

*res cogitans* and *res extensa*—is no longer suitable for a point of departure for the understanding of the modern natural sciences. In the field of vision of natural science, above all stands the network of connections upon which we as living creatures are dependent and which at the same time we as human beings make an object of our thinking and our acting. The scientist no longer confronts nature as an objective observer, but sees himself as an actor in this interplay between man and the natural world. (*Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik* [Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1955], 21)

That description sounds much closer to Romantic organicism than it does to any shade of nineteenth-century positivism. The very thing that positivism is not is relational. And surely, the one thing that positivism, in its quest for the absolute, cannot tolerate is uncertainty, however meliorated by the principle of statistical probability.

Both science and Romanticism, of course, are complex—too complex to be characterized as simply incompatible. Since, moreover, the artistic temper of our period remains essentially romantic, such a characterization severs the “two cultures” even further and consequently confirms what many already believe—that the humanities are irrelevant. But the directions of theoretical physics and the ascendance of biology and cognitive psychology in our day, it seems to me, point to ways of bridging the gap. Such is the task that I believe we need to pursue.

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To the Editor:

Thank you for the mischievous Eichner essay. I enjoyed it as I haven't enjoyed a *PMLA* article in years.

But isn't it a rather serious omission for an article on that topic published at this late date and in the profession's leading journal to ignore Richard Rorty's refinement of Kuhn and analysis of the Western epistemological tradition (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979])?

Eichner lets himself off awfully easy with Laudan. To have followed through to Rorty would have given his rather complacent conclusion a good deal more bite and made the whole essay even more helpfully mischievous.

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*Mr. Eichner replies:*

I am afraid I have the impression that Michael Kearns does not see very clearly what I was trying to do in my article. I was not concerned with repeating once again that the Romantics replaced the mechanical philosophy by organicism and that they strove to overthrow the epistemological convictions and habits of mind of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I was concerned with showing that the epistemological convictions and habits of mind that form an essential part of the story of modern science led to serious problems, that some of the most astute and courageous thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to solve these problems and failed, that the Romantics were therefore driven to search for even more radical solutions, and that the solutions they found are incompatible with good science. In order to present a coherent case, I could not avoid occasionally saying the obvious, but I tried to say it as briefly as possible. As for the method I employed, it seemed to me, and still seems to me, appropriate. I was trying to contribute to the history of ideas, and hence I don't see what is wrong with my saying that Geulinx and Malebranche “must have been compelled” to formulate their philosophy by their need to escape the Cartesian impasse: I was simply showing that there was a serious problem staring them in the face and that their need to solve it led them to ingenious but rather desperate stratagems. And I was trying to show this, and whatever else I was trying to show, in an *article*. If I had done what Kearns thinks I should have done, that is, added “at least one or two case studies of particular Romantics confronting the mechanical philosophy, responding *in detail* to its implications” (emphasis mine), I would have filled up the whole issue of *PMLA*. Kearns also complains that I create the impression that I was writing not a history of individual minds but a “story of essentially one mind, named at various times Descartes, Kant, Fichte, and so on,” but this complaint merely suggests to me that I succeeded to some modest degree in telling a coherent story, and I hope I did so without falling prey to the errors of *Geistesgeschichte*. In any event, there are dozens of case studies that I could refer Kearns to. On reading them all, one gradually begins to lose sight of the wood for the trees. I was trying to paint the wood, and in pointing out, to Kearns's annoyance, that I did so with a wide brush, I for once really did no more than state the obvious.

Edward Proffitt of course understands perfectly what I was trying to do. Before replying to his