

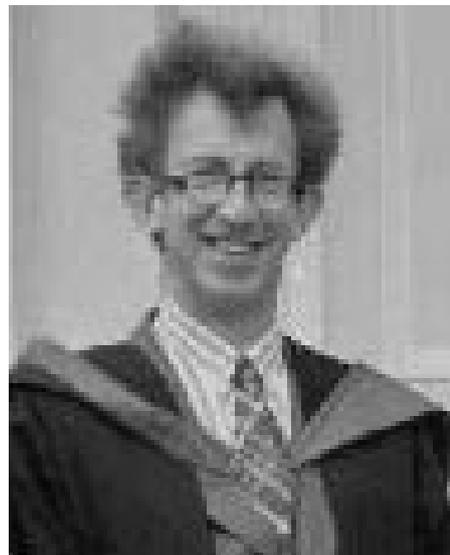
John Fauvel, 1947–2001

R*adical Philosophy* is still too young to have published many obituaries of members of its Editorial Collective. But, at fifty-three, John Fauvel, who died suddenly on 12 May, was too young to die. I knew him first and foremost as a friend, who between 1982 and 1990 was also on the Collective. He was a man whose calm, quiet understanding could always surprise me, be it about Fermat's Last Theorem, nineteenth-century travellers' diaries, current philosophy of language, or simply the human nature of those around us. This gargantuan knowledge was founded on an unconstrained accumulation of books and papers – when John's house was filled with them, he simply added a second floor.

Brought up and educated in Scotland, where his father was a headmaster, John pursued his education and his career in the south after he went to study mathematics at university, first at Essex and then at Warwick, finishing with an M.Phil. Close friendships there gave him a lifelong base at Leamington, which is where he died. But in 1977, he moved to a lectureship at the Open University Faculty of Mathematics, and established himself in Milton Keynes. John, being John, could see the virtues in that easily slighted city.

John was a man known more to the friends, colleagues and students he gathered over the years – he and I soon became friends through working together – than to the wider world. After his time with *RP*, he was for the last decade a key figure in the British Society for the History of Mathematics, first as its president and then as the editor of its *Newsletter*. He was a supportive and patient editor of that newsletter and of five books. He had an ambition, which can be seen in his work for the Open University, to bring together students' own development of mathematical understanding with the study of the historical development of mathematical concepts.

For *Radical Philosophy*, he simply shouldered part of the work (dealing with subscriptions, refereeing, channelling articles), and contributed his mild-mannered, witty insight in print when he had something to say. So let him speak for himself now from the pages of the magazine. On Isaac Newton: 'The retiring Cambridge scholar, prised from his solitary study to serve a grateful nation in an amiable sinecure [as Warden of the Mint], became an avenging fury.' On sexist language: 'I am more interested', he wrote in 1983, 'in lending support to those trying to create a non-sexist verbal climate than in safeguarding "our" linguistic heritage' – and then he added laconically, 'Language has always been pretty absurd anyway.' But he could chide us too: 'feminists have enough problems dealing with men without having to suffer the wit and wisdom of an almost entirely male collective.' 'Lending support': that was very typical of John.



Noel Parker