



Myths About Philosophy: Dispelling Common Misconceptions About Philosophy and Philosophers

Three of the most common myths about philosophy are that it is old, impenetrable, and irrelevant. This guide acts as a rebuttal to these common myths about philosophy and functions as a guide for educators who would like to incorporate philosophy in the classroom but may face skepticism from students or administration.

1. “Philosophers are always old men and are therefore unrelatable.”

According to Sara Goering, children under the age of 10 might be some of the most philosophically-minded people, which is evidenced by their continuous question-asking. Goering also argues that philosophy has no age minimum. Lone and Burroughs hold that all children are philosophically inclined. If children are capable of asking questions about their state of being unintentionally, then it follows that students of all ages are capable of discussing the same questions. This means that if you were ever a toddler, you have probably done some type of philosophy in your life. It is important to remember that **philosophy can be done by anyone who is willing**; there is no specific age at which a person has seen and felt so much that they are suddenly capable of asking philosophical questions.

2. “Philosophy is pedantic and impenetrable.”

According to Lone and Burroughs, **philosophy is about asking questions and analyzing the answers beyond one perspective**. This is most effective with people new to philosophy through dialogue. However, most schools do not participate in the necessary type of dialogue. Philosophy, when presented through lectures, can seem esoteric. Sean A. Riley and Goering note that even in classrooms where students are given the opportunity to actively participate in philosophy through discourse, philosophy can still be difficult to learn. Students might be dismissive of the value of pursuing certain conversations because they believe that “everything is relative anyway.” To respond to such cases, teachers need to be persistent and continue the dialogue. One way to do this is to isolate a particular statement and ask the student to clarify the point.

3. “Philosophy is irrelevant to my life.”

Developing a personal investment in philosophy can be one of the biggest challenges for students, especially for those who do not want to study it at the collegiate level. However, philosophy is a broad subject capable of incorporating almost any student interest. This broad subject range provides space for teachers to teach philosophy through a tiered learning approach. Further, philosophy has benefits for every student. According to a report given by Goering and Robert Figueroa regarding a high school summer philosophy institute in Colorado, students who participated received better test scores across the board. At-risk **students who participated in the program also reported higher graduation rates**. Riley also noted that after implementing philosophy into his history classes, students were more adept at finding ways to incorporate philosophy into their everyday life and fields of study at the college level, regardless of major.

- Sources: Lone, Jana Mohr, and Michael D. Burroughs. *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.
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