Do not propose to reopen the question of the authenticity of the epistles. Rather, I wish to examine one argument advanced against the genuineness of Ep. II.1 In that epistle, the author states that his purpose in coming to Syracuse was to gain the assistance of Dionysius ἵνα δὴ μοι τιμήτω φιλοσοφία καὶ παρὰ τῷ πλῆθει (312A). Bury, in the Loeb edition, states in his prefatory note that in addition to the "historical inconsistencies there is much to arouse suspicion in the tone and matter of the letter" (p. 399).2 As evidence, he says, "Can we imagine the real Plato saying that his object in visiting Syracuse was 'to make philosophy honoured by the multitude'?" (l.c.).3 And as a footnote ad loc. he adds, "A most un-Platonic sentiment: contrast Rep. 493E ff., and 314A below".

My remarks to Bury, and indirectly to Hackforth (cf. n. 3), would be these. First, Bury minimizes the force of the sentence immediately following the one quoted: τοῦτο δ’ οὐκ εὐαγγέλευ μοι ἀπέβη.4 For, to paraphrase Bury, this is a most Platonic sentiment and, in spirit, quite close to the tone of despair often noted in Socrates’ final discussion with Callicles, the so-called “digression” of the Theaetetus and elsewhere.5 Secondly, and of a more serious nature, is the fact that Bury’s two references in his footnote are misleading. In Rep. 493E Plato, it is true,

1 Scholars are divided as to the authenticity of Ep. II. Among recent scholars, it is accepted as genuine by Taylor, Plato, 515-16; Field, Plato and His Contemporaries, 199; Post, Thirteen Epistles of Plato, 5; Burnet, Greek Philosophy, 212; for the older literature cf. Hackforth, Authorship of the Platonic Epistles, 40 sq. It is rejected by Hackforth l.c. and Morrow, Studies in the Platonic Epistles, 106 sq.
2 On the alleged historical inconsistencies cf. Soulilhe’s Introduction p. LXXX in the Budé edition; Hackforth op. cit. 42; Morrow l.c.
3 The similarity between Bury’s position and Hackforth’s seems not to have been noted. Hackforth (op. cit. 44) writes, "In 312A we are told that the object of Plato’s visit in 367 B.C. was that ‘philosophy might be honoured of the people’. Not only is no such object referred to in Ep. III and Ep. VII, but it is foreign to Plato’s whole convictions (cf. especially Rep. 494A, φιλόσοφον ... πλῆθος ἀδύνατον εἶναι)." For the Quellenforscher, Richards, C.R. (1900) 336 would seem to suggest considerable, but unacknowledged, indebtedness on the parts of both Bury and Hackforth.
4 Richards’ proposal of εὐαγγέλευ (op. cit. 98) has found no acceptance.
5 The so-called digression of the Theaetetus (172B-177C) was prompted, Cornford suggests (P.T.K. 89) by “Plato’s sad experiences at Syracuse”. Cf. esp. the derision of philosophy in 175B and, whether genuine or no, Ep. XI, 35E.
does cast doubt on the intellectual abilities of the πλήθος, as he does in other passages as well. But in that passage it is the obviously difficult Theory of Forms that is in question while Ep. II, 314A (Εὐλαβεῖον μέντοι μήπτε ἐκπάθη ταῦτα εἰς ἄνθρωποις ἀπαίδευτους) alludes to the obscure teaching of 312E sq. Surely it is one thing to recommend secrecy for esoteric doctrines and something quite different to be cautious in matters of technical philosophy lest one’s auditors be hopelessly confused. Whether 312E sq. is a garbled version of the Theory of Forms, Pythagorean mystification, or what not, I leave to others. At any rate, it is difficult to understand and our author has done well in thinking that such a teaching would not be of much practical benefit to the πλήθος. There is, then, no incompatibility between our passage in 312A and the two passages adduced by Bury for the simple reason that they are concerned with two quite different matters. So much for the first half of my reply to Bury.

The second half concerns the implication, whether or not intended by Bury, that Plato was unconcerned with the πλήθος. Nothing could be less faithful to Plato’s message. It is patent, I think, that such an implication runs counter to the Socratic legacy inherited by Plato, viz. the reform of society. To be more specific, not only does the passage in 312A not run counter to the evidence brought forward by Bury, in point of fact it accords quite well with other evidence which we know to have been Plato’s considered belief. Consider, e.g. the purpose of

4 It should be evident from such passages as Gorg. 507D (ὥ διώτης ἡ πόλις, ἐπιθετέον δίκην καὶ κολαστέον) and Theaet. 176A that Plato was concerned with the πλήθος. Cf. the παρακάλεσις, Leg. XII, 950C. The wise ruler attempts to preserve the citizens and ἀμένως ἐκ χειρόνων ἀποτελεῖν κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν. Pol. 297B, cf. Gorg. 513E. Epp. V, 322AB; VII 330E, 331D and Plut. Dion. 11 attests to the ancient opinion of Plato’s participation in political reform. There is also the tradition that Socrates was invited to give advice to Archelaus, King of Macedon, cf. Arist. Rhet. II 23, 8 and Gorg. 470D sq. Xenophon records Socrates’ proffered advice to Pericles (Mem. III 5, 1) and this admonition to future statesmen: χαί μὴ ἀμέλεις τῶν τῆς πόλεως, εἶ τι δυνατὸν ἐστι διὰ σὲ βέλτιον ἔχειν, ib. III 7, 9.