

**IN MEMORIAM:  
ROBERT EVERETT REUMAN**

When I was a student at Colby, Bob Reuman was more than just one of my teachers: he was also a role model for me. After I joined the faculty here, he was more than just one of my colleagues: he was also a mentor. But for the last twenty five years, above all else, he was my friend.

What he meant to me--and to countless other students, colleagues, friends, and family members--cannot be put into words, but words are what we have, so if you'll allow me a few anecdotes, I will at least try to share a sense of the man and what he meant to me.

Prof. Reuman was an inspiring teacher; Dr. Reuman was a marvelously syncretic philosopher; but *Bob* Reuman was a delightful and wonderful human being. That, of course, was the most important thing, but I had thought that I'd talk mostly about others, about the educator and about the scholar, because those were his designated roles at Colby. And there is no question that Bob filled those roles conscientiously, faithfully, and superbly. But part of what made Bob such an effective teacher and such an insightful philosopher was that he didn't--couldn't--limit himself to just those roles. For him, they were not separate roles. Philosophy is not something that can be confined to the study; teaching is not something that ends when you leave the classroom; and life is not something that happens to you when you aren't studying or teaching. He was the teacher and philosopher that he was because of the person that he was. How fitting that it was Bob Reuman who introduced the concept of "teachable moments" into the Colby College vocabulary. Those occasions when the fabric of the community has been stretched out of shape or torn altogether are the times when we need to "mend the world." Teaching is a life's vocation, and the most important time to teach is when we most need to learn. Bob taught us that. He truly was a moral philosopher, in all its senses.

As a teacher, Prof. Reuman could only be described as, well, "awesome." I was in awe of his knowledge, his erudition, and his dedication. And when I say that I was in awe, I mean exactly that: I was inspired by the example he set, I was dazzled by the philosophical vistas he opened up, and, to be honest, I was sometimes a little bit daunted by his presence. And believe me, he really was a presence. For us, he was philosophy incarnate, someone who had read and digested *everything*. Why, he was on speaking terms with Kant and he could even understand Hegel! And this was the person who was going to read *my* papers, too? How could I ever hope to make them worthy? And yet, he read and listened and questioned and criticized and suggested and engaged and struggled with my thoughts as if I were Spinoza reborn and he were the supplicant student.

Sometimes it would happen in class that you'd ask a question, and Bob would start mulling it over ("Reumanating," we would call it.). You'd get the feeling that you'd asked exactly the right question, the one that would allow Bob to unlock all the mysteries of Being. You could almost see the thoughts swirling around, coming together, profoundly connecting and reconnecting with one another, in that inscrutable and omnipresent hovering halo of pipe smoke. It was a sublime image--so powerful that it wasn't until I told one of my colleagues about it, a few years after I joined the faculty at Colby, that I realized just how indelible it was: she pointed out that Bob had given up his pipe at least ten years earlier! It was indeed a powerful impression.

As a philosopher, Dr. Reuman could be described in many ways, because he was so incredibly syncretic. He was a master at making connections, bringing Lao Tzu and Leibniz into conversation with one another, or showing why the Kantian dictum that intuitions without concepts are empty, concepts without intuitions are blind revealed why ethics and epistemology have to be treated in tandem.

That last was one of Bob's favorites. It goes straight to the heart of what he thought philosophy was all about. It articulates a demand for intellectual integrity in matters philosophical and stands as an indictment of purely academic philosophy. The philosopher who thinks about ethical matters without the benefit of a larger theoretical framework is indulging in idle speculation. The philosopher who concentrates on metaphysics, ignoring questions of value, is *at best* half a philosopher. Perhaps worst of all are the philosophers who dabble in both without connecting them, because they have compartmentalized and, in so doing, they have compromised. That, Bob liked to tell me, was the problem with Bertrand Russell. A good academic philosopher, which is to say a good half-philosopher, but utterly inadequate as a whole philosopher. I think that was Bob's particular cautionary tale for me. To make it into Bob's Philosopher's Hall of Fame, you had to do it all. So, in the end, even Heidegger, he than whom no one could think deeper, must be regarded as having fallen short *philosophically* because his excavations into Being did not make him a good man.

If Heidegger is the cautionary tale for all academics, then Robert E. Reuman is the counterbalancing inspirational because he was a good man--a very good man. He not only thought intensely and deeply about moral principles, he *lived his life* by those principles--intensely and deeply. For him, the arguments of moral philosophy were morally convincing, not just academic exercises. There is something meet and proper about this. Whenever I think of Bob, I am reminded of a conference I attended of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers, in the summer of 1984, just after my first year on the faculty. The keynote speaker, John Lachs, made quite an impression on me as he spoke of the special obligations on professors of philosophy. The medical doctor who does not heed his own advice about smoking can still be a good doctor; the pharmacist who abuses drugs can still be a good pharmacist; and so on. But the philosopher who does not heed philosophical argument, he said, more than just manifests an inconsistency. He or she undermines his or her own credibility and

status as a philosopher. Teaching is not like other careers, and philosophy is not like other disciplines. Philosophy demands engagement. As I remember it, Prof. Lachs then went on in very general terms to describe the ideal professor of philosophy: morally committed, intellectually serious, liberally educated, both keenly analytic and creatively synthetic, and above all passionately engaged even while striving for the larger perspective of objectivity. As he spoke, I recognized the description immediately, as do you all: without ever having met him, Lachs was describing Bob Reuman.

As a teacher of philosophy, one of the things I like best about the discipline is that I don't have to know the answers. I only need to understand the questions. There is room for us to disagree without acrimony. And yet I was always nervous whenever I disagreed with Bob--both as his student and as his colleague--because I could never shake the sneaking suspicion that I just hadn't thought about the issue at hand long enough or hard enough. If he came to a different conclusion, I had better think again. Of course, Bob and I would often disagree about philosophical matters and debate them. I grew to relish those debates the best because that is when I learned the most. It's not that we came to philosophical answers, but that we could learn so much from and so thoroughly enjoy the questions.

There is, however, one philosophical question that I always thought that deep down I knew the answer to. It was an answer that I learned from Bob, but not one that he ever taught. You see, Bob lived a life of principled engagement. His principles were non-violence and fairness. If it required an act of civil disobedience and going to jail, he would do that. If it meant going against the national charter of his own fraternity because it had a restrictive clause in it stating that Jews were not welcome as members, Bob would fight that fight. If it meant taking on the responsibilities of spokesman and advocate for the African-American students at Colby, he would do that, too. It was important to me--and to all his students and colleagues--to know that about him. So I hear Rabbi Hillel's questions differently for having known Bob

Reuman. Hillel asked, "If I am only for myself, then what am I? And if I am not for myself, then who will be?" I knew the answer to that one: Bob would be for me. I could count on it.

We'll miss you Bob, but you have left some of you in each of us, and for that, well, thanks.