
MACKAY, Donald Sage (1892–1951)

Donald S. Mackay was born on 8 September 1892 in St. Albans, Vermont, to Donald Sage Mackay and Helen Smith Mackay. His father was a distinguished clergyman in New York who had emigrated from Glasgow, Scotland. Mackay

graduated with a BA from Williams College in 1914, and earned a BD from Union Theological Seminary in 1917. He then served in the US Army during World War II, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Distinguished Service Medal, as well as a Purple Heart.

Mackay returned to Columbia University, where he received the PhD in philosophy in 1924, writing a dissertation titled "Mind in the Parmenides." He was an assistant in philosophy in 1919-20, and a lecturer in 1920-21 at Columbia. He went to the University of California at Los Angeles in 1921 as an associate in philosophy, and was appointed instructor in 1922 and assistant professor in 1924. He joined the philosophy department of the University of California at Berkeley in 1927, and was promoted to full professor in 1938. He also served as chair of the department from 1946 until his death. He was President of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association from 1942 to 1944. Mackay died while vacationing in Bend, Oregon, on 13 September 1951.

From the time of his dissertation, Mackay evidenced a profound interest in the philosophy of Plato. As book editor of the *Journal of Philosophy* for many years, he reviewed a steady stream of writings on Plato and Greek philosophy. His analysis of Plato's *Parmenides* and *Sophist* identify the principles of definition as processes of dialectical inquiry. He denied that the network of definitive Forms was not structured as a pyramid with Good at the apex. The task of the dialectician is to follow the strands interconnecting the forms wherever they lead until the ideal meanings have been distinguished from the tangle of existences in which they are involved. A judgment expresses the propositional nature of reality as meaning discovered in its subject matter but distinct from that subject matter. On Mackay's view, Plato in the *Parmenides* hints at and in the *Sophist* fully anticipated Aristotle's doctrine that it is in affirmation and negation that there is truth or falsehood. Much of Mackay's later career involved elaboration of these central Platonic doctrines

and their implications for such subjects as aesthetics, the problem of relations, causality, succession, duration, and reason.

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Further Reading

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