



**Australasian**  
Association of  
**Philosophy**



## **Impact of Philosophy**

These profiles show what a number of successful graduates have done with their degree in Philosophy. They showcase the variety of ways graduates have been able to use their training in Philosophy to often remarkable effect - covering work in a range of fields, including politics, the arts, education, IT, business consultancy, and advisor/managerial administration in ministries.

They are a useful resource for those interesting in knowing where Philosophy can lead, including for Philosophy lecturers, potential students, teachers and parents.



## **Belinda Prakhoff**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed a BA (Hons) in cognitive science/philosophy of mind at the University of Adelaide in 1994 and a PhD in philosophy of music at the University of Melbourne in 2014.

I also completed a Master of Music Performance at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2004 – the thesis component was very much centred on philosophy of music and writing it contributed to my decision to return to a PhD. I had abandoned my first attempt at the University of Adelaide for a variety of reasons in about 1996.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I'd always enjoyed animatedly discussing philosophical issues growing up, even before I knew that's what they were! What excited me about philosophy at University level was discovering how these issues had been discussed in the past, and learning how to engage in such arguments myself with clarity and discipline. The appeal of unpicking what seems to be a simple argument or observation into its many complexities has never faded. What excites me now, though, is the way in which we can find out more about the world and our experiences through philosophy. For example - in my PhD, I examined the interactions (or lack thereof, sometimes) between several approaches to music: the musicologist, the professional musician, the average listener, the psychologist, the emotion theorist, and the philosopher. I'm fascinated by the idea that these interactions might show us something more about the nature of music.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I've had parallel career paths over the last twenty years or so as a University graduate research administrator and as a professional opera singer. At the moment, I'm just about to start a new project officer role in the University of Melbourne's Chancellery working on graduate research policy and development, after many years of working with PhD students across several faculties. At the same time, I'm preparing for this year's singing contracts with Opera Australia and Victorian Opera, and continuing with my singing lessons. It's a juggling act, but I've had a lot of practice over the years at managing it all with the support of some understanding supervisors, colleagues and family.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

It's split very neatly down the middle between my two careers: the expertise obtained in my PhD informs my practice and thinking as a musician, and the skills I needed to obtain that expertise have transferred themselves nicely into my work at the University. In music

(to take some specific examples of what was a PhD-led overhaul of my own musical experience), I can understand more about why particular approaches might work well in my lessons, or how a performer expresses the emotional colour of a musical phrase. At the University, I can understand complex policies and explain them clearly to students and staff. I can write clearly, and I can effectively problem-solve when faced with difficult situations in which students, supervisors and policy may be in conflict. My philosophical training has been extremely valuable in both of my professional pathways.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

During my PhD, I had a brief sessional lecturer contract in Aesthetics at the University of Melbourne. I tutored all semester and wrote and delivered half of the subject (in philosophy of art and philosophy of music). It was an enjoyable if demanding experience, and helped me develop my thesis in directions it might not otherwise have taken. Unfortunately, it also highlighted the scarcity of jobs in this area for me, at least in Australia.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

If you decide to look for a career outside of philosophy, you already have some valuable transferable skills developed throughout your training. It's going to be a case of finding ways of explaining to potential employers not only what those skills are, but also why they are valuable in the context of the roles they are seeking to fill. In my experience, this can be more difficult for philosophers than it may be for graduates in other, more obviously applicable (at least to the average employer) areas of research. But the options are there. Don't feel you have failed if you don't want to continue in academia as a philosopher. And if you do want to, I am filled with admiration (and maybe a bit of envy) for your commitment. But in the end, it takes persistence, networking, and a lot of support to succeed on either pathway.





## **Bruce Sheridan**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

The University of Auckland at undergraduate and graduate levels. Currently a PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Auckland.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

The range: it's a legitimate portal to thinking about everything human beings do  
The rigor: you discover very early that there are no obvious or unimpeachable answers, so the discipline of learning to formulate and argue multiple perspectives becomes both essential and liberating

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I am a filmmaker and screen education strategist. I won the 1999 New Zealand Best Drama Award for the tele-feature *Lawless*. Other projects while based in New Zealand include documentaries on Split Enz (*Spellbound*) and Frank Sargeson (*Perfectly Frank*).

In 2001 I moved to Chicago to lead the largest U.S. film school at Columbia College Chicago. I held that position for 16 years, during which time I took the program into the elite echelon of international screen schools. I continued to make films, including a short drama called *Kubuku Rides* (2006), *Head Games* (2012), a feature documentary on sports concussion, and *Our Blood Is Wine* (2018), a feature documentary on the renaissance of ancient Georgian winemaking traditions after the Soviet era.

I am currently Chair of the North American region of CILECT, the world organisation of screen education institutions, a member of CILECT's governing Executive Council, and a key advisor to U.K. immersive media company Virtual Reality Associates. I continue to teach screen directing, writing, and producing at Columbia College Chicago, where I am a tenured professor.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I have lived my life backwards. I was already a successful filmmaker when I went back to university to complete an undergraduate degree I had started in English literature. The philosophy bug bit me hard, and I changed my major. I then completed a graduate degree in philosophy, for which I earned first class honours.

Studying philosophy gave me skills that made me a better filmmaker, strategic thinker, and team leader. Though the field was necessarily divided into sub-disciplines, crosstalk and synthesis were inherent to doing philosophy. I discovered in my professional work that most other academic fields now sacrifice this aspect to achieve extreme levels of specialisation. Philosophy is the rare exception where broad thinking and narrow focus

are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive - at least that's been my experience.

Many of my best professional achievements came about because I was able to drill down into narrow, complex issues while maintaining a clear global perspective. This has been particularly helpful in strategic planning and team leadership. It doesn't matter how good the individual contributions to a collaborative project are if they can't be woven together in a coherent and cohesive manner. Many times, I have drawn directly on my philosophical learning to achieve results that were greater than the simple summing of the collective contributions. It was through studying philosophy that I learned how to approach challenges from multiple perspectives and critique complex ideas constructively.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Philosophy can amplify your abilities in any field that engages your passions. For this reason, I think of it as one of the few deep areas of study that is universally applicable, and its particularly good preparation for complex, collaborative endeavours. Seek out work that interests you and communicate these special and rare qualities most philosophy graduates acquire from a discipline that is intellectually rigorous and infinitely variable.





## **Clare McCausland**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed an MA at Monash University in Philosophy of Mathematics in 2002 and a PhD in Moral Philosophy at the University of Melbourne in 2013.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Its ability to turn crazy ideas into common sense, and to understand the complexity of what seems straightforward by taking the arguments where they lead – novel, well-argued ideas play an essential role in improving life on earth. From shaking up entrenched views about women, class, race and nonhuman animals, to asking whether a machine might think, philosophers have played a necessary (but not sufficient) role in making profoundly positive changes for the world.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I manage the Graduate Research School at La Trobe University in Melbourne. I like universities and want to help make them supportive, professional and transformative institutions. My current role has oversight of graduate research policy, administrative systems, reporting, communications and engagement with staff and students. It's wide-ranging and challenging for all different sorts of reasons – we work in often deeply inconsistent environments with all manner of complex systems and people. Before starting this job I worked in policy and research administration roles at universities – including research ethics policy, which was especially rewarding.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I think it's largely because of my philosophical training that I can read complexity and write clearly; puzzle through abstract scenarios; build workflows, queries and analyse data; convene a group of bickering people with good humour and distil something sensible out of the fray; and handle criticism well without personalising differences of opinion. These are all highly valuable management skills. And I know a lot about animal ethics! That certainly helped me to write and teach ethics policy.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I haven't, but I still carry out and publish research in my spare time. In many respects this is not far removed from the life of a professional academic – except without the teaching, travel perks or philosophically-minded colleagues. The job security, pay and hours are better, though. The autonomy of an academic role is still unsurpassed (if on the wane),

but this gets better as you move into more senior roles.

My current research is in political philosophy and looks at the legitimacy of animal advocacy. I mostly present my research at animal studies conferences now and it's really pleasing to see the language of civil disobedience take hold among activists, and to see the muddle-headed distinctions of 'animal rights' v. 'animal welfare' slowly disappearing from other disciplines.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

I'd advise graduates (and students) to forge an identity that incorporates your philosophical and other career interests – this will mitigate a possible identity crisis (especially if you're not working in philosophy after a graduate degree) and it will build a narrative for yourself, friends, family and potential employers – a personal statement or such is a valuable tool and developing a professional identity is something you should work on during and after your studies.

I'd also tell students that if they really, really do want to become a philosopher, to stick at the application process and the short-term roles. Just because you don't get the first three jobs you apply for, doesn't mean you never will. I'm impressed by the people that were able to withstand the test of time and sometimes regret not trying harder for an academic position after graduation – because once you've been out for a while, it's hard to get back in. By the same token, if you hate working as an academic, be open to other opportunities – other work is no less valuable!

If you are now applying for non-academic positions, I'd urge philosophy graduates to work on how they will demonstrate their transferrable skills in a different context – you can't just tell people that you have these amazing skills. You'll want two CVs (academic and non-academic) at minimum and certainly every bit of experience helps. The key is to convince your potential employer that you are genuinely passionate about their work and to show them how you will achieve exactly what they need you for – with respect and appreciation for the context.





## **Cynthia Townley**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

PhD at University of Tasmania

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I love the hard thinking part of philosophy. I love following an idea to wherever it might take you, and using arguments and reasons to figure out how best to think about something. Sometimes it is like having a glimpse of something, and exploring pathways to try to see it more clearly – and sometimes realising it wasn't like you thought it would be at all.

My favourite thing was epistemology – specifically, the role of ignorance in the ways that epistemic agents interact, and what this means for a virtuous or thriving epistemic community. I also thought about animals and about justice.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

My current job is as a policy analyst and advocate for Tasmanian Council of Social Service (Tas COSS). I work on the broad area of essential services, such as energy and water, and also on housing and general cost of living issues. My role includes consultation with people who experience hardship and the community organisations that support them, and representing Tasmania on some national committees to do with the National Electricity market.

I also write submissions on various topics to do with regulation or with government policy, this is about making recommendations and supporting them with reasons and evidence.

I provide my boss with briefing papers and background for her media and lobbying work. This is about finding clear and concise ways to communicate complex information – both descriptively and normatively. This is the issue, this is why it matters.

There are a lot of meetings, most are with people who also want to ensure good outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged people – but there can be a lot of different views about how best to achieve this. I collaborate with colleagues within Tasmania and nationally, so there are strong networks and opportunities to exchange ideas.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Being able to distil the critical issues from complex information is a big part of my job, likewise being able to communicate clearly with a range of people. Recognising and being comfortable with 'reasonable disagreement' is very useful, as is being able to identify the areas of common ground as well as those of divergence.



Philosophical training helps you to structure a line of argument – reasons that will help someone understand what supports the position you are advocating for. It also helps with analysing reports of complex information - working out which things link, or depend on one another, navigating a complex space with some unknown features, understanding if some options are compatible or exclusive, where there are possibilities of ‘hybrid’ solutions, and developing recommendations.

Being flexible – realising that new circumstances or information can mean taking a different approach is also useful. I think philosophy does help us to be able to adapt and update our ideas when something new comes along to challenge us.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I worked as an academic philosopher (lecturer level B and C) mostly in Australia, with two years in the US on a tenure-track. I was always full time, and except for my first job which was a contract, I had permanent employment. (Very lucky!)

I moved from academia after about 10 years of full time work post PhD. I was ready to return to Tasmania, my home state, and I was finding that the academic life was becoming more of a grind than a joy.

One big advantage of the work I have done since leaving university work is that I have become better at leaving work at work. When I was a philosopher, it seemed that there was never enough time to do all the research, or prep for teaching in a 9-5, M-F timeframe, so it always spilled into weekends, evenings, and there was little real ‘time off’.

I sometimes miss the feeling of doing my very best thinking – thinking to my own limits – and being with other people who were doing the same. That said, I also learn a tremendous amount in my current job, both about technical matters and about legislation, economics, regulation, politics, influence, and the like.

While I mostly loved teaching, I miss it much less than I had expected to! I do miss my colleagues and friends in the discipline.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

I left the academic workplace about six years ago, and I am now up to my 4th job. I have found that my skills are readily transferrable, which I didn’t know before I ‘jumped’. I have worked for Commonwealth Govt, state govt enterprise and two jobs in the community sector. So my advice would be that there are interesting jobs where skills developed in philosophy are valued.

I think for people who would find it satisfying to apply skills to an area which can make real difference to people, the community sector is a good place to consider. Not so much the direct client work (this demands knowledge and skills that are not central to a philosophy degree) but work in peak organisations, with representative, advocacy, policy and research roles. There are also training and mentoring roles – but these tend to require a level of on the ground experience.

The other area where the skills learned in philosophy are highly useful is regulation. Much of the energy sector is regulated, as are other industries, the medical sector is regulated,

telecoms are regulated and so on. These are possible pathways to job satisfaction. I have been lucky enough to work with great people - really smart, knowledgeable and effective thinkers and great colleagues and friends – both in universities and other workplaces. I think that there are many opportunities within and beyond academic spaces to do your own best thinking and to work constructively with others. A background in philosophy is a great foundation to do many things.





**Dan Vine**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed a PhD in Philosophy at Monash University in 1998. My thesis focused on a question in aesthetics. Previously I completed an Honours degree with majors in Philosophy and the History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne (1991) and a Bachelor of Theology with sub-majors in Philosophy at the Melbourne College of Divinity (1986).

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

For me, philosophical questions are exciting but before that, they are inevitable. I struggle to remember a time when I was not bothered or bemused by ‘silly questions’. How can I be sure things are as they seem? What if I am dreaming? Can I be sure that God exists? How do we know about the past? Hence the formal study of Philosophy was probably inevitable, even though I began my tertiary career as a student of Physics and Chemistry. I have always been deeply convinced that the ‘unexamined life is not worth living’. At very least, such a life must be unutterably dull!

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I am currently a Research Fellow. The core of my work is writing Humanities, Arts and Social Science items (in lay speak ‘questions’) for a number of the tests for a range of clients. I work on tests for middle secondary through to university students. A typical day involves looking for suitable stimulus material (a paragraph from fiction or non-fiction, a poem or a cartoon or visual artwork), writing items based on that material and panelling these items with small groups of colleagues. Most of our tests are multiple choice; the challenge is to create distractors that are wrong but plausible.

I came to my current position fairly recently after eighteen years of secondary teaching and other work in the secondary education sector. After completing my PhD, I undertook Graduate Diploma of Education at the University of Melbourne. Since then, I have taught in four different schools punctuated with three and a half years as a Project Manager at the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. My main work in the latter role was the development of online examination marking. Although I think of myself primarily as a teacher of Philosophy and History, during my secondary teaching career, I have also taught English, Geography, General Science, Legal Studies and Religion. Over the years, I have been heavily involved in curriculum development and assessment of Philosophy as a study within the Victorian Certificate of Education.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

For a good deal of my career in education, I have been a teacher of Philosophy and so a broad knowledge of and skills in the subject have been essential. Secondary school Philosophy courses typically include discussions of the central questions in Ethics, Epistemology, Metaphysics, the Philosophy of Science, Political Philosophy and even Aesthetics. As a teacher of Philosophy, I have often had to write courses and develop or adapt curriculum and teaching materials on the go. This work and the actual teaching of Philosophy to adolescents, especially gifted adolescents, is made a great deal easier if one has a confident mastery of the key ideas and arguments as well as a deep conviction of their importance.

My current work, my classroom teaching and my work as a Project Manager have all benefitted from qualities that I think have been nurtured through the study of Philosophy: a habit of seeing questions in what others find unproblematic, an ability to envisage and entertain alternatives, a love of linguistic and logical precision (that might sometimes be mistaken for pedantry). This last tendency was invaluable in my work as a Project Manager, which included developing and implementing test plans for online marking. Finally, I have always told my students that one of the qualities that makes a good philosopher is ‘omnivorous curiosity’; a quality that has enabled me to teach so many different school subjects and is extremely useful in my current work.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

Like most post-graduates, I worked as a sessional tutor and, on a couple of occasions, a lecturer but I have not worked in the tertiary sector since the demands of my DipEd course obliged me to relinquish a tutoring position at the University of Melbourne.

I would like to say that I had principled reasons for leaving the academy but the reality is that it had taken a long time for my PhD thesis to take shape and when it was finished I had nothing published and was not convinced that I had much that was worth turning into publishable writing.

On the positive side, in the year after I finished my PhD I gave a number of seminars on philosophical themes (aesthetics and the philosophy of mathematics) to secondary students and found the experience rewarding. A lot of these students demonstrated a passion for ideas and a spirit of enquiry that I had rarely experienced as a university tutor. These experiences made the prospect of a DipEd thinkable (and the reality bearable). Although I have never entirely warmed to schools as institutions, I love teaching. Over the past eighteen years, I have left the classroom on two occasions with every expectation of leaving it for good, only to return later. I don’t think that will happen again but never say ‘never’.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

I got my start in secondary teaching as a direct result of my involvement in Philosophy for Children/Philosophy in Schools. (I undertook a Level Two Workshop in Philosophy for Children immediately on completion of my Dip Ed.) At that point, I was not having much luck with ‘cold’ job applications. Even schools that are actively looking for a Philosophy teacher are likely to be nervous of someone whose only recommendation is an impressive

academic transcript. I think I have had only one position in half a dozen where I did not already have a contact or two.

Anyone interested in teaching Philosophy in secondary school would be well advised to have at least one other string to their bow. I have been lucky in having been employed as a Philosophy teacher on a couple of occasions but even then I have been employed to teach Philosophy and something else – English or History. In my most recent teaching role, I was employed as Director of a Learning Centre and a teacher of English and History. It took a few years to get a Philosophy program going on the strength of my skills and enthusiasm. I suspect that this is the more common experience. Think of your credentials in English or History or Science as the Trojan Horse poised to unleash a belly full of Philosophy!





**Darryl Betts**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

After originally doing a BSc in Computer Science, I returned to University of Auckland 10 years ago as a mature student and completed a BA in Philosophy, Logic and Computation. I am now continuing with part-time post-graduate study in Philosophy – also at University of Auckland – while also working in my technology business.

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

For as long as I can remember the biggest questions for me have been the nature of reality and consciousness, I have been a lover of science all my life, and as I got older I have come to understand the immense role philosophy plays trying to understand these things - and also in our efforts to live a fulfilling and just life as conscious beings. Some of the most exciting (and potentially dangerous) things happening in the world today – such as the rise of AI – involve philosophy in many ways, working alongside science and computer science. Conversely philosophy has an important role to play in helping us deal with some of the most worrying aspects of society, culture and politics such as potentially dangerous religious, political and social ideologies, the way AI will affect the way we live and work, and changes in understanding and attitudes to biology, environment and science. I most value the way philosophy is grounded in logic, reasoning and rational argument, questioning norms and assumptions, and always attempting to view things in an objective dispassionate way. At a personal level aside from finding it intellectually interesting - on a range of topics from mind and consciousness, space and time, knowledge, scientific methodology and progress, maths, logic and critical thinking, ethics – I believe it also makes me a better and ultimately more successful person through better thinking. I would also like to think that in some way my studies have been a positive influence on my sons as they go forward in life.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I have been in IT for 30 years, primarily as a computer software designer and developer but also at various levels of management. I am currently the co-owner of a company that makes software products for the telecommunications companies, ISPs and utility companies.

**HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I would say that I have always been motivated to try to reason logically about things, but my formal philosophy training has I believe – in addition to many other benefits - sharpened my reasoning and communication skills, both in terms of making arguments of

my own and evaluating the arguments of others – and sharpened my writing and reading skills. In my degree I did a number of courses in critical thinking and logic, which look deeply at the nature of arguments – what types of arguments exist, what makes a good argument and all the different ways an argument can be a bad or weak argument, what methods of proof and disproof exist, and much more. To me these are supremely valuable skills because work and business is at the foundation primarily about all of these things – solving problems, constructing arguments, evaluating the arguments of others, explaining, questioning, making decisions and plans – whether they be technical in nature or business or people oriented.

I also think the way that philosophy challenges and expands thinking and teaches one to question assumptions and norms contributes to creativity and innovation – both at a technical and at a business level. For example you might look at a practice that is common in your industry and say “why do we do it this way? – is there a better way?”. Finally I think my training in ethics has helped me to build businesses and practices which are responsible and fair to all stakeholders – it is very important to me that I can sleep at night and feel good about what I do.

As a person who has hired and managed staff for many years I can’t recall how I viewed philosophy training on a CV when I was younger, but I would definitely now place significant value on philosophy training – and I think any employer should do likewise. I think the world would be a better place if there was some compulsory philosophy education in schools – and although it goes somewhat against the spirit of flexibility at university, I would even say some level of training and critical thinking and logic should be compulsory at university. I can’t think of any subject or vocation that you could do that wouldn’t benefit from better thinking skills – in addition to the personal benefits.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

As a general comment I have always been a believer in the value of higher education and how it contributes subtly and holistically to life and work – sometimes I have heard other people reflect on their university time as “not relevant” but over my career there have been many and varied ways that my university training (be it computer science or philosophy or other) has helped me – some big, some small, some obvious, many I am sure were unnoticed – but overall I have no doubt it has helped me immensely. It is also worth considering that in this fast changing world the “shelf-life” of philosophy skills is much longer than specific technical skills – so I think the smart money should be on skills which might be less immune to what might happen in the future job market – or at least makes you better able to adapt.

I guess there might be a perception that philosophically inclined people might be overly analytical or overly concerned with detail or overly concerned with matters of no practical relevance, so you would want to make sure you are always striving for balance – reasoning well and carefully but paying attention to the big picture and the priorities and

the needs of the audience or situation, knowing when it is time just to listen, or follow instructions, or to accept that the system – while not perfect – is good enough for now, or that there are better and worse ways to deal with the bad argument of your colleague, or boss, or customer. That said – philosophy enables you to look at yourself just as easily as at the world – so if anything is going to help you become a better more useful person then philosophy will.







**David Seymour**, leader of the New Zealand ACT party and MP for the Epsom electorate

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

University of Auckland, 2001-2005 at undergraduate level. I did a conjoint BE(Hons) / BA (majoring in Philosophy).

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

The questions philosophers seek to answer are ultimate, and the subject humbles you. What is time, how is the mind connected to the physical world, can we know anything with certainty? Once you have meditated on questions like these you realise there are no final answers, yet you feel better able to chase them.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Today I lead the ACT Party in Parliament, representing the Epsom Electorate. I have been an Under-Secretary in Government, responsible for charter schools and regulatory reform. I am also sponsoring the highest profile Private Members Bill, which is the End of Life Choice Bill. Prior to entering parliament, I worked as an electrical engineer and as a researcher/director at a couple of Canadian Think tanks.

**HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

My philosophical training is the basis for my approach to public policy. I argue that most of my opponents' positions are epistemologically untenable. It is implausible that the State or its agents could have the knowledge required to achieve their goals. Take the housing market; we have a problem because overzealous planning presumed too much about future demand, and left us with an undersupply as a result. They should have allowed the various market actors greater freedom to respond to demand.

At a skills level, philosophy taught me to ask the right questions to get to the nub of an issue, process information, and communicate abstract concepts succinctly.

**WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Be confident about your degree. There will be no shortage of knockers, saying that it is avocational and part of a B.A. (bugger all). The joke is on them. As the pace of change accelerates, the future of work becomes less certain. The latest vocational qualification is already out of date, and your timeless skills of questioning, processing, and communicating the hardest concepts will stand you in good stead.





## **Deborah Russell**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I started out with a degree in Accountancy, but I went back to university in my late 20s to do a BA in History and Philosophy. I did Honours in Philosophy at Massey University in the mid 1990s, and then carried on to a PhD at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, supervised by Professor Philip Pettit. I graduated in 2001.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Thinking! And exploring new ideas. I've always loved Star Trek – “to explore strange new worlds and new civilisations” – and that sense of adventure and discovery is what I like about philosophy.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I'm a Member of Parliament. I was elected in 2017 as the Labour MP for New Lynn in Auckland. In my [maiden speech](#), I talked about my training in philosophy and my love of ideas.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I find that I'm very much able to consider many aspects of a problem and to see that there can be many arguments for and against a particular policy or piece of legislation. I'm also able to see that there's often no definitive answer, but that there can be a compelling, or a good enough, case for some action to be taken.

I've also enjoyed quoting Aristotle and Adam Smith in the House.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I spent a couple of years lecturing at Massey University, mostly in political philosophy and ethics. I had three small children at the time, and to be honest, I found it all extremely challenging. So I left that job and went and wrote tax policy for central government for a few years. And that led to a route back into the academy, lecturing in taxation. I found that my training in conceptual thinking meshed very well with my practical training in accountancy. I found a way of explaining grass roots practice in conceptual terms, and of explaining conceptual terms using grass roots practice.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Be prepared to try anything! My degree has taken me from lecturing, to writing policy, to

more lecturing, and now into government. The ability to think and explain ideas clearly has been enormously valuable, as has the ability to really understand other points of view, even if I don't agree with them. Your degree in Philosophy prepares you for nothing, and for everything.





**Emma Larking**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I did a PhD in what was then the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 2011.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Philosophy – and particularly moral and political philosophy – felt like a homecoming for me because it actively poses the question, ‘how are we to live?’, and this was a question that had always lain below the surface of my thinking. I felt deeply the disjuncture between a world of beauty and enriching possibilities and the failure of current modes of social organisation to honour these. We can pose the question, ‘how are we to live?’ in many forms and through many mediums – I could have asked and pursued answers to it through literature, for example, which was my undergraduate major – but for me, the direct, frank, conscious pronouncement of this question as a kind of reason to get out of bed for most moral and political philosophers was a revelation.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I’m a Visiting Fellow in an interdisciplinary school at ANU – the School of Regulation and Global Governance – or RegNet (sadly often misheard as ‘RedNeck’). I moved to ANU to work as a postdoctoral fellow on an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship project led by an international law academic, Hilary Charlesworth. Hilary was based at RegNet and her project considered the gap between ideals and implementation in the international human rights system. I had a law/arts degree and the focus of my PhD and much of my previous experience as an RA and sessional lecturer at MU related to human rights, so I was able to bring this experience to Hilary’s project. It was exciting to work on a well-funded research project – with lots of opportunities for travel and interaction with fascinating people – but since then I haven’t had a continuing position. I had a Research Fellowship at RegNet for a year and am now doing bits and pieces of casual work while also pursuing my own research and applying for ongoing positions.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Philosophy taught me to be a more disciplined thinker – and helped me understand that when thinking hurts it’s probably also productive! It taught me to be more careful and considered in developing my own arguments and scrutinising the opinions and arguments of others. I also continue to be inspired by the idea of the philosopher as gadfly and goad – challenging views that are easily taken for granted, and living consciously rather than unreflectively adopting mores endorsed by those around us.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I convened the 'global justice' philosophy course at MU for a number of years, as well as courses in applied philosophy, and public policy and human rights. Teaching these kinds of subjects is invigorating because the students who have chosen them are predisposed to be engaged and motivated. In my experience, students revelled in the opportunity to address fundamental issues about how society is structured, and how to build more just and inclusive societies.

My perception of working as an academic philosopher is that it is very tough – particularly for philosophers working in departments where they have to balance heavy teaching loads with high expectations in terms of publications and successful grant applications.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Seek out mentors and nurture connections with friends and peers so that you can support and nourish each other. Be generous and collaborative. In difficult times, find solace in the work of those thinkers who originally inspired you. Join your union. Avoid participating in practices that exploit others. If you are in a well-paid or continuing position, use it to advance the position of others – for example, if you are an academic and your department uses guest or student lecturers, lobby for a policy to ensure these lecturers are appropriately remunerated for their time.





**Emma Martin**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I did a BA Hons at Otago, which I finished in 1988. A couple of years later I accepted a Commonwealth Scholarship to Manchester University to do a PhD, which I eventually completed in 2000, after a series of detours that included working as a taxi driver and a film censor.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

When I think back to my first contact with philosophy over thirty years ago, I do remember an incredible sense of excitement. In my first Metaphysics class the lecturer recounted a modernised version of Plato's allegory of the cave. Not only was I intellectually captivated, but also on some more fundamental level I think the allegory reflected the disorientation I was experiencing at that time, the feeling of being jolted from one frame of reference to another. In my Ethics class I remember putting down my pen and staring at the lecturer stunned as he outlined the problem of free will and determinism. Ditto in Theory of Knowledge when it came to the problem of induction. For the first time I was realising there were all kinds of unarticulated assumptions which seemed to provide the foundations for our everyday beliefs, but if you held them up to scrutiny, you could see they were often flimsy or incoherent. This makes me think of how, when there's an earthquake, you become suddenly alert and intensely conscious of your surroundings. I had become suddenly and intensely conscious of my conceptual surroundings. Philosophy for me was at its best and most brilliant that year.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

In my day job, I mostly work as an adviser on public sector transformation programmes. A lot of my work has been in the areas of human-centred design and digital innovation.

My main working relationships are with programme team members, organisational subject matter experts, and senior decision-makers.

Often I'm responsible for writing business cases. In the public sector in New Zealand, we have a structured framework for developing business cases which is mandated by Treasury. In a way, you're inside the mind of an organisation, and you're mapping out its thought processes as it makes a decision. It's intriguing to see how that works (top tip: not always in the ways you might expect).

I've been self-employed for fifteen years. As a contractor you tend to come in, get the work done, and go away again, and you have to not be too precious about taking

whatever work is available when a contract ends. It's a less considered and more erratic career path than working your way up an organisational hierarchy. But I do quite like the slightly random element. In the last few years I've found myself visiting mail processing warehouses, shadowing electrical maintenance staff at power substations, listening in on 111 calls in the Police emergency contact centre, and running strategic sessions with executive leadership teams.

Outside of my day job, I'm a writer. I had a book of short stories published five years ago, but I'm on a go slow with book number two. It's not always easy to balance writing with work and family commitments.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I've always been interested in epistemology, and I'm fascinated by how organisations codify knowledge – how they decide what is and is not true. I don't know if this has necessarily always helped me in my working life, because often I seem to be the person who is critiquing what the organisation deems to be The Truth rather than falling into line with it. Sometimes this is valued; other times it makes you an annoyance!

Within limits, however, the ability to think critically and articulate ideas clearly has undoubtedly been useful to me. When you're developing strategies and plans, the consequences of people not having a shared understanding of what they've agreed to can be quite costly once you start to implement that plan. I think studying analytic philosophy in particular made me acutely aware of language and meaning, of when people appear to agree but are actually talking at cross purposes, or conversely when they appear to disagree but have a common set of underlying goals.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL ME A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I did some tutoring and part time lecturing in logic, ethics and history of philosophy when I was a student. I did think about an academic career, and was at one point offered that opportunity, but I decided it wasn't for me. Partly this was because academia had begun to feel quite claustrophobic to me. But also, I came to see that academic philosophy is only one way of engaging with philosophical ideas, and for me it's not really my preferred way. These days the writing I connect with most tends to be fiction or creative non-fiction – so maybe what I was wanting was that fusing of intellectual and emotional content that you get in creative forms, or the stylistic diversity, or the structural innovation, or the subtlety, the sweep, the attention to the particular, or really just a different kind of insight into the world and our experience of it.

I do still read a bit of philosophy, and lately I've started following a couple of philosophy podcasts. I like that I can engage with philosophy while I'm weeding the garden, for no other reason than that I enjoy it.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Well, that would very much depend on your values and goals. One thing I would say is that in my working life, people have very rarely paid much attention to what I studied or what I achieved academically. A good general degree in pretty much anything will open up doors for you, but what will count most is what you do next. Be confident about what you have to offer and humble about what you have to learn.







**Erik Koed**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

B.A. Philosophy and Political Science, Canterbury University, 1991

B.A. Honours Philosophy, Canterbury University 1992

M.A. Philosophy, Canterbury University, 1994

PhD, St Andrews University 2000

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I have always liked thinking and debating about ideas and theories. What excites me about Philosophy, however, is not so much the intellectual challenge or the satisfaction of technical problem solving, but the fact that it can involve a deep engagement on how best to think about things that are really central to what we value and how we live our lives. This may be why I have always been drawn to issues in moral and political philosophy and the philosophy of art more than to logic, epistemology and metaphysics.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

For a few years I flipped between academia and the Public Service, sometimes working in both. I have held various roles in cultural, economic and justice policy, and am currently employed at the State Services Commission of New Zealand. The Commission leads New Zealand's professional and politically neutral state services. Its core role involves the design of the state sector system, and the performance of people, agencies, sectors within it. We recruit and manage Departmental chief executives, guide and set standards of behaviour for public servants, ensure that the system is performing well, and investigate issues as required. In my role as Assistant Commissioner I work across these areas at a system level and directly with Chief Executives in a portfolio of agencies, and with Ministers on the delivery of their priorities. I also currently take the lead for the Commission on access to official information and on privacy and security issues across government. It is varied, interesting, motivating and challenging work.

**HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

The honest answer to this question is that while the training helps, in terms of a direct application of skills (especially those learned at higher levels) much of it is irrelevant. A bit of philosophical training, some logic, some critical thinking, knowing how to argue, never

hurts, but it doesn't follow that the more you have of it the more helpful it is. I have found that moral and political philosophy can be informative working in policy or service design and delivery given that the ethical choices to be taken are real, and are more likely to come up in work conversations than ontological or metaphysical matters. That said, I have yet to find a direct application for anything much from my PhD thesis on sculpture! It's the philosophical formation rather than the training that I have found to be the most useful. It's the experiences I've had during the course of my philosophical education and career, the practice of doing philosophy with the people I've met and the places I've been, that have been most influential in shaping my philosophical thinking but also the broader perspectives that I bring to my current career.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL ME A BIT ABOUT IT?**

Like many postgraduate students, I tutored part time at the Universities I was studying at. I found that teaching something is a great way to learn something, and you often would learn as much in conversation with students as they might be expected to learn from you. That kind of reciprocity made the teaching side of academia quite attractive. Also, towards the end of my PhD studies, I was lucky enough to spend 6 months at Aarhus University on a fellowship with the Danish Research Academy, which was a nice way to focus on my research and getting a broader view into the broader academic research environment. Returning to NZ after completing my studies, I re-joined the public service for a brief period of time before heading to teach history of political thought and aesthetics at Bilkent University in Turkey for a couple of years. Returning to NZ again, I re-joined the public service and also taught part-time at Victoria University of Wellington (legal/social philosophy, philosophy of art) and Massey University (Ancient Greek metaphysics and epistemology). I had a couple of things published during that time, but then moved (permanently?) into a full time public service career. I enjoyed academic life, but also found I missed public service - just as I missed academia when in the public service. I also found - probably through lack of discipline - that it was really hard to 'switch off' from work - the brain just kept on going with whatever it was thinking about, and there was no time of the day or night that you couldn't just go and write some of that stuff down and work it into something. At the same time, there was a narrower rather than a broader circle of people nearby thinking about the same stuff with who you could have a meaningful discussion about the intricate details - one of the hazards of deep specialisation. At some point I needed to make a choice, but also find a bit of balance. I chose public service, and haven't regretted it (much, other than on a bad day). I admire my friends and colleagues in academia for the depth of their contribution to human understanding and to education, but I don't know if I could have sustained that way of life and feel more at home doing what I'm doing now.

## **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

I remember my old professor saying, when I told him I was off to do a PhD, “why do all the smart people do PhDs instead of something useful?!” I have found however that while there are indeed a lot of smart people in academic philosophy, actually the smartest people I’ve met have been in the public service – intellectually, but also about getting things done. (What was it Marx said about the philosophers?) Of course it turns out that some of these people did philosophy too! My advice to philosophy graduates is different, but it is really the same as I’d give anyone: try to find a job that you enjoy and that fits with your values and provides a decent living. But if you can’t, then being philosophical helps! Unless you want to work in academia, don’t worry too much about finding work where your studies are directly applicable. When you’re in academia, it is really easy to get totally engrossed in the specific problem you’re working on. When you step out of academia, it can feel like you’ll never be able to get that back if you’re away too long, and that can feel like a risk or a loss. But what you may also find is that you become less concerned about all those things you loved about academic philosophy, and more interested in philosophy in the broader and original sense, and where it can fit in your view on life as a whole, including a perspective on the value you create in the career you’ve chosen.





## **Esther Anatolitis**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

UNSW to honours, and then USyd for a PhD which I then discontinued to move to Germany and work on an international architectural program at the Bauhaus. I was especially interested in Hegel, Nietzsche, Deleuze, Deleuze & Guattari, Foucault and their contemporaries. This was in the mid-late 1990s.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

The way it animates my mind. The way it charges my thinking with rigour, passion and originality.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

A generative balance of arts leadership, civic engagement and cultural critique. More at [estheranatolitis.net](http://estheranatolitis.net)

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Adventurous strategic thinking. Agile leaps. Experimental approaches to the frameworks that empower creativity. Reflective practice. A critical approach to my own values and assumptions. Forensic skills in breaking down arguments, responding to artworks and confronting the unexpected.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I tutored in political philosophy and aesthetics at USyd. I collaborated on ASCP and MSCP conferences and schools, and for years was the ASCP's custodian, guiding its existence between annual conferences. I even designed that bold hammer logo! (You'll know the Nietzsche quote I'm sure.) As an undergrad at UNSW I revived the Socratic Society which had been dormant since the late 1960s, hosting weekly lunchtime workshops open to the entire campus community. These had a transformative impact on so many of our lives – in fact, twenty years later, people still get in touch to tell me what a highlight that was of their student years. I've also taught at RMIT but in architecture, and also at the CAE and the School of Life.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Philosophy is a set of tools for your entire lifetime. Amazingly, those tools evolve with you, changing with your thinking, changing your thinking. There's a whole world out there –

and it needs your thinking, your criticality and your vision.





## **Geoffrey Roche**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I did the BA, MA and PhD in philosophy at the University of Auckland. During my PhD I had a brief exchange at Université Jean Moulin (Lyon III) in Lyon.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Philosophy for me is essentially a term for free, rigorous inquiry, unencumbered by tradition. It's like a nebula, an inchoate cloud of dust from which stars are born - whether ideas, movements, or sciences. As such it is of enormous cultural and historical importance, even if much of its worldly impact as a distinct practice or institution appears to have waned over the last 100 years. The deepest problems and questions of any particular sphere of human activity or inquiry are often philosophical ones, even if the answers may sometimes be best sought via less esoteric means. Merely realising that a particular question is a philosophical one (rather than say a scientific or technical one) or that the wrong key question was being asked may be a major step in finding an answer.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I am a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Health in Wellington, New Zealand. After a failed Ministry of Health job application in 2005 (as the secretariat of an ethics committee for pre-implantation genetic diagnosis), I wrote up a paper on that same issue in 2007, and submitted it with my application for another Ministry of Health job, as Policy Analyst in the National Screening Unit. That application was successful, and I worked on screening policy for three years. Since then I have been an Advisor in the Communicable Diseases Team. Topics I've worked on since joining the Ministry have included surveillance and research of sexual behaviour, the relationship between poor housing and respiratory disease, antimicrobial resistance, foetal alcohol syndrome, and the storage of human tissue for research purposes. To improve my knowledge of public administration I've also studied law to Stage II level at Victoria University of Wellington.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I'd say that my philosophical training has been very useful in my government career, although one must let go of the idea that philosophy as an academic discipline somehow lords it over all the others. As the physicist Richard Feynman put it, "a scientist looking at nonscientific problems is just as dumb as the next guy." I think the same goes for philosophy graduates in the public service. You could be useful, but the nearest you might come to being the office philosopher is by laying out the 'logical geography' of a problem (to use Ryle's phrase).

What I can say is that my philosophical training has been invaluable in learning to think and write clearly, and to argue well. But to work in the public service, adjustment is required. You are part of the machinery that connects the experts up with the elected officials. Decision-makers will need to have material presented to them that allows for smooth and well-informed decision making. To assist officials in making good decisions, one must be as clear and concise as possible in one's communications, and to account for all the relevant facts, perspectives, considerations and risks. One must also have a good sense of when key assumptions need to be rigorously rethought, key premises have been hidden, and seemingly obvious questions need to be asked. Philosophy is invaluable throughout the process, but one must also have a good grasp of the facts and a keen awareness of the purpose of whatever enquiry one is engaged in.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I was Adjunct Professor of Ethics and Critical Thinking at the Tokyo campus of Lakeland College Wisconsin in 2006 and 2007. ('Adjunct professor' in North America just means 'lecturer'). Most of the students were Japanese, and were at Lakeland to prepare for tertiary study in the UK or USA. In both courses I encouraged them to do their own investigations into contemporary debates in Japan, the more controversial the better; we covered among other things drug policy, the euthanasia debate and the ethics of nuclear weaponry. Critical, independent thinking wasn't encouraged in the Japanese educational system, and many of my students were positively thrilled once they realised the degree of freedom of philosophical practice permitted them.

In my ethics classes I also covered topics of local relevance, such as Japanese Buddhist ethical thought, and the Kyoto School.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

- Present yourself as a well-balanced team player, and adapt to the market

Members of job interview panels, or reviewers of job applications, are unlikely to know the first thing about philosophy. You'll need to present yourself as having relevant and applicable job skills, as someone who will work well with others, and will be able to deal with the routine of a normal office job. You will need to present yourself as a problem-solver, and not as a metaphysician. Interview panels may well ask you whether you'll find the job boring, or what the relevance of your training is to the job. It may be a good idea to get something published on a topic that would look good to a prospective employer, and readily defensible to non-philosophers.

- Think long and hard about doing the PhD (and if you do one, do it fast)

A 2010 article in *The Economist* reports that doing a PhD, on average, lowers one's earning potential across one's lifetime. If are thinking of doing the PhD and it's not a sure

thing that you're on an academic job track, and if you haven't secured a scholarship, think very carefully about enrolling. And if you do it, try to get it finished in good time. Employers are likely to be more impressed by the fact that you finished the project in a timely manner than what the actual project was.

- You'll be in good company

It might be worth bearing mind that a number of philosophers, intellectuals and other writers have managed to flourish while working outside academia. John Stuart Mill, one of the greatest philosophers of the 19th century, worked as a colonial administrator for 35 years. Robert Charles Zaehner, an expert on comparative religion, worked as an intelligence officer; David Hume worked in the British Embassy in Paris. Walter Terence Stace worked in the civil service in Ceylon, George Orwell worked in the Burmese police force, and Franz Kafka worked in a law firm, specialising in industrial accidents. At least one great philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, worked explicitly on government policy, in particular legal reform and economic policy, and his philosophy transformed the British legal system.







**Hugh Clapin**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

Bachelor of Science (Major in Philosophy), Honours: UNSW – 1990

Doctor of Philosophy (Philosophy): UNSW – 1996

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Investigating some of the big intellectual questions and challenges, particularly about ideas and reasoning, including about mind, epistemology and metaphysics: how can a material brain and body give rise to mental phenomena? How do ideas connect to each other (reasoning, rationality etc.)? How is the mind (and ideas) connected to the world?

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I work for the Australian media and communications regulator, the ACMA. I lead a small team that coordinates the ACMA's implementation of new legislation to manage radio frequency spectrum. The job involves contributing to establishing a fresh approach to the regulation of a scarce natural resource through close collaboration with many experts within my agency, policy development staff in the Department of Communications, and spectrum users.

**HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I learnt through Philosophy that many bad ideas are supported by excellent and convincing arguments! The skills of critical thinking – of going beyond the surface attraction of a particular idea, argument, course of action or policy approach – are invaluable when considering what advice to provide to public policy decision makers, and how to provide that advice.

Public servants both develop and implement the legislation set by Parliament. Final decisions are made by democratically elected representatives, or their delegates (sometimes those delegates are established under law to provide a degree of independence from day to day politics). In this context, my philosophy training has provided me with a deep-seated ability to critically analyse the rapid flow of argument and advice that is the hallmark of contemporary public policy and its implementation.

Philosophy doesn't give you the answers to everyday problems and dilemmas – but it provides the tools to recognise various kinds of problem or dilemma when they arise, and to recognise how arguments and ideas are connected to each other, arising from intellectual frameworks and (largely) self-consistent bodies of thought.

Philosophy has also left me comfortable working with deeply inconsistent or contrasting sets of ideas. Often I am faced with issues where the competing arguments (from within

and without government) are based in fundamentally different premises and world views. It is enormously helpful to see that this is what is happening early on, and as a consequence to dig a little deeper than the surface of the arguments or reasoning provided for various points of view.

**IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I had a five year contract as Associate Lecturer, and then Lecturer, at the Australian National University. I had a 3 year contract as a U2000 Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Sydney.

I chose to move out of academia for two reasons – and it was probably the combination of them rather than either individually.

First, my postdoc provided the most wonderful opportunity to pursue my research interests, and my passion for teaching, in exactly the measure and direction that suited me. But after those 3 years, during which arose a book, journal articles, and a number of successful conferences and workshops, I realised I still wasn't having fun! It was hard to imagine what Philosophy position would actually be better, at least in the short term. And I've since discovered that I particularly enjoy and value working as part of a team – I think I found the day to day practice and structure of philosophy research and teaching to be quite isolating.

Secondly, there were no jobs available in cities I wished to live, during the time I was actively searching for a position. My family and I weren't prepared to go just anywhere in order to secure a philosophy job.





**Jacob Pearce**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

PhD in History and Philosophy of Science at University of Melbourne (2015).

BSc/BA(Hons) with philosophy and social theory major at University of Melbourne (2010).

Year 12 Philosophy at Melbourne High School (2004).

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I became interested in philosophy as a teenager when I realised that I didn't really have an answer to any fundamental questions of life, nor had I ever reflected on why I chose to do things in the way that I did. This is a well-trodden path during adolescence I suppose, but philosophy gave me an avenue to pursue some of the questions I had. I'm still excited by the plethora of philosophical thinking that has been undertaken throughout human history. While training in philosophical skills such as critical thinking can help day-to-day, I'm still interested in an overall critique or meta-perspective on philosophy in general. Things such as the conditions which allowed philosophy in its current form to emerge; whether reasoning is a historically contingent concept; and perhaps more applicable to politics today, how philosophy and reason are, at times, subverted and used as a powerful and authoritative tool to achieve political ends. My PhD was in the history and philosophy of modern cosmology. I traced the way that historical reasoning emerged, evolved, and became entrenched in cosmological inquiry over the past 100-odd years. I'm still interested in pure philosophy, but I've become more interested over the years in philosophical perspectives on other disciplines, especially the sciences.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I'm a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). I work in the Assessment and Psychometric Research Division. Day-to-day, I work on high-stakes assessment instruments, such as the UMAT and GAMSAT for medical selection. For the UMAT, I work on the 'logical reasoning and problem solving' section. For the GAMSAT, I work on the physics component of the 'reasoning in the biological and physical sciences' section. I also work with different medical specialty colleges as an assessment consultant, helping ensure that assessment practices are of high-quality and following best-practice in assessment. This involves practices such as exam blueprinting, employing a range of psychometric techniques, ensuring thorough review of candidate results and exam question performance, following standard setting procedures, and ensuring useful feedback is given to candidates.

## **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

If someone told me 10 years ago that I was going to be working in assessment, I don't think I would have believed them. I started at ACER 8 years ago writing items as a casual job, but I quickly started to love it. Some people (and many graduate capability statements) go on a lot about the 'transferrable skills' that you acquire by studying philosophy, but I think this is spot on. I spent over 10 years involved in the study of philosophy in some form before I completed my PhD. Over this time, I took subjects that covered lots of interesting things – critical thinking, formal logic, epistemology, metaphysics, history of philosophy, history and philosophy of science, etc. However, I think the three most important 'transferrable skills' I learned that have helped me in my current career are:

- (i) Clarity of thought. The ability to cut through jargon and invalid or unsound reasoning, coupled with the drive to always present information as clearly as possible.
- (ii) The importance of critique. This may be an upshot of an arts degree more broadly, but I do think that philosophical study encourages a type of critical perspective on the world around you. Philosophy demands that you ask questions – a tendency that I have come to see certainly as more of a strength rather than a weakness.
- (iii) The importance of scholarship. Even with the internet at our fingertips, if you want to become an expert in any type of content area, it is essential that you read thoroughly. Reading primary sources, original texts, understanding historical contexts, etc. This type of knowledge acquisition does not happen overnight, but if you understand content thoroughly, and how it applies in different contexts, you will be valued in the workplace.

## **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

I hold an honorary associate affiliation with the University of Melbourne. This keeps me in the field in a way, and grants me library access. It also means that as I build a publication record I can maintain an affiliation with a university department. I see this as a potential avenue to enter pure academia at a later date.

## **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Your philosophical training is a great strength, and something that will help you in countless ways in the future (even if you cannot quite see it yet!). Keep focusing on content areas that you find interesting. Hopefully it will lead to paid employment in some form that is aligned to your area of interest.





## **Miriam Bankovsky**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

My exploratory undergraduate years were spent at ANU, from which I graduated with honours in 2002. I then completed a French Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies (what is now referred to as a Masters II). It's really equivalent to honours. This permitted me to continue my PhD under a cotutelle agreement between University New South Wales and Université Paris Ouest – Nanterre, and I graduated in 2009. My PhD supervisors were Paul Patton and Catherine Malabou.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Initially, philosophy was about challenging aspects of my identity that had come to trouble me. So, it was really the units in European philosophy that grabbed me. No-one is better at shattering narratives of identity than the post-war Europeans! This attraction might appear odd, given that I studied my undergrad at ANU, renowned for analytic philosophy and the research school of social sciences. But it was Penelope Deutscher's class on Love, Death and Freedom that first overwhelmed me, and forced me to take myself apart. What philosophy can do to a young mind is extraordinary. When I had used up all the "external units" that I could take as part of a piano performance degree, I changed my degree entirely to arts, simply so that I could do more philosophy.

But philosophy, for me, was about ethics and justice too (something's got to replace God, right?) It was probably my working-class and migrant parents from England and India, working hard to give my brother and me far more than they themselves ever received, who contributed to an overdeveloped sensitivity to injustice. I still have it as a proud member of the union. I thank my parents sincerely, for I was never pushed to be vocational. For me, philosophy soon became a conduit to the exploration of ethics and political justice, informed by both the European tradition that had first helped me rearrange my world, but later, and increasingly so, informed by the more deliberative and Kantian political thinkers. In hindsight this now makes sense: it was only after I was able to explain to myself why I had initially found the Kantian thinkers so frustrating that I could begin to understand their value. At ANU, I noticed how the ability to deliberate philosophically often seemed related to education and economic privilege. Speaking was far more of a painful endeavour for me, and I was not exactly underprivileged. It was in this way that philosophy, and even its own practise, became firmly about socio-economic justice for me.

What is exciting about philosophy is that no-body knows what it is, even if they tell you they do. It has helped me, first, to ask different questions that lend a new perspective on

things. It has also helped me, second, to put these things back together in a different way. I have discovered how even the philosophical ways in which we think tend to reflect our place in culture, society and history, and also that this thinking might in tortuous ways be reoriented in more desirable directions.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I don't take the privilege of teaching and researching in philosophy for granted. I'm actually employed in politics, not in philosophy, where, as a continuing Senior Lecturer in Politics and an Australian Research Council DECRA fellow at La Trobe University, I have taught political theory, political ideas and ideologies, the history of political thought, ethics and economics, and other units. I was employed to support the "PPE – Politics, Philosophy and Economics" degree at La Trobe.

I love being in a politics department because I interact with academics who are experts on the institutional, historical and policy contexts of our political ideas. The role has also pushed me to seek opportunities to develop more capacity in economics. My ARC funded research now extends my plural philosophical approach into the domain of economics, and I am working on a manuscript (my second book) provisionally entitled *The Family, Ethics and Economics: An Unorthodox History of Household Economics*.

Attempting to feel comfortable with the uncomfortable, I have this year accepted media invitations, including an interview on ABC Radio National's *Philosopher's Zone* and a conversation with Waleed Aly and Scott Stephens on *The Minefield*. I am also looking forward to the challenge of presenting my work, later in the year, to economists in the UK and Perth, first at the *History of Economic Thought* conference in Oxford, then at SOAS University of London, and finally, to the *Women in Social and Economic Research (WiSER)* cluster at Curtin in Perth.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

My current career is teaching and researching in political theory, with important crossovers into the history of economic thought. Philosophy helps me to ask questions that haven't been raised in relation to a particular way of thinking. It also helps me to put a system of thinking back together in a different way, not only revealing how our thinking reflects our institutional background, but also exploring resources for reorienting thinking towards different ends.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Philosophy is so much more than clear thinking in response to a question, or the application of logical thinking to a particular topic or discipline. It also requires the courage to uncover and formulate into a question what seems to be problematic, raising the questions that most need to be asked, even if these questions appear odd or make others (and even yourself) feel a bit uncomfortable. This courage and creativity is relevant to everything.



## **Mitch Parsell**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed both my undergraduate (BA(Hons)) and PhD at the University of Tasmania in the 1990s. My PhD was awarded in 2000. My undergraduate degree had a broad analytic focus. I particularly enjoyed philosophy of mind. I combined my philosophy degree with a psychology degree. My PhD looked at the relationship between artificial neural networks and folk psychology. During my PhD, I spent a time at the University of Texas at Austin to study cognitive science.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Philosophy excites me because of its simplicity and openness. It is simple in that it has no specific methodology, approach, apparatus or the like. It is pure rational argument: critical, deep and creative thought about a subject. It is open in that you can apply this to any domain. You can think philosophically about the nature of reality, the nature of right and wrong, or the nature of beauty. You can think philosophically about politics, education or art. No subject is out-of-bounds.

It is exciting to be given permission to think deeply about anything. You can, for example, bring your philosophical training to very practical issues at work: to how you structure your time, how you manage your team or what procedures your organisation should implement to improve performance in a specific domain. This is how I use my philosophical training in my present role.

### **COULD YOU TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Presently, I am the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching for the Faculty of Human Sciences at Macquarie University. This involves leading the teaching strategy for the faculty. I am also chair of the university's Senate Learning and Teaching Committee which is charged with developing the university's learning and teaching policies and procedures. My days are fairly diverse, although (sadly) meetings are a constant. Perhaps some concrete (and interesting) examples from this week.

Monday: I got to explore the new teaching spaces we have been designing for the university inside a Virtual Reality rendering. It has been a very interesting process working with architects and committed educators to plan what the next generation of teaching should look like, what technology we need to include and how this translates to the organisation of the physical space. Exploring our plans in VR was amazing (and also more than a little nauseating – literally).

Tuesday: I worked with my team on a second roll out of live lecture streaming for the faculty. Live streaming allows students to access live lectures from their own devices and interact with each other and teaching staff in real time. It's a big change for the university

and the planning has involved making sure we pre-empt and guard against numerous possible problems. The first pilot made some senior people very nervous, but the students loved it.

Wednesday: I prepared some materials for an upcoming steering group meeting on academic integrity. Universities across the sector are very concerned with plagiarism, ghost writing and the like. I'm presently chairing the group working on MQ's approach to these issues. The work stems from some research I conducted a number of years ago on trust and plagiarism. It's a complex and difficult project, but exactly the type of thing that demands the critical and creative thinking philosophy provides great training for.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

My work is very much focused on what constitutes learning and how we can best use the affordances of modern technology to promote learning. I also need to think seriously about potential issues facing universities. My philosophical training is helpful in both domains.

There is a massive literature on what constitutes learning. The literature crosses multiple academic disciplines. My philosophical training has given me the analytic skills to assess and synthesis this diverse and often divergent literature. It has provided me with argumentative skills to defend a position against criticism, often in highly emotion and high-stakes settings. Just as importantly, it allows me to be constantly on guard against assumptions, often my own, about the way things must be. Questioning those assumptions and then arguing rationally for the alternatives is incredibly valuable to an organisation, and something philosophers are trained to do.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Be open to possibilities, and watch out for your own assumptions about what a philosopher can (or can't do). But, most importantly, enjoy yourself.







**Ruth Isaac**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Political Studies and Philosophy and then a Master of Arts with Honours in Philosophy at the University of Auckland in the early-mid 1990s. I began a PhD at the University of Toronto in Philosophy, but did not complete that degree.

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I have always liked the way that philosophy allows a deep and open exploration of ideas, through rigorous analysis and criticism. It is also exciting to think about the ‘big’ questions – the things that really matter – and to be able to understand why and how different answers can be provided to those questions. And it gives you tools to have these conversations (and others) in ways which provide insight and enable debate that takes people forward in their thinking.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I am a public servant and a policy professional – policy advice has been my career since leaving university. I have worked in a number of government departments and different areas of policy, including spending 13 years in the New Zealand Treasury, and earlier in my career did a stint as private secretary to a senior Minister in the Beehive. I have been an Associate Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Education in charge of investment in the education system and strategic policy.

I am currently General Manager of a large policy branch within the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. My branch is the lead policy and regulatory advisor for the government on the labour market – i.e. employment law, employment relations, skills and labour market, health and safety, accident compensation, compliance and exploitation, and immigration (and related border issues). We cover issues such as the minimum wage, collective bargaining, pay equity, refugee quotas, who is allowed into NZ to work, funding for injury prevention in the workplace, and the safety framework for working with electric vehicles. We provide policy advice and support legislative changes and other regulatory settings for the Government of the day, and work closely with regulators and service delivery agencies – such as ACC, WorkSafe, the Labour Inspectorate, and Immigration NZ - that put into effect Government policies. We work with senior Ministers and a large set of social partners (unions, business) and stakeholders, as well as researchers and other officials, to ensure that the Government is as well informed as possible in making decisions.

## **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I think my philosophy background has helped me enormously in my policy career. Philosophy trains you to think clearly and systematically, to unpick issues and arguments, and to build a strong case for something you want to persuade others to agree with. It also provided me with frameworks for analysis (including logic!) and for separating means and ends. Political philosophy also helped me to understand different perspectives on 'ends' and different approaches to social justice and the role of the state. Philosophy also helped me to write well, and to structure my thinking and arguments effectively, and to bring a critical eye to all I hear and see. This training has been and remains invaluable.

I would add that along the way – since starting my career – I have done a bit of economics and a lot of economics reading, and this also provides an excellent additional set of analytical tools and frameworks for my work.

One skill that philosophers tend to overuse in the workplace is the 'black hat' – it took me a while to learn not to break every other argument apart at every opportunity.

## **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

One – know the value of your skills in the world of work. The main thing would be to understand that your skills and training are incredibly useful in a range of spheres – anything where clear thinking, writing, and in depth analysis is required. Critical analysis and the ability to structure arguments, the ability to understand and develop concepts and frameworks for working through issues, are very important skills.

Two – many jobs will enable you to use these skills and assuming that you are a philosophy graduate because you like this kind of thing, then you can find a number of career paths that will take your fancy.

Three – these skills are rarely enough (when all is said and done). You will need to develop some deep subject matter knowledge/expertise in most jobs. A lot of this will happen on the job – but also look for ways to use your research skills and big brain to get ahead of the curve here.

Four - you may have to tone down (or choose when to use) your ability to demolish someone else's arguments/views – this generally looks arrogant outside of debating clubs and university. Analytics and logic are not the only way to win people over – and rarely work on their own (how infuriating!). You need to get this quickly to succeed and focus on growing wider influencing skills.

Finally – the world of work is changing. You are likely to have lots of jobs, even a few different careers, some of those jobs might get automated, and the way you work may look very different in the 'gig economy'. But robots and AI are unlikely to take over jobs that take a lot of judgment, tactics, problem solving, the ability to find common ground and build trust in negotiations, and advice born of a wide range of experience.





## **Swantje Lorrimer**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

Macquarie University - BA (Soc Scie) 2000 – 2006 Hons (Phil) 2007 - 2008

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

Initially, despite a keen interest in Philosophy, I didn't take any subjects because people told me it was 'useless' in terms of employability

But very soon I disregarded that bad advice and found the areas of ethics, metaphysics and phenomenology super engaging – they really helped me to make sense of the big questions in life and the fairly chaotic life I had been leading

Philosophy is about learning to never being scared or hesitant to ask one more question about how things really are, might otherwise be and searching for avenues that might lead to alternatives to what we see in front of us – it teaches a habit of rigorous questioning

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Before studying Philosophy, I had a successful career as tailor for the entertainment industry (in London).

After finishing my degree at MQ I stayed on as research assistant for many big projects (some research, a lot of administrative work). I found this work very rewarding and it polished my research, organisational and interpersonal skills.

Two years ago I returned to my original career as tailor for the entertainment industry. I work for myself and my days are excitingly varied. My clients are TV commercials, theatres, Australian Opera, movie production companies. I have a workroom at home where I make patterns, cut garments and manufacture anything from bespoke suits to neoprene superhero outfits (with electronics) to beaded dance outfits for Broadway shows. Prior to undertaking any job, I am involved in discussions with the design team and costume supervisors about which work process and which materials will yield the best outcome for the given timescale and budget. Sometimes I am hired for a particular show to work in a workroom, where I am cutting the garments and I supervise a team of sewers to manufacture the items. Some days I spend on film sets, just adjusting last minute details on the garments.

I have applied for jobs as production researcher/ assistant for social documentaries... who knows if anything comes of that – I would not be surprised if it did... I am very open to yet another career change...

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

There is a big difference in how I work in my original profession AFTER my philosophical training! When people hire me now, it is not just because of my very good craftsmanship. I am the first port of call for a number of people in the industry because of my ‘thinking outside the box’ approach and because I never think “I know how to do this”, “Yeah, I have done this before”. I get approached because I don’t shy away from unconventional production approaches, I am interested in more than just my little contribution to the whole (but how it will fit in with the rest of the entire production), I am happy to cut corners, take risks, think up alternative ways... whatever the plan ends up being in the end, I will always find a way to get everything over the finishing line on time, no matter what and how.

In sum, I have incorporated problem solving, inquiry and sound deduction skills into my craft with great results. Working as a research assistant has helped a lot as well, since it developed my project management and communication skills.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Study what you love. Keep in mind, there are very few career options for professional philosophers, and it is a very stressful and competitive path to undertake, if that is what you want to do.

Don’t lose sight of all the other options, apart from academia. Philosophy teaches sound thinking and writing skills that will give you a competitive edge in all professions you may consider entering.

Keep an open mind. Volunteer as much as possible during your studies to create a great network and build your skills. I was a teacher trainer for Primary Ethics for two years and taught Ethics in a Primary school for three years. I also volunteered for Get Up! and ACF on a weekly basis. But there are endless volunteer positions in many NGO’s where you can learn all your employability skills needed to enter a fulfilling career.





**Tim van Gelder**

**WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

- BA(Hons) University of Melbourne 1984
- PhD University of Pittsburgh 1989

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

As a student, I (somewhat naively) felt that philosophers studied the most profound questions of all, and so doing philosophy, and perhaps being a philosopher, was deeply meaningful. The intellectual rigour of analytic philosophy also appealed. Some individual teachers were deeply inspiring.

**COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

I have recently become a co-leader of a large interdisciplinary research project based at the University of Melbourne, funded by US Intelligence. Due to a historical accident, my appointment is in the School of BioSciences, but my contribution, apart from research management, is as an applied epistemologist and system designer.

The largest chunk of my career was spent in as a founder/principal in a micro consulting and training firm, van Gelder & Monk (previously Austhink Consulting). vGM started out doing training in critical thinking, but ended up in the applied epistemology business. We helped organisations understand and improve their reasoning, decision making and problem solving processes.

I also had a five year interlude as founder/CEO of a small venture-funded software startup, Austhink Software, which created the argument mapping tools Rationale and bCisive.

**HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

The most useful skill was the ability to understand and evaluate complex reasoning and argumentation. More broadly, how to organise your thinking.

**IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

After my PhD I was:

- Four years as a regular assistant professor in philosophy and cognitive science at Indiana University
- Five years as an ARC QEII Fellow in philosophy at ANU (1.5 years) then Melbourne (3.5 years).

By the end of the fellowship I had become bored and restless with the academic lifestyle, and was even feeling jaded with my research. Having had the luxury of an ARC

fellowship, I didn't want to return to the regular academic life with teaching and administrative responsibilities. And, though it sounds cliched, I wanted to do work that made a difference in the "real world."

Life as a consultant, in my experience, tends to throw up a more diverse range of interesting challenges, and take you to a wider range of interesting (work)places. The major downsides, at least if you are running your own business, are perennial uncertainty about your future income, and no safety net.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Epistemology is a very hot topic at the moment.

Consider trying to find entry-level work in a consulting firm of some kind. Doesn't have to be one of the big-name multinationals. There are hundreds of mid-to small consulting firms which do very interesting work, most of which you would never have heard of.

Build your intellectual toolkit so you can tackle a wide range of problems. Acquire skills in areas like mathematical modelling, experimental design, data science, coding.

Generally speaking, unless you are very lucky, life outside the academic career path is going to be better than life within it.





**Toby Collis**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND AT WHAT LEVEL?**

I completed my Bachelors and Honours degree at Macquarie University, graduating in 2008, whilst also undertaking a combined law degree. I also studied jurisprudence and political theory at Oxford University as part of the Bachelor of Civil Law in 2012.

### **WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT PHILOSOPHY?**

I had originally enrolled in a psychology degree and took a first year philosophy course as an elective. I remember how this course, in a systemic way, articulated my own questions about the world and society. I was hooked and switched majors to philosophy! At the same time, in my law degree, I was tackling jurisprudence (the philosophy of law). Normally a dread for most students, I took to it like a duck to water. In particular, I was fascinated by one essay by Jacques Derrida on the force of law. I looked at the philosophy courses at Macquarie and plotted a path of subjects that would lead me to studying Derrida and post-structuralism. My goal, by the end of my philosophical education would be to understand Derrida's essay, which I would like to think I did; my Honours thesis was on his essay, which I used as to reconceptualise the Mabo decision, one of Australia's most important cases on the recognition of native title.

### **COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

After graduating I began my career as a commercial lawyer, but early on transitioned to a social justice career. I am a currently human rights lawyer, based in London, at the Open Society Justice Initiative, which is a global, multi-thematic NGO that focuses on strategic human rights litigation. I am working on a diverse range of cases including anticorruption, freedom of expression, discrimination and Roma rights. Prior to this I worked on cases at a number of international human rights and international criminal law mechanisms including the European Court of Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, Special Tribunal for Lebanon and others. I have worked on cases involving the Armenian Genocide, the case against Saif Gaddafi, and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Singapore. Prior to this I was part of a team that delivered access to justice projects in Malawi, Africa.

### **HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING AND FORMATION HELP YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER?**

Philosophy and law are, I believe, two sides of the same coin and are highly complementary. Philosophy asks life's big questions and unpacks them within a rigorous methodology. Law does the same – lawmaking asks what are the best norms to regulate society, and then backs them through coercive mechanisms. This is particularly the case

for human rights which fundamentally attempts to articulate norms that are the conditions for equality, dignity and fairness. Law, like philosophy, is not dogmatic, and litigation is an institutional method for debating the content and application of these norms. Skills in thinking creatively and having innovative ideas about received concepts, and then persuasively articulating this applies equally to philosophy and the law.

### **IF YOU HAVE WORKED AS AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT?**

At the end of my philosophical studies I oscillated whether to undertake further doctorate studies. However, I wanted to be out in the world, trying to make a real impact for the marginalised, and I could better do this through the law. But it would be a mistake to say I no longer ‘practice’ philosophy – philosophical concepts such as the content of equality and justice play an obviously critical role in my career.

### **WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE RECENT PHILOSOPHY GRADUATES?**

Despite not undertaking an academic career, I never regretted studying philosophy. It has stayed with me as a critical launchpad to my current career. Said another way, there are many indirect ways that philosophy is useful for non-academic careers. But to consider merely its usefulness is overly-reductive. More importantly, I loved it. And I would like to think it is the love of philosophy and its intellectual challenges that was the reason graduates studied philosophy. That passion and intellectual rigour will hold you in good stead in any career.

However, if you are considering a non-academic career, having another string to your bow such as a professional degree may make it a slightly smoother transition.

