

As teacher

PETER A. HALL

ENTERING the classroom, he was not an imposing figure, at least in physical terms—somewhat slight with glasses, often wearing a turtleneck that conveyed a vaguely continental air—but there was a penetrating light in those eyes that commanded attention and, as soon as he began to speak, you knew this was someone serious. Working from minimal notes, he would frame the issues in terms that went straight to the heart of the matter—usually in three parts, of course—and it was suddenly possible to see the anatomy of a complex subject. In perfectly formed sentences, replete with metaphors that captured the full nuances of the topic, he would lay out arguments rather than points. When disagreeing with a position, he could be merciless in dissection, but, even when he agreed, he could not resist identifying the accompanying ironies, to the delight of his students. In conversation, he liked to tell the story of de Gaulle coming upon a poster that read “Mort aux cons” and replying “Vaste programme”. Those eyes could also twinkle.

Stanley Hoffmann was first and foremost a teacher. He was certainly the most brilliant lecturer I ever heard. For years, I went to as many of his presentations as possible, knowing I would leave with deeper insights. The operative word here is depth. Stanley had a striking grasp of the subtleties of international relations as well as French and European politics and a remarkable capacity to convey all those subtleties with absolute clarity and force. Because of those abilities, he was one of Harvard’s greatest teachers. But equally important was what he taught.

Whether discussing French politics in his course *Doctrines and Society: Modern France* or international relations in celebrated classes on *War* and *Ethics in International Relations*, Stanley alerted us to the complexities of poli-

tics and the manifold ways in which the world could go awry. As Keats said of Shakespeare, he had “negative capability”—namely a capacity to see the many dimensions of a single phenomenon both salutary and adverse. Stanley’s world was full of paradoxes. As often as not, politics was a perilous voyage between Scylla and Charybdis.

But Stanley also saw politics as a creative process. The point of understanding was to make a better statecraft possible, and he impressed upon his students their own responsibilities for advancing that cause. There was nothing utopian in this. Indeed, Stanley entitled one book of essays *The European Sisyphus*, as if to signal how often that rock rolls back downhill; and, in his later years, American policy toward Iraq took him to the edge of despair. But, asked to provide advice for young scholars of international relations, he concluded a retrospective by saying “As scholars and as citizens working in a field in which violence, deceit, injustice and oppression are in full display, beware of illusions, but never give up hope—by which I do not mean a faith in progress, only the modest belief that it is not impossible.”

Beware of illusions. As Gary Bass has aptly noted, Stanley was “a realist among liberals and a liberal among realists”. Like his mentor, Raymond Aron, he was skeptical about how much purchase any one theory could have over the world; and, in his younger years, he was a scathing critic of oversimplification in the realist theories of Hans Morgenthau, partly because their abstract formulations neglected “the inner drives and demons of statesmen” and “the sudden passions, rages and dreams of nations”. But Stanley knew about the brutalities that could be inflicted in the name of national interest, and he insisted that foreign policy must be based on a ruth-

lessly realistic understanding of international relations. He was as critical of the myopic idealism that sometimes animates American foreign policy as he was of an amoral *realpolitik*. In a famous debate about the Vietnam War, held in the spring of 1965, Stanley deliberately disarmed the Defense Department official, Daniel Ellsberg, by making a case against that war on realist, rather than moral, grounds. Some see this as a turning-point in Ellsberg's own stance to the war and his subsequent decision to leak the Pentagon papers.

But never give up hope. In brilliant analyses of the "stalemate society" of Third Republic France and the Lilliputian bonds on the American colossus, Stanley laid out the structural dilemmas that impinge on the fate of nations. He saw the relevant structures in expansive terms, rooted as much in culture and historical practice as in institutions; and his mammoth syllabi contained works of literature and films as well as weighty tomes of political science. But Stanley believed in the capacity of agency to overcome structure, much as did Charles de Gaulle, the hero of his youth. He taught his students that politicians are active human agents who can make the world a better place. The young find such views appealing, especially if they are interested in politics, and more than a few of his students became important policy-makers. But I think Stanley's objective was not to appeal but to teach – conscious that, over their lifetimes, all his students would confront a series of moral dilemmas for which structural theories provide scant guidance. By embracing them as active moral beings newly equipped with a multifaceted knowledge of international politics, he prepared his students to be responsible agents in the complex worlds they would inherit. Although this objective rarely appears on the agendas of curriculum committees, can a university education offer anything more important?

In these regards, Stanley also taught by example. His moral courage was evident in matters large and small. An early critic of the Vietnam War, when many others were equivocating, he challenged McGeorge Bundy in a famous Harvard debate about the war in March 1968, an act that must have carried some personal pain since Bundy had been a close friend and the dean who invited Stanley

onto the Harvard faculty. A year later, Stanley emerged as a prominent defender of the Harvard students demonstrating against the war, while also defending the library against the students seeking to occupy it, incurring animosity on both sides. As Chairman of Harvard's Center for European Studies for twenty-five years, he taught all of us there about the importance of doing what is right, however inconvenient that can be, upholding more than once the rights of younger colleagues to advance unpopular views with which he disagreed.

All of this was leavened by a fundamental human decency and abiding compassion, especially for those prone to falling between the cracks of an institution. In a setting where some faculty members are interested mainly in attracting the most brilliant doctoral students, Stanley made time for everyone who sought his advice. He spent countless hours with undergraduates, whose views he took seriously, knowing that teaching is also a matter of effective listening. Maybe because he had once been a visiting student himself, he had a soft spot for foreign students, whether or not they were in a degree program, and he became a mentor for many who went on to serious careers. This was brought home to me a year ago when, reading *Le Monde* on a bench beside the boulevard Saint-Germain, I was suddenly interrupted by a passing bicyclist who recognized me and stopped specifically to ask how Stanley Hoffmann was doing, remarking on how generous Stanley had been to him some years ago at Harvard. Perhaps that is Paris, but it was also Stanley Hoffmann.

It is not difficult to find the roots of Stanley's qualities as a teacher in the circumstances of his childhood. Born of a fiercely anti-clerical mother who was classified as Jewish by the Nazis, he fled with her from Paris on June 12, 1940, barely days before the arrival of German troops, to spend the war in hiding, initially in Nice, where Stanley's best friend was seized by the authorities, and then in Lamalou-les-Bains, a tiny spa in the Languedoc that was also the site of a sizeable German garrison. In memoirs, Stanley speaks in moving terms about the decency of the schoolteacher who produced the forged papers that saved them and of the villagers with whom he found shelter. As he later put it, "It wasn't I who chose to study world poli-

tics. World politics forced themselves on me at a very early age”.

In this crucible of youth, Stanley learned both about the devastation that politics could wreak and about the redemptive power of moral action. Throughout a long life, he used his brilliance to bring those lessons from Vichy to bear on the politics of the late twen-

tieth century and, though they may no longer recall the tenets of liberal intergovernmentalism or neo-functionalist doctrine, few of his students will ever forget Stanley’s inspiring presence or the deeper insights into politics that underpinned all his teaching.

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