Memories and Portraits

Philadelphia architecture spanning three centuries

Memories and Portraits: Explorations in American Thought

By

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by H. G. Callaway

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Where there is no vision the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

—Proverbs 29:18

We go to Europe to be Americanized.

—R.W. Emerson, 1860

Something always escapes. 'Ever not quite' has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom. However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective center of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity.

—William James, 1909

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INTRODUCTION
ON THE FAMILIAR AND THE FOREIGN

Moderate anti-formalism

This book is chiefly a work in American philosophy, though partly historical and autobiographical. A life-story, only partly told (as with any such story) contributes to the context, useful, if not always strictly necessary, to understanding the philosophical issues addressed and their connections. Where biographical aspects strike some readers as short, there are many locations from which the story may later be continued. Much the same can be said for the strands of history woven in below. This is a frankly particularist approach to philosophy—personal and locally focused—, and insofar empiricist as well; but it consorts with the conviction that universal claims in philosophy are best viewed as *aiming* at universality, though always starting with varied particularities of time and place, culture and background. If we *do* arrive at universalities, then there is some need to understand the routes involved—if only for purposes of inter-subjective checks on the meaning of the claims. It is generally a useful exercise to check for continuities and discontinuities in any course of development; and our construction of meanings is a process and a course of development. In a universe of chance, the construction of meaning selects from much of accident and happenstance and slowly develops concepts of relevance.

There is no absolute requirement of tracing a purportedly universal claim to its *origin* in experience for validation or acceptability, since I suppose that many different sources sometimes lead us to the same insights or generalizations. It strikes me as pure prejudice to think that differing origins or background must *inevitably* lead to distinct conclusions. (In fact, they often do, though.) The view here is, instead, that contextual considerations are crucial for understanding and meaning, and less so regarding truth and validity—which retain more formal aspirations. The contextualism of this book is, all in all, a mild anti-formalism, one consistent with our judging of "truth as earnestly and absolutely as can be," though "subject to correction."[1] It is in testing our claims that sense

1. Cf. W.V. Quine 1960, *Word and Object*, p. 25.

experience is crucial for the contemporary empiricist. Our developed sense of relevance comes to our aid in this. I suppose that the validity of our methods are judged by reference to their success in established forms of inquiry. A mild anti-formalism is open to the use of formal methods when clearly applicable to given problems. Again, there is no call here for any version of the historicist notion of inevitable development. I see little as inevitable about historical developments.

Like George Santayana (an American philosopher who never became a citizen), I think that "only an American can speak for the heart of America,"[2] while, in tension with Santayana, I accept the idea that our friends *may* understand us better than we do ourselves. Still, even if the friends of America may sometimes understand us better, there is no turning over responsibility to friends, or any others, for what we may think or become. "Trust thyself" says Emerson, "every heart vibrates to that iron string."[3] The truth is, we can hardly expect deeper trust from random strangers or even from many an acquaintance; even true friends may be simply too busy with other matters. Being American by birth and conviction, I cannot offer, as Santayana does, the understanding of the "family friend," who has a "different temperament." But I do offer in this book something of the perspective of both the insider and outsider to American developments. It has been American philosophers who have contributed most to what clarity and conviction I can claim for the following threads of philosophical thought; yet I have frequently encountered American philosophers and philosophy on foreign shores—becoming, I believe, more poignantly aware of the distinctiveness of American conditions and thought by noting the scattered foreign reaction and reception on the part of friends and others alike. In this way, as it happens, one may come to know something of who has the heart of America in mind.

Intimacy and distance

William James on "intimacy," quoted below, calls for some comments on the word and its usage. Between 'intimacy' and 'intimate' (judging by the dictionary) it is 'intimate' which is more basic in the pair, and the verb in the first place—apparently arising from old Latin and having to do with what is most inward; thus, "to intimate:" to communicate delicately and indirectly. James' use of the noun "intimacy"—in contrast with the "foreign"—is suggestive of what is "intrinsic or essential," of what we

2. George Santayana 1920, *Character and Opinion in the United States*, pp. v-vi.
3. R.W. Emerson 1841, "Self-Reliance," p. 139.

find as "belonging to, or characterizing, one's deepest nature;" and we understand under "intimacy" what is "marked by very close association, contact, or familiarity."

Intimacy is a matter of what is familiar and engaging in contrast to what is not—or in contrast with what is less familiar and less engaging. "The difference between living against a background of foreignness and one of intimacy," according to well-traveled William James, "means the difference between a general habit of wariness and one of trust."[4] This is far from saying, of course, that we must be able to place our trust indiscriminately in order not to be alienated or oppressed by the "foreign" and unfamiliar. A demand for universal intimacy in our physical and social environments would likely create a tyranny of intimacy; it is in any case impractical, and presumably pernicious.

Still, in contrast with the occasionally strict linguistic division between the formal and the familiar in various continental European languages and elsewhere, which may call for our decision between addressing someone as, say, "*Sie*" or "*Du*" on each occasion, English has evolved a system of degrees of intimacy linked to the linguistic phenomenon of "register," which term plausibly derives from the use of the word in music—having to do, for instance, with range of a singer's voice. In linguistics, register concerns "any of the varieties of a language that a speaker uses in a particular social context."

Europeans sometimes remark that Americans treat everyone as familiar, perhaps wanting for means of distance and sensing some relation or similarity between "you" and "*du*" or "*tu*." "*Sie duzen alle*!" the Europeans may complain. The impression is reinforced by the frequent use of given names in American speech. Historically, the linguistic point is inaccurate, however, since it is the familiar forms "thee" and "thou" which evolved away in English, and we are left addressing everyone by the historically formal and grammatically plural "you." Lacking a stricter decision between formal and familiar address on each occasion, though, we are more inclined to neglect formalities. In spite of that, there is a graded sense of formality surviving in register and in related, educated word choice.

What derives from Old English, though not extremely extensive, has high frequency in modern English; it has left marks on the sound system and tends to be more emotionally charged. On the other hand, we often have many words with more or less the same meaning, some from the Old

4. William James 1909, in Callaway, H.G. ed. 2008, *A Pluralistic Universe, A New Philosophical Reading*, p. 19.

English stock and others borrowed from Norman French, from more recent French, or from Latin, Greek and many other sources. Classical examples include "town" vs. "village," "cow" vs. "beef," "pig" or "swine" vs. "pork," "worry" vs. "concern," "need" vs. "requirement," etc, etc. We can hardly imagine being invited to dinner and being asked if we would like another piece of pig, but to translate literally and falsely, that it what Europeans sometimes do ask. More accurate is to remark on the lack of a *contrast* corresponding to that in English between the "pig" of practical animal husbandry and the "pork" of the retail market and polite table talk.

The effect of the massive borrowings in English is that speech among familiars, and often among new acquaintances, tends to be marked by the high frequency and emotional quality of common words derived from Old English, while in more specialized contexts, we back off, and launch into our extensive, borrowed vocabulary of "loan words"—frequently marked by Latin and Greek roots. Since a native speaker of English need have no comprehension of Latin and Greek roots, and new compounds of Old English roots are exceedingly rare, new words tend to be the creation of experts, and the non-expert must consult the dictionary to get a better comprehension of them.

If we switch to a higher register, words of higher prestige borrowings, this immediately and unconsciously creates a sense of serious endeavor and greater emotional distance or neutrality. Our ability to regulate closeness and distance in English speech depends significantly on strength of vocabulary. The prevalence of the notion that our human relations must be unrestricted in intimacy and scope may, then, signal some linguistic limitation of particular speakers. One sign of this is perhaps the prevalent American invention of new forms of address, *felt* to be plural, such as "you' all," (or, consider the northern variants, "youz," and "youz guys"). In fact the ordinary "you" is already plural. On the other hand, educated English speech, when translated out of foreign habits and experience, may resent and resist the complex and varied regulations of intimacy and distance which come with the English reliance on register. Still, focus on the foreign helps make the modes of familiarity and distance in English all the more engaging. All of this is highly relevant to the "familiarity" of the American freedom of (dis-)association. Where we cannot freely explore for new friends and associates in a friendly manner or break off associations which prove fruitless, then this suggests the presences of something basically foreign to the historical modes and development of American society.

E pluribus Unum

"Only being is," said Parmenides, the ancient Greek thinker, "and non-being is not." This may seem to be an entirely reasonable starting place for a philosopher, but following up the initial claim, we soon discover that Parmenides counted "the many" to non-being, and mere appearance, along with all change and motion. The truth is, according to Parmenides, that "all is One," and when we go on about the many, then this is not "the way of truth" but the "way of opinion." Zeno of Elea, a friend and student of Parmenides, attempted to show, by logical argumentation, the impossibility and contradiction of the notions of change and motion in his famous paradoxes, including the well known paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. According to Plato, Zeno held that if things are many, then they must be both like and unlike. But that is impossible; unlike things cannot be like, nor like things unlike. In reply, common sense tells us that things unlike in many ways can still be more or less alike.[5] The states of the Union for examples are, in many ways, quite different in size and shape, in climate, population and history, yet in contrast to a foreign country, say Nigeria or Sweden, they are still very much alike. If Parmenides had a reasonable way of explaining such points of common sense, it has been lost on most commentators over millennia.[6]

We may plausibly think of Parmenides as the first in a long developmental line of Western metaphysicians who have placed a similar emphasis on "the One." (It is an intriguing idea, and its appeal is doubtlessly a reflection of the emphasis on thematic unity involved in all good writing.) I think to include here Spinoza's pantheism, and certainly F.H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1897), which argued against the reality of distinct things standing in spatial and temporal (or any other) relations. Most directly representing late nineteenth-century British, Absolute Idealism, Bradley might reasonably be thought of as among the greatest of the followers of Parmenides. It is worth remarking, too, on the rationalistic tendency and polemical style involved in starting with "the One." Empirically inclined philosophy tends, in contrast, to start from a multiplicity of observed phenomena. Striving to arrive at unity of insight and understanding out of the variety of our experience, empiricism, at its best,

5. Plato 1961, "Parmenides," 127, d-e.
6. In the passage cited from Plato, Socrates asks of Zeno, "Is this the precise purpose of your arguments—to maintain, against everything that is commonly said, that things are not a plurality?"

strives to bring "one *out of* many." It never quite finishes, though. Greater unity may indeed be better, though the ideal of total unity is pernicious.[7]

In a somewhat similar way, American society has sought to bring national and social unity out of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of the American people—and waves of immigrants thereto. There is always a legitimate tension involved in doing so, which tends to accumulate around contested concepts of integration and assimilation. Regarding these concepts, it is decisive to ask what purposes integration and assimilation may serve, and part of the legitimate answer is that they serve themselves. Integration and assimilation must be conducted in such a way as to facilitate further integration of diverse sources. It would be a mistake to think that the unity of the American republic is an *a priori* concept, dictating in each case some unique result or aim in the manner of philosophical rationalism; but, on the other hand, there is considerable historical experience to be considered and the need of this is connected with the historical success of the U.S. as a society—so largely based on immigration and integration. Integration implies, for the immigrant, that there should not be too little of America, and too much of the foreign. But what is too much and what too little?[8] What is it to be an American?

It is a matter of an American centeredness which combines with openness to difference, and that is exactly what must be preserved in integration: the rejection of jealous exclusiveness. Jealous exclusiveness will not be supported in the long run, though it manages to establish itself here and there for a time. That is part of the interest of the contrast between "integration" and "assimilation." If the American idea were for us to be simply "one," rather than "one out of many," then strict assimilation of immigrants would be more plausible and required. But in contrast with this, we are often content that immigrants, old or new, retain their differences and distinctness, though the aim of integration does require some, more limited, self-development—enough so that we, as a society, can continue becoming "one *out of* many." (I emphasize the integrative process.) Though we often politely ignore our differences, if we abolished them, then the "one out of many" would have no point. We want to be one and still always many. It is a matter of common sense, balance and repeated rebalancing.

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7. See the "The Meaning of Pluralism" my Introduction to James 2008, *A Pluralistic Universe, A New Philosophical Reading*.
8. Santayana observes regarding his experience as a student in Germany, that in the end, "In my Germany there was, and there still is, too much of me, and too little of Germany."

There must be room for our many different communities of sympathy and intimate affiliation, but in such a way that they do not cease growing into components of one country and nation. Many people have difficulty with the idea that American pluralism is, or could be, a permanent constitutional condition. The states must mature into provinces and strictly subservient subunits, it is sometimes thought; maybe a parliamentary system would be better after all; and we will all eventually be as similar to each other as any pair of Englishmen or Japanese are similar to each other. But that is not the kind of view expressed in this book. To get a better hold on the idea of pluralism, it helps to look at particular historical episodes, such as that of the Federalists of New England in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Some were certainly Anglophile in extreme during the War of 1812. It helps to understand something of how people like the Federalists of the Hartford Convention eventually became good, liberal New England Whigs.[9]

A fool's paradise?

"Traveling is a fool's paradise," wrote Emerson—in his argument against mere imitation in "Self-Reliance."[10] He was surely right that we cannot escape ourselves by taking to foreign shores or reasonably seek self-development by imitation. Imitation of the foreign (as with foreign modes of intimacy and distance) may suggests a lack of self-trust. Yet Emerson recognized the positive uses of travel.

> Of course, for some men, travel may be useful. Naturalists, discoverers, and sailors are born. Some men are made for couriers, exchangers, envoys, missionaries, bearers of dispatches, as others are for farmers and workingmen.[11]

The idea that travel is a "fool's paradise," is closely connected, in Emerson's view, with the attempt to disconnect from what is familiar and nearer to home. In spite of his negative comments, Emerson made three trips to Europe himself. On further reflection, he points to some of the advantages.

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9. See, e.g., Henry Adams 1986, *Madison*, Chapters IX and X. Also, Emerson may be understood to ask, of his fellow New Englanders, if they were really as much "non-conformists" as they thought.
10. R.W. Emerson 1841, "Self-Reliance," pp. 159-160.
11. R.W. Emerson 1860, *The Conduct of Life*, in H.G. Callaway 2006, R.W. Emerson, *The Conduct of Life, A Philosophical Reading*, p. 71.

> No doubt, to a man of sense, travel offers advantages. As many languages as he has, as many friends, as many arts and trades, so many times is he a man. A foreign country is a point of comparison, wherefrom to judge his own. One use of travel, is, to recommend the books and works of home,—we go to Europe to be Americanized;[12]

I certainly agree with Emerson that extended residence abroad tends to Americanize thoughtful Americans. Still, it is a slow process. The longer view contrasts with the effects of short visits, especially among those more easily impressed with the varied beauty and decorum of European civilization. It takes a good deal of time to make thoughtful comparisons, escaping both the glitter of the new and the ingrained prejudices of established habits and ways of thought. A foreign country or a second or third language are indeed vantage points for comparisons. The first step in making the best use of them, though, is to follow Emerson's advice and avoid imitation of the foreign. Given that first crucial step, one may, after long consideration, come to see the virtues and the virtues lacking in American life and society. That is perhaps reason enough to travel: to acquire an American-centeredness.

One thing worthy of notice is that the countries of Europe are predominantly uniform in ethnicity. The point needs qualifications of various sorts, but as a first generalization it will stand. Many other countries, outside of Europe, tend to imitate this feature of their former colonial masters. The point throws the multiethnic and multiracial character and sources of American society into stark contrast. Secondly, one should reflect on the degree to which American society has been built up by immigration. This is another sharp contrast, only somewhat diminished by globalization in recent decades. Consider, too, that unlike Europe-as-a-whole or many European and non-European countries, American has no officially defined ethnic sub-polities. In crucial ways, we have all been thrown together into one great pot and afterwards stirred and mixed around pretty thoroughly—though we do rightly resist complete melting in spite of that.

In the longer run, the European perspective highlights the degree to which the U.S. has been built up by *immigration and integration*. Recognizing many failures and mishaps along the way, historically, it remains a fundamental misconception to think of "American" as an ethnic designation (or as a disjunctive ethnic designation). That does not mean, however, that we can have no suitable unity (of our "one out of many" sort) or that we, in contrast to every other country, should not regulate

12. *Ibid*., p. 72.

immigration with one eye on the unemployment rate. Departures from our "one *out of* many" tend toward very serious mistakes of policy and politics. This is an argument in favor of pluralism and against multiculturalism.

Reconstructing travel

I would like to see the American pragmatist tradition deeply explored by philosophers of a naturalist and analytic persuasion, with an eye to introducing greater logical and methodological rigor. Taking the broadest view, this seems the natural course of American philosophy after the Cold War—mutual reasoned evaluation of older and newer elements. Whether this will come to pass, I do not know; it seems certain in any case that it will take a good deal of time if it does occur. In somewhat that spirit, I would like to conclude this Introduction with the following reflections on John Dewey's early view of travel.

Dewey, in some tension with Emerson, is a great proponent of the importance of travel and its influences. Perhaps the most important Deweyan text along these lines is his discussion of the events of the age of exploration in which the Western hemisphere was opened up to European discovery and settlement. Dewey followed an Emersonian path in relating the work of Francis Bacon to American thought and conditions in the second chapter of his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). What is of greater interest however, is Dewey's more optimistic view of the influence of travel and the interaction of diverse peoples. "Upon the industrial side," he comments, "it is impossible, I think, to exaggerate the influence of travel, exploration and new commerce which fostered a romantic sense of adventure into novelty."[13] He emphasizes in the same passage, that it "loosened the hold of traditional beliefs," helped "produce new methods of manufacture, commerce, banking and finance;" it also "stimulated" invention, and helped "introduce positive observation and active experimentation into science."[14]

In general terms, I want to suggest that Dewey is somewhat too optimistic about "change," and that rapid change is, in fact, not always something we can equate with improvement. Dewey's related view seems to be summed up in the following passage:

13. John Dewey 1920, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 101.
14. *Ibid*.

> Contrasts between peoples and races previously isolated is always, I think, most fruitful and influential for change when psychological and industrial changes coincide with and reinforce each other. Sometimes people undergo emotional change, what might almost be called a metaphysical change, through intercourse. The inner set of the mind, especially in religious matters, is altered. At other times there is a lively exchange of goods, and adoption of foreign tools and devices, and imitation of alien habits of clothing, habitation and production of commodities. One of these changes is, so to speak, too internal and the other too external to bring about a profound intellectual development. But when the creation of a new mental attitude falls together with extensive material and economic changes, something significant happens. [15]

The idea here seems to be that "mental change" and "material and economic changes" naturally complement each other in such a way as to produce something positive. That this *can* happen, I think no one doubts. (This point is central in the broad contemporary faith in globalization.) But it seems equally clear that complex and compounded social, moral, intellectual and economic changes may also result in stubborn, large-scale disillusion, disorientation and exaggerated conflict.

Comparing Emerson and Dewey on the influence of travel, Dewey's account seems to lack for Emerson's more conservative and emphatic stress on the familiarity of home. Though Dewey does discuss the political and valuational changes arising from more extensive travel and contacts in the early modern period, still the idea that continuity of values is required in order to sort out the results of large-scale interactions appears to be missing. Much more could be said, of course, and many further texts from Dewey explored; but in the passage explored here, Dewey appears as the fully optimistic modernizer—and this in spite of the catastrophe of WWI just recently past at the time Dewey's book was first published. We may also sometimes revise our values, to meet outstanding problems, and new interactions with the foreign may help with this; but we surely cannot revise everything at once, and we might better think of such contingency of values as akin to the revisability of the U.S. Constitution—never ruled out in principle, but properly very difficult and rare in practice. Unrestricted optimism about change, difference and ever wider interaction, I suspect, is the genuine "fool's paradise."

Travel has brought me, personally, to the conviction that America needs to closely consider its own history—especially just now after the Cold War and in the wake of globalization. While skeptical of the early Emersonian idea that history is just biography, I believe that biography

15. *Ibid*.

may contribute crucially to our understanding of history. History, in turn, provides needed context for philosophical thought. Instead of going further into details on the themes, however, I will recommend the following text—trusting that we would do well to consider both the view from home and that from afar.

The autobiographical aspects of this book chiefly draw upon my own memories, journals and correspondence. In the writing, I constructed a personal chronology detailing travels and meetings—though of insufficient interest to publish. Wherever possible, I have checked my impressions of foreign lands, customs and language against the views of the native born in conversation. The philosophical and historical sources employed are, as a general matter, detailed in the footnotes and the bibliography. In addition, the stands of history below draw upon the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1999, and later editions, for dates and specifics regarding historical figures, and especially regarding the history of Nigeria, Florence and Switzerland. This has proved itself a convenient means of quickly checking historical claims provided by memory or particular published sources; and it provides standard, authoritative summaries on many diverse topics—from which (even a life-long) lay historian will not easily or quickly depart. In this spirit, and by these means, I have attempted to limit myself to matters of historians' consensus.

CHAPTER ONE
STARTING IN PHILADELPHIA

A city as intimate and foreign

Philadelphia is one of those places in the world, there are just a few, in which I get around easily and intuitively. It's a matter of knowing the streets and the layout of the streets, how to get from one place to another, how the expressways run and connect, and perhaps more importantly, knowing where it may be worthwhile going—and places to avoid. This familiarity with Philadelphia contrasts with many more places in the world, more or less renowned, that I will have visited once or more frequently, or even settled down for a time, but where, however famous and inviting the place may be, there is a serious need to consult maps and stop and ask directions of the natives. Getting around easily and intuitively belongs to feeling at home.

There is more to feeling at home, but this easy familiarity of getting around has its importance. It is part of fully trusting yourself to move around the place. William James writes sometimes of "foreignness" and "intimacy," and of the need of "intimacy" in our relation to the world.[1] One way to understand this is in terms of alienation vs. engagement; the more familiar a place is, by way of getting around in it, the more easily one may become engaged. Though perhaps neither necessary nor sufficient for engagement, the ease of getting around helps. It contributes. Thus arises our American admiration for a logical and systematic configuration of streets and street names in the cities—a feature built into William Penn's original plan for Philadelphia. This Enlightenment style of cities is less demanding of strangers and natives alike. In consequence it takes less effort and experience to become a native, though the experience of the native is less distinctive. I think here of the differences between America and Europe connected with traveling the streets and highways. In the U.S.,

1. See William James 1909, *A Pluralistic Universe*. "From a pragmatic point of view," James says, "the difference between living against a background of foreignness and one of intimacy means the difference between a general habit of wariness and one of trust."

you decide where you want to go and find out from a map what road will take you there. In the driving, the road signs, displaying north or south and east or west, along with a number, instruct you about approaching your distant goal. In Europe, in contrast, grid structures of city streets are rare and exceptional, and the road signs often tell you of the sequence of local towns or villages; you often have to already know that sequence or continually consult a map, to check on whether you are going in the right direction. If you *do* already know the local sequence of towns and villages, then, of course, the road signs are perfectly adequate; but it is often much harder for the stranger. The Enlightenment reasonableness of American street and road plans contribute to the relative ease of immigration and integration.

Ease of getting around is not everything, and the appeal of transparency in the layout has its limits. Moreover, there are several places in the world where I definitely know my way around the streets and roads, though I am nonetheless not at home—lacking for deeper engagement. These are places where I am less at home than in Philadelphia. Philadelphia is after all my home town. Emerson wrote that "We go to Europe to be Americanized;"[2] and I sometimes feel, paradoxically, that I have traveled Europe and the world only to retain or develop what is in me of Philadelphia. It is a city comfortable and limiting—engaging yet often contrary to fuller aspiration.

To become Americanized these days is something distinct from the experience of Emerson's day. Both Europe and America have changed; America's founding values have been more effectively challenged both at home and abroad. In the end, though, Emerson had it right. A society as pluralistic as America needs high levels of non-conformity to facilitate its integration. However committed you may be to your particular community of origin, background or sympathy, as soon as you succeed in understanding some of the rest of the country, in all of its variety, you have already gone beyond your background particularity and you may become unrecognizable within your communities of origin. This is a point Santayana suggests: "To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career."[3] Being an American is a matter of becoming something. This is now harder than it once was.

Although much more familiar and appealing to me than many a place, as a general matter, Philadelphia still has its own distinctive coolness.

2. See R.W. Emerson 1860, *The Conduct of Life*. Boston: Tricknor and Fields, p. 127.
3. George Santayana 1923, *Character and Opinion in the United States*, p. 168.

Coolness, like all psychological distance, makes for difficulty of engagement. I habitually associate this coolness with the experience of walking among the walls of Center City office buildings at different times, over years and decades, looking at the multitude of shining windows and feeling that there was no place in any of it for me. It is not, though, that Philadelphia is too much a city of business and there is nothing else to seek. But sometimes the distance of the business world from my own personal inclinations came to evoke an impression of more pervasive distance.

An old Philadelphian writer of the Gilded Age, Agnes Repplier, seems to have captured this general character of the city in a description she provided some hundred years ago. Using the term "Quaker City," she suggests relation of the character of the city to its founding:

> Above all, the Quaker City lacks that discriminating enthusiasm for her own children . . . which enables more zealous towns to rend the skies with shrill paeans of applause. . . . If mistaking geese for swans produces sad confusion . . . the mistaking of swans for geese may also be a serious error. The birds either languish or fly away to keener air.[4]

The Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers) is a Christian group that arose in mid-seventeenth-century England. They believe in living by the "inward Light," or direct inward apprehension of God, without creeds, clergy, or other elaborate religious formalities. The premise of a Quaker meeting, conducted by episodes of speech and silence from the congregation, and without benefit of clergy, is "continuous revelation": that the Holy Spirit may speak through any of the congregants on any occasion. Generally, they sit and wait, facing each other on long benches, until someone decides to stand and speak. An hour's meeting may easily pass without a single word being uttered—until the Elders stand to make announcements. Quakers of long standing will sometimes avoid even the word "church"—preferring to speak dismissively of a "steeple house" (from Quaker founder George Fox's[5] aversion to the decorative steeple) in contrast to their own "meeting house."

These proceedings can make a strange impression on those unfamiliar with Quakers ways. The point is illustrated in the description of Philadelphia offered by a German visitor in 1750:

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4. Agnes Repplier 1898, *Philadelphia, The Place and the People*, pp. 390-391. Quoted in Burt, Nathaniel and Wallace E. Davies 1981, "The Age of Iron, 1876-1905," p. 471.
5. George Fox (1624-1691) was an English preacher and the founder of the Society of Friends.

> In this city there are already 8 churches, three English, three German, a Swedish and a Quaker church. In the Quaker church one can often hear and see a woman preach in English, but you will hear none of them sing, since they don't hold with singing. After the end of the sermon someone else steps forward who has something further to add on the same topic; and he declares his opinion. One can often hear two people disputing in front of the entire assembly—which will sometimes last longer than the sermon.[6]

One might suspect some misperception in this passage, though it also suggests changes in Quaker practices. However it may have been in the early 1750's, my experience is that in contemporary meetings of Quakers in Philadelphia, there are no disputes (though differences are sometimes expressed). It is frowned on to speak twice in the same meeting.

One appealing description of a Quaker meeting can be found in Christopher Morley's[7] *Philadelphia*, which draws on his books and articles from the 1920's and earlier. Morley knew the Quakers well having been born in Haverford, where his father had been a Professor, and he was also a graduate of Haverford College—the first college founded by the Quakers. He described an episode which took place while he was at Oxford in a "humble little Friends' meetinghouse":

> …a shy homely girl in a plain tweed suit suddenly got up in the silent sitting. It was a clear Spring forenoon, with that moist English savor in the air. Her voice trembled with terror, but she managed to say "I'm thinking of the sky and the trees and the shadows of the trees, and the wind, and the smell of everything." She sat down, subsiding into a shaken privacy of tears; but we understood.[8]

For Morley, this belongs to the most memorable of Quaker "outgivings of concern." Particularly since he thought so, it makes a beautiful little Quaker story on the wonder of the ordinary.

I know only one "Quaker joke," which is nonetheless worth the telling. The story is of two old Quakers, John and Paul, who had been going to meeting together for many, many years, and where being questioned in detail about Quaker beliefs. Finally, they were asked whether the Quakers believe in God, and John turned to Paul, with a quizzical look, asking,

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6. Gottlieb Mittelberger 1997, *Reise nach Pennsylvanien im Jahr* 1750, p. 105.
7. Christopher Darlington Morley (1890-1957), novelist and literary columnist, is best known for his *Kitty Foyle* (1939). The novel was turned into a film starring Ginger Rogers.
8. Christopher Morley 1990, *Philadelphia*, p. 268-269.

"Well, I don't think we have got around to that one yet, have we?" Part of the point here is that it may take a very long time to grasp the Quakers' beliefs merely sitting in on the meetings.

As a general matter, the Quakers have been consistently viewed as too impulsive by other Protestant or Puritan-derived denominations. (We must be more wary, it is said, of "what comes into our minds.") But the Quaker idea of continuous revelation seems too close to the main-line practice of finding new meanings in scripture, based in current situations, to be fairly rejected out of hand by clergy. It is not that the Quakers' expressions of concern go totally without examination. When something genuinely challenging is said, the point will go bouncing with visitors from one congregation to another—perhaps bouncing up toward Harrisburg and eventually returning with replies in tow. Again, the Quakers have their more conservative and more reformist-liberal branches. What they lack are trained clergy; and consensus within their own congregations may indeed quickly yield an "indiscriminate enthusiasm" together with disdain for the opinion of the wider world.

Early on, the Quakers were persecuted in England—by the Puritans and the Restoration Cavaliers alike. Since, on general pacifist principle, they refused to fight in the great religious wars, they were suspected of sympathizing with the Catholics, and they frequently remained dissidents and outsiders to the established Church of England no matter who controlled it. Later, in America, they were persecuted by the New England Puritans. Once chatting with a local Catholic priest in Philadelphia, and mentioning the Quakers, I was surprised to learn that he suspected they weren't "really Christians," since they don't practice baptism. (Their young people write a letter to apply for membership when they come of age.) Penn's "Holy Experiment" early extended religious freedom to Catholics, and by now, Philadelphia's population is about half Catholic. But few are aware of the history.

Because of the Quaker founding of Pennsylvania, the local Quakers often count to the establishment and old money in the area. The point belongs to the contemporary paradox of America's founding by religious dissidents or "non-conformists."[9] Free competition among all religions, denominations and sects plausibly belongs to the living soul of America: a point early recognized and instituted in Quaker Pennsylvania—and later in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The ideal of a single univer-

9. "Non-conformist": someone who does not conform to an established church; especially, one who does not conform to the Church of England; a person who does not conform to accepted patterns of thought or action.

sal church has always stood in an uneasy practical balance with William Penn's "Holy Experiment." An older friend and advisor, and native Philadelphian, once opined to me regarding the Quakers, paradoxically, "Well, I'm glad that they are there, but I wouldn't want to be one." I suspect that this captures the attitude of an overwhelming majority in Philadelphia and the general area.

The Philadelphia jinx

It is not too difficult to describe the kind and degree of "intimacy," or openness and invitation to engagement, needed to keep Agnes Repplier's local swans from flying away to keener air. For many an American, what chiefly counts in favor of a place is openness to enterprise: opportunity. I mean this in a wide sense and certainly do not chiefly have business enterprise in mind, though that is part of the mixture, too. It is all well and good to think one's own thoughts and perhaps write them down; but whatever those thoughts may be, there comes a time when we need to go out into the wider world, cooperate with selected others and see some of the results put through. A place is significantly less "foreign" (or alienating) as it evokes our trust for its opportunities.[10] Writing in 1980, historian John Lukacs, reiterated Repplier's judgment: Philadelphia has "a stogy culture with a radical tinge which will hesitatingly follow current reputations elsewhere rather than recognize the best of Philadelphia's own."

> So often has Philadelphia favored the second-, if not the third-rate, due to a sort of provincial suspicion well hidden behind a successfully maintained pose of patrician reserve. It is easy to be deceived by this pose, as if it were the natural reserve of confident and cultured patricians. What lies

10. "The man not only thinks, but speaks and acts," says Emerson, in "Art" in his *Society and Solitude* (1870): "Every thought that arises in the mind, in its rising aims to pass out of the mind into act; just as every plant, in the moment of germination, struggles up to light. Thought is the seed of action; but action is as much its second form as thought is its first. It rises in thought, to the end that it may be uttered and acted. The more profound the thought, the more burdensome. Always in proportion to the depth of its sense does it knock importunately at the gates of the soul, to be spoken, to be done. What is in, will out. It struggles to the birth. Speech is a great pleasure, and action a great pleasure; they cannot be forborne."

> beneath it is embarrassment, and unwillingness to take risks and, more often, an unwillingness to think.[11]

The recurrent hope is that the cultural reserve of Philadelphia, since this is suited to resist the uncritical enthusiasms of national and media trends and happenings, may yet produce something of value out of the deep historical significance of the place. But this is not typically how things turn out. Instead a preeminent tendency is to uncritically follow trends from afar or else to follow uncritically some local and provincial notion. It is not that there is nothing of deeper value and interest embodied in Philadelphia's history, of course.

In his extensive history, *The Perennial Philadelphians* (1963), Nathaniel Burt seemed never to tire of reinforcing the idea of a Philadelphia-area aristocracy of old names, money, and family connections. At times, this seems to be more a matter of hagiography than history. But his diagnosis of the failure of literature to thrive in the city pulls no punches. "This is partly colonialism," he says with an eye to the history of the city, "Philadelphians were slobbering over Tennyson and Thackeray while they condescended to Emerson and Hawthorne;" and he continues:

> Whitman and Melville of course were considered rude barbarians. In later years colonialism became provincialism, and Philadelphians waited for the accolade from Boston or New York. "Philadelphia is extremely proud of its sons, once they have been approved of by New York," as Struthers Burt said of Richard Harding Davis; but the same thing is true today.[12]

One may certainly sense that the reticence and provincialism of the "Old Philadelphians" who Burt lionizes and chronicles may have much to do with their getting bloody noses when venturing out, to depart from, or in opposition to provincialism; and this thought suggests, in turn, that Philadelphia has lacked for something in contesting the heights of culture —sufficiently established or sufficiently aggressive media for the battles? In any case, the city has lost its once preeminent place in the book and magazine publishing world. One recent writer from which Burt drew hope, however, is Catherine Drinker Bowen (1897-1973), chiefly a writer of biography whose most famous book recalls the *Miracle at Philadelphia*— telling the story of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. This is indeed a fine book, based on Philadelphia's history and arising from one of its oldest, most distinguished families.

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11. John Lukacs 1980, *Philadelphia, Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950*, pp. 307-308.
12. Nathaniel Burt 1963, reprinted 1999, *The Perennial Philadelphians*, p. 395.

Considering Philadelphia's history, the themes of tolerance and independence come immediately to mind. Tolerance is memorialized in the city along with William Penn's "Holy Experiment" of religious pluralism; and national independence, too, has its memorials and tourist attractions—located in a mini-National Park in the Old City. Still, the life of the contemporary city seems to ignore the attractions and memorials in the same degree that it ignores the tourists. My sense of the matter is that the city's tourist industry would significantly benefit, in that degree, as the attractions of the city become chiefly things of intellectual-historical value which Philadelphians provide to themselves. As it is, visiting national politicians have frequently relied upon consumption of South Philadelphia cheese steaks, soft pretzels, and hoagie sandwiches[13] to foster the local citizen's identification with their causes. (No denigration of our local delicacies or culinary specialties intended.)

Steve Lopez, once a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the city's presently largest and most important newspaper, helps bring the picture up to date in his 1995 book, *Land of Giants, Where no Good Deed Goes Unpunished*. The book is a collection of Lopez's revealing and often humorous columns from the *Inquirer*, and the very title of the book suggests my theme. "Where no good deed goes unpunished," is quoted in the book's title from a column of January 1995,[14] recounting the adventures of the then Lt. Governor's chief of staff when he was appointed to the governing board of a local inter-state agency and came to question the workings of the board under the domination of local bread-and-butter party politics. While it is not exactly a story of overly cautious patricians ignoring talent (to say the least), it is nonetheless a story of talent disregarded. Reading Lopez, one can almost get the impression that whatever old-style patricians there may have once been to worry about, they are now long gone, having left the city for the suburbs and turned over their honored traditional role to a different band of folks.[15] Though there is room to doubt that the city has retained any distinctive or coherent charac-

13. "Hoagie": this distinctive Philadelphian name for an Italian submarine sandwich possibly derives from the sandwiches which Italian immigrant shipbuilders brought from home when working at Philadelphia's Hog Island during WWI. Notice that "hog" pronounced with a long "o" (as in Italian) comes out "Hoag." "Hoagie" would then be "ho(a)g" + "ie" –a diminutive of familiarity.
14. See Steve Lopez 1995, *Land of Giants*, pp. 84-85.
15. For an overview and profiles of prominent contemporary Philadelphians, see Huber and Wallace 2006, *The Philadelphia Reader*—which draws on articles from *Philadelphia* magazine over a twenty-year period.