

It's not the first differential you need worry about, i...

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Many years ago the man who I now think of as my teenage mentor told me that it was not change that worried people because almost all of us can manage that. It's the rate of change that matters. I think that on this, as on many other points (including the fact that politicians don't change the world, but writers and especially poets can) he was right, and the evidence was seen yesterday.

Osborne got away with the claim that there were cuts to be made in the first instance because it is always possible to find some spare in almost any big budget if you try. So change was possible. But if you keep cutting proportionately speaking the cuts get bigger and so the rate of change is larger and at that point the impact is more difficult to accept, for almost anyone. That's the point Osborne has reached now, and wise people are recoiling as a result.

Mathematically speaking, no one is accepting that change is not either possible or even desirable (even if the nature of the change is not agreed upon). That is called the first differential. What is being argued about is the rate of change and that's the second differential. And Osborne's very clearly trying to do something that is testing the boundaries of possibility. That may yet be his Achilles' Heel.