

## Memoirs of a Misunderstood Truth Seeker<sup>1</sup>

Nathan Salmón

I have discussed philosophical issues at some length with each of the four philosophers whom I deem the most intellectually and philosophically gifted philosophers of my time: Alonzo Church (deceased), Saul Kripke (deceased), Hilary Putnam (deceased), and David Kaplan (very much alive). All four were logicians as well as philosophers, and by any reasonable measure, all four are extraordinary thinkers. I had the distinct good fortune of studying closely with three-quarters of this remarkable quartet: Church, Kaplan, and Kripke.<sup>2</sup>

I grew up in the 1950's and 1960's, an honors student in a working-class section of Torrance, a suburb of Los Angeles. My parents were bohemian, not well educated, and poor. Neither of them ever flew on an airplane. In fact, they regarded traveling great distances even by land as an extravagance. Both had only the vaguest idea what it is I do for a living and no idea how I manage to earn a salary for doing it. Contrary to their wishes I became a practicing agnostic a couple of years after my bar mitzvah and a devout atheist four years after that. Between 1970 and 1971, as a student at El Camino College I took courses in Aristotelian logic and history of modern philosophy from Mary Anagnostis, a formidable, dyed-in-the-wool logical positivist who had studied with Hans Reichenbach at UCLA. I learned much in her courses. I especially loved the assigned texts: Reichenbach's *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* and Book Three of Bertrand Russell's monumental *A History of Western Philosophy*. Those two texts served as my primary introduction to philosophy. Although Reichenbach's book was already by then intellectually passé and Russell's history has been the subject of harsh criticism, both works are eminently readable (quite unlike my own philosophical work), and few works convey as well to the novice what philosophy is at its best. Despite everything, both works are still in print. I changed my major from mathematics to philosophy and transferred to UCLA in the Fall term 1971. (The polymath, Richard Montague, was murdered only a matter of a few months before my arrival.) I studied at UCLA from 1971 to 1973 as an upper-division

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<sup>1</sup>These reminiscences were written, in some haste, at Joseph Almog's invitation. With apologies to the reader, I have taken Joseph's request, perhaps contrary to his intent, to grant me permission to be self-indulgent. I go back and forth between referring to others by their last or full names and referring to them by their first names. (I do this according to a systematic rule, although I have not been able to discern precisely what that rule is.) I thank C. Anthony Anderson, Jonathan Berg, David Braun, Jeff Buechner, Harry Deutsch, Marcello Fiocco, Matthew Hanser, Steven Humphrey, Bernard Kobes, Gary Mar, Gary Ostertag, Barbara Partee, John Perry, Hilary Putnam, Teresa Robertson Ishii, Clara Seneca, and Scott Soames for their comments and reactions. I note with some concern that for the most part, my philosophical acquaintances appear to prefer the present essay to my philosophical work. This memoir is dedicated to David Kaplan. It is also dedicated to the memory of Alonzo Church, Keith Donnellan, Donald Kalish, Saul Kripke, and Hilary Putnam. Finally, it is dedicated also to Teresa Robertson Ishii, whose influence permeates it, most especially the closing paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> I also had several enjoyable philosophical discussions with Putnam. One of my deepest regrets is that I never had the opportunity to meet Bertrand Russell. Russell continues to inspire me deeply through his writings, both on an intellectual level and on a personal level.

undergraduate (taking both philosophy and non-philosophy courses), and from 1973 to 1978 as a graduate student (only philosophy and logic), earning a Ph.D. in 1979. The philosophical climate at UCLA in the 1970's was as if tailor-made for my philosophical temperament.

I have known many philosophers who received superb educations. I had the finest philosophical education of anyone I have personally known. Through my student years and early on in my professional career I participated in full-term courses and seminars given on a variety of topics by a number of very capable, and in some cases quite remarkable, philosophers and logicians, including Felicia (née Diana) Ackerman, Marilyn M. Adams, Robert M. Adams, Rogers Albritton, Paul Benacerraf, Nancy Cartwright, Harry Deutsch, John Earman, Herbert Enderton, Kit Fine, Phillipa Foot, Montgomery Furth, Ian Hacking, Gilbert Harman, Hans Kamp, David K. Lewis (co-taught with Kripke), D. Anthony Martin, Robert L. Martin, Yiannis Moschovakis, Thomas Nagel, Scott Soames, and Richard Wasserstrom. My primary teachers were Tyler Burge, Keith Donnellan, Donald Kalish, and, most important to my philosophical development, Alonzo Church, David Kaplan, and Saul Kripke. I took every course or seminar that each of the six taught during my time as a student, aside from logic courses I had already taken from others. While I was a graduate student my principal mentor was Kaplan. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's I participated in many workshops that Kaplan directed or co-directed. While I was Kripke's colleague, both at Princeton and during my more recent three-term stint at the CUNY Graduate Center (2009-2011), I participated in every course or seminar he taught, whether technical or philosophical.<sup>3</sup> Over the years I discussed philosophy at great length on a great many occasions, many of them informal and casual, with both Kaplan and Kripke. I have also learned a good deal discussing philosophy with my colleague, C. Anthony Anderson.

I treasure my education. A philosophical education of that caliber is nowhere to be had today, at any price. My good fortune was due in large measure to Kaplan's recruitment efforts. As an uncomfortable consequence of my remarkable education, I must bear significantly more responsibility than is typical for my own many shortcomings as a philosopher. Although my religious training did not get much of a foothold, this responsibility is one I bear with a decidedly Jewish sense of guilt.

The 1970's were part of a golden age of philosophy at UCLA, especially philosophy of language and philosophical semantics.<sup>4</sup> The UCLA Philosophy Department was a magic

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<sup>3</sup> I recorded a great many hours of Kripke's lectures, mostly in the 1970's. The original cassette tapes are archived at the Saul Kripke Center, the CUNY Graduate Center. Romina Padro Birman informed me that the Kripke Center is in the process of digitizing those recordings. The Center also has photocopies of many of my notes, totaling well over 1000 pages, on eight courses that Kripke gave between 1979 and 1982, mostly at Princeton.

<sup>4</sup> Philosophy of language and philosophy of science at UCLA enjoyed earlier periods worthy of special note. Bertrand Russell taught at UCLA during 1939-40, resigning prematurely to take a position at CCNY. The CCNY position would ultimately be denied him for his having held publicly that non-marital sex is morally permissible. (According to Russell in his *Autobiography, Volume 2: 1914-1944*, he attempted to rescind his resignation from UCLA immediately after submitting it, but the university president was relieved to be rid of him and told him it was too late.) Hans Reichenbach taught at UCLA in the early 1950's, supervising the dissertations of Hilary Putnam and Wesley Salmon (no relation), both in 1951. Rudolf Carnap replaced Reichenbach in 1954. David Kaplan's dissertation (1964) was the

kingdom, in some respects not unlike the one only a few miles down the California coast in Anaheim (which, being a child of the playground that is SoCal, I knew extremely well). It was a dizzying and dazzling environment in which to study philosophy. I arrived with the same sense of awe, wonder, and Technicolor as Dorothy felt at her foray into Munchkinland. In the early 1970's the UCLA Philosophy Department seemed more a combination analytic-philosophy boot-camp and fictional theme park than a university department. I was a buck private, a plebeian with much to learn, but eagerly hopeful. In the classrooms of Dodd Hall and pouring out into the halls was a potpourri of scholars, idiosyncratic characters, and hangers-on. In addition to the typical bearded philosophy graduate students, there were young men with pronounced personality quirks, affluent San Fernando Valley kids, unwashed, pot-smoking hippies, affluent San Fernando Valley hippies, clean-cut Montague grammarians, a couple of disciples of the great Alonzo Church, fast-talking intensional-logic aficionados, Frege junkies, pipe-smoking wannabes, an undergraduate analytic-philosophy guru said to be David Lewis's favorite UCLA student, and other assorted philosophy-philes. Many of these people were strikingly intelligent. By the initials 'LSD' they did not mean the psychedelic drug; they meant Alonzo Church's Logic of Sense and Denotation. They dismissed David Lewis's philosophical cosmology of a plenitude of isolated alternate universes (which Lewis misidentified with the modal metaphysician's possible worlds) as metaphysics gone mad.<sup>5</sup> The students were quite adept at constructing derivations in the masterfully constructed deductive apparatus of Donald Kalish and Richard Montague's textbook, *LOGIC: Techniques of Formal Reasoning*. The faculty were especially interesting. Kalish would march on Janss Steps protesting the Nixon administration or America's involvement in Viet Nam, and the same day deliver a brilliant lecture on equivalents to the axiom of choice. Direct reference was all the rage. Students studied Kaplan's "Logic of Demonstratives," with its insightful distinction between *character* and *content*. (Kaplan's distinction was spawned by double indexing, which had been invented by Hans Kamp, who had been a student of Montague's.) Students and faculty alike voraciously

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last that Carnap supervised. Richard Montague taught at UCLA throughout the 1960's, supervising the dissertations of Nino Cocchiarella and Hans Kamp. Arthur Prior lectured at UCLA on tense semantics in the mid-1960's. He says in the preface to his *Past, Present and Future* that he learned much from several UCLA students. Barbara Partee taught linguistics at UCLA from 1965 to 1972. Montague's teacher, the great logician Alfred Tarski, taught at UCLA during Winter Term 1967, and participated in a set-theory institute there for a month the following summer. John Perry taught at UCLA from 1968 to 1974. David K. Lewis taught there in the late 1960's, overlapping with Church, Kaplan, Montague, Partee, and Perry. Montague's student, Rolf Schock, was inspired to create and fund (after his death) a prize in logic and philosophy comparable to the Nobel. Schock prize laureates include Kaplan, Kripke, and Putnam.

<sup>5</sup> See my critique of Lewis's *On the Plurality of Worlds*, in *Philosophical Review*, 97, 2 (April 1988), pp. 237-244, and "The Logic of What Might Have Been," *Philosophical Review*, 98, 1 (January 1989), pp. 3-34; reprinted in my *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2005), chapters 6 and 7, pp. 122-149. A good many contemporary scientific cosmologists follow Hugh Everett in postulating a plenitude of parallel universes, although a good many others regard the hypothesis as physics gone mad. The "multiverse" or "many-worlds" cosmologists generally (not always) hold that each of us exists in a plurality of isolated universes. Lewis held instead, on confused grounds, that each of us has a plurality of counterparts, each inhabiting a single universe. Lewis also claimed to reduce metaphysical modality to, or to analyze it in terms of, his bloated cosmology. Reduction of metaphysical modality is no part of physicists' many-worlds theories.

devoured Kripke's new and rich masterpiece, *Naming and Necessity*. Owing to Kaplan's recruitment efforts at the time, Kripke was a frequent visitor at UCLA. (By 'at the time' I mean basically the entire decade.) Frege's theory of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* and Russell's theory of descriptions were taught, regularly and rigorously though in distinctly different ways, by Burge, Church, Donnellan, Kaplan, and Kripke, with Kalish sometimes expounding on alternative logics of 'the'. I learned the basics of the philosophy of language and philosophical semantics from all of them, in an academy nestled under bright blue skies just across Sunset Boulevard from Bel Air.<sup>6</sup>

David Kaplan became my doctoral supervisor.<sup>7</sup> If there is such a thing as a perfect doctoral supervisor, it is David. He is a force of nature, both intellectually and personally. He invariably leaves an indelible impression on all who have any encounter with him. David's courses, both graduate and undergraduate, were spectacular. I learned more about philosophical semantics from David than from anyone else. I subsequently discovered that some of the important facts he taught me are still misunderstood or unknown by many of the discipline's practitioners, including some very high-profile figures. On occasion, an important fact he taught me had since been forgotten by David himself, affording me the rare opportunity to return the favor (and to establish that the relation, *x taught p to y*, is not asymmetric). I also discovered the extent to which the sheer pleasure of doing philosophy at UCLA was due to the force of David's extraordinary mind.

Two decades ago, at David's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration I spoke of the enormous impact he has had, and continues to have, on me.<sup>8</sup> David taught me the value of intellectual discipline, a lesson I learned gradually. Under his close and extremely meticulous tutelage, I was driven to dig far deeper, and to reach far higher, than I had ever done prior, and more even than I had ever thought myself capable. I vividly recall proudly sharing with David some telling arguments I had come up with for my dissertation. "That's very good. I really like that" he said with genuine enthusiasm. "But you might be able to do better, maybe significantly better. Maybe you can ..."

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<sup>6</sup> C. Anthony Anderson studied at UCLA shortly before me. He tells me, "I missed Kripke. However I took courses from Montague—also a genius. Carnap was retired but I got a job reading to him when he had a cataract operation. I shared your feeling of wonderment. There was an incredible congregation of philosophical talent and pedagogy."

<sup>7</sup> The other members of my dissertation committee were Tyler Burge, Keith Donnellan, the logician Yiannis Moschovakis, and the linguist (and former graduate dean) Victoria Fromkin. I worked almost exclusively with David and Keith, mostly with David.

<sup>8</sup> "Quantifying Into the Unquantifiable: The Life and Work of David Kaplan," in J. Almog and P. Leonardi, eds, *The Philosophy of David Kaplan* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 25-41.

Ironically, as an undergraduate David was for a time at risk of flunking out of UCLA. Shortly after I completed my own coursework, he asked me what my cumulative UCLA grade-point average was. I had in fact received an 'A' (then the highest possible grade) in every course I took at UCLA. "Sheesh" he exclaimed. "You shouldn't tell anyone that. You'll be better off."

This typified David's approach to supervising my graduate research. It was my work and my Ph.D., but he and I were in this thing together. It was not yet time for me sit back, satisfied with my effort. There may never come such a time. Instead it was time for me to roll up my sleeves and to get back to work. The lesson that with still greater effort, significantly more can be achieved, has been one of the most important intellectual lessons I have learned, and I am forever in David's debt for it.



David Kaplan, mid 1970's

With David the endeavor to do better is invariably an ode to joy, as magnificent as Beethoven's.

In many ways the spiritual figurehead of philosophy at UCLA in the 1970's was Alonzo Church. Prof. Church's importance was already historic.<sup>9</sup> He had a genuinely great mind, and

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<sup>9</sup> Church is known for the  $\lambda$ -calculus, the Church-Turing thesis, the Frege-Church ontology, Church's theorem (the undecidability of the *Entscheidungsproblem*), and the Church-Rosser theorem. He was the founding editor of the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* and its driving force for nearly fifty years.

he maintained the most exacting of standards. Invariably dressed in suit and tie, Church was a formal man, very much a man of respect. With the rumored exception of his former student, the logician William W. Boone, no one was on a first-name basis with Church. Even his colleagues addressed him as “Professor Church.” It was said that Mrs. Church addressed him more intimately, as “Church.” Students attending his lectures—I among them—rarely addressed him at all, except after raising one’s hand and being called on. Speaking with him was made more difficult because he was hard of hearing. Yet Church seemed to be quite a nice man, at times even jovial.<sup>10</sup> A man of few words, he spoke in tight, exquisitely well-constructed paragraphs. Church had a palpable distaste for inexactness. Though his words were few in number, they were rich in content, rich in reason, and precise. His course lectures were meticulously clear and magisterial recitations, whereby the audience was afforded an opportunity to absorb wisdom from a true master. He covered all material, from simple and rudimentary to advanced and arcane, at exactly the same pace. His calm precision was cognitively comforting, even soothing, in itself a thing of genuine beauty.<sup>11</sup>

When Mrs. Church died, the daughter of a close friend of mine (the late Louise Nunnink, who was the staff assistant to the Department chair) helped out by doing Church’s laundry and the like. The daughter commented to us that Church ate breakfast cereal in an unusual manner. First he poured the milk into the bowl. Then he poured sugar into the milk and stirred. With sugar dissolved and evenly distributed, he then poured only a single spoonful of cereal into the sweetened milk, scooped the moistened but still crisp cereal up with spoon and ate it. Then another spoonful, and so on until all the milk was consumed. A moment’s reflection reveals that this is the correct way to eat cereal. I confess I continue to eat cereal in the conventional and incorrect manner. Force of habit no doubt, yet it also confirms that I can never be in a league with the great man.

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He supervised the doctoral dissertations of many notable thinkers, including William W. Boone, Martin Davis, Leon Henkin, Stephen C. Kleene, Simon B. Kochen, Hartley Rogers Jr., J. Barkley Rosser, Dana Scott, Raymond Smullyan, and last but not least, Alan Turing.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Deutsch recalls the following incident: “I was in Church’s office and we were going over a proof in my dissertation. But it was clear to Church that I couldn’t see the page clearly. (I’ve always had weak eyesight.) So he jumped up, opened all the blinds and turned on all the lights. This illustrates his basic kindness and humanity.”

<sup>11</sup> Church engaged in a ritual as a prelude to lecturing. Bernard Kobes recalls: “I liked how Church would erase the board before every class, with a low tuneless hum. We would erase the board for him, before he arrived. But he would re-erase it. If we noticed an error during the lecture, we’d point it out, which would require Church to walk a bit toward the student with his hand to his ear. Then he’d give an embarrassed chuckle and erase everything back to the error, and start writing again.” John Perry shares the following memory: “I tried to benefit from Church, and went to some of his classes, [which were] pretty much above my head. My most distinct memory is that he would come in each afternoon for class and spend about five minutes erasing the board. . . . One day some graduate students came in early and gave the board the most thorough erasing conceivable before Church arrived, to see what he would do. He looked at the board for a moment, a little nonplussed perhaps. Then he erased it once again quite thoroughly, as usual.”

Endeavoring to make small talk at a department party, I once asked Prof. Church who his own philosophy instructors had been. “I confess I never took a philosophy course,” he chuckled. “One might say that I’m in the Philosophy Department under false pretenses.” I have known many good philosophers who did not have the opportunity to learn directly from Church. I have known none who would not have been better philosophers had they done so. I learned many technical lessons from Church, on such diverse matters as the ramified theory of types, Gödel’s proof of his completeness and incompleteness theorems, and the  $\lambda$ -calculus. More importantly, Church taught me the value of exacting precision—which is not to be confused with technicality or a formal methodology, and which is often in short supply even where it is indispensable to the undertaking at hand. In philosophy generally, and in metaphysics and the philosophy of language especially, lack of precision often protects the devil lurking in the missing detail. Frequently—and even only once is too often—excessive vagueness is tactical. Church would have none of that.



Alonzo Church in conversation with Nathan Salmón at David Kaplan’s home

Prof. Church wrote everything out by hand in an impressive cursive calligraphy well known to all who have attended his lectures or have seen a copy of one of his manuscripts. I had some written correspondence with him. I save the paper bearing his remarkable script. I

was delighted to learn that he had read my book, *Frege's Puzzle*, as well as one of the sequels to it, "Reflexivity."<sup>12</sup> Although he disagreed with the central thesis of *Frege's Puzzle*, he had himself written a pair of papers, "Intensionality and the Paradox of the Name Relation," and "A Theory of the Meaning of Names,"<sup>13</sup> which show sympathy for a position that significantly overlaps that taken in *Frege's Puzzle* and "Reflexivity." In 1989, he sent me a short letter together with his manuscripts. The letter began, "Just to prove that great minds run in the same channel." Although his throwaway remark did not reflect a genuine assessment—of me or of himself—it was exceedingly generous and the memory of it can still cause me to blush. It was a distinct honor to have been tutored by Prof. Church.

Don Kalish told his meta-logic class a charming tale involving his legendary and extraordinary collaborator, Richard Montague. Montague was slated to deliver a technical result, a partial solution to an important problem, at a meeting of the Association of Symbolic Logic. Montague declined to present. Instead he announced—with as much dignity, one imagines, as he could muster—that he had received word the problem in question had been completely solved by some high-school student in Omaha, Nebraska.

The Omaha high-schooler who had stolen Montague's thunder: a whiz-kid by the name of 'Saul Kripke'. Saul was a genuine phenomenon. He was a man of extremes. He was the foremost philosopher of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, certainly the most gifted philosopher since Russell. So forceful was his personality I would have believed that the very name 'Saul Kripke' semantically expresses a particularly vivid individual concept, had he not convinced me that names are not semantically descriptive in that way, not even his own. As with Church, whose work is also important in computer science, to my knowledge Saul never used a personal computer. (He once told me he hated them.) But in contrast to Church, Kripke's handwriting was nearly undecipherable. Especially extreme was Saul's knack for analytic philosophy. Margaret Gilbert put it well. "For Saul," she said, "doing philosophy is like breathing."

In 1971, as a recent community-college transfer to UCLA, I heard the lore surrounding Kripke. In Spring Term 1972 I learned about the Saul Kripke Experience first-hand. That is to say, I learned what it is like to experience bona fide genius. It was at once intimidating, humbling, frustrating, and awe-inspiring. I was 21. Saul was only 10 years older than me. (Sadly, he no longer is.) But he was light years ahead of me, and remained so to his dying day. I enrolled in Saul's undergraduate course on Frege and Russell on names and descriptions. Saul arrived late, by two weeks. A bundle of nervous energy, looking and sounding very much the eccentric prodigy, he spoke too loudly. He was easily distracted. His lectures were accentuated with much hem, haw, and stammer. But the content was solid gold. I had already been exposed to the theories of Frege and Russell by very knowledgeable experts. Saul put forth forceful arguments and considerations, both pro and con, such as I had never seen, heard, or read before,

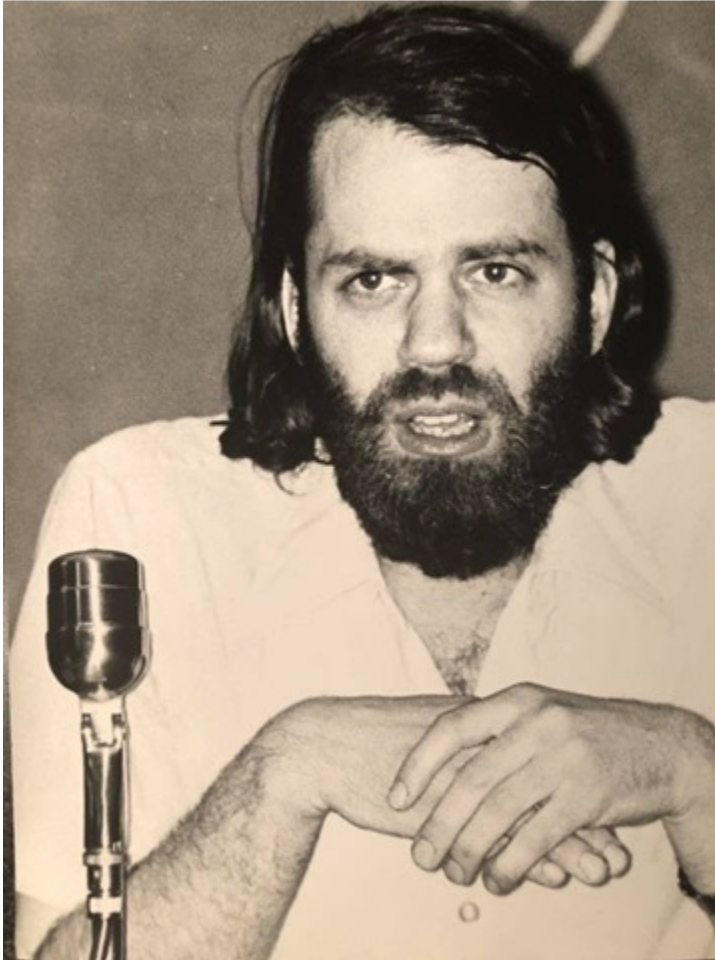
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<sup>12</sup> "Reflexivity," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 27, 3 (July 1986), pp. 401-429; reprinted in my *Content, Cognition, and Communication*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter 2, pp. 32-57.

<sup>13</sup> J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, eds, *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 151-165; V. Sinisi and J. Woleński, eds, *The Heritage of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995). pp. 69-74.



and have witnessed only by Saul since. The course was a spellbinding tour de force. It was the most brilliant undergraduate course I have ever experienced.



Saul Kripke, early 1970's

I also attended Saul's graduate seminar that term. More a workshop than a seminar, it was held in a large classroom—not a lecture hall but something much larger than a seminar room. Philosophers came in from other SoCal institutions. To the best of my recollection, which might be inaccurate, attendees included (perhaps off and on) Bob Adams, Marilyn Adams, Tyler Burge, Harry Deutsch, Keith Donnellan, Montgomery Furth, David Kaplan, and Alvin Plantinga (who was also visiting at UCLA). Still a junior, I was not yet sufficiently schooled to participate in the discussion. I sat inconspicuously in the back row and did my level best to be invisible. Although the seminar was largely over my head, I paid very close attention and took careful notes for future reference. (I still have the notes.) I commanded my mind to expand in a Herculean effort to keep up. One exchange in particular has stayed with me. It is clear enough what it is for a proper name like 'Socrates' to designate (to "refer"). The term designates the man. Saul wondered what it is for a general term, like the word 'tiger' in 'Tony

is a tiger', to designate. If it designates, presumably it designates *tiger*. But just what is *tiger*? A property? A species? Similarly, if the adjective 'blue' is 'Henry's favorite shirt is blue' designates, presumably it designates *blue*. "But what is *blue*?" Saul asked. "A property?" I immediately thought there was something strange about the question, since normally the same question would elicit an obvious answer. Just as immediately David offered the answer out loud: "A color!" I felt confident I could learn to do this, whatever it was that these guys were doing.

During a subsequent term I drove Saul on a Friday afternoon from his Westwood apartment to the Laguna Beach vacation home of the magnate, Warren Buffett. The house was vacant and Saul would be spending the weekend there as Buffett's guest. (Buffett was a friend of Saul's parents.) Things did not go according to plan, of course, and we arrived with barely enough time before sundown for Saul to cook the meat that would have to last through the Jewish Sabbath. Saul sat himself next to the oven, opened the oven door a crack, and nervously looked back and forth between the oven and a clock the whole time the meat cooked. He expressed annoyance that he would not have any time to work on a difficult meta-mathematical problem he had been hoping to tackle before sundown. "Dammit all, now I'm going to have to do it in my head," he complained. "You know, that's much harder than with pencil and paper!" Despite my years of religious indoctrination, I had not known until that moment that the prohibition against working on the Sabbath did not extend to work done in one's head, evidently regardless of the difficulty. For although I did not know what problem he was working on, I was confident that what Saul would be doing in his head was beyond the capabilities of most of us even with all the pencil and paper in the Western Hemisphere.

Of special interest at the time were claims by Kripke and Putnam that their theories of names and natural-kind terms, respectively, delivered *a posteriori* necessities, such as that Woody the table was not made from *m*, where *m* is particular matter that does not overlap the hunk of wood that Woody was made from, and that water is composed of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen.<sup>14</sup> In a talk On October 11, 1974, Keith Donnellan made important, insightful observations in support of Kripke's and Putnam's claims concerning the necessary *a posteriori*. The very notion that direct-reference theory yields *a posteriori* necessity was itself tantalizing. It had an almost mystical quality. I was enthralled by Keith's wonderful talk. He was attempting to de-mystify the very process by which the claim that 'water' is rigid generates the conclusion that water is necessarily H<sub>2</sub>O. For me, Keith's explanation only made the process more mysterious. I was determined to get to the bottom of the mechanism. The endeavor became my doctoral dissertation, and eventually a book.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972, 1980), at pp. 110-134, especially p. 114n56; Putnam, "Meaning and Reference," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXX (November 8, 1973), pp. 699-711, especially pp. 706-709.

<sup>15</sup> *Reference and Essence* (Princeton University Press, 1981; Second edition, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005). See especially pp. xiii-xiv.



Saul Kripke, with Edward Keenan and David Kaplan in background

In 1978 I joined the Princeton University philosophy department as a superbly trained assistant professor and the new low-person on the tenure-track totem pole. I had other excellent tenure-track options, but I wanted to extend my philosophical education by participating in Saul Kripke's classes and seminars. Princeton had the world's strongest philosophy department at the time, primarily because it had Kripke.<sup>16</sup> I spent four years at Princeton. By the end of 1980, I had enjoyed a good deal of success as a young professional philosopher, with solid publications in first-rank journals and a complete draft of my first book, *Reference and Essence*, which was based on my doctoral dissertation (and which would later go on to win a national book award). However, the culture in the Princeton philosophy department *circa* 1980 promoted a certain kind of intellectual negligence-*cum*-disingenuousness. Some of the tenured faculty valued bold postulation above insight and careful reflection, even if the product was unbacked by tutored intuition, cogent argument, or good sense. Regrettably, this is to a considerable extent true

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<sup>16</sup> A quip is attributed to Peter Unger: "If Saul Kripke worked for that post office, that post office would have the world's greatest philosophy department". The quip no doubt angered some. It was true.

today of the profession at large. On the whole, a philosopher is prized more for being audacious or provocative than for shedding light and improving understanding. This is despite the fact that results achieved through insight, careful thought, and (in Russell's words) honest toil are more intellectually significant than bullshit, and far more rare.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of my third year as assistant professor, David Lewis, who had been charged with judging my prospects for promotion to tenure in three years and with advising me accordingly, admonished me that instead of doing what I saw as the pursuit of philosophical truth (making potentially insightful observations, coming up with forceful arguments where strong support is needed, and the like), I must stake out a bold, previously unclaimed philosophical position, put it forward publicly as my theory, and garner critical attention for it. (As I pointed out, this was exactly what he himself had done with his infamous counterpart theory.) It was not required that the bold position be correct, that it be plausible, that I have persuasive arguments to support it, not even that I believe it—as long as I invented it, professed it as my view, and was widely discussed for it. David had read my forthcoming book, and was well aware that I had mounted a case against *S5* modal logic there, and even against the weaker *S4*. But this went against his own views and he had an argument—albeit fallacious—against my case.<sup>18</sup> David's professional assessment and “advice” were, in effect, an ultimatum. They included the explicit threat that otherwise I would certainly be fired from my job—and that I very likely would be anyway. Such was my eye-opening introduction to the ways of professional philosophy and of promotion to tenure at the then top-ranked department.

I was completely taken aback, thoroughly repulsed, and profoundly offended by the improper demand. A highly distinguished (albeit eccentric) Princeton philosopher was requiring me, under severe economic threat, to become precisely a sort of philosopher no one should ever be. If I was to have any remaining hope (slim though it might be) of keeping my job, I would have to sacrifice my intellectual integrity.

Really? At Princeton University—the academic ancestral home of the great truth seeker, Alonzo Church?

Yes, really. At Princeton. Despite the threat to my livelihood, obeying the directive was as unthinkable to me as caving in to pressure to find an innocent person guilty in court. I explained to David that with all due respect, I would not be doing what he was demanding of me, that instead I would continue pursuing philosophical truth to the best of my ability, wherever that pursuit leads, come what may.

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<sup>17</sup> I here mean ‘bullshit’ in its scholarly, technical sense. See Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton University Press, 2005). I thank Teresa Robertson Ishii for pointing out that the word in that sense is apt for the phenomenon under discussion (although no serious harm results by taking the word instead in its literal sense). In his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1919, 1953), Russell famously observed that postulating mathematical entities instead of securely deriving their existence has “the advantages of theft over honest toil” (p. 71). In that same spirit, I here distinguish between philosophical flimflam and genuine insight.

<sup>18</sup> Ironically, Lewis's counterpart theory violated *S4*. Evidently unaware of this, he endorsed *S5*.



Snapshot of the Princeton Philosophy Department, April 17, 1979. Top row: Gilbert Harman; James Ward Smith; Michael Frede; George Pitcher; Richard Jeffrey; Richard Rorty. Middle row: Margaret Wilson; Walter Kaufmann; Stephanie Lewis ("Steffi", not ladder faculty); David K. Lewis; John P. Burgess; Thomas Nagel. Bottom row: Raymond Geuss; Saul Kripke; Paul Benacerraf; Nathan Salmón; Arthur Szathmary; Thomas ("Tim") Scanlon; Calvin Normore.

David's ultimatum was an abusive miscarriage of academic justice and of due process. More important, it constituted a violation of the most basic of sound academic principles. It prized celebrity instead of truth. In fact, it reflected disdain for what is arguably the academician's most solemn duty to their field of inquiry: the pursuit of truth for its own sake. David's demand reflected a corrupt and seriously warped academic-value system, one that infects the profession of philosophy at least as much today as in the latter half of the 20th Century. At bottom, the ultimatum was anti-academic, anti-knowledge, anti-truth. Forty+ years on, I remain enormously thankful that I had opted to go to UCLA for graduate school instead of Princeton. At Princeton, I would have studied under Saul Kripke, just as I did at UCLA, but I likely would also have come under David's heavy thumb. At UCLA, I had the great fortune of studying under the three very best philosophical minds of the day: Alonzo Church, David Kaplan, and Saul Kripke. All three also upheld sound academic values and the most exacting standards. In fact, two of the three had spent most of their careers at Princeton.

Almost certainly, no assistant professor at Princeton besides me was officially issued the same improper ultimatum in the same way. (On the other hand, it is no mere coincidence that a couple of them followed the very course of action that David demanded of me, and benefited by doing so.) There is a backstory that I learned about only years after I left Princeton for sunnier shores. David's wife, Steffi (1944-2019), had been a philosophy graduate student at UCLA since 1967, when David taught at UCLA (and when I was still in high school). The UCLA philosophy department conferred my PhD in 1979. Weeks later, the same UCLA philosophy department rejected the second of two consecutive doctoral dissertations submitted by Steffi. At a Princeton Philosophy Department function, David expressed to me his palpable outrage—specifically asking about a view of one member of Steffi's doctoral committee regarding approving a dissertation—though I of course knew nothing at all about the matter. (David did not let on that Steffi's dissertation had been rejected. I still expected that she and I would receive our PhDs from the same department in the same year.) With two failed attempts at UCLA, Steffi gave up on pursuing a PhD in philosophy and made a career change.

What was clear from conversations with some senior colleagues (including David) was that despite my auspicious start as a professional philosopher (and despite what previously had been a friendly relationship between us), David now wanted me gone from Princeton and he was pushing me out early. Saul Kripke, who also didn't yet know the backstory (almost no one did), volunteered to me that he was shell-shocked (Saul's word) by David's assessment and stance regarding me. More as a friend and mentor than as a senior colleague, Saul advised me to take a professorship somewhere else, where my philosophical efforts would be appreciated and supported. I was only too happy to do so at the first opportunity—with valuable lessons learned and a properly adjusted attitude toward the professional hierarchy. And so ended my voyage of discovery in a place as strange as Princeton.<sup>19</sup>

On the positive side, owing to Kripke's presence my appointment at Princeton enabled me to extend my philosophical education. It also gave me a better informed appreciation for my fabulous experience at UCLA.

The word 'philosophy' comes from the Greek for *love of wisdom*. Yet the primary goal is neither wisdom nor knowledge; knowledge is the attainment of the primary goal. First and foremost philosophy embodies love of truth. The primary personal philosophical virtue is not so much the gaining of correct belief and avoidance of error as it is the endeavor. The primary philosophical tool is reason. Gottlob Frege, G. E. Moore, and Bertrand Russell—the founding giants of analytic philosophy—sought truth through reason. Truth was their ultimate goal; they

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<sup>19</sup> Some of Lewis's admirers have reacted badly to my recounting of these facts, although none to my knowledge has taken the position—as one might expect they would—that the ultimatum Lewis issued me was perfectly proper and legitimate academically. It was not, but Lewis clearly felt that it was. One is often told, "If you see wrongdoing by someone in a position of power, call it out." I endorse this admonition, but with some hesitation. One is obligated to add a cautionary word: Be prepared for the consequences, as some might take great offense at your exposure of the truth. Anticipate unfounded denials by some without any knowledge of the situation, and *ad hominem* attacks on your veracity or character.

rarely (if ever) lost sight of that objective. That noble tradition has not been consistently maintained. Love of truth is too often preempted by love or admiration of cleverness. Some philosophers are so enamored of cleverness that they care not at all whether the pronouncements delivered are right. Some philosophers dismiss truth as an unworthy intellectual goal. They discredit truth as subjective, as having little value, as irrelevant to the enterprise, or even as non-existent. Some replace truth with various practical or social surrogates, sometimes mislabeling the substitute 'truth'.<sup>20</sup> Those philosophers from whom I learned most, and those philosophers whom I most admire and respect, have applied their brilliance in the service of the uncompromising search for truth.



Nathan Salmón and Saul Kripke, Mexico City, October 30, 1996

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the preface to my *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning*, pp. vii-ix, at p. viii.