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Karl W. Deutsch: Teacher, Scholar, Mentor, Mensch¹

In thinking about Karl as a teacher one fact stands out. His mind soared. What was so extraordinary for his students, was to him a way of life. It happened spontaneously in any setting: while answering questions in a lecture hall filled with 250 undergraduates; while debating research strategies in an advanced graduate seminar; and in discussions, one-on-one. Karl often appeared to be unprepared for class, ready to jump on any possible diversion. The unfocused questions of his students were opportunities for him to teach us how to soar. Rather than 'winging it', he was simply taking another exhilarating leap. Working his magic—a blend of analytical abstraction steeped in relevant evidence and presented with telling detail called up from an evidently inexhaustible store of historical knowledge—Karl never shied away from taking intellectual risks in the classroom. Attempts to make an ordinary idea, any idea, soar, or to extract a testable hypothesis, any hypothesis, from a confused insight, entailed the risk of having to abort during take-off or suffering the occasional indignity of a crash landing. Devoid of professorial stuffiness, Karl accepted this as the inevitable by-product of creative thinking and vigorous teaching rather than a cause for embarrassment. Typically, though, he would succeed effortlessly in getting that ordinary idea or confused insight off the ground and in reformulating and extending it until its origin was almost unrecognisable. And then he would cut the string quickly, look around the room with a faint smile, thus sharing with us the sense of a world full of exciting, unthought thoughts. Karl never paraded his brilliance; rather, he used that brilliance to sharpen ideas and correct misconceptions. He never treasured insights as his own; he always insisted that ideas were a common property.

This was only natural for a man whose work centred on the concept of communication and the making and unmaking of national communities. Karl's scholarship was visionary and transcended an emphasis on the power to threaten and hurt. Imbued by a sociological perspective on politics his innovative analysis

¹ An abbreviated version of these remarks were read on 20 November 1992 at the memorial service for Karl Deutsch held at Memorial Church, Harvard University.

of pluralistic security communities, islands of peaceful international relations, became a relevant utopia to which Karl held with iron conviction at times when others could only see the stark reality of superpower confrontation. The end of the Cold War is not comprehensible with the theories of political realism, commonly held within the academy and beyond. But the processes of nationalism, modernisation, and supranational integration that Karl unified in a communication theory of politics make intelligible both the promise of the end of the Cold War in his beloved Prague and the horrors to which the end of the Cold War has yielded in Yugoslavia.

Karl's appetite for acquiring new data and insights about virtually any subject was voracious. On matters of evidence, Karl was an unrelenting egalitarian. Everyone was entitled to their opinion; no one was entitled to their facts. Karl's ability to probe data was legendary. Large correlation matrices and detailed episodes of the most minor historical events were a source of endless fascination for him. He did not like 'stylised facts'. He wanted 'real facts'. Carefully sifted and properly presented, facts, Karl insisted, would relativise mistaken theoretical and political claims. On this score his generosity and easy manner gave way to a steely determination. He pushed his students very hard to go back to the library, time and again, to look harder for better data. He did not seem to notice the occasional bouts of discouragement or exhaustion that his students suffered. Yet he did not threaten or cajole. Instead he would peer through thick glasses mournfully while cheerfully announcing 'I know you can do better'.

Karl was a rationalist to the core and a cautious optimist who was in love with intellectual subversion. Kepler, he delighted in recounting, was hired as the astrologer of the Danish court only to become the founder of modern astronomy. Little did the king know what he was funding. The openness of the process of intellectual discovery and the limits of political power in the face of human ingenuity were two key insights which Karl used to navigate through the turbulence of the late 1960s at Harvard. He disdained power and had no patience for ignorance. He did not fit well either with conservatives, worried over their authority in the academy, or student radicals chanting received, alternative truths. In the final analysis, politics for him was not about power but about learning and empathy. He remained a Central European Social Democrat at heart, believing in the force of reason and reform, and committed to those at the bottom. 'Never forget', he once advised some of us, 'to send the elevator down again, once you have gotten to the top'.

He was shamelessly exploited by all around him; and he enjoyed every minute of it. When I met him in the late 1960s at Harvard his life was extremely hectic. He was incapable of saying no and thus was permanently on the run. I remember a string of a dozen appointments made and broken with one first-year graduate student. Conscientiously jotted down in his calendar—glasses pushed back on his forehead, a tiny pencil trying to find an empty line in his overcrowded diary—these appointments yielded to his many other obligations or simple for-

getfulness. His secretary, Evelyn Neumark, tried to impose order on his life. I still remember one hectic departure to the airport for an overseas flight, his briefcase covered, like Big Bird, with numerous yellow stickers reminding Karl of some of the practicalities of life. Valiant these efforts were, and they succeeded at least in part. Karl resented at times the fact that his life was run by the schedule of others. And as students we too resented these others never imagining that we could ourselves fall in that category. I learned quickly that late afternoon appointments were ideal; at 5:30 the phone stopped ringing and free-wheeling discussions reached closure at no predetermined hour. These private tutorials ended normally with a phone call from Ruth, an hour or two later, gently reminding him that it was time to come home for dinner. Karl would look at his watch, then at me, and grin. And then he was into his coat and out of Littauer—in a hurry. For a man so absorbed in the world of ideas, he was at the same time deeply devoted to Ruth whom he loved and adored for her many accomplishments.

In the end Karl's gift of letting the mind soar reflected his ability to combine what he had brought from Central Europe, first-hand knowledge of diverse cultures and histories, with what he experienced in the United States, powerful intellectual currents in the social sciences. The combinatorial richness of linking fact with theory thus was reflected by his life history. It was only years later that I learned how deeply in Karl's mind that life history was enriched by his two daughters, Mary Edsall and Margaret Carroll, and how much pleasure and satisfaction he derived from the great successes and accomplishments in their rich lives. The loss we all feel with his death is very deep, yet muted. Teaching and learning always remained a social not an individual act for Karl. He inspired scholars the world over. And he encouraged especially the young to give their best, while finding their own voice. His gift remains with us. Great teacher that he was, Karl outwitted death.

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