

RESPONSES

The Principle of Charity: Response to John Glucker

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One is entitled to respond to reviews that contain factual mistakes. I should therefore like to respond to John Glucker's review of my book *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999), published in *Scripta Classica Israelica* 20 (2001), 288-93. It is often said that the best response to a negative review is silence. There is a difference, however, between a negative review whose negative judgment derives from, entirely legitimate, scholarly difference of opinion, and a negative review whose negative judgment is founded in error, mis-reading or carelessness on the part of the reviewer. In such a case, the author has not only the right but the obligation, towards himself and towards others, to correct error and check sloppiness.

Perhaps the best test for the usefulness of a review is what it tells its readers about matters an author could have handled differently. Among the conclusions of Glucker's assessment are the claims that some passages could have been translated differently — this does indeed matter — and that the treatments of the different topics could have been arranged in a manner that would have made it easier for readers to follow. But there is nothing any author could have done to address claims that:

* Greek passages have been left out (289, and n. 5) — when in fact in the one instance the reviewer mentions, p. 191 of the book, the Greek is in the main text on the next page, and the second instance, p. 194, is not a quotation but a summary passage, in which the key Greek expressions have been included;

* key works of secondary literature were not consulted — when in reality they are included in the bibliography and mentioned in the footnotes, as is the case with work by Theiler (p. 291 in review, see book p. 86, n. 2 and bibliography) and with Reid's commentary on Cicero's *Academica* (p. 292 of review, see book p. 128 n. 36, in conjunction with p. 91 n. 18, and bibliography).

* the Stoic notion of Providence has been overlooked (p. 288 review, taking p. 78 of book out of context) — when it is one of the main themes of the book, discussed at great length in ch. 1.iii, 2.iii, Interlude (including the second book of the *De Natura Deorum*, which the reviewer says was overlooked), and 5.iii. In the index of the book the reviewer could have found the references to the *SVF* fragments that fall in the 2.1106-86 range, von Arnim's section on the topic.

* 'worst of all' (review p. 289, n. 6) the references to Calcidius are inconsistent — whereas the readers' intelligence can be trusted to discover the rationale quite easily: 'ch.' indicates chapters of the text, numbers and periods indicate pages and line numbers in Waszink's edition, when a chapter covers more than one page.

The book does not give a critical apparatus for the Latin and Greek passages it cites, the reviewer complains (289). But relevant textual variants are discussed, mostly in the main body of the text. How many recent monographs in English have not only all the Latin and the Greek, but also a full critical apparatus? In any case, decisions on these matters often lie with the publisher, and not with the author.

The level of mistakes in the review is perhaps best indicated by the following example. *Restant Stoici*, we are told (289, n. 2), 'does not mean "No Stoics Need Apply"'. A reader who turns to page 124 of the book will read there: '... he puts up a sign "No Stoics Need Apply"'. [period; that is, full stop; new sentence] *Restant Stoici* ...; besides the Old Academy and the Peri-

patetics, *there remain the Stoics ...*'. The first expression is a pun that leads from the previous argument to the next; the passage in italics is the translation of the Latin. *Restant minora*.

No arguments of a study will be refuted, none strengthened or nuanced if a reviewer with a rhetorical sleight of hand reduces 'the long and short of the argument' to a single paragraph (289-90) and starts the next paragraph with 'much of this general outline is hardly surprising'. The interested reader can get a much fuller overview of the book's contents from Cristina D'Ancona's review (*Adamantius* 6, 2000, 300-4).

Any reviewer can reserve the right to remain skeptical about an author's thesis (290), such as, for instance, the book's claim that the *Timaeus* was important to the Early Stoics. But the reviewer in question cannot then pass over the evidence in silence, *in casu* the passages attributed to Chrysippus that echo Plato's account, discussed in the first chapter of the book.

An expression such as καθ' ὁρμήν in Galen, the reviewer chastises (291-2), does not have to carry a technical Stoic meaning, given how common the use of ὁρμή is before the Stoics, starting with Homer, as even a superficial perusal of LSJ reveals. But a word does not have to be a new coinage in a strict sense in order to be endowed with an innovative technical meaning; and in Galen, as the book explains, it is precisely the context that would determine the meaning of the term. Contrary to the reviewer's claim, context is crucial to this study.

Pointing out that an author has 'neglected' to quote Reid's interpretation of how the line of Cicero '*sed quod ex utroque, id iam corpus et quasi qualitatem quandam nominabant*' (*Ac.* 1.24) fits into the *Stoic* tradition will not be relevant if the book claims that the line actually represents a *Platonic* counter-position. On p. 292 the reviewer claims that had the author consulted Reid more closely, 'she would have been alerted to the Stoic πολόν and to the confusion between it and πορότης in some of our sources'. The argument of the book, instead, focuses on the first part of the line, how, for something to be a body, it has to consist of both the active and the passive principles, i.e. god and matter are not corporeal in their own right. The subject of the verb *nominabant*, in context, are not the Stoics but the Platonists/Academics as *Varro* presents them, and in line with them the early Peripatetics, who reject the Stoic claim of corporeal first principles. The reviewer neglects to refer the reader to the main discussion of this point on pp. 129-30 of the book. Given that the reviewer has also neglected to give a sense of the overall line of argumentation, the reader here is at a complete loss to figure out why this passage matters in the first place.

It does not make sense either for any exposition to go off on a tangent concerning issues mentioned in footnotes, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Peri Mixtionē* (p. 57, n. 49 of the book). Alexander's own 'far more subtle and analytical arguments against the Stoic doctrine of κρᾶσις' (p. 293 of the review) fall outside the framework of the discussion.

The 'principle of charity' — that we assume that an author makes sense unless we can, upon *careful* scrutiny, detect mistakes or omissions — appears to have escaped the reviewer's notice. This is not a plea of 'let's all just be nice to each other'. It is a sound and essential hermeneutical principle, which we apply to ancient authors as well as to secondary material, and it is precisely the condition that makes legitimate criticism possible. It behooves every author to acknowledge mistakes and accept criticism. On the other hand, even younger and less experienced scholars are entitled to a minimum of respect. Other people's books are not occasions for fighting one's own battles, nor for projecting one's own pet theories.

Glucker is a master at wielding his pen. Leaving aside the minor entertainment value a caricature can provide, however, either a review is accurate and fair or it is irrelevant. *Tertium non datur*.