

# In Gratitude to Richard Bernstein

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Richard Bernstein was my first philosophy teacher and was the primary reason for my pursuit of philosophy. I encountered Dick Bernstein during my first year as a Yale undergrad, at what turned out to be his last year there. After enrolling in his Philosophy 10a class, I encountered a charismatic professor who, by dint of the power of his presence and the penetration of his thought, opened the mind of a benighted would-be physicist who genuinely believed that physics would ultimately reveal everything that is worth knowing. After Dick was inexplicably denied tenure, I recall having marched on picket lines in protest of what became perhaps the first nationally famous "publish or perish" case in the U.S. (it was covered in *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, etc.). Later in my career, I was the beneficiary of his generative attitude towards younger scholars in a number of ways: among them his encouragement to contribute to his journal, *Praxis International*, and his invitation to make a presentation at and participate in the three-week long research seminar organized by Jürgen Habermas and Dick at the Inter-University Centre of Postgraduate Studies in Dubrovnik, Croatia (then Yugoslavia) on the shores of the Adriatic, my first international experience. When I last saw him, and just before the onset of the Covid pandemic, we were gathered at a Manhattan jazz club, along with his wife, Carol, and my colleague, Ed Casey. When Dick learned that I performed occasionally at jazz vespers at Saint Peter's church (the place informally known as the "jazz church") he straightaway asked Carol to note the next performance in their calendar so that they might attend. Such was his ongoing and expansive curiosity. Unfortunately, that next meeting was not to be. But what endures in my memory and continues to inspire me is the thought that not only was Dick Bernstein a singularly irenic, ecumenical, judicious and synoptic philosopher—able to weave into an edifying hermeneutic conversation such disparate voices as those of Robert Brandom, Jürgen Habermas, his classmate Richard Rorty, and Jacques Derrida—but that Dick was also truly a *mensch*, and he will be sorely missed.