

Obituary

Allen Phillips Griffiths (1927–2014)

It is with sadness that we record the death on 1st December 2014 of Allen Phillips Griffiths, who was the Director of the Royal Institute of Philosophy from 1979–1994.

Griff, as he was universally known, was appointed to the chair of Philosophy and the newly founded University of Warwick in 1964. At the time he was the youngest Professor of Philosophy in the country, and he proceeded to build up a department, remarkable not only for the many distinguished philosophers who served and continue to serve in it, but also for its eclecticism and for the range of philosophical interests and styles represented in it. By the time of his retirement from Warwick, in 1997, the department had become one of the biggest and strongest in the country.

Griff was born in Llandaff in South Wales and read Philosophy at University College, Cardiff (during which time he also did military service). He took the B.Phil at Oxford, and then held posts at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and at Birkbeck College, London, before going on to Warwick for the rest of his academic career (though he did take a number of visiting professorships in the USA). He was recognised by all who knew him to have the sharpest of philosophical minds. To those lucky enough to encounter them, his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* made an indelible impression. He published sparingly, but his work on moral principles, on the use and justification of reasons, and on belief is of the highest order, and well worth visiting or revisiting for its clarity, economy, force and rigour, as well as for its originality.

As Director of the Royal Institute, Griff organised a sequence of prestigious and highly regarded lecture series. He presided over the meetings with an incomparable authority, style and wit. He was often at his best in discussion, in his seemingly endless ability to construct telling and incisive counter-examples, on almost any philosophical topic, and always with a substantial point beneath the brilliance. He also played a major role in organising the World Congress of Philosophy on behalf of the Institute, the first (and only) time it has been held in Britain since 1930.

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Griff was famous for his strong and robust opinions on many areas, including religion (on which his views changed over the years) and politics (on which they did not). In the causes he defended he took no prisoners, and at a time when it was deeply unfashionable (particularly at Warwick) he upheld the purest form of conservative liberalism. He was a doughty defender of academic freedom, properly understood, and he was once tear-gassed in the USA, during the student troubles there in the 1960s, because he refused to cancel a lecture despite the mayhem all around.

The Royal Institute was very fortunate to have him at the helm for fifteen years, and along with many others, we mourn his passing.