Discussion

Frohmann's review of W.W. Bartley III

by David Ramsay Steele

BERND FROHMANN'S EXTRAORDINARILY abusive review of *Wittgenstein*, by W.W. Bartley III, in *Russell*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (Summer 1987), seeks to discredit not only the author, but also the publisher of the new edition of this work, Open Court. In defence of our decision to publish a revised and enlarged edition of *Wittgenstein*, I would like to make the following points:

1. Mr. Frohmann refers to Professor Bartley as "the Lyndon LaRouche of philosophy" and quotes other derogatory epithets. In fact, Professor Bartley is a highly distinguished philosopher, with several outstanding works to his credit.

2. Mr. Frohmann states that "the book's publisher (Open Court) trades on [*Wittgenstein*'s] notoriety by printing as blurbs on the back cover of the new paperbound issue several vigorous condemnations from reviews of the first edition". In fact, the back cover bears eight blurbs, six of which are highly favourable and two of which are extremely hostile. The use of conflicting blurbs in this way is an old book-marketing device, and was used, for instance on the cover of Karl Popper's *Logic of Scientific Discovery*. The reception of Bartley's *Wittgenstein* by scholars, including scholars and writers of great eminence, has been overwhelmingly very favourable—a fact which Mr. Frohmann seeks by insinuation to deny.

3. Mr. Frohmann's readers are clearly intended to get the impression that Professor Bartley's "allegations" (!) have been refuted, when in fact as Mr. Frohmann must very well know, they have been amply corroborated. Mr. Frohmann might respond that even though what Professor Bartley says is *true*, he is still at fault in not completely documenting his sources (this seems to be the meaning of Mr. Frohmann's reference to Professor Bartley's "blatant disregard of the necessity for presenting any evidence for his allegations ..." and hence the comparisons with *The National Enquirer* and Lyndon LaRouche). However, it is well within the normal conventions, when writing a work of biography, to use as sources living persons whose names cannot yet be divulged. After, all, what are the alternatives, when writing a biography? To

omit the fact that the subject was a promiscuous homosexual and was consumed with guilt about it? To reveal the identities of informants, causing them extreme embarrassment?

4. Mr. Frohmann is inordinately preoccupied with the issue of Wittgenstein's sex life. He says of Professor Bartley: "he has brought the tabloid form to philosophy." Readers would hardly guess that the matter of Wittgenstein's homosexuality is mentioned *on four or five pages* of the biography, that is, on about three percent of the pages (the actual percentage of text devoted to this subject is much smaller). The mentions are brief, unsensational, and matter-of-fact. The "Afterword on Homosexuality" in the new edition is surely justified by the quite remarkable reaction to the first edition, a reaction which Mr. Frohmann now repeats, and a reaction which certainly cannot be explained by any theory that supposes the critics to be entirely rational or coherent when the subject of Wittgenstein's homosexuality is broached. Bartley's *Wittgenstein* is a balanced, accurate account of Wittgenstein the man—indeed, it remains the only balanced, accurate account.

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