

**George N. Schlesinger**  
**1925-2013**

Rabbi and Professor Dr. Natan (George) Schlesinger passed away on June 27, 2013, at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis, TN. He had been a resident of the Memphis Jewish Home and Rehab for seven years.

Schlesinger was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1925. He moved to Israel in 1939 with his parents, who settled in Bnei Brak. He studied at religious seminaries in Jerusalem and was ordained as a rabbi in 1948. He met his wife of 63 years, Shulamith Davidi Schlesinger while teaching in a seminary in Kfar HaRoeh.

Less than a year after their marriage in 1950, they moved to England, where Schlesinger received his B.Sc. and M.Sc from the University of London. They then relocated to Australia, where he received his Ph.D in 1959 from the University of Melbourne.

During his career he published 10 books, and more than 300 articles, on scientific method, time, logic, and religion, which were often also anthologized. He lectured throughout the world. In his work he raised original questions, and he usually took highly provocative positions backed by ingenious arguments.

From 1960 to 1967 he held the ranks of Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer and Reader (the equivalent of U.S. full professor) at the Australian National University. He also volunteered his services as a rabbi to the small Jewish community of Canberra, where his son David was born.

In 1967, the Schlesingers moved to Chapel Hill, NC, where Schlesinger was Professor of Philosophy until his retirement in 1999. He also held fellowships and visiting positions at the University of Minnesota, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Texas, and (repeatedly) Bar-Ilan University.

His teaching specialties at UNC were Philosophy of Religion and Philosophy of Science (especially confirmation theory, philosophy of physics and philosophy of time). In each of those areas he educated his students in Socratic fashion, with provocative and

stimulating questions. In 1975 he won a university-wide Tanner Award “in recognition of excellence in inspirational teaching,” and in 1990 he was Henry Horace Williams Award laureate for excellence in undergraduate teaching, an honor bestowed by UNC’s Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies.

For many years he taught a course on Space and Time jointly with Professor Hendrik van Dam of the Physics Department. (Under the influence of 20<sup>th</sup>-century physics we came to think of time as simply another dimension along with those of space. Schlesinger particularly enjoyed calling attention to the *contrasts* between the static nature of space and the dynamic nature of time.)

In 1991 he directed a very successful NEH Summer Seminar on the Philosophy of Time for College Teachers—so successful, in fact, that its members set out to form a society for the philosophy of time. That Society exists to this day, meeting in conjunction with the APA, and continues to credit Schlesinger for its inspiration: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/philtimesoc/intro.aspx>.

Schlesinger was an incomparable raconteur. He could just start in, telling stories off the top of his head, with jokes and anecdotes and literary references and historical oddities and cultural tropes and biographical information and personal reminiscences and..., punctuated by philosophical observations and modest flights of fancy. And he could go on indefinitely; he never ran out, nor would anyone have wanted him to. Naturally this ability enhanced his teaching.

During the 1980s and `90s, Schlesinger and Lycan put on periodic debates under the auspices of the UNC Graduate Philosophy Club, on topics such as Pascal’s Wager, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the practical application of moral rules, “Is Ignorance Bliss?,” and lastly in 1997, “Ulterior Motives in Philosophy.” These were immensely well attended. (The audiences had come to hear Schlesinger.) On several occasions, Schlesinger and Shulamith hosted a reception in their home following the debate; both food and conversation were superb.

Not surprisingly, he was much in demand as a speaker, at over two hundred different universities in Canada, Great Britain, Greece, India, The Netherlands, and Sweden, in addition to Australia, Israel and the U.S.

A retirement festivity was held in Schlesinger's honor in October, 1998. Numerous affectionate and amusing testimonials were given, and a congratulatory proclamation arrived from then NC Governor James B. Hunt. Schlesinger gave a valedictory speech on the difference between wisdom and intelligence, illustrated by an intriguing little paradox from game theory.

Schlesinger's first book, *Method in the Physical Sciences* (1963), was very highly regarded. At 50, it has been reissued by Routledge. *Aspects of Time* (1980) developed his views on space-time analogies and disanalogies, the status of temporal becoming, and the direction of causation. *Timely Topics* (1994) applied those views to various other issues in metaphysics; of it, *Philosophia* said that "no one wrestles with these questions more vigorously, more creatively, or with greater variety of innovative and fascinating twists and turns, than does George N. Schlesinger."

*Confirmation and Confirmability* (1974), *The Intelligibility of Nature* (1985) and *The Sweep of Probability* (1991) addressed paradoxes of confirmation theory and probabilistic reasoning; in approaching them, among other things Schlesinger developed and deployed his own notion of a "scientifically genuine" predicate. *The Range of Epistemic Logic* (1985) introduced concepts from probability theory into traditional epistemic logic, and applied the result to each of several traditional issues in epistemology.

*Religion and Scientific Method* (1977) and *New Perspectives on Old-Time Religion* (1988) gave novel confirmation-theoretic arguments for the existence of God, and took up various topics in natural theology, most notably the problem of evil. Schlesinger offered not just one but several mutually compatible theodicies.

Schlesinger was once asked by an interviewer how he had happened to end up in Chapel Hill, by way of Israel, England and Australia after leaving Budapest, and to settle

there for so many years. Deliberately intensifying his Hungarian accent, he replied, “Because it is the Southern Part of Heaven.”

Schlesinger leaves behind his wife Shulamith, his son David, and four grandchildren, Avishai, Ariav, Efroni and Eliana Schlesinger.

William G. Lycan

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