

Reminiscing James E. Tomberlin

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During his sadly short life, Jim Tomberlin published prolifically, participated in numerous philosophical conferences, co-edited a leading philosophy journal, and started a top-notch periodical. There is much to be said about each of these accomplishments and I am afraid I couldn't do justice even if I tried my best. Fortunately we have four other distinguished panelists, who I am sure are better qualified than I am to put Jim's accomplishments in the proper perspective within the philosophical world at large. So I will not duplicate their efforts to produce less worthy results. Instead, as my modest contribution to this session, I will say a few words about Jim's contribution to the Department of Philosophy at California State University, Northridge and about Jim as a colleague.

After having taught at Wayne State University as a teaching assistant for three years and at University of Windsor as an instructor for one year, Jim joined the Department of Philosophy at California State University, Northridge (then known as San Fernando Valley State College) as assistant professor in 1969. He became associate professor in 1973 and was promoted to full professor in 1978. With the sole exception of the spring semester in 1985, which he spent as a visiting professor at University of Memphis (then known as Memphis State University), Jim spent

his entire academic career at CSUN. He never took a sabbatical leave. He was scheduled to take his very first sabbatical leave during the spring semester in 2003. Alas, it was not to be.

Jim was the graduate adviser of the department's masters program, which we no longer have, from 1976 to 1980. He regularly served as a member of the department lecture committee from 1970 to 1985 and of the department personnel committee in 1973 through 1995.

Between the fall of 1993 and the spring of 2002 Jim taught three classes a semester with 30 students a class on average except one class. As we have no teaching assistants, Jim did all his grading by himself. Fortunately, all of his classes were elementary logic or critical reasoning classes. Still, he was forced to work around his teaching obligations to do his editorial work and his own research. The one exception was the class on Philosophical Topics in Logic, which he taught in the fall of 1998 and which had an enrollment of three students. He was skilled at teaching advanced topics to advanced philosophy majors. He did modal logic and metaphysics in that class. All students gave him a perfect 5.0 out of 5.0 in their evaluations. One of the students from that class is now finishing his graduate work at Rutgers, and another at University of Southern California.

1987 was the year when two significant events occurred in the history of the Philosophy Department at CSUN. One is the arrival of a young assistant professor, Takashi Yagisawa. The other, much more important event was the publication of the first volume of *Philosophical Perspectives*. Jim worked hard to launch this seminal periodical and keep it afloat. This was no small task. Nothing comparable had happened at the Philosophy Department at CSUN before.

Jim had to convince the university administration that such a project was worthy of their full support. Jim's effort ranged from preparing a meticulously written proposal to scrambling to place a wake-up phone call to the department chair, who was fully supportive of the project but was a notorious night owl, for an important early morning meeting with a university administrator. Jim presented a convincing case for founding and editing *Philosophical Perspectives*, and the president of CSUN gave Jim and the department his solid support. Jim was given a modest reduction in teaching load. His original publisher, Ridgeview Publishing Company, was owned and operated by his CSUN philosophy colleague Jeff Sicha, who acted as the managing editor and also received some teaching-load reduction. Solid as it was, apart from some additional clerical help, that was the extent of the administrative support. This meant that Jim still had to carry a non-negligible amount of teaching duties while also performing additional editorial duties as a co-editor of *Nous*. Jim quickly adjusted himself to the arrangement, however, and *Philosophical Perspectives* was up and running. Apart from the obvious enormous benefit to the profession, *Philosophical Perspectives* raised the visibility of our department outside Southern California and brought regular high-level philosophical discussion to the department in the form of the annual lecture series. The head article in each volume was presented to our department prior to its publication. These lectures were given by leading philosophers and undoubtedly enlivened the intellectual life of the department. Independently of the *Philosophical Perspectives* lecture series, Jim, through his vast array of professional connections, would arrange equally high-powered visitors to give us additional talks. Thanks to Jim's effort, the battery of the intellectual life of the department was recharged afresh on a regular basis. Then something horrendous happened. A few years after the launching of *Philosophical Perspectives*, there was a ferocious attack on the dean of Humanities and the chair of the Philosophy Department for supporting

*Philosophical Perspectives*. The amount of energy and resources that went into the attack was considerable. The attack was ill conceived, vicious, and personal. Jim was deeply hurt and saddened by it. Most unfortunately, as a direct result of the attack, the university support for *Philosophical Perspectives* was withdrawn. Despite this entirely undeserved and totally unexpected setback, Jim kept up the quality of his editorial work as high as ever and kept providing the department with annual lectures more or less as before.

Jim's colleague and occasional research collaborator, Frank McGinness, came to CSUN in 1970, a year later than Jim. Frank was on his way to the faculty lounge one day when he encountered Jim for the first time. Jim was going the same way, so the two walked together. The very first thing Jim said to Frank, according to Frank, was, "So Frank, what do you think of quantified modal logic?" This welcoming treatment by Jim of a new member of the department was characteristic and was repeated 17 years later, when I joined the department. My wife and I were driving from Cleveland, Ohio to Southern California, *terra incognita* for both of us, in August, 1987. Jim and his wife, Hilda, had never met us before but kindly offered to put us up while we hunted for an apartment. Upon our arrival at their doorstep, Jim wasted little time to engage me in a philosophical conversation. His first question was, "So Takashi, what do you think of actualism?" I don't remember exactly what I said but I did say something derogatory about actualism, which amused Jim. After a few more minutes of discussing actualism and possibilism, I finally said, "Jim, this is not good. We are agreeing with each other too much." This amused him further, and he agreed with me again. I would have many more conversations with Jim on various philosophical topics during the short period of fifteen years when my professional life overlapped with Jim's at CSUN, and learn a tremendous amount.

Jim's office was two doors down from mine on the fifth floor of Sierra Tower on the campus of CSUN, where the entire Philosophy Department is located. Jim's teaching schedule and mine usually overlapped and Jim was usually the first person I would see in the department in the morning on my teaching days. He would greet me by calling my first name in his baritone voice: "Hi Tah-ka-shi." I have been conditioned to associate hearing Jim say my name with a logic class, which is usually my first morning class of the day. I have taught logic for one semester and a half without hearing Jim's greetings, and I am still getting used to it.