

Henry Bugbee, edited by David W. Rodick
Wilderness in America: Philosophical Writings
New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017
ISBN: 978-0-8232-7536-6 (PB) \$32.00. 222pp.

In his Introduction, editor David W. Rodick states that his hope for this anthology of selected writings by Henry Greenwood Bugbee, Jr. (1915–1999) is to elevate Bugbee’s canon beyond ‘relative obscurity’ (p. 2) in American philosophical thought; to reintroduce, reconsider and cast critical scholarly attention anew on Bugbee’s legacy. Rodick champions a philosophical and literary legacy that looks beyond Bugbee’s 1958 ‘underground classic’ (p. 5) *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form*. The result is a carefully curated collection of Bugbee’s essays and conversations that traces the genesis and evolution of his experiential philosophy, and confirms Bugbee’s place as a stalwart (albeit one often neglected) amidst twentieth century American philosophy.

Wilderness in America: Philosophical Writings is organised in four parts, with the selected writings spanning Bugbee’s academic career from college student to emeritus professor. Part I features selections from Bugbee’s college writings – namely sections from his 1936 undergraduate honors dissertation ‘In Demonstration of the Spirit’, and from his 1947 doctoral dissertation ‘The Sense and the Conception of Being.’ Part II moves on to some of Bugbee’s published writings, including the 1974 essay ‘Wilderness in America’, which also gives its name to this collection. Part III includes unpublished writings, while Part IV presents the abridged transcript of an interview conducted between Bugbee, his wife Sally Moore, and friend and colleague Ray Lanfear during the last decade of Bugbee’s life. The book concludes with a series of appendices that further speak to Bugbee’s influence and legacy, and include personal correspondence and journal entries, tributes and other writings. The appendices might be an eclectic compilation of Bugbee’s words and those of others, but they succeed in drawing together and distilling the key themes that cross-cut the writings selected for this compilation. Rodick’s light editorial presence throughout the book, in the form of brief biographical notes, context and discussion at the beginning of each essay, are a valuable companion to Bugbee’s writings.

One of the strengths of this collection is that it reveals and consolidates the early origins of Bugbee’s preoccupation with an ‘experiential naturalism’, its many manifestations across his writings, and how it would come to define his philosophical thought. As Rodick justifies,

‘Bugbee’s philosophical approach may be viewed as a kind of experiential naturalism insofar as it recognises the need to address beings experientially on their own terms, within the natural context out of which they emerge, in an effort to see what can be revealed once beings are beheld in their own light’ (p. 6). Indeed, Bugbee calls for an approach to a sense of being where ‘*The sense of being implies the transition from an egocentric to a cosmocentric point of view*. And the latter view inevitably places man as but a child in the universe, introducing a humility and a receptiveness into his position which are neither forced nor assumed, but the natural concomitants of that position’ (‘The Sense and the Conception of Being’, p. 45, original emphasis). Bugbee’s writing is heavily influenced by works by the Concord Transcendentalists – especially Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson – as well as Martin Heidegger, and is frequently punctuated with (and grounded in) references to classical philosophy and biblical texts.

For environmental philosophers, environmental historians, conservationists and wilderness advocates, the essays included in *Wilderness in America* together offer testimony on Bugbee’s dovetailing of embodiment *and* reflection *in place*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is in the essay ‘Wilderness in America’ that Bugbee speaks most directly to ecological concerns and values, for it is here that he reflects and meditates on the importance of wilderness. The essay is framed early on by his participation in public hearings on wilderness, and Bugbee uses the essay as a platform to interrogate the promise of instruction, invitation and opportunity held in the wilderness (e.g. p. 84). In celebrating the wilderness idyll, Bugbee remarks, ‘I suggest wilderness is not to be understood as a place appropriated to human interests or to a special human interest. Its fundamental gift lies in the qualification of disinterestedness with which human interest requires to be informed. But for such qualification we tend to lapse into a wallow of anthropocentricity and suppose ourselves to be titular on the face of the earth’ (p. 87, cf. pp. 91–93). And elsewhere in this collection – especially in the previously unpublished essay ‘Nature and a True Artist’ – Bugbee frames an experience in/of nature as an experience of *resistance*, to question an intimacy, appreciation, participation and partnership in nature. In revisiting Bugbee’s writings, this collection restores a neglected voice to contemporary commentary on a sense of wilderness. But Bugbee also did more than write about a sense of wilderness – in the mid-1970s he also established the Bugbee Nature Preserve in Missoula, Montana to honour his late father Henry Greenwood Bugbee, M.D., who had introduced him to the Mountain West, and to fly

fishing (recounted here by Bugbee's son in the appendix 'Bugbee Nature Preserve – Named for Henry Greenwood Bugbee, M.D. (1879–1945)').

There is one narrative trope that persists in Bugbee's environmental philosophy – the pursuit of fly fishing. Rodick first learned of Bugbee as 'a philosopher who moved to Montana and took up fly fishing' (p. 2), and Bugbee's passion for fly fishing is woven through his philosophical reflections. This pursuit is told and retold in vignettes throughout his writings; a demonstration – and lasting reminder – of Bugbee's own personal, intimate experiential philosophy, or experiential naturalism (especially in essays in the Appendix, including 'Experience, Memory, Reflection: An Interview with Henry Bugbee', 'The Splendor of Rock Creek', 'Upper Clark Fork: Rock Creek Fishing').

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