

Remembering Ed Green

Utopia is a world filled with the people described in eulogies. People in eulogies are kind, helpful, smart, cheerful, hard-working, patient, brave, loving, and every other positive adjective. There is nothing wrong with remembering the best of those that we have lost, but eulogies feel empty because they only describe a small part of who someone was. The task of telling someone's story is impossible. People are so complex, even those who know us the best only know a bit of us. At best, we can tell the stories of the slice of someone the way we knew them. But we can never really get at who someone was.

Even so, sometimes it is better to say something rather than nothing at all. To use a phrase Ed taught me, the perfect is the enemy of the good. Let me tell you the slice of how I knew Ed Green when I was a graduate student at Penn State University. I feel compelled to write something about him, because he is a role model of mine. As I knew him, Ed was a Professor of Economics at Penn State University. He taught a field course in Game Theory, which I took. He advised a number of graduate students who did Economic Theory. He was soft spoken, which meant that his sarcastic sense of humor often took me off guard. As others have noted, he was kind, generous, and intelligent.

These things are all true, but let me try to describe Ed from another perspective. Let's start with his personal webpage. It is deeply unusual. He doesn't have a CV on the webpage at all, and his short recent research section includes a link to a working paper with the following statement: "This paper was rejected for publication, but all of the referees (4 reports were received in total) judged that the results are mathematically sound." For a professor of his standing, Ed was not particularly prolific, but he did have many top publications, which his webpage does not list in any way.

Why the unusual webpage? Ed cared very little for what most of us academics obsess about – our standing in the field and our ranking against our colleagues. I wonder if his attitude toward academic rank and honor has something to do with his experience in the Vietnam War movement. Ed was a non-violent protester of the war, and he burned his draft card. He was briefly thrown in jail, and then released on community service. Many of his generation outgrew their roots opposing conflict, but to Ed's credit he was a lifelong proponent of peace. He and Ruilin named their son Enrico after Fermi, the brilliant physicist who argued against developing the technology for the hydrogen bomb for moral reasons.

Rather than spend his life jostling with sharp elbows and jealous colleagues, Ed chose to ignore the status game. He chose to work on topics he found interesting, rather than jumping on trendy topics that could secure a stream of top publications. While his most influential paper was published in *Econometrica* and has 2500 citations, he once told me that the best article he ever wrote was something published in the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Quarterly Review in 1993, with 28 citations to date.

As a teacher in the narrow sense, Ed was disorganized. He was from the old-fashioned chalk on blackboard school. Another of my professors, Jim Jordan wrote on the chalkboard as though he had perfectly memorized every symbol and equation in a book on general equilibrium theory. In Ed's game theory course, he would frequently confuse himself and erase what he had written, rewrite, and then erase again. A few times he worked himself into such a bind that he called off our lecture early so that he could get the math straight and present it during the next lecture.

As a teacher in the broad sense, however, Ed was top notch. He was a mentor to me and many others among the graduate students. He had deep insights into just about any topic you asked him about. He attended many seminars in the department, and was one of the faculty who would ask deep questions which the presenter had apparently not heard or considered before. He was also a frequent seminar napper, but that didn't stop him from immediately asking an insightful question upon waking up.

Ed once told me that once he got tenure, the first thing he did was to read the economics literature, every important paper that had been written up to that time. He told me that this probably was not a good strategy for getting publications, but that it deepened his understanding of our field. I recently got tenure, and I remembered his strategy. I'm currently reading a Theory of Justice by Rawls, and I just finished Anarchy State and Utopia by Nozick. This morning looking through his google scholar profile, I found that Ed recently put a piece on utilitarianism and rights on arxiv last March, first draft 1994.

Last spring, Ed wrote me a long email. I had corresponded with him a few times since I graduated in 2014, but it had been several years since I heard from him. I replied by telling him what I was up to and thinking about. He wrote back briefly with a few observations, and said he would reply at length when he got a chance. That was the last I heard from him. Knowing and learning from Ed was one of the many ways I have been lucky in my life.

-David Jinkins

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