

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., thesis director

Peter Luba

B.A. thesis evaluation

Pragmatic Method, Transformation, Perspectivism, and Individualism: The Cornerstone of Pragmatism Laid by Ralph Waldo Emerson

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In this thesis, Mr. Luba aims to investigate the sources and correspondences between the philosophical work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the philosophy of pragmatism. Emerson, as one of the chief figures of American philosophy, laid the cornerstone of the pragmatic method of thinking, which later was 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 was 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.

The thesis examines four main characteristics of the pragmatic method of thinking, and each of these has a chapter devoted to it. 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 the 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 examines the possibilities of applying creative agency in education. Chapter 5 then considers Emersonian Pragmatic Individualism, examining Emerson's position on solitude but also Dewey's mix of solitude and society. Finally, the Conclusion offers an overview of the thesis, and an acknowledgment 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.

In all of these areas, Mr. Luba has provided a knowledgeable and illuminating commentary on some of the central problematics of the American Renaissance and on the relationship between Emerson's rapid-evolving (and dissolving) "Transcendentalism" and the proto-Pragmatism (and beyond) into which he was progressively venturing. The inclusion of material from the oft-neglected sermons, seedbed of the epistemological premises crucial to Emerson's subsequent philosophical, ethical, and theological vector(s), is much to be appreciated, and invaluable in helping the reader understand the theoretical dynamics underlying Emerson's future transitions, transformations, and boundary-crossings (or erasures). Mr. Luba's frequent, but never redundant, citations of the congruences between Emerson's and William James's thoughts and formulations are particularly demonstrative of the central contention of his thesis. In short, while not all of the possible questions and issues surrounding the metamorphosis of Romantic (subjective) idealism into Modernist pragmatism, fictionalism, and existentialism have been addressed in this thesis, the number of them that has been, and the competence with which it has been done, far exceeds any reasonable expectation at the B.A. level. The language with which the author expresses himself is thoughtfully chosen, revealing a mastery of vocabulary, syntax, and diction more

than adequate to the undertaking (including, most critically, the reading and exposition of Emerson's work). The bibliography is well-chosen and comprehensive for the topic, and the materials contained in it are well digested and put in appropriate interrelation.

I have, in short, no significant reservations regarding, nor negative criticisms of, Mr. Luba's product. All in all, Mr Luba has fashioned a well-researched, sensitive, intelligent, nuanced, and valuable B.A. undertaking. Because of its impressive quality, and because of the exceptional grasp of the scope and depth of the subject matter which it reveals, I believe that this thesis merits an evaluation of "1, vyborne."

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne."

Signed:

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June 9, 2019

If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz.