

Richard Flathman, professor emeritus, passed away on September 6 | Political Science

Richard Flathman, the George Armstrong Kelly Professor of Political Science Emeritus and chair of the Political Science Department from 1979 to 1985, died on Sept. 6. He was 81.

A letter from Beverly Wendland, James B. Knapp Dean:

Dear Krieger School Faculty and Staff,

It is with sadness that I tell you of the death of Richard Flathman, George Armstrong Kelly Professor of Political Science, emeritus, on September 6. He was 81.

I can say without exaggeration that Dr. Flathman was a giant in his field. An eminent political theorist, he is perhaps best known for having pioneered the application of analytic philosophy to political science. He was a particularly influential scholar of Hobbes, and he articulated a distinct understanding of liberalism and freedom. Next year, Routledge will publish a book about his work: *Richard E. Flathman: Situated Concepts, Virtuosity Liberalism and Opalescent Individuality*, edited by P.E. Digeser.

With his colleague William Connolly, Krieger Eisenhower Professor in the Department of Political Science, Dr. Flathman founded what is sometimes called the “Hopkins School” of political theory, a deeply philosophical approach to understanding the meaning of political concepts such as liberalism or pluralism. Dr. Connolly explains it this way:

“When I arrived at Hopkins in 1985 as a new professor, Richard Flathman was well-known as a theorist who pursued assertive individuality in politics joined to relations of presumptive generosity between individuals of different sorts. I pursued a deepening of public pluralism in which people—in ways that compromise a secular division between public reason and private faith—sometimes carry their faith into the public realm and then recoil back through admission of its contestability to promote public negotiations. Out of these complementary views, people soon started talking about a Hopkins School. Our students were increasingly placed at top schools and they took pride in that name. It persists today: the theory faculty here continue to carve out distinctive space in the American world of theory, though in new ways. And former Hopkins students play a huge role in helping new Hopkins PhD’s to find their way in the profession. Dick was a giant as a theorist, a teacher, a colleague and a person, and we all miss him immensely.”

Dr. Flathman received a bachelor’s degree in history from Macalester College and went on to receive a master’s degree and a doctoral degree—both in political science—from the University of California at Berkeley.

Before coming to Johns Hopkins in 1975 as a professor of political science, Dr. Flathman held teaching positions at Reed College, the University of Chicago, and the University of Washington at Seattle.

He has published numerous books and articles in esteemed journals and was the recipient of several awards and fellowships, including the David and Elaine Spitz Prize and a Guggenheim fellowship. He was known as a serious scholar and an exceptional teacher and adviser.

Dr. Flathman's storied career is a testament to the kind of path-breaking scholarship we have at Johns Hopkins. You can read memorial tributes by some of his former students on this public [Facebook page](#).

He resided in San Rafael, California, and we send condolences to his wife, Nancy, and to their three children, Karen Jamison, Kristen Flathman, and Jennifer Flathman.