

## ***Reflections on the life of Dr. Harold Hotelling***

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This seems to be a very risky enterprise—trying to describe the qualities of such a good and brilliant man in front of his family and friends.

I could describe the man whom we could count on to take the lead on the really difficult jobs. Only a few years after he came to Lawrence Tech, we chose him to lead the negotiations for the College of Arts and Sciences as the University totally overhauled its curricula. Within five years, he took on the toughest of all jobs—chair of the department. Most recently, he has served the University during a long stint on the Faculty Senate and as a member of the Faculty Handbook Committee—jobs that made extraordinary demands on his time, patience, and diplomatic skills. But you can read about all of his accomplishments in today's program.

The question is: How can I ever do justice to a man of such varied virtues? And I really knew him mostly as his colleague and “work friend,” in the department of humanities, social sciences and communication at Lawrence Tech. Can you imagine what it was like to be the only full-time economist in a department full of smart-aleck English and history professors? Taking all that ribbing for being an economist AND a lawyer? Harold soon gained our respect, admiration, and affection partly because he was a witty man, but a man whose wit went deeper than his abundant sense of humor. He had the wit of a genuine deep thinker and inspired problem solver. We all appreciated and benefited from it. He was also A Man of Good Cheer, always cheerful—indeed cheery. He would always cheer you up! Something to remember in this time of great sadness.

In fact, I first knew Harold before I even knew him, or I should say he influenced my life--for the good, of course--before I met him when he came to Lawrence Tech in 1989. I was lucky enough to be the department chairperson who received his acceptance of an offer to teach full time at Lawrence Tech. But before then, when he was still on the faculty at Oakland University, my wife Jane, who is a publisher's representative for college-level books, was walking the halls there late in the afternoon after a particularly tough day. She had been trying with little success to make contact with professors. She was deeply discouraged, about ready to pack it in. And then an economics professor with a cheerful smile warmly asked her how he could help. She explained who she was and what she was doing, and with his characteristic cordiality, Harold invited her to sit down in his office. They talked textbooks. She was relieved and encouraged. She came home to tell me of this nice man she had met that day.

She stuck with her job. He would have been proud and happy for her. He applied to teach at Lawrence Tech, and only after he was hired did I mention to her that we had this new economist, Harold Hotelling, who came from Oakland University. She was delighted, and so was I! I've been happy about it ever since.

But cheerfulness and warmth, although they were the first of Harold's qualities we noticed (and his students noticed it too!), hardly account for the impact that he has had on all of us.

I've been trying to come up with a term that can, in some however inadequate way, sum up Harold's many human and professional qualities. Make no mistake: professionalism was of the greatest importance to him, and I knew and valued him as a professional colleague as well as a friend. So here is what I came up with:

"Compassionate Rationalism,"

Or "Optimistic Realism."

OK. I couldn't come up with just one term.

These are terms I associate with the eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. He seemed to me an eighteenth-century man in so many ways, but an eighteenth-century man navigating the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first with wonderful curiosity and a deep sense of duty. He was a quick yet careful thinker, full of useful ideas and sensible caveats. I'm confident that as friends and colleagues, we all admired and were grateful for his intellect. I felt privileged to be around it.

He also had faith expressed through his church (the Episcopal [Anglican] Church), which always seems to me—my apologies to the Rev. Sams--like a good eighteenth-century religious institution, but he also seemed to have faith, supported by deep knowledge of theory, mathematics, and statistics, in Adam Smithian economics, *laissez faire*, the free market—the classical economics born in the eighteenth century. For years, I learned from him about the virtues and limitations of economic deregulation, first of airlines and then of a wide range of financial, and non-financial, institutions. He was the "Go-to Guy" for deregulation, financial derivatives, and reassurance during panic-inducing times like, say, the current recession. He could always reassure you with his upbeat cynicism: "I'm counting on the one reliable constant of human nature to bring us back from the brink—greed!"

But Harold also seemed to me to embody another of Adam Smith's lesser-known key ideas—the notion of "Moral Sentiment." And here's where the compassion part of that "compassionate rationalism" comes in. He had a genuine moral sentiment, spontaneous, really not calculated. A sentiment-- never sentimentality--that balanced the rationality grounded so

firmly in his penetrating intellect. The genuine interest in the well-being of others showed itself time and again. He showed the same readiness to help a student lost in the back hallway of the second floor of the Science Building, where we had our offices, that he had shown my wife Jane. He would tirelessly sit in his office and talk economics with even the most uncomprehending student. (In fact, one of the delights of my job as his department chair was reading the students' comments in his teaching evaluations. They continually expressed amazement at his ability to make such a boring subject interesting, even fun! I always enjoyed sharing these comments with Harold and then hearing his good-humored grumbling: "Boring? Economics? Never!")

Well, those lost souls in the hallway and befuddled students in his office experienced one of his great qualities: his repeated offers of guidance and help. Offering help. That is what he did over and over again, at the personal level certainly, but also at the department level and the university level. Harold's deep sense of duty benefited us professionally but also, over and over again, personally. And that duty was backed by a simple kindness—especially to strangers. We, being stuck-up Northerners, would sometimes needle Harold about his North Carolina roots, but there seemed something Southern, something Southern gentleman, about his kindness to strangers. Blanche Dubois could have counted on him. We certainly did.

In closing, I'd like to point to the wide range of Harold's knowledge. I could count on him to make subtle distinctions in identifying military air craft by their wing profiles, or especially in distinguishing among all the ships at sea. He knew a lot about a lot of things, including the exploits of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster as presented by that master of English prose, P. G. Woodhouse. So, it has been with great trepidation that I have spoken to you this morning, wondering how many times Harold would have felt the impulse to correct my English but been too kind actually to say a word.

My deepest sympathy goes out to his family, of whom he always spoke with such great pride and affection. I always knew what everyone, especially Barbara, was doing and achieving. You gave him the greatest happiness.

I know I'll feel a great emptiness when I walk down that second floor hallway again, but I'll also try to remember the twenty years of humor and good counsel he gave me. One final example: when I made one of my characteristically idiotic comments to him about how appealing I found the colors of my favorite college football team, so appealing that I thought these colors were obviously in some objective sense superior to other color combinations—like scarlet and grey, for instance—he had a very Harold Hotelling reply: "Maize and blue? You like them so much because they're the colors of your Cub Scout uniform." Genuinely witty, but also in all probability—true! That was Harold.