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The Metaphysics of the Instrument. (I). Sidney Hook Alexander's Metaphysic of Space-Time (I)

Alexander's Metaphysic of Space-Time. (I). Arthur E. Murphy Is Politics a Branch of Ethics?.G. E. G. Catlin

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Vol.	LXVI	JULY	15,	1927	No.	1698

CONTENTS

Public Health Progress and Race Progress—are they Incompatible? Professor H. S. JENNINGS	
Dr. Franklin P. Mall: PROFESSOR WILLIAM T. COUN- CILMAN	
Scientific Events: Expedition of the American Geographical Society to Central Peru; Honorary Degrees conferred by Yale University; Grants for Scientific Research of the American Medical Association	
Scientific Notes and News	
University and Educational Notes	
Discussion: Mean Sea-level as affected by Shoreline Changes: PROFESSOR DOUGLAS JOHNSON. Quantitative De- termination of Rock Color: OLIVER R. GRAWE. A New Fundamentalist Stronghold: PROFESSOR N. M. GRIER	
Quotations:	
Steel turns to Research	
Scientific Books: Bower on the Ferns: Professor Douglas Hough- TON CAMPBELL	
Special Articles:	
The Influence of X-rays on the Development of Drosophila Larvae: R. G. HUSSEY, W. R. THOMP- SON and E. T. CALHOUN. The Anti-sterility Vitamin E and Poultry: DR. RAYMOND T. PARK-	
HURST	
The American Association of Museums: DR. LAU- RENCE VAIL COLEMAN	
Science News	

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PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRESS AND RACE PROGRESS—ARE THEY INCOMPATIBLE?¹

THE public health workers, the social workers, the civilizers, we are told, are corrupting the race; are destroying the race. By protecting us from our enemies, the bacteria and the viruses; by removing the sources of disease; by showing us how to avoid unfavorable conditions and to find favorable ones; in short, by bringing us and our environment into harmony, they are promoting the survival of the unfit; they are progressively filling the race with the weak and the degenerate who must hand on their weakness and degeneracy to their descendants. This should all be stopped. In dealing with the delicate and ailing, our motto should be: Treat 'em rough!-Let the environment kill them. That's what will produce a strong race, a fit race.

To one who has spent his life studying the unnumbered devices by which organisms of all sorts protect themselves from their enemies; who sees that their daily, their hourly occupation is the seeking of favorable conditions and the avoiding of unfavorable ones—to such an observer this proposal comes as a paradoxical surprise. The public health worker, the social worker, is not alone in this nefarious business of adjusting the organism to the environment; everybody's doing it. And by everybody I mean our brothers, the birds and beasts, our cousins, the insects and worms and plants; I mean all organisms. We ourselves have been doing this sort of thing for a hundred million years. It's going to be a hard habit to break, if we must break it.

And as we look at it, the difficulties become greater. All organisms are *forced* to defend themselves in all sorts of ways against other organisms that seek to destroy them; against bears and beetles as well as against bacteria. All organisms *must* protect themselves against the injurious forces of nature; against heat and cold and wind and wet; against starvation and against over-eating; against unfit food and drink; against bumps and bruises and broken bones; against plagues and poisons. That's what life is: a struggle for existence. If any organism ceased this struggle, ceased to select its environment, ceased to protect itself—its kind would become extinct in a generation.

¹Address at the twenty-third annual meeting of the National Tuberculosis Association at Indianapolis, May 24, 1927.



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