Ken Arrow:

NATHAN ROSENBERG 1927-2015

Brought a new and vital perspective to economics. Specialty: Economic history of technology. Combined a deep knowledge of the technology itself with a study of the economic forces leading to its adoption and to its implications for the future of the economy, including subsequent innovations. He showed, for example, how the existence of an innovation in turn produced more knowledge as to its uses and to further needs, a process he called, "learning by using."

He was a pioneer in this field, and his students have continued and enlarged the tradition. Although the bulk of his studies was in the study of particular cases, he co-authored a very influential broad study, "How the West grew rich," which emphasized the role of competition, especially among nations, in giving rise to the current situation of European-derived economic and technological transformation. Among other aspects, this work led to a revaluation of the medieval economy, with much greater emphasis on the agricultural economy and technology. This hypothesis has received strong support from other economic historians, such as Joel Mokyr.

He was further a noted specialist in the history of economic thought. Especially deep were his studies in the economic thinking of Adam Smith.

His work was honored. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, and the Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences. He received the Leonardo da Vinci Medal from the Society for the History of Technology and honorary degrees from the University of Lund and the University of Bologna.

He joined our Economics department in 1974 and served as department chair from 1983 to 1986.

His leadership in the economics of technology attracted support, especially from the much-missed friend and supporter, Ralph Landau. This was one of the leading factors in the development of that very successful institution, the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. Nate not only created a new area of economic research but was instrumental in all these various ways in the institutional development of the strength of the Stanford Economics department.

Nate and I became friends very quickly, and, together with our wives, saw each other frequently. The liveliness of our meetings and Rina's social skills remain memorable events in our lives. Among other aspects we learned, we found Nate's range of reading and citation outstanding. I myself am fond of books; I certainly owned more economics books alone than most of my colleagues. I realized from long acquaintance that Paul David had even more books than I did. But I found, when entering Nate's office, that his collection of economics books considerably exceeded even Paul's.

Nate's passing is a great loss to all of us. But we all recall how much he has given us.