

## Country Report:

### Philosophy at Secondary Schools in Spain – Part II

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The purpose of this article is to continue tracing the way in which philosophy is taught in Spain; in particular, in the first year of the Baccalaureate (at around 17 years old). This report will describe the contents and problems, the methodologies and the forms of assessment commonly used in secondary education as well as the procedures used by the public administration to select philosophy teachers.<sup>1</sup>

#### Contents and problems

In Spain, philosophy is a compulsory subject in the first year of the Baccalaureate, with a weekly work load of around three hours per week. The content covered in the course aims at offering an introduction to the study of philosophy focusing on the great questions that have worried thinkers throughout history and still do today. As opposed to the chronological approach, which is used in the subject of History of Philosophy taught in the second year of the Baccalaureate, the first year philosophy course is taught in a thematic order, covering the following disciplines and branches of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of language, anthropology, philosophy of science, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics and applied philosophy.

Each of these branches is mediated by a question that is presented as a problem to be solved. This initial question to be addressed is: what is philosophy? After covering this, the aporetic nature of the matter is revealed and other major questions can be asked, such as: What is reality? How is knowledge possible? What is science? What is it the human being? What is beauty? What should I do? How can we organize a fair society? How can I apply philosophy to solve problems (personal and professional ones, of individuals and society)? The answer to these questions will require students to research and analyze the arguments on which various philosophical theories are based. In addition, students have to be able to understand and apply basic philosophical terminology as well as be able to begin reading short philosophical texts (more or less autonomously) and formulate their own arguments, both orally and in writing.

As a reference on these philosophical issues, works by classical authors of the history of philosophy, such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas More, Machiavelli, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche or Ortega y Gasset, are frequently used. When discussing topics such as philosophy of science, philosophy of language, political philosophy and applied philosophy, reference is also made to theories and texts of contemporary philosophers, e.g. Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Cassirer, Rawls

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<sup>1</sup> See Country Report, Part I in: *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* 3 (2019), pp. 84-87.

or Habermas, among others. Attention to these well-established thinkers is complemented with the reading of press articles and fragments of literary works or texts by current philosophers.

### **Methodologies and activities**

The methodology of the study of philosophy has been perfectly coupled to the new trends in pedagogy. This is the case because, contrary to the prejudice that philosophy is a matter anchored in the past (Plato is still Plato after 23 centuries), it is precisely in the approaches of classical philosophy where we find the promotion of critical thinking that today is intended to favor the most innovative forms of pedagogy. Three examples will serve to support this statement:

- the emphasis that the most current pedagogy puts on the relevance of student-centered learning is closely related to maieutics, where it is perfectly assumed that knowledge must be enlightened by each individual;
- the competency approach was already present in a certain way when Kant claimed that one could not learn philosophy but rather philosophize;
- the call to apply theoretical contents to the practical field, far from being a discovery of project-based learning, is present from Plato's Republic to Marx's Thesis on Feuerbach.

The subject of philosophy therefore approaches the new teaching methodologies in a natural way, which affects the role of teachers as mediators, guides and providers of the scaffolding necessary for autonomous construction of learning. Pupils for their part become the protagonists of learning and their goal is to put into play the tools provided by philosophy to solve problems. Among the methodologies used in this area, we can highlight the following types of activities:

- a) Socratic dialogue
- b) Formal or informal discussions
- c) Exercises of logical calculation, formalization and detection of fallacies
- d) Development of philosophical dictionaries
- e) Approach and resolution of ethical dilemmas
- f) Research and use of ICT media for dissemination and promotion of learning communities
- g) Development of outlines, concept maps and infographics
- h) Production of dissertations and other argumentative texts
- i) Commentary on philosophical texts
- j) Comments regarding current news and opinion articles
- k) Creation of videos, films or art works with a philosophical sense
- l) Philosophical analysis of literary works
- m) Other productions: newspapers, podcasts, video creation, plays

### **Assessment methods**

With the aim of measuring student competence, a series of assessment activities are designed. Oral tests generally include presentations, debates and interventions that are spontaneous or derived from the Socratic dialogue. Written tests include essays, text analysis guided by questions, ethical dilemmas and presentation of theoretical and practical aspects based on questions.

The current trend in assessment systems is twofold. On the one hand, it seeks to establish more varied evaluation methods, so that the traditional exam loses weight in the percentage of the grade. At the same time, more attention is paid to the quantification of the results. Evaluation rubrics in which the grading of a task corresponds to a set of more specific quality descriptors has been promoted. For example, for a text commentary there would be a different weight assigned to aspects such as terminological analysis, comprehension, expression, formal aspects, etc.

### **Teacher Selection Procedures**

To be a philosophy teacher in Spain, both in the public and private sector, a certain training that ensures knowledge of both philosophy and pedagogy is required. For example, a degree in philosophy (or other studies that include philosophy in their curricula, like sociology, political science, anthropology, etc.) will be compulsory as well as specific training in pedagogy (Master's Degree on Secondary Education or equivalent).

In addition to the requirements above, in order to work in public education, it is necessary to overcome the selection process, the "civil service examination" organized by the public education administration every two years. Through this procedure the applicants are listed, so that the best qualified ones are those who have access to one of the permanent jobs offered, while those who pass the test but are not selected will become part of a job bank in case of replacements.

The examination consists of two parts. In the first part, the applicant must present a series of academic merits (complementary training, masters and doctorates, training courses, etc.) and job experience (previous experience in the educational field). In the second part, applicants have to take a series of exams in which theoretical and practical skills must be shown, both in the area of philosophy and pedagogy.

The written exam includes the presentation of a topic related to philosophy and the resolution of a practical exercise (text commentary, ethical dilemma, logic problem or application of educational legislation to specific cases). The oral test consists of the defense of an educational program developed for a class during an academic year.

Those who obtain a permanent job position will still have to go through a trial period of one academic year during which they will combine their work in a secondary school with some training courses. After a successful educational inspection, the teacher will be considered a "civil servant." At this point, the stability of the job is ensured, but teachers usually go through a long period of roaming in which they must once again assert their merits to get closer to the desired destination.

A change in the selection system is planned in the coming years with the aim of making

the theoretical exam more demanding. Instead of the exam consisting of a single topic chosen by the applicant from among five raffled options, it has been proposed to offer a short answer test with questions that cover different parts of the agenda.

Paradoxically, despite the tendency of pedagogy towards competency learning, the examinations continue privileging the conceptual domain over other practical abilities, which are more difficult to quantify.