

Latin and the Love of Wisdom: Philosophy and the High School Latin Class

In this essay I return (as a slightly wiser and more seasoned veteran) to a topic I explored roughly a decade back in a paper delivered at a state Classical conference. My rather unorthodox contention that philosophical texts ought to be incorporated into the secondary school Latin curriculum has been further and further confirmed over the years. I am currently in my second year of leading a class that has as its subtitle, “Roman Philosophy,” and in the essay I consider why it is that I opted to devote an entire academic year to the study of the Roman philosophers, and how that curriculum has fared thus far. Conventional wisdom stands against me in three respects: first, one is told that high school students have not yet achieved the level of intellectual maturity requisite to the serious pursuit of philosophical inquiry; second, one is told that the Romans’ contribution to the enterprise of Western philosophy was rather negligible; third, one is told that secondary school instructors of Latin should devote what little time they have with their students to the more canonical works of Latin literature. In the essay I address each of these three challenges in turn, and conclude that - at the very least - the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.