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Akademiniai maršrutai / Academic Itineraries

On Paraconsistent Logic, its Reception in East and West, and on Being a Philosopher

Graham Priest interviewed by **Jonas Dagys** and **Pranciškus Gricius**

Graham Priest is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at The Graduate Center *City University of New York* (CUNY). He is well-known for his work on non-classical logic, especially paraconsistent logic, metaphysics, paradoxes, and the history of philosophy, both East and West. Priest is a most prominent defender of dialetheism, the view that there are true contradictions.

Professor Priest participated in the 2nd Logic and Philosophy conference in Vilnius University. After the conference, we – Jonas Dagys and Pranciškus Gricius – had a pleasure to talk with Prof. Priest about his intellectual biography, paraconsistent logic, dialetheism, the divide between Continental/Analytic and Western/Eastern philosophies, and the value of studying philosophy.

The interview was taken on Monday, 27 June 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, Vilnius University.

Jonas Dagys (JD): To start with, we wanted to ask you some questions about your intellectual biography. How did you end up in philosophy at all?

Graham Priest (GP): Well, I was trained as a mathematician. I studied mathematics at the university, but although I enjoyed mathematics very much in high school, I didn't care for it much at university. I thought that the teaching was terrible: You'd have lecturers who would come in and spend an hour with their back to the audience writing on the blackboard. All he did was copy it down. There was no enthusiasm, no energy, no sense that you were dealing with something very beautiful.

While I was an undergraduate, a friend told me about logic. I thought, well, I will look into that. I did most of the reading of that myself. And, of course, logic has a very close connection with philosophy. I started to see the philosophical connections. When I finished my undergraduate degree, I decided to study mathematics but work in mathematical logic. My doctorate is in the mathematics department, but on mathematical logic. By the time I finished my doctorate, I knew two things. First of all, philosophy was a lot more fun than mathematics. And secondly, I would never be a very good mathematician. I wanted a job in a philosophy department, and for reasons I still don't really understand, the University of St Andrews gave me a temporary job in philosophy. I jumped at it. And since then, I've worked in philosophy departments.

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Having virtually no background in philosophy, I didn't know any. So, I had to teach myself. I've just completed 50 years as a professional philosopher, so I've been around for a long time now. I've taught myself a lot of philosophy in that time, and I've enjoyed every moment of it. And, in some sense, the fact that I didn't have a philosophical education has kind of helped me because I didn't know what things were supposed to be important. So I just followed my interests. If I didn't know something and it looked interesting, I would just teach a course on it and learn about it. After being a professional philosopher for some 25 years I started to feel that I knew something about how in a world all the bits fit together. And they do fit together! Although it's not always obvious.

I started to get a feel for the area as a whole, at least I thought I did. Then I met someone who is now a very close friend and who showed me that I knew absolutely nothing about the ancient traditions in philosophy. There is this whole other world of philosophy which was rich, intriguing, and important, and I knew absolutely nothing about it. And it wasn't that I thought it wasn't philosophy or anything like that: I wasn't biased against it, it just wasn't on my horizon. But talking to Jay Garfield, I realised that it was important. I started to try to teach myself some of that too. I made a point of going to various Asian countries to study and teach. I didn't give up working as a Western philosopher, I didn't give up working as a logician. But nowadays when I do philosophy I have Eastern and Western traditions to draw on, as well as, of course, my tools in logic. I just find it is a very rich matrix of ideas to use.

I guess, over the years, there is very little in philosophy that doesn't now interest me because, as I say, it all sort of connects up in the end, although it takes a long time to see it. Nowadays I'm engaged with most philosophical things.

Pranciškus Gricius (PG): And what is the place of dialetheism and paraconsistent in this history?

GP: Well, I was trained to be a classical logician. My doctorate is on classical mathematical logic. But, of course, if you study mathematical logic, you are going to be engaged with results like Gödel's theorem and its connection with paradox and so on. Those things have driven so much of the development of logic in the 20th century. Having a philosophical inclination, I was engaged in thinking about the meaning of Gödel's theorem, how you handle paradoxes, and so on. And it was thinking about Gödel's theorem which started to draw my attention to paraconsistency. As I am sure you know, the reaction to the self-referential paradoxes in the history of Western philosophy has been: "*Hey! There's got to be something wrong with the arguments!*" What is wrong with them? Well, there is still no consensus on that after two and a half thousand years, so it does not look very promising. I was struck by the idea that there is actually nothing wrong with the arguments. Of course, if that is right and you have to accept the conclusions, then you cannot use classical logic, because, if you do, all the hell breaks loose. You need a logic which tolerates contradictions. There wasn't really any reference to that in my doctoral thesis, but it was immediately after that that I started to work on paraconsistent logic.

At that time, I did not know that investigations of paraconsistent logic were already 20 years old. I wrote my first paper on paraconsistency when I was still in Scotland in the UK. And then I re-immigrated to Australia and I sort of fell in with the Australian logicians. One of those was Richard. His name was Richard Radley at the time, but he changed his name to Sylvan, so his later writings are coming out under the name Richard Sylvan. He had done a lot of work on relevance logic, which is one kind of paraconsistency. Richard knew a lot more about what had been going on in the rest of the world than I did. He was ten years older than I was. I immediately started working with Richard on paraconsistency and dialetheism. That's when the whole thing really kicked off. We worked on similar areas. Richard and I coined the name 'dialetheism'. We really pushed dialetheism as a view. And, of course, as you can imagine, it was highly unpopular. It's not exactly so frantically popular now, but in those times it was so unorthodox that we had a lot of trouble.

JD: Like what? You couldn't get a paper published? The reviewers wouldn't let you go through?

GP: No, not quite. My first paper was called *The Logic of Paradox*, and that was something that I'd written before I moved to Australia. I sent it off to the *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, and they accepted it really fast. They didn't even ask for revisions. So, there wasn't that kind of hostility.

It was more at conferences. You would say "*OK, I think these arguments show the contradictions got to be true*" and then an outlaw, and uproar of people saying that you are crazy. To be honest, I thought it was crazy. I thought that this is so orthodox in the history of Western philosophy, that there must be something wrong with contradictions. For a long time when I was giving talks, I expected someone to put their hand up in the back of the audience and say "*Yes, but...*" and then I would have to go "*Oh yeah…*" and give it up. But it never happened! And, after 10 years, I thought, well maybe it is not so crazy after all. After that I thought, well, let's push it.

By that time, Richard and I had been going to conferences in Australia for a long time, and it was familiar to philosophers and logicians in Australia, but Australia is a very small country. If we were ever going to get anywhere, we had to make it better known in Europe, North America, and eventually Asia, and South America. So, we've worked on that.

PG: Why do you think we have the resistance to accept contradictions?

GP: That is a very interesting question. I think there are several factors. One of them, I am sure, is the legacy of Aristotle. He argues for the law of noncontradiction in *Metaphysics*, and thus it is clear that there are dialetheists before Aristotle. At least he thinks there are. I think it is fair to say that Aristotle's defense of the law of non-contradiction cemented the view into the history of Western philosophy. This is kind of interesting because, if you look at the arguments, they are pretty terrible. And this is not just my view, this is the view of the modern Aristotle's scholars. But they were very successful sociologically because

they established the law so firmly that there hasn't really been a defense of the law of non-contradiction. There wasn't something like a new defense until a long period when the law was seriously under pressure from dialetheism. It is kind of odd, because everything about Aristotle has been overturned in the last 2000 years, or, if not overturned, seriously problematized. And this did not happen to the law of non-contradiction until recently. In some sense, modern dialetheism is an attack on the last bastion of Aristotelianism. So, it's been orthodox, I think, partly because of the magisterial position of Aristotle in the history of Western philosophy and the fact that virtually no one has sought to challenge it.

Now, you've got to be a bit careful about that, because it's unquestionably the orthodox view. Over the years, I started to look more into the history of Western philosophy, and there are people who do challenge it. The most obvious example is Hegel. There are others, but certainly Hegel. However, if you speak to Hegel's scholars about him being a dialetheist, they start to shake and quiver. Because, well, if you work on Hegel, you think he is a great philosopher, and you do not want your great philosopher endorsing crazy views like dialetheism! So, if you look at a lot of the scholarly work on Hegel or the work applying Hegel's ideas, most of it is an attempt to render his views consistent with the law of non-contradiction. I just think that is crazy: Just read the guy! Interestingly, what we are now seeing is a number of younger Hegel scholars who are actually using dialetheism in their interpretation of Hegel. I think that they have a much more accurate interpretation of what Hegel is doing. Just to come back to the point: I do think there are important philosophers in the history of Western philosophy who are dialetheists. But they are minority voices, for sure.

Even in contemporary European philosophy, I don't think there are many philosophers, at least until the present period, who really think that contradictions might be true. They often *say* things which suggest it, but they do not really *think* it. Let me tell you an anecdote. I met Derrida only once, and it was in 1996 or 1997. I was in New York, and Derrida was visiting, and he was giving a lecture at NYU. I went to it, the lecture was in French, and my French is okay. I didn't follow the lecture very well, but then I don't think that was due to the language, that was due to Derrida. The title of the lecture was one of the following, and I forget which, and you will see why: It was either "*The Possible is more Impossible than the Impossible*", or "*The Impossible is more Possible than the Possible*". This was a big public lecture. A week or so later, Derrida was giving a small graduate seminar, and I had an NYU affiliation, so I went along. He was talking in French and English, and, after about an hour, I plucked up my courage, put my hand up, and said "*Professor Derrida, your works are full of these contradictory things. Do you think that contradictions might actually be true*?" And he looked at me as though I was a complete idiot, and said "*No, of course not, one contradictory is true in one sense, another contradictory is true in a different sense*." I thought, thank you very much. He was just using these things to sound profound, but he didn't really think that – he didn't really endorse the violation of non-contradiction. I think there is a tendency, especially in French philosophy, not so much in German philosophy, to sort of dress up your ideas in a kind of sexy-sounding rhetoric.

JD: A terminological question: is dialetheism stated by just saying that some contradictions are true?

GP: Yes.

JD: And there's nothing else to it? No formal side?

GP: Well, sometimes it is hard to distinguish between metaphysics and semantics. Is the view that some contradictions are true, a view about semantics or metaphysics, or both? Yes, definitely both. But it doesn't commit you to any particular view of truth. There's nothing more to the definition.

Richard and I coined the name in the late 70s. We were well aware that paraconsistency was being studied in many different countries: Australia, Brazil, Poland, Belgium, and Canada. There were a lot of people working on paraconsistency across the world, largely independently of each other. We thought it was time that we should try to draw all these things together. We produced the first collection of essays on paraconsistency – we collected them from all the people we knew who were working on it. The word 'paraconsistency' had been around by that time for maybe 10 years. It was coined by a Peruvian philosopher, Miró Quesada, who was aware of Newton da Costa. So, da Costa was the most important Brazilian, maybe South American, mathematical logician. Quesada was aware of da Costa's work and created the name. That caught on very fast. By the time Richard and I were working, the word 'paraconsistency' was well established.

But there was a kind of confusion because people ran together paraconsistency, which is a view about a consequence relation, namely the view that the principle of explosion is not valid. They were confusing that with the view that some contradictions are true. What we now call dialetheism. Both were called 'paraconsistency'. Sometimes dialetheism was called strong paraconsistency. There was just too much confusion. Most paraconsistant logicians are not dialetheists. They think that explosion fails not because some contradictions are true, but for other reasons, maybe relevance or information processing, or whatever. We really did need a new word, and that is when Richard and I coined the term 'dialetheism'. It is a really ugly word, but it does its job.

JD: But why is it counterintuitive, this idea that contradictions could be true? OK, to be more fair, is it counterintuitive that contradictions could be true?

GP: Yes, prima facie it is.

JD: And, obviously, Aristotle is not to blame for that. Or do you think that our intuitions are affected by his arguments in the *Metaphysics* in some ways?

GP: Yes, I do think that philosophy has a habit of seeping down into popular consciousness. So, there is an element of that. But I think there is more going on than that. One of the other things that is going on is this: In day-to-day situations, we do not often meet situations where it is plausible that contradictions might be true. For example, Donald Trump says *p*

on one day and not *p* on the next day. He does not have any reason for what he says, other than promoting himself. It is not that he has reasons for the two contradictions.

JD: Trump is not a dialetheist.

GP: Yeah… (*laughs*) So, most of the time, when in ordinary life we meet contradictory circumstances, there is very little plausibility in the thought that they are a dialetheia. The situation changes when you get to paradoxes, in particular, paradoxes of self-reference. Then you've got these arguments for a contradiction, and you start to think, well, maybe this kind of common-sense view has its limits. Wittgenstein says somewhere that philosophy is often motivated by an inadequate diet of examples. He was very keen on examples, of course, especially in the *Philosophical Investigations*. And if you just take run-of-the-mill examples, then, OK, dialetheism is not going to seem very plausible. But once you look at these unusual situations, then you think, well, maybe our common-sense views have their limitations.

This is not, by any means, the first time this has happened in the history of logic. Consider the paradox of infinity, for example. Take the natural numbers. Throw out all the even ones, and you are left with the odd ones. But they can be put into a one-to-one correspondence. Thus, in some sense, there appear to be as many odd numbers as numbers. That seems really paradoxical. This paradox was known for at least 1500 years before Cantor. People thought that our notion of infinity is just incoherent. Then Cantor comes along and says: "*Well, no, it is not. It really is the case that there are as many odd numbers as numbers*. *Actually, not only that, but that's also how you define an infinite set: An infinite set is one such set that if you throw some stuff away, you can have as many as you started with*". This is one of the great breakthroughs in contemporary mathematics, philosophy, and logic. The observative paradox was accepted because it seemed pretty obvious. Why was it obvious to people? Well, because they weren't used to thinking about the infinite. Most of their intuitions were from thinking about ordinary, finite situations. So again, the reaction to the paradox of infinity is a result of the fact that people were drawing their intuitions from the kinds of situations they were familiar with. By the time mathematics gets into the 19th century or the end of the 18th century, mathematicians are seriously thinking about infinity. But it isn't until Cantor that you get someone who spurns out what really is the upshot of a lot of the mathematical thinking about infinity in the hundred years before that.

To return to dialetheism, I think in some ways the fact that people are inclined to reject dialetheism, could be seen as this fact that they've had an inadequate diet of examples in the way that infinitude was thought of until Cantor.

PG: And do you think that there are dialetheias only in these exotic cases, like semantic or set-theoretic paradoxes, or do you think that there are dialetheias also in cases closer to common sense?

GP: There is a debate amongst dialetheists about the spread of dialetheias. Some people like Jc Beall have always been insistent that it is only with the paradox of self-reference.

Actually, let me take that back slightly because, in the last 10 years, he's been writing on dialetheic theology, which seems to be a growing area of interest amongst theologians. Christ is a strange object. Christ was totally human and totally divine. Is that a true contradiction? Even Beall now has started to broaden the ambit of possible dialetheias. But I've always been a bit more open-minded. There is nothing in the definition of dialetheism that says it is about paradoxes of self-reference, although, in a lot of people's minds, it is thought of as connected with only that. It is a view about truth, negation, the world, meaning. Undoubtedly paradoxical self-reference was one of the very first possible applications. But there are lots of other possible applications.

Any possible application is going to be contentious. After all, this is philosophy. Any solution for a philosophical problem is going to be contentious. I think there are plenty of other places where a dialetheic approach works and works well. One of them is one of Zeno's paradoxes: the Arrow paradox. There are standard solutions to most of Zeno's paradoxes, but the Arrow is special. Most of Zeno's paradoxes are dichotomy-type paradoxes: a half, a quarter, an eighth, a sixteenth, and so on. The Arrow is different. Traditionally, in the Arrow Paradox, you have a person who fires an arrow towards a target. You take an instant of the motion. At that instant, how much progress on its journey does the arrow make? Zero. So, progress at each instant is zero. Now, the entire journey is made up of instants. If it makes zero progress at each instant, how can it make any progress on the totality of instants? You can add zero to zero as many times as you like, even transfinitely, you still get zero. That's Zeno's Arrow Paradox. I think a very plausible solution to it is Hegel's. You read what he says about motion in the *Science of Logic* and some other places, and his solution to Zeno's Arrow Paradox is this: What's the difference between something at rest and something in motion? Something at rest is just there and nowhere else. Whereas something in motion, because it is in motion, has already gone a little bit further, maybe it hasn't quite got there yet, but it's made a little bit of progress if only a very, very small amount. And when you add all these bits of progress together, you get complete progress. That's Hegel's solution to the Arrow Paradox. I think that is pretty good.

PG: And the precise dialetheia here is that it is both in rest and in motion?

GP: Not quite. Being in motion is, as Hegel puts it himself, to be both here and not here. It is here because, well, of course, it is here. But it is not here because it has already gone a little bit further. That's the dialetheia. And that's *verbatim* from Hegel. So, you can see why I think Hegel is clearly a dialetheist.

PG: Another topic we would like to talk about is the so-called divide between analytic and continental philosophy.

JD: Is there any way in which you feel the divide? Does it affect you?

GP: Does it affect me? No. Well, I can sense the divide because it is sort of etched into our profession. I think probably a better way of characterizing the divide is to speak about European philosophy – French, German, Italian, Spanish, etc. – and Anglo philosophy,

because Anglo philosophy gave up philosophical analysis in about 1925 or 1930, and continental philosophy is what the English called the rest of Europe.

There are certainly differences. It is true that European philosophy has been much more conscious of its history than Anglo philosophy, which is often taught appallingly ahistorically. There are differences in the style of writing. Anglo philosophy tends to concentrate on smaller problems and precision more than European philosophy. European philosophy is often concerned more with the big picture than the minutiae. Not always. Hegel, for example, is painstakingly concerned with minutiae. So, these are kind of sweeping generalizations. Also, most of the Anglo philosophers have been trained in or at least influenced by science, whereas a lot of the European writers come more through a literary tradition. That affects how they express themselves.

A lot of the animosity has been driven by what the English call turf wars: Who has the power at the universities? Who gets to make appointments? Continental philosophers are often being marginalised in the Anglo tradition because Anglo philosophers want to appoint people with their own interests. That may well be true too in the other direction.

So clearly there is this division. But I find it of virtually no significance whatsoever. Because when you look at the problems that the people in those traditions are dealing with, they are very much the same. They might approach them from different perspectives, but that never stopped philosophers from talking to each other. You find problems about language, problems about reality, problems about politics, problems about ethics both in so-called European philosophy and in so-called Anglo philosophy. There are great philosophers in both of those, and there are terrible philosophers in both of those. Of course, because of the animosity between people who feel committed to one of these traditions, they will pick on the bad examples from the other side and say "*Look at what they do!*". But there are great philosophers in both traditions. The problem is trying to figure out who is which, and that is not always easy.

There are vices which go with both traditions. If you look at a lot of philosophy in the Anglosphere, for example, it is dull, it is boring, it is minute, and it is not going to be read in five years' time. It's just busy work, right? It is not terribly exciting. Because of the concentration on small things, often Anglo philosophers lose their perspective on the big picture. Often the minute problems are relevant because they are relevant to the bigger picture. But if you forget the big picture, then well, as the English say, you have lost the wood for the trees. You can only see the trees, not the forest. That is a definite vice of Anglo philosophy, at least as I see it. People will disagree about that.

On the other side, a lot of European philosophers hang on to the big picture, but they do not care much for precision and clarity. So, they can be sloppy. Of course, great philosophers from any tradition are not sloppy. They are very precise. They are very clear-thinking. Although they might express themselves in completely different ways. But you do not need to know much about the history of philosophy to know how many voices philosophy is written in, just think of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, Mill, Kripke, Heidegger, and Nietzsche. If you want to read these guys, and they are all great philosophers, you have to get used to their voices. Writing in a different voice is not sig-

nificant. But that does not mean you can write any old damn how and make sense. You should be careful and precise. And often it is difficult to be precise because our concepts are sometimes pretty muddled. But getting rid of muddle is important.

The fact that the two styles – Anglo philosophy and European tradition – have typical vices does not mean that they do not both house great philosophers, great ideas, great arguments, and original thoughts. And I think if you are a serious philosopher, you will learn from great philosophers anywhere, whatever tradition you come from.

And just the last thing on this division. It seems to me now to be the case that it is breaking down, and jolly good. There is a growing number of European philosophers and Anglo philosophers who are prepared to read and engage with the other side. For example, Robert Brandom in the Anglo tradition, and Markus Gabriel in the European tradition. I also try to draw from both. So, there is a growing number of philosophers who are not scared to cross the divide. And that is great, and I think that, in 50 years hence, this division is going to be very insignificant.

PG: A speculative question: And will a new tradition emerge from some kind of synthesis? Or will we just have something called philosophy without any self-identification?

GP: That is a very difficult question. Philosophy is often most productive when traditions collide. We have seen this happen many times. For example, when Greek philosophy comes into contact with Judaic or Arabic thought, you get the Greek periods of Arabic and Latin philosophy, which are both highly original periods. Buddhism is Indian, but when it came to China around the turn of the Common Era, it met the indigenous philosophers there, especially Daoism. The fusion of Buddhist and Daoist thought breeds fascinating new kinds of Buddhism in China, Japan, and Korea. It is like two rivers running into each other: they merge and you get a bigger river, which can go its own way. I think that we now are in a period of something like that. What is going to come out of it? Who can predict? But I think it is going to be really interesting.

JD: Philosophy as a term is somehow, I think, institutionally by default stipulated to signify the Western tradition in most of the study programs. There is a question of how adequate it is to use the term ‘philosophy’ for the Eastern tradition of thought.

GP: That is a fair question. The word ‘philosophy’ is Greek or Greek-derived. There isn’t really a word that means the same thing in Japanese or Chinese. The social institutions in which these things are thought about are quite different. In the West, it has been done by the Church, and, at least since the 18th century, the universities. The Eastern traditions did not have churches or universities. Philosophy was often pursued in other religious institutions, like Buddhist temples and so on. So, sociology is quite different. But that fact does not mean that they are doing different things, any more than the people in modern universities are doing different things from what the clerics did in the Arabic or the Latin traditions.

The question then is: Are they doing the same thing? And the answer is: Yes, they are. It is easy to see this when you start reading the texts. The view that Asian traditions are

not philosophy was very common in Western philosophy 50 or 60 years ago. People said it is religion, great man pronunciations, they are oracular. And yeah, they are sometimes like that. And, bloody hell, Western philosophy is often like that too.

But if you read the texts, you can see that these people are dealing with problems that you are very familiar with: *What is the nature of reality? Is there a God? How should you treat other people? How should you run the state? How do you know all these things?* You find these in every philosophical tradition that I am aware of. People examine these problems. They create arguments and theories. They argue against each other about which theory is right, just as philosophers in the West have always done. Sometimes the views they come up with are similar to the ones that people in the West have come up with. That is not surprising, either. Great minds think alike, that is an English saying. Sometimes they come up with very different views. When you cross the divide from the West and find yourself in the East, you find something that is both familiar and somewhat alien.

Again, we are back to the question of two traditions merging. I think this merging of cultures is going to be very fruitful as well. And just to come back to the Western condition for a moment: if you look from the East at the division between analytic and continental philosophies, this has virtually no significance: It is like a family argument, it is like a brother and sister arguing.

One should also remember that the East has absorbed a lot of input from the West over the last hundred years. The East has already realised that there are significant philosophical thoughts coming from the West that are relevant to their ideas. For example, you've got the impact of German philosophy on Japan in the 20th century. You've got the impact of the British 19th-century philosophy on the British Raj in the 19th and 20th centuries. You've got the impact of Marxism on China. The East has already been engaged with Western philosophy, but not the other way around until recent times. Why has that happened? A large part of the story is Western imperialism. The West has dominated, captured, colonized the Asian traditions, or at least tried to, and imposed their central power on them. And so they had to respond to the West's economics, the West's culture, the West's philosophical thought. But now Western philosophers are starting to understand that there are these rich traditions in India, China, Japan, Korea, and I am sure many other places. And I think this sort of coming together of traditions is going to be very fruitful. Again: two major rivers come together, and the resulting river, well, who knows where that is going to go. We will see. I'd love to come back in two or three hundred years and find out. But I don't believe in rebirth.

Also, one thing you've got to forget straight away is the thought that there is such a thing as Asian philosophy. That is crazy, right? There are many different Asian traditions, as there are many different Western traditions: Nietzsche is not Aristotle, and Confucius is not Nāgārjuna.

PG: Do you think there is some resistance to Eastern philosophy, whatever particular Eastern tradition we're talking about, just because some of the ideas are so unfamiliar and hard to fathom? For example, sometimes it seems hard for us to understand the Buddhist

conception of no-self. Maybe that is because of the heritage of liberalism, the idea of free will, and so on.

GP: Yeah, that is true. If you cross over the Urals or the Himalayas or whatever, you are going to find views that you are not used to. But they are not completely alien to the Western traditions. Many people have observed that the no-self view is essentially Hume's or Derek Parfitt's. So, you've got to be prepared to go with an open mind. One of the greatest virtues of any philosopher is having an open mind. If you are closing yourself off to ideas, then you are selling philosophy short. When you meet new ideas, you may then come to the view that they are crazy, but you may also think that, well, I was silly to ignore these. And you won't know what is going to happen until you start to think about them.

I think there are also cultural issues at foot here too. Because, in the West, a lot of Asian ideas have not only been ignored as alien, but they have also been devalued. There is a very well-known book by Edward Said called *Orientalism*. It is mainly about the attitude of the West to Arabic or Middle Eastern philosophy. But the point he makes applies to the Far East as well. If you want to take over a country, to dominate it, to steal its wealth, to colonize it, to dominate its people, one of the first things you do is devalue its culture. Then you can come in and say "*We are educated, and you guys are all superstitious, you've got these funny religions. By the way, we've got the right religion. You are sort of ignorant, and your culture is not worth much. And we are going to tell you what really cultured people are like*". That's *Orientalism*. And it must be said that the West has had this attitude to the East. I think that is at least one reason why philosophers in the West have had this sort of attitude to Asian traditions. Of course, when Western philosophers have had this attitude to Asian philosophy or philosophical texts, it is usually that they haven't read any. What that says about rationality, well, I'll leave you to think about.

But there are notably some Western philosophers who have not had that attitude. Again, Hegel is an example. He did not write a great deal about Asian traditions, but you read his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and you will find discussions. This guy was open-minded. And he is not the only one. Even before the 20th century, there is Leibniz, there is Schopenhauer, and so on. What we are seeing now is good translations of the Asian texts into the Western languages. It must be said that the translations that were made before the last 50 years were not very good. They were made by people working in philology departments and British studies departments. They were not made by philosophers. To translate philosophical texts, you need to be a decent philosopher. Now we are seeing people who are good philosophers and who have the linguistic skills starting to produce really good translations of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese texts. It is now much easier for Western philosophers to open these things and say "*Wow, this is really interesting!*"

Of course, you've got to get used to the fact that you are dealing with a different way of writing, different examples, different cultures, and so different things are taken for granted, different methods are used, different things are alluded to. You've got to be prepared to make that crossing. But it is worth it. And we are already used to making that crossing. The culture of Ancient Greece is as alien to me as the culture of Ancient India. But I cross

it, I understand that I am dealing with a different language, a different culture, different religious beliefs. No one would suggest that it is a silly thing to make that crossing. The same is true of crossing into Asian philosophical texts.

JD: What do you personally find attractive, interesting, or valuable in the Asian texts?

GP: The ones I know most of are the Buddhist texts, and that is partly historical because they are the ones I started to work on. I know most about them, and they are the ones I've found, at least so far, the most interesting. And probably the ones I have the most philosophical sympathy with. Although I'm not a Buddhist. I have no religion.

Buddhist philosophy itself is not a single thing. There are so many different Buddhist traditions, and they disagree about lots of things, in particular, in metaphysics. There are many different Buddhist metaphysics, just as there are many metaphysical traditions in Christianity. I find some of those congenial, particularly the Indian Mādhyamaka school, the school founded by the second-century Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna, who was probably the most influential Buddhist philosopher after the Buddha himself.

There is much less disagreement about the ethics of Buddhism. It is much more common to different schools. I have a lot of sympathy with Buddhist ethics. But something interesting about Buddhist ethics is that it has not been heavily engaged with political philosophy. There are comments on political philosophy in the canonical texts. It is not that there is no commentary, but not a lot. However, that changed in the 20th century when you got this movement called Engaged Buddhism. It is people who say "*Hey, look, if you are serious about trying to make people's lives better, as any Buddhist is, then you should start to consider the political systems which produce so much suffering*". These are philosophers like Thích Nhất Hạnh, the current Dalai Lama, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar in India, and Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand, these are people who started to apply Buddhist ideas to political situations. And there is a debate amongst Buddhists about whether or not this is a new dimension of Buddhism. People say "*Well, this is not really Buddhism*". And people say "*Yes, it is*, *it is an important aspect of Buddhism that Buddhists should have paid more attention to*". There is this kind of scholarly debate going on in Buddhism now. I believe that Buddhism should have paid a lot more attention to political issues in the past. And it is a jolly good thing that it is doing so now. I am certainly interested in the application of Buddhist ethics to political situations.

PG: Before closing, I would like to ask a few questions about the value of studying philosophy. What kind of expertise, set of skills, or intellectual habits one can develop by studying philosophy that could be valuable after one, for example, leaves academia?

GP: There are several interconnected things. Let us start with studying philosophy at the postgraduate level. Most people who do a doctorate in philosophy are usually thinking in terms of becoming a professional philosopher. Now, that may be entirely appropriate for you. If you want to earn money in life, forget it, okay? You are never going to make a lot of money as a professional philosopher, compared with going into business studies,

banking, insurance, and so on. So, if you are interested in making as much money as possible, philosophy is not an option. However, most professional philosophers are not interested in making a lot of money. It is not that philosophers are badly paid. I have a very comfortable lifestyle, so I am not saying you are going to be poor. But if I wanted to make a lot of money, I wouldn't have become a philosopher. But I do really love the subject, and that is the best reason for doing it. If you are the kind of person who has this kind of fascination, this love of philosophy, it is great being a professional philosopher. Conditions within the academy are changing, which is kind of problematic, but it is still pretty good being a professional philosopher if you love the subject. Okay, that is the first point.

Second point: if you are studying philosophy at a postgraduate level, then it is quite possible you will not be able to get a job as an academic philosopher. Because we – meaning the academy – turn up more people with PhDs than can possibly get jobs. Thus, you must bear in mind that you should have another, as the English say, string to your bow. At the end of five years when the time comes to get into the job market, you've got to be prepared to say "*Okay, it was five years of my life that I spent. It was worthwhile because I really enjoyed what I was doing. And if now I must go and do something else, that is fine too*". Of course, a lot of people who do doctorates in philosophy do get jobs in universities, but there is no guarantee that you will. Especially if you get married and have kids when you are a postgraduate student, it makes it very hard to move because of your family. Nowadays, to get a job after your doctorate, you've really got to be prepared to move anywhere in the world that offers you a job. So, you've got to be prepared for the possibility of something else. Now, will your doctorate in philosophy be an advantage in doing something else? I doubt it because you are probably dealing with a very small part of philosophy in your doctorate.

Let us now wind the clock back to talk about an undergraduate education in philosophy. Most people who study philosophy do not do a doctorate in philosophy, and they do not become professional philosophers. Yet, the kind of skills we try to encourage in philosophy are very important ones. Philosophy is kind of odd because we do not teach people facts. Obviously, we do teach facts about the history of philosophy, but that is not where the action is really at. We think about problems. We think about how to solve them. The solutions take into account the things that people have tried in the past. We have to sort through lots of information, some of which is relevant, some of which is not. We have to come up with new ideas. We have to make the case for them: discard bad ideas and promote new good ideas. These are skills which are of use, I think, in anything you are going to do in life.

So, I sometimes read reports by industry bodies that say "*We'd much rather appoint a philosophy graduate than a graduate with specific skills in our area because the specific skills that people have learned by studying X (it might be business studies, it might be IT, etc.) are going to be obsolete in 10 years. And we can teach people what they need to know now, and we'll keep them kind of "upgraded" as they go along. What we really need are people who have these generic skills, which are not so easily absorbed*". So, a lot of

people do philosophy degrees and then do very well in journalism, the media, banking, IT, the public service. Anywhere where you've got problems to solve which do not have algorithmic solutions. These are the skills that we try to give our students in philosophy. We do not always succeed, but I think that when we *do* succeed, we give them something really valuable. And I think they are going to be valuable to people, whatever they do in life.

Last point. I've talked about people's professions, but, of course, there is a lot more to life than just making a living. Even though the academy nowadays is more and more focused on giving people job skills so that they can go on to become an *X*. However, living is not just about making money. Living is about flourishing as a human being. We can argue about what that means and, of course, that is a deep philosophical issue. But I think philosophy when done at its best can give you an appreciation of the richness of what it means to be a flourishing human being. In the end, if you are lucky, you are going to get a job which supports you and your family. If you've got a degree somewhere, you probably will. But it is not so easy to live as a decent, flourishing human being. And I think that is one of the most important things that a philosophical education can give you.

PG: And what would be your advice for young aspiring philosophers?

GP: First of all, it would be to take into account what I've just said. But, in terms of succeeding as a philosopher, what I would say is this: Do not pay too much attention to what is currently hot, because other things may well be hot in 10 years' time. I am old enough now to have seen fashions come and go in philosophy: Marxism, Wittgensteinism, deconstructionism, there is a whole raft of these things. What is going to be hot in 10 years' time? Well, you might guess, but you might well be wrong. Thus, do not pay too much attention to what is currently hot. Find the parts that interest you, because what is important is that you do your best philosophy and develop as a philosopher. And you'll do that by engaging in the things that interest you. I see my own students at the Graduate Centre (CUNY). They tend to be motivated by writing a thesis on what is currently hot. Well, you know: Kit Fine and Jonathan Schaffer are writing about grounding, I am going to write on my own grounding theory, and I am going to get a job. In five years when they finish, grounding theory will still be going, but it will be over its peak. What is going to get them a job is writing the best philosophy they can. How are they going to write the best philosophy they can? By doing the things that really engage them. So, the advice would be to follow the bits of philosophy that interest you. Try and solve the problems that interest you in the best way you can.

Also, do not forget that philosophy is a social enterprise. It can often be kind of lonely: you sit in front of your computer, and you are sitting on your own, and you are typing. But philosophy is actually a very social activity. When you are a graduate student, when you are a professional philosopher, you spend a lot of your time talking to your supervisor, other graduate students, your peers, and the people you correspond with. And this is really important. Because every great philosopher is influenced by the people they talk to, and the ideas they've read. The way you improve as a philosopher is by sharing your

ideas and getting them criticized. When you write your doctorate, you are going to be heavily indebted to other people. And a service you can do for other people is to talk to them about their ideas. You help them, and you learn in the process. So, something we do not often think about is the social engagement of philosophers with each other. And the way that the community of philosophers helps to develop ideas. In science, that is kind of obvious, because people work in teams. It is not obvious in philosophy, because we tend to write individually. However, just think about the social context that you are coming through and the people you are going to be engaging with as a philosopher or a philosophy student, and you will realize how social interaction is important to the quality of philosophy you write.