

JOEL FEINBERG RETIREMENT RECEPTION REMARKS—MAY 10, 1994*

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I first encountered Joel Feinberg in print—I recall the day, and the piece (it was on duty to rescue) though not the specific title. I was in an all-but windowless and completely cheerless office in Gainesville, Florida. Reading his work in this grimly institutional space, I felt a certain light spill into the room. It went beyond the logic and elegant prose and subtly brilliant arguments: it was the someone behind the arguments that made the room (and me) glow.

Not all people who dazzle us with their writing—as Joel does in ways that have made him such a powerful and nationally recognized scholar—do so with their real presence. It is no secret that Joel has so dazzled me. And I know from the graduate students we have shared and from my colleagues that I am not alone.

For Joel Feinberg is—remarkably and virtually uniquely—precisely what one would hope he would be from reading his work: someone who believes in moral discourse—who argues from a position of liberal toleration, from a position of profound respect for others' right to disagree, from a position of respect for others, period. He talks the talk, *and* walks the walk. Moreover, Joel is rare, staggeringly rare, in that despite his stature, he is modest, unassuming, and generous-spirited. He is, quite simply, a great man -- not just a man with great talents.

As a lawyer, I cannot resist the power of evidence—of facts that support this expansive claim. The Philosophy Department in conjunction with our *Law Review* is planning a conference in Joel's honor for the fall. In discussing the roster of possible speakers and commentators, Joel imposed only one fixed rule: that his former students, several of whom are now assistant professors making their way through the gnarly thicket of untenured years, be included as participants. I wonder how many professors of his stature would have acted similarly—seeking student participation even when their academic luster may not—yet—match that of other, more senior and thus accomplished participants.

Further proof lies in his classroom ethics. I have watched him teach—our own law students, the very same ones who warm the chairs of our lecture rooms—and been amazed at what he draws from them. He does the honor of "Regents Professor" proud. He guides the discussion to a higher plane, always present yet still allowing them to try out their own ideas. He listens to them, he respects their ideas; he *pushes* them. In short, he treats them exactly as he does

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his colleagues. His are vigorous, fun, exciting and collaborative classes. Watching Joel teach, I thought of Buber's aphorism that teaching is authentic communication. Joel's teaching illustrates the sense and power of Buber's observation.

As Joel prepares for his retirement, he has been exploring means of preserving the tie between the Philosophy Department and the Law School. This tie is important to him (luckily for us) as it is a tangible extension of his scholarly endeavors. We therefore might best honor Joel and his work by committing resources and energy to preserve this tie, which he heretofore has virtually single-handedly created and maintained.

But even as I endorse such plans for a future in which Joel is less prominent, I must say for all of us at the Law School, that no matter who may come to either program with an interest in both, they will not replace Joel. In the dozen years that I have spent in teaching, I have met none like him—and I do not expect to again in the next dozen. Thank you, thank you, thank you for all of your unparalleled gifts—as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a true colleague.