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A Man Without Enemies

My first encounter with Bob Jervis was half a century ago, as a first-year graduate student in his Gov 230 seminar on theories of international politics. The syllabus was an ideal voluminous survey of the literature, and I cribbed from it six years later when, as a lecturer, I taught the course after Bob's departure for UCLA. I recall the class in particular because Peter Katzenstein was in it (auditing?) and he regularly dominated the class discussion, but most of all because of my pride in getting a straight A from Bob –before the prevalence of grade inflation! I was a late bloomer academically and didn't take such a grade for granted. Many years later, at Bob's 60th birthday party, I was gratified to see that he was a bit of a late bloomer too. At the party he displayed copies of his old report cards from the Fieldston School, and I was pleasantly surprised to see a lot of B grades. Maybe for selfish reasons I liked to think that he affirmed the notion that creativity and great intellectual achievements do not depend on early performance according to standard metrics.

I had only infrequent contact with Bob for the next twenty years, but we shared an interest in developing the academic study of intelligence. He was arguably the dean of this field, which only emerged in a serious way at the end of the 1970s when waves of declassification began to provide reliable empirical material for study. He came to the subject through his work in political psychology, while I came to it via work on the staff of the original Senate investigation of U.S. intelligence agencies (the Church Committee). This combination fueled some cross-fertilization and we crossed paths occasionally in purveying our academic insights as consultants in the intelligence community. While I've been primarily a policy analyst, Bob was the consummate theorist, but unlike some eminent theorists he was eager to apply his ideas to policy when opportunities arose, and without the naiveté often found among cloistered academics about what constitutes real policy relevance.

Probably because of his work with CIA, Bob was apparently on a list of potential appointees in the incoming Clinton administration at the end of 1992 when I got a call from someone on the transition staff who was compiling information and opinions about candidates. I assume that I was contacted because I had previously spent fourteen years in the Washington policy milieu, including several months on leave from the Brookings Institution as a foreign policy advisor in the Walter Mondale's presidential campaign, and had some connections among insiders. I gave Bob a strong recommendation but then the caller asked, "Is he quirky?" I responded, "What do you mean?" He answered that he'd heard that Bob dressed "unconventionally." What could I say, other than that unconventional was conventional in the academic world, and I knew Bob was happy to dress appropriately when circumstances required since I had heard that he dressed up for the opera. I mention this only because in the various reminiscences about Bob that I've heard in the days after his death fondly humorous remarks about his clothing choices seem to pop up.

Another aspect of Bob's personality that I kidded him about whenever possible was his Manhattanite provincialism – that is, his view, which is typical of many raised in the city, that it is the only place to be, and indeed that there is scant reason ever to go anywhere else. This was a trait Bob flaunted, albeit with an eye twinkle. An international affairs expert who had to be dragged into foreign travel – indeed, I think he never got to Asia even once – is unusual. When Harvard tried to recruit Bob in the late 1980s, Sam Huntington, originally a New Yorker himself, lamented to me that conversation had revealed they couldn't entice him because of his attachment to "the high life in Manhattan."

One of our colleagues once characterized Bob as a "conflict avoider." At the time this sounded like criticism for unwillingness to embrace contention forthrightly. Like our colleague I too tend to prefer frank confrontation in most cases, but I wouldn't criticize the difference in Bob's inclination if such it was. He did not avoid polite debate and was quite adept at making critical points indirectly, or stepping up to aggressive argumentation on the rare occasions when importance and effectiveness demanded it. The milder diplomatic style may well have underwritten his success in leading the profession, and in any case it had a strongly admirable side. As Ken Prewitt said in a Zoom meeting soon after Bob's death, Bob was a man who had no enemies. That was something unusual and laudable.

I owe many sorts of thanks to Bob. He was a personal friend for the past thirty-plus years since I came to Columbia despite the many demands on his time as not just a professor called on by administrators more than most but as a leader of the profession outside. I had to love him because he appreciated my work more than many others have. We often (definitely not always) shared a similar tilt in attitudes toward contending arguments, and when Bob agreed with me in a debate with others I took special comfort and confidence in my position. He is one of two especially eminent political scientists (Huntington the other) who supported my career progress and had faith in my work despite its not being in step with the main methodological trends of recent times. He was instrumental in getting me to Columbia at a time when I was, in a sense, damaged goods, the president of another great university having just vetoed my appointment after it had been voted by its government department. He supported me beyond the call of duty several times along the way in my career – something doubtless legions of his friends, colleagues, and disciples would also say.

These recollections dwell on Bob's personal relationship more than his intellectual influence on me. The latter was not so much in specific matters of research as in simply being a model of theoretical innovation, intellectual breadth, and erudition. If any critic ever mounted a major attack on any of Bob's ideas or writings, let alone a telling one, I missed it. Bob and I shared the devotion to accumulating, annotating, and relying heavily on books, which used to be typical of academics but has become less so in the computer age. His appreciation of the empirical discipline that psychology and history should impose on political science rang ever truer in the heyday of rational choice theory and emulation of economics. That Bob was chosen as president of the American Political Science Association at the same time that the latter trends were ascendant (and which he supported as a fellow traveler and intellectual pluralist) is especially powerful testimony to his stature. Indeed, he had no enemies – personally, intellectually, or professionally.

Please add a brief autobiographical statement here:

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