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Holism, Nature, and the (Non-Ironic) Enchantment of Modernity

In 1918, Max Weber pronounced that modernity was responsible for the disenchantment of the world. Since then, intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic have grappled with what this means for the denizens of secular modernity. Many prominent scholars have shared Weber's pessimism, thereby contributing to a critical discourse lamenting the impact of instrumental reason and mechanistic science. Recently, however, a new body of scholarship has emerged that challenges this view. It argues that modernity, far from being disenchanted, is full of enchantments, albeit ones that are reflexive and ironic. What both these schools of thought neglect, however, is how holistic thought—and particularly its ecological variety—has served as a form of modern enchantment that speaks in the register of science, supposedly the prime force of disenchantment. Ecological holism is reflected in the work of writers and scientists such as Uexküll, Smuts, Clements, and Carson, as well as in the actions of groups as diverse as the German *Lebensreform* movement and Greenpeace. This type of ecological holism has inspired a form of modern enchantment that is free of irony and fully grounded in a scientific worldview.