

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

In the July issue of *PHILOSOPHY* there appeared a review of my *Philosophy of Relativity* by Mr. Herbert Dingle, who contends that this book, although "undoubtedly worth reading" for philosophers, is not a "valuable contribution" to science. The reviewer might, of course, have made it clearer that I had no intention of contributing anything at all to science, that, as explained in the Preface to the book, the exposition of the relativity-theory is given there entirely for the benefit of philosophers without mathematical training; but this I certainly would not bother mentioning if it were not for the objectionable interpretation which Mr. Dingle gives to his contention. According to him, to say that philosophical speculation about the concepts of relativity does not contribute anything to the science of physics, is the same as saying that it is irrelevant to an understanding of the nature of physical reality—in his own words, that "the relation of any scientific theory to philosophy is simply the relation of science in general to philosophy, and that is not at all affected by the advent of relativity." These words are simply not true to facts. In the history of philosophy before "the advent of relativity," the philosophies of events in spatio-temporal relations as contrasted with the philosophies of substances in mutual transactions were not, and could not be, heard of.

With regard to Mr. Dingle's specific illustrations, which are my speculations about the reality of space-time, solipsism, and motion, I should likewise disagree with him that they are irrelevant to or unaffected by relativity. To take the question of the "reality" of space-time, a philosopher of nature is bound to discuss it, since some of the physicists themselves (the operationalists) hold, in disagreement with the majority of scientists who have tried to treat scientific theories as descriptions of nature, the philosophical opinion that space-time is not an objective reality but merely a pragmatically useful scheme.¹ But there is no need to argue my point, because Mr. Dingle himself, naively overlooking inconsistency, admits the relevancy of science to philosophy when he says that the problem of reality is "closely connected" with the question of solipsism and that a "cardinal feature" of relativity is that it is "in conformity" with solipsism. If instead of arguing that relativity as science has nothing to do one way or another with solipsism, Mr. Dingle can argue that the two are "in conformity," then certainly I have the right to argue that they are incompatible, especially if my argument, as I am going to indicate, is the better of the two.

Mr. Dingle writes: "Relativity identifies 'another observer' with 'myself using a different co-ordinate system.' If there is another observer whose experience of mechanical events I cannot myself describe simply by changing my co-ordinates, relativity leaves him entirely out of account, however 'real' or 'independent of the mind' he may be."

If this means that relativity is in conformity with solipsism because it describes events which might be experienced by a single observer, then Mr. Dingle is wrong because he overlooks that besides mechanical events relativity describes strings of events with space-like and zero-intervals which cannot be observed by a solipscist for the simple reason that they transcend observation. In this connection it is important to understand that independently of any philosophical speculation

¹ Although it does not help Mr. Dingle's general contention, he could not refrain from a dig at my definition of reality as being independent of the mind: "Except that mind must be unreal, this tells us nothing. . . ." Even disregarding the fact that I gave my definition in a discussion of physical reality, this remark of Mr. Dingle shows an astounding ignorance of the traditional philosophical context in which "independence of mind" is taken in opposition to the subjective idealists' "dependence on mind as an idea." In this sense a mind is independent of a mind, and is real for it is not a mere idea of another mind.

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relativity as science has no discrimination in favour of time-like intervals being more real than the other two. But even if, for the sake of argument, all but mechanical events are disregarded, the existence of alternative frames of reference in Relativity is certainly incompatible with the proposed identification of "another observer" with "myself using a different co-ordinate system." For while systems are moving relatively to one another, I can use only one of them at a time. Of course, I can change from time to time my co-ordinate systems, but if I do I am not the same percipient event after such a change. And the admission of the existence of percipient events other than the one which is the solipscist's experience at the present moment is tantamount to a rejection of the thesis of solipsism.

I wish to add a word concerning Mr. Dingle's remark that my "writing, though lacking distinction, is clear." The remark is an expression either of the discredited opinion that style is separable from content or of a regrettable request for such "embellishments" as the reviewer uses himself when he writes, for example, that my book "drags relativity, so to speak, into an atmosphere in which it cannot breathe, with the result that we have two unconformable sets of ideas forced into an unnatural union."

Yours faithfully,

A. P. USHENKO.

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TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

Professor W. T. Stace's article on "The Place of Philosophy in Human Culture" is so interesting that I regret its containing a reference to Herbert Spencer which will undoubtedly mislead all who have no acquaintance with that philosopher's works. Professor Stace says that Spencer's conception of the business of philosophy "finds no place for many of the problems which have always been regarded as essentially philosophical . . . for example, the problem whether the material world is in any way dependent for its existence upon mind," as "asserted in the past by idealistic philosophers." Spencer's philosophy certainly does find a very large place for the discussion of Idealism, for in the *Principles of Psychology*, fourth edition, well over 200 pages are devoted to the subject—being the whole of Part 7, vol. 2. Seeing that the entire work covers some 1,400 pages, it will be seen that Spencer gave more than one-seventh of his space to the question of Idealism.

Of course, the work I have mentioned forms two of the ten large volumes in which the whole of Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy is developed.

Yours very faithfully,

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SIR,

Since Mr. G. R. G. Mure has evidently been at considerable pains to collect the facts relevant to his interesting study on "Oxford and Philosophy" (Vol. XII, No. 47), it may be worth while to correct a slip on pp. 295 f. It is there stated that "the first three *Tracts for the Times* were published in this year [i.e. 1833]." Actually the rate of progress was much more rapid. The first three were issued on one day—Sept. 9, 1833—and no less than twenty were out by the end of December. See, e.g., H. P. Liddon, *Life of Pusey*, iii, 473 f.

Yours faithfully,

F. L. CROSS.

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OXFORD.