IN MEMORIAM

DAVID LOUIS MILLER

David Louis Miller, who taught at The University of Texas at Austin from 1934 until his retirement and appointment as Professor Emeritus in 1978, died in Austin at his home on the morning of January 8, 1986, at the age of 82. A philosopher of international renown and the world's leading scholar of the thought of George Herbert Mead, he remained active in his studies and writings until the very day of his death. He was preparing to leave his home for his office on the University campus when he died, suddenly and unexpectedly, of heart failure.

Early Life and Education

David was born on May 6, 1903, at the family home six and a half miles outside the village of Lyndon, Kansas. His father (Otto William Miller) and mother (Lucy Augusta Plettner Miller) had both immigrated from Germany in the 1880's, and David was the seventh of nine children. His father was a member of the School Board of the nearby elementary school, which had nine grades and one teacher. After graduating, David worked for two years on the family farm before entering high school. During the second of these years, he was allowed to rent and work land with one of his brothers, and his share of the profit enabled him to help pay the expenses for his high school education in Lyndon. In 1923 he entered the College of Emporia in Kansas and received a B.A. degree with a major in mathematics and physics in 1927. He also played football for the College and was named All-Conference guard in his senior year. Upon graduation he received an offer to coach at the Douglas, Wyoming, high school for $2,000 a year, which at that time was an exceptionally high salary. But he had already determined to continue his education at the University of Chicago.
David arrived at Chicago by train in early June, 1927, with five dollars in his pocket. Fortunately, three college friends from Emporia took him into their cost-sharing "commune" and helped him find a temporary job. He enrolled immediately in a course in Speech, entered a speech contest, and won the first prize of $500, which of course he shared with his friends. Until he attended George Herbert Mead's course in "Social Psychology" in 1928, he was undecided what his major would be or even whether he would study beyond the Master's degree. His experience with Mead's course decided things for him; he would work for a Ph. D. in philosophy. He began his dissertation on the topic of emergent evolution with Mead, but after the latter's unexpected death in 1931 he completed his work under the direction of Charles W. Morris.

There is no doubt that the year 1928 represents a turning point in David's life. Not only did it bring his first contact with Mead and his decision to pursue philosophy and a college teaching career, but it also marked the beginning of a romantic involvement with Mary Evelyn Harsh, who had come to the University of Chicago on a scholarship after having graduated from Ohio Wesleyan College in 1928. Mary grew up in a prosperous and socially liberal family in Ohio and had been spending her summers doing settlement work in New York City and taking courses at Columbia University. It is clear that her deep concern for social work, combined with Mead's view of the social basis for the self and responsibility, encouraged David in the philosophical direction he was beginning to make his own. His lifelong devotion to the issue of the interrelation of the individual and society surely did not have its inception there, but it was provided in that setting with an impetus and intensification which he never lost. Mary and David were married in September, 1929, a few weeks before the market crash that initiated the great depression. A son, Reese, was born to them in Austin, Texas, in 1934. (Reese Miller is now a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.)

Upon receiving his Ph. D. in 1932, David found himself, as many young men did in those deep depression years, without a regular job or
any prospect of one. Remaining in Chicago, he found temporary employment teaching one course at the University of Chicago in each of the fall and winter quarters. Then in May, 1933, he was hired as a guide at the Chicago World's Fair, where he eventually served as bodyguard to Sally Rand, the famous fan dancer, during her performances. In the fall of that year he was also able to take on the full-time job, at $25.00 a week, of teaching college students at a federally-funded campus in downtown Chicago. For approximately nine months he held two full-time jobs, which consumed, between them and the travelling involved, sixteen and a half hours each weekday. Finally, in the spring of 1934 he received two offers of a regular teaching position beginning in the fall, one at Yankton College, South Dakota, and the other, which he accepted, at The University of Texas.

**Professional Career**

With the exception of three visiting appointments elsewhere (University of Hamburg, 1960; Kansas State University, 1967; University of Miami, 1970) and a research appointment with the Research Analysis Corporation in Bethesda, Maryland (1963), David Miller taught continuously at The University of Texas until the age of seventy-five. Beginning as an Instructor, he moved rapidly through the ranks and was promoted to Professor in 1945. He served as departmental chairman twice, from 1940 to 1944 and for a ten year stretch from 1949 to 1959. It was during this last period that the Department underwent its greatest development. A doctoral program was established, the first Ph. D. was awarded in 1952, and the faculty grew from four to ten members. With the warm support of the Dean of the Graduate School and fellow Professor of Philosophy, Albert P. Brogan, Miller initiated a process of careful recruitment of both distinguished and promising scholars which was continued by the chairmen who succeeded him and resulted in the Department's achievement during the next decade of a position of national prominence. Indeed, in terms of the number of full-time faculty and doctoral students it became by 1970 the largest department of philosophy in the country.
From the beginning a forceful and accomplished speaker, Miller became, in spite of the justice of his grading, a popular teacher. An imposing figure of a man, erect, large-boned, and over six feet tall, he yet captivated his students, both graduate and undergraduate, with his gentle humor and patience. His patience had limits, however. There was the time he started down the aisle towards a certain All-American football lineman who had persisted in talking throughout the lecture, had been asked to leave the room, and had replied that he was not going to leave and nobody was going to make him. Those who have known David in such moments of determination will not find it difficult to understand why the student jumped up and ran out the room. More characteristic is the story told by John Silber regarding his participation with David on a panel during Religious Emphasis Week in 1957.

We served on the panel with a man who claimed to have experienced a miraculous religious cure. David drew him out in the best Socratic fashion. As the man proclaimed that God's goodness was demonstrated by God's having cured his tuberculosis, David asked if God had the power to cure tuberculosis in others. The man replied, "Yes, if the individuals have faith in God and if their lives are worthy." Whereupon David asked:

What do you say, then, about God's neglect of all those tuberculars dying in sanitariums all over the world? Are none of them believers in God? Are none of them worthy of God's attention? Do you really think God owed you so much more than he owed them? Should you assess God's goodness on the basis of your own good fortune? Should those less fortunate do the same? And finally, shouldn't you be ashamed of yourself?

At the end of that dialogue students were thinking seriously about religion and were no longer being manipulated.

It would be impossible here to recognize all of David Miller's contributions to his profession and to the University. The following sampling will have to suffice. He has often been praised for his guidance, firm yet reasonable, in University affairs. For example, his leadership among the faculty, especially in the activities of the American Association of University Professors, during the period of faculty and student unrest before and immediately after the firing of President Homer Rainey by the Board of Regents in 1945 had a significant effect upon the course of affairs at that time and upon the future shape of University policy. His work with the larger community was also significant. A founding member of the Southwestern Philosophical Society, he served as its President in 1949. In 1966 he served as a member of the Governor's Conference of Libraries. From 1965 to 1968 he was a consultant to the Research Analysis Corporation and the United States Department of Agriculture. He was appointed the General Chairman for the Fourteenth Annual Conference for the Advancement of Science and Mathematics Teaching in 1967. He received the Alexander von Humboldt Award from the government of West Germany in 1969. He gave radio talks on occasion, read many papers at professional conventions, and was an invited speaker on numerous occasions on college campuses in this and at least four foreign countries. But there is no doubt that his greatest achievement lay in his contributions to philosophical thought in his published writings.

Philosophical Work

In 1965 David Miller delivered a public lecture at The University of Texas which was subsequently published in The Graduate Journal. It was entitled "Individual Achievement in an Open Society" and it was subtitled "Dignity and Worth." There is surely no single phrase from David's many
writings which can serve adequately to represent the richness and subtlety of his own distinctive philosophical posture, but this title may serve to indicate what was central to it. It represents, first, his commitment to the view, which he shared with his teacher George Herbert Mead, that the individual, the self, emerges only in a society and, second, his view, which he developed far beyond Mead, that the individual is allowed his full development only in an open society and that a society can achieve its development only through the office of those open selves which it allows to arise within it. Thus, as he saw it, individuality and the social not only presuppose each other but advance one another towards a level on which the dignity and worth of individuals can be achieved and recognized. This underscores the importance of the subtitle of the lecture, "Dignity and Worth," for David's philosophical stance was, if anything, an ethical one. His guiding concern was never merely theoretical, but always practical and moral. At its heart his philosophy provides us with an encouragement towards an ideal of what men, individually and in their togetherness, can be.

David carried his great respect for and gratitude to Mead throughout his life. It was a constant concern of his to set out Mead's views for the benefit of others. In the mid-30's he helped to prepare and coedit for publication many of Mead's unpublished writings; the work appeared in 1938 under the title The Philosophy of the Act. In the forty years since 1943, when his first article on Mead appeared in print, his presentation of Mead's views included numerous journal articles and encyclopedia entries, two books, and many invited lectures, including several in Japan and Switzerland.

The books deserve further mention. In 1973 he published a large and comprehensive account of Mead's philosophy which was upon publication and remains to this day the central secondary work in the field and the model for any further scholarship. In 1982, four years before his death, he published another edited collection of Mead's unpublished writings and, at his death, he had completed work in collaboration with his former student Michael Jones on still another collection.
From 1934, when he came to The University of Texas, to the end of his life, David worked towards the development of his own view, first in the area of the philosophy of science and then, after the publication of over twenty articles and a book in that field, in the larger area that concerned him most, the philosophy of man, value, and society. His book in the philosophy of science, published in 1959, already indicates this deeper concern. It was entitled Modern Science and Human Freedom, and it makes clear that for him the topics were entwined and were equally important. The titles of several of the articles which he published during and immediately after this period underscore his broad social and ethical interests: "The Ought and the Is," "The Problem of Freedom in Contemporary Philosophy of Education," "Needed: Courage to Face the Future," "The Individual as a 'Cog' in a Machine or in a System," and, of course, the article which was cited earlier, "Individual Achievement in an Open Society -- Dignity and Worth." This concentration upon the topic of human life and achievement in community with others culminated in his publication in 1967 of a book of profound and sweeping vision, Individualism: Personal Achievement and the Open Society. He could have rested with that, sixty-four years of age and confident that his place in philosophy was assured. But he didn't. The book on Mead followed, as well as many articles and lectures on Mead, James, and Royce and on the topics of human freedom, value, taking the role of the other, and, of course always, the individual and society.

In 1978, when David was seventy-five, a two-day symposium honoring him and his work was sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and the University. At it were gathered many of his former students from all over the country, his colleagues, his friends, and others who had merely studied his work and came to pay him their respect. There were lectures given by distinguished philosophers on David's work and on American philosophy in general, and on that occasion he was presented with a festschrift appropriately published by the Southwestern Journal of Philosophy and edited by four of his former students. They did not have to puzzle long about the title to be given to this work. It was entitled simply The Individual and Society.
In the course of a long and productive career David Miller published six books and sixty-seven articles. At his death he had completed two additional articles which were to be submitted for publication. And among his effects were discovered over fifty finished but unpublished articles and two completed but unpublished books.

A Whole Man

In the article "Individual Achievement in an Open Society" David Miller made this observation:

The individual can develop himself only through work, and development can be known only by one's achievements -- the artist by his paintings and other works of art, the farmer by what he produces on the farm, the author by his written works, and so on. Personal achievement or self-actualization cannot be separated from work, from the attainment of goals.

David's own personal achievement is well indicated by the professional and philosophical work already noted. But only in part. Those who knew him well will remember him less for those things than for other, less public accomplishments which stamped his everyday life and personality. No memorial to the life of David Miller could be complete without mentioning some of these.

He was, for example, an accomplished cabinetmaker; his skill in the fashioning of fine wood into tables and chairs of remarkable dignity and beauty was of the highest order. He knew how to work with his hands and with the craftsman's tools in many ways: in farming, in the building and repair of houses, in the delicate work of inlay and finishing.

Even more striking than this care for and devotion to the work of the hands, was his concern for human beings. In keeping with his concern for the fundamental importance in human affairs of the interplay between
the individual and his community, he made an art of personal relationships at all levels, from the intimacy of love and friendship to the more public dimensions of politics and community affairs. His remarkable talent for taking the point of view of others, his deep appreciation for the unique shape of individual lives, and his tender concern for children and the disadvantaged indelibly marked his character and was plain for all to see. He was a constant source of help to others, not only in regard to the history and problems of philosophy and science, but in respect to such matters as buying a house or car, budgeting one's time and money, overcoming alcoholism and other disabilities, confronting and handling personal tragedy, choosing careers, and, in general, coming to terms with the vicissitudes of everyday life. In all such matters — human, personal, and social — he came to be respected as a man of genuine wisdom.

In sum, he was a whole man, accomplished not merely in intellectual and professional matters, but in the arena of practical, moral, and personal affairs. Perhaps it was because his own life was so full and rich that it could overflow so generously into the lives of the rest of us.

William H. Cunningham, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Douglas Browning (Chairman), Edmund Pincoffs, and Emmette Redford.