

# What Is It Like to Be Barry Smith?

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Barry Smith is known for his work; very well known, in fact. But I would like to pay tribute to my friend Barry in this Festschrift with a few words that attempt to clarify that he is not reducible to his work, even if his life seems dedicated only to this work. Indeed, his successes are no doubt attributable in large part to his prodigious productivity. But none of us can really know what it's like to be Barry Smith in toto: as a son, brother, husband, friend, teacher, jazz aficionado, gastronomist, Aristotelian political animal, and all the other interesting dimensions of his consciousness. This is the subjective nature of experience, as Thomas Nagel so aptly pointed out in his famous article, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" We may infer from our own experience but cannot know the full extent of Barryhood. And I dare say that his experiences in our profession are perhaps much less like ours than we think.

Barry could have accepted offers for many faculty positions, research professorships, and distinguished university lectureships during his career. While any of us, his closest friends, would have been honored to be considered for such positions in the first place, Barry was in the happy position of being selective. In light of his enviable circumstances, it was all the more surprising when he revealed to us that the offer he received from the University at Buffalo was too seductive to let pass. He could have stayed in Liechtenstein, where in the 1990s he was made a Research Professor at the Internationale Akademie für Philosophie. But he took up the position of Julian Park Professor at the University at Buffalo. He did this because he felt that, there, he would be finally independent, no longer subject to anybody's whim or will, and in a collegial atmosphere of colleagues and friends. This decision involved not only a change in location yet again, as he had done so many times in his life before; this was a sig-

nificant relocation. Not being in his shoes, the change could have appeared to be a departure from a very comfortable position with papal privileges and ducal prerogatives. Yet only Barry knew what he was leaving behind, and fortunately, he was a very good fit for his new job.

Aside from the work for which Barry is known, colleagues, students, and collaborators of his also know him for his never-ending generosity. He is never too busy to write a letter of recommendation, read a paper and provide ample comments, or connect one person with another for their mutual benefit. Barry bestows random acts of kindness even upon those who have been unkind to him, as if he viewed them as having a right to ask him for favors, treating them in the same way as those one would think are truly deserving of his time and good will. It is always surprising to me how much he can do for others and still manage to maintain the high level of productivity that he has. I don't think that I know anyone busier than he, nor anyone who accomplishes as much as he does, yet he always has time to attend to others who seek his help. I cannot say how one becomes such an extraordinary person. I can only say that it makes me very happy and proud to call him my friend, and that my experience in this life has been the richer by knowing him.

## REFERENCE

Nagel, T. (1974). What is it like to be a bat? *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (4): 435–450