12

Principled

Jeffrey F. Barr

Jeffrey F. Barr practices law in Las Vegas, Nevada. He studied under Murray Rothbard and Hans Herman-Hoppe in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In a lifetime of accolades that could be bestowed upon Hans-Hermann Hoppe, one stands out among all the rest: his relentless commitment to Truth. For 35 years, I have had the good fortune to be a first-hand witness to Professor Hoppe’s pursuit of Truth. I have been his student, his lawyer, his friend, and lifelong admirer. For me, Hoppe’s relentless commitment to Truth has manifested itself in three ways: Hoppe the Principled Scholar; Hoppe the Principled Educator; and Hoppe the Principled Man.

**The Principled Scholar**

Hoppe started his academic career as a student of Jürgen Habermas. The brilliant young Hoppe could have enjoyed a prestigious sinecure as a leftist professor in Europe. Instead, he rejected the ideas of the renowned Habermas, left Europe, and joined a then-obscure Austrian economist, Murray Rothbard. The pursuit of Truth provoked the Principled Scholar to jettison comfort and false glory.

Many are familiar with Professor Hoppe’s academic works. All of these works are deeply philosophical, yet easily accessible to a discerning reader. I am fortunate to have witnessed the embryonic stages of many of these pieces. For example, we shared countless nights of discussions over casual drinks as Hoppe worked out the material that would become *Democracy: The God That Failed*. I also remember long conversations about works that Hoppe had yet to complete—in particular, Hoppe’s fascination with the philosopher, Adolf Reinach. (I hope he someday finishes this.)[[1]](#footnote-1) In all of these (sometimes strident) debates, the Principled Scholar remained committed to discovering the Truth, regardless of where it led, and I am grateful to have shared this one-on-one time with him in this pursuit.

Of course, Hoppe was not content to rest on his laurels as an accomplished philosopher and economist. The Pursuit of Truth led the Principled Scholar to found the Property and Freedom Society. The PFS reflects Hoppe’s unique commitment to Truth. With its salon-like atmosphere and erudite attendees, the PFS most closely resembles the early casual conversations and strident debates that Hoppe led with me and others. It is a place where curious people can freely discuss economics, religion, philosophy, sociology, and all of human action. The singular, most memorable conversation of my life occurred over breakfast at PFS one year. I am grateful that the Principled Scholar saw fit to bring together such literate people.

**The Principled Educator**

Few people have experienced Hoppe as the Principled Educator. I have had this distinct privilege. (Although I have not formally been his student for 30 years, I am proud that he still introduces me as such to this day.)

As I have written elsewhere, the Principled Educator was not content with simply presenting ideas as a monolith in a vacuum, hoping his students would regurgitate it on exam day. Instead, Hoppe lectured logically and factually with an open mind, demanding that his students approach learning with equally open-minded rigor. I have carried these lessons with me my entire life. It is a great blessing of one’s life to have one’s worldview set at age 18, and I thank the Principled Educator for this lifelong gift.

Ironically, it is his pursuit of Truth as a Principled Educator which led to the display, in my mind, of Hoppe’s most estimable quality: the Principled Man.

**The Principled Man**

In March 2004, Hoppe connected Keynes’s homosexuality with his famous dictum that “in the long run, we are all dead.” Hoppe, himself, has written about his battle with the “thought police” in his typically laconic style. What followed, however, was a firestorm of persecution and recrimination from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas that has become legendary. (I will not recount the details here; Hoppe’s essay is well-worth the read.)[[2]](#footnote-2) I, however, would like to add a first-hand account to the legend.

UNLV threatened Hoppe’s livelihood, reputation, and his retirement pension over this innocuous comment in pursuit of Truth. Hoppe consulted with me and other lawyer-friends to discuss his options.   
I remember vividly sitting at his dining room table helping him evaluate his case.

The mood was somber and dark. Hoppe, the Principled Scholar and Educator was also a man—a man who was understandably shaken and fearful. He had a choice to make. Fighting the Eye of Sauron, with its unending resources, could mean years of public litigation at princely price. His family and his reputation would undoubtedly have suffered with no assurance of ultimate victory.

But there was a way out: Hoppe could acquiesce to UNLV’s demands: Retract his comment, issue a mealy-mouthed apology with some performative humility, and offer a mere pinch of incense to Caesar. Hoppe could keep his position, save his pension, and re-join “polite” society. It was an uncomfortable, but quiet, resolution.

In the end, Hoppe chose to fight because he was (and remains) a Principled Man. Courage is not charting a risky course without fear; rather it is proceeding despite the fear. Hoppe proceeded despite the fear. Few scholars, few educators, and few men would have chosen this fight. Hoppe was ultimately vindicated. But the courage he displayed 20 years ago still resonates with me. The Principled Man continued his relentless pursuit of Truth.

I remain sorely grateful for Hans-Hermann Hoppe, the Principled Scholar, Principled Educator, and Principled Man, and I congratulate him on a lifetime in pursuit of Truth.

1. Professor Hoppe for example participated in “Reinach and Rothbard: An International Symposium,” Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn, Ala. (March 29–30, 2001; https://perma.cc/396W-HJEL), which symposium also included Guido Hülsmann (the director), Walter Block, Stephan Kinsella, Larry J. Sechrest, and Barry Smith. This resulted in Hoppe’s article “Property, Causality, and Liability,” *Q. J. Austrian Econ.* 7, no. 4 (Winter 2004; https://mises.org/library/property-causality-and-liability-1): 87–95, also included in *idem, The Great Fiction: Property, Economy, Society, and the Politics of Decline*, Second Expanded Edition (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 2021; www.hanshoppe.com/tgf), discussing Reinach’s views on causation. See also Adolf Reinach, “The A Priori Foundations of the Civil Law,” *Aletheia* 3 (1983; https://philarchive.org/rec/REITAP-9): 1–142 and *idem*, “On the Concept of Causality in the Criminal Law,” Libertarian Papers 1, art. no. 35 (2009 [1905]; http://libertarianpapers.org/35-concept-causality-criminal-law/); also Kevin Mulligan, ed., *Speech Act and Sachverhalt: Reinach and the Foundations of Realist Phenomenology* (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hans-Hermann Hoppe, “My Battle With The Thought Police,” *Mises Daily* (April 12, 2005; https://mises.org/mises-daily/my-battle-thought-police). See also Stephan Kinsella & Jeffrey Tucker, “The Ordeal of Hoppe,” *The Free Market* 25, no. 4 (April 1, 2005; ttps://www.stephankinsella.com/2005/04/the-ordeal-of-hoppe/). This episode is also mentioned in Mark Thornton’s chapter in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)