2013 Jack Smart Public Lecture. Jack Smart: Logic and Passion

Thursday 18 July 2013 4 - 6pm

John Bigelow, Emeritus Professor, Philosophy Department, Monash University

Coombs Lecture Theatre, ANU

Jack Smart defended a number of theories with palpable passion, and yet also with candour and clarity and rational argument. Among the most memorable of the theories he championed were: his materialist theory of the mind, his scientific realism, and his utilitarianism. Many have stoutly opposed Smart’s materialism, his scientific realism, and his utilitarianism. Yet even more significant than the theories themselves was the way Smart conducted debates about these issues. He was remarkable for his clarity and candour: he always made it abundantly clear where he stood. And even if you did not accept his conclusions, his argumentation was so clear that your understanding was deepened by identifying where the premises lay, over which you had to agree to differ. And, more than most, he managed to avoid rancour against those who resisted the conclusions he so passionately defended. And even more important than this fostering of clarity of debate was the way he made it apparent to everyone, on both sides of each of the debates into which he entered, why these issues mattered. Philosophy was not just a game for Jack. It really mattered to him. And he helped many of us to see, and to remember, why it really matters to us too.

Emeritus Professor John Bigelow began his philosophical career in 1966 at the University of Canterbury, NZ, where he completed a BA; then he completed an MA at Simon Fraser University in Canada, and a PhD at Cambridge University, UK. He taught philosophy at Victoria University of Wellington, NZ, and La Trobe and Monash Universities in Australia and published academic papers and two books (one joint with Robert Pargetter) primarily in metaphysics, usually defending broadly Platonic theories. In 2010 he retired and became Emeritus Professor at Monash, and is now nearing completion of a second PhD, this time in English, on “Plato’s Music in Shakespeare’s Sonnets”.

Presented by
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