

AN INVITATION TO A LECTURE ON HUMAN SPIRITUAL NATURE
followed by
AN APPEAL TO OXFORD STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS
and
AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MASTER OF BALLIOL

Dear All,

Allow me to invite you to my virtual public lecture on 'Human Spiritual Nature and the X of Neurophysiologists' which you can listen to (or which you can read) on my website (<http://www.juliustomin.org/>). The abstract follows:

'The world of our senses is organized in accordance with the space, shapes and movements of objects, animals, activities and interactions of people in front of us and around us, all of which is fundamentally different from the way in which the fabric of the brain is organized within the space of our skull and from the way in which the activities of neurons proceed in time. Neurophysiology provides us with data that enables us to investigate the difference between the two. We can see, hear, smell, taste and touch the objects, animals and people around us, and experience our body, only on the basis of stimuli affecting our senses, which are then transformed into neural impulses that are transmitted to the brain, and processed on the way to the brain and in the brain. These messages exist in all their transformations within the nervous system in forms radically different from the forms we perceive on 'the world's stage'. There must therefore be X distinct from the brain, which transforms the information as it is processed in the brain into 'the world's stage' in which we live. The process of this transformation is entirely subconscious. Since our brain with all its neurons is located in the skull, our subconscious, in so far as it registers the brain's activities and transforms them into the world of which we are conscious, must be located in the same space. Its nature must therefore be fundamentally different from the nature of the brain, for 'the world's stage' we perceive is not interfered with by the fabric of the brain, by the electrical currents and chemical transmitters generated by neurons, and the activities of the brain are not interfered with either by 'the world's stage' as we are conscious of it or by the subconscious activities intervening and mediating between consciousness and the brain.'

I hope that you will agree with me that I ought to be allowed to present the lecture at Oxford University. The view of human nature I advocate in it compelled me to invite Oxford dons to my philosophy seminar in Prague in 1978, and has sustained me in my philosophy studies ever since I came to Oxford in 1980 at the invitation of the Master of Balliol.

AN APPEAL TO OXFORD STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS

Early in September I asked the Master of Balliol for permission to present my lecture on 'Human Spiritual Nature and the X of Neurophysiologists' at Balliol. On October 4 the Master replied: 'It is not I fear possible to give you a platform in Balliol'. I have therefore decided to reinforce my request by action. On November 18 I stood for two hours in front of Balliol with a poster 'A philosopher from Prague appeals to Oxford academics: LET US DISCUSS HUMAN NATURE'. A series of appeals/protests is following, which will culminate on November 18, 2014, the 25th anniversary of the events to which the date is related.

Why November 18? Almost a quarter of a century ago, on 17 November 1989, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia started with a student demonstration. I have reasons to believe that my invitation to Oxford dons played a role in paving the road towards the Velvet Revolution. I invited Oxford dons in the hope that we might jointly promote those aspects of learning that help us to live good, strong lives irrespective of any financial rewards. My message to Oxford dons was simple: 'We never know whether our next meeting will not be the last and we all end in prison. Just think about something worth telling us, something that will contribute to our endeavour to live as free and intellectually strong lives as possible.' What were the results? Roger Scruton wrote in 'A catacomb culture' (*TLS*, February 1990) how the 'secret seminars' began to flourish after I left Czechoslovakia for Oxford:

'Tomin then emigrated and ... we decided that, although our purpose was charitable ... it should not be openly pursued, and that we could henceforth best help our Czechoslovak colleagues by working secretly ... we won the confidence of a large network of people, none of whom knew the full extent of our operations ... We therefore began to establish other, purely nominal organizations through which to pay official stipends, so that the names of our beneficiaries could not be linked either to us or to each other. In this way we helped many people ... We also encouraged our French, German, American and Canadian colleagues to establish sister trusts, thereby acquiring an international dimension ... In the mid-1980s, thanks to a generous grant from George Soros (who will surely be commemorated in future years, not only as a great Hungarian patriot, but also as one of the saviours of Central Europe), we had expanded into Moravia ... the organizer of our work in Slovakia, Ján Čarnogurský ... was released under an amnesty and made Deputy Prime Minister ... By then another of our beneficiaries was President, and within weeks we were to see our friends occupying the highest offices in the land ... Among those who had worked with us we could count the new rectors of the Charles University, of the Masaryk University in Brno, and of the Palacký University in Olomouc.'

This summer you may have read about the corruption scandals that have erupted in the Czech Republic. I feel co-responsible for that situation, for I cannot help asking whether all the money thus lavishly expended under the patronage of Oxford University (George Soros got his money back with interest on Black Wednesday) did not sow the seeds of corruption within the intellectual and political elite of the nation as it emerged from the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989. We all ought to think about unforeseen consequences. Unforeseen consequences? In 1979, when Oxford dons began to visit my seminar, I insisted that the forthcoming financial support to Czechoslovak intellectuals ought to be open, in the form of scholarships delivered through Czechoslovak banks.

I believe that the concept of Human Spiritual Nature I advocate in my lecture could help to promote moral regeneration in my country. This is why I intend to do my best to obtain permission to present the lecture at Oxford University so that it can be thoroughly discussed.

Why do I intend to enact my appeal at Balliol on November 18 and not on November 17? On 18 November 1989 *The Independent Magazine* published 'The Pub Philosopher' (written by Nick Cohen, these days a distinguished contributor to *The Observer*) from which I quote:

'Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford, impatiently brushed aside the suggestion that the Conservatives' reduction in funding for British philosophy since 1980 might explain why there was never an academic post for Tomin at Oxford. "That's not the point at all," he said. "He would not be accepted as a graduate here, let alone be given a teaching job." ... Last October Rude

Pravo, the mouthpiece of the Czech Communist Party, happily reported Tomin's story. Under the headline PAID TO MAKE SPEECHES, it said: "Even in a public bar words can earn money, or rather make money. The recipe for this was found in Britain by the Czech emigrant Julius Tomin. Since 1980, when he emigrated, he has struggled as hard as possible to keep going since no university has shown any interest in him. Only now he has found an audience interested in his disputations – namely a public house in Swindon. No other milieu will put up with him."

The recent rejection of my request by Professor Bone, the Master of Balliol, has brought to my mind the lecture that the then Master of Balliol, Dr Anthony Kenny, gave in my philosophy seminar in Prague in April 1980. Kenny argued that according to Aristotle only a man called upon to do philosophy should devote himself to it: 'A man who would insist on doing philosophy without being called upon to do so would be a vicious and ignoble character by the standards of Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*.' Before I could show to Dr Kenny that he misinterpreted Aristotle, the Czech Secret Police forced their way into our flat and interrupted our discussion. I do not like it when the police are given the power to interrupt academic discussions.

I wrote about my encounter with the Master of Balliol in Prague in 'Pursuit of Philosophy' (*History of Political Thought*, Vol. V. No. 3. 1984) which I opened with the chapter entitled: 'To Resume an Interrupted Discussion'. The discussion with Dr Kenny and its aftermath revealed our diametrically opposed views on human nature. Ever since I came to Oxford in 1980 I have endeavoured to have the discussion reopened, with no success.

May I appeal to you: Would you raise your voice in support of my request?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MASTER OF BALLIOL

Dear Master,

I have invited you to my virtual public lecture on 'Human spiritual Nature and the X of Neurophysiologists' on my website www.juliuostomin.org. I received no positive answer to my invitation. I offered you the lecture for presentation at Balliol, to which you replied: 'It is not I fear possible to give you a platform in Balliol'. I therefore addressed Fellows at Balliol, Blackfriars, Brasenose, All Souls, Campion Hall, Christ Church, Corpus Christi, Exeter and Green Templeton College with the appeal: 'Would you raise your voice in support of my request?' Having received no positive reply, I decided to address British MPs with my Invitation and my Appeal, for my lecture raises important issues that ought to be discussed at any university, let alone Oxford University. Properly discussed and reflected, it will profoundly change our view of human nature, and correspondingly affect psychology, neurophysiology, and philosophy. In the following I am informing you about my exchange with one of the MPs.

Desmond Swayne MP replied to my Appeal: 'In a free society Balliol should remain free to listen to - or not to listen to- whomsoever they choose. DS'

I replied: "I find it deplorable that Oxford dons cannot face a discussion on Socrates and Plato, or even on Human Nature and Neurophysiology, with a philosopher from Prague, which is glossed over by a reference to a free society.

Allow me to go back to Nick Cohen's article 'The Pub Philosopher', from which I have quoted a short extract in my 'Appeal'. Cohen 'quoted' me as saying that Oxford dons 'all pretend to their students they can read and understand Ancient Greek, but none of them can'. This is a serious misquotation. I took great pains to explain to Cohen that Oxford dons must translate Greek texts in order to understand them. They know how to translate, but they do not understand Greek in Greek.

Cohen let my 'quote' sink down into the reader's mind as my completely misrepresenting Oxford dons, which proved that Tomin 'needs psychiatric help', and then he returned to my criticism: "Tomin's criticism has not been well received. 'It's crap,' said Jonathan Barnes."

In those days – throughout the 1980s – I was allowed to give lectures and seminars at Oxford University, which were on the Lecture List, although I was not paid for giving them. A parent of a student of Classics wrote to Jonathan Barnes in response to Cohen's article: 'I have the closest contact with some of the best of your students, and even now they are adamant that the man or woman who understands "Greek Greek" does not, with the exception of Julius Tomin, exist: certainly they do not recognize their students at Oxford as doing so. You yourself and your colleagues know this, you admit it among yourselves.' In response, Jonathan Barnes, Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Balliol College, wrote to the parent: 'What you say is a false and foolish calumny – had you made it public it would, I think, have been libellous.' At that point the parent contacted me and gave me Barnes' reply. And so I wrote to Professor Barnes: 'You deny my claim that you and other classical philosophers at Oxford do not understand Greek Greek. Would you agree to submit yourself together with myself to a test that would establish the truth? It would be a valuable educational experience for those students of Ancient Greek and Ancient Philosophy who would attend.' – I wrote the letter on November 26, 1989. I am still waiting for a positive answer. – 'In a free society' Professor Barnes 'should remain free' to answer my challenge or not, as he may 'choose'."

Dear Master, may I appeal to you once again: allow me to present 'Human Spiritual Nature and the X of Neurophysiologists' at Balliol.

I hope to be hearing from you soon.

With best wishes,

Julius Tomin

From Exeter College I received the following answer to my 'Open Letter':

Dear Sir,

If I asked the master of Balliol if I could give a lecture, and he said no, then I would understand that they already have a lot of lectures and they don't want to hear mine, because they don't think it would be as good as the lectures they do have. That is all there is to it. I hope you will come to understand this.

Yours sincerely

A. M. Steane

The rejection e-mail by the Master of Balliol was as follows:

'Dear Professor Tomin, My apologies for apparent rudeness. You are unlikely to know that in a very small way I was involved in that struggle, as a visitor myself in odd circumstances, starting by talking about Byron and literature in general to some of those who had lost their positions in Charles after 1968, one of whom, Alois Bejblik, now sadly dead, became a close friend. It is not I fear possible to give you a platform in Balliol, but I do understand the significance of the 17th November. Drummond Bone'

I am not a Professor; PhDr is as far as I have got in my academic career.

Before coming to my seminar in April 1980, Dr Kenny, the Master of Balliol, received a letter from the U.S.A. 'informing' him that I had failed to obtain a Doctor's degree. He came to my flat in Prague with his wife some twenty minutes before the beginning of the seminar and said: 'Julius, I will be talking about Aristotle. Would you translate two passages, one from the *Nicomachean* and one from the *Eudemian Ethics* at the beginning of the seminar?' as if it was quite natural and any proper academic might expect such a request from a fellow academic whom he would invite to his seminar.

What happened next is described in 'An Invitation to a Lecture on Socrates and Plato that cannot be presented at Oxford University' on my website <http://www.juliustomin.org/>.

To cut the story short, when I was leaving Prague in August 1980, the border guards wanted to confiscate my doctoral diploma. When I made it clear that 'either I go to Oxford with my Doctor diploma or I stay,' they let me go with my doctoral diploma. After coming to Oxford, I photocopied my doctoral diploma at the request of the Master of Balliol; the photocopy was for Professor Diemer, the President of the International Federation of Philosophy Societies. The 'information' about my having failed to obtain a Doctor degree seems to have been widely disseminated before I arrived at Oxford.