

One more portrait – a personal note

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I am happy to see Is's recollections published. I have enjoyed many of these anecdotes over the years, over lunch, or apropos a philosopher we discussed. I often asked Is to record them for the enjoyment of others – they are too good not to share – especially if one is familiar with the person in the portrait either in life or in print.

As Is said, meeting the scholars in this gallery give a sense of his academic environment and the people who influenced him. As Is's last doctoral student, I was fortunate to have my acquaintance of these scholars be enriched by these anecdotes. The anecdotes also give a clue to Is's perception of these people, many of whom were major intellectual figures of the twentieth century: Goodman, Richards, Popper, Wolfson, and others.

I took Is's seminars at Harvard both in the School of Education and in the 'Yard.' He has shown the same respect and concern to students in both, which was not always the response students registered in the Ed. School's doctoral programs received. Some faculty members considered us less well trained (which was true), and therefore less capable of participating in or benefiting from philosophical discussions than Arts & Sciences students (which was not true). Is always treated us as adults with rich and varied experiences who wanted to know how to *do* philosophy, and for whom, no matter what their field – biology, mathematics, sociology – philosophy has relevance and meaning.

I came to Is when I was teaching mathematics and biology in an alternative school and was interested in philosophy of science – I have just read his book *The Anatomy of Inquiry, Philosophical Studies in the Theory of Science*. I had some philosophy background in a less than stellar college. I was 50 years old. None of this prevented Is from believing that I could study philosophy concentrating on science in a doctoral program in the Philosophy of Education, and write a credible dissertation on scientific creativity. He was open to seeing the potential even in middle-aged spottily trained people and ready to take on the difficult task of mentoring for the long-haul. He accepted people like me in such seminars in the 'Yard'

as Symbolism, the Pragmatists, and other similarly challenging ones, where we were expected to participate as the equals of the Ivy-trained students. He put into practice his view of philosophy as inquiring together, thereby allowing us to have confidence to explore, and not only 'receive wisdom' from our professors.

Reading the portraits in this Gallery, some of this openness seems to have come not only from Is's natural generosity, but his own experience with Nelson Goodman – a kind of tradition. Thank you both for the confidence and the opportunity.

Another illustration of Is's open attitude to the role of philosophy in all walks of life was the creation of PERC in 1983, the Philosophy of Education Research Center, the first incarnation of which was to be a post-doctoral research center, but in effect was a place for the free exchange of ideas from all academic fields by people from all over the globe. I attended some of the early colloquia, first while earning my stripes at the Ed. School as a mathematics teacher, later traveling in from my suburban teaching post – always eagerly anticipating the intellectual pleasure of these sessions. I remember an early humorous session on the 'seven sins' by Is, one on artistic creativity by post-docs at Project Zero, and one from which I took back to my students the good news that it is OK to talk about and to show the passion for learning.

When I came back as a doctoral student, and after graduation, Is asked me to be his assistant with various projects at PERC, including those of the Mandel Foundation. These years are fond memories. Not only did we have wonderfully enriching discussions, we had the opportunity to read and discuss 'working papers' by PERC resident researchers on topics ranging from history, to political science, anthropology, literature, architecture, the philosophy of education and many others. The beauty of these small groups was that we were not a group of experts on a topic speaking jargon, rather, we honored Is's precept of 'conveying the subject in clear language, fit for an educated general audience,' a task we found more challenging than professional shop-talk. We had to clarify, eliminate baroque jargon, and invite all to participate, to bring their perspective to the table. – It was a Renaissance experience; it was Is's approach to philosophy put into practice.

When the School of Education suddenly closed our doors, deeming our work irrelevant to the mission of the School, there was an outcry from all who part-took of the Center for 20 years, many by then scattered all over the globe. What could be more relevant, they asked, than open discussion in clear language and inquiry into all topics of human concern, the weighing of ideas and values?

Fortunately, Is is irrepressible, and PERC has risen phoenix-like, a gift from Is and a testament to the endurance of what philosophy means to him - and through him, to his former students.

I was asked to talk about Is's book, the *Gallery of Scholars*. There is a portrait missing in this Gallery – it is that of Is. I just wanted to fill it in. But even without my little sketch, we see him peeking through the lines.