Reviews

Psychopompos philosophikos

by Bernd Frohmann

William Warren Bartley III. *Wittgenstein*. 2nd ed., rev. and enl. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1985. Pp. 218. US$9.95, paper.

> I have not found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* anything that seemed to me interesting and I do not understand why a whole school finds important wisdom in its pages. Psychologically this is surprising. The earlier Wittgenstein, whom I knew intimately, was a man addicted to passionately intense thinking, profoundly aware of difficult problems of which I, like him, felt the importance, and possessed (or at least so I thought) of true philosophical genius. The later Wittgenstein, on the contrary, seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine which would make such an activity unnecessary.[1]

RUSSELL'S PUBLISHED REMARKS on his change of opinion, from believing Wittgenstein to be "the most perfect example I have ever known of genius as traditionally conceived"[2] to believing that his major philosophical work "resulted from a renunciation of serious philosophical inquiry",[3] disguise the strength of his ill feeling. We know that Russell's abhorrence of linguistic philosophy amounted at times to a physical revulsion: "I find Ryle's work always repulsive, in the sort of way in which a bad smell is repulsive ... my disgust became so strong that I had to put him down.... It is shocking that the philosophy of the English-speaking world should consist almost wholly of tea-table rubbish" (letter to C.W.K. Mundle, 19 June 1967). We also know that Russell saw Wittgenstein as one of the leading ideologues of the "cult of common usage": "I detest linguistic philosophy more and more as time goes on and I am sorry that at the time I thought well of Witt-

[1] *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959), pp. 216–17.
[2] *Autobiography* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1985), p. 329.
[3] Russell to Helen Hervey, 31 March 1959 (Russell Archives).

genstein" (letter to Mundle, 10 Dec. 1968).

But disagreement with a rival philosophy, even for someone who, like Russell, lived so passionately the life of the intellect, does not explain the force of his hostility, either to Wittgenstein's later thought or to the man himself. Russell strongly detested many rival philosophies and philosophers, but he rarely swept them aside without any reasoned response (consider, for example, his view of Bergson). His dismissal of Ryle was uncharacteristic and, in any case, it is no model for the transformation of his feelings for Wittgenstein, whom he once regarded so highly. Yet in a letter to Helen Hervey (24 August 1959) Russell simply dismisses Wittgenstein's remarks on private language, now recognized as central to his later philosophy: "Thank you for your letter and for the two enclosures on the private language problem. I have read them both and, although I do not know the detail of what you are arguing against, I find myself in agreement with what you say, but I cannot offer any detailed comment as Wittgenstein's thesis seems to me silly and I cannot get myself into the state of mind of taking it seriously ... I have not the patience to take seriously what seems to me absurd." Russell even goes so far as to suggest that his first high opinion of Wittgenstein may have been a distortion caused by Wittgenstein himself: "You criticize me for having said that Wittgenstein was a genius, and I think perhaps you are justified. His personal impact was so powerful that it tended to warp one's judgment. I think Wittgenstein's influence has been wholly bad, and I hope you are right that it is diminishing even at Oxford" (letter to Hervey, 31 March 1959). In a letter of 24 April 1957, Roy Harrod aired his criticism of the man and his philosophy: his work had not only made no progress since the *Tractatus* but had regressed, he was not constructive, was egotistic, and was unfit to be the head of a school. Russell replied: "I agree completely with what you say about Wittgenstein" (30 April 1957).

The young "perfect example of genius", the man to whom Russell looked for the "next real important advance in philosophy",[4] "the most apostolic and ablest person I have come across since Moore",[5] becomes, in Russell's later view, someone who has renounced serious thinking, who has regressed intellectually, whose major ideas are too absurd and silly to be taken seriously, an egotist who warps others' judgments of him, and one whose influence is wholly bad. The rhetoric of Russell's

[4] Russell to Leopoldine Wittgenstein, Ludwig's mother, *c.* 1914. In *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*, ed. Michael Nedo and Michele Ranchetti (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 120.

[5] Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, 13 Feb. 1913. In *Autobiography*, p. 231.

correspondence is that of someone who feels he has been personally betrayed and who reacts, predictably enough, with the desire to punish: "I do not think you need hesitate to challenge those who revere Wittgenstein and I do not believe that his influence is lasting" (letter to Hervey, 31 March 1959).

The full story of the change in Russell's opinion of Wittgenstein has yet to be told, and until it is, any book that sheds light on Wittgenstein's character and life is welcome to Russell studies. It is therefore unfortunate that William Warren Bartley III's *Wittgenstein* connects with Russell studies only by escalating the tempo of the anti-Wittgenstein rhetoric found in Russell's correspondence. Bartley's book finds its "econiche", to use one of the author's more flamboyant verbal barbarisms, only in the arena of hostility, antipathy, desire for punishment and damage to Wittgenstein's reputation.

First published in 1973 and reissued in a second edition in 1985, the book's publisher (Open Court) trades on its notoriety[6] by printing as blurbs on the back cover of the new paperbound issue several vigorous condemnations from reviews of the first edition, denouncing it as "foul", "lies and poppycock", "pure invention" and "filth". Even stronger statements can be found in the reviews from which these comments are taken. Wittgenstein's nephew, John Stonborough, has written that Bartley and his publishers have "put out a book in which they pee on the graves of men whom honest and upright people admire and respect";[7] "... the present volume on Ludwig Wittgenstein strikes me as a novella or a spot of fiction written by the slovenly and the prurient for the delectation of the gullible" (p. 79); "if I hear such tushery expressions again, not even the hat of a USA publisher will be able to cope with my vomit" (p. 80). He suggests that Bartley is "the dregs of USA philosophy" (p. 81), and with scatological flourish refers to Bartley's speculations as "the cloacal theories of Bartley III" (p. 84). His rage is wonderfully concentrated in a passage worthy of a scene from a George Romero film, where he has us envision Bartley's informants as to Wittgenstein's alleged homosexuality:

> All of a sudden there appear from behind every bush and tree all the old, old men crippled with arthritis and many other diseases not to be mentioned among philosophers in the USA, and they recognize a philosopher sans any trouble, and waving their *Tractatus* or the *Philosophical Investigations* they

[6] See the controversy in the letters column of the *TLS*. See Bartley's nn. 8–10, p. 162.

[7] John J. Stonborough, "Wittgenstein", *The Human World*, no. 14 (Feb. 1974): 78–84 (at 78).

halt our Cicerone and his student to tell all about L.W. whom they remember as well as if it were a mere 53 years ago; and they want to know how he is and they want to go more deeply into the problems of logic or higher mathematics.... Silent as the grave through decades of poverty, of civil war, of Nazi terror and of Stalingrad etc. they now in 1969 were still (some minus a limb or two) at their post and doing their bit. Hats off to the stamina of these very, very old men, to their women folk, and to the trepid American explorer of the Prater who hit on all those to whom the *Tractatus* was a passport to illicit pleasures! (P. 82)

Hyperbolic rhetoric, to be sure, yet salutary because it draws attention to Bartley's main innovation in philosophical hermeneutics: he has brought the tabloid form to philosophy. *Wittgenstein* might best be regarded as a philosophical version of *The National Enquirer*, and Bartley as the Lyndon LaRouche of philosophy. Devotees of the lunatic fringe of American politics have long relished LaRouche's talent for beaming theories down from a hitherto uncharted region of cognitive outer space. To those familiar with the concept of evidence, he provides a breathtaking jolt of intellectual vertigo, a feeling that might justify reading LaRouche for anyone harbouring a penchant for the cognitive version of those familiar but disturbing dreams of falling from tall buildings. After reading that a $200 billion per year drug trade is run through the City of London and directed by the Queen of England, and that the environmental movement in the United States plots genocide, readers of this journal might consider the following from Carol White's *The New Dark Ages Conspiracy: Britain's Plot to Destroy Civilization*, a work "commissioned and inspired" by LaRouche,[8] and dutifully collected by the Russell Archives in its indefatigable quest for Russelliana of any stripe: "Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells were two of the most evil men alive in this century. Through their own writings, they reveal how they were instrumental in shaping a fascist subculture and carrying out the most evil acts of menticide and genocide in human history ... these men plotted World War I, then World War II, and now World War III ..." (p. xviii).

Bartley's book also makes the mind reel, not so much by his analyses of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which are simply inept, but by his blatant disregard of the necessity for presenting any evidence for his allegations of Wittgenstein's homosexual practices, of his intellectual debt to the Austrian school reform movement, and of repressed homosexual desire as the meaning of his dreams. The boldness of these assertions is

[8] New York: New Benjamin Franklin, 1984, pp. v–vi; 1st ed., 1980.

matched only by the utter disregard for evidence that characterizes LaRouche's thunderbolts or *The National Enquirer's* headlines.

Because the failings of the first edition of Bartley's book are now a matter of published record,[9] there is no need to draw attention to them in this review. The interest of this second edition lies in its Afterword, "Wittgenstein and Homosexuality",[10] in which Bartley not only seizes the opportunity to continue the *TLS* controversy (see n. 6 above), but also manages to explain, in a bold exercise of the Jungian and alchemical theoretical imagination, Wittgenstein's extraordinary influence, the relation between his homosexuality and his thought, and the unsporting behaviour of Bartley's own critics.

The centrepiece of the Afterword consists of three arguments against the notion that a philosopher's work can be reduced to the expression of an emotional state. Bartley wants to use these arguments to show that Wittgenstein's philosophy cannot be reduced to an expression of his homosexuality. While the conclusion is commendable (for who would seriously think that the richness of any major philosophical position is nothing more than an expression of homosexuality, or any other kind of sexuality?), Bartley's three arguments are easily refuted.

He calls his first argument biological; it consists in passing from the explicit premiss that descriptive statements are needed for the human species to survive and the implicit premiss that the human species is not now extinct to the conclusion that not all statements can be reduced to the expressive function of language. Aside from considerations that bear against the first premiss (Wittgenstein, for example, invites us to imagine a form of life in which the language consists only of commands), this argument does little to show that a philosophy could not be reduced to merely expressive statements. However highly the *Tractatus*, for example, may be regarded, it is hardly arguable that it consists of statements requisite to the survival of the human species.

The second argument is equally weak. Bartley argues that the reduction of description to expression is impossible because causal analyses of language are defective. But the argument is successful only given that the expressive function of language requires a causal analysis,

[9] In addition to the review by Stonborough, see "The Austrian Wittgenstein", *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 Aug. 1973, pp. 953–4, and reviews by: R.L. Goodstein, *Philosophy*, 48 (1973): 403–4; William De Angelis, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 35 (1974): 289–90; W.A. Frank, *Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974): 601–2; J.T. Price, *Man and World*, 7 (1974): 423–32; Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein", *The Human World*, no. 14 (Feb. 1974): 66–78. Bartley provides a list of favourable reviews in his n. 6, p. 161.

[10] Reprinted from *Salmagundi*, nos. 58–9 (Fall 1982–Winter 1983): 166–96.

according to which an expressive utterance refers to the inner state that caused it. This analysis is implausible for many reasons, among them Wittgenstein's own criticisms, both of inner states as the kinds of things to which one can refer, and of Russell's causal theory of meaning.

Bartley's final argument is that since the descriptive content of a philosophy always exceeds what its creator intends, it cannot be reduced to expressions of his inner states. But the argument fails to show that there might not be some features of a philosophy that are reducible to some features of personality. Only the latter, more modest proposal is required to argue for a relationship between thought and personality.

The final section of Bartley's Afterword must be applauded for its sheer bravado. In it, he bequeaths to philosophy the concept of the *psychopomp*, originating, he says, in the Neopythagorean figure of Hermes Psychopompos.[11] The concept cannot be fully appreciated without a mastery not only of C.G. Jung's researches into instinctual, archaic and archetypical responses, but also of the analyses of shamanic figures in "the Pythagorean tradition, and in the alchemical and hermetic writings" (*ibid.*). Fortunately for the uninitiated, an extensive bibliographical footnote is provided. Nothing about Wittgenstein's philosophy explains his appeal because, according to Bartley, "If one wanted his ideas, one could go to any number of other, clearer writers" (p. 192). No, Wittgenstein is a psychopomp, "an *anima mundi*, a spiritual guide", a figure whose charisma requires, we are told, a *soupçon* of homosexuality. The psychopomp, apparently, incites on an instinctual, archetypal level both the tremendous admiration of disciples and their violent rage against the psychopomp's detractors. But this is not the only motive of Bartley's critics, although "Nothing more is needed to explain the response to the first edition of my book" (p. 196). In a final audacious flourish, Bartley tars the entire American academic profession with a single brush. He leaves the reader a footnote claiming that the silence surrounding Wittgenstein's private life is explained by "the extensive repressed homosexuality and homophobia of American professional academics".[12] To this reviewer's relief, Bartley knows where to lay the blame: the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory Test.

I'll take Lyndon LaRouche any day.

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[11] See Bartley, *Wittgenstein*, p. 193.
[12] See his n. 70, pp. 196–7.