



**ARUN ALAGAPPAN '81**

***When you first came to Princeton what did you think your major would be?***

Math.

***What made you decide to major in philosophy?***

Bishop Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, and Princeton Professors John Burgess and Paul Benacerraf.

***Are there any stories about your experiences as a Philosophy major at Princeton that you'd like to share?***

At Princeton, I took engaging courses in Math, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, History, English, Psychology, and Engineering. From a distance, my initial take on philosophy fell into the category of amusing quotes such as "the purpose of a philosopher is to pass his headache on to the reader" or "the purpose of philosophy is to distinguish itself from anything that is useful." In the end, no courses came remotely close to the intellectual stimulation and enjoyment I experienced in my

Philosophy courses. Philosophy also honed my analytic ability, an ability I have drawn upon virtually every day in my professional work.

***What did you do immediately after leaving Princeton?***

I tutored for a year and then went on to Harvard Law School where I also spent time teaching in the University's Math Department. (Evidently you don't need to major in Math at Princeton to teach Math at Harvard.)

***What do you do now?***

I run both a 250-tutor tutoring company I founded called Advantage Testing and its public service arm, the Advantage Testing Foundation. In my AT Foundation work, I have been privileged to work with some remarkable leaders in higher education. Together, we are committed to delivering intense, innovative programs that promote socioeconomic diversity in the nation's leadership pool. Joining me on the AT Foundation's Board of Trustees are President Shirley Tilghman, NYU President John Sexton, and Dean of Harvard Law School Martha Minow. Former trustees include U.S. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan '81 who served as Vice President of the Advantage Testing Foundation while she was Dean of Harvard Law School.

***Final words?***

Many years ago, like my brother (who is now a Professor of Medicine), I was headed down my extended family's well worn path to medical school. One summer, while working in a university Genetics lab, I couldn't bring myself to bleed some quivering mice. Add to that my general discomfort around blood, pus, and pain, and I realized that I may not be well suited to being a doctor. Apart from proposing to my wife, majoring in Philosophy at Princeton remains the best

decision of my life. Reading and discussing philosophy made me truly happy. From brilliant professors who could teach and inspire to graduate students and fellow undergraduates, the Princeton Philosophy Department fostered a lively, informal, supportive, pleasantly quirky, and intellectually intimate community. Rigorous and creative thought flourished. The many talented students who majored in philosophy could have pursued myriad alternative academic paths but came together in their love of the subject. We had no quizzes or busy work. Rather, the department was characterized by thoughtful reflection, collegiality, smart students, and absolutely superb professors.



**NANCY JEFFREY '87**

***When you first came to Princeton what did you think your major would be?***

History, Politics or the Wilson School. I had no idea what philosophy was and had never read a philosophical text before coming to Princeton. I actually spent six weeks in the Wilson School before switching my major.

***What made you decide to major in philosophy?***

I found I loved the emphasis on analytical thinking, rigorous argument and clear writing. It had a kind of beauty that I think other people find in math. I also liked the way it dealt with some of the most fundamental questions of the nature of matter and consciousness that

now have been taken up in modern physics, psychology and other areas. Also, I was active in the school newspaper and thought I wanted to be a journalist—a very empirically-oriented job. I wanted my academic major to feel very different.

***Are there any stories about your experience as a philosophy major at Princeton that you'd like to share?***

Generally speaking, I always felt very cool telling people I was a philosophy major. And I have found in life that former philosophy majors are generally cool people.

***What did you do immediately after leaving Princeton?***

I went to Oxford on a Marshall Scholarship where I studied at Christ Church College and earned a second BA in PPE (philosophy, politics and economics)

***What do you do now?***

After a 10-year stint at the Wall Street Journal, I am now a senior editor at *PEOPLE* magazine, where I run and edit stories on breaking news (Haiti earthquake, Hurricane Sandy), medical, "heroes among us"—inspiring stories of people who help others—and the British royals. I was the senior editor who ran our coverage of the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

***Final words?***

My experience as a Princeton philosophy major taught me to think clearly, argue persuasively and write clearly. It's a wonderful foundation for a career in journalism, law, business and any other number of fields. And in concerning itself directly and indirectly with history, science, art, psychology and other disciplines, it's a simply great basis for an appreciation of and ability to explore other disciplines as an educated adult in the modern world.



**ANDREW STRAUSS '87**

***When you first came to Princeton what did you think your major would be?***

Either Mathematics or Philosophy. It was a toss up.

***What made you decide to major in philosophy?***

Though I majored in Mathematics, I took more Philosophy courses than Mathematics courses, and my thesis advisor was in the Philosophy department. Though the disciplines have their formal similarities, Philosophy grapples with the most fundamentally important aspects of our lives; Math, well, doesn't. On any given day, I'd rather learn or try to prove something about what we are and what matters than about a mathematical object.

***Are there any stories about your experience as a philosophy major at Princeton that you'd like to share?***

I studied in small classes with two professors who are surely amongst the top 50 and arguably amongst the top ten most important philosophers of the 20th century. That's the amazing story.

***What did you do immediately after leaving Princeton?***

I went to UCLA on a Mellon Fellowship to work on a Philosophy PhD. A year later I returned to Princeton, and received my MA and "ABD" from Princeton in Philosophy.

***What do you do now?***

After a dozen years in Private Equity, rising to Managing Partner at The Riverside Company, I now run a 200-person litigation support business founded by my grandparents, and I spend as much time as I can with my family.

***Final words?***

In my career in finance, I always preferred to hire a humanities student, because they have been trained to think broadly and creatively and within as large a context as is possible. Princeton students are blessed in that they don't need to study a trade: they will find great jobs and rise regardless of their major. The best reason to study Philosophy at Princeton is that you can.



**HEI-OCK KIM '89**

***When you first came to Princeton what did you think your major would be?***

I honestly had no idea what it would be. I had played classical piano seriously all my life, and was very excited by the opportunity to explore new disciplines.

***What made you decide to major in philosophy?***

I originally lucked into taking my first philosophy course by meaning to avoid taking math, which I'm horrible at. I soon discovered that I loved how studying philosophy taught me to lend structure to

my thought process, which naturally tended to range far and wide looking for all possible answers to questions and also was, admittedly, pretty argumentative. In addition, I knew that a philosophy degree would allow me to consider a variety of career options, such as law or business, if I decided to pursue something other than music.

***Are there any stories about your experience as a philosophy major at Princeton that you'd like to share?***

Well, the fact that I found my Logic course completely illogical is something I only share to make people laugh. On the other hand, German philosophy suited me to a tee – perhaps as an echo of the fact that Beethoven and Brahms were among the composers I understood best at the time.

***What did you do immediately after leaving Princeton?***

I went to The Juilliard School of Music to earn my Masters degree in piano performance. No, I didn't end up pursuing law or business.

***What do you do now?***

After earning my doctorate in piano performance and spending a couple decades performing and teaching, I took a hiatus from the professional life to see if I had left other interesting career stones unturned. Following a keen interest in nature, I dabbled briefly in the world of marine biology, and now am responding to a long-buried passion for organic gardening and native landscape design.

***Final words?***

Listen carefully, and express yourself clearly. People respond best when they believe you've truly heard what they've said, and when they believe they truly understand what you've said.



**LIONEL McPHERSON '90**

***When you first came to Princeton what did you think your major would be?***

Philosophy and English. I soon learned that Princeton allowed only one major, presumably because of the senior thesis requirement. I chose Philosophy but also took the courses of an English major.

***What made you decide to major in philosophy?***

Late in high school we read some existentialist literature, which I found deep and exciting. I followed up by reading William Barrett's *Irrational Man*, which sustained my enthusiasm. My freshman year, which I did at Stanford, I signed up for the Philosophy track of the Western Civilization requirement. The manner of thinking and argument in Philosophy, as much as the mostly standard subject matter, proved an excellent fit for my sensibilities.

Somewhat naively, I realized that one could have a job being a philosopher—which I decided I might rather pursue as compared to continuing on a path toward medical school.

***Are there any stories about your experience as a philosophy major at Princeton that you'd like to share?***

In the spring semester of my junior year, Professor John Burgess alerted me that I was in luck: they had just hired Richard Moran, an analytically-trained junior philosopher who, like me, was into "alternative" connections with literature and critical theory. Professor Burgess was right. My senior year—with Professor Moran as my thesis adviser—became the most intellectually rewarding experience I have had. When I was a graduate student in Philosophy at Harvard, Professor Moran moved to that department and served on my dissertation committee. Basically, Dick (he finally convinced me to stop calling him by title) is my philosophical mentor, though we work on different issues. I am grateful that Princeton had the good sense and ecumenical spirit to hire him.

***What did you do immediately after leaving Princeton?***

I worked in New York for two years: as an arts and media critic for the now-defunct *Brooklyn City Sun* newspaper, and as the "race desk" coordinator for the progressive media-watch group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). My plan was to go to graduate school in Philosophy after a break and some experience in the non-academic world—which is what I did.

***What do you do now?***

I'm an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University. My areas of specialization are moral, political, and social philosophy.

***Final words?***

Not yet. I have quite a lot to say in the meantime.