

2008 Herbert Schneider Award Citation: Angus Kerr-Lawson

It's a pleasure and an honor to be able to play a part in celebrating the career of someone who has contributed so much to the advancement of American philosophy. My part is principally to serve as the representative of two of Angus Kerr-Lawson's friends and fellow travelers, John Lachs and Herman Saatkamp, neither of whom were able to make it to East Lansing for these meetings. In a few moments I'll read the tributes John and Herman have written for this occasion, but first I want to say a few words of my own.

I first heard of Angus in the 70's when I was a student of philosophy at the University of Waterloo and rumor had it that across campus there was a professor of pure math who knew a lot about philosophy of mind, one of my interests. When we started an AI discussion group, Angus was a regular member and it was then, through Angus, that I first heard of George Santayana's early naturalism—we were possibly the only AI group then going where Santayana and Peirce were brought into the mix along with Putnam, Dennett, Stich, Churchland, and that lot. Until then, all I knew about Santayana was that our only hope of avoiding the painful mistakes of past ages is to study history. When I wrote my dissertation on a logical problem from Peirce, I asked Angus to be an examiner for my defence, and he thanked me for forcing him to read my thesis by making me add an addendum on Boolean Rings. Except for that, I have always held Angus in the highest esteem.

I won't pre-empt the praise of John and Herman by duplicating their thoughts but what I read from them are sentiments I share. I'm sure all of us here are aware of the tremendous contribution Angus has made to the understanding and advancement of Santayana's philosophy. Also, I know from my colleagues at the Santayana Edition in Indianapolis how much he has contributed to their work and what an exceptional advisor and friend he has been to the Santayana Edition—and he has helped out the Peirce Edition Project whenever called on. To some extent, Angus has played his part in the advancement of American philosophy quietly and without fanfare, but he has played a significant part and he has played it well and I am very pleased to be able to join with you in honouring him with our most prestigious award for a life of service.

Now I will read the tribute from John Lachs.

Plato demanded that his followers study mathematics. Leibniz, Kant, Peirce, Whitehead and Royce were mathematicians themselves. Hegel despised mathematics, the sad consequences of which are displayed in his system. Arguably, the best philosophers were mathematicians, as well; now imagine what happens when someone who is a mathematician first and foremost becomes a philosopher. That is exactly what happened in the case of the person we honor today. Angus Kerr-Lawson's academic career was spent in a Mathematics Department. In the last thirty years, however, he lived his life in the world of philosophy, pursuing study of the thought of George Santayana.

One great strength of Santayana's philosophy is that it attracts people from beyond our narrow profession. Doctors and lawyers, librarians and retirees searching for

an understanding of this baffling world discover him and find their lives enriched. The wisdom of his judgments, his keen sense for the beautiful in the everyday and his supple ontology capture inquiring minds and never let them think in their accustomed ways again. This is what happened to Angus, and it changed his life.

What Santayana did for Angus, however, was more than reciprocated by what Angus did for the cause of revitalizing Santayana by promoting a deeper understanding of his work. On Angus's reading, Santayana is a materialist of a sophisticated sort, someone whose view of the world is far more defensible than the half-baked naturalisms in vogue today. This hard-headed and cold-eyed approach to human existence suggests that, as Santayana says, no one is "too good for extinction," and prevents philosophy from serving as a cheap consolation for the ravages of time.

Angus Kerr-Lawson's contributions to philosophy do not end, however, with his vigorous defence of contested ideas. He has encouraged a generation of young philosophers to inquire boldly and think deeply about urgent and important issues. He has, moreover, taken responsibility almost single-handedly for editing *Overheard in Seville*, the publication of the Santayana Society. Without his conscientious labours, the society devoted to promoting the study of Santayana's thought would not have had the excellent programs it has presented at the annual Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

As President of the Santayana Society, Angus has brought study of Santayana and, more broadly, of American philosophy closer to the mainstream of the life of our profession. By example and quiet persuasion, he has turned our attention to the power of philosophy, to the special promise of American philosophy and to the best of Santayana's thought. He is richly deserving of the Herbert W. Schneider Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Philosophy.

And now I'll read the tribute from Herman Saatkamp.

Angus Kerr-Lawson's scholarship is based in theoretical mathematics and his intellectual achievements carry the elegance, clarity, and rigor of that foundation. His philosophical research and publications spring logically from his discovery of Santayana's essences, but it is Angus's detailed grasp of Santayana's naturalism that informs his work and extends his explication of Santayana's philosophy beyond conceptual possibility to careful analysis and application. On his website, Angus notes that his publications "develop the theme that [Santayana's] work sheds considerable light on issues in dispute today, and that [Santayana's] version of naturalism, were it more widely known, would commend itself to a large following." And Angus has focused much of his energy and resources in making Santayana's work better known. In particular, his leadership of the Santayana Society and his editing *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* have brought Santayana's philosophy, poetry, and literature to the doorstep of many within and beyond the usual philosophical circles.

Like Santayana, Angus has great respect for other cultures and their contributions to human life and humane living. His home and his life share the grace and order that carry the influence of his experiences in Japan. His dedication to family, parents, and his unyielding dedication to Santayana scholarship have the bearing of a previous generation, yet his acumen always points to future generations with a straight forward approach to the human predicament and prospect. It is Santayana's frank naturalism coupled with his lyrical account of the human spirit that is echoed in Angus's own account of human civilization.

I am very sorry not to be able to be present when Angus receives the Schneider Award, one that he so richly deserves. But I am in Spain and will shortly be in Avila, Santayana's boyhood home. There I will toast Angus Kerr-Lawson, remembering dearly his friendship, scholarship, and his dedication to Santayana and American thought. And while in Madrid conferring about the next international Santayana conference in 2009, I will remember that so much of modern Santayana scholarship lies in the fine work of Angus Kerr-Lawson.

Angus, will you please come forward to receive the Herbert W. Schneider award.

(Citation by Nathan Houser, John Lachs and Herman Saatkamp)
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 15 March 2008

Previous Herbert Schneider Award Recipients and Award Citations

1987—**Joseph Blau**

Justus Buchler (Buchler's citation, by George Kline, appears with his memorial tribute see *SAAP NEWSLETTER* No. 60 (1991): 3-6

1988—**Max W. Fish**

1989—**Sydney Ratner** (by Ralph Sleeper)

H. S. Thayer

1990—**John E. Smith** (by Andrew Reck): *SAAP NEWSLETTER* No. 56 (June 1990): 7

Gerard Deladalle (by Christian Kloesel): No. 56 (June 1990): 7-8

1991—**Edward H. Madden** (by George Garrison): No. 59 (June 1991): 10-11

1992—**Murray Murphy** (by Bruce Kuklick): No. 62 (June 1992): 10

1993—**John J. McDermott** (by Herman Saatkamp): No. 65 (June 1993): 10-11

1994—**Beth J. Singer** (by George Kline and Marjorie Miller): No. 68 (June 1994): 10-11

1995—**Abraham Edel** (by Beth Singer): No. 71 (June 1995): 9