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Celebrating J.N. Findlay's contribution to philosophy: A comparative textual analysis from a *Mahāyāna* Buddhist perspective

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J.N. Findlay was a South African philosopher who published from the late 1940s into the 1980s. He had a prestigious international academic career, holding many academic posts around the world. This article uses a textual comparative approach and focuses on Findlay's Gifford Lecture at St Andrews University between 1965 and 1970. The objective of the article is to highlight the extent to which Findlay's philosophical writings were influenced by *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Although predominantly a Platonist, Findlay drew influence from Asian philosophy and religion, particularly *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In these lectures, he applies the metaphor of the Platonic Cave to investigate Hegelian and Husserlian approaches to knowledge. Though he was a leading Hegel and Husserl scholar, his reading of these two philosophers is strongly influenced by *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, resulting in a unique mystical interpretation of these two philosophers. Revisiting Findlay's writings is significant for two reasons; firstly, he investigated Buddhism prior to the Asian religions being included in Religious Studies departments' purview in South African universities, and secondly, his interpretation of two prominent Western philosophers along Buddhist lines provides an early attempt at decolonising the predominance of Western philosophical views of knowledge.

Contribution: This contribution forms part of a larger collection of essays investigating philosophical works that have had a significant impact on the study of religion. This contribution investigates the Buddhist influence on J.N. Findlay's philosophical readings of Husserl and Hegel.

Keywords: J.N. Findlay; Husserl; Hegel; Buddhism; mysticism; Plato; Neo-Platonism.

Introduction

John Niemeyer (J.N.) Findlay was associated with Pretoria University, Rhodes University, and the University of Natal in South Africa. He was an international philosopher, holding posts at Yale and Kings Colleges in Newcastle and London, the University of Otago, and the University of Texas, Austin, and holding the prestigious Clark Chair of Metaphysics at Yale University. He died in Massachusetts, USA, in 1987. In South Africa, Religious Studies departments began taking an interest in Eastern religions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. My research reveals that Findlay predated this trend, beginning to investigate Eastern philosophy in the 1960s. In this regard Findlay is sadly underappreciated, despite his international renown. The influence of Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies on his writings provides a new perspective on early research into Eastern philosophy in the South African academy. Findlay's writings pioneered the way for a philosophical trend of drawing on Buddhist ideas.

Findlay adhered to a primarily Platonic approach and his writings were aligned to the Platonic resurgence among British philosophers in the 1950s and 1960s. These philosophers' writings formed a value-based tradition that explored the Platonic Good as a reaction to the analytical and materialist traditions of, for example, G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russel, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Gottlieb Frege. Some of Findlay's peers include: Alasdair MacIntyre, Iris Murdoch, Philippa Foot, and Elizabeth Anscombe. Despite the common roots of their thinking, there are notable differences: Anscombe (2008) and MacIntyre (1981) follow a Catholic tradition in their explorations, but Findlay's approach draws eclectically on Eastern traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, and culminates in a Neo-Platonic mysticism. He refers to leading Eastern thinkers such as Lao Tzu, Nāgārjuna, Ramanuja and Shankara (Findlay 1966:131). His writings also reveal familiarity

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with Eastern philosophical texts, like the *Upaniśads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Findlay's Buddhist-influenced writings on Western philosophy need to be revisited as part of the interest in globalising philosophy (cf. Kalmanson 2017; Kim 2019; Kirloskar-Steinbach & Kalmanson 2021; Mayar & Guevara González 2017; Schilbrack 2014). His writings show how Western philosophical texts are open to different cultural and religious hermeneutics, reducing the dominance of Northern models. His readings of Husserl and Hegel, influenced by Buddhist and Hindu thought, provide the beginnings of a framework for reading Western philosophical texts from global perspectives.

This article focuses on Findlay's incorporation of Buddhism into his thinking on Hegel and Husserl. The Buddha's rejection of a substantial transcendent metaphysic, I argue, leads Findlay to innovative approaches to reading Husserl and Hegel. Ultimately, he remained Platonic in his approach, particularly in his mystical ideas, in asserting the importance of what he termed neo-neo-Platonism (Findlay 1970:248), but his uniqueness lies in his interest in Buddhism. Where Western philosophers such as Iris Murdoch showed a fleeting interest in Buddhism (Conradi 2004), Findlay's Buddhist influence draws partially from *Theravāda* but mainly from the *Mahāyāna* tradition, integrating concepts such as emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Buddha Nature and *samādhi* (ultimate meditative equipoise), as will be shown in textual comparisons between selected *Mahāyāna* texts and Findlay's writings. Consequently, his interpretation of Husserl and Hegel is perfused with Buddhist sensibility. The comparison of Findlay's texts with *Mahāyāna* texts will focus on three texts which form his two Gifford Lecture series in December 1965 and January 1966 (Findlay 1966, 1967) and a general collection of his essays written during the 1960s (Findlay 1970).

Gifford Lectures: The central argument

Between the two World Wars and after the Second World War, there was a reaction against the emphasis on fact and opinion in philosophy. Analytical philosophy was still the dominant focus in, for example, the Vienna Circle (Grayling 2019:377). Logical empiricism and logical positivism continued to view nature as inert and available to objective, rational analysis. A small group of philosophers, mainly women, opposed this 'valueless approach', perhaps because they saw it as a mask for analytical philosophers not to declare their values. They argued that philosophy needed to return to a Platonic value-based approach, mentioning that even Aristotle saw nature as fundamentally alive (Grayling 2019:89). They also argued that philosophy needed to be imbued with ethics, especially in the light of the horrors of the Second World War. Value-based philosophy is less concerned with objective fact than with grades of belief contingent on perception, which is based in values (Lipscomb 2022:1–21).

By the mid-1960s, Findlay had embraced a value-based Platonic approach (Findlay 1966:61). His Gifford Lectures of 1965 and 1966 articulated a Platonic framework for knowledge and values, based on Plato's metaphor of the cave. His argument falls within a mystical framework, proceeding from the dimly-formed knowledge of sensory-based information to mystical heights of unified and nondualistic knowledge. I argue that his Platonic approach is not caused by his Husserlian–Hegelian turn, but, significantly, his integration of concepts such as Nāgārjuna's understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* and the broader *Mahāyāna* understanding of emptiness in his reading of Husserl's phenomenology and Hegel's sense of the absolute negative. He includes perspective, relation and change into his reading of Husserl. Findlay's (1966) fourth lecture, 'The Cave Foreground: The Resting Face of Bodies', argues that:

> … The *absolute*, nonrelational nearness or farness of a body which can only belong to it from the standpoint of other bodies. (p. 91)

According to Findlay, there is no special standpoint. Similarly, the fact that moving objects change size from a particular standpoint places objects in relation to space and time (Findlay 1966: 91). Such ideas on objects in interdependent relation raises the question of *a priori*, placing it in the region of the speculative (Findlay 1966:81). He writes:

> For, if the past is not part of the present, is this exclusion, this pastness of that past not part of the present, not something that now is the case, something without which, moreover, the present would have no position and only a vanishing content, and does not this in a fashion readmit the past, encapsulated and modified, no doubt, into the present that thus excludes it? (Findlay 1966:80)

This is very close to Nāgārjuna's insights in *Mūlamadyamikakārikā*, Chapter 19, on the primacy of the present:

1. *pratyupanno 'nāgatas ca yady atītamapekṣya hi /*
   pratyutpanno 'nāgataś ca kale 'tīte bhaviṣyataḥ //
   If the present and the future are to be dependent on the past, the present and future will be in the past.
2. *prattyupanno 'nāgatas ca na stas tatra punaryadi /*
   Pratyutpanno 'nāgatas ca syātākatham apekṣya taṃ //
   Again, if the present and the future do not exist there, how would the present and the future depend on it (McCagney 1997:183).

Later, the notion of shared consciousness led Findlay to argue for the 'logic of mysticism', which holds that since mystics of all cultures have relayed valid accounts of extrasensory knowledge, it requires investigation (Findlay 1970:162). However, within the parameters of relative space and time (Findlay's 'Cave'), an approximate consensus is required about the objects commonly shared. For this purpose, he is drawn to the phenomenology of Husserl and Hegel. He writes:

> My methods of examining the cave of human experience are all influenced by [*Husserl's*] *reine Wesensschau* or pure examination of essences, though I have not necessarily agreed with him in my results. To the methods of Husserl, adapted as I have adapted

> them, I have added the methods of Hegel, also adapted as I have found necessary to adapt them. (Findlay 1966:39)

Findlay identifies the cave, where there is a profound mutual dependence of all things, as an obstacle to philosophy: 'for on account of this interconnection, each factor and feature of cave-life encourages us to see all the features and factors in relation to itself' (Findlay 1966:35). Findlay's method, therefore, takes from Husserl's phenomenology the empiricism of 'seeing', or (in phenomenological terms) how objects reveal themselves to consciousness. He does not accept Husserl's suggestion of objectivity, attained via the phenomenological method of eidetic reduction. Findlay confutes, like Heidegger, that the pattern of bodies in space and time are so interdependent that the *a priori* functions in 'inexhaustible variety' wherein a whole series of phenomenologies are contingent on each other at varying conceptual levels (Findlay 1966:15).

In his work on Hegel, Findlay applies the dialectic method of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. The subject and the objectification of spirit provide the thesis and antithesis so that Findlay can argue for the actualisation of spirit as a synthesis. However, he deviates from Hegel's idea of the spirit actualising itself in the State, arguing that it is actualised in a non-material mystical state. He uses the Plato's Cave metaphor to argue for the 'logic of mysticism' as objects and phenomena present themselves as less distinct than Husserl would claim. In contrast to Husserl's argument that phenomena can be viewed via his 'suspension of conviction', Findlay (1966) argues for a 'whole series of phenomenologies' that lead not to accurate depictions within the Cave, but transcend it:

> I am also no phenomenologist, since I believe in a probabilistic, as much as in a rigorously necessary *a priori* … I am, also, not an Hegelian, since, though I *try out* an imminent, this-world, teleological philosophy of 'spirit' on Hegelian lines, I do not stay at this, but feel pushed by pressure of the phenomena, or by the logic of matters before me – it does not matter which one says – in the direction of forms of experience and existence which break down and break through what we ordinarily believe in and find clear, and which force on us a discourse, and a style of reasoning and conceiving, which have their own strange standards of cogency and clarity … to establish just that other sort of other-worldliness which Hegel is so often at pains to dissolve. (p. 15)

These reflections reinforce a Platonic sense of knowledge and value since what is perceived is contingent on the nature of the perceiver. In applying the metaphor of the Cave, Findlay holds to a two-tiered epistemological framework with conventional and absolute truth occupying different tiers. Nāgārjuna explains the two-tiered truth framework in his *Mūlamadhymakakārikā* in Chapter 24 from verse 8:

> 8. *dve satye samupāśritya buddhānām ca dharmadeśanā /*
>
> *lokamsaṁvritisatyaṁ ca satyam ca paramāarthatah //*
>
> The instruction of the teachings of the *buddhas* are based on two truths:
>
> The truth of common-sense conventions about the world and truth in the higher sense of the word.
>
> 9. *ye 'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṁ satyayor dvaoḥ /*
>
> *Te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīraṃ buddhaśane //*
>
> Those who do not understand the distinction between the two truths do not understand the profound reality in the teaching of the Buddha.
>
> 10. *vyavahāram anārtham anārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate /*
>
> *Paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate //*
>
> Higher truth is not taught independently of common practice.
>
> Liberation is not accomplished by the unattainable higher truth. (McCagney 1997:200)

Similarly, Findlay (1966:15) argues that, in the Cave, phenomena are accepted, not as objective fact, but within a conventional framework. This argument resonates with Nāgārjuna's teaching about the two truths as paradoxically inseparable. Findlay asserts that he is neither a conventional Husserlian nor a phenomenologist. The *a priori* cannot be separated from space and time: indeed, phenomena are contrived through patterns in space and time. Again, we discern reverberations of Nāgārjuna's teachings about *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, where *nirvāṇa* is synonymous with *saṃsāra*, the cyclical lived bodily experience. He writes:

> 19. *na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśesṣanaṃ/*
>
> *na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇaṃ//*
>
> There is no distinction whatever between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.
>
> There is no distinction whatever between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.
>
> 20. *nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ saṃsaraṇasya ca/*
>
> *na tayor antaraṃ kiṃcit susūkṣmam api vidyate*
>
> The limit of *nirvāṇa* is that of *saṃsāra*.
>
> The subtlest difference is not found between the two. (McCagney 1997:209)

Close examination of Findlay's Buddhist influences

Although Findlay was a leading Hegelian and Husserlian scholar, as demonstrated by his forewords for translations of both philosophers (Hegel & Miller 1990; Husserl & Findlay 1970), in his Gifford Lectures he presents unique interpretations of their work, informed by Buddhist thought. His reading of Husserl and Hegel in these lectures shows remarkable resonances with *Mahāyāna* texts in terms of ideas. In addition, he could not have arrived at these interpretations by using the conventional readings of Hegel and Husserl that he articulates in the forewords for the translations.

Although Findlay embraced a neo-Platonic mysticism, his ideas about the Cave are infused with the insubstantiality of all things. He innovatively associates this inessentiality with Hegel's absolute negativity. He writes in his foreword to *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* that providing an orthodox interpretation of Hegelian negativity is the dialectic of the

self setting itself against the otherness of things on its path towards actualisation:

> Mind can step out of its abstract, self-existent universality, out of its simple self-relation, can posit within itself a determinate, actual difference, something other than the simple "I," and hence a negative; and this relation to the Other is, for mind, not merely possible but necessary, because it is through the Other and by the triumph over it, that mind comes to authenticate itself and to be in fact what it ought to be according its Notion, namely, the ideality of the external, the Idea which returns to itself out of its otherness; or expressed more abstractly, the self-differentiating universal which in its difference is at home with itself and for itself. (Findlay in Hegel & Miller 1990:15)

Here Findlay argues that the other provides the means, via the dialectic, for the self to find substance and identity. Findlay's reading of Hegel in his 1965 Gifford Lectures emphasises a different outcome of the absolute negativity of the other. Here he evokes the absolute emptiness of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism (Findlay 1966:45 and 209). *Mahāyāna* derives its notion of emptiness from the notion that all things are in a state of flux as well as being fundamentally interdependent and therefore devoid of inherent identity. In the following quotation, Findlay describes the development of mystical knowledge via an increasing awareness of interdependence:

> We proceed [*along the mystical path*] to notions which are not featureless blurs, but which are systematic wholes characterized by what Hegel calls "totality" [*though not the* "home with itself and for itself"], which means simply that each member of the system presupposes all the others, and may be said to have a built-in reference to the others in its notion, so that we have in reality not a set of separate notions, but a single notion seen, as it were, from distinct and perhaps opposed standpoints [*this is how Findlay interprets Hegel's Absolute negativity*]. We then also pass from whole notional systems of greater separateness and mutual irrelevance to systems of *ever-increasing interdependence* until, it is suggested, some absolute limit is reached. (Findlay 1966:79, emphasis added)

Findlay's mysticism, based on interdependence, comes to rest in nonsubstantial mystical awareness. The following passage demonstrates his understanding of the self as insubstantial:

> The ego's essential freedom and openness, its resemblance to a free mathematical variable rather than a mathematical constant, was further evinced in all these higher feats of imagination, essential to morality and philosophy, in which we conceive our-selves in personal positions utterly unlike our own … The idea of an ego is, however, against all such arguments [*of personal identity*], since an ego is not the sort of thing that could be confined to (though it of course can take on) any first order set of characteristics, to any set of traits, personal features and modes of working whatever. Some things at least we may do, not because we are this or that sort of person, but just because we are persons, and this is the modicum of truth in the existentialist claim that in man existence precedes essence. (Findlay 1966:205, 206)

Findlay's sense of interdependence emerging from absolute negativity is closer to the Buddhist idea of interdependence, or *pratītyasamutpāda*, than to any notion of self-identity. For Hegel, absolute negativity is synonymous with Concept and Notion: the most adequate substantial conception of identity and objects arrived at via dialectical relations (Hegel 1990:77). *Pratītyasamutpāda,* by contrast, asserts the emptiness of the self and all things, opposing the ideas of self-identity and self-actualisation. Nāgārjuna argues, 'because emptiness works, therefore everything works' (McCagney 1997:201), implying that, because of the interdependence of all things and continuous change, not only are all things empty, but life is possible. This is surely what Findlay means when he claims that a person's freedom and openness can only be conceived through the lens of (Findlay's interpretation of) Hegel's 'absolute negativity' of our being 'that was essentially a power of alternatives or of opposites' to conceive of ourselves as fluid, changing and open (Findlay 1966:205).

Similarly, in Findlay's Foreword to Husserl and Findlay (1970), he asserts that phenomenological investigations result in *epochė* or objective knowledge of phenomena. He writes:

> The essence of meaning is seen by us, not in conferring experience, but in its 'content', the single, self-identical intentional unity set over against the dispersed multiplicity of actual and possible experience of speakers and thinkers. (Husserl & Findlay 1970:316)

In his 1965 Gifford Lecture, however, he offers a Buddhist-influenced perspective of phenomena as entangled with empty space, which enfolds them and determines their relative states:

> But, when deeply reflected on, void, neutral space and time show themselves up as not being truly self-sustaining, being no more than a foil to bodies and to bodiliness, as organically related to body and as shown only in bodily behaviour and pattern and in inseparable from these last. To enter into this new point of view is to view body in a manner which demotes it from its independence, its pure bodiliness: it becomes dependent upon its foil, and as moulded by its foil's permanent structure, as that foil depends on it. We are introduced to the possibility of queer spaces which are as positive in their nature as the bodies which occupy them, which in a sense decide what forms bodies take and where they go, though it is in bodily manifestation that their deciding influence is made known. (Findlay 1966:143; Flanders 2018:n.p.; Gifford Lectures vii:n.p.)

Instead of the phenomenological method arriving at fixed knowledge, Findlay asserts that positing a plethora of complex phenomenologies and 'shifts and transitions' (Findlay 1966:144) offers only 'intellectual absurdity' (Findlay 1966:144). His epistemology is not the empirical certainty sought by Husserl and claimed by contemporary British and American philosophers such as G.E. Moore. Findlay argues that he uses Hegel and Husserl in unHegelian and unHusserlian way to establish an otherworldly mystical view by applying Hegel's dialectic method to track the transition from this world to the other (Findlay 1966:16). We

need to understand Findlay's use of absolute negativity as a phenomenological method here. In his mysticism, Findlay returns to Plato and neo-Platonism, but his method is grounded in Buddhist sensibilities, as is apparent in his emphasis on interdependence and the fluidity of things, undermining any notion of things as substantial.

In order to prove this, we need to scrutinise the diction of Findlay's Gifford Lectures. Some of the words and phrases in the lectures show striking resonances with Buddhist ideas and phrasings. Initially, we must emphasise that he identifies space and time as the fundamental building blocks of knowledge (Findlay 1966:98). These are not fixed or separate: Findlay emphasises their interdependent natures. Space can only be conceived of as a combination of empty space and bodiliness which 'becomes dependent on its foil' (Findlay 1966:143). Similarly, time always has space inextricably interwoven within it. Hence there can never be a true present in time (Findlay 1966:111). Within an understanding of space-time as interdependent, Findlay argues, the objects of the world become 'phantasmagoric'. He observes:

> It [*object*] has ceased to stand in a firm relation of contrast to the spatio-temporal emptiness which served as its background, it has not been firm in its inertia, its integrity, its insensitivities to the environment and to the ideally possible, it has not even been true to the independence which appears its proudest distinction, revealing itself as deeply adapted and accommodated in the minds that study it, and not even capable of being torn from their personal sensibility. Matter, in short has shown itself to be a fraud, and not merely a change in descriptive orientation but a quest for a logical stability turns our gaze in another direction. We have been reduced to the absurd ... (Bligh 1966:435; Findlay 1966:156; Gifford Lectures viii:n.p.)

Nāgārjuna makes a very similar reference to the phantasmagoric or unreal nature of objects. In verse 64 of the *Seventy Verses on Emptiness*, he writes:

> Thus the Buddha said:
>
> All things arise from causes and conditions;
>
> To view them as real is ignorance. (Komito 1987:94)

And in the *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, chapter 5, verse 1, he writes:

> [*N*]*ākāśaṃ vidyate kiṃcit pūrvam ākāśalaṣanat /*
>
> *alakṣaṇaṃ prasajyeta syāt pūrvaṃ yadi lakṣaṇāt //*
>
> Space does not occur prior to some characteristic of space.
>
> If it would exist prior to having a characteristic, it follows that there would be space without characteristic. (McCagney 1997:148)

And more aptly in relation to Findlay, he writes in the *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, chapter 23, verse 8:

> *Rūpaśabdarasasparśā gandhā dharmās ca kevalāḥ /*
>
> *Gandharvanagarākārā marīcisvapnasaṃnibhāḥ //*
>
> Physical form, sound, taste, touch, smell, and events made-up imaginary cities in the sky, dreams and fantasies. (McCagney 1997:196)

Similarly, Findlay avers that knowledge is not structured according to a subject-object relation, but rather founded in consciousness. He observes:

> The inner dimension of consciousness reveals presence in the constantly exposed inauthenticity of bodily phenomena, solid and real as they may at first seem to be, it reveals itself in the constantly changing stress upon different features of bodies, it reveals itself in a constant variation of interpretative slant, it is shown in the contrast of a great number of different senses and degrees of 'presence', it is lastly in a variety of changes which are utterly alien to bodily changes ... (Findlay 1966:29)

In describing the nature of things, Findlay's epistemology is closer to *Yogācāra* concepts of *ālaya-vijñāna* and *Grahaka*, the 8th century post-Madhyamikan school of Buddhist psychology, than Husserlian or Hegelian approaches. Findlay asserts that things only make sense in terms of layered structures of consciousness:

> Much of what we were aware of must therefore not merely pass into some obscure margin of consciousness but into its readily available, *dispositional* fringe, and beyond this into the storehouse of what is not readily available to all. A conscious ego, whose actuality is nothing but a flux of conscious states, whether focal or marginal, has nothing stable and abiding to which such dispositions could attach, and in which they could, as it were, be laid up …
>
> Out of the vast range of facts and circumstances that we say we 'know', those matters must come to consciousness and those alone, that fit in with the task at hand, that are relevant to the line of our conscious voluntary activity. Now it is plain empirically that selections are made, and solutions arrived at, in manners of which we have no ordinary awareness; in this sense the requirement of unconscious co-operation is indeed met. (Findlay 1966:210 and 211)

Findlay's concept of an unconscious 'storehouse', from which items can be withdrawn at need, is very similar to *Yogācāra* Buddhism's concept of *Grahaka* and its related concept of *ālaya-vijñāna*. Both terms denote a substratum storehouse consciousness that 'acts as the receptacle in which impressions of past experiences and karmic actions are stored … and produce all present and future modes of experience in samsāra' (Keown 2004:9). Shantideva, the 8th-century Madhyamikan philosopher, wrote in *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Shantideva & Elliott 2008) that knowledge is fundamentally based on developing more refined yoga practices:

> 3. Two kinds of people are to be distinguished:
>
> Meditative thinkers and ordinary folk.
>
> The concepts of the ordinary give way,
>
> Refuted by the views of meditators.
>
> 4. And within the ranks of these philosophers,
>
> The lower in degrees in insight are confuted by the higher.
>
> Comparisons are held in common;
>
> In order to achieve the goal, analysis is left aside. (Dalai Lama 1994:119)

The original Sanskrit text of this section from the *Bodhicaryāvatara* of Shantideva reads,

mama tāvadanena yāti vṛddhiṃ
kuśalaṃ bhāvayituṃ prasādavegaḥ ।
atha matsamadhātureva paśyed
aparo 'pyenamato 'pi sārthako 'yaṃ ॥ 3
kṣaṇasaṃpadiyaṃ sudurlabhā
pratilabdhā puruṣārthasādhanī ।
yadi nātra vicintyate hitaṃ
punarapyeṣa samāgamaḥ kutaḥ ॥ 4. (Mahoney & Battacharya 2003)

Findlay's value-based approach also asserts the importance of the yogic perspective, where knowledge changes as one approaches what Shantideva refers to as meditative-based knowledge. Findlay draws on the idea of *āsamprajñata samādhi* that can only be realised in yogic meditation:

> Beyond the trances which involve penetration, discernment, are the yet more profound trances which are undiscerning (*āsamprajñata samādhi*). (Findlay 1966:209; Gifford Lectures x)

Similarly, Findlay interprets Husserl in Buddhist terms:

> The inner dimension of consciousness reveals presence in the constantly exposed inauthenticity of bodily phenomena, solid and real as they may at first seem to be, it reveals itself in the constantly changing stress upon different features of bodies, it reveals itself in a constant variation of interpretative slant, it is shown in the contrast of a great number of different senses and degrees of 'presence', it is lastly in a variety of changes which are utterly alien to bodily changes ... (Findlay 1966:29)

Findlay's use of Hegel and Husserl paradoxically arrives at the exact opposite of what they were aiming to achieve. Instead arriving at fixed, unmodifiable knowledge, he asserts that there is a plethora of complex phenomenologies, and 'shifts and transitions' (Findlay 1966:144). The dialectic carries a whole series of bodily traits offering only 'intellectual absurdity' (Findlay 1966:144). In his 1965 lectures, he postulated that cave knowledge became absurd under close scrutiny, and he later found sensory-based knowledge more fruitful for value-experience. In the final chapter of *Ascent to the Absolute*, entitled: 'Towards a Neo-Neo-Platonism', he argues that metaphysics must ultimately merge with religion in order to grasp a vivid understanding of Plato and Plotinus's luminous ideas of 'Goodness itself, Beauty itself, Truth itself':

> I regard religion as the most embracing of the rational enterprises, one that engages the heart and the will as well as the mind. I give it as a verdict of my feeling that only a Form, something basically universal, though uttering itself in the individual and the specific, can be truly adorable, can in any way deserve the name of 'God'. (Findlay 1970:267)

Conclusion

My study of J.N. Findlay's philosophical thought reveals the potential of Western philosophy to engage with non-Western philosophical and wisdom traditions. While Findlay wrote the texts nearly 50 years ago, he provides a useful blueprint for a syncretic global philosophy that critically evaluates and compares different philosophies. His readings of Husserl's and Hegel's writings from a Buddhist and Asian perspective demonstrates how creative and informative hermeneutics can be when opened to global philosophical and wisdom traditions. Kevin Schilbrack (2014:12) quotes Richard King in *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*: 'engagement with the intellectual traditions of the non-western world has become the single most important task for the philosopher in an age of globalization'. This article is an attempt, therefore, to heed Schilbrack's call for a globally integration of philosophical traditions.

As a South African philosopher who had a global presence, Findlay's writings have immense value. Since the latter decades of the 20th century, Religious Studies departments at South African universities have kept alive research into Asia religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. As a philosopher who explored Asian religions, particularly Buddhism, Findlay shows that philosophy is an excellent conduit for the study of Asian philosophies. In addition, via his Platonic perspective, he demonstrates that philosophy is adept at integrating religion into its critical scope. In this regard, Findlay's writings proffer an invaluable contribution to the global project in philosophy and religious studies.

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