

Memorial Minute for Murray Kiteley
Read by John Connolly at the October 25, 2017 Faculty Meeting

Murray James Kiteley, Sophia Smith Professor of Philosophy emeritus, died February 16. He was 88.

Born in Saskatoon, Murray was proud of his Western Canadian heritage. He told the story that as a teenager he was reported to his parents by the local librarian for reading, not *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. The first line of the *Tractatus* ("The world is everything that is the case") apparently bowled him over. If, as Plato claimed, philosophy begins in wonder, then Murray was a philosopher from the start.

He received his college and graduate degrees at the University of Minnesota. After a stint of three years teaching at San Jose State, he came to Smith in 1962. He would thrive here as a leader in department and college for over three decades. Within 6 years he was full professor, which was crucial for the philosophy department, then in the throes of generational change. Murray was already a respected figure in the world of philosophy in the U.S., and that together with his personal skills helped ensure that his department would be a model of productive, collaborative harmony.

This, we all know, does not go without saying for philosophy departments. Murray himself was always good with a quip, and he proposed that, just as we speak of a gaggle of geese or a school of fish, so we should talk of a "quarrel of philosophers." No doubt about that, but at Smith the quarrel was contained within a web of amiability that was the happy product of Murray's skillful weaving.

Murray and his wife Jean were famously gracious hosts, renowned for Friday evening social gatherings in their warm and spacious home. There would be food, drink, music (often provided at the piano by Murray, playing the jazz he so loved), and conversation with colleagues from all over the college and the Valley. Even quarrelsome philosophers became mellow at such events, and the mellowness carried over into our work together.

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In his research Murray's focus was on language—in the 1970s he taught one of the first linguistics courses at Smith, with an enrollment of more than 200. His main philosophical project was to understand substitutivity, or the lack thereof. For example, it may be true that someone believes Denver is in Colorado, but false that the same person believes the Mile-High-City is in Colorado, even though Denver is that city. Truth-preserving substitution of terms with the same referent, commonsensical though it seems, in fact frequently fails. How can that be? For decades Murray plugged away at this question.

He and his friend Herb Heidelberger began discussing this problem in 1955. Their discussions evolved into a weekly meeting that continues to this day under the title, “the Propositional Attitudes Task Force,” Its members, especially Murray and Herb, were dogged. An early crisis concerned whether the Friday group meeting that would have taken place on Christmas Day should be postponed (Christmas won out).

Though Murray did not publish a great deal, he was truly devoted to philosophy. This was evident to generations of grateful students at Smith and in the Five Colleges, and it continued practically to the day he died, in spite of the devastations of Alzheimer's disease. After being unresponsive for some weeks, he surprised his daughter Barbara when he suddenly woke and said, “a couple hundred.” She asked, a couple hundred what? He replied, “Oh, you want specifics?” Then he smiled, “I can only give you generalities.”

That was Murray Kiteley: gentle, fascinated with distinctions, full of wit, and a philosopher of language to the end.