O. K. Bouwsma, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, died in Austin on March 1, 1978, at the age of 79. He was one of the most distinguished and distinctive practitioners of "ordinary language" philosophy.

Bouwsma came to the University of Texas from the University of Nebraska, where he taught from 1928 to 1966. At various times he held visiting professorships at Alberta, Columbia, Cornell, San Jose State, Smith College, California at Santa Barbara, University of Pacific and the University of Washington. He was Honorary Fulbright Professor at Magdalene College, Oxford (1950-51); John Locke Lecturer, Oxford (1951); Woods Fellow, London (1955-56) and President of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association (1956-57). In 1973, Bouwsma was named Distinguished Alumnus of Calvin College. In 1975, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in humanities from the University of Nebraska.

In addition to the organized courses he taught from 1966-1974, Bouwsma conducted weekly seminars which continued until the illness that caused his death. These seminars were perhaps his most important contribution to the life of the philosophy department. Promising students from his courses were invited to attend along with interested faculty members, some from other departments. The topics of discussion and the time devoted to them varied. A day or a month of talk might revolve around a single remark, often by Wittgenstein but sometimes by Kierkegaard or Nietzsche or even Heidegger. Bouwsma's participation varied. Sometimes he would say little, sometimes he would merely ask a question or two; but whatever his participation, his practice was to write out his thoughts on each discussion. He would usually read what he had written at a subsequent meeting. These writings, virtually
all unpublished, are currently deposited at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. Jack Murphy, a Bouwsma student and a professor at Trinity University, is presently indexing these writings.

Bouwsma was well-known and respected for the wit and grace of his style. An example is the last paragraph of the "Preface" to his Philosophical Essays: "I have long hesitated to assume the risk of the incalculable harm these essays might do but now in view of the likewise incalculable good they might do, I have tossed a coin and it came down just as I thought it would. It stood on its edge. And I knocked it down."

Bouwsma wrote much but published relatively little. He did so deliberately, believing that philosophy is an activity, not a body of doctrine. What he said of Wittgenstein's Blue Book applies as well to his own work: "And now I want to try to help myself to keep a certain perspective of what the author is doing. It may not be the only one nor the most profitable one but it suits me. I say what the author is doing rather than what the author is saying in order to prevent the misunderstanding that one could be told what he says and if one then remembered that, that would be what the author aimed at. . . . What, then, is he doing? Remember to begin with that these are dictations. They are dictated to a few students. . . . I want to say that these dictations are designed in connection with other oral discussions to help in teaching these students an art. . . . Let us call it intellectual therapy of a certain sort. It is the art of finding one's way when lost. . . . It is the art of removal, of riddance. . . . It is the art of discussion. . . . It is the art of exposure. . . . It is the art of helpful reminders.
The art of reminding, exposing and curing, requires a detailed examination of numerous uses of ordinary words in ordinary contexts. (The art aims, first, at drawing the limits of the uses and, second, at showing that and how traditional philosophers unwittingly exceed the limits.) Persons familiar with Bouwsma's art often found it disconcerting. On one occasion, when the group was discussing thinking, a newcomer grew more and more impatient with the seeming lack of progress caused by the elaborate discussion of various uses of the word think. Unable any longer to endure the details, the newcomer shouted, "I don't care about all these uses of 'think'. What I want to know is what are the necessary and sufficient conditions of thinking." Never at a loss, Bouwsma turned to the person and softly said, "For me, the necessary and sufficient conditions of thinking are a pencil, a tablet and a lapboard."

Throughout his lifetime, Bouwsma made fine use of those simple tools. His having done so allows him to continue to make a difference to those who seek wisdom.

Lorene Rogers, President of The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Edmund L. Pincoffs (chairman), Edwin B. Allaire and Aloysius Martinich.
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