

## CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

I agree so heartily with almost all of Professor Macbeath's article in your April issue, and consider his main theses so important, that I am emboldened to ask whether he would consider a change (not affecting these at all so far as I can see) in one of his descriptive phrases.

He shows that we judge what we ought to do, not abstractly, but each of us in the light of a certain plan or policy; an ideal not lodged merely in the future but working day by day. This he describes as the conception of "the good of the self as a whole." While I know that the phrase has a distinguished history, yet I believe that its continued use to indicate the guiding principle or scheme of the good life makes a very real stumbling-block for ordinary readers. There seem to be two objections to it, partly separable. (1) Conduct is so often determined by needs located elsewhere than in the actor's self. The tired mother sits up with the sick child because the child needs it. The same reason no doubt makes it simultaneously part of the good of her self, but it would shock her to be told that the latter conception, and not the child's need directly, was moving her. (2) Our attitude in important concerns is incongruous with the phrase. When the disinterested statesman toils with others over some reform, or the creator or discoverer loses himself in his work, he does not feel as if he were working in a scheme arranged round himself. Rather, he is striving to arrange himself round these things which he serves; to make himself a means and a detail for them. In so far as any man is religious, this will be his attitude at all times.

It is certainly difficult to suggest a phrase which shall avoid these objections and yet indicate some unity in the total life of each individual. Yet even the simple "This is what I really want" fits better, I think, than "the good of my self as a whole." Professor Macbeath himself has an improved variant in one place where he speaks of "the unity of the self's *interests*" (italics mine). Could we perhaps adopt the form "the good *espoused* by the self as a whole"? I have tried it in each of Professor Macbeath's contexts, and it seems possible.

He writes in another connection, "Moral goodness is not something at which we aim directly. . . . Moral goodness and other goods enter into the good life in different ways. . . . The latter are the ends to which it is directed, the former is realized in the pursuit of them" (pp. 112, 114-15). I should like to invoke a parallel to this. We do sometimes aim at moral goodness, but this is not our typical aim in the course of the good life. We do sometimes think about the good of our self as a whole, as in the reflective moment of youth described on pp. 101-2, but it is much more typical of the mature man to be working within a scheme of goods which he has espoused. These are the ends to which his life is directed. The good of his self is realized in the service which he gives to these.

HELEN WODEHOUSE.

Swansea, April 27, 1948.