

## Harold Lasswell Memorial\*

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Ladies and Gentlemen.

Harold Dwight Lasswell died on December 18, 1978, at the age of 76. He was and remains the greatest of them all.

We have assembled in his memory to review his work, if only in part. It would be difficult to review his work as a whole because it was more than the sum of its parts.

Before introducing our two speakers who will consider some of Lasswell's contributions, I want to take the liberty of presenting what I wrote about him throughout the long night when I heard of his death. I called it "HDL Is Gone." It was a great personal loss.

At least outwardly, the way to describe him is to think of his *joie de vivre*.

Yet, I always wondered whether he liked his life as much as he liked his living.

The trouble is that after knowing him for over 40 years I feel that I really did not know him. I knew him and I knew him not. But I remember. . . .

It was always fun to be with him. It made one feel good, for he detested bores and pompous asses, and being with him meant that one was neither but in the company of the select. He was very selective, in what he did, in what he thought and in what company he kept.

To be with him meant to enjoy living, even if it was mostly in clubs, in restaurants, in bars, in resorts—mostly public places, and sometimes in other people's homes but rarely in his own place. That was a private place and HDL was a private person who liked public places because there, in anonymity, he could be private. I often wondered whether he was a lonely man. He never said and I never knew.

In all the years he would come through Stanford he was at my house only twice. Once uninvited and without prior notice—he just showed up; the other time invited and the central person—pivotal, he would say—at a small dinner party.

The first time he came it was, he told me on arrival, because he did not feel doing anything else—which was not the kind of thing one says

as an uninvited guest; but he was a conventionally unconventional man. If you knew him, you knew that it was a compliment.

As I said, he was very selective. So we did nothing but sit around and talk and drink, which for me was a great deal; until he abruptly got up and said he had to go. He didn't say where he was going, and one would not ask him. He was always kind of secretive in that way. I later learned that he had gone to dinner at Arnie Rogow's house. He was a very private man.

I first met him when he had come to Berkeley for a semester in the late thirties. . . . I took his course and found what he said ununderstandable and, I suppose, therefore challenging. Until I learned his language. It was very important to know his language, to read his stuff—but, more important, to understand his talking. And that was not necessarily the language of his writing. He used a lot of four-letter words in private conversation, though they were well chosen and not those one ordinarily uses. He was not an ordinary man.

He did his stints at many public colloquia where he was the master, but he liked the small group. I remember a small group around him at the Mayflower bar in 1963. I had run into him in the corridor, and as we moved along through the crowd we ran into Sam Eldersveld and Dwaine Marvick, and he said "let's pick up a couple more," and we did and went into a bar, and he talked and we listened, and everything he said was crystal clear because he was talking like one of the boys. He was a great talker.

He would talk about the most incredible things, so strange in fact that sometimes I had to act as if I understood what he was saying—which sometimes I didn't, perhaps because by then my brain had been saturated by the flow of his words, if not by the flow of martinis, and was no longer receptive, while his brain had been expanded and his tongue loosened. He was a great drinker.

I remember meeting him at the St. Regis bar in New York one late afternoon. He was full of something that had something to do with mental health training for nurses. He had just come back from some meeting in Geneva of some study section of the World Health Organization—and whatever it was he had learned excited his imagination but didn't interest me very much, cocktails or no cocktails. But as I nodded understandingly he went on and on, and seemed to enjoy himself enormously being in such intellectual company.

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\*This memorial to Harold Lasswell was presented at the 1980 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association at a plenary session honoring his life and work. Two other memorials, by Jeane Kirkpatrick and Dwaine Marvick, will appear in a future issue of *Political Behavior*.

As I met him through the years, there were always new things that he was involved in, with collaborators in India, Japan or Peru, or at M.I.T. or Ohio State, or in some law school or some mental hospital; and he liked to talk about it without ever using, it seems to me in recall, the word "I." He was always talking about himself as if he were outside himself—HDL the self talking about HDL the ego. He was not an egoist.

That night we ended up sitting on the floor of a Japanese restaurant of his choice. He was very choosy in what he ate.

When I joined his Washington group in June, 1941, at the Library of Congress where something called "World Attention Survey"—nothing less—was going on, he was called "the boss." (I suppose we so entitled him because Charles Merriam, his mentor, was still "the chief," back in Chicago). When he interviewed me for the job, I could see only the outlines of his then massive figure. He was sitting with his back to the window and a glaring sun was shining into my eyes. He looked like a silhouette. I have often wondered whether it was an inadvertent or a studied posture. Anyway, I got the job and my career was other than it might have been without him.

I didn't see too much of him in the Washington years. He was always off to somewhere—to Chicago or New York or, some said, to the White House, but nobody ever really knew where he went, as I found out years later, when he went to Arnie's house and didn't tell.

There were some seminars at which he and Nathan Leites were discussing evidently important things, but I was still learning the language and didn't hear very much. But I do remember an evening at Bruce Smith's apartment, just HDL, Bruce and I. I have forgotten what the talk was about but it went on until three or four in the morning. He loved the night life.

I saw him several years later, the only time I was in his New York apartment at One University Place. How fitting that address, I thought, as I went up in the elevator. It was an elegant apartment, with Persian rugs on the floor and original oil paintings at the walls and Louis XVI chairs. HDL was a very elegant man.

He was enormously interested in what I was doing at the time as an editor of a liberal weekly "journal of opinion." He liked opinions and, for once, I could do more talking than he, for I was having an experience he never had.

In general, when he had his own experience in something and you would tell him yours which may have been similar, he was not interested. He then preferred talking himself because he had more to say in the matter—whatever it was he was talking about—the Chinese Revolution, or the thought of Kautilya, or the new psychoanalysis of his friend Karen Horney, or

the French impressionists. He was a universal man.

The next time, I remember, I had come to New Haven to see his "decision seminar" at the Yale Law School. It was a weird place, with charts and maps and newspaper frontpages and what not. He demonstrated. But at lunch he again listened. I was at a small progressive college then, and he wanted to hear about it. He had great hunger for "intelligence." One always felt that one was somehow one of many agents he had around the world—out there to collect information to be absorbed into what he liked to call "the framework."

Then there were the notes or postcards, sometimes handwritten when he was abroad, more often dictated, but never longer than the message required. He would come right to the point. Here are two of the most whimsical.

When my daughter was born in 1948: "Dear Heinz, I'm glad to note that you have added biological to symbolic creation. With best wishes, HDL."

Or, after a proposed merger of Yale and Vassar had fallen through, a Christmas card showing three buxom young women in front of a fireplace: "The Virgins of Vassar said No. Season's Greetings, Harold Lasswell."

Most of the short letters were in response to my sending him recently published books. He was always generous with praise. The praise was perhaps more lavish than deserved. When Arnie Rogow edited the *Festschrift*, he simply wrote: "Thank you and Arnold for the original initiative that you took." When I dedicated a little book to "Harold D. Lasswell, Persuader," he wrote:

I am deeply gratified at your gesture in dedicating your brilliant essay to me. I am especially taken with the paragraph of disclaimer, since this strikes a note of very great importance for any one who is perpetually on the move into the future.

The disclaimer referred to said this: "His work has been a continuing source of stimulation and suggestion. But I am not a disciple. Indeed, one of the admirable things about Lasswell's teaching is that it makes discipleship impossible."

He was always looking into the future and to the next project. That is why his going is such a loss. He is an immortal and, I think, he knew it. The universe—past, present and future—was his oyster. When I wrote the chapter on his methodology for the *Festschrift*, he commented in "pure" Lasswellian style:

I've just had an opportunity to look again at the final draft of your chapter on the "Philosophical Underpinnings." As I told you originally, I think you have emphasized the essential identification with creative evolution shorn of many of the formulations of Bergson, who helped to give the approach a bad

name—after several years of a rather sensational popular success.

And he continued:

The mode of presentation that I have adopted through the years has been very much what you describe. Ever since I can remember I have written with a comprehensive map in view which was parallel in many important respects to the vision of the whole that has often guided painters who work on comprehensive programs. Hence the “allusive” and partially explicit mode of statement.

Finally:

You have raised a number of points concerning levels that are very important and in this day of “orbital models” where the universe seems to be composed of many “vortices,” the fundamental way of thinking will doubtless become more everyday.

I will not try to uncode the message for those who have not learned the language. I think his influence would have been far greater than it has been if he had made concessions in his rhetoric. People quote his definition of politics as “who gets what, when, how,” even though they may not understand him at all. But that book, I am told, was severely rewritten by someone else, I don’t know who. It was not his most significant contribution.

HDL had a message, was a “persuader,” as I saluted him. This, quite clearly, accounts for the fact that once the “framework” had been set, he repeated himself, like any good propagandist, almost endlessly in his public self-presentations, while the private Lasswell was a man of endless variation in concerns and interests, practical and intellectual.

There was the conference on public policy research that Austin Ranney had put on at some resort on St. Thomas Island in the early seventies. HDL was there and so was Pen Herring, and we had lunch with them to discuss something or other concerning APSA which I no longer remember, perhaps because I do remember Harold and Pen recollecting about the twenties and thirties, and how they had fun on some SSRC committee and were doing the new political science and writing for the old *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* and felt very “young Turkish” indeed. It wasn’t often that HDL reminisced about the past, for he enjoyed living in the present and always had the future in view. It took Pen to draw him out. It was a rare occasion.

Sometimes, in later years, I met him at the Kirkpatrick’s house in Bethesda, usually for dinner, sometimes with someone else around, like Austin or Warren Miller. Someone else who was much around for a couple of years or so was Charles Hyneman, and between the two of them discourse could be fast and furious, for Charlie is a talker of some stature in his own right. But, by then, Harold had slowed down.

While his intellectual appetite was undiminished, his by then legendary bibulous propensities had diminished, whether on doctor’s orders I don’t know, and 11:00 or so had become the witching hour. But those evenings on Granby Street stand out, with Jeane, who really adored him, as the hostess. Harold liked to be hosted without wanting to be a guest. He would orchestrate his social environment without ever giving an inkling of doing so. I suppose he would call it the manipulative mode. “I hope we coincide in Washington again and persuade Jeane to turn out one of her master-pieces,” he would write after one occasion.

The contemplative mode was equally pervasive. No moment was wasted. Once, when he was visiting at Stanford, I returned him to his room at the Faculty Club in the late afternoon after a full day of conversing with colleagues and students and lecturing. I wanted him to rest before the evening’s festivity. Picking him up an hour later, I found him sitting in the chair reading a book. “Did you have a good nap?” I asked. “Oh no,” he said waving the book, “just a change in focus of attention.” He loved festivities. “I was disappointed at not being able to be present at the festivities that marked the launching of the 17 volumes,” he wrote me on the occasion of the appearance of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* in 1968, for which he had written an article on “Policy Sciences.” And he continued: “I should like to hear what your present reflections are on the way to conduct an enterprise of this kind.” Then, again looking into the future: “After all, this may not be the last encyclopedia.” He was an indefatigable entrepreneur.

As I said, he loved festivities but really not those of a public kind, though he would not shrink away from his public duties. He came, on and off, to the Association’s annual merry-go-rounds, as he called the meetings, but never stayed at the convention hotel. He would take quarters at a nearby more exclusive hostelry, there to receive a progression of acquaintances or friends. He would show up at the meeting for whatever chores he had been booked for but withdrew when he felt his presence was no longer needed. I think he was very sensitive to his “presence,” especially when it was sought, as it often was, for purposes other than those he deemed really worthy of his support. These he tried to avoid if he could as much as he would be chagrined to miss meetings he thought valuable. “Until a few days ago,” he wrote on one occasion, “I thought I would be able to come to the Iowa City meeting and participate in the growingly important discussion of instructional material and activity. Unfortunately. . . .” He was a very important person.

It was not all serious business, though. He liked to listen to good jokes and story-telling. There was no better at that than E. E. Schattschneider. I remember sitting with them in the old Washington railroad station after the 1956 an-

nual meeting. HDL had gone out as APSA president and Schatt had come in. Schatt was at his best and Harold roared at Schatt's priceless jokes and stories. He seldom told a joke or story himself but he knew when he met a master. "That Schatt," he said afterwards, "is some character."

He was always eager to get feedback on his own work. He would write: "I recently sent along a draft of a policy sciences article and I look forward to your comments when you have had time to look at it. What's next on your schedule?"

He was ever curious about others' agenda. "I look forward with especial interest to your eventual assessment of Walter Lippman," he wrote at the time of Lippman's death, knowing that this was an unfinished task of my own. He had an uncanny knack for sorting out what was genuine and what was phony in matters theoretical and methodological. He was always pioneering but, in some respects, quite old-fashioned. Because he knew himself well, he welcomed many new developments which he could not master himself but in which he sought to have a hand. There were always mysterious "projects"—a favorite term of his—in which he claimed to be involved, and mostly they did come off with the help of bright younger associates whom he was able to attract.

Other projects remained on the burner. There never seemed to be enough time. The last I heard of a project he had suggested to me at a sumptuous four-hour brunch at the Plaza in New York in 1962 was a sentence: "From time to time I shall give further consideration to the exceedingly interesting project that we talked about at lunch." He was an eternal planner.

My last contact with him before he was struck down at Christmas time in 1977 concerned the possible publication of his collected works. He wrote:

Thank you very much for your letter of June 2 which indicates that you and Morris have compared notes on the feasibility of publishing the "collected works." I look forward to seeing you at the APSA meeting in early September at the latest. . . .

It is fortunate these days to have any publishers willing to engage in such a large-scale enterprise.

If I find myself on the West coast during the summer I will certainly give you a call and hope to have a preliminary discussion.

He never came and I did not see him in September of that year. He was struck down in December, and it was fortunate that a few months earlier Dwaine Marvick's carefully selected collection of HDL's writings had been published by the University of Chicago Press.

I said farewell to Harold about three weeks after the stroke, on a dreary January afternoon in 1978. Jeane Kirkpatrick and I had gone to the Roosevelt Hospital in New York to see him. He was asleep on his back, snoring gently, more white-haired than when I had last seen him, but his cheeks were slightly pinkish, as always. We sat in silence for a time. When he awoke, he talked, as best he could but difficult to understand. We were glad he recognized us. His mind was clear.

"He liked living as he did," I said. "Yes," Jeane said. And now only memories. . . .