

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

MY DEAR EDITOR,

In Professor G. C. Field's review of my *Platonic Legend*, in the January *Philosophy*, there appears, as the first of his illustrations of "Professor Fite's methods," the following:

He is determined not to admit that Plato in the *Republic* really contemplated the possibility of any one born in the industrial class being promoted to the ranks of the guardians, or vice versa. Though it is clearly asserted in the myth of the gold, silver, iron, and brass races, he argues that that, being a myth, is obviously not meant to be true.

Permit me then to state the facts. All that I have to say about this "parable of the metals" is contained within a single section (§ 5) of three pages. Nowhere is it even suggested that because Plato puts his meaning into the form of a pleasant tale, the tale is intended to deceive. What I do say—say very plainly, and not merely "argue"—is that Plato himself tells us that the tale is intended to deceive—and this I say in the following passage on page 29, which the reviewer has ignored:

This "parable of the metals," as Jowett calls it, is very commonly cited as conclusive evidence that the underlying motive of the *Republic* is democratic justice. Plato himself is careful to inform us (414b), in tones frankly cynical, that it is only one of his many pious lies, pious fictions, "opportune falsehoods" (*mechanē tōn pseudōn en deontōi gignomenōn*) [the passage should include a second *tōn* after *pseudōn*]*—*the opportune falsehood being defined by Professor Shorey in a footnote to his translation as an "ingenious device employed by a superior intelligence to circumvent necessity or play providence with the vulgar."

WARNER FITE.

PRINCETON, N.J.,
U.S.A.

February 9, 1935.

REPLY

MY DEAR EDITOR,

I am far from clear what Professor Fite's exact grounds of complaint are. I have re-read the relevant passages in his book and my own review, and I cannot see that I have misrepresented his argument in any important respect. Of course, a summary cannot be the same thing as the full text, but I could hardly be expected to quote several pages of the book in a review.

I cannot see that Professor Fite's present letter strengthens his position in any way. His statement that "Plato himself tells us that the tale is intended to deceive" seems to me a most misleading half-truth. I should have thought it fairly obvious that here, as elsewhere in his use of myth, Plato regarded the literal details as fiction but the general principles of conduct that they suggested as absolutely true. If there is even a possibility of this view being right, it is plain that it is absolutely unwarranted to infer from Plato's general description of the myth as untrue that he meant to deceive people on the specific point of the possibility of promotion from one class to another.

G. C. FIELD.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL,
February 28, 1935.

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

MY DEAR EDITOR,

In the January number of *Philosophy* there appears a review of Haserot's *Essays* by L. Susan Stebbing. We wish to take exception to this review on particular and general grounds. Irrespective of the fact that Haserot's book may or may not be an important contribution to philosophy (although we believe it is), we think that nothing is gained and a good deal lost by the kind of carping criticism which singles out subsidiary points and deliberately overlooks the main argument. Professor Stebbing criticizes some of the terms in which Mr. Haserot expresses his philosophy, but of the philosophy itself she says nothing. Implicit in this review is the affectation of a lack of comprehension, which is at once supercilious and pedantic. Surely Professor Stebbing knows the meaning of the term "reference." If such terms must all be exactly defined, there would be an infinite regress of definition.

The important point at issue, however, is not this particular review but the unfortunately common practice of passing over intention and criticizing execution. If execution must be technically perfect before intention can be understood, then there never would be any lasting philosophy. The writings of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Locke, *et al.*, contain many undefined terms, contradictions, and vagaries; yet the importance of their work has succeeded in transcending these peccancies. Unfortunately for the readers of *Philosophy* who have not seen Mr. Haserot's book, they will be unable to form any judgment about the work as a whole because from Professor Stebbing's review they will have learned nothing of it.

Very truly yours,

JAMES FEIBLEMAN.
JULIUS W. FRIEND.

305 BARONNE STREET,
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA,
January 28, 1935.

REPLY

MY DEAR EDITOR,

Thank you for sending me the letter of Mr. Feibleman and Mr. Friend concerning my review of Mr. Haserot's *Essays on the Logic of Being*.

It is well that reviewers should sometimes themselves be reviewed in order to correct the not uncommon misapprehension that a person, by the mere fact of becoming a reviewer, is an infallible guide to the merits or demerits of the book reviewed. Mr. Feibleman and Mr. Friend wish to make both a general and a particular complaint about my review of Mr. Haserot's book. With regard to the general complaint, I agree that 'carping criticism' is not helpful, but I cannot admit that my criticism was carping nor that I singled out 'subsidiary points' or overlooked the main argument. I hold strongly that the first duty of a reviewer is to give the readers sufficient indication of what the book is about to enable them to decide whether or not the book is likely to be of interest to them. To do this ought not to be beyond the competence of anyone who undertakes the review. I submit that both in what I said and from the quotations I gave I provided ample indication as to what the reader might expect from Mr. Haserot's book. When, however, the reviewer passes to an evaluation of the book's merits, the comments made must result from a personal standpoint. Hence it is important to bear in mind the fallibility of the reviewer.

I came to the reading of Mr. Haserot's book with great enthusiasm. I happen to be much interested in the theory of communication, and I was eager to learn what I could. I was disappointed. Mr. Feibleman and Mr. Friend are mistaken in attributing to me an 'affectation of a lack of comprehension.' The remarks immediately following this charge suggest that they have not at all understood what I tried to say. I must admit that I am not at all clear when I myself use the word "reference" in the context "the reference of language." In my review I stressed the difficulty of giving a clear account of *reference*: I meant exactly what I said. It was surely reasonable to complain of Mr. Haserot's failure even to see that there was a difficulty—a failure shared by Mr. Feibleman and Mr. Friend. But in Mr. Haserot's case this

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failure is serious, seeing that his account of *truth* depends upon *meaning*, and his account of *meaning* depends upon the notion of *reference*. I gave quotations to show that this is so, and I must ask the reader to consult my review on this point.

I do not think that a book is worthless unless it is "technically perfect," and I hope that I shall continue to learn from 'the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Locke, *et al.*' I am surprised that anything in my review should have given an impression to the contrary.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

L. SUSAN STEBBING.

BEDFORD COLLEGE,
February 28, 1935.