
PHILOSOPHY FOR YOUNG THINKERS
Second Edition, Revised

Table of Contents

Intended Uses of This Book	v
Preface	vi
Preface To The Second Edition	viii

PART ONE: Philosophy at the Precollege Level

CHAPTER ONE	– Teaching For Understanding	1
CHAPTER TWO	– Philosophically Speaking	9
CHAPTER THREE	– Philosophy: A Values-Centered Approach	15

PART TWO: A Multidisciplinary Curriculum for Gifted Education

CHAPTER FOUR	– A Curriculum Model for Investigating Humanness	24
CHAPTER FIVE	– Conceptual Scheme One: Emerging Humanity	30
	Philosophical Problem: “How Free Is Man?”	
	Philosophical Problem Sheets One — Six	
	Essay: Moral Objectivity	
CHAPTER SIX	– Conceptual Scheme Two: The Self and Self-Awareness	66
	Philosophical Problems: “Who am I?” / “Why Am I?”	
	Philosophical Problem Sheets Seven — Eleven	
	Essay: Moral Foundations	
CHAPTER SEVEN	– Conceptual Scheme Three: Values/Moral Thinking	98
	Philosophical Problem: “Telling ‘Right’ from ‘Wrong’ ”	
	Philosophical Problem Sheets Twelve — Eighteen	
	Essay: Glaucon’s Challenge	
CHAPTER EIGHT	– Conceptual Scheme Four: Knowledge and Understanding	138
	Philosophical Problems: Claiming to Know and The Problem of Induction	
	Philosophical Problem Sheets Nineteen — Twenty-three	
	Essay: Wide Reflective Equilibrium	

**PART THREE: Planning and Teaching: Strategies For Implementing a
Precollege Philosophy Curriculum**

CHAPTER NINE	– A K-12 Sequential Philosophy Program	175
CHAPTER TEN	– The Tuttle AG Experience	203
CHAPTER ELEVEN	– Facilitating Moral Development	220
Definition of Terms		230
Bibliography		234

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J.H.

CHAPTER 1

TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING

An adequate curriculum for gifted students finds its roots in the solid ground of human need in a world characterized by its quickness of change, disorganization of values, and failures in the arena of human relationships. The curriculum presented in this book encourages gifted students to chart their own course in their quest of solutions to significant human problems. But this process of integrating human knowledge and assessing human values is not an easy one. It requires a structure which promotes consistency and permits meaningful conceptualization.

THE PATH WE SEEK. . .

The curriculum model developed in this book provides an educational setting within which an impartial consideration of philosophical ideas and the evaluation of one's most deeply rooted beliefs can occur. An integration of knowledge and understanding cannot take place without direction and experience. There is a need for a plan to pool diverse information around some common theme.

This curriculum focuses on the question, "What is human about humans?" and seeks an integrated and comprehensive study of its many answers. Gifted students should not only be challenged to explore these answers, they should also evaluate the basic assumptions upon which they are based. The rational methods employed in this exploration have been tested in human experience and improved upon in our colleges and public schools. A study of the most important problems of human societal living cannot take place in a methodological vacuum.

This curriculum model outlines a study that will take the gifted student into the arenas of heredity and environment, the dimension of sociology, and an exploration of the descriptive dimension of being human. This curriculum moves into the prescriptive dimension of being human where the student will begin a study of the self and self-awareness, values and moral

thinking, and the sources and criteria of human knowledge.

The curriculum plan proposed here is comprehensive. It integrates many kinds of knowledge. There are many philosophical problems which will be examined. Although in this one book we cannot explore all these avenues of knowledge and understanding, we can point the way, suggest a method, provide enough facts, concepts, and skills to get the student started on a lifetime of philosophical exploration. This model is merely a beginning. You—the teacher—must provide the abilities, interests, and strategies by which the task can be completed.

THE COMFORT OF OUR MINDS. . .

Change is proceeding at a pace more rapid than ever before in our society. The discoveries and innovations of the coming decades promise to make the last century appear to have progressed at a snail's pace. In the years since the end of World War II we have learned more about the universe than in all the life-spans of all the generations that went before. We have used this new knowledge to perform extraordinary feats of technology, yet there seems to be a growing awareness that knowledge alone is not enough. Rolfe Neill, Publisher of the *Charlotte Observer* newspaper, reflected:

As I look back at helping to rear our five children, I feel I failed them in an important area: developing the capacity to react quickly to change. I've concentrated on instilling independence and the ability to love. I left one out.

Mind-baffling change seems to be the centerpiece of our time. We are slow to react because we're slow to change. We don't like it. Almost all change upsets the comfort of our mind.

(April 8, 1979, Page 3B)

In order to react quickly to change, one must have more than factual knowledge quickly at hand. One must also possess understanding of that knowledge. Such understanding includes:

- The appreciation of the evolution of an idea,
- The values that give meaning and significance to life, and
- An adequate methodology which expands, limits, shapes, and directs one's thoughts.