

The Long History of Philosophy as a School Subject in Finland: Continuities and Controversies

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Introduction

There is a widespread and persistent misconception of philosophy being a new and young school subject in Finland. The reason for this misrepresentation is that philosophy returned in a renewed form as a compulsory high school subject only as recently as in 1994, after being an optional subject since the early 1970s and very rarely studied in the 1980s in particular. Thus, fewer and fewer people (including teachers and headmasters) remember the times preceding these decades through their own school studies. In reality, however, the historical perspective is very different. The main purpose of my article is to demonstrate that this perception of philosophy as a newcomer is thoroughly incorrect and to provide an overview of the history of teaching philosophy in the Finnish school system. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the varying and contentious interpretations of the identity of the subject. The history has both continuities and breaks, and some of the interpretations and decisions made have had long-lasting consequences for the fate of the subject. Disputes over the subject's alignment have been an enduring feature at least throughout the independent Finland's school history.

In the following, I will offer a concise excursion to the long line of teaching philosophy in the Finnish upper secondary schools (*lukio*, equivalent to high school, *lycée*, *gymnasium*, *bachillerato*) from the 16th century to the present, reviewing the main institutional phases and curricular changes chronologically. I will focus more on the pre-contemporary history, which is less known than the stages of the new advent of upper

secondary school philosophy since the early 1990s. I conclude with a brief overview of the major disputes on the nature of the subject in the modern period throughout the 20th century.¹

Philosophy has been present in several guises in the Finnish school system throughout the history of the pre-university curricula. Philosophical contents, topics and textbooks were already included during the 16th, 17th and 18th century, and since the mid-19th century, philosophy figured in the earliest specified institutional curricula as a compulsory subject under such titles as 'logic', 'psychology' and 'moral lessons'. The recognizable roots of the modern subject date back to the beginning of the 20th century when the 'basics of philosophy' was instituted as a compulsory high school subject in the first core curriculum of independent Finland in 1918.

Despite the fluctuations in philosophy's history as a school subject, there are also marked continuities in its aims and contents, as well as in the problems its teaching has posed and the criticisms it has been subjected to. The most significant curricular and pedagogical problem was its subordinate relationship to the teaching of religion and psychology, which hindered its development as a subject until the 1990s. The most enduring pedagogical tension through the 20th century was the conflict between the aims and content: the ideal formative aims of developing thinking skills and encouraging students' self-reflection of their worldviews and life philosophies colliding with the reality of an academic school subject, with historically presented or otherwise content heavy textbooks and the pressure of preparing for the written matriculation examination. However, this is only one of the key issues and sources for the recurring disagreements which I summarise at the end of the article.

The First Centuries of Formal Education

If one has a basic sense of the cultural history of the systems of education and science, it would not be too difficult to infer that philosophy must have been present since the early days in that part of the formal school curricula that prepares students for

¹ I draw from and elaborate the extensive overview of the history of Finnish upper secondary school philosophy that I presented in my research monograph (Tomperi 2017, 114-200).

academic studies at the university. The medieval conception of the so-called *septem artes liberales* (*trivium*: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic or logic; *quadrivium*: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) gradually took diverse concrete forms in emerging early modern European national and local cultures and gave rise to different arrangements of formal schooling. Alongside the obvious foundation of Christian theology, Biblical studies and remnants of scholasticism, Classical Greek and Roman authors (especially Aristotle and Cicero) were held in high esteem within this constellation, and later it was influenced by humanistic scholars (Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives and Petrus Ramus among the most prominent of them) and rising ideas of early modern pedagogues (Jan Amos Comenius in particular). This was the case in the Kingdom of Sweden, as well, the province or eastern part of which Finland remained until 1809.²

Philosophy was one of the oldest subjects indicated in the Swedish (and thus Finnish) upper secondary school syllabi. However, we must recognize that this is partly a matter of definition, since we need to remember how significantly the meaning of the term 'philosophy' and its referent have changed over the centuries. Earliest instances of philosophy in school curricula of 16th through to 19th century are found under different names: 'logic', 'metaphysics', 'moral philosophy' or 'practical philosophy' (corresponding to the later 'politics', 'civics' or 'social studies'), 'moral lessons' or 'moral studies' (ethics, in Finnish of the time the obsolete 'siveysoppi', literally 'chastity teachings') and psychology (in Finnish the obsolete 'sielutiede', 'science of soul', a literal translation of the Greek *psyche* + *logos*).³ As long as 'philosophy' served as a generic term for much of academic study and the as yet undifferentiated later empirical human and social sciences, the term itself was too broad to be used as a denomination for a single school subject. The lists of early upper secondary school subjects

² For a general overview of educational systems in Europe, see Bowen 1975 (esp. Ch. 12–14); in Finland, see Joutsivuo 2010; Nuorteva 2001; Tähtinen & Hovi 2007. The indispensable main source on the developments of philosophy in Finnish academic and scientific history is the recently published *A History of Philosophy and Psychology in Finland, 1809–1917* by Manninen, Ihanus, Jalava & Niiniluoto (2021). I refer the reader to it in places for comparison and a broader picture.

³ As a comprehensive historical account, see Hanho 1947 (esp. Ch. I and IV).

show, however, that what was later to become simply philosophy or taken to be sub-fields of philosophy, figured in the syllabi in many guises.

Until the 19th century, learning reading, writing and eloquence in Latin dominated the content of formal education, alongside Biblical studies and the Greek language. To take as an example a quick snapshot from the earliest official national school regulations ('*koulujärjestys*') for the grammar schools ('*oppikoulu*'), instituted by the first Lutheran Archbishop of Sweden, Laurentius Petri, in 1571, it illustrates the difficulty of defining what 'studying philosophy' could mean at that point: "The curriculum generally emphasized strong moral guidance. Young people were required to carefully read a set of Bible verses, aphorisms and life precepts, which were considered suitable for instilling decency (*civilitas morum*), piety and chastity. With this in mind, the school regulations prescribed as textbooks *Disticha Moralia* by Cato, *Praecepta morum* by Camerarius, *De officiis* by Cicero, the Aesop's *Fables*, *De civilitate morum* and *Colloquia familiaria* by Erasmus." (Hanho 1947, 16.)⁴

The first *gymnasium* ('*kymnaasi*', to which I will be referring somewhat anachronistically in the following as the 'upper secondary school' for consistency) was established in 1630 by upgrading the status of the Turku cathedral school and appointing more lecturers. Ten years later it was further upgraded into the first university in Finland, Academy of Turku, in 1640. At that point a new gymnasium was established in Vyborg, later to be moved to Porvoo to escape the Great Northern War (1700–1721). New school regulations for the grammar schools, *trivial schools* ('*triviaalikoulu*') and the new *gymnasia* were given in 1611, 1649, 1693, 1724 and 1778. However, the practical impact of the official decrees on teaching was usually very limited. One of the *gymnasium's* seven required lecturers was designated for 'history and practical philosophy', also teaching 'moral studies', and another lecturer for 'logic and physics' (or 'natural philosophy'). For instance, according to the regulations of 1724, *Logicus* and *Metaphysica*, as well as *Historica* and *Ethica*, were among the subjects in syllabi. The teaching of logic was based above all on Aristotle's philosophy, as described in the textbooks of the period, and was accompanied

⁴ All translations from Finnish are by the author of the article.

to a lesser extent by the teaching of metaphysics. Upper secondary schools were also meant to teach 'practical philosophy' as civics (*disciplina civilis*), using textbooks on moral philosophy written by German scholars, such as *De officio hominis et civis* (1673) by Samuel Pufendorf, professor at Lund University (1668–1676), based on his important main work on the theory of natural law. (Hanho 1947, 215–293; Heikel 1940; Joutsivuo 2010, 116–139; Tähtinen & Hovi 2007; see also Manninen et al. 2021, 11–15.)

In order to get a more solid picture of the reality of formal education in practice and a more comparable starting point to the modern era, it is necessary to move forward to the mid-nineteenth century. In the 19th century, as the country became part of the Russian Empire since 1809, the school system expanded and its regulation became more specific. In the 1843 school regulations, provisions were made for establishing new upper secondary schools, defining their subjects, and appointing lecturers. Initially, there were upper secondary classes in six cities (Vyborg, Porvoo, Helsinki, Turku, Kuopio and Vaasa), and towards the end of the 19th century the number of upper secondary schools doubled. The division of subjects was adjusted to better align with evolving conceptions of the relationships and boundaries between academic disciplines. The list of subjects in 1843 regulations included, as a single subject, 'moral science, logic and psychology' (or 'science of soul', 'sielutiede', as mentioned above), intended especially for those aspiring to clerical or governmental careers, and taught by a lecturer in philosophy. (Hanho 1955, 55–85.)

In the 1856 school regulations, upper secondary schools were divided into civil service *lycea* (*lyceum*, 'lyseo' had now been adopted as the main term for upper secondary) and 'general education' *lycea* for priests, teachers and aspiring administrators. Both types of *lycea* included two weekly lessons of 'psychology and logic' across all three grades. However, a change with far-reaching repercussions was made: to make room for a teacher of the new natural sciences, the post of lecturer in philosophy was abolished, and the teaching of psychology and logic was transferred to the lecturer in religion, while the lecturer in history was assigned the teaching of natural and state law, originally intended for the lecturer in philosophy. 'Moral studies' (ethics), on the other hand, was

combined with religion and church history, and later disappeared as a subject altogether, merging into religious education. (Hanho 1955, 78–79, 113, 119–124, 305–363.) The consequences of these arrangements largely persisted even through the 20th century. Teachers of religious education were responsible for teaching philosophy and psychology, and ethics was never taught as a separate subject but only as a part of religion (and later also of the parallel secular subject ‘elämänkatsomustieto’, ‘worldview/life-view education’). Teachers of history, meanwhile, held the task of teaching social studies. These connections only unraveled very late and had a significant limiting effect on the possibilities for philosophy to develop as a fully-fledged independent school subject.⁵

Some insight into the nature of the subject in the 19th century can be gained from the decrees of the Turku Cathedral Chapter, according to which the following works were available and approved to be used in teaching logic and psychology: the Kantian German professor J. G. C. C. Kiesewetter’s translated *Lärobok i logiken* (1806; ‘Textbook on logic’)⁶, Swedish L. M. Engberg’s *Försök till lärobok i psykologien* (1824; ‘An attempt at a textbook on psychology’) and the Hegelian F. G. Afzelius’ *Utkast till Lärobok i logiken för elementarundervisningen* (1839; ‘A draft for a textbook in logic for elementary education’), and

⁵ Philosophy and psychology were not officially separated as subjects until the end of the 1970s, and teacher training for philosophy majors began only in the mid-1990s. Social studies was officially separated as a subject from history in 2003. And it wasn’t until the national core curriculum of 2015 that ethics started being taught in common to all upper secondary school students within the subject of philosophy.

⁶ Kiesewetter had studied shortly in Königsberg under Immanuel Kant and participated closely in Kant’s personal circle. Kiesewetter’s lectures and books on Aristelian-Kantian logic were popular for decades. The shortest textbook for schools mentioned above, originally *Logik zum Gebrauch für Schulen* (1797), had been translated into Russian as well, which probably contributed to its approval as a textbook in Finland under Russian rule (Krouglov 2011). G. I. Hartman, perhaps the most advanced and original philosopher of his time at the Academy of Turku, also refers to Kiesewetter in his dissertation on the theory of knowledge, *De tribus gradibus persuasionis (des Fürwahrhaltens): credere: opinari: scire* (About the three grades of persuasion (Fürwahrhalten): believing, supposing, and knowing), Hartman (1808/2007); see also Manninen et al. 2021, 24–26.

later, Finnish Z. J. Cleve's Hegel-influenced *Försök till lärobok i psykologi* (1854; 'An attempt at a textbook on psychology'). (Hanho 1955, 265–291.) Cleve was initially the principal of Kuopio *lyceum* and later the professor of pedagogy and didactics at the University of Helsinki (former Academy of Turku), becoming one of the most influential academics and educators of the time. The Finnish translation of the mentioned work as *Sielutieteen oppikirja* (1859; 'Textbook on soul-science') was the first publication in the field in Finnish language. Through this list we can also notice the gradual transition from Kantianism to Hegelianism that took place in Finnish academic learning during the first half of the 19th century.⁷

For a large part of the 19th century, psychology and logic were seen as the core areas of philosophical research into the (natural, non-religious) forms and sources of knowledge available to the human mind and as such very close to each other. Only much later, and in parallel with the increasing criticism of psychologism, did perceptions of the scope of philosophy change, when psychology evolved into empirical research and logic became independent as a formal science. Both were still regarded at that time mainly as the study of the conditions, forms, principles and rules of human mind and thought, and thus as branches of the theory of knowledge under the general philosophical science of the mind or soul (and philosophical anthropology). Consequently, logic and psychology were often regarded as *propaedeutic* – preparatory – foundational disciplines supporting other philosophical and scientific research, and their combined significance was emphasised in many leading 19th century works and textbooks.⁸

The great long-standing debate in formal education during the 19th century concerned the balance between the old classical literary learning (Latin and Greek languages, classical authors and history) and the rising new practical and natural 'real' sciences. The long-dominant Latin was weakened towards the end of the century, although it still remained as the

⁷ For a comprehensive account, see Manninen et al. 2021 (Pt. 2).

⁸ On the views of Finnish professors of the time from Cleve and Snellman to Rein in this issue, see Manninen et al. 2021, 216–234. For a general overview in the history of philosophy, see e. g. Kusch 1995, 93–119; Haaparanta 2009; Vilkkö 2009.

major upper secondary school subject alongside mathematics as late as in the early 1880s. The amount of psychology and logic first decreased to two courses (two weekly hours) that were eventually taught in the last year of studies, and after the 1872 regulations, only one course of logic remained. When upper secondary schools were divided in 1883 into two types (or two lines, if they were available in the same institution), the new 'real' *lyceum* and the traditional classical *lyceum*, philosophy was studied only in the latter of these. It could be studied as an optional alternative to Russian language for a maximum of four courses. (Hanho 1955, 305–363; Kiuasmaa 1982, 19–26.)

Philosophy's status was not strong, but it never disappeared completely. Perhaps philosophy was able to maintain its position by sitting on two rather different chairs: it appeared as a part of classical literary education through Cicero's speeches and the humanists' treatises learned in Latin, as well as later contemplative essays and the assimilation of virtuous examples and life lessons from reflective literature; but on the other hand, the 'core' of modern philosophy, understood as psychology and logic of the time, was seen as a useful theoretical pre-university grounding for further studies. This, too, can be seen as an instance of ambiguities about the nature of philosophy, reflected in the controversies about philosophy as a school subject later on.

The 20th Century: Philosophy and Psychology

By the early 20th century, psychology had proved its potential for advancement as an empirical science, and logic had taken groundbreaking steps in formalisation. Now 'philosophy' as such appears as a name of the school subject in the new school regulations of 1914 as an optional subject with two courses both in the classical and the real stream of *lyceum*. Then, perhaps surprisingly, in the first school regulations and curricula in the decrees of the Senate of independent Finland in 1918, the 'Basics of Philosophy' ('Filosofian alkeet') was made a compulsory subject for all, including in the girls' lyceums, which were a part of the still largely gender-segregated upper secondary system. Philosophy was studied for two hours a week in the last two years of secondary school, four courses in total, in all types of lyceums. The Matriculation examination was

reformed during the same years, and philosophy entered the newly founded 'real' exam (essay test in humanities and natural sciences) with one question yearly. These regulations remained in effect for a long time, despite numerous proposals for reform, until 1941. (Kiuasmaa 1982, 61–69; Kaarninen & Kaarninen 2002, 60–65, 74–87.)

Now for the first time the Finnish senate (in 1916) had also confirmed written descriptions for the different subjects in the curriculum. The 'Basics of Philosophy' was specified in two short sentences: "A short course in psychology with a special focus on spiritual development and self-education. The main points of the criticism of knowledge historically illuminated."⁹ The duality I mentioned above is noticeable in this description: on the one hand, the subject was still seen as character-educational and uplifting as an excursion to the philosophies of life, while on the other hand, it reflected the academically grounded themes of psychology and criticism of knowledge. We can also notice another issue that has persistently divided views on the teaching of philosophy: the historical dimension of the subject. Ottelin (1931, 29) offers a synoptic view of the developments from the perspective of intellectual and cultural history:

Neo-humanism did not consider philosophy as a separate subject, because the entire education, especially the reading of classical literature, was supposed to be permeated with humanism. The philosophical idealism soon collapsed under its excessive conceptual structures, leading to aversion towards philosophy as a whole. Additionally, knowledge began to branch into numerous scientific disciplines, making comprehensive mastery increasingly difficult. Philosophy disappeared from the curriculum of most schools, so that by the turn of the century, only a brief course in logic and psychology remained, often even less. However, the increasing fragmentation of knowledge also led to a renewed desire for connection and unity. Already before the First World War, interest in philosophy began to revive.

The first Finnish language textbook covering the entire subject, *Filosofian alkeiden oppikirja* ('Textbook for the basics of

⁹ Curricular standards for lyceums and secondary schools established by the Senate in 1916, in *Oppikoulu-käsikirja* 1920, 420.

philosophy') by Paavo Virkkunen, had been published in 1915. It can be assumed that the textbook had a decisive impact on the formulation of the curriculum and the trajectory of philosophy as a subject in the early decades of the 20th century. Virkkunen was a remarkably influential figure in many respects in Finnish politics, culture and education of the time, but in this regard the most important aspect was his position as the principal of the Finnish Normal Lyceum in Helsinki (1908–1918). At that time all the Finnish speaking secondary school subject teachers were educated in this institution, and thus Virkkunen as its principal had considerable influence on the earliest developments of upper secondary teaching in independent Finland.¹⁰ About three-quarters of the textbook deals with elementary 'science of soul', psychology. Virkkunen justifies the approach as follows:

The vague name of 'Basics of Philosophy' and the breadth of this discipline can make one uncertain about what should be included in this course, especially considering the relatively limited time allotted for its completion. I myself have not the slightest doubt that the core of this syllabus is to be an introductory course in psychology. Only on this basis can the basic questions of philosophy be taught in schools.

... The most important questions of logic, aesthetics and ethics naturally find their place within the presentation of the system of psychology. Teaching shows how philosophical questions gradually emerge from the general study of the life of the soul. After the study thus arranged, it is fitting to examine certain basic philosophical problems that now appear in their proper place, having been prepared by the preceding instruction. (Virkkunen 1938/1915, III–IV.)

Virkkunen's reasoning clearly continues to be strongly influenced by the propaedeutic view of philosophy as a preparation for deeper acquaintance with other academic-scientific contents, and psychology as the foundational core for other topics

¹⁰ Paavo Virkkunen (1874–1959; formerly Snellman) was a Doctor of Theology, Lutheran priest and vicar (1918–1951), prominent politician, member of the Parliament for the Coalition Party for 30 years (and briefly the Chairman of the party), the Speaker of the Parliament for several years, and shortly the Minister of Education.

within philosophy. The centrality of psychology and its structuring in the textbook is clearly influenced above all by professor Thiodolf Rein's textbook on psychology (in Finnish, *Sielutieteen oppikirja*, 1884).¹¹ There are many similarities between Rein's book on psychology and Virkkunen's textbook. For instance, both present the triad of faculties of cognition, emotion and will, which was still the dominant conception of the dimensions of human psyche at the time, although it was already being subjected to strong criticism in the wake of empirical psychology.¹²

In a couple of decades another two textbooks were published, *Filosofian alkeiden oppikirja – oppikouluja varten* (1925; 'Textbook of the basics of philosophy – for the secondary schools') by lecturer Yrjö Ora, and the lighter and shorter *Filosofian alkeet* (1932; 'The basics of philosophy') by author, journalist and sportsman, PhD Heikki Lehmusto. Both had psychology as the main part of the content, although not quite as dominantly as in Virkkunen's book. The first half of Ora's textbook deals with the main features of psychology and the slightly shorter second half with logic, aesthetics, ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. Ora rephrases the established structural justification clearly:

A prerequisite for assessing the validity of a philosophical worldview is a study of the possibilities and limits of human knowledge, a question which, in turn, requires a psychological investigation into how thinking occurs in reality. And without taking into account the facts of emotional and volitional life, it is

¹¹ Rein had been appointed to the position of Professor of Philosophy at the University of Helsinki in 1869, succeeding J. V. Snellman. During his long tenure, Rein had also written influential and much-used textbooks on logic (in Swedish, *Lärobok i formell logik*; in Finnish, *Muodollisen logiikan oppikirja*; both published in 1882), pioneering the formulation of new Finnish scientific terminology in psychology, logic and philosophy; see e. g. Manninen et al. 2021, 222–234.

¹² The triad 'faculties of mind/soul' also features in the works of Mikael Soininen, the most prominent Finnish educationalist and educational theorist of his time, such as his *Kasvatusopilliset luennot* (1895; 'Lectures on Educational Theory') and *Opetusoppi I* (1901; 'Didactics'), as well as in Virkkunen's own work, *Kasvatusopin luonnos* (1906; 'Sketch for an Educational Theory'). For an overview on the issue in Swedish(-Finnish) philosophy and psychology textbooks of the time, see Rydberg 2008, 31–41.

not possible to arrive at a satisfactory lifeview. Thus, psychology remains the foundation on which all philosophical thought must be built. Closely connected with it is formal logic, i.e. the doctrine of formally correct thinking. Both are called the *preparatory (propaedeutic)* branches of philosophy. (Ora 1925, 10–11.)

Judging from the textbooks, it appears that within upper secondary school education, views on the nature of psychology and the boundaries of philosophy were a decade or two behind the scientific changes taking place in universities. Regarding the advancements in empirical psychological research, Lehmusto's later book is even more outdated than the preceding ones by Virkkunen and Ora. School subjects are always slower to change than scientific disciplines, but in the case of philosophy this lag became a particularly significant issue and an object of criticism for decades in Finnish debates on the subject.

The next decree on the national curriculum was issued in 1941, and the division of the upper secondary school curriculum into a mathematical stream and a language stream was established. The subject was now renamed 'psychology and philosophy', in line with the prevailing practice and content, and reflecting the scientific development of psychology. In the curriculum of the last few classical lyceums, it remained a common subject for all, with two hours a week in the last two years of secondary school, as before. In all the other upper secondary schools, it was instead an optional alternative subject to biology and geography. (Kiuasmaa 1982, 324–327, 637–638, Appendices.)

The 1975 decree abolished the parallel linear system and introduced a new curriculum for all upper secondary schools. It divided subjects into compulsory subjects and optional ones, the latter including psychology and philosophy. This finally put an end to the already rare special status of philosophy in the classical lyceum curricula. The subject had to compete with physics, chemistry, geography, arts and music, among others, for the few optional weekly hours that pupils could fit into their timetable. In 1977, the Upper Secondary School Curriculum Committee proposed the formal separation of the subjects of psychology and philosophy. The new curriculum for upper secondary schools, established in 1982, separated the curricula of psychology and philosophy in accordance with the

proposal. However, now only psychology was made a national elective subject for all upper secondary schools and students, with 3–5 courses, while philosophy was relegated to the status of a school-specific (optionally offered) elective subject with 1–2 courses. (Kiuasmaa 1982, 455–466, 645–646.) This decision reflected the relationship between the subject areas of psychology and philosophy and the proportional difference in the weighting of the content taught.

The subject of psychology had already effectively become detached from philosophy in school well before their formal separation. As psychology had become established as an empirical science, both the original theoretical justification and the practical rationale for the close link between the disciplines disappeared. Their separation as scientific disciplines had been institutionalised in Finland when the first chair for a professor of psychology was established at the University of Jyväskylä in 1936. The professorship of psychology was separated from theoretical philosophy and established at the University of Helsinki in 1951. The first professor of the discipline at Helsinki, Kai von Fieandt (1947, 7), defined psychology in his academic textbook in no uncertain terms as a ‘biological science’, a “study of life governed by the central nervous system”.

In secondary school textbooks, the teaching of psychology took off on its own when professor of psychology Arvo Lehtovaara’s textbook on psychology, *Kokeellista menetelmää noudattava sielutieteen oppikirja* (“Psychology textbook according to the empirical method”), appeared in 1945. It was not until ten years later that professor of adult education Urpo Harva’s *Suuria ajattelijointa* (1955, “Great thinkers”) appeared as a new textbook for philosophy and turned out to be the book that similarly dominated philosophy teaching for the next decades. Harva’s book was much more limited in content than Lehtovaara’s, reflecting the difference in the number of hours taught. The immediate and sustained popularity of Lehtovaara’s textbook showed how in the context of a still formally and nominally common subject, the amount of courses and proportion of content taught in psychology had become

considerably higher.¹³ The increased share of psychology was also clearly reflected in the Matriculation exam. Initially, philosophy was included in the subject group Religion, Church History and Philosophy, and there was one question yearly focused on philosophy. In 1950 the subject group was divided into two parts, Religious Studies and Church History, and Psychology and Philosophy. There were now five questions for both religion and psychology, and still only one for philosophy. Psychology gradually became one of the most popular subjects in the 'real' exam, with the third highest number of answers, after history and religion, between 1971 and 1990. (Kaarninen & Kaarninen 2002, 181–183, 266–269, 314.)

Harva's textbook *Suuria ajattelijoita* was a short, essentially booklet-like cavalcade of the history of philosophy, introducing 15 philosophers from Socrates to Nietzsche, and including a very short concluding chapter on 'philosophy in this century'. This historical approach through 'great philosophers' was probably in keeping with the established way philosophy was usually taught in schools. The approach was repeatedly criticised by academic philosophers, but the criticism did not have practical effect on the teaching of the subject.¹⁴ The debate on the backwardness of school philosophy was particularly visible in the 1960s, in the context of major Finnish school reforms. The philosopher Erkka Maula published a textbook, *Filosofian aapinen* ('Philosophy ABC', 1968), in an attempt to revise the subject to reflect the main contemporary issues in academic philosophy, and insisting on the history of philosophy to be transferred to the subject of history: "...if the subject of history continues to examine the influence of major currents of thought in the past, I believe that the teaching of philosophy in schools can present the basics of the systematics of contemporary philosophy"¹⁵. However, Maula's book remained very little used in upper secondary schools, so evidently the approach did not appeal to teachers.¹⁶

¹³ After the initial publication, there were reprints almost yearly, adding up to, for instance, 14th revised edition in 1963; see Tomperi 2017, 133.

¹⁴ More on this debate, see Tomperi 2017 (esp. Ch. 3.3).

¹⁵ Maula 1968, 6. See also, Maula 1965.

¹⁶ This cannot, however, be attributed solely to its thematic non-historical approach, as it is in many ways a failure as a textbook and was also heavily criticised when it was published, see Tomperi 2017, 173–175.

A few years later, Harva published two new textbooks for the now reformed curriculum, *Maailmankatsomuksen ongelmia* (1973; 'Problems of the worldview'; 6th ed. 1980) and *Moraalin ongelmia* ('Problems of morality'; 4th ed. 1980). Judging by the number of editions, they also had a considerably large school circulation, unlike Maula's textbook. However, Harva's original and in many ways outdated *Suuria ajattelijoita* remained the most popular textbook by far and went through numerous editions (without any revisions according to the new curricula), being still read even in the late 1980s. As late as 1989 and 1995, the 15th and 16th editions of Harva's book were published.

The numerous reprints of Harva's three books suggest that philosophy was still taught in a considerable number of secondary schools up to the early 1980s. However, as philosophy became only a possible school-specific optional subject, it almost disappeared from upper secondary education during the 1980s. It was only at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s that the number of students began to increase slightly: In 1987–88 there were about 500 students studying philosophy and it was taught in about 35 upper secondary schools (out of a total of about 500 upper secondary schools), in 1989–90 there were 1742 students, and in 1992–93 philosophy was taught in about 120 upper secondary schools to more than 3500 students.¹⁷ Then eventually, the subject of philosophy was transformed and modernised in one decisive swoop when it was made compulsory for all in the 1994 curricula, after which all the more than 35 000 students starting upper secondary school took at least the one required introductory course. From the 2015 curriculum onwards, there have been two compulsory courses of philosophy (introduction and ethics) for all.

These latest developments, however, are recent history, and thus another story, better known today than the subject's previous centuries. The main point of the article has become now clear: in one way or another, philosophy has been present in Finnish upper secondary schools without a break throughout the history of formal education. Interpretations of the nature

¹⁷ Nordenbo 1997. The figures may not be complete and certainly not precise, but a corresponding picture emerges from the increase in the number of answers to the matriculation examination, see Elo 1994.

and function of the subject have varied, and sometimes it has been optional or taught only in some forms of upper secondary education, but at no point has it disappeared from upper secondary education completely.

Enduring Criticisms and Controversies

There is, of course, much more to be said of the subject's trajectories and challenges during the last 100 years, but I will end up characterising briefly the main topics for debate that have recurred several times along this long history. Throughout the 20th century, the subject often drew severe criticism, and most commentators, philosophers and educationalists alike, were dissatisfied with the way the subject was presented and taught in schools, albeit for different reasons. In what follows, I will not take any positions on the resolution of the controversies but will simply present the most important of them as a historical overview of the problems faced in reconstructing philosophy as a school subject.¹⁸

At least the following problems have been repeatedly debated since the early 20th century in discussions on philosophy's place in schools:

- Should philosophy be an independent subject or integrated to other subjects and topics?
- Should it be compulsory for all or only optional for those who are academically gifted or oriented to continue to universities?
- Should it concentrate on the disciplinary substance and contents (presented either historically or thematically) or focus on practicing the skills of philosophical thinking (and whether these can be condensed in a method or particular forms of reasoning)?
- Should it offer a synoptic picture of philosophy as a discipline or focus only on those sub-problems that are held to be the most relevant in contemporary academic philosophy and/or the most useful for students today?
- Should the history of philosophy be a part of the subject (and how essential), or should the curriculum concentrate on

¹⁸ For a comprehensive account (including some positioning), see Tomperi 2017 (esp. Ch. 3 and 5).

contemporary philosophical problems and advances? Does the history of philosophy rather belong to the curriculum of history?

- Should it distill the contemporary academic discipline of philosophy or also draw from different other interpretations (historical, literary, artistic etc.) of what philosophy can be and has been?

- Who should be eligible to teach philosophy? Does the teaching require deep acquaintance with philosophy as a discipline or are graduates with a master's degree in other disciplines (religion, psychology, history) also capable of teaching philosophy competently?

For the most part of the 20th century, there was recurring debate on the competence of teachers of religion to teach philosophy. The controversy arose from the practical reality that, because of the structure of the profession and teaching posts and the relationship between subjects, it was religious education teachers who almost invariably taught philosophy (and psychology) until the late 1990s. The same pattern often still prevails, although since the mid-1990s it has been possible to become a subject teacher with a Major in philosophy. Without taking a position on the question as such, it is clear, however, that the independent development of philosophy as a subject in Finland was substantially hindered and curtailed by its subordination to religion and psychology as school subjects. It was only in the 1990s that the actual development of the subject didactics of philosophy began.

In Finland, psychology had an exceptionally strong position, even by international standards, first as a subfield of philosophy and then as an independent empirical science, at a time when the relationship between the disciplines was taking shape. In the 1880s, Rein's most important students, Arvid Grotenfelt and Hjalmar Neiglick, visited Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig and both wrote their dissertations on experimental psychology, as did Eino Kaila, who was appointed professor of philosophy after Grotenfelt. (See e.g. Salmela 2007; Silvonon 2006; Manninen et al. 2021, 234–259.) Especially Rein's and Grotenfelt's views had a clear influence on Virkkunen's and other educationalists' understanding of the role of psychology within the subject of philosophy. Kaila, for his part, emerged as the leading figure in Finnish science and

academy, establishing the importance of psychological research. Although psychology gradually became differentiated as a scientific discipline, as a school subject it remained combined with philosophy and gained a dominant position within the common subject.

The second factor contributing to a kind of instability and lack of consolidation of philosophy as a subject stemmed from the many differences in interpretations on the nature of philosophy itself, even after psychology had already diverged onto its own path. Synthesising the disputes I listed above, one can see at least a threefold tension that persisted throughout the 20th century. The first interpretation regarded philosophy as a culturally significant subject for general education, introducing the history of Western thought by discussing prominent historical philosophers. The second interpretation saw philosophy as a progressing academic discipline, largely detached from its history. And thirdly, philosophy was seen as an explorer of questions of life, summarising, clarifying and harmonising the worldview of the individual, for which philosophical themes and reflections on wider culture (literature, history, art) were also useful. In the textbooks mentioned above, this division is evident: Harva's first book represented the historical approach, whereas Maula's book followed an academic disciplinary structure, and Harva's later books engaged in existential and moral contemplation, drawing from a variety of sources beyond the confines of academic philosophy or its history.

These oscillations, particularly in the main decades of the scientific renewal of philosophy and psychology, led to a sense of unease about the state of the subject and to proposals to remove it from schools, by both educationalists and philosophers. For instance, the textbook-author and educator Ora (1943, 60) wrote:

The first question that arises is whether there is any subject that could be completely removed from the curriculum. I would answer for my part: there is one, namely the basics of philosophy. This subject, which I myself have taught for years, has been part of the syllabus for twenty years, but now seems ripe for removal. The results of its teaching have been severely criticised by the university, and the course is now largely obsolete. Reform of the course, on the other hand, faces great difficulties when the

disciplines of psychology and philosophy are currently in such an unstable state as they are at present.

Ora's thoughts echo almost word for word philosopher G. H. von Wright's (1943, 269) essay on the state of school philosophy, published the same year:

It should be pointed out, however, that a truly purposeful reorganisation of school philosophy, if it is undertaken, will face great difficulties. These are partly due to the fact that, even in university teaching, it has not been possible to meet by far all the requirements which are appropriate to the subject itself. Against this background, one could even take a strong stance against the teaching of philosophy in schools and propose the total or partial abolition of it. Such a measure would in fact be a step forward in many respects compared with the desperate situation in which philosophy is currently taught in our schools....

In that essay, already 80 years ago, von Wright (1943, 269) also succinctly encapsulated a version of the most persistent dilemma inherent in the nature of philosophy as a school subject:

The teaching of philosophy (including psychology) in schools seeks to promote two purposes that are quite sharply distinguishable. The first is to widen the pupils' knowledge of new facts, the second is to mature their general intellectual level and sharpen their logical instincts.

This is the problem of balance between learning substantial content knowledge and practising (philosophical) thinking skills I already mentioned in the Introduction. The problem continues to stimulate the most pertinent discussions within the field of philosophy didactics today. However, the current psychological and educational understanding of the issue is more forgiving than von Wright's dilemma: by now, it is acknowledged that subject/discipline-specific thinking skills cannot be learned without a thorough understanding of the content; they cannot be separated, but the persistent challenge is to operationalise how best to put this relationship into practice. The problem is undoubtedly a perennially difficult one for the didactics of philosophy, but the guidelines von Wright (1943, 272) proposed still serve as a useful point of reference in the pursuit of this goal:

A. The teaching must be comprehensible, i.e. it must not contain anything that could only be acquired by mechanical memorization.

B. Teaching must remain as close as possible to the rest of the world of knowledge transmitted to the pupils.¹⁹

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¹⁹ However, von Wright's own proposition does not seem quite realistic, either in his time or today: he suggested that the main substance of school philosophy courses should consist of (1) formal logic, and (2) epistemology, the latter of which "should be centred around two main problems: the question of the nature of deductive, mainly mathematical, reasoning on the one hand, and the nature of inductive, or generalised, empirical knowledge on the other". In this we surely can hear echoes of his early logical empiricism and of the young philosopher's recent dissertation *The Logical Problem of Inductivism* (1941).

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