

## 14: Global Finitude

### *A Conversation with Graham Harman*

*In this conversation, Graham Harman begins by reflecting on the status of Speculative Realism a decade on from the conference that established it as a new and exciting movement in philosophy. Although Kant attracted a fair amount of critical attention from within this movement, Harman makes it clear that Kant's legacy is far from a catastrophic one and goes on to explore the pivotal role Kant plays in his object-oriented ontology (OOO) in which it is argued that the Kantian thing-in-itself is an inevitable aspect of any relation (rather than simply of the human-world relation as in Kant). Arguably, Harman suggests, OOO is the only contemporary philosophical movement that swears by the thing-in-itself.*

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**We find ourselves ten years on from the famous conference at Goldsmith's at which the Speculative Realism movement was founded. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on your contribution to this turn towards**

**realism in continental philosophy which has expanded and diversified so much over the past decade.**

The enduring importance of Speculative Realism is that, within the idiom of continental philosophy, the realism question had always been marginalized. One can point to Nicolai Hartmann as a *bona fide* continental realist in the early part of the last century, but of course Hartmann's influence has been near zero compared with that of Husserl and Heidegger. These two established the standard approach to the realism question, which was to call realism a 'pseudo-problem' insofar as we are 'always already outside ourselves' in intending objects (Husserl) or being-in-the-world (Heidegger). The current upswing of continental realism dates as far as I know to the early 1990s with Maurizio Ferraris's realist rebellion against his former teacher Gianni Vattimo. After that, I do believe the next important date was 2002, with Manuel DeLanda's realist interpretation of Deleuze (*Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*) and my own realist reading of Heidegger (*Tool-Being*). Notice that while DeLanda and I have both built up significant readerships, neither of us has had much success with the communities to which our books were addressed: most Deleuzeans were not persuaded by DeLanda that Deleuze was a realist; almost no Heidegger scholars have shown sympathy for my claim that Heidegger was a realist in spite of himself, from start to finish, and not just in some lonely corner of his later period. This shows to what extent realism is still a shunned doctrine in continental philosophy, even though it has always been a normal available option for analytic thought. DeLanda once told me that to call oneself a realist in continental circles was for many years equivalent to calling oneself a child molester. It's no longer that bad, though realists are still a stigmatized minority.

**Given the often critical attention paid to Kant by those within the speculative realism tradition (summed up in**

**Meillassoux's evocative phrase 'the Kantian catastrophe'), I was hoping you could say a few things about Kant and what role, if any, he plays in your philosophy.**

Kant was not a catastrophe. In any case, I wouldn't agree that Speculative Realism was built on a shared aversion to Kant. Meillassoux phrases it that way because in his quest for absolute knowledge through the mathematization of the primary qualities of things, he is a natural enemy of Kantian finitude and the thing-in-itself. By contrast, object-oriented ontology (OOO, pronounced 'Triple O' rather than 'oh oh oh') fully endorses the thing-in-itself, and claims that Kant's real error was to hold that the thing-in-itself is something that merely haunts human cognitive and sensory powers. OOO claims instead that the thing-in-itself is an inevitable aspect of *any* relation. When fire burns cotton, even when it succeeds in destroying it, the fire does not make contact with the cotton directly, but only with a phenomenal version of it. This bothers people because it smells like panpsychism, and the central dogma of modern philosophy is that humans and everything else are so utterly different in kind that it is a sin against reason to approach them both in the same way.

The real problem with Kant is the notion that humans and everything else are two different *kinds* of entities that must never be mixed. Bruno Latour, by contrast, tacitly assumes that they must *always* be mixed. But in fact, sometimes they mix and sometimes they don't. Hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water even if no humans are on the scene; they form a compound. But humans combining with water (in drinking, swimming, showering) also form a new human-water compound with an innate character of its own. Water is a thing-in-itself, but so is swimming. The thing-in-itself is not ruined by the mere involvement of human ingredients, but only by the assumption that human theoretical or practical access to the things is enough to exhaust

them. Far from being an anti-Kantian position, OOO expands Kant into the inanimate realm, rejecting the standard German Idealist tactic of claiming that the thing-in-itself is a contradictory notion.

In short, we need to move on from the long modern duopoly in which there are two and only two kinds of things: human thought on one side, and *everything else* on the other. Most of the claims to ‘overcome’ the modern subject-object dualism are really just attempts to glue these two pieces together without ever questioning that these are the two fundamental pieces. What about world-world interactions rather than just those of the human-world sort? What about meteorites striking the surface of distant planets unseen by any human? Philosophers generally cede such issues to the natural sciences: “Let scientists explain the interaction of inanimate things. They will never be able to explain the human realm in the same terms!” But then the neurophilosophers come along and try to do just that. Philosophers made a bad bargain when they exiled themselves into a purely human territory. Even when they claim that human and world are mutually determining, humans are always still part of the picture. This is what needs to change.

**I was hoping you could clarify your idea that the thing-in-itself ‘haunts’ any relation such that, to take your example, “when fire burns cotton, even when it succeeds in destroying it, the fire does not make contact with the cotton directly, but only with a phenomenal version of it.” I’m afraid I just don’t get it!**

It’s hard to grasp at first, because we’ve been culturally trained not to think in *metaphysical* terms about the inanimate world: “The natural sciences are doing so well with non-human matter, so why bother?” Let’s start with Kant’s own conception of the thing-in-itself. Human beings are finite. We experience the world only in terms of space, time,

and the twelve categories of the understanding. We don't know if the world is really the way we perceive it to be, because we can never step outside of a human mind in order to compare reality with our understanding of reality. Now, there are a great many people who reject this argument of Kant and deny that there is a thing-in-itself beyond our grasp. Nonetheless, they all at least *understand what Kant is talking about*. It is not difficult to see what Kant meant: human experience is limited, and there is some dark and unknowable reality that haunts it from some inaccessible realm beyond perception.

But when OOO says that the same thing happens at the inanimate level, things get a bit harder for the imagination. What I claim is that when a human perceives cotton, Kant was right: we perceive the cotton only in a limited human way. But OOO goes a step further: when *fire* encounters cotton, it also encounters the cotton in a limited fire-ish manner. The problem is that Kant and his followers mix two separate issues: 1) finitude and 2) sentience. They seem to think that the reason humans are finite is *because* they are sentient, that we are limited only *because* we experience things in time and space. But these are actually two separate questions. The reason objects are finite is because no object (not even God, by the way) is able to step away from itself and relate to things in the way that something else does. It makes no difference that fire and cotton don't seem to be 'conscious' in the way that animals are. Finitude has nothing to do with consciousness. It has to do with the fact that nothing is able to encounter another thing without translating it into its own terms. Fire encounters cotton in fire-terms, unable to interact with cotton-properties that lie beyond the scope of fire. And humans encounter cotton in human-terms, unable to interact with cotton-properties that lie beyond the scope of humans. Stated differently, finitude is not rooted in *consciousness*, but in any *relation* whatsoever. In any relation between any two things, there is

no direct contact between them, since everything is just as finite as humans are. It may also turn out that there is some primitive form of experience in inanimate objects too, as Whitehead and others argue, but that's not essential to my argument at this stage.

Why is this point so important for OOO? It's important because it's the first step in allowing us to escape the limitations of modern philosophy. Medieval philosophy revolved around a difference between two different *kinds* of entities: the Creator, and everything created. Modern philosophy revolved around a difference between a new pair of two *kinds* of entities: thought and the world, mind and matter, or however one wishes to phrase it. But the more important difference is between objects and relations. This distinction works globally, since everything is itself and also is in relation to other things in finite/translated form, whether we are speaking of humans, fire, or cotton balls. Medieval philosophy posits the Creator as the single most ultra-special type of thing that exists, and everything else derives from it. Modern philosophy repeats the gesture, but with human thought in place of the Creator. But OOO offers a theory that holds good for the Creator, for humans, for cotton balls, for reptiles, and for subatomic particles. We've only scratched the surface of the implications of this shift. Meanwhile, the modern split between thought and everything else continues to govern even those philosophies that explicitly claim to have overcome it: phenomenology, new materialism, even Latour's actor-network theory (which has made the greatest steps toward breaking free of modernity).

**The poet Heinrich von Kleist famously committed suicide in part due to the despair induced by Kant's transcendental idealism, writing that "my one, my highest goal has sunk from sight, and I have no other"; the goal in question being knowledge of things in themselves, absolute and independent of us, as opposed to the**

**scraps of appearances with which we are left to content ourselves following Kant's transcendental philosophy. Meillassoux is presumably on Kleist's side in his reference to 'the Kantian catastrophe'. Would it be fair to say that you see this yearning for the in itself as a peripheral issue or even a non-issue?**

Kleist's difficulty was the one that plagues most melancholics: their focus on what is inaccessible, beyond their reach. And OOO is often accused of leading nowhere but to a similar melancholia of the lost object. But that's just a start. Though we can't *know* the thing-in-itself, we nonetheless *are* a thing-in-itself: Kant already saw this in his ethical philosophy, which is based on a human free will that can never be proven on the purely phenomenal level. Yet there's more. Not only *is* each of us a thing-in-itself, we can also *become* countless others. Kant fell a half-step short of seeing this, since he was so focused on purifying consciousness from any attachment to the object.

Max Scheler, a colourful German philosopher of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, saw the problem with Kant's ethics: it leaves no room for ethical objects, such as the objects of serious devotion or passion, or the objects of a personal or national vocation (chess, ballet and many other things for the Russians; sweeping collective fantasies and dreams for the Americans). Through such passions we actually form part of a new object by entering into union with the objects of our ethical seriousness. The same with artworks, as Kant again missed in his *Critique of Judgment* because he was so concerned to put both the beautiful and the sublime on the side of humans, uncontaminated by any object. The modern era defined and measured itself too much in terms of what it *knew*. Perhaps the next era will be more about what we create when we surrender ourselves to our fascinations and take them even more seriously than we still think we take knowledge.

**I am intrigued by your comment that “the next era will be more about what we create when we surrender ourselves to our fascinations and take them even more seriously than we still think we take knowledge”. I was hoping you could say something about your vision of a philosophy that does not place knowledge as the highest goal of its enquiry.**

Put simply, I don't think philosophy is really about knowledge, any more than the arts are about knowledge. It's strange that this has been forgotten, since Socrates – and I would call him the first philosopher, not his pre-Socratic forerunners – made no secret of his ignorance, his lack of knowledge of anything. *Philosophia* in Greek means 'love of wisdom,' not wisdom itself. Much later Nicholas of Cusa called it 'learned ignorance,' at the moment when medieval philosophy was passing into early modern philosophy. Most people are willing to admit that art is not primarily a transmission of knowledge, despite its obvious cognitive value. Then why not philosophy? Probably because philosophy since the dawn of modern thought – meaning the 1600s – has allowed itself to be intimidated by the great strides made by mathematical physics, and has internalized the notion that if philosophy does not emulate the sciences then it cannot be of any value.

As I see it, knowledge comes in only two basic forms. When someone asks you what something is, you can answer either by 1) explaining what it is made of, or 2) explaining what it does. For example, a few hours ago, a non-native speaker of English asked me what a 'seam' is; she was reading some sewing instructions regarding the cushions on her couch. My explanation involved a bit of both 1) and 2). You can say that the seam is made of stitches at the point where the surface of the cushion meets its side. Or you can say what the seam's purpose is. But these are both just ways of recognizing the seam, and both of them fail to give

us the seam in its own right, over and above what it's made of and 'under and beneath' what it does. In a case as trivial as this one, it might sound silly to ask what the seam-in-itself might be. But what about cases that Socrates discusses, such as friendship, virtue, or justice? Here it is clear not only that Socrates cannot tell us exactly what these are, but that there is no way to understand, say, justice, only by talking about the various elements of justice or the various positive effects and punishments that result from it. These are just indicators that help us find it when we run across it. Art may be an even clearer case. If someone asks us to give an analysis of Picasso's *Guernica*, we most likely aren't going to describe the physical properties of the canvas and the pigment of which it is made. But neither is it enough to say that *Guernica* was meant as a stirring protest against the Luftwaffe's brutal intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

When someone explains something by reducing it downward to its pieces, I call it 'undermining.' When they do the opposite and reduce something upward to its effects, I call it 'overmining.' When they do both at once, which is usually the case, I call it 'duomining.' All knowledge involves some sort of 'mining.' Philosophy and the arts are not a form of knowledge, and hence they aim at the thing insofar as it is *more* than the knowledge we have of it, not identical with that knowledge.

**So what resources would a 'post-knowledge' philosophy utilize? What would its aims and goals be? And to whom would it be in service (if not the natural sciences, for example)?**

Philosophy must serve no one, and in turn it must expect no one else to serve. Everyone is quick to celebrate the fact that philosophy is no longer the handmaid of theology, as it was said to be in the Middle Ages. But they still want

philosophy to be the handmaid of something else: usually either brain science or the political Left. This won't work. Since philosophy is not a form of knowledge, as Socrates already taught us, it cannot be the servant of disciplines that claim to know. This is related to the reason that art should also not be the handmaid of theology, Leftism, or brain science. Knowledge generally fights forward by way of trench warfare against what it regards as the paramount symbol of ignorance. Darwinian evolutionary theory is haunted by the image of drooling Creationists; Marxism by the specter of evil capitalist moneybaggers; 'scientific' psychology by the supposedly unscientific character of psychoanalysis; contemporary rationalism by the purported dangers of 'New Age Obscurantism.' Philosophy proceeds differently, by outflanking all trench wars of this kind. It seeks neither knowledge nor victory, but is always on the lookout for *surprises*. And if you see yourself primarily as a soldier of Rationality, of Enlightenment, of Justice, of Truth, or of anything else, then you have already sacrificed *reality* in those cases where it may challenge the ideal you seek. The philosopher is the one who never sacrifices reality, and this is what is always done by those who are sure that they already know what it is, and merely wish to annihilate or silence those who have not yet grasped the shining truth.

As for what resources post-knowledge philosophy would utilize, I'll start negatively here as well. Philosophy should not primarily be about 'arguments,' though the whole of Anglo-American analytic philosophy is constructed on the basis of this faith. There have never been more 'rational arguments' in the world than we have today; they are now a commodity reaching the level of basic grain stockpiles or sand dunes. And yet, it would be hard to claim that this is the greatest era of philosophy the world has ever seen. There are several problems with viewing philosophy as being primarily about arguments. First of all, arguments are attempts to prove something through a chain of statements,

yet it has long been noted that such chains of proof depend on the validity of their initial premises, which are never proven by argumentation but must be either assented to or rejected. Second, and more importantly, philosophy has less to do with proof than with being able to distinguish the important from the unimportant. There are some brilliant philosophers who nonetheless waste their talents on incredibly narrow technical problems. Third and finally, proof is not necessarily the most important philosophical activity, since philosophy is not like geometry, deducing non-obvious findings from unshakeable first principles. This is a seventeenth century prejudice that has somehow managed to survive into the twenty-first century. It is easy to imagine a philosopher who mostly makes assertions rather than giving proofs (Nietzsche is like this, and some would say Wittgenstein as well) who are nonetheless obviously more interesting than a run-of-the-mill philosophical technician who 'proves' any number of conclusions.

It also follows from my claims that doing philosophy requires some aesthetic talent. Few people will appreciate this claim, because 'aesthetics' has been widely trivialized into meaning cosmetic decoration, style without substance, and so forth. But OOO grants far more importance to aesthetics than this. For us, aesthetics is about the separation between objects and their qualities, which we take to be the single most important topic of metaphysics.

**I am keen to pursue what you have just opened up, but before we do this I was hoping you could attempt an answer to the following question: what is an object?**

In the minds of many people, the word 'object' has connotations such as 'physical,' 'durable,' 'inanimate,' 'different from the human subject,' and so forth. For OOO, none of these connotations are accepted. When we say 'object,' we simply mean anything that is not exhausted by being reduced

downward to its components or upward to its effects. As mentioned, every form of knowledge is either about a) what a thing is made of, or b) what it does. We call these two strategies ‘undermining’ and ‘overmining.’ And since knowledge is essential to the survival of the human race, so are both forms of ‘mining.’ We need to know the constituents of the human body or the effects of various chemicals. The mistake is to think that cognition cannot do anything else. It can. It can give us indirect access to the reality of objects insofar as these objects are irreducible to either of the two kinds of knowledge.

It is also important to note that OOO distinguishes between two different kinds of objects. *Real* objects are those that exist apart from any observer or any other entity that might encounter them, while *sensual* objects are those that exist only in the experience of some other entity. An obvious case would be the hallucination of something like a unicorn: the unicorn is an *object*, because it is a unit in our experience and not just a ‘bundle of qualities’ as David Hume thought. 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology did the service of showing that even the objects of our experience are units, since we see them from different sides and different angles from one second to the next, yet they remain the same unified things. In turn, there are also two kinds of qualities: the real and the sensual again. This gives us the basic stock of elements from which OOO is built. We have real and sensual objects (RO, SO) and real and sensual qualities (RQ, SQ). That gives us four basic permutations of objects and qualities. You can have RO-RQ, RO-SQ, SO-RQ, SO-SQ. When you start playing around with these combinations as I do, you find that an awful lot falls into place.

**Given that you consider exploration of this interplay between objects and qualities to be the single most important topic of metaphysics, I was hoping you could give some specific examples of the kinds of questions ob-**

**ject-oriented metaphysicians may be asking. What can philosophy do with objects?**

First of all, philosophy needs to shift to the study of *compound* objects, whether or not those objects contain humans as part of the compound. Modern philosophy, and modern civilization more generally, was too much about purifying different *kinds* of entities from one another: science must eliminate the arbitrary influence of human observers on nature-in-itself (though quantum theory complicates this picture considerably), and the human sciences must talk about purely arbitrary projections of personal preferences and values without any non-human contribution. Latour dealt this sort of modernism a death blow in *We Have Never Been Modern*, but unfortunately he has a tendency to counter the nature/culture divide by demanding that nature and culture always come as a pair. But no, they don't. Many compound objects (and all objects are compounds, made of parts) do not contain humans at all. Take the sun, for example. Latour has the tendency to replace the sun itself with an account of how humans came to know it and learn things about it, which is not the same thing. Sun plus human is a different compound object from the sun in its own right, and to this extent scientific realists are right to smell something they don't like in Latour's work (though I will defend him to the end against cheap dismissals from such people).

But let's get back to what I take to be the real intent of your question, which is to ask about the more concrete stakes of the turn toward objects. Many of the most obvious stakes involve art and architecture, but since everyone knows OOO is involved deeply with those disciplines, let's look at two others. In 2014 I published *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political*. What I saw when writing that book is that modern politics sees itself structured around the difference between Left and Right, a distinction that clearly emerged in the French Revolution. But the deeper distinction in mod-

ern political theory, as I see it, is between Truth Politics and Power Politics, a distinction that crosses the one between Left and Right. Truth Politics thinks it already knows the political truth, which is sadly withheld from implementation due to the innate competitive corruption of society (Rousseau), greedy class interests of the exploiting rich (Marx), or the ignorance of the dangerous mob that will always kill a Socrates and must therefore not be told the whole truth (Leo Strauss). Power Politics tells us that there is no truth, that might makes right, and that it is a matter either of overpowering and outfoxing one's opponents so as not to be subjugated (Machiavelli), delivering all power to the sovereign so as to prevent constant bloody civil war (Hobbes), or allowing the sovereign to declare a state of exception in which we stop talking to the enemy and simply defeat them due to the existential threat they pose (Carl Schmitt). But what all these diverse positions share in common is the idea that politics consists in *knowledge* of the best political state of things. They fail to incorporate our inevitable *ignorance* about political matters. The funny thing about Latour is that he begins as a remorseless power politician, praising Machiavelli and Hobbes. But then he flips in about 1991, and realizes that Hobbesian power needs to be deconstructed just as much as the textbook picture of natural science does. On a similar note, OOO invites us to exit the sphere of modern idealist philosophy that gave rise both to Marx and to a number of right-wing parallels to Marx, and incorporate the impossibility of knowledge into our political reflections. Knowledge must be replaced with *reality* as a political consideration, and this is why I dislike characterizations of Donald Trump as a 'post-truth' figure. For who has this truth that Trump supposedly ignores? He should be seen, instead, as a 'post-reality' figure. The same reality can support a number of alternative truths, but one must be in contact with that reality to be given any credence. In any case, OOO tries to provide a new way to look at modern political theory, by returning focus to our political *ignorance* as the centre of politics.

Another place where the implications of OOO have been worked out in more detail is in my 2016 book *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory*. There I take the example of the Dutch East India Company and try to show that the history of the Company should not be read in terms of ‘events,’ as has been so fashionable in philosophy for a while now. Many events that look big on paper are not so big on the ground. Certain events, I argue, are ‘symbiotic’ (in the sense of the late, great Lynn Margulis) and therefore irreversibly create new objects out of two previously independent ones. My thesis is that every object goes through roughly 5-6 symbioses before reaching mature form, after which they ripen before decaying and dying. Only OOO can offer the basis for such a theory, because only OOO lays such stress on the compound character of objects, and on the fact that most relations are trivial and only some are symbiotic. I’m happy with the book, but the theory it contains has a lot more room to expand, and I am optimistic that the humanities and social sciences will find much to draw on here.

**It is clear that object-oriented metaphysics is extremely ambitious in terms of its scope. Given that Kant is generally seen as a curtailer of metaphysical ambitions, do you see OOO as a break from Kant or a radicalization, and thus extension, of Kant? In short, what kind of future does Kant have within the framework of OOO?**

Rather than endless attempts to overcome Kantian finitude, whether through Hegelian dialectics, pragmatist wishy-washiness, or a resurgent French rationalism, we need to accept the finitude and simply deny that humans alone exhibit it. Finitude is the very stuff of relations, not just the stuff of human perception and cognition. This is a crucial step forward made by Kant, even though it is one of his least popular insights today. Is there another philosophical movement besides OOO that swears by the thing-in-itself? I can’t think of any at the moment.

Otherwise, Kant gives us a formalist program that we *should not* follow any longer. In both ethics and the arts, he is too keen to purify human consciousness from any contamination by the outside world, and though he did so for a very good reason (to preserve the *autonomy* of ethics and aesthetics from peripheral concerns) he paid too high a price. As I mentioned earlier, Max Scheler pointed the way for ethics by making it about a love or passion for what is *different* from us, which Kant wrongly denounced as ‘heteronomy.’ Scheler showed that each person’s and even each nation’s ethical vocation is unique, though not all such vocations are admirable, since some or all involve some degenerate component.

In metaphysics, the first thing that will happen once we have truly worked ourselves free of Kant is that all the philosophical disputes he denounced as impossible – Is there a simplest atom of matter or can it be divided infinitely downward? Does the world have a beginning in time and space or do both extend infinitely? – will come back from the dead. The reason Kant thought we could never answer such questions is because they pertain to the thing-in-itself, which we cannot access directly. But this assumes that there’s either direct access or none, and Kant makes clear that he thinks all knowledge is ‘discursive’ knowledge, meaning the kind that you can put into literal propositions. I’d agree with Kant that this is impossible, but here he is missing not only the *aesthetic* way of referring to things indirectly, but even the *philosophical* way of doing so pioneered by Socrates. Yes, the Socrates portrayed by Plato and Xenophon is always very clear, but he never gives us a conclusive prose definition of the meaning of justice, friendship, virtue, or anything else. This has been missed because everyone is in such a hurry to turn philosophy into a science. They should watch out, because they are on the wrong side of history.

**As a final question, do you have any predictions about where philosophy could go in the future?**

I often ask myself what earlier figures in philosophy, the arts, and the sciences would think about more recent masters in those fields. Would Aristotle recognize Heidegger's *Being and Time* as great philosophy? It's doubtful, since even Edmund Husserl (Heidegger's teacher and immediate predecessor among great philosophers) never really got the point of the book. What about in the arts? The same holds here. I read once about a conversation Matisse and Picasso had about the emerging Jackson Pollock. Picasso was quick to denounce Pollock's art, while Matisse admitted that he didn't grasp it, and merely added the qualification that it is always hardest to judge those *younger* than we are. What would Newton have thought of Einstein? It's not clear that great figures in the natural sciences would be any better equipped to understand the importance of later figures than can be done in philosophy or the arts. One of my greatest fears, in fact, is reaching a point at which I simply can't understand what younger thinkers are doing. But maybe that's just inevitable.

But there's one thing I'm fairly sure about when looking at the future of philosophy. As there is no linear progress, certain concepts or strategies that are thought to be dead will eventually return in new form. Even the greatest philosophers go in and out of fashion. During my student years, everyone held Plato at arm's length. Everyone was 'reversing' Plato, or 'overturning' Plato, or accusing others of being closet Platonists. That stopped at some point, for reasons I still don't fully understand. More recently, it has been Aristotle and Husserl who are the least popular great classics. Few people want anything to do with them, perhaps because they both speak highly of 'essence' – a pariah concept at the moment, though one I don't think we can do without. And then there is the strange case of Deleuze. In

my early student years, he was considered just an irreverent smart-ass of the same order as Jean Baudrillard, while the 'serious' people were all working on Derrida and Foucault. Well, Deleuze's star really rose in the mid-1990s at around the time of his death, and now this irreverent smart-ass is spoken of with the greatest admiration as a sage for all time, even by some analytic philosophers. It is difficult to predict what the next cycle will do for the reputation of various philosophers. But if philosophers were publicly traded stocks, I would sell Derrida and Foucault, both of whom rose on the wave of wider cultural trends that I expect to fade away. Maybe I'll even live long enough to test that prediction.