

NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

Eloge

PHILIP J. PAULY, 3 SEPTEMBER 1950–2 APRIL 2008



There we were, at the “Ishkabibble” (International Society for History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology) meeting in Exeter, England, in the summer of 2007. Phil Pauly was happy to be healthy enough to be there, and he was winning over his lymphoma. He sat at one of the long picnic tables outside, as we ate and drank and laughed and talked. Phil shared his ideas and projects and listened eagerly. While others engage in “How are you doing?” small talk, Phil liked to learn about what people are working on, and he spent a long time with my grad student, with me, with colleagues and friends, all thinking out loud about our projects. Phil always had ideas and enthusiasm, and it

was always worthwhile thinking out loud with him. Good ideas always came out of it.

Good ideas also arose when Phil gave his paper a couple of days later. People streamed into the session, filling up the seats because it was a promising session and also because many of us always made an effort to hear Phil give a presentation. This one lived up to expectations: he spoke about “Mums as the Measure of Men? Interpreting the History of Culture through Gardening.” When he gave a talk, Phil always told a story. He always offered a beautifully crafted set of concrete details, woven together to make a point that we would go away still pondering and that we would end up discussing with him later. What larger work was this part of? Why mums? That sort of thing.

One of my favorite lectures was at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Chicago in 1992, shortly before Phil was elected a fellow of the organization. His title asked “Is Liquor Intoxicating? Physiologists Confront Prohibition,” but he started out with slides and explained that his talk was really about “science in the age of Al Capone.” The presentation was brilliant and compelling, weaving in social history and history of science, punctuated with questions to keep listeners’ attention. And they were attentive. The audience of more than a hundred stayed riveted, laughing at the often dry humor that Phil injected so expertly. Many of the science writers gathered around him afterward, making notes so they could write up the story for the next day’s paper. Those were the days when science writers truly existed and wrote stories—and when people actually read about science in the newspapers. But even then, historical stories about science were not the ones that typically appeared. Phil made his historical story come alive, and he got it into the pages of newspapers in 1992. That takes special talent, and Phil had it.

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Phil Pauly was a serious scholar and teacher, a devoted husband and father. He loved his son Nicholas Pauly and his wife Michele Bogart and would talk proudly about Michele's latest work in the history of art or Nick's successes. For a while his young son was especially keen on baseball, Phil explained happily, but then Nick grew up and became a sophomore at Rutgers, where Phil taught. They could get together frequently, which Phil valued; Nick reported to the Rutgers *Daily Targum*: "He was such an amazing person and an incredible dad. He was warm, brilliant, funny, and was always there for you. The two of us would often go to Au Bon Pain together after our Tuesday morning classes. It was really special." It was the same with Phil's students. While he had only a few graduate students, he was proud of them and really connected with them. He could detail the strengths of each one, as well as those of the undergraduates whose research he had mentored.

Other people seem to collect students or prizes or to revel in the attention of giving a great lecture and being mobbed with questions. Phil always seemed to love the creation of something lovely, and his pleasure came in the preparation and the performance. The public recognition just didn't matter as much. He explained this one time as stemming from two things. One, he always talked about his work with Michele, and by the time it reached an audience he was fairly confident that it worked. Second, as he put it, it was important that he was not an oldest child. Phil was the son of Vincent and Edyth Pauly; he had four sisters (Rita, Linda, Alice, and Janet) and one brother (Mark), so he learned early to be part of a larger team.

Philip Joseph Pauly was born in 1950, graduated from Catholic University in 1971, and received an M.A. from the University of Maryland in 1975 and a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1981. He held a predoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian, a postdoctoral fellowship at Ohio State University, and taught at Union College and the University of Georgia. The year 1981 was very special, since in addition to receiving his Ph.D. he married Michele Helene Bogart and began a distinguished career at Rutgers, where he rose to a full professorship in 2001.

One year Phil and I were among a large mass of History of Science Society annual meeting attendees riding on a bus to an off-site reception. I asked Phil whether he would help me head up a project I was cooking up. He said that he was happy to be a part of it but that he didn't want to be a director because, while I was an older child and always "out there," as a younger one he

preferred to wait a bit and see how things were going. He was happy to commit and put in a lot of effort to make a project work, but he wanted to do it more quietly. And he often did just that, serving on many, many committees and editorial boards for professional societies and at Rutgers. Most recently, he served on the History of Science Society's Committee on Publications, which oversees the Society's publications, and he played an important role in selecting a new editor for *Osiris*. At his death, Phil was just about to become chair of the committee. He showed that he was an excellent and wise committee member—and also a confident and committed leader when he took on such roles.

Most notable is his intellectual work. Phil did not just sit in his study writing papers and books. He developed ideas and a story line, then tried them out through examples in talks and papers. Unlike many scholars who become defensive about their work, Phil always invited and welcomed critique and engagement. I spent many hours asking him questions about why he had presented a story in a particular way rather than some other, and he always had an answer. Even when I started out thinking that another way might have been better, he always persuaded me.

This happened in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL). I had spent a summer there in graduate school and had become enchanted with the place and its scientific history. In my mind, the lab was a place where scientists had gone for nearly a century to trace embryological cell lineages or to study regeneration or neurobiology and such. Phil accepted the invitation to join Keith Benson, Ron Rainger, and me in working with a group at the Friday Harbor Laboratory in Washington. He gave us the marvelous paper "Summer Resort and Scientific Discipline: Woods Hole and the Structure of American Biology, 1882–1925," which looked at my favorite scientists. Now they were not just in the lab doing their science but also frolicking with their families at the beach. They had reasons to be in Woods Hole apart from the availability of embryos, which they could have found back home.

Phil had a way of seeing the larger picture. He looked at the science, but for Phil that work was always done by people in a social setting and as part of historical movements. That was his real intellectual genius. He saw the many small pieces of his historical puzzles very clearly, but for Phil the pieces were always part of something bigger. He just had to figure out the "something" and verbally paint the picture. His wonderful study of Jacques Loeb, which began

with his graduate work at Johns Hopkins, is an example. At Hopkins he studied with Donna Haraway, who also has a talent for seeing beyond empirical details to a larger story. Phil's first major work looked at Loeb, who worked at Bryn Mawr, the University of Chicago, and the Rockefeller Institute but spent summers with his family in Woods Hole. Rockefeller money even built a modern lab for him there, and one of the lab buildings at the MBL still bears Loeb's name. Phil's outstanding 1987 book, *Controlling Life: Jacques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology*, gives us Loeb the scientist at the turn of the twentieth century, seeking knowledge in order to engineer living things.

Later, Phil turned to other examples of scientific attempts to control culture—probing studies of alcohol and behavior in the Prohibition movements, for example. He explored modernism and progressivism and their impacts on life; he considered the role of science and natural history as an integral part of those movements. These investigations led him in 2000 to *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey*.

Phil had been struck with cancer for the first time in 1993. He underwent treatment and went into remission, so that five years later he was declared free and clear of the cancer. As he explained, when he was first diagnosed he felt sort of frozen for a while. He had to focus on preserving his health and learning everything he could about his disease. He didn't even buy socks and felt that he was in something of a holding pattern. His wife and son got him through that episode, and he came out stronger and more determined to pursue his interests—and to keep buying socks.

He also committed to a serious study of environmental history, beginning with a marvelous paper in *Isis* in 1996, "The Beauty and Menace of the Japanese Cherry Trees: Conflicting Visions of American Ecological Independence." He played out his ideas in a 2003 session at the History of Biology Seminar at the MBL, where he asked whether ecology was "A Jim Crow Science? How Humans Were Excluded from Ecology." That week-long seminar saw Phil in intense discussions morning, noon, and evenings about environmental history, nat-

ural history, and ecology. He moved on to the Hessian fly and then to his final book with Harvard University Press, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America*. This is an important book for American historians as well as historians of science, since the latter often lose the larger contextual picture and the former forget the technical science. Phil has brilliantly woven the threads together here, just as he did in all aspects of his life.

Then in March 2006 came the terrible news that the non-Hodgkins lymphoma had returned. Again, he and his family faced the challenge with courage and forward-looking optimism. The situation looked so promising that, despite the expected ups and downs, Phil was feeling better and was pronounced to be improving. On 27 March 2008 Phil sent me an email message, asking a question and answering mine about his health. He explained that he had become a walking chimera, with stem cells from his sister's generous donation, and that the treatment seemed to be working. Phil wrote that despite some challenges, the health trajectory seemed very promising. As he wrote, he was beginning for the first time to become involved with department politics at Rutgers, where he had spent his entire academic career. He was looking ahead, full of new ideas, and he reported: "So life is good."

Just a few days later, on 2 April 2008, Phil died. We will miss him tremendously in so many ways. It would be easy to indulge in lamentations that it wasn't his time and that he still had so much to give. Instead, Phil would remind us to keep buying socks, to keep asking questions, discovering details, telling stories, working together to learn from each other, and above all to keep the science, the scientists, society, and the larger history and culture in mind. Keep things in perspective, as a younger child knows how to do. And those who would like to remember Phil formally may make a donation in his name to the History of Science Society to help support younger scholars.

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