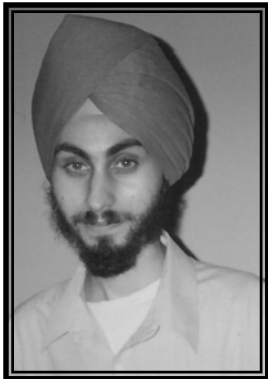


# ALUMNI UPDATE

---



When chatty strangers and inquisitive elders discover that I majored in philosophy at the University of Miami, some give an approving nod and proceed to wax parapsychological or sing the praises of yoga. Others give a disapproving frown and confidently dismiss philosophy as useless. To borrow from law, approving mystics commit misdemeanors by representing their pursuits as philosophy. Philosophy is a rational method of addressing issues that do not admit of empirical resolution. Its practitioners may treat mystical propositions as objects of *philosophical* study, but only if such treatment is devoted to systematic and fair examination of all arguments for and against such propositions. Philosophers may also advance propositions about mystical propositions, but such advancement counts as philosophy only if it is supported by minimally good reasons. To be sure, I only quarrel with approving mystics who fail to abide by the philosophical method. While such mystics arouse mild irritation for representing their pursuits as philosophy, disapproving skeptics arouse outright alarm. To borrow from law, disapproving skeptics commit felonies by doubting the utility of philosophy. Being felonious, disapproving skepticism demands more attention.

When someone denies the utility of philosophy, they self-defeatingly corner or contradict themselves. Denying the utility of philosophy is arguably akin to saying that philosophy is impractical or a huge waste of time; it is arguably akin to saying that one should neither examine arguments nor support propositions with minimally good reasons. If disapproving skeptics are pressed to justify their belief in the uselessness of philosophy, consistency demands that they refrain from indulging in philosophy—in other words, consistency demands that they refrain from supporting their belief with minimally good reasons. When pressed, a principled skeptic should remain silent. Alas, disapproving skeptics do not corner themselves like this; they generally contradict themselves. When pressed, they generally say that philosophy lacks utility because it is impractical or a huge waste of time. By doing so, they offer reasons for their belief; however, by offering reasons for their belief, they self-contradictorily indulge in philosophy, the very enterprise at which they so contemptuously sneeze. Even if I forgive the disapproving skeptic for contradicting himself, I must address his claim that philosophy lacks utility. To this end, I will devote the rest of this essay to explaining how useful philosophy has been to me.

My undergraduate studies in philosophy at the University of Miami were inherently interesting, encompassing ancient philosophy, modern philosophy, symbolic logic, ethics, philosophy of law, metaphysics, philosophy of biology, and philosophy of education. My studies stimulated interest in other disciplines and led to the adoption of a healthily critical disposition toward almost everything. My studies also empowered me to approach problems creatively and from multiple angles, to analyze competing arguments, to penetrate dense prose, and to articulate complex ideas, among other things. All of the skills and habits of mind that I developed at the University of Miami's Philosophy Department are useful—and indispensable—in professional contexts and also for citizenship.

I am nowadays undertaking legal study at William & Mary Law School. Like philosophy, legal study and law practice demand analytic acuity and reward open-mindedness. Happily, my exposure to philosophy eased the transition from college to law school. As well, philosophy plays an important role in my extracurricular life. In my spare time, I read, write, think, and argue about a variety

of subjects: the ideal society, the ethics of procreation, the (non)existence of God, the sources and scope of human rights, the sources and scope of moral obligation, the nature of optimism and pessimism, and then some. Many of these issues crossed my mind during an internship last summer with the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre in New Delhi, where I learned and wrote about state-sponsored terrorism, child labor, and the methods by which states circumvent their international obligations, among other things. These subjects raise a host of important questions that admit of philosophical engagement and resolution: May states violate the human rights of a few individuals to secure the majority from terrorism? Should we oppose child labor when such labor is a crucial source of income for desperate families? How do we reconcile international legal norms with diverse cultural norms?

As a human being, I regard myself as having a choice between substantially retiring from the world and substantially engaging with the world. Having chosen the latter course, I hope to use my ever-developing philosophical skills for the *use* and benefit of people for whom advocacy and concern are wanting. If all goes as planned, philosophy will be useful not only to me but also to others. This should give disapproving skeptics pause.

*Rajdeep Singh Jolly (BA '03) is a magna cum laude graduate of the University of Miami's Philosophy Department.*

---

## ALUMNI UPDATE FORM

NAME : \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_

NEWS : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please send to:** Department of Philosophy, PO BOX 248054, Coral Gables, FL 33124-4670