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Editors' Message

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Editors' Message

COMMENTS from readers are recognized as a critically important form of scholarly discourse. They are the means by which readers respond to authors, enriching the data and arguments presented in initial contributions. They also permit readers to respond to original presentations and point out errors, misconceptions, or other shortcomings.

Comments are not the last word on a subject, however. Just as readers can react to authors, the original author, as reader, can react to comments on his or her contribution. Comments are thus the middle element in the sequence *article-reply-rebuttal*, which was established by convention long ago. The players in this discourse are therefore the original author of an idea or contribution, one or more readers who respond to that idea or contribution, and the reply by the original author.

Not all publication series are set up to provide a forum for readers' reactions. Monograph series, for example, present original contributions, and the only way readers normally can respond to monographs is to write reviews of them. Some regularly issued serials publish neither reviews nor comments. How does one respond to an original contribution if a simple book review is not the answer?

This problem has arisen at various times since the *JCGBA* came into existence. Should a reader be allowed to respond to a work not originally published in the *JCGBA*?

Our position as editors is that such discourse is intellectually healthy and should be permitted. Two conditions are imposed, however, on comments, especially comments on works originally published elsewhere. First, comments are refereed in the same manner as original contributions. Second, the author of the work being commented upon is free to rebut the comment if he or she chooses to do so within a reasonable period of time. And that is the end of that particular cycle of scholarly interchange.

Readily apparent is the fact that it sometimes is advantageous to have the last say in an exchange. It therefore makes a difference if one's submission is perceived by the editors as a comment on an earlier work (in which case the submitter will not have the last say in the article-reply-rebuttal exchange), or as an original contribution. Only if one is engaged in research of a truly pioneering nature is his or her contribution ever not to some degree built on, or a reaction to, earlier work. It follows therefore that a decision has to be made regarding the status of a contribution submitted for publication. Is the paper an original work or is it a comment on an original work? Authors should specify their perceptions in this regard, but the final decision rests with the editors.

Editors