

edges the relevance of such radical intimacy to Blake's theory, but I find that Welch's admirable attempt to locate the dynamism in Blake's idea of artist-reader relations is distorted by accents foreign to Blake. Quoting Blake's declaration "To the Deists" that "Man . . . requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary," Welch equates "Selfhood" with identity, as he similarly equates "self-annihilation" with the annihilation of identity. He forgets that "the Selfhood deadly" lies "Beyond the outline of Identity"; as the seven angels tell Milton, "Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States. / States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease" (*Milton* 37.10, 32.22–23); or in Blake's own words, "In Eternity one Thing never Changes into another Thing Each Identity is Eternal" ("A Vision of the Last Judgment"; Erdman ed., p. 546).

In the same vein, Welch's formulation that "The poet calls his reader to awaken from the grave of himself to possibilities other than the mere projection of his own identity" almost forgets Blake's essential faith in the originating powers of individual imagination. No one is suggesting that "mere" projection of a dead self characterizes expressive romantic art any more than such projection characterizes authentic human relations. Welch's dissatisfaction with the merely individual is closer to Enlightenment suspicions of mere "singularity" than to Blake. (Such suspicions have served traditionally as grounds for regarding romantic poetry as the mere "private" mythmaking of a few monomaniacs.) And Welch's preference for the dramatic strength of terms like "system" and "annihilation" over the namby-pamby vagueness and softness of "love" and "sincerity" is partly responsible for the claims of his final paragraph, where a vocabulary that Blake would not sanction—"rhetorical maneuvering" and "manipulating"—is assimilated to Blake's own phrases about the "deep dissimulation" of an "honest man." I don't know how Welch reacts to "honest." But he should remember that "love" is not just firelight and brandy any more than "sincerity" is just for girls or an "honest man" is just a soft touch. Let me close with a clarifying passage that seems to me entirely faithful to some essential romantic assumptions about the language of poetry: "Poetic thinking, being mythical, does not distinguish or create antitheses: it goes on and on, linking analogy to analogy, identity to identity. . . . This means, not that it is merely facile or liquid thinking without form, but that it is the dialectic of love: it treats whatever it encounters as another form of itself" (Northrop Frye, *A Study of English*

Romanticism [New York: Random, 1968], pp. 122–23).

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Empirical Psychology

To the Editor:

Judith Ryan's article "The Vanishing Subject: Empirical Psychology and the Modern Novel" (*PMLA*, 95 [1980], 857–69), erudite as it is, would be clearer had the author more carefully distinguished between empirical psychology and empirical philosophy. Paragraph two explicitly refers to psychologists, whereas paragraph three discusses "the interaction between literature and philosophy." The fourth paragraph then states that "the empirical psychologists were responsible for unmasking the fictitious division into subject and object, world and self" (pp. 857–58).

Now, this statement is as true of the "British empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume," mentioned in the second paragraph, as it is of William James and Ernst Mach. What distinguishes the empirical psychologists from their philosophical forebears is not just that they questioned the modern concepts of consciousness, self, and subjectivity but that their empiricism incorporated research. Their position was not just a philosophical one, as a reader might infer from Ryan's article. James instituted the first psychological laboratory in America, and Mach was a physicist before he was a psychologist. Psychologists at the time were trying to free their discipline from philosophy and to win for it the status of a science, although the most thoughtful of them admitted that psychology could not be a pure science. Pure or not, it dealt with phenomena, some of which could be classified, measured, and demonstrated. The point could be made that James, especially, is important because rather than turn to a strictly physiological psychology, he attempted to maintain the breadth that had characterized preexperimental psychology.

I am not suggesting that Ryan should have elaborated on the history of psychology; she already covers an impressive area of modern thought. She should, however, have identified her focus clearly as empirical philosophy. Her commentary is theoretical and interpretive for the most part, for example, in the series of sentences in which she reaches the conclusion that for the empiricist, "Events must be presented more as a random chain

than as a logical progression . . ." (p. 864). Any fictional point of view implies an epistemology, and not all possible points of view are equally acceptable in the context of a given epistemology. These correlations need to be set out, and Ryan has done so. Her statement of purpose, however, remains slippery: "I should like to show in this essay how a number of writers took up these issues [of consciousness, self, and subjectivity] through their contacts, direct or indirect, with empirical thought" (p. 857). The reader who looks carefully at this sentence may have trouble determining just how a writer can *take up* an issue *through contact* with something. Ryan points out that she is not suggesting a simple causal relationship between "literature and philosophy," but the word *through* is evasive: does it here mean "by way of," "by means of," or (surely not) "because of"?

Studies on the impact of empirical psychology, as psychology, can support or qualify general statements about influences. Viewed as an experimental program, the psychology of James and Mach probably overlaps with literature in concrete ways. Perhaps connections can be made on a very specific level, for instance between research into thresholds of sensation and certain kinds of details Joyce places in Bloom's mind. Ryan has provided the conceptual framework within which such connections can best be understood.

MICHAEL S. KEARNS
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Ms. Ryan replies:

Michael S. Kearns's thoughtful letter gives me a chance to elaborate on two points that could not receive sufficient attention in the space of my article.

I shall deal first with the relationship between empirical philosophy and empirical psychology. The distinction we now make between these two disciplines has its origin, to be sure, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but it was by no means so clearly drawn at that time. There was considerable overlap between the two, and psychologists of the period were well schooled in the work of their philosophical forebears. The development, moreover, was not one-way (from philosophy to psychology): Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, for example, would be unthinkable without the "act psychology," as it was called, of Franz Brentano (*Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*, 1874). The concept of "intentionality" fundamental to Husserl's phenomenology was first developed by Brentano.

In terms of my argument, what distinguishes nineteenth-century empirical psychology from earlier empirical philosophy such as that of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume is the context in which seemingly similar problems were raised. Whereas the earlier empirical philosophers were more concerned with an inquiry into the nature of reality, the new empirical psychologists were more concerned with the workings of consciousness. The sentence Kearns quotes from my fourth paragraph is merely a transition to a series of issues I then enumerate in the continuation of that same sentence. Most of these issues are more germane to psychology as it was then understood: I refer to the intentionality of perception and the dependence of our concept of "self" on that principle. This new emphasis makes for a fundamental distinction between the nineteenth-century empirical psychologists and the eighteenth-century empirical philosophers.

Now it is true, as Kearns states, that the new psychology also incorporated experimental research. The move into psychology by a number of men first trained as physicists (Helmholtz, Fechner, Stumpf, and Mach) added an important dimension to the new explorations into the psychology of perception. William James's psychological laboratory is a result of this interaction; but James did not use it for research—it was a demonstration laboratory for teaching purposes. It is important in this connection not to confuse "empirical" with "experimental." "Empirical" means based on experience, either of the external world or of one's own mind. Introspection was the method by which the empiricists investigated the latter. Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen* is almost entirely based on this method (his wonderful line drawing of himself looking at his virtually headless torso on a chaise longue is emblematic of the approach), and long stretches of James's *Principles of Psychology* and his short course book *Psychology* rely heavily on introspective proofs for his theories of attention and consciousness. The use of introspection as a valid method of psychological observation was common throughout this period; derived from more traditional, earlier conceptions of psychology, it was still central to the other branch of nineteenth-century psychology, that of Wilhelm Wundt and his followers, for whom experiment was merely an additional method of corroboration. Not until the advent of behaviorism was the introspective and phenomenalist basis of psychology seriously challenged.

Since the focus of my article was less the psychologists' investigations into sensory perception than their understanding of "self," I naturally based my argument on the "introspective" aspect of their method, not on the experimental.