

## **An Interview with Jordan Scholar, Professor Melvin T. Bobick**

*Melvin T. Bobick, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, died on March 1, 2020 in Durham, New Hampshire at the age of 93. He was born in Wilmerding, PA, but moved to Chicago with his parents at the age of 2. For most of his career, he taught at the University of New Hampshire where he was widely regarded as an outstanding teacher and enthusiastic promoter of the arts. Bobick leaves his wife, Ruth, and his son, Stephen.*



*In 2014, when he was in his late 80's, we approached him about conducting an extended interview with him. Our main purpose was to develop a record of some of his vast insights into the work of Elijah Jordan and Erich Ahrens. In addition, we hoped to elicit some of the details of his extraordinary life from his childhood in the Serbian section of Chicago, his years as a student of Ahrens and others at the University of Illinois, his 49 years of outstanding teaching at the University of New Hampshire, his contributions to sociology and philosophy, and his unparalleled contributions to the arts at UNH and elsewhere, most particularly his renowned Arts and Society program. Finally, we hoped to get a sense of the ways in which Jordan and Ahrens shaped his own thinking about the world.*

*Except for the very beginning of the interview which comes from a telephone conversation prior to the formal interview sessions, the interviews took place in the Dimond Library at UNH on February 22 and 23, 2014.*

*The transcript was edited for clarity. Those who knew Bobick will recognize the discursive style of his responses. At times, they may be challenging to follow, but the digressions are usually related to the main point and usually interesting and insightful. And he always gets back to the main topic.*

*Interviewers: Prof. Bobick was interviewed by Gerald A. Ginocchio, Professor of Sociology at Wofford College and Dennis W. MacDonald, Professor of Sociology at Saint Anselm College. Both were graduate students and long time friends of Bobick.*

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[Before the formal interview got underway, Bobick reminisced a bit about how he was introduced to Jordan and Ahrens.]

**MB:** ...when I got into Jordan, I asked Kaplan. So, what do you think? "He's ok. Aristotle did it better." But I knew he never read Jordan, and he never read Aristotle.

[On Ahrens teaching a seminar on social theory:]

**MB:** Well, he opened and insulted the class, and said that his purpose in teaching the seminar is that he was going to destroy sociology. And Otis, who sat next to me, said, "You know, he sounds paranoid."

And you know Jordan criticizes sociology, but Ahrens criticizes it in detail -- I mean, intricate detail, you know.

And he [Ahrens] told me, before he ran into Jordan, he was in Illinois. I remember it like it was yesterday. And he said he was losing sleep because he could not get an answer to the question: does the individual cause society or society cause the individual? And he used to walk at midnight trying to figure it out. And then he said with Jordan, he saw that he faced the problem in a different way.

But, oh my God! And the walks we used to take. Unbelievable! Unbelievable.

[At this point, the formal interview commenced with the interviewers giving a general overview of the topics they hoped to cover:]

**INT:** What we were thinking is, we had a bunch of things to ask you -- historical, biographical kind of things, like you were telling us over the phone the other night about how you ran into Ahrens' course and that sort of thing. And, then, we would like to talk to you about Jordan and Ahrens and their ideas. And of course that is the most important part. But just for the historical record, it seems like a good idea to get down some of these little details as well.

**MB:** Fine.

**INT:** What years were you at the University of Illinois?

**MB:** I started in 1942. We were at war; I was 17. My first job was when I was 6 years old. I sold newspapers on the corner of Diversey and Ashland, a busy intersection on the north side of Chicago... [which then led him to reminisce about growing up in Chicago]

[Bobick went on to recount other jobs he had as a kid growing up in Chicago. Most significantly, he got a job at the prestigious Newberry Library where he was a page who filed books and searched for lost books. This experience brought him into contact with a very well-educated library staff and fellow library workers.

Nearby the library was a famous place in Chicago called Bughouse Square where he recalled anarchists, socialists, communists would speak, but reactionaries dared not to. He spent many hours there during high school, perhaps too many, listening to speeches.

He said he thought he was the number one student in college preparatory. And he was head of ROTC; said he used to give lectures at 7AM to ROTC cadets.

There were also art theaters in this same area where he was exposed to foreign films.

He did not know anything about college when he was asked by the head of the Newberry Library if he wanted to go to Oxford. But also his friend, Herb Lucas, asked him about college. Herb was planning to go to Illinois.

The tuition at the time was just 40 bucks. He recalled his father and mother working hard, moving to Chicago because they thought their 2-year-old son would have better opportunities.

So, he packed off to the University of Illinois where he worked in a sorority house to make some money, which is where we pick up the story in his own words.....]

**MB:** I go to Illinois. I was carried away a little bit too much, but I never got into drink. And my classes: Herr Stegemeyer for German, Tops. Written assignments every night. Graduate of Heidelberg. Bryce Harris, English. Tops. Zoology, big lecture hall; they didn't know anything about teaching. Chemistry, compounds; didn't know anything about teaching. Had a teaching assistant; he didn't know [about teaching]. But a good school. I enjoyed myself.

I took a course in psychology; I thought I was going to be a psychiatrist. I couldn't believe it: what the psych. instructor would announce, I think I knew when I was 9 years old. But I graduated with a psychology major and a sociology major.

And then I took a [sociology] course my first year, or second semester sophomore year, with Max Kaplan, Introductory Sociology. He was a nice guy, but I didn't learn anything.

But he called me up after class on the last day and said, “Bobick, take a course with Ahrens -- he’ll like you and you’ll like him.”

I never took notes. But when I went into Ahrens’ classes -- I took Social and Cultural Dynamics and Modern Society -- my hand started to move. I didn’t want to miss a word because -- it’s like Plato’s theory of education, when Plato says, give the kids music. Ahrens interpreted that passage to say, kids like something big. Plato said don’t let the teacher intervene between the object and the child.

His lectures were beautiful. He wrote an outline on the board and followed it. Lecture two started where lecture one ended. Lecture three followed lecture two. 45 lectures; not repeating himself; building. Made sense to me.

Jordan’s got a line -- all political thinking is utopian. He was talking about Plato.

We had written questions for every class. And we were supposed to write the answers. And he would call on someone at the beginning of class to read their answer; he would respond with a lecture. That was his style. He was a bit intimidating with questions because it was hard for him to conceal when someone asked a stupid question. And I don’t think he liked to be interrupted. And occasionally there would be some smart aleck, and he would take care of him. Maybe some educators would say it was a bit cruel, but he’d just stare at him, you know.

[Reflecting on Ahrens’ Social and Cultural Dynamics course:]

**MB:** Ah, come on. I never experienced anything like that.

And this is where he disagreed with Jordan. He told me he disagreed with Jordan, but he didn’t say “disagreed.” He said, “We’re different.”

He opened the course with: what is society; what is wrong with society; how did it get that way; what’s a better society, and how do we get it? Opening lecture is: what is society? The title is Social and Cultural Evolution. So he began at the beginning. No physical anthropology. He said his focus was humans in the world.

**INT:** Sorry to interrupt, but is the course Social and Cultural Dynamics, or is it the evolution course you are talking about?

**MB:** Same course.

**INT:** Same course, ok. And is this where Order and Disorder in Society comes from, the evolution course mostly?

**MB:** Yeah. We can talk about that. Yeah, we can talk about that right now. He didn't name it that way, but he said, what is society? And what he said is -- he says it like Plato -- justice is an institution of a natural order. Society is synonymous with order. Jordan says, Ahrens says, whenever you study social science, by definition, your task is to order society.

Order has nothing to do with force. He places this conception of order against Hobbes, when Hobbes says, original human nature was everybody out for himself, chaos. Most people were too weak; they liked the "freedom," but they didn't like to be victims of other people practicing their "freedom." So, they couldn't take that world. So what did they do? They invented government to produce order; they gave up their freedom to get order, to get security -- that's Hobbes. If you analyze it, the nature of government according to Hobbes is force -- it's invented; it's unnatural. Nothing is worse to Hobbes than disorder. You get the sovereign; the sovereign kicks you in the butt, but revolution is worse. You put up with it because you get peace. But for Plato, you don't have society. What is justice? Book I of *The Republic*. Anyway, you could say that is synonymous with order. Plato is different from Hobbes. Plato reviews existing theories of government.

...that Plato course was a masterpiece, a masterpiece. Never experienced anything like it.

There was a German who approached Ahrens, but I've forgotten his name. All of these philosophers who were arguing his innate ideas and ideas in heaven, and so on, but I remember, Ahrens told me, he said, "Bobick," we were having a cup of coffee, "where does *The Republic* begin? In the Piraeus." I used to go to the Piraeus often. "I went down to the Piraeus to pay my respects to the gods," says Socrates. "There are processions. The Athenian one was very nice, but the Thracian one was equally nice." Ahrens said that Plato is making a dig against the Athenians because the Thracians were called uncivilized, but they were just as good at ritual. And then Ahrens says, it opens with a seaport; there's a festival; there's games; there's fun. Plato is talking about life. (By contrast, where does St. Thomas Aquinas open? -- with Being.)

The young people say, Socrates, come on, my father wants to talk to you. But Socrates declines, says he has to go home. He doesn't want to talk to Cephalus. But the boys say, no, no, no...we'll use force if we have to take you to our father. He misses you. So, they take him to their father Cephalus. These are a beautiful, beautiful couple pages. Ahrens made the point that Socrates never refuses an invitation to talk.

So they talk and soon the question, "What is justice?" comes up. Be honest and pay your debts, says Cephalus. But would you repay a madman? Cephalus declares, "I've got to go; I got to do my sacrifices." Ahrens pointed out, was he really interested in the conversation? And he interpreted this to mean: you don't argue with an old man. This guy's hopeless. But, Ahrens said, he had the most meaningful answer: be good to your friends and pay your debts. Interpersonal relations to friends; debts, the economic system. Do you repay a madman? Ahrens interpreted this to mean: the economic system of Athens is crazy [mad].

But that is one of the most important ideas in Plato, and in Jordan. Jordan says, either in *The Theory of Legislation* or *Forms of Individuality*, the separation of person-to-person relations from person-to-object relations is a flaw in liberalism. Ahrens noted about George Herbert Mead in another context, that Mead's sociology was a "sociology of angels." He said they are up in the sky interacting with each other, playing roles of the other, empathetic response, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. However, I would argue, if I were younger, I would do a paper on Elijah Jordan and George Herbert Mead, because Jordan had Mead for a year. And, Elijah Jordan, my God, if you read him carefully -- to hell with sociology; it doesn't contribute anything. But Jordan uses Mead's interaction theory.

However, Jordan makes the point; Ahrens makes the point -- the function of philosophy in Plato is to answer the question: what is reality. And the concept of reality, of person-to-person and person-to-object relations, is fundamental. And Ahrens talked a lot about property.

Ahrens doesn't talk about art too much; he hardly mentions Jordan's aesthetics. I once asked him about aesthetics. He said, "Bobick, we haven't..." and he got a little shaky, aggressive. We haven't done anything in aesthetics. It may be that he didn't work enough on aesthetics. And what would that have been? Jordan's aesthetics book [*The Aesthetic Object*] is profound, but it should be another couple hundred pages.

Philosophy begins with Plato and ends with Plato, Jordan says in *Forms of Individuality*. Jordan and Ahrens have different accounts of evolution. Oh, much different. Ahrens once told me, "Bobick, Jordan has an element of a golden past. I'm the opposite. I think in the beginning it was hell." That's where his theory of war comes in. With hunting and gathering societies, often not enough for all. One tribe fights another tribe. The conqueror becomes the upper class; the conquered becomes the lower class. Eventually, the conquered makes up a permanent army; the king is an outgrowth of the military. That's history to Ahrens. It's convincing. He mentioned that feudalism used to

be taught as a local phenomenon in western Europe, but it's universal. It's all over the world, and Ahrens' orientation is the world, the whole. And Jordan is the same way, the whole. Now, what is the whole?

Back to order. You only have a society, according to Plato, to the degree you have order. Order has nothing to do with force.

Jordan makes a great deal of individuality and individualism. They're different. In individualism the basic unit is the psycho-biological individual. Jordan calls that in one place "molecular atomism." It's false. There's no such animal as the separate and distinct psycho-biological individual existing independently of relations. But that is our pervading philosophy. Law is built on it; the economy is built on it; government is built on it. Plato sees man as constituted by his relations. There is an identity between the state and the individual. There's a lot to be said about identity.

But order: you have society because you have agriculture. And order: you have society because you have work, order. Order in the family; order in the village. Nothing to do with force. Comes out of working with the land; comes out of working with tools.

Ahrens' Social and Cultural Dynamics course also brings out the disorder from the beginning. War was fated; it's fated. Man could not ignore it; man could not escape it. It was due to an imbalance between the food supply and the availability of food. Tribes wanted the same territory; one tribe won, and eventually became the upper class. That's disorder. But along with that there was craft going on; there was taking care of kids; there was agriculture. He said that held the world together. Then this growing disorganization is manifested in militarism, conflict, war. War, he once said to me, "Bobick, war is the devil." It's responsible for all evil. And if you know, no you wouldn't know this. I don't think you got a copy of this. Peyton Richter interviewed Jordan. Did you read that?

**INT:** Yeah.

**MB:** You read that. And you remember what Jordan's motivation was: why the war [WWI, that is]? But I don't want to create any division between Ahrens and Jordan. There is enough division. But, I once asked Ahrens, "Ahrens, would you teach a course on Jordan?" "No, no," he said. "Bobick, he breaks ground. There's so much to do to carry him on." He said that at another time. I didn't have the guts to ask him at the time why he didn't want to teach a course on Jordan. I thought that on my own; I don't know if that is valid.

But order, craft, agriculture, industrial revolution -- he's pretty clear -- maybe he got it from Veblen, that he distinguishes between business and industry. It's not industry's problem; it's a perversion of industry by big business. I probably told you this. I used to have the class stand up and look at the engineering school and then look at the business school. And I'd say, what's the difference? And I said, the school that doesn't produce anything, that's business. The engineering school produces, but it better be careful about what business is going to do with it.

**INT:** So, you took this Social and Cultural Dynamics course with Ahrens as a sophomore?

**MB:** [Yes]. And I taught that course for ten years on [this] campus [UNH, that is].

I knew every line.

**INT:** We are also curious, following up on that. Would Ahrens in his lectures refer to Jordan by name? How did you find out about Jordan? Was it in private conversations with Ahrens?

**MB:** You know the story about how Ahrens found out about Jordan?

**INT:** About how Ahrens did, but we were asking about how you did, because we gather that Ahrens did not lecture on Jordan.

**MB:** Yeah.

**INT:** But, of course, we also want to record the story about Ahrens discovering Jordan, too.

**MB:** It may have been....I was not a member of the original group that went out to his house. I finally made it. And then I would hear....I was amazed at that course. It sprung to life, that social and cultural dynamics course. And that modern society course. I remember, you read the notes, and you said that was a hell of a course. And it was! You can learn from those notes today. I mean the organization of it, the thought that went into it. I finally, I don't know how long it was, but he invited me to have a cup of coffee. And he taught Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday: 8:00, 9:00, and 11:00. And he told me, "Bobick, you get better students that way." Better students will take a Saturday course, at 8 o'clock in the morning, on Saturday. And then I would every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, I went to coffee with him at 10 o'clock at the Newman Foundation. And Prehn's on the other side of the campus. And there are all kinds of stories there. I



think I told you, we were in Prehn's and he was talking and then suddenly a blast of some awful music. And the guy was right next to him, a big football player – "Goddamn moron." He would have gone crazy today. I mean the music today. There's no, nothing rational about it. Oh, somebody would say, the lyrics, but you can't hear the lyrics.

That group, that group was offered credit for going out to his house. He'd give a lecture every Tuesday night. And the department offered credit, but the group voted that they didn't want any credit. They didn't want the department interfering with that. Then I changed it a little bit. It was interesting, I brought Diggs. I took his course in medieval philosophy and I asked Diggs if he would come with the group.

**INT:** Who?

**MB:** Diggs, professor of philosophy; his specialty was medieval. I took his course. Good. And he talked about St. Thomas [Aquinas], society, and Ahrens was very impressed. It can be argued that Ahrens and Jordan are too tough on rationalism. The medieval age put emphasis on the soul, which they did, and that's all, you know. A lot of later scholarship, when I looked into it, was correcting that thesis. And there was one book, I've forgotten who wrote it, argued , and then Ahrens argued -- he made an exception -- that there were cities that withstood the Middle Ages. You know, Ahrens was very interested in the city. And he had a very important point about order and the origin of philosophy -- that had a big impact on me. The problem in the cultural evolution course was the transition from agricultural society to the city. Now Ahrens and Jordan have a different conception of philosophy than any philosopher I ever read. They both agree that philosophy is to better the world, unequivocally. And how did it emerge? You remember?

**INT:** Out of the craft life.

**MB:** How did philosophy?

**INT:** Philosophy. Well, with the people having the opportunity to discuss -- I mean that their lives were not consumed by meeting the basic needs of survival, and the development of the craft life in the context of the city. That is, as we understand it.

**MB:** Ok. Well, he had...It was easy to miss. And then when I re-read the *Forms*, you know Jordan has got a different theory of knowledge than the behaviorists, and all this science. He makes a lot of feeling. He says, there is the person -- I've got to watch the way I use that word -- and the environment. And mediating relations between the environment and the person is experience. But underlying experience is feeling, and he

rejects the sensation theory of knowledge. I mean when Ahrens said how does Hume explain series. If you think that knowledge is the simultaneity and sequence of phenomena in time and space and you record those sensations, how do you explain the series? There's a series, simultaneous, in succession, in sequence? That's baloney. I remember he gave an example: there's a scientist working in his lab and somebody comes down the street, or comes in the room, and says, "Hello, Joe," he doesn't include this in his lab report. He selects. But Jordan goes on and on about feeling. And that underlies everything. And that is very involved in his aesthetics: experience as underlying that feeling.

So, the city is the birth of philosophy. You can't have philosophy in agricultural society. A precondition of philosophy is the establishment of the city. Ok, where does the city come from? Craftsmen are attracted by other craftsmen. It sometimes becomes the center of religious pilgrimage. It sometimes is an accident of geography. But the city is man-made -- the Greeks made temples; they built roads; there're tools; there're potters. They get an alphabet; they write; they build harbors. And he says, they see that they made the city, and they reason that they can make a better one. It wouldn't have occurred to them to make a better one unless they had made one. They didn't consciously make it.

Well that criticism of Aristotle's syllogism is so profound, maybe other people make it. But when Jordan said, thinking does not come from the mind but mind comes from thinking. It's got drama in it, when I re-read the *Forms*. It's got drama.

**INT:** We don't want to interrupt your train of thought here, but you stated a point about feeling a few minutes ago, and how important that was, and we had talked about this a few months ago.

**MB:** And the city has a different feeling. And he says that feeling is real. Now, a big difference between Jordan and Ahrens is -- sometimes I think I am reading a psychologist when I'm reading Jordan, where he makes all these distinctions between feeling, experience, mind states, and on and on.

But, what was the point I wanted to make about feeling? Yeah, Ahrens reduces it, not contradictory. Ahrens says mind acts as a whole. And he means three characteristics of the mind: intelligence, will, and feeling. You can say that Elijah Jordan is all will. It's will against cause.

**INT:** But of that point about feeling?

**MB:** Wait. I don't want to forget. The city, you can see the city has a different feeling; it is not immediately philosophic. Ahrens: intelligence, will, feeling. Remember how Plato handles it in *The Republic*: mind acts as a whole. In some actions, intelligence dominates, but when you focus on the problem, you use will. And when you are working on the problem, sometimes you *feel* that you're in the right direction. And sometimes you *feel* you are in the wrong direction. Or, sometimes you *feel* you're stuck. So intelligence dominates; sometimes will dominates. You just want to get something done. And intelligence is subordinate. And when you get something done, you get some feeling you are in the right direction. Sometimes feeling dominates. You just sense -- and it's so true; he's just a keen observer -- you feel, you feel that things are wrong. But that doesn't mean that you are not using your intelligence. Sensitivity is intelligence in the feeling life. There are three involved [i.e., intelligence, will, feeling], but one dominates.

But Jordan goes into much more detail. He said the emotion -- he says, but Ahrens says he doesn't deal adequately with emotion, and he tries to show where emotion is important. You once asked me a question about *The Life of Mind* where Jordan writes about the "primordium" -- but he pulled that back and he didn't write about the primordium in subsequent books. But he wrote about feeling. And read the last couple pages of *The Forms* -- it's just elegant. What it amounts to is a simple conclusion: we're in this to try to improve the world. But he develops it. The opposition, the idealism; that you take these notes; he taught a course on idealism. I read those notes. And I should have taken notes on one thing that I discovered that I couldn't believe, but I can't remember the exact detail on it. What else didn't I finish?

**INT:** Well, since Jordan and Ahrens see subjectivism as such a problem in the development of thinking, the development of the modern world, clearly their idea of feeling is an objective one rather than a subjective one.

**MB:** Yeah.

**INT:** So, could you distinguish between feeling for Jordan and Ahrens and feeling the way we usually understand it?

**MB:** Yeah. He [Jordan] said there's a lot of philosophy that, by definition, feeling is baloney. And I find that to be true. And a lot of philosophy where it is overemphasized. And he tries to deal with it as he deals with almost everything -- concretely. And he gives examples in his writing, in *The Theory of Legislation*, p. 220, I think it is; he goes on for about 10 or 15 pages. And feeling comes in -- I was shocked; I read it a couple

times and missed this. I was shocked, where he talks about individuality versus individualism. Individuality is organization; it comes down to that -- that's your order.

The Greeks say, Plato says, freedom and order, they are not antithetical. You're free if you've got money, resources, you can do things. Ahrens noted, "Bobick, they don't get the theory of individuality." Well, I thought, Ahrens, why didn't you tell me freedom is synonymous with order; individuality is synonymous with organization? You always find society with a degree of organization to it. You don't find it [society] unless it is sensibly organized. Society doesn't exist without order, to Plato. I mean, what is freedom? To the Greeks, in order to be free to create a building you have to know the principles of building, you have to know the materials -- it allows you to be free to do something. Well, Jordan is very influenced by the same concept: society is by definition order.

Ahrens and Jordan -- when you study society your mission is to better order it. By definition, philosophy is ethics. And ethics is not just I should behave in my sex life. You've got to have an institutional ethics.

And then he gets into his theory of institution. That's where Ahrens, in a way, didn't want to be bothered. He didn't want to screw around with details: institution, institution, you know. Everything is institution, institution, institution. Well, Jordan goes into great detail on institution; he analyzes it. He analyzes relation. He said our concept of relation is -- man's related to the environment: there's man, there's environment, and there's a third entity, relation. No, he's got George Herbert Mead, maybe that's the source: you internalize the activity of the institution. You have an input to the institution. The relation is not a wall between you and what you're related to. You're borrowing physical terms to make up for thinking, to make up for categories.

Category, category, what the heck is category, I thought for years. In *The Aesthetic Object*, he has the list of categories of value and categories of existence. You remember that? Like he says, a value category is appropriate; it's counterpart in existence category is consistency. And he names about ten categories of value and ten categories of existence. And he makes the point -- and Ahrens used to say, "The work has to be done on categories."

Come on, he's [Ahrens] profound. Nothing like him. Nothing like him. So clear. And so decent. You know he paid for Elma's [a sociology department secretary] funeral. I told you about Ahrens and women. I was interested. I invited him to Chicago. I told you?

**INT:** Yeah.

**MB:** And I told the ice skaters, the greatest mind in the world is on the ice. They were beautiful, those Hilton ice capades skaters, and I was close to them. And Russo had a party for him, and they just smothered him. And I said, "Erich, yes, they are very good at deceiving a guy." He said, "Yes, Bobick, I think it would be fun to be deceived."  
(laughter) But he really liked Elma. They were a nice pair.

Go ahead. What a night! What have I started that I haven't finished?

**INT:** Well, there was the question about what year you started at the University of Illinois. So that was 1942?

**MB:** Yeah. And then I went into the Navy.

**INT:** So is that when you graduated, as an undergraduate?

**MB:** No, no. I finished a year at Illinois, and then in the middle of the third semester I went into the Navy.

**INT:** You spent time in San Diego?

**MB:** San Diego, and then Oakland Naval Hospital, and Great Lakes. It was like a vacation for me.

**INT:** So, then, after the war?

**MB:** But I got my ideas on socialized medicine in the Navy. The Navy had a good hospital. Oooo! These guys were dedicated. And the corpsmen, and the nurses, and the captain's inspection -- it ran beautifully! In the day, they ran beautifully. Well, I was a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed optimist like my mother and father. And I drive people crazy with my optimism, you know. And I think I still got it.

I went into the Navy; I went back [to Illinois] and I was much more serious. I was very serious. And it was Ahrens. And I saw him three times a week. I took his courses again.

**INT:** So you had him before you went off to the Navy?

**MB:** I got to try to think about that and really answer that. I don't think so.

**INT:** Ok.

**MB:** But then the next year I took him -- that would have been 1947, I guess. Or '48. And then there was E.T. Hiller, who was a nationally known sociologist, and he was head of the department at Illinois. And it was August. I didn't know what I was going to do, and I said to myself maybe I should try graduate school with Ahrens. And I went into Hiller's office for an interview. He asked, "What are you interested in?" I said, "Erich Ahrens." He said, "Give me your papers." He signed it. "You're in." He said Ahrens is the greatest sociologist in the world.

And Ahrens told me about him. In his later years, Hiller who is a pompous guy I'm told, very well-known; he wrote a theory book which was unintelligible. He knocked on Ahrens' door, when Ahrens would be open for coffee at 10 o'clock. And he went to coffee with him. And Ahrens told me, he was shocked at what he heard. And he never missed! It just transformed his life. And you, I think, sent some letters where he wrote a letter for his teaching of graduate students, and he says -- what it amounted to -- was that there was no greater mind [than Ahrens].

So then I got friendly with the group. He never had a student worthy of him that I knew. No. I don't like to knock the dead, but Jack Otis was just a businessman. He wrote a book -- did you read it? -- *Jordan's Theory of Education*. He took all Ahrens' material and wrote it up and hooked it in with education -- he and George Barnett. I. Frankel was lazy, but he was bright, very bright. John Osinach worshipped Ahrens, but he was dumb. [Marcus] Orr was bigger than life. Did you meet him?

**INT:** No, never did, but we've heard both you and Wrone talk about him.

**MB:** He was an art history major, Southerner; he was in Patton's army and he got shot in the back, motor sensory paralysis from the waist down; in a wheelchair. Brilliant. I tutored him in *The Forms*. He worshipped Ahrens. He ended up teaching Renaissance history at Southwestern in Memphis. I lost contact with him. I'm terrible. I never write letters, as you guys know.

**INT:** Before you move onto that, one of the questions that Wrone had was, again, just a little detail, but he wondered: did Ahrens have any other students besides Bobick? And I think he probably meant graduate students.

**MB:** Ahrens said that?

**INT:** No, Wrone asked that. Or, how do you explain that he only had Bobick as a student, that you were his only graduate student?

**MB:** Well, I think I was the only student whose PhD he directed. However, if you read your correspondence, there's a letter of Tommy Haynes, where Haynes says he has 500 pages of Ahrens' notes. And I think, well, Haynes is dead. He was a very nice guy. He taught at Lehigh, and he was a teaching assistant. He had Jordan as a teacher. And he called Ahrens the greatest teacher he ever had. And he said that Ahrens was Socrates with a positive message. And that's true.

[And]...he was a member of the group that went out [to Ahrens' home]. He was close to Ahrens; very dedicated to Ahrens.

**INT:** Was he before you?

**MB:** Before, much before. He was probably 10 years older than I am. And just very intelligent. He was my favorite in that group. He was a philosophy PhD, and he was an assistant, I think, to Max Fisch.

**INT:** Well, he did that thing on Jordan for Fisch's volume on philosophy. But...

**MB:** That's right. And I called Lehigh when I was serious about publishing something on Jordan. I wanted an answer to a question in *Business Be Damned*. And the head of the philosophy department answered. And I asked, "Is Tommy Haynes still living?" And he said, "No." I said, "Is his wife living?" He said, "No." He was so negative and critical -- it indicated that he thought Jordan was a nut, and so was Haynes.

Well, Jordan represents, he stands alone in philosophy. Except if I,...I didn't do a thorough job on it, but I worked on it. John Rawls. You read Rawls? He was a famous teacher at Harvard, and January of not this year, but last year, of the Harvard Business Review is devoted to what's wrong with capitalism. And the whole review -- I think it's by two guys -- it's good. When you finish, when they say what is wrong with it and what should be done, it's no longer capitalism. And they're professors at Harvard Business School. I don't think it's anything original, what I'm saying, but they've got these business schools all over the country. These guys are very critical, but you don't read about that. I remember when -- maybe it was in the 1920s -- when Alfred North Whitehead was at Harvard and they asked him, "Should we open a business school?" And he said, "Yeah, it would be good for them to have contact with the liberal arts faculty because they'll broaden them." Well, I think it was the opposite. But it's a good way to bring Jordan in touch -- maybe it's impossible -- but to talk about Rawls.

Rawls. He left Harvard for Stanford. And in his later life he said, "Democracy requires property ownership." Well, that would be a nice article to compare Jordan on that. And the critics in that volume on Rawls. Did you ever read the *Journal of Social Philosophy*?

It's good, yeah. It's good. You guys have common interests with that journal. The criticism fell into the pattern of saying, Rawls did not go far enough.

I sometimes wrestled with Jordan and the critique of capitalism. You know he says, either in the *Forms* or I think it was *The Theory of Legislation*. He said, any ethical theory that doesn't include, in detail, a program of action to embody the ethics you're talking about, is wrong. He gets so wedded to action. Well, look, his idea is very simple, in a way. Man is caused. What does that mean? He calls it [cause-effect thinking] "endless repetition," Jordan does. The effect is brought about by the cause, but what brought about the cause? Another cause. You're always looking backward; you're never explaining growth, which is a very important category for Jordan.

Growth. I remember the example -- maybe it was in one of those things that I gave you on determinism. Grass doesn't cause cows, he says. And he mentions the chemical stages of grass being transformed into feed for cows. He's got in those categories -- value, logic, growth. The world is designed! What comes out is not exactly what they designed, but what comes out is based on assumptions of cause.

But in contrast he talks about action. Very simple. People act. Well, action implies you want to do something. And action requires means, so action is a means-to-ends scheme. And you've got to talk about the means. And you've got to talk about planning. And you've got to talk about -- I mean Jordan is just beautiful. And he talks about what is an idea. An idea is something special! An idea is, by definition, cosmic. An idea is something significant. And, I mean, Ahrens -- idea, idea, idea.

And you remember their criticism of Descartes. How do I know I exist? Because I think. Among my thoughts are clear ideas. And these ideas, clear ideas, are traceable, as produced by the mind. And they both say that mind is produced by ideas, not ideas are produced by the mind. They write about that on science, you know, sociology wants to be a science. It steals the categories of science; the scientists' ideas come about -- they were developed through thinking. They weren't innate to mind.

But I started to talk about it 10 minutes ago. It's slipping away. Just a minute.... Oh, yeah. That Jordan -- I'm adding my own language -- when it comes down to it, in order to produce a greater, better world (and supposedly that's what we're all about; I just love that!) it's an adventure! You don't know where the heck you're going to come out. You don't know what's going to be good -- you take a chance. And in order to take a chance, you need ideas. And, boy, an idea is something. I've never had an idea of my own, I don't think, just an idea.



I'm reducing it to its very simplistic accomplishment or goal: if you start with what's pervaded the world of philosophy and social science -- causal, mechanistic thinking -- and if you assume that this is the thinking that explains the world... Well, he says, it doesn't. It explains existence, and existence is reducible to time, space, motion. And half of the world is left out. And sociology tries to explain that other half using the one that leaves out the other half, and then he gets to work to try to explain the other half, or other three-quarters. And you know, other people have said it, he's just wedded to creation. He wants human beings to be creative creatures, thinking about helping the world. Or, if they're not helping the world, doing meaningful work. And the other half is meaning and value. Science doesn't give you meaning [and value].

And you know what he says about action -- you probably have read that, where he says you only get perfection in art. And he says, if you haven't got -- you haven't got these other areas -- life would be meaningless; there wouldn't be anything to do, you know.

**INT:** What about the story about how Ahrens came to know Jordan and about their subsequent relationship?

**MB:** Good. This is, you know, not precise, what I'm about to tell you. It's not that I've forgotten, but I never really knew some of these details. Ok. As far as I know, and I never really looked into this, Ahrens got his bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester. And I think his family were Christians -- Rauschenbusch, social Christianity. Now, I don't know where I got the information that he was born in Illinois. How he got out to the state of Washington, I don't know. You know he quit high school; you read that stuff, so I don't have to go into that. [Ezra] Park lost his dissertation, you probably heard that.

**INT:** I think it was Burgess.

**MB:** Burgess, ok. I don't know how he got the job at Illinois. Sometimes (maybe I invented it) he just went on the train and went over to the department and they hired him.

**INT:** There's one guy that taught at Illinois who was a friend of McKenzie's, and I [Dennis] wondered if that might not have been Ahrens' way in, but I'm just speculating. I cannot remember the guy's name right off the top of my head.

**MB:** Ok. He told me once, very seriously, how he was confused. And he said, he lost sleep. He would pace the floor on some of this sociological theory. Who wouldn't?

I got into sociology -- it was an elective; I didn't know anything about it. I was good material for classics. I took four years of high school Latin; I was the best student in the class. Illinois had a very fine classics department. They had Turyn -- T-u-r-y-n -- who was Polish and an expert on Sophocles. They had Reville Oliver, who was a great Latinist. They had a good philosophy department. Ah...English, sure; you name it. I audited, oh boy -- I'll think of his name -- he was a very fine art historian. Renaissance.

Well, Ahrens told me, he was walking through the library, and I don't know if they still do it, when they shelve books they put them on their side so somebody checks. And there was one that was in the process of being checked and he pulled it [Jordan's *Forms of Individuality*] out. It's played a part in his life, about chance -- he uses that word a lot. He looked at the book and found it interesting, so he started to read it. And he needed help, so he went to the philosophy department, and he asked the chairman, "Do you know anything about Jordan?" "Oh, yes I do." Well, Ahrens discovered he didn't know anything about Jordan. So he wrote Jordan, and Jordan said why don't you come down and audit a summer course. And he did, and you have some of those notes. "Would you, could you, in your capacity have those, his ethics course notes typed?" [Not sure if this question was put to Jordan by Ahrens, but we believe this is what Bobick meant here.] There are a lot of pages.

**INT:** Yeah. I [Dennis] typed a big chunk. Wrone has. And I think Evelyn Stenseth, who you met in Evanston, has typed a bunch of this stuff. I don't know if she's typed that one yet. But it's in the works. It's a good way to read it, to be typing it.

**MB:** And I think the Idealism notes are handwritten.

So, Ahrens audited him. And they became friends. And I always, when I write, said a teacher-pupil relationship developed into a relationship of colleagues. He told the story of where a group from New York wanted Jordan to start a new university. And Ahrens asked him: "Jordan who are you going to get to teach Shakespeare, who are you going to get to teach Hegel?" And they rejected it because they were afraid of the money. Boy, these guys! He visited Indianapolis; he spoke of Mrs. Jordan in glowing terms. It was very apparent that Jordan was very down-to-earth.

I think that's it. Was there another aspect to your question?

**INT:** Just a few details. When Ahrens drove down to Jordan's, where did he stay? Did he ever talk about that? Or, where did they eat?

**MB:** I don't know. However, you know that the accounts of Jordan said that they were very hospitable.

And that Jordan would give a student as much time as he needed, and on and on...But, Jordan had a nephew, and the nephew was the nephew of his wife who was German. And I think they adopted him. He was a plumber, and he had his own plumbing business. I met him. Ahrens and I went to get an air conditioner in Indianapolis that he sold to Ahrens, and Ahrens put it in and bumped his head, ooh, seriously.

**INT:** But you never met Jordan?

**MB:** No, I remember Ahrens telling me, very sad, "Bobick, Jordan died." 1952 [actually '53]. Never met him. Nope. Go ahead, anything else?

**INT:** Oh, so you spoke to the structure of their relationship -- going from teacher-pupil to colleagues.

**MB:** Judging from what Ahrens told me about their conversations, they were very close. However, that's the wrong word. Dewey taught at Butler and met Jordan. But he said he didn't know his stature at the time. But he did say, Dewey said, whenever he would look for a book in sociology [in the library] he found that Jordan had ordered it. Also, [another colleague at Butler] Bruce Cameron who offered me a job at Bradley and later at the University of Florida liked me and I impressed him, for some reason, he talked about Jordan being good-natured, but also didn't realize his stature.

**INT:** Another question from Wrone. Do you know of anyone who went on in either philosophy or sociology that took some of Ahrens' thinking and developed it, really, other than yourself? And he mentioned that there was a Canadian that brought Ahrens up to Canada to give a talk and spend some time and so forth.

**MB:** Larry Hayworth?

**INT:** Was it Hayworth?

**MB:** Well Hayworth<sup>1</sup> I remember and then I read the interview, and I think I met him. Is it Rucker? The one at BU?

**INT:** Rucker?

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<sup>1</sup> The name was Haworth, and in an email Prof. Haworth indicated that he was not the one who brought Ahrens up to Canada, but it might have been a sociologist at the University of Illinois that he knew.

**MB:** I don't know. Who's the guy that interviewed....

**INT:** Richter. Peyton Richter.

**MB:** I met him. And, yes, [Max] Fisch got a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

**INT:** That was another question that Wrone wanted to ask.

**MB:** And Fisch invited me. I had audited Fisch's course on pragmatism. I got very close to Fisch. Fisch used our house a couple summers. He was Santayana Professor at Harvard to edit the Peirce papers. Lot of people consider him, Peirce, the greatest American philosopher. You should have read that article I wrote on Vico. That is the only thing that I ever published because Fisch asked the editor of the American Sociological Review that I should do a review of the Vico volume. I'll try to find that.

**INT:** Where is that?

**MB:** It's in a symposium on Giambattista Vico. Vico is a very interesting philosopher.

**INT:** Oh, it's in a book, in a volume in this [UNH] library. I remember that came out when we were graduate students here.

**MB:** I worked very hard on that -- what a title! But it is pointless for me to try to recall it.

It was the *strangest* conference. I was with Ahrens. We arrived together. It was 20 miles from Champaign. A rich Champaign family gave it to the University of Illinois as a conference center. It was beautiful. Attending were: Fisch was in charge. There was Ahrens. There was Frankel. There was Jack Otis. There was...Robert Mack, the nicest guy in the world. He taught at Connecticut College for Women, and he wrote Ahrens a question about universal and particular. Ahrens wrote him a letter and Mack said, "It was like talking to the old man!" He'd been a student of Jordan's. He was amazed at that letter. It's an amazing letter. Two pages. It's amazing! When I arrived here [UNH], I wrote Ahrens and he wrote back immediately. I wrote him again; and he wrote back immediately. I just stopped writing.

**INT:** I [Gerry] know, he always responded immediately.

**MB:** I could have asked all kinds of questions. We could've had a monograph on that. His letters were fantastic! That letter to Mack, I think I have a copy. It's unbelievable! No kidding. Two pages.

I arrived with Ahrens. Oh...Negley was there.

Recommendations what we should do. Negley suggested we send a delegate to the international meetings of philosophy representing Elijah Jordan. Obviously, he was wanting to be sent. Otis was playing up to Fisch. Fisch was highly respected and a fine man, a decent man. Ahrens wasn't fair to Fisch, I don't think. He once told me, "Fisch is a fish. What the heck is he looking for, Peirce's wife holding up his biography. What the heck is this?"

None of them wanted to talk about Jordan, except Ahrens. He suggested, like this: people bring in questions, and talking. He said, "I'm not coming back, Bobick." I stuck with him; I just stuck with him all the way. But I think I went back to the meetings; they were a couple days. They were pointless. Nonsense.

**INT:** I [Dennis] recall seeing a letter from Ahrens to Fisch, where he says that he's met with you and a number of other people and talked about the future and this is what you think it ought to be and there's a series of questions that Ahrens poses there.

**MB:** I have a couple letters of Ahrens to Fisch; I think you have them. One, beautifully developed on phenomenology. And he compares him [Jordan, we assume] to phenomenology and existentialism; it's a 10-12 page letter. It's brilliant, clear as a bell. I read Otis's book [*Jordan's Theory of Education*], and he had talked with me, and I criticized it. And that ended our friendship. He was ambitious.

Go ahead, what do you want?

**INT:** Follow up on people dropping interest in Jordan, and then coming back to it, you know, thirty years later. It appeared that there was a growing interest in the 1950s in Jordan. It may have been superficial but the thing that mystifies us, and maybe yourself, is what happened, why someone has not really re-discovered this?

**MB:** Because philosophy, it comes out in Ahrens' notes, that philosophy is dead, and social science is dead. And there's endless confusion. And one gives one theory and the other gives one theory and it's the opposite. And the biggest opposite, according to Ahrens, and Jordan, is we've adopted individualism as the word.

**INT:** Right.

**MB:** Which suggests freedom, but we're all in a trap. We don't have any freedom. There's no thinking. I didn't do a top job but while I was teaching I tried to keep up on things. I retired ten years ago, and I would come to the library and read the journals, and so on, but not religiously. But look, I talked to Duane Whittier [who taught philosophy at UNH]. Look at Whittier, he did his dissertation on Jordan with Gottschalk. I had a course with Gottschalk on 17th century rationalism. He's a good professor, and he, ooh, he read my dissertation. He was a reader. And at the final defense, he came up to me and said, you have some grammatical errors in that, but he also said, "I learned from that." And he was not a humble man. It was due to Ahrens. Ahrens had the idea. It [Bobick's dissertation] focused on a simple idea: explanatory concepts in sociology. And what it showed and documented was the neglect of defining what is the thing they were trying to explain and concentrating instead on what caused it. Got it? Simple idea, but an important one.

What else? My energy is beginning to revive.

**INT:** Ok. You wrote something else on small group dynamics. What was that? An evaluation of small group dynamics?

**MB:** It may be my master's thesis.

**INT:** That's what we wondered. It is in the University of Illinois library.

**MB:** Yeah. It was there. My advisor -- he was the laziest bastard in the world -- was Hulett, the head of the department. And he thought George Herbert Mead was God. But he was not concerned with Mead's socialism. Mead was a socialist. Mead studied Hegel. Mead marched for woman's suffrage with Jane Addams. I taught a course in social theory during the second semester and I would deal with Durkheim's politics. Sociologists talked about his use of statistics; they talked about Mead's "generalized other." Well, that was important, but that was not all there was to them. Jordan was interested in Mead's "generalized other;" he used that. But he never mentioned Mead. Well, he didn't believe in footnotes, but when he did have footnotes he never mentioned Mead. He had him for a year. Jordan got his PhD at Chicago in 1911.

Yeah, didn't you tell me that Ahrens said he knew Jane Addams?

**INT:** Wrone said that Ahrens knew Jane Addams.<sup>2</sup>

**MB:** He didn't say the extent of the contact?

**INT:** No, we don't think so. No, but we'll ask. We'll ask.

Jane Addams was also hooked up with Mead, too. There was a connection with Mead through Jane Addams as well.

**MB:** Ooh. They used to meet for dinner, every week.

**INT:** Was it Jordan or Ahrens he was talking about? I can't remember now.

**MB:** You know *Mind, Self, and Society* was a very important book in the history of sociology, and it was written from students' notes. Go ahead.

**INT:** How did Ahrens end up in Chicago?

**MB:** I don't know. But let me think, but let me probe...

**INT:** Oh, and what was the purpose of the seminars on philosophy that Ahrens held at his home? And why did he stop?

**MB:** I wasn't in it at the beginning. I think it was because of student response. And he was the only one pushing that, and somebody suggested it and he'd say yes. But I don't know.

And he stopped one thing -- maybe you told me -- the kids' picnic. He would have a picnic for the children. He'd work his butt off. He'd buy every child a present; he'd give every child a tractor ride. And when the party was over and the kids had made a mess everywhere, the guests would leave [and he'd be left by himself to clean up].

**INT:** Did he have relationships with other faculty?

**MB:** Yeah.

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<sup>2</sup> Ahrens on a number of occasions expressed to Prof. Wrone his great admiration for Jane Addams and the women at Hull House more generally. When he was a student at the University of Chicago, he attended a number of lectures at Hull House. Wrone recalls that Ahrens included the writings of Addams and her associates on his reading lists, including *Twenty Years at Hull House* and one of the Hull House reports on trusts.

Oscar Lewis was famous for a while. He was one of the outstanding interpreters of Mexico. I think he originated the 'culture of poverty' expression. He's got a section in his *Five Families*....He tutored me. I was hired here [UNH]. Dewey arranged it. He said, 'I'll come here if you'll allow me to bring Bobick.'

I told you the story about how he [the dean of UNH] hired Dewey? He wanted to do something radical. He wanted to hire a very special scholar. And he thought the coming field was sociology. So he met every Friday afternoon for one year with the Sociology Department, and they had a graph with about twenty qualities they wanted in a chairman and in the other part with about twenty candidates, big shots. Dewey wasn't on the list. Dewey had a good house in Illinois. He was a good craftsman; he worked his butt off. It was a 19th century Victorian with a beautiful yard. It was like an estate. He had just finished it. Bob James who taught at Illinois -- he respected Ahrens, but didn't have anything to do with him intellectually -- said, "Dick, there's a chairmanship open at UNH. Would you put in a good word for me?" Dewey was teaching summer school at Rhode Island. He went to Vermont with the family. He had the Packard; he packed the family into the Packard and, oh boy, he was in his glory. They went to Vermont. On the way back, he stopped at UNH. Good Dick Dewey put in a good word for Bob James. He stopped at the Dean's office; the Dean was available; he talked to him. Remember, the Dean had been meeting for one year every Friday with the Sociology Department. He said, "Dick, how would you like the job?"

Lewis -- I came to teach cultural anthropology and sociology. I never had a course in anthropology. Oscar -- I asked him -- he tutored me, never missed all summer. You know why? He respected Ahrens and he thought he was going to learn more about him. And I wrote a paper, my first paper, and he was amazed,...And he would ask me questions about Ahrens. And he was divided between being the world's greatest baritone and the world's greatest anthropologist, and he decided on the latter. And he was married to Ruth and Ruth was the sister of Rollo May, the famous psychologist. She was a worker and, I'm told, she helped him enormously. But he was very nice to me. He was pompous; he thought he was God. But he was delightful. And he rented his house when he went to Mexico -- did I tell you this?

**INT:** To Alvin Gouldner.

**MB:** Gouldner. And Gouldner brought his son and his son had a hammer and nails and was pounding on the woodwork. And Alvin would say, "Junior, please stop that." And then I was having dinner in Urbana with Ahrens, and Gouldner walked up. "May I join you?" And he got into the most vicious argument that I ever witnessed at the University



of Illinois attacking Ahrens. He suggested that Ahrens be fired; he wasn't teaching Mertonian sociology.

Oh, what a shit Merton was, Robert King Merton. And my friend Frankel went to Columbia and said he was a vicious bastard. If you didn't get in line with his sociology, you were out. At least we escaped that.

**INT:** Do you still have some of the notes from the theory course when Ahrens taught European Social Theory?

**MB:** Ahrens, when he was teaching theory? You never had any of those courses?

**INT:** No. And Wrone never had any because he was never able to take the course.

**MB:** Now, if I have it, it's negative. It's a good negative [we assume he means critical of European social theory]. And it's interesting. He includes property at the end. And he has one lecture on Positivism where he tries to be positive. But he just blasts it. And it should be blasted. But, in a way, who is paying attention to it? Maybe journalists. They're not getting wrong stuff [?]. Yeah, I'll look.

**INT:** One question I [Dennis] had was what would a Jordanian/Ahrensian sociology look like?

**MB:** That's fun. Thank you for that question. I'll be thinking on my feet. I start with Ahrens' notes and Jordan. They agree that we -- it's not that we should rebuild sociology. We should rebuild modern thought. Modern thought is screwed up -- totally, according to these two. Philosophy began and ended with Plato. There are in the Jordan writings brief references to what Plato was doing that are just brilliant.

I've got a different idea, but I'm going to have many different ones because that's a profound question. In their own words, they say that a serious scholar should know everything. But that's partially a joke. But it comes out that you should know history and social philosophy thoroughly. That's quite a job. Ahrens comes closer to it, fulfilling that, than Jordan, because of his Evolution course. Now I taught that course a number of times, so you have to be aware that I am prejudiced. I think it's a brilliant course. I worked my butt off on it, trying to read history, anthropology, philosophy. I audited philosophy courses. I took philosophy courses. I audited art history. I took history. I audited history at UNH. I audited music. I went to live concerts. I heard the best for about 60 years, the great symphonies. Don Steele [a classical pianist and chair of the music department at UNH] who was my good friend, we talked a lot about it. I knew one

of the greatest people in jazz, Bill Russo. He was my disciple. I talked him into writing operas. He called me every week. And he took most of my advice. I'm not blowing my own horn. I've made a lot of mistakes and I've accomplished nothing really.

They both would say you've got to read the classics. They don't say it in that language. Jordan shows -- he's an evolutionist and so is Ahrens -- evolution was an idea that was popular in their times. Jordan has -- I am better read in world history than Jordan. He has read areas in the philosophy of law, but he never read Hegel, hardly.

Ahrens made up for what Jordan didn't do in reading on the evolution of culture which is Social and Cultural Dynamics. That is an original, beautiful course. You would have to have a course in cultural history. I'm almost -- yes, I'll say it -- you should read Jordan and Ahrens. They're unique. To my mind, they're unique. And I mean Ahrens takes apart Sorokin, who was quite a scholar. He takes apart Spencer; that's not hard. He read Spengler. Jordan read Santayana, Gibbons.

I'm not boasting about myself, really, just an accident of history that I know more about the Greeks than Jordan and Ahrens. Jordan's account of the Greeks would be heavily criticized. It's like a golden past. The 5th century [BC] is the major source of his idealism. I mean, after all, they murdered Socrates. They were at war with Sparta. They had Alcibiades. They ostracized Themistocles. They were at war with Sparta constantly. Jordan has a tendency, if he has a Plato, he equates that with civilization.

The anthropologists that I talked to, the greatest anthropologists in the world at the American School [American School of Classical Studies in Athens] -- I lived there for two years -- said that Plato only had one vote. I mean there are fascinating things about Greek democracy. They had a census and the man who made the most money was required to pay for the production of drama. They had artistic patronage. They owned silver mines, that were owned by the state. That was used for public works. After all, they had slavery. There were three slaves per family. You can argue the oppression of women; it's mixed. Plato said that we treat women like we treat our left hand. He says that. I think it's a good law -- in their democracy they had an announcement of the agenda. They don't fool around. But there's a lot of infighting and vying for power and this and that and so on and so on. But they're a great society and Jordan equates the 5th century Greeks with Plato. And it's not that clear. He said they had a different mentality. He said they looked at the world not causally, but mindful of its possibilities.

I accept Jordan's criticism and Ahrens' criticism of contemporary philosophy. And when I talk to the Philosophy Department -- they've always been very nice to me, but I openly and in a nice way reject what they have to say about Aristotle and Plato. And then they

get involved...I mean Jordan's got a different system of logic which is remarkable, I think.

Your object would be the world. I mean they've [Jordan and Ahrens] got these levels -- the individual, the family, the community, society. But they've got a category above society, the corporate. The corporate is life perfected or as close as it can come to perfection at the time. It's the ideal life worked out in detail and cognizant of the problem in the present. But very clear on the good. In a way...let me think about this a little bit more and we'll talk about it tomorrow.

**INT:** Is the idea that the ancients, the Greeks, took the world as their starting point, and looked at man as just a particular, just a detail in the world? In the modern period, from Jordan's historical comments, I assume Ahrens as well, you get this transition when you get into the modern world, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and now man becomes the center?

**MB:** The shift from ancient to modern.

**INT:** That seems to be a fundamental sort of thing.

**MB:** It is.

**INT:** Our guess is that the question would be, what kinds of things account for -- we know he mentions Christianity, the Reformation, the soul -- is it accurate to say we need to go back to that valuable ancient perspective?

**MB:** Yes, but qualified. Like for instance what you said he expresses in another way -- that mind used to be thought of as something that went on in your head. It seems that most of the time he leans back to the Renaissance. That may be questionable, what I just said. For Jordan, mind is in the world. It's in the world. There's nature and culture. That's your object. How does he define mind? When Ahrens told me his definition of mind, I thought, what the heck is this? An objective order of fact. You have a change in the metaphysics.

We view fact falsely. A fact is not a separate and distinct, isolate thing. A fact is only concretely fact orders. A fact is related to meaning. What does a fact mean? And its meaning is its value. Oh, that is a profound, remarkable development about fact and value in Jordan. Facts are values and values are facts. What the heck are you talking about -- splitting fact and value [as we tend to do]? There's no isolate fact. You evaluate a fact in terms of its relations and what a fact means. The world is not separate and

distinct ideas. The world is not separate and distinct people. The world is not separate and distinct objects. The world is relational.

It's rough, what you suggested. I, when I'm pompous, I talk about the value of my work on Jordan. I feel like Zeus. In the *Illiad*, Zeus is in the island of Samothraki and he's on Mount Ida and he's looking at the Greeks and the Trojans fighting. What are they doing? To think that's Homer 800BC. Now, I'm contradicting myself on Jordan and the Greeks. I mean that's profound. The tragedies, Aeschylus, the *Oresteia*. I spent one summer reading the *Illiad* with a commentary. I ended up saying it's the greatest book I ever read. When the commentary explains all the details and background and so on.... But, that's a great question. We could talk all afternoon about that.

I haven't talked about what I think is so profound, his aesthetics. It's unbelievable. It's like you have a vision of the world and you're a mathematician. And you interpret the world mathematically. Well, Jordan believes you should interpret the world from this room, this furniture, and the lights and design. And he does it. Maybe it [*The Aesthetic Object*] is too short. And I intend to work more on it if I live.

But, what you're talking about, it seems to me, Dennis, I think I mentioned it to you before, he says ultimately all political thinking is utopian. And he also says, there's no inert object. That lamp isn't inert. It inspires imagination if you look at it and combine the imagination with...when he talks about combining the imagination with will<sup>3</sup>. In the first chapter in *Theory of Legislation* are life, will, and law. Life is will, not cause. It's will; we're doing things. We're talking about things.

Jordan kicks his will argument into the idea that will is always going on. People are inspiring me. In school, there is growth. There's value. There's effort. It's not free will. And then he identifies will as life. In life, life is, a form of it is will. And then will ultimately is law. And we've got to live by law. We don't live by law. He just exposes our damn legal system with its individualism and its individual property ownership. You've got to get rid of [it] -- look at his definition of property. Property is not defined in terms of who owns it. Property is the means to effect a purpose.

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<sup>3</sup> Bobick makes several references to will here without offering much insight into what will is for Jordan. We offer the following discussion of will from his *Forms of Individuality* to help clarify this crucial concept: "If we are to hold to the use of the idea of will as [an] explanatory concept in politics, it will have to be redefined in terms of the ordered and integrated momentums of institutions working together in the public body -- the corporate or objective will. The political will of a state is this corporate will expressed in the creative urge toward public ends and is constituted of the various corporate urgencies of its constituent institutions....The will of the state is not the mystic sum of the mystic pulses of energy of human beings." (p. 382)

And he blasts contract. Contract -- what a brutal, horrible thing. Try to lock the person into these responsibilities. The world changes, but screw that. He says, fight. It makes you think of the stock market. Is there anything comparable to such immorality? Anyway....

**INT:** We talked yesterday about Jordan's and Ahrens' critique of cause and the search for origins.

**MB:** Basic.

**INT:** Also, how to convey the difference between cause and ground.

**MB:** How to convey the difference [between] cause and ground? How to convey the difference between subjectivity and objectivity? Oh, I struggled with his attack on origins!

Society has no origin, he says. There's no origin to democracy. There's no origin to scientism. What the heck's he talking about -- there is no origin? I was brought up on heroes. And I remember -- I can't remember the exact passage where it is -- but I remember the essence of it. When he was arguing -- first of all, cause and growth are opposites. Life is cumulative. Well, you can even interpret that causally when you say cumulative -- it's multi-causal. But, no. You are using the same metaphysics when you do that. You're just breaking up cause into tiny little causes -- "causettes." Growth is a fact. And growth isn't caused. Growth is growth. Plants grow. Trees grow. Nature has growth indigenous to it.

Then there's the introduction of human efforts causing nature. But you still have the same concept of cause. What is cause? Cause is the assumption.... Causal relations exist, but they're not the whole. Other relations, creative relations which in a way is ultimate in Jordan. He wants a life where every human being is creative. Then you have to get a definition of 'creative,' but I haven't finished cause.

Causal relation is two objects in time and space and one making a physical, initiating a physical, movement toward the other. Now, I say initiated. He would say, what the heck do you mean "initiated?" Is cause a creative force? No, you explain the cause of that movement by another cause. And you go on to infinity. And what is in the effect is in the cause. So you just have a physical relation that you identify that takes place in view of a physical universe that's mechanistic. Cause is a mechanical category. And it's indigenous to physics. He has cause -- physics deals with time, space, relation, with

objects separate and distinct in physical contact, but even physical gets you out of the realm of cause.

I'm sorry I lost it; I had a 15-page statement of Ahrens on cause. But what it amounted to -- it's like, as Jordan says in *Essays in Criticism*, experience is real, but it's not the reality. You can't reduce life to experience. Just like you can't interpret the universe by cause. It is a wrong metaphysics.

What is metaphysics? Metaphysics questions our assumptions about reality. In cause, we don't question the assumptions about the principles of causality. Infinite, goes on to infinity, in order to identify a relationship that is obvious -- growth. Science has imposed cause to explain the living quality of life, law, imagination. It has reduced them to cause. And what the heck is cause? Physical objects in time and space -- one having an impact on the other. But....

**INT:** Even that's an abstraction, isn't it?

**MB:** Yes. It's hard for me to state it and I don't know if I understand it thoroughly. Let me see if I can remember to phrase it properly. Seeing is a mental construction. Sometimes it means that that applies in certain instances. But sometimes it means that it applies in everything, like when I used to drive to Boston and we would get to the top of the Mystic Bridge and there was a great view of Boston. And I would say to Stephen, "What's that building?" He would say, "It's the Prudential." And I'd say, "How big is it?" And he would name the number of stories. I said, "No, it isn't. Look, what do you see? It's that big."<sup>4</sup> So you could apply it for example to somebody [who] knows a lot about trees. You look at the tree and you report what you see. But the other person knows about trees, photosynthesis, and so on. It's thought construction.

You could say that one of the principles of Jordan is his emphasis. He says that the main human ethical principle is that they should know. Well, what the heck is knowing? Knowing is not assuming that seeing [by itself is adequate]....

I was introduced to George Wald and was with him a couple times. I wish I would have asked him or read his book. He was the closest friend of Ed Scheier. He won the Nobel Prize for his work on how we see. Now, one of the main oppositions that you would get if you tried to introduce ideas of Jordan would be the opposition of people who explain

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<sup>4</sup> We believe the idea Bobick is trying to convey here is that looking at the Prudential building from the bridge it appears so much smaller than it actually is. Although you can describe its color, shape, etc., without an idea or concept of building one cannot truly grasp the nature of the object you are seeing. That is to say, the visual and conceptual go hand-in-hand to reveal reality; our senses alone cannot reveal the nature of the object.

seeing physiologically, and Jordan neglected that. But he does in his organicism accept that the organic is in a relation of physical parts and so forth, but it doesn't provide for external relations by the organism, you know. We look out at the world and we say it is free will. What does that mean? It evaporates. We can look out at the world and it's cause. It evaporates when we question it. He talks about mystical atavism. We operate under -- and Ahrens too -- we operate under the assumption that you get to reality by reducing it to its most simple elements. You can reduce that most simple element -- you've got the atom; you've got the electron; you've got the -- I used to know all this nomenclature -- the parts of the atom. Split those -- go into infinity. But in Jordan and Ahrens, what rules is you understand the particular by the whole. Now they don't leave it at that. No, no, no, because anybody's that semi-intelligent would ask, "what the heck is the whole?"

What is the whole? A way of defining that is the concept of the universal, is the concept of the particular, is the concept of life is organized. Oh, Ahrens didn't do this but Jordan devotes a lot of attention to "organized." Life is organized. Life is corporate. Life -- you've got religion -- stands in relation to the world, cosmic, like it's got an open universe. He would like everybody to get in touch with all these levels.

Life is -- mind is everywhere; it's not just in your head. Mind is an objective order of facts, unlike the concept of causality. The concept of causality [assumes] we're whims of cause and effect, all separate and distinct and to bring order to them we impose all kinds of false stuff. And that's why we're living in the dark and that's why we're all so screwed up. It might be pointed out that 40% of people living in Manhattan are poor. What the heck are you talking about? It's almost as if you are suggesting their poverty is caused. What cause? Economic, religious causation? They might multiply the number of causes but they still call it a cause, which implies something back of the situation. "Back of" [implying] physical terms. It's because we've got a false conception of the universe, one aspect of which is causality.

Oh, and then the big one. It's not thoroughly worked out. He's asking us to carry on. And that's science metaphysics which deals with a part of the whole, existence. Science deals with existence -- physiological, material, time, space, velocity, but it doesn't deal with this other. What do you mean, other? In a world of culture. What's the world of culture? It's the world of meaning. It's the world of quality. If you get very metaphysical -- I shouldn't even use that term -- everything is metaphysical for Jordan. Let me try this....

This room -- it's not rendered intelligible by science [alone]. You say, Look at the furniture; look at the cabinets; look at the chair; the height. This room has color. It has a

tone. It has color-tone. It has rhythm. Rhythm is not intelligible in terms of beats. Rhythm goes somewhere.... Culture space is color. Time is physical, tone is culture. We may not be aware of it, but what's out there is color-tone, rhythm. Science does not deal with that. And I should have marked the passage when I was re-reading it; it was beautiful. He says that when you look at life concretely -- you look at a flower -- that color doesn't remain in the flower. It's part of a constituent ultimately of the universe. And back to a very simple example. It was on my mind with your question when we ended yesterday. I've been thinking about it ever since. What would be sociology's purpose under Jordan? It's a wonderful question. It makes you think about everything. It's almost as if we need to start again.

However, he also says, those of us who take seriously trying to understand, live in a world that is established. And we are required to acknowledge there is dynamism to it. So, by definition, we're studying what is and what ought to be. We're not imposing that. That's a quality of life. And our mission is to order it by definition. And then when he says philosophy begins and ends with Plato, that's the key to Jordan. Ah, no, I could talk about cause all afternoon. Cause -- he talks about it again and again and again. His major argument is that we have a wrong metaphysics. And he struggles to correct that.

**INT:** Do you think he gives too much credit to science by suggesting that it offers an adequate account of existence?

**MB:** I think he would take that into consideration -- what you said. On balance, from what exists, science does that, but it's not the last word. Yes, there's new developments in science, but what the heck does science have to do with culture? He's got -- I struggled with that -- analogical identity. That is the big concept in him.

**INT:** Science doesn't even seem to get nature right, let alone culture.

**MB:** Oh yeah. He would if you asked him that, he would say you're right.

**INT:** Do you remember Barry Commoner's chapter on corn, growing corn, in *The Closing Circle*? He's got a chapter on Illinois corn fields and how using those artificial fertilizers ended up poisoning the Decatur water supply -- that this illustrates the cause-effect thinking applied to corn growth. It strikes us that that's illustrative of what's wrong with scientific thinking even when it comes to nature.

**MB:** Good. I'll think about it.



**INT:** In Chapter V of *The Good Life*, The Complexity of Experience, Jordan says it's reality that gives perception, not the other way around.

**MB:** Oh yeah. He believes that philosophy is synonymous with metaphysics and believes like Plato that philosophy has a responsibility to address what is reality. And he takes on pragmatism with that perception. I mean James -- what works? What works for whom? For me? Yes. For Dewey, what works for the group. Yes, but me and the group are abstractions. Where does the situation begin and where does it end? It's just arbitrary in pragmatism. You've got a series of situations created as separate and distinct in your thinking. You've forgotten the world. You've forgotten the nation.

It's similar with the concept of action. It's like a form of individualism blown up. Philosophy deals with problems. What is reality? And Ahrens, he works that one, that Cephalus thing. Justice is interpersonal relations and relations to objects. His son -- interacting people, group sociology, forgetting property. Boy, that is such a powerful message. What Jordan does, where he ties it into history, and how in liberalism, we forget peoples' relation to property. Mead is the sociology of angels. He's just talking about interacting people. [But] What would my son's life be without the piano? What would the workman's life be without tools? Without wood? Then craft, action, brushing your teeth, action. We are actors; we are purposeful creatures.

They used to argue with[in] Ahrens' group -- pro and con -- action is a metaphysical ultimate to Jordan. But why? What's so very obvious is the action capacities of modern society. It's got industry; it's got organization; it's got all these materials; it's got schools, universities. What the heck are they doing looking for causes? Sociology looking for more facts.

I remember when Professor Shideler, Ahrens' officemate, once told me, "We're studying the group, but I'm pushing for studying the small group." Ahrens said to me, "Bobick, would you get my umbrella?" And Shideler asked, "Do you think it's raining?" Ahrens responded somewhat contemptuously, "No Professor, I know it's raining." And Jordan notes that the ancient Greeks saw objects in terms of their possibilities. But in modern times, there's the object plus your impression of it -- subjectivity. You don't see the object [truly].

Well, you can question whether the universal was what Jordan said the Greeks saw. But you could see what he's talking about. He just doesn't believe in relativism. It's just filled with contradictions, unacknowledged assumptions, substituting assumptions and not taking account of them. It just falsifies and we produce a world that mouths freedom

but as life goes on we get less freedom. We live in a world where the action is done by institutions and we think our freedom of action produces all of this.

But if you look at all this and really look at it, it's pretty bad. And you don't have any [real] freedom. And it's primarily due to cause, atomism, the assumption of a separate and distinct object, person living in his own world, independent of relations. He's an atom. And we try to unite the atoms and we always fail. That's your two [actually three] chapters in the course you're teaching, the individual and then society part one and society part two. And we try to put them together, and, no, no, no. You need a whole apparatus of categories to really get at what is reality.

**INT:** Can we get a clarification here? You just talked about institutions and it occurred to us -- we always have had a little trouble with the distinction between corporate person and institution. We assume there is a distinction. Could you say a little something about that now?

**MB:** Yeah, yeah. The corporate is used by both Jordan and Ahrens, but Ahrens more to deal with two realities. One is the reality that we have. Life is corporate. Modern life is corporate. Modern life has a body. The body is more accessible to study because of action. The body that we have, that we live in, including nature, roads, buildings, on and on and on, constitutes the reality that we live in. You can't deny that we live in a highly developed body. That has all kinds of implications, that we have one -- health service and on and on and on.

So corporate is a description -- that all life is corporate, all life is embodied. Action involves a purpose; it involves means, body. In order to carry out your action, all kinds of organized physical means are required. We're not sufficiently sensitive that so many of these means are organized within and carried out by institutions.

Corporate is also used, is almost synonymous with culture. Maybe that's going too far. It has reference to life, property, organism. It's following out the potential of what we have, truly. You've got to think in universal terms. You have to have a valid metaphysics. You talk corporate person -- that involves a problem when it comes to Jordan, because he calls the corporation a person.

And there are a lot of very thoughtful people who [would] say, "No, no, a person is a biological, psychological, soulful entity, and don't call an institution a person." But Jordan would point out that historically organization has replaced individual action and individuals get organized by definition. That's what society is. And you even have a

period in American law where it acknowledges the corporation as a person because it gives the corporation....

Well, in the 19th century -- he doesn't mention this, I don't think -- but other people have mentioned this but they don't come out where Jordan comes out and they don't do what he does with it -- a corporation was granted status by the state and they said in order to have a corporation, you had to have a new level of responsibilities. Your corporation was to deal with public health. And then because they got legal status they could buy property and that made them an agent and all action requires an agent. Now where is the agent? The agent is the organization.

He uses law in two dimensions. He says law is a mess. Law is the problem. We refer what an institution does, a corporation does, to judgment by law, but that's nonsense because the law is individualistic. As a proper corporation, a corporate person, in terms of life, that requires an agent. The agent is the corporation and it's a person. But it forgets the individual as supplying the thinking. The individual is the only reality that thinks. So you have to think of these concepts also in relation.

If the corporate institution is really doing its job, you've got to think of it as related to other institutions that are doing their jobs. And if you have a proper relation among institutions, with the corporate, the corporation, which involves the individual doing the thinking and the corporation doing the acting. Oh, but that's involved. That's involved.

What do you mean the corporation doing the acting? Well, the *Theory of Legislation* and the *Forms of Individuality* were originally one volume. He tells you how to carry it out. You need a new organization of government. You need it organized into three branches: legislation, administration, and the judiciary. I mean you've got an unenlightened public. You have them actually thinking just every four years when they go in the voting booth. He says that. And then the whole notion of -- it took me a while to get that if I did get that -- somebody representing somebody else. What the heck is that? That's a crazy idea, that your political figure represents you. How can one mind represent another mind? That's just formal nonsense, abstraction.

A legislator -- and he writes extensively and brilliantly about legislation. You know what he says is the function of legislation? I think I mentioned this to you and you probably know it already -- to dream. He's [the politician] not to represent anybody. He's not even to represent himself. He's to be a public human being -- knowledgeable, thinking every minute, informed. Legislation is a constant thing and he's trying to analyze all these things to pass a law. And the administration, the second branch, is supposed to be working constantly with the guys who are doing the legislating and working out how you

could legislate the idea. And the judiciary checks how it's working and reports back to the legislative. That's a constant.

I had tears in my eyes when he talks about the idea, what an idea is. An idea is not to produce purple toilet paper with the school colors or insignia instead of just white toilet paper. An idea, it's cosmic, it's profound, based on imagination, guided by logic, experimental. It has your dreams, your imagination, your intelligence in an atmosphere of talk. He's got a chapter on talk. I remember that Bellah at the University of California - the most important responsibility of democracy is to listen. He doesn't do what Jordan does, but he emphasizes people listening to each other, the legislators, not [to focus on] defeating Obama. But it's ludicrous even to throw that in because they [our so-called legislators] don't deserve even a mention.

**INT:** I don't know if we got the distinction between institution and corporate person.

**MB:** The institution -- I'm shooting in the dark; I can't remember now the passages, but he's not consistent. Let me tell you what I think. Well, I know that society is corporate. Its got a body. Society -- the corporate idea is Jordan's "good." He's like Plato: what is the good? Sustainability, a word you hear more and more these days. And Plato asks the same question: what sustains us? The good. What sustains us? Order -- one of your earlier questions. What's order? You don't want to talk about that independently of others. Order has nothing to do with force. Order is a valid idea; [it's] embodied. We don't have a decent society because of capitalism.

So find out what sustains us. But I don't think they go far enough. What sustains us is these women that clean this building. What sustains us is my Saab mechanic. What sustains us are the kindergarten teachers. I'm trying to reach out on what's pretty good in what we have. We've got a lot of good that sustains us, the totality.

Individualism doesn't sustain us, [even though] we think it does. It's an obstacle. The Sociology Department doesn't sustain us. I could teach a course on how it has harmed us. It would be very easy [to show] how it harms university students because they're dealing with causes, because they're dealing with interpersonal relations as reality, the group. We live in a world; we don't live in a group. They don't even know what the heck the world is. Their atomism, Jordan says in the *Forms*, their psychology; it's a total loss. Sociology is a step forward -- the group. [But] If you read that chapter [chapter 2] carefully, there's nothing left to sociology, nothing.

**INT:** That was one of the questions I [Gerry] was going to ask about. That sociology emerged to challenge the individualism of the Enlightenment. And yet, it didn't go far enough, even though it embraced this idea of social realism and society.

**MB:** What the heck is social realism? It doesn't include property. And Ahrens taught a graduate course on theory...I think it's the best book, the J.S. Mill book on Comte, but it doesn't compare to Ahrens' analysis of Comte. Comte is impressed with what science has done. There are international meetings of scientists in Paris. He said that the scientists understand each other. They agree on certain concepts and when they use the concept even though there are different languages and so on, they understand. He says, political, legal, he could say social sciences, they don't understand each other. Now, let's get a unified world conception, says Comte. Comte's got an idea of the world. He says, get rid of, stop colonialism in Algeria. He writes to the Pope. He says, you've got the best organization going. But you have to revamp the curriculum. He's like Jordan. He's got a concept of institution. He's big on science, big on religion. He had a representative of his positive religion -- I think [but] I may be wrong -- who came to America to yell at Congress. Ahrens treats Comte as genuinely struggling, but he says his [ultimate] answer is the love of a woman.

**INT:** You mentioned Ahrens' discovery of *The Forms of Individuality* in the library. Do you think Ahrens was already moving in the direction of Jordan's thought when he encountered the *Forms*, given his work with [Roderick] McKenzie and possible connection with Rauschenbusch, among other things?

**MB:** Yeah, that's a good question. I can answer it. He told me personally that prior to that he was confused. And he told me he was losing sleep and weight.

He said he was confused. Burgess had lost his dissertation, but he did not mention that, or that he had no PhD. He was confused about a fundamental question: was the individual the real or society? He said Jordan answered the question; he approached the problem in a different way. Ahrens acted upon it and began studying with Jordan. He audited his Plato course. He audited his Ethics course, the Idealism course. So he audited his courses. It seems that Rauschenbusch, his family -- you gave me that paper he wrote at Chicago, where he says he quit high school.

**INT:** His autobiography.

**MB:** When he went back to high school, he felt that his peers were talking about things better than he could. He went back to high school. I don't know why [he went to] the University of Rochester, maybe Rauschenbusch was there.

**INT:** Yes, I'll [Gerry] check that, but that rings a bell.<sup>5</sup>

**MB:** He always talked about his parents with utmost respect. He talked about his sisters with utmost respect. And they seemed like a remarkable group. The one sister was the assistant to the [CEO of] the biggest mental hospital in the state of Washington. An MD was in charge; she was his assistant, but to Ahrens she did most of the work. And he said her principle was to make the hospital beautiful. She thought that beauty would help the patients. And they had a sense of humor. Then at one period his sister was sick and she started to go to a dietitian and [then] she was fine. He visited them every August. He would tell me stories about the fun they had. I don't know if that's an answer. But my answer would be Jordan -- just like he started from the beginning. He never mentioned a philosophy course. Maybe he had one. And that's why the question about what would be an ideal curriculum for sociology according to them [is interesting]. I gave some thought to that and I'll talk to that if you want me to, but maybe you've got some other questions. Tell me if I don't answer.

But I do think this does us all good, even though I wander. Because I think I should wander. I tried and maybe I'll try again to give specific concepts that Jordan used in their order. I know I could do that. That's not his theory of mind, I don't think, but I couldn't admire anybody more than those two guys [Ahrens & Jordan]. I took Gottschalk, Fisch, Diggs, Vivas [at Northwestern]. Fisch was a giant. He's different. He breaks with Jordan. He says -- typical Fisch -- that after 1936 there was nothing new. I don't even think he includes the ethics [*The Good Life*, 1949]. But then this is Fisch. Perhaps it's us, that we don't see the implications that we should see. And he goes off into Peirce which is more typical, but it's not convincing. But he's formidable, Peirce, and so's Fisch. (In spite of what Ahrens said, "Moron, Bobick; Fisch is a fish." Oh my god almighty.)

**INT:** In the context of *Business Be Damned* and Jordan's critique of both capitalism and communism, it seems that criticizing one or the other usually puts you in the opposite camp, but not Jordan.

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch graduated from the University of Rochester, and later taught at the Rochester Theological Seminary. Rauschenbusch died in 1918, the year Ahrens began attending the University of Rochester. Prof. Wrone recalls Ahrens telling him about Rauschenbusch lectures he attended in Rochester. As Ahrens mentions in his autobiography, he finished his high school years as an adult in a program that combined the high school diploma and the college degree. So Ahrens was likely in Rochester for some time before he commenced work on his B.A. and probably attended Rauschenbusch's lectures and/or services during that time. Rauschenbusch's social gospel theology very likely influenced the young Ahrens.

**MB:** You know his criticism of communism. He -- I don't think he's fair -- but I don't want to criticize, but I'll talk about it. He defines communism -- and I'm not trying to defend communism -- you know that. He equates communism with an equal distribution of profit [or wealth]. That's impractical. You can't do that with the complexity of modern industry. You can't divide up the wealth equally; that's it. They're not stupid; they would respond to that. I love that book [*Business Be Damned*], I love it. I've been a defender of it for years -- even against Ahrens who said it was the product of a mood. I don't think so, oh no. That's not a mood. It's brilliant; it's unique. [But] He's also unfair to socialism because he equates socialism with dividing up the property, economic determinism. No, no; there's [George Bernard] Shaw, the Fabians, I'm just getting carried away. But in the Senate, if you bring up a bill and somebody attacks it as socialism, it's dead. That's terrible. Socialism is an important movement in history. It's had some great thinkers. And they deal with detail. No, no, no. You said, if you're not one, you're the other. Well, he's an example, the best example, of mentioning alternatives. It takes him two hard books to give his alternative. And he gives an alternative. You can't leave out *Theory of Legislation* because he argues that any plan that doesn't give in detail the implementation of that plan in action and the details of it is flawed. You get sick of the details that he gives when you're struggling with his writing. But they're profound. *The Forms*, that was Ahrens' favorite book of Jordan's.

*The Forms* is largely the taking apart of what we have which by definition is horrible. It's based on all kinds of misconceptions, namely atomism versus relationalism. Atomism, relationalism versus the whole. My God, the whole, the whole, the whole. And Jordan tells you what he means by the whole. And Plato tells you what he means by the whole. And to Ahrens, the whole, the whole, the whole. None of them just describe what they mean by the whole, they give concrete alternatives [examples?], and ...But Marx wrote 30 volumes. The one I assigned in SOC 612...

**INT:** *The German Ideology*?

**MB:** Yeah, I think. Or another one where Marx defends himself as being an economic determinist. He gets involved with thinking and what's wrong with capitalist thinking. That's just one volume. Marx had just become available in the 1950s with that Englishman who translated these volumes. They hadn't been translated, many of them. And one of them, maybe *The German Ideology* -- I never reviewed that, but what it pointed [out] was that Marx was a student of Hegel and he was philosophic. There's a philosophic argument in Marx. You could -- Jordan's critique of democracy is profound. It's really profound. And a suggestion is an alternative in the preparation for the legislators -- I mean it's moving, emotionally moving, what he talks about in terms of the qualities that a legislator should have, the sensitivity, the knowledge, the consideration

to be purely public, to have imagination. It's almost as though he doesn't have to mention humanity as a specific [characteristic] because the whole thing is filled with humanitarian aspirations and analyses. And you'll notice the one that you used, the first chapter [of Ahrens' manuscript, *Order and Disorder in Society*] is [on] Human Relations. I mean this is a critique of democracy -- the vote, the preparation of voters, the narrowness, the notion of representation, the...Anyways, you know about that.

**INT:** Just to be fair, you argue that Jordan's understanding of communism is a bit simplistic, so therefore his critique of the communist alternative, in contrast to his critique of democracy, is not nearly as thorough or profound. Is that fair?

**MB:** Very fair. But I maybe wouldn't say simplistic. I would maybe say he's not as interested in that. And maybe he's very informed, but he couldn't have been informed about Marx's writings unless his wife who's a native German translated those volumes - and she was capable of doing that, but they never give any reference to that. But Jordan confesses that he never read Hegel in depth. And Hegel is quite something. I haven't read him in depth, but I've read enough of him to....

**INT:** There is one point in *Business Be Damned*, towards the end, where Jordan says, capitalism is probably necessary in some form. So he thinks that some form of capitalism will need to be part of whatever economic system is going to work.

**MB:** I don't remember that, but that doesn't mean it's not there. I trust you. You know what he says, you remember this line? Where he defends industrial capitalism. Well, they both make a distinction between business and industry. Business is the corrupter, not industry. But, he says, capitalism gave workers the opportunity, in vast numbers. It dealt with vast numbers. It provided the opportunity for vast numbers to work together. Well, that's different than, Ahrens would never say that. No, that's bothered me. Not what I just said Jordan said. What's bothered me -- I hate to admit this -- but I will. I like America. This is terribly superficial. I like to go to the supermarket. I like that inventiveness and all these products there. I get good tickets to the ballet and to the symphony and to the opera. I've got the best tickets in the house to the Celebrity Series, and the ballet, and the Boston Lyric Opera. I like Herbert [Muller] -- he taught at the University of Indiana -- he taught the history of ideas. He wrote a book, *The Uses of the Past*. I used it; it was a mistake because it was too complicated, but you guys would enjoy it. He gives a good defense of capitalism. I sympathize. I know a lot of business people and they would like to work without interference. They are not all profit crazy. They don't like someone in the government telling them what to do and passing regulations, you know.



And you guys know about the first colony in Virginia, how it got there. I think it's 1609. Jobs are hard to get. It's an investment company. They sell shares to Virginia. Ahrens doesn't mention that. It's misconceived. Beard writing at the turn of the century says that the constitutional fathers didn't want democracy; they wanted oligarchy, and that's what they got. But the British opened up a private company that sold shares; people bought shares because they thought they could find a quick passage to India, or gold, or rare materials, or exotic fruits. It was fascinating. They couldn't find any takers. They didn't want to go to the wilderness. They had to let them out of prison. They were prisoners. And 120 men -- no women -- went on a ship to Plymouth Rock, no, maybe it was not Plymouth Rock but the other one, the city on a hill, where the first pilgrims...

**INT:** Jamestown?

**MB:** Yes, that's right; we're talking about Virginia. Oh they told them, don't settle in a place with mosquitoes, but that's what they did. And the writer of the latest book I read about it said that they were tough. They were trying to discourage them from coming back, but they said, no, better wait. And of course, George Washington's ancestors were -- this writer calls them land speculators. But he spends a paragraph or two on where they got the land. The Indians, he said, foolishly thought the land was their hunting grounds. And George Washington, his brother, or brothers, I can't remember if there were brothers, they went to Oxford. Washington, because of finances, couldn't go to college. The only -- what they called higher education -- he had was surveying. He was a surveyor, and surveying was tied up with selling land. And they freed the prisoners and gave them 50 acres per person. And if they brought another person, another 50 acres. And that became the rich and the aristocracy. And Washington's father was in there. And Washington, I mean Mount Vernon is a palace. Have you been? It's a wonderful place, a perfect spot on the river. And Lafayette, who slept in Portsmouth [N.H.], begged Washington, "Why don't you free the slaves?" At one time, he owned 500 slaves. But this was a capitalist, slavery society from the beginning. And it still is, it's a form of slavery.

Hamilton, I read an 800 page [book], this guy was for Hamilton. This book was very revealing. I never thought about who pays the army. They weren't paid in many instances. That painting of Washington in that battle -- I don't know if it was Valley Forge or what it was -- Washington was a clothes horse. He had a tailor in London. He designed his clothes and he liked gold braid. And he's on that horse, and he looks better than the *New Yorker* ads. Many of those troops were barefoot in the snow and lost limbs. And in [a] country with extensive farms where the farmers wouldn't even give them food. The brutal country. And Washington begged the Continental Congress to send money. They said they had no money. And then the currency, Hamilton, he

designed the currency system. You got 13 different currencies. And he argues with the people -- if you don't unite, foreign countries are going to deal with the currency with every state and bargain. Then he argued [for] the federal bank. And he said, do what England did. Get loans and use the loan money more creatively than the company that gave you the loan. Hamilton was a good writer. He was Washington's main assistant and he wrote the letters. And this guy makes him [Washington] a hero, but I read between the lines, he's a real shit, you know. And during the Revolution, the British troops occupied Philadelphia and they're in private, luxurious homes. They're fine in the winter, but the Americans with Washington are barefoot and hungry. It's like today; you could draw a parallel with poverty [today]. We have all this food, and yet we've got hungry people. What else?

**INT:** I [Dennis] have been wrestling with this short biography for the Jordan webpage. I have five or six ideas on how to sum up for the reader who might stumble onto this site. What are three or four key ideas that make Jordan's philosophy so different? And just two or three sentences each.

**MB:** One, the unequivocal judgment of the failure of the moral, reasonable, the failure of American democracy.

Two, a precise delineation of the why of the failure. Maybe you can change precise delineation, make it positive, a factual [delineation]. Maybe not use factual because that's a loaded word. But you know what I mean.

Three, a detailed analysis of an alternative, democratic system that will lead to a good life for all the citizens. You could use the expression -- not Marxist in any of these, but perhaps that's loading the deck. And, in reference to number three, a detailed account of how this is to be accomplished. That's it.

Just a minute, I've thought of another one. The model is, "What is society? What's wrong with it? How did it get that way? What is a good society? And how is it being accomplished?" That's how Ahrens introduced a couple of his classes as to what he would argue.

**INT:** Which brings us back to where we started. Those are exactly the words I think you started with yesterday. This is great. It makes the point that philosophy for Jordan is about the world and making it right.

**MB:** You could, yeah. Absolutely, it's in line -- I associate it with that question you asked, "What would be the ideal?" If you've got a couple minutes more.

**INT:** Yes.

**MB:** I thought of it in the context of sociology. It amounts to what is an ideal sociology. I once asked Ahrens, "What would you think about Plato's *Republic* being the first course in sociology?" He said, "I agree." So you could make *The Republic* your first course. But this is much more autobiographical. I am reflecting on my own [thoughts]. And I saw the logic of Ahrens. The second course [would be] Social and Cultural Dynamics. He sets Plato, he sets history, the philosophy of history over against Plato, which is a good idea. Try to read, and if you don't have it in your library, try to order it -- *The Journal of Social Philosophy*. It's a good journal. It talks about things -- I don't know if they ever had an article on Jordan, but maybe they did, and you guys could write one and they would publish it because it would be fresh. It's still fresh. The third course [would be] Ahrens' Modern Society. But you could do something, maybe they wouldn't let you, but you're a PhD. This Marsey Carsey I think just gave millions of dollars. You know about her? I think she graduated in theater and I think she was a writer for the Bill Cosby Show. She made a fortune. She gave a fortune to UNH. It took the form -- in the North Country -- doing studies.

What was I talking about?

**INT:** Modern Society course.

**MB:** Modern Society course. Then, Marsey Carsey gave \$20 million for a new department. It's a disgrace. She wants a department that gives a picture of modern American society or the modern American world. And she wants on the basis of that course, recommendations for improvement. A simple idea. That is what sociology should be. And if you had that Plato thing, that might be a little bit much to talk them into. But a course, and then where you would work in, but you've got to understand it. Ahrens said, if you think logically, you will do right. The wedding of knowledge and ethics. They're not, it's not the final word that they have to be separate. And that involves Jordan's notion of logic which very quickly, you have only a minute, is in the modern world; logic deals with implication. If you've got something in your world that's universal and you could establish that, it implies policies in other areas. That's logical. It's not like my first course, Max Black, world expert logician gets professor at the University of Illinois writing equations on the board. And a super chess player. Yeah, and....

**INT:** You once told me [Dennis] that Jordan's logic was a discursive kind of logic.

**MB:** I don't know what I meant. He would question that. He would say logic is concrete. Discursive implies a split between theory and practice.

**INT:** I [Dennis] thought you meant it in terms of rather than the syllogistic kind, it was more relational.

**MB:** Excellent. This was great. Hate to see you go.

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