

J. J. C. (Jack) Smart

John Jamieson Carswell (Jack) Smart was born in Cambridge, England, in 1920. His father, William Marshall Smart (1889-1975) was then the John Couch Adams Astronomer at the University of Cambridge. From 1937 until 1959, William Smart was Regius Professor of Astronomy at the University of Glasgow; he was also President of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1950. Jack's mother was born Isabel Carswell; like his father, she was a Scot.

Smart was the oldest of three brothers, all of whom became University professors. Alastair Smart (1922-1992) was Professor of Art History at Nottingham University; and Ninian Smart (1927-2001) was Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham (1961-7), Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster (1967-1992) and Professor in the Comparative Study of Religions at the University of Santa Barbara (1988-1998).

After boarding at the Leys School in Cambridge, Smart commenced undergraduate studies—in mathematics, physics and philosophy—at the University of Glasgow. Smart's undergraduate studies were interrupted by five years of military service during the Second World War; nonetheless, in 1946, he completed his BA, and moved on to the Queen's College in Oxford. After the completion of his B. Phil in 1948, Smart became a Junior Research Fellow at Corpus Christi College. His first published work—'The River of Time'—appeared in *Mind* in 1949. At Glasgow, Smart thought highly of C. A. Campbell, D. R. Cousin, and M. J. Levett; at Oxford, he was much influenced by Gilbert Ryle, G. E. Moore, Friedrich Waismann, George Paul and J. O. Urmson.

In 1950, Smart was appointed Hughes Professor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide. Honours students whom Smart taught while at Adelaide include: Brian Ellis, Graham Nehrlich, Michael Bradley, Brian Medlin, Ian Hinckfuss and Max Deutscher. Staff who had important influences on Smart's philosophical thought included U. T. Place and C. B. Martin. The Gavin David Young lectures also brought a host of significant figures to Adelaide from the mid-1950s, including: Gilbert Ryle, W. V. O. Quine, Anthony Flew, Herbert Feigl, Donald Davidson, David Lewis, Peter Hempel, Daniel Dennett and Hilary Putnam.

In 1972, Smart moved from Adelaide to a Readership at La Trobe University (where his colleagues included Frank Jackson, Peter Singer and John Fox); then, in 1977, Smart moved on again, to a Chair in the Philosophy Program in the Research School for the Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Although he retired from this Chair in 1986, Smart remained an active 'visiting Fellow' in the Philosophy Program until 1999, when he moved to Melbourne, and became—as he presently remains—an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Philosophy and Bioethics at Monash University.

As Philip Pettit noted in his introduction to the Inaugural Jack Smart Lecture—an annual lecture in the Philosophy Program at the Research School for the Social Sciences, first held on October 15, 1999—one can think of Smart's overall philosophical orientation as turning on three fundamental assumptions. *First*, that the theories of natural science, under serious and metaphysically realist interpretation,

offer our best account of the fundamental constitution of reality. *Second*, that our ‘commonsense’ views about the world cannot *all* simply be dismissed as errors or illusions, since they provide the foundations for the successful carrying out of our day-to-day projects. And, *third*, that it is not a straightforward matter to reconcile our ‘commonsense’ views about the world with the theories of natural science. Along with Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Armstrong, and others, Smart was in part responsible for developing a conception of philosophy on which the primary philosophical task is the development of a comprehensive theory that effects the best possible ‘rounding out’ of commonsense and natural science. This conception of philosophy is articulated in Smart’s *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (1963), and updated—as least in some respects—in *Our Place in the Universe* (1989).

In philosophy of mind, Smart is perhaps best known for his paper ‘Sensations and Brain Processes’, in which he argues for a version of the view that mental states are identical to brain states. Under the influence of Ryle, Smart had been a philosophical behaviourist; however, as the result of a three-cornered discussion with Place and Martin, Smart eventually came to adopt a variant of Place’s identity theory. While some critics have disagreed, Smart has always held that his version of the identity theory is compatible with a functionalist account of mental states, and that the identities that hold between mental states and brain states are contingent in nature.

In metaphysics, Smart is widely known as a defender of a constellation of controversial views about the nature of time. On Smart’s account, the best interpretation of physical theories of time—in particular the special and general theories of relativity—should lead us to accept the view that the past and the future exist, that reality is framed by a four-dimensional manifold with three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension, and that the belief that time *really* passes is a mistake that can be explained in terms of facts about human psychology (or—on an earlier view that he subsequently discarded—in terms of facts about the use of human temporal language). These views about time might be thought to comport well with what Smart took to be one of the principle objectives of metaphysics, namely, to try to see the world ‘under the mirror of eternity’.

In metaphysics, Smart is also well known as a defender of a physicalist account of colours. On Smart’s reckoning, colours are *identified* by reference to the properties that explain the discriminatory behaviours of normal human percipients with respect to colour—and, as it turns out, the properties that in fact explain the discriminatory behaviours of normal human percipients with respect to colour are physical properties of the surfaces of objects.

In ethics, Smart is renowned for his role in the resuscitation of utilitarianism. Reworking material from *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics* (1961), Smart co-wrote *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973) with Bernard Williams. In this work, Smart argues for a version of act utilitarianism, and then Williams criticises the account that Smart offers. One of the distinctive features of Smart’s utilitarianism is that it gives primary place to satisfaction of preferences (and not merely to enjoyment of pleasure and avoidance of pain). This adjustment to classical utilitarianism helped to suggest more generic formulations of consequentialism, and to smooth the way for the view—recently defended by, among others, Frank Jackson and Michael Smith—that pretty much any ethical theory can be given a consequentialist formulation.

In philosophy of religion, Smart is perhaps best known for his co-authored ‘debate’ with John Haldane. Their book, *Atheism and Theism*, was first published in 1996, with an up-dated second edition appearing in 2003. In this work, Smart defends atheism, a position that he had accepted—perhaps initially with some feelings of regret—since the late 1950s. In 1955, Smart contributed two papers to the very influential *Essays on Philosophical Theology*, edited by Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre. Subsequently, Smart said that he was ‘ashamed’ of these two papers, and that ‘emotional attachment to my parents ... caused me to hang on to the church long after it was really incompatible with my philosophical and scientific beliefs’.

Under the influence of Quine, Smart had an antipathetic attitude towards ‘extensions’ of classical logic, including modal logic, tense logic, logic for counterfactuals, and so forth. While he had a great admiration for Arthur Prior, and while he learned a lot of logic in the course of extensive correspondence with Prior, he never came to share Prior’s ‘eclectic appreciation’ of systems that ‘extended’ classical logic (never mind appreciation of systems—such as intuitionistic logics, relevant logics, quantum logics, paraconsistent logics, and so forth—that are in conflict with classical logic).

Of course, there are many other areas of philosophy in which Smart also made significant contributions. His other books include: *Between Science and Philosophy: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (1968), *Ethics, Persuasion and Truth* (1984) and *Essays Metaphysical and Moral* (1987). The papers in *Metaphysics and Morality: Essays in Honour of J. J. C. Smart* (1987) give further indication of the range of his influence.

Smart has been a member of the Australian Academy of Humanities for many years. He has been invested in the Order of Australia for his services to Australian philosophy, and has received many other honours the world over. He held numerous appointments as visiting professor at other universities, particularly in the US: e.g., Princeton (1957), Harvard (1963), Yale (1964), and Stanford (1979). He corresponded at length with many of the best philosophers of the age—including Quine, Lewis, and Sellars—and much of this correspondence has been preserved. On top of all this, he provided leadership for Australian philosophy, not only at the institutions at which he happened to have appointments, but right across the country. He is clearly one of the very greatest figures in the history of Australasian philosophy.