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# What Can I Do With a Degree in Philosophy?

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# What Can I Do With a Degree in Philosophy?

**Description**

During my teaching career I heard the same question, “What can you do with a degree in philosophy?” many times from some students I taught (and their parents). I know that many other philosophy professors have heard the same question.

This book works to dispel the view that studying philosophy is impractical or unimportant. As it turns out, most of the students I taught over the years who got a degree in philosophy went on to non-academic jobs and careers. They eliminate the notion that the only thing one can do with a degree in philosophy is to teach philosophy.

Does studying philosophy teach one how to fix a leaky faucet? No, but neither does studying economics. Does studying philosophy lead to rewarding and fulfilling careers? Not necessarily, but it certainly can.

**Keywords**

philosophy, careers

**Disciplines**

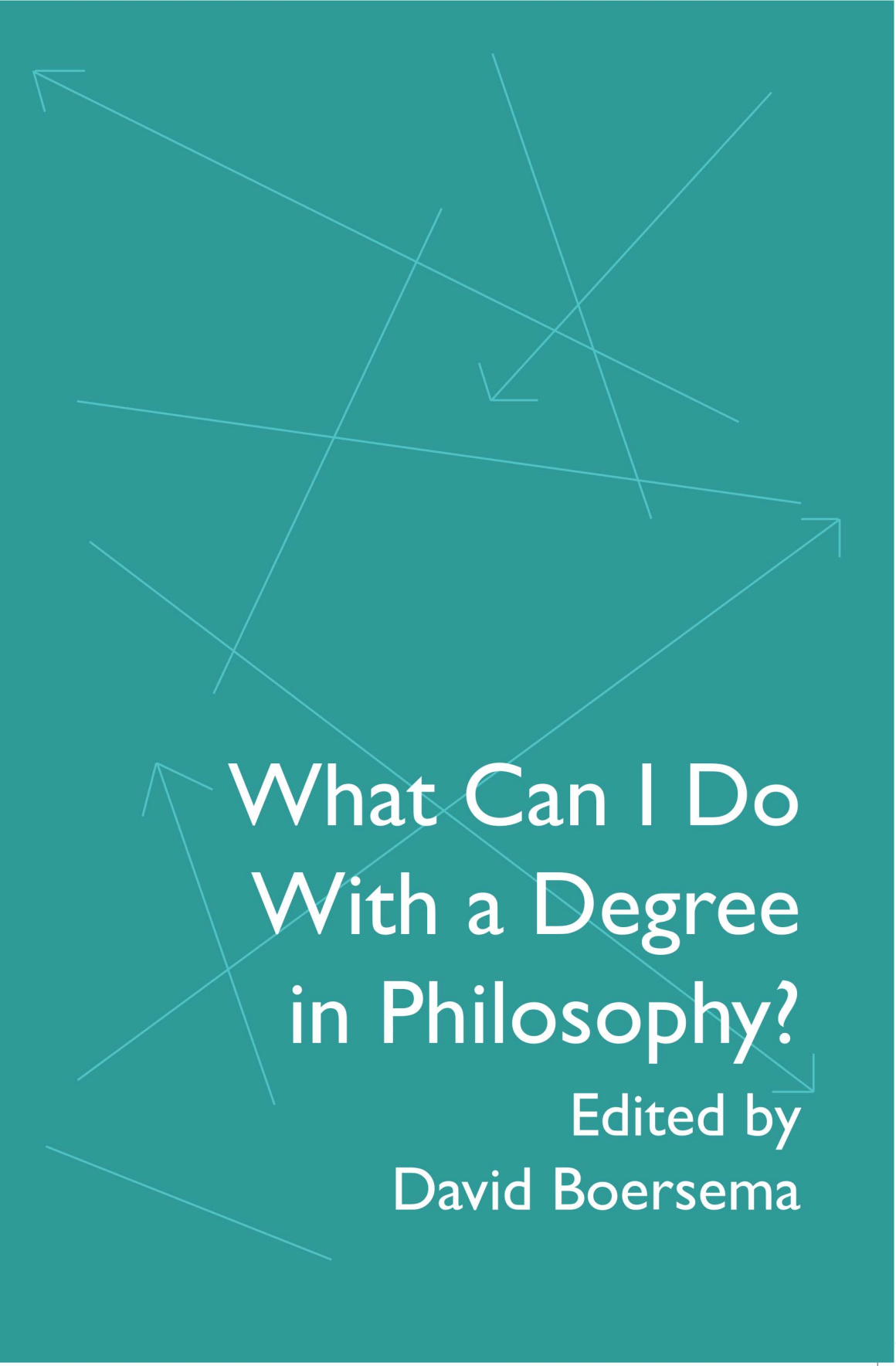
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The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thin, white, hand-drawn style lines and arrows. Some lines are straight, while others are slightly curved. Some lines end in arrowheads, pointing in various directions. The lines and arrows create a sense of movement and complexity, intersecting and crossing each other across the entire page.

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Edited by  
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The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”





# INTRODUCTION

**W**hat do Pope John Paul II, Alex Trebek (TV game show host), Peter Thiel (co-founder of PayPal), Phil Jackson (basketball coach), Wes Anderson (film director), Stephen Breyer (Supreme Court justice), Matt Groening (“Simpsons” creator), Philip Glass (composer), Carl Icahn (financier and investor), Mary Higgins Clark (mystery author), and Vaclav Havel (former president of the Czech Republic) all have in common? They all received a college degree in philosophy.

Years ago when I decided that I wanted to major in philosophy, my parents immediately asked (in a rather unpleasant way): What are you going to do with that? The assumption was that I would be wasting time and money studying something that had no practical value. But when I was asked what would I do with a degree in philosophy, my thought was less about what would I do (that is, what job would I get) and more about who would I be. Having a good job, of course, was and is important. But I saw being a good person as being even more important. I ended up completing two majors, one in philosophy and the other in economics, but philosophy is what I found more captivating and so I went on to complete a doctorate in that field and then went on to a career teaching at Pacific University, in Forest Grove, Oregon.

During my teaching career I heard that same question—what can you do with a degree in philosophy?—asked many times from some students I taught (and their parents). I know that many other philosophy professors have gotten that same question thrown at them. The point of this book is to dispel the view that studying philosophy is impractical and unimportant. As it turns out, most of the students I taught over the years who got a degree in philosophy went on to non-academic jobs and careers. They demonstrate that the notion that the only thing one can do with a degree in philosophy is to teach philosophy is simply incorrect. Does studying philosophy teach one how to fix a leaky faucet? No, but neither does studying economics. Does studying philosophy lead to

rewarding and fulfilling careers? Not necessarily, but it certainly can, and the point of this book is to demonstrate that.

## **What is philosophy?**

First, a short primer on just what philosophy is. The word philosophy comes from two Greek words, *philo*, meaning “love,” and *sophia*, meaning “wisdom.” Philosophy, then, is the love of wisdom, and a philosopher is a lover of wisdom. Both of those words, however—love and wisdom—themselves carry various meanings. Here love is taken to mean both an activity and also an attitude. To love something or someone is to act in certain ways with respect to that thing or person. It is to act for the care and well-being of that thing or person. Wisdom here also means both an activity and an attitude. To be wise is to know things, but it is not “merely” having knowledge. Knowing lots of information, being very good at games like Trivial Pursuit, is not the same thing as being wise. Knowledge of facts is important, but it is not enough.

One sense of wisdom, then, at least for the early Greek philosophers, was the search not merely for a lot of factual information, but for what they saw as “first principles.” Principles refer not to specific cases or instances, but basic, fundamental, unifying notions or conditions. For example, a moral principle, such as “murder is wrong,” is meant to apply not just to a few particular situations, but, rather, universally. Likewise, a natural principle (what today we would call a scientific law), such as the law  $f=ma$  (force equals mass times acceleration), is said to apply not just to a few particular situations, but, rather, universally. So, by seeking wisdom, philosophers were looking for underlying, unifying principles. By speaking of first principles, they meant the most basic, fundamental principles. Wisdom also involves actively seeking knowledge, as well as analyzing and evaluating it. It is an open-ness toward asking questions, with the view that every good question has an answer, but also that every good answer generates another question.

We have all heard the expression that we should treat our family like company and company like family. This means that, since we tend to be on more polite terms and proper behavior with company, but more sincere, comfortable terms with family, that we ought to be a little nicer to our family and be a little less formal with our company. In a similar vein, one characterization of philosophy is that it makes the common uncommon and the uncommon common. That means that philosophers

look at everyday, common notions and experiences and treat them as though they are uncommon; they need to be investigated and thought about more explicitly. So, most of us do not usually question that we have minds, but philosophers ask whether we do and just what it means to say that we do (or don't!). Likewise, philosophers tend to treat the uncommon as common. That is, they look for features or functions that show the things we take as strange or unfamiliar are in fact familiar, after all. It is just this attitude of treating the common as uncommon and the uncommon as common that motivates philosophical questions and points to why philosophical questions are often different than other sorts of questions. Here is an example: Consider the license plate of the next car you see. Suppose the plate number is: XYZ 123. Now, various kinds of questions could occur to you. (Yes, one might be: Why would I think about license plates? However, let's ignore that one.) One might be a simple arithmetical question: Given three letters and three numbers, how many different license plates are possible? (While you might not care about this, state governments do, since they have to decide what to do once they come to plate ZZZ 999.) Another question might be fiscal: How much does it cost to make a license plate? Another might be historical: When did we start having license plates? Another might be sociological: Why do we require license plates for some vehicles, but not for others? A philosophical question is: What is a license? What does it mean to license something, and why would we license some things or activities and not others? These sorts of questions are basic, broad conceptual questions. They are like the stereotypical philosophical questions, "What is truth?" (or "goodness" or "beauty" or "reality," etc.). Philosophical questions often seem very abstract—indeed, sometimes they are—but this is not because they are not important. The value of asking such questions can often be that they make us think about common (and uncommon) phenomena in new ways that shed light on the topic at hand and often on other topics, as well. Taking the common as uncommon and vice versa is not, of course, unique to philosophy. When we ask "Why is the sky blue?" we are doing the same thing, but this is a scientific question, not a philosophical one, because the answer will finally be in terms of empirical facts about the world and scientific theories that account for those facts.

So, again, one way to characterize a philosophical attitude is: treat what is common as uncommon and what is uncommon as common.

That is, ask questions about those things that seem obvious and common; treat them as if they are strange and in need of explanation. The result is to see them in a new light and to see underlying assumptions that one had about them. At the same time, treat uncommon things as common; that is, look for connections and relationships between those things that seem to be strange or unfamiliar and things that one already knows or understands. This is to have a philosophical attitude and to act philosophically (not merely to speak one's opinions or views).

### **Philosophical method**

Philosophy usually proceeds in two ways: analyzing and synthesizing. The first notion of analyzing means asking, "What is X?" where X might be knowledge, truth, beauty, goodness, personhood, freedom, etc. These seem to be very broad and abstract notions, but more concrete ones would be notions such as person or mind or rights. For example, the question, "What is a person?" has very practical and important aspects to it. One aspect is connected with the issue of abortion. It is undeniable that a human fetus is human, because being human is a biological concept. A human fetus has human DNA. The more important social and moral issue is whether or not (or, in what important ways) a human fetus is a person. It is persons that we claim have rights, for instance, or who are part of our moral concerns. So, the issue of abortion rests in large part on whether or not a human fetus is a person. "What is a person?" then, is a conceptual, philosophical question. Although it sounds abstract at first, in fact answers to it have very practical and important consequences.

The way that philosophers address questions and analyze concepts is often by looking for necessary and sufficient conditions for something. A necessary condition for something is a condition that the thing must have in order for it to be what it is. For example, a necessary condition for something to be a mother is that the thing must be female. Another example is that a necessary condition for someone to be elected as President of the United States, that person must be at least 35 years old. A sufficient condition for something is a condition that the thing could have (but would not necessarily have) that would "be enough" for that thing to be what it is. For example, it is not necessary to have ten dimes in order to have a dollar (you could have, say, 100 pennies or four quarters), but it is sufficient; as long as you have ten dimes, you have a dollar. Another example is that being a citizen of Oregon is sufficient for being a citizen

of the United States; as long as you are a citizen of Oregon, you are a citizen of the U.S. Some conditions are said to be both necessary and sufficient. For instance, having a certain chemical structure (say, being  $H_2O$ ) is both necessary and sufficient for something to be water. Or, there might be a set of conditions that are said to be “jointly” necessary and sufficient. For instance, if someone is a bachelor, that person needs to be an unmarried adult human male. All of the four conditions (being unmarried, being adult, being human, and being male) are necessary, but none by itself is sufficient. Together, however, they are said to be jointly necessary and sufficient.

The reason that philosophers care about necessary and sufficient conditions is that these are said to be important components for understanding what something is and for distinguishing what something is. Take, again, the case of what it is to be a person. One might ask whether being a human is the same thing as being a person. This is simply a way of asking if there could be non-humans that we would consider to be persons. Or, often philosophers will ask about “borderline” cases. For instance, would we consider a human body with no brain in it to be a person, or, if we could somehow keep a human brain alive and functioning without it being in a body, would that brain be a person? Questions of looking for necessary and/or sufficient conditions might appear to be abstract, but they are the thought experiments that philosophers use to try to clarify our concepts. However, many philosophers claim that looking for necessary and/or sufficient conditions can itself be a mistake. Some things, they say, simply do not have necessary and/or sufficient conditions. A famous example comes from the 20th century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. He used the example of games and claimed that there simply are no necessary and/or sufficient conditions for what made something a game; the term game is too loose and vague. After all, some games involve scoring points, but some do not; some games have a specified playing area, but some do not; some games involve teams of players, but some do not, etc.

Clarity about concepts is important and useful, but there is more to philosophy than analyzing things. There is also the second component of philosophy, namely, synthesizing. That is, we are concerned about how things make sense, broadly speaking. Being clear about things is good, but what does it all mean? Even if we could get a clear notion of what a person is, then what? One focus of philosophy is to help see how

things fit together or relate to each other and to meeting goals that we set. We want to know not only the assumptions and presuppositions that we have about things, but also we want to know about the implications of believing certain things or acting in certain ways. We want to know how things cohere or hang together in meaningful ways. As the 20th century philosopher Wilfrid Sellars put it, we want to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term. For example, if we were to say that a person is whatever (or whoever) has the ability to learn from its environment or to set personal goals or projects, then, if it turned out that some non-humans do these things, would they be persons? Furthermore, if they were persons, would they, then, have rights? If so, what would this imply about how other persons would need to act or behave? These are the types of synthesizing questions that philosophers ask.

## **Philosophical content**

### *Metaphysics*

In terms of philosophy not so much as an activity or an attitude, but as content (that is, the answers to these sorts of questions), philosophy is usually divided into three very broad categories: metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. Metaphysics is the study of reality. This is not the same thing as science studying nature or social science studying human cultures. Rather, metaphysics is about basic kinds of reality. For example, we take it for granted that there are things or objects in the world, such as trees and cats and water. But what about events? Are events real? An event, such as the falling of a leaf or the buttering of toast by someone, is not the same “thing” as the physical leaf or the toast. That is, events are not equivalent to the objects involved in them. So, are events real and how are we to understand them? Another kind of example: are abstract “things” real? For example, are numbers real? When we write the numeral “2” we are writing down a representation of the number 2. But when we erase that numeral, and it no longer exists, we do not erase the number 2. If the number 2 is real, it is abstract and cannot be erased. So, are numbers real? These are metaphysical questions; they are questions about what kinds of things are real, or are part of a good description of reality. (“What is a person?” is also a metaphysical question.)

Another metaphysical question is about what else might be real besides or instead of things or objects. Consider two common objects, say, a piece of paper and a cat. Besides taking these two objects as real, we speak of the properties or traits of these objects. For instance, the piece of paper is white, it is rectangular, it is flat, it is smooth; no doubt, it has some flavor to it. Are these properties real as well as the object itself being real? In addition, the paper is smaller than the cat (at least, I am going to assume it is, not having seen your cats or pieces of paper). The paper really is smaller than the cat; that is a fact of the world. Now, “is smaller than” is not an object, such as a cat or piece of paper, and it is not a property of either object, such as being rectangular. Rather, it is a relation between two objects, the paper and the cat. So, while we could say: “The paper is flat,” we could not meaningfully say: “The paper is smaller than.” To speak of “smaller than” we need to relate the paper to something else. Are relations real? As just noted, we certainly say that the paper really is smaller than the cat. Asking about the nature and status of relations is a metaphysical question.

### *Epistemology*

Metaphysics, then, is a major branch of philosophy. A second major branch is epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Again, it is not a question of specific knowledge claims, but is broader. Epistemology is about questions such as: What is knowledge? What is the difference between knowledge and belief or knowledge and opinion? What are the kinds of “things” that are knowable? What justifies someone’s claim that she knows something (as opposed to her claim that she simply believes it)? Even the question of whether anyone can really know anything at all is an epistemological question. The area of logic is related to epistemology since logic focuses in large part on principles and rules of inferences and implications (that is, on standards that relate to what is known or knowable).

Philosophers speak of various kinds of knowledge. All of us claim to know lots of things; I know when I have a headache, I know that  $2+2=4$ , I know that the Earth is smaller than the Sun, I know how to ride a bike, etc. These examples illustrate different kinds of knowledge. Sometimes by “knowledge” we mean knowledge by acquaintance, or knowledge of something with which we are immediately connected to (or acquainted with), such as having a headache. There is also propositional

knowledge, or knowledge that something is the case (i.e., knowledge that some proposition is true), such as knowing that the Earth is smaller than the Sun. In addition, there is practical knowledge, which in this case means knowing how, such as knowing how to ride a bike. One issue within epistemology is the examination of how these various kinds of knowledge are related to each other. For example, is all propositional knowledge based finally on knowledge by acquaintance?

In addition, there are many things we believe, but it does not follow that we know those things. For example, I believe that Plato spoke Greek; I believe that humans will some day walk on Mars; I believe that there is no largest prime number; I believe I can successfully repair some basic kitchen appliances if I need to. However, I might be wrong about these things, so, even though I believe them—and have good reasons for believing them—it might be incorrect to say that I really know them. We make a distinction between belief and knowledge.

The fact that we make this distinction points to a long-standing issue in epistemology, which is: what is knowledge? A traditional answer to this question, at least for propositional knowledge, is that knowledge is Justified True Belief. Philosophers usually state this in this way: S knows that *p* (meaning some person S knows that some proposition *p* is the case) involves three necessary conditions. Those conditions are that: (1) S believes that *p*, (2) *p* is true, and (3) S is justified in believing *p*. The first condition, the belief condition, simply says that for us to know something, we have to at least believe it. It would be strange to claim that I know that Portland is in Oregon, but I do not believe it. So, believing that *p* is a necessary condition for knowing that *p*, but it is not sufficient, since we can believe things without knowing them. A second condition for knowledge is the truth condition. This states that *p*, the proposition we know, is true. This means that we cannot know something that is false. Now, we can know that something is false. For instance, I know that it is false that my cat is a dog. I can know that a proposition is false, but I cannot know a false proposition. Another way of saying this is that, while there can be false beliefs, there cannot be false knowledge. For example, I cannot know that  $2+2=3$  or that the Sun is smaller than the Earth, no matter how strongly I believe it. In those cases, I am just wrong. Believing is simply not the same as knowing.

The third traditional condition for knowledge is the justification condition. The first two conditions by themselves, having a true belief,

are not enough for knowledge. I must also have justification, some warrant or evidence, for the belief. We all have true beliefs, but that is not the same as having knowledge. Every student who has been faced with multiple-choice exams has had the experience of making a lucky guess at an answer and getting it right. In such a case, that person had a true belief, but it certainly was not a case of knowing. So knowledge cannot just be true belief; otherwise any lucky guess that turned out correct would be a case of knowledge.

For the record, many philosophers reject the view that knowledge is justified true belief, but that is not the concern here. Instead, the point now is that each of these three conditions (belief, truth, and justification) is itself subject to further analysis. For instance, there are different notions of what truth is. If a belief is true, what makes it true? A common sense view is called the correspondence conception of truth. This view of truth states that what makes a particular proposition or belief true is that it corresponds to facts in the world. If my belief that the Earth is smaller than the Sun is true, it is because in fact the Earth is smaller than the Sun (independent of what I believe)! It is that simple; if my belief corresponds to the facts, it is true (indeed, that is what makes it true), and if it does not correspond, it is not true. Another philosophical view of truth is called the coherence conception of truth. This view of truth states that what makes a particular belief true is that it coheres with other accepted beliefs. That is, no belief exists in isolation and when we say some belief is true (or false, for that matter) what we mean is that it is consistent with other beliefs. Many, probably most, of those other beliefs are ones concerning facts about the world, so truth is not just some coherent fairy tale, according to the supporters of this view. A third view of truth is called the pragmatist conception of truth. This view of truth states that what makes a particular belief true is how it affects us in the future, that is, what consequences follow from taking it as true. The point here is that “true” is not just a descriptive property of propositions or beliefs, but, rather, that “true” is also a prescriptive notion, directing our future beliefs and actions (that is, it prescribes, or directs, us). As the American pragmatist philosopher, William James, put it: Truth happens to an idea, it is made true by events; its verity is itself an event or process. Now, the point for us with respect to philosophy of science is not to resolve the nature of truth, but to see that one epistemological concern is the nature of truth, especially as it relates to the nature of knowledge.

What makes our beliefs true (or false)? It is fairly common to hear someone say that truth is relative or that something is “true for me.” There are several things to say about this. First, there is a difference between relativity and subjectivism. When people say something is “true for me,” that really is a claim that truth is subjective, that there are no objective standards for assessing whether some belief is true or not. To say that truth is relative is not the same thing. We can speak of beliefs being judged true or false relative to certain standards (for example, legal standards of evidence or proof vs. scientific standards of evidence or mathematical standards of proof), but that is not the same as saying that it is subjective. So, one point is that the notion of truth as relative is not the same as the notion of truth as subjective. Beyond that, when someone says that something is “true for me,” that really comes down to just saying that “I believe it” (and perhaps believe it so strongly that I will act in certain ways on that belief). But there must be some reason why something is “true for me” as opposed to being “false for me.” In saying it is “true for me,” the “for me” part does not really add anything. It just says that I believe it. That does not get us anywhere toward distinguishing true beliefs and false beliefs nor to what makes some beliefs true and others false. This points to the third condition of knowledge discussed above, namely, the justification condition.

With respect to matters of justification of beliefs, today philosophers tend to address this issue in terms of externalism and internalism. Simply put, externalism is the view that what justifies a person’s beliefs must be something external to the person, while internalism is the view that something internal to the believer can (at least in part) be relevant to justifying that person’s beliefs.

### **Axiology**

The third major branch of philosophy is axiology. Axiology is the study of value and values. This includes ethics, but it is broader than just that, because there are values other than ethical or moral values. For example, when we say that a particular song is a good song, we do not (usually) mean that it is morally good, but that it is pleasing to listen to or it makes us feel good in some way or other. So, besides ethics, another area of axiology is aesthetics, or values that we associated with art. Aesthetics involves the examination of value(s) where the value(s) might have nothing at all to do with ethics and morality. When we say

that some book or movie or song or statue is a good one, we do not mean that it was morally good (well, at least most of us do not mean that). A song might be good because it has a beat that makes it easy to dance to, not because it carries some approved moral message. Nonetheless, an important issue within the philosophy of art is the relationship between ethical value(s) and artistic value(s), for example, art associated with pornography or stereotyping of particular groups.

Yet another part of the larger field of axiology is the field of social and political philosophy. If we ask about the proper role and function of the State, we are asking a value question. Or, to speak of a good citizen might very well be different than speaking of a good person (or, what it means to be a good citizen is not the same thing as what it means to be a good person, although they might overlap).

When looking at the issue of value (and values), it is very common to hear people speak of this as not being a matter of analysis or evaluation, but, at best, reporting. That is, a common view is that people's values are relative and that is pretty much all that can be said. Our values, this view holds, are simply a matter of what we learn from our upbringing and our cultural environment. However, there are a number of things to be said about this. First, as was noted above when discussing beliefs, to say that something is relative does not mean the same thing as saying that it is subjective. Relativity implies some standard(s). But even with subjective beliefs or values, it is appropriate—and, indeed, useful—to ask why one has this particular value (or values A over B). There is always some reason or cause even for a subjective value.

In addition, when the question “why?” is asked—for example, “Why do you like A” or “Why do you like A over B”—this “why” can be asking for a description of how you came to hold this value or it can be asking what justifies you holding this value. While the origin and the justification of value(s) are related issues, they are not the same thing. Consider this example: Suppose we are talking and I make some outrageous sexist or racist remark. You are astonished and you ask me, “Why do you believe that?” I answer, “Well, that’s what my father told me.” Now, I have given you the origin of my belief/value, namely, it came from my family upbringing. But, clearly, I have not given a justification for that belief/value. You would be quite right in thinking that not only am I reprehensible, but so is my father. The point is that answering a “why” question simply by providing the origin sometimes does not really an-

swer the question. The “why” did not refer to “how did I come to have this belief/value?” but to “what would justify having this belief/value?” Although they might be related, these are not at all necessarily the same thing, and it is the latter question that philosophy asks.

While these three broad areas within philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology—are distinct, they also overlap. For example, the question, “Is there moral knowledge?” involves both epistemology and axiology. That is, if we ask whether someone can know what is right or good, rather than simply believe or assert it, we are asking an epistemological question. At the same time, it is about values, so it is axiological. It is even about metaphysics, because to answer the question would involve saying something about what “right” or “good” is; that is, what kind of thing they are. In addition to questions that overlap the three areas of philosophy, there are questions about the three areas themselves. For instance, we might well ask, “What is the value of studying metaphysics?” This is an axiological question about metaphysics. Or, as just noted above, we can ask, “How, if at all, can we know that some action is right or wrong?” This is an epistemological question about axiology. Sometimes philosophers refer to such questions as being metaphilosophy, meaning questions about philosophy. Even though they are about philosophy, they are still part of the love of wisdom if they are asked with the genuine attitude of seeking wisdom.

We frequently hear that in philosophy (and perhaps elsewhere) there are no right answers. Who can say, after all, what knowledge is or what truth is? As mentioned above, philosophical questions often seem very abstract (because, sometimes at least, they are), but this is not because they are not important. The value of asking such questions can often be that they make us think about common (and uncommon) phenomena in new ways that shed light on the topic at hand and often on other topics, too. And even if there is no recognized, single “right” answer to a philosophical question, it does not follow that asking and addressing that question is not valuable. For one thing, while we might not come up with a “right” answer, we could very well identify wrong answers. Just as we might not know the “right” answer to the question, “How many stars are there in the Milky Way galaxy?” we do know that “Twelve” is a wrong answer. Or we might not know the “right” answer to the question, “What is the best method of raising children?” but we can certainly know that “Locking them up in a closet all day” is a wrong answer. The same point

holds for questions about “What is knowledge?” or “What is a person?” or “What are a person’s duties to others?” etc. We can identify wrong answers, even if we cannot or have not identified a “right” answer. So, not having “the right answer” is not, in itself, necessarily a bad thing; we can still learn by asking the question and coming to find out that some answers are not correct. And, of course, not having “the right answer” now does not mean that we will not or cannot find it at some point.

### **Philosophy in action**

What would be an example of how and where philosophy matters to the rest of us? I will mention here several related notions that might seem abstract, but have very practical relevance to our daily lives. These notions are freedom, equality, harm, and omissions.

So: freedom. There are various senses of freedom. One broad sense has to do with political freedom, that is, freedom with respect to the government or other people. For example, this sense is concerned with people having the right to free speech or free expression. A second broad sense has to do with metaphysical freedom, that is, free will, or people’s ability to act on their own. For example, this sense is concerned with people being free to make some choice (say, choosing chocolate ice cream over vanilla ice cream), as opposed to that choice being determined by something outside that individual’s control.

Within these two broad philosophical concerns (political and metaphysical), there are different senses of freedom. One sense is sometimes called negative freedom, meaning the absence of some imposed constraint. For example, we speak of someone as being (negatively) free to ride a bicycle if that person is not prevented from doing so, say, by being in jail. Another sense is sometimes called positive freedom, meaning having the conditions or ability to do something. So, we speak of someone being (positively) free to ride a bicycle if that person has a bicycle and knows how to ride it. Negative freedom is often referred to as “freedom from,” meaning being free from constraints, while positive freedom is often referred to as “freedom to,” meaning being free to do something (not merely being free from constraints).

With respect to constraints on freedom, some are said to be external and some are said to be internal. For example, being locked in chains is an external constraint; the chains are external to the person himself. So, being locked in chains is an external constraint to one’s

being free to ride a bicycle. On the other hand, being ignorant is an internal constraint; the ignorance is internal to the person himself. So, being ignorant of how to ride a bicycle is an internal constraint to one's being free to ride a bicycle. Generally speaking, things such as locked doors, barred windows, chains, etc. are external positive constraints, while obsessive thoughts, compulsive mental disorders, perhaps even severe migraine headaches are internal positive constraints. These are positive constraints because there is something that has a direct impact on one's freedom; there is something added, so to speak, to a person that constrains him or her. There are also negative constraints, which are cases in which the absence or lack of something is what constrains one's freedom. External negative constraints would be cases such as having a lack of money or lack of transportation. For instance, a person is not free to buy a book if that person does not have enough money to do so. In this case, it is the lack of something external to him that constrains the person. Internal negative constraints would be cases such as having a lack of knowledge or strength or ability, etc. So, a person is not free to order food in a Swahili restaurant if that person does not speak Swahili (or cannot communicate effectively). The constraint is internal because what is lacking is not some object or thing, but some ability or capability.

The notions of freedom from and freedom to are important in terms of what kinds of freedom is relevant to people's social and political lives. Some people argue that the government has a responsibility to provide people with certain external things (such as goods or services) in order for individuals to truly be free to live well. Others claim that for the government to provide these external things is a violation of their own freedom from being oppressed by the government. For example, the government taxes people (an external constraint on them) in order to redistribute wealth in society (to relieve some constraint on others). The various notions of freedom and constraint are important with respect to responsibility, that is, how, if at all, we can hold people responsible for their actions if their actions are constrained internally and externally.

While freedom is one important value that we hold, another is equality. There are various concepts of equality, but for most people the importance of equality arises in moral and social contexts. There is the concept of numeric equality, meaning simply the same number. Where numeric equality matters to people might be in cases when something

is to be distributed among a group and we believe that everyone should get the same as everyone else; that is, an equal distribution is a fair distribution. However, numeric equality is not always what we believe is fair, or a sense of equality that is important to us. In this context, philosophers speak of the difference between treating equally and equal treatment. For instance, suppose that there are three children in a family. The parents want to be sure not to show favoritism for any of the three, so for every child they give the exact same birthday present, say, a basketball. One of the children loves to play basketball, one is neutral about it, and one hates playing basketball. Now, there is a sense in which all three children are treated equally by the parents; they all receive the same thing, a basketball. However, from the perspective of the children, there is not equal treatment; the gift of a basketball has very different meaning for each of them. In such a case, treating equally—that is, numeric equality—is not the same thing as equal treatment. It is not received as being equal (whether or not it is intended as being equal).

Related to the distinction between treating equally and equal treatment (and simple numeric equality) is the issue of equal in what respect. Two people might be equal in various ways and unequal in various ways. It is not simple equality or inequality that matters, but equality that is relevant to certain concerns. For example, in both moral and legal contexts, we believe that people should have equal rights or equal opportunities. However, even this notion is not uncontroversial. Some rights apply to only some people, not to all people. As an example, there are special legal benefits set aside for veterans, such as special low-interest loans from the government. Or there are parking spaces that are reserved only for handicapped people; in effect, they have the right to park in them, but no one else has that right. This case points to the fact that equality is one moral and social value, but it is one that we balance along with other moral and social values.

Equality is closely connected with justice, although not identical with it. As the examples above show, there are cases in which we believe that inequality, or at least unequal treatment, is just and fair—as with providing special parking spaces for some individuals or special low-interest loans for some individuals. In particular, we relate equality both to procedural justice (that is, having fair procedures) and substantive justice (that is, fair outcomes of those procedures). For instance, if two teams receive equal treatment by the referees or umpires in a game, then

whatever the outcome is (that is, whoever wins the game) is seen as just—because there was equal treatment in terms of process, although there was an unequal outcome (one team won and one team lost).

As noted, both freedom and equality are related to justice and to responsibility. These in turn relate to questions of when is it ever appropriate to limit someone's freedom. We want to respect and uphold people's rights and freedoms, but we also recognize that there must be limits to them; people do not have the right to do anything they might want to do, such as taking someone else's life or property. What, then, are legitimate reasons for limiting someone's liberty? The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, gave one answer to this question. His answer has been called the harm principle. The harm principle states that the only justification for limiting someone's liberty is to prevent that person from harming someone else. People should be free to do whatever they want as long as what they do does not harm someone else.

Although the harm principle seems straightforward and reasonable, there are a number of questions about it. First, there is the question of what harm means. There is the obvious sense that harm means physical harm. So, people do not get to kill or beat or in some other way physically harm another. However, what about other forms of harm? Is psychological harm covered by the harm principle? For example, if one person stalks or verbally harasses or abuses another person, but never physically touches that person, is that behavior covered under the harm principle? It is not enough to simply say that there are laws in place to prevent or restrict harassing behavior, because the issue is whether there is a justification for limiting such behavior (and for having such laws). Pointing to laws that exist only moves the question back, because then the question becomes whether or not those laws are justified in limiting someone's liberty. Beyond psychological harm, what about economic harm? Is that meant to be included in the harm principle, so that one person's liberty can legitimately be limited if that person economically harms another person? Intuitively, we think that if such economic harm is the result of fraud and deception, then, yes, that kind of behavior may be limited. However, we think that if such economic harm is the result of simple competition in the market place—that is, one person economically harms another person by being more competitive and driving the second person out of business—then that kind of behavior should not necessarily be limited. So, the first

question about the harm principle is what exactly does harm mean (and what cases of people's behavior would come under the label of harm)?

Another concern with the harm principle is whether it is meant to cover only actual harm that is caused or if it is also meant to prevent potential harm. For example, speed limit laws that regulate driving are set up not simply to limit actual harm that happens, but in order to prevent such harm ahead of time. That is, a person can have his liberty limited—for instance, by getting a fine or a ticket or losing his driver's license, etc.—not because that person actually harmed someone by speeding or driving recklessly, but because that person was being potentially harmful. The point of such laws as speed limit laws is to prevent actual harm before it happens and people's liberty is limited on the basis of merely potential harm. The problem here is that it is extremely difficult to identify potential harm and what potential harms may be appropriately limited, since just about anything could be potentially harmful or used in a potentially harmful way. There is the potential for harm any time that anyone gets in a car, not just when they are speeding.

A third concern about the harm principle has to do with harm that results not because someone does something (such as hitting someone), but because someone does not do something. These are said to be cases of omission. For example, if one person sees a second person who is drowning and the first person could easily help or rescue that drowning person, but simply chooses not to, has that first person harmed the second one? Should that person be held responsible in any way for the harm that occurred to the drowning person?

These various questions about the harm principle focus on whether or not it is a good basis for legitimately limiting the liberty of persons. Many people have claimed that even if these questions can be acceptably answered, there are other concerns and other principles that should be used to limit liberty. One such principle is called the offense principle. This principle states that there are some situations in which offending others is enough to say that someone's liberty should be limited. So, if a man stalking a woman is not literally harming her, at the minimum it is annoying and offensive (and perhaps even threatening). Likewise, it is said, people being extremely loud or shrill in some situations should have their liberty limited. Or, to take another example, should offensive speech, such as hate speech, be limited?

Another principle that has been claimed as a legitimate basis for limiting people's liberty is called the paternalism principle. This principle states that there are situations in which it is appropriate to limit a person's liberty so that he does not harm himself. The harm principle speaks only about not harming others and it leaves open the issue of people harming themselves. The paternalism principle, however, says that there are conditions in which it is appropriate and right to prevent people from harming themselves. Such conditions would be in cases where the person does not know or appreciate the risks or dangers involved in some behavior. Also, such conditions would be in cases where the person is not acting in a thoughtful, deliberate way, perhaps because he is under extreme stress or in an emergency situation.

Finally, another principle for limiting people's liberty is what is called the welfare principle. This principle states that it is sometimes legitimate to limit people's liberty in order to benefit other people. For example, a tax structure that redistributes money to less privileged people is an example, or, taxes on products such as cigarettes and alcohol, in which the money goes to support treatment programs for other people.

Above, I mentioned the notion of omission, that is, when a person is not doing something. When is a person said to be responsible for his actions? Usually, a person is said to be responsible for something when that person was the cause of that thing. For example, if a particular person's actions caused a lamp to be broken or a cake to be baked, we say that the person who caused those things is responsible for them happening. Philosophers usually refer to this as causal responsibility. There are situations, however, where even though someone is the cause of something happening, we do not think that person is to be blamed (or to be praised) for what happened. For instance, if it were a tiny baby who bumped into a lamp and caused the lamp to break, we would not think the baby is to blame, even though the baby caused the broken lamp. Philosophers usually refer to this notion of responsibility, in which blame or praise makes sense, as moral responsibility. In either case—causal or moral responsibility—it is usually assumed that the person who is responsible is the person who committed an act; they did something that led to some result. These cases are said to be acts of commission.

However, should a person ever been held responsible for not doing something? That is, should they be held either causally or morally re-

sponsible not for acts of commission, but for acts of omission? If being responsible usually means that a person did something, then what about cases where a person did not do something? When, if ever, should we say that a person is responsible because he did not act?

To address this question, it is important to recognize that there are different ways in which someone might not act. One way of not acting is to simply fail to act. For example, suppose that two people are 100 miles apart from each other. If one of those people is drowning and the second person does nothing about it, that second person has failed to act (with respect to the drowning), but that failure to act is understandable; the second person has no idea that the first person is drowning. Another way of not acting is to refrain from acting. In this case, not acting (with respect to the drowning) is a choice or decision on the part of the second person. Here, the second person might very well be aware of the first person drowning, but choose not to do anything. Another way of not acting is to be unable to act. Perhaps the second person is aware that the first person is drowning, but cannot swim or call out for help or take any other positive action to help the drowning person. All of these cases are ones of omission—that is, of not acting—but they are not the same as each other. Although it might seem clear that some cases of omission are more directly connected with moral responsibility, it is less clear whether they can be said to be cases of causal responsibility, that is, cases in which not acting actually causes some result. However, preventing something from happening—for example, preventing a person from drowning—is not the same thing as causing that thing to happen—for example, causing the person to drown. If omission, then, is not part of the cause for something to happen, the question is how someone can be held to be morally responsible if that person is not causally responsible.

Now, the point of all this discussion is not to settle these issues. Indeed, there is much more to say about them. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that what are seemingly abstract issues—what is the nature of freedom or equality or responsibility—are ones that we deal with in our everyday lives. What philosophy contributes is to analyze and evaluate these important kinds of concerns and to do so in sustained ways, by drawing conceptual relevant conceptual distinctions, by considering the presumptions and implications and connections among them and by explaining why they matter.

**What can philosophy do?**

Enough about what philosophy is. The present point, as noted at the outset, is that studying philosophy is not merely some abstract waste of time and money. But don't just take my word for this! This book provides the testimony, in their own words, of thirty people, all of whom graduated from Pacific University with a degree in philosophy. All of them went on to jobs and careers outside of academia. Indeed, they represent a wide variety of careers: physician, optometrist, attorney, software architect, high school principal, TV and film editor/producer, administrator for state social and health services, management consultant, marketing/communications director, and others. They speak to the value of studying philosophy in terms of content (that is, specific knowledge they gained from philosophy) as well as skills (how to think about and approach matters in their personal and professional lives) as well as attitude (looking at the big picture and seeing the forest as well as the trees), what was mentioned earlier as treating the common as uncommon and the uncommon as common. They show just some of the many things that one can do with a degree in philosophy.





# TED ETTEN

Deputy Administrator, Washington State  
Department of Social and Health Services

*Class of 1988*

**M**y name is Ted Etten and I am currently a Deputy Administrator for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). After finishing my degree in philosophy, I began my career working with developmentally disabled adults in the community. After eight years, I moved on to work for DSHS in Washington State. My career with DSHS started as a financial worker determining benefit eligibility for clients. After several years, I served clients as a social worker, serving families living in poverty. I advanced in my career to become a supervisor of a unit of social workers. Now, I am the Deputy Administrator of a Community Service Office in Spokane Valley, WA.

The work done in our CSO (Community Service Office) is laced with philosophical topics that need to be addressed every day. Some of these issues include child abuse and neglect, use of birth control, work ethic, alcohol and substance abuse issues, homelessness, etc.

As a new employee of DSHS, I had to reason through my own ethics and values of working with people in poverty. Many of the social issues that an employee of DSHS has to deal with on a regular basis do not have absolute right and wrong answers. Each staff person must work through these issues both intellectually and emotionally. My study of philosophy and ethics provided me with a unique insight and background from which to address these issues. In my discussions with co-workers and community partners of DSHS, it was apparent that everyone at one time or another must reason through these topics and decide how they stand in their convictions. My education in philosophy allowed me to assist co-workers to progress through these processes and gain insight for themselves.

As a supervisor, I often discuss social issues and service delivery philosophy with new staff and how it relates to people in poverty. The services that staff give to clients have significant “gray” areas that are surrounded by philosophical issues. The skills I learned in studying philosophy have allowed me to engage in discussion with staff to bring about a self-awareness of their own views on social issues, thus leading them to be more dedicated and efficient at their work with disadvantaged individuals and families. Much of the service a client receives from a social worker depends on the philosophies that social workers adopt. The more stable a social worker is with their social philosophy, the more effective they will be serving others.

As an administrator, my study in Philosophy has been invaluable in my career. On a daily basis I use what I learned in logic and basic reasoning to evaluate state policies and how they are applied in the daily work of DSHS. Since DSHS is a government entity, there are many political aspects to my work. My study of political philosophy has provided me a strong background to work in the political arena. Regarding office operations, I work with staff to develop office procedures and evaluate their effectiveness. This involves reading and interpreting reports and applying statistical data for continual process improvement. Again, my study of logical concepts and theory has been beneficial in development and interpretation of performance reports.

As a Deputy Administrator of an office giving direct social services to people in poverty, my degree in philosophy has prepared me significantly. I gained logic and reasoning skills to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services. I also gained skills in addressing interpersonal and emotional issues through the study of philosophical insights. Often, staff will discuss how their jobs affect people in real and practical ways. Staff see clients in need and may not be able to assist them in a way they may wish. My degree in philosophy allowed me to develop an ability to engage staff to sort through their feelings and ideas with a philosophical approach. This skill has assisted staff to better gain the emotional and intellectual skills they need to serve clients in meaningful ways.

Without the skills, abilities and insights I gained through earning my degree in Philosophy, I would not have been able to perform as a Deputy Administrator of a Washington State DSHS Community Service Office.

# BRIAN O'DRISCOLL

Director of Career Center, Pacific University  
*Class of 1989*

As the director of a liberal arts college career center, my undergraduate major in philosophy is of course directly relevant and valuable to my job. For instance, one of my core activities involves helping students to discover and appreciate the value of their liberal arts college experiences so that they can in turn highlight and promote that value to prospective employers and, really, anyone with whom they interact in their lives—whether they do so explicitly by talking about the virtues of such an education or more indirectly just by championing ideas that are rooted in their own educational experience. When a philosophy major walks into my office for help in this regard, naturally I note the particular relevance of my own major in the subject and the common ground this provides for our conversation. We can talk about facets of the subject that the student has found most resonant; and even if I've forgotten the finer points of Locke's *Treatise on Human Understanding* or whatnot, the student values the shared background and interest, which lends credibility to whatever career advice or information I may be providing. It means a lot to me to validate my own liberal arts background in the world, and so I really feel the students' need to do the same, and am happy to be able to assist them in this effort that benefits us both. Probably more than just about any major, philosophy students may be particularly skeptical of people in my sort of role and inclined to think "they can't relate," so it's always nice to be able to say, "Hey, that was my major, too."

My job also requires communicating effectively about quite a range of career interests and academic majors and subjects. Obviously good communication skills are linked to all kinds of backgrounds and characteristics and academic disciplines, but I do believe that studying philosophy has made me more conscious of some of the challenges inherent in

understanding others and being understood by them. Without studying philosophy, of course I would've figured that communication isn't always easy, but looking at the philosophy of language and related topics has raised my awareness of what can go wrong in communication and what can help. Plus, the very fact that philosophical discussions—and certainly writings—are often so painstaking and labored in their efforts to make subtle or important distinctions among ideas, it's just become second nature to question my own speaking, writing, and listening skills, which I think has helped my efforts to understand others and be understood by them. I recall as a student while studying some of these issues thinking, how is any communication even possible, given how isolated people ultimately seem to be from one another, and I still at times feel that way during low moments. (Perhaps not the highest praise!)

As a career advisor, like many of my colleagues in this profession, I've thought and talked much about the question of "what can you do with a major in this or that discipline?" In the case of philosophy, as with many majors, the answer is "many things, and perhaps all things." Clearly, a philosophy major doesn't preclude any occupational choice, and I think it is an infinitely practical and useful major in that it's applicable to any and every thing one might care to think about or undertake. At the same time, it's not targeted job training, and so always raises the question of "What are you going to do with that?" I think everyone needs to answer that question with regard to a major or course of study, but perhaps a better question is "How will you narrow down the list of the many things you could do with that?" A good career counseling office can help with this question, and the fact that the question has been raised doesn't have to mean what it so often seems to suggest, which is something like, "What are you thinking? You're never going to be able to do anything with that!" Actually, that is sadly true for some people, but not because of the limitation of the discipline, but rather owing to insufficient imagination, perseverance, or assistance with the undertaking. Choice of major does not equal choice of career; they are separate, though related questions. I'm continually disappointed to encounter faculty (and parents and students) who confuse these issues and seem to suggest that choosing a career should just be a quick, simple matter once choosing the major has happened. Students connect to all sorts of different aspects of a given major, so naturally they will vary greatly in what sorts of careers appeal to them. Not all English majors are good writers or want to be

editors, for instance. Some love literature but want to be physicians or bankers—separate choices, reflecting a complex interaction of variables such as skills, interests, values, passions, preferences, etc.

Inherent in my own philosophical mindset—which maybe I had before consciously studying or knowing about philosophy—is a desire to get to the truth of things to the extent that’s possible. I like to think that I prefer “seeing well” over “feeling good,” meaning, among other things, that I’m okay with being proven wrong about something in the interests of getting closer to some truth, even if it bruises my ego. I also don’t mind not being the expert. I like talking with students about their studies and learning about what they’ve learned, being taught by them. I think I’m secure enough in who I am that even though I’m “the educator” or the more educated (in some sense) and they’re the students, I always keep close at hand the belief that all I know is that I know nothing.

As a literature and writing teacher, when I did that as a profession before working as a career advisor, I came to believe that some teachers come to the work because they like to present information, and more to the point, because they like to be the expert and don’t like not being the expert. They may or may not be good teachers. I like seeing students, or anyone, light up with insight and discovery, and think it’s good for them and good for the broader community. Again, I don’t know how much of this is attributable to my philosophy major. I tend to think the major was a very good fit for my “personality” or disposition or whatever, and that philosophy is as much about a mindset or habit of mind or outlook as anything. Maybe that’s true of mathematics and some other majors, too, but seems less so with majors such as social work or economics... I don’t know. Feels like shaky ground.

At any rate, arriving at the threshold of the study of philosophy—upon taking that first class in Introduction to Philosophy—felt like arriving at a familiar, affirming place and community of sorts that I’d never been to, but that felt like home. Given that, philosophy has given me a lot of confidence. I mean, even though it’s a very humbling discipline, given the confusion and inscrutability it exposes, I think I’m the better for the framework it’s provided me for wading into something as sprawling as, say, “life’s big questions” or tackling something smaller, such as how to complete a woodworking project. For instance, when I first encountered the woodworker’s motto, “measure twice, cut once,” it really resonated, as an example of the value of questioning and doubting oneself, in this

case one's ability to accurately cut a piece of wood needed for a project upon measuring it just once. There's a humility there that strikes me as philosophical, i.e., "I think I can measure this accurately in one try, but maybe it's not as easy as it seems, so I'll double-check." More often than not, for me, measuring twice pays off. Not real bold, but it works, and I like to get the cut right.

I greatly value western philosophy's measured and methodical approach to issues and problems—e.g., be skeptical, ask lots of questions, don't make unnecessary assumptions—and it serves me well in my work, especially when I find myself in controversy. Recently our career center hosted a career fair on campus, something we have done twice a year for the past 20+ years. While they haven't attended all those fairs, US Customs and Border Protection did attend this most recent one, which caused a stir on campus owing to the Trump Administration's stand on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and anxiety this has caused in some students. As I write, we have not yet had a forum at which the issues of concern around this topic will be discussed. Regardless of what the outcome will be, I know that I will take into the forum a mindset focused on parsing out the various stakeholders, concerns, issues, and policies at play, with an eye toward fostering open and thoughtful discussion and perhaps action if not policy making/changing that will dovetail with the university's mission and commitments to its various stakeholders, not the least of which are students. I'm certain my philosophy major will serve me, others, and the overall discussion well, though I can't be certain of the unforeseeable impact of other variables in the equation. In my role I always come back to the fact that competing agendas and interests exist in tension, and I do my best to help my staff and others involved to work as constructively and peacefully as possible in the face of that tension, with a focus on protecting vital interests rather than entrenching in polarizing positions.

Philosophy has shaped my career, or perhaps, the same thing that drew me to philosophy has drawn me to my career path, which amounts to a few core beliefs. One of these is that the unexamined life isn't worth living, or at least is shamefully "underlived" and undervalued. I believed this at a gut level before coming to Pacific, and then when I found philosophy, I discovered that plenty of other people shared this belief, and I received a grand tour of the examined life via books and courses and conversations. It was tremendously affirming and heartening to encounter

such people, especially these professors who were dedicating their lives to the pursuit and teaching of philosophical inquiry.

I loved my undergraduate experience and focusing on life's big questions, so it was only natural that I felt that a college environment was the place for me. This made the decision to pursue graduate study an easy one, as well as the decision to pursue college teaching afterward. Teaching has always felt noble and worthwhile, and while teaching college composition and literature was ultimately challenging for the difficulty it presented in readily finding full-time employment close to where I wanted to live, as well as for the grueling number of hours of grading it entailed, it filled me up inside and felt like a true calling. Though I didn't teach philosophy, a philosophical mindset has strongly shaped my literary tastes and approach to teaching. Though I didn't think I'd like the community college environment, naively believing that all the serious students would go directly to 4-year colleges and universities, I was hooked on day one. At Pacific, my philosophy professors did a wonderful job of raising and provoking questions, while providing guidance on how to frame and address them via lectures, readings, and discussions in philosophy—all without foisting their own opinions or answers on their students. They never tipped their hand on an issue, which I consider the best gift a teacher could give, and an essential quality in a college teacher. I'm saddened a bit by how seldom I ran across this. In trying to pass along this same gift to my students, I strove to provoke questions and expose controversies and dilemmas in my classes, and kept my opinions to myself as much as I could.

After teaching for six years at Portland Community College, Chemeketa Community College, and Clark College, I grew weary of the unpromising life of being an adjunct instructor. When the opportunity to work in my alma mater's career center arose, I landed it, happily. In this work, focusing on helping students and alumni to bridge the gap between liberal arts education and ideas, on the one side, and fulfilling and life-sustaining employment, on the other, I'm still fundamentally an educator and steeped in the examined life and idealism. In working with students and graduates around career explorations and decision making, I employ a Socratic method—helping students to address questions while considering various viewpoints, values, goals, and so forth.

Philosophy has had a profound impact on other areas of my life. For instance, I've come to appreciate the quote attributed to Socrates: "By

all means marry; if it works out, you'll be happy. If it doesn't, you'll be a philosopher." To be sure, my marriage has brought both happiness and philosophizing, as it involves a combination of rewarding and trying times. I don't think Socrates had it quite right, though, at least not in my experience, as marriages seem to go through phases. Even those that endure, are not free of strife. While in some respects philosophy and a love of uncovering truth has NOT always improved marital relations, I think a philosophical disposition has helped me to make the most of good and bad times in marriage. So, I think there's room to be a philosopher and happily (generally) married, with at least some aspects of being a philosopher linkable to marital happiness (e.g., asking good questions, showing curiosity, staying open-minded).

Majoring in philosophy at Pacific provided a foundation and framework for confronting other life issues. Not that handling, for instance, the horrific violence that is so prevalent in the world today is made easier thanks to a background in philosophy, but I think it has prepared me to process such issues more constructively and maybe more healthily. Small consolation, but I think without that background, I'd be at a much greater loss in the face of such stark realities. In the end, I believe strongly that a liberal arts education is about preparation for life, as a citizen, a human being, a friend, etc. I'm the richer in these roles for my background in philosophy, and I think the people I interact with directly and indirectly benefit from that. Career is a separate issue, though I happen to think that liberal arts education, philosophy in particular, is tremendously valuable as preparation for a career. For this reason, though, I take issue with those who suggest that trade schools are the better option for some—they may be, in a career sense, but what do they do to prepare people for their other roles in life and life's big questions?

## TIM CHAMBERS

Attorney  
*Class of 1991*

**A**fter getting my philosophy degree from Pacific University, I returned to Northern California and worked as a landscaper for eight years. After enjoying time working outside travelling, I applied to law school. I was accepted at UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, and earned my law degree in 2000. The study of philosophy provided me with invaluable skills for both the study and practice of law. Regarding studying law, my philosophy degree was an instrumental part of getting in to the law school of my choice, because I was able to score pretty well on the LSAT (the entrance exam for law school) test. I have heard about different studies showing that philosophy majors score better on the LSAT exam than many other majors. This is not surprising to me, since logic and problem solving questions are a big part of the exam, and reasoning and logic skills that a philosophy degree provides are exactly the skills required to succeed on the LSAT.

The study of philosophy has also been instrumental in the practice of law. I specialize in Trust and Estate litigation, which includes will contests and elder abuse actions. In order to succeed as a litigator, I have to convince a judge that I am right, and my opposing counsel is wrong. In order to do this, I have to write concise, persuasive briefs that identify the key issues and apply the facts of a particular case to the applicable law. I also have to take apart arguments put forth by opposing counsel. Being able to break down and articulate an argument in precise terms is an invaluable skill in this context. I still have my "Introduction to Logic" textbook on the bookshelf in my office, and I frequently cite common logical fallacies in order to put forth persuasive counter arguments that will lead the judge reading my brief to reach the conclusion I am advocating.

But even more important than being able to identify the specific premises and conclusions of particular arguments is the ability to engage in big picture problem solving. Philosophy teaches you how to understand a position or an argument put forth by a given thinker and then how to work your way out of it using the skills of reason. This skill applies broadly to litigation, because a complicated piece of litigation has several moving parts, and in order to represent my clients to the best of my ability I must step back, observe all of the components of a case, and coordinate those components in order to get a good result. I think an apt comparison is to a mechanic working on an engine—there may be technicians who can work on a particular part like a carburetor. But true mechanics with a deep understanding of their craft are able to take apart and reassemble an entire engine. Philosophers are the true mechanics of thought, able to step back, identify and articulate a theory, and then disassemble, reassemble, refute or work their way through that theory in their own individual way. There is no better skill for not only pretty much any given trade, but life in general.

## SEAN WILLIAMS

High School Teacher

*Class of 1991*

Over the course of my twenty-five-year career as an educator, I have come to greatly appreciate my study of philosophy. The teachers and administrators I have met over those years have come from a variety of academic backgrounds. Many took degrees in education with certain emphases. Most secondary teachers majored in the area they teach: English, math, history, a science, etc. A few took psychology or sociology, or other liberal studies. Very few majored in philosophy. So, when given the opportunity to share how philosophy has helped me in my career, I jumped at the chance. I would even go as far as to assert that there is no better preparation for those who plan to be in (or find themselves in) the teaching profession.

Philosophy literally means the love of knowledge, so what couldn't be a more appropriate major? Despite the diversity of schooling I mention above, I think the strongest commonality of teachers is a love of learning, and the desire to pass on that knowledge. Formal teacher preparation always includes both practical strategies for instruction, and the pedagogical rationale for the "hows and whys" for those strategies. Practicing educators spend great amounts of time—through professional development and on their own—learning new curricula and new practices that match ongoing research in the study of learning and the latest trends. At higher systematic levels, administrators and policy makers are constantly developing and revising both the hierarchy of what is important for students to know and perform, and how to accurately assess progress toward those goals. Without naming it (or perhaps knowing it), the entire educational field is grounded upon epistemology.

Epistemology, the investigation of the nature of knowledge, is a diverse topic that covers many areas. Philosophers of every era and school

of thought have addressed it as either a means to explain natural phenomena, to justify their explanations for humanity's social state, or the meaning of language. I can't hope to do the topic any justice here. Suffice it for me to say that epistemological concerns are constantly present. In the contemporary era, cognitive science has taken the lead in explaining how the brain makes meaning of the world and stores that as functional knowledge. But it is in a classroom or some such learning environment, where a teacher must try to turn scientific discovery, policy, and theory into effective instruction and valid assessment. This happens in various ways, depending upon student need, capability, and resources. But always, teachers must be mindful of what they teach, how it is presented, and whether the intended lesson resonated with the students and gave them access to new skills, information, or wisdom at a transformational level.

Although discrete logic was just a small part of my degree program, I can say that it had a significant impact. Beyond its usefulness throughout the study of philosophy, I find the basics of logic useful almost daily. Here, I refer to logic as the justification of a claim or belief to be true, and also the process of using observable evidence and data to substantial claims and opinions.

Elementary-aged students deeply adhere to a priori justification for all sorts of beliefs, opinions, and what they feel are facts—a situation all its own worthy of further analysis. An important role for teachers is to push students of all ages away from accepting claims or forming opinions without being able to justify those thoughts with either empirical evidence or some sort of logical justification.

Interestingly, many educational professionals also are challenged by the use of logic. Assumptions and reliance upon preconceived concepts is a part of human nature (I guess), and that is true of educators as well. I often wish that a basic course in logic were required for all teachers.

Another benefit of a degree in philosophy comes from the process of earning that degree. All programs at a collegiate level are academically demanding. And liberal arts majors require a significant amount of study and thought, with most of that shared through writing. But I think I can safely posit that philosophy majors read some of the most challenging and complex materials to be found on college campuses. From the works of the early Greek schools, through medieval, enlightenment, modern, and contemporary periods, I routinely struggled to digest the vast quantity of writings and parse out their meanings. (Aquinas and Locke, I miss

you not.) In current educational terminology, this is referred to as being academically rigorous. My personal academic path was rigorous, especially getting my bachelor's degree. That experience prepared me for a career involving ongoing learning. I felt I was well-equipped with the skills and demeanor to take on the most challenging aspects of my Master of Education program. I have no fear of (and in fact show an unusual affinity for) occasionally quite dense material that my colleagues do not appreciate.

Rigor is not a new concept, of course, but focus on academic rigor is a recently reemerged trend and refers to both the depth and breadth of offered curricula, and also expected levels of student engagement. My anecdotal observations lead me to conclude that teachers who come from rigorous pre-teaching backgrounds not only make better teachers, have higher expectations for students, and are more adept at helping students effectively and empathetically cope with demanding levels of rigor.

One aspect of my education in philosophy that I think has had a major impact on my career comes from the experience of learning essentially about the basics of human thought. (Confession: my program was mostly focused on Western philosophy, so my statement here is not including the perspectives of Eastern philosophy, nor some of the most recently emergent topics of philosophy.) Teaching is an elating, empowering, and often-satisfying endeavor, but it can also just as frequently sidetrack its practitioners with an immense amount of frustration, and lead to a despondency about humanity in general. I have always tried to reflect upon my daily struggles (and successes) with the perspective that minds greater than mine have engaged in making sense of the world and all its constituent components, and none has been successful in producing that grand unifying theory. Perhaps this comes across as being overly pessimistic, or critical of the value of philosophy. Neither is my intention. Far from it, I value my degree in philosophy because I think it allows me to some peace of mind, knowing that I am in good company.

Upon reflection, I find it difficult to speculate what kind of teacher I would now be had I chosen a different academic path. Indeed, I may not have even become a teacher at all. However, I can state with conviction that my degree in philosophy has been a critical asset to my success as a teacher, and I can't image a more useful degree to all teachers. Yes, teachers do need training in specific content, in pedagogy, specific content areas, and in instructional technique. But coupling those efforts with philosophy is an unbeatable combination.



# BJORN PAIGE

High School Principal  
*Class of 1992*

**T**he looks I get when teachers and students hear that I have a degree in philosophy range from bemused to noddingly impressed. *What was he thinking?* Some seem to be wondering. *What a great foundation to be a leader!* I imagine others thinking to themselves. Well, I *imagine* it anyway.

I'm a high school principal, hardly Plato's philosopher king, and as kooky as it sounds, in my workaday world of running a school I consistently lean on the background and perspective my philosophy major provided to me.

A part of that perspective, of course, is critical thinking and the ability to logically parse out arguments, two skills that serve me well as I work in a profession filled with decisions to be made and answers to be found. Inundated with data and opinions, provided a range of "facts" that don't add up, evaluating situations for validity is a part of what I do every day. Years with Carnap and Quine taught me to be careful with my thinking and left me confident in my ability to put my mind to problems and be able to see the clearest way.

But education, and particularly the role of principal, isn't always clear or logical, and I'm also thankful for the ability to suspend disbelief and hold various and contradicting points of view that comes from my study of philosophy. So often the right choice comes only after walking a labyrinth, a task made easier by some comfort in the world of the unknown. Paradox may be too strong a word for some of what I see, but as I work to find solutions to the puzzles of my work an understanding that sometimes Zeno's arrow is staying in the air for a while helps put things in perspective.

Also helping with perspective are the ethical arguments I learned studying philosophy. More often than one might expect issues in educa-

tion are issues of equity, fairness, and justice. Beyond those logicians or playful puzzlers, social philosophers like Rousseau and Foucault, who helped to inform my professional self, also provide a certain perspective that I use to help navigate the turbulent waters of educational policy. I'm not saying that I break out Aristotle when I need to decide if a kid should get a free bus pass or we ought to suspend a student for smoking in the bathroom, but I do believe my time as a philosophy major helped me lay a foundation from which I've built the approach I take to my work.

Finally, and as important as any of the other impacts I've mentioned, I find that studying philosophy inspired in me a profound curiosity, a desire to keep learning, to question, and to always strive to know more. This pursuit of knowing and love of learning help to define who I am as a principal and an educator. They're qualities I hope I model for my students and school community.

While those students may or may not know what to make of my degree in philosophy, it's a part of who I am, and that, I think, makes a difference they can feel.

# WILLIAM P. JAMES

Music Teacher

*Class of 1992*

I graduated from Pacific University in 1992 with a double major in Music and Philosophy. As the son of two music teachers, I knew I would be involved in music at the collegiate level, but I was sure that my majors would be something other than the disciplines I ultimately chose. I came to college intending to study something that would help me make a decent living and have a respectable career title. I knew that there were skills that I needed to learn to reach this end, but was quite confident in my own wisdom and knowledge of the world. My freshman year convinced me otherwise.

Some of the unique values found in attending a small liberal arts college include meaningful interactions with familiar peers and consistent access to professors from a wide range of content areas. Small class sizes and frequent communication with these teachers and students from such different backgrounds changed this typical Montana kid and frankly, taught me just how much I didn't know. It also helped further formulate in me a commitment to truth and fairness and perhaps tempered some of my typical adolescent materialism and narcissism.

At first, Philosophy was just part of my course of study. All freshman were simultaneously required to take classes called "Culture & Civilization" which had us reading classics like; Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, sections of the Bible, Torah, Koran, etc. At school social events (parties), I found myself and my peers discussing and arguing about what we were all reading. These were new and different interactions for me, at least with people my own age, because in the past, discussions at such events would have been centered around some sporting event or one's latest fishing/hunting trip, etc. I increasingly looked forward to the discourse and debate that went on in class and on and off campus.

As I took more Philosophy classes, I realized that we were all gaining new skills when it came to looking at the world, deciphering information, analyzing arguments and identifying facts, opinions and falsehoods. We all were becoming critical thinkers and I was energized by being a part of this. Being a Philosophy Major helped teach me how to learn and educated me to be “educatable.” I’ve had to learn many skills that weren’t timely when I was in school, but learning to distinguish between evidence and opinion, between rational and invalid arguments and between someone giving you information and someone selling something, are skills that are timeless and apply to many vocations and avocations.

While in college, I met a few musicians that I still record and perform with to this day and we stay very busy performing throughout the Northwest. Our music and our longevity are connected to our education and any those arguments to leave creative endeavors like ours behind never held much sway over us, in many ways because of our education. We were signed to a record label (Rainforest Records), had several releases and toured. I’ve performed with the Portland Opera, been a part of several stage productions, conducted various youth orchestras and choirs, am a music employee of the Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, OR and am in my 18<sup>th</sup> year as a music teacher for the Beaverton School District (with some time spent teaching English as a Second Language as well). This was after working for 4 years right out of school at Sisters of the Road Café with Portland, Oregon’s homeless and low-income population. My education has not only helped me in the arts but also as an active citizen, union member and leader. I have stayed engaged in local politics, contract negotiations and workplace policy and feel that my Philosophy background has empowered me to help shape a better environment in my district and school communities. Studying Philosophy helped shape my life as much as it did my career.

I went on to get Masters Degrees in both Music and Philosophy at the University of Montana and was a Teaching Assistant in both departments. I have 20 graduate credits from Lewis & Clark College in Education along with several graduate credits here and there from other institutions. I am by no means finished taking such classes and hope I do this for many years to come. In several ways, this path started for me in my undergraduate days studying Philosophy and I hope I can help to instill a love of learning and a commitment to truth and fairness in my students the way that my professors did for me.

# JOE SCHMELZER

Senior Director of Product Management

*Class of 1992*

I graduated from Pacific University in Philosophy in 1992. My wife and I immediately moved to Urbana-Champaign where she had been admitted to graduate school (and I had not!).

So I immediately commenced looking for my first post-college job. After admittedly stretching the degree of my proficiency with some of their required skills...I was hired by a science and medical textbook publisher in town, where my degree in Philosophy separated me from the other candidates, and made me more desirable. They hired a Philosophy grad because they wanted a perspective different from the rest of the department's employees, who consisted of mostly hard science people on the editorial side, and MFAs on the creative side. That was my jumping off point, and I have spent the last 25 years working in technology-related jobs.

Ending-up in tech wasn't pure chance. I grew up in Palo Alto, CA, where as a kid I enjoyed everything related to computers: building computers; networking them; playing and customizing video games; etc.

I am currently living in San Diego. I make (what I consider to be) pretty good money; enough to support a multitude of bad habits, expensive tastes, thirst for travel and adventure, and four kids!

Why was Philosophy such an awesome degree? I'll break the education I received at Pacific University in Philosophy into a few categories:

1. Read. Lots of reading. Reading different styles, tempos, degrees of technical or literal content versus figurative content, or expressive content. Sometimes the content was voluminous and difficult, particularly in the upper divisions. Stretching the mind to be able to engage and consume each of these varieties of linguistic styles. Even different languages in some cases, Greek, Latin, German,

Spanish. At work I read a lot. On a given day I may spend 25-50% of my time reading? A variety of materials, ranging from technical journals to pop-science blogs to research reports. And lots of email. LOTS of email.

2. Research. The Internet and Google didn't exist in its present form when I graduated. (A friend and I started a side business creating web sites in 1994. The first thing we had to do in every sales call was explain what the World Wide Web was, and why it mattered.) As a Philosophy student, at Pacific, one was primarily asked questions rather than given answers. The expectation was that a student go away and come back somewhat better informed. The ability to conduct research, to understand what qualified as research, was critical. Understanding and verifying source content. (How important today?) To further enhance the sophistication of this skill, we had learning modules that addressed issues like Observation and Experimentation. What qualifies as an observation? How does the experiment itself affect the results? What biases or assumptions are implicit to the researcher? Baffling to me, actually, how some of these fundamental understandings are completely missing from the basic skillsets of functioning (high-level) professionals who have graduated in other disciplines.
3. Write. A Philosophy curriculum can vary from school to school, as with any program. Pacific University was Liberal Arts focused and therefore emphasized strong writing skills, as part of a balanced college education. We wrote a lot, and we had Professors who paid attention to the writing, and enforced the use of proper techniques. Beyond that Liberal Arts baseline, writing was a critical tool to employ to earn a Philosophy degree. Many of the ideas we studied were sophisticated or complex, or abstract. To discuss them academically required an ability to not only explain in writing, but also to simplify, decode, and translate. It takes practice and coaching; both were readily available, and freely given. I write, a lot, every day. From simple directional missives to the team, to more elaborate messages, to full-blown articles and research papers. The ability to communicate in the written form is a basic foundational requirement. Without writing skills you cannot work for me, or be effective in my field (Product Management). Beyond the baseline requirement to get in the

door, a good writer will be able to get more done, faster. And doing that will positively impact everything else he or she does, as a professional.

4. Think. Reading and Research combined yields information. (Which is not to overly discount other ways to gather information, like conversation, physical experience, etc.) Connecting bits of information in various ways creates actionable knowledge. Steve Jobs said, “Creativity is just connecting things.” It’s a simple statement but quite true, on a number of levels. In a Philosophy program, one is encouraged to identify the ideological connections, or to make new ones. This ability is extremely useful throughout a life, in every aspect.
5. Reason. I’ve talked about reading, writing, researching, thinking... The proper combination of all of those I will call Reasoning. Making connections. Also important to understand *how* things are connected, how they *can be* connected, and what sorts of connections are valid versus invalid. How to take the aggregate information, experience, and sort through it, distill it, and come to conclusions. Reasoning.

In the Philosophy program at Pacific University students are taken on a journey that begins with the development of the basic skills and culminates in the ability to use all of the skills together in the process of Reasoning.

There are a number of ways a person can educate themselves, a number of degrees that will capably arm a person to go into the world and be productive, happy, useful. I found the Philosophy program at Pacific to be perfect for me, and I am grateful for it, and to my professors.



# MOLLY WIDDICOMBE

Director of Annual Giving, University of Redlands  
*Class of 1992*

I graduated from Pacific in 1992 with a dual major in Philosophy and English Literature. I also had minors in Creative Writing and Religion. My advisor steered me towards my first class, Philosophy of Religion, because he knew that I had attended a Catholic high school and thought I could handle a junior level class as a freshman. After that initial class, I was hooked on Philosophy!

Initially after college, I used my experience in Residence Life to secure a position as a Hall Director at another university. I believed this to be a one-year gap between undergraduate and graduate work. People continually asked, “So, you want to be a teacher?” My answer was always, “no.” What I didn’t realize was that I could teach in a variety of settings—not just in a classroom. My love for learning was what led me to Philosophy as a major, and ultimately, to seek out employment that requires lifelong learning.

I began a Master’s program in Education, with an emphasis in Higher Education Leadership. During this time, I held jobs in Student and Academic Affairs including Residence Hall Director, Tutor Coordinator, and Summer Orientation Coordinator. All of these positions suited my desire to lead a team of people towards a common goal. I also taught study skills and learning style classes.

After ten years working in higher education, my spouse and I decided our family would be better served by my staying home with our three young children (then ages 4, 1½ and newborn). I was initially afraid that I would lose the ability to think critically being out of the workforce. However, negotiations with toddlers proved to be some of the most interesting and challenging debates I have ever had! I began volunteering at a local hospital, mentoring new parents and helping them identify

milestones in their infants. This became a passion for me, as my second child was born with Down syndrome and often missed the milestones her brothers achieved at the same time. Again, my undergraduate preparation in the liberal arts taught me to be a voracious reader of early childhood development. Today, I lead a group of volunteers who reach out to new parents after a diagnosis of Down syndrome to offer support and education.

When I returned to fulltime work, it was with a large ACT/SAT test preparation company. My job was to present the products (tutoring packages, practice test seminars, etc.) to high school students and their parents. I was happy to be back in the role of mentoring parents and teaching students. Preparing students for success in college is something I have always loved. It was exhilarating to be involved in higher education once again.

When the economy turned sour, my job was eliminated, and again I found myself pondering, “What to do with my skills and education?” My then 10-year-old son expressed an interest in attending Catholic high school, as I had. I went to visit a high school in the area, and learned that a nun had just retired and they were in need of someone to proctor AP exams and serve as part time librarian and substitute teacher. So once again, I embarked on a new career. My ability to adapt to new environments and learn new things has helped me every time I have made a career change.

In my current position as Director of Annual Giving, I use many skills I learned as a Philosophy student. Studying philosophy improved my writing technique. I write fundraising appeals that must reach a broad audience, while also touching individuals in an emotional way. I lead a team of people who each have unique aspects to their jobs, but all must work towards the common goal of raising enough money to provide scholarships for students.

My degree in Philosophy, and my whole liberal arts education for that matter, has prepared me in ways that are often subtle, but always present. I tend to be a “big picture” thinker. I like to approach problem solving from the largest view possible, and then narrow down to the details.

By far, the best job I have ever had is being a parent to three great kids. One is in college studying History and Religion, one is in high school and hopes to become a writer for video game stories, and one is a perpetual child, who reminds me to always be patient, kind, and

thoughtful. My children are the ultimate teachers, keeping me on my toes and always alert to the next lesson to be learned.

So, what can you do with a Philosophy degree? EVERYTHING!



# SEAN O'DRISCOLL

Management Consultant

*Class of 1992*

I remember telling my Dad I was going to major in Philosophy. I think he said something like “Philosophy? What are you going to do with that?” He was mostly (well *mostly*) kidding, but it was a rational question for my Baby Boomer, Farmer and School District Technology leading father. I didn’t have an answer for him, but like most things in life, knowing the answer has rarely stopped me from pursuing what interests me. I enjoyed the process of Philosophy. I think I realized immediately it was giving me a framework for how to think, how to construct a narrative that was defensible and how to approach things with objectivity.

It wasn’t an easy choice upon graduation, as I didn’t have an interest in Graduate School; I wanted to get after a career. I was immediately grateful I had partnered my Philosophy degree with Business Administration as I can only imagine the reaction in my first job interviews to the “farmer philosopher.” That said, there is no doubt over the last 25 years that what I learned from my philosophy studies exceeded all other coursework in terms of impact on my career. I’d likely argue that the combination of learning how to work (life on the farm) and learning how to think (philosophy), gave me a foundation that has been my bedrock throughout my career.

After leaving Pacific in 1992, I moved to Seattle and joined a company I’d barely heard of called Microsoft. A humble starting point on the customer service ‘hotlines’ as a temp worker while I continued to look for a permanent position. “*Thank you for calling Microsoft, this is Sean, how can I help you?*” Sixteen years later I left Microsoft as an executive. It turned out this industry leading Software company didn’t just need coders, but it needed people who could think, problem solve and build consensus. It needed leaders and, fortunately for me, had a culture that

deeply valued critical thinking and a discipline referred to inside the company as 'precision questioning'—no doubt familiar territories for philosophy.

A final twist that permanently changed my trajectory occurred between 2001 and 2008 while at Microsoft. I took responsibility for a global program focused on finding, thanking and engaging on behalf of the company, unique individuals around the world who spent extraordinary amounts of time in online 'communities' helping other people use software—specifically, Microsoft Software. We had a hypothesis that these individuals were uniquely important and a belief that users interacting with other users online could create a sea change in our industry. We were studying online human behaviors, motivations and the ability to connect this passion with our business objectives. Over the course of these years I became a recognized industry expert in online communities and digital influencers—at the time a niche few cared about...until suddenly, the entire industry cared about it—Facebook, Twitter and Social Media burst onto the scene and began to take hold of our culture and business.

Fortunately for me, I found myself a leading thinker at the intersection of social media and business strategy. This moment was the catalyst for the most recent ten years of my career. I left Microsoft to start my own management consulting firm which I was able to grow and ultimately sell to PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2012. Throughout these years I've been an entrepreneur, consultant and strategist working with leading brands on the topic of digital transformation. Essentially, I think, critique, and advise for a living. Had I not been a farm boy or not been a philosophy major, would it have worked out the same? Perhaps a good question for an existentialist. As my oldest daughter prepares to enroll in college in the fall of 2018, I wonder what she'll study, but most importantly, I hope she learns how to think as the path ahead is rarely linear, but with the right tools in your tool belt, you can achieve just about anything.

# JAMES MATTEUCCI

Associate Director for Government Affairs and Policy, Merck Sharp &  
Dohme

*Class of 1994:*

I graduated from Pacific University with a degree in Philosophy and Literature, the first person in my family to earn a college education. I'm very proud of this. I wasn't surrounded by college degrees as a kid. The only people I ever suspected having them were teachers. All the men in my life left high school to join the Navy or become loggers and truck drivers. Solid, necessary, noble work—but not for me.

I wanted to go to college, even though I had no idea what that really meant in any practical sense. I just knew it might let me do things I hadn't seen anyone around me do, even though I wasn't sure what those things were yet. I did know, exactly, what I would be doing if I didn't go find out, however. So college wasn't part of a career path for me. I just wanted to read and talk about whatever they were teaching there. And after sampling sensible majors like Economics and Computer Science, a prerequisite class called "Ethics, Medicine, and Health Care" taught by a guy wearing knickers with a doctorate from Oxford turned the key.

I used to joke that my degree in Philosophy meant I was the most unemployable person in whatever room I was standing. I hadn't specialized in any marketable skill. Had zero business or communications background. A career in the sciences or engineering would only kill people. I couldn't build or fix anything. And with graduation approaching, my mother was sending ads for entry-level insurance agent positions while my dad talked about the Navy. Making things clearer, my girlfriend at the time was running mass spectrometer instruments in a lab downtown a full year before receiving her degree in chemistry. She already had a salary! All I had was a stack of books, some turgid academic papers, and a few years spent learning to develop and defend ideas.

It was fantastic.

Years later I realized that an undergraduate degree in Philosophy was indeed a kind of specialization. I'd been trained to embrace large ideas. I started getting comfortable with complex intellectual puzzles and disassembling them into manageable, malleable pieces. Not only was I challenged to ask questions, I learned to ask the right kinds of questions. Twenty-four years later, I'm surprised how often I think about the Cave, the Other, the Lion or the "stuff you bump into" when huddling with colleagues on legislative strategy or trying to decipher the real impact of new regulations.

Since graduating, I've been a teacher and on staff in the Peace Corps. I've earned a master's degree in public policy. And for nearly twenty years I've had a career in government relations and health care policy, fifteen of which have been working for a multinational pharmaceutical company engaged in markets ranging from childhood vaccines to animal health.

My role is to explain complex business and finance models while negotiating agreements with state governments strained by increasing demands on scarce resources. I routinely engage with people who specialized in very technical areas of medical research, public health policy, contracting, supply chain management, and so on. I worked recently with colleagues and a governor's staff to assemble a novel financing proposal aimed at eliminating a viral disease. Two years ago, I worked with a collection of people I consider some of the world's greatest public health heroes on a project to reduce maternal mortality in rural India. Almost daily I discuss changes in laws and regulations with their authors and implementers.

Over the years I've picked up a catalog of layman's expertise in some areas, for sure. But what I've come to realize is that my expertise is found in the ability to quickly come up to speed on issues, find new insights and navigate the parties toward a resolution. This has helped me become a useful follower and an innovative leader.

As health and tax reform are hotly debated these days, I realize I could have used another math class along the way. But majoring in philosophy forced me to think creatively and defend concepts from many angles. In philosophy classes, I learned the value of using simple language to explain large ideas. I was taught how to think and to be comfortable with the struggle of learning. Majoring in philosophy prepared me to be a useful follower and a creative leader. It was a tremendous, if accidental, career decision.

# BRIDGET JONES

Donor Relationship Manager  
*Class of 1994*

**I** was a transfer student from two years at Oregon State University to Pacific University. It was an amazing experience learning and exploring everything from ethics to philosophy of science (I held on to that book for years) to comparative religion. I graduated in 1994 with Humanities major and a Philosophy minor and no clue what I would do next. I still sometimes wonder what I will be when I grow up!

I started my career working for a short time in a small art gallery in Boise, Idaho before family commitments took me to Ohio. Ironically, while looking for work just to pay the bills, I answered a blind ad in the newspaper and found myself working in a beautiful historic mansion. It was a wonderful introduction to both the nonprofit world and the career of fundraiser.

I spent five years there learning the history of the site and the family who had built it. I quickly found that my philosophy background helped me to explore human interactions both current and historic from an outside perspective and be able to understand how the particular lens/filter through which they viewed the world could help me understand and often empathize even when I didn't agree. This often put me in the unofficial position of mediator, but I found that I loved working with a great variety of people. I played many roles during my time at the museum from working with volunteers in the mansion to running special events on the grounds.

I eventually left to move into the human services type of nonprofit. I have always stayed in Development work though my role has changed several times. I am currently enjoying being a fundraiser for the local food bank. I have been here eight years and the job is amazing. I get to spend every day working to not only support my own family, but also

to help support thousands of individuals and families who are facing a rough patch. They come from all walks of life and I am privileged to be able to help give them hope for a brighter future.

I am so grateful for my education in Philosophy and the Humanities. It gave me a uniquely broad view of humanity and the world. It also taught me the somewhat lost arts of ethics and honor. I shall always cherish it.

# CHRISTOPHER DILLON

TV/Film Editor and Producer  
*Class of 1995*

**S**hould I major in philosophy?  
Yes. And stop second-guessing yourself. You are reading this because by some amount you are already interested in philosophy. Perhaps you got a taste in your prior schooling or you have come across great quotes or met fascinating people who referenced philosophers. Maybe it's just an inkling that you know you will like it. You are correct. *Philosophy is interesting.*

When I was in High School, the classroom was not open to big questions. *Does God exist? Do we have free will? What is truth? What is knowledge?* These were the things that my friends and I spent hours discussing on our own time. The real stuff. When I studied philosophy at Pacific University, what felt important to me was no longer treated as too controversial for class. We engaged in intelligent, guided exploration of deep, complex, existential questions. I loved it.

We all know fear, desire, joy, and loss. We all struggle to understand and draw meaning from our experiences while wondering about the very idea of meaning itself. The questions of philosophy are not fleeting but evergreen. That alone is reason enough to major in it, but it is not the only reason.

*How can something with such ancient origins still be relevant today?*

The same way as agriculture, I guess. We must nourish and replenish ourselves in a challenging, evolving world. Fifteen years ago, if someone said "I can't look away from my iPhone because I'm being trolled by this hashtag group on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram," it would have sounded like a collection of dumb, meaningless, made up: glub. Because it is. But we now live in a world where argument comes constantly from all directions, a perpetual snowball fight of opinion. To deconstruct

the ideas being hurled about, to avoid being misled, and to build your thoughts for maximum impact, these are relevant skills that will be developed and sharpened as a philosophy major.

Broadly, the work done in class was in two parts. We read and analyzed complex texts by people like Nietzsche, Spinoza, or Wittgenstein, and then distilled our reactions into coherent, supported, written argument, anticipating dissent and countering it. Repeatedly you will practice interpreting dense propositions and weighing their validity and coherence while formulating your response. This process is excellent preparation for any line of work where taking in complicated information and communicating effectively are important...so *every line of work*. This includes my career as an editor, producer, and director of film and television.

I work with story, and a well-composed argument has similarities with dramatic structure. Many stories revolve around a central dramatic question that, like the thesis of a paper, serves as the spine around which the body is formed. You keep watching or reading because you want to see how the question is resolved. The work done in philosophy class enhanced my ability to break down narrative according to the function of its components, and to reorder or reform those parts to increase clarity and power. For an example of the central dramatic question, go back to my very first line of the piece you are reading.

*But will a philosophy major prevent employers from hiring me?*

No. No one cares what your major was. Honestly.

Nobody has ever even asked what I majored in. I also have a Masters Degree from a prestigious university, and no one has ever asked me about that either. If I wanted to be a teacher or professor, it would be relevant. Outside of academia? Meh.

In my experience, the primary obstacle in the working world is getting into the room where you want to be. Luck plays an uncomfortably large role, but *your undergraduate major will not be what opens or closes that door*, so study what interests you, challenges you, helps you grow. I have only ever been hired and I have only ever seen others get jobs for one reason: Someone there trusts you. There is risk in hiring anyone, and personal recommendation is how that fear is overcome. So, while you are in school, get an internship in your chosen field and build the necessary relationships to get in the room.

But once in that room, *you only get to stay if you can do the job*.

Studying philosophy will prepare you to excel in a wide variety of environments. These skills will always serve you. So stop second guessing yourself and study philosophy.



# DREW HAMMOND

Elementary School Teacher  
*Class of 1995*

When I went to college in the fall of 1989, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I had been active in the UCC church in the local, regional, and even national level and the thought of ministry had occurred. However, I had not heard a call to ministry. I had heard a call to learn though. I am not knocking my friends who grew up knowing exactly what they wanted to do in life (if fact, I envied them), but it felt like I was one of the few that went to college purely to learn.

This position did pose a practical dilemma, namely, the declaration of a major. I had been toying with philosophy since my freshmen year; thinking of it as a natural extension of math. Instead of inserting numbers, I would be inserting situations and applying logic. At least that was one branch of exploration I was on at the time. I settled on a double major in Philosophy and Humanities. I learned much from my philosophy professors as well as many peers as we explored and debated assorted topics and texts. I found that my world was expanded and challenged. New ideas and ways of looking at the world were discovered and examined.

After college I had a variety of different job experiences. I worked in the building industry for a few years, was a youth minister for five years, an animal control officer for a few years, and worked in a residential facility for teenage offenders for almost four years. Each of these jobs gave me different skills that I have been able to use and build upon. The one skill that has been invaluable through all of them came from philosophy; the ability to think and discern. I have been faced with situations that required me to assess, sometimes very quickly, a situation and look for outcomes and possible consequences.

Examining what constitutes a good life has also been the foundation of my philosophy of being a life long learner. Throughout my adult

life I have also taken this love of learning and challenging myself into my personal life. I have learned to paint; even selling a few paintings. I continued with guitar and recorded a CD of my songs. I have taken classes on homebrewing, glass blowing, pottery, and writing.

Today, I am a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at a charter school in Colorado. Many people ask what I teach expecting me to say math, science, reading, writing, and social studies. And, while that is true and one answer, I usually say, “I teach students” or “I teach students to think”. Education has changed immensely since the invention of Google and internet searching in general. Many students (and others) ask why they need to learn things when they can just google it. My answer is Google may be able to tell you what it is, but not what it means, why it’s important, how it’s useful, what can be done with it, why it’s wrong, or can it be made better. All of these questions are only answered by deeper thinking and questioning.

I use my philosophy degree everyday of my professional life. But, shhh...don’t tell my students that... yet.

## BRIAN ABE

Financial advisor, World Financial Group/Retinal Ophthalmic Technician  
*Class of 1996*

**P**hilosophy has taught me sometimes to persevere through a challenging or rough situation and to pause for a moment and think about what is the obstacle. Experience has shown me that sometimes overthinking a situation may not be the best solution and can be detrimental or resolve nothing. Finding a balance that is right for me has been a life journey and philosophy plays a huge role in trying to fine-tune this. The journey began before I started my undergraduate years at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon but at that time, I did not realize it.

The first couple of years at Pacific University proved to be a challenge in balancing out courses in science, literature, math, electives, and, of course, philosophy. Initially I thought that a more stereotypical path towards graduating at Pacific University would involve a focus on science and electives that would have excelled me toward Optometry school. My mindset during my first year at Pacific University was geared toward science and its hours of memorization and using formulas to achieve an absolute answer. The second year was a different story as my interest in philosophy offered a different avenue of flexing that part of your brain in which discussions, theorizing, and creating a point of view mattered more. Struggling with these different ways of thinking was no means an easy path for me in those four years at Pacific University and I often wondered how I survived. The idea that a philosophy major was absurd at first with my initial mindset along with the opinion of my parents: especially my mechanical-engineer father.

The struggle was important and as I took more courses in philosophy, I began to understand that everyone had a version of philosophy, with some opening admitting how important it is while others dismiss the idea

as trivial. A few times I had struggled to balance studying for quizzes, midterms, and finals in the more traditional manner of rote memorization or equations while delving into the theories and critical thinking of philosophy. Some night—or lack of nights!—were spent cramming information into my brain for a test the next day while completing and revising a philosophy paper or more. At the end of my four years at Pacific University, I had achieved a bachelor's degree with a major in Philosophy and a minor in Biology. Although my brain was tired with struggling with jumping from information that ranged in scope and depth during my undergraduate years, I appreciated the opportunity to explore that part of life.

Jumping forward a few years, philosophy had opened up a few opportunities to meet a variety of individuals and to connect with those that have shared a similar interest in thinking beyond what is perceived as mere fact. The art of conversation was more enriched as I began to develop an ability to listen to individuals express their opinions about different subject matters and to debate or empathize with their ideas. I have met both individuals who have achieved several significant advancements for society and their lives and others who are more focused on one or two accomplishments. One such individual had a huge impact on my life through conversations, debates, and lifelong lessons in philosophy: my martial arts instructor. Although he had passed away about two years ago, the philosophical conversations we had were priceless and brought back that passion to look at life with a deeper understanding.

The deeper passion for knowledge restarted my journey into entering the academic life as a graduate student. Initially I was going to nursing school, but after talking to an advisor for Kaplan University online degree program, the mentioning of an undergraduate degree in philosophy and biology brought up the suggestion of going into public health. After taking a couple of course in public health, I once again found a connection with philosophy in relation to health science that allowed me to focus on something that appealed to an inner passion. Again, the struggle was there to balance out life's challenges: this time involving primarily full time work and graduate school. Two and a half years of courses that covered different aspects of public health allowed me to achieve both a Master in Public Health Program Development degree and develop a greater appreciation for looking at healthcare in a broad spectrum. Public health for me has been an academic achievement and

represents a fine-tuning of a practical aspect of philosophy in my life.

The journey in my life so far has been influenced by my family, friends, and experiences with others. Before entering college, I had questioned life's expectations but lacked the experience and awareness of what it meant to express passion for knowledge. Through years of working, traveling, conversations, academics, and experiencing both expected and unexpected life situations, I can say that the decision to pursue philosophy in both academically and in life has been challenging and rewarding. Although my current job may not involve the same passion for philosophy as I hope to achieve in the long run, the pursuit for growth still lingers. The expectations for the rest of my life journey are the continual growth, involving an active and retrospective thinking, which I have learned to appreciate from the experiences with the philosophical world.



# SHELLY ELLISON

Director of Marketing and Communications  
*Class of 1996*

I graduated from Pacific in 1996 with a degree in Philosophy and Communication (journalism emphasis). My family joked that I was ready to “write a lot of BS.” It turns out that my double major has helped me *cut through the BS* in every facet of my career, from corporate communications and agency public relations to fundraising and my current role as director of marketing and communications for a progressive psychiatry practice.

I have been asking “why?” for as long as I can remember. So, philosophy was a natural course of study for me, even though I tried to drop the introductory class during my freshman year (I remain grateful to a philosophy professor for talking me out of that decision). I was drawn to ethics courses in particular; however, I enjoyed the variety of the required courses and electives. One of my philosophy professors challenged me to achieve a level of proficiency in my writing and research that I didn’t know was possible. As I moved through the curriculum, I discovered philosophy was surprisingly complementary to my journalism coursework, and it helped me become a highly analytical communications professional with superior research and planning skills.

When I reflect on my career history, I believe the greatest value of my philosophy education has been the ability to think critically about the issues, products, or services that I am promoting and the strategies that will best achieve communications objectives. Few fundraising or marketing communications professionals have unlimited budgets, so being strategic is a matter of survival. Yet many professionals struggle with strategic decisions. I recommend philosophy as a practical major for *anyone* who anticipates working in a strategic role.

Though my critical thinking skills have benefited me in many positions, not every employer appreciates someone who challenges the status

quo or asks, “why?” Some organizations look for “yes people” who work without question, even if the work does not serve the best interests of the organization or its stakeholders. After more than two decades in the workforce, I have learned that I excel in environments where continuous improvement is not only acceptable, but also expected. Fortunately, in my current position as director of marketing and communications for Telemental Health Group and The Center of Excellence in Co-Occurring Medicine, I enjoy opportunities daily to practice creative, progressive, and strategic communications—with the full support of company leadership.

On a personal level, I am deeply grateful for the ways that my philosophy education has helped me understand and appreciate divergent points of view. I believe this capacity is vitally important today. In fact, I keep a copy of this quote by Gabriel Marcel with me at all times, which one of my philosophy professors included in his spring 1994 syllabus for “Ethics and Values in the Health Professions”:

“We ought to be capable of understanding a new idea without therefore necessarily adopting it; and in reality there is no possibility of tolerance except in a society where that distinction, between grasping a notion and accepting it, is maintained.”

In summary, a philosophy education is a vital tool for achieving excellence in any profession, and it provides essential skills for navigating the complexities of modern life. It is not possible to predict exactly how philosophy will shape one’s career trajectory, but every philosophy major can count on a significant and profound return on the investment.

# SIMON DUVALL

Senior Software Engineer  
*Class of 1997*

I received my Bachelor's in 1997 from Pacific University in my home town of Forest Grove, Oregon. I majored in Philosophy, so naturally my first post-college job was as a Claims Examiner for a large local insurance company—exactly what I wanted!

Getting my Bachelor's in Philosophy was definitely a topic of interest in the interview I remember, as I had no insurance claims work or training at that point. I said something to the effect of “philosophy taught me to ask lots of questions.” I think that was good enough for them.

I successfully managed to make this job not last long, as it tested one's ethics regularly. I found another job pretty quickly through a temp agency scanning medical documents and labeling the scans with patient information for eight hours straight. It was arguably one of the most painful activities I have ever partaken in. I began drinking a lot at a small local bar nearby.

One night while imbibing at aforementioned watering hole, a man came in and set up a small pile of bricks next to one of the beer taps, mixed some mortar, and began building a square box the register could sit on and also have a keg inside on tap. I had an epiphany and saw myself as this man—a skilled practitioner, a mason! No wondering what the goal of the work was. No million ways to do it right but no one can agree on one. You are building things with bricks and mortar. The bartender and patrons by now had gotten to know me and put out word. I was called the next night at the scanning job by a chimney mason that needed a helper. I quit that night and started the next day.

The chimney business in the city was, needless to say, a small niche community, and that community seemed to be mostly Scientologists. My

original interest was in philosophy of religious experiences, so I naively asked lots of questions, but soon had me flee everyone I knew in the chimney business to avoid yet another request to do a personality test.

I tried doing some jobs on my own, landed a few, and did work I could be proud of. Then winter came and there was no more work. I supplemented for a brief period helping some carpenters from the aforementioned watering hole doing odd jobs here and there, eventually landing a fairly long stint working with a master Danish electrician. This was I believe one of the best periods in my life. We worked periodically with other craftsman we knew from the bar. The work was complex and mentally engaging. I met my future wife at this time. Conversations came up about journeyman-ship. I was no longer drinking myself stupid. It was a good time. Then another opportunity came up.

Another patron at the aforementioned watering hole administered websites at a large community college in the area. When trying to land masonry jobs on my own, I had created a cheesy website with my own paint-program crafted animated chimney in the middle of the page. I had been sharing my chimney business stories and had mentioned my animated chimney I was so proud of, and he was impressed I'd made my own for my business. He asked if I wanted side work helping out with some websites for the community college.

That was 2001. It is now 2018. I now live in another city. I am a software engineer. I have two children—a son Liam and daughter Lillian, a wife Joey, and two German Shepherds—Bonnie and Clyde. Software engineering has proven to be plenty mentally satisfying, but unlike brick and mortar projects, software never seems to be “done.” Wrestling with the “million-ways-to-do-it-right-but-no-one-agrees-on-one” nature of software development can get pretty tiring. All the ways to satisfy a feature's requirements are, for the most part, inherently logical and therefore equally defensible. The “right” way to do something becomes more a political choice than simply a construction choice. The industry carries a fair amount of arrogant players now that it's “cool to be geek”, so to get consensus on anything technical is always a petty prestige game. I often think of whether I would do it again or should have stayed with electrical work.

However, computing is also one of the few “applied philosophic research” disciplines I can think of, if any. Semantic modeling, simulating, machine learning all are not just disciplines-in-themselves in the

computing world, but literally tools used in applied computing. Just using these tools makes the philosopher's mind run amok. More than once I've taken a walk during the workday not to try and think my way through a problem so much as to let my mind run with the thoughts and ideas that spring to life while using those tools.

In general, I don't know how much a Philosophy degree helps one get a job. Diogenes probably would have far less success than Plato or Aristotle. As I pointed out earlier, it came up and piqued interest perhaps at the right place and time. People really seem to find a Philosophy degree exotic or fascinating and will readily engage in any lay-philosophic discourse. It's certainly an excellent foundation for a future law degree. It pairs well with Psychology and Sociology academically, whatever that translates to in "the real world." It may also work well with History, Political Science, and I would imagine Communications, if one wishes to break into policy work or think-tanks in DC.

For myself, majoring in Philosophy was never a career move. Those professors were talking about questions I was interested in, the questions that seemed the most relevant to me, to us all. I still have many of my texts from then and occasionally will pull one from the bookshelf and read for a bit, and save articles I discover on the internet and in magazines that are relevant to some "ongoing direction" I've had since obtaining my degree in Philosophy. Philosophy seemed more like a discipline, something that actually gives one sand, inquisitiveness. It was therapeutic, a veritable Gold's Gym for my psyche. I learned *how* to question things, as well as how to *find* those questions. More often than not, this question-mining has proven fruitful at the workplace and gets cred with the peers and management. But near just as often, the mining needs to be turned off for irrational reasons, usually because the philosopher's sincerity in rooting out an explanation places itself at odds with the laws of business and management. Regardless, I would pursue a Philosophy degree again if I had the choice. It is the only discipline that makes me feel I am truly participating in *all this*. No better reverence can be paid to this life we're in than to want to know more about it, than to pay it the curiosity it readily accepts, and Philosophy has no problem footing that bill every time.



# MATT HOBSON

Web Writer, International Youth Foundation

*Class of 1997*

**Y**ou may not think there's a connection between Thales of Miletus and my career in the global youth development sector—but there is.

In 1992, after graduating from high school, I signed up for a few classes at the local community college, one of which was a class called The History of Philosophy. If I recall correctly, I may have picked the class because a cute girl had also signed up, but after the first class discussion, I was hooked. Philosophy turned a key in my mind that made learning cool and fun. A year later, I transferred to Pacific University where I took dozens of classes in philosophy—from ancient Greeks like Thales, to contemporary Americans like Richard Rorty. I even helped found the Pacific philosophy club. I graduated in 1997 with a degree in creative writing and philosophy.

Studying philosophy as an undergraduate started me down a path of lifelong learning. I went to graduate school, earning a PhD in creative writing, and soon became a writing professor at Loyola University in Baltimore, Maryland. After many happy years teaching courses from freshman composition to advanced fiction technique, I stumbled into an unexpected job opportunity and decided to take a leap of faith off the academic track to pursue a professional writing career in the youth development field.

Since then, I've worked as a communications designer for both for-profit and nonprofit international youth development organizations. Currently, I'm one of two writers on a marketing and communications team at the International Youth Foundation, which for 27 years has worked to provide young people around the world with the skills and opportunities needed to thrive.

Majoring in philosophy, I discovered strategies for thinking through problems, developed close reading and analytical skills, and was taught to articulate my thoughts with clarity and precision. These skills and

habits of mind are essential to the work I do today. As a writer at IYF, a big part of my daily job involves crafting articles and blog posts. One type of post I write frequently is called a curated post. For example, I might read a newly released (and probably quite dense) report from the World Bank, then write (curate) a 500 word post synthesizing the report's complex findings, providing five essential takeaways, offering a succinct analysis, and finally clarifying relevant connections between the report and the work done at IYF. I also read posts drafted by other members of our organization and offer critical feedback to help them shape and express their own ideas.

While some of a writer's work is done independently, collaboration is also critically important. My team and I often take part in brainstorming sessions—to design the public face of a new project, for example. We meet with members from across our organization—finance, business development, and others—and sometimes with stakeholders from donor organizations with whom we've partnered. These sessions might start with a discussion about creating an appropriate name for the project. This sounds easy, but it's not. We consider the way the words sound in English, what different words mean and suggest. Plus, we have to consider how well the words will translate into five other languages once the project reaches scale, and what the words could suggest in those cultures. And that's just the first hour. There are hundreds of other variables. During these sessions, lots of smart ideas and viewpoints are expressed, but there's never a clear consensus. Often, there's a bit of necessary conflict. Studying philosophy as an undergraduate, I was challenged to analyze and synthesize complex texts, to point out flaws in reasoning, but also to find non-obvious connections between ideas. In other words, studying philosophy taught me to be a critical thinker, but also a creative one. Apart from writing skills, this is the greatest asset I bring to my team and organization.

Is philosophy a quirky major? Okay, maybe. Was choosing to major in philosophy an impractical decision? In my experience—absolutely not.

As people (like me) shift from first to second careers, new, specialized skill sets must be acquired. Within industries and career tracks, the demands of the workforce are constantly changing, which means specific skill sets require frequent updating. Not everyone possesses the abilities needed to adapt. Timeless, transferable, widely applicable skills like close reading, critical thinking, and creative problem solving are

essential. They are at the heart of an education in the humanities, and nowhere are they more strongly emphasized and imparted than in an undergraduate philosophy classroom.

My undergraduate degree in philosophy has everything to do with my professional success and happiness.



# JASON GASKILL

Company Director and Business Consultant

*Class of 1997*

**M**y name is Jason Gaskill, and I have had a range of employment opportunities over the years, primarily in business. Currently I am a business consultant in my own firm. I'm also a Director and co-owner of a tourism-focussed property development company.

I stumbled into philosophy, taking a few classes here and there after being exposed to critical thinking, ethics, and logic. Each served to assist with my primary studies in modern American history and the use of the atomic bombs. I walked in 1997 with a History Major, minor in Japanese but had taken many Philosophy classes. After graduating I was only a few classes short of also having a philosophy major. So, with the encouragement of my wife (to whom I lost a logical argument about capital punishment, of all things) I went back to take the classes and write the essays required, which I completed in 1998 with Honors.

That decision changed the course of my life. I read Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*. While I had read many of their writings before, and the writings of many other philosophers before and since, it was these two works that had the greatest impact on who I have become.

As a young 19-year old I was living in Okinawa, Japan, serving a religious mission. It was not uncommon for me, during that time, to encounter people who both questioned what I was doing as well as what I believed. Late one night, as my work companion and I were taking a break out the front of a small rural store, an elderly European gentleman walked past. He stopped. He came to us and asked what we were doing. I told him we were missionaries, speaking with people about religion. He said that was interesting; he taught philosophy at the local university. Then he asked me: was Abraham a murderer or a prophet. I laughed,

and said I loved Kierkegaard. I then told him that he was a prophet, because there was a God. This was Kierkegaard's point. He replied that his view differed, and for the next ten minutes we talked about what faith is, and how it manifests itself in our daily lives. I learned there, on the quiet rural street in the heart of Okinawa, Japan, that philosophy had practical use: it allowed me to express my faith in terms that another not of my faith—not of any faith—could appreciate. We parted with a mutual respect for the other's position. And I have carried the confidence of that day into every discussion I have had since.

Spinoza, however, means more. His *Ethics* changed the way I think, the way I write, and most recently the way I develop business proposals and critiques. The flow from definitions through axioms to principles, ending in conclusions is inspired. An entire argument can be logically constructed to ensure the conclusions are concise, simple, and supported. I have found that in business, this makes for strong proposals. I use this structure every day.

I may have started in philosophy because many of my friends were studying it alongside their majors. However, I stayed because it stimulated my mind. I continue to use it because I have found philosophy to be a mind-set, a pattern of thinking that colours the world I experience. Leibnitz's best of all possible worlds, James' pragmatism, Kant's perspective-less perspective, and hundreds of other concepts, ideas, and proposals—they move my mind around and through the information I gather each and every day. I have found what I learned during my sojourn in philosophy has been of great benefit to me in my subsequent studies and career.

My career led me to the world of business, a world full of deduction, logic and problem solving, debating, writing, the rapid assimilation of competing view points, and the rigorous requirement to clearly express what is both right and wrong with a specific position. A business management position gave me the opportunity to further my education when I studied part-time at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand and obtained a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with distinction on the back of those philosophically-inspired and developed skills. Now, as a consultant, I get paid to think, reason, argue, negotiate, write, convince, and satisfy those with big questions. I get paid to be a philosopher.

So, I still enjoy reading (mostly older) philosophy when I can. I feel it keeps my intellect agile and my mind tough. Everyone knows

the adage I think, therefore I am. For me, philosophy made me think better, therefore I know I can be more. And for this existential, logically positive self-awareness that allows me to scale mountains I never before saw, and to see things I never before imagined, I am grateful every day I lost that argument with my wife.



# TAMI BARRY

Environmental Science Instructor  
*Class of 1998*

I graduated from Pacific University in 1998 with a degree in philosophy. My friends joked that my job prospects were limited to “do you want fries with that,” but my love of the outdoors led me to graduate school for a masters degree in environmental ethics. This program required classes that were cross-listed with environmental science, and provided the philosophy students with research opportunities with the environmental science department. To my surprise, I found the science work both very interesting and easy. Also to my surprise, I discovered that the science grad students I interacted with had quite a bit of trouble thinking critically about environmental problems or even the nature of science. They could easily identify an obscure aquatic macro-invertebrate by sub-species, but when discussing the bigger questions of how we determine which species merit protection or why science isn’t truly objective, they struggled. Having educations with the bare minimum of liberal arts classes and never ones in philosophy, they had a pretty limited lens through which to view the world, or at least their field of study. I found philosophy prepared me to view the world and its subtleties from a variety of extremely powerful lenses. My realization that my philosophy degree was an incredibly useful background from which to approach applied science led me to decide to pursue my doctorate in environmental science.

Philosophy is the ultimate teacher for how to think critically and see a problem from multiple perspectives; it also forces you to be able to make an argument from any of them. That said, I did get hooked on the scientific lens in part because it was easier than philosophy. There generally was a “right” answer and working in the realm of empirical certainty is much easier than the ambiguity of philosophy. However, my years of

philosophy training helped me become comfortable with uncertainty. By this I mean uncertainty in ever knowing if your answer or solution is correct, but also that how you approach and define a problem frames your understanding and solution to it.

I now teach college courses in environmental science, geography, and even a class with a major component about environmental ethics. Professionally, my degree in philosophy informs my teaching methodology, which is really just the Socratic Method. My students know they won't suffer death by PowerPoint (or hemlock) in my classes, but they will be forced to talk to each other and answer question after question about how and why. It's like a series of Russian nesting dolls, for every question they answer, they come to know there's another question coming: what do you think the answer is, how did you get there, why do you think that, what about this alternative, why not this? They also know that they will have to defend their answers and analysis in the face of different interpretations or framings of the problem. This is a hard and sometimes scary thing to do, but it is incredibly important when I am presenting uncontroversial topics for science, but controversial topics for society, such as climate change. Rather than shutting down a student's objection—and risk alienating them—I can use old Socrates' method, walk them through why something shouldn't be controversial by guiding the class through questions that elicit a line of thinking, instead of a fact to be memorized. Looking back on my education and career, it's fitting, I suppose, that *Science* was once called *Natural Philosophy*.

# JASON ELDRIGE

Physician, Mayo Clinic  
*Class of 1998*

**M**y name is Jason Eldrige, and I am a physician at The Mayo Clinic. Though my arrival to the medical field may seem to be a departure from my undergraduate studies, it is really quite *logical*.

I enrolled at Pacific University as the son of an engineer, with a strong interest in basic sciences and mathematics. Incoming students were assigned a “Freshman seminar,” and organized into small groups to discuss Homer’s *The Odyssey*; I was fortunate to be randomized into a group chaired by a philosophy professor. Our discussions with him impressed upon me the power of using precise language, understanding the historical context surrounding literary works, and challenging one’s self to follow intellectual arguments to their necessary conclusions. I enjoyed the challenge of deducing meaning, and trying to achieve a greater understanding of Homer’s true message by being analytical while also having spirited discussion with people more learned than myself. One of the early lessons imparted from group discussion was that understanding alternative viewpoints allowed me to more formally appraise my own ideas; that is, the weaknesses and failings of my own opinions and beliefs were often revealed by listening to and understanding the counterarguments. Frequently, I came to understand that the rationale for my initial views and opinions on a subject was far from unassailable.

This initial experience prompted me to further academic pursuits, and I registered in courses in Classical Philosophy and Critical Thinking. Critical thinking was one of my favorite classes because it taught the science of logic, and illustrated the incontrovertible rules and necessary conclusions that follow a given set of premises. The mathematical nature of logic was highly appealing to me because it required me to understand the specific reasons that gave rise to my own personal beliefs; I could no

longer blindly accept a conclusion without appreciating the foundational steps in logic that gave rise to arriving at that conclusion. In other words, logic forced me to be more intellectually honest about the arguments I made and what beliefs I espoused.

As a medical doctor, much of my daily work involves appreciating small details and then doing my best to deduce the best course of action based upon imperfect evidence. Seeing a spine MRI in isolation is not sufficient; but understanding a patient's exam findings and physical history, and then corroborating these impressions with the MRI in context, allows me to offer the best solution for the patient. Just like dissecting a philosophical argument, which requires a precise reading and understanding of the nuance and subtlety of a carefully constructed text, my professional life requires meticulous attention to detail in order to derive the best risk-benefit solution for patient care. In providing clinical care, tailored to the specific needs of each patient, the study of philosophy (from its outset) allotted me the intellectual framework to better understand alternative perspectives and beliefs. It is the synthesis of these patient specific viewpoints, coupled with the analytical evidence of medical data that accomplishes my role as a physician and patient advocate.

# JENNY JOHNSON-RILEY

Sexual Violence Researcher and Therapist  
*Class of 1998*

I graduated from Pacific University with a degree with literature and philosophy in 1998. When I entered Pacific, I planned to study literature and communications and become a journalist. During my first year, I took a philosophy course on comparative world religions to meet the university's core requirements. The course left me hungry for more. I quickly enrolled in a course on existentialism, and soon afterward, I exchanged my communications major for a major in philosophy. My parents were concerned. What could I possibly do with a philosophy degree? It turns out there are quite a few things.

I developed an interest in feminist philosophy, which overlapped with my literary studies in feminist theory. From French philosophers like Simone de Beauvoir and Helene Cixous to contemporary American philosophers like bell hooks and Judith Butler, feminist philosophy provided me with a critical lens through which to view my own experiences of gender discrimination. Bell hooks' work in particular inspired me to use philosophy as a tool to imagine a more just world.

A few years after I graduated from Pacific, I entered a master's program in English where I resumed my study of feminist theory and philosophy. Truth be told, I floundered in that program. As much as I loved reading feminist philosophy, I longed for a way to translate feminist ideas into practice. I took a leave of absence from my program and began volunteering as a crisis counselor for my local rape crisis center. I was hired as a staff member a few months later. I worked for that center for three years eventually becoming the coordinator of the 24/7 hotline.

In my academic studies, I found that feminist thought was not always accompanied by corresponding action. While working as a rape crisis counselor, I found the opposite was true. My colleagues and I were

working every day to make our community a safer place for women, but our work often lacked an analysis of the conditions that made violence against women a problem of epidemic proportions. Regardless of where I found myself, it seemed I needed to find ways to connect philosophy and action.

I eventually finished my master's degree in English. With the encouragement of my professors, I went on to pursue a PhD in an interdisciplinary social sciences program where feminist philosophy guides my research. I am currently writing my doctoral dissertation, which examines the dynamics of race and gender in the movement to end violence against women. Through my research, I have had the opportunity to talk with many women working in this movement. They think deeply about the violence that plagues the lives of countless women and work to find ways to end it. Feminist philosophy aids them in their work as it aids me in mine.

My community-based work in sexual violence prevention and intervention continues. In addition to my graduate work, I work as a therapist in an outpatient mental health clinic with men who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior. I help my clients learn new skills, so they can stop their abusive behaviors and live healthy productive lives. I use the skills I learned as an undergraduate philosophy major every day. I listen carefully. I think critically about the situations I encounter. I challenge assumptions—my own and those of my clients. When I am asked by the Criminal Justice System or the Department of Social and Human Services to write an assessment of a client's progress, I am able to offer an opinion that is well supported by the available evidence. These are skills that are necessary in nearly every profession. I am grateful I have the opportunity to use them in the service of my community, and I am grateful for my philosophy degree, which gave the foundation I needed to do my work.

# KARI MIDDLETON

Volunteer Coordinator  
*Class of 1998*

I never studied philosophy to get a job. And I studied philosophy extensively—after majoring in philosophy in college, I went on to earn a master’s, and finally a doctorate. I wasn’t sure I wanted to teach; in fact, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do after school to earn a living. I was just sure I loved philosophy. The money, I figured, would take care of itself, and in the meantime I did a lot of reading, writing, and thinking, because when you study philosophy, that is what you do.

The money did work itself out, and I did decide against pursuing an academic career. Someone might ask (actually, people *have* asked), “So what did you do with all that study?” They don’t actually say, “What was the point?” but that’s probably what they mean, at least in part. The truth is that studying philosophy has served me all my life, personally as well as professionally.

I now work as a volunteer manager for a county in Colorado. Prior to that, I worked for a small municipality as Human Resources/Volunteer Coordinator, a position that was mostly human resources, with some volunteer coordination alongside. Volunteer management is closely related to human resources, as running a volunteer program is rather like running a human resources department: it involves looking for new people, screening them to make sure they’re right for the work, giving them the tools they need to have a successful experience that serves them and the organization both (orientation and training), demonstrating to them that their work is valued, and handling all the things that arise, big and small, when you manage people.

First and foremost, what the study of philosophy did for me was develop my ability to reason critically and communicate my reasoning to others. One illustration of this is in the area of recruitment, something

that may sound simple but often isn't. Suppose there are 300 candidates for one job. Of all these people, not only does one want to hire the right one, but also to treat the candidates fairly in the hiring process....all 300 of them. This involves analyzing what the position requires in terms of skills, knowledge, experience, and qualities, and drafting related screening criteria; deciding how to weigh all those criteria against each other; figuring out which qualifications can be discerned just by reviewing application materials and which require an interview, a skill test, or some other means of determining a candidate's qualifications; and developing assessments that are fair, culturally neutral, legally defensible, logistically feasible, and actually test one what one wants tested.

This isn't even to address issues such as state or federally mandated veteran's preference requirements, which also requires analysis. Moreover, there are often gray areas. Screening applications calls for making reasoned, principled judgments. For example, if someone did pipework on a Navy ship, does that count as similar to the pipework required in a municipality—would such a candidate meet an experience qualification? On such questions could turn whether someone is offered an interview, which is turn could mean the difference between whether one person is hired or another. On another note, on such questions also turn potential lawsuits and legal consequences for the hiring organization that made those judgment calls.

Philosophy gave me the analytic skills to develop recruitment processes that were logical, fair, and legally defensible. These analytic skills extend to many other things I have done or continue to do at work, including policy analysis, making policy recommendations and drafting related language, and interpreting legal and quasi-legal documents. In addition, as human resources and volunteer management are essentially about people, good communication is essential. Here too philosophy has been invaluable, developing my ability to articulate my reasoning clearly to others, whether it's when speaking to a hiring manager about why asking a particular interview question is a bad idea or explaining to a supervisor why one might, or might not, require an exempt employee to use paid time off to cover partial day absences.

Another way philosophy has been useful to me professionally, as well as personally, is what it taught me about approaching difficult decisions. At work, I'm often called on to advise people about hard situations, such as interpersonal conflicts, as well as to answer questions such as these:

Should I dismiss a volunteer from a program—knowing how important the volunteer work is to that person—or give the person one more chance? Should I deny a client for a service or take a risk, knowing the client may be unsuitable and accepting the person might create trouble further down the road? Should I accept a volunteer into the program who has a criminal background? If I have a waitlist of clients requesting services, and only one volunteer to supply that service, how do I decide which client gets the volunteer service? I learned from American pragmatism to ask myself, when faced with a difficult decision, what is my purpose? What am I trying to accomplish? I have found that clarifying my purpose—and sometimes asking questions of others to help them clarify theirs—goes a long way toward helping me make good decisions and advise others.

My study of ethics taught me other considerations when making decisions in such situations—for example, from utilitarianism, what action will produce the most good for the most people. But what I learned from virtue ethics is that one can't unfailingly fall back on a universal principle, even one such as "Do what produces the most good for the most people," because sometimes principles conflict. Life is complicated: what might be right in one situation might be wrong in another. Knowing what is right requires a sense of judgment, a feel for nuance, and knowledge of the particulars of a given situation. Knowing at least this much about ethics helps me not to expect easy answers, and also to make my decisions with confidence when I do make them.

I still love philosophy, even though I no longer study it and I decided not to teach it. Is philosophy useful? Well, it depends on what you're trying to do. For me, the answer has always been yes.



# AMY WATERMAN

Self-help Writer

*Class of 1998*

“If you want to attract a man,” I type. “There’s a few things you should know.”

I rest my left hand on the keyboard and use the other hand to pick up a book. I smile. I loved this book. I can’t wait to share its insights with my readers.

This book—*Habits of a Happy Brain* by Loretta Graziano Breuning—is just one of the book on neuroscience I’ve devoured over the past few years. Neuroscience plays an important role in decoding the chemistry of attraction and attachment.

Once we know that novel experiences give us a hit of dopamine, for example, we can begin to untangle the reason we can’t stop scrolling through screens of attractive faces on online dating sites. Once we know that sex gives women a boost of the bonding hormone, oxytocin, we can see why it might pay for a woman to hold off on sleeping with someone if she doesn’t want to fall in love.

I didn’t learn this in philosophy class.

My philosophy professors were completely uninterested in what makes men fall for women—on a professional level, at least.

What they taught was epistemology, how we know what we know. Back in the 1990s, when I was a student, this debate centered on language. Language gives us the words to express what we know, thereby shaping it as surely as a physicist’s act of observation shapes the outcome of his experiment.

I liked epistemology. I liked the feeling of standing in a mental wind tunnel, using what I knew to question how I even knew anything at all.

But then, after a fruitless semester discussing feminist epistemology, the question of whether women know the world in a fundamentally dif-

ferent way to men, I'd had enough. Surely these were not philosophical questions. Surely someone just had to analyze female brains and male brains in enough quantities to notice any differences. And for that, technology was needed.

PET scans. fMRIs. EEGs.

Luckily, researchers were doing just that.

Dr. Louann Brizendine's book *The Female Brain* came out in 2006, nearly a decade after I graduated. As I inhaled its pages, I heaved a sigh of relief. At last, I could put that part of my undergraduate degree to rest. I didn't have to wonder about feminist epistemology any more.

Then I got to thinking...What other philosophical questions was neuroscience answering? Such as for, example, the existence of God?

Dr. Andrew Newberg was studying those questions as I was sitting in class, only he was scanning the brains of meditators and nuns. He discovered that, during what we would normally call mystical experiences—the experience of being one with the universe—something very specific was happening in the brain. The right parietal lobe was shutting down. The purpose of this part of the brain is to distinguish us from our environment, so we know where we end and the chair beneath our bottom begins.

I was gob smacked. Why had I spent my undergraduate degree studying Plato, when I could have been on the frontiers of a brand-new science? For one simple reason: I liked the questions more than I liked the answers.

I was a natural-born philosopher. The mystic in me believes it's all down to my star sign. I'm a Sagittarian wanderer. I live in my head. I'm not interested in everyday questions, like what the best series on Netflix is or whether One Direction is better than the Beatles. I want to know what it all means. How I can get outside my head. How science is finally giving us a user manual to the human body.

I was always going to be a philosophy major. It was a done deal by the time I was 12. I snuck books on Buddhism and dream interpretation and self-actualization out of the library. I wanted to know what else there was, beyond what we knew. Philosophy seemed like the only discipline where I could indulge all those interests.

In fact, two of my favorite classes turned out to be the philosophy and history of science. There I learned that that many of the most important fields of human endeavor—medicine, music, science, politics—had

roots in philosophy. Philosophy can be applied to everything, even the scientific method.

At a basic level, philosophy is the art of asking ever more insightful questions. Why? And how does this connect to this? What assumptions are being made here? Does this logically follow? If you keep asking those questions, they lead you back to the Big Four: What's real? How do I know? What should I do? Any faults in my thinking?

Those questions are pretty darn good preparation for any field in which you have to think for a living. And that's what I do: I think for a living. I get to think about interesting questions, like what makes men attracted to women (or vice versa), and write about it.

If I can pose a question clearly enough, and get my head around my research clearly enough, then chances are I'll write a clear, useful, informative book or article that will get other people thinking. When you think clearly, you help other people think clearly, which helps them act more clearly. That's the gift of philosophy. It's useful in writing, law, politics, marketing ... really *any* field where you want to people to follow you so that you can influence their behavior.

The world needs more people trained in thinking. The world needs more people who can ask probing, insightful questions. The world needs more philosophy graduates.



## ELISE KOST

Energy Medicine Practitioner; Reiki Master;  
Ceremonialist, Shamanic Minister  
*Class of 1999*

**S**i Tacuisses Philosophus Mansisses. (If you had remained silent, you would have remained a philosopher). Delicious, isn't it? Silence.....

Philosophy: from "philosophia" = "the love of wisdom." Or, "philo-sophia" = the love of Sophia. Sophia...the Golden One...the Mother of God. God, in my humble opinion, being the Everything which is No-Thing, which is the emptiness we also embody. What a divine exploration, this love of Sophia! Although you may find another way of digesting it—and that, is where the joy of the journey could possibly make you skip down the street one day just because you are FREE to do and to be! At least, this is something it has done for me. Rumi said something like "Out beyond ideas of right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there." I agree.

I was first intrigued by the vast field of philosophy via a Taoist, reincarnated samuri. It was quite the ride. I do not know exactly what the foundation of a double major in Philosophy and Psychology unfolded in my consciousness and way of being, or in what I offer now through whom I've become due to these years of searching through old wise minds. I can say philosophy kept my thoughts pulsing with passion and curiosity during a very sensitive and youthful time. Why I chose what I chose is as much of a Mystery as is the question of whom I'd have become had I not chosen that.

However, I do know that my experience of academic philosophy certainly affected and enhanced my work in the world because it deeply affected my soul at such a receptive time of my life: expanded it, opened it, and inspired me to not only think outside the box, but to realize that there was no box to think outside of. In other words, undoubtedly

whom I've become was influenced by my early choices and studies, and I imagine that some of my courage and trust—which allowed me to offer that which I do now, came partially from the inspirations of great thinkers and way-showers. I can't pinpoint whether I use particular teachings or skills from my studies in Philosophy, but that the expansion of mind and sense of groundless freedom—first introduced to me through Philosophy—has grown an epistemological undercurrent in me, which feeds into the ocean of ALL I am and do.

A world without PhiloSophia would be missing a deeply stimulating opportunity for expansion and hence, evolution—both individually and as a species.

Allow Freedom to Breathe You  
by making Space  
Within Yourself  
and All that Is.

# ANNE SINKEY

Psychotherapist/Clinical Social Worker  
*Class of 1999*

**L**ike many young people, I entered college unsure of what I wanted to study, but aware of an underlying interest in language, religion, and the search for truth. I liked art, poetry, and big ideas. My initial declared major was literature, but I soon transitioned my focus to philosophy, when I found myself less interested in the manifestation of ideas in art or literature than in the underlying structure and coherence of ideas themselves. My first philosophy class was an intensive 3-week course on Existentialism (during a dark, record-setting wet January in Oregon). As an ennui-filled, angsty teenager, convinced that the world would forever misunderstand me, this introduction to philosophy offered an unfamiliar experience—of seeing aspects of my own thoughts and feelings, which others had often judged as “moody” or “crazy,” reflected back at me in dense and intricate texts, backed by the legitimacy of the academy and the esteem of the discipline of philosophy. Despite pop culture images of philosophy majors as black-turtleneck-clad, logic-obsessed, annoying know-it-alls doomed to perpetual underemployment, I took the plunge and changed majors. (I may have worn some black and played the role of the annoying know-it-all at some college parties along the way, too.)

My entry into the study of philosophy offered intellectual growth as well as emotional support: here I found a classroom environment where I could ask those “weird,” fundamental questions about “the meaning of life” and not be judged or isolated, and where I was taught to systematize my methods of inquiry, clarify my use of language, and place ideas and concepts in historical context. Soon I began to see the study of philosophy as an exercise in world-view shopping, intellectual tourism, or the trying-on of lenses through which to make sense of truth, reality, and morality. Philosophy was instrumental in helping me grow beyond the

search for “capital-T Truth” and towards a more nuanced understanding of multiple truths—how they can be constructed, contingent, more or less useful, and intricately bound up with specific historical and political moments in time. This was an important intellectual, emotional, and developmental shift for me—no longer seeing the world as either/or, and beginning to open to the more complicated possibilities of both/and.

After graduation, I continued to use the skills I learned through my philosophy classes as I went on to graduate work at Emory University, where I focused on feminist political theory and earned a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary cultural studies. At Emory, I drew on specific skills from my philosophy training in close reading, precise use of language, and construction/deconstruction of arguments, as well as content-based knowledge in philosophical terms, schools of thought, and important figures in intellectual history. This knowledge and these skills continued to be honed and practiced as I finished up my coursework and began to teach classes in writing, women’s studies, and cultural studies. My background in philosophy was especially important as I worked as a professor of writing, with its focus on language and argumentation.

After Emory, I moonlighted as an adjunct professor while holding jobs in museums, research administration, and program evaluation. I continued to use skills and knowledge gained from philosophy throughout this work, especially in my work with research and evaluation, where I had to practice taking in large amounts of information, effectively identify underlying themes, arguments, and connections between disparate elements, and then crystallize these themes in concise language. My exposure to the history of philosophy in undergraduate coursework sparked my interest in intellectual history, which came in handy when working in museum environments as well.

Eventually I landed back in Oregon and decided to return to school for a Master’s in Social Work. I now work as a psychotherapist and clinical social worker in Portland. This work integrates emotional, somatic, and intellectual elements, and I continue to draw on skills and knowledge gained from my philosophical training. My exposure and experience with understanding philosophical schools and traditions taught me how to learn and use theory, which helped me to learn and apply theories from psychology and psychotherapy. In addition, with each client I see, I use those same skills in intellectual tourism to get outside of my worldview and try to really understand clients’ experiences through their internal-

ized and often unexamined conceptual maps of meaning and beliefs. In some ways, each client offers a collection of new theories to “read” and understand, and to empathetically offer curiosity about the underlying arguments, associations, inconsistencies and logic behind clients’ experiences and sources of distress. This attunement to ways of seeing and being—a skill honed through philosophical training—helps me build relationships with my clients, to better understand their internal worlds, and to suggest specific insights and ways of contextualizing thoughts, emotion, and behavior appropriate to the underlying “philosophy” that client brings to our session.

Beyond their uses in my profession, this practiced attentiveness to underlying, unexamined arguments, associations, beliefs, and their impact on experience has had an impact on my personal life as well: these skills help me better understand myself and my relationships, as well as to make sense of the massive amount of information that comes at me on a daily basis from news and social media. My experience with philosophy also has helped me cultivate an appreciation for the pure aesthetic beauty of ideas and arguments, to hold reverence for the elegance of a well-crafted argument (even if I don’t agree with its premises or conclusion). This not only adds quality and joy to my lived experience; it helps me maintain respect and appreciation for people with whom I may not agree—a rare experience in today’s polarized political situation. Despite some criticisms of the discipline of philosophy as Eurocentric and patriarchal, I have found that the skills I learned from philosophy have helped me better understand and connect with people different from me, and to be open and curious about their inner worlds in ways that I may not have been otherwise.



# WENDY N. WAGNER

Freelance Writer and Editor

*Class of 1999*

I am a freelance writer and editor. Working mostly in the realm of speculative fiction, I've published more than forty short stories, written tie-in fiction for award-winning role-playing games, and recently released my third novel. I have also won the Hugo Award—one of science fiction's top honors—for my work on the editorial team of *Lightspeed Magazine*.

But I was a terrible philosophy student. In survey classes, I dozed off during lectures. On quizzes I often strained to find enough to fill the blank spaces provided by my detail-hungry professors. I wanted only to read until I found an idea that sparked my imagination and then spend the rest of my time reveling in my thoughts about those shining jewels. Who cared about Wittgenstein? I had so much to say about Foucault!

In some ways, I haven't changed much. As a freelance writer, eighty percent of my job is shouting: "Here's what I have to say! Listen to me!" And although I primarily write science fiction and fantasy, what I have to say is still usually about the stuff of philosophy. Behind the glossy veneer of battles with fantastical monsters, I am usually talking about how to live the best kind of life. Part the overgrowth of a distant planet, and I am trying to address our relationship to language—about how the ways we name the world around us can influence the way we relate to it. I've found fiction to be a wonderful place to dig into the big questions of the nature of reality and our place in it.

I'd also say that every year, I grow a deeper appreciation for the work my poor suffering professors did in the classroom. When I edit other writers, I find myself returning time and again to the tools those philosophy instructors gave me. I make sure my writers carefully define their terms, never skip over any step of their arguments, and always, always let logic be their guide. In fact, in science fiction and fantasy, logic is

perhaps the most critical element of world-building. For a reader to fully surrender their sense of disbelief, they must trust the writer completely. The imaginary world must make sense before it can become wondrous, and writers who forgets this does so at their own peril.

As a writer, I believe many of my most useful tools have come from studying philosophy, and that I was better served by my time spent contemplating epistemology and metaphysics than I would have been by more classes in the English department. Simply put, studying philosophy gave me more tools for discussing the way the world works and the way language functions. Philosophers use language in very precise and clear ways, and they have created a vocabulary that can laser in on important functions of the mind and word.

I am never happier to have that vocabulary than when I'm teaching classes on fiction. You can give new writers exercises and read them samples, but sometimes giving them a new way to talk about language changes the way they create it. I know that when I think about how language works, I do better work as a writer.

I have always wanted to be a writer, and I'm certain I would still be one even I'd majored in English or history or any of the ten thousand topics that fascinated me when I first started college. But philosophy gives me the ability to connect all those shining ideas and fascinating pieces of information and do more with them.

Even when I'm not writing, I am grateful for the philosophical ideas and tools I learned in college. During my daughter's youngest years, I loved noticing all the little developmental milestones she passed through, her brain acquiring language and a theory of other minds and the rudiments of ethics. She wasn't just some cute spud growing up; she was a model of everything we'd talked about in Philosophy of Mind, a wondrous example of neurology and nurture spinning together. Everyone loves watching their kids grow up, but I think my studies in philosophy gave me a deeper appreciation for the experience.

In fact, I might be biased, but I like to think that what I got out of my philosophy degree comes into play every single day. When I'm choosing between those store brand cashews and the fair trade ones, the choice is made because I have tried to build a consistent ethical framework in my life, not because I have a coupon. When my daughter asks me how she should choose her future college major in a time when the economy seems to only reward hedge fund managers, I give her the wisdom of

the Stoics and the existentialists and a healthy dose of American pragmatism. And when times are hard and I get a bad review, I turn to the same texts, perhaps with a healthy dose of Taoist writings. When life gives me lemons, I make philosophical lemons.

So what have I done with a philosophy degree? Well, since college, I've been a pizza cook, a sheet music salesperson, a legal secretary, a stay-at-home mom, an art teacher, a birthday entertainer, a house cleaner, and the ticket taker at the local children's museum. I've achieved my childhood dreams of publishing my fiction.

You can do any of those things without a philosophy degree, of course. But with one, you get to think a lot more about just what you're doing and what it means in the grand scale of the universe. If the unexamined life isn't worth living, then I'm glad I'm living the life philosophy lets me look at, deeply and happily.



# BRANDON DAMITZ

Owner, Big Island Coffee Roasters/Paradise Coffee Roasters  
*Class of 2004*

When I was a freshman in high school, I had to take this really stupid course called “Focus”. To this day, it’s still one of the worst classes I’ve ever attended. And Focus did not benefit from the football coach’s pedagogy. “Alls you gots to do is...” he’d say, instructing us how to put together mock resumes and cover letters, writing checks, giving and taking mock interviews with classmates. We took personality tests. I hated it. The class felt like such a waste of time.

Throughout the semester, our teacher (coach) would repeatedly ask us, “What’d ya wanna do for the rest of your life?” I hated that question so much because it seemed absolutely impossible to answer and thus absurd. I still cringe a bit to think of it. But now I refer to that question fondly as “The First Domino”. It was the first persistent, obnoxiously poignant question of purpose and action to ever chime through my head. And it threw me onto a second domino: studying philosophy at Pacific University.

After my first philosophy class, I knew right away I couldn’t devote my time and energy focusing on anything else. I’d initially gone to college for writing. But I couldn’t get around certain unanswered questions and curious observations. Studying literature, history, physics or chemistry felt like a distraction. I was missing out on something more: inquiry into fundamental principles, into the deepest wells of human knowledge and understanding. I felt like everyone else was learning the “what” while I was trying to unravel the “why” and the “how”. So the dominoes continued to fall.

Then I graduated. But I still didn’t have an answer to The First Domino. So, instead of consuming and generating questions via text, I did so via experience. How was I going to know what to do with my life if

I'd hardly done anything up to that point? Philosophy sparked inquiry, inquiry ignited meaning, and meaning fueled purpose.

Today I am a...coffee farmer/entrepreneur? I have two business engines running now and working on building the third, so much of my day is spent communicating, managing, developing products and basically just doing whatever needs to be done to keep moving forward, whether it's conference calls, logistics, or other daily responsibilities (such as roasting and bagging coffee).

Now, I could tell you how philosophy laid the foundation for my problem solving, critical thinking and analyzing skills; how it taught me to clarify my thinking; how it made me acutely aware of the power and sensitivity of communication and its significance in all aspects of life; and how these tools had and have a dramatically positive impact. But you probably already know that because it's true for many people. For me, the "secret sauce" of philosophy was this nugget of wisdom: *if you don't ask the important questions and discover or create the answers, somebody else is going to do it for you.*

With this understanding, I live with much more purpose, passion, intensity, curiosity and joy. And I feel empowered, stable and capable, like I can do nearly anything because I've learned how to learn. Studying philosophy made me a destroyer and applying it made me a creator. Engaging this process gives me a deep sense of understanding, fulfillment and peace. And, honestly, it makes me a better person to myself and others.

Today, I still have no clue what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I don't even know what I'm going to do next week. But I'm willing and prepared to figure it out. I can gaze into the eyes of the moment with resolve.

# BRIAN CHOW

Optometrist  
*Class of 2005*

I knew I was going to be an optometrist well before I started college. In fact, I chose to go to Pacific University for the very fact that I wanted to attend its college of optometry immediately after my undergraduate studies. Interestingly enough, although I knew exactly what I was going to do with my life upon stepping into college, I could not have been more lost and clueless about what my life meant or if anything I was going to do would really be important. I guess you could say that up until that point, I had spent all my life planning on the “what” without ever having to take moment to think about the “why;” I set out to dedicate my undergraduate education to explore this fundamental question and (hopefully) get it all figured out before I started optometry school.

In case there was any question as to how dedicated I was to this endeavor to sort myself out, by the end of my first semester of college I had declared three majors—all of which I ended up graduating with, and I am happy to say that all of which I owe greatly to shaping me into the person I am today. The very first major I chose, however, was philosophy. If I was going to figure out my life, what better way than to study a subject in which “wisdom” was literally in much of the course titles? Fortunately, my courses in philosophy were more than just that. As I am sure most other philosophy majors can attest, I learned how to develop a number of means to analyze complex issues, and over time I cultivated a habit of critical thinking that could be carried on to any profession as well as to everyday life. Moreover, I became better at reflection, not just on who I am, but also on my decisions and the world around me. And yes, a lot of times, this kind of reflection can be for pragmatic purposes, so one can become a better person, make better decisions, make the world a better place, etc. But equally important, this kind of reflection just allows one

to reach an acceptance of oneself or the surrounding circumstances, and I think that peace of mind is just as valuable.

Now, how is all this “useful” to my occupation as an optometrist? At least in my case, during my undergraduate education I was very fortunate to have been able to take courses relating to the philosophy of science as well as to ethics and values. As healthcare professionals, practically everything we learn to better evaluate and manage the problems of our patients is based off of a scientific study or review of some form. Studying the philosophy of science gave me a better understanding and appreciation of the deliberate yet organic nature of the scientific method and the way in which we have arrived at all of our scientific knowledge (including everything I know about the eyes); that is something I think anyone going into a medical field should receive at least a minimal lesson in as the very manner in which we all practice our professions rests on this foundation.

I also owe much of my patient management philosophy to what I have learned in my ethics courses. These lessons certainly helped me to think about what it means to prioritize the well-being of a patient. To be sure, when managing the eye care needs of your patients, a vast majority of the time these situations are pretty cut and dry with just the textbook knowledge that you learned in school. Other times though, let us say you have patients with macular degeneration or glaucoma but they are near the end of their life or they have terminal illness, and smoking is the only thing that gets them through each day or they would rather not be troubled with eye drops in the final months of their lives; taking a moment to contemplate what is truly best for a patient’s livelihood (instead of just treating their medical conditions) might allow you to side more with the patient’s wishes even if it goes against what you learned in the textbooks. Moreover, you are better equipped to educate the patient to be a part of their own medical decision making for the benefit of their own situation and needs. While you may not necessarily need a philosophy class to teach you that sort of thinking, I would say that a certain type of philosophical and ethical contemplation is indispensable when a healthcare professional is making decisions that affect the quality of life of patients.

Even with all I have benefited from my philosophy major, I do not claim to have my life figured out by any means. Like anyone, I get caught up with the little things in life from time to time. I, too, have bad days,

and I get frustrated with traffic jams and long lines at the grocery market every so often. I still occasionally have questions pop into my mind of what my life means or why I am in my profession. Nevertheless, I am more reassured knowing that I have the mental tools to understand these things, and I cannot be more content with my life. While I would strongly recommend a philosophy major to any individuals who, like me, have kept themselves awake at night just thinking about the big things and little things in life, I believe there is an important lesson for anyone in the study of philosophy. It may be something very general that helps you shape your outlook on the universe, or it may be something very specific that you might even find useful for your work. As with most things, results may vary, but it is hard to go wrong when you are essentially exploring the underlying questions in life.



# MOLLY McDONNELL

Owner, Newberg Mail Room Shipping Company  
*Class of 2005*

I didn't even know you could get a degree in philosophy. I was working at *Slaveway* as a donut fryer (*fictitious name used due to settlement agreement*). It sucked, so I worked hard and eight years later my job was in district management. I thought that the higher up the ladder I went the less it would suck but maybe I wasn't high enough up the ladder because it still sucked. When I targeted my next promotion, I was informed that since I didn't have a college degree I had reached the top of my ladder. What? That pissed me off. I was a top performer with untapped potential and they were limiting me because I didn't have a college degree. Understanding that I wasn't going to change the oppressive corporate culture (*I tried but they 'resisted' and hence the settlement*) I re-evaluated my life and decided to go to college.

I didn't know anything about college degrees nor did I have a passion that I wanted follow but after my first year the two areas of study that fascinated me were Environmental Sciences and Philosophy. The first of which required extensive math courses and I've always struggled with math, so I had to look seriously at Philosophy. Like I said, I didn't even know you could get a degree in Philosophy nor could I have imagined what I would do with it or what it would do to me, but I went for it anyway and three years later with my Philosophy degree in hand I landed a job with General Motors. I was an eBusiness Coordinator with a home office job, great pay and light travel to the three surrounding states and it sounded great! Off to Michigan I went for two weeks training and on the first day I knew it was a mistake when they changed my job description to Sales Representative and my work area to include thirteen states and two Canadian provinces. Same old oppressive corporate culture with no concern for the individual.

I was determined to find a career path that would fulfill my soul and pay my bills but while slogging through another dysfunctional corporate culture it became obvious that very few corporate jobs would fulfill my soul. I came to realize that my uniqueness was an obstacle at the corporate environment but it could be the key to success in micro environments. Six years after walking away from *Slaveway* I purchased a small shipping company. I didn't know anything about shipping but what I did know was that studying Philosophy taught me how to think (not what to think), along with an understanding of how to navigate critical inquiry into the fundamentals of right and wrong and that put me in a unique position to nurture the corporate culture I longed for.

My degree in Philosophy has earned me a net worth of over 3 million and a company culture that I can be proud of. More importantly, it has also given me the knowledge to nurture my soul. It's one of those degrees that you use every day at work *and* in your daily life. Emphasis on *and*...

# ADAM HERR

Software Architect  
*Class of 2006*

I graduated from Pacific university in 2006 double majoring in Philosophy and Computer Science. I came to Pacific as a non-traditional student having worked in the high-tech industry for eight years, but times had changed and I need an CS credential to advance my career. I had this feeling of being intellectually lopsided, where I had strong technical and problem-solving skills, but I was pretty meager in the humanities. This feeling led me to attend Pacific where I could earn a technical degree in a traditional Liberal Arts setting. After taking an introductory Philosophy course my first semester, I decided to declare Philosophy as a second major.

After I left Pacific I resumed my engineering career, but now as a more rounded person. I went to work at a small start-up that built spherical video systems, developing several key algorithms and patents. I took on increasingly senior roles in my short time at the company, until I became the director of software engineering. It turned out that communicating clearly to both technical and non-technical people and articulating a strategic “big picture” were crucial skills. These skills were initially developed as part of my Liberal Arts education at Pacific.

I wanted to start a family, but the pace and uncertainty of start-up life was going to make that impossible. So, I moved to Intel, which had the regular hours and job security that I was looking for. For the subsequent decade I moved into increasingly influential roles within Intel, establishing a reputation for solving extremely difficult, open-ended technical problems. Many of these were pathfinding projects, designing far-looking technologies and patents, often resulting in later products. At some critical point, problem solving bled out from the purely technical domain and into the sociological and psychological spheres. It

became as much about finding consensus, shaping the organization, telling a good story and subtly influencing stakeholders as it was about writing code. Again, good soft-skills enabled me to advance my career in ways that that were not possible through technical prowess alone.

So, what does all this have to do with philosophy? I have some ideas. In the high-tech industry people are often hired based on how quickly and succinctly they can regurgitate technical information in a high pressure interviewing situation. Ironically, beyond a solid technical foundation, it seems, organizations desperately need technical people who can form sound arguments and think deeply within a broad range of subjects. These soft skills are often neglected in the hiring processes and are often antithetical to a rigorous engineering education, where students are evaluated on the basis of finding the “right” solution. What is lacking is an ability to confront ambiguity and established assumptions; issues that are met head-on in the study of Philosophy.

The cliché has it that innovation arrives by “thinking outside the box”, but a conventional engineering education is mired squarely “inside the box”, with very little preparation or hope of step out of it. As a result, innovation relies on rare individuals that are sociable, thoughtful, curious and technically astute. I’ve been fortunate to work with several such innovative thinkers and I’ve noticed they typically have unusually backgrounds. Music, art, athletics, religion, crafts, and unusually hobbies and intellectual pursuits often accompany their technical proclivities. These “unicorns” are well rounded people, in the Liberal Arts sense, and I believe they are elusive partly because well-roundedness is considered superfluous to a “practical” engineering curriculum.

My education and continued interest in Philosophy is something I use daily. Of course, I believe that this makes me a more effective employee, but beyond this there is an important personal dimension. It has to do with finding meaning and comprehending the broader implications of my professional life, where I spend most of my waking hours. For example, the epistemological differences between programming an algorithm and training a neural network is a transition from reductive to phenomenological thinking. This, in turn, invokes a huge body of Cartesian and phenomenological philosophy that helps locate aspects of my professional life in the universe of ideas. Trying to figure out the philosophical underpinnings my professional life isn’t the

heavy-duty self-absorbed intellectual brooding it would seem. I do it because it's fun, often hilarious, and provides a light-heartedness and a level of job satisfaction that maybe otherwise unobtainable.



During my teaching career I heard the same question, “What can you do with a degree in philosophy?” many times from some students I taught (and their parents). I know that many other philosophy professors have heard the same question.

This book works to dispel the view that studying philosophy is impractical or unimportant. As it turns out, most of the students I taught over the years who got a degree in philosophy went on to non-academic jobs and careers. They eliminate the notion that the only thing one can do with a degree in philosophy is to teach philosophy.

Does studying philosophy teach one how to fix a leaky faucet? No, but neither does studying economics. Does studying philosophy lead to rewarding and fulfilling careers? Not necessarily, but it certainly can.



**David Boersema** is retired emeritus Distinguished University Professor of Philosophy at Pacific University, where he held the Douglas C. Strain Chair of Natural Philosophy and taught for more than three decades. He also served as the founding director of the university's Center for Peace and Spirituality.

