THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHYSICS¹

By Dr. W. V. HOUSTON

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

In appearing here to speak on the philosophy of physics I am in a rather dangerous position. Those of you who are philosophers will want to know by what right I speak on such a subject without having mastered the classical philosophies and without knowing the various traditional answers which have been given to the problems I shall discuss. On the other hand, physicists will accuse me of having left the austere and narrow path of physics to wander aimlessly, or at least uselessly, among the byways of philosophical verbiage. For most physicists have a traditional mistrust of philosophy. A definition of philosophy which usually provokes much self-satisfied mirth among physicists is as follows: Philosophy is the systematic misuse of a terminology especially invented for the purpose.

Yet in spite of this state of mind, the rapid changes

¹ An address delivered in a series on "Outlooks in Philosophy" at the California Institute of Technology.
Editor's Summary