

Recent research is showing that studying philosophy improves critical thinking and intellectual ability (1000 words)

As per M. Prinzing and M. Vazquez for the Cambridge university press (11 July 2025), philosophers believe studying philosophy actually develops the students intellectual abilities as they saw that philosophy has a reputation for developing people to become better critical thinkers through learning to dissect arguments and debates alongside complex problems with precision and clarity in comparison to those who do not study philosophy. The methods and practises of philosophy which include being taught different answers for questions, seems to be especially suited to sharpening critical thinking skills. This is an idea which dates back to Plato and Aristotle who both regarded philosophical education as 'essential for cultivating the rational facilities that make societal and individual flourishing' (Republic V, 473-d, Nicomachean ethics 1178b-c.). An argument later arose stating that the value of philosophy lies in its ability to "enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind" (Bertrand Russel, 'The Problems Of Philosophy', P-131.). By this he means that the study of philosophy allows the development of ideas to believe what could be possible and close the belief we are certain we know all. A contemporary philosopher continued this argument by claiming that "philosophy teaches you to think and write logically and clearly" and the "antidote to the uncritical acceptance of the world and ourselves as we are" (Jenifer Morton, 2019, 'Studying Philosophy Does Make People Think Better', P-103-104.). There are many variants to this argument which is dependent on the details of how one thinks that studying philosophy makes people better thinkers which tends to follow the structure that if an activity gives valuable intellectual abilities, then that activity is valuable, and philosophical study gives that and therefore means philosophical study is indeed valuable. The premise that philosophical thinking gives valuable critical thinking and intellectual abilities is an empirical claim. So whether studying philosophy causes improvements in intellectual ability or whether it encourages open mindedness or curiosity, it is not a matter of undeniable truth. So these claims can not be verified but also can not be denied, but rather can be carefully observed and should have an attempt to be supported with the analysis of empirical data. A further study reviewed empirical findings which are relevant to the idea that philosophical studies allow for valuable intellectual abilities and critical thinking skills, the researchers continue on to say "we do not have strong enough

evidence one way or the other to say whether studying philosophy makes people better thinkers"(Prinizing and Vazquez,the Cambridge University Press, P-18.). Since the 1980s, several philosophers have found that undergraduate students who have studied philosophy tend to score higher on standardised tests including the Graduate Record Examination and the Law School Admission Test (Finding by Hoekema, 1986). Numerous further studies also find that people who studied philosophy tend to be more reflective and open-minded people who are skilled in logical reasoning in comparison to those who have not studied philosophy (Prinzing and Vazquez, Cambridge University Press, 2024). However, these results cause debates. This is because it could be that philosophers who may be more logical and reflective due to studying philosophy enhanced their abilities, but it is also possible that people who are already reflective and logical are more likely to study philosophy in the first place, it also, however, could be that people who are more skilled in logic and in language are more drawn to the study of philosophy and therefore study it to increase their abilities further. Recent empirical evidence shows that those who have studied philosophy tend to be more reflective and have better thinking skills (Findings by Byrd, 2021 and Livengood et al, 2010). Using the cognitive reflection test, which lures people into intuitively giving an incorrect answer, a question was asked 'if it takes 5 machines 5 minutes to make 5 widgets, how long does it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?' Many people who have not studied psychology answered '100 minutes' intuitively without thinking, yet, philosophy students were more likely to get the correct answer of '5 minutes' after having a moment to reflect intellectually before answering (Findings by Frederick 2010). An important question for a study of this kind is how does one measure good critical thinking and intellectual ability which could have potential effects of philosophical education. Obviously, there are different abilities that can make someone a good thinker, some way could be shown in standardized tests such as the before mentioned Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE), which both show information on the person's verbal, logical and reasoning abilities. The LSAT is a logic based test with the aim to test logic and reasoning abilities, whereas the GRE is a verbal reasoning test to assess a person's mathematical capabilities. Considering philosophical studies aim to teach students to use language successfully in debates and recognise logical propositions and how to reason carefully with them, therefore, the LSAT and GRE each seem fitting for their respective metric measurement tests. Philosophers also still often believe that studying philosophy allows for certain intellectual abilities such as curiosity, intellectual humility and open-mindedness to develop. Alongside intellectual abilities,

these qualities also seem near vital for being a good critical thinker (Finding by King, 2021). High test scores in standardised tests often show that a person can reason well when asked and prompted to. But this leaves the question of whether the person is generally with the quality to use their abilities to pursue truth by thinking rationally, critically and with openness and humility. This form of intellect however can be difficult to quantify. Empirical measurements such as curiosity, humility and open-mindedness are more often than not, self reports (Finding by Hoyle et al, 2016 and Prince et al, 2015). And to contrast standardised tests, self reports are often done with a sense of bias, be it done consciously or sub-consciously, such as 'self-enhancement' bias in which an individual will present themselves in a more flattering way to make themselves seem more in tune to what they are being asked to measure (Weiner and Guenther, 2020)

Bibliography:

'Studying philosophy makes people better thinkers', Michael Prinzing and Michael Vazquez,

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-american-philosophical-association/article/studying-philosophy-does-make-people-better-thinkers/45A7DE8F37BE4698265BD54490109D4A>