

Memorial Notice
Marjorie Glicksman Grene (1910-2009)

Marjorie Glicksman Grene, Professor Emerita in the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Davis, passed away on March 16 in Blacksburg, Virginia, at the age of 98.

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on December 13, 1910, Marjorie Grene went east for her college education, taking a degree in zoology at Wellesley College in 1931. In 1931-32 she attended Martin Heidegger's lectures in Freiburg, and the following year studied with Karl Jaspers in Heidelberg. Though she took graduate courses at Harvard, her Ph. D. in 1935 was awarded by Radcliffe. "As close as females in those days got to Harvard," she would later say. Faced with the double challenge of being a woman during the depression, she nonetheless managed to secure an assistantship at the University of Chicago, principally as a means to participating in Rudolph Carnap's research seminar. She parlayed this into an appointment as university instructor. In 1944 she was forced to leave Chicago and did not return to formal teaching until 1959, when she held lectures in Greek philosophy at Leeds. This fifteen year hiatus, something of a scandal in philosophical circles, was not fallow. She produced in 1948 *Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism* (republished as *An Introduction to Existentialism*) and in 1957 published *Heidegger*. These frankly critical studies, especially the first, were pivotal in bringing existentialism to the attention of the English speaking world. Expertise in existentialism notwithstanding, Marjorie's intellectual center of gravity lay elsewhere. Much more central to her core conceptual stance was the work with Michael Polanyi at Manchester in 1957-58, where, as research assistant, she had a fundamental influence on his major work, *Personal Knowledge*. In 1960 Grene accepted a post as lecturer in philosophy at Queen's University Belfast. Then, in 1965, the University of California at Davis had the good fortune to hire Marjorie Grene as Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy. She served here until her university-mandated retirement in 1978. In 1988 Marjorie relocated with her daughter, Ruth, to Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. There, until her death, she was Honorary University Distinguished Professor and Adjunct :Professor of Philosophy and Science Studies.

Marjorie Grene's impact on the practice and profession of philosophy is broad and far reaching. In some 13 books and over 100 articles she attacked with brilliance and characteristic independence a wealth of fundamental topics in the history of philosophy, epistemology, and the philosophy of biology. Her epistemology, crystallized in *The Knower and the Known* (1966), is naturalistic and owes much to science, especially, biology, but always displays a keen sense for historical context. Indeed, even as she dismissed much contemporary work as fashionable diversion, she prized the historical tradition. "What we have left," she once said, "is the history of our own literature." To a colleague, and former student, she observed that Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* was the most perfect example of philosophical writing we possess. Marjorie's historical hero, had she one, was Aristotle, and her historical villain, one she had, was

Descartes, for whose disembodied *cogito* she could find no use. Appropriately, she wrote books on both—Descartes twice, in *Descartes* (1985) and *Descartes Among the Scholastics* (1991), and Aristotle in the now classic *A Portrait of Aristotle* (1967). Her Aristotle is a biologist and Grene shows how this influence shapes much of Aristotle's thought. Grene herself credits Aristotle for her entry into philosophy of biology; but it is hard to believe that this particular zoology major from Wellesley could have gone in any other direction. The bulk of her writing and influence lies here. She was, arguably, the founding figure in the new field of philosophy of biology. In two ways—first, through her own work, a taste of which is available in *The Understanding of Nature: Essays in Philosophy of Biology* (1974); second, through a series of NEH seminars and summer institutes for the Council of Philosophical Studies. The latter includes the seminal 1982 institute at Cornell University on the philosophy of biology. By no means narrow, her interests in biology focused on evolutionary theory, notably the evolutionary synthesis. UC Davis was fertile ground for this, and she entered into lively dialogue with Davis colleagues such as Theodosius Dobzhansky, G. Ledyard Stebbins, and, as a visitor, Ernst Mayr. Marjorie appeared to have an inexhaustible supply of ideas about biology, philosophy, and their conceptual and historical relations. As late as 2004, comfortably into her 90's, she co-wrote, with David Depew, *Philosophy of Biology: An Episodic History* for Cambridge University Press.

Marjorie has been richly decorated for her achievements. In 1976 she was made a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and in the following year she became a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1970-71 she was elected Faculty Research Lecturer at the University of California, Davis. She served as President of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association for 1971-72. In 1991-92 Marjorie was the Romanell-Phi Beta Kappa Professor in Philosophy; her lectures, delivered at UC Davis, comprise the heart of her enthralling essay, *A Philosophical Testament* (1995). Professor Grene held honorary degrees from Tulane University and from the University of Dijon, and she accepted visiting appointments at, among other places, Rutgers, Yale, Boston University, UC Berkeley, Vassar, and Waterloo. Many of these were distinguished appointments. In 1986 a Festschrift appeared in her honor, *Human Nature and Natural Knowledge*, edited by A. Donagan, A. N. Perovich, and M. V. Wedin. Others were to follow, including, *Conceptions de la Science: Hier, Aujourd'hui, Demain. Hommage à Marjorie Grene*, edited by J. Gayon and R. M. Burian. For a woman who pioneered so many routes in the profession, perhaps, most fitting is her selection as the first woman to be honored in the distinguished Library of Living Philosophers. *The Philosophy of Marjorie Grene* is volume 29.

Marjorie Glicksman Grene was a singleton. A gifted writer, she wrote easily, even effortlessly, and always managed to find fresh ways to impugn views she regarded as ill-founded, ill-argued, or just plain nonsense. And there were many such views. Spirited in disagreement, in friendship she was steadfast and generous. She deflected praise, frequently with a self-deprecating remark; perhaps, more than anything, this reflected a life-long conviction that there was more to learn than time in which to learn it. For those of us fortunate enough to have shared in her life and times, Marjorie was a force or, as

Henry James might have said, a quantity. For many of us, it is not entirely clear how such a thing could end. But it has.

Marjorie is survived by her daughter Ruth, of the Virginia Tech faculty in Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science, her son Nicholas, Professor of English Literature in the School of English, Trinity College, Dublin, his wife Eleanor, grandchildren, Sophia, Hannah, Jessica, Clement, Nick and Lucy Grene, and great-granddaughter, Nazyia Terry.

For three business days, beginning March 19, the Chancellor of the University of California, Davis, has ordered that the university flag be lowered in honor of Professor Emerita Marjorie Glicksman Grene.

Michael V. Wedin
March 19, 2009
University of California, Davis