

Editorial: Universities?

Philosophy is not accustomed to thinking in terms of new dawns or approaching millennia, but among those who are we notice a subtle change in usage. In Britain, where only five years ago it was decreed that henceforth polytechnics were to be known as universities, the trend is no longer to speak of universities and of dons, but rather of higher education and lecturers. We are not sure what higher education is. Whatever it is, though, all over the world there is more and more of it. It is clearly a very busy animal. It has challenges to meet, opportunities to respond to, quality to assure, new types of students to accommodate. It is kaleidoscopic in its diversity and positively protean in its diversity.

In this maelstrom of innovation, can universities still exist? Far be it from us to hold that there is some timeless essence to which all universities should conform. Nevertheless, there is a noble idea of a university as an institution of liberal education with no aim other than that of fostering in its graduates that 'true enlightenment of mind which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence'. As Newman's vision is in some sense a philosophical one, *Philosophy* is happy to recall it, even at this late stage, simply adding to it Spinoza's proviso that everything excellent is as difficult as it is rare.