Obituaries

John Niemeyer Findlay 1903-1987

John Niemeyer Findlay died on September 27, 1987, still holding at the age of almost eighty-four the Borden Parker Bowne Professorship of Philosophy at Boston University. He had intended to retire at the end of this academic year, but the prospect of a life in which he was no longer a teacher of philosophy had not attracted him. And just as he found it difficult to imagine a life without such teaching, so we who have been his colleagues find it difficult to imagine the community of philosophers without John Findlay. In his first book on Meinong, published in 1933, he endorsed Meinong's view that the world which we encounter phenomenologically includes not only existents, but also such things as absences. Findlay's absence will from now on be a notable and lamentable feature of many philosophical debates, conversations and seminars.

Findlay was born on November 25, 1903, in Pretoria in the Transvaal of mixed Scottish, Welsh, Suabian, Hessian, Dutch and French Huguenot ancestry. He was to be at home in many places, but also to remain deeply attached to both English and Afrikaans speaking South Africa. Like Kant, he regarded his parents throughout life as models for moral admiration as well as objects of intense affection. When he became a student at the University of Pretoria in 1919 his elder brother gave him his own copy of Wallace's translation of Hegel's *Logic*, a book which he described as "my constant companion throughout my life". The philosophical contexts within which he engaged with Hegel and the philosophical issues upon whose resolution he brought Hegel's doctrines to bear varied a good deal in the course of his life. But there seems to have been no period in which his philosophical allegiances were not to some significant degree shaped by his reading and rereading of Hegel.

His principal undergraduate teacher was W. A. Macfadyen from whom Findlay learned the idealism of Green and Bosanquet, widely taught through the British Empire long after it had lost its influence in Britain. It was, however, Fichte to whose doctrines he for a time assented and it was what he learned of Kant, especially through reading Prichard, that was to be permanently most valuable. As a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol, he excelled sufficiently at ancient history to achieve the first class honours in *Litterae Humaniores* for which his philosophy alone, so much at odds with what was then taught at Oxford, might not have sufficed. His earliest teaching appointments were in South Africa and, before he became Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at

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Dunedin in New Zealand in 1934, he had already published *Meinong's Theory of Objects*.

It was Brentano and Meinong who first focussed Findlay's attention upon intentionality and upon the problems of characterising its varieties and its objects. But it was to be Husserl to whom he was later most indebted in this area, a debt both acknowledged and repaid in his masterly translation of the *Logical Investigations*. Yet what Findlay learned from Husserl he put to a very different use from any envisaged by Husserl himself. Findlay believed that Husserl had been unable to escape from an untenable form of idealism in his account of the relationship of intentional objects to objects in the world. And he wished to recast the phenomenological enterprise so that it became a stage in a set of transitions in which the correction and purification of our natural, prephilosophical realistic conceptions by means of the Husserlian *epoche* is followed by a return to a more sophisticated realism, so enabling us to "stand hesitantly in the doorway of the intentional cage, seeing the world as it presents itself from its vantage point and yet continuing to evaluate that vision from an outside critical standpoint" (*Ascent to the Absolute* New York, 1970 p. 239).

Findlay thus placed the kind of understanding which derives from Husserlian intentionality within a sequential development of different conceptual standpoints, and in his accounts both of the relationship of one such standpoint to another and of how such transitions are made he drew upon themes of both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. And as with Husserl, so also with Wittgenstein, what Findlay learned and accepted he then understood in an Hegelian mode. Findlay's relationship to Wittgenstein passed through several phases. He had first visited Wittgenstein in February 1930 at a time when Wittgenstein was reading only P. G. Wodehouse, *The Principles of Mathematics* and Frege. Findlay did not meet Wittgenstein again until 1939. He had left Dunedin on sabbatical leave in 1938 and spent parts of that leave in Cambridge where he attended Wittgenstein's seminar on memory. Findlay "believed that Wittgenstein had provided the germ of a true analysis of metaphysics as the search for a new notation that would remove the cramps produced by ordinary diction, and would satisfy a variety of deep conceptual and linguistic needs" ('My Encounters with Wittgenstein' in *Studies in the Philosophy of J. N. Findlay*, ed. R. S. Cohen; R. M. Martin and M. Westphal). But he rejected what he took to be the distorting rigidity of Wittgenstein's contrast between the public and the private, a contrast which underlay on his view both the solipsism of the *Tractatus* and the attack on the notion of a private language in the *Investigations*. Findlay's grounds for this rejection were in part at least once again drawn from Hegel and so was his thesis that what Wittgenstein diagnosed as linguistic confusions are signs of what Findlay called "deep stresses" between the

categories in terms of which both the world and our interpretations of it are necessarily structured. Philosophy enables us to move to a vantage point at which such stresses and contradictions are not sublated, but understood as inescapable. We can thereby recognise them as pointing us towards modes of completing reality and experience which transcend our ordinary perceptions and ways of understanding.

In 1940 Findlay returned to Dunedin where he responded to his conversations with Wittgenstein by writing 'Some Reactions to Recent Cambridge Philosophy' and 'Time: A Treatment of Some Puzzles'. He also wrote the extraordinarily valuable, now too often neglected 'Goedelian Sentences: A Non-Mathematical Approach'. In 1941 Findlay married. No one has ever been more happily married than he, and the happiness of his family life afforded him throughout his career a security which enabled him to exhibit unusual independence of mind and spirit, sometimes exhibited in a sharp impatience, verging upon cantankerousness, with views or attitudes which he took to be merely silly or, worse still, pretentious. But he never required agreement from others as a condition of either friendship or collegiality. I knew him for thirty-six years, during which I had good reason to admire his patience with what he took, for example, to be the wrongheadedness of my admiration for Aristotle.

In 1945 Findlay returned to South Africa where he taught until appointed professor at King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in 1948, whence in 1951 he moved to King's College, London, where he remained until 1966. At London his main and most lasting impact was upon the teaching of the history of philosophy. He and H. B. Acton combined to introduce a Special Author course in Hegel and it was with undergraduates taking that course in mind that Findlay wrote *Hegel: a Re-examination*, published in 1958, a book in which the resemblances between Hegel's thought and Wittgenstein's received attention.

In 1961 he published what he always took to be his most important book, *Values and Intentions* and certainly, together with his Gifford Lectures at St Andrew's in 1964-6, published as *The Discipline of the Cave* and *The Transcendence of the Cave*, it constitutes the fullest statement of his own distinctive point of view. The project of *Values and Intentions* is to carry through a quasi-deduction (my word, not Findlay's) of the Heads of Value, such heads as justice, beauty and knowledge, by showing how in our attention to and concern for the objects of our ordinary judgment and approval, we cannot escape either an appeal to impersonal standards or an attempt to secure agreement with our own judgments and attitudes from other reflective persons. If we then ask what someone who recognised and implemented this appeal and this attempt would value, we are led, not by logical derivation, but by a set of conceptual transitions which it would be deeply unreasonable to refuse to make, to placing a high value for

their own sake upon scientific understanding and its fruits, upon aesthetic experience and its objects, upon securing and maintaining understanding between persons and so on. It was by similar transitions that he worked out the Platonic or Neoplatonic theses of his Gifford Lectures, theses which he took to express what was rationally defensible in the doctrines of Theosophy, doctrines which he had embraced at the age of sixteen and abandoned at that of twenty-one. It is from our capacity to be guided by impersonal considerations of value and from such experiences as those involved in the intentionality of reading a poem or following a proof that we on Findlay's view, apprehend ourselves as standing in a relationship to a metaphysical unity, a set of perfections, of which merely material beings could not be capable.

In 1960 Findlay had met John Silber and formed a friendship which endured for the rest of his life. It was Silber's persuasions which induced him both to emigrate to the United States, where he taught at Texas and Yale, before coming to Boston in 1972, and to reopen and extend his philosophical enquiries. The extraordinary outcome was the writing of two books on Plato, books which affronted the conventional pieties of contemporary Platonic scholarship, but which continued and revived the Neoplatonic tradition, and of *Kant and the Transcendental Object*, published in 1981 when Findlay was seventy-eight years old. This latter is a book both outstanding in itself and remarkable in its appropriation and criticism of the work of others, so that a deeper and more comprehensive unified understanding of Kant emerges. It is towards the closing pages of this book that Findlay delivers his final verdict on Hegel. At its opening is a quotation from the *Tractatus*. It is notable that, while it was the reading of Prichard's book on Kant which first elicited Findlay's capacity for creative philosophical thought, so making his Hegelianism as much his own as it was Hegel's, it was the reinterpretation of Kant's own texts which brought his work to its splendid completion.

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Raya Dunayevskaya 1910-1987

Raya Dunayevskaya, who died in June 1987, was one of the most celebrated and renowned members of the Hegel Society of Great Britain. Although in England she is remembered principally as Trotsky's former secretary in Mexico in the 1930's, in the United States she has been seen as one of the founders of Marxist humanism in America. She wrote prolifically on a range of philosophical and political issues but her central life interests lay in Marxism, racism and feminism.