



David Stove

**David Charles Stove**  
**1927–1994\***

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**N**OTHING EXTENUATE, NOR SET DOWN AUGHT IN MALICE. I think that is too God-like, too much a counsel of perfection, for us today. Let us rather say with the sensible Romans, 'De mortuis, nil nisi bonum'. About the dead, nothing unless it be good. Let us remind ourselves of some of the good things, truly good things, in David's life.

I cannot speak of him with any knowledge before late 1947, when I was all of twenty-one and a first-year undergraduate at Sydney University. Born at Moree on 15 September 1927, he was a year or so younger than me, but I think in his second year, and deeper than me into the mysteries of philosophy. He came to provincial Sydney from the still more provincial Newcastle. Already he was directed towards scholarship, towards literature, to books and music. These things he passed on to his children, Rob's music and writing, Judy's classical scholarship. He must have given genes for music to his son, who surpassed him in this. But he laboured long with a number of us when we were young to bring us to an appreciation of Mozart, Handel, Haydn and Purcell, warning us meanwhile utterly to abhor Beethoven.

He brought some other things with him to Sydney. One was a passionate interest in Rugby League football, which remained with him all his life. Cricket, I have heard him say, came later, but when it came it stuck. He played grade-cricket, low grade, but grade-cricket nonetheless, for many years. He enjoyed the companionship as well as the games. Many of us remember the cricket days at Mulgoa. He always came on to bowl when I batted, and took peculiar pleasure in getting me out for a duck.

Something that went very deep very early was his feeling for the bush, and for certain stretches of shore—the Myall lakes, and Seal Rocks in particular, later for Treachery Headland. He told me once that when he first came to read Wordsworth he understood at once the poet's sense of wholeness and mystical union with Nature, experienced particularly in youth. Characteristically, he thought that the experience had no importance for metaphysics.

From nature untouched to nature transformed by art, is no great step. David thought and read about landscaping and gardening and starting with a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, on his ten acres at Mulgoa, and not forgetting even a cricket pitch, planted trees of many sorts and lawns and even a certain amount of statuary. It made a sort of park that expressed his own simple, but classical, tastes. There, in a house that they had not omitted to design themselves, he and Jess, at first with Rob and Judy, lived from 1962 onwards

on their own pleasant terms. Jess was anchor for his life, there were good neighbours. Philosophers, ex-students and others from all round the world came to visit them.

He was always a man of books, primarily of old books, and a haunter of second-hand bookshops. Indeed, he had a recurrent and delightful dream that, wandering around Sydney, he had come upon, in some obscure alley, an old bookshop that he had never realised was there.

But above all he was a writer, writer of lectures, of letters and notes, of articles—some philosophical, some polemical or cultural (or all of these things at once)—and of four books. Everything was written by pen, of course, in a clear and attractive hand with its steady forward slope. His English, much influenced by 18th-century models, was a great pleasure.

I think it was the books by which he set greatest store. Two of these: *Probability and Hume's Inductive Scepticism* and *The Rationality of Induction* are works devoted to the important, but technical, philosophical problem of induction. They take a worthy place in that large and growing literature. But two others, *Popper and After: Four Modern Irrationalists* and his last book *The Plato Cult and Other Philosophical Follies* are pure Stove. They are utterly original, serious philosophical attacks on philosophical folly, but written in a bitter, witty and humorous style that makes him, let us say, the Jonathan Swift of contemporary philosophy. (I get a flick or two of the tail, which makes me a little ambivalent about some of it.)

To my mind the most hilarious thing in these two books is his Appendix to Chapter 1 of the Popper book, a book which also scarifies Imre Lakatos, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. There, as a 'Help to Young Authors' he rewrites the sentence 'Cook discovered Cook Strait' in the style of these four philosophers. (Three of them he has going on at some length. Their object in each case is to eliminate the unfortunate implication of *success* in the word 'discovered'.) But others will have their favorite passages. I suspect, anyway, that he would like to be remembered for these books above all.

*David Armstrong.*

\* David Stove died on 2 June 1994. This eulogy (with minor alterations) was delivered at his funeral on 8 June.