



MICHAEL INWOOD

*by Professor Adrian W.
Moore*

This piece was read by Professor Moore at a memorial service for Michael Inwood, and Professor Moore has kindly allowed us to publish it as a tribute to him.

Everyone in the Philosophy Faculty who knew Michael was greatly saddened by his death. He was admired and loved in equal measure.

He was admired for his fierce intelligence, and his breadth of learning. Michael was especially well known for his work on Hegel. And he had an exceptional capacity, not only for engaging with what was deep in this notoriously difficult philosopher, but for doing so in a way that rendered its depth accessible. He had a wonderful knack for finding instructive examples that were simple enough to make the most abstract ideas compellingly concrete, but not so simple as to belie them.

Mention of Michael's work on Hegel reminds me of an amusing incident that I once witnessed at another college, in another university. A very prolific theologian was regaling high table with a report on his most recent publication. A cynical colleague leaned across and said, 'Hmm, what have you called it this time?' I mention this anecdote, not because I want to insinuate for one moment that Michael, who was also prolific, rehashed the same material with different titles. On the contrary. I mention it because there was a time in Michael's career when it looked as though he might achieve the equally remarkable but diametrically opposed feat of publishing many different books all with the same title. There seem to be at least three (possibly four) books to his name called Hegel. But Michael was much more than a great Hegel specialist, of course. His other philosophical achievements—including outstanding



work on Heidegger and in ancient philosophy—and his other contributions to the intellectual life of this university, more generally, were many.

In particular, he was also admired for his dedication to teaching. Anyone who cherishes the Oxford teaching system will know that Michael was the very epitome of what makes it worth cherishing. His students adored him. They appreciated his kindness, his preparedness to understand what they were trying to say, and of course the rigour and knowledge that he brought to bear on whether it was something worth saying. Many of my own students were tutored by Michael. Always their end-of-term reports on him were unstinting in their praise. It was always a great boon to be able to pick up the phone or tap out an e-mail when I had a student who needed to be taught Hegel or Heidegger, sure in the knowledge, not only that Michael would be available to take it on, but that the student would receive the best possible tuition. How many of us in the Faculty, I wonder, took this facility for granted all those years?

I said that Michael was loved as well as admired. Partly, of course, he was loved for his eccentricities. There was the fact that he maintained close contact with the college after even after his retirement because he was—and these are Michael's own words—'hopelessly addicted to Trinity College food'. And of course there was his room in College, which was reckoned to be by many, despite fierce competition, the most chaotic room in Oxford. Piles of books occupied almost every space, and it is rumoured that many admissions interviewees thought that finding their way to a chair meant negotiating some sort of obstacle course that had been especially devised to test them.

Michael will be remembered for many things: he will be remembered for his academic prowess, his gentle sense of humour, his humility, his disdain for all kinds of affectation, and his endearing warmth.