

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**Pragmatic Method, Transformation, Perspectivism, and**

**Individualism: The Cornerstone of Pragmatism Laid by**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Prague, 27 March 2019

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

## **Abstract**

This BA thesis aims to investigate the sources and correspondences between the philosophical work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and philosophy of pragmatism. Emerson, as one of the chief figures of American philosophy, laid the cornerstone of pragmatic method of thinking which later became further developed by philosophers such as Richard Bernstein, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Richard Poirier, Richard Rorty, and William James, among others. The main aim of this thesis is to compare the thoughts of these thinkers to those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who either directly or indirectly precedes them; and additionally to determine whether these reflections are only correspondences, or whether Emerson was a direct source. This thesis examines four main signs of pragmatic method of thinking, and each of these signs has its own chapter. Chapter 2 explores the Pragmatic method, which focuses on practical differences and conclusions, and compares Emerson mainly to William James and Sidney Hook. Chapter 3 is divided into two subsections: Emerson's Orientation Towards the Future and his sense of Fugacity, or fleetingness. Among others, prophetic pragmatism of Cornel West and Richard Rorty's views on fleetingness of signs are compared to Emerson's works. Chapter 4 examines Emerson's Perspectivism, Creative Metaphors, and Imagination, and concentrates on Richard Poirier's approach to pragmatism; it also overviews the possibilities of how to apply the creative agency in education. Chapter 5 will then consider Emersonian Pragmatic Individualism, which will examine Emerson's position on solitude but also Dewey's mix of solitude and society. Finally, Conclusion will offer an overview of the thesis, and a realization that while Emerson might be notoriously hard to understand, his thoughts serve as a base for one of the most vital contemporary philosophical styles of thought.

Key words: Ralph Waldo Emerson, pragmatism, method, fugacity, future, creativity, metaphor, imagination, individualism, Richard Poirier, John Dewey, education, growth

# Abstrakt

Cieľom bakalárskej práce je podať prehľad výsledkov analýzy literárnych zdrojov pragmatizmu a popísať podobné črty medzi filozofickými esejami a kázňami Ralpha Walda Emersona a filozofiou pragmatizmu.

V jednotlivých kapitolách sa práca zameriava na porovnanie myšlienok pragmaticky zmýšľajúcich filozofov s myšlienkami Ralpha Walda Emersona, ktorý ich v niektorých prípadoch priamo, a v niektorých prípadoch nepriamo, myšlienkovo predchádza. V práci podávam analýzu toho, či sa jedná o zhodu v myšlienkových procesoch autorov, ako sú: Richard Bernstein, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Richard Poirier, Richard Rorty, William James, alebo ide o priamy zdroj/inšpiráciu Emersonom. Prvá kapitola predstavuje svojim obsahom úvod do problematiky pragmatizmu. V druhej kapitole sa zameriavam na zhodnosť medzi myšlienkami v dielach Emersona, Williama Jamesa a Sidneyho Hooka. Tretia kapitola sa člení na dve podkapitoly: I. Emersonova orientácia na budúcnosť, II. pohľad Emersona na nekonečne prchavú realitu. V tejto kapitole porovnávam prácu Emersona s prorockým pragmatizmom Cornela Westa a s prístupom Richarda Rortyho, ktorý zastáva názor, že znaky a opisy sú prchavé.

Štvrtá kapitola sa zaoberá Emersonovým perspektivizmom, kreatívnymi metaforami a predstavivosťou a tieto aspekty jeho tvorby porovnáva napríklad s pragmatizmom Richarda Poiriera. Piata kapitola sa zameriava na Emersonovský pragmatický individualizmus a skúma Emersonov názor na samotu, podáva rozbor Deweyho pragmatickej didaktiky, ktorá preferuje zlúčenie samoty a sociálneho života v komunite. Posledná kapitola ponúka prehľad získaných výsledkov prieskumu.

Kľúčové slová: Ralph Waldo Emerson, pragmatizmus, metóda, prchavosť, budúcnosť, kreativita, metafora, predstavivosť, individualizmus, Richard Poirier, John Dewey, vzdelávanie, rast

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# 1. Introduction: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Pragmatism

*You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. Pragmatism appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work.*<sup>1</sup>

- William James

Similarly to the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, pragmatism is a group of intellectual concepts that resist singular definitions. It is not precisely a philosophical movement, since it is too loose of a tradition, but could perhaps be rather perceived as a method of thinking. Or, as William James elegantly summarizes, it “appears less as a solution” but as “a program for more work.” “Work” and thus general activity, indeed, seem to be some of the chief interests of pragmatists. This thesis, however, does not concentrate solely on pragmatism, but rather on the sources of this method of thinking that appear in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. This 19<sup>th</sup> century American philosopher laid the cornerstone of this method of thinking, and this thesis aims to examine the sources of and correspondences between his philosophy and that of later pragmatic thinkers. Emerson himself summarizes the research matter of this thesis in one paragraph found in his essay “Experience”, and through this we can also summarize our own aims.

Illusion, Temperament, Succession Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness, - these are threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way. I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture.<sup>2</sup>

The analytical part will start with Chapter 2, which is an examination of Jamesian “practical cash-value” of ideas, that is, the practical orientation of pragmatism geared towards concrete, “practical” results and differences. This notion is then reflected on and compared to Emerson’s philosophy (this first argument is not reflected in the quoted excerpt, but does

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<sup>1</sup> William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955) 46.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Poirier, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 233.

appear in Emerson's philosophy<sup>3</sup>). Chapter 3 examines the threads "Succession" and "Surprise". This chapter is also divided into two subchapters, the first subchapter concentrating on Emerson's Future Orientation and second on Fugacity. The former examines the "Succession", or the inevitable progression of reality and the expediency for an individual of being prepared for future challenges, and in the state of high alertness, for an individual. The latter subchapter will be more akin to the "Surprise" thread, since it will concentrate on the fleetingness of our reality, as we perceive it, but also on its ebbs and flows. Chapter 4 - Emerson's Perspectivism, Creative Metaphors and Imagination, will then inspect the perspectivism in Emerson's philosophy and it will follow the progressive tendency of this notion in his work. It starts with perspectivist isolation of an individual and ends with a creative, imaginative consciousness that lends creative powers to individuals. These concerns (threads) are represented by "Illusion", "Surface", "Reality", and "Subjectiveness" and are the most crucial on this Emersonian "loom of life".<sup>4</sup> Thus, Chapter 4 is also the longest one. Finally, Chapter 5 - Pragmatic Individualism, will concentrate on the thread of "Temperament", and will examine the notion of Emersonian individualism, or, in other words, how important it is for Emerson to be alone and why some people choose to be so. Chapter 6 will be the Conclusion to the thesis and will summarize and synthesize the research in some key points. The main aim of the research chapters is to explore Emerson's ideas, and from these, the reflections in and sources for pragmatic philosophers are established, namely: John Dewey, William James, Richard Rorty, and Cornel West.<sup>5</sup>

The following chapter (Chapter 2) will inspect the "work" aspect of pragmatism, and introduce the Emersonian cornerstone of pragmatism as a philosophy of action

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> Emerson, stressing the importance of these notions, also names these the "lords of life".

<sup>5</sup> The thesis will also examine the ideas of Richard Bernstein, Giles Gunn, Sidney Hook, James T. Kloppenberg, Richard Poirier, David Lee Robbins, and Richard B. Westbrook.

## 2. Pragmatic method: Emerson's action-style philosophy<sup>6</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson stands as a precursor of Pragmatism<sup>7</sup> and as a forerunner of this varied and colorful philosophical tradition; his concern with action, practicality, and applicability can be seen from the very first of his sermons all the way up to "Poetry and Imagination". This chapter will survey three most important and salient signs of pragmatism that appear in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The first sign to be analyzed is practicality.

Pragmatism's concentration on "practical cash value",<sup>8</sup> practically expedient truth<sup>9</sup> and practical consequences of an action are a prominent feature of pragmatic thought in many pragmatic thinkers. However, there are as many types of pragmatism, as there are its proponents.<sup>10</sup> William James in his lecture "What Pragmatism Means" describes the pragmatic practicality on a most fundamental level, and uses his squirrel anecdote to explain the practical pragmatic method of thinking.

Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you *practically mean* by 'going round' the squirrel" [...] The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, for James, the pragmatic method is about tracing "respective practical consequences" in a dispute or any kind of problem, and determining whether there is any practical difference between "notion[s]" or whether the solutions for a situation differ in their practical consequence, such as in the case of squirrel controversy. A few chapters later in the book he

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<sup>6</sup> Sidney Hook, *The Metaphysics of Pragmatism* (New York: Cosimo, 2008) 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 9.

<sup>8</sup> James 46.

<sup>9</sup> James 140.

<sup>10</sup> James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism," *A Companion to American Thought*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995) 538.

<sup>11</sup> James 42.

also expands upon the use of this method for determination of truth. Ultimately, the pragmatic philosopher “turns towards concreteness, adequacy, towards facts, action and power”.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to William James, there are other pragmatists who also stressed this need for practicality in philosophy. For example, Sidney Hook offers his description of pragmatic method in his *Metaphysics of Pragmatism*.

But where the outcome of thought has momentous consequences for the organism, we recognize its purport by what is in the last analysis *done* rather than by what is *said*, just as a child discerns the immediate purpose of the doctor not in his reassuring remarks but in the instruments he extracts from his tool kit.<sup>13</sup>

And reflecting William James, Hook maintains:

Ideas are rejected for the same reason that instruments are scrapped or replaced, that is, either because they lead to an impasse or because they threaten to produce results we have neither desired nor expected and which, if we wish to solve the problem and not just talk about it, we cannot accept.<sup>14</sup>

The chapter “Thinking as Instrumental” is focused mainly on instruments and their use in human experience,<sup>15</sup> and this carries on into an argument about ideas and thoughts. In pragmatic fashion, Hook in the first excerpt asserts that the thoughts that have important (or “momentous”) “consequences for the organism,” can always be recognized by the fact that they point to something that they do, that they point to (or symbolize) an executable activity (extraction of instruments from the doctor’s tool kit). The “*said*” is here an expression of an abstract opinion (“reassuring remarks” of a well-meaning doctor) and these do not bear important consequence for an organism (visceral fear on the side of the child). Simply stated, the important thing is what we do, and this approach also echoes John Dewey’s concentration on practical, problem solving instrumentalism.<sup>16</sup> In the second excerpt, ideas are seen as

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<sup>12</sup> James 45.

<sup>13</sup> Hook 41.

<sup>14</sup> Hook 57.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of ideas as instruments is also present in James’ *Pragmatism*, on the page 46: “*Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest.*” More on this in the third chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991) 129.

instruments that are respected according to their usefulness in producing desired results. The ideas are functional and acceptable if they produce our desired results, granted that our goal is “to solve the problem and not just talk about it”. Similar priority towards what is “momentous” in philosophy can be found in several other pragmatic philosophers<sup>17</sup> and this concern for practical results and practical solutions can also be traced in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson’s pragmatic practicality is demonstrated throughout his examined works in a subtle, yet persistent manner. This concern with practicality already appears in his earliest works, among which are his sermons, where he encourages his parishioners to take action in their lives.

They forget that they are the very persons who should *originate* customs, bring severe virtue, lofty action into use.<sup>18</sup> [...] You are made capable of independent action, and you are called to it.<sup>19</sup>

And all the great philanthropic objects are accomplished by action and by joint action<sup>20</sup>

Emerson believes that his parishioners should bring “severe [...] action into use”, that is, they should act<sup>21</sup> “into use”,<sup>22</sup> and the audience is also called to an “independent action”. All of these signs clearly reflect a pragmatic orientation towards action<sup>23</sup> in the later works of pragmatic philosophers, and this preoccupation with “purpose and action”<sup>24</sup> is a distinct indication of action-style philosophy that was already budding in Emerson’s thought. The

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<sup>17</sup> James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 88-89.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Sermon XXXVIII, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Albert J. von Frank, 4 volumes (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989-1992). 1:292 All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in footnotes in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon XXXVIII” 1:293.

<sup>20</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon CLXVI” 4:219.

<sup>21</sup> Emerson later remarks in his “Spiritual Laws”: “To think is to act”. Therefore, “to act” for Emerson does not only mean a physical action but even the thinking process itself.

<sup>22</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 374. What Emerson could mean by this “use” can be reflected in Dewey’s educational philosophy: “Since industry removes work from the home and makes man an appendage of his machines, it is more difficult to encourage children to develop the imagination and intelligence earlier generations saw in use all around them daily.”

<sup>23</sup> Charles Pierce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” as quoted by William James in *Pragmatism*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Hook 4.

sermons were therefore only a starting point for the notion of practicality that became more pronounced in his later essays, and where facts, action and power also figure prominently.

Emerson supported action and practical engagement with the world from the very beginning in his sermons, which could stem from his protestant background;<sup>25</sup> and this trend carried on consistently into his later philosophical essay writing. Beginning with “Nature: Introduction” in his book *Nature*, Emerson clearly states his position on dualism and suggests his “*via media*”<sup>26</sup> approach.

We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgement, the most abstract truth is the most practical.<sup>27</sup>

The “sound judgement” here stands for our perspective (or immanent subjectivity), which, to be sound (i.e. adequate for Emerson), needs to see truth as an abstract and at the same time “most practical” notion. This is one of the first instances where the Emersonian equity of action and thought appears.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the dual nature of truth and its formation from both “tender-minded” and “tough-minded” ideas<sup>29</sup> is one of the cornerstones of American pragmatism, and this is also reflected in John Dewey’s observation that “all knowledge was, in a broad sense, practical”.<sup>30</sup> Similarly to the previous essay, Emerson talks about truth and learning in regards to practice in his “The Method of Nature”.

The one condition coupled with the gift of truth is its use. That man shall be learned who reduceth his learning to practice. Emanuel Swedenborg affirmed that it was opened to him, ‘that the spirits who knew truth in this life, but did it not, at death shall lose their knowledge.’ ‘If knowledge,’ said Ali the Caliph, ‘calleth unto practice, well; if not, it goeth away.’ The only way into nature is to enact our best insight.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> David Lee Robbins, “Emerson the Nihilist,” *Literaria Pragensia* 24.48 (2014): 116.

<sup>26</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 86.

<sup>27</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 3.

<sup>28</sup> Brooks Atkinson, ed., *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 188: “To think is to act”

<sup>29</sup> James 22.

<sup>30</sup> Westbrook 173.

<sup>31</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 95.

Emerson here again states that the “condition” of “the gift of truth” is its “use”, and it is this concern that is reflected by William James in his chapter “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” where he asks “How will the truth be realized?”.<sup>32</sup> Emerson in the excerpt states that the only way to “be learned” is to devote yourself to “practice”, and that the only way into “nature” is to “enact” our ideas, “enact” our “best insight”. Nevertheless, Emerson’s ideas about practicality in our lives are most potently seen in his later and core essays.

The essay “Spiritual Laws”, which belongs among Emerson’s core essays, comes the closest to Jamesian individually expedient practicality.<sup>33</sup> “Art”, on the other hand, ties in more with John Dewey’s instrumental learning. In “Spiritual Laws”, Emerson presents his thoughts on education and abstract ideas in general, especially as they relate to the intellectual life and well-being of an individual. In a characteristic Emersonian manner, he offers arguments and counter-arguments for intellectual and anti-intellectual life, as if he were talking to himself; but there is one notion on which he remains adamant – the unnecessary perplexity caused by some abstract ideas.

The intellectual life may be kept clean and healthful, if man will live the life of nature, and not import into his mind difficulties which are none of his. No man need be perplexed in his speculations. [begin 173] ... Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, predestination, and the like. They never presented a practical difficulty to any man, - never darkened across any man’s road, who did not go out of his way to seek them.<sup>34</sup>

In the second quoted line, Emerson means by “difficulties” the abstract ideas and dogmas of idealist tradition<sup>35</sup> that have a tendency to make minds of people “perplexed”, that is, filled with ideas that are not clear or clearly demonstrable in practical use. He sees these overly abstract, impractical ideas as a “disease” and according to him, they “never presented any practical difficulty” to anyone. Thus if we do not go out of our way to seek them, the odds are

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<sup>32</sup> James 133.

<sup>33</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 113. As opposed to social efficiency of John Dewey, but as the quote suggests, the individual satisfaction was not a pure condition of happiness for James.

<sup>34</sup> Atkinson, 172-173.

<sup>35</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 27.

these ideas will not even appear as a problem; they will never “darken...across” our road. The essay “Spiritual Laws” then continues its assertion of practicality and practical action in connection to great acts and personal authenticity.

‘What has he done?’ is the divine question which searches men, and transpierces every false reputation. A fop may sit in any chair of the world, nor be distinguished for his hour from Homer and Washington; but there need never be any doubt concerning the respective abilities of human beings. Pretension may sit still, but cannot act. Pretension never feigned an act of real greatness. Pretension never wrote an Illiad, nor drove back Xerxes, nor Christianized the world, nor abolished slavery.<sup>36</sup>

When considering the genuineness of character, the key question for Emerson is “What has he done?”, which again, echoes the aim of *via media* pragmatists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose claims radically diverged from the standard dichotomy of thinking and practice in the philosophy of previous eras.<sup>37</sup> The pragmatic radicals asserted that “This emphasis on the interdependence of contemplation and action, on the completion of *theoria* in *praxis*” pointed towards their new way of thinking and was “tied to these radicals’ conception of lived experience”,<sup>38</sup> “experience” meaning the flux of the world as perceived by the consciousness, which “stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands”.<sup>39</sup> In this vein, Emerson in his “Spiritual Laws” suggests that a reputation not earned by action is false. “Pretension” as an abstract, not concrete, and most importantly false notion can never “act”. In other words, for Emerson, false ideas cannot produce action, and by action it is meant here a concrete, tangible action such as writing the “Iliad,” driving back Xerxes, or abolishing slavery. For Emerson, “true” ideas inherently contain power and as a philosopher fitting into the category of prophetic pragmatism (for his practical, power generating lectures and essays) he could be called a philosopher preoccupied with the operation of power.<sup>40</sup> In pragmatism, to

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<sup>36</sup> Atkinson 185.

<sup>37</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 65. “They [the radicals] conceived of knowledge as an unending experiment whose results can be validated only in activity rather than reflection, and whose conclusions are at best provisional and subject always to further testing in practice.”

<sup>38</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 86.

<sup>39</sup> James 167.

<sup>40</sup> West, 223.

find out the “truth,” we must consider the practical results and consequences,<sup>41</sup> and this preoccupation with practically applied thoughts can also be observed in Emerson’s “Art” which shows signs of another approach to joining theory and practice.

John Dewey stands as one of the most prominent pragmatic philosophers in the American context.<sup>42</sup> He is well known for his didactic works, such as instrumental learning that emphasized learning in unity of theory and practice.<sup>43</sup> The aim of Dewey’s educational theory was “to give practical value to the theoretical knowledge that every pupil should have, and to give him an understanding of the conditions [...] of his environment”.<sup>44</sup> Students thus “built desks, tables, book cases” so that the continuity of thought and action would be achieved.<sup>45</sup> Emerson lays foundation for these ideas in his essays “Art”.

Art has not yet come to its maturity, if it do not put itself abreast with the most potent influences of the world, if it is not practical and moral, if it do not stand in connection with the conscience, if it do not make the poor and uncultivated feel that it addresses them with a voice of lofty cheer. There is higher work for Art than the arts. [...] Art is the need to create; but in its essence, immense and universal, it is impatient of working with lame or tied hands<sup>46</sup>

Emerson considered “art” as a “need to create”; and this is not only meant in the creative-perspectivist way, but also in the sense of practical democratic education. “Art” must be “practical and moral”, and any kind of spiritual or intellectual activity should be “practical and moral”. For Dewey, “practical” would mean the ability to overcome a practical “unanticipated problem”<sup>47</sup> and “moral” in the sense that it should have an “aim”.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, we could see Deweyan education as a form of art or a creative problem-solving discipline, Education as Art. As to the possible question whether Emerson separates “fine” or “useful”

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<sup>41</sup> James 47.

<sup>42</sup> Westbrook, “Preface” xiv.

<sup>43</sup> Westbrook, “Preface” ix. “Dewey developed a philosophy that called for the unity of theory and practice and exemplified this unity in his own work as a critical intellectual and political activist.”

<sup>44</sup> Westbrook 181.

<sup>45</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 86.

<sup>46</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 192.

<sup>47</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 375.

<sup>48</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985) 114.

arts, he explicitly erases the difference between them in the conclusion of the essay: “Beauty must come back to the useful arts, and the distinction between the fine and the useful arts be forgotten”.<sup>49</sup> In conclusion and from the standpoint of pragmatism, for Emerson and Dewey alike, “art” as any form of intellectual activity, must be “practical and moral”, and must not be “remote and dead – abstract and bookish”.<sup>50</sup> In addition to the concerns of practicality and unity of thought and action, Emerson also explored the notion of power in his later works.

After the death of his son Waldo,<sup>51</sup> Emerson contemplated his helplessness and inability to influence the flux of reality and the impossibility of resisting the world’s illusions in his essay “Experience”.

Also, that hankering after an overt or practical effect seems to me an apostasy. In good earnest, I am willing to spare this most unnecessary deal of doing. Life wears to me a visionary face. Hardest, roughest action is visionary also.<sup>52</sup> [begin 234] ... Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart! – it seems to say, - there is victory yet for all justice; and the true romance which the world exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power.<sup>53</sup>

The first paragraph again erases the difference between thinking and action. For Emerson, one does not need to “hanker” after a “practical effect” necessarily to act, and the “roughest action” is seen as equal to an action on the level of abstraction--that is, even the roughest action can be “visionary”. Emerson seemingly contradicts his previous preoccupation with practical engagement of human activity in this quote, however, the second examined quote from the end of the essay mitigates this contradiction, since the “transformation of genius into practical power” does not imply that the activity must necessarily be physical, but can also be intellectual. Ultimately then, this seeming contradiction is resolved through the Emersonian joining of action and thought; and as Emerson himself says in “Spiritual Laws”, “The rich

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<sup>49</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 194.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education* 11.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 47.

<sup>52</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 233.

<sup>53</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 234.

mind lies in the sun, and sleeps, and is Nature. To think is to act.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, these remarks tell us that our genius should produce any kind of practical power,<sup>55</sup> be it a thought, an act, or both in one. Emerson was “obsessed with ways to generate forms of power”,<sup>56</sup> and this flavor of pragmatic practicality or pragmatic intellectual power can be observed in “prophetic pragmatism”, which purports to be a “material force” that “has some potency and effect or makes a difference in the world”.<sup>57</sup> Thus, it could be argued that this type of pragmatism works with powers in society, rather than with any concrete or small-scale individual acts. At length, Emerson’s notion of practicality suggests that the difference in experience can be achieved not only by “roughest action”, but also by any type of effect or “potency”<sup>58</sup> that can create a change in both the world out there, and in the individual’s consciousness.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Ralph Waldo Emerson subtly supported practical reality’s claim on intellect in his last essay “Poetry and Imagination”.

The tone of writing in Emerson’s “Poetry and Imagination” has a different, almost a parting, reconciliatory tone. From the very beginning of the essay, Emerson grounds the connection of ideas and practical reality together in his description of common sense.

Poverty, frost, famine, disease, debt, are the beadles and guardsmen that hold us to common-sense. The intellect, yielded up to itself, cannot supersede this tyrannic necessity. The restraining grace of common-sense is the mark of all the valid minds.

[...]

The common-sense which does not meddle with the absolute, but takes things at their word, - things as they appear, - believes in the existence of mat-ter, not because we can touch it, or conceive of it, but because it agrees with ourselves, and the universe does not jest with us, but is in earnest, - is the house of health and life. In spite of all the joys of poets and the joys of saints, the most imaginative and

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<sup>54</sup> Atkinson 188.

<sup>55</sup> West, 234. “This political dimension of prophetic pragmatism as practiced within the Christian tradition impels one to be an organic intellectual, that is, one who revels in the life of the mind yet relates ideas to collective praxis.”

<sup>56</sup> West 211.

<sup>57</sup> West 232.

<sup>58</sup> West 232.

<sup>59</sup> This concern with change effected within the individual consciousness will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4, which examines Emerson’s perspectivism and creative metaphor. In his “The Method of Nature”, Emerson maintains that we can change (thus “act” within our consciousness) what we see in our perspective by virtue of thinking about it (and naming it) in a different way. See page 27 of the thesis.

abstracted person never makes, with impunity, the least mistake in this particular, - never tries to kindle his oven with water.<sup>60</sup>

The common-sense, described in the excerpt, is the ability to face and engage practically with empirical reality. Phenomena such as “frost” or “famine” force a person into consideration of practical and real-life oriented solutions to his or her situation. In other words, when the fundamental biological needs arise,<sup>61</sup> “the intellect” by itself as a representative of abstract ideas cannot solve the practical situation of “tyrannic necessity”. Thus, a degree of practical thinking, a “restraining grace of common-sense” is “the mark of all the valid minds”, i.e. these minds are survival-positive and thus good for the individual, expedient. And the notion of expediency is the main idea analyzed in the second excerpt. For Emerson, the correct thought orientation, “the house of health and life” (and perhaps one of the ways to attain a “working mood”<sup>62</sup>) is one where the thinker does not “meddle with the absolute”, that is, does not search for solutions outside of the really practicable. But, quite contrary to the imaginative poet, if he or she decides to take “things as they appear”, because they “agree... with ourselves”, the person will attain an expedient perspective, a perspective that does not doubt the material reality of the universe or does not run to overly abstracted solutions, but rather chooses to see material reality in the light that is the most reassuring and most pleasant for the observer. Furthermore, no “imaginative” or “abstracted” person is completely free of material reality, however hard they might struggle. This is so because there are facts of objective reality we cannot avoid,<sup>63</sup> no matter how imaginative we are; and if we try to exist in this denial, we might well find ourselves risking a punishment from the world out there.

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<sup>60</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 440..

<sup>61</sup> Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, et al., *Atkinson & Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Hampshire, Cengage Learning EMEA, 2009) 361. “Our lives depend on keeping certain things the same.[...] If the proportion of water in your body rose or fell by more than a few percent, your brain and body could not function and you would risk death. Humans and animals walk a tightrope of balance between physiological extremes.” Compare with “A man is a golden impossibility. The line he must walk is hair’s breadth.” in “Experience”, Poirier, *Raph Wado Emerson* 226.

<sup>62</sup> Robbins 95.

<sup>63</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 218. “Experience”: “Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying There at least is reality that will not dodge us”

For that reason, a degree of practical “common-sense” can be a saving grace for a rationalist just as a degree of imaginative capacity can breathe some new life into the hard science of an empiricist<sup>64</sup>--so that we may not try to “kindle our ovens with water”, and may not study a cold lifeless world.

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<sup>64</sup> James 20.

### 3. Future and Fugacity

The following chapter presents an overview of another sign of pragmatism that appears prominently in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The examination will progress gradually, from the first signs of Emerson's future oriented pragmatic philosophy in his collected sermons, and will carry on to examine this notion in his later works. At the same time, the chapter will compare Emerson's approach of future orientation with this approach as used by later pragmatic philosophers. This chapter encompasses three subcategories of Emerson's transformative thought: future orientation, fugacity, and flux. The "future" part of the chapter will examine Emerson's orientation towards future and action of our thoughts, acts and general mindset. Therefore, this subsection will be more focused on Emerson's advice to be more ready for the future and be future oriented. This subsection will be subsequently grounded and explained by a subsection on Emersonian fugacity which concentrates more on fleeting nature of signs, languages, vocabularies and social institutions in general.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 166-167.

### 3.1 Emerson's Orientation Towards the Future

This subsection will concentrate on one of the most indicative signs of pragmatism in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's future orientation can be seen as a strong sign of pragmatism<sup>66</sup> and appears very prominently throughout his examined works. First indications of Emerson's future orientation can be seen in his "Sermon XXXVIII" and "Sermon CLXV"

Read, study and know yourself. [...] And sleep out no more time in a stationary religion. Wake to the truth that no moment of your life is without consequences, for yourself is improved or injured every day. Set your eye in performing a good action on the true reward, and not on a false one.<sup>67</sup>

That all are students, all are learning the art of life, the discipline of virtue, how to act, how to suffer, how to be useful, and what their maker designed them for. [...] you will then accept Instruction as the greatest gift of God, and anxiously put yourself in the attitude of preparation.<sup>68</sup>

As a young preacher, Emerson is already encouraging his parishioners to not "sleep out" in a "stationary religion", which already shows the first signs of his problematic relationship with dogmas and stationary elements of thought in general that become more notable in his later works. Emerson already cannot stand to keep stationary. Furthermore, the first signs of the radical transiency<sup>69</sup> of our existence are already appearing in statements such as "yourself is improved or injured every day". What this suggests is that the experience of our life is "contingent, open-ended, and unavoidably uncertain",<sup>70</sup> and we cannot foretell whether we will be "injured" or "improved" at any time. In other words, "The results of life are uncalculated and uncalculable".<sup>71</sup> To counter this radical contingency, Emerson adds in his "Sermon CLXV" the student perspective, and his preaching style refuses to look at issues from only one standpoint. We are all "students"

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<sup>66</sup> James, 86. "-see, I say, how pragmatism shifts the emphasis and looks forward into facts themselves. The really vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself?"

<sup>67</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* "Sermon XXXVIII" 1:294.

<sup>68</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* "Sermon CLXV" 4:210.

<sup>69</sup> Robbins, 116.

<sup>70</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 26.

<sup>71</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 227.

learning “the art of life”, but the art of life consists of concepts such as “how to suffer” or “how to act”. This means that Emerson does not only consider the positive side of growth in “how to be useful”,<sup>72</sup> but also takes care to recognize the suffering part of our existence, that God allows to happen. The obvious question then arises: How does Emerson want to resolve this problem of seemingly random contingency to whose mercy parishioners are left? He recommends that they first accept “Instruction” as the greatest gift,<sup>73</sup> and that they should “anxiously” put themselves into an “attitude of preparation”. The latter part of the recommendation is important because it prepares the ground for John Dewey’s life focused learning<sup>74</sup> and his flexible democratic education.<sup>75</sup> The “Instruction” reflected in Dewey’s continuous learning<sup>76</sup> is seen as the greatest gift for a person, but this is immediately complemented by advice always anxiously to be prepared (“anxious attitude of preparation”) for another hit of contingency,<sup>77</sup> in a “universe spiced with chance”.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Emerson can be seen as one of the forerunners of modernist relativism. Next, the focus shall be shifted to one of Emerson’s most well-known and core essays, where he develops this future orientation even more.

Emerson published his “Self-Reliance” and “Compensation” in *Essays: First Series* and today it remains one of the core works of his philosophical thought. In this essay, his previous thoughts on future orientation have been morphed and enriched by his first apparent recognition of fugacity.

yet when the devout motions of the soul come, yield to them heart and [begin 137] life, though they should clothe God with shape and color. Leave your theory, as

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<sup>72</sup> John Dewey, “Natural Development and Social Efficiency as Aims” 127.

<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, “Education as a Necessity of Life” 5.

<sup>74</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 18. Quoting John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*.

<sup>75</sup> Sidney Hook “Introduction” xviii.

<sup>76</sup> John Dewey, “Education as Growth” 58.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 20:16. “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

<sup>78</sup> Hook, *Metaphysics of Pragmatism* 144.

Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot and flee.<sup>79</sup> [...] Greatness appeals to the future.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly in “Compensation”.

We cannot part with our friends. We cannot let our angels go. We do not see that they only go out, that archangels may come in. We are idolaters of the old. [...] We do not believe there is any force in to-day to rival or recreate that beautiful yesterday. We linger in the ruins of the old tent, where once we had bread and shelter and organs [...] The voice of the Almighty saith, ‘Up and onward for evermore!’ We cannot stay amid the ruins.<sup>81</sup>

For Emerson, life has to keep moving somewhere, and in his own words “Everything good is on the highway”.<sup>82</sup> In the first excerpt, Emerson talks about “devout motions of the soul”, which suggests his departure from previously-mentioned social constancy to a more internal form of thought. The focus here is shifted to the movements of thought and soul. Again, a lot of Emerson’s philosophical thought is processed “within”, that is, in his inner world. When these motions of the soul arise, we should “yield” ourselves to them, though they break our personal dogmas<sup>83</sup> (“clothe God with shape and color”), leave our theory as Joseph did his coat, and openly accept a new theory,<sup>84</sup> new concept, new “devout motion[s]” of our souls. This aspect of pragmatism is most vividly reflected in William James’ metaphor of the truth grafting process.<sup>85</sup> Emerson thus appeals to us to stay open to our inner intuitions and their decisions. The second excerpt starts with a similar notion of constant movement forward, but this time he switches his focus to friends and social circles of an individual. Emerson criticizes his listeners and us that we “cannot let our angels go”, that is, we keep up our societal constancy even if better friends

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<sup>79</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 136-137.

<sup>80</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 137. See also “The American Scholar”, 41: “Genius looks forward.”

<sup>81</sup> Atkinson 170.

<sup>82</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 224..

<sup>83</sup> John Dewey, in Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 91.

<sup>84</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 136. See also “Circles” in Poirier 168: “Fear not the new generalization. Does the fact look crass and material, threatening to degrade thy theory of spirit? Resist it not; it goes to refine and raise thy theory of matter just as much.”

<sup>85</sup> James, 50.

come along who would make us happier. However, this approach to keeping friends, losing them and letting “archangels” come in does not mean that Emerson would not keep his end of the deal<sup>86</sup> but its aim is rather to make an individual more free. In addition to this social perspective, he also foreshadows the first signs of creative pragmatism.

Emerson believes that we adore the past experience, that we are “idolaters of the old”, which he sees negatively and he also scolds the nostalgic human belief in their incapacity to “recreate that beautiful yesterday”. Instead of being creative, active and diligent to make new things in the new day/era, we “linger in the ruins of the old tent” which shows the first signs of Emerson’s focus on the creative power of the poet.<sup>87</sup> This creative power manifests in the new creations in the present and in the future as opposed to old thoughts, notions and things of the past. Finally, the last essay where Emerson expresses his future-orientation is “Considerations by the Way”.

Nature is upheld by antagonism. Passions, resistance, danger, are educators. We acquire the strength we have overcome. Without war, no soldier; without enemies, no hero. [...] And evermore in the world is this marvelous balance of beauty and disgust, magnificence and rats. Not Antoninus, but a poor washer-woman said, ‘The more trouble, the more lion; that’s my principle.’<sup>88</sup>

Nature is no longer a benevolent force as she is portrayed in the earlier works;<sup>89</sup> here, and similarly in “Fate”,<sup>90</sup> nature turns into an entity that must be striven against. For a now older, and more experienced Emerson, the world is filled with pragmatic contingency and

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<sup>86</sup>Emerson’s position on consistency is, quite ironically, fugacious. In “Illusions”, Poirier (404), which is one of his mature works, he claims that “I prefer to be owned as sound and solvent, and my word as good as my bond, and to be what cannot be skipped, or dissipated, or undermined, to all the eclat in the universe.” But compare “Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? (2042), “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” (2042) and “I will have no covenants but proximities” (2058), all in “Self-Reliance”- Poirier (136, 137, 143), which is his earlier work.

<sup>87</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 99.

<sup>88</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 386.

<sup>89</sup> Atkinson, “Spiritual Laws” 176. “Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right and a perfect contentment.”

<sup>90</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “Fate” 354. “Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members, link in chain, nor any ignominious baggage, but a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe.”

uncertainty<sup>91</sup> and from his experienced perspective, he now feels that “The Way of Providence is a little rude”.<sup>92</sup> This reflects a stance toward reality that is also held by more mature pragmatism.<sup>93</sup> The Emersonian pragmatist faces this powerful uncertainty and contingency and rises to the challenge he is presented with, and Emerson encourages this pragmatist with adages such as “Without war, no soldier”, “The more trouble, the more lion”. In other words, the final recommendations of Emerson to his audience, the last link between his Sermons and hopefulness in the radically contingent future, can be found here. Later pragmatism also examines the question of survival in this contingent reality and uncertainty. For a number of pragmatists, this is a world where our thinking capital is better “invested and portfolios being risked”,<sup>94</sup> a world where we would do well to be flexible and respond to the “intellectual quicksands”<sup>95</sup> not only of postmodernism, but of our lives as well. This appears to be one of the shared threads of thought between Emerson and other pragmatic philosophers. To conclude this chapter, perhaps the most eloquent future recommendation for our contemporary world can be given by Cornel West with his “Prophetic pragmatism” (see the closeness of “prophetic” to “preaching”)<sup>96</sup> in his *The American Evasion of Philosophy*.

In fact, prophetic pragmatism denies Sisyphian pessimism and utopian perfectionism. Rather, it promotes the possibility of human progress and the human impossibility of paradise. This progress results from principled and protracted Promethean efforts, yet even such efforts are no guarantee. And all human struggles – including successful ones – against specific forms of evil produce new, though possibly lesser, forms of evil. Human struggle sits at the center of prophetic pragmatism,<sup>97</sup>

A profound paradox of future orientation appears in this final excerpt. The great contradiction of the human condition is “the possibility of human progress and the human impossibility of

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<sup>91</sup> Westbrook, 362.

<sup>92</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “Fate” 347.

<sup>93</sup> Westbrook 328.

<sup>94</sup> Gunn 6.

<sup>95</sup> Gunn 7.

<sup>96</sup> West 234.

<sup>97</sup> West 229.

paradise.” While we might grow in Deweyan fashion, we can never know whether we will be successful or what happens tomorrow. And perhaps it is this paradox of our existence that lives in the core of Emersonian pragmatism and reaches all the way to present pragmatism as well. In the end, it is Emerson who rather wistfully concludes in his “Self-Reliance”: “A political victory, a rise of rents ... or some other favorable event raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.”<sup>98</sup> And it is the unpredictable fugacity of our perceived reality that is the focus of the following subsection.

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<sup>98</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 151.

## 3.2 Fugacity

This subsection will offer an overview of the notion of fugacity in Emerson's writing, which appears even more richly, and serves effectively as a cornerstone for Emersonian future orientation from the previous chapter.

First of all, it would be expedient to define what exactly "fugacity"<sup>99</sup> means in the wider context of pragmatism, before we move on to look at the Emersonian cornerstone of the notion. William James in his *Pragmatism* sketches this characteristic of reality quite elegantly.

This pluralistic view, of a world of *additive* constitution, is one that pragmatism is unable to rule out from serious consideration. But this view leads one to the farther hypothesis that the actual world, instead of being complete 'eternally,' as the monists assure us, may be eternally incomplete, and at all times subject to addition or liable to loss<sup>100</sup>

For James, we make our reality on the go<sup>101</sup> and for pragmatists, the world never stands finished, but always changes, transforms,<sup>102</sup> breaks down and is molded into different forms. "The actual world" is "eternally incomplete" and fugacious. This is so because the world is "liable to loss" or opened to addition, which in turn makes our meanings and vocabularies fleeting<sup>103</sup> and the old culture will always give a way to a new culture.<sup>104</sup> However, the new culture will always be based historically on the old culture (cf. James' truth grafting process).<sup>105</sup> Richard Bernstein examines this process of cultural transformation in his *The New Constellation*.

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<sup>99</sup> "fugacity.": the quality of being fleeting or evanescent. Def. 1. Oxford Dictionary of English, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> James 112. See also James, "Pragmatism and Humanism" 167. "The import of the difference between pragmatism and rationalism is now in sight throughout its whole extent. The essential contrast is that *for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future.*"

<sup>101</sup> James 159.

<sup>102</sup> Robbins 115. If we consider the world a "human construction".

<sup>103</sup> Rorty 9.

<sup>104</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, "The Poet" 211: "For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead."

<sup>105</sup> James 113. "The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass;"

A Nietzschean motif runs through Rorty's discussion of contingencies. Rorty sees the history of culture as replacing old gods with new gods. After the demise of theology and metaphysics, philosophers *divinized* rationality, science, and the moral self. Romantic poets *divinized* imagination, poetic genius, and the creative self. [...] we should recognize that there is nothing more than contingencies and try to emulate those 'strong poets' who seek to create something new out of those contingencies.<sup>106</sup>

Bernstein maintains that for Richard Rorty, our culture consists of "replacing old gods with new gods", but even these "new gods" eventually end up de-divinized. After that, as Bernstein further notes in his analysis of Rorty, "there is nothing more than contingencies"; this suggests that all our intellectual constructs are essentially fleeting and subject to constant change and transformation. Bernstein then, in a very captivating manner, quotes Rorty's view of gradual progress of history and of fleeting absolutist ideologies, such as "theology and metaphysics", "rationality, science, and the moral self". All of these ideas eventually gave their way to something else in the progress of history. Finally, Rorty sees this process as "nothing more than contingencies", and we could imply that the fugacity of our ideas on a micro and macro scale is perhaps the only absolute of pragmatism. With this background on pragmatic fugacity, we may have a look at Emerson's "Divinity School Address" where this sign of pragmatism first appeared.

Emerson in his "Divinity School Address" introduces his fugacious perspective on religion and dogma,<sup>107</sup> but our focus will be the end of the essay where he renders one of the most beautiful descriptions of a pragmatic philosopher in "fundamentally hazardous"<sup>108</sup> world.

There are men who rise refreshed on hearing a threat; men to whom a crisis which intimidates and paralyzes the majority, - demanding not the faculties of prudence and thrift, but comprehension, immovableness, the readiness of sacrifice, - comes graceful and beloved as a bride. Napoleon said of Massena, that he was not himself until the battle began to go against him; then, when the dead began to fall in ranks around him,

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Maiden: Polity Press, 2007). Chapter 9, subsection "Rorty's heroes", paragraph 4. Electronic publication (epub) -due to the format of the book, the citations to this work will include the paragraph number from the beginning of the chapter and subsection indicated in the citation.

<sup>107</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 58.

<sup>108</sup> Westbrook 328.

awoke his powers of combination, and he put on terror and victory as a robe. So it is in rugged crises, in unwearable endurance, and in aims which put sympathy out of question, that the angel is shown.<sup>109</sup>

The “men” who are “refreshed on hearing a threat” reflect Rorty’s portrait of an ironist,<sup>110</sup> the poet that recognizes her own contingency. But the affection for these philosophers of crisis is also a cornerstone to Dewey’s practical problem based education,<sup>111</sup> which requires “comprehension, immovableness, the readiness of sacrifice” from the previous chapter. Therefore, pragmatic philosophers, as are for example Rorty’s liberal ironists, revel in these “rugged crises” and with “unwearable endurance” are “advancing on Chaos and the Dark”.<sup>112</sup> For Emerson, the “angel” shows only in the contingent situations happening within nature. This address was, however, only a beginning of an idea that would become especially visible in his later works.

Another essay that, among others, displays the fleetingness of our condition prominently is “Circles”. This essay contains the heart of Emerson’s philosophical thought and provides the clearest portrait of his sense of transience.

There is not a piece of science, but its flank may be turned to-morrow; there is not any literary reputation, not the so-called eternal names of fame, that may not be revised and condemned. The very hopes of man, the thoughts of his heart, the religion of nations, the manners and morals of mankind, are all at the mercy of a new generalization. Generalization is always a new influx of the divinity into the mind. Hence the thrill that attends it.<sup>113</sup>

For Emerson, there is no “piece of science”, “literary reputation” or “eternal names of fame” that will stay with us forever. Human constructions are always in the process of “transference, adaptation, evolution, change, reconstruction”, they are never fixed, always flowing.<sup>114</sup>

Notions such as a “religion of nations” are threatened by “a new generalization”, and in a

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<sup>109</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 66.

<sup>110</sup> Rorty 73-78.

<sup>111</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 375.

<sup>112</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 132.

<sup>113</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 169.

<sup>114</sup> Robbins 115.

Jamesian sense, these constructs stand “really malleable” at our hands.<sup>115</sup> The pragmatic interest here is always to break out from the current circle into another one, farther from the center. In Richard Poirier’s formulation, this effort is to “refloat the world, to make it less stationary and more transitional, to make descriptions of it [...] more uncertain”.<sup>116</sup> Finally, somewhat in contradiction to this covertly nihilistic<sup>117</sup> perspective, Emerson still maintains his religious language and claims that the “Generalization” that makes our social institutions so fugacious and fleeting is in fact “new influx of the divinity into the mind”. The divinity here appears to be an absolute subject, yet in its absoluteness it is perfectly fugacious, unreachable, everchanging, always receding, as intangible as perhaps creativity is. For Emerson, this “divinity”, or creativity that unsettles all things<sup>118</sup> is attended by a “thrill.”, of a new creation. And it is this thrill of new creation that is elaborated in the next examined essay.

For Emerson, there seems to be a seamless continuity between this notion of fugacious reality and his “divine” creativity. This gradient can be best illustrated in his “Over-Soul”.

The things we now esteem fixed shall, one by one, detach themselves, like ripe fruit, from our experience, and fall. The wind shall blow them none knows whither. The landscape, the figures, Boston, London, are facts as fugitive as any institution past, or any whiff of mist or smoke, and so is society, and so is the world. The soul looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her.<sup>119</sup>

Our experience is in mutation and our truth is in mutation as well.<sup>120</sup> The “wind shall blow them none knows whither” and so the radical contingency<sup>121</sup> of our reality will eventually change our whole world. Emerson then carries on once again to illustrate some further advanced measures of transience of institutions, and marks them as “fugitive”. The reason for all this fleetingness of reality is hidden in the last line of the excerpt. “The soul” looks

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<sup>115</sup> James 167.

<sup>116</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 40.

<sup>117</sup> Robbins 98.

<sup>118</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 173.

<sup>119</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 155.

<sup>120</sup> James 147.

<sup>121</sup> Rorty, 17.

forward<sup>122</sup> and creates the world, thus she, the soul is the reason for this characteristic of our reality. Richard Poirier reflects this approach in seeing the soul also as a function that breaks out of a “circle” and “*becomes*”.<sup>123</sup> The soul becomes and the soul functionally serves; she looks “steadily forwards,” and as she is looking, she is “creating a world before her”. This functional soul is thus, effectively causing the fugacity of our world, by her sheer creative potential and creative engagement with the world through our perception and acts. Finally, the focus will be switched to Emerson’s final work where he offers his last poignant insights into the transient nature of our lives.

Emerson starts his last essay “Poetry and Imagination” in a plaintive tone where he thinks about the fleeting nature of our lives. The essay begins with a classical example of Emersonian transience on the first page,<sup>124</sup> but our focus will rather be on the gradient from fugacity to creativity as experienced by Emerson’s character: the poet.

Or, shall we say that the imagination exists by sharing the ethereal currents? The poet contemplates the central identity, sees it undulate and roll this way and that, with divine flowings, through remotest things; and, following it, can detect essential resemblances in natures never before compared. He can class them so audaciously, because he is sensible of the sweep of the celestial stream, from which nothing is exempt. His body is a fleeing apparition, - his personality as fugitive as the trope he employs. In certain hours we can almost pass our hand through our own body. I think the use or value of poetry to be the suggestion it affords of the flux or fugaciousness of the poet.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “Self-Reliance,” 137, also see the footnote 80: Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “The American Scholar”: “Genius looks forward.”

<sup>123</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 23 “Nonetheless, there is always at work in him what he calls the soul. Thus directly after warning about the danger inherent in circles, he insists that individuals have the freedom and power to break out of a circle. [...] (From “Self-Reliance”) ‘This one fact the world hates,’ he there writes, ‘that the soul *becomes*; for that forever degrades the past, turns all riches to poverty, all reputation to a shame, confounds the saint with the rogue, shoves Jesus and Judas equally aside.’ Even though the ‘soul’ in ‘Circles’ is equated with the ‘heart,’ it is not to be imagine as an entity; it is more nearly a function, and yet no determination is made as to when the function occurs or from where it emanates.

<sup>124</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 440: “Early hints are given that we are not to stay here; that we must be making ready to go; - a warning that this magnificent hotel and convenience we call Nature is not final. [...] the creation is on wheels, [...], always passing into something else.

<sup>125</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 448.

In the essay, the poet is the one who looks at the fabric of reality.<sup>126</sup> The poet observes the “identity” to “roll this way and that”, that is, randomly.<sup>127</sup> The “divine flowings” are followed and the poet can synthesize “resemblances” “never before compared”. In other words, the Emersonian poet is “sensible of the sweep of the celestial stream”, and this sensibility also serves as a cornerstone for the Jamesian flux of sensations.<sup>128</sup> For Emerson, the poet’s ephemerality is ultimate: his body is a “fleeing apparition”, her personality “fugitive” as the “trope” or fugacious vocabulary that s/he employs.<sup>129</sup> The poet is so translucent, so intellectually flexible, that in certain hours “our hand” can almost pass “through our own body.” The fullness of argument, however, is achieved in the last sentence. The point of poetry is not to present itself as an art, but rather to suggest or present the “flux or fugaciousness” of the poet himself/herself. Curiously enough, Emerson thus announces and promotes Rorty’s liberal ironist long before Rorty’s own time. But the poet figure for Emerson is radically democratic. Everyone can become a creative poet, and it is this democratic poet that will be the main theme of the following chapter on perspectivism. For a pragmatist, the best bet is to remain “in the attitude of preparation” (of openness to life’s and experience’s teaching of “how to act, how to suffer, how to be useful”),<sup>130</sup> for “gunpowder is laid under every man’s breakfast-table”.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Frank O’Hara, “Larry Rivers: A Memoir,” *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 515. “What his work [Rivers’] has always had to say to me, I guess, is to be more keenly interested while I’m still alive. And perhaps this is the most important thing art can say.”

<sup>127</sup> Rorty 77. As recognized by the ironist.

<sup>128</sup> James 160.

<sup>129</sup> Rorty 80.

<sup>130</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon CLXV” 4:210.

<sup>131</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 441.

## 4. Emerson's Perspectivism, Creative Metaphors and Imagination

The following two chapters will overview two basic tendencies residing at the heart of Emerson's inner world.<sup>132</sup> First, we will examine Emerson's gradual turn towards perspectivism. For Emerson, we live in our inner worlds that are "bare and barren"<sup>133</sup> and which we must populate by being creative.<sup>134</sup> This bare subjectivity is then populated by the second approach of Emerson, that becomes more salient in his later writings. This is the approach of creative, transformative metaphor, which is deeply connected with poetry and Emerson's philosophy of language.<sup>135</sup>

The examination of Emerson's perspectivism will be considered as a source of several other pragmatic writers, and the part that deals with the creative metaphor will concentrate on reflections thrown by William James, Richard Rorty and most importantly, Richard Poirier. In regards to Emersonian perspectivism, we shall start from the beginning and trace it from its very roots, in Emerson's sermons.

Before the we undertake the analysis of Emerson's perspectivism in his sermons, it would be expedient to provide a background of what exactly perspectivism is, in the context of pragmatism. Perspectivism was foreshadowed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the formulator of subjective idealism.<sup>136</sup>

Fichte's subjective Idealism was an adaptation of Kant's transcendental philosophy, an adaptation in which the uniqueness and subjectivity of each individual consciousness was emphasized to a much greater extent than in Kant's approach [...] Fichte's adaptation centered on the idea of the individual transcendental consciousness as preceding, filtering, and structuring (often unconsciously, according to its unique sensibilities, preoccupations, and styles) all experience or experiential data which that consciousness encounters. His "transcendentalism" is thus not transcendental, but

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<sup>132</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 31. "Emerson makes himself sometimes amazingly hard to read, hard to get close to, all the more because he finds it manifestly difficult to get close to himself, to read or understand himself."

<sup>133</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 71: but quoting Emerson's "Experience"

<sup>134</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 72.

<sup>135</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 167.

<sup>136</sup> Robbins 100.

immanent, fully part of the lifeworld of human consciousness, eminently human, psychological, naturalized (in Dewey's and Rorty's phrase), and de-divinized – just as 'nature,'"<sup>137</sup>

As per the quote, in Fichte's active period we see a shift in the vein of romanticism, towards "uniqueness and subjectivity" of an individual and individual's consciousness. Emerson studied Fichte<sup>138</sup> and built on his idea of an individual's "transcendental consciousness" which is "preceding, filtering, and structuring" all the sensory data.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, since the individual already works with the sensory data that approaches his or her brain, this data is filtered, structured and humanized<sup>140</sup> in the process of perception. This human processing is happening entirely within an individual's consciousness; it is "eminently human", "immanent" and "psychological". Thus, this vein of thinking suggests that there is no bit of information that is processed by the human consciousness that is not already "de-divinized" or "psychological". What we see and experience is only a matter of our own perspective. We cannot escape our own perspective and we cannot escape our own mind and immanent thinking process. And that creates our perspective, our "thinking on the bias".<sup>141</sup> This fact is also stressed by William James in his *Pragmatism*, where James stresses that the "The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything."<sup>142</sup> and in his Lecture "Pragmatism and Humanism", where he establishes his view of human perspective affecting all our thinking.

Laws and languages at any rate are thus seen to be man-made things. Mr. Schiller applies the analogy to beliefs, and proposes the name of 'Humanism' for the doctrine that to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products too. Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist.<sup>143</sup>

Human, but also natural constructs such as "[l]aws and languages" are according to James "man-made products", which is a thought that reflects the inherent human creativity that will

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<sup>137</sup> Robbins 100.

<sup>138</sup> Robbins 100.

<sup>139</sup> James 160. "the *first* part of reality from this point of view is the flux of our sensations."

<sup>140</sup> James 162.

<sup>141</sup> Gunn 5. Burke's figure.

<sup>142</sup> James 53.

<sup>143</sup> James 159.

be dealt with later in the chapter. For James, our motives “sharpen all our questions” and “all our formulas have a human twist”, which means that there are no objective questions that do not stem from our immanent world of consciousness, and there are no mathematical or scientific formulas that can escape this “Humanism”, this ever present human tinge.

Rephrased differently, all human constructs are inherently psychological and all our ideas, opinions, and formulas will be inherently biased by our consciousness. And this is something that Emerson started introducing to his parishioners in his early sermons.

In his “Sermon XXVII” Emerson introduces the first signs of his perspectivist approach towards reality. As with other aspects of pragmatism, these thoughts can be found here in their inchoate forms. This sermon examines the quote from the Bible, 1 Corinthians 3:21: *Therefore, let no man glory in men; for all things are yours.*

*Secondly; that the fruit of that knowledge, is the conviction, that, we are masters of our own condition, that, all things are ours. [...] For the sciences and arts are nothing else but the relations of different objects in the Universe to the human mind. [...] Because, do you not see, that if your mind were differently constituted, that proportion would not appear? For if there were no mind in the whole universe, what would it signify, what were the forms of matter?*<sup>144</sup>

Emerson here says that “all things are ours” and our “sciences and arts” are only relations of objects “to” the human mind, which reflects a related philosopher, Thomas Kuhn, and his history of science.<sup>145</sup> The perspectivism here is very radical and forms the basis of later pragmatism that was interested more in the experience of the human mind<sup>146</sup> rather than in absolute values. Therefore, the basic issue here is “if there were no mind in the whole universe”, who would be left to perceive it? Had it not been for us, the world is mute. In the

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<sup>144</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon XXXVII” 1:227.

<sup>145</sup> Rorty 20. “that the world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors that we can only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called ‘fact’[...] Such efforts can be supplemented by the work of philosophers of science such as Kuhn and Hesse. These philosophers explain why there is no way to explain the fact that a Galilean vocabulary enables us to make better predictions than an Aristotelian vocabulary by the claim that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics.” Also Kloppenber, *Uncertain Victory* 102.

<sup>146</sup> Kloppenber, *Uncertain Victory* 108-109.

words of Richard Rorty: “The world does not speak. Only we do.”<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, later pragmatic intellectuals maintained that our “knowledge does not in any uncomplicated way correspond with what is ‘out there’”<sup>148</sup> and thus only supported the notion of pragmatic perspectivism as defined on the previous pages. This notion of pragmatic perspectivism, however, rarely exists alone and similarly to the previous chapter also forms a gradual gradient slowly building up to the later notion of creative metaphor. Emerson, in other words, always seems to keep trying to understand himself and find some practical solution to our condition.

The practical value of these truths, it seems to me, is very great. “All things are yours.” You are the Universe to yourself. We are not feeble, we are not pitiful, [...] We are very powerful beings. We can as we choose, be trained into angels or deformed into fiends.<sup>149</sup>

For Emerson, “All things are [ours]” and we are “the Universe to [ourselves]” meaning that all “things” are inside our perception and we build our own mental “universe”. However, as a true predecessor of pragmatism, Emerson believes that the world is out there, but it does not speak our language.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, pragmatism maintains that within this inner universe, “there is nothing right or wrong, but thinking makes it so.”<sup>151</sup> Therefore, we can already see the first signs of this creative approach towards our inner universe, since according to Emerson, “We are very powerful beings”, we have the ability to transform ourselves, to build ourselves, to give birth to oneself,<sup>152</sup> or, as Nietzsche would put it, we are the architects of our own life.<sup>153</sup> We can choose to “be trained into angels” or “into fiends”. Thus, for early Emerson as the predecessor of pragmatism, this inner universe is the site of growth, transformation and construction of individual consciousness. And it is precisely this idea of

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<sup>147</sup> Rorty 6.

<sup>148</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 26.

<sup>149</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon XXVII” 1:229.

<sup>150</sup> West 198.

<sup>151</sup> Westbrook 153. Quoting John Dewey directly.

<sup>152</sup> Rorty 29. Quoting Harold Bloom.

<sup>153</sup> Rorty 27.

inner growth and slow turning from perspectivism towards creative, plastic reality<sup>154</sup> that starts to appear in Emerson's essays.

This subtle gradient between creativity and perspectivism can be best exemplified in Emerson's "The Method of Nature", which belongs to his early essayistic works. Here, nevertheless, the creative energy in individual perspective/consciousness is becoming slightly more clear.

Each individual soul is such, in virtue of its being a power to translate the world into some particular language of its own [...] But when the genius comes, it makes fingers: it is pliancy, and the power of transferring the affair in the street into souls and colors.<sup>155</sup> [...] Nature represents the best meaning of the wisest man. Does the sunset landscape seem to you the palace of Friendship, - those purple skies and lovely waters the amphitheatre dressed and garnished only for the exchange of thought and love of the purest souls? It is that. All other meanings which base men have put on it are conjectural and false. You cannot bathe twice in the same river, said Heraclitus; and I add, a man never sees the same object twice; with his own enlargement the object acquires new aspects.<sup>156</sup>

Emerson starts out by saying that every individual soul has a "power to translate the world into some particular language of its own". This is significant, because it precisely mirrors Richard Rorty's core argument in his *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, where he holds that we merely redescribe the world as we see it by virtue of adopting a new vocabulary.<sup>157</sup> This creates our perspective. In addition to this, by "translat[ing]", redescribing and remetaphorising what we see within our inner world we consequently change our behavior.<sup>158</sup> The bearer of the creative faculty of consciousness is recognized by Emerson as "the poet", but here the power to create is also ascribed to the human agency called "genius", which is also essentially inventive. And it is these effects of "genius" that are so apparent in the second quote. The "sunset" can seem to one person as a "palace of Friendship" and Emerson affirms this metaphorisation- if you see it so, "It is [all] that." Since pragmatism "assumes that we can

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<sup>154</sup> James 159.

<sup>155</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 88.

<sup>156</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 92.

<sup>157</sup> Rorty 9.

<sup>158</sup> Rorty 9.

never get beyond stories”,<sup>159</sup> these representations of reality are always personally valid. The creative consciousness, nonetheless, grows stronger and more salient downstream. We can never see the “same object twice” because we enlarge, humanize, stain the object with our immanent perception, and thus the object acquires new aspects.<sup>160</sup> As we progress through Emerson’s writings from *Essays: First Series* into *Essays: Second Series* (which begins with his essay on “The Poet”), it is possible to spot a greater tendency to stress this creativity but also our subjective isolation.

The transformative quality of each human mind, or “the mechanics of transformation as the magic of mind”,<sup>161</sup> stand apparent in Emerson’s essay “Intellect”. Here, Emerson talks about the way we accept and work with new thoughts.

We are stung by the desire for new thought; but when we receive a new thought, it is only the old thought with a new face, and though we make it our own, we instantly crave another; we are not really enriched. For the truth was in us before it was reflected to us from natural objects; and the profound genius will cast the likeness of all creatures into every product of his wit. But if the constructive powers are rare, and it is given to few men to be poets, yet every man is a receiver of this descending holy ghost, and may well study the laws of its flux.<sup>162</sup>

There are no immediate facts<sup>163</sup> and those that are received as “new thought” graft themselves on our previous truths, modifying them in the process<sup>164</sup> – thus become “old thought with a new face”. However, we make these thoughts “our own” and consequently start to crave more novelty which we can subsequently humanize. For Emerson, the “truth”, meaning our creative potential to make true/real what we construct through our consciousness, “was in us” originally.<sup>165</sup> Our ability to create is inherent, affected by but independent of our

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<sup>159</sup> Gunn 15.

<sup>160</sup> James 164-167.

<sup>161</sup> Hook 38.

<sup>162</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 183.

<sup>163</sup> Hook 52. “The predicament of the logical intuitionists is almost as anomalous as is that of those philosophers who assert that immediate knowledge is a fact and yet cannot say without falling foul of one another what are the facts which we have immediate knowledge of.”

<sup>164</sup> James, 158.

<sup>165</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 132: “Accept the place the divine providence has found for you [...] Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying

surroundings. Additionally, the “profound genius”, i.e. the creative person, will produce creative output that bears likeness to “all creatures”. This is a very intriguing point that connects the argument to the Emersonian fugacity and transience in pragmatism in general. According to one of the philosophical precursors of pragmatism [,] Wilhelm Dilthey, “no human essence can be extracted from history and analyzed”<sup>166</sup> and every imaginative person (“poet”) will in his or her creations reflect their cultural and psychological background. The human imprint (or, as termed by Rorty [,] “the blind impress”<sup>167</sup>) is always found in any of our creative outputs. Finally, Emerson talks about how rare the “constructive powers” are, as these constructive powers are more primeval than the eponymous “Intellect”; but at the same time he already offers his democratic distribution of genius. This notion will persist and become more apparent in his later works. Richard Rorty discusses this pragmatic notion of universal creativity with relation to Sigmund Freud’s imaginative unconscious. To compare the two, for Emerson, “every man is a receiver of the holy ghost” and similarly for Freud, every person has a capacity “to generate a self-description”. Ultimately, we all share an agency – the “faculty for creating metaphors”.<sup>168</sup> And it is this metaphoric faculty that starts to become very powerful and extremely apparent in the later works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson’s *Essays: Second Series* is a mature work of philosophy which extends the investigation begun in his lecture "The Poet" on the power of transformative metaphor. There

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their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating all their being.”

<sup>166</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 110. Dilthey: “The human mode of life is thus one of becoming rather than being, and the study of man is inseparable from the study of history. While human purposes cannot be entirely reduced to historical circumstances, no human essence can be extracted from history and analyzed. Because man makes himself through his choices and his actions, the accumulated evidence of history offers the only avenue for understanding man.”

<sup>167</sup> Rorty 24-25.

<sup>168</sup> Quoted Freud in Rorty 35-36: What makes Freud more useful and more plausible than Nietzsche is that he does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals. For Freud’s account of unconscious fantasy shows us how to see every human life as a poem – or, more exactly, every human life not so racked by pain as to be unable to learn a language nor so immersed in toil as to have no leisure in which to generate a self-description. He sees every such life as an attempt to clothe itself in its own metaphors. [...] But what Freud takes to be shared by all of us relatively leisured language-users – all of us who have the equipment and the time for fantasy – is a faculty for creating metaphors.

is, however, a seemingly contradicting tendency in Emerson's writing of this period and this can be at the outset best illustrated by "The Poet" and "Experience".

He uses forms according to the life, and not according to the form. This is true science. The poet alone knows astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation, for he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs.[...] By virtue of this science the poet is the Namer, or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to everyone its own name and not another', thereby rejoicing the intellect,<sup>169</sup>

"The poet", as a person through whom the imagination flows, uses forms of "life" itself and does not adapt this "life" to any prescribed or traditional "form"; rather, he takes the sciences such as "astronomy" or "chemistry" and uses them at his will, "bends them at their will".<sup>170</sup> This work, however, only takes place on the level of "signs", and "the poet" is not affecting the world out there but rather works with the language itself. This is one of the first moments where Emerson radically swerves from the ethos of changing the reality practically and in one's own perspective (in seeming contradiction with previous chapters), and starts to concentrate on language. And it is this concentration on language that precedes Rorty's core philosophical concern with vocabularies and language. Notably, Rorty was not directly influenced by reading Emerson, but started out rather as a scholar of John Dewey. Nevertheless, this preoccupation with the "sign", "Namer", "Language-maker" and the poet who is "naming things sometimes after their appearance" can be reflected in many of Rorty's thoughts.<sup>171</sup> For Rorty, all intellectual change is "metaphoric redescriptions",<sup>172</sup> which are in this sense the activity of creating new metaphors and naming things in new and different ways.<sup>173</sup> Phrased differently, for pragmatists, "language is the site of work",<sup>174</sup> and language

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<sup>169</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 205..

<sup>170</sup> John Dewey, "Aims in Education" 113-115. Emerson here lays the cornerstone of pragmatic intellectual and developmental freedom, e.g. choice of flexible aims by a student rather than a tutor.

<sup>171</sup> Note that "naming things...sometimes after their essence" is omitted here, because many pragmatists, including Rorty, do not maintain that there is an "essence." Curiously, even Emerson himself maintains that there are "degrees in idealism" and his use of "essence" here could be attributed to his gradually ebbing need to believe in an ideal, absolute, Platonic form reminiscent of the "noumenal", or even of the universal categories of the "phenomenal", in Kantian idealism. See Robbins, 100-102.

<sup>172</sup> Rorty 9 and 16.

<sup>173</sup> Rorty 9.

is seen as a “surrogate for all other forms of institutional and systematic power”.<sup>175</sup>

Consequently then for Emerson and pragmatism in general, human creativity is limited by its ability to work with and use the words of one's particular language. Emerson's essay “Experience” deals quite directly with this perspectivist isolation and this inability to effect changes outside of language.

The following examination of Emerson as a cornerstone of pragmatism will deal with two key essays that mark his beginning realization of human isolation. These essays are “Experience” and “Nature” (both from 1844). One of the main pragmatic scholars examined in this chapter will be Richard Poirier, whose analysis becomes more relevant as Emerson grows mature and more wistful.<sup>176</sup> First off, Emerson's awareness of the isolation of consciousness begins with “Experience”

There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality.[...] Well, souls never touch their objects. [...] The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. Nothing is left us now but death. [...] Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion.<sup>177</sup>

In this mature work, Emerson starts out bleakly. “Suffering” is seen as the only “sharp peak[s] and edge[s]” that our reality can offer and even that caveat is immediately subverted as our “scene-painting”. Poirier, as a pragmatist following Emerson's tradition directly, starts out his analysis of "Experience" similarly, when he talks about Emerson's metaphor of “bleak rocks”.<sup>178</sup> He maintains that the image of “bleak rocks” in “Experience” represents the metaphorical environment of our subjective experience; and it is here that our own consciousness constrains us to live in our “poverty of subjectivity”.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, Poirier in

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<sup>174</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 99. Quoting Richard Rorty.

<sup>175</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 134.

<sup>176</sup> Robbins 102.

<sup>177</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 218.

<sup>178</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 71.

<sup>179</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 73.

his analysis stresses the Emersonian “prison of glass”.<sup>180</sup> The glass surfaces in this prison reflect the illusions we live in since it is translucent and illusion-making at the same time. Emerson similarly believes that our reality is “counterfeit” and considers grief as a part of reality that is “shallow” and that his grief will never “introduce... [him] into the reality”. Additionally, Emerson also stresses that our souls can never “touch their objects” and that we “shed every drop” of the rain that is falling on us, the rain representing any practical effect the reality has on us.<sup>181</sup> Poirier sees this as “poverty of Subjectivity”, since this lack of tangibility of any factual matter is “all you have to hold on to”.<sup>182</sup> In other words, we cannot interact directly with our world, only through our mind that has to create it first. Poirier’s reading of Emerson’s “Experience” then suggests that while we do not have much to live by in this rocky, barren world,<sup>183</sup> we are privy to “generative, creative power that in fact only temporarily allows expression of itself through the medium of a human being”.<sup>184</sup> This undulation of creative power is caused by the fugacity of human construction. What Emerson and Poirier are trying to say through this experience, is that one cannot create permanently, or permanently stay in the state of creativity. As with everything within and without of human life, our mind and reality are flowing. This flowing and ebbing of the conditions of intellectual construction produces the phenomenon that, once we put something down on paper, or once we publish our thoughts through any medium, the volatile creative genius has already moved on, leaving behind only its shed skin. So it is this fugacity of genius that causes the bareness of our subjective experience. Similarly, in “Nature” Emerson writes:

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<sup>180</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 71.

<sup>181</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 218: “So it is with this calamity: it does not touch me. Curiously, we can note a similar observation from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2006): 1835. Book 1. Lines 139-140: “for the mind and spirit remains/ Invincible, and vigor soon returns,”

<sup>182</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 73.

<sup>183</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 73.

<sup>184</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 73

It is the same among the men and women, as among the silent trees; always a referred existence, an absence, never a presence and satisfaction.<sup>185</sup>

In “Nature” Emerson sees our condition as the one of “silent trees” – “always a referred existence”, always “an absence” – therefore one of deficiency. Other pragmatists also see this “referred existence” and isolation, too--e.g. for Sidney Hook the “cognitive experience is *par excellence* a mediating one between some sort of problematic situation and its prospective fulfillment”.<sup>186</sup> Our isolation is complete, and we can only rely on our cognitive word-making powers to affect our reality in any way. And in the later works of Emerson, this malleability of the “kingdom of heaven”<sup>187</sup> appears in full force.

The last part of this chapter will look at Emersonianism's "stupendous antagonism," a stroke of new strength that arises from the subjective aridity of Emerson's life experience. The pragmatic life experience is a constantly streaming reality into which we are thrown, and, as we have learned in “Experience”, at whose mercy we are also left. This isolation is examined in Emerson's “Fate”, but the essay offers a counter-tactic against the powerlessness of a person against the fate.

For, though Fate is immense, so is power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits power, power attends and antagonizes Fate. We must respect Fate as natural history, but there is more than natural history. For who and what is this criticism that pries into the matter? Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members, link in a chain, nor any ignominious baggage, but a stupendous antagonism, [...] But the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him. On one side, elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock-ledges, peat-bog, forest, sea and shore; and, on the other part, thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature, [...] riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.<sup>188</sup>

While “Fate” is seen as an immensely powerful force, there is always an entity that “antagonizes” it, and this is something that Emerson terms as “power”. This “power” is more

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<sup>185</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 245.

<sup>186</sup> Hook 42.

<sup>187</sup> James 167.

<sup>188</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 354.

than “natural history”; and further in the excerpt, it is suggested that “Man is not order of nature” or merely “ignominious baggage”, but a “stupendous antagonism”. Emerson so far remains faithful to his notion of isolation, but also introduces this new type of opposition; and several lines later he lays the cornerstone of contemporary pragmatism. For Emerson, “Man”, seen generally as every person, has “the lightning” that “fashions planets”. This is an extremely important point for pragmatism. Emerson here maintains that we have something “divine” in us--that we have the faculty to “fashion planets” and the “spirit that composes and decomposes nature”. For Emerson, the reality stands “really malleable”<sup>189</sup> ready to be “decompose[d]” through our imagination. In pragmatism this is reflected differently in several thinkers--in Richard Bernstein’s understanding, for example, of Rorty’s “‘good society’” where we all would play “*puissance*” in self-creation, constantly creating new vocabularies;<sup>190</sup> and in Cornel West’s notion that “religion generates human heroic energies and facilitates personal struggle with the world”.<sup>191</sup> Richard Rorty could claim that this “religion” that is the source of hope and “stupendous antagonism” for the person, is only a new way to describe our reality, and for him, this creative antagonism would rest in our ability to re-metaphorize and create new vocabularies that could look more adequate than the previous ones.<sup>192</sup> For Rorty, this kind of belief is the goal.<sup>193</sup> Finally, this can also be reflected in John Dewey’s didactic theory, which stresses that any curriculum should be designed to prepare for life-experience, which is filled with unpredictable events. For Dewey, the teacher’s goal is to prepare students for solving unfamiliar problems with imagination,<sup>194</sup> that is, to help them use their “spirit which composes and decomposes nature” and help them think creatively. Dewey’s preoccupation with developing the capacity to think creatively, and

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<sup>189</sup> James 167.

<sup>190</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 8, subsection “Aestheticism and moral commitment”, paragraph 4.

<sup>191</sup> West 66.

<sup>192</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection “Rorty’s heroes”, paragraph 2.

<sup>193</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection “Rorty’s heroes”, paragraph 3.

<sup>194</sup> Kloppenborg, *Uncertain Victory* 374.

exercising pragmatic “radical intellectual freedom”<sup>195</sup> in school environments reflects

Emerson’s exhortation for the use of our creative power in life’s struggles and problems.

And it is exactly this creative agency that Emerson talks about in his touching, reverent, and affectionate approach towards work with the potential of a child in “Education”.

Leave this military hurry and adopt the pace of Nature. Her secret is patience. [begin page 156] ... Can you not wait for him, as Nature and Providence do? Can you not keep for his mind and ways, for his secret, the same curiosity you give to the squirrel, snake, rabbit [...] He has a secret; wonderful methods in him; he is, - every child, - a new style of man; give him time and opportunity. Talk of Columbus and Newton! I tell you the child just born in yonder hovel is the be-ginning of a revolution as great as theirs. But you must have the believing and prophetic eye.<sup>196</sup>

For Emerson, when working (here meaning more “observing” rather than “shaping”) with the potential of the child, one should be first and last patient. We should “adopt the pace of Nature” and “wait for him” as “Nature and Providence” do.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, we learn that a child has a “mind and ways” a “secret”; and that it is this “mind and ways” for which we should “keep...the same curiosity” as we do for natural observations. In other words, we should be interested in the child’s natural thinking patterns, and we should patiently study them. This “mind and ways”, “secret... wonderful methods in him” reflects the fact that “every child” has the “lightning which explodes and fashions planets...in him”. Emerson then, in an ingenious manner, compresses the two basic rules of education: “give him time and opportunity” and you may start to talk “of Columbus and Newton!”<sup>198</sup> At his most reverent and affectionate, and as a true philosopher of democracy, Emerson believes that the child “in yonder hovel is the beginning of a revolution”. Phrased differently, Emerson maintains that this “divine”

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<sup>195</sup> Kloppenberg *Uncertain Victory* 375.

<sup>196</sup> Edward W. Emerson, ed., *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), Volume X: *Lectures and Biographical Sketches*, “Education,” 155-156.

<sup>197</sup> Jerome Beker, Reuven Feuerstein, “Shaping Modifying Environments” *Residential Treatment of Children and Youth*, 8: 22. This sense of Emersonian security in his metaphor of an educator as a serene naturalist can be reflected in the “Modifying Environment” approach by Beker & Feuerstein, 1989: “but it does ‘start where the student is,’ building on existing competencies while providing for needed feelings of security”

<sup>198</sup> Dewey 46. “But we also mean by capacity an ability, a power; and by potentiality potency, force. Now when we say that immaturity means the possibility of growth, we are not referring to absence of powers which may exist at a later time; we express a force positively present- the *ability* to develop.”

faculty, this “stupendous antagonism” and “maker of planets”, is present in every child and “patience”, “time” and “opportunity” are required<sup>199</sup> for his or her proper development. The child then may begin a “revolution” owing to the expansion of his or her inherent “divine” agencies.<sup>200</sup> And it is in “Poetry and Imagination” that this warm-hearted approach towards the “divine” creative means residing in every person gets developed to its final metaphorical summary.

The last essay to be examined in the chapter will be “Poetry and Imagination” where an older, more experienced Emerson summarizes his whole philosophical thought. The final essay to be composed primarily by Emerson's hand, “Poetry and Imagination” offers us his final, summative thoughts on the imaginative, poetic capability of “the poet” but also of any person in the world.

Poetry is the *gai science*. The trait and test of the poet is that he builds, adds, and affirms<sup>201</sup> [begin page 456] ... He knows that he did not make his thought, - no, his thought made him, and made the sun and the stars. Is the solar system good art and architecture? The same wise achievement is in the human brain also, can you only wile it from interference and marring. We cannot look at works of art but they teach us how near man is to creating.<sup>202</sup>

The “poet” envisioned in Emerson's valedictory essay outright “builds, adds, and affirms”, reflecting William James’ elegantly simple statement- “In our cognitive as well as in our active life we are creative”.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, Emerson claims that the poet “did not make his thought” but “his thought made him” which suggests that for Emerson, the faculty of imagination/creativity precedes and shapes the process of thinking<sup>204</sup>--of drawing out the

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<sup>199</sup> An outcome of these three elements could perhaps be well illustrated in the pervasive tendency for encouragement found in some Christian approaches: Acts 20: 1-3: “When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, <sup>3</sup>where he stayed three months.”

<sup>200</sup> Interestingly, Emerson’s educational aim collides here with Rorty’s idea of his liberal utopia, with its goal to develop the creative agencies of individuals. See next page, Bernstein 1163.

<sup>201</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 455.

<sup>202</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 456.

<sup>203</sup> James 167.

<sup>204</sup> This aspect of imagination preceding intellect is discussed in the paragraph about “Intellect”.

implications of that initial constructive agency. As previously quoted in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, this is the ability of a strong poet, through which he is “giving birth to himself”.<sup>205</sup> For Bernstein, this strong poet who can redescribe herself and remetaphorize her perspective into a different, new vocabulary, is akin to a cultural hero in Rorty’s liberal utopia; and it is this ability to create “herself out of the fabric of her own radical contingencies” that is something “all” (individuals) should “emulate”.<sup>206</sup> This creation of new vocabulary for self-description is also echoed by Freud when he maintains that we all have the capacity to clothe ourselves in our metaphors.<sup>207</sup> Further down the line Emerson asks whether the “solar system” is good “art and architecture” and maintains that the “same wise achievement” is in our brains as well. With this, he clearly suggests that the human brain has the sublime capacity to create lofty structures such as universe, “good art” and “architecture”. Finally, Emerson also maintains that we cannot look at a work of art and not see at least some human influence, the sense of “how near man is to creating”. In the context of writing as an art, this can be reflected in Richard Poirier’s flavor of pragmatism. Writers struggle to free themselves from the historical obligation of language, just as they are bound by it.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, we are indeed creative, but while we use our language we are still influenced by our predecessors and consequently we cannot be wholly original. Every word was once a metaphor and “Language is fossil poetry”.<sup>209</sup> Phrased differently, there is always some human imprint in any creative work of art we produce; any of these works will show how near we are “to creating”. We are creative/imaginative; we employ signs<sup>210</sup> and change our reality through changes to our language. The very last argument that Emerson wrote examined this

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<sup>205</sup> Rorty 29.

<sup>206</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection “The liberal ironist”, paragraph 5: “Our heroes and heroines would be poets, self-creators – those lucky enough to create something new out of the contingencies that constitute their lives.”. Despite the fact that the “hero” or “heroine” here offers self-creation as something worth striving for, having someone as a “hero” to emulate is a thought which is still nevertheless un-Emersonian.

<sup>207</sup> Rorty 36. Quoting Freud.

<sup>208</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 75.

<sup>209</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 205.

<sup>210</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 205: “The poet alone knows astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation, for he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs.”

imaginative potential explicitly – idiosyncratic language and metaphor as the tools which give each human consciousness the capacity to become, to the extent possible for her or him, to become a "strong poet."

Pragmatism is a method of thinking. As a method of thinking, its form, function, and purpose is closely tied to one area of human activity--writing and describing. All the examined pragmatic thinkers touched on the issue of description, language, and writing in one point or another. Fittingly then, Emerson's last originally written lines ruminate about "the poet" and his method of thinking, which he metaphorizes into the design of a play. In other words, Emerson offers us an insight into what happens in the immanent consciousness during the imaginative process.

[S]o the poet creates his persons, and then watches and relates what they do and say. Such creation is poetry, in the literal sense of the term, and its possibility is an unfathomable enigma. [...] This reminds me that we all have one key to this miracle of the poet, and the dunce has experiences that may explain Shakespeare to him, -one key, namely, dreams. In dreams we are true poets; we create the persons of the drama; we give them appropriate figures, faces, costumes; they are perfect in their organs, attitude, manners: more-over, they speak after their own characters, not ours;- they speak to us, and we listen with surprise to what they say. Indeed, I doubt if the best poet has yet written any five-act play that can compare in thoroughness of invention [begin page 459] with this unwritten play in fifty acts, composed by the dull-est snorer on the floor of the watch-house.<sup>211</sup>

The preceding lines are among the most beautiful and insightful from the works examined here. Emerson is sometimes construed as an elitist, but here, in his last paragraph, he demonstrates his deep love and reverence for every person. Given the nature of this last quote, Richard Poirier will be the main pragmatic focus for this last argument, since his ideas also emanate from a similar reverence.

Emerson begins the second quote with dreams, which is often the case with the writers, philosophers, poets and artists when they are bidding farewell to their career and their

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<sup>211</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 458-459.

world.<sup>212</sup> Emerson believes that the “dunce” has experiences that can explain Shakespeare to him, and the key is “dreams”. Dreams are one thing of which every person, whether “dunce” or “Shakespeare,” is capable. Through this universal imaginative capacity we “create the persons of the drama” or our imaginary friends. Emerson is also said to write as if he were talking to himself, so these “persons of the drama” are a representation of his imaginative vision. In other words, when he composed his writings he apparently saw characters that he created to whom he “listen[ed] with surprise”. In addition to this, the quote “We listen with surprise to what they say” reflects Poirier’s approach to language that can surprise us or disturb us,<sup>213</sup> and in many strains of pragmatism imagination is equated with our ability to work creatively with language. This creativity is further elaborated when we learn that these characters we create “speak after their own characters, not ours;” and Emerson sees the influx of new thoughts streaming through these characters. He is painting his mental world for us. He converses with these, and, more importantly, these characters provide him with “surprise” and inspiration--thus with a new intellectual stimulus. Finally, the warm concluding sentence closes up this short meditation on creativity. The “dullest snorer on the floor of the watch-house” has the poetic, creative, imaginative potential to write a grandiose “play in fifty acts” because of his immanent, inborn capacity whose “thoroughness of invention” is unparalleled by any professional poet. Emerson here confirms for us his--and, as he hopes, our--reverence for every human being, because of the immense imaginative potential of human thinking. In

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<sup>212</sup> William Shakespeare, *Tempest* in *Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. W.J. Craig (London: OUP, 1966). Act IV, Scene i, lines 148-158. See, for example, Prospero’s late monologue:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

<sup>213</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 176.

other words, the late Emerson would not dare to underestimate, nor allow his readers to forget, the profundity and complexity of each diverse human soul, since he maintains that “We know the authentic effects of the true fire through every one of its million disguises”.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Atkinson, 189. Also see Bernstein quoting Rorty in Bernstein’s *The New Constellation*, Chapter 8, subsection “Aestheticism and moral commitment”, paragraph 4: “let a thousand flowers bloom,”

## 5. Pragmatic Individualism

The last chapter of this thesis will overview individualism in Ralph Waldo Emerson and in pragmatism as exemplified by its representative thinkers. This chapter will examine Emerson's gradual transformations of his notion of individualism in his examined works. His sense of individualism changes from the personal relationship with the deity to its most radical criticism of society in "Considerations by the Way". Pragmatism, as a method of thinking, is here considerably divided. While John Dewey's emphasis on an "open-ended democratic social action" and "mutual understanding"<sup>215</sup> suggests a kind of collectivist individualism, the pragmatism of Richard Rorty is very private.<sup>216</sup> Thus, I propose that Emerson's individualism be examined as one tendency that is subtly, albeit still changing along the way as he matures. The Emersonian cornerstone of pragmatism consists of three kinds of individualism: social, private, and inner individualism of consciousness. The inner individualism of consciousness is mostly examined by David Robbins in "Emerson the Nihilist", while the "antifoundationalist"<sup>217</sup> approaches of Richard Rorty fit more into private pragmatism<sup>218</sup> along with Richard Poirier's inspection of an individual's creative consciousness. However, these accounts of private pragmatism and pragmatism of individual consciousness are examined more in depth in the previous chapter. Emerson, as the "champion of individualism",<sup>219</sup> reflects more the private individualism and individualism of consciousness, but given that these have already been explored in depth in the previous chapter, this chapter will concentrate on the pragmatic social individualism, and will point out the surprising connections between the hardline individualist Emerson and Deweyan stealth collectivism.

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<sup>215</sup> Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism" 8.

<sup>216</sup> Rorty 63.

<sup>217</sup> Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism" 5.

<sup>218</sup> Bernstein Chapter 9, subsection "Rorty's heroes", paragraph 5: "Self-creation is a private project"

<sup>219</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 71.

Our examination of Emersonian individualism starts with Emerson's early works, his Sermons. In these, he presents his first opinions on the relationship of a believer with his or her God. Since Emerson comes from the environment of radical Protestantism, he believes that the relationship with the deity should be personal and should not be interposed by any authority.<sup>220</sup>

But the moment you put them together and they appear as Society- though the characters are the same in the multitude that they were alone; though 'tis nothing as before but a great many disagreeing, imperfect, passionate persons, yet the eye is vanquished, and the reason prostrated. Now we are willing to surrender our freedom. Now we *must* do as they do. Their opinion begins to look to us like truth, and their act like virtue, fashion for Virtue.<sup>221</sup>

Emerson is aware early on in his career of the negative effects of a mob mentality and related ideologies that thrive in these environments. When you “put them[persons] together” they appear as “Society” and according to Emerson, our perception of individuals in this multitude changes. These individuals are still “imperfect, passionate persons” but in our perception of “Society” and consequently in our consciousness, “the reason” is already “prostrated”. We “surrender” our better judgement and “freedom”, and now we “*must*” do as the mass of others does. Thus, in our perception, these fragile, fallible persons become a massive entity that is always right, since what was originally “their opinion” starts to look like “truth” and their act a “virtue, fashion for Virtue”. Emerson yet again handles his language excellently, since the “fashion” adjective accurately expresses the trend-like quality of some of the ideas that become popular in the mass movements, but do not have an intrinsically virtuous nature. This early concern of Emerson foreshadows his approach to private individualism and interest in individual's perception, which is, for example, reflected in Richard Rorty's philosophy. According to Richard Bernstein, Rorty is an extremely private thinker since in his politics,

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<sup>220</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 140: “the relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure that it is profane to seek to interpose helps.”

<sup>221</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon XXXVIII” 1:293.

there is “no public space”.<sup>222</sup> Rorty himself in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* talks primarily about an “idiosyncratic lading-list”<sup>223</sup> or “private projects” of “self-creation”.<sup>224</sup> To name one more pragmatist that reflects this notion of private individualism, William James is also considered to be a “hardy individualist”<sup>225</sup> among pragmatists. However, he is already a step further, being the individualist of consciousness.<sup>226</sup> And this individualism of consciousness is exemplified amiably some lines further into the same sermon.

The design of the gospel of Christ, the object of every admonition God sends to the soul of man from without or from within, is, to break this evil yoke, divorce you from these relations to others, and to make you free, to make you solitary. Man! Woman! in the relations you sustain to God, no other creature in the universe can partake. [...] To each moral agent whom God has made, is a relation independent, lonely, peculiar; a several universe. [...] obey the scripture which God has writ within you, [...] so is an independent mind more excellent than a dependent one.<sup>227</sup>

In the vein of this personal relationship to the deity, Emerson considers “relations to others” an “evil yoke”, which sounds distinctly radical, especially as contrasted to John Dewey’s social individualism where development of “social sympathy”<sup>228</sup> played a vital role. For Emerson, to “make you free” means to “make you solitary”, and similarly for Rorty, the ironist project of self-creation and self-description happens privately, alone, although even this ironist is never completely solitary.<sup>229</sup> However, the solitary place for rumination can be clearly seen as a shared element between the two thinkers.<sup>230</sup> In the second part of the excerpt,

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<sup>222</sup>Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection “Rorty’s politics?”, paragraph 1: “Rorty’s politics seems to be one in which there is *no* public space- the space in which human beings come together to *debate* and *argue* with each other. This is what Dewey ... called the ‘eclipse of the public.’

<sup>223</sup> Rorty 23.

<sup>224</sup> Rorty 63.

<sup>225</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 113.

<sup>226</sup> James 78: “I myself believe that the evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences”, 169: “For pluralistic pragmatism, truth grows up inside of all the finite experiences. They lean on each other, but the whole of them, if such a whole there be, leans on nothing.” [...] “It can hope salvation only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies”.

<sup>227</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* “Sermon XXXVIII” 1:293.

<sup>228</sup> Westbrook, 172.

<sup>229</sup> Gunn 15.

<sup>230</sup> cf. also Matthew 14:23. “After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,” or Mark 1:35. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

the notion of creative perspectivism starts to appear. The relations we “sustain to God, no other creature” can partake. Thus, according to Emerson, human beings have a special life line to God. Furthermore, as a “moral agent” made by God, this person is “relation independent, lonely, peculiar” ( which are all signs of radical individualism), and most importantly, a “several universe”. Every “moral agent” is a “several universe”, every individual consciousness is an isolated universe. And it is precisely this isolated, “several universe” that James introduces in his *Pragmatism*.

Such a universe is even now the collection of our several inner lives. The spaces and times of your imagination, the objects and events of your day-dreams are not only more or less incoherent *inter se*, but are wholly out of definite relation with similar contents of any one else’s mind.<sup>231</sup>

For James, our “inner lives”, “imagination”, and “day-dreams” are “wholly out of definite relation” from any other mind. In other words, our immanent perceptual universe, our “several universe” is completely severed from other universes, and this “several” character makes it “independent, lonely, peculiar”. Ultimately then, for early Emerson, the “independent mind [is] more excellent than a dependent one”, and this, along with the notion of “several universe” reflects directly the Jamesian pluralism of isolated minds.<sup>232</sup> The following analysis will concentrate on two of Emerson’s great philosophical essays.

Emerson carries on this powerful sense of individualism further on to his little book *Nature*, where he submits some of his more general views on the importance of solitude. Following these initial sketches, Emerson writes his “Self-Reliance” where he puts forward some of his most individualistic ideas; and as early as here his individualism is slowly starting to show a growing preoccupation with perspectivism and creativity. He begins with a meditation on the human intuition:

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<sup>231</sup> James 105.

<sup>232</sup> James 105. “ Our various reveries now as we sit here compenetrate each other idly without influencing or interfering. They coexist, but in no order and in no receptacle, being the nearest approach to an absolute ‘many’ that we can conceive.”

No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.<sup>233</sup> [omit pages 135-138; begin page 139] ...The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.<sup>234</sup>

First off, Emerson's nascent perspectivism can be seen in the first and second sentence. The notions of good and evil are for Emerson "readily transferable to that or this", which connects this individualistic assertiveness to his arguments on Fugacity and Perspectivism. Several pages later, Emerson, unlike many pragmatists,<sup>235</sup> searches for an "essence of genius", and finds it in "Spontaneity" or more importantly "Instinct". This "Instinct" is an "Intuition" that cannot be taught by any teaching, thus it is something preceding,<sup>236</sup> emanating from the person. But it is the last sentence, that is pivotal. In this deep force, this "Instinct", "all things find their [begin page 140] common origin" which means that "instinct" is capable of creating "all things". And since our "perception is fatal",<sup>237</sup> our consciousness (or "instinct") then effectively creates our perspective.<sup>238</sup> Interestingly enough, in his essay "The Transcendentalist", Emerson thinks about individualistic tendencies in a person from a different point of view.

In the previously mentioned "Self-Reliance" Emerson's tone is more defiantly individualistic, and defends this behavior/orientation by stating that "no law can be sacred to me but that of my nature". His essay, "The Transcendentalist", written less than a year later, might, on the other hand, appear as a reaction towards possible criticism of such a seemingly

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<sup>233</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 134.

<sup>234</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 139.

<sup>235</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection "Selfhood", paragraph 2: "Consider the claims that Rorty makes about the self. On the one hand he criticizes the very idea that there is a common human nature or any deep self to be "discovered." The self, he tells us, is nothing but a contingent weaving and reweaving of desires and beliefs which are themselves the effects of historical contingencies."

<sup>236</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 183: "For the truth was in us before it was reflected to us from natural objects".

<sup>237</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 139-140.

<sup>238</sup> Robbins 102. "Emerson had to admit that [...] the only knowledge to which an individual has access is that contained in (and perhaps solipsistically confined to) his/her consciousness" compare with Emerson's "all things".

self-centered, individualistic orientation; it also offers Emerson's preliminary psychological insights into introversion, society and their interactions.

Society is good when it does not violate me; but best when it is likeliest to solitude.<sup>239</sup> [omit pages 100-102; begin page 103] ... Society, to be sure, does not like this very well; it saith, Whoso goes to walk alone, accuses the whole world; [...] Meantime, this retirement does not proceed from any whim on the part of these separators; but if any one will take pains to talk with them, he will find that this part is chosen both from temperament and from principle; [...] --they are not stockish or brute, - but joyous; susceptible, affectionate; they have even more than others a great wish to be loved.<sup>240</sup>

From Emerson's writing here and so far, it is possible to see that he indeed does prefer to be alone, or at least not violated by any "society".<sup>241</sup> For Emerson, "society" becomes an accusative force, that violates and restricts him. This concern with not being "violated" could be very well compared to John Dewey's approach of "greater individualization" that supports these introverted tendencies, but at the same time also advocates an interhuman cooperation in a "broader community of interest".<sup>242</sup> Ultimately, however, Emerson talks about the psychology of personality of an introverted person. For him, this preference is almost inevitable, for lifestyle of solitude is chosen "both from temperament and from principle." Thus, Emerson already recognizes the congenital role of temperament in these individuals.<sup>243</sup> These persons are "susceptible" and "affectionate" and are overall more sensitive to the outside stimulus, and also have a "great wish to be loved", which suggests that Emerson could be foreshadowing the idea of what is today known as "highly sensitive person".<sup>244</sup> Emerson then develops his individualism further in his later essays, where he thinks not only about political individualism, but also about upbringing and education.

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<sup>239</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 99.

<sup>240</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 103.

<sup>241</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 144. See also Poirier, "Self-Reliance," 136: "For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure." and compare with Poirier, "The Transcendentalist," 103: "Society, to be sure, does not like this very well"

<sup>242</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 373.

<sup>243</sup> Marek Blatný, et. al., *Psychologie Osobnosti* (Praha, Grada Publishing, 2010) 23.

<sup>244</sup> Elaine N. Aron, "Introversion, Extroversion and the Highly Sensitive Person," *Psychologytoday.com*, Sussex Publishers, May 2018 < <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-highly-sensitive-person/201805/introversion-extroversion-and-the-highly-sensitive-person> > 4 Mar 2019.

In his essay “Politics” Emerson approaches two topics from an individualistic perspective. First, he ponders on the role of the state, which he later transforms into a contemplation on the educational dynamics between him and his child. After that, more consideration of the role of the state appears. We shall have a look at these two elements nearing the end of the essay.

This undertaking for another, is the blunder which stands in colossal ugliness in the governments of the world.<sup>245</sup> [...] If I put myself in the place of my child, and we stand in one thought, and see that things are thus or thus, that perception is law for him and me. We are both there, both act. But if, without carrying him into the thought, I look over into his plot, and, guessing how it is with him, ordain this or that, he will never obey me. This is the history of governments, - one man does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me;<sup>246</sup> [...] Hence, the less government we have, the better.<sup>247</sup>

Emerson starts out with a blunt criticism of government, anticipating in tone H.D. Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience”<sup>248</sup> by calling “government[s]” a “colossal ugliness”. This political self-reliance is then quickly followed and compared with a short passage on the education of a child. Emerson “put[s]” himself “in the place” of his child, he wants to “stand in one thought” with him, so as to merge their perceptions, for “perception is law for him and me”. Here Emerson might be anticipating what psychology today calls “empathy”;<sup>249</sup> Pragmatism, and even Emerson himself in his other works on perspectivism, could however point out one chief problem: we cannot “stand in one thought” with anyone. We are isolated in our perception.<sup>250</sup> Despite this contradiction, Emerson further maintains that the same “law” must be perceived by both parties, in order that the child may “obey” him (the educator may be it a parent or a

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<sup>245</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 255.

<sup>246</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 255.

<sup>247</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 255.

<sup>248</sup> Henry David Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” *The Project Gutenberg*, last updated January 18, 2018: 3, Project Gutenberg <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/71>>, 2 Feb 2019.

<sup>249</sup> “Empathy,” *Psychology Today.com*, Sussex Publishers <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy>> 5 Mar 2019.

<sup>250</sup> Robbins 113. “Since each consciousness inhabits its own perceptual universe, and since therefore none is in a position to judge any other (or even earlier or later versions of itself), all points of view, all angles of vision, are equally valid.”

teacher). The educator should at least attempt to “stand in one thought” with the child/student, even if it is impossible to achieve this completely. This educational empathy is also one of the central points of interest for a pragmatist philosopher of education, John Dewey. Emerson’s approach here perfectly predates Dewey’s approach to career guidance in his “Aims in Education”, where he maintains that the “educational aim must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs [...] of the given individual”.<sup>251</sup> This is precisely reflected in Emerson’s idea of “look[ing] over into his plot, and guessing how it is with him”, without first at least considering the perspective of the child. If this “look[ing] over” into the plot of the child is done unempathetically, he or she will never obey (respond to the “ordain[ing]” of) the educator. Dewey sees this originality of a child, this “plot”, as “intrinsic activities and needs” that is, “original instincts” on one part and “acquired habits” on the other, all within the “given individual”.<sup>252</sup> For Dewey, then, any kind of aim in education (or the “ordain[ing]” of Emerson) must not be remote, and external, so the child might not be demotivated by the “the vice of externally imposed ends”<sup>253</sup> but any successful aim has to flow from within the child’s originality, or as Emerson would put it, “instinct”. This approach, of course, bears several restrictions, which will be examined in the second part of Dewey’s method . Additionally, Dewey reflects this element of Emersonian education in his “Education as Growth”, where he directly quotes Emerson, but also builds on his thought:

I answer, - Respect the child, respect him to the end, but also respect yourself... The two points in a boy’s training are, to keep his *naturel* and train off all but that [...] stop off his uproar, fooling, and horse-play;<sup>254</sup> keep his nature *and arm it with knowledge in the very direction in which it points*<sup>255</sup>

Emerson’s empathy expressed as the ability to “stand in one thought” is his own chief concern for an educator, and John Dewey reflects this notion by citing Emerson dictum of

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<sup>251</sup> Dewey 114.

<sup>252</sup> Dewey 114.

<sup>253</sup> Dewey 115.

<sup>254</sup> Edward W. Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 144. Cited from “Education as Growth” in Dewey 57. “stop off his uproar, fooling and horse-play”

<sup>255</sup> Dewey, 57.

“Respect the child” – in other words think about the child! What both Dewey and Emerson are trying to say by this, is that an educator, be it a parent or a teacher, needs first and foremost to empathize and think a lot with and about the child<sup>256</sup> – “respect him” as you “respect yourself”. Through this method of thinking, the educator and the child should “stand in one thought”, so that they are “both there, both act” in synchronicity. The educator and the child should be, quite colloquially, on the same page, in order that the educator might be empathetic but fair.

Finally, Emerson’s broadly encompassing statement “the less government we have, the better” is not only a cue for political orientation, but also has strong applications in educational theory. For example, Dewey in his “progressive educational theory” maintains that:

Social integration must be understood to flow from the free development of individuality in the direction of benevolence. It cannot be imposed from above. It must develop, in other words, from the democratic ethos of the citizenry.<sup>257</sup>

For Dewey, the Emersonian “government” which could affect the “flow” that makes possible “the free development of individuality” is something unacceptable. “Social integration” (which is a facet of Dewey’s educational theory) must not be “imposed from above”, be it by the government or any other authority outside the individual. Ultimately then, both Dewey’s “social integration” and “intrinsic activities and needs” stem with equal strength from his philosophy that is “infused with the love of individuality and community, and rooted in the Emersonian theodicy”<sup>258</sup> that the two may be reconciled. Turning back to Emerson, his most

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<sup>256</sup> Even more charmingly, Dewey writes about this exact same method few lines further on the page 57: “And as Emerson goes on to show this reverence for childhood and youth instead of opening up an easy and easy-going path to the instructors, ‘involves at once immense claims in the time, the thought, on the life of the teacher. It requires time, use, insight, event, all the great lessons and assistances of God; and only to think of using it implies character and profoundness.’”

<sup>257</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 377.

<sup>258</sup> West, 103.

radical individualism appears in his apparent dissatisfaction with the state of humanity in general in his “Considerations by the Way”<sup>259</sup>.

Emerson, along with William James, is a strong individualist.<sup>260</sup> This is in contrast with the fact that most pragmatists were essentially supportive of social engagement,<sup>261</sup> and most of them advocate a middle-of-the-road approach. In his late work called “Considerations by the Way”, Emerson’s individualism appears to the reader in the strongest, almost Nietzschean force.<sup>262</sup>

Masses! the calamity is the masses. I do not wish any mass at all, but honest men only, lovely, sweet, accomplished women only, and no [...] narrow-brained, gin-drinking million stockingers or lazzaroni at all. If government knew how, I should like to see it check, not multiply the population. [begin page 384] ... Nature makes fifty poor melons for one that is good, and shakes down a tree full of gnarled, wormy, unripe crabs, before you can find a dozen dessert apples;<sup>263</sup> [...] The mass are animal, in pupilage, and near chimpanzee. [begin page 385] ... To say then, the majority are wicked, means no malice, no bad heart in the observer, but, simply, that the majority are unripe, and have not yet come to themselves,<sup>264</sup>

This essay is one of the key points of contention in understanding Emerson. Emerson’s radical individualism here appears in its fullest extent, as we can see in his strong expression: “Masses! the calamity is the masses”. Again, this strong individualism can be seen in Richard Rorty being criticized by Bernstein that in his strong readings, he wants “to excise all the passages in their works which do bear on our public lives.”,<sup>265</sup> and thus concentrates more on his private projects of re-description in his private consciousness. On the other hand, Cornel West’s understanding of pragmatism as “prophetic pragmatism” is one that is a “material force for individuality and democracy,”<sup>266</sup> “democracy” being a notion that comes closer to the ideas of social participation. This approach stems from West’s understanding of Dewey’s

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<sup>259</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 383: “Masses are rude, lame, unmade pernicious in their demands and influence,” and “Masses! the calamity is the masses.”

<sup>260</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 68. James’ individual is a version of Emerson’s individual.

<sup>261</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 114.

<sup>262</sup> Rorty, 35. “What makes Freud more useful and more plausible than Nietzsche is that he does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals.”

<sup>263</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 383-384.

<sup>264</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 384-385.

<sup>265</sup> Bernstein Chapter 9, subsection “Private and public”, paragraph 2.

<sup>266</sup> West 232.

social individualism, in which democracy is a system “in which self-creation and communal participation flourish in all their diversity and plurality”.<sup>267</sup> West sees one of the crucial aspects of Dewey’s vision in the formation of a society in which the development of “self-begetting individuals” is happening in “self-regulating communities”.<sup>268</sup> And it is this last concern with a community of “self-begetting individuals”, where Emerson subtly ties himself in with these thinkers, by stating that he does not wish “any mass at all”, but “honest men only”. Thus, while remaining severely critical of “masses” (as he was even in his early Sermons), when looking deep enough into his lines we can see that Emerson did not in fact relegate everyone to “lazzaroni” or “poor melons”, but rather hankered to see more development of individuals in his contemporary society. In other words, while Emerson scornfully considers the “mass [of people]” to be “animal”, these are immediately mentioned to be in “pupilage”. And this is the exact place where Dewey’s “education as growth” philosophy ties in. The education of John Dewey aimed to promote “greater individualization” and at the same time “broader community of interest” that would not be too individualistic, but would be “sheltering a core of personal integrity from intrusions of community”.<sup>269</sup> While Emerson uses a very powerful dictum, upon closer inspection we might see that any time he uses a scolding phrase, a phrase denoting general immaturity is used immediately after. Consider, “unripe crabs” and “dessert apples”, “animal” and “in pupilage”,<sup>270</sup> “accomplished women” vs. “narrow-brained[...] stockings.” Even at this pinnacle of frustration, Emerson does not lose his warm reverence to people by concluding that “the majority are wicked”, but rather sees that “the majority are unripe, and have not yet

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<sup>267</sup> West 103.

<sup>268</sup> West 103.

<sup>269</sup> Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* 373.

<sup>270</sup> An interesting perspective could be provided by Dewey’s reverential approach to immaturity as a thing privative in nature. This could have been directly influenced by this especially strong dictum of Emerson.

come to themselves”.<sup>271</sup> Emerson, however, intends “no malice” and remorsefully adds that the “observer” of this has “no bad heart”, but rather that he still remains subjunctively hopeful the mass of individuals may “yet” “self-actualize”<sup>272</sup>. Since Emerson believes that these individuals “have not yet come to themselves”, the final connecting point will then be John Dewey’s approach of “education as growth”. Dewey also builds on this perspective of “masses” being “wicked” although he does not state so explicitly, but rather already offers a solution in his philosophy of growth. This philosophy of growth is also closely tied to Dewey’s deep belief in equality of moral worth<sup>273</sup> appearing in his notion of “social efficiency”, which attempts to break down “the barriers of social stratification”<sup>274</sup> that isolate individuals, rendering them, to a greater or lesser extent, impervious to the interests of others. The “chief constituent” and “only guarantee” of this “social efficiency” is “intelligent sympathy or good will” which prevents the misuse of “social efficiency” by an external authority.<sup>275</sup> Ultimately then, Dewey maintains that:

What is sometimes called a benevolent interest in others may be but an unwitting mask for an attempt to dictate to them what their good shall be, and find the good of their own choice. Social efficiency, even social service, are hard and metallic things when severed from an active acknowledgement of the diversity of goods which life may afford to different persons, and from faith in the social utility of encouraging every individual to make his own choice intelligent.<sup>276</sup>

To prevent the manipulation of an individual, and to ensure his/her genuine growth, the acknowledgement of the “diversity of goods” for “different persons” and “faith in social utility of encouraging every individual to make his own choice intelligent”<sup>277</sup> must be present

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<sup>271</sup> This is brilliantly reflected in Emerson’s early “Sermon XXVII” by his expression “Know thyself” as a “hardest and highest precept of human duty” (226), and also reflected in Hook’s *Metaphysics of Pragmatism* by his exhortation for people to attain “self-knowledge”, 137.

<sup>272</sup> Emerson challenges the reader to find his/her own interpretation. The challenge here is, what exactly constitutes Emerson’s “come to themselves”. This could be either Rortian liberal ironist (“strong poets”, see Bernstein Chapter 9, subsection “Rorty’s heroes”, paragraph 4), or it might be a Maslowian “self-actualizer” (see Nolen-Hoeksema 487.) or it could be Dewey’s socially efficient individual.

<sup>273</sup> Hook, “Introduction” xii.

<sup>274</sup> Dewey 127.

<sup>275</sup> Dewey 127.

<sup>276</sup> Dewey 128.

<sup>277</sup> In Emersonian language: natural

in the educator. While Dewey might not be denying that “Nature makes fifty poor melons”, he does not see this fact as being pertinent to a teacher’s/educator’s job.<sup>278</sup> Dewey does not care about the individual quantity of intelligence or ability.<sup>279</sup> Morally, this is just not important. Furthermore, he does believe that growth comes naturally,<sup>280</sup> especially to children. And in this spirit of his social individualism, he maintains that if a true democratic society is to have

a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all.<sup>281</sup>

Just as Emerson, Dewey also believes (albeit covertly) that the “majority are wicked”, or rather “unripe”, but as he had a chance to ruminate on Emerson’s and other ideas in his era, he could advance further into the practical solutions and answers needed to remedy the situation. Firstly, a certain “social return”, that is, a type of usefulness is expected<sup>282</sup> from every single person. Secondly, everyone, be it “poor melons” or naturally gifted “dessert apples” have an “opportunity for development of distinctive capacities”. The goal in this democratic development of an individual is not to “force a line of action contrary to natural inclinations” but rather development of “social sympathy.”<sup>283</sup> This “sympathy” (or “imaginative empathy”<sup>284</sup>) allows an individual to live harmoniously with others. Moreover, “every existence deserving the name of existence has something unique and irreplaceable about it”<sup>285</sup> and deserves to live, cooperate, and exist in a broader society, in harmony with his or her natural temper. This approach of combined reverence for individual originality and social functioning can be seen as the connecting tissue between Emerson’s seeming indignation with

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<sup>278</sup> Hook “Introduction” xiii. “How one person’s abilities compare in quantity with those of another is none of the teacher’s business. It is irrelevant to his work.”

<sup>279</sup> Westbrook 364. amiably says: “All differences in quantity of ability are negated by the fact of irreplaceable individuality”

<sup>280</sup> Dewey 47. “Growth is not something done to them; it is something they do.”

<sup>281</sup> Dewey, 129.

<sup>282</sup> Dewey 128.: “expected” not by any external authority, but in the Deweyan sense that the individual goes to “find the good of their own choice”.

<sup>283</sup> Westbrook 172.

<sup>284</sup> Bernstein, Chapter 9, subsection “Redescription and humiliation”, paragraph 2.

<sup>285</sup> Westbrook 364.

“masses”, and his reverence for each individual; as well as with the approaches of later pragmatists that included the societal aspect of life into the pragmatic method of thinking.

## 6. Conclusion: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Pragmatism

*I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture.*<sup>286</sup>

For Emerson, this is perhaps one of the most encompassing phrases of his work examined in this thesis. Reading Emerson can be quite daunting, for he wants to provoke the reader truly to look and try to create his or her own meaning. But the quoted line above from “Experience” emanates a powerful sense of humility – a realization and perhaps a resolve to “know better” than to think we know something for certain at all. For Emerson, and for the pragmatic thinkers examined in this thesis, this statement encapsulates the deep core in the pragmatic method of thinking. After introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provided an overview of the concern with a practical result/difference in Emerson and other pragmatists. Chapter 3 showed us that we might do well not to expect any “completeness” for “[our] picture” but rather keep our guard up in a world that continuously goes forward, and adapt to its fugacity. Any complete “picture” in this world might not do well for our purposes. Chapter 4 might then make us painfully aware of our isolation in our own perspective and consciousness, but might also provide us with a sense of liberation stemming from our creative consciousness that has the ability to construct the loftiest structures in our dreams. While the “picture” is incomplete, it is also just that, a “picture”, not a direct copy of reality. Chapter 5 then stresses the “my” and “I” element, for it inspects Emersonian individualism, the ultimate “my” of our mental “picture” and perspective, and the “I” of any opinion we might voice. And our Conclusion might lead us to a singular realization: Reading Emerson is a challenge. His prose quite often veils itself from the reader, but this is perhaps due to the fact that for Emerson himself, his words refuse adequately to represent what he believes to be the “stream of his own experience”.<sup>287</sup> Richard Poirier, in all this struggle for understanding, offers a piece of

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<sup>286</sup> Poirier, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* 233.

<sup>287</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 27.

invaluable advice: “Good reading and good writing are, first and last, lots of work”.<sup>288</sup>

Indeed, reading Emerson is “lots of work”, but this is perhaps what Waldo Emerson wanted his readers to experience when reading his works; because for him “there is creative reading as well as creative writing.”<sup>289</sup> What Emerson tries to do is to challenge the reader not actually to understand one “correct” interpretation of his work, but rather by reading creatively to become the creator (or at least a co-creator) of its meaning. The reader should become creatively involved when establishing the meaning of the text; hence Emerson’s concern with “creative reading”. And it might be this element of creative participation in finding the meaning in his work that appears daunting to so many; but in an Emersonian democratic sense, everyone is invited to interpret. Moreover, if we consider Emerson to be a good writer, we might end up complimenting ourselves along with his work-- for “’Tis the good reader that makes the good book.”<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* 174.

<sup>289</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal B, 29 October 1836, p. 286, in *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, William H. Gilman and Ralph H. Orth, chief editors, 16 volumes (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960-1982), 5:233.

<sup>290</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Success”, *Society and Solitude*, paragraph 18, in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10 volumes (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971-2013), 7:150.

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