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 islift 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
essays (all but three of the twenty-six selections have been published before) is that they reflect this concern with integrity: the book does not read like a collection of essays but more like variations on a theme (though the later chapters do seem unduly repetitive). This has the great virtue of appealing to a diverse readership while holding the attention throughout the travels over varied subjects. This virtue is further enhanced by Lachs' conversational style and the short chapter structure (less than twenty pages each) which makes for a book that can be picked up and put down without loss of clarity. This is a book philosophers can recommend to their friends, who may in turn take from it what is useful to them without having to wade through obscure or professionalized prose.

Lachs ranges from reflecting on recent Continental thought to various issues in applied ethics (including issues on technology, advertising, educational policy and euthanasia, with a helpful chapter entitled "When Abstract Moralizing Runs Amok" to top things off.) This is balanced with reflections on Aristotle, Santayana and Dewey along the way. One's estimation of the value of this book stands or falls with Lachs' commitment to "domesticating" these and many other familiar philosophical issues. His treatment of relativism, while balanced and fair, may not be sufficiently robust to pique the interest of a scholar immersed in the intricacies surrounding modern debate of the subject. But Lachs is honest about his method and his convictions (he sketches his theory of human nature in the concluding pages of his introduction! (xvi-xvii). To my mind, it pays reasonable dividends: his meliorative approach assists non-specialists in finding more subtle descriptions for their experience (the moral dilemmas they face, their criticisms of contemporary life), and helps remind philosophers of the need to apply their brain power to their own daily lives. Lachs covers this vast terrain without losing either his ethical animus or baffling his readership, and this is no small accomplishment. One shortfall is the lack of suggestions for further reading; a non-specialist may not know where to turn after this book, but, in fairness, the author does imply that action is more urgently needed, and if he has led his readers to some degree of conviction (and hopefully involvement), they perhaps need not look to him for books but rather worthwhile causes to take up. (Readers steeped in the academy could also use such suggestions: perhaps Lachs' next book could be called Ten Things Philosophers Can Do to Make Themselves Relevant!)

The hope with which one is left upon reading The Relevance of Philosophy to Life is that this book and others like it will have made such an impact that one day the claim that philosophy is relevant to life will seem like less of an irony and more of a truism. It is clear that, despite his misgivings about the contemporary situation, Lachs holds philosophy to be deeply relevant to all our lives, and his writing conveys that passion, and the optimism, that he brings to his critique of modern life. As the first installment in Vanderbilt's Library of American Philosophy series, one can hope that John Lachs' book will be a sort of "flagship" volume: setting the tone and style toward
which future volumes will aim. The standard professional desiderata of greater technical detail and of more thorough historical genealogy of the views proffered by Lachs can surely be met within this larger domain.

University of Alberta Matthew Stephens


This book is the first of an anticipated two volume set dealing with important aspects of the cultural context in which William James was raised and the significance of his response to that context. Croce describes his project this way:

Volume I is about James and his circle in the context of certainty just entering an eclipse; Volume 2 will cover James's early adulthood and his formulation of answers to uncertainty — and of a template for twentieth-century intellectual life. The two-volume project is about James at the center of groups of intellectuals who gradually steered scientific and religious understanding, often unintentionally, away from proclamations of certainty. (p. xi)

Croce considers the latter part of the nineteenth century "... the era of William James." (p. x) Because the first volume focuses on evaluating the significant cultural forces at work in James's early life, the determination of whether Croce has effectively established his case awaits the publication of Volume 2.

In the Introduction, Croce explains that the term, 'certainty,' is used "... not as a philosopher's abstract theory, nor even as a synonym for truth, but rather as a cultural category indicating confidence or assurance in any particular idea or belief." (p. 3) He points out that the confidence that most Americans had in religion and science at the beginning of the nineteenth century was largely lost by the end of that century. His aim is to explore those factors which promoted the development of what Peirce called the fallibilistic attitude. He sees this exploration as critically important because these realms of life are the ones that most fundamentally tell us who we are and define our relationship with the rest of the world. Uncertainties in other departments of cultural and intellectual life may come and go, but religious and scientific uncertainty is doubt at its most profound. (pp. 16-17)

Part I of the text examines James's early life and, in particular, the strong impact his father had on his intellectual and moral development. Henry James, Sr., was deeply influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical writings. Although he remained