

One evening about four years into my Penn time, Tom and Agatha had me over to dinner. We did that now and then, the beginning of a mentor relationship evolving into a friendship. After dinner Tom sat me down on the sofa and gave me a talking to. He had recognized that my commitments directing The Spiritual Exercises were a compelling love of my life and that I had not chosen whether I would invest myself in the academy at that same level or not. So he talked about my counseling ability -- I worked at that time with about ten regular clients, not as a licensed counselor but as what Catholics often call a spiritual director. Tom began: "When you listen to someone, and it is evident that your listening is helping that person at a deep level, you have an immediately satisfying experience. Scholarship is not like that. You work a long time not knowing whether what you are working on will be any good or very important." Then Tom changed register: "Historians do not ordinarily sin by commission, by using fraudulent evidence or shoddy arguments. Mostly historians sin by omission, by the questions they do not ask and the evidence they do not look for. You came to grad school from Pine Ridge carrying questions about technology that you thought needed to be asked. If you were to decide to attempt an academic life when you finish your degree, you would be in a position to place some of those questions in the shared discourse of the profession. Do you know anyone else who would be in position to raise those particular questions as well as you might be able to do?"¹

I laughed at him, and told him he was talking as if he'd read the Jesuit Constitutions about how to choose one's profession: to look at the works for which you had competence and, from that mix of options, try to choose the greater of the available goods, as I noted earlier. Tom recognized that I had not gotten off the fence, and he was lobbying.

¹ Those questions turn up as "Questions Seldom Asked" in the final chapter of Technology's Storytellers: Reweaving the Human Fabric (Cambridge, MA 1985) pp. 174-181.