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## A.N. Prior and ‘The Nature of Logic’

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**Abstract:** Logical realism, by Prior understood as the view that logic is not about language but about reality, is a consistent and strong tenet in all of A.N. Prior’s philosophical work. Recent discoveries in letters from Prior to his wife, Mary Prior, and to his cousin, Hugh Teague, serve to highlight the influence of J.N. Findlay with regard to Prior’s logical realism. Through the letters, we come to learn, that the title of Prior’s M.A. thesis from 1937 was ‘The Nature of Logic’, that he didn’t consider it good and finally, that he attributed much of the work to Findlay. It is argued here that Findlay’s criticism of philosophical idealism, evident in his early writings and documented by Prior’s letters, moderated Prior’s views on Marxism and Karl Barth’s theology, and indeed constitute the foundation of Prior’s temporal realism. We are thus able to improve our knowledge on all of these aspects. Regarding Marxism, we can extend backwards the time when Prior was aware of the logical problems with Marx’s dialectics from the time given by Mary in her 2003 interview with Hasle. Regarding Barth, we can see how Prior’s work on ridding Barthian theology of philosophical idealism led him to investigate the importance of the ontological argument with regard to the philosophical foundation of Barthian theology. Finally, the analysis of Findlay’s influence helps us better understand the nature of Prior’s logical realism and appreciate i) why Prior said that he directly and indirectly owed all he knew of logic and ethics to Findlay, and ii) why Prior called Findlay the founding father of tense-logic.

**Keywords:** A.N. Prior, J.N. Findlay, Hegelianism, Karl Marx, Karl Barth, Logical Realism, Philosophical Idealism, Temporal Realism.

## 1. Introduction

Arthur Norman Prior (1914-1969) is best known for his discovery of tense-logic, an achievement that earned him a place as one of the most important philosophers of the time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Hasle and Øhrstrøm 2006* and *Copeland 1996*). Before this discovery in 1954, his most important work was *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* (Prior 1949). In this work, and throughout his entire philosophical and logical body of work, Prior demonstrates an adherence to the principle stated by him in *A Statement of Temporal Realism* that ‘Logic is ... about the real world’ (Prior 1996, 45). A.N. Prior was, already as a 16-year-old student, a prolific writer and was good at preserving his articles and notes. Therefore we can assert, quite confidently, that there is no time in Prior’s authorship at which we find him denying the view that logic is about reality. Prior was, in the 1930s, fascinated by Marxism and the theology of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), but in spite of this Prior was highly critical of the influence of philosophical idealism on Karl Barth’s theology and Hegelian dialectics on the work of Karl Marx. John Niemeyer Findlay (1903–1987) was Prior’s teacher in ethics and logic at the University of Otago in New Zealand, and Prior spoke highly of Findlay’s importance for his views on logic. Indeed, there can be no question that the lasting influence on Prior’s thinking during his studies was that of Findlay, as pointed out by Anthony Kenny (*Kenny 1971*), but the question remains: What influence did Findlay have on Prior’s views on the relationship between logic and reality? From Kenny, we know that Prior in his M.A. thesis defended an objectivist, rather than a subjectivist or formalist, approach to logic (*Kenny 1971*). Unfortunately, Kenny does not mention the title of Prior’s thesis, which would have been helpful, and so far it has not been found in any archive. This is indeed remarkable in light of the wealth of material preserved by Prior and now available in various archives.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that, after Prior’s death in 1969, neither Kenny nor Mary Prior had any recollection of the name of the thesis. Whatever the reason might be, we have not known Prior’s own

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<sup>1</sup> The main archive for Prior resources is the Bodleian Library, Aalborg University and the Popper-Prior archive at the Canterbury University in Christchurch.

view on the thesis, but now a letter has emerged from Arthur to Mary in which Arthur not only provides the title of his thesis but also his own opinion of it. The letter is undated and titled ‘Friday noon’. From the letter, we can see that Mary was in the hospital and Arthur was alone with their little son, Martin Prior. According to Martin, Mary was hospitalized in 1947, and there is thus some certainty in that date.<sup>2</sup> Besides taking care of their son, Prior was also constructing a reading list that would “equip [him] properly for teaching Advanced Logic next year, here or at Otago.”<sup>3</sup> In connection with this Prior writes: “I am realizing how little I really knew when I wrote my M.A. thesis on “The Nature of Logic”; & what a cheek I had to submit it with so thin a background, and what a lot of work in it was really Findlay’s”.<sup>4</sup> The comment gives us the title of the thesis as well as Prior’s own opinion of it. His comment might explain why he, contrary to his meticulous archiving tendency, did not preserve his thesis. The work was thin and whatever he found of value in it he seems to ascribe to Findlay. The new information, apart from the name of the thesis, is that ‘a lot of the work was really Findlay’s’.<sup>5</sup> With this comment we are given a clear indication, by Prior himself, supporting Kenny’s view on Findlay’s influence. In fact, an argument can be made, on the basis of Prior’s correspondence and Findlay’s early writings on Meinong’s theory of objects (*Findlay 1933*) and relational properties (*Findlay 1936*), that Findlay’s influence on Prior made him critical of anti-realist philosophy in Marxism and Karl Barth’s theology, and laid the foundation of Prior’s logical realism, even with regard to taking time serious.

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<sup>2</sup> From personal correspondence with Martin Prior.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to Mary, [B30] Aalborg University Martin Collection, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to Mary, [B30] Aalborg University Martin Collection, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to Mary, [B30] Aalborg University Martin Collection, 1.

## 2. Logical realism

Russell and Moore's turn from British idealism to logical realism played a crucial role in the emergence of analytic philosophy (*Griffin 2013*). The turn constituted a break with neo-Hegelianism (*Griffin 2013*, 401) and a rejection of, what is essentially a Kantian paradigm, with regard to mind and matter: that only thought or mind is ultimately real. With regard to Findlay, Russell's work, in 1904, on Meinong's theory of objects, is important. Russell begins his essay by stating a series of theses that, then, was not generally accepted as true:

That every presentation and every belief must have an object other than itself and, except in certain cases where mental existents happen to be concerned, extra-mental; that what is commonly called perception has as its object an existential proposition, into which enters as a constituent that whose existence is concerned, and not the idea of this existent; that truth and falsehood apply not to beliefs, but to their objects; and that the object of a thought, even when this object does not exist, has a Being which is in no way dependent upon its being an object of thought.<sup>6</sup>

Russell recognized the importance of Meinong's work with regard to this perspective of logical realism, when it comes to 'the theory of knowledge,' where the crucial matter is a rejection of the view that identifies logic with 'the theory of knowledge' (*Russell 1904*, 204). Fundamentally, Russell agrees with Meinong that 'the proposition known is not identical with the knowledge of it' (*Russell 1904*, 204). Russell's work on Meinong was important for the philosophical development of Findlay, who described it as 'generous and brilliant' (*Findlay 1963*, xi).<sup>7</sup> In 1933 Findlay published his own analysis of Meinong's theory of objects and it shines through, from its very

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<sup>6</sup> *Russell 1904*, 204.

<sup>7</sup> The preface of *Findlay 1963* is not included in the first edition from 1933, who differs very little from the 1963 edition.

beginning, that despite his awareness that “modern realism” had its problems it had “left certain distinctions clearer than they were before,” and “strengthened our insight in one most important respect” (*Findlay 1933*, 1):

We are no longer tempted to confuse the experiences which we live through with the objects, physical, mental, or ideal, which are presented to us by their means. We are no longer able to profit by the ambiguities of language in order to pass from those peculiar modifications of our inner life which we call sensations and emotions, or those peculiar inner activities which we call judging and willing, to those wholly different entities whose nature it is merely to be there, to exemplify or to be an essence, to stand in certain relations to each other, but not to act or suffer.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, despite its problems, realism was fundamentally right in insisting on “the absolute distinctness of experiences and their objects” (*Findlay 1933*, 1). From 1934 to 1944 Findlay took up the post as professor of mental and moral philosophy at Otago University in New Zealand, only two years after Prior began his studies. Findlay’s early philosophical writings display a clear adherence to Russell’s view on relations and realism, but, as we shall see, from a dynamic perspective on time. In 1936, while Prior was his student, Findlay wrote ‘*Relational Properties*’ in which he discussed the applicability of Russell’s theory of relations to some problems in philosophy. We know, from a letter written by Prior to Ursula Bethell 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1937, that he counted that article among ‘his most valued literary possessions.’<sup>9</sup> In *Relational Properties* Findlay distinguish between ‘relation’ and ‘relational properties’. A relation is, according to Findlay, a universal which, metaphorically, can be seen as a bridge between entities, but a relational property is merely a point of contact between the related entities. It is, for Findlay, only the former that comes with an ontological commitment to some existing entity bridging the gap between the entities. Findlay takes this distinction to be

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<sup>8</sup> *Findlay 1933*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> A.N. Prior to Ursula Bethel undated, but ‘about 2nd July 1937’ on heading, in *Grimshaw 2018*, 113.

essential in Russell's view, allowing Russell to be 'pluralist without denying the interconnection of things' (*Findlay 1936*, 178). Findlay's application of Russell's logic comes with two criticisms of idealism. One on the philosophical problem of intentionality and the other on nonexistent entities. Concerning intentionality, 'or rather the reference of the mind to objects.' Findlay argues that idealists and realists have both assumed 'the bridge theory', i.e., the view that some actual act of cognition constitutes a connection between the subject and the object. The idealist, Findlay argues, should draw the logical conclusion of this assumption and 'deny the real existence of foreign minds or of anything beyond the vanishing thought of the moment' (*Findlay 1936*, 186). The realist he argues must explain how some object in 'any way can be part of the inner life of the subject' (*Findlay 1936*, 187) The solution he offers is instead to regard cognition as a relational property, 'present in the subject alone.' Concerning non-existent entities Findlay argues that the bridge-theory of relations commits its adherents to accepting the presence of any term involved the supposed relation claimed to be present, 'for one cannot connect entities if there are no entities to connect' (*Findlay 1936*, 187) Taking an aim at the idealist he writes: 'The idealist, we may notice in passing is faced with the opposite problem of explaining away the apparent reality of certain objects of thought, and showing that the difference between Mussolini and a dragon is one of degree, and not of kind' (*Findlay 1936*, 188). It turns out that one of the evident influences Findlay had on Prior appears to have been this rejection of philosophical idealism, which moderated Prior's view on Marxism, the theology of Karl Barth and, more crucially, influenced Prior's view on temporal realism.

### **3. Moderating Karl Marx**

As is clear from Prior's letter to Mary, Findlay had a huge hand in guiding Prior's thesis work. It was completed and defended in what was a tumultuous time for Prior, the year after he got married to journalist Clare Hunter. On August 28, 1936, the *Western Star Newspaper* carried a small notice on

the marriage of Arthur Norman Prior and Clare Hunter,<sup>10</sup> who ‘was a woman with a strong social conscience and in fact finally identified as a communist.’<sup>11</sup> Prior, while not a communist, was fascinated by Christian socialism, and was a ‘young progressive’ (*Grimshaw 2018*, 26). He never publicly identified as a socialist and distanced himself from communism, but it is clear from his early writings, *Prayer and Praise* (Prior 1933a) and *Dostoevsky* (Prior 1933b), that he held Lenin and socialism in high regard. Prior finished his M.A. in 1937, and the next year he and Clare went off to Europe. From letters sent to his cousin, Hugh Teague, it is clear that they were happy and energetically pursuing a progressive social activism within journalism. They praised France as the reddest country they had been to, attended socialistic events and wrote book reviews for the pacifist journal *Peace News*, trashing the attempt by MacMillan, the later Prime minister of Great Britain, to find a middle way between capitalism and socialism.<sup>12</sup>

From Prior’s letters to his cousin Hugh, sent from Europe, it is clear that A.N. Prior’s view on Marx was moderated by a criticism of the philosophy of Hegel. In the letter, Prior recalls an event, he is convinced that his communist cousin would appreciate. Prior had attended a Workers Education Class in which Professor R.W. Souter had ‘attempted to apply Hegelian dialectics to economic theory’.<sup>13</sup> Prior wasn’t impressed and ventured to dispute the argument and claimed that he considered ‘Marx’s one big mistake’ to be ‘merely ‘standing Hegel upside down & not also giving him a thorough shaking into the bargain’.<sup>14</sup> He proceeded to illustrate his point by criticising Engel’s use of Hegel view on motion as a contradiction. Prior quotes Engels as saying: ‘Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of place can only come about through a body at one &

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<sup>10</sup> I am grateful to A.N. Prior scholar Mike Grimshaw for sharing information concerning Arthur and Clare’s marriage and the photo of Prior from Knox Theological Hall in 1935.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Prior, Arthur’s younger brother, writes about Hunter and Prior in his memoir of his own marriage to Elespie Prior (2006).

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful for the help of Emma Sangster from *Peace News* in digging up Clare Prior’s review of Harry MacMillan’s *The Middle Way*, published in *Peace News* on July 16, 1938.

<sup>13</sup> Prior to Hugh, June 15, 1938, 2, in Grimshaw 2018, 162.

<sup>14</sup> Prior to Hugh, June 15, 1938, 2-3, in Grimshaw 2018, 162-163.



the same moment of time being both in one place and in another place, being in one & the same place & also not in it.’<sup>15</sup> The passage is quite likely from Engels’ defence of Marx’s view on Hegelian dialectics against Dühring’s criticism in *Cursus der Philosophie*.<sup>16</sup> At the meeting Prior had maintained that this view on motion was “sheer confusion”. Against Engels, Prior argued that ‘motion essentially means that a body is in different places at different times; & at any one “point of time” during the motion the body is not in several places but in one place’.<sup>17</sup> This criticism is interesting because it doesn’t show Prior arguing for a straight forward dynamic view of time, though we must bear in mind that Prior not only had read Findlay’s *Relational Properties* from 1936, but indeed valued it highly. We will postpone the discussion of Findlay’s view on time for later however, as it is beside the point here. What is interesting is Prior’s clear dismissal of Engels argument as supporting the peculiar perspective of Hegelian dialectics in which it is denied that contradictions lead to an reduction ad absurdum. The letter to Hugh show us that Prior was aware of the problems of Hegelian dialectics earlier than Mary remembered in her interview with Hasle, in which she says: ‘Many of his friends were Marxists, but of course dialectic had no appeal because of its logical repercussions. However, I doubt if he realized this as a very young man’ (*Hasle and Prior 2003*, 303).

There is indeed evidence that Prior’s awareness of the logical problems with Marxism stems from Findlay’s criticism of the philosophical foundation of Marxism. In an undated letter, which according to Grimshaw perhaps was written in September 1936, Prior writes that ‘He [Findlay] finds Marxists very ignorant of the actual development of philosophy’,<sup>18</sup> and later in the same letter it is evident that Prior’s thesis work brought him in connection with Marxism. There is quite good reason to think that

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<sup>15</sup> Prior to Hugh, June 15, 1938, 3, in Grimshaw 2018, 163.

<sup>16</sup> *Engels 2000*, 153. The first book edition appeared in 1887.

<sup>17</sup> Prior to Hugh, June 15, 1938, 3, in Grimshaw 2018, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Prior to Ursula Bethel, undated, Letter 12, 2, in Grimshaw 2018, 99.

what Findlay found confusing in Marxism was its adherence to Hegelian philosophy. In an undated letter to Mary, also written around 1947, Prior writes the following:

I have been re-reading Bosanquet's 'Essentials of Logic'. We used it for advanced Logic in my day, Findlay pulling it to pieces bit by bit. It is rather poisonous stuff & not Logic at all. I'm going to read a few Hegelian & Pragmatist Logics, through, I think; to keep track of the Enemy. I'll need it if I do land in Auckland next year!<sup>19</sup>

Here, we come closer to tracing the roots of Prior's 'only problem' with Marxism: Findlay's pulling to pieces Bosanquet's neo-Hegelian-inspired view on logic. As late as 1947, he considered Hegel and Pragmatist logic to be 'the enemy'. It would not be surprising to learn, if we could find 'The Nature of Logic', that a huge part of his M.A. thesis involved an attack on Hegelian philosophy. Bosanquet was among the most influential neo-Hegelian British idealist, who wrote several works on logic and was, together with T.H. Green and F.H. Bradley one of the most influential idealist political philosophers (*Wolff 2013*, 798). Bosanquet's *Essential of Logic* contains several clear affirmations of logical idealism, such as his distinction between between psychology and logic: 'Psychology treats of the course of ideas and feelings; Logic of the mental construction of reality' (*Bosanquet 1895*, 4)

It is quite likely that Prior's first encounter with Bosanquet was in Findlay's teaching, where the work was pulled to pieces and where he came to dislike it as 'poisonous' and 'not logic at all', together with Hegelian and pragmatist logic. When he returned to Bosanquet's work in 1947 as preparation for teaching a course on advanced logic, it was to arm himself against Hegelians and pragmatists. It is quite reasonable to assume that part of Prior's reason for not following Clare into communism, even though he considered himself a lifelong socialist, was the one big mistake he found in Marxism regarding its entanglement with idealism, and that this influence was due to Findlay's criticism of

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<sup>19</sup> Prior to Mary, [B46] The Martin Collection Aalborg, 3.

philosophical idealism. When Prior in 1946, in a letter to his friend Alexander Miller, who had recently published *The Christian Significance of Karl Marx* (1947), describes the philosophy of Marxism as “abominable”, it is quite likely the philosophical idealism he had in mind.<sup>20</sup>

#### **4. Moderating Karl Barth**

It is, however, not only in his moderated criticism of Marx that we see Findlay’s impact. We see it, perhaps even more clearly, in Prior’s theology. Prior was very active in the Student Christian Movement actively publishing in their magazine *The Student*, and served for a period as the editor of the magazine. He was a strong adherent of the theology of the neo-orthodox Swiss theologian Karl Barth. In August 1937, Prior wrote ‘Revaluations’ and published it in The Student Christian Movement’s magazine *The Student*, which until 1936 was called *Open Windows*. ‘Revaluations’ is a one-page article in which Prior takes a more critical look at the theology of Karl Barth than anywhere else in his theological articles in the 1930s. Indeed, with the exception of *Can Religion be Discussed* (1942), it is perhaps his most critical article of Barthian theology.

According to Prior Barth had not freed himself from the ‘philosophical disease’ of idealism (*Prior 1937*, 11). The theology of the future, in Prior’s eyes, would have to ‘submit more readily to the disciplines of fact and logic’ Karl Barth was a strong adherent of fideism, maintaining not only that faith and reason are epistemologically independent of each other, but that faith, from the perspective of reason is logically meaningless. Prior also considered himself a fideist, but rejected Barth’s attempt to ground it in logic, and proposed that the traditional arguments for God’s existence would indeed be meaningful to address, which they cannot be if faith is logically meaningless. He addressed this problem in *Revaluations* (1937) where he writes: ‘I am becoming increasingly convinced that we must

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur Prior to Lex Miller, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1947, 1. I am grateful to Mike Grimshaw, who discovered the letter, for sharing a transcription of it with me.

give a far more respectful consideration to the traditional ‘proofs of the existence of God’ than Barth accords to them’ (*Prior 1937*, 11)

He was, of course aware that this is an ‘enormous concession’, but believes that taking the arguments for God’s existence seriously, will prevent Barthian theologians from confusing questions of the form ‘Is this the case?’ with questions of the form, ‘How do we know this?’ (*Prior 1937*, 11). Applying these principles of logical realism to the question of God’s existence, Prior continues:

We can pray, ‘Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief’, but it is meaningless to pray, ‘Lord, I believe, and my belief is false, but please make it true’, and wicked to pray, ‘Lord, I believe, and my belief is false; but make me go on believing all the same’. [.,.,] The Reality of God is deeper than all our doubts, and unaltered by them, if He *is* real – there is our comfort. But if He is *unreal*, His unreality is deeper than all our certitude – there is our peril. And there is *no* way of evading this. Barth tries to evade it, often.<sup>21</sup>

These are the words of a philosophical realist looking at Barthianism and finding it logically wanting. Again, this can be seen as supporting the idea that Prior’s M.A. work, and Findlay’s influence in particular, contributed to Prior’s moderation, or reevaluation, of the importance of Barth and Marx. Like Marxism, anti-idealism—which we are reasonably able to ascribe to the influence of Findlay—did not cause Prior to dismiss either his Christian convictions or his adherence to Barthian Calvinism. Both Marx and Barth were still, in Prior’s eyes, thinkers of the future. Misgivings over the room given to the ‘philosophical poison’ of idealism did, however, cause Prior to look deeper into the roots of Christianity for a better philosophical grounding for Barth’s theology. This work began in *Revaluation* in 1937 and was continued in 1938 in a review of Etienne Gilson’s *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventura* (Prior 1938). Prior was especially interested in the idea of a system of theology, in

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<sup>21</sup> *Prior 1937*, 11.

the Augustinian tradition, in which ‘one can only enter by an act of faith’, and writes: ‘This metaphysic of mysticism is only possible if we admit the legitimacy of an act of knowledge into which the light of faith and the light of reason both enter, each lending strength to the other’ (*Prior 1938*, 143).

Prior seemed especially interested in Anselm’s ontological argument which he, in the 1950s, discussed in personal correspondence with Von Wright and J.J.C. Smart (*Jakobsen and Øhrstrøm 2017*). As early as 1955, Prior in *Formal Logic* (1962), argued that a syntactical modal version of the ontological argument can be proven if the distinct S5 theses of the Lewis modal system is accepted (*Prior 1962*, 201). That his interest in the argument began with critique of Karl Barth’s theology concerning its dependence upon philosophical idealism is a strong indication of Findlay’s influence on Prior’s thinking as he worked on his Master’s Thesis on ‘The Nature of Logic’.

## 5. Taking time seriously

In light of Prior’s later development of tense-logic and defence of temporal realism, it is interesting that Findlay, in Prior’s eyes, pulled Bosanquet’s logic apart in his teaching. The reason is that Bosanquet, in *Essential in Logic*, defends the view that the world, including time and space is an idea (*Bosanquet 1895*, 4). Bosanquet affirms what might sound like the existence of a privileged present moment:

But yet the whole of sense-perception has a peculiar quality in being present. Artificial though it is, it yet, relatively speaking, contains an irreducible datum. It is distinguishable from everything which is not present. It is pervaded by something which we cannot reduce to intellectual relation, though if we withdrew from it all that is relation, the apparent datum would be gone.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Bosanquet, 1895*, 28–29

Bosanquet's philosophical idealism is however evident in the view that 'if we withdrew from all that is relation, the apparent datum would be gone.' This is, according to Bosanquet, not something we are actually capable of, but it follows from the assumption that the world is constructed as an idea in our judgments about it. Bosanquet argues, that it is not legitimate to assume, that the way in which we actually perceive the world has remained the same as it was at a 'different stage of our visual education' (*Bosanquet, 1895, 28*). Therefore, according to Bosanquet, 'we can give no precise meaning in the way of time-limit to the *presentness* of perception' (*Bosanquet, 1895, 28*). All relations apparent in a concept are internal to the idea, therefore even presentness is artificial, and 'if we withdrew from it all that is relation, the apparent datum would be gone' (*Bosanquet 1895, 28-29*).

It turns out that Findlay, in his discussion of Meinong's theory of objects, evaluated Meinong's argument for why we must fundamentally distinguish between the content and the object of an idea, and relates this debate to the question of objects in time. The idealist has a problem with ideas in which the content is about an object that does not exist, either because it just doesn't, like the golden mountain, or because it could not, like a square circle. From this, it follows that these objects are not contained in the idea, which refer to them, and hence they challenge the fundamental assumption that ideas are more fundamental than objects and relations between such. It is very interesting, with regard to Findlay's influence on Prior, that he in 1933 evaluates Meinong's application of this argument on existence at another time:

[,,] we cannot hold that last year's melted snow, which stands at one point in the time-series, is also a part of my idea which stands at another point in the time-series. If such multiple ingressions of an object into the history of the universe were possible, there would be no sense in locating an

object, of which I am thinking now, at some date before the date of my idea: it would be as much present as my idea, and this is plainly not the case.<sup>23</sup>

It is especially interesting that Findlay neither agrees with the idealist, nor Meinong's theory of objectives by which he attempts to solve it. The reason is, that both ends up being unable to account for a dynamic view of time. The idealist ends up with ideas, about other times than the present, and must, since the concept of these ideas are about non-present objects, assert that these, like the present, exist. The Meinongian realist asserts the real existence of what he calls objectives, as being what concept of future or past objects are about, in ideas distinct from these concepts. Findlay finds, that Meinong's postulate of *objectives*, is 'rather unpalatable' (Findlay 1933, 80) and that it leaves him with a theory of experience and time 'identical with that of Mr. Russell' (Findlay 1933, 79). Findlay was however aware that Meinong later changed his theory concerning time in *Zum Erweise des allgemeinen Kausalgesetzes*, (Meinong 1918) to postulate the existence of tensed, as well as tenseless facts:

"There must therefore, on this later view of Meinong's be *two* varieties of objective, those that are and those that are not affected by the passage of time. That the sun *is* going down, or *was* going down, or *will* be going down at certain time, are not always facts, but it is a fact at all times that a particular sunset persists at a particular date. For every fact in whose material a *tense* is included, and which is therefore affected by time, and need not always be a fact, there is another tenseless fact of persistence which is always a fact."<sup>24</sup>

In *Relational Properties*, discussed above, Findlay also applies the distinction between "the bridge theory" of relation which entails ontological commitment, and mere relational properties which does not come with ontological commitment to temporal relations. With this distinction, Findlay argues

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<sup>23</sup> Findlay 1933, 20

<sup>24</sup> Findlay 1933, 80

that we can “take time serious” (*Findlay 1936*, 189). The problem is, according to Findlay, that we on one hand want to believe in “the emergence of novelty in the present” and distinguish “between what is living and actual *now*, and what is merely a matter of memory or history”. On the other hand it is difficult to make sense of the now as a moving arrow since it appears to be immobilized in the now. Rejecting the now and substituting for it “a complex logical construction of durations” (*Findlay 1936*, 190), does not appear to do justice to the way we perceive time however, according to Findlay.

He then argues:

“But we may inquire whether the whole conception of a duration, as something present all at once and in a block, does not do violence to our notion of time quite as seriously as would a Spinozistic eternity. If any portion of the past, however infinitesimal, can cohere with the present or stand in any other relation to it, then that portion of the past is not past, and the duration into which it enters in not really protracted in time.”<sup>25</sup>

Against this Findlay suggests that we use relational properties, instead of relations as such, and it is obvious that he suggests this to be modelled on tenses:

“Out of this impasse we can save ourselves by having recourse to the theory of relational properties. There cannot, it is obvious, be any temporal relations, in the ‘bridge’ sense of relations, between the present, the past and the future, because these relations can only subsist when their terms are all in existence, and the past, the present and the future never exist together. But thought there cannot be bridge-like connections between the real present and non-existent past and future, there may nevertheless be, in the bosom of the real present, a self-transcendent reference to what has been and what will be.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Findlay 1936*, 190

<sup>26</sup> *Findlay 1936*, 190



Findlay's treatment of time, in 1936, as a self-transcendent reference of what 'has been' and what 'will be', constitutes an important background information for his treatment of time in *Time: a treatment of some puzzles* (Findlay 1941), where he states that 'our conventions with regard to tenses are so well worked out that we have practically the materials in them for a formal calculus' (Findlay 1941, 233) Findlay proceeds, in a footnote, with formulating some of the propositions that would have to be included in such a calculus:

x present = (x present) present;

x future = (x future) present = (x present) future;

also such comparatively recondite propositions as that

(x).(x past) future; i.e. all events, past and future will be past.<sup>27</sup>

The footnote was important for Prior's formulation of tense-logic, and is the direct reason why Prior in *Past, Present and Future* writes that Findlay 'in a sense [is] the founding father of tense-logic' (Prior 1967, 1-10). Findlay's earlier work, published while he taught Prior, already contained the claim that to 'take time serious' (Findlay 1936, 189) requires that we treat the present as containing 'a self-transcendent reference to what has been and what will be' (Findlay 1936, 190) The fact that Prior not only knew about the article, but considered it one of his 'most valued literary possession'<sup>28</sup> gives a greater depth to the sense in which Findlay is the founding father of tense-logic: The temporal realism at the root of Prior's view on time bears the hallmark of Findlay's influence.

## 6. Conclusion

The claim is here that Findlay's influence on Prior is evident in his adherence to logical realism as the view that logic is about reality and not language. We know that Findlay, when he taught Prior at Otago, had published a treatment of Meinong's theory of objects (Findlay 1933) in which he clearly

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<sup>27</sup> Findlay 1941,

<sup>28</sup> A.N. Prior to Ursula Bethel 2nd July 1937, 1, in *Grimshaw 2018*, 113.

distanced himself from philosophical idealism, and in 1936 continued this criticism in *Relational Properties* (Findlay 1936). We know that Findlay had been outspoken about the ignorance of Marxist toward ‘the actual development of philosophy’,<sup>29</sup> and had pulled the neo-Hegelian idealist Bosanquet to pieces, as Prior recalled it.<sup>30</sup> We also know that Prior considered Marxist philosophy ‘abominable’,<sup>31</sup> and considered Marx’s one big mistake that he hadn’t dislodged himself from Hegel.<sup>32</sup> We also know that Prior considered philosophical idealism a disease (Prior 1937, 11) and something that Barthian theologians should distance themselves from. What caused Prior to attain such a highly critical attitude toward philosophical idealism and argue for logical realism as early as 1937 with regard to Barthian theology? The best explanation is J.N. Findlay, and especially the work undertaken by Prior as he wrote his M.A. thesis on ‘The Nature of Logic’. When Prior looked back on his thesis a decade later he recalled that ‘a lot of the work was really Findlay’s’.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, we not only know that Prior cherished Findlay’s *Relational Properties*,<sup>34</sup> with its criticism of philosophical idealism, but we also know that Prior later continued the strong view on temporal realism displayed by Findlay in 1936. Prior seems to have adopted the high view of realism displayed by Findlay even concerning the present as containing a ‘self-transcendent reference’ to the past and future and provided a formulation of it, that in form resemblance a statement of faith, in *Some Free Thinking about Time*:

So far, then, as I have anything that you could call a philosophical creed, its first article is this: I believe in the reality of the distinction between past, present, and future. I believe that what we see

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<sup>29</sup> Prior to Ursula Bethel, undated, Letter 12, 2, in *Grimshaw 2018*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Prior to Mary, [B46] The Martin Collection Aalborg, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Prior to Lex Miller, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1947, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Prior to Hugh, June 15, 1938, 2-3, in *Grimshaw 2018*, 162-163.

<sup>33</sup> Prior to Mary, [B30] Aalborg University Martin Collection, 1.

<sup>34</sup> A.N. Prior to Ursula Bethel 2nd July 1937, p. 1, in *Grimshaw 2018*, 113.

as a progress of events is a progress of events, a coming to pass of one thing after another, and not just a timeless tapestry with everything stuck there for good and all.<sup>35</sup>

The use of words such as ‘creed’ and, ‘first article’, as well as the twofold repetition of ‘I believe’, can be seen as reminiscent of were Prior first learned to appreciate logical realism, namely while he was trying to make sense of Barthian fideism. However that may be, it is evident that the question of realism, has been a contentious matter from the beginnings of tense-logic. When Prior, on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1954 presented tense-logic at The Second Philosophical Congress in Wellington, in his presidential address which was later published in 1958 as *The Syntax of Time Distinctions*, he was confronted by a Thomist who desired to know his position on realism. Prior, recounted the story in his letter to Mary on the same day:

There was a very pugnacious priest at the back who said that he was ‘a Thomist & a strict Thomist’, that this was the first exhibition he had seen of ‘logistics’, & that (this very aggressively & totally irrelevantly) he wanted to know if I was a ‘realist’. I had a great deal of pleasure in telling him that I was far more of a realist than he was, & that he would in fact classify me as an ‘extreme’ realist.<sup>36</sup>

However one chooses to label Prior’s logical realism, there can be little doubt that it bore the hallmark of Findlay’s influence, stretching back to Prior’s M.A. work on ‘The Nature of Logic’.

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<sup>35</sup> Prior, 1996, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Prior to Mary, August 27, 1954, 4.

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