
Letters to the Editor

Comments on the Gale Letter, Nov./Dec. 1994

In connection with my letter in the November/December issue of the *Notices*, Saunders Mac Lane has pointed out to me a misreading of a part of his article in the *Mathematical Intelligencer*. In referring to certain views of G. D. Birkhoff, he wrote that these opinions were “common among mathematicians of Birkhoff’s generation” and “held by many (most?) of his contemporaries.” In my letter I interpreted and paraphrased these statements as an assertion that the views in question were “typical of a substantial fraction, possibly a majority, of the mathematical community at that time.” Saunders has explained that he was in fact referring only to the subset of the community consisting of Birkhoff’s contemporaries. I regret the misreading and hope that anyone who read my earlier letter will take note of this retraction.

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The above letter—and a previous one—from David Gale comment on a

pair of short articles by Ralph Phillips and Saunders Mac Lane published in 1994 in the *Mathematical Intelligencer* after the authors had exchanged and commented on drafts. My article was entitled “Jobs in the 1930s and the Views of George D. Birkhoff”. In it I tried to describe relevant aspects of the whole job situation then and mentioned, for example, the ambiguous role of Einstein. I stand by what I then said. Since the two original articles were not published in the *Notices*, I can provide reprints to anyone who might be interested.

Saunders Mac Lane
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Doesn’t Like the Chaotic Behavior of the Dollar

I wish to protest the new design of the *Notices*. In particular, I believe that the addition of fancy and irrelevant pictures to the main articles makes them harder to read. I am distracted by inserts such as the one on page 226 of the February issue. What possible point is there to the design using \$ signs on page 229? Worst of all are the oversized pictures and list of names

spread throughout the article on finite groups. Why do graphic artists so often ignore the readability of their results? This issue and the rather pathetic attempt to follow modern trends of glitz and superficiality only lend support to the call of Lee Rubel in the letters column of the same issue for the formation of a new mathematical society.

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ABOUT THE COVER (con’t. from previous page)

The center illustration depicts a body of constant brightness flanked by two of its (scaled) projections; a meridian section of this body appears in W. Blaschke’s book “Kreis und Kugel”, Chelsea, New York, 1949 (first edition: W. de Gruyter, Berlin, 1916). The figures were produced with *Mathematica* and then imported into a *Virtuoso* document for convenient scaling and positioning. The author, R.J. Gardner, thanks Geoff Matthews for the use of his NeXT workstations.