

## **Professor E.J. Lowe (1950-2014)**

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Professor E. J. Lowe was born in Dover, England, on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1950. His educational journey began at Bushey Grammar School, Hertfordshire (1961-67). After Grammar School, Jonathan joined Cambridge University to read Natural Sciences in 1968. However, after one year, he shifted to History and was awarded a BA (first class) in 1971. During his time at Cambridge, Jonathan was also a Senior Scholar from 1971 to 1972. In 1972, Jonathan moved to Oxford University where he was awarded his BPhil in 1975 for a thesis entitled – ‘Induction and Non-Demonstrative Inference’ (supervised by Rom Harré) and his DPhil in 1975 for a thesis entitled – ‘Induction and Causal Inference’ (supervised by Simon Blackburn, examined by J. L. Mackie and Richard Swinburne). Jonathan began his professional career at the University of Reading, where he taught from 1978-1979. He joined Durham University in 1980, where he stayed for the rest of his career. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1990, Reader in 1992 and Professor in 1995.

Jonathan established himself as one of the world’s leading metaphysicians. He also made significant contributions to philosophy of mind, philosophical logic, philosophy of language, history of philosophy (particularly, John Locke) and philosophy of religion. Jonathan was the author of eleven books: *Kinds of Being* (Blackwell, 1989), *Locke on Human Understanding* (Routledge, 1995), *Subjects of Experience* (CUP, 1996), *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (OUP, 1998), *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (CUP, 2000), *A Survey of Metaphysics* (OUP, 2002), *Locke* (Routledge, 2005), *The Four-Category Ontology* (OUP, 2006), *Personal Agency: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action* (OUP, 2008), *More Kinds of Being* (2009) and *Forms of Thought* (CUP, 2013). He also published more than 220 articles in highly acclaimed academic journals and edited volumes. He co-edited four volumes: *Analytic Philosophy Without Naturalism* (Routledge, 2006), *Psycho-Physical Dualism Today: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), *Truth and Truth-Making* (Acumen, 2009) and *Mental Causation and Ontology* (OUP, 2013). Jonathan also published a hundred book reviews. Throughout his philosophical career, Jonathan was an extremely sought after

speaker. He gave over two hundred invited talks, lectures, special lectures and conference presentations at numerous leading universities in the UK, Europe and the US.

Jonathan adopted a realist approach to metaphysics rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, motivated by a sense that we can, with sufficient intellectual discipline and effort, grasp the nature of mind independent reality. This conviction led Jonathan to publish his highly influential book, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (1998). In this book, Jonathan set out to restore metaphysics to a central position in philosophy as the most fundamental form of rational inquiry that has its own unique methods and criteria of validation. On Jonathan's view, all other forms of inquiry depend, in one way or another, on metaphysical presuppositions; no form of inquiry can avoid metaphysics. So Jonathan argued that we should attempt to do metaphysics with our eyes open, as opposed to allowing it to exercise its influence upon us at the level of uncritical assumption. He also pointed out that the importance of this point, is increasingly recognized by those who pursue various research programs in areas such as philosophy of mind and the philosophy of quantum physics, where an explicit and adequate metaphysical underpinning is needed. In his highly acclaimed book *The Four-Category Ontology* (2006), Jonathan later laid out an extremely sophisticated metaphysical system demonstrating, among other things, how and why metaphysics conceived of in its traditional Aristotelian sense provides a foundation for natural science. Jonathan was a naturally gifted systematic thinker, who always felt at home with metaphysics. He loved thinking about metaphysical puzzles and the ways they can be solved. For Jonathan, philosophy was a lifetime pursuit of truth. That was why he repeatedly reminded himself and others of the painstaking process that making progress in metaphysics requires. For Jonathan, the solution is not to reduce metaphysical inquiry to that of the scientific inquiry. Rather, for him, the solution can only lie in bringing the two domains together in such a way that each can inform the other for a healthy and adequate understanding of the nature of reality. For anything less than this, Jonathan refused to settle. This was the kind of conviction that represents Jonathan's entire philosophical career.

Jonathan's writings have influenced and inspired so many philosophers around the world, from first year undergraduate students to leading metaphysicians. Many philosophy students have written dissertations, PhD theses, and journal papers on Jonathan's writings. Symposia have also been conducted on his work. In 2006, the Department of Philosophy and National Center for Ontological Research (State University of New York at Buffalo) dedicated a three day conference to *The Metaphysics of E.J. Lowe*, — honouring him as one of the most distinguished contemporary metaphysicians. In 2010, another symposium was conducted on *E. J. Lowe's Metaphysics* at the University of

Turku, Finland, where Jonathan was also instrumental in establishing *Dynamis* – The Finnish Network for Metaphysics. Jonathan also had close connections with the Theology and Philosophy Center at the University of Nottingham. Dr. Conor Cunningham describes him as follows:

We here, at Nottingham, had a very fruitful relationship with his unbelievable analytical skills; indeed his generosity and patience, especially with our ignorance, was nearly unsurpassed. Speaking personally, for me (Conor Cunningham) he changed my intellectual life. Jonathan's brilliance was only matched by his grace. Sometimes we fear to cross disciplinary boundaries, but not E. J. Lowe, as his love of the mind, his love of metaphysics, and his love of truth trumped any ego, and any departmental, ideological, or political axe that may well grind. His mind was a soul that pursued, fearlessly, wherever the skirts of the truth led him, to which he clung with the faith of the true intellectual – he was, in short, in the world of analytical philosophy, incomparable. We here will forever miss his brilliance, as will the world of learning, but more, his bravery. But I do have to say one negative: he was supposed to write a book for me on dualism, and he has gone and left us too early, and for that, well, I'm annoyed beyond belief, as are so many, and so many to come yet, who will read, study and expound his work.<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan was utterly dedicated to his PhD students. Some five years ago, I contacted him to express my interest in studying with him. He immediately responded and talked me through every step that I needed to take to be able to come to England to study with him. Had it not been for Jonathan's help, I would not have been able to pursue my PhD in England. As my supervisor, he was always available for me. We met on a weekly basis for over two years. Given how busy he was, I used to feel guilty, at times, thinking that I might have been too demanding of Jonathan's time. But he never told me that it was too much of a commitment for him and he was so kind to me, and to all his students. His recent PhD students have offered remarks such as the following: James Miller, "E.J. Lowe was a constant source of inspiration and support for myself, for all that knew him, and many that had never even met him, nurturing and shaping the philosophical interests of countless students over a brilliant career."; Henry Taylor, "Jonathan Lowe was sharp, driven, kind, generous and, despite the truly Herculean amounts of knowledge and talent that he had, his main essential property for me was his incredible modesty."; and Alexander Carruth, "as a person, what always struck me most about Jonathan was his generosity and integrity". Jonathan had a huge respect for his students as well as his colleagues and was a model of collegiality, as well as intellectual brilliance. In departmental seminars and symposia, Jonathan's presence made such a big difference. His questions were clear and insightful, his criticisms firm but gentle, and the breadth and depth of his thinking an inspiration and guide for helping people think better. His choice of words when he communicated with people was in itself a source of encouragement. Jonathan

had a mission to help people and see them become better philosophers. Moreover, he tirelessly served the global philosophical community: he was the General Editor (with Walter Sinnott-Armstrong) of the Cambridge Studies in Philosophy monograph series, a member of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Peer Review College, President of the Mind Association, the author of countless references and letters of support, and an external examiner for undergraduate programmes, postgraduate taught programmes and postgraduate research theses in numerous universities in Europe and beyond.

Jonathan will be remembered as one of the world's most distinguished metaphysicians. As well as being an accomplished philosopher, he was a family man and a true friend to many. He was a lovely, kind, gracious and honest person. Once when my family and I had spent time with Jonathan in his office, my five year old boy drew Jonathan's picture on a piece of paper and gave it to him. The next time I went to his office for supervision, I saw inside a brand new photo frame, the picture of Jonathan that my son had drawn. I was so touched and moved by his respect not only for grown-ups but also for the very young as well. My son Pete used to tell me that one day he would like to be Jonathan's student.

Jonathan had been working on two books: one on dualism and the other on essence. Though the world of philosophy has missed both of them, the pursuit of truth is in a better shape, thanks to his contribution to the discipline and the profession of philosophy.

Jonathan died on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, aged 63. He is survived by his wife Susan, and their two adult children, Rebecca and Tim.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/2014/01/08/announcing-the-death-of-a-great-philosopher-friend-of-the-centre-and-friend-to-many-e-j-lowel/>. Accessed February 10, 2014.