

INTRODUCTION

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IN APRIL 2008, THE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT AT WEBSTER UNIVERSITY organized a conference to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the meeting of Henry C. Brokmeyer and William T. Harris at the St. Louis Mercantile Library. After the initial meeting in 1858, these two men embarked on a project that was to shape the St. Louis Philosophical Movement, a systematic study of German idealism, and in particular an interpretation of Hegel's work. While Brokmeyer served as a colonel in the Union Army, during the Civil War Harris kept the small group of Hegel enthusiasts together in St. Louis. Denton J. Snider, a graduate of Oberlin College who had come to St. Louis in 1865 to teach at the Christian Brothers College, joined the group. He became the self-appointed historian of the St. Louis Movement. These three were to form the inner circle of the St. Louis Hegelians. The St. Louis Philosophical Society was formally founded in 1866 and its journal, the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy (JSP)*, the first truly philosophical journal in the United States, was published in 1867. While Brokmeyer spent the rest of his life translating Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Harris and Snider were, as the papers in this volume show and attest to, the intellectual forces behind the St. Louis Movement. Taken together they draw a multifaceted, layered portrait of the development of a distinctive American philosophy, pragmatism, and its lasting impact on American culture, intellectual thought, and social institutions.

James A. Good's paper, "The St. Louis Hegelians and the Lost *Bildung* Tradition in American Philosophy," focuses on *Bildung*, the conception of philosophy espoused by the founders of the *JSP*. The St. Louis Philosophical Movement conceptualized philosophy as a fundamentally practical activity, an edifying philosophy, based on Hegel's philosophy of education. The ideal of *Bildung* was to become a self-directed and self-formed person, a person of cultivation and taste. But it went beyond the individual and was used in efforts to reform and promote a progressive society. An example

of such a use of philosophy (to solve practical social problems) is the organization of the first kindergarten program in 1873 by Susan Blow and William Harris. Harris subsequently served as superintendent of the St. Louis public schools for twelve years, 1868–80, and as the first United States commissioner of education in 1889. The kindergarten movement grew under Blow's leadership and led to the formation of the New York Kindergarten Association. The *JSP* was an important tool in the effort to reform society and culture. It sought to promote an American type of speculative philosophy, a philosophy that goes beyond epistemology in favor of *Bildung*, edifying and practical philosophy.

In his paper, "St. Louis Hegelians and New England Pragmatists," Douglas Anderson shows the impact of the St. Louis Movement on American pragmatist philosophy, specifically its relation to William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. Both published in the *JSP*, as did John Dewey; hence all three corresponded with William Harris, the editor. Harris's response to Peirce's essay "Nominalism vs. Realism" acted as a catalyst to Peirce's examination of the nature of reality. Anderson argues that, while Peirce's idealism has an important kinship with the views of the St. Louis Movement, his resistance to Hegel's and Harris's reduction of the concrete, the brute element of the universe, to an unchangeable essence residing in the "Forms of Eternity" led him, as a pragmatic idealist, to work on a synthesis of idealism and common sense and to maintain a dialectical tension between speculation and common sense.

The influence of the St. Louis Movement on James was more indirect. Thomas Davidson and George Holmes Howison, who spent time with the St. Louis Hegelians, were both good friends of James. Howison, who developed the philosophy program at University of California–Berkeley, critiqued James's views as too closely allied with features of idealism and revealed to him a way of synthesizing pragmatism and idealism. Davidson was an independent, renegade scholar who believed that universities imprisoned, rather than helped develop, one's thoughts. He, as the St. Louis Hegelians, sought to relate philosophy to culture, and Davidson influenced James in many conversations to ally himself more with working-class people. Davidson and James were committed both to individualism and to pluralism, and both championed the individual will in the transformation of self and culture.

Anderson shows the importance of idealism in pragmatic thought, in particular that pragmatism did not appear out of nowhere. The St. Louis Movement left a permanent trace in American pragmatism.

Jerome P. Schiller shows how strong the strain of idealism was in American pragmatism. In focusing on the metaphysical aspect of Hegelian idealism in the St. Louis Movement in his essay, "William T. Harris on 'The Speculative,'" he offers a close textual analysis of Harris's notion of the concept. He draws on Harris's articles in the *JSP*, the first of which is called "The Speculative," in order to determine just what Harris meant by the Speculative. Harris characterized the world as comprised of three levels of consciousness—the sensory, the imaginative, and the rational—to which correspond the fragmented world of sense, the unified world of science, and the realm of self-determination, respectively. The multiple relations between these are captured in logico-grammatical terms, like mediation, comprehension, and the universal. Ultimately the speculative standpoint was for Harris a self-determination issuing from a self-relation that is conscious of the principles of the speculative system, in addition to being able to evolve such a system, i.e., the highest realm of consciousness.

Another side of William T. Harris emerges in the portrait drawn by Dorothy Rogers in her paper, "Mentor as Blessing/Curse: Marietta Kies and the Problem of Derivative Identity." Harris was an egalitarian who provided opportunities for intellectual women to flourish, among them Susan Blow and Anna Brackett, a feminist and the first woman in the country to head a secondary school. Marietta Kies was one of his students at the Concord Summer School of Philosophy and Literature in Massachusetts. She became the seventh American woman to earn a Ph.D. in philosophy and one of three women to teach philosophy at a co-educational college or university (Butler College in Indianapolis) before 1900.

Kies published *An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy* in 1889, a presentation of Harris's work that won acclaim for its systematic and clear nature. Anticipating feminist care ethics by almost one hundred years, Kies developed a theory of altruism in the 1890s. She argued that, in a truly rational state, justice and grace must complement each other in all realms of human activity. In spite of the originality of her theory

of altruism, it was considered derivative of Harris's work, which Rogers attributes to the blessing and the curse of a woman's being the disciple of a prominent man in her field.

The last paper in this collection shows how the St. Louis Hegelians used Hegel's historical dialectic to explain what they saw as a crucial flaw in the American character, intellectual immaturity and unreflective custom. In "Absolute Speculation: The St. Louis Hegelians and the Question of American National Identity," Matt Erlin argues that the appeal of the Hegelian dialectic to the St. Louis Hegelians was that its framework could be used to recontextualize the crisis in American institutions following the Civil War as a step toward the actualization of the country's historical mission. Denton Snider recast Hegel's history of civilization as the history of the American republic, in terms of the achievement of a self-conscious awareness of freedom as the essence of humanity. The disintegration of social institutions was seen as a result of the conflict between individual consciousness and national authority, manifest in the contradictions of slavery. Snider used Hegel's conceptual framework to reconcile his belief in an American mission with the degeneration of political culture in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Viewing the American intellectual deficiency also in comparison to the European intellectual tradition, Snider recognized the shortcoming, but used Hegel's framework to assert America's superiority over Europe in its realization of a constitutional confederacy. The United States then could appear as both more and less advanced than Europe in its realization of an ideal of which its citizenry was still unaware.

Harris entertained a concern similar to Snider's in characterizing the country's moral collapse and the role of education to resolve it. While Snider's focus was institutional, Harris framed his concern in terms of race. He argued that the United States developed according to the principles of an Anglo-Saxon race that lacked a propensity for deep thought. Its strength lay in the establishment of practical institutions, though without the mastery of systematic thought. This aspect was characteristic, however, of German science, which Snider saw as necessary to the development of culture in the United States. Both Harris and Snider, then, used Hegel's framework to rationalize America's moral

decline and its lack of a theoretical culture as a temporary phase in the development of the nation.

Erlin concludes that Harris's and Snider's projects, seen from the perspective of the idea of self-consciousness and American intellectual inferiority, must be viewed as a conscious strategy of nation building designed to overcome the latter. The context of a dialectic allowed them to recognize the intellectual immaturity without admitting any permanent inferiority in the American national character.

While the presence of German idealism is strong, the lasting impact of a conception of philosophy as a practical and edifying enterprise emerges clearly in these essays, and in the St. Louis Philosophical Movement's originating contribution to American pragmatist philosophy.