

John as Advisor

John was not my formal mentor, although he could have been. I had applied to Berkeley for graduate school, but chose another institution. Yet over the ensuing decades, John assumed the role of gentle advisor.

Lunch and dinner at conventions were convenient venues for offering advice. Want to occupy yourself in productive ways during boring convention speeches? Pull out a pen (he always a fine nib fountain pen, black ink only) and write out proofs from Euclid's *Elements* from memory! How to deal with declining visual acuity in your 40s? Get progressive lenses, not bifocal ones! Want to use archival material responsibly? Use it sparingly! -- He never cured me of being an archival junkie, but I did get progressive lenses in my 40s.

John's good counsel was especially comforting in my early career when a troubling incident unexpectedly ensnared me. I asked him if it were hypocritical of me to contribute my time and effort to an organization that honored someone who sought to discredit me. He simply pointed out that the honor was "an instance of imposing on the ignorant." Continue your work, he advised, for the hypocrisy lies on the other side, in the organization. Somehow, John always knew when the emperor had no clothes. He could put matters in perspective.

On a lighter note, John's advice could come in the form of gentle enticement. When he asked me to be on the editorial board of the *Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, he sent the *Oxford Companion to Wine*. I never told him how appropriate the choice was.

Our last encounters with John were at Oxford in fall 2018 when he and Alison entertained us at a local pub, Old Bookbinder's Ale House, and regaled us with their knowledge of this storied university. The following spring, we met them at the Jedfest in Pasadena where, in Jed's and Diana's garden perched above Los Angeles, we shared observations on the state of the modern university. His good counsel persisted. Do not, he cautioned in 2019, do other scholar's homework by transcribing what were clearly key documents in the history of 19th century physics, Kirchhoff's seminar paper and his dissertation, both written in German script, which few historians could read. Problem solved! I moved on to more creative pursuits.

His guidance and especially his camaraderie will be missed. The memories will remain.

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