

Joe

I want to talk about Joe's intestines. I want to say four things about them. First, he had them. Second, it can't have been easy to be Joe's intestines. Third, my husband knows (in some sense of knows) more about them than anybody should have to. Fourth, again, he had them.

First. Joe had intestines. I started graduate school at Pitt in 1989, and was dismayed to discover that, apparently, part of what one was supposed to do in graduate school was acquire a philosophical persona. The personae most conspicuously being cultivated by the ambient graduate students were ones that did not bring intestines to mind. These personae were ethereal: propelled by insatiable philosophical appetites and manifesting exquisite philosophical genius, their intellectual landscapes featured the likes of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, whom they set straight on such questions as the true nature of norms. I was prepared to take on a lot in graduate school, but becoming so . . . precious wasn't something I could imagine managing. Then there was Joe. Joe was not ethereal. He smelled. He wore greasy suits. He swore a blue streak. His philosophical landscape featured Clyde the Moose, his relatives from Alabama, and a number of ants named Charlie he didn't set straight but confused. Very obviously, all this also was a persona. *But it broke the space of possible personae wide open – wide enough to include the option (which however deficient it was in other respects, seemed simplest) of being myself.*

Second. It can't have been easy to be Joe's intestines. . . . My graduate cohort took the core course in M&E from Joe our first year. At least for a while. The course started out fantastic in all the ways we've been hearing about. And then Joe stopped coming. He stopped coming, it was disclosed, because he'd fallen prey to an obstructed bowel. (A number of us decided to blame Joe's bowel obstruction on Wilfrid Sellars, who had died the previous summer. At another memorial service, about a month after we started graduate school, Bob Brandom had all too memorably claimed that philosophers eat their dead. Still, we didn't model Joe's bowel obstruction as the straightforward material result of an ill-judged act of post-Sellarsian cannibalism. Our model of Joe's bowel obstruction was that the ghost of Wilfrid Sellars had moved into Joe's bowel – because there was nowhere else it would rather be.)

To complete Joe's course, we were supposed to write four short-ish essays. One Joe returned, graded, in 1990, before Sellars occupied his bowel. The second I also got back, under the following circumstances. In 2002, with Joe retiring, a crew of graduate students had been detailed to clean out his office, in the sense of relocating its contents to a giant grey plastic dumpster on wheels. A member of the cleanup crew appeared in my office door, holding a dusty document by the corner: my essay, produced on a dot matrix printer in 1990, on Mark Wilson's "predicate meets property," and submitted to Joe in partial fulfillment of the M&E core course requirements. It hadn't been marked. The other two essays – well, they could be anywhere. Joe eventually returned to fighting form, but he never registered a grade, for any of us, in the core course. My cohort shares

a collective guilty secret. Thanks to Joe's intestines, and possibly Wilfrid Sellars, we never finished the core course in M&E. Completing that course is a requirement for comprehensive evaluation. It's a requirement for admission to candidacy. Indeed, it's a Ph.D. requirement. Thanks to Joe's intestines (and possibly Wilfrid Sellars), it's a PhD requirement no one in my cohort met. *I stand here, the successor of John Dewey, Bill Frankena, and Allan Gibbard as the Chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of Michigan, since 1834 one of the foremost philosophy departments in the land, and I tell you: my professional credentials are fraudulent. I think Joe would have liked that.*

Third. What my husband knows, in some sense of knows, about Joe's intestines. In Joe's later years in Pittsburgh, he would occasionally call upon me or my husband to help out. The division of labor was: I helped with the discharge of Joe's civic duties, like voting. Gordon helped discharge his medical duties, like going for his colonoscopy. And so it was that Gordon found himself in the wee hours one morning sitting in a waiting room with bleary loved ones of those undergoing that procedure that day. Joe had been led off, in shorty nightgown with a gap at the back, to his examination room. It soon became apparent that, due to some glitch in the intercom – or perhaps to the intervention of Sellar's ghost – that what was transpiring in Joe's examination room was being broadcast into the waiting room. The assembled bleary loved ones were being treated to the audio of Joe's colonoscopy--- Including but not limited to Joe's conversation with the technician about its progress and findings. No transcript was made of the audio, and Gordon was so traumatized by the experience that he repressed all memory of it for a decade. The memory resurfaced last winter, while we were eating burgers with Derrick in Ann Arbor. It sent both D and G into such deep hysterics that they both turned eggplant purple, and I started doing complicated moral calculations to determine, if they both needed the Heimlich maneuver simultaneously, which one I'd Heimlich first. *That the mere mention of Joe's colon could, decades later, so quickly land his former students in such a condition says a lot about Joe.*

Fourth. Again, Joe had intestines. Now by intestines I mean "guts," and I'm going to try to talk about Tamara dying. Tamara Horowitz: Joe's partner, a compelling, sane, stylish, tough, funny, brilliant, striking woman. Early in the fall of her first year as the first woman chair in the history of the Pitt philosophy department, she developed a pineal blastoma, a brain cancer. She died the following January. In between there was the sort of roller coaster of hope and despair that leads to a death from cancer. On this roller coaster the plunges and twists were even more sickening because: Tamara was about making sense of things. You wouldn't think a commitment to understanding to be a character trait that distinguished her from other philosophers, but it did: Tamara was exemplary at understanding, at picking things worth understanding, at managing to understand them. And both the disease and its treatment lay waste to big chunks of her capacity to understand, and to express what she understood. This was eviscerating to witness.

And I witnessed some of it. While she was dying, Tamara was in one of the campus hospitals for long stretches. While she was there, John Earman and I fell into the habit of swinging by on our way from the Cathedral to the gym to visit her a couple times a week—because nothing brightens up a hospital room like a pair of well-intentioned but awkward philosophers of physics. This is actually true if Joe also happens to be in the hospital room. And Joe always was. Not only was Joe there, he was also indelibly, intensely, Joe, delivering profane, hilarious, horizon-twisting riffs on the latest developments in Tamara's war on cancer. I remember Joe reporting, and being thrilled to report, that a collection of rabbi relatives of Tamara had convened in Brooklyn to try to get some divine intervention organized. He wasn't thrilled by this because he thought it would do a damn bit of good. He was thrilled, I think, because it was delightful to realize that this was one of the ways the world fit together. Joe's agility at negotiating zany ways the world fit together also enabled him to take up the sometimes tattered and disjoint conversational threads Tamara offered to weave with her (and us) a genuine discussion, albeit one whose integrity may have been lost on anyone encountering it through a transcript, rather than through sharing the room with us.

What Joe brought to Tamara dying included his remarkable clarity and his remarkable curiosity. That curiosity was not limited to the medical situation. It comprehended the moral one as well. And a moral fact Joe found marvelous, a fact he enabled us to appreciate, a fact I believe he contributed significantly to sustaining, was this: to a surprising extent, and in spite of the disintegration of her cognitive and expressive capacities, Tamara's fundamental personality remained intact. She was still, somehow, there, and how we could tell she was there was how she came out during the Joe-orchestrated hospital room conversations. There was one visit, after the disease had progressed unbearably far, we made very shortly after a surgery that had left Tamara half-bald and raggedly scarred. We asked her how she was doing. After a minute or so of obvious struggle to find a way to communicate her predicament, Tamara replied (and she did this with an air of apologizing for complaining at all): "I don't think I like my new haircut." Thanks to Joe, this launched a meaningful (although not conventionally literal) conversation with Tamara about her situation and how she felt about it.

Joe's ability to infuse even Tamara's hospital room with the sense that pervaded his seminars that we were having the world's craziest sensible conversation, and saying things that had never been said along the way---this was an awe-inspiring performance. Also, all-too-evidently, a deeply draining one. Still, it wasn't hard to form a hypothesis about where Joe got the strength and the motivation, in the face of Tamara dying, to continue so vividly to be Joe. *He was being Joe for Tamara. He was being Joe for Tamara because it was the best way he knew to help Tamara, against what should have been insurmountable physiological and psychological odds, to continue to be Tamara. Joe being Joe in the face of Tamara dying---this was the most sustained and unusual display of courage and of kindness I've ever seen. It took guts, guts of Joe's exceedingly peculiar sort, guts I reckon myself lucky to have encountered, guts that we are all going to miss.*

