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INTERVIEW

An interview with Graham Oppy

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Abstract

This article is part of *Religious Studies*' new initiative to publish a series of interviews with distinguished philosophers of religion. Each interview explores the personal and academic background of the interviewee and discusses their core philosophical views. The aim is to inspire students and scholars and to provide an overview of some of the most important works developed by contemporary philosophers of religion. In this interview, Jeremiah Joven Joaquin interviews Graham Oppy, covering topics such as his entry into philosophy, his views on naturalism and atheism, and why there is no successful argument for or against the existence of God, as well as his advice for those interested in pursuing a career in professional academic philosophy.

Keywords: atheism; naturalism; philosophical arguments; theism

What led you to study philosophy?

When I was 16, I think – maybe I was 15 – I was given, as a birthday present, a copy of Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography*, which I read, and I was really impressed. That's how I became interested in philosophy, and I decided before I left high school that I wanted to be a philosopher, which I think is quite unusual. Many people don't make this decision until significantly later in their lives. But that's how I got interested in philosophy, and I started reading stuff Russell talked about in his autobiography while I was still at school.

So, Russell was one of the catalysts for your interest in philosophy; did you also read his *Why I Am Not a Christian*?

Later. I can't remember exactly when I read it. I probably read that one while I was still at school, or maybe it was very early in my university career. When I first started university, I was enrolled to study medicine. I spent a year reading philosophy books when I was supposed to be studying medicine, and decided that I was in the wrong faculty.

You shifted from studying medicine to philosophy. What brought that about aside from you reading Russell's autobiography?

It was just a question about my interests. By monitoring what I was doing, it became clear that I was genuinely interested in philosophy. Because I was following Russell, I was also very interested in mathematics and physics. Consequently, I pursued two undergraduate degrees, one in science and one in the arts. But I hadn't fully decided whether I'd do maths or philosophy until I'd finished both of those degrees.

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Who were your philosophical heroes?

In some ways, Russell and Hume would be as close as it gets. I don't think of myself as having heroes, though. People tend to have good and bad aspects, and that was no less true of Hume and Russell than it is of anyone else. I had mentors, and that was more important. So, at Melbourne University, when I was an undergraduate, Allen Hazen was a mentor of mine, and that made a significant difference to what I ended up doing. After leaving Melbourne, I went to Princeton, where Gil Harman and David Lewis were two significant mentors. They both had a lot of influence on my philosophical outlook.

So, your mentors were Allen Hazen, who's a logician, David Lewis, who's primarily a metaphysician, and Gil Harman, who's doing everything in philosophy. But what aspects of their philosophy influenced you?

It's not so much the content of their philosophy. They just taught me how to do philosophy. I know there are certainly things I have picked up from each of them. Gil Harman's book, *Change in View*, influenced my thinking about argument and reasoning. Lewis's stuff about possible worlds, central to his philosophy, didn't rub off on me. But I think the papers he wrote in philosophy of religion – particularly 'Anselm and Actuality' and 'Evil for Freedom's Sake?' – are models of good philosophy of religion. As for Hazen, he was generally very generous with his time. I spent many hours discussing various kinds of philosophy and learned a great deal that way. I think it's quite important if you're a student and have the opportunity to talk to your teachers, then you should take it. You will get a great deal if you do that.

You're a self-professed atheist, yet you're also working on the philosophy of religion. What led you to atheism, and why did you specialize in the philosophy of religion?

Atheism came relatively early in my life. My family background was Methodist, and I went to church and Sunday school until I was about 13. Then, in a fairly short period of time, I decided that I didn't believe in what I had been taught in church and Sunday school. And things haven't changed since. It's not very exciting, but that's how I became an atheist. I didn't talk to anybody. There was no particular trigger for it. I just started thinking about the things I was being taught, and to me, they seemed unbelievable. So, that's that side of it.

The other question, how I ended up in the philosophy of religion, is more complicated. After I became an atheist, I loved arguing with people about religion, right through my school career. It's interesting that when I went to a school reunion last year, various people came up and said they remembered arguing with me about religion. But I didn't set out to become a philosopher of religion. My PhD was in philosophy of language. By the time I got out of graduate school, I had studied only one course in the philosophy of religion in my entire philosophical career to that point.

When I returned to Australia, Richard Campbell, who was then heading the department – which was then known as the Teaching Department at the Australian National University – needed someone to teach a course in the philosophy of religion, and he asked if I could do it. I just said 'Yes!' and then started teaching myself the subject, so I was a week ahead of the students throughout the semester. However, along the way, I gathered enough material to publish a couple of papers, and I began to develop an interest in this area of philosophy.

I then had a couple of jobs in Sydney and Wollongong, where I wasn't teaching philosophy of religion and wasn't particularly working on it. I published papers on the philosophy of language and aesthetics at the time. But an opportunity came up. I decided to apply for an Australian Research Council (ARC) Grant. The ARC grant scheme was kicking off. It

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was an opportunity to secure a three-year postdoctoral position. The project I chose was to write about reformed epistemology. I talked to Frank Jackson at the ANU, and he said, 'You'll never get this grant, but I'll support you'. Then I got it, and I went to the ANU and wrote a book about ontological arguments, which I thought of as the first step in the project – that turned out to be all I got done. At that point, I sort of became a philosopher of religion. However, I view it as a series of accidents. I was offered some teaching. I just happened to get a grant. If things had gone differently, I might not have ended up working in the philosophy of religion at all.

That's an interesting episode of your life. You're not keen on doing work in the philosophy of religion from the start. You just love to argue about religious topics, but not professionally. But a series of accidents – the teaching post and the ARC grant – led you to it anyway. I'm curious how your philosophy of religion course went.

I wrote extremely detailed notes for each class and then distributed them to students. What I thought I would do is a thorough study of the arguments on both sides of the question about the existence of God. Why did I do that? Because the one course that I had previously done, which was taught to me by Bruce Langtry at the University of Melbourne, had its main focus on arguments about the existence of God. It didn't try to do what I did, but it inspired me to design my course similarly. My course consisted of 26 lectures, each devoted to a particular argument. That means my students and I looked at 26 arguments for and against the existence of God. Langtry's course examined arguments for design and the problem of evil in more detail. He had one argument on each side and spent several weeks discussing each. But that was my model, and I think it was the first thing I'd ever taught, and so it was natural that I looked around for a model somewhere else, and that was the thing that was in my experience, so that was why I ended up teaching the course that way. That settled my research direction, because for the first 15 years of my professional life, my work in the philosophy of religion primarily focused on arguments about the existence of God.

You wrote many books and papers on the philosophy of religion, from your first work on the ontological argument to your opinionated introduction. But how should we understand the subject in the first place?

Let's go back a step. Let's first ask, 'What's philosophy?' I think you should think of philosophy as a discipline with an interesting relationship to all the other disciplines. In other disciplines, there's a core of stuff on which there's expert agreement. For example, there are many things that mathematicians, physicists, or historians agree about. And then, around that, there's a bunch of other things that are currently controversial, but everybody's certain that so long as we go on using the 'method' we've got, we'll arrive at the answers. Hence, we know these are mathematical or physics questions, and we're pretty sure they will yield mathematical or physics answers. And then, around that other stuff, you get to this borderline where there are questions we don't know the answers to or the methods we should use to answer them. We're not even sure whether these questions appropriately belong in this discipline or not. Well, that's where the philosophy of the discipline comes in, so that's like philosophy of mathematics or philosophy of physics.

The way that I think about philosophy is this. The philosophical questions are those that lack expert agreement or consensus on the answers, and also lack expert agreement or consensus on the methods to be used in answering those questions. In some areas of philosophy, such as metaphysics and most normative fields, including value theory, this is the case. Philosophy of religion, then, is, according to me, the study of questions about religion where there's no agreement on the answers and no agreement on the methods we should use to try to answer those questions. Many other disciplines study religion, including

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the sociology of religion, the history of religion, and others, but philosophy has its own distinctive place. That's my official story about what philosophy of religion is.

You're talking about philosophy as examining borderline questions within a specific discipline. In the philosophy of mathematics, you're asking what numbers are, perhaps. In philosophy of physics, you're asking about the status of quarks and muons. But how about in the philosophy of religion? What are the borderline questions here?

Remember that philosophical questions are questions where there's disagreement on the claims and the methods used to resolve them. Now, if you consider whether God exists, it will fall into that category. There's no agreement about the answer to that question. But there doesn't seem to be any agreement on how we should answer that question either. You might disagree about that, but I think there isn't any agreement on the answer to that question either, and that's enough to make that question belong to the philosophy of religion.

Isn't this a borderline question in theology rather than religion? So, the question of whether God exists falls under the philosophy of theology rather than the philosophy of religion.

No, because that was one example that I picked, but there are lots of questions that philosophy of religion can take up. In my book, you've already referred to it, *The Opinionated Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, I consider some general questions about religion that fall into metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory. So, there are epistemic questions about religious disagreement. Should it bother us that there's disagreement about religion? Should we think there's only one rational way of thinking about religious questions? In metaphysics, there's the question of whether we should believe that there are entities beyond the entities to which a naturalist will be happy to commit himself. In value theory, there are questions about where values come from, whether they're derivatively religious, and so on.

I'm hearing Bertrand Russell in your discussion just now. For Russell, philosophical questions fall under the categories of metaphysics and epistemology. That is, what things are there and how do we know them? Now you're adding value questions into the mix. Why should we care about these things? Given all these, what would a typical syllabus of this subject look like to you? What should students expect to learn in philosophy of religion?

I think that's a tough question. You can take different approaches depending on what you care about now. One thing you might think that your students should have is a kind of introduction to questions about religion considered as a global phenomenon. There are many religions, and we should be interested in the emerging questions when considering them together. A different approach you might take is to think about the local conditions and religious beliefs, or the predominant religious beliefs of a particular culture. You might think about the philosophical questions that arise in connection with those specific beliefs and make that part of the syllabus. Now, what has happened in the philosophy of religion in the West in the last 50 years is that it's had an enormous focus not just on Christianity and specific central philosophical questions about Christianity but a focus on one kind of Christianity, which is the kind of US evangelical Christianity that had a completely disproportionate amount of attention in the philosophy of religion. And if we go back to my original syllabus about arguments about the existence of God, that's essentially where the literature was coming from.

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So, aside from the topic about the existence of God, what else should be included in the syllabus?

I suggest that anything can be there. It depends on what your aims are. I mean, one of the things you wanted, if you've got a syllabus, is to engage the students and talk to them about things that they think are important. But you also have to balance that with what you think are the significant bits of the subject that they should think about. For example, balancing local and global approaches is quite tricky to negotiate in the philosophy of religion. One way to think about this is to consider William James's *Will to Believe*, where he focused on whether or not some hypotheses are live. Suppose you're in a particular community, say in indigenous Australia, where the belief in rainbow serpents is prevalent. You may ask, 'Is this religious belief a live topic for you and your students?' And so, including that in the syllabus, if you're teaching a course on the philosophy of religion, and your students are no more interested than you are, it's possibly not going to be a good move. So, I don't think there's a 'should' here, a normative requirement about what goes into a philosophy of religion syllabus. You have to judge the class you've got and the appropriate topics you could all talk about.

But what would a standard philosophy of religion class look like?

I have a textbook called *Reading Philosophy of Religion*, which is divided into five sections. There's one section on arguments about the existence of God. There's one on divine attributes. There's another section on the kind of epistemology of religion that looks at a narrow range of things, for example, the dispute about the bearing of evidence on religious questions. There's also some stuff about religious language: the meaning of religious language. And, finally, maybe this is slightly more unusual, there's some stuff on religious pluralism and exclusivism. If you look at a typical philosophy of religion syllabus over the last 30 or 40 years in an Australian university, like Monash, a major American university, like Notre Dame, or a major British university, like Oxford, a lot of that stuff will be what's in their syllabi.

Indeed, the last topic about religious pluralism seems unusual. So, why did you add that to your textbook?

The textbook is co-authored with Michael Scott from the University of Manchester, and he was very keen to have the material on religious pluralism in there. When we wrote the book over a decade ago, I had previously included material on religious pluralism in my philosophy of religion classes. But if he hadn't pushed for it, maybe it wouldn't have ended up in the book. The book begins with a section on religious language, which he wrote, and concludes with a section on religious pluralism, which he also wrote.

Let's go back to a fundamental question in the philosophy of religion, viz., the existence of God. You have a whole book that discusses arguments for and against the existence of God. Are any of them good arguments?

Now, we have to discuss what makes for a good argument. And this discussion could go on for a while. But we have to fix our terms first. An argument is a list of claims, one of which is the conclusion, the rest of which are the premises. An argument's valid just in case the conclusion's a logical consequence of the premises, and an argument's sound just in case it's valid and all its premises are true. So, one thought is that a good argument is a sound argument. And often, that turns out to be roughly what people are actually assuming. That's not a satisfactory account of what a good argument is, but it's often what people assume. One way of thinking that it's not really a good account of what makes for a good argument is to think about the difference between asserting a claim and putting forward an argument.

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Suppose we disagree about whether God exists, and you say, 'God exists'. You shouldn't expect me to change my mind just because you've asserted something I don't believe. Let's suppose you put forward an argument that goes: premise one, premise two, therefore, God exists. Suppose I don't accept the premises. You shouldn't expect me to be any more moved by what you're doing than I was when you just said God exists. Now, we disagree about a whole lot of things. So, when you think about which arguments we will think are sound, they will only contain things we believe. Thus, it seems that giving me arguments with premises I don't accept is just a waste of time.

That suggests that the point of giving arguments will be something like this. I'm committed to a bunch of claims, and you can show that something absurd follows from those claims. So, there's a *reductio* of my position, in which case I better revise my beliefs because they are inconsistent, notwithstanding that I believe in true contradictions like Graham Priest. I don't like that. I can't just hold on to beliefs from which things that I take to be absurd follow. Alternatively, there might be some unexpected consequences that I didn't realize were derivable from my beliefs. It's not a contradiction, but I still have to decide whether I'm really comfortable believing it or not. On that account of what it is to be a successful (good) argument, there are no successful arguments about the existence of God, in my opinion – none of the big arguments anyway. Someone might show that theism is inconsistent or that atheism is inconsistent. But on my current way of thinking about these things, there are no successful arguments either way, and that's consistent with the kind of position that I defended in the book that you were referring to – *Arguing about Gods* – the book I published about 15 years ago.

I'm hearing Gil Harman's *Change in View* in what you're saying here. Instead of asking whether an argument is sound or reasonable, what you want to prescribe is to engage with its premises (its starting beliefs) and see whether it leads to an inconsistency or an unexpected consequence that one needs to accept given the premises that one has.

Correct! That's part of the reason why I mentioned Harman earlier on. The point is that given the premises, you need to accept it, but you have a choice. You always have a choice once you've been shown that something follows from your beliefs, whether to revise your beliefs or accept the thing.

So, what does this view of good arguments imply about arguments for and against the existence of God? For example, is the argument from evil a successful argument?

My thesis in *Arguing about Gods* was that there's no successful argument on either side, and I've got clearer views about what makes for a good argument now than I had when I wrote that book. But these ideas were fuzzy in the background when I was writing that book.

Let's go back to your atheism, do you have a good argument for it?

I don't exactly have an argument for that. But in my *The Best Argument Against God*, I set out my reasons for taking an atheistic position, controversial as they are. Here's a rough outline. Naturalism is a simpler view than theism, since naturalism commits you to fewer claims than theism. For example, naturalists and theists are committed to the existence of the natural universe, but theists have one more commitment than naturalists. They are also committed to the existence of God. So, theists now have a burden to justify this further claim.

Theists may think they have some evidence on whether God exists. However, in every case, the explanation that theists can give of that evidence is no better than the explanation

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that naturalists can give, so, at worst, there's explanatory parity, but naturalism's simpler, so, by my lights, it's the better view.

I don't expect everybody else to agree with my assessment. This is the sort of fallible side of it, but it's more than that. I think you can reasonably disagree with me about that, but that's how I weigh it all up. So, that's why I'm a naturalist, and hence, because I think naturalism here excludes theism, I'm an atheist as well.

Let's now discuss your new book, *Naturalism and Religion: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation*. There, you argued that naturalism does not involve an *a priori* rejection of the supernatural. But before we get into that, how should we understand naturalism in the first place?

That's quite a difficult question to answer. My short summary is that what's central to naturalism is the idea that there are none but natural causal entities, with none but natural causal powers. So, the only causal entities and causal powers are natural ones. That leaves open a whole lot of questions. For example, whether there are abstract objects of one kind or another, because I take it that what's constitutive of being an abstract object is that it's not causal, right? So, some people think that naturalism is inconsistent with the existence of abstract objects. Given this minimal definition of naturalism, I don't believe this.

There's also a further question about how naturalism relates to science. Some people may think that naturalism is the claim that the only things you should believe in are those established by our best science. In a vast range of cases, if you want to know the causal entities and the causal powers, the safest thing to do is to see what the science says. If, in particular, there's a scientific consensus, you should follow it. If there isn't, which is often the case, then you've got some freedom to speculate and, depending on the case, you might want to be agnostic, but in some cases, you might actually take a punt, and maybe that won't be unreasonable.

Let me see if I get your point here. Naturalism, for you, is not just a scientific point of view. It's an overall philosophical view that everything is natural and in the physical world. But you mentioned causal powers, which reminded me of the Eleatic principle often invoked by philosophers. This principle states that only those that make a difference or have causal powers exist. Do you subscribe to that principle as well?

Let's consider the open issue of abstract objects again. Since they don't have causal powers, you might have reasons for thinking that they don't exist. But consider the claim that two and three make five. You might think that since that's true, there better be something that makes it true. Maybe it's true because there are the numbers two, three, and five, and they're related in the way the claim says they are. And so, you might have a reason for thinking that there are numbers while nonetheless accepting that they don't have causal powers. So, I'm not saying that having causal powers suffices for existence, since you could be a naturalist and accept that kind of reasoning. And many people have this reason for believing in numbers, whether or not they're naturalists.

So, you're adhering to a type of naturalism that subscribes to an Eleatic reasoning about causal powers and a reasoning about truthmaking. That is, your naturalism accepts the existence of something because it has causal powers and accepts the existence of some other things because they make true some claim. This connects well with your idea that naturalism does not lead to the *a priori* rejection of the supernatural.

Yes, because my naturalism rejects the supernatural *a posteriori*. Remember what I said before when I was talking about how I would defend my position. It works something like this. Let's compare a range of non-naturalistic worldviews with a naturalistic worldview.

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A worldview is just a theory of everything. The naturalistic worldview is among the only worldviews I'm interested in since they all agree that there's a universe, so I will set all the others aside. So, naturalism is minimal in this class because it says there's a universe and that's all, whereas, as far as the causal stuff goes, the other non-naturalistic worldviews, like theism, have more causal stuff in there. They have some non-natural causal entities. Unless you get some explanatory advantage from postulating those extra entities, then there's a reason, I say, for sticking with naturalism. So, that's the kind of general form of the argument.

We're talking about worldviews, but you're also looking at the big picture. So, are they the same here?

Yes. I go backwards and forwards. A 'worldview' is a term with a certain amount of historical and conceptual baggage, whereas 'big picture' is my own term, and it doesn't seem to have that baggage. 'Theory of everything' is another term that has a bit of baggage because many physicists have used it to describe something else. But it's easier to say what I've got in mind than it is to settle on the terminology. Just imagine a theory that gives you a completely accurate description of everything that there is. That would be the true theory of everything.

I'm hearing a kind of parsimony argument here, a sort of Ockham's razor argument.

Yes. You could think of my argument as an Ockham's razor argument. However, it's a lengthy argument, and as I mentioned earlier, it contains numerous controversial details. Here's another way of stating the same thing. If you pick two worldviews, they disagree about lots of things. One of them might be simpler, and the other explains some things better and nothing worse. But we have no principle that tells us how to weigh those worldviews. What is distinctive about naturalism, and this is the hugely controversial point, is that it's simpler, and nothing does it better than it at explaining stuff. Of course, many people disagree about that. But it strikes me that that disagreement is one that reasonable people can have, so it won't turn out that you're rationally required to be a naturalist or a theist. It'll be rationally permissible to go either way, on my view.

Your interlocutors in the book are people like William L. Craig and J. P. Moreland, who are critical of naturalism. What were their worries, and what's your response to them?

In one sense, the worry is that my worldview contradicts theirs. That's the worry. They're committed evangelical theists, and there's no room for God in my worldview. Their arguments are often about other alleged consequences of naturalism. They're there if you've read the introduction to the book, and some of the discussion through the book, you'll know that I just disagree with them about what they take to be the consequences of naturalism. They think that naturalism has consequences for metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, and so on. But these are not the consequences that it actually has. Just to give an example, it seems to me that my characterization of naturalism is consistent with a huge range of different views that you might take about the nature of morality, you could be consequentialist, deontologist, virtue theorist, all of those are consistent with a view about the causal entities being just natural.

Where do you think the philosophy of religion is heading? What are its prospects?

That's a difficult question to answer. Within the field, there's a split in opinion. There are a bunch of people, like Craig, Moreland, and other fellow travellers elsewhere in the world, who think that philosophy of religion is currently in a golden age, that philosophy of

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religion hasn't been this good since Thomas Aquinas or something like that. And then there's another bunch of people, maybe I'm more in this other camp, who think that philosophy of religion is in serious trouble because it ignores so much that's interesting in the religions of the world, because it has a narrow and exclusive focus on a particular kind of Christianity. And people who take that view would like to see the discipline open up to be more inclusive to include conversations about a much wider range of topics.

There has been some opening up in the discipline to some extent. There's a bit more discussion about pantheism and panentheism, a bit more discussion about Hinduism and Buddhism, and so on. However, when examining the content of academic journals, particularly the major Anglo-American ones, the focus remains heavily on Christian themes.

I'm curious about what you think of analytic theology, a brewing movement in the philosophy of religion, which is gaining some traction.

That's a movement from within the establishment. A different kind of movement, which you might also see as, in some ways, related to that, is Thomism, which seems to be enjoying quite a considerable resurgence within that part of philosophy of religion as well, especially in the last 10 years or so. Whether you're excited about that or not depends to some extent on the view that you take about what philosophy of religion ought to be, whether we really should be thinking about religion as a global phenomenon, and considering giving equal attention to questions about Buddhism and the rainbow serpent that we give to Christianity.

But about analytic theology in particular, I think there's lots of interesting stuff in there, especially if you're interested in questions about the existence of God and about divine attributes, as I have been for a long time. However, what's tricky is that the kinds of theoretical assumptions I'm inclined to make are rather different from those that people pursuing analytic theology are making. So, if your question is whether this movement is interesting, or if there are lots of new moves happening, and so on, then yes, there's some interesting stuff in there. But if your question is whether it has important questions to pursue, then the answer depends on whether you share the views about God that most people who are invested in that pursuit have.

You've been an academic philosopher for most of your life. You've been a newbie lecturer and the CEO of the Australasian Association of Philosophy. So, it's fair to say that you've experienced the ups and downs of this career. What advice, then, would you give those starting their academic careers in philosophy?

This is really tricky. For one thing, there've been hardly any downs in my career. I've been incredibly lucky throughout my career. But there are lots of other people who were not as lucky as I've been. For example, Australia's academic job market has been terrible since 1975. And so, that colours any advice that you might give. If you're still starting out, you shouldn't suppose that it's certain that you'll end up with an academic position. At Monash University, only 10 per cent to 15 per cent of our graduate students become academics. So, it's important to have realistic goals. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be an academic philosopher, there's nothing wrong with trying hard to do it, but you should make sure you've got some backup plan if that's the route you're going down.

The other thing that I would say is that, going now to kind of more detailed advice, assuming that this is what you want, and you're going to have a serious shot at it, you should make sure that you maintain a balance between a whole lot of different things in the activities that you're pursuing while you're chasing that dream. To be an academic requires typically a whole lot of different things, so to succeed, to actually make it as an academic, you have to be a good teacher, you have to be a good researcher, and you have to be a competent administrator and manager. You have to be able to get on well with people,

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you have to be able to work with a wide range of colleagues, and you have to be able to interact with people from a whole lot of different intellectual backgrounds – I mean people who belong to other disciplines. So, among the things that you need to do is keep a wide range of scholarly interests going. You have to be not just focused very narrowly on the little bit of philosophy that's your research interest. You must be prepared to teach in a much wider range of areas. Maybe you'll end up teaching with people from other disciplines, like the medical faculty, the law faculty, or whatever. I expect that in the future, we'll see lots more collaborations in universities.

So, the advice here is to set a realistic goal, be prepared for contingencies, have a wide range of interests, and be able to collaborate with people from other fields of study. But how's your academic life going at present?

I guess, in some ways, I'm heading towards the tail-end of my career. That's just thinking about it realistically. I had a very busy period from 2000, when I became Head of Philosophy at Monash. Then, in 2004, I became an Associate Dean in Research and Graduate Studies for about four years. Then I went back to being Head of School for another five years or so. Somewhere in the middle of that, I became the CEO of the Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP), and then I was Director of the Graduate Program at Monash while serving as the CEO of the AAP, so I had this kind of parallel role going on.

For the last little while, since I stepped back from being the CEO of the AAP, there hasn't been anything in particular that I'm doing. I was on the Council of the Australian Academy of Humanities, and that's something else that I've stepped back from. What I'm currently focusing on is just teaching and research, which, after 20 years of doing a wide range of other things, is kind of nice to be doing again. But the reason why that's happening is because I'm getting towards the end of my career, I think.

Is your academic career worth it?

For me, absolutely. When you look at blogs about philosophy, such as *Daily Nous*, you read about the struggles of many people in academia, some of whom were unsuccessful. Then there's this question about whether it was worth pursuing such a career. It's very hard to answer that question at the start of one's academic life. It's impossible to answer the question, 'Will it be worth it?' because you don't know how it will turn out. What you would like is for you not to end up with regrets if you don't make it. However, making a judgement about that is really hard to do ahead of time.

It was a long time before I felt comfortable with my decision to pursue philosophy. I went to Princeton for my PhD. I came back to Australia after. It was seven years before I secured my job at Monash, and during that time, I held contract positions, casual teaching roles, and other similar arrangements. So, I guess there's always this question, 'Is it going well enough?' 'Do I want to give up?' Once you get a tenured position, you'd probably stop asking yourself those questions unless the working conditions are unbearable, like if you're in a really unhappy department with many colleagues you don't get along with. So, there might still be reasons to give it up. But I've been lucky. I had great colleagues throughout my career.

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