

Reviews

The Isles of Greece! The Isles of Greece!

Rush Rhees, *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, ed. D. Z Phillips: volume 1, *The Presocratics and Reality*; volume 2, *Plato and Dialectic*, Ashgate Publishing

Now that everyone can see that they don't exist, in the sense formerly imagined, only an agreeable tourist destination, it is time to dust our grammars off and do what we can before we die to bring the Greeks back in; treading on the ground, though, now; talking about what it's like. Listen!

While waiting for Rhees' new posthumous book to come out we read Plato. Here was the old familiar feeling, of not knowing where to have him. A monograph on his thought, published by a Cambridge man in 1935, was not a lot of help:

As for immortality, the human soul as a whole definitely does not attain it, since part of it is unequivocally stated to be mortal. Neither physical desire nor ambition survives. So that the human personality as we know it ceases to be at death. It is however said with equal clearness from the *Phaedo* to the *Timaeus* that the highest part of the soul, the mind or intellect, the capacity to apprehend universal truth, does survive. It lives on, presumably, as a focus of soul-force, that is, of the longing for perfection, beauty and truth which is the ultimate origin of all ordered movement and life in the universe. If we ask, further, how far this immortal mind keeps its individuality we must remember that from first to last the aim of the Platonic philosopher is to live on the universal plane, to *lose himself* more and more in the contemplation of truth, so that the perfect psyche would, it seems, lose itself completely in the universal mind, the world-psyche. Hence it remains individual only in so far as it is imperfect, and personal immortality is not something to aim at, but something to outgrow.

Such seems to be Plato's view.[1]

The Rhees arrived. It did not disappoint:

The soul is what brings life to the body. It can do this only because the soul *has* life, or we might say, because the soul *necessarily* has life; this seems to be what Socrates is assuming throughout his argument. ... If you say that the soul brings life to the body, then you have to ask what is the sort of life that *is* characteristic of the soul. That is, first and foremost, the activity of thinking, and of knowing; and also, the activity of striving. That is what the soul brings to the body, or what the human soul brings to the human body, at any rate. ... The soul brings the body as far as possible into line with its own characteristic

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strivings. ... The point is that if the soul brings to the body a kind of activity that is concerned with, and governed by, insight into the intelligible natures of the Forms, then it brings to the body something from outside the world of things that come to be and perish at all. This seems to be the important part of Plato's argument.

One of these authors had a clue. Pretty obviously, it consisted in an obsessive interest in writing sentences that might say something. This was a clue that led into the labyrinth—not out. Nevertheless, it was the other author that was the harder to read. It was harder to keep awake, reading him; and the result of trying was that you found yourself in a dream—why ever fight it?—of floating on the clouds outside the window of the aeroplane. “A focus of soul-force, that is, of the longing for perfection, beauty and truth which is the ultimate origin of all ordered movement and life in the universe”? Talk about the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean!

Rhees is expounding Plato, but taking up and using his language (“when it leaves the body”; “the soul acts on the apprehension”) by way of seeing what there might be in it, and by way of fighting with him, into a sense he strives to make his own. We say “fight”, and mean it: the result is this clarity, if you will give it a chance, read a sentence at a time, a section at a time, beyond anything we have any right to expect.

He goes so straight to the heart of what is interesting to talk about that you look up from the book and wonder, before plunging back in:

The activity of the human soul belongs to the realm of intelligible things in which it is exhibited.

And we might say that the reason why the soul will not perish even when it leaves the body, when it withdraws from the body, is that the source of the life that the soul has is a source, not in bodily existence; not of the things that come to be and perish, but in the things that do not perish. It is to be found in those objects that give understanding, that give knowledge, that give the soul that life which it brings to the body. The life of the bodily existence itself, then is one which, in its essential character, does not dissolve when the body dissolves and decays. [He deals with the Mind-Body Problem, then continues:] What Socrates suggests, for instance, is that no knowledge of physiology will explain why he is sitting there. ... That depends upon a knowledge of the Good ... If the body is alive—the human body, that is—that is because the soul brings life to the body.

The soul *accounts for* the life and actions of the body in a way which the bones and the sinews do not. This has to do with the fact that the soul acts on the apprehension of reasons or causes. ... The senses become not merely physical instruments, but organs of knowledge. The

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Forms are in things, but the Forms are known and apprehended by the soul ... But it is important also to distinguish between the life of the soul and the life of the body. Unless you do that, you cannot see what the life is that is brought to the body. You cannot see how the body's growth and the body's life is a form of *genesis eis ousian* (coming into being). ...

Certainly in some sense Plato wants to say that the soul is eternal, and that you cannot understand what the soul is unless you see that, unless you see its relation to eternal life. In some sense or other he wants to say that the soul is what it aspires to be. This has something to do with the reality of the soul being the destiny of the soul, probably.

The soul is that which the body loses at death. The soul is also that which the body loses through moral degradation.

It is difficult to review these volumes. Rhees did not write books. It appears that he wrote, it must have been every day, philosophy that keeps on circling round and coming back, starting again and going over again, for his own soul's sake and, we can only put it, to the glory of the most high God and that his neighbour might be benefited by it.

Professor D. Z. Phillips it is that makes the books, writing them out with his fountain pen from the sixteen thousand pages Rhees left. Thanks to Phillips, we now have quite a bit.[2] There are several things to say about it. It is reading for a lifetime. It is difficult. It is immensely cultured and utterly unaffected. It goes straight to what is interesting and is as clean as a jump in the ocean.

It might be worth reflecting that most of the work here dates from the Sixties! A period of culture is seen finally as all that isn't its great exemplar; Grube, finally, as not-Rhees. Phillips tells us elsewhere that Rhees lectured without notes, but he always had them by him. It is poignant to think of his Swansea undergraduates receiving the thoughts contained in these pages, write-ups of lecture notes, like Aristotle's works, as apparently they are. Whoever wants them, will want them a lot.

R. M.

1. G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (1935) 1970
2. Rush Rhees' posthumous books so far—all edited by D. Z. Phillips—are:

On Religion and Philosophy, Cambridge, 1997

Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse, Cambridge, 1998

Moral Questions, 1999

Discussions of Simone Weil, New York, 2000

Wittgenstein's On Certainty—There Like our Life, 2003

A Philosopher Speaks

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Public and Private Occasions*, ed.
James C. Klagge
and Alfred Nordmann, Rowman & Littlefield (USA), 2003

There might be an elderly reader here or there who can recall from thirty years ago the appearance of a book, whose author had got it into his head that Ludwig Wittgenstein was a homosexual, and that it was important to know.[1]

In service of the first of these passions he had gone to Vienna, where, he said, he found old men who told him tales of fifty years ago, of the one-day-to-be-author of *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* hieing himself—he said—to the Prater park, in search of rude boys and love. With the second of them *The Human World* was able to assist.[2]

Professor Bartley having published the part of his researches concerning old men and rude boys, the philosophical community has awaited, for the light they must bring, publication of coded diaries also mentioned in his book.

Now it had better be said—for here are diaries, by Ludwig Wittgenstein, in part in code—that the sex so far is kissing; with a female person; and with marriage (since we are hieing) prepense. Never mind: *écrasez l'infâme!* We mean, of course, that of the wholly unnecessary, *intimidating*, difficulty of this *Wittgenstein*.

The one commanding sentence in this collection of entirely private jottings (the woman he loved having found a more likely husband) is:

“The bourgeois odour of the Marguerite-Talla relationship
I find so gruesome, unbearable that I could flee from it out
of this world.”

We rather felt it set out and dealt with the whole topic.

R. M.

1. William Warren Bartley III, *Wittgenstein*, New York 1974.
2. *The Human World* No. 14 February 1974; comment by Rush Rhees and Major and Mrs J. Stonborough, p. 66 ff.