Department of Philosophy
Arizona State University

Box 872004
Tempe, AZ 85287-2004
602/965-3394 FAX: 602/965-0902
9 May 1995

Dr. Viktor Hamburger
Department of Biology
Washington University
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Viktor:

I like the changes in your revised paper. It is a clear, well-crafted paper with a point. Just the sort of thing that I wish I could always write. I have sent a copy to Fred Churchill, though he is not very good at writing to anybody. There were a few very minor comments that I made in the margins, but none is very important at this point. Presumably, the paper should eventually be published (either along with the others as a special volume or separately if there is no such volume). The Journal of the History of Biology, for example, would surely be delighted to receive such a submission, as would History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences.

I am also returning your Spemann. A rare books librarian thought it better to leave it as it is and add a layer of plain tape, which we did. We could put binding tape on the backing, but that is opaque and would obscure the title. So, here it is. I started reading it, focusing on the parts you had noted in your "index." As you suspected, slogging through some of the subtleties is not easy for an American whose German is rusty, so I copied parts and will work on them this summer. I have a wonderful, peaceful cabin in the mountains with no phone or other distractions, so I look forward to working on it there.

In particular, I need to think more about what holism, vitalism, and organicism have meant. I am still puzzling over your comment that you consider yourself a "vitalist," which sounded more like what I have been trained to think of as a "holist." So, just what that distinction really means and the extent to which it matters because it gets translated into different ways of thinking about the science is something I need to work a lot harder to understand. I suspect this is one of those "German things," resulting from the fact that German intellectuals were really widely educated in philosophy and other areas besides their narrow specialty. I don't see evidence of many American biologists of the first half century comfortably considering issues such as "what is life" or "what is an organism"? Yet such issues would seem to be fundamental to embryology, for surely we must understand what it is that is developing in order to study its development very deeply. Of course, I would value any insights you have.

Thanks again for the lovely conversations in April, which I enjoyed so much.

Yours,

Jane

Jane Maienschein