

# CORRESPONDENCE

## TAC

SIR,—I read with very great interest your article on the TAC Report (*Nature*, **241**, 2; 1973).

Our company, which through the Greenwich local television channel can claim, we believe, some responsibility for broadening the minds of the legislators, was similarly disappointed with the TAC Report. However, our trade association—the Cable Television Association—has already reacted by stating that it will shortly be producing its own plan for the future of broadcasting in this country. I am convinced that this will promote lively discussion about the great potential and versatility which cable offers.

Yours faithfully,

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## Special Relativity Again

SIR,—Professor Ziman's admirable review<sup>1</sup> of Professor Dingle's book *Science at the Crossroads* covers most adequately "the question" raised by Dingle about special relativity, except for one point: Ziman invokes general relativity at a stage when it is not really needed.

In fact, while special relativity does not deal adequately with gravity, it does quite adequately cope with accelerated motion. In special relativity, just as in general relativity, the answer to Professor Dingle's "question" is: the fastest working clock between any two events is one that travels between them by free fall. Any other clock travelling between these events necessarily experiences inertial forces, which a physicist moving with the clock might interpret as being due to a (uniform) gravitational field; a physicist moving with the "fastest" clock would experience no such forces (he would be an "inertial observer").

This completely answers Professor Dingle's "question". It leaves unsettled the further question as to what it is that prescribes this particular structure for space-time. In special relativity, this structure is simply taken as given *a priori*; while this may not be thought to be a completely satisfactory answer (and general relativity gives a better

one), it is certainly at least a logically consistent answer.

Yours faithfully,

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<sup>1</sup> *Nature*, **241**, 143 (1973).

## Reprint Requests

SIR,—The interesting article by Briggs and Briggs<sup>1</sup> on reprint request patterns under the deliberately misleading title "Hormones and Blood Chemistry" has moved me to make several comments about the reprint courtesy.

In 1970, some similar experiments on information retrieval techniques were conducted in *Nature*<sup>2-4</sup>. At that time, I had a pleasant exchange of correspondence with one of the principals (V. R. Pickles of Cardiff) through which we found ourselves to be in general agreement regarding uses and abuses of the reprint privilege. However, several mistaken impressions still appear to be fairly generally persistent.

There can be no argument that there is abuse of the reprint privilege by people who could determine whether or not they really need a reprint before they order it, by dabblers, and by habitual collectors ("scientific pack rats"). However, there is another side to the requesting of reprints through information gained from sources such as *Current Contents*. Many scientists work in places which are relatively remote from adequate library sources and they must gamble a bit on judgments about *Current Contents* titles to stay in the literature in their fields. If I might use myself as an example, I freely admit to errors in reprint ordering in the past and I acknowledge that I have some reprints which I can't use, but in most of these cases I was misled by titles. It would be impossible for me to check the actual contents of some journals without travelling literally hundreds of miles. I, and others in similar positions, must beg the indulgence of colleagues and we ask not to be lumped with the careless and abusive users of the reprint privilege. Of course, it could be argued that almost everyone should have access to *Nature*, but even this might not be the case.

I also sense that some of the concerns about reprint ordering by American scientists may arise from some mistaken impressions which are held by some workers in other countries concerning general working conditions in science in the United States. While a few workers here may have such financial and/or technical resources available that they can depend exclusively upon computer-based information retrieval done by hired assistants, most of us carry on the day-by-day slog through the literature which is the common burden of scientists everywhere. Hopefully, workable modern information retrieval will continue to become more readily available to everyone everywhere in the next few years.

Finally, one might ask how often these "experiments" need to be conducted in *Nature*. Publication costs and space limitations certainly would enter into such a determination. If further research is needed, possibly the editors could design even better "experiments" if they would construct an occasional *Nature* entry which incorporated into a single title such terms as "cancer, heart disease, racial differences in IQ, energy crisis, ecocide in Vietnam, and biological basis for female superiority".

Yours faithfully,

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<sup>1</sup> Briggs, M. H., and Briggs, M., *Nature*, **240**, 490 (1972).

<sup>2</sup> Davies, D., McKenzie, D. P., Turner, J. S., and Pickles, V. R., *Nature*, **225**, 636 (1970).

<sup>3</sup> Pickles, V. R., Davies, D., McKenzie, D. P., and Turner, J. S., *Nature*, **226**, 881 (1970).

<sup>4</sup> Pickles, V. R., *Nature*, **226**, 1181 (1970).

## Nature's Parish

SIR,—At this juncture to ask the "academic community" to give Dr Kissinger "credit for his liberalizing influence in the past four years" is remarkable. As the use of violence during the Kissinger era has been liberal to the utmost extent, this statement (*Nature*, **241**, 1; 1973) ought, in fact, to be remembered and highly valued. The editor should be given credit for having given the ultimate expression to the complicity of the aca-