

Country Report:

Philosophy at Secondary Schools in Spain – Part I

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Philosophy and the subjects related to it have traditionally formed a fundamental part of the curriculum in secondary education in Spain. However, we have been witnesses to how the rapid succession of legislative changes, aiming at raising the academic level of the Spanish to the UE level, have displaced Philosophy from the place where it belongs by its own right.

Among the factors that have determined this circumstance, I will include:

1. The positivist prejudice that considers all knowledge that does not entail an immediate influence on the development of technologies and economic expansion superfluous and a mere erudite ornament.
2. The traditionalist prejudice responsible for the rivalry between the subjects of Ethics and Religion (Catholic), by offering Ethics as an "alternative to religion".

Before analyzing these factors in more detail, I will offer a general historical overview of educational laws in recent Spanish history.

Recent history of Spanish educational legislation

From the 70s to the 90s in the 20th century, the LGE (August 6, 1970), which accompanied our maturing as a democracy, was in force. This law extended free and compulsory schooling up to the age of 14 years and offered a Baccalaureate in 4 years that is still remembered today with longing. This post-compulsory education from 14 to 18 years allowed the intellectual maturation of students in demanding conditions. There were three compulsory subjects related to Philosophy: Ethics (16 years), Philosophy (17 years) and History of Philosophy (18 years).

In the mid-nineties, the LOGSE was passed (October 3, 1990). It was a law that adapted the European measure to extend the age of schooling to 16 years of age, which meant that the Baccalaureate was reduced to 2 academic years (from 16 to 18 years). Curricula became more flexible and new subjects aimed at specialization led to the decrease of hours devoted to core subjects (such as Language and Mathematics). Humanistic matters were also neglected including Philosophy. Nevertheless, in the last year of compulsory secondary school (16 years) there were two hours a week of Ethics and this subject was also frequently offered in the other courses as an optional subject alternative to Religion.

The laws that followed the LOGSE retained the same structure of the curriculum, but added some modifications. The LOE (May 3, 2006), promoted by a socialist government, prevented the marks of Religion from counting for the average of the academic record. Ethics disappeared as an alternative subject to Religion. Although that hour was on free disposal of the secondary school, actually, the alternative to religion became an hour devoted to games or, at best, to self-

study time. The new subject of "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights" was mandatory in part of primary education and in compulsory secondary education (12 to 16 years).

The current law is the LOMCE (December 9, 2013), also known as "Wert Law". It was promoted by the conservative party as an attempt to return greater workload to subjects such as Mathematics and Language. In this law, the contents associated with Philosophy lose their presence in the curriculum. The History of Philosophy ceases to be compulsory in the 2nd year of Baccalaureate (18 years) and the subject of Ethics in 4th year (16 years) disappears together with the subject "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights" that, as we will see later, had been a matter of controversy. However, the LOMCE allows the autonomous governments to determine certain subjects within their scope, so that 9 out of 17 regional governments have chosen to keep History of Philosophy in the 2nd year either for all types of Baccalaureate or only for some. In the rest, it becomes a subject that the students cannot choose and that the schools do not offer.

Marginalization of the humanities in high school curricula

The arrival of the LOMCE meant the confirmation of the tendency to corner humanistic matters (its reforms have also negatively affected the Plastic Arts and Music). Currently, a student can attend compulsory education and leave it at 16 without having matured his critical spirit in contact with the foundations that structure Western thinking.

A misunderstood idea of progress has enforced this shift towards a pragmatic view of education. It has been considered that to be competitive, our country had to produce engineers, economists and entrepreneurs. However, business schools have already realized what the eminent Spanish philosopher Emilio Lledó (Sevilla, 1927) has been explaining for years: that an economist and an engineer also need the humanities. For Lledó, as a society, we cannot afford this loss, because it would mean the death of a country's greatest wealth, which is culture, where freedom resides. "Philosophy plays an essential role, because it forces us to think about language, about good, about justice, about what we are, about the truth. Since ancient Greek times, philosophers have always been the critical conscience of an era."

The voices that defend Philosophy today, claim their potential for basic education, both as support for core subjects (because it teaches students to express themselves both orally and in writing), as well as to help the maturation of critical capacity at an age in which the first questions and concerns appear. But for these reasons, the subject requires a minimum span of time: at least two years.

The controversial "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights"

As we have anticipated, with the LOE a new subject appeared on the horizon of the subjects related to Philosophy: "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights". This subject aimed at teaching democratic and constitutional values, following the recommendations of the European Council in 2002, which affirmed the importance of this type of education to promote a free, tolerant and just society.

Despite the support of European institutions and recognized entities such as the NGO Amnesty International, the implementation of this subject aroused a notorious suspicion among

some conservative sectors that understood that the State assumed a moral education that should rest with the family. In addition, they considered that the Left was trying to shape children's viewpoints, imposing a biased perception on sexual education and multi-parental or homosexual families. For the Catholic Church, it was an attack on the traditional family. Although other conservative tendencies did not oppose and understood that the subject was focused only on the teaching of Human Rights, there were parents who even declared themselves "conscientious objectors" to prevent their children from taking the new subject and even raised their protests to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

To add fuel to the fire, certain conservative media claimed that prejudices against businessmen and the free market were poured into some textbooks. However, we must remember that in Spain there are no official manuals, but the schools are free to use the sources they consider most appropriate. In contrast, sectors of the anarchist left were annoyed because the parliamentary democracy was contemplated as the only system that respects human rights.

Ethics as an alternative to religion

With the LOMCE, both the controversial "Education for Citizenship" and the Ethics of the 4th year of Compulsory Secondary Education (16 years) have disappeared. On the other hand, there is an optional subject called "Ethical Values" that is offered in the other years as an alternative subject to Religion, which counts again for the general records.

The choice between the subjects of Religion and Ethical Values raises paradoxes. The underlying assumption is that every religion includes a moral code, so that people who study religion will have the same training as those who choose Ethical Values. If that were so, it would not matter if we reached moral awareness through religion or through processes of criticism and rational discussion, dialogue and confrontation of ideas. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the two subjects are not equivalent, because in one case it is considered that moral values depend on the divine will and in the other they are human creations, dependent on societies and history. Presenting Religion and Ethics as alternatives at the same level recalls the theory of the double truth of medieval scholasticism.

Philosophy teachers claim their own space for Ethics and that an analogous alternative to Religion (such as Religious Culture or History of Religions) may be given. One thing is a shared, public and minimal ethic, regardless of the creed or the absence of this, and another very different thing is a religious training that you want to convey. By placing an "or" in between ethics and religion, the former is being betrayed, as is the latter.

The future of philosophy in Spain

The near future raises favorable prospects for Philosophy to recover the lost ground. On October 18, 2018 the main political parties approved a non-legislative motion in the Education Committee of the Congress of Deputies to reinforce the presence of the subject of Philosophy in Secondary Schools. The intention of political parties is that Ethics in the 4th year of secondary school (16 years) and History of Philosophy in the 2nd year of Baccalaureate (18 years) becomes compulsory again, so that students have a process that takes 3 years through which to mature their critical thinking and that allows every citizen to acquire notions that roots

them to the Western cultural project, which, by the way, has been developed on the basis of philosophical efforts to answer questions of meaning.