

FOREWORD

David Carl Wilson, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Webster University

SOON AFTER MOVING FROM LOS ANGELES TO ST. LOUIS'S WEBSTER University as a dean and philosopher in 2002, I was browsing through the philosophy section of Powell's bookstore on the south side of Chicago. Well above my reach I saw three red leather-bound volumes titled *The St. Louis Hegelians*. I perched myself high on a ladder and browsed through the volumes in fascination. St. Louis did not immediately come to mind when thinking about important philosophical movements. Certainly Athens, New England, Vienna, Frankfurt—the list could go on at great length. But St. Louis?

Yet, a century and a half ago, one of the most intense, lively, and unusual philosophical movements in history took root in St. Louis. Perhaps somewhat lacking in modesty, the leaders referred to themselves as “The St. Louis Movement in Philosophy, Literature, and Education.” It was a time when the city's leadership comprised four significant threads: transplanted New Englanders, German immigrants, northerly drifting Southerners, and French descendants of the city's founders. This movement blended two of these threads. The New Englanders were represented by the sophisticated William Torrey Harris, and the Germans were represented by the incomparable Henry Conrad Brokmeyer.

They met at a downtown St. Louis lecture in 1858 and discovered their shared interests in German philosophy, New England Transcendentalism, education, and social change. They set up the Kant Club, ostensibly a discussion group but, at the same time, so committed to social engagement that the club played a role in an early Union victory at Camp Jackson. The Kant Club eventually evolved into the St. Louis Philosophical Society, which launched the first English-language philosophical journal in the world, the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Alas, as one writer puts it, “By 1890, however, the St. Louis Movement was as dated as St. Louis's pretensions to future greatness, and the philosophers retained only a unique ability to annoy the young.”¹

Although these philosophers did not generate novel philosophical ideas that changed the course of philosophy, their journal did play a critical role in disseminating groundbreaking ideas by publishing the early works of James, Peirce, and Dewey. And they continue to be of interest owing to their role in the development of American philosophy and their role in the history of the St. Louis region.

But, most important, Harris, Brokmeyer, and other members of the St. Louis Movement are worthy of our close attention because of their commitment to the notion that philosophy must be brought to bear upon life and upon society. Their commitment to education made a direct contribution to the beginnings and growth of the American kindergarten movement. They are credited with contributing to the pioneering commitment of Joseph Pulitzer—a leading St. Louisan of the time—to the importance of investigative journalism. They are credited with contributing to Missouri's critical antislavery and pro-Union stance during the war. They were no less abstract and intellectual than the most bookish of technical philosophers, but they insisted that thought be married to action. Edification, they believed, must be the outcome of philosophy. In this way, they are models to us all.

Sitting atop that ladder, the date 1858 seemed promising. I determined to go back to St. Louis and propose to my colleagues in Webster's philosophy department that we host a celebration of the sesquicentennial of the beginning of the St. Louis Philosophical Movement. Professor Don Morse organized an outstanding conference in 2008, held only a block away from the downtown St. Louis location of Harris and Brokmeyer's initial meeting. This volume, ably edited by Professor Britt-Marie Schiller, grew out of that conference.

As for those three red volumes from Powell's bookstore, they are now among the holdings of Webster University's Emerson Library—immediately beside a copy of the volume you are about to have the great pleasure of reading.

NOTES

1. Max Putzel, *The Man in the Mirror* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 56.