Mr J. L. Mackie

Distinguished empirical philosopher

Mr J. L. Mackie, FBA, who died on December 12 at the age of 64, held chairs of philosophy at the universities of Otago, Sydney and York before going to Oxford as Fellow and Praelector in Philosophy at University College, Oxford. In 1978 the university appointed him to a personal Readership.

John Leslie Mackie was born in Sydney on August 24, 1917. His father, Alexander Mackie, was professor of Education at the University of Sydney, besides being head of a Teachers Training College, and exercised a considerable influence on the educational system of New South Wales.

After attending a local grammar school, John Mackie entered the University of Sydney in 1935, and obtained first class honours in Latin and Greek. The powerful influence of John Anderson, who held the Chair of Philosophy in Sydney for thirty-one years, aroused Mackie’s interest in the subject and having been awarded a traveling scholarship he came to Oriel College, Oxford, in 1938, to read for Literae Humaniores, obtaining a first in 1940. He then joined the R.A.O.C. and served in the Middle East and Italy, attaining the rank of Captain and being mentioned in despatches.

In 1946, Mackie was appointed Lecturer In Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Sydney, becoming a Senior lecturer in 1951. After holding a chair at the University of Otago in New Zealand from 1955 to 1959, he had the distinction of being chosen to succeed Anderson as Challis Professor of Philosophy in the University of Sydney. He held this position for only four years before returning to England in 1963 to become the first holder of the Chair of Philosophy at the University of York. In 1967, after completing his third four-year spell as a Professor, he was appointed Fellow and Praelector in philosophy at University College, Oxford. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974. In 1978 Oxford University recognized his distinction by appointing him to a personal Readership.

Though he wrote a good many articles on a wide range of philosophical topics, it was not until 1973 that Mackie published his first book, entitled *Truth, Probability and Paradox*. Of its three sections the one on the logical and semantic paradoxes is perhaps the most interesting and original. This was followed in 1974 by *The Cement of the Universe*, in which Mackie made a noteworthy attempt to analyse the concept of causation, and in 1976 by *Problems from Locke*, and acute and sympathetic study of a philosopher with whom Mackie had many points of agreement.

As befitted a pupil of John Anderson, Mackie was a thoroughgoing empiricist. He too found this easy to combine with realism, but he did not share Anderson’s Marxist leanings, and he had a considerably better grasp of the intricacies of modern logic.

The unusual breadth of Mackie’s philosophical interests helped to make him a very successor tutor. His lectures, like his books, were lucid and scholarly. His quiet manner tended to belie both the sharpness of his thought and his tenacity in argument. He took his full share in the administration as well as the academic work of the University and his personal no less than his professional qualities will cause him to be greatly missed.

He married Joan Meredith in 1947, and leaves two sons and three daughters.