

I N T E R V I S T E

Conversation with Graham Priest

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Graham Priest is a philosopher and a logician. He is Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is a past president of the Australasian Association for Logic, and the Australasian Association of Philosophy, of which he was Chair of Council for 13 years. Much of his work has been in logic, especially non-classical logic, and related areas. He is perhaps best known for his work on dialetheism, the view that some contradictions are true. This interview offers an overview of his views on philosophy and academia, as well as his personal journey within the academic world.

1. *Hi Graham, welcome back to Italy!*

GP: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be back.

2. *Could you tell us a bit about your past experiences in Italy, and about your relationship with Italy and with some Italian philosophers?*

GP: I've been to Italy many times. I taught in Turin for a semester. But I've also had some Italian students, and I've been here with them. One of my old students is Filippo Casati; he now works in the United States, but his family is from Milan, so I've been to Milan many times. I've been to many other universities to give talks. Filippo and I gave a series of lectures in Padova a few years ago. So, I know a number of Italian philosophers. I also met Emanuele Severino: he was a very influential philosopher in the post-war period. Probably the most influential in Italy. He died a couple of years ago, but just before that, there was an event in his hometown, Brescia, focused on his work. They invited me because much of his philosophy is based on the Law of Non-Contradiction, which I don't subscribe to, so I was invited as a critic. There were a number of interesting sessions, most of them in Italian, which I can't speak. Emanuele and I did a session where I gave some critique of his work (very little of which has been translated into English – one or two books). I don't speak Italian, and he didn't speak English, so we had to do this with a translator: not a great way to do a debate... and it felt like a football match and he was with his home crowd. So, especially when the discussion got complicated and it was clear that the translators were having a hard time keeping up with the translation, the audience, who understood perfectly well, showed whose side they were on! But it was a good occasion. And after the session, we discovered that we could both converse in French, and we had a very amiable dinner.

I know a number of Italian philosophers who left Italy because, at one time, it wasn't a great place for people with interests in English-speaking philosophy. Achille Varzi and Franz Berto are old friends. But philosophy in Italy is changing. The old ways of doing philosophy are not disappearing, but the new ways are happening as well. There is a growing number of philosophers who are interested in English-speaking philosophy, and places like Turin and Padova have a number of people working in the area. At the moment, at the Graduate Centre where I work, there is the Kripke Centre, which was founded a number of years ago to get a lot of Saul's unpublished work out; and, currently, we have two Italian

philosophers from Turin visiting, Lorenzo Rossi and Matteo Plebani, and it's nice having them around! So, yes, I've had quite a lot to do with Italian philosophers over the years.

3. *Ok, let's start talking a bit more about you. We know that philosophy was not your first academic choice. What led you to change your mind?*

GP: In high school, I discovered that I had a talent for mathematics. So it was natural for me to go to university and study mathematics. So, I got my degree in mathematics. But during that I discovered philosophy and started going to philosophy lectures. Naturally, with that sort of mathematical skills, logic interested me. So, I got interested in logic. Then, when I finished my undergraduate degree, I did first a master and then a doctorate in mathematical logic, but it was in the mathematics department, not in the philosophy department. So, my doctorate is in mathematics. By the end of that period, I knew that I was much more interested in philosophy than in mathematics, and I knew that I was never going to be a very good mathematician. I wanted a job in a philosophy department, and the University of St Andrews offered me a temporary position. At the same time, I was offered a job in a math department in London, but for me, it was a no-brainer: I knew I wanted to be a philosopher! So, I went to St Andrews, and I've never regretted it.

4. *Now, a more personal question. In another interview, you said that you were raised with a Christian education, and now you are an atheist. Could you tell us something about your relationship with religion? Do you think that it has influenced your philosophical work or your decision to get into philosophy?*

GP: So, the last question is easy: it didn't really affect my decision to get into philosophy. As a young philosopher, I was interested in the bits of philosophy that related to mathematics.

I was brought up as a Christian, as you say. It was in a Protestant part of Christianity, relatively left-wing. It's a group that no longer exists, because it has merged with other groups. In those days, it was called Congregationalism, but it has since been absorbed into what I think is now called the United Reformed Church. It wasn't as far left as Quakerism, which is probably the most left-wing form of Christianity, but it was much

further to the left than, say, the Church of England or Catholicism. So, it was a kind of non-conformist church. I was brought up as a fully-believing Christian. However, especially once I went to the university and started thinking about these things, I decided that Christianity didn't make any philosophical sense whatsoever. The historical evidence is pretty thin, and it was hard to believe a number of philosophical doctrines of Christianity. For example, the concept of atonement is kind of crazy. The idea that God decided to torture himself because someone had to suffer, but as an act of mercy, he made himself suffer instead of the people who are supposed to deserve it – it just doesn't make any philosophical sense.

When I started thinking about the problem of evil, that really was it. How is it possible for a benevolent God to allow the horrible things that happen in the world? I've never met a Christian who could provide me with a sensible explanation. So, at that point, I decided that there couldn't really be a God, and I became an atheist. Nothing has changed my mind since then.

But part of your question was whether my Christian upbringing influenced me. To a certain extent, it probably did, because many ethical values cross religious traditions and ethical traditions. For example, compassion is found in nearly every religion in the world. Certainly, in the Christian religion, such a relationship with other people is really important. You can find this idea in Buddhism as well, where one of the most important attitudes is compassion, toward other people and toward yourself. People suffer, and an important thing is to minimize the suffering. That's something I learned as a Christian, so it came to me very naturally when I started reading about Buddhism. So, had I had a different upbringing, maybe I wouldn't have found Buddhist ethics so natural. That's a hard counterfactual to evaluate, but no one can escape their upbringing.

We've evolved as creatures of a certain kind, and evolution has given us the potential to become very different kinds of people. People can be fantastic and kind, or complete arseholes. The same person can sometimes be kind and sometimes be an arsehole. People have all these tendencies within them. Which ones are brought out depends largely on their socialization. If you're brought up in a culture that is largely aggressive, grasping, and racist, it's pretty likely that you are going to become a person like that. Whereas if you grow up in a society that is caring and compassionate, then those tendencies in you are more likely to come out because of your socialization. This is why the kind of society we live in is so important.

5. *So, after St Andrews you moved to Australia. Could you tell us about that decision? Was it difficult? It was the other side of the world...*

GP: It wasn't a difficult decision, in the sense that it wasn't a decision at all. I had a temporary job in St Andrews, I was applying for temporary jobs in the UK, and I wasn't getting anywhere. So, the first permanent job I was offered was in Australia, at the University of Western Australia. I wanted to be a philosopher. I was married, and we had a small child, so I talked to my wife, and we decided to move to Australia. I expected it to be temporary. I thought, "I'll apply to jobs back in the UK, and eventually, I'll get one". But it didn't happen.

It took me a while to feel at home in Australia. I had some of the traditional cultural attitudes that English people have towards Australia. It's not so much like that now, but especially when I was growing up, English people looked down on Australia because it had no culture. I confess I had this kind of attitude towards Australia: it didn't have the BBC, really good quality newspapers, a rich history, or old buildings. So, I wanted to come back to the UK. But after a while, I started to look at Australia not through British eyes.

It's true that Australia doesn't have the BBC, and that there are things that are good about England that you don't find in Australia. But there are so many things that are good about Australia that Britain does not have. There are things like: great food, sunshine, a friendly culture, and perhaps most importantly, Australia doesn't have the British class system. This is something that you can really understand only if you grew up in Britain. The class you are born into defines who you are and who you can be. It's not like the class system in the United States, where money defines everything. It's very limiting if you are born into the working class, as I was.

Now it's changing a bit, but not that much. Let me give you an example. Virtually all the conservative prime ministers of Britain have gone through Oxford, Cambridge, and the British private school system. So, the private school system, Oxford, and Cambridge are still central to the British class system. If you look at parliamentarians, the BBC, the military, a lot of university professors, they've all been through this route. I don't like the British class system. Australia is very different. A plumber and a lawyer can live next door to each other, and they will have a beer together in the pub watching a football match. There isn't the same kind of class distinctions that exist in Britain. And I really like that about Australia.

After being in Australia for a number of years, I grew to love it, for the great things it has; and for what it's worth, I feel very much more at home in Australia now than anywhere else. There is something else that makes me feel at home in Australia: the philosophical culture. Australia is a relatively egalitarian society, and the philosophical culture is egalitarian, open-minded, and also tough-minded. If you go to a philosophy conference in Australia, you will find people joining in, who can be professors, PhD students, or undergraduate students. They all join in and make the discussion lively, and there is no sort of distinction such as one you can find here in Europe. Additionally, in Australia philosophy tends to be more open-minded. If you look at the traditions that have come out of Australia in the last fifty years (the mind-brain identity theory, ecological ethics, relevant logic), these are all ideas that were somewhat heterodox compared with the northern hemisphere. Philosophers in Australia don't have to stick to the old ways of doing things. This is one of the advantages of Australia being a young society. People will consider ideas that aren't given much attention in the northern hemisphere. So... open mindedness, but Australian philosophers also tend to be very tough-minded. If you've got an idea and it's not that great, they often tell you so in no uncertain terms; not in an unfriendly way, but just like, "Alright mate, that's not a good idea, and I'll tell you why". And that's a very good environment for bad ideas to die and good ideas to flourish. This is a feature of Australian philosophy that I don't find as much in the US and in the UK.

6. *Have you ever been forced to choose between family and career?*

GP: No, I've never had to choose. I had a family life and a professional life, and they do compete sometimes, clearly. One obvious reason is the time commitment. When you spend time at home with your family, you don't have much time to do research. So, I publish a lot more now than when I had a family because I have more time. Family puts constraints on where you go and what you do; you've got to consider the wellbeing of your kids. Plus, having kids costs a lot of money, so you have expenses and you can't travel as much. But you do the best you can.

And it's not just the kids, but also your partner, whether it's a female partner or a male partner; you've got to collectively consider everybody's wellbeing. My wife and I were both students at the same time. We very much shared the child-rearing of our first child. But I'm embarrassed to say that my wife did much more of the housework than I did. I don't think I was

very enlightened when it came to feminist issues when I was younger, because when I grew up, my mother did everything for me. I hope I've improved in that. But, generally speaking, we made all the decisions collectively, so in that sense it was a very egalitarian relationship. We both had jobs. When we had our second child, my wife – she wanted a second child more than I did – said, “Well, I'll stay at home while the second child is younger”, and I went to work. So, that was fine. She didn't work for a few years. But for most of our lives, we each had our own jobs.

7. *So, Australia. You spent twelve years in Perth, at the University of Western Australia, and then you moved to the University of Queensland. Then, after another twelve years, you moved to Melbourne. What made you move? What made you stay in Australia?*

GP: Frankly, I moved because of ambition. The British academic system is changing now, but the traditional system was like this: you had a department with one professor, and the professor sort of ran the department and held the highest rank in philosophy. It was very hard, forty years ago, to be promoted to professor. It wasn't impossible, but it was difficult. So, mostly, you became a professor by applying for a chair somewhere else and getting it. And I wanted a chair.

The Chair of the University of Queensland came up, and I was ambitious. My wife was happy to move. Twelve years later (after we had separated), I got the job at the University of Melbourne. Melbourne was an older university, a more established University. It is the oldest chair of philosophy in Australia. When that position came up, I was offered it, so I moved down to Melbourne.

8. *Finally, you now teach in New York. Could you tell us what you think is the difference in how philosophy is studied in the US with respect to the UK and Australia; and, also, more generally, what are the differences between the academic world in the US and in the rest of the world?*

GP: That's a complex question. Philosophy varies greatly from country to country, with different historical traditions. Different countries tend to read different people; they tend to take different texts for granted. This is very evident if you're in Japan, or Germany, or Italy. But it is equally true in the English-speaking world. For example, certain philosophers have had an enormous impact on American philosophy but not so much on British

philosophy, and vice versa. For example, Wilfrid Sellars had an enormous impact on a lot of American philosophy and virtually no impact on British philosophy. Conversely, Michael Dummett had an enormous impact on British philosophy and hardly any on American philosophy.

So, there are differences, but there are also a lot of commonalities within the English-speaking world. Generally speaking, if you go to any philosophy department in the English-speaking world, you know what to expect, in terms of what is usually discussed, what people refer to by and large. Everyone is going to read the same people in the department of philosophy. And, nowadays, most English-speaking philosophers publish in the same journals, read the same things, and communicate over the internet, so there is a lot of commonality.

Now, let's address the elephant in the room: the distinction between the so-called analytic philosophy and the so-called continental philosophy. The names are actually terrible because English-speaking philosophy hasn't done philosophical analysis since the 1920s, and "continental" is a term used by the British to refer coyly to the rest of Europe. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, English-speaking and non-English-speaking philosophy have diverged slightly—only slightly. Personally, I don't think that the distinction is really important, but that's my opinion and it's not shared by many philosophers, both in the English-speaking tradition and in the European tradition.

It is true that in the English-speaking world, most philosophy is analytic. There are philosophy departments in the US that are more continentally inclined and which specialise in that area; they're good, but they're a minority. The same is true in England. Australia and New Zealand also have largely analytic departments, but they have always been more catholic (with a small 'c') than other parts of the English-speaking world, in terms of paying more attention to other traditions. So, most departments in Australia have taught some European philosophy, and there have been some significant continental philosophers in Australia.

But I think the biggest divide in philosophy is not the analytic-continental split, but the East-West split. If you look at the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy from the East, it appears like a family tiff: it's not significant. Whereas the difference between Eastern and Western philosophy is enormous. In the Western tradition, most of the Eastern philosophical ideas have not even been thought of as philosophy. That's now starting to change, but it's much more common to find courses on Eastern philosophy in Australia than in the UK or in the US. I think that's an index of the more open-minded nature of Australasian philosophy.

9. *Is there also a geographical reason for that?*

GP: It would be a natural assumption, but I don't think it is true. Australia is a colonial country, founded as a British colony. It has often had the same kind of colonial attitude towards the East that the rest of English-speaking world has always had. So, I think the attitude towards Asian philosophical traditions in Australia has been just as orientalist as in the northern hemisphere. Although it's changing now, and that's a great thing.

10. *Let's keep talking about your interest in Eastern philosophy. How was this interest born?*

GP: Well, when I started my first job in philosophy, I knew virtually nothing about philosophy because my doctorate was in mathematics. So, I had to educate myself in philosophy, which I did by reading, teaching, and talking to people. And I've had a great time. When I had been a professional philosopher for about twenty years, I started to feel that I had some sense of philosophy overall. Then I met someone who is now an old friend, Jay Garfield—we've since written several things together. Jay is a US philosopher who, at that time, was a professor in Australia. I met Jay at a conference and we started talking. I had just finished my book *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. He was trained as an analytic philosopher but became interested in Asian philosophy. He learned Tibetan and had just finished a fine translation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*—one of the most important Buddhist philosophical texts.

We started talking and discovered that we had very closely related interests. It was through talking to Jay that I came to understand that I knew nothing about half of the world's philosophy. It wasn't because I had anything against the Asian tradition; it wasn't even on my radar. It didn't even occur to me that there might be something interesting there. So, meeting Jay was a real eye-opener. I realized that my understanding of the world of philosophy was very, very limited. Just as I had been trying to educate myself in Western philosophy, I tried to educate myself in some of the Asian traditions. I went to India to study, I went to Japan to study, and I've been to China a few times. I read and I taught. So, I now have some understanding of the Asian traditions, as I do of some of the Western tradition.

I haven't given up on Western philosophy, but I've been trying to engage in some of the Eastern stuff as well. When I approach philosophical

issues now, I find that I am able to draw on traditions from East and West, and I find that it makes my philosophical thinking richer. (At least I have that illusion!).

11. *Why do you think Eastern philosophy is not studied in the West as much as Western philosophy is studied in the East? Do you think this will change, eventually?*

GP: The major reasons are cultural. Put it down to Western political imperialism, which is closely connected to economic imperialism. The West colonized the East largely for economic reasons. But colonization involved not only taking the wealth of other countries, but also downgrading their cultures. Because you need to justify the fact that you're doing horrible things to those people, you say that you have a better culture than they have and that you're trying to educate them. That's what people said about British educating the East in the nineteenth century. So, there was a kind of downgrading of Asian cultures. That's where a lot of the Western attitude that views the Asian philosophical tradition as not being real philosophy comes from.

Now, because of the imposition of Western culture on the East, philosophers in the East know more about Western philosophy than the other way around. The impact of Eastern philosophy in the West is a much more recent phenomenon; and it's happening slowly, but it's happening. This is again partly for economic reasons, as the economic center of gravity is moving East. However, the reason is not only economic; Western philosophers are starting to read Eastern texts for the first time and realise their philosophical importance.

Buddhism is now having an impact on the West for several reasons. One is that Japan was conquered by the West in WW2, and a lot of Americans – missionaries, military, administrators – went to Japan and learned about Japanese culture. One of the features of Japanese culture is Zen, and so these people started to bring Zen back to the West. Additionally, China invaded Tibet, and there was a Tibetan diaspora. A lot of Tibetans came to the West and brought Buddhist ideas with them.

There has been a large impact of Asian ideas, especially Buddhist ideas, on the West. Philosophers have started to read the texts and discovered, surprise, surprise, that they contain really great and interesting philosophies. So, it's not simply an economic matter. Many Western

philosophers are making the discoveries that I've made: this is really cool philosophical stuff!

12. *We all know you practice karate, which is clear from some famous photos taken by the cold Scottish seaside. Is there a connection between your interest in Eastern philosophy and your passion for karate? Did the practice of such an activity change the way you approach your philosophical and academic life?*

GP: Initially there was no connection. I started practicing karate a long time ago. My daughter, who was 12 at that time, wasn't a very physical kid. So my wife and I both thought that it would be a good idea for her to learn how to defend herself. My wife said to her, "Look, if you join a karate club, I'll come with you". So the two of them started training in karate when we lived in Perth. Then we moved to Brisbane. I used to play baseball in Perth, but I decided to hang up my glove. My wife said to me, "Well why don't you join us?", and I said, "I'm not interested. I'm not into hitting people". She said, "You don't understand: it's about not hitting people". I thought it was just silly, but she was absolutely right. I went along just to find out about it, and within a month, I was hooked. Ok, you train in violence, that's undeniable. But the whole point, paradoxical as it may sound, is that you train in violence in order not to be violent. I just loved karate. I practiced it for 25 years. I was blessed with good teachers in Australia, and I trained a lot in Japan with people very high in the karate hierarchy.

13. *Did you also teach?*

GP: Oh yes. Once you reach a high enough dan grade, you have to teach. So I did a lot of teaching. I've never run my own dojo because I travel too much, but I often taught in the dojo in which I myself trained. My love of karate was not a philosophical one—at least, not at first; it was a love of karate itself. I mean, it's a *dao* (*dō*), a way of life, a way of being. There is a traditional connection, especially in Japan, between Zen and the martial arts. Being a philosopher, you soon become aware of that. If you practice a martial art, the whole distinction between mind and body ceases to make any sense. Mind and body are both integrated, and dualism doesn't make any sense at all. That influenced a bit the way I think about philosophy of mind.

But probably the biggest effect related to philosophy that training in a martial art had on me was on my teaching. When you start teaching philosophy, you know only how you have been taught, so you tend to reproduce that, which is the way I approached teaching philosophy. One of the first things about teaching a martial art is that when you have people to teach, you look at them: you see where they are in their development, what they can do well, what they can't do well, and you think, "Ok, this person is now here in their development; how do I get them to the next level?". Then you start to train them on the things that will take them to the next level. That's the way experienced teachers teach a martial art. I never thought of teaching philosophy that way. I used to go into a philosophy classroom and just talk philosophy, hoping that the students would improve. It never occurred to me that I should teach students at different levels in different ways. Now, I look at the students and I think, "Ok, where are they in their philosophical development?". It's not that I think I know everything, but I know that I know a lot more than young people simply because I've been around for a long time. So when I look at young philosophers, I know that they could be better, and I start thinking, "How can I get them to the next level?". So, teaching karate did have an enormous impact on how I teach philosophy.

14. *Now, Dialetheism. That must have been a pretty strange theory when you brought it up in the Seventies. Could you tell us what kind of difficulties you encountered in defending such a view in its early stages?*

GP: Okay. I don't need to tell you how orthodox the Principle of Non-Contradiction is in Western philosophy. I started to have doubts about it when I was a research student, and these had to do with theorems of mathematical logic, like Gödel's theorems, which are closely related to various paradoxes. I started to think about the reactions to the paradoxes of reference. These paradoxical arguments are arguments for contradictions, and *prima facie* they are pretty good arguments! So I thought: maybe we should take these arguments seriously. Attempts to solve the paradoxes of self-reference have been going on for two and a half thousand years and haven't been successful because, after all this time, there is still no consensus about how to solve them. Maybe it's just the wrong attitude: maybe some contradictions can be true. I started to think about that idea and investigate it.

When I moved to Australia, I met Richard Sylvan (formerly Routley). He was already sympathetic to the idea, but I think our becoming friends pushed him over the edge. We worked on dialetheism for many years until he died, nearly thirty years ago. In the late 1970s, there were two dialetheists in the world: him and me. Things grew from that.

Every great philosopher in the West – maybe except Hegel – has thought that accepting contradictions is crazy. So I went around giving talks, and for a long time, I expected someone in the discussion to raise their hand in the back of the room and say “Yeah, *but...*”, and I’d have to agree. After ten years, it never happened. I came to discover that if there were arguments against dialetheism, they really weren’t obvious. People find it very hard to argue against dialetheism. The obvious argument is the Principle of Explosion, but if you’re a dialetheist, that begs the question. I’m not saying that there are no arguments against dialetheism, but they have turned to be a lot harder than you would have imagined. There may be good arguments against applications of dialetheism to particular things, but argument in favor the Principle of Non-Contradiction as a fundamental principle of philosophy, I don’t find any.

In the early years, we got an enormous amount of pushback. It was a very interesting time because no one believed us! I remember giving a talk to the Aristotelian Society in London. I gave this paper on dialetheism and rationality. As is standard practice there, I talked to the paper for ten minutes. (People are supposed to read it in advance.) Then the chair said, “Any questions?” Silence... fuck! Then after a few minutes, a question: “You don’t really think that contradictions might be true, do you?”. I said “yes”, and boom! The discussion lasted two hours. The whole discussion was about whether contradictions can be true; no one cared about the paper itself.

That was a typical reaction we got in those times. It was great fun! What I learned is that talking face-to-face is very different from writing a journal article. When you write an article, someone might read a bit, say “That’s crazy!” and throw it away. That’s not an irrational reaction. Life is short and one can’t engage with all ideas; one employs a plausibility-filter. But when you talk to someone face-to-face, it’s different. If someone says, “Well, contradictions can’t be true, can they?”, you can ask “Why?”. I’m not a journal; they can’t close my cover, so they’ve got to come up with some reasons. You might not convince people, but putting them on the spot means that they can no longer ignore the question. Slowly, you do enough of this, and people start to think, “Oh, maybe it’s not so crazy after all”. They still might not believe it, but at least it is something that has to be

taken into account. Slowly, dialetheism has established itself. It's still an unorthodox view, but it's something that good philosophers know is there. They have to take account of it.

15. *Nowadays, it is hard for a student to develop a new theory, especially if it goes, in some sense, against the usual way of thinking. Young scholars tend to explore already confirmed theories and work within their frameworks. Do you think this is a correct analysis? If so, what do you think about it? If not, why not?*

GP: Yes, it's true. Naturally, people want to get jobs, and they figure—probably correctly—that it's a good idea to play it safe. Do something reasonably orthodox. But in the end that's not a good philosophical attitude. Good philosophy is about questioning things taken for granted.

When someone starts to learn philosophy, they don't know much. They have to understand the problems, the solutions, the history, the techniques – they have to learn all these things. A lot of that is going to be learning very orthodox stuff, and there is nothing wrong with that. So, I understand people teaching a lot of orthodox ideas at the beginning; it's going to be the same in the teaching of any skills. But I think it's really important that we don't close our students' minds. If you're teaching philosophy, unorthodox ideas are going to come up, and you don't do a great service to your students if you say, "Well, that's stupid". That just closes their mind. Philosophy, if anything, should be about opening minds. So you can say, "Look, that's a very unorthodox idea, and it's a bit difficult to talk about that in detail at the moment. We'll come back to that when you know a bit more. That could be interesting, but it requires that you know a bit more to talk about it". So, I'm not against teaching orthodox stuff, especially at the beginning, but I'm very much against closing people's minds.

I think that a lot of our logic teaching is particularly bad in this regard. We give students truth tables and say, "This is logic!" and they learn to put the ones and zeros in the right places, etc. But there are so many counter-intuitive things about classical logic, like the paradoxes of material implication, the arguments for truth value gaps, etc. If we teach logic dogmatically, it closes people's minds. So, I'm fine with teaching classical logic to first-year students. You can't teach people the Theory of Relativity initially; you have to teach Newtonian physics first. Similarly, in logic, you

have to teach the basic stuff. But it's wrong to close people's minds. Make them aware of possible limitations. Many of these limitations are worthy of investigation.

16. *Could you tell us something about Meinongianism/Noneism? I have the feeling that it is still a minority view in philosophy, even though some philosophers who came after Quine – such as yourself – have tried to restore its credit. Do you agree? Do you believe that, with time, it will get more and more accepted?*

GP: Yes. I think there's a lot more interest in noneism – the view that some things don't exist – than in dialetheism—partly because dialetheism runs deeply against the history of Western philosophy, and noneism does not. The view that some things don't exist has been absolutely orthodox in the history of Western philosophy. You look at most of the greatest medieval philosophers and logicians; they all believed in non-existent objects. Some of them also believed in impossible objects. So this was standard. I know it's called Meinongianism, but it wasn't just Meinong's view. It was Russell who really started a demolition job, although he did it with respect. Quine took up the fight without respect. Often, when you read Quine, you find a nice piece of rhetoric rather than a solid argument. That's true of 'On What There Is', which is the canonical demolition job of Meinongianism.

But the arguments against Meinongianism are pretty weak. Russell's are terrible, and Quine's are really no better. Yet they were so influential that they revolutionized the way that people thought of existence in 1950s and 1960s. Many philosophers say, "To be is to be the value of a bound variable. Quine proved it, didn't he?". Well, no, he didn't. But the view became so orthodox that Gilbert Ryle said, "If Meinongianism isn't dead, nothing is", but he has been proved wrong. All great philosophical ideas come back, and noneism has come back. I think that most English-speaking philosophers don't know the history, and they think that Meinongianism is a novel view. But the supposed killer arguments of Russell and Quine don't kill. We have seen a number of good philosophers since the 1960s who were noneists, including my late friend Richard Sylvan. When all is said and done, noneism is a very simple and very sensible view.

17. *And what about impossible worlds. Do you believe that, just as philosophy and logic underwent an intensional revolution with the*

introduction and acceptance of possible worlds, there will also be a hyperintensional revolution with the introduction and acceptance of impossible worlds?

GP: Yes, I think that's right. When possible worlds started to really hit the scene in the 60s and 70s, most philosophers, including myself, thought that this was outrageously wacky metaphysics. But now we can't do without them! Non-classical logics have two main semantic drivers: world-semantics and many-valued semantics; and they're essential. Because they're essential, we've learnt to live with them.

But then I saw impossible worlds start coming into use two decades later, and they had the same kind of bad taste that possible worlds did in the 60s and 70s. But again, they have so many applications – in counterfactuals, the theory of intentionality, and various other areas – that they are quickly becoming necessary features of the logician's and metaphysician's world. And I don't think we can go back.

18. *You have also written about political philosophy. Do you believe you are going to be more and more interested in that topic? Could you tell us something about your ideas?*

GP: I'll say more about the topic if I find new things I think are worth saying. The book I published on political philosophy came out a couple of years ago. I haven't thought a lot about those topics since then, but there are so many things that should be thought about. I mean, political philosophical questions are so important, much more than noneism or dialetheism, because they affect everybody's well-being. It's not rocket science that the world is in a terrible state. The book argues that capitalism is a prime driver of so many of the problems. And it's going to be very difficult to move the world in a more humane and rational direction. The book I wrote on capitalism was the most depressing book I've written, just because it's going to be so, so hard to push the world into a more humane direction.

19. *Let's go back to the distinction between continental and analytic philosophy. There is a famous video on the internet in which Kit Fine, when asked what he thinks about non-analytical philosophy, answers, "I despise it". What do you think about that?*

GP: Well, I disagree if that's his view, but don't believe all the things you see in the net! Anyway, I think the division is disappearing, because there are more and more philosophers in both traditions who are prepared to cross the boundary. There are serious analytic philosophers reading Heidegger, and amongst the European philosophers, there are many that are familiar with the English classics.

There is good and bad philosophy on both sides of the "divide". The important thing, I think, is to learn from good philosophy wherever it's done. Saying that continental philosophy is rubbish or Asian philosophy is rubbish while claiming analytic philosophy is great, that's silly.

20. *Are there some non-analytical philosophers that have had a particular impact on you?*

GP: I think the most profound non-analytical philosopher in the twentieth century was Heidegger. This doesn't mean that I agree with everything he wrote. But his vision of the world (I'm not talking about the Nazi stuff) – his philosophy – is fascinating. He's drawing on a Neo-Platonic tradition: he's not as original as he thinks, but he has said a lot of interesting things that Neo-Platonists hadn't said before.

Now we read philosophers who wrote centuries ago, sometimes millennia ago. Who of the twentieth-century philosophers is going to be read in the same way in three hundred years? Of course, that's an entirely unanswerable question. But from my money, if I had to bet, I would say Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Their thoughts have a fascination that brings people back to them. One thing about great philosophers is that every time a generation reads them, they find something new that hasn't been found before. This happens with Plato, Kant, Hume, and, of course, Asian thinkers like Confucius and Nāgārjuna. I think that Heidegger and Wittgenstein are in that league. I'd like to come back in three hundred years and find out!

21. *In your opinion, how important is it for a young philosopher to read classic ancient philosophy?*

GP: I think that the more you know the history of philosophy, the better philosopher you will be. To understand the problems we engage with now, it is important to understand their genesis and the attempts that have been made to solve them in the past, their strengths, and their weaknesses. So,

understanding history improves your understanding of philosophy. Of course, that includes the ancient traditions of Greece, Rome, China, India.

22. *Related to all this, a super general question. What is, for you, philosophy? And what is or should be the role of a philosopher in our society nowadays?*

GP: Well, those are two very difficult questions. So, what is philosophy? It's hard, maybe impossible, to define philosophy. If you want to explain to someone what philosophy is, I reckon that the best way to do it is to give them examples of the kinds of questions that philosophers engage with: Is there a God? How should we run the state? How should we treat other people? What are the fundamental constituents of the world, if there are such things? These are some very important philosophical questions that you have in all cultures.

Now, what role should philosophers play in public culture? I think they should play a very essential role. I'll tell you why in a second. But I think there is quite a big difference between English-speaking culture and European cultures. My knowledge of the Asian cultures is not firm enough to make comments on that. But in the European cultures, there is such a thing as the public philosopher. These are people that are engaged in a public domain: Sartre, Severino, Foucault, some of the philosophers in the Frankfurt school. These were all engaged with the public domain. This is very rare in the English culture. It's hard to think of anybody. The only person that comes to mind is Chomsky.

Why the cultural difference? I'm not sure I know the answer. But I think that it is a good idea for philosophers to engage in the public domain: I think philosophers have a lot of skills for addressing the important questions, like the question of abortions, democracy, or what we should say about social media. Philosophers have a lot of skills to deal with these very tough, very diffuse, questions. Not only that, they don't have a party line to toe. They can try to give answers without being dogmatic. I often listen to discussions about public affairs on the radio, and who gets involved? Politicians, religious leaders, journalists. The political people and the religious people have a party line to run. So they're not going to be open-minded in the same way philosophers can be. And having an open-minded approach to these questions is really important. So, I do think that philosophers should be involved in these discussions. They should get out

there and do so. Of course, there is a reciprocal obligation on those who organize these events to get them to do so.

23. *Finally, do you have any advice for young (and not) philosophy students?*

GP: You're going to do the best philosophy if you pursue the things that interest you. So, follow your interests. I wouldn't pay too much attention to what's currently hot in philosophy. I've been around long enough to see that lots of fashion come and go. Learn from people you respect, both alive and dead. And remember that philosophy is a social activity. Maybe you write sitting in front of a computer on your own, but the final result will be an essentially social product—the result of many productive social interactions. We all learn from discussion, critique, the insights of others.

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