

Country Report: Italy – The Teaching of Philosophy in Italian Schools. Some Recent Orientations

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Reconnecting to the European and international scene, in the last decade the national education system in Italy has underlined the centrality of the idea of competence, recognized as a functional tool to contribute to the conscious action of the person and to the maturation of an active and responsible “global” citizenship.¹ The various documents and normative interventions, from the “National Recommendations” (*Indicazioni nazionali*) of 2010 to the Law 107 of 2015 up to the most recent legislative decrees, have affirmed the importance of a didactics able to combine the learning of knowledge with the acquisition of key competences. In line with the general framework, the debate on the specific contribution that the teaching of philosophy can make to this end has been animated. In the “General Profile and Competencies” of the *Indicazioni nazionali*, the general objective of the teaching of philosophy is identified in the fact that “at the end of the school year the student must be aware of the philosophical reflection as a specific mode of human reason”, practiced throughout history and in different cultural traditions. Already from this formulation it is possible to evince the essential role of philosophy for the formation of the person and for inter-subjective action. On the one hand, philosophy, like the other particular subjects, qualifies according to an autonomous specific configuration, with its own statute and language; on the other hand, philosophy assumes a universalistic characteristic, which concerns humans and their qualification as rational beings, constitutively open to the question about the meaning of his own being and knowing, acting and producing in the world and in history. Precisely for this reason, the *Indicazioni* renew the recommendation to teachers to foster the maturation of the student’s sense of historical development, learned through the knowledge of the historical-cultural contexts in which the different philosophical positions have matured in the light of the needs and main questions that each age poses to thought and submits to its instruments of analysis and understanding.

As is well known, starting with the Gentile Reform of 1923, the historical structure represents a fundamental characteristic of the teaching of philosophy in Italy which, however, having lost its original theoretical depth, has flattened over the decades into a simple chronological succession of authors. Since the 1990s, the experimentation conducted by the Brocca Commission as part of a project to reform the upper secondary school had hoped for a profound didactic renewal based on the union of the historical-diachronic dimension of thought with an approach based on themes and problems (prevalent in other countries). In particular, on the methodological level, there was a return from the use of manuals (synthesis of the life and thought of philosophers) to the reading of philosophical texts (central in Gentile himself),

¹ In this direction goes the Recommendations of the European Council of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, see: [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)). As well as the Recommendations of the European Council of the same day on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching, see [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01))

recognized as a privileged tool for understanding the author's thought and for analyzing its logical-conceptual force and argumentative styles. The Brocca programs, however, have never gone beyond the experimentation phase. It is only in 2010 that the scenario changes: new criteria for the teaching of philosophy are indicated; the school autonomy and the free programming of the teacher is recognized, no longer obliged to respect the ministerial program; the teaching of philosophy is extended to all upper secondary school paths.

On the road opened by the *Indicazioni*, in 2015 the Directorate General for Schools and the Evaluation of the National Education System of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) established the Technical-Scientific Group of Philosophy (*Gruppo tecnico-scientifico di Filosofia*), composed of professionals in the philosophical field in schools, universities and research. The Group has produced the document *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della Filosofia nella società della conoscenza*² (Guidelines for learning philosophy in the knowledge society) with the aim of enhancing the learning of philosophy in a perspective of lifelong learning, as an indispensable background of knowledge, skills and abilities for the training of young people in a complex society such as the present one. The document, which also contains attached didactic proposals and concrete investigations with respect to the theoretical lines expressed, in 10 chapters addresses some of the main themes, outlining future actions and projects. In particular, it emphasizes the main skills promoted by the teaching/learning of philosophy: it contributes to the acquisition of the ability to exercise thought with a view to the creation of a critical and creative mental "dress", open to confrontation and dialogue with others; it encourages conscious action by providing the tools for the development of a proper structuring and understanding of expressive and communicative strategies, crucial today in the face of the pervasiveness of digital; it creates the conditions for ethical and inclusive action, based on respect for other individuals and cultures, as well as the environment.

To educate to the critical exercise of thought also means to transmit the sense of the dynamism of thought, the idea of a reason and a culture that are not absolute nor bounded in univocal forms, but embodied in the multiplicity and richness of the fields of human production. Outside an empty rhetoric – which, however, is often witnessed – this is also the fundamental and productive sense of learning philosophy by competence. As Plato said at the very origins of Western thought, philosophy is the use of knowledge (*sapere* and *conoscenze*) for the benefit of humans, which is possible to acquire thanks to a "straight" education, that is, in our contemporaneity, through a teaching that does not transmit knowledge sterilely closed in on itself but opened to the awareness of the complexity of reality and the relationship between the different spheres of knowledge in view of acting. In the light of these assumptions, the document intends to be a contribution to the discussion, open to the different subjects which are involved in various ways, around an innovative teaching, on its forms, tools and methodologies, giving back to the education and training system a central role in the development of the overall personality of the individual and in its maturation as the subject of an active and conscious citizenship. For this objective to be achieved, it is necessary to create

² Carmela Palumbo et al. (2017), *Orientamenti per l'apprendimento della Filosofia nella società della conoscenza*, MIUR. <http://www.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Documento-Orientamenti.pdf>

a real cooperation between education, universities, research and the world of work, established on the basis of mutual needs and resources as well as the specific needs of local realities. Today Universities and research institutions are, therefore, called to pursue, in addition to the traditional objectives of teaching (“First Mission”) and research (“Second Mission”), also a “Third Mission”, helping to create the conditions so that culture and knowledge also become engines of social growth through activities related to technology transfer and the development of innovative production processes as well as in those cultural and social activities that promote the welfare and cohesion of the community. The university also has the task of contributing to the adequate training and professional development of school teachers, oriented according to some of the main skills concerning educational and organizational autonomy, monitoring and evaluation systems, digital innovation, internationalization, global citizenship, inclusion and social cohesion. In addition to the organization of specific professional refresher courses for teachers, Italian universities have recently been directly involved, through the establishment of specific modules, in outlining the path to access the teaching profession, recognizing, as far as philosophy is concerned more directly, the formative role played by philosophical disciplines related to the moral field or related to a specific didactics and methodology of philosophy (*Decreto Ministeriale* 616/2017). There are, however, still few universities that include in their study offer also special teachings of didactics of philosophy. A MIUR initiative (POT, *piano finanziato di orientamento e tutorato*) is dedicated to the enhancement of the synergistic action of universities and schools in order to help students make a correct university choice and successfully complete university courses. For the first time, the initiative is specifically aimed at the humanities, including the philosophy degree classes.

In conclusion, the *Orientamenti* formulate some proposals for “the renewal of the teaching of philosophy in schools and the diffusion of philosophical learning as an opportunity for all”, underlining the importance of debate and productive confrontation between the main institutional subjects and all stakeholders who participate in varying degrees in the learning processes. In this direction, the Ministry has promoted a series of seminars on the teaching of philosophy on the national territory to share the Document and contribute, thanks to the comparison and the concrete exchange of experiences, to the outline of new and effective strategies for the enhancement of philosophy and its teaching/learning.