

REMARKS ON PROFESSOR ROBIN WEST

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Most of you probably know Robin West best through her scholarly contributions: the way she has fundamentally reshaped our collective understanding of the law; of morality; of empathy; of human nature; of feminism; and of women's lived experiences. The wonderful Marc Spindelman is going to focus in a moment on the substance of Robin's scholarship.

But Robin West is so much more than the ideas she's put into writing; her excellence also shines in her contributions to students, fellows, budding scholars, colleagues, and the legal academy as a whole. So I'm going to take the next few minutes to talk about all of that.

Robin gives more generously of her time than anyone I've ever known, or even anyone I've ever heard of. You might think that a person who's written 14 books and more than 150 articles would have little time left to offer to others in the pursuit of their own scholarship. But in Robin's case, you'd be wrong. Robin never—and I mean never—turns down a request, whether it's from someone who's in the early stages of finding her own voice as a legal scholar, or from someone who's at an advanced stage in her scholarly career. And these requests hit Robin's email inbox in a never-ending stream; responding to them alone must be close to a full-time job. But Robin not only responds, she says yes: yes to discuss an initial paper idea, yes to comment on a draft, yes to moot a job talk, yes to give feedback at a workshop presentation.

And of course it's not just that Robin says yes. It's what she does with that yes that's so amazing. It is truly dazzling to watch Robin provide feedback on a paper. Robin has an uncanny ability to locate another person's work—no matter the field, no matter the scholarly approach—in a broader frame, and to demonstrate, quite frequently more effectively than the presenter herself, why the work is important. I've observed this process so often that I now just sit back and wait for the inevitable moment when, as Robin starts to speak, the presenter's jaw visibly drops, her eyes widen, and after a brief moment of near-total disorientation, she whips out a pen and starts scribbling down every pearl of wisdom that is dropping from Robin's lips, often at an incredibly rapid clip.

Those of you who've experienced this (and I know there are many of you in this room) know what I mean: Robin not only fully understands the power of other people's work, she also reliably provides them with a profoundly new perspective on their own ideas. People leave Robin's presence deeply intellectually reinvigorated.

And Robin's approach to this work reflects some of her most deeply abiding personal qualities. Robin combines exceptional analytic ability with a profound concern for the wellbeing of others. Her criticism is uniformly constructive—it's

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designed to make the work stronger. As we all know, far too many academics seek, intentionally or otherwise, to belittle others in an effort to elevate themselves. Robin chooses the opposite path. She bolsters those who most need it, and helps them become their own best, most insightful thinkers and writers. Robin's approach to scholarly engagement is an object lesson in how we all should strive to contribute to the academic communities we inhabit.

Now given that Robin is one of the most admired, original, and influential legal scholars on the planet, you might expect her to have an ego that is just *slightly* inflated. But in fact, the opposite is true. Robin is utterly without pretention. She is not interested in academic pedigree; instead, she is unshakably inclusive, accessible, and even humble. Robin assumes the best in everyone she meets.

In addition to all of this, Robin has an enviable moral clarity, combined with the courage to voice her convictions. At Georgetown, it is often said that Robin serves as our faculty's conscience. When difficult issues arise, Robin cuts to the heart of the matter and articulates what is right and moral, even when, or even *especially* when, there is an easier way forward. Robin is mindful of ethical blind spots, and she refuses to either indulge in them or to let them go unremarked upon. Again, Robin's approach is one to which all of us should aspire.

But though Robin's standards are extremely high, her capacity for forgiveness is commensurately huge. Robin somehow manages to be consistently forgiving when it comes to the foibles of those of us in her wide circle of friends. Robin is finely attuned to the complexities of the human condition and is supremely empathetic.

And, unlike most profoundly influential intellectuals, Robin tends to lead with her heart. She's disarmingly warm, open, and brimming with compassion. She is the first person I think of when I need advice, commiseration, or inspiration, whether personal or professional. And so many others feel the same; Robin is a cherished colleague not only for everyone at Georgetown but throughout the world of legal education. Even those who don't know her well are drawn to her when they need to talk about deeply difficult experiences.

Now, because Robin lives in the world of high theory, you might expect that her abilities would be limited to big-picture, 50,000-foot thinking. But that's not the case. Take virtually any of Georgetown's programs designed to support scholarship and academic careers among students, graduates, fellows, and junior faculty, and you'll find that Robin has been not only the inspiration behind it but also the work horse, taking on all of the nitty-gritty details involved to get things going on the ground. As just one example from what could be so many, during her tenure as Georgetown's Associate Dean for Research and Academic Programs, Robin created a "fellows collaborative," bringing together about 30 graduate fellows who were isolated in pockets all over the law school for a weekly colloquium that familiarizes them with various forms of contemporary legal scholarship, gives them regular opportunities to present their own work, and

prepares them in numerous, practical ways to go on the teaching market. Robin has led that program every year for the past decade.

And she doesn't just find time to engage in this kind of selfless work for Georgetown folks. Again, just one example from many: Robin has written well over 100 tenure evaluations for people at outside institutions.

My own decades-long friendship with Robin has seen us both through extremely challenging and deeply joyful life experiences. There's no one on earth I'd rather have had with me, through the good as well as the bad. And I'm certain that if each of us would push ourselves to be a little more like Robin every day, to let our own inner-Robin come out, to care not only about justice in the abstract but also about the dignity of individual human beings, to give of our own talents as generously as possible to as many as possible, and to rise to Robin's challenge to think more profoundly about connection and human relationships and the law, the world would be a far, far better place.

It's my privilege and a true joy to help to introduce Robin to you all as she accepts the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Lifetime Achievement Award.