

Leon Roth: A Philosopher-Teacher

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DURING MY SCHOOL-YEARS—from kindergarten through university—I had many teachers. They were mostly very good teachers—often dedicated to their vocation beyond and above formal instruction in their specific subjects. Out of the many, two were outstanding—one in the higher classes of my secondary education and another at the university. It is the latter, Professor Leon Roth (1896-1963), who is the subject of this essay.

In order to present his personality and performance to the contemporary American reader it is necessary to expound on the context of my experience as a university student. My last four years of secondary education and the subsequent study at the university transpired in Israel—or, strictly speaking, in Palestine under the British Mandate before the establishment of the State. While the political control of the country was in the hands of the High Commissioner, appointed by the British government and responsible to London and not to the population under his rule, he and his administration left the educational institutions—notably those of higher learning—in the hands of the Jewish community. Thus, unlike in India and the various colonies of Great Britain, the

ruling power did not educate the native population (if the Jews could be described as such), but left them to their own traditions and devices, to their own ideas, plans and organization. One consequence of this cultural independence was that the language of instruction in the Jewish sector was Hebrew and this encompassed higher education. Thus, in a way, a new system of education and novel institutions of learning emerged: a Hebrew education and research, which encompassed customary subjects of Western Civilization in sciences and humanities, as well as traditional Jewish disciplines—all of these taught in modern Hebrew.

This does not mean that the educational system was created *ab initio*. The elementary and secondary schools had their precursors in Eastern Europe where Hebrew or partially Hebrew schools existed between the two World Wars in major cities. These were semi-private communal institutions, largely financed by the students' parents, and therefore attended by a minority of Jewish children. Yet, they were a living proof of a new approach to Jewish education—secular with a colouring of religion and tradition, and animated by the spirit of Jewish national renaissance, or Zionism. Like Zionism itself, the new way of Hebrew education was prefabricated in the Jewish

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diaspora—mainly in Eastern Europe—and eventually transplanted to the growing National Home in Palestine.

The incipient Hebrew education in Europe had another significance. It created the prototype of the new teacher and eventually supplied the cadre of Hebrew teachers, as well as Hebrew-speaking teachers of other subjects, for the secondary schools in Palestine. They were themselves the product of European schooling, but usually also of traditional Jewish education, and applied this synthesis in Hebrew schools in Europe and carried this symbiotic approach to the schools in Palestine, if and when they succeeded to emigrate to the Promised Land.

The Hebrew *gymnasia* (high schools modeled on the European example) offered instruction in such basic subjects as the Hebrew language and literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, another foreign language, history (general and Jewish), Bible. The subjects were taught in a continuous sequence—notably mathematics and history—so that there was no disruption and switching from one field or “unit” to another. There were very few electives. This instilled in the student a sense of continuity and cohesion of knowledge, as well as basic familiarity with the various fields—indeed, foundations of what used to be called “liberal education.”

The *gymnasia* studies were concluded by a comprehensive final examination, conducted by a central national authority. The successful passing of this examination was a prerequisite for admission to higher institutes of learning. These matriculation examinations caused a considerable degree of anxiety—especially in the last year of studies, which largely focused on preparation for the great test. Not surprisingly, little time was left for the teenagers to look for extra-curricular excitement. I do not recollect having any knowledge of the existence of drugs, let

alone a temptation to use them. Problems in algebra and geometry offered intellectual excitement. Some literary classics provided emotional involvement and aesthetic gratification. The Bible stimulated reflection—oscillating between theology and philosophy.

With this intellectual baggage—not too heavy but not insignificant—I entered the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to face a new domain of knowledge and its pursuit. It was new in substance, in method and style. First, one had to choose the subjects of study—a situation both attractive and perplexing. Then, instead of the give and take in a high-school class, one sat in a hall and listened to formal lectures, trying one’s best to absorb the words of the professor and record them in notes. Moreover, there were no assignments, as had been the case in school. The professor lectured for a whole year and then there was an examination—whether written or oral (called by the Latin word *colloquium*)—which entitled the student to enter a seminar. In the seminar the student participated, along with others, in discussing the subject-matter and was required to submit a substantial paper on a theme agreed upon with the professor. To sit for a final examination in one of the subjects of study, one had to fulfil specified requirements in lecture attendance and seminars. The examination, both written and oral, covered the study of the preceding years and usually also additional material.

As is clear from the preceding description, the system differed from the American college approach. It emulated the universities of continental Europe, the origin of most professors. There was no B.A. or B.Sc. The students prepared directly for the Master’s degree. There were no requirements to take courses for general education. That was assumed to have been accomplished in the secondary school. The students had to choose one major subject—such as philosophy, his-

tory, Bible, mathematics, physics—and two minors. Here they were allowed any combination, though certain patterns developed. Thus a major in mathematics was often combined with physics and philosophy as minors. There were no prescribed text-books (at least not in the humanities). The opening lecture or two was devoted to bibliography in which cardinal works in Hebrew (if available), in English, German, and French were offered. The books were available in the university library, which was also the national library, but what to choose was left to the discretion of the student. Certain subjects required reading knowledge in certain languages. A student of ancient history had to master either Greek or Latin. Modern history required English and either French or German. The university offered courses in these languages to facilitate the fulfillment of prerequisites and tests had to be passed to qualify the student for the pursuit of his subject of study.

On the whole, the system assumed more intellectual and scholarly maturity than most students had. It offered a new kind of freedom to the young graduates of secondary schools—a freedom which could be used to advantage by the serious and dedicated student, but which could be abused by one who was eager for student life but not disciplined enough to commit oneself to concentrated study.

If in this sense the Hebrew University was a replica, an incipient replica, of a European university of the early twentieth century, in another sense it was an institution *sui generis*. It was such not only because of the combination of manifold Jewish studies and universal subjects. It was peculiar also because of the unique composition of the faculty. There had been no institutions of higher learning in Palestine which could have prepared scientists and scholars for the Hebrew University, founded in 1925. They were, as a rule, educated abroad, and quite often left academic positions in

Europe for a corresponding post at the Hebrew University.

The consequence was an academic blend in more than one sense. There were professors who mastered Hebrew perfectly, there were such who spoke it correctly, and there were a few who struggled with the hard Semitic language. Some spoke Hebrew with a Russian accent, some with a German accent, some with an Italian, etc. A few spoke it with what was regarded as a native pronunciation. Then the professors carried the traditions of their own schooling—Russian, German, Austrian, etc.

This diversity, while it may have interfered with the creation of a fundamentally uniform academic approach, had its hidden advantage. The student, confronted with the diversity of cultures, reflected in the teaching of the professors, came to ponder about the differences among them and tried to decide which is best. Or he might have thought whether the peculiarities could be combined into an ideal intellectual symbiosis. In any case, he was stimulated to reflect on the problem of university education. This was notably the case in the humanistic subjects.

Having outlined this historical preamble and the distinctive local conditions, let me turn to my encounter with the chosen university professor in the late thirties of the twentieth century. True, much water has passed since, not only under the bridge on the Mississippi where the University of Minnesota, my focal employer is located, but even through the humble, but not less famous river Jordan, which can be discerned from Mount Scopus where I studied. Yet, there are many memories which impressed themselves on the mind of the young student and which have remained vivid through the turbulent years and decades that followed. These memories are not merely cherished recollections of an encounter with a great

teacher, but also a mark of the latter's impact on the teaching and writing of his disciple. The teacher was Leon Roth, and in a significant way I remain his disciple.

When I enrolled at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the university was quite small. The students numbered less than one thousand and the number of instructors was also small. Philosophy, which I chose as my major, had only two professors. History, one of my minors, had three, who covered antiquity, the middle ages and modern times respectively. My other minor had one professor only. The deficiency in quantity was compensated by the excellence in quality. Professors in the humanities would master Greek and Latin, besides cardinal modern languages of scholarship—English, German, French. They were often disciples of famous scholars, and had published important scholarly work of their own. They were highly respected by their students, and usually a distance was maintained between professor and student. No student would dream of calling a professor by his first name, and the professors in turn were usually polite in addressing the student—occasionally embarrassingly courteous.

Among the professors whom I encountered—they included more than the five referred to above, for I toyed with the idea of choosing other subjects in the initial stages of my studies—Professor Roth impressed me almost immediately as being different from the rest. His appearance, his manners, his style, his teaching, his personality were emphatically distinctive.

In the first place he was English, or what we call today British. Although Palestine was ruled by the British, the encounter with the British was usually limited to tall policemen walking calmly with self-confidence and exuding imperial authority. Higher echelons of the administration were staffed by British officials, but one would rarely, if ever, come into contact with them. At the Hebrew Univer-

sity Leon Roth, or as he was known by his Hebrew initials H.Y. Roth, was the prominent Englishman among the professors. (There was another Briton, Shaul Adler, a Professor of Parasitology—an outstanding scientist and a remarkable individual; but due to the specialized nature of his field he did not get the wide recognition which a professor of Humanities could gain.)

Needless to say, Leon Roth, having studied and obtained his degrees in Oxford and published scholarly works by the Clarendon Press, besides being born in England, was naturally English. Yet to us he appeared *very* English, if one may put it this way. He seemed to cultivate his Englishness and to relish in exhibiting it—whether out of deliberate preference or as an educational ploy, or both. He would dress impeccably in the English style. He would speak Hebrew with the clear diction and rhythm of an educated Englishman. Indeed, I think I have acquired some of my English diction through listening to his Hebrew lectures.

Significantly, though very British in sound, Roth's Hebrew was impeccable and colored by an individual style—both in speech and in writing. For he had a very solid traditional Jewish education and Hebrew schooling which were assimilated into his personality, even if we, his students, did not know it. Such a Hebrew-British personality, elegant and self-confident in appearance and deeply rooted in the knowledge of the two cultures, was an unusual manifestation in Jerusalem of those days. Judeo-Russian, Judeo-German, Judeo-Polish were familiar combinations. Judeo-English carried the aura of Britain's splendid isolation and attracted special attention and wonderment.

Yet, all these were external impressions created by the professor, and were they to account for his personality, he would not have been but another colorful ingredient in the mosaic of the faculty of the Hebrew University of that era. The

crucial factor in the personality of Professor Roth (as we would refer to him) was his teaching method and style—indeed his personality as a teacher.

Roth's courses included ancient Greek philosophy, ethics and political philosophy. Greek philosophy, of course, covered morals and politics, but the lectures on the latter subjects also encompassed the domains of modern philosophers, such as Kant and John Stuart Mill. There was no attempt to reach the contemporary scene, just as modern history courses were not updated—apparently on the assumption that academic approach required a certain distance to view events and ideas with objective detachment. Perhaps this was the way for examining the world of ideas and the world of so-called reality as far as possible *sub specie aeternitatis*.

What imprinted itself on my mind out of Professor Roth's lectures and seminars was predominantly Plato, and the Platonic dialogue as a way of exploring ideas and reality and developing one's own thinking. This does not mean that one accepted all of Plato's philosophy, or that the professor presented Plato as the proclaimer of the ultimate truth. The Platonic message—never proclaimed as such—focused on two matters: one was the pursuit of ideas, of truth, without any restrictions of convention or accepted opinions; another was the method of doing it. Each point requires further elucidation.

As is well known, Plato did not accept the beliefs and the opinions of his contemporaries, but put conventions to the merciless scrutiny of logic, without concern for the conclusion to which scrutiny might lead. This is philosophical radicalism in its pure form—looking for *radix*, the root of things. Some of this radicalism led Plato not merely to controversial conclusions, but outright dangerous corollaries, such as advocacy of a totalitarian

society in which genuine freedom of thinking is restricted to the all-knowing philosopher-kings, that is to say, Platonic philosophers made into rulers or kings adopting such philosophy.

Yet, if the students may have had reservations concerning Plato's ideal Republic—and Plato's own disciple, Aristotle, already articulated some of these—they could not but admire Plato's intellectual daring. That was a quality which some of them—the present writer included—would assimilate in their endeavours to build their own ideas and ideals, or when waging criticism of the society in which they lived and the institutions which controlled their lives. They would discuss current events and issues without respect for conventions, but rather including such conventions as subjects of philosophical scrutiny. The conclusions need not have led to discarding whatever was accepted and customary; one could affirm many practices and justify some policies. Yet, one could also reach dissenting conclusions and oppose public sentiment. Such conclusions may have been mistaken too, and acknowledged as such years later. In the meantime, however, they turned the student into a sovereign thinker, into a seeker of truth, into a pursuer of wisdom, into a philosopher, in the original sense of the term. That was a formidable educational achievement and our teacher could take credit for presenting Plato to us and preserving the ardor of his philosophical zeal.

Another aspect was the *manner* of conveying the message, or rather making the student comprehend and absorb it. Here came into the picture, or rather made its way into the mind of the student, the Socratic method of inquiry. It is clearly exhibited in the so-called early Platonic dialogues which are thought to reproduce the authentic teaching of Socrates, later enlarged and superseded by Plato himself (even if he attributed his own ideas to his teacher).

As is well known, the Socratic method was not to expound his philosophy and preach it to all who were ready to listen, but to enter into a casual conversation with a fellow Athenian, and the moment the latter uttered such a word as “righteous,” or “just,” or “noble,” or mentioned a certain intention, such as to educate his sons—at such a juncture Socrates would innocently ask: What is the meaning of “righteous,” or “just,” or “noble”? Or, who is the right educator for one’s sons, and what makes an educator a good educator?

Socrates aimed at a clear definition of words, or at a logically consistent and rationally valid justification for one’s actions. As the Athenian interlocutor failed to respond in the required manner, Socrates would show him, through seemingly innocent questions, that the answers led to inconsistencies—that is to say, that the man did not know what he was talking about. Socrates himself did not suggest an answer—arguing that he did not have one. He only wanted his fellow citizen to look for the right response. He, Socrates, the son of a midwife, was only serving as an intellectual midwife in assisting in the birth of a living healthy idea by another person. He himself, Socrates asserted, has no answer to his questions. All he knows is that he does not know. *Oida hoti ouk oida*, I know that I do not know. Yet this deliberate ignorance does not prevent him from seeking knowledge and from exposing the ignorance of men—whatever their station in life and position in the state—out of pursuit of knowledge and concern for truth.

Professor Roth, as I read his teaching, chose to follow the Socratic-Platonic method in his own teaching of innocent students. He took upon himself the task of being the Socratic gadfly. He wanted them to pursue ideas and the dictates of reason fearlessly, to try to reach to the root of things. And he studiously refrained from pronouncing—let alone preaching—his own opinions. He presented ideas ex-

pressed by great philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill—with a light touch, suggesting here and there the peculiarities, the problems, the perplexities. It was up to the student to explore the truth and to reach his own conclusions.

Often, when he posed a philosophical problem, with its inherent difficulties, he would look into the eye of one student and another and say: “I do not know the answer. Maybe you do... Or, perhaps, you...” Socrates proclaimed his ignorance, and wanted his interlocutors to look for a solution. Thus, it was not *what* he taught that was crucial, but *how* he taught.

These pursuits of intellectual games, performed as it were in the Greek agora, were not to be interpreted as Roth’s indifference to the affairs of the community or to world events. He was not retiring to the ethereal domain of pure thinking, to the world of ideas—Platonic or otherwise. Nor did he want the students to escape into such an intellectual refuge.

To be sure, this was an attractive option. I remember that my involvement in philosophy, as a beginning student, made me enjoy the immersion in the Platonic dialogue, and practice the Socratic art on some of my friends, largely ignoring the outer world with its troubles—and troubles there were galore.

Conceivably, Leon Roth himself may have been tempted by the intellectual joys of philosophy, Greek and modern, and by the self-sufficiency of pure intellectual pursuits. He must have been aware of the futility of attempting to follow in the steps of Plato and educate philosopher-kings, or becoming himself a philosopher-politician. Ostensibly, teaching Greek philosophy could offer a withdrawal from reality (reality as understood by common-sense)—notably the reality of Palestine at that time and the impending crisis of political transformation.

Yet he did not choose such an escape. He must have kept in mind the teaching of

Plato in the *Republic*, which squarely addresses this issue. The philosophers who ascend into the regions of the absolute Truth and Good must not be allowed to remain there enjoying the realm of perfection. "They must be made to descend among the prisoners in the den," *i.e.*, the ordinary people, and guide them in the right way (*Republic*, VII, 519-520). Or, as we might put it today, the philosophers must leave their ivory tower and descend to earth.

If Roth did not choose to perform the political task imposed on the philosophers by Plato—probably out of democratic scruples, as well as aversion to political life with its shady aspects—he did not ignore Plato's demand for practical involvement in life and in social affairs. This Roth did primarily through his academic teaching and occasional public lectures. If not a philosopher-king, he did not shy away from being a philosopher-educator.

Some of this task he accomplished by teaching Political Philosophy and promulgating the virtues of representative democracy. He also did it in his teaching at large—even in lectures on Greek philosophy. Remote as Athens of the fifth century was from Palestine, and then Israel, in mid-twentieth century, there were opportunities when a comment of Socrates, or about Socrates, could lead to allusions about the contemporary scene. Such allusions—usually needling, in line with Socratic irony and in the manner of English humor—made their apparently spontaneous appearance on diverse occasions to the joy of the students. Yet, they did not merely enliven the lecture. They also testified to the relevance of Socrates, as well as Plato and Aristotle, beyond their times and place. They exhibited the usefulness of classical texts at any time and in any place. The teachers of ancient philosophy brought the light of wisdom and the sparks of illumination to a world two and a half millennia younger.

The ancient world of ideas could benefit the modern caves of reality.

Roth's teaching method had additional salient characteristics. His lectures were clear. He avoided the penchant for abstract vagueness of some German philosophers. The insistence on clarity accorded with the philosophical tradition of the English academy. He demanded clarity of exposition in the papers of his students, and warned against verbosity. One of his sayings was: "Whatever you cannot write on a stamp do not write at all."

Such a saying manifested his penchant for epigrammatic statements which the students would not forget. I recollect other examples. When a student at a seminar started reading his paper at a rapid pace without paying attention to elocution, he interrupted him and said: "When I was in school, the teacher taught us to count 'one' at a comma, and 'one two' at a fullstop. Now start again." When years later my wife and I accidentally encountered him in Cambridge, after he had retired from the Hebrew University, he instantly gave us the following advice: "Go to King's College, enter the chapel, sit down and look upward." The reward was the view of the magnificently carved vault.

As the above example shows, Roth remained a teacher outside the lecture hall and after one's conclusion of studies. He taught by word and by example. Every letter of his contained or implied an educational message. His word of approval evoked the student's gratification and served as encouragement. His prompt response to any letter taught the lesson of courtesy. His punctuality displayed the worth of this rare habit.

He kept educating his former students with whom he remained in touch, but he did not restrict himself to this small circle. I recollect being present at his meeting with an old colleague at an American university—a retired professor older than

Roth—who showed him some valuable philosophical books purchased for that university. When the professor opened a volume and then put it on the table face down, Roth, a devout bibliophile, instantly picked up the book and set it face up, with a gentle rebuke: “You must not put a book that way! It ruins the spine.”

While the dominant characteristic of Roth’s teaching was his oral performance—in this respect, too, he followed in the steps of Socrates—he did not limit himself to this medium of instruction. As there were hardly any translations of the Greek classical philosophers, or books about ancient philosophy, in modern Hebrew, he took the initiative to remedy the situation. He initiated and supervised the translation of select philosophical texts into Hebrew, himself translating Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Books I and II, *Ethics* I-II, *Politics* I-II. Other philosophical classics in Hebrew, including some Platonic dialogues, were edited by him.

Moreover, he published a series of “Guides” to Philosophy—Greek Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, Political Thought. All of these were in Hebrew, of course. Each of the “Guides” consisted of a terse introduction to the subject with generous quotations from the primary texts and with restrained comments and commentaries by the author, in line with the method employed in his lectures. A significant portion of the slim and handy books was devoted to a carefully chosen annotated bibliography. The “Guides” were clearly designed as such and not as textbooks. The student, at the university or outside it, was directed into the field of inquiry and left there to pursue knowledge on his own.

Leon Roth taught us philosophy, but he did not impart to us *his* philosophy. The student did not know what his opinions were—about politics, religion, history. His scholarly works did not figure in his bibliography, which was essentially con-

finied to the courses he taught. He occasionally revealed his attitude or reaction to current events, but did not link it to a “philosophy.” Yet, one could not think of him as a teacher of philosophy who had no outlook of his own and who could equally teach any other subject. For there was a sense of a close and intimate relationship between the teacher and his subject-matter.

The philosophical outlook of Leon Roth, if not a philosophical system, could be ascertained only by a more personal acquaintanceship and by his publications after he had left the Hebrew University after twenty-three years of service but well before retirement age. A few salient features emerge.

One was his interest in literature, English and other. I remember having met him on the street, when walking in Jerusalem with my wife who was holding a book. He could not resist asking to look at the volume—I believe it was something in English literature—and, on discovering its identity, making a comment on the work. He occasionally gave a public lecture on a man of letters—such as Albert Camus, or the Hebrew brilliant publicist of the early century, Ahad Ha’am. Clearly, while focused on philosophy, he regarded the wider world of letters as a valuable expansion of explorations by the human spirit.

Roth was very British, but he was also profoundly Jewish. I was surprised to discover, years after leaving the university, that he was an observant Jew. His familiarity with Judaism had been evident from his Hebrew style, but his religious commitment remained invisible. Only when he came to deliver a lecture at the University of Minnesota, where I was employed at that time, and it transpired that he and his wife had provided their own sandwiches for the long train trip from Chicago because of dietary rules, did I realize his commitment. Later on, when I had read his book *Judaism, A Portrait* (1960)

and some of his essays, I could satisfy my curiosity how he combined philosophical rationalism with religion, Plato with the Bible, universalism with the Jewish legacy.

It appeared that he avoided the issue of religious belief and focused on the ethical teaching of Judaism. Whenever divergent sentiments—tribal and universal—manifested themselves in the Bible or in the rabbinical literature, he clearly chose the universal. As to dietary laws, which cannot be explained rationally or justified morally, he saw in them a civilizing factor, in that they taught man to control his animal impulses by the imposition of some restraints on his urges. That, incidentally, comported with Plato's philosophy.

The English side of Roth's personality was reflected in the sense of civic duty, in the cultivation of good manners, in the spirit of toleration, and in a good dose of common sense. There was nothing in it to contradict the Jewish tradition, or, to say the least, all of the above could be justified by some trends in the long history of Judaism.

It could be suggested that Roth embodied the idea of a synthetic—even symbiotic—perception of civilization as a combination of Hebraism and Hellenism, to use the phrasing of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), or Abramism and Atticism, in the wording of S.D. Luzzatto (1800-1865), an Italian Jewish scholar and writer, and the latter's contemporary Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), who elaborated on this approach. Each of the above had his own ideas what the terms exactly meant, and each may have selected certain salient aspects of the two civilizations in his own manner. So did Roth, stressing the philosophical legacy of Greece and the moral heritage of Israel, and adding the elements of modern European, mainly English, civilization.

This synthesis was in harmony with enlightened humanism and with selective cosmopolitanism. "Selective," be-

cause it must not be equated with the notion that all the cultures are equal and that one must refrain from judgment and evaluation of human conduct. Nothing could be further from Judaism, from nineteenth century Britain, from ancient philosophy—even if in each case the normative judgment may not be based on identical premises. Yet they all lead to similar, or at least compatible, value judgments.

If all these recollections convey the personality of a distinctive individual and teacher, the two inextricably intertwined, there is another aspect of the man and the professor which must not be overlooked. That is his attitude to his students, or to the few elect among them who were graced with his special attention and friendship.

The first impression of the student—the present one included—was that here was a visitor from Olympus, overwhelming with his wisdom, his wit, his authority, to whom the student owed respect, submission, admiration. The professor did nothing to dispel this attitude. As a matter of fact, he could be quite rough to the average student and even disdainful if the student neglected his scholarly duties. Certainly he would not consider trying to endear philosophy to the student or to attract him or her to the realm of the philosophers. Philosophy was up there, lofty and immovable, and it was up to the student to try and climb up the mountain.

My personal experience was that Professor Roth did not show any interest in me till, on one occasion, I questioned some comparison he had made between an epistemological argument of Galileo and an argument of Plato. In response to my comment, he suggested that we look for it in the Platonic text and report at the next meeting of the seminar. He opened that meeting with the question whether anyone had found the evidence. As nobody answered, he said: "I have not found

it either.” Ever since, it seemed to me, he came to notice me. To generalize the anecdote: a student had to prove himself by independent thinking. As long as he merely repeated the lesson of the professor, he was not a true student of philosophy.

However, once a student proved his intellectual independence—and this may have required more than a minor comment on the professor’s assertion—Roth was ready to help and to do it on his own initiative. Nor was he sparing in praise of the student’s, or former student’s, work, if he found it to be of merit. Here again—at the risk of appearing egocentric—I have to quote from personal experience, as I have never inquired into his relations with other chosen students.

I published a slim book in Hebrew, *Humanism in Practice* (1947), my “philosophy” at the age of twenty-six, and sent my professor a copy. He appeared to like it and recommended it for study at a high school connected to the university. On another occasion he offered my name as a book reviewer to the literary editor of the English daily, *The Jerusalem Post*. This arrangement secured the supply of some books of interest to me, besides modest fees which came useful in those days. Eventually, when an academic vacancy was created at the Hebrew University in a newly established Department of Political Science, Professor Roth’s recommendation must have been very significant in leading to my appointment to a junior position.

Some years later, after academic vicissitudes, I landed at the University of Minnesota. When Leon Roth came on a visit to Minneapolis to deliver a public lecture at the university and naturally visited me and my wife with Mrs. Roth, he commented: “Well, now you’ll write a *drei Bände* work and you’ll be settled.” (Though we conversed, as well as corresponded, always in Hebrew, he used the German phrase.) *Drei Bände* stood for a solid scholarly research in the German

tradition. While the comment expressed Roth’s good will and good wishes for a former student of his, it was not without a touch of irony: a tinge of doubt about the intrinsic worth of pure scholarship, and perhaps an element of existential puzzlement as to the happiness accrued in an academic career.

Thus, some months later, when I sent him a book of fiction which dealt with the perils of the nuclear arms race, he commented in his response: “Another book like this is worth more than seven *drei Bände*.” He added: “And if you succeed in alerting the inhabitants of this world to their future lot, you will have achieved something in your life.”

These comments revealed the philosophical-human perspective of Leon Roth. Beyond and above his interest in the academic world and in scholarly achievements was his concern for humanity at large. What one could do for humanity was of greater importance than what one could achieve in academe. While this may strike one as self-evident, such sentiment is not frequently displayed in an outspoken manner in the pronouncements of scholars and scientists.

To Leon Roth the well-being of humanity, the fair and just society, the civilized mankind—*urbs et orbis*, the community and the world—were the highest aim, the Aristotelian *telos*. Education was a major means to this good. Yet education was not indoctrination, imposition of the educator’s ideas on the *tabula rasa* of innocent students. Education meant stirring up some of the innate potentials in the souls of the students, which would lead them to shape their own cogent ideas. Education was not merely instruction, offering information and skills, but, in the words of Plato, an endeavor to turn the whole soul towards the good (*Republic* VII, 518). Such education was the philosopher’s task, and Leon Roth embraced it with all his heart and all his intellectual might.