

## IPO Debate – Società Filosofica Italiana (SFI) Educational Committee

Following the reading of the IPO Essay Guide and of the documents related to the IPO Debate (May 2017), the Educational Committee of the Società Filosofica Italiana (SFI) offers the following reflections:

1. **General remarks:** the strictly technical questions regarding the choice of essay topics and the evaluation criteria that have been raised during the IPO debate may be traced back to an essential point concerning the meaning and purpose of the *IPO Contest*, i.e. *to contribute to the education of young people in the present-day*;
2. **The educational potential of the IPO experience within the context of the Philosophy curriculum:** the SFI Educational Committee wishes to highlight the educational potential of the IPO experience, noting the following points:
  - this experience must be integrated with ordinary teaching experiences, in such a way as to support them and make them more effective through the testing of new ways of teaching philosophy, designed to foster those *skills* related to philosophical writing (i.e. *the ability to problematize, to examine matters in their historical context, to relate things to the present, and to develop an argument*) and to the acquisition of *life skills*;
  - the competitive aspect that marks the various stages of the IPO experience, therefore, is not the real driving force behind it, but rather a way of further motivating students and teachers, not least in view of the large number of young people in different countries who choose to focus on philosophical issues;
  - the competition, in which participants vie for first place at a national or international level, is only one aspect of the IPO project and a *consequence* of the vast educational movement which, under the guidance of local sections of the SFI, finds fulfilment in teaching activities engaging the whole class;
  - hence the need to adopt in everyday teaching a vast range of methods to make students aware that they might have something to say with regard to what they personally regard as a philosophical problem; that they are capable of formulating this problem; that they know how to evaluate the implicit thesis behind that philosophical problem, always against the background of a constant attention to argumentative skills. What appears crucial here is the training of full-time philosophy teachers (a key element in SFI activities);
  - the extensive work carried out in the classroom in order to enable students to take part in the IPO contest does not rule out – and indeed may find completion in – the specific training off those students who have reached the international stage;
  - consequently, the *automatic framework* for the drafting of philosophical essays (suggested in the guidebook *How To Write a Philosophy Essay* on the basis of various guidelines drawn from English-language sites) must be superseded and positively revised to produce an updated guide that will fully meet all goals in terms of personal education as well as teaching methodology (to promote *a philosophical and philological understanding of texts*; to develop *argumentative and critical abilities*);
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- conversely, in preparing students for the IPO contest, it is important to bear in mind that there are various ways of writing philosophy and that these cannot be learned from textbooks, but only by direct contact and engagement with the great texts of the philosophical tradition (treatises, aphorisms, dialogues, narratives, etc.).
3. **Structure of the essay assignment:** as in the past, in the 2017 edition the question was limited to a single quote from a text. It is worth stressing that this does not make things any easier for the candidates or the examiners, as the choice of quotes risks being a very subjective matter. We propose instead to provide detailed assignments presenting a problematic situation and also including a quotation. The students would then be required to develop an argument and to produce relevant answers by identifying questions and philosophical fields related to the quotation, discussing the thesis implied, comparing it to other theses in the history of philosophy, developing a critical discussion, and laying out their own philosophical position on the matter.
  4. **Evaluation of the essays:** one crucial contribution to the question of evaluation that has been discussed as part of the international IPO debate might come from a reflection about *systems of value* (What is of value in a given philosophical text? What is it that makes it philosophically relevant?), and about the *system of indicators*, their *levels* and *weight* (How are the detected and shared values perceived? What, then, are the indicators for them? What is the degree of competence shown by the indicators in the paper? What weight do the indicators acquire within the overall picture?). The assessment report provided by the SFI Educational Committee constitutes an attempt to translate into practice the general considerations that have been advanced concerning the evaluation process. As such, it might be worth discussing this report even at an international level.