



All Souls College

GERALD (JERRY) ALLAN COHEN

BA McGill; BPhil, MA Oxford; FBA

14 April 1941–5 August 2009

Reader and Lecturer, University College London, 1963–84;  
Chichele Professor of Social & Political Theory, University  
of Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College, 1985–2008;  
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Addresses by  
Professor Philippe Van Parijs  
Professor John Roemer  
Myles Burnyeat, CBE  
Family Tribute  
Professor Timothy Scanlon

A Commemoration on  
Saturday, 19 June 2010

Philippe Van Parijs

OLD LIBRARY, OCTOBER 1978. After a year in Berkeley I'm back in Oxford to complete my DPhil. I look at the lecture programme for Michaelmas term and what do I see? A seminar on *Historical Materialism*, by Professor C. Taylor and Mr G.A. Cohen. Never heard of this G.A. Cohen, but should be interesting, I thought.

I was not the only one. On Friday, 20 October 1978 at 5p.m., I was sitting on the floor in the packed Old Library seminar room of All Souls College, along with a crowd of other people, including Charles Taylor himself, waiting for this Mr G.A. Cohen, waiting, waiting.<sup>1</sup> He finally appeared half an hour late. The train from London was late. He had run all the way from the station. Puffing and sweating, he soon undertook to give a glimpse of the main claims in his then forthcoming first book, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, the galley proofs of which were going to serve as the basic text of the seminar.

I cannot say that I had already guessed on that evening that no one would have a more formidable impact on my intellectual life than this young Reader at UCL with abundant grey hair, who was struggling to recover his breath while explaining that the central propositions of Marx's theory of history could only make sense as functional explanations. But it took me few minutes to realize that there

1 Mark Philp and Michael Rosen first met Jerry on the same occasion and have now corrected my memories. The seminar was scheduled in the Wharton Room, and that is where we first waited (with Charles Taylor on the floor). As more people kept trying to find their way into the packed room, we moved to the Old Library, and that is where Jerry entered our lives.

was something very congenial going on here, an impression soon confirmed by our first exchanges.

After the second session, the shy foreign student I was felt bold enough to send him a note I had written shortly before, which strongly resembled what I had just heard. I received by return of post the first of many letters I was to receive from Jerry over the next thirty years. It starts as follows, in a typical Jerry style, which many here will recognize.

University College London  
Nov 2, 1978

Dear ~~Mr Van Parijs~~ [crossed out by hand and replaced by 'Philippe'],

I have just read your discussion note, and I cannot tell you how delighted I am. Our views on functional explanation are not similar, unless identity is a form of similarity. We are sensitive to exactly the same considerations, we have exactly the same intuitions, and we formalize them in (pretty well) exactly the same way. You and I are animated by the same demon. And I am sure there is between us the further agreement that what explains the agreements already listed is that we are both right. [...]

SEPTEMBER GROUP. Subsequently, Jerry became the external examiner of my DPhil thesis. He put me in touch with the publisher of my first book. I received from him a huge amount of extraordinarily detailed and generous typewritten feedback on my work, typically starting with 'Think of each page as being divided into 4 parts, called "a", "b", "c", "d".' Above all, he took the initiative, jointly with Jon Elster and John Roemer, of founding what

became known as the ‘No[n?] Bullshit Marxist Group’, or, less narrowly and less arrogantly, the ‘September Group’, an exhilarating intellectual adventure that has now been going for three decades and has involved in addition, from the start, Eric Olin Wright, Robert van der Veen, Hillel Steiner, and later also Pranab Bardhan, Sam Bowles, Josh Cohen and Seana Shiffrin, all present here today.

Jerry was not only uncontroversially the wittiest member of the group and therefore the centrepiece of its group dynamics, he was also among us the most untiring prosecutor of sloppy writing and lazy thinking, and the member of the group best at imposing upon himself and upon others the discipline required to keep such a group going for so long. Thus in 1989, Jerry was the convenor, and we all received the following stern message, on paper with the September Group’s letterhead (including its motto *Marxismus sine stercore tauri*).

April 13, 1989

Dear Member,

I write further to mine of September 1 last, about next September’s meeting.

I very much regret that most of you have not responded to the request expressed in the last paragraph of the September letter, where I asked you to say whether or not you wanted to give a paper at the next meeting. At the moment there are three paper-givers, and we need one more. Whoever volunteers first will be that one more. The three to hand are [...]

OBSessional PERFECTIONIST. The first sentence of a quick response I sent a few days later (“Thank you for the

September Group circular, characteristically unindulgent with the weaknesses of human nature.?) triggered, a few months later, a reaction I had not anticipated.

London, July 29, 1989

Dear Philippe,

In a letter to me of some months ago, which is in Oxford and therefore not to hand as I write, you thanked me for a circular NBMG letter, which, you remarked, showed my usual lack of indulgence towards weaknesses in human nature.

I was very struck by that remark, which I saw, immediately, was very much to the point, but which nevertheless conveyed news to me. You were, of course, right, but I had not been aware of this feature of mine before you said it, and I am grateful to you for pointing it out so that I can curb its operation. What is more, I read your remark as having been composed in a generous and at most teasing spirit, rather than in a stern and admonishing one. That is, I readily recognized that you, for your part, *were* indulging *my* weakness of rigidity, or whatever we should call it.

I am very hard on *myself*. I am an obsessional perfectionist, and that is no doubt part of the reason for the largely approving judgement that my work receives: its virtues aren't all wholly due to special talent. And I slip easily into being equally hard on others. But, admonished by you, I now hope to have that tendency under control.

That is prelude to my assuring you that I am not blaming anybody for the events which have led me, as I now announce, to decide not to come to the conference

next month, a decision for which, having read my explanation, I hope you, in turn, will not blame me. [...]

Then followed an explanation for why he had decided not to attend a conference I had organized in Louvain-la-Neuve, for a combination of reasons in which his family's 'right to a relaxed Jerry for three weeks' played a crucial role. Among the countless letters and messages you receive in your life, this is the sort of letter you never forget, because of its specific contents, but above all because of this so characteristically Jerry-like way of trying to get things straight, both morally and intellectually.

PROMISES TO KEEP. Even more than his letters, most of them directly work-related, many personal conversations I had with Jerry – and conversations with Jerry could easily become very personal – are unforgettable for me. I shall mention just one such conversation, one of the last ones, still very vivid (and somewhat sore) in my memory, which ended leaving us both with tears in our eyes.

First a brief word about the context. Both before and after his retirement, several of our conversations touched upon his succession at the Chichele Chair. As several of you know, Jerry would have liked me to apply and gently insisted on several occasions that I should. As some of you know, there is no academic position in the world in which I would have been more tempted to show interest than this one, for a number of diverse reasons, including the fact that the first holder of the Chair, G.D.H. Cole, was the first academic advocate of an unconditional basic income, or the fact that I met my wife just across the wall in the Nun's Garden of Queen's College, but above all because of my great admiration and deep affection for Jerry

himself. Yet I would not apply and Jerry understood my reasons and sympathized with them.

The last time we talked about it he was taking me to the bus stop on Cowley Road. As the bus approached, Jerry summarized my reasons by reciting the end of a poem no doubt familiar to most of you but unknown to me at the time. Because I didn't know it, Jerry cut it out of some book a couple of days later and posted it to me. It goes like this:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.<sup>2</sup>

Jerry suddenly went to sleep last summer when many miles, we thought, were left for him to go, and with many promises we wish he had been able to keep. But the demanding yet tender Jerry is still with us. He lives on with Michèle, with his children, with her children, with their families. With the many students he supervised, taught, inspired. He lives on with each of us in the September Group. With some Marxists, with some ex-Marxists, with many not-Marxist-at-all. With the non-bullshitters and those who honestly try. He will live on with the readers of his first book to appear – very soon – in French: *Si tu es*

2 Robert Frost, 'Stopping by woods on a snowy evening'. After the memorial event, Pranab Bardhan and Sam Bowles told me that Jawaharlal Nehru had these verses next to his desk and, later, next to his death bed. Did Jerry – fascinated as he was by India – know this? (Jerry's striking account of his first trip to India will be published in volume II of his posthumous writings edited by Michael Otsuka.)

*pour l'égalité, pourquoi es-tu si riche?* And with a bunch of fishermen on a Greek island. And with half the Asian shopkeepers on Cowley Road.

For many of us, the strength of Jerry's meticulous writings, for all of us the power of his radiant personality, will enable us to go many more miles, to keep many more promises, than we would have managed without him.

Thank you, Jerry, for all you've been, for all you've meant, for all you've done for me – and for so many of us in this room today.

Philippe Van Parijs

John Roemer

In 1978, Jerry's book *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* was published, revolutionizing Marxian social science and philosophy. In this book, Jerry subjected the theory of historical materialism to the acute analysis that we should demand of any political theory. The tools he used were the ones of contemporary analytical philosophy. This marked a break with Marxism as it was then practiced, both in the west and in the socialist countries, where it was the norm to apply so-called 'dialectical' reasoning to Marxian issues. Dialectics was supposed to be a different mode of logic from standard logic, in which the Hegelian 'thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis' was the underlying guide to explanation, and explanation of social development in particular. Whether it was mainly the dogmatic use of dialectics or the apologetic role that social science and philosophy played in the socialist countries which hampered Marxist analysis is perhaps hard to say. Jerry's book brought Marxism back



into modern social science; this is not the same thing as saying that the theory of historical materialism emerged unscathed.

At around the same time, other young Marxist social scientists were applying the same method: that is, using the tools of contemporary social science to analyze Marxian questions, in an objective way. In 1979, I think it was, Jerry and the Norwegian political scientist Jon Elster organized a meeting of ‘analytical Marxists,’ which over several years stabilized into a group of a dozen or so young scholars, social scientists, historians, and philosophers. The somewhat arrogant name of the group was the No-Bullshit Marxists, later changed to the anodyne September Group.

Since we are remembering Jerry, it is appropriate to reproduce a section of a letter that he wrote to me (I don’t have the date), with a little skit, spoofing the kind of discussion in which we engaged:

BOB (BRENNER): (concluding a ten-minute disquisition)...so that the Moravian peasant was tied to the soil, while the Transylvanian peasant was tied directly to the Ukranian peasant, and not to the soil at all.

JON (ELSTER): Well, then, you get a combination of the free rider problem and the prisoners’ dilemma.

HILLEL (STEINER): Only if the Rider and the Prisoners *agree* to combine.

SERGE (KOLM): And they can only agree if each is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of one extra util for any of the others. Otherwise, you have exploitation.

JERRY: No, no , no. Not *exploitation*. *Exploiting*. They have completely different counterfactual conditions.

JOHN (ROEMER): It doesn't affect my theory anyway.

BOB [yawning]: ... Yeah, well, I'm sure there's an important difference between exploiting and exploitation, but why bother with it?

JERRY: It's very important when you're arguing against the bourgeoisie.

ROBERT (VAN DER VEEN): Which bourgeoisie? I distinguish seven bourgeoisies, and eight in Holland.

JOHN: None of them understand my theory.

The September Group has continued to meet these thirty years; Jerry was, as Jon Elster once put it, its moral centre, as well as its intellectual one. To paraphrase what Engels said at the grave of Marx, 'Jerry was a genius. The rest of us were merely talented.'

However, by the end of the 1980s, most, though not all of the members of the September Group, thought that we had done our job with Marxism: that is, we had revived what was correct and important, discarded what was wrong, and it was time to continue doing social theory without the constraint of having to tie it to Marxian concepts. Nozick, as Jerry put it, 'awakened me from my dogmatic socialist slumber'.

Why was Jerry so taken with Nozick's philosophical argument for laissez-faire capitalism, while other prominent left-liberal philosophers, notably John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, dismissed him? Perhaps it was because Jerry was deeply honest and serious about argument. Jerry, however, gave another reason, that there is a commonality between the Nozickian notion of self-ownership and the Marxian notion of exploitation. For exploitation, to the

extent that it is a normative concept, maintains that workers are being unfairly treated if their surplus labour is expropriated by the capitalist, which presupposes that they are the rightful owners of that labour. Self-ownership. Of course, Marx also said that ownership of one's own labour was a bourgeois right, and that in full communism, people would contribute according to their ability and receive according to their need, but it is nevertheless the case that, to an extent that exploitation comprises a moral condemnation of capitalism, that is most easily justified by the view that the worker is a self-owner. And so Jerry's problem was to criticize Nozick's theory *without* dropping what he called the thesis of self-ownership, that a person should have the rights over his bodily powers that a slave-owner has over a slave. This was not Rawls's problem: for at the foundation of *his* theory was the view that personal talents were morally arbitrary, and so self-ownership was rejected *ab initio*. The same can be said for Ronald Dworkin's theory of resource equality, although his rejection of self-ownership was not so quite militant as Rawls's.

Now Jerry was a militant egalitarian, and would certainly agree that the distribution of talents is morally arbitrary, and that view is implicit in the communist formula of distribution of which I just spoke, but the intellectual problem was to display the weakness in Nozick's argument without rejecting self-ownership. And this Jerry succeeded in doing. Indeed, Jerry eventually said that he could not argue effectively against the thesis of self-ownership: it was a moral premise that one either had to accept or reject. He rejected it, but did not want to make the attack on Nozick depend upon that rejection.

I have discussed the first two great contributions that Jerry made to social theory, his analysis of historical materialism, and his anti-Nozick critique. The third, I believe, was his critique of John Rawls from the left. Rawls, as you know, did for egalitarianism what Jerry did for Marxism: he made its advocacy respectable in twentieth-century social theory. But the equality that Rawls called just was not full equality; inequalities were accepted, by Rawls, which were necessary because of private incentives. If the highly talented will cut back their labour supplies if taxed at 60%, the amount of public revenue may be smaller than what would be collected if they were taxed at only 30%, thus rendering the worst-off, who are the recipient of those revenues under a redistributive scheme, worse off than they would be at the 30% tax rate. So maximizing the welfare of the worst-off might require countenancing more inequality than would be achieved at the higher tax rate. Indeed, Rawls called the tax scheme 'just' which maximizes the welfare of the worst-off group. In this case, it might be a 30% tax rate rather than a 60% rate. Jerry pointed out that to call the 30% rate just is inconsistent with Rawls's own theory: for a just society must be well-ordered, which means that its members must embrace the concept of justice. If the high flyers withdraw their labour supply when facing high taxes, thus rendering the worst-off worse off than they could be, they are not embracing the Rawlsian concept of justice. Now this argument requires that justice apply not only to social institutions, but to personal behaviour, and this involved Jerry in a discussion of the *site* of distributive justice. I think this critique of Rawls is correct and very important.

The fourth major contribution of Jerry's is the argument that fundamental concepts of justice do not depend upon facts about the world; they are general principles which are fact-independent. A proposition about justice takes the following form, if it is spelled out properly:

The principle of justice is X. If the facts of human nature and the world are Y, then this means that X reduces to X1. If the facts of human nature, etc., are Z, then X reduces to X2.

Notice that this statement does not depend on whether the facts are Y or Z; it is true independent of what the facts are. Jerry's claim is that whenever we think deeply enough about our principles, they can be stated in this form; the deep principle is independent of facts. This claim has generated at least three reactions: first, that it is obviously wrong; second, that it is obviously right and trivial; and third, that it is right, not obviously so, and important. I subscribe to the third view. But, being objective, I would have to say that this contribution has not yet stood the test of time, like the others I have mentioned, and so we will have to assess its true value in the future.

I am, however, reminded of a conversation I had with the great economic theorist, Leonid Hurwicz, who died recently, in his nineties, shortly after being the oldest economist or perhaps individual to receive the Nobel Prize. Leo was very much a theorist: he is known to have said, 'I don't believe something unless I can prove it.' He and I were arguing about socialism some years ago, and were discussing the history of the Soviet Union. (Leo, incidentally, was born in Moscow in 1916.) I brought up some facts about Soviet development, and Leo responded,

'Don't bring facts into a serious discussion.' I think he would have agreed with Jerry's view on facts and principles.

It is almost as if Jerry planned his death. With hindsight, many of us remember the swan song he sang at his retirement conference in January 2009. Some of us were taken aback that he felt such equanimity about retirement. Michael Otsuka discussed this in his talk at Jerry's funeral last August. The second premonition was his publication of the short essay *Why not socialism?* as his final book. (There will be a posthumous book, however, edited by Mike.) For that book-essay was atypical for Jerry: it was an outline of an argument, and a plea, rather than an iron-clad logical demonstration, as was his wont.

*Why not socialism?* leaves us with an important question, Jerry's final legacy. Suppose that a society has the right social ethos: its members subscribe to an egalitarian theory of justice, they want to implement equality. But in a complex society, with millions of people and millions of productive activities, how can they arrange their affairs to do this? As Jerry says, we know how to implement a distribution of income based on the emotions of fear and greed, using markets and private property in productive assets. But how can we implement an egalitarian outcome, even if people want to do so, given the complexities of an advanced economy? Jerry says, what we have is a design problem. I think this is absolutely correct. The design problem is not trivial.

Jerry leaves us, then, with two major questions. What can we do, if anything, to hasten the transformation of our societies into ones with a solidaristic ethos, where most people subscribe to an egalitarian theory of justice? And

once we are there, how do we implement equality, in that willing society? Perhaps the solution of the former problem requires us to solve the latter one first: for if we can produce a credible design, and perhaps only if so, will people move towards a solidaristic world-view. To quote Marx, ‘Therefore, mankind always sets itself only tasks which it can solve...’ I so much wish that we had Jerry to cut the brush away from the hidden path to the answers, but, alas, we will have to hack away without his clear vision to guide us.

John Roemer

Myles Burnyeat

It may surprise some of you if I start by saying that I think of Jerry Cohen as the most *serious* person I have ever known. He passionately believed, as not all philosophers do, in the possibility of getting difficult philosophical issues *right*, and therefore he believed also in the importance of constantly striving to get them *exactly* right. I would suppose that this seriousness was the carrying forward into his adult life of the seriousness of the political commitments of his Marxist upbringing in Montreal.

But it was equally manifest in his seriousness about getting non-Marxist philosophers right. They too were no joke for him. He once got me to read through a set of lectures he had written – for his own enlightenment as well as that of the audience – on Plato’s *Republic*. I was to read them and tell him what mistakes he had made in his interpretations. He was not at all hospitable to my defensive response that interpretations of a great

philosophical work of the distant past were often not such that one could take a given passage, perhaps a very famous one, and pronounce someone's interpretation of it definitely right or definitely wrong.

That encounter was during the time we were colleagues here in All Souls. But we first met in the Autumn of 1963, when we both arrived at University College London, he coming from the Oxford BPhil. to his first Lectureship, I from my BA degree in Cambridge to start graduate work with Bernard Williams. When Bernard left for his first Professorial Chair, they gave me a Lectureship too, with the result that Jerry and I were colleagues together for over ten years in the wonderfully open atmosphere encouraged by Richard Wollheim, the Grote Professor of that period. From time to time Jerry and I would give a term-long seminar together. I recall one term in which we explored the then current debates on knowledge and belief – neither his nor my specialty, just a shared interest in finding out what was going on in various areas of controversy. Philosophy was so much less specialized in those days than it is now, and there was little pressure to publish before you had something of your own to say. I am confident that for both of us these excursions brought benefit to our more specialized work, about which both of us were extremely serious and full of youthful ambition.

Eventually, I left London for Cambridge, leaving Jerry behind. But we continued to meet and I would like to tell one story which puts Jerry's jokes in an admirable, serious, even heroic light. He was visiting me one day in Cambridge with Gideon, then a small boy of perhaps four or five. Gideon was on a swing in a playground somewhere when he fell off backwards and hit his head. Tears at once, of



course, but then also, more worryingly, his eyes began to droop and close. Jerry knew this meant a threat of concussion and serious damage if the child was allowed to nod off into unconsciousness. For some reason he thought it important to get him back to a London hospital rather than risk being stuck in Addenbrooke's at Cambridge. We rushed him to catch a train to London, on which Jerry contrived to keep Gideon awake, eyes open, with a heroic stream of jokes and funny stories. Jerry's ability to joke and be funny turned out to be a deeply serious asset. Gideon survived, but tells me he does not remember the occasion.

I should like to close with a more recent report on University College London, where a memorial meeting for Jerry took place this past Thursday (17 June) in the Philosophy Department there. A large body of people gathered in the room, overlooking Gordon Square, where we used to have seminars and departmental meetings. I found myself constantly hailed by middle-aged men and women whom I did not recognise in return, for the good reason that they were no longer the fresh-faced, twenty-something year-olds that Jerry and I had taught all those years ago. Hardly any of them were academics; they had come simply to share their memories of Jerry and to express their gratitude for what he had given them in their student days. I have no doubt that the same is true of everyone here today, not only those he taught. All of us have reason to celebrate Jerry's life and be grateful for his seriousness as well as (some at least of) his jokes.

Myles Burnyeat

Gideon Cohen

Good afternoon and thanks to all of you for coming. My father would have been proud to see all of you here today. Today's gathering represents a unique and never to be repeated collective memory of my dad. With us here today are his childhood cousins: Laura, Bobby and Ronnie, and his brother Mike, representing his childhood years in Canada; colleagues and friends from his student days here in Oxford; my mother, myself and my sisters, friends and colleagues from his years in London; his wife, Michèle and her children from Oxford and all of his grandchildren. Thank you all for being here today.

My dad adored people and was adored by so many people. He was able to form unique friendships with a seemingly endless number of people. I am sorry to put him on the spot as he is an unassuming and self-effacing person, but my dad adored Michael Otsuka, and I know that Mike adored my father as well. Mike is presiding over the collating and editing of three volumes of my father's unpublished works, and I would like to give him a round of applause for this effort that he has graciously undertaken, thanks, Mike, we look forward to seeing the result.

My dad studied people, he was fascinated by their behaviour, whether he liked them or not. He was always friendly and tried to be tolerant towards everyone. Dad's love of people was reflected in his great talent for mimicry. When he mimicked people it was rarely mocking or insulting, rather it was part of his attempts to understand them. Dad loved humour and jokes, and was one of the best joke tellers I have ever known. Sadly I did not inherit that ability or else you would have been much better

entertained today. One of his most famous jokes was the title of his book *If you are an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* and this gave rise to many internal family jokes often at his expense. At some point my dad was considering becoming a stand-up comedian, much to my and my mother's abject horror, but that never happened. Dad loved language and words and songs, always songs. It is impossible for me to think about dad without remembering so many songs, as children we were surrounded by music and singing.

Dad loved human diversity and celebrated people of different races and cultures, our house was full of people from all over the world, including, notably for me, Haile Selassie's grandson, Eskender Desta, of whom I will say more later. My father loved India with a great passion. He toured lecturing in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. When I was fourteen years old I went with him to Jerusalem, where we attended a Peace Now rally aimed in that era at Palestinian and Jewish reconciliation. In a later era he supported the Palestinian's right to form an independent state.

Living in Ethiopia I considered that I had escaped from being labelled 'Jerry Cohen's son' until at a conference on Federalism where I was presenting a paper, his former students and devotees Rajeev Bhargava and Will Kymlicka identified me and started telling everyone whose child I was. The Addis Ababa University establishment were astonished, including the President of the University, Professor Endreas Eshete, who exclaimed 'All these years and we never knew you were Jerry's son. I will never leave you alone again!' Dad's reputation in Ethiopia is remarkable, with senior government officials and academics being

highly influenced by and quoting his ideas on equality and the rights of minority groups in the state. So I have now become 'Dr Gideon Cohen, Jerry Cohen's son' in Ethiopia where I live. My dad made me very happy and proud by lecturing in the University where I teach in Addis Ababa.

My dad was always analyzing everything and giving us interesting and unusual ways of looking at things. When we were children he would take us to restaurants and he would proclaim 'liberty hall', meaning we could order as much and whatever we liked, in my case that meant two cokes. (Mike will remember an occasion of four Big Macs as well.) On one occasion I remember I could not finish the second coke and I asked Dad if it was ok to waste it. He replied that he was spending the same money anyway, and coke was bad for me so the less I consumed the better. I also remember him saying something about dentist bills as well, but I cannot remember it accurately enough to repeat it today.

Like all truly great men, dad was a man of ideas. His opinions were very strong, but if you were tenacious enough you could convince him and he would change his mind. One example of our attempts to influence and convince each other was a three decade debate about Communism and Christianity, which I think my dad saw as Communism versus Christianity. When the Revolutionary Communist Government of Mengistu Haile-Mariam, otherwise known as the Derg, seized power in Ethiopia, they executed Eskender Desta, Haile Selassie's grandson. This was the first time that I questioned the communist ideology of our upbringing. How could my dad, who was obviously upset, support the ideology that was responsible for the death of his friend? He replied that it was the idea of com-

munism that was important and that the practice was often flawed. Later when he criticized some of my less admirable actions as being not worthy of a good Christian, I used his own argument and replied that it was the idea of Christianity that was important, but that in practice Christians were usually flawed.

Dad developed a love of the language and ideas of the Bible and when he died he was writing a paper on Spirituality, which unfortunately we will never see in a final form. However, the very tentative and unfinished version that we have will be published in volume two of the upcoming publications. This paper, nevertheless, has great significance for myself and other members of our family.

My dad always courted new ideas and interests, some examples include his love of architecture and Renaissance art that he developed in the last two decades of his life. He evolved through many phases, but always remained true to his core values, of which Equality was perhaps the most prominent and enduring. He treated everyone equally, talked to anyone, showed respect to the most lowly in social and economic hierarchies, which he detested, and remained primarily a man of the working class while he developed a great love of All Souls College and its protocols. He taught us to be like him, and although we miss him, he is still with us, we have so much to be grateful for and so much to celebrate and I am very happy to share all of this with you all today.

Gideon Cohen

Timothy Scanlon

It is tempting to talk about what made Jerry so remarkable as a philosopher, and people will be doing that for many years, I am sure. What I am thinking about first today, however, is what made him so remarkable as person and a friend. Two things that made Jerry a remarkable person and friend, however, are also part of what made him such a good philosopher. The first was his unusual intensity of focus. In a conversation with Jerry, one always had the feeling that he was concentrating intently – concentrating on the subject at hand, of course, but also concentrating on you, on what you said, and also on how things seemed to you, on what you were feeling. He would sometimes surprise me by commenting on this in insightful ways, sometimes long after the conversation in question. He would say things like,

You know when we were talking last year about ... it seemed to me that that you were surprised and shocked that anyone would hold such a view.

And then he might add, with a slight bouncing chuckle that looked like a hiccup, ‘It was very American of you to be so shocked by that. No European would be so surprised’.

This aspect of Jerry’s gift for friendship – his capacity to focus on and identify how things seemed to others, which might be called sympathetic curiosity – is what I want mainly to discuss. I am not saying that he always got it right. We all have our limitations in understanding others, as well as ourselves. But Jerry did, I believe, focus analytically on other people’s feelings in a way that many of us do not. This focus was the other side of his perceptiveness about his own feelings and his openness in describing

them. His remarkable and moving self-reflections at the close of the conference in his honour in 2009, analysing his feelings about teaching, the striving involved in work, retirement, and advancing age are a good illustration of this capacity.

I was struck by the same quality recently when I reread some of Jerry's letters to me. These were letters from the mid-1970s just after his visit to Princeton when we first became acquainted. They were remarkably frank and open, about his feelings about trying to do philosophy as well as other worries and concerns. All of them were responses to letters I had written him – they began by thanking me for my letter, or apologizing for taking so long to respond. I have no idea what I said in those letters of mine, but when I reread Jerry's I was left worrying that my letters were cool and reserved by comparison with his.

I say that this openness is 'the other side of' Jerry's focus on the feelings of other people because I take both to express a desire for direct and meaningful connection with other people. This capacity was also illustrated in Jerry's distinctive brand of humour. He was famously funny and entertaining. Many people are famously entertaining, most often by being witty, quick, and verbally adept. It is fun to be humorous in this way – it is a skill and a way of showing off. It can also be defensive – a way of dealing with nervousness, or unease about oneself. Jerry certainly enjoyed being amusing, as anyone would who was so good at it. But his humour was of a different kind. There was an element of showing off – it was a high level performance – but it was not a defence mechanism, and was not about him, or a reaction to how he felt.

Jerry's impersonations were so appealing because he got inside of those he was representing, and made you feel how they felt. This was increasingly true in later years, when he turned from impersonations of particular individuals to routines involving general types of people. I am thinking here, for example, of his routine involving interaction between a British philosopher and an American philosopher, both of them types from the 1950s or early 1960s, and his representation of a somewhat pedantic German philosopher giving a lecture. In each case, Jerry made you feel keenly his characters' enthusiasm for what they were saying, their sense of urgency about the points they want to make, and their frustration at the difficulty of getting them across to the audience. Of course Jerry also made these characters seem ridiculous. But they were not *merely* ridiculous, and the whole thing would not have been so funny if they had been merely ridiculous. One would not have laughed so hard if Jerry had not made one feel so acutely how *they* felt – their mixture of self-absorbed eagerness, enthusiasm, anxiety, frustration, and impatience. Even when it was clear that Jerry identified more with one side of the confrontation he was depicting, he brought out what was right and reasonable about what each of the parties was feeling, even while displaying what was ridiculous about both.

Once Jerry and I met at Paddington to take the train together to Oxford. As the train was leaving the station, he told a joke about a philosopher, a priest, and an economist who are playing golf. The foursome ahead of them on the course is playing more and more slowly. They have to keep stopping to wait for that party to finish a hole, and they all become very impatient about the delay. Finally,



they send their caddy to see what is holding things up. The caddy reports, 'They can't play any faster. They're blind.' The philosopher berates himself. 'I think of myself as being rational, capable of impartiality and of seeing that other people's interests count just as much as mine, but there I was, complaining rudely about them!' The priest consoles him, 'Don't be too hard on yourself. None of us is without sin.' But the economist says angrily, 'If they are blind, why the hell don't they play at *nigh*?' After telling the joke, and bouncing up and down with silent laughter, Jerry commented, 'The thing I like about that joke is that it does not put any of the three down. Each of them is right in his own way'.

That was, I think, typical of Jerry's outlook. Not that he did not strongly disapprove of some people, or even strongly dislike some, although I think that was relatively rare. But over a remarkably wide range of cases he was more able than the rest of us to see how things were even for people he disagreed with, and to appreciate what was reasonable in how they felt.

I can't resist concluding with a related point about Jerry's philosophical views. As he grew older, Jerry's writing in philosophy took on a more personal cast. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* dealt with very abstract issues. By contrast, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich* and *Rescuing Justice and Equality* characterize issues of justice in very personal terms. I myself understand morality in terms of personal relations, and see the question of justice as a question of what our institutions would have to be like in order for us stand in the right kind of relation to our fellow citizens. But Jerry went much further, and saw justice in much more personal terms.

I remember a conversation with him when he was first thinking about normative political philosophy, in which I expressed surprise at his attraction to Robert Nozick's work – not to Nozick's particular views, but to the way he saw justice in terms of interactions between individuals, in contrast to Rawls for whom justice is fundamentally about institutions. I was puzzled how Jerry, as a Marxist, could fail to see that it was institutions that were crucial, not the attitudes or choices of individuals within those structures.

I think I now have a better understanding of this difference. Like Rawls, I experience injustice as one who is put in the position of benefiting from the unjustifiable ways in which institutions treat other people, whom I will never see or meet. The discomfort of injustice has to do with the relation in which I stand to those people. But the problem is created by institutions, and I therefore naturally see the solution in institutional terms. Jerry, not merely as a Marxist but as someone who grew up in a working class family, saw things differently. His perspective on injustice was from the point of view of the exploited and took the form of a confrontation between two people, one of whom asks the other, 'How can *you* justify doing this to *me*?' The challenge to injustice was, for him, personal and dramatic, like the interaction between the participants in one of his vignettes, in which it is demanded that each take seriously how things seem to the other.

Jerry's death is a loss for philosophy. But the loss of a remarkably perceptive friend and sympathetic human being is what we now feel most keenly.

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