Algis Uždavinys, 1962–2010

Algis Uždavinys, Lithuanian philosopher, who died suddenly ten years ago, devoted his academic career to research in ancient philosophy. He was not only a respected author of philosophical books and articles, but also a translator of ancient Egyptian and Greek texts into Lithuanian and Russian. He also translated works by Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings, authorities in the field of comparative religion. The motivation for the research was to highlight the role of mysticism in the Platonic tradition and to emphasize the part played by non-Greek traditions. He hoped to reconcile the understanding of philosophy by its ancient representatives with its interpretation by philosophers in the 20th century.

Influenced by the insights of Pierre Hadot, he regarded ancient philosophy in the narrower sense, as essentially a way of life. Philosophy was for Greeks not only inseparable from “spiritual exercises,” but it was also in accord with their cosmogonical myths and sacred rites. As Uždavinys wrote, for later Platonists philosophy does not consist simply of a conceptual edifice (be it of the order of reason or myth), but of a lived concrete existence conducted by initiates, or by the whole theocentric community, treated as a properly organized and well-guided political and theurgical body attended to the principle of *maat*—truth and justice in the ancient Egyptian sense of the word.

Uždavinys also examined influences and relationships between Greek philosophers and Egyptian, Iranian, Mesopotamian, and Indian traditions, which the ancient Platonists accepted. For them, Pythagoras brought all the basic themes of philosophy to Greece from the Egyptians. He also investigated the role of theurgy in Neoplatonic thought. In accordance with Frithjof Schuon, Uždavinys made a distinction between theurgy and magic, because theurgy, according to Uždavinys, in the most general (or metaphorical) sense, is close to sacred art and both macrocosmic and microcosmic liturgy. He regarded it as a sacramental means for the ascent of the soul. In response to E. R. Dodds, Uždavinys claimed that theurgy cannot be reduced either to ‘a manifesto of irrationalism’ or to a one-sided mysticism, which denies corporeality altogether. Arguing against Dodds, he placed theurgy as a central practice to foster a connection between the corporeal and the spiritual realms in Platonism.

Uždavinys’ books and papers on Pythagorean philosophy and Platonism, on the Pythagorean tradition, on Hermes Trismegistus and the way of wisdom,

on philosophy and theurgy in late Antiquity, and finally on Orpheus and the roots of Platonism are carefully constructed and rigorously argued works. They are not merely an overview of the History of Ancient philosophy but also contain a wealth of mystagogic insights and intimations, sparks perhaps of that 'fiery beauty of truth' contemplated by the author.

Uždavinys provided a clear understanding of the two worlds of later Platonism—the upper realms of the One and Intellect and also the lower material realm. His body of work remains an essential part of Platonic research. He is greatly missed.

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