

CORRESPONDENCE

DEFINITION OF THE WORD "FACT"

To the Editor of *Philosophy*

DEAR SIR,

Mr. Ayles, in the last paragraph of his letter in your last issue, suggests that giving a precise definition to commonly-used words adds to confusion. The experience of scientists shows that this need not be so if a little care is taken. Physicists who, at dinner, have been talking of the energy of Churchill, the power of Stalin, and the force of circumstances, can retire to the study and then enjoy a profitable discussion where *energy*, *power*, and *force* have precise definitions. The trouble with philosophers is that when they retire, after dinner, very few of the common words they use have an agreed definition.

Mr. Ayles, avoiding criticism of the words *fact*, *real*, and *true* which I did discuss, concentrates on the word *know* the precise use of which I did not discuss. He therefore has to invent "a declared intention" for me, and then shows that I haven't kept to it! This procedure rarely adds to the "advancement of learning," and it would take more space than I should be allowed, to deal with the word *know*, so I must merely say that Mr. Ayles' three examples of its use all necessarily involve events of consciousness, and I leave it to him to work it out as a little exercise!

The sentence: "what we are conscious of is some integrating process," should, of course, have been: "what we are conscious of is the result of some integrating process." I am sorry that this slip should have caused confusion, especially as I emphasized, later on, the rapidity of these processes, which is much too great for "conscious discrimination."

G. BURNISTON BROWN.

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.).