



ALEXANDER BOYCE GIBSON

ALEXANDER BOYCE GIBSON (1900-72)

Alexander Boyce Gibson, Foundation Member of the Australian Humanities Research Council and Foundation Fellow of the Academy died on 2 October 1972.

He was a man of remarkable width of learning. His first degree, at Melbourne, was in Classics but he also had a mastery of several European languages, particularly Russian and French, and throughout his life he maintained a lively interest in European literature. Thus when, at Balliol, he became a philosopher these interests and skills made him an unusually wide-ranging one, and unlike most of his colleagues in the Anglo-Saxon world he was always abreast of philosophical developments in continental Europe.

His first work, published in 1932 when he was a lecturer at Birmingham, was on the philosophy of Descartes. In 1935 he returned to Melbourne to take up the Chair of Philosophy, and thereafter his researches, communicated principally in a stream of journal articles, were in three main areas: the philosophy of Plato, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion. On the latter two topics his contributions were notable for his attempts to reach an accommodation between the idealist philosophical tradition in which he grew up and the empiricist linguistic analysis practised by some of his juniors. He was among the first, for instance, to show the importance for aesthetics of Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance', and it was towards an empiricist philosophy of religion that he directed his thinking.

After his retirement from the Chair in 1965 he continued to teach, but had much more leisure for his philosophical investigations. One of them, *Thinker and Muse* was on aesthetics; the other was called *Theism and Empiricism*. A third book—*The Religion of Dostoyevski*—was being prepared for publication at the time of his death.

But Sandy Gibson's contribution to the advance of philosophy should not be measured solely by his published work. He was fond of saying that the road to philosophical progress and discovery was through disagreement and controversy. Unlike some who say such things, he acted on it as Head of Department and surrounded himself with people of very diverse philosophical opinions, including many vehement opponents of his own deeply held beliefs. Although there is no school of 'Gibsonian philosophy' scores of philosophers around the world have reason to be grateful that Sandy Gibson ran such a lively department, and such a happy one.

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D. A. T. Gasking