Rising Before Dawn: Wilderness as Vocation

The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in the Wildness is the preservation of the World.
—H.D. Thoreau, “Walking”

I want the truth, marrow-bone truth, and I find the intimations of it whenever I am alive to things, even the most familiar and commonplace things, for the wilderness I take them to comprise. It seems to me that every time I am born, the wilderness is born anew; and every time I am born it seems to me that then, if ever, I could be content to die.
—Henry Bugbee, The Inward Morning, p. 127-28

The Inward Morning is replete with images of daybreak, dawning, awakening, the illumination of horizons, the renewed promise of a new day, a clean slate, a second chance without second thoughts. Recorded throughout these journal entries are insights, epiphanies, and elucidations aplenty, any of which may trigger similar awakenings in us. In general, we find that Bugbee tracks the light as faithfully as the trout follows the well-tied fly.

At the same time, however, the figure (or metaphor) of the “inward morning” departs significantly from the natural, cyclical process on which Bugbee ostensibly models it. Lest we mistakenly associate him with the ongoing project of Enlightenment, and its relentless campaign to eradicate the lingering shadows of ignorance, prejudice and superstition, Bugbee makes clear that the figure he wishes to pursue is meant to convey a daybreak
characterized by uniformly penetrating clarity and perspicacity. Unlike the outward morning on which it is modeled, the inward morning is neither gradual nor partial nor oriental in its advent. Rather, it explodes upon the scene of awareness, in a moment of sudden and total illumination, as if a switch had been thrown. What he calls the “light of eternity” is in fact the even, ambient radiance in which all things stand forth in the fullness of their presence.¹

In certain respects, then, the figure of the “inward morning” more closely resembles Zarathustra’s “great noon,” which is the moment at which no shadows fall in any direction, thereby eliminating any distinction between foreground and background, between forelight and backlight. At such a moment, reality is disclosed to us in the fluent plenum of its totality, stripped clean of heuristic fictions, oppositional distinctions, cartographic grids of explanation, and all other accretions of human science and habituation. In his most illuminating discussion of what he calls “immersion,” Bugbee explains that

Metaphysical thinking must rise with the earliest dawn, the very dawn of things themselves. And this is the dawn in which basic action, too, comes into being. It is earlier than the day of morality and immorality.²

Philosophers, he thus suggests, have acquired the unseemly habit of sleeping late, of lazily accepting the precepts of conventional morality as reliable indices of authentic (= “basic”) action.³ They have done so, moreover, precisely insofar as they have abandoned the noble tradition of “metaphysical thinking,” wherein philosophers endeavor to behold reality
prior to the concoction of even the most basic of scientific postulates and philosophical distinctions.⁴

There is a second sense in which the figure of the “inward morning” deviates from the outward morning on which it is modeled. To witness a resplendent sunrise is truly wondrous, but it does not usually involve much preparatory effort on our part. Daybreak is not something that we typically earn, whether by virtue of exertion or creativity, but something granted to us on a regular, cyclical basis. By way of contrast, Bugbee presents the inward morning as what might be called an achievement, as an epiphany whose event is not merely adventitious.⁵ As characterized in his journal, the figural “inward morning” has not yet dawned, precisely because it has not yet been earned. And even if he has won this (or some other) epiphany in the past, he must begin each day, and each journal entry, anew.

This means that the book The Inward Morning is preparatory to the dawning of the “inward morning”—hence the searching, fumbling, halting successes documented in the journal form that Bugbee braver elects for the record of his philosophical exploration. The book The Inward Morning thus belongs not to the refulgent inscape illuminated by the inward morning, but to the twilit, shadow-shrouded moments before dawn. Although Bugbee’s journal occasionally glows in the reflected light of past epiphanies, it more centrally chronicles the struggles of his passage to future breaks of day. It is for this reason that The Inward Morning has become the vade mecum of those who rise before dawn, whether they be anglers in pursuit of leaping trout, surfers and rowers in search of
windless, glassy water, or nervous, imperfect parents hoping to tap unknown reserves of inspiration, energy, patience, and love.

Despite its obvious and titular emphasis on the glories of daybreak, the book The Inward Morning thus essays an unexpected conclusion: For many of us, dawn is too late. At dawn, after all, one is obliged to make do with what one has, to christen one’s secret compromises as truths, and move forward with all the perseverance and fortitude that one can muster. And one must pray that the resources one has marshaled will be adequate to the day’s agenda. At dawn, the savvy pragmatist and the plucky bricoleur will gather the tools scattered before them and command these resources to their best possible use. And for the most part, to be sure, this mode of deployment is unobjectionable, and even commendable. Most of our tasks are adequately addressed and tackled at dawn. But some are not.

On most days, dawn announces the renewal of what Kierkegaard calls failed repetition, which involves returning contentedly to the familiar resources and implements with which the labors of the previous day were concluded. More to the point for Kierkegaard, days like these qualify as instances of failed repetition precisely because they allow us to cling to the self-limiting mythologies that have sustained our efforts in the past. We witness instances of failed repetition in a number of Bugbee’s journal entries, wherein he records his disappointment over failing to follow up on previous insights or follow through on past promises. His entry for August 7, 1953, for example, begins with a dispirited confession:
What a painful discrepancy between the spirit in which I reflect, on some days, and that in which I go about doing other things...[T]here are days during which...I become something of a mockery to myself, catching such strong hints of inherent weaknesses of mine as force upon me the misery of questioning the very authenticity of my own work. The world as I take it reflectively and the world as I muddle through it then seem excruciatingly worlds apart.6

Other “bad days” are present in their absence from Bugbee’s journal. These are days so derelict, or so I presume, that not even their individual and cumulative failures merit a written record. On such days I imagine Bugbee enmeshed in the numbing repetitions of mundane life: paying bills, marking papers, indulging petty conceits, stoking long-standing resentments, and generally living on credit.

Section I

Rising before dawn on the day he would die, Socrates greeted The Eleven and received their briefing of the day’s agenda. He was no doubt distracted, but not because his death, which he famously claimed to welcome, was now imminent. The ceremonial ship had returned from Delos, its garlanded prow now resting in its familiar place of harbor. No, Socrates was distracted because there was work to be done, even on this last of days. There were fables to be versified, arguments to be defended, women and children to be banished, friendships to be indirectly and all-too-cautiously affirmed, hemlock to be imbibed, and, finally, payment to be rendered (or at least promised) to the healer Asclepius.
In addition to this familiar list of tasks, however, another kind of work remained to be completed. Socrates rose before dawn not to accommodate The Eleven, but to conclude his work on himself, to finish presenting to himself, in the words of Jacques Derrida, the gift of his own death. On this particular day, after all, he would be obliged not only to prove to his sympathetic, yea-saying friends that the philosopher does not fear death. He would also need to prove this provocative thesis to himself, by actually facing death without fear. And he could complete this task only in the event that he came to accept from himself the gift of his own death.

Let us set aside for now any reservations we may have concerning this odd gift, or Derrida’s characterization of it. Let us imagine instead the unspeakable terror that must have gripped Socrates in the dusky hours before dawn, as he struggled to complete himself in his well-known—but as yet untested—image of the fearless philosopher. Later, in the light of day, he would of course deny ever feeling any such terror. But by then he would be in character once again as the “music-practicing Socrates,” bravely determined to spin for his sweetly gullible friends a suitable fable and farewell lullabye. In a dialogue that is virtually obsessed with the details of ritual purgation, Socrates is obliged not only to cleanse his argument of logical defect, but also purge himself of all lingering doubts. And this latter task he must accomplish before dawn, even as The Eleven crowd his cell.

At dawn, we might say with Richard Rorty, everyone is a pragmatist, for everyone must use what he or she has to the best ends that he or she can envision. Before dawn, however, one may yet develop and cultivate new resources, to serve in the realization of a previously unimagined vision of oneself. At dawn, one is obliged to select from a finite
number of familiar alternatives and throw oneself behind the articulation of one’s choice. Before dawn, however, one may refuse not only the familiar alternatives but also the frame in which they are lodged and presented for review.

Before dawn, one may yet look forward to what Kierkegaard calls *genuine* repetition, which involves a repletion of one’s resources through multiple iterations. Genuine repetition allows us, in his words, to “recollect forward,” such that we may fund an uncertain future from the ever-renewed wealth of the past. Many such “good days” are celebrated in Bugbee’s journal, but none outshines July 11, 1953, where Bugbee records a moment of Zen-like enlightenment:

> The fisherman may learn that each instant is pregnant with the miracle of the new-born fish, and fishing in the river may become a knowing of each fish even before it is born…[I]f one receives this fish as purely as the river flows, everything is momently given, and the very trees become eloquent where they stand.  

On these “good days” he receives everything back again, perhaps even twofold, like the faithful and patient Job (Job 42:10).

Why, then, doesn’t everyone rise before dawn? As we have seen in the case of Socrates, one must be willing not only to forego precious sleep, but also to perform a kind of painful, terrifying work on oneself. One must be willing, finally, to hold oneself to the standards of measure to which one has publicly pledged one’s allegiance. It is only before dawn, that is, that one may resolve to ascertain what Bugbee calls the “marrow-bone truth” of one’s existence, which alone secures the “finality” of one’s deeds. The limiting
horizon of our daylight labors is described not by the paucity of resources and alternatives
arrayed before us, but by our assent to this paucity, by our contented participation in the
comforting repetition of familiar routines. Those who rise before dawn do so not to
prospect for new external resources, though discovering these would be nice, but to
engage in the painful development of unknown internal resources. Socrates, as we have
seen, was obliged before dawn to face his most harrowing doubts—about philosophy,
himself, and the afterlife—which he never shared with his daylight acquaintances.

What happens before dawn? According to Bugbee, we may confront ourselves
voluntarily divested of the ideational armor that ordinarily protects us from debilitating
self-doubt. If we are inclined, we may greet ourselves as creatures born of weakness,
dependency, vulnerability, and fragility. We would do so, moreover, in order to cultivate
an expanded capacity to live with ambiguity, loss, contingency, and uncertainty. Before
dawn, if we are game, we may face up to the existential truth that we are simply
overwhelmed by the bewildering flux of our experience, that the certainty and bravado
with which we face the dawn are mostly false, that we cheat ourselves and reality anytime
we resort to simplifying distinctions and conceptual schemes. We may come to
understand that any ordering of our experience is unavoidably arbitrary, fictive,
whimsical, and fiercely self-protective. Rising before dawn, we stand naked before
existence, measuring ourselves against the immeasurable, hoping to acquire in the process
a reliable yardstick.

In Bugbee’s unflattering image, we are not so much featherless bipeds as fish
(occasionally) out of water:
One moment we understand, the next we may be lost. One moment we are lifted gratefully along the gentle stream, another we are stranded, gasping and writhing, estranged from the element in which it is given to us to live.  

This whimsical image acquires dramatic *pathos* when we consider Bugbee’s account of one such fish, who nearly drowned in the North Fork of the Trinity River. Upon reaching this unknown other, just minutes after his reprieve from a nearly certain death, Bugbee remarks:

> As nearly as I can relive the matter, the compassion I felt with this man gave way into awe and respect for what I witnessed in him. He seemed absolutely clean. In that steady gaze of his I met reality point-blank, filtered and distilled as the purity of a man.

If Bugbee sounds at least mildly jealous of this nameless man, it is because the latter unwittingly achieved something like the aim of Bugbee’s own experiential practice of philosophy: He was washed clean of pretense, conceit, preconceptions, and the accretions of habit. He was stretched to the limit of his receptivity and suspended in sheer vulnerability over the precipice of life itself. He received in return the pure, unadulterated truth of his existence, which shone forth from his gaze and arrested Bugbee on the spot. As a consequence of his brush with death, at least as Bugbee “relives” the baptismal moment, the unnamed man gained full possession of himself and his authentic existence. To borrow another of Bugbee’s favorite images, the unnamed man emerged from the river, like the “sudden fish,” “newborn—whole, entire, complete, individual, and universal.”

Here it is interesting to note that Bugbee simply refuses to entertain the possibility that one
might bathe in the fluent whirl of reality—whether literally or figuratively—and not emerge in possession of “marrow-bone” truth. His bedrock faith in “the ultimate significance of all things” prevents him from entertaining the possibility of a near-death experience that is not also rejuvenating.

Not unlike Socrates, then, Bugbee recommends a practice of philosophy that both anticipates and simulates the clarifying thrall of imminent death. As if exposing himself to the whims of a raging river, Bugbee seeks to immerse himself without restraint in fluent reality, which he alternately characterizes as a return to wilderness. As he puts it, “wilderness is reality experienced as call and explained in responding to it absolutely.”

Much as Socrates gave himself the liberating gift of death, so Bugbee gives himself the galvanizing gift of wilderness. Rising before dawn, Henry Bugbee receives and responds to the call of the wild.

What happens before dawn? In literal terms, we yield to our most memorable dreams, so vivid in their presentation that they should perhaps be called visitations. In the Phaedo, Socrates famously reveals that his “dreams” have urged him to “practice and cultivate the arts” (60e). Until very recently, he explains, he had interpreted these exhortations as confirming his devotion to the “art of philosophy, this being the highest kind of art” (61a). Upon receiving his sentence of death, however, Socrates began to wonder if his persistent “dreams” might not be urging him to practice the “popular art” of poetry (61a). On this interpretation, his “dreams” authorized and initiated a life-changing makeover, which was still underway as he welcomed his friends and interlocutors for the final time.
Bugbee does not speak at length of our dreaming life, but he does conjure a trilogy of haunting recollections that return his readers to a time before the dawning of adult consciousness. The consecutive sketches devoted to “Swamping,” “Building a Dam,” and “Rowing” — which, by the way, are always among my students’ favorite readings from The Inward Morning — recount experiences that afforded him full absorption and immersion in the moment. It is no accident that Bugbee retrieves these sketches from his youth, for the immersion he recommends is a practice well known to children, though it is gradually unlearned in the march toward adulthood. Bugbee is no romantic, however. Although he sailed to the South Pacific, he is no Gauguin. He does not exhort us to offload the baggage of adulthood and return to a primal, childlike innocence. Rather, he retrieves these experiences as a way of preparing himself, and perhaps his readers, for the dawning of an “inward morning.” Like Socrates, who gave himself the gift of death, Bugbee gives himself the gift of wilderness. Rising before dawn, that is, Bugbee receives and responds to the call of the wild.

Section II

Bugbee returns to the theme of vocation in his 1974 essay, “Wilderness in America.” We Americans, he boldly maintains, do not yet understand what wilderness is, whereof and wherein it consists. Before we can address the kind of political questions raised at the hearing that Gordon Brittan attended, we must first engage in a sustained meditation on the nature of our relationship to wilderness. In this essay, Bugbee provides us with an
example of the kind of thinking that refuses to allow “practical intelligence” to be collapsed into “technical intelligence.”

Rising before dawn, Henry Bugbee reveals that our need for salvation is at least as great as that of wilderness. What is more, he locates our salvation precisely in the wilderness that we have recently entrusted to our own shaky stewardship. Bugbee’s pre-political meditation thus helps us to understand why our best-intentioned efforts at wilderness preservation have failed thus far to repair our relationship with wild nature, even if they have succeeded in arresting the degradation of some fragile ecosystems and the extinction of some endangered species. In mounting these efforts, he allows, we have failed to acknowledge our optimal relationship to wild nature as one of partnership. We continue to “save” wilderness only at our own expense, or vice versa, rather than renewing both parties in a spirit of complementary mutuality.

In this essay, Bugbee attempts to communicate the results of his efforts “to ponder anew the potential significance [wilderness] might yet hold within the shaping of our destiny as a people.” Rejecting the standard arguments for the preservation of wilderness areas, he takes his stand with those who wish to acknowledge what is thus given us [in wilderness] in a manner appropriate to it, with gratitude, with forbearance, with respect, in a more liberal frame of mind akin to sacrifice…[W]ilderness is the stronghold of a new ethos upon the land, working in dialectical complementarity with the full range of the relationships and activities in which we may stand.
As this passage indicates, Bugbee is not opposed, strictly and simply, to the legislated protection of officially designated “wilderness” areas. What he opposes is a continued reliance on legislation that is neither balanced nor complemented by a corresponding revolution in human awareness. Legislation may occasionally achieve the ends for which it was designed, but it fails in any event to awaken us to the partnership between human beings and the wild spaces they inhabit. The application of the trusty utilitarian calculus is in no sense a solution to the problem of articulating our healthiest relationship to wild nature, but is in fact symptomatic of a much larger problem, which remains unnamed and unacknowledged. As he explains,

In wilderness the partnership of man and nature dawns on our surmise—prior to all undertaking and use to which nature may lend. The partnership seems to be a dialogic affair, in which we are charged with responsibility in the way things come to mean, having been placed in that way. Even as the things of the place command attention in the presencing of the world they are discovered to us from within the depth of responsiveness in confirmation of our mutuality with them.18

Bugbee thus identifies wilderness as the transactional setting wherein human beings might productively re-evaluate their most basic principles and resolutions. By renewing our suspended dialogue with wilderness, he claims, we may determine the range and extent of the responsibilities that attend our “partnership” with wilderness. For his own, very different reasons, that is, Bugbee agrees with Thoreau that our salvation lies in wilderness. He thus maintains that
True solitude is as a wellspring of communal life; its return affords measure of what has become of communal life, perhaps most closely in the dissipation of one’s own resolutions, the forgetting of one’s whence and whitherto. For wilderness puts our standard of living to the test. What can stand to the mutuality of man and nature can be affirmed in the relations between men...And without respect for nature man cannot stand, not even in the mutual regard of men.\textsuperscript{19}

Wilderness itself thus provides the “test” to which we might “put our standard of living.”\textsuperscript{20} This we may do, moreover, only if we rise before dawn, before we join with the mob in ridiculing the very idea of a dialogic partnership with nature.

To be sure, the mob has a point. This is not a relationship that we have either initiated or pursued; nor can we point to a contract or agreement that stipulates our prescribed duties and expected benefits. This partnership is furthermore predicated on a relationship of potentially terrifying asymmetry: Wilderness, after all, \textit{claims} us, exerting a subtle gravitational pull that he famously characterizes as a \textit{call}, to which we are invited to respond. We might think of the call of the wild as issuing both a vocation and a provocation.

Because wilderness is granted to us as a gift, it is incumbent upon us to determine the appropriate way(s) of receiving (i.e., living in and with) its call. That is, we must respond responsibly to the call of the wild. As simple as this may sound, however, we actually encounter here our most troubling inadequacy, for which our political efforts are designed (if not destined) to compensate. As inexpert as we have become at the giving of
gifts, we are even less practiced in the art of receiving them. Wherein we are currently lacking, and wherein Bugbee may wish to instruct us, is in the spiritual capacity for what he calls “active receptivity.” As he explains,

   But here is an essential point: Nothing can be truly given to us except on the condition of active receptiveness on our part. Our capacity for estrangement from reality, in all its permutations, is to be remarked in all our indecision, our insistence to have things on our own terms.21

   Conclusion

If there is a single lesson that could be said to headline Bugbee’s legacy, it would be this: We Westerners must become versed in the full range of responses that fall under the heading of “active receptivity.” Here, as elsewhere, moreover, we may learn from reality itself, provided that we are willing to behold it, as Bugbee recommends, as wilderness. The call of the wild calls not for passivity, but for what I have elsewhere called patiency,22 for a willing participation in the embrace of an intensity immeasurably greater than ourselves. By dint of our “active receptivity,” or patiency, we become wilderness in our own right and resume our rightful place within the “closed circuit” of reality. Here, as elsewhere, Bugbee recommends that we follow the lead of the leaping trout:

   The stream comes upon us laden with the twofold aspect of responsibility: the demand and the capacity to respond; if we swim with necessity we discover power.

   Faith is trusting ourselves to the stream which makes responsibility possible, and reasonableness a swimming smoothly in the stream.23
The demand and the capacity to respond. Here we may detect in Bugbee’s meditation on wilderness the murmurs of a Levinasian sensibility. As Marcel observes, in fact, Bugbee’s use of the “term ‘responsibility’…must be grasped in its literal signification of [the] capacity to respond.” As Bugbee and Levinas agree, moreover, there is no better, and in fact no other, sign of our responsibility than our capacity to extend an appropriate response to the other, particularly the unknown other. The asymmetry that informs our partnership with wilderness furthermore suggests that what Bugbee calls “basic action” (and which Levinas calls “ethics”) is prior to ontology. We are obliged to choose and to act before we know, in the thrall of an antecedent responsibility that we have not elected to assume. At one point in *The Inward Morning*, in fact, Bugbee comes remarkably close to invoking Levinas’s notion of the *face* as the source of the ethical claim made on us by the other: “I think of reality as ever questioning, calling upon us, as if in syllables shaped from a mouth, which issue almost soundlessly.”

To be sure, any worthwhile comparison between Bugbee and Levinas would require a further elaboration than I can provide here. For my purposes today, I would be satisfied if this truncated comparison served to draw attention to the religious or spiritual dimension of Bugbee’s meditation on wilderness. Much as Levinas detects the trace of God in the face of the other, especially the victimized other, so Bugbee discerns an asymmetrical spiritual intensity at the source of the call of the wild. Whatever set of attunements “active receptiveness” is discovered to involve, its range will no doubt include a spiritual or religious attunement. In this respect, at least, Marcel is correct to ascribe to Bugbee a basic concern with the restoration of “transcendence.”
expression of which he experiences in his encounters with wild nature. As he remarks upon reflecting on one such experience in the Canadian Rockies,

And it was there in attending to this wilderness, with unremitting alertness and attentiveness, yes, even as I slept, that I knew myself to have been instructed for life, though I was at a loss to say what instruction I had received.27

Bugbee’s pre-political meditation on wilderness thus reveals the spiritual deficit that beggars our best political efforts. Although he does not say so explicitly, he apparently means to suggest that our various efforts at wilderness “preservation” will continue to fail us so long as they pretend or aspire to a purely secular orientation. Nothing short of our spiritual salvation is at stake here, and Bugbee intimates that we had best acknowledge the “transcendent” dimension of our partnership with wild nature. Here, however, with respect to Bugbee’s whereabouts “in the domain of religion,”28 I should simply acknowledge that my words fail me. While the spiritual or religious orientation of his thinking is irrepressible, its content or nature as yet defies characterization. He rejects, on logical grounds, the gods typically associated with “personal theism,”29 but he retains the asymmetrical structure that might well support an impersonal theism, wherein “finite centers of response” (= human beings) might respond to the call of an infinite center of response. He is a man of faith, to be sure, though he invests his faith, elusively, in the plenitude of wilderness and “the ultimate significance of things.”30 He identifies “the genuine religious mystery” as “that of the existence of things, of ourselves and all finites,”31 yet he also understands our finitude as shaped by the response we muster to a call that we cannot confidently locate within finitude itself. Is this an “atheistic mysticism,”
as Quine would have it?\textsuperscript{32} Or a godless theology of “communion,” as Marcel speculates?\textsuperscript{33} Or an occidental transplant of Taoism or Zen Buddhism, as various commentators have opined?\textsuperscript{34} Does Bugbee mean to offer wilderness as a kind of Western Tao, as \textit{our} nameless unifying principle and unquenchable source of mystery and wonder?

Bugbee’s call to “active receptiveness” will no doubt trouble many or most of his readers. The asymmetry of the relationship to wild nature, the lack of choice and control, the response to a call from an unknown source, the radical dependency and vulnerability—all are alien to most Western spiritual traditions. Still, there is much to gain from a renewed partnership with wilderness. In particular, we stand to gain what we supposedly have been seeking all along: a non-subjective, immanent standard of a sustainable way of life.

Hence the irony of our current estrangement from wild nature: We have determined to set aside designated “wilderness” areas so that we or our descendants will be in a position to enjoy (or otherwise dispose of) them, provided that we or they ever figure out how to enjoy these areas without also destroying them. According to Bugbee, however, our most promising option for figuring out such things lies in an open, ongoing dialogue, with wild nature. If he is right, then our well-intentioned legislations may have succeeded in largely foreclosing our opportunities to initiate a revolution in ecological awareness. It will be extremely difficult for most North Americans to strike up and maintain a dialogue with wilderness areas that we have sequestered from contact. In this light, in fact, our attempts to protect designated “wilderness” areas appear to have more to do with our own needs for \textit{self}-protection. In setting aside these areas for future disposition, we
postpone the fateful moment of reckoning that a dialogue with wild nature might demand of us. We thereby defer the “inward morning” that might otherwise herald the dawning of a genuine partnership with wild nature.
Works Cited


Notes

1 Bugbee, pp. 162-63. See also the excellent discussion by Webb (36-39).


3 He remarks that “Those who speak of experience in which man may find conclusive meaning…seem to speak more as men who dream than as men who are awake. Awakening is not finding things illusory, but…finding finality in them” (162).

4 This sense of “metaphysics” is helpfully recovered by Bruce Wilshire, pp. 153-57.

5 Bugbee advises that “Insight is earned, to be sure, but it is not steered, and it must find its own articulate form” (33-34).

6 Bugbee, p. 138.

7 Bugbee, pp. 86-87.

8 Bugbee, p. 100.

9 Bugbee, p. 172.

10 I am indebted to the extended discussion of this entry by Mooney (pp. 215-218).

11 Bugbee, p. 86.
Webb draws an instructive contrast between Bugbee’s “faith in the ultimate significance of things” with the existential nausea that overcomes Sartre’s character Roquentin (60-62).

In his Introduction, Bugbee relates (with some pride, I think) that “Two dear friends and teachers of mine have said to me, independently of one another: ‘You have written here as a man might write only near the end of his life.’ Since certain episodes in World War II that has been my sense of life” (11). In explaining his appreciation for the wisdom of Cephalus, Bugbee observes that “his thought is keyed to the fact that his days are numbered, yet the fact does not unbalance him.” Like Socrates, Bugbee is interested to know what “a man [will] have to say, for whom no future stretches out as an indefinitely extended prospect” (74).

Bugbee, p. 128.

It is interesting to note in this context that Bugbee says of wilderness that “it carries with it the gift of life. And it lives in the authenticity of every gift, every true blessing confirms it deeper; it is always with me when I come to myself” (128).


It may be instructive to compare Bugbee’s optimism on this point with Thoreau’s resignation. As the latter laments, “Unto a life which I call natural I would gladly follow
even a will-o’-the-wisp through bogs and sloughs unimaginable, but no moon nor firefly has yet shown me the causeway to it. Nature is a personality so vast and universal that we have never seen one of her features” (627).

21 Bugbee, p. 133.

22 I am encouraged in my use of this term by the following passage: “It seems that there is a stream of limitless meaning flowing into the life of a man if he can but patiently entrust himself to it. There is no hurry, only the need to be true to what comes to mind, and to explore the current carefully in which one presently moves. There is a constant fluency of meaning in the instant in which we live. One may learn of it from rivers in the constancy of their utterance, if one listens and is still. They speak endlessly in an univocal exhalation, articulating the silence” (83, emphasis added).

23 Bugbee, p. 100.

24 Bugbee, p. 25, emphasis added.

25 Bugbee, p. 221.

26 Bugbee, p. 27.

27 Bugbee, p. 140.

28 Marcel, p. 30.

29 As he explains his position, “Abstractly stated, man is a finite center of response...[H]e encounters personality only in relation with other finite centers of response. Since this has always seemed to me so...I have not, in fact, ever been sufficiently implicated in personal theism to the point of reacting against it” (pp. 215-216).
30 The phrase is borrowed from Webb (60).


33 Bugbee, p. 31.

34 See, in particular, the essays by Rothenberg and Feenberg.