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April, 2004



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Remembering C. West Churchman (1913-2004)

The grand old man of the "systems approach" died on Sunday, 21st of March, in Bolinas, California. He was 90 years old.

I owe to West Churchman five formative years of my life at the University of California, Berkeley, where he was professor of business administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration (now Haas School of Business) and Associate Director of UC Berkeley's Space Sciences Laboratory. For a personal appreciation, see the essays "[An appreciation of C. West Churchman](#)" and "[In memory of C. West Churchman](#)" in the section "[A Tribute to C.W. Churchman](#)" of this web site.

After receiving the news of West Churchman's passing, it was clear that this month's picture should be dedicated to him. The page begins with the text of a [press release](#) by the University of California at Berkeley of 31 March 2004. Subsequently, you will find below a [short biography](#) of West Churchman; some [excerpts](#) from some of his writings; [links to other web pages](#) that offer material on West Churchman; and in the end, as always, my picture of the month, which in this case is a [photographic portrait](#) of West Churchman.

UC Berkeley Press Release, 31 March 2004

C. West Churchman dies

By Kathleen Maclay, [Media Relations](#) | 31 March 2004

BERKELEY – Charles West Churchman, a professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business who was a pioneer in management science and ethics, died Sunday (March 21) in a Bolinas nursing home at the age of 90. He died of complications from Parkinson's disease.

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For a hyperlinked overview of all issues of "Ulrich's Bimonthly" and the previous "Picture of the Month" series, see the [site map](#)

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"A Tribute to
C.W. Churchman"

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During a career spanning six decades, Churchman investigated a vast range of topics such as accounting, research and development management, city planning, education, mental health, space exploration, education, and peace and conflict studies.

He consulted over the years for NASA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and many other organizations.

Andrew Shogan, associate dean and professor at the Haas School, said that Churchman is among a handful of persons who each is widely regarded as a "founding father" of the field of knowledge known as management science, operations research or decision sciences. The field uses mathematical models to gain insights into a diverse set of decision problems arising in business, industry and government.

"After spending much of his career focusing on applied mathematics, West devoted much of his subsequent work to social issues, such as world hunger," said Shogan, who joined the Haas School in 1974, when Churchman was a senior professor.

Churchman's wife Gloria said the primary focus of her husband's work was to emphasize the ethical aspects of management science.

Churchman was born in Philadelphia. He earned his B.A. in philosophy in 1935, his master's in philosophy in 1936, and his Ph.D. in symbolic logic in 1938, all from the University of Pennsylvania.

"I'm a planner, but I'm also a philosopher," he told the San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle in 1982. "A planner finds out what an organization's goals should be. He determines problems and suggests solutions. He puts the pieces together so that the people who make the decisions can make better decisions.

"As a philosopher, I'm interested in such questions as: How do we know the plan is going to work? ... Is the plan ethical?"

During World War II, Churchman headed the mathematical section of the U.S. Ordnance Laboratory at the Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia and devised a way to test small arms ammunition and detonators based on the statistical methods of bioassay.

He joined the University of Pennsylvania's philosophy department in

Philadelphia as an assistant professor in 1939 and was department chair from 1945 to 1948. In 1948, he joined the philosophy department of Wayne University (now Wayne State University) in Detroit as an associate professor.

Churchman branched out in 1950, joining the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland (now Case Western Reserve University) as a professor of engineering administration, organizing the first operations research academic group. There, he helped design the first master's and doctoral programs in operations research.

Churchman also co-authored the first operations research text, "Introduction to Operations Research," in 1957. The dozen books he wrote include "The Systems Approach and Its Enemies" (1979), "The Design of Inquiring Systems" (1971), "Challenge to Reason" (1968), and "Prediction and Optimal Decision" (1961).

He joined the School of Business Administration at UC Berkeley in 1958 and initiated master's and doctoral programs in operations research. He also helped found the Center for Research in Management Science.

He taught such courses as the philosophy of systems science, introduction to ethics, and value assumptions of planning and systems design. After his retirement in 1981, Churchman taught peace and ethics in the campus's Peace and Conflict Studies for 13 years.

From 1964 to 1970, Churchman was appointed associate director and research philosopher at UC Berkeley's Space Sciences Laboratory, directing its social sciences program.

In 1972, Churchman was part of a group that developed the plans for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, a non-governmental research institute sponsored by scientific organizations from 17 countries. Its task was to research systems analysis for models for information and forecasting for use in energy, the environment and resources, agriculture and other fields.

He also headed a 30-member Mars Investigation Group that researched an intriguing 1976 Viking I spacecraft photo of Mars.

In 1983, Churchman received the Berkeley Citation, one of the campus's highest awards. He was awarded honorary doctorates from Washington University of St. Louis, the University of Lund, Sweden, and Umeå

University in Sweden.

Although Gloria Churchman said her husband's work was his life, she said he also enjoyed growing roses and listening to classical music.

In one of four H. Rowan Gaither Lectures given by Churchman in 1981, he mused that the essence of philosophy "is to pose serious and meaningful questions that are too difficult for any of us to answer in our lifetimes. Wisdom, or the love of wisdom, is just that: thought likes solutions, wisdom abhors them."

In addition to his wife,^{*)} Churchman is survived by his son, Josh Wharton Churchman of Bolinas, and two grandchildren. Funeral services will be private. A public memorial service will be announced later.

Memorial contributions may be sent to the Parkinson's Institute, 1170 Morse Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94089-1605.

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^{*)} **Postscript:** C. West Churchman's wife Gloria died on 2 August 2009, aged 81, in Mill Valley, California. [W. Ulrich, 28 Sep 2009]

A short biography of C. West Churchman

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(Slightly abbreviated excerpt from W. Ulrich, "[An Appreciation of C. West Churchman](#)," in this web site)

Churchman originally studied philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (BA in Philosophy, 1935; MA in Philosophy, 1936). His doctoral thesis of 1938 was *Toward a General Logic of Propositions*. At Pennsylvania University he also began his career of half a century of academic teaching and writing. Already before completing his dissertation, in 1937, he became Instructor of Philosophy; in 1939, he was appointed Assistant Professor; in 1945, the young Assistant Professor was elected Chairman of the Department of Philosophy.

His two chief philosophical teachers and mentors at the University of Pennsylvania were Edgar A. Singer, Jr., who had been a student of the well-known exponent of American pragmatism, William James, and Henry Bradford Smith, who himself had been a student of Singer. Singer's pragmatic stance never allowed him to understand philosophy as a merely theoretical enterprise; rather, philosophy to him was an intellectual effort to

improve social practice. We can recognize the same pragmatic stance in Churchman's basic question, which he often used to begin his courses, "How can we secure improvement of the human condition by means of the intellect?"

Hence, it becomes understandable why a philosophically minded spirit such as Churchman was to spend most of his career outside of philosophy departments. During World War II he was a mathematical statistician at the Frankford Arsenal of the U.S. Army in Philadelphia, working on experimental methods of testing small arms ammunition. Back at the University of Pennsylvania, he and Russell L. Ackoff, his first doctoral student, tried to establish the "Institute of Experimental Method," in an effort to apply E.A. Singer's "experimentalist" philosophy to societal issues such as problems of city planning, management, education, and others. However, the Philosophy Department did not appreciate this effort to practice philosophy as an applied discipline. The Institute could not be founded formally. Ackoff's teaching appointment was not renewed. In 1948, Churchman resigned his chairmanship of the department and accepted an appointment as Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wayne University (now Wayne State University) in Detroit, where Ackoff had gone the year before as an assistant professor. Again the Institute could not be founded, despite earlier promises of support. Churchman and Ackoff had to realize that they could not do what they wanted to do within philosophy departments.

Thus, these early efforts to practice philosophy as an applied discipline within philosophy departments were soon to be followed by academic appointments and mandates in other fields. In 1951, Churchman and Ackoff moved to the Department of Engineering Administration at Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio. From 1951 to 1957, Churchman was Professor of Engineering Administration at Case. In 1958, finally, Churchman was offered the position of Professor of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration of the University of California at Berkeley, where he remained until his retirement in 1981. During that time he founded Berkeley's graduate program in operations research and helped establish the Center for Research in Management Science. Many additional appointments outside of the Business School made sure the field he had chosen for practicing applied philosophy did not become a new ivory tower. Just to mention a few, from 1962 to 1963 he served as a research director of System Development Corporation. In 1963, he was appointed Research Philosopher and Associate Director at the Space

Sciences Laboratory of the University of California at Berkeley, where he directed the Social Sciences Program. Other engagements included teaching mandates in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program of the Graduate Division of UCB and in other Universities as well as consulting mandates with commercial corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies, among them the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA), the U.S. Department of Energy, the Texas Energy Council, the Office of Education, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, World Malnutrition (USAID), and others. After his retirement, he continued to teach at UCB as a Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies until 1996.

Excerpts from West Churchman's writings

Science "How can we create a science which is meaningful, that is, a science that will use reason to provide guidelines to men in the improvement and maturation of their own lives and of social systems? Can there be a science of the ethics of the whole system?" (*Challenge to Reason*, 1968, p. 83)

Management and science "When discussing management and science, I kept saying to myself over and over again that science could be looked at as a kind of management, or that management could be looked at as a kind of science. Saying that science can become a way of managing didn't imply automation or any other form of mechanical decision making, because none of this is science. Science is the creative discovery of knowledge. Management science is the process of trying to look at science as a management function. Similarly, management can be looked at as a scientific function, that is, as a way of finding out about the world." (*Challenge to Reason*, 1968, p. 104)

The Systems Approach: a basic description "On the broadest level, the systems approach belongs to a whole class of approaches to managing and planning our human affairs with the intent that we as a living species conduct ourselves properly in this world. Everyone adopts at least one such approach during her/his life, even if he/she is a recluse, an agnostic, a nihilist. The systems approach is, therefore, only one approach to the way in which humans should respond to reality; but it is a 'grand' approach, by which I mean 'large', 'gigantic', or 'comprehensive'. It is one of the approaches based on the fundamental principle that all aspects of the human world should be tied together in one grand rational scheme, just as astronomers believe that the whole universe is tied together by a set of coherent 'laws'." (*The Systems Approach and Its Enemies*, 1979, p. 8)

The Systems Approach: How can we distinguish it from a non-systems approach? "Since I often write on the 'systems approach', I am asked what 'it' really is. My response is that one way to recognize a systems approach vs. a non-systems approach is [analogous to] distinguishing between elementary counting and measurement; the latter being an unfolding process into other domains of science. If the process of acquiring useful information [...] simply ends in a set of data or graphs, then the process is *not* a systems approach. But if it unfolds into other domains of management, thereby showing, for example, that the problem of inventory always involves financial, marketing, and personnel management, then it may be a systems approach." (On the epistemology of useful information for organizations, paper prepared for "Producing Useful Knowledge for Organizations," a Research Conference by Organizational Studies Group, Graduate School of Business, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburg, PA, October 28-30, 1982; unpublished paper, Center for Research in Management, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 1982, p. 10)

Problem Solving "In the broader perspective of the systems approach, no problem can be solved simply on its own basis." (*The Systems Approach and Its Enemies*, 1979, p. 5)

The Ethics of the Systems Approach "The important feature of the systems approach is that it is committed to ascertaining not simply whether the decision maker's choices lead to his desired ends, but whether they lead to ends that are ethically defensible." (*The Systems Approach and Its Enemies*, 1979, p. 65)

Rationality "Man becomes more rational to the extent that he becomes reflective. But reflection is not merely 'looking inward'; it is not a direct self-examination. Rather, the rationality of reflection comes from using as much of the world, or the 'whole system', as one possibly can to understand oneself." (*Challenge to Reason*, 1968, p. 105)

Links

This is a list of web pages dedicated to, or offering material on, C. West Churchman. Only pages written in English and available in an open-access mode are listed. The list is in (as far as a few pages are not dated, approximate) historical order, according to the dates on which the contributions were first published on-line. All hyperlinks were last verified on 10 April 2006.

http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/~schultz/people/churchman_cv.html

"West Churchman's Home Page," by Arnold M. Schultz, 1996.

<http://www.informs.org/History/Gallery/Presidents/TIMS/cchurchman.htm>

"C. West Churchman, Ninth President of TIMS," *INFORMS, The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences*, 1999.

http://projects.iss.org/C_West_Churchman

"An appreciation of C. West Churchman, With and Extensive Bibliography from 1938 to 2000," by Werner Ulrich, *ISSS, International Society for the Systems Sciences*, 29 August 1999, original URL: <http://www.iss.org/lumCWC.htm>. Reformatted as Wiki page and relocated to http://projects.iss.org/C_West_Churchman in January 2005 (last updated 5 March 2006).

<http://www.daviddriscoll.com/churchbio.htm>

"C.W. Churchman - a short biography," unnamed author, undated, ca. 2000-01.

<http://www.aisnet.org/award/bios/churchman.html>

"C. West Churchman," *AIS, Association for Information Systems*, 2001.

<http://wulrich.com/cwc.html>

"A Tribute to C.W. Churchman," by Werner Ulrich, *Werner Ulrich's home page*, 12 November 2002.

http://wulrich.com/cwc_appreciation.html

"An Appreciation of C. West Churchman," revised version, by Werner Ulrich, *Werner Ulrich's home page*, 12 November 2002 (last updated 12 March 2006).

http://wulrich.com/cwc_bibliography.html

"A Bibliography of C.W. Churchman's Writings from 1938 to 2001," expanded version, by Werner Ulrich, *Werner Ulrich's home page*, 29 November 2002 (last updated 10 April 2006).

<http://systems.open.ac.uk/page.cfm?pageid=resource-churchman>

"Reading C. West Churchman (1979), *The Systems Approach and Its Enemies*," Systems Open Study Group Discussion, *Systems Department Website*, Faculty of Technology, The Open University, UK, March 2003 (reformatted in 2005, undated).

<http://www.lionhrtpub.com/orms/orms-6-03/tims.html>

"The Founding Fathers of TIMS," by Melvin E. Salvesson, *OR/MS Today*, June 2003.

<http://www.informatik.umu.se/~kivanov/Chu-SysAppDes.html>

The systems approach to design, and inquiring information systems: Scandinavian experiences and proposed research program, by Kristo Ivanov, Umeå University, Department of Informatics, Sweden, 21 October 2003 (prepublication version of an article published in *Information Systems Frontiers*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2001, p. 7-18).

http://mansci.pubs.informs.org/churchman_tribute.html

"C.W. Churchman – a Management Science legacy," by Wallace Hopp, Editor-in-chief, *Management Science*, 2004.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/03/25/BAGN95QTGO1.DTL>

"C. West Churchman – Groundbreaking Philosopher," San Francisco Chronicle of 25 March 2004.

http://wulrich.com/cwc_obituarynotice.html

"C. West Churchman – Obituary Notice", by Werner Ulrich, 26 March 2004.

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/03/31_chrch.shtml

"C. West Churchman Dies," by Kathleen Mclay, University of California, Berkeley, Media Relations, Press Release of 31 March 2004.

http://www.ptreyelight.com/stories/apr01_04/churchman_obit.html

"C. West Churchman, 90, world-famous philosopher," by Larken Bradley, 1 April 2003.

http://wulrich.com/picture_april2004

"C. West Churchman (1913-2004): Picture of the Month," Werner Ulrich's home page, 2 April 2004 (last updated 10 April 2006) [= *the page you are currently visiting*].

<http://www.lionhrtpub.com/orms/news/informs/inf0404churchman.html>

"In Memoriam: C. West Churchman," *OR/MS Today*, INFORMS News, 21 April 2004.

<http://www.acasa.upenn.edu/churchman.htm>

"C. West Churchman Memorial Service", *Ackoff Center for Advancement of Systems Approaches (ACASA)*, University of Pennsylvania , undated (April 2004).

http://ackoffcenter.blogs.com/ackoff_center_weblog/2004/04/c_west_churchma.html

"C. West Churchman Memorial Service, Wednesday, May 19, 2004," *Ackoff Center Weblog*, Ackoff Center for Advancement of Systems Approaches (ACASA), University of Pennsylvania , 23 April 2004.

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-3995.2004.00478.x>

"C. West Churchman," by Richard O. Mason, IFORS' Operational Research Hall of Fame, *International Transactions in Operational Research*, Vol. 11, No. 5, September 2004, pp. 585-588.

http://home.case.edu/~nxb41/mids527%20papers/iss1_nick.html

"IS Scholar Review: C. West Churchman, Champion of The Systems Approach," by Nick Berente, 15 September 2004.

http://isworld.student.cwru.edu/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=Churchman_Review

"C. West Churchman, Champion of The Systems Approach," by Nick Berente, *IS Scholar Reviews/ Wiki for IS Scholarship*, 21 September 2004.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._West_Churchman , previously

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=C._West_Churchman&oldid=42549239

"C. West Churchman," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 11 October 2004, last modified 6 March 2006. [Note: Many other sites in Wiki format simply reproduce this Wikipedia entry and for this reason are not listed here. Conversely, the photo of West Churchman in the Wiki page is taken from the present "Tribute to C.W. Churchman" site.]

<http://projects.iss.org/Main/CWestChurchman>

"An appreciation of C. West Churchman, With and Extensive Bibliography

from 1938 to 2001," by Werner Ulrich, *ISSS, International Society for the Systems Sciences*, January 2005. (Public Wiki version of an essay first published on 29 August 1999, last updated 5 March 2006).

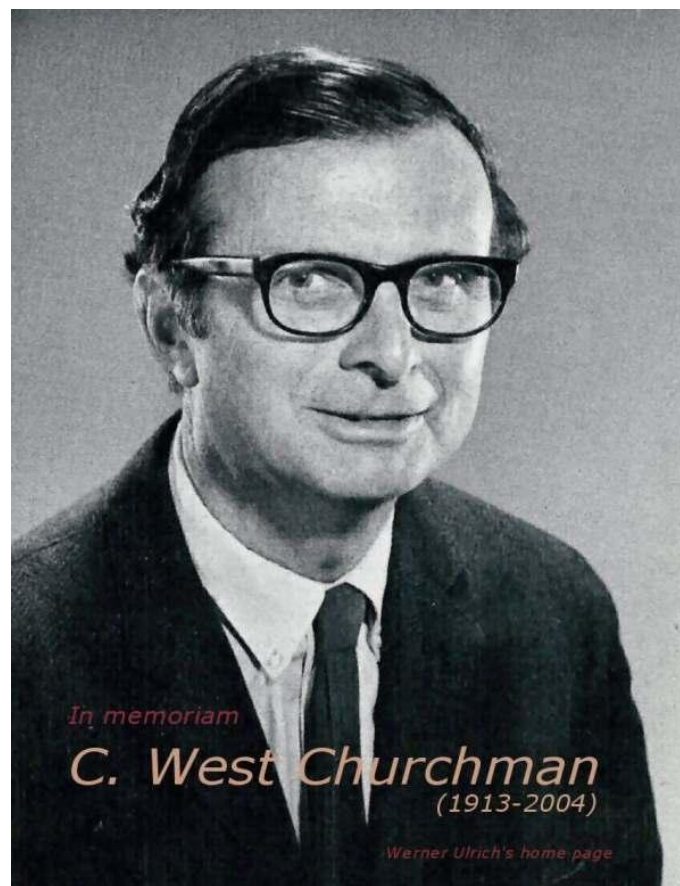
<http://wulrich.com/downloads.html>

"In memory of C. West Churchman (1913-2004): reminiscences, retrospectives, and reflections," by Werner Ulrich (prepublication version of an article published in the *Journal of Organisational Transformation and Social Change*, 1, Nos. 2-3, 2004, pp. 199-219).

[Hyperlinks last check and updated 8 Nov 2009]

Photographic portrait

April, 2004



„Thought likes solutions,
wisdom abhors them.“

C. West Churchman,
Thought and Wisdom, 1982 (p. 20)

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Last updated 12 Dec 2012 (PDF added), 8 Nov 2009 (text; first published 2 April 2004)
http://wulrich.com/picture_april2004.html

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