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As you can see, my handwriting's no better than it was when I last wrote, so please excuse the fact that this letter's typed.

I gather you've been in the wars again, and right sorry I am to hear it. You were on very good form when we met up in Leeds in April this year; it was a great pleasure to spend time with you. I've not seen enough of you over recent decades, so I don't think I've ever really told you how much I believe I owe you.

It's not just your inspirational talent for music or the mind-expanding discussions about art and culture so often initiated by you that meant so much to me in my adolescent days and later. In some important measure, I believe I owe my Oxford career to you, though I've never really acknowledged it before.

It was surely you who first put me in touch with the philosophy of Lao Tse (or Tzu) - a short verse work called in translation THE WAY. Reading it made a profound impression: there was something so right about it, especially the idea of flexible, yielding water having Empire over obdurate, immobile stone (I can't now remember the exact words, but that was certainly the gist of it). It tied in with notions of Christian quietism and passive resistance, which were very appealing to me at the time, even though I was no longer a religious believer. Without being able to claim that it transformed my life, I can say that it's an outlook I've clung to over the years.

How it affected my going to Oxford is more mundane. In the exams I had to sit to get into St Edmund Hall, apart from papers on French and Latin, I had a three-hour essay to write on the one-word subject RESIGNATION. Well, I simply let rip, giving them Lao Tse, the full monty. My French and Latin, though pretty good, were not really a match for my Public School competitors, and I can only believe that my success in gaining entry was principally due to that essay. So, I owe you one, brother.

Kindest regards to Jenny.

With much love.

Yours ever,