

Letter from J.J.C. Smart to A.N. Prior, September 26, 1951¹

The University
Adelaide
S. Australia
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Dear Arthur

I have noticed yet another material error in the paper I read at Sydney. On p. 11 the sentence “Then S would tell us that if the m th number is m then the m th number is $m+1$ (or 0 if the m th number is 9)” should read “Then S would tell us that if the m th decimal of the m th number is n then the m th decimal of the m th number is $n + 1$ (or = if $n = 9$).

I am having an interesting correspondence with John Mackie arising out of his article on Ryle in the journal. It began by trying to find out just what he meant by the words “fact”, “quality” and “relation”. I suggested that he was so using these words that “every fact consists of a thing having a quality or of two or more things having a relation between them” becomes analytic. We have written several longish letters to one another and I think we are getting nearer and nearer to agreement.

I thought the Sydney conference was most enjoyable. I’m sorry that you are not planning to come to Canberra. I hope you change your mind! Also I hope to see George Hughes there! I gave Passmore’s article in Mind “The Dreariness of Aesthetics” to some of the English people here to read. His illustrations seem badly chosen, and calculated to annoy library folk, and so I’ve not been able to get them to agree unreservedly to the logic of his contentions. However it is good fun – no doubt it has sowed doubt in their minds. Anyway they think aesthetics is dreary, too! But they still hanker after “common characteristics”. As for me, of course, I know nothing whatever about aesthetics or literature!

I’m hoping to get some dovetailing with the English dept. next year. As a sort of advertising stunt I thought putting on a few lecturers for first year English students on “Can you think without words?” And Gunner would like to do some philosophical aesthetics with the Honours people. The new Prof. of English is quite interested, and may do something in the nature of “The influence of Cartesianism on literature” for my (Cartesian) 1st year philosophy people. I hope it comes off. I think infiltration between departments is a good thing!

Best Wishes to Mary

Yours Jack Smart

¹ Editor’s note: The letter is in the Prior archive box 3 at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and has been transcribed and commented on by David Jakobsen, with much help from Martin Prior.