
Tony Atkinson (4 September 1944 to 1 January 2017): A personal tribute

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Tony Atkinson died on 1 January 2017 after a long illness. He was 72. With his death, the economics profession has lost one of its finest far too early and his many friends mourn the passing of a wonderful human being.

I have known Tony since he was an undergraduate at Cambridge in the 1960s. I like to think that he may have gone to my lectures. I do know that we subsequently had a unique relationship, about which we joked: I was the first person to ask him for an off print (remember them?) of his first ever article (it is now a classic), on how long is the long run in then fashionable growth models. It was published in *R.E. Studs* in 1969 (Atkinson, 1969).

We kept in touch over the years, and, as were other members of the Cambridge Faculty, I was over the moon when he finally came back to Cambridge as Professor of Political Economy (Marshall's Chair) in 1992 with a Professorial Fellowship at Churchill. Alas, it was only to be for three years before he became Warden of Nuffield at Oxford from 1994–2005.

Tony was exceptionally intelligent in many dimensions, and he would have more than made his mark in any area of economics. But he was, most of all, an exceptionally fine person: warm, compassionate with an exemplary sense of social justice. This arose partly from personal experiences as a young man and partly because he was inspired by James Meade's similar passion.

Tony therefore devoted the bulk of his life's work to exploring the causes of inequality of income and wealth, developing deep theory with which to understand them and devising pioneering ingenious measures which laid firm foundations for realistic humane policies to tackle what he had unearthed. When he started, these were unfashionable, much neglected issues. That they are now back as the centre of attention is due to Tony more than anyone else. He has left us a large number of major contributions. That he was never awarded the Nobel Prize is a scandal.

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Tony was loved by his colleagues and students for all the right reasons: he was an outstandingly supportive colleague, a wonderful supervisor of graduate students, he lectured to all three years of undergraduate degrees, and a fine community as well as university citizen.

When he knew his last illness was terminal, along with many other publications, he wrote his socialist manifesto', *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* (Atkinson, 2015), providing a package deal of measures that could serve to lay the foundations for a just and equitable society.

Tony and Judith were a devoted couple, linked together by their humanitarian ideals and their great love for one another, and their families. It was a unique privilege to have been his colleague and friend. I hope the essays and tributes that follow will be seen as fitting memorials to a wonderful man.

References

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Author biography

GC Harcourt AO is Emeritus Reader in the History of Economic Theory, University of Cambridge (1998), Emeritus Fellow, Jesus College, Cambridge (1998) and Professor Emeritus, University of Adelaide (1988), and Honorary Professor, UNSW Sydney (2016–2019). His research interests include history of economic theory, intellectual biography and Post-Keynesian theory and policy. Now 'over sixty years a [Post-]Keynesian', he has authored, co-authored, edited or co-edited 33 volumes, as well as over 400 articles, book chapters and reviews. Geoff is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and in the United Kingdom, an Officer of the Order of Australia, and a Distinguished Fellow of the Economic Society of Australia, The History of Economics Society USA, The European Society for the History of Economic Thought and The History of Economic Thought Society of Australia.