CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Journal of Philosophical Studies.*

DEAR SIR,

One must not expect to be allowed to bandy arguments with a reviewer, and in the general tenor of Mr. M. Kaye's notice of my book, *The Fallacies of Fatalism*, there is nothing to be complained of. On two points, however, he has, doubtless through a misunderstanding, seriously misrepresented my position.

Firstly, I do not hold that an entity is, in respect of its essential nucleus, "self-caused" and "self-sufficient" and "impervious to external influences." If any entity deserved these descriptions, that could be nothing less than the universe itself. The physical entities of which I chiefly treat in the first part of my book are molar bodies such as appear on the earth's surface. Each of these I hold to be in part, but only in part, the cause of itself. The existing fragment of rock is not *merely* an effect of the disintegrating factors which caused it to separate from the cliff. The living and developing embryo is not *merely* an effect of the conjunction of sperm and germ cells and of the maternal nourishment subsequently supplied to it.

Molar entities are not only pervious to external influences. The higher they stand in the scale of physical evolution, the more pervious they become. The relatively impervious pebble remains itself for ages. The short-lived organism depends for its survival on adaptation to environment, and an important part of this adaptation, in the higher animals, consists of their reactions to sense-perceptual stimuli. The highest known type of "self-determination," in human persons, depends upon conceptual knowledge opening up a wider terrestrial environment than is ever apparent to the senses—an environment which includes many other individuals and organized human groups, the influences of and reactions to which are or may be subject to moral valuations.

Secondly, as to "chains of causation"—*i.e.* serial sets of events in which each consequent has a causal antecedent. The reviewer, in accordance with his misunderstanding already alluded to, supposes me to hold that "the chain of causation within a physical entity may exist independently of other chains of causation." In fact my book does not discuss such *internal* chains of causation, and I should agree to the statement in question only if taken in a relative sense. There may be a continuity of ultra-microscopic oscillations which appears as the cohesion and gravity of an individual pebble; while the complex continuing life of an individual organism seems to involve a network of chains of causation in harmonious co-operation. In both these cases there is a relative, but not more than a relative, independence of external agencies. In fact, however, it is not internal, but external, "chains of causation" which I discuss in Sections 22–23 of my book. These are conceived to depend on the successive interactions of separate entities with one another, such interactions occurring locally, here or there, on the earth's surface. Whatever laws of causation there may be, every sequence of cause and effect is a strictly particular or circumstantial fact.

While, according to the law of gravity, bodies, whether near together or far apart, attract one another in the way that the law describes, the other forms of causation, physical, chemical, and biological, are not thus proportionate to distance. They depend upon the actual local contact or the close proximity of the bodies interacting, and when bodies which might interact are separated by a sufficient (it may be a very small) space interval,[1] no interaction takes place. As I put it on page 35, "all terrestrial physical causation depends upon some collocation of entities which interact with one another in their natural ways, because of their having come into contact or into such proximity as causes them to interact."

[1] "A miss is as good as a mile."

Of the chains of causally connected events which are simultaneously occurring at all parts of the earth's surface, a vast number must be practically independent of one another. Most events and series of events, whether of physical, biological, or social import, which are now happening in Bristol, are quite independent of those happening in Southampton or any other English or foreign town. Even within a very limited area causal sequences may be independent of one another. Most of the persons and vehicles passing one another in a crowded street are bent on different, or at least disconnected, errands, and do not affect one another by the fact of passing. Here, however, the fact of proximity does make possible both street accidents and personal meetings of dramatic import; whereas bodies, and their interactions in series of events, when occurring sufficiently far apart, can have no practical effect upon one another.

It is in the constant casual meeting of chains of causation of diverse local origin—a meeting which is, of course, caused, but not caused according to any uniform law—that, I believe, a real physical contingency resides. Physical reality is compact of "accidents," although it is only to a few of the more startling ones that the name is popularly given.

Yours sincerely,
CHARLES E. HOOPER.

SOUTHAMPTON,
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