Joseph Margolis
2007 Herbert W. Schneider Award

Jerrold Levinson has called Joseph Margolis “a one-man intellectual tradition”. No philosopher in America has drawn on a more varied set of philosophical approaches in constructing his own original philosophical system. The tools of each of these he deftly uses to critique other traditions. Pragmatism, for example, is employed in criticism of analytic philosophy, and vice versa. Hegelianism and hermeneutics perform yeoman service in appraisal of American naturalism, and vice versa. A complete list of such mutual critiques would be very long indeed.

Margolis is “a one-man intellectual tradition” in another respect. Over more than a half century he has published in almost every field of philosophy. Although he first became well known for his work in aesthetics and moral philosophy, he has since published widely in epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and philosophy of culture, while remaining active in philosophy of art and ethics.

Further confirmation of Levinson’s description of Margolis is found in the volume of his publications. If I were now to recite the titles and subtitles of all his books, I would exhaust the time available for an award citation of this kind. And that says nothing of the many hundreds of journal articles and contributions to edited volumes. For that reason, it would seem wise to amend Levinson’s comment to say that Margolis is a one-man library as well as a one-man intellectual tradition. For those among you who revel in early American philosophy, as Herbert Schneider did, this amendment will bring to mind Cotton Mather’s description of his grandfather John Cotton: “Mr. Cotton was indeed a most universal scholar, and a living system of the liberal arts, and a walking library”.

No single “ism” can claim Margolis. Pragmatism has as strong a claim as Hegelianism, relativism as strong a claim as realism, and so on. Since the doctrine of “the flux” is central to his philosophy, some may be tempted to label him a “fluxist”. But that label would fail to capture the pains he takes to do justice to invariance. I would even hesitate to label him a proponent of “Margolisism” because that would suggest that his views are not continuing to evolve. Even as I speak, I suspect that Joe is going over in his mind plans for a massive trilogy in which a novel ism is propounded.

For my money, in light of the balkanized state of professional philosophy today, what is of most value in Margolis’ lifework is the way he has vividly demonstrated that it is possible for a philosophy to be as synthetic as it is analytic, as historically rooted as it is focused on contemporary problems, and as humanistic as it is scientific.

Recalling the occasion of the conferral of a Schneider Award some years ago when Joe told me emphatically that the citation was too long, I fear he may find the same fault in this citation. Let me then conclude by saying that Joseph Margolis honors us
today by accepting the Herbert W. Schneider Award for distinguished contributions to
the understanding and advancement of American philosophy. The fact that Schneider was
Joe’s dissertation director makes this all the more fitting.

Peter H. Hare
University at Buffalo

Previous Herbert Schneider Award Recipients and Award Citations

1987—**Joseph Blau**
   Justus Buchler (Buchler’s citation, by George Kline, appears with his memorial
   tribute see *SAAP NEWSLETTER* No. 60 (1991): 3-6

1988—**Max W. Fish**

1989—**Sydney Ratner** (by Ralph Sleeper)
   H. S. Thayer

1990—**John E. Smith** (by Andrew Reck): *SAAP NEWSLETTER* No. 56 (June 1990): 7
   Gerard Deladalle (by Christian Kloesel): No. 56 (June 1990): 7-8


1992—**Murray Murphy** (by Bruce Kuklick): No. 62 (June 1992): 10

1993—**John J. McDermott** (by Herman Saatkamp): No. 65 (June 1993): 10-11


   Elizabeth Flower (by Murray Murphy): No. 71 (June 1995): 9-10

1996—**Peter H. Hare** (by Edward Madden): No. 74 (June 1996): 9-10

1997—**John Lachs** (by Herman Saatkamp): No. 77 (June 1997): 14-15


1999—**Frank M. Oppenheim** (by John McDermott): No. 83 (June 1999): 8-12

2000—**Thelma Z. Lavine** (by Beth Singer): No. 86 (June 2000): 6-7

2001—**Bruce Wilshire** (by John McDermott): No. 89 (June 2001): 20-21

2002—**Richard S. Robin** (by Peter Hare): No. 92 (June 2002): 20