

## Stephen Wallace Gaukroger FRSN FRHistS FRSA FAHA 9 July 1950–3 September 2023

Conal Condren, Emeritus Scientia Professor, UNSW

conalcondren@icloud.com



Stephen Gaukroger was born in Oldham, Lancashire, on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1950. He died in Sydney on 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2023, having been diagnosed with a brain tumour while in London earlier in the year. He was educated at Cardinal Langley Grammar School, Manchester, before going up to London University (Birkbeck College), where he took a First in philosophy. He studied for his PhD at Cambridge (Darwin College), before being elected to a Junior Research Fellowship at Clare Hall, Cambridge. In 1978 he was awarded a research fellowship at Melbourne University and in 1981 came to Sydney University as a lecturer in philosophy. Despite a good deal of travelling, there he stayed, becoming a Professor of

Philosophy and finally Emeritus Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science.

He published extensively in the history of early modern science and philosophy, with books on explanation in physics (1978), Cartesian conceptions of inference (1989) and on the conceptions of truth advanced by the philosopher Antoine Arnauld (1612–94) (1990). These prepared the ground for his much-acclaimed intellectual biography of Descartes (1995). Together these works, plus several edited volumes and papers, gained him an exceptional international reputation. Much of his attention remained centred on Cartesian mathematics and physics — including, with John Sutton and John Schuster, the world’s largest collection of essays on Descartes’ *œuvre* (2000). Yet in the following year he also produced a short but seminal study, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy*. In this he explored Bacon’s distinctive understanding of what being a philosopher entailed, in order to cast fresh light on early modern philosophy as a whole. It is a book important to a wider shift of perspective in the study of the history of philosophy.

His last years were taken up with an ambitious exploration of this whole field, a multi-volume and magisterial account of early modern science and its centrality to what we recognise as modernity, published by Oxford University Press, (2006, 2010, 2016, 2020). His last sole-authored book was a more general essay reflecting on the

whole history of western philosophy by exploring the importance and sometimes beneficial consequences of philosophical failure (2020), but collaboration continued with a co-edited anthology of essays on the problem of knowledge in post-Renaissance philosophy, and a complete English translation, with full editorial apparatus (2022), of Charles Bonnet's curious psychological excursus *Essai Analytique Sur Les Facultés De L'âme* (1760).

He has been a book series editor, sat on the boards of *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* and *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, was an editor of *Intellectual History Review* and President of the International Society for Intellectual History.

Stephen's work was not only marked by an extraordinary depth and range of knowledge of philosophy — especially epistemology, science and mathematics — but also by a capacity to see further implications from the linkages he established between them. His written style was pellucid and uncluttered, and his treatment of the materials and the views of other scholars was fastidiously balanced.

The honours he received give some idea of his achievements as an historian of science and philosophy from the post-Renaissance world, and the respect which his work deserved: Fellowship of the Academy of the Humanities (1992); of this Society (2016); recipient of the Australian Centenary Medal (2003). He was a corresponding member of the *Académie Internationale d'Histoire des Sciences* (2007). He was awarded The Royal Society of New South Wales Medal in the History and Philosophy of Science in 2022. His works have been translated into in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian.

But those who worked with him have a much fuller appreciation of his professional and personal qualities. Convivial, generous, efficient and kind, he was a man of much good humour who enjoyed company, fine food and who occasionally played the viola — not at the same time. Despite his intellectual energy, he wore his abilities lightly and turned fruitful collaboration into lasting friendship: working with him was a joy and an education. He will be sorely missed. He leaves his wife, Professor Helen Irving, also a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales, a daughter, a son, and a truly remarkable legacy.

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