

## **Robert M. Pirsig R.I.P. 1928-2017**

I was saddened to hear yesterday of the death of Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

I heard the news from the professional philosophy e-list Philos-L. Coincidentally, the deaths of two other philosophers were announced on the same day: Eva Picardi, Professor of Philosophy of Language at the Alma Mater Studiorum, Bologna Italy, and Hubert L. Dreyfus, for nearly 50 years a professor of philosophy at UC Berkeley, USA.

Eva Picardi gained her D.Phil at Oxford University in 1984, working under Michael Dummett, just two years after I gained my D.Phil at Oxford. I also attended Dummett's lectures so it is quite possible that our paths crossed at some point. Professor Dreyfus is most widely known for his videoed lectures on Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* which can be found on YouTube.

Robert Pirsig was a big influence on my philosophical development. In 1999, I wrote about Pirsig's book in 'My Philosophical Life', on my 'Glass House Philosopher' web site:

"My reading of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* as a second year undergraduate was my most important influence, and the turning point of my life. I could never again look at the professors of philosophy with the respect and reverence I had done before.

"What struck me most forcefully about Pirsig's book was his passionate defence of the Greek Sophists. With hindsight, I can now see that Pirsig (or, rather, his alter ego Phaedrux) had been over-zealous in his attack on Plato and Aristotle. Battling against what he saw as a perniciously one-sided vision, in which the dubious character of the sophist was contrasted with the impeccable virtue of the philosopher, it was easy to fall into the opposite extreme. -- Then again, there is more to philosophy than seeing every side of the question. That is something Marx saw.

"In the long history of philosophy, it is only over a comparatively short

period that the universities have been the torch bearers for philosophy. Most of the great philosophers were not academics. That is surely sufficient grounds to raise a question."

<http://sophist.co.uk/glasshouse/index.html#life>

The above extract can also be found on the home page of Pathways to Philosophy <http://www.philosophypathways.com> next to a picture of my 1974 First Edition copy of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* which my father gave me as a Christmas present. I'd asked for the book after I'd seen an article on Pirsig in one of the Sunday newspapers.

As I wrote in my recent book *Philosophizer*, 'I gulped the green and orange volume down in greedy delight.'

An era has passed.

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