



IN MEMORIAM

Joseph Tussman
Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1914 – 2005

Joseph Tussman died in Berkeley on October 21, 2005 at the age of 90 after a long career at the University of California, Berkeley. Tussman was born in Chicago on December 4, 1914. He attended Washington High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and after that the University of Wisconsin in Madison where, in 1937, he obtained a B.A. in economics. For the next four years he was enrolled as a graduate student in philosophy at UC Berkeley but left in 1941 for five years of Army service without having completed his degree. In 1947, he returned, however, for one more year to complete his dissertation on the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Having obtained his Ph.D., he became a lecturer in Berkeley's Department of Speech and, after the dissolution of that unit, an assistant professor in philosophy. In 1955, he left Berkeley for Syracuse University and then for Wesleyan University; but in 1963 he returned as a full professor to Berkeley's Department of Philosophy, where he stayed until his retirement in 1982.

Throughout his life Tussman was deeply committed to undergraduate education. He considered it his primary obligation to educate students to a responsible and mature sense of citizenship. With great dedication he taught his large and popular Philosophy 2 course, which sought to introduce students to the fundamental problems of moral and political thought. Tussman had a classical conception of what that meant. He thought it important that undergraduates familiarize themselves with the great works of Western philosophy and literature, and he thus spent a great deal of time on reading works like Plato's Republic and Hobbes's Leviathan with his students. His interest in these texts was, however, never purely scholarly or antiquarian in character. He wanted, rather, to show the contemporary relevance of these classical texts, how they raised issues that still very much concern us, and how their lessons can be usefully applied to the present day. In reading the Republic he would thus easily move from discussions of fourth century Athens to current debates about abortion, women's equality, and civil rights. In studying Hobbes, he would move just as comfortably from considerations concerning seventeenth century England to contemporary issues of political obligation, thus relating Hobbes's words to the Vietnam War and to the civil disobedience movements of the 1960s. In putting forward these ideas, he was always keen on engaging his students in the philosophical issues, and he often did so by taking highly provocative stands. This gave him the reputation of being an intellectual conservative, when he sought, in fact, only to show alternatives to the currently popular views. In putting forward these provocative positions, he was consciously adopting the role of a Socratic gadfly spurring his students on to think responsibly and independently. In addition to Philosophy 2, Tussman was also widely known and much admired for his courses in the philosophy of law and the philosophy of literature.

Though liberal by temperament, Tussman was genuinely conservative in one direction, and that was in his commitment to an organized educational curriculum. He strongly objected to the idea that the University should be seen as "a marketplace of ideas" where students could shop for whatever they found attractive. He

considered it most important that students (and indeed an educated citizenry) share a common fund of ideas and understanding. The image of selective buying and selling as a model for human life and specifically for education appeared to him to be, by contrast, “disastrous, emotionally poverty-stricken, self-defeating,” and not likely to survive for long. At Berkeley, Tussman set out to realize his educational goals in the Experimental College Program that he directed for the four years of its existence from 1965 to 1969. The program sought to give students a thorough and systematic knowledge of ideas ranging from Homer to Thoreau and from Plato to Malcolm X. The program unfortunately faltered because of excessive costs and the reluctance of many students to submit themselves to its highly structured curriculum. Tussman’s model, however, spawned successful follow-ups at the University of British Columbia and at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. In his memoir *Experiment at Berkeley* (1969), Tussman has described for us the educational vision of his Experimental College Program as well as the practical steps of its implementation.

Philosophically, Tussman remained committed to work in political thought. He did so even in a period when that part of philosophy was not generally considered to be at the center of the field. He was in this respect, as always, independent and sovereign in his thinking. His best known, most widely read, and most influential book, *Obligation and the Body Politic*, appeared in 1960 and was followed by a series of other writings in which he expanded on the ideas contained in that early work, most notably *Government and the Mind* (1977), *The Burden of Office: Agamemnon and Other Losers* (1989), and *The Beleaguered College* (1997). The dates show that Tussman remained intellectually active long after his retirement and up to the end of his life. In his later years he particularly nurtured his literary interests in the Homeric epics, in ancient tragedy, *Beowulf*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He remained at the same time a keen and critical observer of contemporary political life, holding views that were not necessarily popular but always deeply felt and rationally argued.

Tussman’s true mettle and his most fundamental political and moral commitments became evident early in his career at Berkeley when the University required all its employees to sign an anticommunist loyalty oath. Tussman was one of the leaders of the roughly 20 percent of the faculty who refused to sign the oath. At the time he argued in his usual forthright manner that he himself was not a Communist but that he considered it a good thing for some Communists to be on the faculty, since students would otherwise be deprived of understanding what Communism was about. But to his deep and continuing chagrin, Tussman felt forced in the end to sign the oath on purely economic grounds. He thus escaped the fate of 31 of his colleagues who were dismissed from their teaching positions. On the basis of that experience, Tussman remained deeply convinced that it was not the role of the institution to censor ideas, that all thought deserved rational assessment, and that it was the job of educators to help their students in that undertaking. Tussman was an educator, first of all, but a philosophically minded educator — someone for whom his educational practice and the content of his thought were one.

Joseph Tussman is survived by his son David, who continues to live in Berkeley.

Hans Sluga
Benson Mates
Wallace Matson