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Eliot Deutsch—Cheerfulness of the Heart and the Mind



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The first time I saw Eliot, I was at an APA meeting in Boston in response to offers for job interviews. I still remember heading towards the hotel where the Philosophy Department of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa had scheduled their interview with me, opening a hotel room door, and seeing four gentlemen waiting for me: three in suits and one dressed casually. I went straight to the Department Chair, assuming his vote should prove crucial. After greeting the other professors as well, I sat down facing the Chair. I was just about to answer the first question when Eliot suddenly stood up and decided to rearrange the seating. At the end of his rearrangement, I saw his smiling face before me. He must have sensed how uneasy I felt being alone with four male professors in a hotel room. Thanks to Eliot, the interview turned into a relaxed conversation about my love of Renaissance and Islamic Philosophy. After the interview passed, I realized the Chair was not the true leader of the Department; Eliot was.

Years later, after Eliot became Chair, I gifted him with an Uzbek knife. In retrospect, I realize that was an odd way to thank him for having supported a generous SEED grant that had taken me on the Silk Road (where everyone was carrying a knife). Eliot examined somewhat surprised the Central Asian present I had brought him, smiled, and then looked up mischievously saying, "This will come very handy in department meetings!" A hearty laughter followed.

When Eliot retired, the Department threw him a party in Sakamaki Hall's Bamboo Courtyard. Everyone was talking about how to honor and thank him. I felt I too should prepare a few lines to express my gratitude for his gracious mentorship. The first notion that came to my mind was "*hilaritas mentis*," usually translated as cheerfulness of the heart, although the Latin attributes it to the mind. This ancient notion is not one I often encounter in my readings, and, yet, it immediately made sense to me that from all the people I knew, it applied best to Eliot. It describes a state of mind that thrives on detachment; it is unburdened by material, emotional, and other needs. The mind keeps the appreciation of love, friendship, and beauty without craving for them. When affected by misfortune, it finds a way to calibrate itself and remains somewhat free-floating. Smiles and laughter are its visible manifestation.

As soon as I finished reading my little text in praise of Eliot's *hilaritas mentis*, he came straight up to me with a bright face and said, "I never knew about that virtue!" He looked genuinely happy and, of course, cheerful. He may not have known the term, but he doubtlessly embodied it.

What makes Eliot memorable is not our memories of him but the personality that imprinted these on us. Eliot belongs to a rare type of human being one enjoys remembering. Even after his departure, the recollection of our encounters with him helps us improve ourselves on a scholarly and, possibly more so, personal level. As we scholars who work in multiple philosophical traditions know, that is the mark of a true sage. They teach you whether they are present or absent.

Eliot will remain present.

Farewell/See You Soon



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Long—at least 15 years—before he launched me in the University of Hawai'i Department of Philosophy, I happened to meet Eliot Deutsch very briefly when I was a doctoral student at Oxford. With his deceptive nonchalance, he abruptly wanted to look at a paper of mine. I sent him a hand-written paper which, with unconcealed irritation, he got typed with some suggested edits, and surprised me within a year by my first refereed publication in *PEW*!

Like my Indian and British professors, he never praised my work in front of me, but for the 15 years we were colleagues, knocked at my door regularly and demanded to read my current research. And of course, dinner at his place was the most congenial cultural high point, gawk as I would at an original Picasso "Minotaur" drawing hanging on his bedroom wall, on my way to the restroom, as Indian classical music and Johann Sebastian Bach would be playing in a low volume, while drinks were served outside! Even when he walked with a walker and came only once a week to the department, and was writing those beautiful Zen Koan style poems, he afforded me the honor of sharing my philosophically unkempt over-enthusiasm with the living legend of a world-philosopher that he was. Not just his incomparably canonical monograph called *Advaita Vedanta*, which generations of teachers have taught and will keep teaching, but his early work on *Truth*, and late work on *Aesthetics*, *Creativity*, and *Friendship* will