



Sydney S. Shoemaker

September 29, 1931 – September 3, 2022

The Sage School of Philosophy announces with great sadness the death on September 3, 2022, of the brilliant and much beloved Sydney S. Shoemaker, Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy Emeritus. He was born on September 29, 1931, so his death came not long before his 91st birthday. Sydney's association with the Sage School began in 1954 when he started graduate study at Cornell after a year's postgraduate work at the University of Edinburgh, which fueled his deep admiration for the work of David Hume.

Carl Ginet was another member of the 1954 entering class. He and Sydney began then what was to become a very close friendship of 68 years. First jobs for them both were at Ohio State, where Sydney began in 1957, Carl a year later. Sydney left OSU in 1960 for a 2-year Santayana Fellowship at Harvard (he had just married Molly MacDonald, an undergrad philosophy student at OSU), after which he accepted an invitation to return to Cornell as an assistant professor. He left again in 1967 to join what proved to be the very short-lived philosophy department at Rockefeller University in NYC, returning in 1969 to the Cornell faculty, where he became a full professor in 1970. Carl returned to the Sage School in 1971, and until the late 1990s, he, Sydney, and Norman Kretzmann lunched together weekly to talk philosophy and, especially during Norman's lifetime, to exchange chitchat about all sorts of other things. The Shoemaker, Kretzmann, and Ginet families regularly shared Thanksgiving and sometimes Christmas dinners at one another's homes and even occasionally in other locales.

After Norman's untimely death in 1998, Sydney and Carl continued their weekly lunches, with conversations that were very important to them both. They talked with one another about their work, and Sydney dedicated his last book, *Physical Realization*, to Carl. Sydney's brilliance might initially escape the casual observer. He was not quick off the mark nor was he trying to score points. He was slowly, but with enormous care and patience, exploring arguments, developing his own and others' understanding through meticulous examination of a number of issues central to philosophical projects.

Sydney's philosophical work was primarily on topics in metaphysics – for example, how the mind is “realized” in physical events, the nature of properties and causation, what constitutes the identity of a person over time – and on related topics in epistemology – for example, the nature of one's knowledge of one's own mind, the nature of perceptual representation. His work on all these topics was highly original, penetrating, and influential. One of his papers, “Time Without Change”, was on a question that does not fit neatly under any of those topics, namely, whether it is conceptually possible for the whole universe to exist for a time during which no change occurs in it. It was widely thought (and probably still is), following Leibniz, that this is not possible, that the passing of time requires change, requires some difference between earlier and later. Sydney's paper showed how it could be possible: he gave an ingenious, easy to comprehend example of a possible world in which we would have convincing evidence that there had occurred a significant period with no change at all.

Testimonials from some of his former students capture well what Sydney was like as a teacher and mentor.

Jessica Wilson: “Time without Change” was one of the first metaphysics papers I ever read; it blew me away and sealed my fate. When I got into Cornell, I was over the moon thinking that I'd be able to study with the great Shoemaker. He didn't disappoint, of course. What a mind! Brilliant, meticulous, and awfully shy (I had to blather on for the first few minutes of every meeting until he could get into the swing of things), he inexorably zeroed in on the heart of the matter, whatever the topic at hand.

Dick Moran: He was the reason I wanted to go to Cornell for graduate study and he was the most wonderful adviser I could have imagined. Apart from his brilliance and clarity of thought, he was always responsive and encouraging to whatever I was doing. He was the opposite of an adviser who insists that you conform to their particular way of seeing the problems. With him I always felt that precious combination of freedom, guidance and encouragement that anyone needs to flourish in graduate school. With him it simply came naturally, and was part of his utter lack of vanity. By the time I got to Cornell Sydney had already been a legend in that department for many years and had everyone's deep respect and admiration. But he himself was almost diffident in his self-presentation, which made the forcefulness of his spoken thought (in teaching or colloquia or conversation) all the more impressive. It was a memorable experience to *watch* him think, when he had to pause, sometimes in the middle of a lecture. You could see the beauty of his desire to get things right, the effort it took to get past some difficulty, and the movement of the powerful mind behind it all.

Alan Sidelle: While we used to joke about the fact that Sydney's seminar style ... was to write a paper and then read it - what is not a joke is that he would write a paper every week. And of course, they were all eminently worth listening to, illuminated the readings and the issues, and were provocative and often contained the germs of ideas that he would later publish. It was a privilege to be in on ground zero. And, as Kadri Vihvelin humorously noted..., if you bent over to pick up a pen you had dropped, you would likely have missed a crucial step in the

argument...His arguments were often very intricate...He wasn't baroque - but he saw and developed difficult connections and wanted to nail everything down as much as possible.

Hilary Kornblith: I vividly remember one session of a graduate seminar he taught my first term at Cornell. As others have mentioned, Sydney would simply read the very extensive material he had typed out for each seminar meeting. He'd read a chunk of it, and then pause for questions. On [this] occasion..., there was a question right near the end of the class which he really didn't adequately answer. None of us thought much of it; this sort of thing happens. The next week, he began by saying that he hadn't adequately answered a question that came up the time before, but he'd now had a chance to think about it and he had a bit more to say. And he then pulled out about a dozen or so type-written pages, and he read out his answer. It's not just that it was a masterful response to an interesting question. We all realized that this was what it was like to be taken seriously, and that quick off the cuff responses, however impressive at the time, were nothing compared to this. It provided a model for us all of what philosophy could be.

Jeffrey Roland:...what really struck me...was the atmosphere in the room, the people there and the way business was conducted...every week around [the] table would be not only first and second year grad students still doing coursework but a number of advanced grad students...and faculty, both from Cornell and elsewhere in the area...The overriding feeling in the room was that we were collectively engaged in a project. We might disagree and probe as philosophers do, but it was never about getting over or up on someone. It was about working the problem at hand cooperatively. That was a mark of the Cornell approach, due in no small part to Sydney.

Rebecca Copenhaver: He was on my committee because he was one of the few people who had heard of Reid and had actually read him -- part of his dissertation was on Reid. Having him on my committee with three other incredibly supportive people -- Allen Wood, Carl Ginet, and Zoltan Szabo -- got me through grad school. Sydney was solidly in my corner at a very difficult, hazardous time. He was also warm and now-and-then playful: ...I loved catching a glimpse of him riding his scooter to work. My funniest memory of Sydney is going into his office to discuss something. He was so quiet and slow. Quiet people make me nervous, and when I get nervous, I talk louder and faster than I already do. I worked myself up into quite a tizzy and Sydney just looked at me, cocked his head sideways, and shook his head "no". Anyone else and it would have devastated me. But he was always gentle with me.

Eric Hiddleston: He was immensely thoughtful in giving feedback that was so slow and careful that you really had to take a time-out from the world to appreciate and engage with what was happening right in front of you. He was like a philosophical whale in a world populated mostly by seals and dolphins.

More such comments and further information about Sydney's life and career can be found at the following websites:

(<https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2022/09/in-memoriam-sydney-shoemaker-19312022.html>)

(<https://dailynous.com/2022/09/06/sydney-shoemaker-1931-2022/>)

(<https://usdaynews.com/celebrities/celebrity-death/sydney-shoemaker-passed-away/amp/>)
(<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2022/09/sydney-shoemaker-leading-figure-cornell-philosophydies-90>)

Sydney was an extraordinary person, the memory of whom we treasure. We grieve with and for his much-loved family: wife Molly, son Peter, and grandson Erik.

Written by Carl Ginet and Sally McConnell-Ginet