Ācāryasamarpaṇam: Studies in Honor of Edwin Gerow

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This collection of essays is presented in honor of Professor Edwin Gerow, an American Sanskritist and doyen of Indological Studies in the United States. The contributors to this volume include former students and distinguished colleagues. All have benefited greatly from Edwin Gerow's erudition; all have been touched deeply by his generosity.

Edwin Gerow was born in Akron, Ohio in 1931. Between 1949 and 1962, he studied philosophy, French, linguistics, and Sanskrit at the University of Chicago,[1] the Université de Paris, and the University of Madras, receiving his doctorate from Chicago in Linguistics and Sanskrit in 1962.[2] In 1967–68, Edwin returned to India to study Mīmāṃsā with M. M. Ganesha Bhatta and grammar and poetics with H. V. Nagaraja Rao at the Mysore Sanskrit College. He again went to India in 1974 to study the *Vādaratnāvalī* (The Jewel-Necklace of Argument) with Bannanje Govindācārya and in 1980 to engage the Dvaita Siddhānta school with the Pejāvara Mathādhipati.

In 1962, Professor Gerow embarked on a teaching career that would span thirty-five years and include terms at the University of Rochester (Assistant Professor of Sanskrit, 1962–64); the University of Washington (Assistant and Associate Professor of Sanskrit and Indic Literature, 1964–73); the University of Chicago (Frank L. Sulzberger Professor of Civilizations and Professor of Sanskrit, 1973–87); and Reed College in Portland, Oregon (Professor of Religion and Humanities, 1989–97). During this time, he also held visiting appointments at Northwestern

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University (1980) and the University of Otago (New Zealand, 1993) and was called often to Paris in many different academic capacities. In 2008, Université de Paris, La Sorbonne honored Professor Gerow with the Doctorat honoris causa.

Along with his teaching career, Professor Gerow has been deeply involved with the American Oriental Society, serving as vice president and president of the Society and for twelve years as editor-in-chief of its journal. Here, in the *Journal of the Oriental Society*, there are to be found more than eighty published pieces attributed to him, from reviews to full-length articles. Alongside this work, Gerow has had an active publishing career, producing dozens of works as editor, co-editor, author, or translator (see bibliography of his published works in this issue).

Students entering Professor Gerow's classroom knew it to be a place of elevated expectations, with the bar set high not only in terms of academic performance and scholarship, but also in matters of civility and comportment. Although Gerow's teaching portfolio was broad, including classes on Indic philosophy, religion, and literature, his courses in the Sanskrit language stand out for many as the core of Gerow's teaching persona. To participate in these classes required hour upon hour of preparation; Gerow expected students to *fully* engage the Sanskrit text, parsing every form encountered, stating the full *sandhi* rule (or rules), and, of course, devising a reasonable translation. In class, Gerow unfailingly noted student errors, using corrections as an opportunity to engage the Sanskrit text at ever-deeper levels of analysis. Student work was then subjected to Professor Gerow's fine-point red pen, with errors marked and, in the margins, corrections suggested. In the telling, this pattern of teaching seems not at all extraordinary. But, to see it thus would be a terrible misrepresentation of what was, in fact, an utterly unique classroom experience. Here looms large what can be only abstractly described as Gerow's deep and utter engagement with the material being studied, an engagement that gave expression to a learning environment that was as formidable as it was inimitable. It is worth noting here that several contributors to this volume, former students and now established faculty members, observed that in their own teaching careers the standard they sought to achieve was that set by Edwin Gerow in his classes. For all of us, it has been a standard glimpsed, but not reached.

As editor of this volume honoring Edwin Gerow, I asked contributors

to reflect on their experiences as Professor Gerow's students. These reflections are telling and are worth quoting in some detail. Francis X. Clooney, now Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology, noted that "He [Gerow] was a formidable reader of papers, exams, and chapter drafts—the kind of professor who starts by insisting that the draft was fine and then proceeds to give a very long list of problems, questions, criticisms; I learned so very much from his every marginal note." James Fitzgerald, now St. Purandara Das Distinguished Professor of Sanskrit at Brown University, recalled how he and Edwin agreed to study the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and the *Mahābhāṣya* using only spoken Sanskrit in their meetings. Although, as Professor Fitzgerald recalls, the deep discussions often inadvertently led away from spoken Sanskrit, the class remained "one of the most interesting and rewarding learning experiences I had at Chicago, and that is saying a great deal indeed." Maria Heim, now Professor of Religion at Amherst College, observes that Gerow's powerful influence as Sanskrit Professor and Professor of Religion at Reed College led four students in a single year (a cohort to which she belonged, and a remarkable number at a small college) to graduate programs in Religion and Asian Studies, with three attending Harvard and one attending Chicago. Another student in that group, Deepak Sarma, now Professor of South Asian Religions and Philosophy at Case Western Reserve University, noted that it was Professor Gerow who serendipitously forged a connection to Sarma's background, a background of which he was not even aware, as he learned:

> ...not only was I [Sarma] a Mādhva Brāhmaṇa from Udupi, but that he [Gerow] had studied Sanskrit there with Bananjee Govindacarya, to whom I am related, and who lives about two blocks from my uncle's house. To make matters even more interesting, his contact in Udupi was my father's social studies teacher when he was a high school student! And, when Gerow noted my interest in realism versus idealism he suggested that I seek answers by examining the debates between the Madhva and Advaita schools of Vedānta. It is by pure serendipity that I have ended up as I am today. And, all of this is thanks to Professor Edwin Gerow. I owe a great deal to him.

Beyond the classroom, many recalled the yearly dinners at Gerow's

house, where the demanding Sanskrit don of the classroom emerged as a gracious host. Here, I can imagine no more eloquent words than those of his former advisee, Francis X. Clooney, who wrote simply of Ed as always "the scholar, teacher, true intellectual, friend."

During fifty years of active writing and publishing (a process that continues apace into the present), Professor Gerow's scholarship has ranged widely. Although he is perhaps best known for his studies of Indian (Sanskrit) poetics, he also has several translations to his credit and a great variety of works dealing with elements of India's literary and philosophical traditions. Among these works are broad introductions, such as his contributions to *The Literatures of India* (University of Chicago Press, 1974)—which remains a standard work for undergraduates in the field—as well as many specialized, often ground-breaking, monographs.

Professor Gerow's published work is distinguished by its liveliness and its willingness to stretch beyond the commonplace. Here, it is worth quoting in full Gerow's first paragraph to a paper that bears the somewhat sly title "What is Karma (kiṃ karmeti)? An Exercise in Philosophical Semantics" (*Indologica Taurinensia* 10 [1982]: 87–116):

> At a recent conference on « karma and rebirth », I was widely suspected to have made a joke when I observed that the sense of « karma » most familiar to me was that of the grammatical « direct object »: īpsitatamaṃ karma. The « joke » of course presumes a commonplace: that the senses of « karma » worth enquiring into must have to do either with a reality principle (as when the world and the sacrifice are both said to be a « karma ») or a condition of moral or ethical bondage (as when « karma » is said to be the mechanism of saṃsāra). Grammar deals with mere « words »; it cannot capture the *seriousness* of the *kosmos* (87; emphasis in original).

Here, in a mere three sentences, Gerow has turned the academic establishment upside down,[3] proposing a line of inquiry into *karma*—one of Indology's most favored and most studied subjects—that seemingly has no precedent in Indian Studies. Yet, Gerow does not pause at the curious fact that generations of scholars have failed to observe the obvious, that *karma* is an oft-used grammatical term, with specific syntactic and lexical connotations. That scholars have failed to engage this is, as Gerow sees

it, somewhat ironic, for, as he observes, despite the enthusiasm for studying India through Indic categories, "One, therefore, runs a certain risk in laughing at those dimensions of a conceptual system that are *most* strikingly « indigenous », such as the fact that « karma » means also « direct object » and is functionally equivalent to our term « passive voice »" (1982: 87; emphasis in original). From here, Gerow launches into an analysis that explores not only *karma*'s connotations in Indian grammar systems, but also its meaning in Indian philosophical thought, worlds that, as Gerow exposes them to his readers, are intimately connected. Reading Gerow's stunning analysis of *karma*, we quickly see why others have failed to take this path, for it requires a grasp of complex modes of Indian thinking that is rarely to be met with among Western Indologists.

This is, of course, but the tip of a substantial iceberg. For those familiar with Edwin Gerow's scholarship, to say more would only belabor the obvious.

I would like to thank the contributors to this volume as well as the many scholars who expressed an interest in its progress. The idea for a volume honoring Edwin Gerow had been under discussion for some years. In its early stages, Professor Deepak Sarma was a driving force behind it, and this collection would not have come to light without his hard work. The authors of the individual essays all showed great patience with my demands as editor. Special thanks go to Sushil Mittal, editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, for his kind offer to publish this festschrift and his enthusiasm for the project as it developed.

Notes

1. In a personal communication, Ed notes that he completed the requirements for the bachelors degree at what was then known as Hutchins College, a program devised at the University of Chicago by President Robert Hutchins. The College centered on a "Great Books" curriculum and was designed for students who were ready for college before completing four years of high school. (Ed matriculated in what would have been his senior year of high school.) The Hutchins College program was completed by taking exams, rather than by course credit, and so could be completed at an accelerated pace. Although Ed finished in two years, he

remained at Chicago for another year, taking courses, since as he notes "few other universities were prepared to take a [University of Chicago] B.A., given after the 'sophomore' year of a normal college, as a 'real' B.A., qualifying one for graduate study."

2. In a personal communication, Ed notes that he studied first-year Sanskrit with George V. Bobrinskoy, and then with J. A. B. van Buitenen, who was newly arrived at the University of Chicago. Of Bobrinskoy, Ed remarks, "Bo's method of teaching Sanskrit, by the way, was exemplary—all questions were answered by referring to relevant paragraphs in William Dwight Whitney; as a result, Bo's copy of Whitney had become by that time a stack of loose pages, completely unbound—but Bo went unerringly to the right page each time."

3. The "recent conference" referred to here is the famed Karma conference held in Seattle in 1976, which yielded the multi-author volume, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (ed. Wendy Doniger) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

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