

In Memoriam

Rob Grootendorst

1944 - 2000

Rob Grootendorst, co-founder of the pragma-dialectical school of argumentation, died in Amsterdam this year just after his fifty-sixth birthday. He was born in Schiedam, The Netherlands in 1944. At the time of his death Rob Grootendorst was Professor of Dutch Speech Communication and Director of the Instituut voor Neerlandistiek (Institute for Dutch Studies) in the University of Amsterdam.

Rob Grootendorst's career began as an elementary school teacher in the 1960s. He entered the University of Amsterdam in 1970 to pursue the M.A. degree in Dutch Studies, and with Frans van Eemeren received his Ph.D. in Speech Communication in 1982. The dissertation, which later appeared in English as *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions* (Foris, 1984), is itself a testament to the value of dialectical discussions when undertaken by participants who are willing to learn from each other, and change their opinions in light of good arguments: it was jointly written with van Eemeren and represents the culmination of over ten years of their collaboration on both theoretical and practical problems. Together with van Eemeren, Grootendorst compiled an outstanding publication record over twenty-five years. It includes not only many articles, monographs, and text books in Dutch, but an almost equal output in English. Best known to English readers are *Argumentation, Communication and Fallacies* (1992) and *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse* (1993), co-written with Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's last joint book, *Kritische Discussie*, was published in Amsterdam this June, three months after Professor Grootendorst's passing.

With Frans van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst started the International Society for the Study of Argumentation (ISSA). Its first conference was held at the University of Amsterdam in 1986, and ISSA continues to meet in Amsterdam every four years. It is now a large international conference, drawing scholars from not only Europe and North America, but also South America, India, China, Australia and Africa. Grootendorst was also a co-founder of the journal, *Argumentation*, which began in 1987 and is published by Kluwer. It is now in its fourteenth year of publication. Professor Grootendorst was also an active and valuable member of the Editorial Board of *Informal Logic*.

The students of Rob Grootendorst remember him as a stimulating and inspiring teacher, who was always fair and helpful, and not shy to use humour in the cause of learning. That Grootendorst was as much a friend as a mentor to many of his students is shown by the keen interest he continued to have in their lives and careers after they left the university. What made Rob Grootendorst such an effective teacher was his overriding commitment to sound pedagogy, and his insistence on the practical value of education in general and argumentation theory in particular. He was influenced by, and had an abiding interest in Theo Thijsen, the Dutch pedagogue and novelist (1879-1943), and was co-editor of the collected works of Thijsen, and co-founder of the Theo Thijsen museum in Eerste Leliedwarsstraat in Amsterdam. The museum, in its memorial to Rob, described him as an “inspiring leader”.

Those of us who knew Rob Grootendorst less intimately than his Dutch colleagues and students were impressed not only by his vast knowledge of argumentation literature and Dutch culture, but also by his very genuine friendliness and interest in what we were doing. He was extraordinarily supportive and encouraging to younger scholars, and he was an agile and constructive critic of other people’s work. We North Americans will miss Rob Grootendorst not only for his own very important original and continuing contributions to pragma-dialectics, but also for his ambassadorship which helped to bridge the gulfs between disparate communities of argumentation scholars.

A scholarship in Grootendorst’s name has been set up by Wake Forest University to assist talented young argumentation scholars who wish to attend the Wake Forest Argumentation Conference which is held every four years in Venice. More information on this scholarship will be available in the near future.

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