If *American Literature and Science* is not a book about philosophy, it is nonetheless an important volume for philosophers working and teaching in aesthetics. Robert Scholnick, Dean of Graduate Studies at the College of William and Mary, has done a splendid job of editing this attractive, well-bound collection of thirteen essays, each of which gives voice to an aspect of the rich (if not novel) suggestion that literature and science have shared methods and goals during American history. It is also a crucial book for those interested in the interstices of literature and scientific method: both in content and in comportment, this book is an experiment in translating between two seemingly incommensurable disciplinary languages. And, unlike much recent scholarship in comparative literature, most of these essays will be comprehensible to the non-specialist.

Scholnick sets out the book's goals in his essay, "Permeable Boundaries." American science, he suggests, has "like everything else cultural-art, ideology, religion, common sense—been hammered together in some place for some purpose by partisans and devotees." Using examples culled primarily from physics and biology, he suggests that literary tools have been extraordinarily helpful for understanding the cultural expressions of scientists. Moreover, common theoretical commitments were developed by scientists and their literary colleagues. For example, post-Einsteinian physics placed new attention on the agency of the investigator as interpreter just at the time that post-structuralist interpretation methodologies put into question the status of the author. The codes of science thus "tough on literature in an unsuspected way."

The book selectively emphasizes the ways in which science changes literature and literary expression, from Ben Franklin to cyberpunk. To that end, most of the essays in *American Literature and Science* discuss the treatment and role of science in the work of particular authors: Edward Taylor (Catherine Rainwater), Benjamin Franklin (A. Owen Aldridge), Thomas Jefferson (Joseph Slade), Edgar Allen Poe (William Scheick), R.W. Emerson (David Robinson), H.D. Thoreau (Robert Richardson), Mark Twain (H. Bruce Franklin), Hart Crane and John Dos Passos (Joseph Slade), Charles Olson (Steven Carter). In addition, Judith Lee has a marvelous essay here on the effects of humor in and on science. The volume also deals in a very interesting and subtle way with the converse role of literature in articulating a different kind of science, or at least a different understanding of science's meaning for culture. For example, both Slade and Bruce Franklin take pains to demonstrate the effect of Jefferson's and Twain's work on the science of the day. N. Katherine Hayles essay, the final chapter of the volume, attempts to establish reciprocity with literature as an important frontier for American science. This is an important subject; unfortunately, it is also the weakest link in the volume. Hayles is barely comprehensible. She butchers both Luce Irigaray's and Haraway's interesting analyses of institutional
science; she neither weaves in insights of the other authors, many of whose work bore directly on Hayles claims, nor succeeds in displaying the role of literary theory in advancing Chaos physics. Thus the volume is left fundamentally unfinished, as, I suppose, any work in this area must be.

Nevertheless, Scholnick does a fine job of indexing, and his annotated bibliography of relevant and related work will be useful indeed. Even there, however, interesting work remains undone: the important contributions of American philosophers to the relationship between art and science are not noted, and the political and economic work in the past 20 years on similar questions is similarly not in evidence. The tragedy of disciplinary rigidity, here as elsewhere, is that we are somehow least able to access resources from other disciplines at the exact moment when they are most needed: what an irony to see this problem in a book whose avowed purpose is to burst the disciplinary bubbles of literature and science. Scholnick's *American Literature and Science* is thus a lesson in two parts: first, that there is much to be mined by philosophers of science in literature; second, that interdisciplinary inquiry is best when it really is interdisciplinary, even if that requires us to solicit contributions from outside our own field.

University of Pennsylvania


If, as many have alleged, philosophy and the rest of society have little to do with one another, then John Lachs's latest book constitutes one of the more successful attempts to ford this chasm. In the best spirit of American philosophy, the spirit of William James's *Talks to Teachers* and of the essays of Emerson and Thoreau, Lachs has written a book with the distinctive voice of a philosopher deeply concerned with what he sees as the unthoughtfulness of his age, and frustratingly, of his profession as well. It is a voice whose tone, Lachs writes, "is one of tolerant concern." (xiv)

Regarding the title, *The Relevance of Philosophy to Life* is both a statement that philosophy is relevant and an engaged plea, through argument and example, that it must be considered relevant. To fail to do this is, according to Lachs, is to retreat into narrow specialization, and ultimately to fail ourselves and our fellow citizens by not applying our knowledge to our own individual and communal plights. Lachs is drawing on very ancient sources when he says "devotion to reason in discourse combined with refusal to honor reason by bringing our actions in line with what we say reveals a basic incoherence, a break in the unity and integrity of the person." (6) Restoration of that unity and integrity is the guiding theme of Lachs' book.

Perhaps the best thing to say about this collection of