



McGILL UNIVERSITY

Foundations and Philosophy of Science Unit

Montreal, 27 January 1971

Professor Imre Lakatos, Editor
The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science

Dear Imre,

I have your letter of December 20, 1970, concerning my paper "Testability 1970" read at the Popper symposium at Boston University in December, 1969, and submitted to the Journal last July.

I don't accept the charges of the referees, which you seem to approve of. I won't go into details because their minds, and apparently yours as well, are made up. However, for your information I will say the following.

1. My paper is not concerned with tracing the recent history of the concept of testability among philosophers. Hence the charge of incompleteness of the bibliographical references is hardly to the point.
2. The charge that most of my theses and arguments have been anticipated by others is not substantiated. The publications cited in support of this criticism do not seem to me to make any of the main points of my paper, namely that scientific theories come with various degrees of testability, that automata theory, information theory and the like are not tested through prediction, that generic theories (such as continuum mechanics) are untestable by themselves, that scientific metaphysics is continuous with science (and also possible), and that this blurs the distinction between science and metaphysics.
3. If you agree with the preceding theses I am glad. But be advised that Popper disagreed with them, in particular with my contention that generic theories, such as quantum mechanics without the adjunction of any specific theoretical model of any definite system, is untestable.
4. The referees and you complain that I don't cite your 1968 paper, an expanded version of which occurs in your Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. Defense: My paper was written before this book came out. Counterattack: Neither you nor the referees cite my book Scientific Research, published three years before yours (in 1967). And yet many of the ideas in my paper, as well as some of those in yours, are either stated or adumbrated in that book of mine. However, I did not complain that neither you nor your referees have failed to take notice of my two volume treatise, in which the question of testability is discussed in detail. (More details were given in a paper submitted in 1967 and published last year in Kiefer and Munitz, eds., Mind, Society, and History, vol. 2.) Do you think I should air this complaint and start yet another sterile squabble in the philosophy of science?
5. The referees of my paper recommend that it be not published. On the other hand you take no stand. You only indicate that I ought to cite your 1968 paper. Is this a condition for publication? Please, clarify this point.

Sincerely,

Mario Bunge

Copy to KRP