

REMEMBERING PHILIP MCSHANE

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Lessons in Thinking

I rang the doorbell. I was warmly welcomed. I stepped into his living room and said hello to two people. He started talking. Two hours later, without a pause, he stopped speaking. The first class, called ‘Method in Theology’ in the Mount timetable, was over. Three of us sat in silence. He had weaved together *Method in Theology*, *Wealth of Self*, *Insight*, *Ulysses*, Glen Gould, Cervantes, The Beatles, Picasso, Beethoven, van Gogh, and a big dose of a critique of the current state of the academy and the world. Plus there were funny jokes. He sang. I floated home and excitedly climbed into bed and opened *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, hoping to discover there what he had been talking about.

Years later my father commented, after watching a few of Phil’s lectures on television: “I sure liked listening to him even though I didn’t understand a thing he was talking about.” That was me during those classes in his living room. But I did come to appreciate that cognitional theory was what my undergraduate cognitive psychology professors—treating memory as recall and perception as information processing—desperately needed. And for the past thirty years my main scholarly obsession has been trying to get legal theorists to appreciate that questioning, understanding, judging, and deciding are the heart of legal reasoning.

Swimming Lessons

When I was a law student, every Friday I would head to Mount St Vincent University to sit in on Phil’s class. It was such a relief to listen to a fascinating speaker who was not boring or trying to humiliate me. At the end of my first term, I mentioned to Phil that I wasn’t sure I could take another two-and-a-half years of the awful drivel served at the law school. He lived nearby and his apartment building had a swimming pool. During the Christmas break he invited me over for a swim and to plot and plan. As soon as I jumped into the water he said, “Consider doing a PhD in law.” That seemed like a pretty good idea to me. And the rest of the swim was rather enjoyable.

That plan, plus attending Phil's Friday classes and taking classical guitar lessons, got me through law school. I did, in fact, complete a PhD in legal philosophy, and my writing and teaching ever since has been concerned with trying to correct mistakes in that field, drawing on Lonergan's and Phil's work.

Phil didn't have much to do with my PhD. But he did offer the advice, "Give them what they want," and I used his work, especially *Wealth of Self*. At some point during my first year of the PhD, we stopped communicating—he believed I had gone over to the 'opposition.' However, when I was later preparing my PhD for publication, he read the manuscript and told me it needed a final chapter that drew various strands together. That concluding chapter covered the distinction between mental acts and expression, the difference between what he called the rhetoric of discovery and the rhetoric of logic, and functional specialization in law. Whenever I pull out that book, I am reminded that the final chapter, which I have come to think of as cutting-edge, wouldn't be there but for Phil.

Subsequently, he read other papers and book chapters I wrote and provided comments that gave them a novel slant, helping me get to the heart of whatever I was trying to figure out and communicate. His ability to 'cut to the chase' always amazed me.

Economics Lessons

In the late 1970s I attended a series of public lectures Phil gave at Mount St. Vincent University. One lecture was on Lonergan's economic writings. I remember his analysis of the current state of economic policy: "It is like driving a car with your feet on the gas pedal and the brake at the same time." He characterized Wall Street and Bay Street as casinos and I remember the contrast he pointed out between his graph of the relation between the surplus expansion & the basic expansion and boom and bust cycles. It was all very intriguing. Later, in 1982 I audited Bernard Lonergan's 'Macroeconomics' course at Boston College. He simply read his unpublished economics manuscript. I didn't get much out of it.

More than ten years later, when Phil was immersed in editing Lonergan's *For a New Political Economy*, I went to New Brunswick to visit Sally and him for what turned out to be my real lessons in economics. Phil and I met for a few hours every day for three or four days. After my lessons were over each day, I had time for homework. The materials were pages from the soon-to-be-published Volume 21. It was a very interesting and exciting visit.

When Phil and Sally were on a trip to Dublin and Oxford, they stopped in Newcastle, England, where I was living, for a little visit. During that visit Phil was up before dawn writing *Economics for Everyone*. I read some of the chapters he had recently completed and, of course, he talked enthusiastically about his work.

For some time I took it for granted that business and economics were two messed up walks of life. Each time I graduated from university, I couldn't get a job. The first time it was stagflation. The second time there was a recession, and the interest rate on my student loan rocketed to 18%. In Northern England I saw poverty, despair, and anger. My nagging questions were "What's the big deal with Lonergan's economics?" "How is it different from mainstream economic theory?" "What good could it do?"

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to try to answer my questions. My aim was to compare and contrast Lonergan's economic writings (primarily *For a New Political Economy*) with Gregory Mankiw's popular first-year economics textbook. When I mentioned this project to Phil, he immediately offered to "contextualize" what I planned to do. This was a wonderful turn. When I conceived the project, I figured I might ask him to write a Forward or a Preface to whatever I ended up writing.

Very soon I began receiving his chapters in the mail. They were brilliant. And he wrote them in a few months. A year-and-a half later, I finished my chapters. Then Phil and I met where he and Sally lived near Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. He titled the manuscript *Beyond Establishment Economics: No Thank-you Mankiw*. I liked it—it sounded punchy and in your face. He ordered the chapters and wrote paragraphs linking one chapter to another. Axial Press published it and it has largely been ignored ever since.

Political Science Lessons

In 2001 I was hired by Saint Mary's University in Halifax to teach a fourth-year undergraduate course in political science called *The Scope and Method of Political Science*. Since Sally and Phil were living near Bridgewater, a one hour drive away, I thought it would be worthwhile to talk to Phil about that course. Well, we planned the course. The idea was that the question 'How should we live our lives?' should be at the centre of the scope and method of political science. I taught the introductory session. To my surprise Phil offered to teach the following three weeks. His lectures were on the importance of 'considering consideration.' All the

students, plus Sally and I, were totally captivated by him. He talked for two hours each class and I frantically took notes. It was an incredible experience.

That was the best teaching experience I ever had. Topics included critiques of the input-output model of politics, the superficial textbook tradition of political science in Canada, the importance of separating economics from politics, Phil's demolition of John Maynard Keynes work, bias, the human good, and the need for functional specialization in political science. The students, all final year political science majors, 'got it.'

Publishing Lessons

In his final years of teaching at Mount St. Vincent University, Phil occasionally declared that he didn't care whether he wrote and published another thing. He had had enough. I didn't believe him for a second. Soon after he retired, he started his *Cantower* series and wrote *A Brief History of Tongue*. Ten year later we started Axial Press. Axial Press was intended to address various problems: a few years previously, Phil had been awarded a Canada Council Grant to publish *Process*, but he could not find a publisher, and at the same time the book based on my PhD thesis published by Kluwer was beyond the reach of most people because it cost \$150. But the larger problem Axial Press was meant to address was the Axial Period.¹ Phil wrote in the Editor's Introduction to *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics*, "We may look forward, then, to a past-axial future—whose distance from us depends on us—of mature rhythms of economic, dramatic, aesthetic life, a life paradoxically of richer and yet deeper mystery."² The first book Axial Press published was *A Brief History of Tongue*, next *Economics for Everyone, Beyond Establishment Economics*, and *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics*.

¹ The problem is how to understand total history. The term "Axial Age" was coined by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers to identify a pivotal period in human history from about the 8th to the 3rd century BC. Phil envisages a much larger context of millions of years. See "Middle Kingdom, Middle Man," in *Searching for Cultural Foundations* (New York: University Press of America, 1984) 9–11. This text is reproduced in *A Brief History of Tongue*, 39–41.

² *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics: A Fresh Pragmatism* (Nova Scotia: Axial Press, 2002) 1.

This was a very busy time for me—reading the manuscripts, laying them out, getting the covers designed, having them printed, and writing reviews—and it was always very exciting to pick up the boxes of new books at the printer’s and, with not a little trepidation, determine whether or not they were printed properly. Axial Publishing, under the direction of Sandy Gillis, has since published fifteen more of Phil’s books. Incredible.

Other Lessons

I have always thought that scholars, like professional athletes, need coaches. Not only was Phil my coach for many years, but he was also the superstar player. He was inspiring. It is not possible to adequately capture all the valuable things I learned from listening to him, reading his work, and watching him with others. There were lessons in keeping sane. Lessons in slowing down. Lessons in listening. Lessons in reading. Lessons in caring. Lessons in detecting bullshit. Lessons about conflict. Lessons about despair. Lessons in watching B-movies. Lessons in hope. Lessons in perseverance. And lessons in gettin-er-done. Some lessons were deliberate; others not so much. I am grateful for them all.

One of the things I have always enjoyed, and will remember even more fondly now, was meeting up with Mike Shute, Bob Henman, and Sandy Gillis and sharing stories about Phil—his encouragement, his advice, his energy, his kindness, his passion, his stubbornness, his humour, his plotting and planning, his work, his daring, his genius. I won’t have any new stories to share, but I am certainly very lucky to have had these few.