

Association des Professeurs de Philosophie de l'Enseignement Public: *Professeur de philosophie. Entrer dans le métier, (L'enseignement Philosophique. Numéro Hors-Série), 2016.*

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The *Association des Professeurs de Philosophie de l'Enseignement Public* (APPEP), founded in 1947, is the main association of philosophy teachers in France. Philosophy as a school subject has a high standing in France. It is taught in the last year of high school, with a remarkably high number of teaching hours ranging from three (in the economic branch) to eight (in the literary branch). Teaching is traditionally oriented towards lectures by the teacher and the training of writing a philosophical essay according to closely specified rules (the *dissertation*). Besides representing the interests of philosophy teachers such as the principle of pedagogical liberty, as Nicolas FRANCK mentions in the introduction, the APPEP also organizes conferences on the topic of philosophy education and publishes the journal *L'enseignement philosophique*. The book under review is a special edition of that journal.

The title of the book may be translated as: *Teacher of philosophy. Entering the profession*. Its main aim is to introduce new teachers to their work. It contains fourteen articles, each discussing a particular challenge one may face in the classroom. The first seven focus on the conditions of the profession, the next seven on the contents taught. A final third section is mainly informative, including an article about the journal itself and information about the school programmes and the final exams of high school, the exams of the *Baccalauréat*. I will very briefly present here the topics of the articles of the first two sections.

In the first section, Frédéric WORMS takes a stand against general didactics and in favour of the unity of teaching, research, and action, thus perpetuating the traditional conservative approach of teaching philosophy in France. Simon PERRIER argues against the new school programmes based on competences, claiming that they reduce education to an insignificant pile of pieces of knowledge (*connaissances*).

Pierre HAYAT takes up the important and internationally interesting question of secular neutrality. Secularism (*laïcité*) has a long tradition in France going back at least to the French revolution. It was institutionalised in the 1905 French law of the Separation of the Churches and the State. Since 1946 it has been a constitutional principle that the state is obliged to provide for a free and secular education at all levels. This affects also the teaching of philosophy, and Hayat proposes to examine the question of secular neutrality from three points of view, the public agent, the teacher and the student.

Public agents are prohibited by law to display signs of religious affiliation and to use their position for religious propaganda. Outside of his *fonction*, however, the public agent of course has the same civil rights as any other citizen, including freedom of speech and religion. The obligation of public agents not to propagate a religion may also be seen as a guarantee that they will not be forced to propagate one. Hayat argues that secular neutrality should not be seen as an end in itself but rather as a means to living the values of human rights and of the republic.

From the point of view of the teacher, one may ask what the limits of secular neutrality are. In particular, one may ask whether teachers must remain neutral towards religious fundamentalism. According to Hayat, there is no such obligation, since again neutrality is not an end in itself, but a means. Teachers, having the pedagogical liberty of teaching according to reason, are free to voice their opinions and preferences as long as they do not propagate a particular view. They should follow the principles of impartiality and objectivity, thereby empowering their students to make up their own minds.

Finally, from the point of view of the student, the law of 15 March 2004 is important. It prohibits students to wear ostensible signs of religious affiliation, while discrete signs remain allowed. This law has been criticized of being anti-muslim, but Hayat defends it, claiming that it helps to create a school environment in which each student can learn and develop rationally in the best possible way. The law may also be seen to protect students from prematurely identifying themselves with a particular religious group, and it helps students understand that in the secular state no religious law is above state law.

Alain CHAMPSEIX analyses the concept of teacher authority and discusses obstacles to having teacher authority in the classroom. Patricia VERDEAU presents the main ideas in the various school programmes for philosophy since 1802. She argues for the lasting influence of Victor Cousin, who changed the 1832 programme from a dogmatic approach to one of fostering rational judgement. Cousin, influenced by Hegel, wanted to validate the achievements of reason in the institutions of the state. Based on their personal experience, Adeline DELEZAY and Patrick DUPOUEY give practical advice to novices on work in the classroom, attitude towards students and cooperation with state authorities and with other teachers. They explain, for example, how to establish teacher authority – French educational teaching is traditionally more teacher-oriented than for example in Germany – or how to go about correcting student texts, a considerable workload for French teachers, given the high numbers of up to 35 students per class.

Julien FONOLLOSA explains the difficulties of the so-called contractual teacher (*professeur contractuel*). The normal way to become a teacher in France is to participate in either of two national competitions, one of them called *CAPES*, the other *Agrégation*. The award winners go on an internship of one year, during which they receive teacher formation, are supervised by a mentor (*tuteur*) and are assessed several times. If successful they attain the position of regular teacher (*professeur titulaire*), a position which guarantees a lifelong teaching position (somewhere in the educational system) and a salary. There is, however, another way to become a teacher, one that is paved with much insecurity. As a candidate, one must first deposit an application. In the case of acceptance, one is eligible for appointment to a school. If appointed, one receives a contract of one year (which may be renewed and must be transformed after a number of years into a permanent contract). During the first year, one does not receive any teacher formation – a surprising and deplorable fact resulting in an educational system with two classes of teachers: regular teachers with significant privileges with regard to security, salary and also formation, and contractual teachers without these privileges.

In the second section, Frédéric DUPIN addresses a central didactical question: what is the object of a philosophy course? He argues that the object is not the notions of philosophy but rather the objects of real life. The aim of philosophy is to teach students to deepen their understanding of the world and of themselves. He further argues that the object is given by our common human experience. When we think, for instance, about the difference between remorse (*remords*) and regret (*regret*), we are not simply talking about a semantic difference, but about different human experiences. The philosophy course is neither an enterprise in deductive logic nor an exchange of arguments on anything. Finally, there is an object only for a subject. The object must be, as Dupin rightly highlights, one that "addresses the students". Julien LAMY takes up the question whether the understanding of a problem (*sens du problème*) can be taught. He argues that such understanding is neither a piece of theoretical knowledge nor a technical competence that may be instructed through rules. It is rather a capacity which can only be acquired in practice, like an art. This, however, does not mean that one can acquire it without any theoretical knowledge. Jean-Pierre CARLET presents two topics for a course unit, one on knowledge and one on nature. Clotilde LAMY emphasizes the importance of examples in teaching philosophy. Examples from everyday life may show students that what we do in philosophy lessons is in fact about real life. Classical examples from the literature in turn may serve to dive into a particular topic. Both types of example are excellent starting points for doing philosophy, since they are (in general) easy to grasp and can serve as objects of analysis. Bernard FISCHER argues for the use of exercises throughout the school year in order to help students develop their thinking and writing skills towards the *dissertation*. The exercises may be questions for reflection to be answered in one page, such as for example: what is the difference between feeling oneself and thinking oneself? Or what does it mean to be in the nature of things? Didier BREGEON explains how to read and evaluate a *dissertation* using two examples from students from the technological branch. Finally, recommendations for students on how to write a *dissertation* are offered by Anne SOURIAU.

The book addresses several didactical questions for the teaching of philosophy, offers advice to new teachers and thus introduces them to the profession. The advice includes ideas from more progressive pedagogical views, but is generally kept within the range of traditional pedagogy in France. The book also addresses fundamental questions about what the teaching of philosophy is about. For readers outside of France it presents not only some basic facts about the teaching of philosophy in French high schools (programmes, teacher formation), but also insights into its practice and into the questions teachers face.