Mark Perlman was one of the great 20th century economists, first on labour economics and industrial relations; and later as a specialist in public health, demographic economics and the history of economic thought. His dissertation on Judges in Industry: a Study of Labor Arbitration in Australia (1954), in which he strongly came out in favour of incomes policy, was recently described by an essayist as the second best book on Australian labour arbitration, being surpassed only by the work of Henry Bournes Higgins (A New Province for Law and Order (1922)), who drafted the early law and was Chief Judge of the Court until his death. From the very beginning Perlman’s writing was built on the conceptual basis of theory and sustained systematically by detailed empirical and historical research. His early work was followed later with Labor Union Theories in America: Background and Development (1958), The Machinists: a New Study in American Trade Unionism (1961) and Democracy in the International Association of Machinists (1962), and Health Manpower in a Developing Economy (1967).

His major work on the interpretation of the history of economic thought, which encompassed different cultural contributions to the subject, is entitled The Pillars of Economic Understanding, published jointly with Charles R McCann Jr in two volumes: Volume I ‘Ideas and Traditions’ (1998) and Volume II ‘Factors and Markets’ (2000). In addition to his work as an author, Perlman was editor of many collective volumes, as well as founding editor of several highly influential journals. In recognition of the variety of Perlman’s contribution to economics, three distinguished scholars, Hank Lim, Ungsuh K. Park and G.C. Harcourt, published a volume in his honour in 2002 entitled.editing contributions. as well as founding editor of several highly influential journals. In recognition of the variety of Perlman’s contribution to economics, three distinguished scholars, Hank Lim, Ungsuh K. Park and G.C. Harcourt, published a volume in his honour in 2002 entitled Editing Economics to which eighteen scholars contributed chapters exploring themes such as the history of economic theory, applied economics and an evaluation of Mark Perlman’s written contributions.

Mark Perlman was born on 23 December 1923 in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, and died on 3 May 2006 in Shadyside, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, aged 82. He was the son of the famous and internationally respected labour historian Selig Perlman at the University of Wisconsin, a Polish émigré in 1918. After graduating from the same university in 1947, Mark took his PhD at Columbia University in 1950. He first taught as an instructor at Princeton University and subsequently held academic posts at the University of Hawaii (1951), Cornell University (1952-54) and Johns Hopkins University (1955-61). Returning to Pittsburgh University as Professor of Economics in 1961, he served as Head of the Department from 1965 to 1970. In 1968 he was named a University Professor for outstanding contributions to more than one discipline: economics, history and the economics of public health, and became Emeritus Professor on his retirement in 1993.

It was fascinating to listen to him discourse about his upbringing in a highly intellectual household, of having met, as a young boy, Albert Einstein and other luminaries of the academic world at that time. Most of the great economists and many of the leading historians and philosophers of the 20th century were known to him personally, and it was in such company that he honed his own intellectual tools. The frequency of his contributions to many volumes of essays in honour of famous colleagues is witness to the intellectual company he kept.

Apart from his writings, Perlman has been widely praised for his dedicated and inspiring teaching. His preferred imaginative approach was to provide undergraduates with broad-based instruction in liberal arts and proceed from this basis to economic science. The term papers they had to write for him (to be subsequently discussed in his office) also gave him the chance to become thoroughly acquainted with his students, many of whom went on to become lifelong friends. Although occupying emeritus status, he much enjoyed continuous work with current and former students until shortly before his death, and even as late as 2005 he chaired a dissertation committee. His autobiographical essay ‘What Makes My Mind Tick’, published as the introduction to his selected essays The Character of Economic Thought, Economic Characters, and Economic Institutions (1996), as well as the other essays in this volume, is a stimulating read. He was a warm-hearted man and once a friend, a friend for life.

Perlman was a great anglophile who often talked of his rewarding period as an official faculty visitor and visiting fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge in 1976-77. He and his wife Naomi delighted to entertain their English friends and colleagues at the Athenaeum Club in London during their frequent visits to the UK. He was also for many years a rewarding period as an official faculty visitor and visiting fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge in 1976-77. He and his wife Naomi delighted to entertain their English friends and colleagues at the Athenaeum Club in London during their frequent visits to the UK. He was also for many years a much appreciated co-editor of the Cambridge University Surveys of Economic Literature (1977-96) and the Cambridge Surveys in Economic Politics and Institutions (1991-95).

Last October, I received an e-mail from Mark with the worrying news that he was suffering from clinical symptoms of myasthenia gravis. However, more shattering was the diagnosis of a pancreatic malignancy. Typical of the person he was, his initial decision on nothing but nursing and pain-avoidance medication was taken partly to ensure that enough funds would be left for the care of his beloved hospitalized wife Naomi, suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, whom he had visited every day for many hours over a number of years until he himself fell ill. His daughter Abigail Williams then took over so that medical intervention and chemotherapy could start. He himself did not request these interventions, believing in the text of Ecclesiastes — ‘there is a time to live and a time to die.’
He considered the founding of the highly prestigious *Journal of Economic Literature*, a leader in its genre, in 1968 and managing editorship from 1968 to 1981 as one of his lasting achievements, and similarly, the creation of a journal for the US Department of State (*Portfolio on International Economic Perspectives*), along with a journal for the Schumpeter Society — *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* — in 1989. Among others, he was also an Editorial Board Member of *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Surveys of Economic Literature*, and the *Quarterly Journal of Business and Economics*. His work on investment in public health, too, was highly original in its time, and he took great pride in his final volumes on *Authority Systems and Economic Thinking*.

Perlman’s discovery of the English economist G L S Shackle, whom he counted as one of his most insightful mentors, was almost serendipitous, and he has advanced the important work of commending Shackle’s influence by publishing papers and substantial reviews of his books, partly by Perlman himself, in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. With his deep insight he stated in 1984 to a Shackle conference that

Shackle’s golden threads include an important, and virtually novel, emphasis on the role and uses of imagination … Attention by economists to the neglected role of imagination — intuition, if you will — undoubtedly offers an opportunity for a comprehensive Descartian empirical research programme. But what Shackle has most clearly already given us on the theoretical side is that rare leavening agent …. which makes organic (i.e. living) our discipline’s current body of accumulated thought.¹

He returned to these thoughts twenty years later in his Shackle Centenary Lecture at St. Edmund’s College Cambridge, in May 2004 in which he stated:

We Shackleans focus on the importance and effective uses of the imagination …. Shackle stands in the history of economic thought as the one who first drew attention to the importance of that organic instrument, the human imagination.²

Mark Perlman was a deeply religious man and a prominent member of the Jewish community in his home town. The core of his thinking was a religious conviction that it is the people (the tribe), not the individual, that comes before the Almighty, and he assured me that his one comment, if questioned, will be that he is not conscious of ever having tried to cover-up his serious errors.

*Stephen Frowen*  
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