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## THE DIDACTIC GOALS OF THE PHILOSOPHY COURSES IN THE MACEDONIAN HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to illustrate the main objectives and goals of the Philosophy courses (obligatory and elective) in the Macedonian high school system, and to determine whether, and to what extent, they align with the contents of the courses syllabi. At a first glance it might seem that the objectives stated in the course programs are unattainable and over-stretched, but a further analysis shows their diversity, applicability, and usefulness for the overall student improvement. These objectives, being directed towards the development of critical thinking, moral deliberation, pluriperspective flexibility, and awareness for the contexts in which people function, are crucial in this age, and necessary for the formation of young adults capable of determining causal relations, of orienting in multiple sources of information and sets of circumstances, and staying in tune with the moral needs of their communities.

The text shows the main didactic goals of the Philosophy courses in the Macedonian high school curriculum in light of the courses' contents, and in the greater framework of the Philosophy courses from several countries from this region (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bulgaria).

Attention is paid to the ways in which the goals reflect the contents of the courses, and the contemporary needs for a solid education rooted in context-awareness, critical thinking, and empathy. The comparison between several courses' goals will show that while the objectives of the philosophy education seem complex and multifaceted (as is philosophy itself), their achievement (even partial) is pivotal in the formation of young adults capable of not only understanding the values with which they live, but of working on ways to improve their own, and the circumstances of their communities.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Courses, Goals, Didactical, Curriculum

## Introduction

The aim of the paper is to illustrate the main didactic goals of the Philosophy courses (obligatory and elective) in the Macedonian high school system, as well as to analyze whether, and to what extent, they correspond to the contents of the courses syllabi. The idea of the present mini-research was to review the proposed official objectives and goals of the existing syllabi for the course curricula of the philosophical corpus (philosophy, logic, ethics, aesthetics), as they were presented in the University project by the Institute for philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje in 2019 (“Theoretical and practical update of the syllabi for the philosophical subjects (philosophy, ethics, logic, aesthetics) for high-schools”) (Донев et al., 2019), and revisited for this occasion, without taking into consideration any possible changes made to the programs in the countries of the region in the meantime. One of the issues that arise is the rate of feasibility of all these goals, having in mind the contents of the courses. The problem concerning the estimation of such a possible attainment of the envisaged goals (or lack thereof) is the (non)durability of the follow-up of their range and reach. Such research, however, would have a focus diverging from that which the Institute for philosophy had taken as a topic for research for the project. Therefore, the research is aimed at overviewing the proposed didactic goals and discussing their attainability.<sup>61</sup>

## The Didactic Goals of the Obligatory and the Elective Course Philosophy

The goals of the course Philosophy should be dominantly oriented towards the level of knowledge that needs to be attained, pertaining to the history of philosophy, since the content of the obligatory course Philosophy is an overview of the history of Western philosophy. (Наставна програма по Филозофија, 2002). Still, the majority of the expectations, or the goals, are directed towards the development of critical thinking and argumentation, which could later help in the development of society, and in the attainment of specific abilities and skills. The general goals of the course Philosophy could be divided into four groups: *Knowledge*, *Critical thinking and argumentation*, *Development of the individual and of the society*, and *Development of skills*.

From the aspect of *knowledge* (certain amount of knowledge that needs to be obtained in the field), the following goals can be presented. From the pupils it is expected to gain knowledge about the philosophical thought and the aspects of philosophical research. Also, it is expected to gain knowledge about the development of the human thought, the connections (temporal and causal) during this development, as well as about the world and the worldviews in the development of our civilization, which include the philosophical understanding and experiencing of the world. Furthermore, this entails the achievement of an understanding of the intellectual striving of people through history, and the directions of the particular philosophical and scientific discoveries. The obligatory course Philosophy follows a historical (chronological) approach in the

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<sup>61</sup> For the perception of this issue among the high-school teachers of philosophical courses, participants in the empirical research during the work on the project, please refer to Донев et al. 2019.

teaching of philosophy, which means that these proposed goals of understanding of the development of Western thought, the paradigmatic shifts in the worldviews, and the key points in the development of the civilization could be realistically expected.

The elective course Philosophy (Наставна програма по филозофија – изборен предмет за IV година, 2003) follows a problem-oriented approach to philosophy, and in this sense, it is expected to introduce the pupils in the structure, contents, topics, and methods of philosophical thinking, facilitate the understanding of the problems of philosophy, its methods of thinking, and its significance for human knowledge. From this course it is also expected to develop in the pupils the ability to understand the intellectual aspirations of people through history, and the objectives of the particular philosophical and scientific discoveries. According to these didactic expectations, and, as it might be expected from a course designed to broaden and deepen the knowledge of the pupils particularly interested in the matter, the accent is on the principles, methods, and mechanisms of philosophical thinking, and the grasp of the importance of the problems of philosophy in a broader context.

From the aspect of the goals from the group *Critical thinking and argumentation*, the expectations of the obligatory course Philosophy are to: enable the pupils to conduct autonomous, creative thinking; to develop their individual critical and axiological disposition; and to facilitate in the pupils the development of the capabilities to conduct a free dialogue based on rational, substantiated arguments. Considering the overwhelming abundance of topics in the course material, ranging over all the main periods of the Western history of philosophy, it is unclear how these goals could be attained, especially the development of autonomous critical thought. The elective course Philosophy strives to enable the pupils to discuss philosophical (and other) issues using suitable arguments, which is more realistic, considering that the focus of the course is aimed at the understanding of the basic principles of critical and creative thinking.

The goals directed towards the *development of the person and of the society* in Philosophy (obligatory course), are concerned with the pupils getting acquainted with the postulates of human freedom, and the principles of cultural and intellectual development of human society. Also, the pupils are expected to cultivate an understanding about the foundational questions about man, the society, and the world; to discern and explain the significance of humanistic axiological principles, etc. A part of these goals might be reached by transposing the facts from the history of philosophy into a contemporary context. In this sense, a contextualization of the axiological principles, the importance of responsibility, tolerance and an open democratic consciousness can be reached, but this must be attained only through the personally motivated intervention on the part of the teachers, since the material (the whole of the historical periods included in the program) does not entail such goals. Part of these goals are also nearly identical with those of the elective course Ethics (for second and third year of high school).

The course Philosophy (elective) expects the pupils to be directed towards (at least) a part of these goals, especially in the domain of attaining an awareness for the achievements of humanity, and the power of philosophical thinking in resolving the life problems of people; the development of the sense of responsibility, self-confidence, and the feelings of certainty and spiritual stability; as well as tolerance and an open civic consciousness. Actually, the goals seem identical to the ones of the obligatory course, which is expected from their complementary nature. Considering that there are no centralized official directions for the course, nor a textbook (and/or reader) covering the material, it is even more striking that the attainment of the goals is left to the personal involvement of the course teachers. This leads to an uneven achievement of the objectives and goals, and to discrepancies in the attainment of the full potential of the value of the course, and most importantly, of the pupils' abilities.

The goals dedicated to the *development of skills* are specific to the area, therefore, both courses, and in a major part the course Logic, expect the students to acquire the skills to: analyze,

synthesize, abstract, and classify; to form accurate conclusions; to identify and carry a substantiated tolerant discourse. These goals are quite similar to those in the group of development of critical thinking, which is to be expected.

The goals of the high school course Philosophy in the Republic of Serbia (Предметни програм Филозофија и Логика, s.a.), which are dominantly directed towards the attainment of knowledge, gravitate around the methodological structure of the scientific and the philosophical thinking; the connection of the personal thought-experiences with some characteristically philosophical problems, thanks to the overview of different philosophical stances; the understanding of the historical context and the developmental dimensions in the formation of the philosophical worldviews; as well as the intertwining of cultural and intellectual traditions in the origin and the creation of the scientific theories and the spiritual works of the Western civilization. In the area of critical thinking and argumentation, some attention is paid to the elements and principles of valid conclusion-formation, and algorithmic problem-solving; and the grasp of the structure of the cognitive capabilities (the thought-language relation, for example, and the intricacies of communication); the improvement of autonomous and critical judgement through the interpretation of philosophical texts and the reconstruction of philosophical arguments.

The expected goals directed towards the development of the person and of society are manifold. Some of them include: the attainment of awareness for the need to actively shape one's own life, by responsibly participating in the public life of the human and democratic society; learning to distinguish between factual and value judgements, in facing ethical dilemmas and societal challenges. Some of these goals coincide with, or can be placed in, the group of development of skills. Some other expected skills from the pupils are to improve their verbal expression, and participate in open respectful discussions.

From the course Philosophy in Montenegro (Predmetni program Filozofija, 2014), it is expected to introduce pupils in the flows of philosophical thinking and facilitate the capabilities to connect different experiences (in science, arts, religion, etc.). Pupils are also expected to develop critical thinking about the basic questions about the world. These are similar to the goals pertaining to the other groups: to learn to apply the basic philosophical notions to the problems of man, society, nature, and spirituality. The other goals could easily be paraphrases of the previously mentioned Macedonian and Serbian ones.

The goals aiming for the attainment of knowledge in the course Philosophy in the Republic of Croatia (Nacionalni kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Filozofija – prijedlog nakon javne rasprave, 2017), are to introduce the pupils in the philosophical ways of thinking; and to facilitate some reflection on the content of the other subjects, ones that cannot be fully examined using the methods of those same disciplines. Some of the other goals, versions of which have not thus far been mentioned in the overview of the courses, and keeping in mind that the Croatian curriculum places the utmost importance on the place and roles of the individual as an active participant in society, are: the attainment of knowledge and values necessary for the development of aware, responsible citizens who think, act, and create (the individuality and uniqueness of each pupil as an equal member of society); the development of reflexivity, in order to improve autonomous moral action; the formation of integrity and respect for others; the encouragement of the love of freedom, of truth, of the protection of life; and the insistence on the dignity of each human person. These goals in the Croatian system, present in each philosophical course, match the content of the material. To expand on the role of the individual in societal life in the Macedonian system would mean to substantially change the course content.

Some of the goals that have not been previously formulated as such, from the Bulgarian Philosophy courses (Учебна програма по Философија – VIII, XIX, X, XI, XII клас, 2016) in several years of study (and considering the complexity of the high school curriculum), are the understanding of, and distinction between, the historical and the contemporary norms (moral, legal, religious,

political); the understanding of the basic concepts and theories of social philosophy and the philosophy of law; gaining a grasp on the historical origin and importance of religion as a cultural phenomenon, the features of the world religions and of the orthodox tradition in particular; the argumentation of one's personal preferences in art, and the proper use of aesthetical categories; the capability to rationalize one own's experiences with the help of philosophical and psychological concepts and theories; the development of empathy and trust in the community through collaboration and active communication; the encouragement of suitable conduct in the sphere of scientific knowledge, especially in the natural and formal sciences. The Philosophy courses in the several years of high school are also aiming to enable the pupils to analyze philosophical texts, express their own points of view, as well as to write essays, participate in discussions, perform case-analysis, and to practice project conception and completion, conflict resolution and management, and public speaking.

### **The Didactic Goals of the Course Logic**

The goals of the course Logic (Наставна програма по Логика, изборен предмет за IV година, 2003) from the group *development of abilities and skills*, as it was previously mentioned, almost coincide with those of both Philosophy courses, with a focus on the proficient operation with abstract entities, and, very importantly, the development of the apparatus necessary for the attainment, organization and (re)evaluation of the many individual facts received from other courses and materials.

From the aspect of the attainment of *knowledge*, the goals of the course Logic are directed towards the acquaintance of the pupils with the essence of logical notions, principles and methods; the character and structure of the scientific method and scientific systems; and the new tendencies in communication, based on the information technologies (which includes a certain level of interdisciplinarity absent from the Macedonian high-school curricula). The course Logic aims at the development of a logical sensibility in pupils, which would help not only in the more successful learning of the material from other courses, but also the general intellectual preparedness of the pupils.

The course Logic in Serbia (Предметни програм Филозофија и Логика, s.a.) and the course Logic in Montenegro (Predmetni program Logika, s.a.) are aimed at enabling the pupils to learn the elements and principles of valid thinking; to learn to recognize and avoid the typical logical fallacies; to grasp the structure of knowledge, as well as the methodical structure of the scientific and the philosophical research principles. Like in the Macedonian system, special attention is paid to the development of the capabilities to transfer the knowledge from different areas, and use the skills for a process of permanent learning. The course Logic in Republic of Croatia (Nacionalni kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Logika – prijedlog nakon javne rasprave, 2017) generally has the same goals, but it is worth mentioning that it promotes creative thinking; the development of auto reflexivity; and the awareness for the criteria shared by all people, which are universally acknowledged as the basis for the culture of togetherness; and – like in all other courses in the Croatian system – the importance of the development of responsible, active citizens. There are almost no goals in the course Logic in the Bulgarian systems (Учебна програма по Психологија и логика – IX клас, задължителна подготовка, 2017) that were not already mentioned: the accent is yet again on the importance of clear, accurate, critical thinking, but some differences can be spotted in the goals directed towards understanding diversity as a constitutive element of the world, and problem-solving in the face of diversity.

### **The Didactic Goals of the Course Ethics**

The goals of the course Ethics (Наставна програма по Етика за II година, 2003) are in the context of acquisition of permanent knowledge applicable to the moral problems in life. The didactic goals of the course Ethics as an elective in second and third year of high school (Наставна

програма по Етика – избран предмет за III година, 2003) are directed towards introducing the pupils to the importance of the evaluation of the moral in life, and the role of ethics in the sustaining and the improvement of mankind. Considering that the material does not include complicated overviews of the history of ethics, but rather universally important topics like: Ethics and morals, Man, Life and morals, Love, Work ethics, Political ethics (in the second year); and Introduction to ethics, The value of life, Elements of ethics, Ethics and religion, Ethical priorities, Bioethics, Social and political ethics etc. (in the third year), a clear complementarity can be seen between that which is and that which ought to be, or rather, between the manner in which the course is structured and the expectations from it.

The goals in Montenegro (Predmetni program Etika, s.a.) do not focus on the theoretical knowledge in some broad range, but rather focus on the acquirement of skills useful for a competent decision-making in the moral matters in life, and the application of the moral character. In Croatia (Nacionalni kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Etika – Prijedlog nakon javne rasprave, 2017), the goals of the course Ethics are accomplished through two domains: moral and ethical thinking, and moral and ethical acting. Some of them include, apart from the development of creative thinking, rational acting, and the protection of human rights, the contextualization of moral thinking through examples from myths, legends, folktales and examples from ordinary, quotidian life; the building, sustaining, and improving of the communities; and the awareness for the importance of moral acting within such communities. Much attention, apart from the civic engagement of man, is paid to the universality of moral issues and decisions, and the needs for multidisciplinary in understanding the complexities of man and of society.

The course Ethics and law (general education) in Bulgaria (Учебна програма по Етика и право – X клас, задължителна подготовка, 2017) aims at enabling the pupils to act justly and warmly towards themselves, the others, and the world, as free, autonomous persons and citizens. The three modules of the course Ethics and law (vocational education), Applied ethics, Social and political philosophy, and Law and ethics in the information society, have additional practical goals, as well as some of the already mentioned. Some of them are: to gain some knowledge of the practical importance of deontology; to apply the knowledge of ethics in the realm of professional relations; and, especially relevant for the contemporary world, to grasp the importance of bioethics and medical ethics. Furthermore, it is expected that the pupils develop their legal and political culture in the philosophical speculation of the issues of justice, liberty, human rights, ownership, legality, democracy etc. The pupils are expected to know about, and analyze and synthesize positions on, the topics of taxes and state management; political subjects and political life; the law of the European union; the protection of minority rights, and other current issues; as well as to understand the information society as society for all; grasp the legalities of the use and misuse of the internet; the legal aspects of intellectual property and copyright claims; and the basics of economics.

## **The Didactic Goals of the Course Aesthetics**

From the teaching of the course Aesthetics (for musical secondary education) (Наставна програма по Естетика, средно музичко образование, 2007) it is expected to enable the pupils to acquire knowledge about the meaning, essence, and the principles of art; about the history of the aesthetical ideas and values; about the essence and the division of the arts, as well as their characteristics; about the work of art and the role of the artist in the creation of the artworks. Furthermore, it is expected that the pupils learn how to distinguish between genres of art; as well as how the tastes, styles, and artistic experiences in people originate and develop. Next, it is expected from the pupils to ponder the possibilities to evaluate, critique, and accept the work of art; to understand the distinct features of the classical and the modern; and to understand art as an important dimension of the person, as a manner of communication, and as a way to relate to the

other spheres of societal life. The pupils are also expected to understand the process of creation of art, from the inspiration of the artist to the completion of the piece; to form their own position towards the different arts, and to form aesthetic values, feelings and experiences; to develop their own creativity, and to tolerate the ideas and stances of others. Given that for this course there are absolutely no official textbooks or centralized materials and methods of study, it cannot be expected that these goals are achieved, especially since the vast majority of them are interdisciplinary and need a wider contextualization. Although some of the courses in the philosophical corpus present in the high school curricula of the countries in the region do include topics pertaining to the area of aesthetics, Macedonia is the only country that offers it as a separate course, which means that a brief comparative overview is not possible.

## Conclusion

It might be concluded that a certain part of the didactic goals of the courses of the philosophical corpus are attainable, and with that, extraordinarily applicable and useful for the overall improvement of the pupils, both in their knowledge gained from the four courses analyzed (on the basic topics of the history of philosophy; the logical categorial apparatus; the morals, ethics, values and civic consciousness; the perception of the artwork and beauty, and other fundamental themes), and for the development of a general metaphysical sensibility, and of various capabilities for creative, critical, autonomous thinking, substantiated argumentation, tolerant communication, and an awareness for their own worth and the responsibilities to their communities and to the world.

In order for these designed goals to be attainable (or as attainable as possible), following our analysis of the course curricula from Macedonia and the countries in the region, as well as the precious empirical insight gained from the project (a seminar with high school teachers, surveys, focus-groups), some conclusions were reached. The main problems, and, with that, the main issues to remedy are: a new, topical and contextually suitable textbook/reader is needed for the course Philosophy (obligatory), and a textbook (which would also be “new” in a sense, since there have not been any) for the course Philosophy (elective). For the course Ethics, an awareness needs to be raised that, due to its importance and practical applicability, certain changes should be implemented so that it can be offered to all the years of high school; it could also profit from a wider selection of textbooks available, in touch with the contemporary ethical problems. The course Aesthetics should have textbooks/readers (as there are none). There are some other modifications which could be favorable to the attainment of the goals, but also to the general status of the courses (cf. Донеv et al, 2019).

Although in the empirical research within the University project of the Institute for philosophy, the participants in the one-day seminar, teachers in high schools from across the country, evaluated which goals are best achieved in which courses, there was no empirical survey on the perception of (a sample of) the pupils about the plausibility and feasibility of the goals. Such a survey would not have been focused on the main objectives of the project, which was the status and the upgrade of the course syllabi of the philosophical corpus. A survey on the pupils would have to include a longitudinal follow-up, and the possibility to compare the acquired skills (especially those most typical for the aims of the philosophical education – critical thinking, autonomous analysis, understanding and application of values etc.) of the pupils before and after the courses, compared to a control group, and also after an allotted time-period. This was not one of the goals of the Institute’s project, nor of the present paper.

The courses’ goals from the Macedonian philosophical corpus largely correspond to those from the countries of the region. The greatest differences can be spotted in the Philosophy and Ethics courses in the Croatian system, and in the Philosophy courses in the Bulgarian system, wherein the goals are not only much broader, more thorough, wide-encompassing, far-reaching, and properly contextualized, they are also more attainable, resulting from their correspondence

to the courses' contents, and the number of classes available, far greater than those in the Macedonian high-school system (and those of the other analyzed countries). This could serve as a useful pointer for the further restriction of our high-school system: allowing for more classes in the courses from the philosophical corpus, with the improvements previously mentioned, would allow for a greater attainability of the didactic goals, and thus, an improvement in the pupils' philosophical education. The simple general point of the analysis of the didactic goals of the philosophical courses' syllabi is that we need **more** philosophy in our lives, not less, and a great place to start is precisely in the high school curricula.

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