

## CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

### THE PHYSICAL WORLD AND REALITY

SIR,

As a layman I must, in common with the majority of people, formulate a theory of the physical world and reality from whatever unspecialized knowledge I possess; being guided to some extent only by those better qualified to express an opinion than myself. Nevertheless, on reading Mr. Gomborow's article in the October issue of *Philosophy*, I feel constrained to enter a caveat against his complaisant suggestion that, because such tautological explanations as that the sun attracts the earth *because it does*, or that zinc displaces copper in solutions *because it does*, fail to satisfy an intelligent person, the real explanation must necessarily be the simple fact that God has willed they should.

With respect I would suggest that the latter theory not only is less acceptable to many intelligent persons than the former, but also does unpardonable violence to the idea of Immanent Deity. If we accept Mr. Gomborow's theory, as a logical consequence, we perforce accept the following *a priori* hypotheses, namely, (a) All "laws" of nature are "laws" extrinsic to reality; "laws," that is to say, imposed by Transcendent Will on an otherwise chaotic universe; and (b) the universe is essentially static, and its present-day dynamic quality is, or was, occasioned by some agency "outside" of and independent of reality. In other words, we are back at the mental stage of our nurseries when the image of God, first making the clock and then winding it up, was used to stultify our first questionings. Surely the physical world (or any other world for that matter) is the world made manifest to us through, and only through, one or more of the very limited number of senses with which we have been endowed. This world we *know* as a world essentially dynamic, and, if you like the expression, as a world essentially "orderly"—that is, a world exhibiting certain well-perceived and well-defined "laws"; but surely, again, that fact offers no reason at all for envisaging the world as *amenable* to those "laws," or for imputing those "laws" to anything other than intrinsic aspects of reality.

We appreciate those "laws" in much the same way as we appreciate the "greenness" of the visual world. They are "good" for us simply because they *are*, and *not* because it is good for us that they should be. The great drawback with most scientists and philosophers is that they are unable to recognize in this dynamic quality, in this orderliness, *essential* characteristics of the physical world; but only imposed and, as it were, incidental, characteristics. I feel that if Mr. Gomborow could see his way to attempt another hypothesis of the universe based this time on the assumption that things are simply because they are, the result would be instructive; provided only (and the proviso is important!) he embraced in that hypothesis a conception of Immanent Deity willing the best in man and infinite in potentiality for man's becoming.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,  
FRANK W. ROBINSON.

LONG SUTTON, LINCOLNSHIRE,  
October 30, 1935.

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TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

### PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICAL ETHICS

MY DEAR EDITOR,

Two passages in your October issue have so impressed my mind that I feel moved to write you about them. One of them occurs on page 481, in Mr. J. L. Stock's

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review of Sir Herbert Samuel's book on *Practical Ethics*, and is as follows: "Such a book will, of course, necessarily be for non-philosophers" (the implication of this being apparently that philosophers already possess plenty of light on the subjects dealt with), "though that does not mean that it will not be of interest to philosophers also. It should discuss on a philosophical background, vexed questions of conduct, in regard to which contemporary society is puzzled, doubting what is right and what is wrong, and should presumably at the same time suggest that *the answer to the philosophical problem has some relevance to these practical problems.*" So far, so good. But my trouble begins when I turn the pages back, and, rubbing my eyes, carefully read once more these words from the account of Professor Hallett's address at the annual meeting of the Institute of Philosophy: "Who would go to a philosopher for advice on—the relations of the sexes?" The hope raised by the language of Mr. Stocks is here dashed ruthlessly, and one wonders where the truth lies. Certainly it cannot be denied that the relations of the sexes constitute one of the most baffling and, I must add, dangerous problems of contemporary practical morality, and in its rough waters many thoughtful men and women are more or less helplessly struggling, having lost all faith in the dictates of traditional ethics and in the teaching of the Church, of which last I speak with the highest honour, for I am one of her loyal servants. But my eyes are not shut, and I know how deep the trouble is. I am, moreover, unwilling to accept the implication of Professor Hallett's question as the last word of the philosophers on this vital subject. I, therefore, make bold to ask you, Sir, whether you cannot invite some of them to give their views on this specific matter in your valuable pages, and thus provide, for many eager and anxious readers, some of that light that is, as Mr. Stocks hopefully and I believe rightly suggests, in the possession and at the disposal of philosophy.

HUGH GORDON ROSS.

4, CLIVE STREET,  
DUNDEE, ANGUS,  
October 10, 1935.

### *Remarks by the Chairman.*

On receipt of the above letter the Editor, while considering it inadvisable to open a correspondence on the important problem it raises, has asked me, as Chairman of the Editorial Committee, if I have any comments to make upon it that might be of interest to readers. With regard to the contradiction which the writer finds between Professor Hallett and Professor Stocks as to the relevance of philosophy to practical problems, it need not be taken so seriously if, as I took it myself, Professor Hallett's statement be supposed to refer to particular problems in the life of an individual, while Professor Stocks refers to the general principle on which the solution of such problems should be sought. I do not think any of us would be prepared to exclude from the proper sphere of philosophy a subject which from the time of Socrates has exercised the minds and the pens of philosophers. If it finds itself helpless after all these centuries to say anything useful on one so fundamental as the relations of the sexes it would indeed be sentencing itself to futility. But it would be equally passing sentence on itself if it tried to treat of it in isolation from the principle which, from the beginning, the greatest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle perhaps more definitely than any before or since, laid down as the regulating one of any conduct which is truly human. Life, they taught, for a *man* differs from the life of an animal in being a fine art—the finest of all arts containing possibilities of "love and beauty and delight" denied to all lower creatures, yet only to be realized under one condition: that the animal instincts and passions should be treated as merely the materials of the art, the means through which man's essential humanity should find expression. Each of these instincts has its function and its place, but it can only perform its function and take its proper place, as a line or a colour can in a sculpture or picture, according as it is made to minister to the form and beauty of the whole. The sex instinct only differs from others in the dominating power it exercises owing to the load it has to bear in securing the continuance of the race and constituting the physical foundation of one of the highest forms civilization has hitherto achieved in the life of the Family. What has recently brought the problem of its regulation