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MEMOIR

MICHAEL L. FRIEDMAN (1947–2025)

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This notice mourns the passing of the prominent philosopher Michael L. Friedman, who died at Stanford Hospital on March 24, 2025, after a long illness. He was 77. Friedman was the Suppes Professor of Philosophy of Science at Stanford University until his retirement in 2024.

Friedman (Ph.D. Princeton, 1973) had been a member of the Stanford Philosophy Department since 2000. He taught previously at Harvard (1972–75), the University of Pennsylvania (1975–82), the University of Illinois at Chicago (1982–94), and Indiana University (1994–2000), where he served as Chair of History and Philosophy of Science. He also held visiting positions at Harvard, UC Berkeley, Western Ontario, Konstanz, Oxford, and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. He was made Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001 and was President of the Philosophy of Science Association in 2000. He was awarded the 1987 Lakatos Prize (for *Foundations of Space-Time Theories*), the 1985 Matchette Prize (for the same work), and the 2015 Fernando Gil International Prize in Philosophy of Science (for *Kant's Construction of Nature*).

Michael Friedman was among the most incisive philosophical intelligences of our era, and his work left an indelible mark on the philosophy of science, on Kant studies, and on philosophy more broadly. His early work on space-time theories and on unification-based theories of scientific explanation was broadly influential. Noteworthy highlights include the Lakatos prize-winning *Foundations of Space-Time Theories* (1983) and the widely cited paper 'Explanation and Scientific Understanding' (*J Phil*, 1974). Over time, his interests and his contributions steadily moved in the direction of greater historical depth. 'Kant's Theory of Geometry' (*Phil Rev*, 1985) initiated Friedman's field-shaping intervention into Kant scholarship, and sparked a series of penetrating studies that found an early culmination in the landmark book *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (1992), which decisively reoriented Kant studies by restoring the systematic Kantian account of the foundations of exact scientific knowledge to its rightful central place in our understanding of the overall Kantian philosophy.

That project kicked off three decades of probing scholarship on Kant and Newton, which included a new translation of Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (2004) and literally dozens of influential papers. The culmination of this historical work was Friedman's monumentally detailed, Gil-prize-winning *Kant's Construction of*

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Nature (2013), which probes the deepest and most technical details of Kant's reconstruction of Newtonian science.

Through this research trajectory, Friedman remade himself into a scholarly historian of philosophy and science, with sensitivity to the historical actors' own categories and the full strangeness of the past. But he never relinquished the aim of *also* deploying that historical depth in the service of his own novel explanations of scientific knowledge. Indeed, his historical work fed directly into his distinctive, neo-Kantian theory of the progress of science, which combined Kuhnian insights into the nature of revolutionary scientific change with Kantian ones about how a priori constitutive principles permit the formulation of well-framed scientific questions that can stand in exact relation to evidence. These ideas received initial expression in *Dynamics of Reason* (2001), a work which began life as the 1999 Kant Lectures at Stanford. The ideas continued to preoccupy Friedman, and a fuller and more detailed working out of the Friedman neo-Kantian conception of science was the subject of his 2012 Spinoza Lectures and his 2015 Isaiah Berlin Lectures at Oxford, as well as late papers and manuscripts on which he continued working until his health gave out.

Friedman was also one of our major scholarly interpreters of the development of analytic philosophy and its connections to philosophy of science, with particular expertise on Carnap and logical positivism (*Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, 1999). In addition, he was a leading voice on the emergence of the split between 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophy. *A Parting of the Ways* (2000) shed decisive light on the previously under- or even *un*appreciated role played in that split by differing reactions to certain difficulties that arose in the research program of orthodox neo-Kantianism generally, and within Ernst Cassirer's work in particular.

Friedman's major lecture series on the material about Cassirer, Carnap, and Heidegger, like the ones on the *Dynamics of Reason* material, were experiences of impressive rigour, remarkable erudition, and unforgettable intellectual excitement for those who were able to attend.

Friedman's training touched literally dozens of students and postdocs, decisively shaping the intellectual trajectories of an exceptional group of younger scholars across the history of philosophy, the history and philosophy of the exact sciences, and contemporary philosophy of science alike. Many others of us who were never his students likewise benefitted as colleagues from his penetrating pressure and critique, and from studying his careful work. Readers can gain a sense of the depth and power of these intellectual connections from the remarkable 850 page volume *Discourse on a New Method* (2010), which brought together an impressive collection of students and colleagues to engage with themes from Friedman's work. His own response to the contributors runs to over 200 pages, and should be considered another Friedman book in its own right.

Michael was preceded in death by his beloved wife and philosophical collaborator, Graciela de Pierris (1950–2024). He is survived by his mother, his sister, her two children, and his three grandnieces, as well as a wide circle of students, colleagues, and admirers worldwide.

Michael was a philosopher's philosopher. He was immensely serious about our subject, and he was relentlessly demanding – both in the excellence he expected from his interlocutors (and himself), and in his recognition that knowledge and philosophical understanding are a never ending journey demanding continual

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improvement. As Kant rightly saw, the sort of systematic knowledge to which philosophy aspires is a regulative ideal, not an achieved fact. When one talked with Michael, philosophy was never far from the surface, whatever the ostensible topic.

His death is an enormous loss for the world of philosophy.[1]

Note

1 *Kantian Review* thanks the North American Kant Society for sharing this memorial notice, with permission from Lanier Anderson.

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