



British Philosophical Association  
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British Philosophical Association

Re. Consultation on Development of new GCSEs and A levels for teaching from 2017.

The British Philosophical Association is happy to have provided some guidance and assistance in this draft of Subject Content for AS and A level philosophy. We recognise the need to ensure that these qualifications represent the subject properly, that distinct component modules present students with directly equivalent intellectual challenges, and that the assessment methods are appropriate and rigorous.

The draft Subject Content for AS and A level philosophy specifies four modules which are taken to define the subject at this level: for AS philosophy these are epistemology and the metaphysics of God; A level philosophy specifies these two modules plus moral philosophy and the metaphysics of mind. **The BPA agree that this curriculum provides a good introduction to the study of Philosophy** in Higher Education; it is rigorous and covers components that are central to the study of philosophy. It also provides a suitable overview of the discipline for a terminal qualification. It does not, however, capture the full variety of topics which would be accessible to and usefully studied by A-level students. **The BPA would be supportive of carefully planned proposals to introduce more flexibility and optionality in future iterations of the Subject Content**, and to include modules covering, e.g. political philosophy and aesthetics.

There is a good intellectual rationale for making Epistemology part of the core AS syllabus, since it plays a foundational role in philosophical methodology. The metaphysics of religion module does not play a similar role in philosophy, while moral philosophy is certainly more central. **We propose that Moral philosophy should be offered as an AS module**, and that the metaphysics of religion module be offered as part of the A level curriculum instead, so that AS students have a more representative exposure to philosophy.

The list of philosophical texts includes only one piece by a woman. **The gender imbalance of this list of central texts concerns us greatly.** The failure to represent women philosophers can give the erroneous and misleading impression to students that only men do philosophy, or that men's arguments and positions are the most important. The BPA think it is very important to address this issue, and are keen to be involved in suggesting pieces for inclusion that are written by women.

The proposed assessment objectives (§3.66) have been altered from the current assessment objectives (§3.67). The current specification has two objectives: students must (AO1) demonstrate their understanding of philosophical concepts and methods, and (AO2) analyse and evaluate philosophical arguments to form reasoned judgements. The proposed specification has three objectives, AO1 as above, followed by (AO2) apply conceptual analysis and argument analysis to reasoning, and (AO3) evaluate philosophical arguments to form reasoned responses. The second assessment objective is not clearly distinct from the first and third. One of the core methods of philosophy is analysis, and analysis is used as a preliminary stage in evaluation. **The BPA strongly recommends that the existing two assessment objectives be retained.** We think it appropriate for the evaluation element (AO2 on the current assessment objectives) to contribute 25 to 30% for AS philosophy and 40% for A level philosophy.

## Errata / addenda to the Subject Content specification for GCE Philosophy

- p6 First bullet point under 'Moral Philosophy' reads: "...meta-ethics: the origin of our metaphysical principles...". Replace 'metaphysical' with 'ethical'.
- p7 The date of Hume's *Enquiry* is 1748, not 1848.
- p8 The date of Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* is 1977, not 1990.
- p8 A relevant text is needed for prescriptivism (see p.6). This might usually be R.M. Hare's *The Language of Morals* (1952)
- p8 A text is needed for 'preference utilitarianism'. Some more up-to-date texts for utilitarianism (to supplement Bentham and Mill) could be included, e.g. Smart J.J.C. and Williams, Bernard, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973).
- p 8 The core readings for Philosophy of Mind are in danger of being slightly too demanding and may steer the course content rather too heavily in the direction of certain arguments about qualia. Three of the entries of papers by Jackson should be omitted, with the exception of Jackson's paper 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', which should remain. A useful supplement to the reading here would be the last chapter of Ian Ravenscroft, *Philosophy of Mind* (2005).
- p7/8 Where texts cited are books that are recognised as classic contributions to a field, it might help if particular sections of these books were highlighted for teachers.