

Statements on John J. McDermott

Wednesday, October 3, 2018

The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) is saddened to learn of the passing of John J. McDermott, one of SOPHIA's founders and a Trustee Emeritus. The messages gathered here speak to his influence and the importance of his work, life, and friendships.

“John McDermott was the embodiment of American philosophy: intelligent, vital, caring. In the years when American philosophy was unappreciated, he was a lone voice crying in the wilderness. He kept James, Dewey and Royce alive and fought to return the profession to its historic mission. He combined a keen aesthetic sense with urban practicality. His colleagues loved him and even his adversaries paid him grudging admiration. He was a teacher and deserves the gratitude of thousands of his students whose lives he touched.”

– John Lachs, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Centennial Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University

“John McDermott embodied the spirit of American Philosophy as he explored the depths (both dark and rich and uplifting) of human experience. He also provided us with rich resources for exploration of American philosophy with his edited volumes on William James and Josiah Royce. He supported younger scholars, mentoring and encouraging them, and was always a gadfly for making all that we do as philosophers deeper and clearly relevant to life and to change for the better.”

– Jacquelyn Kegley, Trustee and Professor of Philosophy at California State University Bakersfield

“Among John McDermott's innumerable contributions to American academic philosophy, within SOPHIA's history he especially added stability and a cosmopolitan spirit just as SOPHIA became less restricted and more open to a broader mandate and membership. John knew how to look forward. Intellectually he was unafraid to push connections between the literary and the philosophical. A favorite example is his textbook, *A Cultural Introduction to Philosophy: From Antiquity to Descartes*, which for me provided a tantalizing example of the fruitfulness of such connectivity. John knew how to link 'story' to American central experiences, ideas, and arguments. He will be missed as a comrade in arms, deeds, and words and as a versatile, pliant, opinionated critic!”

– Jack Loughney, SOPHIA Trustee Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Westfield State University

“I literally do not have the words to say what needs to be said about John. He was simply the most amazing teacher and mentor I have ever known. And together with John Smith, he was the best scholar of American philosophy in the twentieth century. His character and influence will be with the world for a very long time through the work of his many students and those he mentored.”

– Doug Anderson, Emeritus Trustee and Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Texas

“With the passing of John McDermott philosophy in America has suffered an enormous loss, but, even more sadly, many of us have lost an irreplaceable friend and inspiration. At a time when the analytic establishment was making philosophy in America boring and irrelevant, John McDermott led the fight that brought back classical American philosophy and launched the pluralist movement, not merely through his voluminous writings and unique, spirited style of writing but also through his personal example, friendship, and encouragement. I like many of my generation would not have remained in philosophy had I not met John, and philosophy in America would have a very different face today if it had not been for him.”

– Kenneth William Stickers, Trustee and Professor of Philosophy at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

“John was an inspiration to legions of philosophers and resisted some of the worst trends of the philosophical profession. He helped to create a better way forward. He was named one of the 50 most influential living philosophers in 2016, yet had the consideration and kindness to reach out to young scholars with an ear, sympathy, and advice. A towering scholar and force championing American philosophy, John also worked to include philosophers of all levels and positions into dialogue in SOPHIA, rejecting the traditional pretenses of the ivory tower. He will be missed, but his voice and heart continue to inspire.”

– Eric Thomas Weber, Executive Director and Associate Professor of Educational Policy at the University of Kentucky