

EDITORIAL NOTE

Before Tony La Vopa had joined Nick Phillipson and me in founding *Modern Intellectual History* in 2004, Tony had successfully traveled in the spiral spirit of Vico's philosophy of history. Born in the Bronx to a Catholic Italian-American father and Irish-American mother, educated at the Jesuit Boston College and later at Cornell University, Tony launched his scholarly career as an intellectually inflected social historian with his book *Grace, Talent, and Merit: Poor Students, Clerical Careers, and Professional Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge UP, 1988). Then, while much of the historical profession was abandoning social history for the seemingly more capacious field of cultural history, he deepened further his strongly intellectual and social history approach in his Mosse Prize-winning rendering of the identity and career of a single poor but tremendously ambitious young philosopher. In *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge UP, 2001), he embedded his striving scholar in a thick web of political and religious discourses, which Fichte tried both to penetrate and transcend through his rigorously soaring philosophy of the Transcendental "I." Currently, Tony is completing a manuscript titled *Manly Thoughts. The Labor of the Mind and the Specter of Effeminacy in Enlightenment Cultures*. Promising to offer a fascinating further extension of his socio-intellectual method, the book will serve as a timely capstone of his career as one of the Enlightenment's preeminent historians working today.

I encountered versions of these dialectical moves when I first became friendly with Tony at the Duke-UNC-NC State "Triangle Intellectual History Colloquium" held at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Although committed to finding ways of bridging intellectual history and the burgeoning field of cultural history as long as a deep ditch could be dug between culture's amorphous marsh and its more intellectually cultivated garden, Tony chose provocatively to start off the seminar with a discussion of Heidegger's politics and philosophy of being. A little surprised but pleased to find attendance actually increase at the next meeting, Tony and the other conveners set about inviting to monthly meetings an array of prominent and promising intellectual historians in the U.S. and the U.K. While the critical gauntlet they had to run was usually formidable, Tony was especially fearsome in cross-examining

authors whose philosophical concepts or historiographic methods seemed to him anemic or fuzzy. It therefore came as something of a surprise to me when these fierce sessions earned him genuine appreciation from most, if not all, of our targeted visiting scholars.

When I later conceived of the idea of bringing out a new journal of intellectual history, I immediately thought of Tony as the perfect coeditor. Originally the Americanist editors of the journal's predecessor, the *Intellectual History Newsletter*, started in 1979 at the peak of social historians' critiques of our field, had put out a welcoming mat to its less besieged Europeanist brethren, but they, probably partly for that reason, chose not to make an appearance. Herein lay Tony's crucial role. Unlike many Europeanists, he was actually quite interested in American intellectual history and like me eager to make a journal that for the first time in the history of the field would be deliberately and thoroughly transatlantic. Tony's interest in literature also made him a keenly friendly reader of manuscripts from literary and cultural historians as well as a little later the most energetic of the three of us in broadening the journal's reach to include the non-West. As an editor, too, Tony was unsurprisingly demanding but also patient, especially with young scholars. Even those who did not make the final cut frequently expressed gratitude for the tutelage they had gotten in how to turn a dissertation-derived fragment into a solid piece of publishable intellectual history. Sometimes Tony's critical patience outlasted that of his authors. Early on, Tony happily pushed one susceptible scholar through five revisions, before finally agreeing that the hapless author could stand no more and asking for a sixth would probably make him (as Huck Finn had threatened) "light out for the territory." Tony reluctantly called a halt to the revisions. For several years that article was the most downloaded piece *MIH* published.

Intellectually intense, Tony was amply supplied with a healthy dose of his Enlightenment's vaunted "sociability." Of course, Nick Phillipson's energetic charm and endless fund of academic anecdotes made this a virtual requirement of the job. Yet Tony easily met it. With a strangely fitting mix of social innocence and biting wit (he was a master of the after-dinner "roast") along with an unflagging enthusiasm for the life of the mind and sharply formulated unillusioned social democratic politics, Tony made coediting with him fun. With a lively historian's knack for making old things new (he's also currently working on a memoir), his quintessential ex-New Yorker's quirky nostalgia for Gotham city was almost infectious. Once during an editorial meeting in New York, wanting to relive the magic of 1950s Jello, which he assured us could only be savored in a "real" New York diner, he took us to one. After our order and what seemed like an inordinate amount of time, the waitress reappeared with a bowl full of Jello that seemed to have come from some ancient cranny in the back of the kitchen's refrigerator. She laid it on our table, with the somewhat unsettling comment that no one

had asked for this culinary delight for several years. From its appearance, that sounded right, but Tony dug right in.

After eight years as coeditor, anxious to give his full time to his book, earlier this year Tony resigned from his editor's post at *MIH*. Coming especially after the resignation of Nick, who also left to finish a book a long time in the making, it was for me an unexpected turn in the life of the journal. But with Sam Moyn having joined us a couple of years earlier and with the addition of Duncan Kelly to replace Nick and now Sophie Rosenfeld stepping in for Tony, I feel our boat is once again on course. That it will continue to be is in no small way due to Tony, who helped to launch it and keep it sailing in new directions.

Charles Capper