

VERNON K. DIBBLE
1933-1980

Vernon Dibble died of cancer this spring, at the age of 47, before he was able to revise his draft manuscript on the legal thought of the young Marx, which was to have appeared in this issue. During the last fifteen years Vernon had been uncovering and polishing distinctive sociological views on the nature of legal thought, the mental habits of lawyers, and law and legal institutions. In "What Is and What Ought to Be," his awkward but powerful lead article in the *American Journal of Sociology* (November 1973), Dibble situated legal cognition in a landscape of scientific, lay, policy, and ideological versions of rationality. During that period Vernon sat among mounds of partly analyzed data on the impact of changes in the federal Rules of Civil Procedure upon judicial behavior, data drawn from survey research he helped to direct while at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. Ten years earlier, working at the University of Chicago in the traditional style of the solitary scholar, Dibble adumbrated a picture of early modern Justices of the Peace as the "universal joint" in the organization of English county government and thus key figures in the evolution of law (in James G. March, ed., *Handbook of Organizations*, Rand-McNally, 1964). The common thread running through these fifteen years was his search for peculiarly subtle ways of moving from the *is* to the *ought*.

It was characteristic of the man to encompass opposite extremes and paradox. Dibble was deeply rooted in both his native Vermont and Wesleyan University. A slow-speaking raconteur, master of the elliptic anecdote, he savored tradition, or rather traditions in their multiplexity—savored them perhaps the more for having penetrated their nature so clearly. Yet he slowly turned more and more radical as he evolved as a scholar and scientist. Marxism had become a central interest at the time of his death.

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