

Remembering John Tooby

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I'm going to share a couple of memories from my first knowing of John. For those who don't know, he was largely responsible for me being here today: he led the search committee that hired me 22 years ago. Towards the end of my job interview, while spending time at his house, we talked for hours about my field experiences in South America and the ethnography of hunter-gatherers. Like Galactus devouring planets, John devoured every detail, and in typical fashion, he'd provide new insights on my own experiences fed back to me. Listening to him, I remember feeling like the experiences were now his, no longer just mine – he was that good at assimilating knowledge, like the Borg from Star Trek he would frequently reference.

Later that night, driving me back to my hotel, I remember we were talking about the environmental horrors of oil spills in the Pacific. And as we looked out at the well-lit oil rigs lining the dark horizon, he remarked: "I should feel guilty to say this, but there's a stark, eerie beauty to those lights at night". That stuck with me, his ability to distill good despite the bad, beauty amid the horror, humor instead of pain. I think he also made a reference to Blade Runner, but I can't remember the details.

Many times over the years, I was touched again and again by his remarkable ability to pivot misfortune and doomsday into a light-hearted quip, as if to say "things really suck now, but we're in this together".