

Editorial: *Experto Crede*

What, if anything, is an expert amateur? The question becomes clearer if we look at a whole sentence in which that phrase occurs: 'My colleagues exemplified a devoted and highly expert amateurism which is growing rare in British academic life but which greatly aids good philosophy'. The author is William Charlton. The sentence occurs in the Preface to his new book *The Analytic Ambition: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Blackwell, £12.95 paper). He is paying a well deserved tribute to his colleagues in the Philosophy Department of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The department was abolished several years ago, and its members are widely scattered.

On the first page of the main text of the book Professor Charlton explains further a conception of philosophy that is now dominant in Britain, and by contrast implies a minority view of the subject, one that has a place for expert amateurs:

Today philosophy is taught and studied at universities as one particular discipline among others. You can get a degree in it or be a professor of it. This institutionalization has dangers as well as conveniences. For philosophy has no special subject-matter or field for research on a level with those of other disciplines like history, mathematics and biology; while to tackle the deepest problems philosophers must preserve the freedom of amateurs: they must not be bound intellectually by any terms of reference. If they become just another group of professional academics they cease to be of any use either as philosophers or as anything else: their philosophy turns into scholasticism.

There are other articulate spokespersons for views akin to those of Professor Charlton. One who has made a profession of studying the relations between philosophy and literature and the arts is Professor Berel Lang of the State University of New York at Albany. In *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style* (Blackwell, £12.95 paper) and in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* (London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1983), and other works of which he is author or editor, he explores the intricacies of nuance and resonance and finesse that belong to philosophy as they do to literature, because philosophy is itself one form of literature. It is written by individuals, as poems and novels are, and not by teams, like most modern scientific research. In the earlier book Professor Lang writes:

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The objection may be made that in citing these points of analogy as historical description I have given weight to what *some* philosophers have said about their work but not to the opinions of others—in effect that my opening claim for philosophical neutrality in this discussion was misleading. Certainly what I have said conflicts with the not uncommon representation of philosophy as a variety of science and thus as progressive (usually with that progress either beginning or ending with the philosopher who makes the claim). Certain philosophers, furthermore (often the same ones), have challenged the very concept of a history of philosophy invoked here as evidence—and if that history does not exist, neither, of course, does the evidence. But disagreement on this point, it seems to me, is itself historical—not primarily theoretical or philosophical, and still less a matter of will or desire. It may be that the work of philosophy will one day be complete, and that the only work left for subsequent reflections on philosophy, like the history of the dinosaur, will be to arrange the events that came between its beginning and its end (the two histories probably involving the same issues: disproportion of body to brain, predatory competition, inability to adapt).

It will be clear how closely Professor Lang's remarks chime with the purposes of this journal and most of its authors. Such disagreements as remain are to do with the need for wider exploration rather than to any dissatisfaction with what has been said so far. In particular, it seems that Professor Lang is a shade *too* literary in his overall view of philosophy. For example he gives its due place to rhetoric, but primarily if not exclusively to a *written* mode of rhetoric. There is little or no attention to human speech, to dialogue and dialectic, to *conversation* conceived after the manner of Oakeshott rather than the more cramped and less cognitive view of Rorty. There is much here to pursue on other occasions. For the present, sufficient unto the day is the expert amateurism thereof.