic church (even though philosophy was taught in Anglican monasteries and in protestant seminaries as well). If one were to restrict the history to modern schools in Europe, then one would expect to start at the beginning of the 19th century with the educational reforms in Prussia (Humboldt) and Bavaria (Niethammer), which had an enormous impact on the educational systems in other countries (Pfister 2022: 119-122). And for France, one would have to look at the school reforms at the end of the 19th century (Jules Ferry's laws, 1881-1882) and the beginning of the 20th century (separation of school and religion, 1905).

Second, if the situation is about countries around the world, one would expect to find some remarks about the situation in Germany (which has a long tradition in philosophy education) and in Eastern European countries (during the years under communist regimes, Marxism was taught as a school subject, which in some countries was transformed into other subjects after the fall of communism).

Third, and closely related to the prior point, is the concern that Gatley applies a narrow notion of philosophy, for example when she mentions the tension between ideological education and philosophy education (p. 16). Arguably, the former should be distinguished from the latter, but the former is still part of philosophy education in some sense. And when Gatley, citing the example of Spain, refers to the teaching of "citizenship" and writes that "philosophy courses" are adapted to further political aims, it seems that, while she deplores that "other philosophical content" is pushed off the curriculum, she nevertheless categorizes it as philosophy (p. 17). But then the school subject called "ethics", which has been introduced as a substitute for Religious Education in federal states in Germany since the 1980s and in Austria since the late 1990s (and other developments such as the course in citizenship in Belgium), should be mentioned as well (Pfister 2022: 125-128). Distinguishing between such different kinds/conceptions of philosophy education could have enriched the chapter. For example, one could use the distinction by Michel Tozzi, based on a survey of curricula of different countries, of five educational paradigms: dogmatic-ideological, historical-patrimonial, problem oriented, democracy oriented, and praxeological-ethical (Tozzi 2006).

In the next chapter, Gatley writes that the definition of nature and aims of philosophy is subject to philosophical disagreement (p. 49), so one expects her to apply this knowledge to the question in the first chapter, but she does not relate the different traditions of philosophy education to different concepts of philosophy. Furthermore, given that Gatley endorses an analytic approach to philosophy and that her first argument for philosophy in schools refers to the method of conceptual analysis, it remains unclear if philosophy education in Catholic

countries would be supported by her first argument. More importantly, the same goes for philosophy education in France (and countries influenced by it), which she refers to again in the book's conclusion (p. 183).

In chapter 2, Gatley discusses existing arguments for teaching philosophy in schools. Such arguments should, she writes, satisfy two criteria: they should “(1) demonstrate that philosophy provides some specifiable educational good(s) and (2) that there is reason to hold that these educational goods are only, or best, delivered by teaching philosophy” (p. 25).¹ First, Gatley argues that the reasons associated with Philosophy for Children (improving academic skills; improving social skills, attitudes, and virtues) do not show (either conceptually or empirically) that the only or best way to achieve these goods is through philosophy education. Second, she argues that reasons to include philosophy as part of Religious Education (which she irritatingly sometimes calls “religious reasons”) fail on the same grounds and, additionally, would require a defense for including Religious Education in the curriculum. Third, she discusses the argument that philosophy education provides the students with the best available material to support judgments about moral, political, and religious standards and thus provides the students with guidance on how to proceed with such questions (p. 43). This is an argument previously made by Michael Hand. Although Gatley claims that existing arguments do not fully satisfy the beforementioned criteria (p. 25), she does find “some value” in it, going as far as actually endorsing it, if I understand it correctly, as she claims that her own argument to be developed in chapter 5 and 6 is “broader” (p. 43). Fourth, she argues that an argument based on the status of philosophy as a well-established discipline would require an account of the value of such a discipline. Fifth, she discusses the argument that philosophy “plays some sort of key role” in education, and she cites the following: promoting reflection and critical thinking (from a survey among philosophy teachers in France in the middle of the 20th century), the awareness of the interpretative nature of knowledge and linking academic subject areas (from the International Baccalaureate), the coping with the fragmentation of the curriculum (from Lipman, Sharp, and Oscayan), the bringing together of different fields and making sense of them (Midgley). Gatley complains that the general idea behind these reasons “remains poorly defined”. She objects that it is unclear whether other subjects might not achieve the aim as easily and it remains unclear how philosophy should achieve it; the development of her own argument will remedy these points, she claims (p. 48).

The discussion here, as before in chapter 1, remains historically underinformed. The idea of philosophy playing a special role in the curriculum goes back (in Germany) at least to the middle of the 18th century, as Ingrid Stiegler (1984; 1986) has shown. Stiegler distinguishes three phases in the German debate: (1) between 1750 and 1820, the traditional view, that the philosophical subdisciplines of dialectics and rhetorics provide necessary elements in education, is expanded to include the whole of philosophy as a method, (2) between 1820 and 1850, philosophy is justified through the subdisciplines of logic and psychology, and (3) from 1850 onwards, the idea that philosophy should provide unity in the array of different fields is consolidated, but with the result that other school subjects claim to deliver this function. The

¹ Aaron Yarmel argues that the second criterion would need a defense because a philosophy program may still be justified if it provides a larger number of educational goods than any rival and yet not provide the best way to achieve each individual good (Yarmel 2024: 111).

debate about the legitimacy of philosophy as a school subject is later revived and intensified with the school reform in Germany in 1972.

In Chapter 3, Gatley discusses the aims of education. She starts by defining what she calls “theoretical education” as “the practice of conveying ideas to students” (p. 55). This is a practice that many subjects are engaged with, e.g. history, literature, and science. Gatley describes the history going back to Ancient Greece. She then reviews four possible accounts of the value of theoretical education, (1) intrinsic value, (2) cultural capital, (3) political value (for democracy), and (4) rational autonomy.

The intrinsic value account can be supported, Gatley explains, by a transcendental argument as expressed by Richard Stanley Peters in *Ethics and Education* (1966): people are generally interested in the question ‘why do this rather than that’, and once asked, one is committed to the pursuit of truth. The pursuit of truth is best engaged in via “theoretical activities” such as science, history, philosophy, etc. Here, Gatley sees two puzzles. First, there are activities of intrinsic value which seem inappropriate to be included in a school curriculum, such as viewing of original works of art (which is valuable, and can be part of a school curriculum, but not necessarily so) or encouraging romantic love (the experience of which is valuable, but not educationally valuable). Second, John White’s objection that to ask ‘why do this rather than that’ does not imply a commitment to truth, for one could discard any interest in knowledge of arts and sciences and opt for a life of idleness and comfort instead. But idleness and comfort are not educational values (p. 66-67). Gatley takes up Christine Korsgaard’s distinction between the concept pairs intrinsic/extrinsic and final value/instrumental value (p. 67-69) to argue against Peters’ argument as follows: if the pursuit of truth has value because of some properties internal to it (intrinsic value) then it cannot have a bearing on educational value because something is educationally valuable only in virtue of its effect on students, which is extrinsic to the pursuit of truth. If on the other hand the pursuit of truth is a valuable end, then White’s objection holds: some people do not value truth as a final end, and there is no reason to stipulate that one ought to value truth as a final end (p. 70).

Gatley’s argument is sophisticated, but her argument in the first horn of the dilemma is not convincing: that something has intrinsic value does not exclude that it has intrinsic value *for* someone. It is at least possible to conceive of intrinsic value in this way, as I understand Korsgaard: something has intrinsic value if it has value for everyone or for anyone in the same situation. So, the pursuit of truth (and knowledge) can have (and does have) intrinsic value for the students.

Against the argument of cultural capital, Gatley argues, among other things, that it offers little guidance on curriculum development. The political argument is also inadequate, as she insists that the value of theoretical education should be greater than to be beneficial to democratic societies.

The argument of rational autonomy is the one that Gatley spends most time on. She argues that present autonomy accounts, particularly that of Paul Hirst, are not clear enough about what rational autonomy is. For instance, Hirst defines rationality in terms of “mind” and of being able to think according to different forms of knowledge (p. 84), and there are difficulties with the thesis of forms of knowledge (p. 86) and it is unclear how learning about forms of knowledge leads to rationality (p. 88).

In chapter 4, Gatley develops her own “utility account of education”. According to this account, acquiring “a broad array of theoretical content” amounts to acquiring understanding of the world. Understanding the world contributes to a person’s “ability to act effectively within the world”, and such an ability is a justifiable aim of education (p. 97). Gatley claims that a theoretical curriculum is not subject driven but rather driven by “prominent and pressing questions”, i.e. ones that facilitate effective interaction (p. 111), such as questions about relationships (p. 113). Thus theoretical education should help young people in answering these questions.

It is not evident that Gatley's account of rational autonomy is any clearer than other accounts, such as Hirst's. For example, what does it mean to act effectively within the world? Furthermore, one might wonder whether it is always good to have this ability. Aaron Yarmel objects by imagining cases in which students learn to effectively design weapons or environmentally devastating business models (Yarmel 2024: 112).

In chapters 5 and 6, Gatley develops two arguments. The first one is this:

- (1) A theoretical education ought to provide students with the capacity to address prominent and pressing questions using the best available content;
 - (2) There is a distinction between ordinary and theoretical concepts;
 - (3) Ordinary concepts are essential to some prominent and pressing questions;
 - (4) The disciplinary science of philosophy, in particular conceptual analysis, systematically studies these ordinary concepts;
 - (5) The disciplinary science of philosophy is often best-placed to address prominent and pressing ordinary-concept questions;
- Therefore, to conclude, philosophical content ought to be taught as part of a theoretical curriculum. (p. 132)

Gatley has a specific view of philosophy or, more adequately, focuses on one aspect of philosophy, namely conceptual analysis. This is fine. However, that philosophy is often best suited to address ordinary concept questions, i.e. that philosophy does a better job than any other subject of theoretical education, is a bold claim. Gatley argues that philosophy adds clarity to the work of the arts and humanities and provides more systematic tools (p. 145). While it is uncontroversial that philosophy provides the tools, it is not the case that these tools are always needed or that they provide the best way to achieve the necessary clarity to answer the questions. Work on ordinary concepts is done in many areas and without the conscious and explicit use of philosophical tools. Robert Hudson imagines the example of a horticulturist naming an apple “Sweet” due to its sweetness and of a diabetes association actively arguing against such a name; this can be done without having been trained in philosophical methodology, and the reply that trained philosophers can do it better is only true if applied to specific purposes, the purposes of the philosopher (Hudson 2024: 26-27). Aaron Yarmel points out that Gatley does not show that, concerning questions of gender and sex, philosophy does a significantly better job than gender studies or human sexuality studies, nor does she show that philosophy does a better job than the approach of Philosophy with Children, which she rejects (Yarmel 2024: 112).

Work on concepts is done in all theoretical disciplines. Gatley mentions the case of biology. Regarding evolutionary theory, she writes biologists will analyze theoretical concepts such as ‘evolution’, ‘origin’, ‘species’, ‘scientific’ and ‘evidence’ (p. 147). This is striking for two reasons. First, and this connects to the previous point, Gatley omits that biologists not only introduce theoretical concepts but also analyze *ordinary* concepts, at least in education (and in education they ought to do so, if they, for instance, follow the model of Educational Reconstruction by Ulrich Kattman et al., 1996). Second, at least for the latter two concepts of ‘scientific’ and ‘evidence’², one expects philosophy to have a say in such matters, specifically the subdisciplines of epistemology and philosophy of science. It is not clear whether Gatley, following some variety of ordinary language philosophy inspired by Wittgenstein, Ryle and Strawson (p. 128), wants to exclude theoretical concepts as objects of philosophy altogether, or includes them (because it is “theoretical content”, p. 100)³ but thinks there is no specific philosophical contribution to an analysis of such theoretical terms. Neither view seems particularly attractive. If Gatley’s premise (2), which distinguishes between ordinary and theoretical concepts, leads to such a view, then it might be necessary to reconsider. A more scientifically continuous view suggests that there is no sharp distinction between ordinary and theoretical concepts. Instead, there is a spectrum ranging from concepts that require little theory to those that can only be understood against a background combining several scientific theories.

Gatley compares her argument to one developed by Michael Hand, namely that questions about moral, political, and religious standards are a subset of philosophical questions that “feature prominently and pressingly in human lives” (p. 135-136). Her claim is that “the sort of philosophical content needed to begin to answer them is analysis of ordinary concepts” (p. 136).

It is not clear whether specifying the content in this way is a worthwhile move because it might not be conceptual analysis but rather argumentative skill that proves to be helpful in answering the questions. On the other hand, by formulating a general argument that does not refer to questions of moral, political, and religious standards, but rather focuses on the method of conceptual analysis, which is employed in many fields, Gatley runs the danger of losing what is genuine to philosophy.

Gatley’s second argument, developed in chapter 6, is that the conceptual fragmentation of theoretical education causes problems for students (p. 154). Conceptual work across a range of different theories is needed which is provided by philosophy (p. 159).

Again, Gatley does not show that philosophy is the only, or the best, discipline to provide such work. The idea that philosophy can function as a remedy against fragmentation has a long history, and other subjects have claimed to fulfill the function (Stiegler 1984; 1986).

In the final part of chapter 6, Gatley describes three exemplary problems which a philosophy course could adequately tackle: drug use, climate change, and Covid-19. The first starts with the example of a student who is considering smoking cannabis for the first time.

² A few pages earlier, Gatley categorized ‘evidence’ as an ordinary concept (p. 136). So Gatley probably sees ‘evidence’ as being both an ordinary and a theoretical concept.

³ Gatley introduces a wide notion of “theoretical education” which is “the practice of conveying ideas to students” (p. 55), but then later uses a much more restricted notion of “theoretical content” as content that is “theoretically significant, alongside the theories the content is part of” (p. 100).

Gatley proposes a course during which basic moral concepts are analyzed and three major types of normative ethical theories (deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics) are introduced (p. 176).

Two worries come to mind. First, rather than help students bringing together content from theories in different subjects, such an introduction to different ethical theories is likely to produce new problems and new fragmentation, at least for some students. For example, they might not know how to deal with competing normative theories in a situation (Yarmel 2024: 112-113). Second, it is not clear how these normative ethical theories should help an adolescent, who is considering smoking cannabis for the first time. If the adolescent is really struggling with what to do – and my conjecture is the same as Yarmel’s, that many people would not have much trouble to decide, they simply accept or decline (Yarmel 2024: 113) –, and if the educational aim is to support them in their decision making process, then a practical course in fostering their self-esteem and decision-making capacities, or a theoretical course describing the negative effects of drug use, or even a theoretical course introducing psychological concepts such as addiction or peer pressure, are likely to be much more effective.

In the concluding chapter, Gatley gives four interesting reasons for including a separate philosophy course in the curriculum rather than embedding philosophy into other subjects. First, it allows for the recruitment of subject-specialist teachers. Second, the questions are not easily embedded into other subjects because the questions cannot be answered definitively but allow for several defensible options. Third, the kind of reasoning needed for answer such questions is best developed through practice. Fourth, disciplinary sciences are a good place for teaching “theoretical content”, but this applies to philosophy as well.

Despite the many worries and objections that can be raised against different parts of Gatley’s argument, the book stands out as a landmark. It offers impressive philosophical reasoning on why philosophy should be included in the high school curriculum.⁴

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