

Remarks for Grisha Mints Memorial

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1. Welcome to the friends, family, and colleagues who have come from near and far to join us in celebrating the life of our colleague, Grigori Mints, known to all of us as Grisha. On behalf of the Philosophy Department at Stanford, where I am chair, I thank you for making the effort to be with us as we remember Grisha.

2. Grisha's life gave us a great deal to celebrate. Grisha was born in St. Petersburg in 1939, trained under Nikolai Shanin at the Leningrad State University, and went on to become one of the most distinguished logicians in the world. He held research positions at the Steklov Mathematics Institute and the Leningrad University, but after his petition to emigrate from the USSR was denied, he relocated to Estonia, where he worked in computer programming while maintaining a remarkable degree of activity in pure logic. He married Marianna Rozenfeld in Tallin, Estonia in 1987, and it was from there that we recruited him to Stanford as Professor of Philosophy in 1991, building on our strengths to make Stanford a leading center for proof theory. Marianna came to California along with Grisha, and ever since, she has been an important contributor to projects coming out of Patrick Suppes' distance education initiatives—first within CSLI, then at EPGY, and now at Redbird Advanced Learning.

3. Mints was a leading advocate of the “epsilon substitution method” for carrying out the theory of proofs, which had been proposed by Hilbert in the 1920s and advanced in the 1960s by our colleague William Tait, who has flown in today to be with us to remember Grisha. Grisha led the way in recent decades to develop that method and expand its range of application, and he was hard at work on exciting new developments right up to the end of his life. Marianna's gift of Grisha's papers to the Stanford Archive will create a lasting legacy of this work at Stanford, where scholars will be able to study his papers and build on the results. Mints' important contributions to this (and many other) areas of logic were recognized through his election to the Estonian Academy of Sciences in 2008, and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2010.

4. Grisha was not only a great logician and a great intellectual presence in the life of our department— he was also a great friend and a welcoming colleague to many of us across the University. Of course, he *never* compromised his standards of intellectual rigor, and in consequence, his welcoming gestures were never mere talk, but always carried real force—one felt that one had been included into a circle of collaborators on a considered and justified basis. In my own case, in fact, it was one such gesture from Grisha that

really began to make me feel I might belong here at Stanford. Grisha and his colleague Solomon Feferman had invited me to give a talk in their workshop—back then just called the Logic Lunch—about some thoughts on Michael Friedman’s views on Kant’s philosophy of geometry. It was very new work for me, and I was very nervous; Pat Suppes came along and gave me a pretty good working over, as I remember it. On the way over to the Faculty Club for lunch, though, Grisha said just one simple thing: “You should come to talk to the Logic Lunch again.” Coming from him, I felt like it was the best thing I had ever heard.

5. Grisha’s technical power and high standards could seem forbidding to some, I suppose. But I do not want to leave the impression that he was out to impress or intimidate. On the contrary, Grisha believed in, and indeed lived out, the scientific sensibility in the best old sense—that “bright, transparent, vigorous, electrified air” in which “the most difficult is asked and the best is done without praise or decorations” (*GS* 293). But he lived his life in the constant effort to bring new people into that rarified atmosphere along with him, be they students, collaborators, colleagues from abroad, or just the other philosophers from his own department who should engage more with logic, he insisted, to our mutual benefit. One last example fits the pattern by hitting all the groups I just mentioned. Late in his life, Grisha discovered an ongoing project in Amsterdam led by Michiel van Lambalgen to give a rigorous modern logical basis to the core structures of Kant’s transcendental logic, and he became quite an enthusiast. He brought the ideas back to Stanford, passed around the key papers, came into the offices of all the Kantians to discuss the idea, presented it in the logic group, and made sure all of us—colleagues and students—were there for the discussion. As always, Grisha brought his tremendous energy to bear to open up an exciting idea from logic to new audiences. Although van Lambalgen could not be here with us today, he wrote me and asked me to convey his regards with these words: “I have known Grisha all too briefly, and I’m left with regretful reflections on what could have been. The work that Dora Achourioti and I had done on extracting logical content from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* had evidently struck a chord in Grisha. So much so, in fact, that he lectured on the topic and wanted to take time off to apply his own profound knowledge to the project, which no doubt would have led to a complete metamorphosis. Since time can be spent only once, this was a great gift, for which I will remain deeply grateful.”

6. All of us here today have been marked by that special Mints energy and enthusiasm—that gift of his time and attention— whether in seminars and discussions, or meetings, or just waiting to use the microwave in the Department Lounge. He was a special man, who lived a deeply committed life in logic. I give this podium now to some of his close

colleagues and friends, who will help us to remember him.