

18. Academic Relationship between Mark and Philip

MA: Now what more can we discuss? You know more than you need to know about me
[laughs]

DA: Tell me more about your view of what Philip did in his research and how it developed, and his thinking.

MA: Philip's interest in research. **[taking a break]**

DA: so where were we.....when he was applying for research monies

MA:no, I think you see, Philip was uneasy in a way, all his academic life, about the possibility of simply being another version of me. For example, when he first got his Chair at Durham. Went up there, and almost immediately, the word went round in the Social Sciences Department ... Oh God, now we are going to have to do surveys, we are going to have to learn about political sociology, and so on, now that he's come. The assumption, and accusation, being, you know, that he would have exactly the same interests that I had. And he was aware of that, and I think he almost went out of his way to avoid any contact with surveys of the normal kind, the usual traditional kind ... and went out of his way to follow up his own real interest in political sociology. And his first published work on Locke was really a study on political sociology, in a sense, to show that here was a man that could talk the language of radicalism, but at the same time be a through-and-through conservative. And somehow they were compatible in the same philosopher. So his interest in political sociology he sacrificed in a way. Because of his unwillingness, his fear, of being confused in some way with me, and being influenced by me ...

Audio Note¹

.....and that went on, I think on many occasions. For example, I had gone to America for a time, and been very impressed with the *Detroit Area Study*. Which I think is one of the major inventions of the academic world, as far as the social sciences are concerned, of taking an area, and year after year, after year, studying it. But each year, giving a member of the social sciences faculty, a senior member, an opportunity to say, "Well this year we will study a particular aspect of the Detroit area that impinges most closely on my work and my

¹ Tape 3, Side 2

interests ... In return I will take the post-graduate students who want to join the *Detroit Area Study* ... they will be apprentices if you like, but they will also be colleagues, in the sense that when the study is finished, any of the material they want to use for their own publications, they will publish over their own names." And I was greatly impressed with this, partly because it threw a great deal of sociological light on how a community develops, changes in the tensions it had. Also partly because it produced, year, after year, new young people who had learnt how you use empirical research in developing social theory, and I thought this was wonderful.

So I came back to England, and told the Social Science Research Council about it, how good it was. And they were sufficiently impressed to say "Fine, draw up a memorandum indicating what such a scheme is and how it could work in this country and we will send out invitation to all 45 universities in the country, asking them to put in applications for funds to set up a similar programme here. But it will be a programme, not a project. The funds will be guaranteed to begin with for five years." So I did this, and the thing was sent out. We got 11 applications back. The majority of them were pretty bad. Four of them were short-listed, and included among the four was the one from Durham University, which had been written by Philip. I thought it was absolutely first-rate. He had understood completely what the Detroit area could do as a post-graduate training tool, what lights it had thrown on the American social scene, and what the people who had worked on it as graduate students had subsequently done -- how good it was. Now I was not alone in feeling that it was first-rate. Everyone on the Council who was concerned in the project, felt exactly the same way. Now unfortunately, well unfortunately in a sense, Philip not only wrote that project ... that proposal ... but when it came to presenting it to the Council and arguing for it, Durham University picked Philip to do it. That meant he had to sit one side of the table, with me the other side of the table, and me being flanked by people I was going to live with for the next few years anyway. And, I imagine Philip thought, oh God, if the thing is given to Durham now, everyone will say, "Well it's because Mark is there and intimidated the others". That was absolute nonsense. Even if I voted against Durham, it would have been given to Durham, because it was so good. But when it was given to Durham, Philip ostentatiously dis-associated himself from the project. He watched it being handed over to the Geography department. When the Geography department made a mess of it, I think made a mess of it, Professor Angus Campbell and I went up to look at it, to monitor it, talk to the people on the course who were very unhappy. And we both said, "Philip, why don't you take a greater interest in it?" Philip said no. He did not want anyone, for a moment to believe, think, suggest, that he had got this because he was connected to me. And he leant over

backwards, time and time again, I think, to make clear that he was Philip and that I was Mark. And I can understand that.

[Cake arrives served by Jean Abrams – 18 minutes 40]

This meant that, in a way, Philip neglected some areas of sociology which I knew he was interested in. For example, his interest in political sociology was very real, very important to him. His very early studies of the young liberals, the young socialists, the young conservatives, was something that excited him. That he wanted publish very much. But no, he felt that would be running the risk of

DA: Being too close? But surely his work on neighbouring was getting actually in some way quite close to what you had been doing. Obviously it was a different theoretical position, but in methodical terms, and some of the real interest behind it. It must have been quite similar?

MA: No, it is very, very interesting that although neighbouring, in practice, is very largely a matter of support and care for the elderly, Philip, from time-to-time in his writing makes clear that there are other segments of the population, who are important in community care – the young, the single parent, and so on. The homeless, and so on. That it is wider than just the elderly. Again, in terms of methodology. The bulk of his support material, other than his own thinking, is in the terms of vignettes -- long quotes of people on what they mean by neighbourliness, or what they mean by neighbouring. Whereas I think my temptation all the time would have been to say ... “Here are three possible definitions of neighbouring. Which is most important? Which is least important? And then at the end said ‘93% said this and 20% said that”.

DA: Do you think that was a matter of presentation? I mean, my recollections of seeing the questionnaires and things, and the interview schedules being coded, was that that kind of hard empirical quantitative data was often there but he choose not present it.

MA: He left it to other people to present it and work on it, yes and to work on it and present it. Yes. Whereas that was the first thing I would have asked for ... where are the [cross] tabs? [laughs]

DA: Why do you think he got involved in such applied questions, given that his interests were largely theoretical?

MA: Well, in fact he'd long ago mentioned to me that he would like to be involved in policy research. I was not encouraging I suppose, because I said, "Well, the only thing that convinces some of the policy makers, is when you produce great tabulations of people who want this, or want that, or showing how many of them have houses with no lavatories in, or no central heating. That's the sort of thing that gets the headlines and influences policy makers. You realise that when you say you are going into policy research". And he said, "Well yes I suppose so." But the interesting thing is that almost the last thing he did, you see, was to accept this post at the Policy Studies Institute, where, whether he liked it or not, he would have had to relate quantitative empirical material of this kind to recommendations about policy, or implications for policy making. So, there might well, eventually as he grew older, have been some reconciliation within himself, at this feeling that figures were mucky useless stuff. [laughs]

DA: I think it is interesting in a way. Maybe he gave that impression more strongly to you than he did to me, 'cause perhaps he felt, I don't know ... but he would often discuss with me what was the use of doing experiments for example.

MA: Oh, yes.

DA: Saying well, you know we can't really learn very much from them. I would argue back and say that, that on the other hand, you have to try and test theory in very controlled conditions. And he'd agree with that ...

MA: He would agree with that?

DA: He would. We would reach an impasse, he would be accepting the need for data, if you like, but on the other hand, be resisting the possibility that you could have any objective data. So I mean, I think he was, to me anyway, presented a recognition of both things as being important. And maybe with you he was resisting a bit more strongly.

MA: Yes, I think that's right. In fact he didn't often discuss his work with me at all.

DA: No, he didn't with me that much.

MA: I don't think he, in fact, I don't think he did with anyone much!



Evelyn and Mark, Brighton, June 1988



Ben, Dominic, Mark and Jean Abrams, Pelham Square, Brighton, 1993

