



Yehuda Elkana (1934-2012)

Professor Yehuda Elkana, co-founder and first Director of the Cohn Institute, died in his home in Jerusalem on September 21st 2012 after several months of bravely contending with cancer. His intellectual leadership remains a powerful source of inspiration for much done and all that has been achieved at the Institute, long after he retired from the teaching faculty at Tel Aviv.

Yehuda Elkana was born in the Hungarian part of Serbia, and in 1944 was deported by the Nazis to Auschwitz, together with his parents. He and his parents survived the holocaust and immigrated to Palestine after the war. Following a brief period at Kibbutz ha-Zorea, Yehuda enrolled at The Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium in Tel Aviv, where he completed his high-school diploma.

Yehuda went on to study physics and mathematics at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and to teach at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Rechavia. He was fond of relating the fact that it took him eight whole years to complete an M.A in philosophy of science - during which he expanded his knowledge of the life sciences substantially – but finished his doctorate (with Stephen Toulmin at Brandeis) in eighteen months! As usual, he didn't mean it as a casual remark...

Yehuda embarked on his illustrious academic career in 1969, in the course of which he held teaching and research positions at the universities of Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and the ETH in Zurich. He was a thinker, a visionary and a leader who, at times alone, at times together with friends and colleagues, has contributed decisively to an impressive list of major institutes of learning, academic programs and intellectual projects: The Central European University (CEU), Budapest (where he served as Rector and President for the best of a decade), The Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Collegium Helveticum, The Max Plank Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. He was the driving force behind the founding of *Science in Context* in 1987, and the Bar-Hillel Colloquium for History, Philosophy and Sociology of Science in 1981. He was the founding Director of the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, and the Inter-Disciplinary Program for Excellent Students at TAU.

Yehuda Elkana founded the Cohn Institute in 1983 together with the late Professor Amos Funkenstein, in which he maintained a living and motivating presence long after he left. The Institute remained his intellectual home in, and by which he left his distinct mark on generations of researchers, scholars and intellectuals in all areas of academe.

Yehuda belonged to that rare breed of deeply engaged and connected intellectuals. He was profoundly knowledgeable of all aspects of Western culture – the natural and the social sciences, history and philosophy, art and literature, music, theatre and film.

He considered education, especially higher education, as aiming to facilitate constant rethinking and self-reflection, geared at questioning old boundaries and breaking new ground, and to cultivating and promoting a qualitative elite capable of appreciating the complexity of today's challenges, and harboring the creativity required to facing them anew. He was well aware of the

inadequacies and growing suspicion toward the original ideals of the enlightenment that had emerged since the 19th-century – ideals that had grounded the development of the modern university since the 13th-century. But he refused to abandon them, insisting that they be rethought, modified and further developed, rather than rejected. Our task, as he put it, should be that of "Rethinking, not unthinking the Enlightenment"!

Yehuda was also an engaged, loving, and deeply connected critic of Israel, always original, always constructive, but frequently controversial. A vivid case in point was the passionate call of his 1988 article on the memory of the Holocaust entitled "In Favor of Forgetting"!

It is impossible within the confines of these few paragraphs to do anything like full justice to the broad spectrum of Yehuda's fields of interest, his ideas and undertakings, and the many different ways in which he moved and effected the many people and institutions whose lives he touched, or to adequately articulate his intellectual and cultural legacy.

The faculty of the Institute along with very many of its students and alumni, so profoundly diverse in their interests, positions and undertakings, are united in viewing themselves as thinking and working within a shared and unique tradition in which Yehuda's presence will always remain deeply felt. We mourn the passing of a dear friend who was also a key figure in our professional, intellectual and spiritual world.

May he rest in peace.