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The Ethics and Politics of Friendship in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

by

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According to Derrida, “Thought, in so far as it is to be *for man*, cannot take place without *philia*.”[1] The thinker who I am and the thoughts that I think in the following pages are gifts to me from my friends. My unending love and gratitude to my mother and father, who believed in me, loved me, and let me become who I am. My gratitude to my teachers, who have laid before me a provocation without end: Thomas Carlson, whose voice calls me to be myself; Andrew Norris, whose voice calls me to be strong; Christine Thomas, whose voice tells me I can do it. My thanks especially to my colleagues at UCSB who have granted me the gift of friendship and conversation, especially Garret Baer, Martin Becker, Eva Braunstein, and Stuart Nelson. My love and thanks also to Emerson, my constant companion and a very good boy. My thanks to my friends Candace, Christine, Earl, Myriad, and Theresa who have been society to my solitude and a reminder of who I am. My thanks to the faculty, staff, and students of the UCSB McNair Scholars Program, who have supported my ability to acknowledge myself and those around me.

[1] *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 224

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ABSTRACT

The Ethics and Politics of Friendship in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche

by

Christopher Thomas Morales

Researchers in religious studies, political theory, economics, and history have drawn attention to the dialectical emergence of modern capitalism along with new ways of being-in-the-world and understandings about what constitutes a full and free life. Max Weber's classic text on the emergence of modern capitalism in Protestant contexts argues that Protestant understandings of predestination, faith, and secular asceticism supported ways of being-in-the-world and working that are highly conducive to the emergence of modern capitalism. Mark C. Taylor's *Speed Limits* continues Weber's line of thought, arguing that the obsession with convenience and accumulation, and the understanding that the hand of God has been replaced by the invisible hand of the market, have given rise to a postmodern finance capitalism that is decoupled from reality. In his recent work, Nobel Prize winning economist Edmund Phelps argues that the emergence of a modern, dynamic capitalism in the U.S. during the nineteenth century was made possible and supported by the displacement of traditional communitarian values by emerging modern values centered around individualism and self-expression. Taken together, the general sense is of the emergence of a new egoistical individualism shaped by and shaping the capitalist culture that emerged in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. This

modern subject's greed, vanity, and aversion to pain have brought the modern world to the precipice of economic, political, and ecological disaster.

This dissertation brings together Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche, two philosophers who have been read as prophets of a strong modern individualism, but who I claim require society as much as solitude. Emerson is well known for his philosophy of self-reliance, but the meaning of self-reliance has often been misinterpreted as self-sufficiency, as in the ideal of the self-made man, and as a foundation of egoism and narcissism in U.S. culture.[2] Due to his emphasis on the development of the individual human, Emerson has been seen as offering little in the way of ethical or political concern for other people. He has been widely critiqued for his alleged failure to respond in meaningful ways to slavery and the Civil War.[3] Nietzsche's individualism has led to his ejection from conversations of politics and ethics.[4] More dramatically, misreadings of his individualism led to his appropriation by twentieth and twenty-first century fascists. Nietzsche was so popular among twentieth century fascists that Adolf Hitler is said to have gifted the collected works of Nietzsche to Mussolini on his birthday.[5] Bringing together Emerson and Nietzsche not only helps to correct their egoistic images, but it also contributes to the ongoing exploration of Emerson's influence on Nietzsche, who, according to Cavell, was Emerson's greatest nineteenth century reader. This research thus positions Emerson as an important fountainhead for modern European philosophy, in the fields of phenomenology and existentialism.

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[2] Anderson
[3] Gougeon
[4] See Rawls and Nussbaum on how Nietzsche's philosophy is unfit for political thought and Bonhoeffer on how Nietzsche is unethical.
[5] Levy, Oscar. "Nietzsche to Mussolini." *New York Times*. August 22, 1943. p. 8

Reading Emerson and Nietzsche on friendship, I uncover the existential, ethical, and political ways that friends contribute to one's capacities to think and to be oneself, and thus to be free in a real and meaningful way. I show how Emerson and Nietzsche identify the emergence of a modern egoism supported by capitalist choice and consumption and how they respond through the articulation of a strong individualism that finds freedom in commitment and friendly relationships with other people. In uncovering the role of friendship in Emerson and Nietzsche, I bring to light ethical and political considerations related to neighborliness, vanity, agonism, conversation, pain, hospitality, and love.

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INTRODUCTION: Modern Capitalism and Egoism

During the nineteenth century the United States underwent a period of dramatic economic progress and technological invention which could be seen, as Mark Twain described it, in "the drive, and push, and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century!"[6] In his classic work, *The Market Revolution*, historian Charles Sellers describes how during the period from 1815-1846, which he deems the Jacksonian Market Revolution, capitalism moved beyond a form of economic exchange and began to restructure social relationships and American ways of being-in-the-world.[7] Nobel Prize winning economist Edmund Phelps argues that the economic boom in the U.S. economy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was made possible by the emergence and popularization of modern values including individualism (which Phelps traces in Luther, Jefferson, and Emerson), vitalism (exemplified in Cervantes, Hegel, and Twain), and self-expression (in Voltaire, Goethe, and Verne).[8] Phelps argues that these modern values displaced traditional, communitarian values, supporting a dynamic and thriving economy based in exploration and development. What Phelps overlooks is the degree to which loving and solicitous relationships are necessary for and supportive of the creative exploration of self and the development of one's capacities that we would recognize as a fulfilling and flourishing life.

Abraham Lincoln captured the mood of the emerging capitalistic culture in his 1858 lecture where he said of Young America,

> Thousands of hands are engaged in producing fresh supplies, and other thousands, in bringing them to him. The iron horse is panting, and impatient, to carry him everywhere, in no time; and the lightening [sic.] stands ready harnessed to take and bring his tidings in a trifle less than no time. He owns a

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6 Quoted in Ziff, Larzer. *Mark Twain*, p. 2
7 Sellers, Charles. *The Market Revolution*.
8 Phelps, pp. 9-17

> large part of the world, by right of possessing it; and all the rest by right of *wanting* it, and *intending* to have it… He has a great passion—a perfect "rage"—for the "*new*."[9]

Lincoln could already see, without obvious contempt, the networks of unsightly labor that provide for new kinds of insatiable consumption and the manipulation of nature that provides for an unending and petulant expectation of convenience. Max Weber's classic theory connecting the emergence of modern capitalism to the spread of Protestant values opens the way for thinking about how modern capitalism dialectically shapes modern values. The emergence of modern U.S. capitalism was accompanied by the emergence of a modern U.S. egoism that finds support in understandings of freedom and human flourishing as rooted in an individual's capacity for unencumbered choice, consumption, and possession. Where Weber traced the Protestant support of modern capitalism, this dissertation focuses on how Emerson and Nietzsche, two ex-Protestants, formulate responses to capitalism and modern egoism using the logic of predestination and vocation.

The expansion of railroads, the invention of the steamboat, and the building of canals and turnpikes through the American Northeast made it possible to ship farm products cheaply from the Midwest where land was cheap and plentiful. Even from her relatively sedentary perspective in Amherst, Emily Dickinson noted how the new locomotives could "lap the Miles – / And lick the Valleys up."[10] The U.S. population began concentrating in densely populated industrialized cities and migrating westward towards new industrial forms of farming. As Emerson observed,

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[9] Lincoln. "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions," April 6, 1858. Available at: <https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/discoveries.htm>. Accessed: April 29, 2022.

[10] Dickinson, "586," p. 286

> The inventions of the last fifty years counterpoise those of the fifty centuries before them. For the vast production and manifold application of iron is new; and our common and indispensable utensils of house and farm are new; the sewing-machine, the power-loom, the McCormick reaper, the mowing-machines, gas-light, lucifer matches, and the immense productions of the laboratory, are new in this century, and one franc's worth of coal does the work of a laborer for twenty days.[11]

Spurred by advances in technology that pushed Americans to greater specialization and reliance on the market, American capitalism supported the emergence of new ways of understanding oneself in relation to others and the world.

During the Jacksonian Market Revolution, Emerson witnessed the emergence of a newly distractible, greedy, and egoistic American way of being. In his 1844 essay, "The Young American," Emerson describes how new railways and roads annihilated the distances between people and places, supporting "an American sentiment":

> Not only is distance annihilated, but when, as now, the locomotive and the steamboat, like enormous shuttles, shoot every day across the thousand various threads of national descent and employment, and bind them fast in one web, an hourly assimilation goes forward, and there is no danger that local peculiarities and hostilities should be preserved.[12]

The population began resembling less the self-sufficient life of New England yeoman farmers and came to be organized into networks of economic interdependence typical of advanced capitalism, prompting Emerson to write, "Commerce, is the political fact of most significance to the American at this hour."[13] Farmers began specializing in the mass production of single crops for the market, while city dwellers became entirely dependent on the market to provide the necessities of life. As Emerson notes, "the farmer who is not wanted by others can yet grow

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[11] "Works and Days," in *Society and Solitude*, pp. 159-160
[12] "The Young American," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, p. 293
[13] Ibid., p. 296

his own bread, whilst the manufacturer or the trader, who is not wanted, cannot."[14] We can already see in Emerson's essay the tensions between the ideal of network culture as democratizing and connecting and the reality of network culture as balkanizing. He forecasts that peculiarities will give way to a shared American sentiment, but also recognizes that manufacturers, traders, and farmers will have diverging interests.

As Mark C. Taylor discusses in his study of the impacts of nineteenth century capitalism on modern subjectivity, "Increasing connectivity through high-speed transportation, information, communication, and financial networks not only draws people closer together, but also creates deep social, political, and economic divisions."[15] More than geographic and economic networks of exchange, the emergence of a culture of capitalism in the U.S. created new concepts of subjectivity and freedom. The culture of capitalism supports the emergence of a subject that is in possession of itself, that seeks the satisfaction of its needs, and that understands freedom in terms of arbitrary choice, consumption, and possession. The modern, egoistic subject is skeptical of other people and the obligations and sacrifices that life in community might demand. This skeptical egoism and unwillingness to trust and live with others supports, as Taylor argues, the destruction of our natural environment and, as Hannah Arendt argues, the emergence of anti-democratic and totalitarian politics.[16] It is this subject

[14] Ibid., p. 344
[15] Taylor, *Speed Limits*, p. 182
[16] Arendt argues in several places that political loneliness (i.e., the inability to trust others or accept their promises) was a major factor in the emergence of twentieth century totalitarianism. She makes this argument movingly in the final pages of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she explains that since one's identity depends on confirmation from others, an inability to trust others leads to an inability to trust oneself, and thus "Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time… What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions such as old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever growing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism

that Emerson critiques in his theories of self-reliance and freedom as commitment, and it is this critique that founds, by way of Nietzsche, Derrida's radical hospitality and Taylor's a/theological deconstruction of the self and his hope for a subject that delights in generosity. Confronting the problems of the contemporary world and learning to cohabitate on a finite and spherical planet require ethics and politics that recognize the essential interconnection of things, whereas interconnection is precisely what modern culture and politics increasingly obscure.

Without the language, concepts, or temperament to mount a Marxist critique, Emerson describes how he sees economics displacing politics and reducing humans to their market value. He writes,

> Trade goes to make the governments insignificant, and to bring every kind of faculty of every individual that can in any manner serve any person, 'on sale.' Instead of a huge Army and Navy, and Executive Departments, it converts Government into an Intelligence-Office, where every man may find what he wishes to buy, and expose what he has to sell, not only produce and manufactures, but art, skill, and intellectual and moral values. This is the good and this the evil of trade, that it would put everything into market, talent, beauty, virtue, and man himself.[17]

The Revolutionary era ideal of the self-sufficient and moral yeoman farmer, whose family produced what they needed for a modest lifestyle, gave way to the ideal of the self-made man, a term coined by Henry Clay in his February 2, 1832 speech on the Senate floor, "The American System," and later popularized by Frederick Douglass.

Douglass articulated the idea of the self-made man in his lecture of that title, where he invokes Emersonian self-reliance as his inspiration. Douglass's formulation of the self-made

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drives and organizes the masses looks like a suicidal escape from this reality… a last support in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon." (pp. 175-176)

[17] "Young American."

man is of a man who creates his destiny, often against the best attempts of society to keep him down. In the common imagination, this is a person who, without any of the originally intended irony of the statement, pulls himself up by his own bootstraps. Self-making came to describe men who grew up poor but achieved economic and political success, as in the common example not only of Douglass himself, but also of Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Carnegie. The conflation in American culture of self-reliance with economic self-sufficiency understood as the capacity to possess, consume, and make arbitrary personal choices led President Bill Clinton to push back in his 1996 State of the Union Address where he said, "The era of big government is over. But we cannot go back to a time when our citizens were left to fend for themselves… Self-reliance and teamwork are not opposing virtues; we must have both."[18] A main argument of this dissertation is not merely that society needs both self-reliance and teamwork, but that self-reliance and teamwork need each other to be what they are, which is to say, we, individual humans, need each other to be who we are.

Douglass's formulation of this idea recognizes that no person can ultimately be self-sufficient. He writes of the self-made man, "That there is, in more respects than one, something like a solecism in this title, I freely admit. Properly speaking, there are in the world no such men as self-made men. That term implies an individual independence of the past and present which can never exist."[19] In the common imagination and later readings, both of the self-made man and of self-reliance, readers would ignore the recognition on the parts of both Emerson and Douglass that even highly developed individuals require other people

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[18] Clinton, William J. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union." January 23, 1996.
Available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-10>. Accessed June 5, 2022.
[19] Douglass, Frederick. "Self-Made Men."

> Mr. Emerson has declared that it is natural to believe in great men. We seek out our wisest and best man, the man who, by eloquence or the sword compels us to believe him such, and make him our leader, prophet, preacher, and law giver. We do this, not because he is essentially different from us, but because of his identity with us. He is our best representative and reflects, on a colossal scale, the scale to which we would aspire, our highest aims, objects, powers and possibilities.[20]

The self-reliant person is not one who is recognized by self-sufficiency, but rather one who is recognized by exemplarity. Self-reliance is one's way of being-in-the-world when one is at one's best; an inspiration (in the original sense of a divine guidance) and reminder of one's future self. One unfolds a self-reliant life thanks to the inspiration one receives from others. The self-reliant person is exemplary and admirable precisely because of her way of manifesting what it means to be human, and not because she is made differently. For Emerson, the idea of a self-made man is close to blasphemy since for him people are at their best when they are made by God.

Nietzsche's inheritance of Emerson

The influence of Emerson on Nietzsche has been well documented since Charles Andler's 1931, *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée*, wherein the Sorbonne professor of German language posits a connection between Emerson and Nietzsche based on their philosophical similarities. Andler's analysis was later confirmed by Max Weber's nephew, the German Americanist Eduard Baumgarten, who was ultimately denounced as an enemy of the Reich by Heidegger over his alleged Americanization of Nietzsche. Baumgarten's archival research reveals the extent of Nietzsche's reading of Emerson through an examination of Nietzsche's

[20] Ibid.

annotated copies of Emerson's work in translation.[21] In spite of these early studies, and a few other noteworthy contemporary projects, especially by Stanley Cavell and Benedetta Zavatta, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to this important influence during the nineteenth century of American thought on German thought.

Nietzsche and Emerson scholars have proposed political and philosophical explanations for the general unwillingness in both American and German academic circles to acknowledge Nietzsche's inheritance of Emerson. Ralph Bauer, Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, claims that for American scholars, "the alleged connection between Emerson, originator of a distinctly indigenous American and democratic philosophy, and Nietzsche, demonic symbol of German autocracy and eccentricity, has been considered a desecration of a national icon."[22] European scholars, on the other hand, prefer to imagine the stream of intellectual influence flowing from Europe to America rather than vice versa. Thus, even Europeans who recognize the Emerson-Nietzsche connection prefer to think of Emerson as an "American Nietzsche."[23]

Nietzsche was not alone among Germans in his appreciation of Emerson. Emerson was read widely by his German contemporaries, who, Bauer points out, were ironically largely critics of Nietzsche, finding in Emerson a proponent of German Idealism.[24] Because of this intellectual divide in Germany and the general antagonism to Nietzsche in the U.S.—where he was long misinterpreted as a philosopher of Nazism—it is no coincidence that the first scholar to make an issue of the connection was a professor in France, Charles Andler. Andler claims

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[21] Bauer, p. 69
[22] Bauer, p. 69. See also Stack, pp. 38-39
[23] Bauer, p. 70
[24] Bauer, p. 72

that Nietzsche's early philosophical ideas "were already latent in Emerson."[25] He traced Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator* to a reading of Emerson's *Essays First Series*, translated into German as *Emersons Versuche*. For Andler, Emerson and Nietzsche are closest over what he perceives to be their "shared immoralism," which, Andler claims, figures the right and good to be whatever is dictated by one's own conscience. It is in light of this focus on individuals determining what is right for themselves that Andler makes the further claim that the goal of Emersonian and Nietzschean social thought is the promotion of a "people of individual souls." The tension between individuals who follow their own conscience and the political need to maintain the project of being a community is a major concern for modern political thought, and to which, I claim, Emerson and Nietzsche respond with the concept of friendship.

The first archival evidence of Emerson's influence on Nietzsche comes in Baumgarten's article, finally published in 1956, "Report and Observations Concerning the Influence of Emerson on Nietzsche." Studying Nietzsche's journals and his copy of *Emersons Versuche*, Baumgarten saw Emerson's influence to be most pronounced in Nietzsche's school writings, from 1862, through much of Nietzsche's early period, ending around 1872. Baumgarten claims that Nietzsche did not return to Emerson until his 1883-84 studies of the *Versuche* with Ida and Franz Overbeck.[26] Still, there is debate over the duration and periodization of Nietzsche's engagement with Emerson. George Stack, Nietzsche scholar and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University College of New York, maintains that Emerson was a strong influence only on the early Nietzsche and that this influence carries into

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[25] Andler, quoted in Bauer, p. 73

[26] Bauer, pp. 78-80

Nietzsche's later work only since "Nietzsche's earliest essays anticipate central themes of his later thought.[27] Bauer's and Stack's claims that Emerson is not influential on Nietzsche's middle period can seem reasonable only if one overlooks the role of friendship in Emerson's *Essays* and Nietzsche's middle period. In her chapter on friendship in Nietzsche, which does not identify an Emersonian influence, Ruth Abbey, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, claims that the concept of agonistic friendship is definitive of Nietzsche's middle period.[28]

There is general agreement among Nietzsche scholars that he studied Emerson's *Essays First Series*, *Essays Second Series*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Letters and Social Aims*, and "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England."[29] Moreover, as Nietzsche scholar Mason Golden points out in his archival project on Nietzsche's marginalia in his Emerson texts, "Emerson's essay 'Friendship' is one of the most heavily marked in Nietzsche's copy of *Versuche*. The essay speaks volumes to the Emerson-Nietzsche connection… A persistent antagonism of thought is essential for both Emerson and Nietzsche."[30]

Stanley Hubbard's reading of Emerson and Nietzsche seeks to save each from their popular American reputations so that Emerson is no longer a simple optimist about individual strength and Nietzsche is no longer a Nazi villain. Hubbard claims that Nietzsche's attraction to Emerson is precisely over Emerson's provocative refusal to expound a systematic and readymade philosophy. Bauer reiterates this point when he claims that "Emerson forced the young Nietzsche to discover in himself the desire for himself and inspired him to conquer

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[27] Stack, p. 48
[28] Abbey, p. 67
[29] Bauer, p. 70
[30] Golden, p. 403

himself."[31] In this way, by providing the stimulation Nietzsche needed to articulate his own thoughts and by not providing those thoughts to him, Emerson can be understood as an example of friendship in Nietzsche's philosophical development. Golden's framing of the relationship between Emerson and Nietzsche reflects this well since he claims their relationship is not founded on a simple "conveyance of ideas" but rather an "affinity of temperament."[32]

Though recently more attention has come to the Emerson-Nietzsche connection, especially thanks to the work of Stanley Cavell, there remains a vast unexplored terrain between these two thinkers. Benedetta Zavatta, Marie Curie Fellow at the French National Center for Scientific Research, points out that among the most significant concepts still to be explored in the work of Emerson and Nietzsche is friendship. Zavatta's illuminating 2019 book, *Individuality and Beyond*, examines Nietzsche's reading of Emerson, sketching out the agonistic role of friends in individual self-development and opening a ground, which this dissertation partly occupies, on the role of friendship for our understanding of freedom and human flourishing.[33] In his chapter on Nietzsche's repudiation of Christ, Kaufmann notes that "The general practice of completely ignoring Nietzsche's exaltation of friendship—though his critique of altruism cannot be correctly understood apart from this—has gone together with the false assumption that Nietzsche was decisively influenced by, and loved, only the *pre*-Socratic Greeks."[34] Even here, Kaufmann gives only a few lines to friendship, which he uses as a starting point for his discussion of the importance of Socrates for Nietzsche.

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[31] Hubbard, p. 84
[32] Golden, p. 403
[33] Zavatta, *Individuality and Beyond*, see especially pp. 128-151
[34] Kaufmann, p. 349

Stanley Cavell and political philosopher Michael Lopez each identify friendship as central to Emerson's thought, though neither develops a systematic analysis. Lopez groups friendship with nature and books, as a trio of phenomena that contribute to self-cultivation. He writes, "Each functions as an object (an 'other,' a Fichtean nonego, or NOT ME) that the mind can love and emulate—a nonself in which the self can find, as Emerson terms it, the deepest, most 'occult' sympathies and most profound inspiration."[35] Lopez's claim that friend's find themselves through the nonself (i.e., friends, nature, and books) is quite helpful, though friendship is not a main concern of his project and he does not provide a detailed analysis of how friends perform this existential, ethical, and political function. Cavell similarly identifies friendship as necessary to self-development, writing,

> Here, in this constraint by recognition and negation, is the place of the high role assigned in moral perfectionism to friendship. Aristotle speaks of the friend as 'another myself.' To see Emerson's philosophical authorship as taking up the ancient position of the friend, we have to include the inflection (more brazen in Nietzsche but no less explicit in Emerson) of my friend as my enemy (contesting my present attainments).[36]

Though Cavell does not unpack Emersonian or Nietzschean friendship, his description of friends as enemies who contest one's present attainments suggests that friends have a central role to play in perfectionism and a life lived in pursuit of one's higher self. As I discuss in detail below, the friend is an agonistic partner who encourages and provokes through love, reminding me that who I am now is not all I will ever be. Cavell makes the illuminating claim that Emerson's authorship takes up the position of the friend, a position which Cavell explicitly takes up in his own authorship. From the position of the friend, Emerson and Cavell rarely dominate their readers with arguments or solid conclusions. Their essays are like

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[35] Lopez, p. 82
[36] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and* Unhandsome, p. 59

conversations: not a mere exchange of information, but a provocation to thought and self-examination.

These studies in Emersonian and Nietzschean friendship have helpfully worked out some common themes associated with friendship and perfectionism: particularly the value of agonism, the related critique of charity, and the role of friendship in mediating society and solitude. The current project builds on past research, showing how friendship is a response to the decadent, egoistic cultures and subjectivities emerging in the nineteenth centuries that were supported by the emergence of modern capitalism and associated ideas about human freedom and flourishing. It continues the work of writers such as Stanley Cavell, Thomas Carlson, and Benedetta Zavatta, who have brought attention to the significance of Emerson for modern European philosophy through his influence on Nietzsche and Heidegger. The project goes beyond the ethical and existential significance of friendship in the lives of individuals who are becoming themselves, arguing that friendship can help us think about the political, economic, and cultural conditions that would support the creative exploration and development of people's capacities.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One interprets Emerson's concept of self-reliance within the context of his broader religious and metaphysical outlooks. I argue that self-reliance is a way of relating to oneself and God, which within the scheme of Emerson's monism amounts to the same thing. Presenting Emerson as a committed monist, this reading responds to critiques that have been raised by readers of Emerson as either a philosopher of self-sufficiency or submission. The simplest readings of Emerson take self-reliance to be a form of self-sufficiency on the model

of the self-made man, whereas more attentive readers have called attention to Emerson's emphasis on obedience and reception in self-reliance. I show how Emerson understands the human subject to be composed of an inner divine spark and a more superficial, socially mediated ego. The divine spark is present in all people and is the basis of Emerson's monism, or what I call his rooted subjectivity. The divine spark is the source of thought, spontaneity, and one's most authentic sense of oneself. When Emerson writes that "Self-reliance is reliance on God,"[37] we can interpret this phenomenologically as reliance on the spontaneous movements of one's thought.

In addition to the divine spark, Emerson describes a more superficial ego that is a more-or-less false image of oneself and that one constructs and maintains to shield one's thoughts from others. Emerson describes the ego as a reaction to the "hobgoblin of little minds": a desire for self-consistency in the eyes of others and oneself.[38] In our everyday way of comporting ourselves among other people we tend to rely on the ego rather than God. Skeptical of our essential relatedness and shared existence, we inhospitably reject difference and scar the globe with walls. Since Emerson understands thinking as a spontaneous reception we can only stand in a relation of obedience to the source of thought, whereas the ego and its construction are experienced as matters of choice and freedom. The egoistic choice and consumption by which the ego maintains itself are supported by modern capitalism, which defines freedom as choice, consumption, and ownership. The freedom to become oneself, for Emerson, is not a matter of arbitrary choice and consumption (i.e., freedom without emancipation), but obedience to the divine source of thought.

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[37] Emerson, "The Fugitive Slave Law," in *Essential Writings*, p. 788

[38] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Essential Writings*, p. 138

After unpacking self-reliance as an existential concept related to becoming who one is over the course of one's life, I turn to more immediate, phenomenological examples of this self-becoming in the egolessness of the glance and good conversation. I show how Emerson uses the glance of the eyes and the flow of good conversations as examples of the letting be of the spontaneous movements of one's thoughts. Glances and conversations are experiences in life that help us to understand the existential structure of self-reliance.

Chapter Two explains the ethical and existential significance of friendship for Emersonian self-reliance. While the theme of friendship has received limited attention in the secondary literature, this dissertation develops the existentialist contours of Emersonian friendship. This dissertation is the first project to develop a sense of the religious significance of friendship by tracing Emerson's development of this concept in his early writings and sermons. I read Emerson's final essay "Friendship" along with three previous texts that serve as the essay's drafts: his "Sermon CXL," an untitled manuscript on friendship, and his lecture "The Heart." I argue that friendship develops from a relationship that prepares one for a relationship with a transcendent God to a relationship that prepares one for a relationship with the divinity in other people.

I unpack Emerson's concept of friendship, reading him alongside two of his sources on friendship, Aristotle and Montaigne. I explain Emerson's philosophy of friendship before explaining how friendship contributes specifically to self-reliance. For Emerson, friendship is a type of love that is not limited to or necessarily found in the relationships one normally thinks of as friendships. Friendship is a type of love that can grow in many places, for example between family members, teachers and students, and even rivals. Friendship is an emancipatory love that allows one to become who one is without having to know who one is. Though we

might find friendship in unexpected places (and find it wanting in places where it is expected), friendship is exceedingly rare since it is slow to develop and impossible to intentionally choose or produce. A saying in the ancient world maintained that two people must have shared enough meals to have eaten a pound of salt before they could be considered friends. Besides this, friendship confounds the methods of the ego insofar as friendship cannot be chosen or produced. Friendship is reciprocal and generous, and friends allow each other to say what they cannot say in solitude. Finally, friendship is a love that establishes equality of value while recognizing inequalities in merit.

I argue that friendship is necessary to self-reliance since friendship is a provocation and encouragement (i.e.., it calls one forth and gives one heart) to think and speak new ideas. Friendship supports the creative exploration of oneself and the development of one's capacities without demanding that one know or suspect where this might lead. Since friends are distinct others, who we value for their otherness and to whom we are hospitably and intimately exposed, they help the self-reliant person to overcome the problematic Emersonian dichotomy of society and solitude. Learning to become and be oneself in relationships with friends, one cultivates the courage to be in society.

Chapters Three and Four repeat the structure of Chapters One and Two by first introducing Nietzschean subjectivity and perfectionism and then explaining the existential, ethical, and political role of friendship. In Chapter Three, I show how Nietzsche conceives of human subjectivity as divided along lines analogous to Emerson's divided subject. Where Emerson discusses this division in metaphysical and religious terms, Nietzsche's discussion is based in his psychological understanding of humanity. The Nietzschean subject is divided between the unconscious will to power and the conscious ego, which, as for Emerson, is

supported by the experience of free choice and consumption that it offers. Whereas Emerson's self-reliance aims at overcoming the ego or bringing it into attunement with the divine part of oneself, Nietzschean perfectionism aims at a course of training and cultivation that tames the ego and gives shape and direction to the will to power. Discussing Nietzsche's emancipatory unfreedom—or in his own terms, asceticism—I show how at several points in his philosophy, most notably in his discussion of the last humans and the sovereign individual, meaningful freedom is associated with a cultivation of oneself through obedience and rules rather than arbitrary choice and consumption. I identify in Nietzsche's work four main obstacles to self-overcoming—conformity, charity, greed, and vanity—setting up the discussion in Chapter Four of how friendship overcomes these obstacles.

Chapter Four explains how friendship contributes in ethical and political ways to Nietzschean perfectionism and the project of self-becoming. Through a reading of the secondary literature, especially Willow Verkerk's *Nietzsche and Friendship*, I explain how friendship performs educative and emancipatory roles in Nietzsche's philosophy. The discussion of ethics centers on the ways friendship helps one to overcome the obstacles to self-becoming: charity, greed, and vanity. I explain how the agonistic nature of friendship avoids and overcomes these deficient modes of solicitude. Instead of the vain attempt to manipulate the other into believing a lie about oneself, friendship is a challenge to the other to manifest herself. Instead of the greedy attempt to turn the other into something familiar and to hold her as she is presently, friends delight in the other's incalculability and growth in unknowable directions. Instead of the thoughtless and charitable drive to extinguish suffering, the agonistic friend helps the other to give suffering meaning.

I provide a novel reading of *Genealogy of Morals* in light of Nietzsche's broader critique of Christian morality from the perspective of agonistic friendship. Reading *Genealogy of Morals* in light of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche attributes an agonistic morality to the knightly caste, I argue that *Genealogy of Morals* should be read as an account of the overcoming of noble friendship by priestly ideologies of charity and compassion. This reading sheds new light on the text since Nietzsche does not explicitly mention friendship in *Genealogy of Morals*. By showing how friendship is at work in *Genealogy of Morals*, the concept takes on greater significance in Nietzsche's work and allows us to bring together his texts on friendship and morality in new ways.

I bring together *Genealogy of Morals* with Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, exploring the problem of human aggressivity in social life and explaining how Nietzsche thinks agonistic friendship turns aggression in productive and creative ways, avoiding the stultifying and excoriating moralities and practices of life-denying religions. I explore the political significance of Nietzsche's agonistic friendship, reading him alongside contemporary theorists such as Chantal Mouffe on agonistic pluralism and Jacques Derrida on radical hospitality. I argue that Nietzsche's agonistic friendship serves as a response *avant la lettre* to Carl Schmitt's claim that the essence of politics lies with the ability to distinguish friends from enemies and the willingness to kill those enemies.

Chapter Five explores the ethical, political, and religious significance of friendship for an understanding of freedom capable of supporting human flourishing and a full life. Such a life, I argue, is not well supported by a conception of freedom as arbitrary choice, ownership, and consumption, but rather through an understanding of freedom more closely associated with commitment. I show how Emerson critiqued the capitalist concept of freedom in terms of

slavery, and I show how Nietzsche undertakes a critique of freedom in terms of the invented happiness of the last humans. I bring together three philosophers influenced by Christian theology—Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger—to show how each formulates freedom in terms of the logics of vocation and predestination. I discuss these philosophical conceptions of freedom as commitment alongside theological accounts of a vocation that gives meaning to a life and world, especially in, Kierkegaard, Mark C. Taylor, and Paul Tillich. I show how for Emerson the vocation emerges from nature and talent, while for Nietzsche having a vocation comes through learning to love and being hospitable. Using the ethics and politics of friendship developed in the first four chapters, I interpret Heidegger's cryptic claims, in *Being and Time*, that all Dasein carries with it "the voice of the friend."[39] In doing so, I bring out new ways of thinking about ethics and the role of friendship in *Being and Time*.

[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 206

Chapter One: Emersonian Perfectionism and Self-Reliance

"The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship."

-William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Self-reliance is the central concept in Emerson's thought. No matter what topic he discusses, he always leads us back to self-reliance. In a journal entry from April 1840, he writes, "In all my lectures, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man."[40] Though self-reliance is a foundational concept for Emerson's thought, there is much disagreement over how this concept should be understood and what might be its contributions to political and ethical thought. Against more traditional understandings of self-reliance as self-sufficiency, a contemporary trend in the literature on Emerson recognizes that self-reliance reveals a subject who is conditioned by reliance on God and other people. The reading presented in this chapter takes seriously Emerson's perduring religious and mystical attitudes, which some contemporary, liberal authors have sought to excise (removing the theós from Emerson's ontotheology). I show that the Emersonian subject is divided between a superficial, desiring, and willing ego, and a deep, impersonal, and fundamentally monistic divinity. The ego stands in a relation of receptivity with regard to the divine, and yet the fundamental problem for Emerson is that society trains people to turn away from the divine part of themselves and to self-unreliantly lose themselves in the anxious maintenance and presentation of an ego. Self-reliance is the overcoming of this anxious attachment to the ego such that one manifests the divine and universal part of oneself. This overcoming takes place on two levels

[40] *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7, p. 342

in Emerson's work: phenomenologically, in experiences of the flowing expression of thought, typified for Emerson in the glance and conversation, and existentially, in the perfectionist development of oneself over the course of a life.

The tradition of self-reliance

There are three trends of misreading Emersonian self-reliance. The first misunderstands self-reliance as self-sufficiency, sometimes in terms of material or economic sufficiency, as in the ideal of the self-made man, first articulated by Frederick Douglass. The second misunderstands self-reliance as egoism, as in Quentin Anderson's imperial self and as seen in the asociality often ascribed to Emerson, both in his life and in his philosophy. The third trend, typified by George Kateb, Christopher Newfield, and Lawrence Buell, extricates Emerson's religious commitments from his thinking on self-reliance to make the concept more compatible with modern, non-religious, liberal political thought. Having shorn Emerson of any commitment to metaphysical monism, these authors ultimately struggle with the question of whether self-reliance could amount to real freedom or ethical behavior.

Quentin Anderson's study of the origins of American narcissism in transcendentalism is typical of many readings of Emersonian self-reliance as an egotistical concept. Anderson reads Emersonian subjectivity as an extreme case of egotism, where one abandons all relationships to become the foundation of one's own world—a reading diametrically opposed to what is presented in this dissertation. Writing in the 1970s, Anderson is responding to an American culture that he claims understands individualism in solipsistic ways, as "the energy, inventiveness and adaptability of Americans committed to commercial or industrial enterprise... those personal qualities which foster impersonality in social and economic

relations."[41] Anderson sees this idea of alienated individualism becoming concretized and popularized in American culture for the first time in Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance, and being further developed in the work of Walt Whitman and Henry James. Anderson writes of Emerson, "The social world was not for him either a home or a significant and threatening other with which we enjoy a dialectic relation, or in whose denial we affirm ourselves. His sky was empty of these possibilities; he had to fill it himself."[42] Anderson thinks that Emersonian subjectivity is an autarchic assertion of selfhood: self-validating and unconcerned with other people. He writes that Emerson is "post-social," and that he "denies that our sense of ourselves is based on a reciprocal or dramatic or dialectical awareness of one another."[43] He claims that Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance is a response to the shared psychic trauma of the failure of previous generations—a failure of American fathers, and of the absence of a royal family—to provide a unifying American cultural identity. Facing this father-shaped hole in American culture, the people of Emerson's generation were forced to become their own individual foundations. Anderson writes, "Americans were more or less unconsciously attempting the emotional task Emerson had undertaken: that of incorporating the powers of the father who no longer seemed to be present, *qua* father, or minister, or state."[44] Anderson's reading of self-reliance as imperial selfhood describes an ego that is ahistorically self-begotten, without need for other people. Anderson's self-reliant ego moves through life seeking to avoid other people since relationships place duties and obligations on the self-reliant individual, intruding upon her narcissistic self-sufficiency.

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[41] Anderson, p. 4
[42] Anderson, p. 32
[43] Anderson, pp. 5-7
[44] Anderson, p. 55

For Anderson, self-reliance is not merely the autogenic fantasy of being one's own father, but also the "psychotic" fantasy that one is "the actual focus at which universal and particular meet."[45] He calls this Emerson's "secular incarnation," the idea that the self-reliant person must become God because it is only through idiosyncratic individuality that the universal can be expressed.[46] Anderson writes of Emerson's religious perspective, "God can be manifest only in that which is a particular, not in generic humanity, not in a second Adam. Not, mind you, in our distinctive role vis-a-vis others, who enjoy roles of another kind, but our distinctiveness as against all the rest of humanity."[47] Anderson's Emerson is not critical of particular forms of social and economic arrangements; he is critical of society as such. He writes of Emerson's aversion to community and opposition to society:

> An emotional constitution such as this, whose triumphs, momentary though they are, had a psychotic completeness, could no more reckon with the dramatically opposed strands in daily experience than it could conceive the founded otherness of sexuality, parenthood, death, or simple heroism. How suddenly remote is the world of *The Federalist Papers*! Reading them, one enters a world in which the life of community is the paramount fact about human beings, and the arrangements to govern it are assumed to have the decisive power to qualify that life.[48]

Anderson's reading of Emerson as narcissistic and imperial, as setting up a subject that needs itself alone, is perhaps the clearest example of a reading that misses the significance of friendship and affection for other people in Emersonian self-reliance.[49]

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[45] Anderson, p. 55
[46] Anderson, p. 33
[47] Anderson, p. 12
[48] Anderson, p. 57
[49] While Anderson's essay on Emerson is often thought-provoking, his reading of Emerson is based on scant evidence from Emerson's corpus. Much of Anderson's argument rests on a single line from Emerson's journals in which he writes, "It seems to be true that the more exclusively idiosyncratic a man is, the more general and infinite he is" (1830; p. 11 in Anderson). But when Emerson writes "idiosyncratic," Anderson seems to read narcissistic or solipsistic. Besides this quote, Anderson relies heavily on material from "Experience," an essay

Christopher Newfield sees Emerson as the founder in American culture of an understanding of freedom as submission, which he claims sets the stage for authoritarianism. "The Emerson effect" is Newfield's term for a sensibility in American culture and politics by which individuals are made to feel free precisely when they are most determined by external and unchangeable laws. He uses the example of economic markets that are increasingly out of the control of individuals and nations, where it is through giving up control that an individual's experience of liberty is increased. Newfield thinks Emerson's contribution to American politics—especially centrist, middle-class politics—is the justification and normalization of this concept of freedom through submission. He writes that in Emerson's work, "Individual autonomy and public authority vanish together before unappealable laws, but this leads to the enhancement of [the feeling of] freedom. Emersonian liberalism... develops the political sensibility that allows [liberalism's] loss of both private autonomy and public sovereignty to *feel OK*."[50] Newfield understands the essential work of liberal democracy to be the balancing of commitments between individual autonomy and collective duties, but he thinks Emerson's work undermines both on the path towards authoritarianism. He writes, "Emerson did not repudiate democracy in favor of radical individualism in his youth, or vice versa in his maturity, for he consistently repudiated both at the same time."[51] In the final chapter of this dissertation I come back to deal with the political and ethical implications of Emerson's endorsement of freedom as submission. There, I explain how Emerson understands freedom in terms of commitment to a vocation which one can never choose or possess. Whereas

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with a uniquely solemn tone in Emerson's corpus, and which, by itself, cannot be taken as representative of Emerson's social thought.

[50] Newfield, p. 4

[51] Newfield, p. 22

Newfield somewhat simplistically describes Emerson's freedom as submission to be a position of servitude that feels like freedom, I argue that a freedom without submission—typified by the freedom of arbitrary choice and consumption—is more accurately servitude experienced as freedom.

Newfield writes that Emerson's writing on self-reliance is contradictory and unsystematic. He writes, "[Emerson] would repeatedly say be free and not a slave, emancipate yourself, build your own world out of the revolutionary genius of your unique being—all the kind of statements most associated with him. But the next minute he would define freedom as a rapturous servitude."[52] Newfield identifies three stages on the way to becoming self-reliant. First, one rejects conventional wisdom in favor of instinct. Next, he claims Emerson identifies this self-trust as "a form of accepting one's places in society."[53] Finally, the source of genius and power are located beyond society. Newfield writes,

> This familiar injunction to move beyond conventional understanding into harmony with Being means that one must 'accept' and 'obey.' The transcendentality of the law does not appear as a specifiable rule or quality but as the rule of superiority, that which compels obedience. Superiority forms the content of transcendent law; accepting an external superiority is what makes 'great men' great.[54]

Because Newfield's reading does not take seriously the role of God in Emerson's thought, he thinks that Emersonian self-reliance means reliance on other people and political authorities, rather than, as Emerson insists, reliance on God. The superiority on which Emersonian subjectivity relies is not located externally in the world of political parties and leaders; rather this superiority is always internal, the shared ground of existence that can be in another person

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[52] Newfield, p. 22
[53] Newfield, p. 23
[54] Newfield, p. 23

only as much as it is in me. Newfield claims that Emerson could have avoided authoritarianism by demanding "the autonomy of inner life from divine law [or] the return of divine law to the power of covenanted humans."[55] But Newfield is merely describing the willfulness and voluntarism of the ego, overlooking the emancipatory potential Emerson ascribes to obedience to oneself, God, and intuition. Emerson would agree that submission to a party or political authority amounts to unfreedom. Emerson writes as much when he describes the "inferior men" without character in the Senate, who voted for the Fugitive Slave Act in blind solidarity with Daniel Webster as if "they had no opinions, they had no memory for what they had been saying like the Lord's Prayer all their lifetime: they were only looking to do what their great Captain did."[56] The self-reliant obedience to intuition is an obedience that precludes any of the submission to external political or social authorities that troubles Newfield.[57]

Buell provides a better understanding of how Emerson thinks self-reliant people should relate to each other and to great people. On Buell's reading, great people are to be understood as disposable exemplars. Great people are models of self-reliant behavior, but like all models—books and teachers included—Emerson thinks these are to be used for their benefit and then moved beyond. Buell identifies four stages of self-reliance. In the first stage, the self-reliant person disengages from perspectives and worldviews to which she has become committed. In the second and third stages the self-reliant person learns to "trust instinct more and reasoned

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[55] Newfield, p. 25

[56] Emerson, "The Fugitive Slave Law," in *EW*, pp. 780

[57] Newfield undermines his claim that Emerson legitimates the notion of freedom as submission in American culture when he acknowledges that the common and naive reading of Emerson is centered on a myth of radical individualism. Newfield argues both that Emerson is a source of submission in American culture and that the theme of submission has been overlooked in the literature and by casual readers of Emerson.

judgment less."[58] Buell correctly explains that for Emerson the intuition on which the self-reliant person relies is beyond individual identity and willful choice. Buell writes, "The Me at the bottom of the me, the 'Trustee' or 'aboriginal Self' on which reliance may be safely grounded, is despite whatever appearances to the contrary not a merely personal entity or interest but a universal. The more inward you go, the more impersonal you get."[59] In the final stage of self-reliance, the self-reliant person serves as an example to other people and thus makes possible their own development towards self-reliance. Despite his recognition that self-reliance involves the mutual inspiration of other people, Buell ultimately thinks self-reliance is a solitary condition. He writes of Emerson, "His troubled, troubling essay on 'Friendship' was wholly serious both in idealizing the place of friendship in the life of a human being, and in defining proper friendship as inspiring each party to become his or her best self—a higher goal than friendship itself, finally to be pursued on one's own."[60] Buell relegates the educative role of other people to his fourth stage of self-reliance, missing that self-reliant people constantly rely on and interact in synergistic ways with other people.

Aversion to and suspicion of Emerson's religiosity are common among contemporary readers such as Dewey, Kateb, and Buell, each of whom reads Emerson without God. But there is evidence that even Emerson's contemporaries were uneasy with how his religiosity might infect his message of human strength and development. Emerson notes as much in a journal entry from 1840: "In all my lectures, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man. This, the people accept readily enough, & even with loud commendation, as long as I call the lecture, Art; or Politics; or Literature; or the Household; but the moment I call it

[58] Buell, p. 65
[59] Buell, p. 65
[60] Buell, p. 90

Religion,—they are shocked."[61] Contemporary readers such as Buell are perhaps made no less uneasy by Emerson's religiosity. As Buell writes,

> This side of Emerson can seem quaint and off putting today. Consider how often he resorts to the 'G-' word: in SR, no less than fifteen times… Such talk is hardly calculated to appeal to the majority of university researchers who presently dominate Emerson studies. For the most part, we are a thoroughly secularized lot, all the more skeptical of God-talk given the rise of fervid evangelical power blocks at home and abroad… In the United States… expressions of religious commitment—of a Protestant kind particularly—tend to strike academic intellectuals as nothing more than strategic, or anesthetic, conformity.[62]

If religion makes contemporary readers uneasy, we must still face the fact of Emerson's deep religiosity rather than ignoring it. Self-reliance as Emerson articulates it is a religious concept. Self-reliance can be described in somewhat less metaphysical terms as a person's expression of intuitive thought, but Emerson returns repeatedly to the language of divinity and undoubtedly represents intuition as the voice of God.

Though Emerson was a proponent of strong reading, a reading that removes religion from Emerson is too strong. If we want to understand Emersonian self-reliance, we need to understand it in the necessarily religious ways it functions for Emerson: as a moment of actual divine inspiration. Against authors such as Kateb and Buell, I do not take it to be the case that because self-reliance is a religious concept it can provide nothing of value for philosophy or modern, liberal political thought. Self-reliance can be understood properly only by taking Emerson's metaphysical commitments seriously. If those metaphysical commitments are problematic for the contemporary world and secular readers, we still must understand self-reliance as it appears in Emerson before attempting to draw lessons palatable to contemporary,

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[61] Emerson, *Journals*, vol. 7, p. 342
[62] Buell, p. 160

non-religious readers. In the following sections I lay out my reading of self-reliance as a psychological, existential, and phenomenological concept rooted inextricably in Emerson's eclectic spirituality.

Emersonian subjectivity: Ego and divinity

It is commonly acknowledged that Emersonian subjectivity includes at its core a divine spark, though the literature has largely overlooked the psychological and theological significance of this phenomenological description of a divided subject. That the self has at its core a divine spark is an idea common in Western thought and which Emerson encountered in Plato's daimonion and the Plotinian relationship between souls and the One. He confirmed this divine spark theology as closest to his own religious perspective when he encountered it in Quakerism. When, later in life, he was asked about his religious outlook, Emerson is reported to have said, "I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the 'still, small voice,' and that voice is Christ within us."[63] Frederick B. Tolles, scholar of American Quakerism, points out how this theology of a universally distributed divinity motivated Emerson's abolitionism and that in George Fox, Emerson found a kindred spirit—a religious teacher who posited his religion on man's 'involuntary perceptions'—a preacher whose preaching consisted in calling men to 'that of God in themselves.'"[64] As I show in this section, Emersonian subjectivity is divided between a superficial, willing and desiring ego, which one anxiously maintains and presents to other people, and the inner, impersonal and generous core of

[63] Haskins, David Greene. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Maternal Ancestors, with some Reminiscences of Him* (1886) p. 48
[64] Tolles, p. 154

subjectivity, which he describes sometimes as God and sometimes, in less theistic terms, as the intuitive movement of thought.

> Culture, the height of Culture, highest behavior consist in the identification of the Ego with the universe, so that when a man says, I think, I hope, I find,—he might properly say, the human race thinks, hopes & finds,—he states a fact which commands the understandings & affections of all the company, and yet, at the same time, he shall be able continually to keep sight of his biographical *ego*,—I had an ague, I had a fortune; my father had black hair; etc. as rhetoric, fun and footman, to his grand & public *ego*, without impertinence or ever confounding them.[65]

Contemporary authors who have removed reference to the divine have been left with the superficial, biographical, and public ego alone; the same ego which is precisely what in self-reliance Emerson sought to overcome or to bring into conformity with the divine—or as he describes it here, the universe. This is the most basic definition of self-reliance: conforming the ego to God. As he writes, "self-reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God."[66] At times, Emerson pushes this relationship in the direction of the ego's submission to the divine, though it can be understood phenomenologically as the forgetting of the ego so that the intuitive movements of thought are expressed.[67]

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[65] Emerson, *Journals*, vol. 11, p. 203
[66] Emerson, "Fugitive Slave Law," in *EW*, p. 788
[67] The divided self is a fundamental problem in the history of Western thought that can be found already in Plato's allegory in *Phaedrus* of the chariot driver. The divided self shows up in Book IX of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he describes how a self that is divided against itself cannot love even itself, and so cannot be a friend. For Aristotle, it is only the proper self-lover, who is in concord with herself, who can be a friend (Book 9, Chapter 8, pp. 260-263).

There is a long history in Christian thought of conceiving the self as divided between two wills: one of which is a manifestation or awareness of the divine will, and the other, which is an individual desiring will, problematically at odds with the other, divine will. This is seen most paradigmatically in Jesus's moment of hesitation at Gethsemane as well as in his moment of self-doubt when he cries: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Augustine takes this disjuncture between wills to be the heart of the condition of fallen humanity. In *City of God,* Augustine writes, "The injunction forbidding the eating of one kind of food... was so easy to observe, so brief to remember; above all, it was given at a time when desire was not yet in opposition to

Herwig Friedl helpfully explains Emersonian subjectivity in terms of what he identifies as Emerson's double consciousness. Friedl writes, "Early on Emerson noted 'an ambiguity in the term Subjective,' which serves to designate both the individuality of a person and his ontological participation in or, rather, identity with a totality, that is, both his self and his SELF."[68] Friedl explains Emersonian subjectivity as a synthesis of social and divine, existing both in the world and in being. Friedl describes "two basic existential moods in Emerson, the mythically gained assurance of identity with Being and the seeming aimlessness in a world of shifting values call for a reconciliation, a fusion."[69] Friedl's suggestion that Emerson seeks a fusion or reconciliation of these two modes of being is a bit misleading. If Emerson seeks a

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the will. That opposition came later as a result of the punishment of the transgression." (Book XIV, Chapter 12). The struggle with a divided will characterizes Augustine's conversion, and was also a leitmotif in the work of one of his favorite authors, Paul:

> For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.
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> So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am!

Medieval Christian mystics—following the Neoplatonic understanding of matter as fallen and of the One as absolutely transcendent, and the Augustinian understanding of the restlessness and dissatisfactions of concupiscence—largely sought to bring about this conformity with God through the annihilation of their individual wills. Canons regular sought to practice such conformity of the will by living under a monastic rule and obedience to an Abbot. Monks such as Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines would eventually develop the practical obedience of the will into the springboard for mystical ascent and divine union through self-emptying (kenosis). Annihilation of the ego is most dramatically exemplified in Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* and Eckhart (cf. Sermon 52). Compare Eckhart's *gelassenheit* with the reading of self-reliance developed here.

[68] Friedl, p. 72

[69] Friedl, p. 74

reconciliation between these two ways of being it is not a reconciliation that would accept a compromise of divine being, nor is it a meeting midway between being and worldliness.

The reconciliation Emerson calls for conforms one's ego entirely to the divine, and so is just as much an overcoming of the ego. As Emerson writes in his journals, "These hands, this body, this history of Waldo Emerson are profane and wearisome, but I, I descend not to mix myself with that or with any man. Above his life, above all creatures I flow down forever a sea of benefit into races of individuals."[70] Emerson makes the suggestively Hegelian move here of replacing his proper name with the first person pronoun, "I," which signals absolute individuality as well as impersonality and universality insofar as "I" is a designation available to all people in all times and places. By writing "I," Emerson identifies his truest self (i.e., his thought) with the singular and monistic spirit that descends into historical and particular individuals without itself becoming individualized. In this line, he performs his own authorial death pointing beyond his individual ego to the source of his words. He reiterates the valorization of the universal in his essay "Love" where he writes, "In the actual world—the painful kingdom of time and place—dwell care and canker and fear. With thought, with the ideal, is immortal hilarity… But grief cleaves to names, and persons, and the partial interests of to-day."[71] For Emerson, the truest or most authentic expression of oneself is motivated by the part of oneself that is universal, divine, and impersonal.

This divided self is the basis for what I discuss as Emerson's rhizomatic metaphysics. This is the idea, developed in Emerson's thinking no doubt from his readings of Plotinus and German idealism, that, like the shoots of a rhizome, all individuals share a common root.

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[70] Emerson, *Journals*, vol. 7, p. 435
[71] *EW*, "Love," p. 191

Human individuals are rooted in the one God. Thus, on the superficial level of phenomenal experience, each person is an individual, but in a truer way—for which Emerson found evidence in Kant's positing of the noumenal realm—all people are one. William James notes this intersection of monism and individuality in his description of Emerson's metaphysical outlook. He writes,

> [Emerson's] metaphysics consisted in the platonic belief that the foundation of all things is an overarching Reason. Sometimes he calls this divine principle the Intellect, sometimes "the Soul," [sometimes] the One. Whate'er we call it, we are at one with it so far as our moments of insight of god. But no moment can go very far, and no one can lay down the law for others, for their angles of vision may be sacred as his own. Hence two tendencies in Emerson, one towards absolute Monism; the other towards radical individualism. They sound contradictory enough; but he held to each of them in its extremist form.[72]

Emerson foreshadows the basic structure of Schopenhauer's metaphysics. As Elisabeth Hurth shows, Emerson engaged with Schopenhauer's work throughout his life, attracted by Schopenhauer's concern for "the world of everyday objects" and rejection of abstract Hegelian dialectics. Though even in his darker and more fatalistic moods Emerson never accepted Schopenhauer's pessimism, he was influenced by Schopenhauer's metaphysics.[73] Schopenhauer pushes Kant's understanding of the non-temporality and non-spatiality of the noumenal realm to its logical conclusion. If time and space are mental intuitions which structure the phenomenal realm, then the noumenal realm, without the intuitions of time or space, can be deduced as a single thing-in-itself. Without time or space, there can be no sense of individuality, separation, or change, and thus only one thing. Separation and individuality

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[72] James, p. 318
[73] Hurth, pp. 182-185

are part of the way the mind organizes phenomenal reality. Thus, the things in our world appear to be separate objects though they are ultimately unified.[74]

While Schopenhauer's monism applies to all phenomena, Emerson usually describes a monism of living things—of humans and of nature. Emerson's monism is supported by the idea of noumenal reality, but Emerson's monism is based on an intuition of spiritual unity more than physical unity, and for this reason we can take it to be grounded more essentially in his Neoplatonism. Though Emerson would eventually agree with Schopenhauer's view, Emerson's early monism is not based on the non-temporality and non-spaciality of the Kantian thing-in-itself, but rather on the abiding spiritual participation of all creatures in God. As he writes in Sermon CXLII, "The moral universe is one great family, included in God as the waves are contained in the ocean… He is with the humble, the generous, the diligent, the thoughtful, the self improver."[75] And again in "Oversoul," "As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul, where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins... We live open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God."[76] The impact of his early engagement with Neoplatonism, largely in the translations of Plotinus by Thomas Taylor, is evident in Emerson's thinking about the way humans abide in divinity as well as in the way he thinks about thinking as a receptive capacity. As Frederic Ives Carpenter helpfully explains in *Emerson and Asia*, Emerson, though less systematic than Plotinus, draws on concepts evocative of Plotinus in his metaphysical essays and descriptions of the relationship between God and humanity.[77] Following Plotinus,

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[74] In Chapter Two I argue that Emersonian skepticism is the selfish refusal to acknowledge the unity of people described by this rhizomatic metaphysics.
[75] *Sermons*, vol. 4, p. 64
[76] "Oversoul," in *EW*, p. 238
[77] Carpenter, pp. 75-86

Emerson describes the human as a receiver of thought, spirit, life, and strength; a beneficiary of a spiritual reality, at once higher than oneself and internal to oneself, and in which each person is ultimately grounded.[78]

One's thoughts could seem to be the most authentic contribution one could make from the depths of one's freedom and will, and yet Emerson is emphatic that one is the receiver or the observer of one's thoughts.

> Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has not prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the very next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine. As it is with events, so it is with thoughts. When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come.[79]

Thought is the influx of the divine oversoul into the human mind, and thus one's thoughts become one's own not in the thinking of them but in the manifestation of them in the world.[80] It is in the self-reliant expression and carrying through of thought that one lays claim to thought. Far from a willful expression of self (more appropriate to the striving of the ego),

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[78] The idea of God as above and inner to the self is a Neoplatonic theme that pervades early and medieval Christian thought. For example, in Augustine's characterization of God as "*ineterior intimo meo*" (higher than my highest and more inner than my innermost). Also, in Bonaventure's description of the mystical contemplation moving inward and upward in "The Soul's Journey into God."

[79] "Oversoul," in *EW*, p. 237

[80] Thought as a receptive faculty was a common theme among transcendentalists. See for example Dickinson's "1421," where she describes God's "outlets" as the "inlets of the mind" (p. 606). See, too, her "733," (p. 359), where she compares our receptivity to hearing, in ways anticipating Heidegger (as discussed in Chapter Five). Dickinson describes the spirit as a faculty receptive of divinity and thought as what we hear. She writes,

> The Spirit is the Conscious Ear,
> We actually Hear
> When We inspect – that's audible –
> That is admitted – Here –

thought is the placing of oneself in the position of receptivity so that one can observe the flowing river of inspiration. In “Spiritual Laws,” he calls genius a kind of susceptibility: “A man's genius, the quality that differences him from every other, the susceptibility to one class of influences, the selection of what is fit for him, the rejection of what is unfit, determines for him the character of the universe."[81] Even when selection enters Emerson’s description here, it is merely the selection of what is fit, not the selection of any random future or possibility.

Though Emerson’s religious language makes some contemporary readers uneasy, we cannot read Emerson without God if we want to understand the full complexity of the Emersonian subject. Emerson does however leave room for a non-religious understanding of the phenomenology of thinking when he discusses the voice of God as intuition. While intuition is the way one experiences the voice of God in one’s life, Emerson’s Neoplatonic conception of the generous, rhizomatic God cannot be reduced to intuition without losing the unity and ethical universality that are its foundation and guides. It is not only thought, but ultimately self-reliance which he describes as a reception of divinity. As I show below, self-reliance is not the autarchic and willful production of the ego, it is rather the overcoming, or forgetting of this ego in such a way that one manifests the intuitive movement of thought.

Following on the relationship between individuality and monism, Emerson distinguishes two modes of thought—Understanding and Reason—a division he picks up from Kant and romanticists such as Carlyle. Emerson reconstrues these terms though. For Kant, understanding is the faculty of the mind that deals with causality and phenomena; it is piecemeal, temporal, and reliant on the sensory intuitions of the world. Reason, the synthetic faculty of the mind, is used to draw inferential conclusions beyond what is empirically given.

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[81] “Spiritual Laws,” *EW*, p. 178

Such inferential knowledge is essentially foreclosed in Kantian epistemology: Reason seeks to know the thing-in-itself, but it only produces non-empirically based illusions. Emerson, in a decidedly religious mood, grants Reason access to the noumenal and spiritual realm. As Buell astutely observes, "That Kant denies Reason can know the thing in itself, whereas Emerson granted Reason that knowledge invoking Kantian authority, is one of the ironies of intellectual history. The key point is that Emerson believed that inner-lightism had good modern epistemological warrant."[82] Emersonian reason is the capacity to receive thought and ethical motivation from the Oversoul, and thus an indispensable component of self-reliance.

One of the most striking features of Emersonian subjectivity is the degree to which one's everyday identity, the person who one usually takes oneself to be, is a false image of oneself. This exterior ego is the locus of personality, will, and choice; it is who one takes oneself to be in one's everyday inauthenticity; it is the part of one's being that stands apart from the divine unity and becomes an individual. He writes in "Oversoul,"

> What we commonly call man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend.[83]

This superficial ego is an inauthentic expression of oneself insofar as it is a symptom of one's lacking the courage to manifest self-reliantly divine intuition. The ego is that part of oneself that refuses to follow a vocation because it is turned towards worldly commitments, especially the commitment to social norms and the ego's autobiographical continuity. "Common men are apologies for men; they bow the head, excuse themselves with prolix reasons, and accumulate

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[82] Buell, p. 61
[83] "Oversoul," in *EW*, p. 238

appearances because the substance is not." Nietzsche's concept of vanity builds off the logic of the self-unreliant person's attempt to have an identity by manipulating others.[84]

But the ego is not merely an inauthentic expression of oneself; it is most essentially the wall one throws up and maintains in the face of the other when people self-unreliantly "descend to meet." It is the anxious reaction to the hobgoblins of small minds—others' expectations (i.e., my fear of showing myself to be other than they expect me to be), and my own anxiety about autobiographical continuity (i.e., my concern that my present and future should conform with my past: that I should become who I have been; that I should be systematic). Thus, the ego is supported by both social and intrapsychic anxieties. This ego is a bad faith commitment to one's past, and insofar as it is so committed it is a weight that prevents one from having an authentic present or future. In its commitment to the past, the ego is one's descent in the presence of others and the loss of a future.

More essential to one's being than the superficial ego is the divine spark at the heart of subjectivity. The divine spark is the origin of thought and intuition, it reveals one's vocation, calling one to become who one is. In everyday life one tends to turn from the divine spark, to ignore its call and anxiously flee toward the ego. It calls one in unrestrained and novel ways towards oneself, and out of bad faith and self-unreliant commitment to what one has been. Interestingly, Emerson describes this part of the self not only as universal and public, but also as impersonal. Publicness is just another way Emerson speaks about the universality of the divine spark. It is public because it is what I share with others. As Kateb puts it

> To be an individual one must become "public"; it means losing "personality" as well as losing the partiality of distinctiveness flowing from one's identification with a group… We ascend by abandonment—that is, by the deliberate struggle against being calculating, against becoming obsessively

[84] Cf., Chapter Three

> self-absorbed, self-furthering, even self-realizing…. We abandon pride of personality. We mitigate what I have called 'positive personality' because it distorts self-reliant receptivity.[85]

The divine spark is metaphysically universal because it is the same monistic, rhizomatic root to which all people are all connected. It is morally universal because it speaks the same truth to all people. The common moral vocation is what Emerson has in mind when he writes of publicness. Publicness is the idea that if one speaks from intuition, one's words will take on broad public significance since in such words other people will recognize their own latent thoughts and familiar vocation. Emerson's next move has confounded many readers: "That which is individual and remains individual in my experience is of no value. What is fit to engage me and so engage others permanently, is what has put off its weeds of time & place & personal relation."[86] He pushes the logic further to argue that the divine spark, in its universality, is entirely impersonal. The ego is the center of one's personality, while divine intuition is the universal, public, and impersonal movement of all life. Thus, though Emerson has often been portrayed as egoistic and individualistic, he is highly suspicious of the ideology of individualism.

Literary theorist Sharon Cameron claims that gaining access to the impersonal "is a question that precedes all others in Emerson's essays" and thus elevates impersonality to the level of self-reliance. In terms that confirm this elevation, she explains the impersonal as Emerson's Over-soul, the universal ground of being in which all individuals are rooted and from which thoughts are received. Being more than any individual, though requiring individuals for its manifestation, the impersonal is beyond what any person can possess or will.

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[85] Kateb, p. 29

[86] *Journals*, vol. 7, p. 65

The impersonal is akin to self-reliance since it is a way of being oneself freed from the personalities of society and oneself. In terms that square with the definition of self-reliance I have developed in this dissertation, Cameron writes that impersonality is the state of one who has broken "out of the tyranny of egotistical self-enclosure."[87] She draws attention to the essentially Plotinian or Hegelian structure of the relationship between the impersonal, universal divine totality and the individual particulars through which universality is manifest in the world.

In line with my own reading of self-reliance, Cameron shows how the overcoming of the personal by which the impersonal becomes manifest is a matter of "not-willing, of seeing what we are when the will stops executing its claims," and of "giving ourselves up to the involuntary."[88] Her reading of the unwilled impersonal in the glance, mood, and moral law is quite helpful in bringing to light the phenomenology of impersonality—and, I say, self-reliance—in everyday life, though she misses what I take to be one of the most instructive examples of such a phenomenon in Emerson's writing: conversation. As I describe later in this chapter, conversation is one of the most important examples of ontic self-reliance in Emerson's work, since more than the glance and moral law, and perhaps more even than moods, conversation is the practice by which friends overcome the hobgoblins of small minds and let flow the spontaneous movement of thought. We could borrow Cameron's language and speak here of the impersonality of intuition as well. In conversation we manifest thought and become who we are without having to know who we are.

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[87] Cameron, p. 83
[88] Ibid., p. 86

Kateb draws attention to impersonality in self-reliance, but because he reads Emerson without God, he understands impersonality not as the source of thought but as the character of self-reliant mental activity. “Impersonality is actually a refusal to shut out any aspect of oneself from the reach of cultivated self-awareness in order to position ourselves to use all aspects—all our warring impulses and thoughts—as bridges to the kindred phenomena actualized in the world.”[89] Kateb understands self-reliance as “substantive withholding,” the refusal to commit to an unchanging perspective or opinion.[90] Impersonality, for Kateb, applies to this selfless and uncommitted style of thinking. While such withdrawal from partial thinking and systematic commitments is a condition of self-reliance it is not, as Kateb assumes, the purpose of self-reliance.

While Kateb rightly sees self-reliance as a form of receptivity, his atheistic reading suggests that this receptivity is directed at worldly novelty and social life. He writes, “One relies on oneself rather than seeking support in external commitments. One stays with oneself in order to enter imaginatively into all the commitments that social life displays and must display. One increases the amount of value in the world by keeping oneself from embracing favorite ideas and works exclusively.”[91] Certainly this childlike neutrality is important to Emersonian self-reliance, but it is important because of what it makes possible: the revelation of the divine movement of intuitive thought. Kateb notes that self-reliance is impersonal even to the point, sometimes, of overcoming self-expression, and yet he thinks the point of this is to unleash an ongoing process of creative action. But without the idea of an impersonal divine or

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[89] Kateb, p. 30
[90] Kateb, p. 4
[91] Kateb, p. 5

a divided subject, such action could be nothing more than the assertion of the ego. Autarchic and egoistic self-assertion is precisely what Emerson seeks to overcome. Emerson writes,

> When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself.[92]

Kateb claims that Emerson develops two modes of self-reliance, one active and the other intellectual, and that these are two directions in which the self-reliant ego can move. On my reading, there is only one form of self-reliance, and it is the subject that is divided. Kateb's active, egoistic, striving, and consuming form of self-reliance is not a form of self-reliance at all; it is merely the individualism and self-assertion of the ego.

In self-reliance it is this divine spark, the innermost and most universal part of oneself, on which one relies. As Emerson writes in "The Fugitive Slave Act," "Self-reliance, the height of human culture, is reliance on God." Thus, perhaps counterintuitively, self-reliance is a manifestation not of the willful, choosing, ego self, but of the universal, impersonal, and generous aspect of one's being. As Buell puts it, "we are entitled to trust our deepest convictions of what is true and right insofar as every person's innermost identity is a transpersonal universal."[93]

Emerson describes children and students as examples of people naturally in the position of self-reliant impersonality. Children and students are neutral, accepting of novelty and without commitment to parties or systems of thought. He extolls the virtues of youthful neutrality over several paragraphs in "Self-Reliance":

> What pretty oracles nature yields us on this text in the face and behavior of children, babes, and even brutes. That divided and rebel mind, that distrust of a

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[92] "Oversoul," in *EW*, p. 238
[93] Buell, p. 59

> sentiment because our arithmetic has computed the strength and the means opposed to our purpose, these have not. Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered.
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> The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature... He cumbers himself never about consequences, about interests; he gives an independent, genuine verdict… But the man is as it were clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has acted or spoken with *éclat* he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this. Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality! Who can thus avoid all pledges and, having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence—must always be formidable.[94]

The infant is blissfully unaware of social expectations and unconcerned with autobiographical continuity. The same goes for nonchalant boys, free of anxiety about the future and committed to nothing other than the enjoyment of the present. Adults are committed to others' expectations and their own, and so are unable to be who they are in the present. Analogously, Emerson describes philosophers and theologians to be committed to the spreading of systems rather than the discovery of novelty. "Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hands of the harlot, and flee. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines."[95] Emerson's point is not to suggest that adults adopt a childlike naive neutrality, but first to experience and observe the world before being able to return to neutrality. The infant's neutrality is a neutrality that has not observed the world and so lacks the knowledge and experience that would make the neutral adult or the neutral philosopher the fullest manifestation of self-reliance.[96] He provides a list of such people, "Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo," not systematizers but also not

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[94] "Self-Reliance," in *EW*, p. 134
[95] Ibid., p. 138
[96] See Chapter Five on Kierkegaard and the difference between the aesthete and the knight of faith.

mystics; these men, according to Emerson, lived in the world without becoming committed to its ways.[97]

The phenomenology of self-reliance: the glance and conversation

Self-reliance, taken as an existentialist concept, can be discussed both in existential and existentiell terms. The existentiell way is what prepares one for an understanding and experience of the existential kind of self-reliance. Existentiell self-reliance can be thought in terms of Heidegger's phenomenology of everyday knowing (which is "grounded beforehand in a Being-already-alongside-the-world"[98]) or Sartre's non-thetic self-consciousness: a state of absorbed action in which one loses one's self-reflexive, egoistic sense of self. Emerson discusses this existentiell (or ontic) self-reliance in the glance and conversation. In these experiences, one acts and encounters the other without regard for the anxious maintenance of the ego self. The glance and conversation are moments when one is given over to the divine self and the intuitive movement of thought. But self-reliance is not just about these passing experiences of ego transcendence. Self-reliance is more appropriately about expressing the divine self over the course of one's life, which involves a more perduring overcoming of the ego and a structure of human existence (i.e., it is existential). Self-reliance is not merely the ego loss that allows one to flow in friendly conversations, but the transcendence that allows one to be in one's life today and everyday who one is in the present, without being overdetermined by who one takes oneself to be or who one presents oneself as in society.

[97] And yet, we must note the yawning divide between Luther's religious, self-reliant, "Hier stehe Ich, Ich kann nicht anders," and Galileo's resigned, "Eppur si muove."
[98] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 88

Existential self-reliance is the ego transcendence that allows one to live one's vocation as it calls one now without regard to one's bad-faith commitments or others' expectations.

The glance shows up repeatedly in Emerson's writings, both as a form of communication among friends and as a moment of self-reliant action. True friendship and such moments of self-reliance go together since true friendship is an affinity between two people's inner divinities, and self-reliance is the exposure of one's inner divinity to the world and to the other. Glances show up in two important ways in Emerson's work: people glance at each other and one glances at the world. Both examples describe people who are lost in thought, looking without aim and without concern for the ego. One glances at the world in the mode of thoughtful receptivity when pondering a question and awaiting the response of thought. Similarly lost in thought and without concern for the ego, one's eyes sometimes meet another's in the intersubjective glance. In the intersubjective glance, one is not only given over to thought but one sees another person egolessly actualizing the intuitive movements of their thoughts: such moments can be startling and intrusive precisely because we see the other with her guard down, and thus we see the other's thinking exposed.

Glancing at the world in the mode of receptive thought is an experience familiar to anyone who practices philosophy, writing, or any form of deep and sustained thought. One glances at the world contemplatively awaiting the advent of ideas or the proper words. For Emerson, glancing at the world is a practice of active thinking. He writes in "Intellect," "Our spontaneous action is always best. You cannot with your best deliberation and heed come so close to any question as your spontaneous glance shall bring you, whilst you rise from your bed, or walk abroad in the morning after meditating the matter before sleep on the previous

night. Our thinking is a pious reception."[99] Glancing is an anticipatory looking at the world that sees nothing in particular since it is a manifestation of the mind's general openness. In "Behavior," Emerson writes, "The eye obeys exactly the action of the mind. When a thought strikes us, the eyes fix and remain gazing at a distance."[100] The glance looks beyond the particularity of objects to see the world, generalizing not only one's visual perspective but also one's mode of thought. In the mode of deep thoughtful receptivity expressed by the glance at the world, one momentarily leaves behind concern for one's partial ego self, forgetting one's outward presentation of self and allowing the intuitive movement of thought to rise to the surface. In this way, the contemplative glance at the world is an experience that points towards self-reliance.

When it comes to the intersubjective glance, Emerson often likens it to friendly conversation, which, as I show below, is his other major example of phenomenological self-reliance. In *Conduct of Life*, he even claims that the glance is a more effective means of communication than conversation, being more general and universal than language expressed through particular words and linguistic conventions. "The eyes of men converse as much as their tongues, with the advantage that the ocular dialect needs no dictionary, but is understood all the world over."[101] Though I may not understand the other's lament, I see the pain and sorrow in her face, and I recognize it as an eruption of the same emotions and sensations that move me in my own sorrow. Whereas the conventions of a language particularize thought, the glance brings us back to our essential universality and monism. In his early essay on friendship, "The Heart," Emerson writes, "The Heart is as I have said a community of nature which really

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[99] "Intellect," in *EW*, p. 264
[100] "Behavior," in *CL*, p. 178
[101] "Behavior," in *CL*, p. 180

does bind all men into a consciousness of one brotherhood. Of this the look between man and man is the expression."[102] When in the course of my day I catch the eye of another and we glance at each other, we see each other as we are given over to the intuitive movement of our thoughts. In the glance I am seen thinking, while simultaneously I see the one who sees me in her act of thinking. Glancing, we see each other with our guards down; we see each other given over to thought and in a moment without concern for the maintenance and presentation of the ego.

The young Emerson, in "The Heart," writes that the glance is superior to conversation not only because words as such concretize and particularize the thoughts they speak, but also because language is willful, and thus associated with the ego, whereas the glance is unwilled and spontaneous. The somewhat later Emerson of *Essays*, and the much later Emerson of *Conduct of Life*, identify a form of egoless and flowing conversation which speaks self-reliantly, from beyond the will, much as the glance sees. That the glance is not an expression of will or ego means that it is an expression of the intuitive movement of one's thought and thus an experience of self-reliance in the present. He writes,

> One of the most wonderful things in nature, where all is wonderful, is, the glance, or meeting of the eyes; this speedy and perfect communication which transcends speech and action also and is in the greatest part not subject to the control of the will. It is the bodily symbol of identity in nature. Here is the whole miracle of our being, made sensible,—the radical unity, the superficial diversity. Strange that any body who ever met another person's eyes, should doubt that all men have one soul.[103]

The glance overcomes the stingy and egoistic skepticism about our underlying monism—a skepticism manifest in the ideal of egoistic individualism—and reveals our rhizomatic

[102] "The Heart," in *EL*, vol. 2, p. 283
[103] "The Heart," p. 283

rootedness in a single impersonal, divine unity. He thinks "moments of insight, of fine personal relation, a smile, a glance" are moments more meaningful in their depth than eternity could be in duration.[104] When two people encounter each other, egoless and self-reliantly expressing the intuitive movement of their thought, as they do momentarily in the intersubjective glance, each sees the other as an incarnation of the impersonal and general divinity that permeates all nature.[105]

In *Conduct of Life*, Emerson does not abandon the glance but places it alongside conversation as a practice of friendship in which people drop the semblances of the ego to expose the movement of their thoughts. In this way, it is only in the glance, conversation, and other moments of egolessness, that one sees the other as who she is beyond her presentation of a managed and curated self. He writes,

> Eyes are bold as lions,—roving, running, leaping, here and there, far and near. They speak all languages. They wait for no introduction; they are no Englishmen… What inundation of life and thought is discharged from one soul into another, through them! The glance is natural magic. The mysterious communication established across a house between two entire strangers, moves all the springs of wonder. The communication by the glance is in the greatest part not subject to the control of the will. It is the bodily symbol of identity in nature. We look into the eyes to know if this other form is another self, and the eye will not lie, but make a faithful confession what inhabitant is there.[106]

Friendship and all true relations with the other grow out of this vision of the other in her authentic spontaneity. Moreover, the phenomenology of being seen in one's self-reliant

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[104] "Works and Days," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude,* vol. 7, p. 179

[105] Emerson's conception of the glance as revelatory of authentic being can be compared with more recent, existential, and psychoanalytic theories of intersubjective gazing and looking as productive of inauthenticity. On these accounts, gazing or looking is a glance that has overstayed its welcome and become intrusive. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre compares the gaze to a sadomasochistic relationship, where one's subjectivity becomes concretized in problematic, bad-faith ways when one is seen by another.

[106] "Behavior," in *Conduct of Life*, p. 178

spontaneity—being caught off guard as being one's thoughts in the world when one has forgotten one's concern for the hobgoblins of little minds—is an experience in the present of a self-reliant life. In conversations such as these, we speak in ways that are exploratory and experimental and we learn who we are without assuming the authority and capacity for self-possession of one who could say, "I AM."

In *Essays: Series One* and *Conduct of Life*, Emerson develops the experience of conversation as an example of phenomenological self-reliance. "Conversation," he writes, "is the vent of character as well as of thought."[107] Whereas the glance is momentary and essentially gone as soon as one recognizes it, the loss of oneself in conversation is a more perduring experience of self-reliance. He writes in "Experience," "All good conversation, manners, and action, come from a spontaneity which forgets usages, and makes the moment great. Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive. Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such."[108] In the kind of good conversations that Emerson has in mind, the participants focus on the ideas of the conversation, forgetting about their anxious conformity to social expectations and commitments in their presentation of themselves. In such conversations, ideas flow through each speaker so that each exposes the spontaneous movements of her thoughts to the other. Because in conversation we see and hear the other as another person thinking—which is to say, in her self-reliant and egoless spontaneity—we get a glimpse again of our underlying monism and essential intersubjectivity.[109]

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[107] "Clubs," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude,* vol. 7, p. 237

[108] "Experience," in *EW*, p. 318

[109] In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of language is the starting point for his own theory of the essential intersubjectivity of the self. For Merleau-Ponty, underlying intersubjectivity is revealed first at the level of intercorporeality and the recognition that the world is always already a world for others. Encountering the other's body and capacity for

Conversations that are examples of phenomenological self-reliance are rare, and our speaking to one another more often consists of thoughtless gossip and evasive politeness. Emerson describes the rarity of good conversation in *Society and Solitude*, writing,

> Nothing seems so cheap as the benefit of conversation; nothing is more rare. 'T is wonderful how you are balked and baffled. There is plenty of intelligence, reading, curiosity; but serious, happy discourse, avoiding personalities, dealing with results, is rare: and I seldom meet with a reading and thoughtful person but he tells me, as if it were his exceptional mishap, that he has no companion. Suppose such a one to go out exploring different circles in search of this wise and genial counterpart,—he might inquire far and wide. Conversation in society is found to be on a platform so low as to exclude science, the saint and the poet.[110]

The common mode of conversation in society does not avoid personalities; it is precisely the confrontation of two egos anxiously and politely maintaining their ego identity and never exposing their spontaneous thoughts to each other. In “Friendship,” Emerson writes, “Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow-man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds.”[111] We fend off the other’s approach in conversation through the thoughtless and formulaic performance of manners and social conventions. Rather than self-reliantly revealing our thoughts and being, we discuss the events

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intentionality, one realizes that “as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and the other’s are one whole, two sides of the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously” (p. 412). He goes on to show how language and conversation constitute “between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being… we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge and we co-exist through a common world” (p. 413).

[110] “Clubs,” *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude,* vol. 7, pp. 230-31

[111] “Friendship,” in *EW*, p. 207

of our day and the news, and we make small talk. We politely censor our thoughts in order not to offend the other's partialities and say what is pleasing and acceptable in the other's company.

Polite consideration for the other's partialities can be such a hindrance to the flow of authentic conversation that Emerson even considers once whether conversation might be best among strangers, since they are unaware of each other's partialities. In her unknown and unrevealed self, the stranger is for Emerson here an example of universality incarnate. In "Friendship," he writes of the stranger, "He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish."[112] A stranger is someone about whom I know nothing and so is for me an infinite potential. One can speak more freely with the stranger insofar as one is unaware of the strangers' sensibilities. Of my acquaintance, I know she prefers to avoid certain topics and is easily offended by others, and so our discussions remain within polite limits. Emerson goes on to describe conversation with a commended stranger:

> The same idea exalts conversation with him. We talk better than we are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers. But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects, into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress, and the dinner,—but the throbbing of the heart, and the communications of the soul, no more.[113]

Thus, the stranger provides another fleeting experience of self-reliance in the world. The stranger whose ego has yet to be revealed to me is to me an image of the impersonal and universally human. Every stranger is a potential friend. Every stranger is potentially the

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[112] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 202
[113] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 202

conversation partner for whom Emerson searches. It is when the stranger becomes an individual ego through the introduction of her partialities that the strange image of universality is spoiled. If two people are still able to glimpse one another and converse from places of self-reliant and egoless spontaneity, they might become friends.

Emerson writes that we often slip into deficient modes of polite and mannered speaking not only when we are trying not to offend our partner, but also when the topic of conversation does not interest us. A conversation which would be of no interest is one which fails to consider topics of universal concern and instead dwells on what is of egoistical interest to the one who speaks. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson describes the "mortifying experience" of being trapped in an uninteresting conversation. He writes that one slips into the mode of mechanical politeness, playing the role of audience: "The forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease, in answer to conversation which does not interest us. The muscles, not spontaneously moved but moved by a low usurping willfulness, grow tight around the outline of the face, with the most disagreeable sensation." [114] Uninteresting conversation closes off the possibility of self-reliance since it demands the non-spontaneous performance of politeness precisely to cover up one's actual thoughts. Such a performance, which blocks up one's spontaneous thought to please the other, while maintaining a certain socially acceptable and expected image of oneself, is the very antithesis of self-reliance.

It is not only one-sided and uninteresting conversations that keep people from self-reliantly revealing themselves, but also gossip. Emerson writes of gossip as a mode of self-unreliant talking commonly employed to parry the other's approach. In his 1832 "Sermon CLV," Emerson describes gossip as a form of talking that is narrowly specific to a particular

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[114] "Self-Reliance," in *EW*, p. 137

time, place, and ego, whereas true conversation reveals the inmost universality of the egoless movement of spontaneous thought.

> Thoughts which are superficial are local and personal; would be unsuitable to any other time or place. Those which move the man from the bottom of his soul are equally interesting to all men. Carry the gossip of your street to Rome or Japan and it would be unintelligible. But your concussions respecting right and wrong, the laws of the mind, the end of man, which command your own interests at all times have an equal interest for all men that ever were on earth…. Thus is the inmost self the universal nature of man.[115]

Gossip is talking about ego identities and the particularities of a person's life, and thus not conversation on any perduring or universal truth. One gossips about what was done or said by a particular person, about the events and exchanges pertaining to individual people in the world. One does not gossip about eternal truth or topics of universal concern. Unlike the conversational intimacy wherein people share in a mood based on the mutual exposure of their spontaneous thinking, the gossipy concern with mundane events and encounters can only acquaint one ego with another. When an encounter between people is overdetermined by the formulaic performance of manners or the thoughtless and egoistic sharing of gossip "all is yet unsaid, from the incapacities of the parties to know each other, although they use the same words."[116]

Good conversation considers topics of shared interest, and in their focus on the topic of conversation each partner forgets her self-unreliant concern for social conventions and others' expectations, revealing the spontaneous movements of her thought. As discussed above, this spontaneous movement is revelatory of a monistic and pre-egoistic ground of

[115] "Sermon CLV, in *Sermons*, vol. 4, p. 146
[116] "Nominalist and Realist," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 145

subjectivity. Thus, two people conversing are not only examples of self-reliance, but also an experience of the underlying unity of nature. In "Over-Soul," he writes,

> Persons are supplementary to the primary teaching of the soul. ...The larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all. Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God.[117]

When one is caught up in good conversation, speaking and moving self-reliantly and without thought for others' judgements, one speaks with the universal voice of God. Further on he writes, "We know better than we do. We do not yet possess ourselves, and we know at the same time that we are much more. I feel the same truth how often in my trivial conversation with my neighbors, that somewhat higher in each of us overlooks this by-play, and Jove nods to Jove behind each of us."[118] These lived experiences of self-reliance, in the glance and in conversation, are indications of the existential self-reliance by which one becomes who one is in one's life. In the glance one is caught in a moment of thought. In conversation one gives oneself over to the topic of our discussion and reveals one's unmannered speech and spontaneous thoughts. Because Emerson understands these spontaneous thoughts to be the voice of God, glances and conversations are moments of revelation and incarnation.

Irena Makarushka looks to Emerson's sermons as examples of revelatory conversations between the preacher and his congregation. She writes that preaching "unites the seer with the sayer. It is an expression of the soul's insight and as such, it is the soul conversing with other souls. For Emerson, this conversation constituted the ongoing process of revelation." However, Makarushka does not connect the sermon, as revelatory conversation, with what Emerson

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[117] "Over-Soul," in *EW*, p. 241
[118] Ibid., pp. 242

writes about conversation more broadly and so misses how not only sermons but all good conversations are moments of religious ecstasy, revelation, and self-reliance. She takes Emerson's advice to preachers—to speak with the force of their inner divinity, as did Jesus—to be narrowly applicable to preachers, not seeing how this speaking with divinity is possible in good conversations, or how it is a phenomenological example of self-reliance.

While conversation reveals metaphysical and existential truths about who one is and how one is related to others, it also does the more epistemological work of developing one's thoughts and expression. Articulating one's ideas in conversation is already by itself an effective way in which to begin developing these ideas, by concretizing and defining them in language. Emerson refers to this as "the mechanics of conversation."

> Conversation is the laboratory and workshop of the student. The affection or sympathy helps. The wish to speak to the want of another mind assists to clear your own. A certain truth possesses us which we in all ways strive to utter. Every time we say a thing in conversation, we get a mechanical advantage in detaching it well and deliverly. I prize the mechanics of conversation. 'T is pulley and lever and screw. To fairly disengage the mass, and send it jingling down, a good boulder,—a block of quartz and gold, to be worked up at leisure in the useful arts of life,—is a wonderful relief.[119]

Much as a mathematician scrawls numbers on a pad to manipulate them more easily, the expression of ideas into words allows conversation partners to go to work on the ideas. But even before going to work on the ideas, we get an advantage merely from the speaking of ideas, from settling them and concretizing them in words, even if only temporarily. Expressing an idea through words allows that idea to circulate in the world, to be taken up and worked upon by others. The benefit for one's thought of concretizing ideas in words and of facing the

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[119] "Clubs," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude,* vol. 7., pp. 228-229

challenge of communicating and being understood will be familiar to anyone who has had to teach a class or prepare a formal explanation. In "Social Aims" Emerson writes,

> It is very certain that sincere and happy conversation doubles our powers; that in the effort to unfold our thought to a friend we make it clearer to ourselves, and surround it with illustrations that help and delight us. It may happen that each hears from the other a better wisdom than any one else will ever hear from either.... for in good conversation parties don't speak to the words, but to the meanings of each other.[120]

In communicating one's ideas to another one becomes more familiar with those ideas oneself. He writes elsewhere, in "Inspiration,"

> Conversation, which, when it is best, is a series of intoxications. Not Aristotle, not Kant or Hegel, but conversation, is the right metaphysical professor. This is the true school of philosophy,—this the college where you learn what thoughts are, what powers lurk in those fugitive gleams, and what becomes of them; how they make history. A wise man goes to this game to play upon others and to be played upon, and at least as curious to know what can be drawn from himself as what can be drawn from them. For, in discourse with a friend, our thought, hitherto wrapped in our consciousness, detaches itself, and allows itself to be seen as a thought, in a manner as new and entertaining to us as to our companions. For provocation of thought, we use ourselves and use each other. Some perceptions—I think the best—are granted to the single soul; they come from the depth and go to the depth and are the permanent and controlling ones. [1] Others it takes two to find. We must be warmed by the fire of sympathy, to be brought into the right conditions and angles of vision.[121]

Here, Emerson moves from the mechanical and workshop concept of conversation, pointing out the role of sympathy in conversation. Conversation is not only thinking-with, but also feeling-with (sympathy), a sharing of mood, and this is an aspect of good conversation as well. Emerson writes that the best perceptions are granted to the single soul, and indeed he does often insist that genius blossoms in solitude, away from the intrusions of others and the temptations to gossip with and peep at one's neighbors. These controlling and permanent

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[120] "Social Aims," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude,* vol. 7., pp. 92-93, 100
[121] "Inspiration," in *Letters and Social Aims*, p. 293-94

perceptions that go to the depth are a vocation which one must hear for oneself, though which one learns to hear in conversations with friends.

Conversation takes one beyond oneself and one's own abilities because it is the product of the intercourse of two minds thinking. Like partners in a relay race, conversation partners each develop the topic before it is taken up and developed in new directions by the other. Conversation partners create a shared space of agonism and self-development.[122] As Emerson writes, "Conversation is a game of circles. In conversation we pluck up the *termini* which bound the common silence on every side."[123] The common silence is not merely that which has yet to be said, but that which neither of us is able to say without the other, and thus that which can only be brought out of silence through our common action. Good conversation synergistically moves the conversation partners beyond that which either is capable of on her own. A good conversation partner is someone who agonistically challenges me and draws out my thinking beyond itself. In "Inspiration," Emerson writes,

> Homer said, "When two come together, one apprehends before the other;" but it is because one thought well that the other thinks better: and two men of good mind will excite each other's activity, each attempting still to cap the other's thought. In enlarged conversation we have suggestions that require new ways of living, new books, new men, new arts and sciences. By sympathy, each opens to the eloquence, and begins to see with the eyes of his mind. We were all lonely, thoughtless; and now a principle appears to all; we see new relations, many truths; every mind seizes them as they pass; each catches by the mane one of these strong coursers like horses of the prairie, and rides up and down in the world of the intellect.[124]

Conversation, like friendship, can be interpreted in terms of the Greek agon (ἀγών): a friendly competition or sparring between warriors that serves to exercise and develop their skills.

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[122] "Conversation" is etymologically derived from the Latin *conversari*: "to live with; to dwell with."

[123] "Circles," in *EW*, p. 256

[124] "Inspiration," in CW, p. 294

Agonistic competitors become strong through each other. When one exceeds or betters her competition, she does not dominate the other but paradoxically liberates the other to her own development.

More than helping one to exercise and develop one's ideas, a good conversation partner allows one to say what one cannot say to oneself. In "Considerations by the Way," he writes, "Conversation… is a main function of life. What a difference in the hospitality of minds! Inestimable is he to whom we can say what we cannot say to ourselves."[125] Such a hospitable mind goes beyond simply providing an occasion for one to express oneself or even to agonistically develop one's ideas. The conversation partner who allows me to say what I cannot say to myself is the occasion of a new thought, not simply the development of an old idea. This partner allows me to express a transcendental truth about myself which I have avoided or which I cannot see because it is what structures my ability to see. As literary theorist, Branca Arsić points out, conversation decenters the speaker and allows her to get beyond her own intellectual frameworks. Such conversation is similar in function to the exchange between analyst and analysand in the psychoanalytic relationship. In his manuscript on friendship, Emerson writes of the educative function of conversation,

> But there is a use which is rendered to us by our friends which is not mercenary nor finite, but is absolute <productive of an eternal benefit,> & ^everlasting˅ & is the very highest office which one being can render to another. It is, that, we educate each other. It is, that, one man is trained up to the knowledge of what he is & what he can do, by the instrumentality of other men; that by our mutual action, conversation, and observation, our powers are exercised & disclosed to us.[126]

[125] "Considerations by the Way," p. 270

[126] In Kalinevitch, p. 54. NB: The arrows and brackets in seen in this text indicate revisions Emerson later added to his journal entries.

More than being disclosed to the conversation partner, one is disclosed to oneself in conversation. More than an exchange of information, conversation is an existential orientation characterized by friendly hospitality, agonism, and shared joy.[127]

In "New England Reformers," Emerson draws out the political implication of conversation, namely, that conversation reveals the participants as equals. Conversation partners are equal because they move beyond the partialities of their ego identities to become impersonal and spontaneous. They are equal in conversation because each has revealed herself as rooted in God. Emerson understands the inequalities and differences between people to be real but also superficial and less important than underlying monism. Such inequalities have less to do with being and are instead related to people's capacities and willingness to express and manifest the divine.

> And as a man is equal to the church, and equal to the state, so he is equal to every other man. The disparities of power in men are superficial; and all frank and searching conversation, in which a man lays himself open to his brother, apprizes each of their radical unity. When two persons sit and converse in a thoroughly good understanding, the remark is sure to be made, See how we have disputed about words! Let a clear, apprehensive mind, such as every man knows among his friends, converse with the most commanding poetic genius, I think, it would appear that there was no inequality such as men fancy between them; that a perfect understanding, a like receiving, a like perceiving, abolished differences, and the poet would confess, that his creative imagination gave him no deep advantage, but only the superficial one, that he could express himself, and the other could not; that his advantage was a knack.[128]

Emerson here suggests that all people have the same connection to the divine source of thought and that we get a glimpse of this equal access in good conversations. A scholar is not a person with more truth than an amateur, the scholar merely has a more cultivated way of expressing

[127] In Chapter Five, I discuss the ethical and existential significance of Dasein's hearing the voice of the friend in Heidegger's *Being and Time*.
[128] "New England Reformers," in *EW*, p. 416

that truth. This is because conversation reveals a truth that is fundamentally metaphysical rather than merely epistemological. It is not so much that conversation partners say what is true but that they reveal themselves truly. “The best of life is conversation, and the greatest success is confidence, or perfect understanding between sincere people. ‘Tis a French definition of friendship, rien que s'entendre, good understanding. The highest compact we can make with our fellow, is,—'Let there be truth between us two forevermore.'”[129]

Arsić provides one of the most compelling and complete analyses of Emersonian conversation, and although she recognizes Emerson’s emphasis on egolessness she does not equate egolessness with self-reliance and so does not recognize conversation as an experience of self-reliance. Much of her reading comports with what has been presented here, although she understands egolessness to be a prerequisite of good conversation, rather than an effect of good conversation. On Arsić’s account, Emerson distinguishes lowly forms of talking, which are essentially thoughtless and formulaic reports of one’s personal experience, from high conversation, which destabilizes and decenters the participants, setting the stage for individual development. She writes that such conversations are “less informative than transformative.”[130] An important part of making such perfectionistic transformation possible for Arsić is that one should become egoless and subjectively decentered to be open to the arrival of a future self. She thinks this is essentially what happens in conversation: conversation partners become egoless to make room for the other’s ideas and a future understanding. She writes, “High conversation happens on condition that it triggers the abandonment of egotism and the suspension of self-reflexivity… At the moment when two souls in self-denial produce an

[129] “Behavior,” in *CL*, p. 152
[130] Arsić, p. 196

impersonal channeling of affective thinking, conversation reaches its truth as impersonal conversing with itself."[131] She helpfully highlights how since in good conversation the partners become egoless, the conversation is a way of the impersonal speaking to itself.

In this chapter I have developed a reading of Emersonian self-reliance and subjectivity in light of Emerson's religiosity, and which points towards Emerson's significance as a foundation for later developments in existentialism. I develop and defend this claim in Chapter Five where I discuss the significance of freedom as vocation in three post-Protestant philosophers: Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. I have shown how self-reliance functions as a psychological, phenomenological, and existential concept for Emerson. The self-reliant person is one who overcomes her anxious maintenance of an ego identity in the face of others' expectations and her own desire for autobiographical continuity. Overcoming the ego, the self-reliant person actualizes the spontaneous movements of thought, which Emerson understands as intuition and the voice of God. Emerson prizes moments in daily life when a person forgets the maintenance of the ego and is moved by spontaneity: the glance and good conversations. Self-reliance becomes an existential concept when understood on the level of a life, where one gives up anxious attachment to the ego not just in the momentary ecstasy of conversation but in a more perduring way in everyday life, the choices one makes, and the relationships one develops.

[131] Ibid, p. 196

Chapter Two: The Significance of Friendship for Emersonian Self-Reliance

> "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order."
>
> -Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Friendship has been recognized as a central motif in Emerson's thought, though the concept has not received a systematic analysis. Besides Kalinevitch's cursory tracing of a few themes in her introduction to an unpublished manuscript, other authors focus exclusively on the 1841 essay, ignoring the development of Emerson's thinking on friendship over the previous ten years. This development can be traced in at least four separate texts: Sermon CXL (1831), the unpublished manuscript on friendship (early 1830s), "The Heart" (1838), and "Friendship" (1841). The paucity of attention to friendship in the literature on Emerson is striking considering the frequency with which this concept appears in his work and the centrality of it to his thought. Friendship is a fundamental ethical and political category for Emerson, which he uses to think about how others are necessary for one's development, actualization, and freedom.

Friendship has been recognized as necessary to self-reliance in several ways. In his introduction to his volume on Emersonian conceptions of power, Michael Lopez groups friendship with nature and books as a trio of phenomena that contribute to self-cultivation. He writes, "Each functions as an object (an 'other,' a Fichtean nonego, or NOT ME) that the mind can love and emulate—a nonself in which the self can find, as Emerson terms it, the deepest,

most ‘occult’ sympathies and most profound inspiration.”[132] Though pointing out a useful constellation of concepts in Emerson, Lopez does not develop specific ways in which books, nature and friends contribute to education. Certainly, his suggestion that these are to be emulated seems at odds with Emerson’s understanding of how one ought to relate to such teachers. In “Friendship,” he writes,

> I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them. We must have society on our own terms, and admit or exclude it on the slightest cause… Though I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lose my own… We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not.[133]

The friend is someone I love, but someone whose life must have its own direction. Friendship requires that each partner have her own plans and projects because friendship is a love that desires that the other should become herself. In “The American Scholar” he writes,

> Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books. Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system.[134]

Certainly, friends and books are to be loved for Emerson, but they are not to be emulated. Indeed, emulation might be one name for the ultimate Emersonian sin: conformity. Far from emulation, the love that characterizes our relationships with books and friends is a love which prizes individuation and the other’s self-actualization. Friendship is a society that is made stronger by self-reliant individuals who develop in their own directions.

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[132] *Emerson and Power*, p. 82
[133] “Friendship,” in *EW*, p. 213
[134] “The American Scholar,” in *EW*, p. 47

Cavell also identifies friendship as necessary to self-development but gives the concept little attention. "Here, in this constraint by recognition and negation, is the place of the high role assigned in moral perfectionism to friendship. Aristotle speaks of the friend as 'another myself.' To see Emerson's philosophical authorship as taking up the ancient position of the friend, we have to include the inflection (more brazen in Nietzsche but no less explicit in Emerson) of my friend as my enemy (contesting my present attainments)."[135] Cavell is helpful in pointing out the agonistic character of the friend as someone who goads one on to education and self-actualization. However, instead of analyzing this role of friendship for perfectionism, he turns to a discussion of one's future self as the exemplary motivation for this development.

Emersonian friendship has been the subject of several articles, though these treatments are partial and do not represent an ongoing conversation. Articles by Constantinesco, McNulty, and Sebouhian interpret the "Friendship" essay through a biographical lens, with an eye to Emerson's own lived friendships.[136] While this is a helpful method, these articles come to the same general conclusion: Emerson's letters and journals reflect a disappointment with his actual friends, and that disappointment shows up in the essay's praise of the idea of friendship in place of praise for actual friends. While it is interesting to note this connection to Emerson's biography, more work needs to be done to interpret the philosophical significance of friendship in Emerson's thought. Moreover, some of the conclusions drawn in these articles may be anachronistic since they trace the development of the "Friendship" essay alongside events occurring around the publication of this essay, whereas a more careful reading of Emerson's corpus shows that many of the ideas from "Friendship" were already on Emerson's mind nine

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[135] *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 59
[136] Constantinesco (2008); McNulty (1946); Sebouhian (1989).

years earlier when he delivered Sermon CXL. While Emerson certainly worked out the specific vocabulary of "Friendship" in the journals and letters he composed in the years immediately preceding the publication of the essay, the underlying ideas are present in his work for almost a decade prior.

Kalinevitch's introduction to the unpublished manuscript is a helpful comparison of the two pieces and an introduction to the ways Emerson's thought developed in the nearly ten years supposed to separate these pieces. Kalinevitch proposes a date in the early 1830s for the composition of the manuscript, as it was during this decade that Emerson developed ideas on friendship. Additionally, according to Kalinevitch, the manuscript has many of the hallmarks of Emerson's apparently more positive take on friendship, typical of the earlier writings. While the dating may be accurate, Kalinevitch's logic is based on a questionable reading of Emerson's essay. Kalinevitch adopts Whicher's authoritative interpretation of "Friendship," which sees the essay moving in a Platonic direction from a concern with actual friends in the beginning towards the valorization of the idea of friendship at the end.[137] Kalinevitch says this is a pessimistic move since Emerson is apparently disappointed with his actual friends and longs for an ideal friend whom he can love. She follows Whicher in concluding that over the course of the essay, as well as his life, Emerson becomes increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of true friendship. While Emerson undoubtedly strikes pessimistic tones—perhaps most clearly in his almost Augustinian suggestion in Sermon CXL that God might be the only

[137] Readings of "Friendship" often attempt to account for the shift in tone that occurs at paragraphs 8-10, apparently dividing the essay. David Robinson reads the shift as from fated and unchosen friendship to friendship that is intentionally cultivated (p. 57). Russell B. Goodman reads the shift as from disappointment in our knowledge of other people (i.e., Cavellian lived skepticism) to one of hope for a friend whom we might authentically know (p. 74).

friend worthy of love—I doubt whether the development of this pessimism is the main current of Emerson's thinking on friendship and whether this is the lens through which his 1841 essay is best interpreted.

On my reading, the movement of the essay is not a pessimistic turn from actual friends to the idea of friendship, but rather a movement from the egoistic mode of friendship towards the impersonal mode of friendship based on divine affinity. The egoistic conception of friendship in Emerson is roughly akin to Aristotle's friendships of utility and pleasure. These friendships are based on partial aspects of one's ego identity: the superficial layer of Emersonian subjectivity which is driven by will, and the sedimentation of which is shaken off in self-reliance. These are the partial aspects of who I am as an individual—my occupation, my hobbies, my political party, the things I enjoy—as opposed to the true core of Emersonian subjectivity, which is divine, impersonal, and universal. Emersonian subjects are both superficial ego and divine impersonality; lower friendships are "touching and clawing" attractions between ego identities, whereas true friendship is an affinity between divine cores. Thus, the essay does not trace a turn away from the other, but a movement of authenticity beyond the egoistic particularities of the other towards the impersonal, divine core of her subjectivity.

Zavatta's article on the ethico-political contours of friendship in Emerson and Nietzsche is helpful in pointing to the way friendship presents an ethics of care and concern for the other that contrasts with the Christian ethics of compassion. However, she does conflate Emerson's position with Nietzsche's, attributing to Emerson too strong a critique of compassion. While this certainly is a centerpiece of Nietzsche's theory of friendship (see Chapter Three), it represents a slightly different concern for Emerson. While Emerson does

offer friendship as the basis of a new ethics, he is not thereby critical of charity and compassion in the same way as Nietzsche. In fact, in the manuscript, he points to compassionate action as one way that we can gain self-knowledge. He describes in the manuscript that the compassionate call to action, especially in emergency situations, is a powerful manifestation of the intuitive movement of thought and the spontaneous response to this call is an experience of self-reliance.

Besides this, Zavatta's reading of the political implications of friendship pushes Emerson in anarchistic directions at odds with his critique of negative freedom and egoism, and his conception of self-reliance as positive freedom. She writes,

> The suggestion that Nietzsche takes from Emerson is that if every person reached that degree of maturity which today is possessed only by a few exceptional individuals, the state would have no reason to exist. If every individual were self-reliant he would in fact be able to satisfy those needs for which the state was invented. In this ideal condition of self-government everyone could deal with others as friends, without wishing to exercise authority over them or feeling the need to help them.[138]

The first problem with Zavatta's reading is that self-reliance does not describe an economic capacity to satisfy one's own needs. As discussed in Chapter One, self-reliance is to be understood along existential lines as a process of actualizing the intuitive movement of thought. Such an existential capacity does not obviate the need for government, and Emerson does not suggest as much. Self-actualization and the freedom it assumes might rely on the assertion and protection of political rights.

While Emerson does describe, at the end of "Politics," a society of self-reliant individuals free from the politics of force and punishment, this needs to be understood within the broader context of his valuation of a positive, Calvinist theory of freedom and fate.

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[138] Zavatta, p. 536

> The power of love, as the basis of a State, has never been tried. We must not imagine that all things are lapsing into confusion if every tender protestant be not compelled to bear his part in certain social conventions; nor doubt that the roads can be built, letter carried, and the fruit of labor secured, when the government of force is at an end.[139]

Emerson describes a new society not free from government tout court, but free from punitive methods of government. Freedom, for Emerson—as for Luther, Calvin, and Hegel before him—is not freedom from the law. The politics of self-reliance does not mean dissolving social conventions, and it does not assume a libertarian or autarchic subjectivity. The politics of self-reliance is a politics of friendship, where communal solidarity is established on the basis of love rather than compulsion, charity, or punishment. I will return to these political claims in the Conclusion.

George Kateb's chapter on friendship is quite helpful in bringing out many important aspects of this relationship and how it promotes self-reliance. Key among Kateb's observations regarding self-reliance are that it is an essentially receptive capacity in which one's egoistic will makes way for the expression of thought (which, in Chapter One, I called the intuitive movement of thought or the impersonal, divine core of subjectivity).[140] He says self-reliance is a creative self-trust[141] wherein one lives by one's own principles[142] and follows one's vocation.[143] Kateb recognizes the religious context in which Emerson developed his idea of self-reliance, as well as his ongoing appeal to religious language to describe the concept. Still, Kateb insists that the concept must be scrubbed of Emerson's "metaphysical fictions" if it is to

[139] "Politics," in *EW*, p. 388
[140] Kateb, p. 6
[141] Ibid, p. 19
[142] Ibid, p. 21
[143] Ibid, p. 24

be of any use to contemporary, liberal social theory.[144] Because Kateb reads Emerson without religion, he misses the Protestant significance of concepts such as vocation, predestination and law, and the positive notion of freedom they imply. This leads Kateb to interpret self-reliance as a wholly negative type of freedom. He calls it "substantive withholding," which amounts to a separation from society and refusal to commit to creeds or even the thoughts of yesterday.[145] Kateb misses how Emerson's conception of freedom is based on a Protestant logic of retroactivity. The self-reliant refusal to commit to social conventions and autobiographical continuity requires a commitment to one's vocation. The freedom such refusal engenders is not, for Emerson, a negative freedom to become whoever one chooses to become. Self-reliance is the freedom to become who one is. But who one is is a decision one encounters, when one encounters it, as always already having been made.

Kateb misses, or ignores, these religious dynamics at work in Emerson's thought perhaps because his project seeks to decouple Emerson's metaphysical and religious ideas from the theory of self-reliance in order to make the theory acceptable to secular sensibilities.[146] However, self-reliance is by no means an abandonment to the arbitrary choice made possible by negative freedom; rather it is the freedom to be one's best self that is made possible when one experiences oneself as predestined to be who one is. Kateb's reading of friendship comes out of his understanding of Emersonian freedom as negative freedom. The friend is someone who makes me comfortable, someone with whom I can share my thoughts, an accomplice in truth, a stranger who gives me room to grow. But Kateb misses the friend's positive role as a stimulus and provocation to growth. He misses the way in which one becomes

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[144] Ibid, p. 65
[145] Ibid, p. 4
[146] Kateb, p. 73

free through commitment to the friend's agonistic love and through the spontaneous exposure of thought which the friend makes possible. In friendship I lose my will and my attachment to myself so that I can be freed to myself authentically.

Arsić's reading of friendship is also quite helpful, especially regarding the ethics of friendship, which she develops as a love without desire. Her explanation of friendship as a model of radical democracy and radical hospitality based on the friend's essential strangeness is, I claim, overly optimistic. Certainly, Emersonian friendship describes an openness to the strangeness of new and old friends. However, Emerson is clear that this radical hospitality is very rarely met with a worthy recipient. She allows the figure of the stranger to frame her discussion of friendship without acknowledging the persistent disappointment Emerson describes in friends and strangers once they cease to be strange. She focuses her reading on the excitement and activity provoked by a stranger's visit, forgetting about what usually follows soon upon his arrival.

> But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definition, his defects into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and the best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress and the dinner—but the throbbing of the heart and the communication of the soul, no more.[147]

Where the stranger invariably loses strangeness and becomes a bore, the friend is one who maintains strangeness in intimacy, mediating society and solitude. Not only this, but Arsić's exploration of Emerson's theory of conversation—which can be practiced between no more than two individuals—as the culmination of friendship, while quite illuminating in itself, stands in some tension with her claim that Emerson is radically open to friendship with anyone.

[147] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 202

In “Spiritual Laws,” after explaining how books reveal different truths to each reader, he writes, “It is with a good book as it is with good company. Introduce a base person among gentlemen, it is all to no purpose; he is not their fellow. Every society protects itself, and he is not one of them, though his body is in the room.” In this example, the base person is unable to be-with gentlemen in a self-reliant way since they lack a shared way of being-in-the-world that would allow them to perceive each other’s truth. Certainly, there is a democratic contour to friendship insofar as anyone is potentially a friend, but Arsić overlooks the aristocratic tendencies in friendship evidenced by Emerson’s disappointment, boredom, and longing for better friends and conversation partners who would exercise his truth.

Four texts on friendship

Emerson devotes four texts to the idea of friendship. Like Emerson’s writing generally, these texts are produced through complex intertextual borrowings and revisions, so the development of his thought can be traced over a decade. The first text dedicated to the theme of friendship is Sermon CXL, delivered at the Second Church of Boston on January 8, 1832, and the New South Church of Boston on January 29, 1832. Sermon CXL is a discussion of I Corinthians 10:24, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” Already in this early work Emerson makes the connection between perfectionistic self-development and the generosity of a friendship that reveals one to oneself. He introduces here the idea of conversation as the practice of friendship, which is an enduring line of thought in these texts. In the flow of conversation friends drop their concern for social convention and ego so that their inner selves find expression and get drawn out beyond themselves. Because he thinks the quality of our expression is contingent not only on the quality of our ideas but on the capacity of our audience to hear them, he thinks we spend our life in search of friends worthy of

conversing with about our highest thoughts and he ultimately considers that God might be the ideal conversation partner and friend. Finally, he introduces the idea of friends as unchosen gifts who are attracted to each other on the basis of their inner, impersonal, and divine selves.

Emerson's next text on friendship is an undated and untitled manuscript, likely composed before 1834. In this manuscript Emerson systematizes his ideas, describing the educative function of friendship and showing how it contributes to self-knowledge in three ways. First, one learns about oneself by observing one's friends, whom Emerson considers—following Aristotle—to be other instantiations of oneself. In the second section, he describes how friends contribute to self-knowledge by stimulating one to education and development. He returns to the idea of conversation as a practice of self-reliant being-together and claims that in conversation friends stimulate each other to articulate and develop their ideas, and thus to bring their outer life into greater agreement with their thought. In the final section, Emerson writes that conversation is not enough and that one gains further self-knowledge through action, making the existentialist claim, avant la letter, that the things one spontaneously does reveal the person one is.

In 1838, Emerson described friendship for the third time in his lecture "The Heart." This lecture was delivered on January 3, 1838, at the Masonic Temple in Boston as part of the *Human Culture* series. In this lecture Emerson works out themes and passages that comprise the 1841 essay, especially the idea that friendship mediates society and solitude so that one learns to be in society who one is in private. Because the lecture is much shorter and less imagistic than the essay, Emerson's ideas on friendship are presented in sharper focus. He discusses the fundamental unity of people, friendship as divine affinity, and conversation as the practice of friendship. The lecture is in many ways a first draft of the 1841 "Friendship,"

published in his collection of essays, *Essays: First Series*. The essay draws together lines from the earlier texts, especially the significance of friends for individual development and the mediation of society and solitude. Over the course of a decade, Emerson's thought develops from friendship as a relationship that perfects one for a relationship with God, to friendship as a relationship that perfects one for a relationship with the divinity in others, and dialectically with the divinity in oneself. In the following section I discuss the most important characteristics of Emersonian friendship, showing how Emerson adapts ideas from Aristotle and Montaigne. I then go on to show how friendship contributes to self-reliance.

Characteristics of Friendship: Aristotle, Montaigne, and Emerson

Like his religious thought, Emerson's philosophy of friendship is an eclectic and original synthesis of ideas. Since Emerson did not usually read as a systematic researcher it would be too much to claim that he responds directly to any of the philosophers on friendship. Still, he was familiar with the philosophy of friendship as it was developed in the work of major thinkers before him. Since Emerson rarely mentions the name of another philosopher, he is prone to misquoting others, and he never provides a citation, tracing his sources is an unsure project. In the current section I describe some of the main characteristics of Emersonian friendship, showing how these ideas develop through his readings of Aristotle and Montaigne. We know Emerson read the *Nicomachean Ethics* because we have his library records, and we know he owned a copy of Thomas Taylor's *A Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle*. The other clear influence on Emerson's understanding of friendship is Montaigne. Scholars have long recognized Montaigne's *Essais* as an important stylistic and philosophical inspiration for

Emerson's own essays.[148] Recalling his experience reading the *Essais*, Emerson writes, "It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience."[149]

Following Aristotle, Emerson locates the special power of the friend in her ambiguous intersubjective positioning. More than any other person, the friend is mine as not mine. As Aristotle puts it, the friend is "another myself," and thus offers a unique opportunity to know and relate to oneself in the world.[150] Aristotle understands friendship as a love aiming at the emancipation of the other, for the sake of the other.[151] He thinks that more self-realized people have a greater need for friendship since friends share a vision of the good, and since one's actions are most noble when directed toward a friend.[152] These considerations support Aristotle's broader claim that friendship is a more fundamental concern for politics than justice.[153]

Emerson was familiar with Aristotle's theory of friendship through his readings of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as translated by John Gillies (1797), and through the work of the classicist, and one of young Emerson's favorite authors, Thomas Taylor. Taylor proposes that Aristotle's political theory of friendship, as the bond which brings people together in a shared world, is grounded in the metaphysical role ascribed to friendship and love by some pre-Socratics. Empedocles posits six metaphysical principles that constitute existence: There are

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[148] See Young, Charles Lowell. *Emerson's Montaigne*.
[149] Emerson, *Representative Men*. p. 155
[150] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.4, 9
[151] Ibid, VIII.3
[152] Ibid, IX.9
[153] Ibid, VIII.1

four elements—earth, wind, fire, and water—which are held together in different proportions in individual things by friendship and strife. Taylor quotes Empedocles,

> Oft many things to one their being owe,
> Fire, water, earth, and air immensely high;
> And each with equal power is found endued,
> When strife pernicious is from each apart,
> And friendship equalised in length and breadth.[154]

Whereas friendship provides metaphysical unity to things, strife is the principle of individuation and separation. Though both forces are more-or-less active everywhere, Taylor interprets Empedocles's claim to be that friendship is dominant in the spiritual realm and strife is dominant in the material world. A main goal of Emersonian and Nietzschean friendship, as I discuss below and in Chapter 4, is the incorporation of strife and love in agonism.

Modern commentators on Aristotelian friendship are quick to point out that since Aristotle's conception of friendship is so different from a modern, everyday conception, the two concepts cannot really be compared. Aristotle's friendship is a bond which brings people together into a shared world. The argument generally suggests that philia and friendship are incomparable concepts since the ancient Greek *philia* applies to a wide range of relationships—for Aristotle friendship is not only a relationship between what is often translated as bosom buddies, but also between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, citizens, business partners, travelers, and even hosts and guests—whereas the modern concept of friendship is generally limited to Aristotle's bosom buddies. Emerson, like Aristotle and the Greeks more generally, understands friendship as a form of love that can exist in different types of relationships. Aristotelian or Emersonian friendship is not one type of relationship among others, but rather a mode of solicitude and love that can exist in any relationship. Just as well,

[154] Quoted in Taylor, *A Dissertation on Aristotle*, Book I, pp. 42-43

it is a type of love that might not exist between one and the people one calls one's friends in an everyday sort of way. For Aristotle, there is friendship whenever two—or sometimes more—people have proportional and reciprocal good will, where that good will is generously aimed at the other's good for the other's sake, and where each partner is aware of the other's good will. Emerson's understanding of the work of friendship differs from Aristotle's, since Emerson suggests that friendships need not be reciprocal.

Montaigne explores friendship in his essay "On Friendship." This essay develops a theory of friendship, though it is largely a discussion of Montaigne's specific friendship with Etienne de Boétie. Montaigne and Boétie met soon after Montaigne's appointment to the Bordeaux Parlement in 1557, and they quickly became best friends. Montaigne was already familiar with Boétie, having read his short work of political philosophy, *On Voluntary Servitude*. In this treatise, Boétie argues that all political power is based on popular consent and that a population can withdraw consent, and should withdraw consent, when they are living under a tyrant.[155] Montaigne and Boétie's friendship was cut short when Boétie died suddenly, apparently of the plague, in August 1563.[156] When Montaigne first published *Essais*, in 1580, he planned to include *On Voluntary Servitude* as the center chapter of the book. Montaigne had such reverence for his friend that he compares Boétie's essay to a painter's masterpiece, and his own essays to the grotesques which traditionally surround the masterpiece.[157]

[155] The implications of *On Voluntary Servitude* for Emerson's political thought will be discussed in Chapter Five. I will show how Boétie finds in friendship a form of sociality inimical to tyranny since friendship establishes equality and reciprocity. I will show that whereas for Boétie the negative freedom of arbitrary choice and consumption leads towards tyranny and unfreedom, Emerson identifies an emancipatory potential in obedience to oneself, one's friends and God.
[156] Smith, Malcolm, "Introduction," in *Slaves by Choice*. p. 15
[157] de Boétie, *Slaves by choice*. p. 19

Montaigne's essay "On Friendship" would have been the chapter before *On Voluntary Servitude*. However, Montaigne ultimately chose not to publish *On Voluntary Servitude* with his *Essais*, having discovered that the treatise had recently been published by a group of Huguenots as a denunciation of Charles IX—an awkward development for Montaigne who had been a courtier of the king. Early editions of Montaigne's *Essais* were published with a collection of Boétie's sonnets in place of *On Voluntary Servitude*.[158] Though Montaigne revises and republishes his essays over the course of the next twelve years, he never removes the references to and discussion of Boétie's political essay, creating the sense of an uncanny absence at the climactic center of the book.

Montaigne's influence on Emerson's thinking on friendship can be seen at many more-or-less explicit points in Emerson's writing. One particularly explicit moment is in Emerson's poem on friendship entitled "Etienne de la Boecce." In this poem, Emerson describes a friendship that is made stronger by a manly resistance on the part of the friends. He wrties,

> I serve you not, if you I follow,
> Shadow-like, o'er hill and hollow,
> And bend my fancy to your leading,
> All too nimble for my treading.
> When the pilgrimage is done,
> And we've the landscape overrun,
> I am bitter, vacant, thwarted,
> And your heart is unsupported.
> Vainly valiant, you have missed
> The manhood that should yours resist.[159]

Interestingly, the idea that friendship is made stronger by resistance and agonism between the friends is fundamental to Emerson and Aristotle, but this is not to be found in Montaigne's

[158] Montaigne, "On Friendship," in *Slaves by Choice*, p. 34-35.
[159] Emerson, "Etienne de Le Boecce," in *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship*, by Marc D. Schachter. Ashgate. p. v

description of his friendship with Boétie. For Montaigne, friends' "souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together."[160]

Friendship and friendships

Aristotle, Montaigne, and Emerson distinguish between friends who are true friends and friends who are, in various ways, less than true friends. Aristotle is the most systematic in his description of friendships based on either utility, pleasure, or the good, though this hierarchy appears implicitly in both Montaigne and Emerson. Aristotle delineates three specific forms of friendship based on whether the friends wish for the good of each other on the basis of utility, pleasure, or the good itself. "Now, when the motive of the affection is usefulness, the partners do not feel affection for each other *per se* but in terms of the good accruing from the other. The same is true of those whose friendship is based on pleasure: we love witty people not for what they are, but for the pleasure they give us."[161] Some people are friends simply because they find each other useful and because they get some profit out of the friendship. Such a friendship might exist between co-workers or people who have a common interest in some venture. These people are friends because they help each other to navigate life in the workplace or to ensure the success of their projects, but once the shared venture is complete and there is no more profit to be had from the relationship the friendship quickly fades. Utility friendships are most common among needy elderly people and ambitious young people, since these people are mostly interested in what benefit they can obtain from another. Utility is also the basis of the friendship Aristotle identifies between a host and guest.[162]

[160] Montaigne, in *Slaves by Choice*, p. 26
[161] Aristotle. 1156a.10
[162] Aristotle. 1156a. 25-30

Friendships on the basis of pleasure are those where the friends share some desire or hobby such as wine tasting, or where the friends mutually derive pleasure directly from each other, as in the case of a witty or charming person. Friendships of pleasure come to swift ends when the tastes of one friend change and they no longer desire the other as a source of pleasure. Aristotle thinks these friendships are formed primarily among the young since he understands their lives to be guided primarily by emotion and the pursuit of pleasure.[163]

For Aristotle, friendships are durable only when they are based on the friends' shared goodness and pursuit of the good. He writes, "These friends wish alike for one another's good because they are good men, and they are good *per se* [i.e., intrinsically good, and not by accident]. Those who wish for their friends' good for their friends' sake are friends in the truest sense."[164] Since both friends are good intrinsically, since they both pursue the good, and since the good is unchanging, this higher friendship is durable. Such friends are not attracted by, or only by, accidental qualities of their personalities. Finally, this higher friendship is not based on how one might profit from the relationship but on how one might generously contribute to the good of the friend.[165] True friendships are extremely rare since they can be developed only between virtuous people, and virtuous people are themselves rare.

Montaigne reiterates Aristotle's distinction between higher and lower types of friendship, using his relationship with Boétie as an example of the higher form. But Montaigne is more modern and more restricted in his definition of friendship. His first argumentative

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[163] Aristotle. 1156a. 32-26
[164] Aristotle. 1156b.6-10
[165] This generous and dutiful character of friendship comes to characterize the medieval understanding of friendship as caritas as the relationship between humanity and God in Aquinas and Richard of St. Victor.

move in the essay is to reject the expansive, ancient concept of friendship, which includes family members, business partners, and citizens.

> Now, the perfect type of social relationship is this one [i.e., friendship]. For all those relationships which are created and sustained by pleasure or profit, or public or private need, are to that extent less fine, less noble than friendship, for they have other causes, other objectives, other benefits than the relationship itself. None of the four types of relationship which the ancients distinguished—natural, social, hospitable, or erotic—corresponds to friendship, either individual or conjointly with other.[166]

Montaigne argues successively against each of these ancient categories of friendship and in so doing describes his modern concept of friendship via negativa.[167]

According to Montaigne, parents and children have a love based primarily on respect. He thinks this respect precludes the kind of open communication and mutual critique that are central to friendship. He writes, "The hidden thoughts of fathers cannot be communicated to children, as this would risk engendering an unseemly familiarity, nor is it possible for children to perform for their parents that essential duty of friendship which consists in offering admonition and correction."[168] Brothers are not able to be friends since they must compete for honor and success. He writes, "There are things which greatly dilute and loosen the fraternal bond—holding property in common, sharing things, and the fact that the prosperity of one is the poverty of the other. Since brothers have to make their way on the same path and at the

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[166] Montaigne, p. 21

[167] The problem of representing friendship or love directly is a question for modern philosophers as it was for medieval Christian mystics. This is especially evident in the writing of the 13th century Beguines who utilized poetry to attempt to write the ineffable. In *On Friendship*, Nehamas discusses the difficulties of representing the concept of friendship in art. He claims that friendships unfold in mundane repetitions of idiosyncratic lives such that it is impossible to represent friendship in painting and extremely difficult, and on his account boring, to depict it in novels. Similarly, Kierkegaard, in *Works of Love*, suggests that love is unrepresentable in isolated writing since any word or statement can convey love. In order to know whether a word conveys love, one needs to know not what was said, but how it was said.

[168] Montaigne, p. 21

same speed, they are bound to collide with each other."[169] He thinks erotic lovers cannot be friends since they have "an objective which is physical and therefore capable of being sated. Friendship, on the other hand, is enjoyed as and when desired, and the enjoyment of friendship strengthens and sustains and develops it, for it is spiritual—and in the exercise of friendship the soul is refined."[170] Besides all this, Montaigne says there is no reason to expect family relations to be characterized by the "harmony and fellow-feeling" which is central to friendship.[171]

Montaigne writes that erotic love is more intense, but also more "fickle, fluctuating, changeable," whereas friendship is "general and universal, temperate and constant, sustained and settled, all sweetness and smoothness, having nothing about it which is cutting or harsh."[172] Marriage is not like friendship since there is an obligation to maintain marriage and also because marriage is complicated by legal and economic matters, "whereas the only business which friendship has is with itself."[173] Finally, Montaigne places women completely outside the realm of friendship: "Women do not normally have the ability to sustain that encounter of intellect and that frankness upon which the holy bond of friendship feeds; nor do they appear to have the stability of character which will bear the embrace of such a firm and durable bond."[174] He thinks that such a friendship of mind and body would be the ideal friendship, "but there is no example of the female sex having yet been able to arrive at such friendship."[175] Finally, Montaigne says ancient Greek pederasty cannot be friendship since "it involved such

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[169] Montaigne. p. 21
[170] Montaigne, p. 23
[171] Montaigne, p. 21
[172] Montaigne, p. 22
[173] Montaigne, p. 23
[174] Montaigne, p. 23-24
[175] Montaigne, p. 23

disparity of ages and difference of function between the lovers that it did not correspond very well with that perfect union and harmony which we were looking for."[176] In the process of denying extensions of Aristotle's conception of friendship, Montaigne tells us something of his modern concept. Friends must have open communication and be able to critique one another, they must be on individual life paths, and their relationship must be spiritual, seeking the soul's refinement. Their love must be characterized by a harmonious fellow-feeling, temperance, and equality. Finally, the relationship is consummated in an intellectual bond.

In the second portion of the essay, Montaigne provides some additional characteristics of friendship when he discusses the rules of high and low friendships. In common friendships the friends should proceed with caution since "the relationship is not so close."[177] Common friends should love each other "as if they will one day have to hate [each other]."[178] In high friendship, the friends fully merge their wills and lives in such a way that a different set of rules applies. Noble friends are too unified for there to be obligations or duties between them. There is nothing I can owe to or expect from a friend since my friend is already me. "Since they truly hold all things in common—the will, thoughts judgements, goods, wives, children, honour and life—, and their harmony with each other makes them one soul in two bodies (to use Aristotle's very apt definition), they cannot lend each other or give each other anything."[179]

As I show in the following pages, Emerson follows Aristotle and Montaigne in describing friendship as a type of love that can emerge in any relationship and which rarely exists in the relationships often called friendships. The love that is friendship, as Emerson

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[176] Montaigne, p. 24
[177] Montaigne, p. 29
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

understands it, is extremely rare and transient such that he often writes of the expected or anticipated friend or the friend who has departed. Friendship is a relationship that demands reciprocity and recognition of equality even among otherwise unequal partners such that the love is made stronger as each friend becomes himself and can contribute more of himself. Finally, friendship is characterized by generosity and agonism such that friendship is not about possessing the friend in a fantasy of permanence but challenging her forth toward her own self-reliance and education.

Friendship is rare

The rarity of authentic friendship is a strikingly similar feature in Aristotle, Montaigne, and Emerson. Friends are so rare that they are often represented in these texts by their absence. As Aristotle points out, since virtuous people are scarce, the coming together of virtuous people in friendship is an exceedingly rare event.[180] It is to develop this line on the scarcity of virtuous people that Montaigne and Emerson attribute to Aristotle the statement, "My friends, there is no such thing as a friend."[181] For both Montaigne and Emerson, this phrase distinguishes between the ubiquity of lower friendships and the extreme rarity of authentic friendship: True friendships are so rare that even the people one addresses as one's friends are not true friends. Emerson writes,

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[180] Aristotle, 1156b.25

[181] Montaigne, p. 28. As Agamben points out, this phrase does not appear in the work of Aristotle but is originally attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius in *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers.* The line appears in Book V, 21-22: "He who has friends can have no true friend." It is likely that Diogenes means to paraphrase *Nicomachean Ethics* 1171a.15: "Those who have many friends and are on familiar terms with any chance acquaintance are thought to be friends to none, except in the sense in which there is friendship among fellow citizens." Where Derrida takes the phrase to suggest an aporia in the concept of friendship, the original line from Aristotle makes the much more straightforward point that true friendship requires intimacy.

> But whilst all men are familiar with the image of a perfect friendship, whilst all ardent minds have so keen an appetite for it, is it not strange that it is so seldom realized? realized, I mean, in the highest degree. It was the saying of a wise man, "O my friends, there is no friend." And I cannot think that every one of us must have remarked in his own experience the strange solitude in which every soul lived, in this world, let our acquaintances be as many and as intimate as they may.[182]

The scarcity of virtuous people is further complicated by the fortuitousness of friendship: One cannot seek out and willfully choose a friend on the basis of explicit qualities. Friendship is a gift that appears unsought, and which attracts people on the basis of something more internal, divine, and impersonal than superficial ego traits. Even when virtuous people find each other, friendship is slow and takes time to develop. In this section I show how scarcity, fortuitousness, and slowness contribute to the rarity of authentic friendship.

Though the rarity of friendship is evident in Aristotle, he discusses it with less pathos than Montaigne and Emerson, each of whom write of the friend's absence with a mournful remembrance and anticipatory longing. Montaigne's essays are inspired by the absence of friends in his life, especially after Boétie's death. He writes that he would rather write letters, but since he has no one to write to he spends his days secluded in his chateau writing the *Essais*. Moreover, Montaigne's essay on friendship is written as a kind of literary elegy for Boétie: we learn about friendship largely through Montaigne's lamentation and remembrance of his dead friend. The overall sense in Montaigne is that philosophy—especially in Montaigne's style, as a playful parrying with the everyday, which was so influential for Emerson—gets started in friendly conversations. Montaigne's longing, broken heart is evident in the final pages of the essay where his words seem to fail adequately to describe his pain, and he increasingly substitutes for his own words quotes of mourning from Horace, Virgil, and Catullus. Through

[182] *Sermons*, vol. 4, p. 51.

the account of the longed-for absent friend and the failure of language, the reader finally comes to the revelation of the absence and inability to speak for itself even of Boétie's text. Not only does the friend evade Montaigne through death, but the essay's absence is a repetition of the impossibility of representing friendship and of speaking oneself in the friend's absence.

Boétie's evasion of Montaigne through death and the impossibility of Montaigne's representing such a death is the experience of an unspeakable grief, but one that can become a moment of new creation and thought. Thomas Carlson, reading Emerson's "Experience," argues that the unspeakability of such a grief, which Emerson felt in relation to his dead son, opens one to one's own finitude as a condition of one's thoughtfulness. The inability to speak grief leads Montaigne to take up the words of others while Emerson struggles to write the stunning silence. Carlson writes that "Thinking, for Emerson, means being at a loss, such that the essential awakening, or morning, to which thought aspires would be tied intimately to mourning as grieving."[183] Unable to speak or write his grief, Emerson experiences it and receives it. Grief recalls one to childhood, in Carlson's terms, to the position of one who can think, explore, and project a new possibility. The confrontation with one's finitude in being at a loss calls one to find new and creative ways of speaking, thinking, and being in the world.[184]

Whereas Montaigne's sometimes elegiac essay can lead one to question whether he is investigating friendship as a concept or merely indulging in a remembrance of his specific friendship with Boétie, it is the alleged absence of any specific friends which leads some readers (e.g., Whicher and Kalevenitch) of Emerson's essay to characterize it as a cold, unfriendly valorization of the concept over lived relationships. Emerson, however, does not

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[183] *With the World at Heart*, p. 188
[184] Ibid., p. 195

exhibit any unfriendly satisfaction in rejecting friends for the pursuit of philosophy, and this proposed opposition between friendship and philosophy is at odds with Emerson's overall idea of friendship as foundational for the development of thought and self-reliance. As Cavell rightly points out, if philosophical thinking "is a continual turning away from society, it is thereby a continual turning *toward* it."[185] When Emerson writes of the scarcity of virtuous people and his disappointment with relationships that do not live up to the promise of friendship he does not reject society, but shows his enduring hope for the eventual arrival of one who is worthy of friendship. He writes,

> The best part of our nature is not known or shared since we rarely encounter people worthy of hearing our best thoughts. Still, "these thoughts were made for communication" and we hunger for sympathy… These unsatisfied desires intimate a future state; they promise a gratification yet to come. We hold out the hand of affection to embrace friends in the spiritual world. This restless love, ever seeking its object, points to a future state and to exalted companions, as much as the folded wings of the poor caterpillar indicate that one day it shall cease to creep along the ground and shall rise into the air with new form and increased powers.[186]

The absence of personified friends in Emerson's essay is not a rejection of his personal friends or a turn from society, but rather an attempt to reveal friendship as a love that aims at something deeper than superficial and partial ego traits. In "Friendship," he writes, "The soul does not respect men as it respects itself."[187] This is a truncated version of a passage from "The Heart" where he writes,

> With persons pure soul has nothing to do. The religious sense is not more accurately true than the philosophical sense of the text, "God is no respecter of persons." In strictness the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. It looks at a continual unfolding of the impersonal… it postpones persons, all persons, to this contemplation of the impersonal, the immutable, the One.[188]

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[185] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 59
[186] "Sermon CXL," in *Sermons*, vol. 4, p. 52
[187] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 204
[188] "The Heart," *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, pp. 278-79

Emersonian friendship is a kind of divine narcissism, in that what is universal and divine in me pursues what is universal and divine in my friend.[189] This is clear in "Friendship," where he writes, "Men have sometimes exchanged names with their friends, as if each would signify that in their friend each loved his own soul."[190] Friendship is not about "touching and clawing" at the other's ego, and Emerson even advises that one should avoid spending too much time at the friend's house. In "Spiritual Laws," he writes, "He cleaves to one person and avoids another, according to their likeness or unlikeness to himself, truly seeking himself in his associates and moreover in his trade and habits and gestures and meats and drinks."[191] As I argue in Chapter Five, the self-reliant person seeks and finds herself in the world, among her commitments, care, and vocation.

As an affinity between what is divine in people—a divinity which Emerson understands as impersonal in its universality and transcendence of the ego—friendship is a relationship that is fortuitous: friendship cannot be calculated and reduced to an explicit set of desirable personality traits that would make one my friend. Rather, Emerson understands friendship as an affinity which is not chosen, so friendship is experienced as a gift. Emerson writes,

> My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one.[192]

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[189] See Chapter One on Emersonian subjectivity and the dualism of the divine core and the superficial, socially constructed ego.
[190] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 202
[191] "Spiritual Laws," p. 181
[192] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 203

As discussed in Chapter One, Emerson understands the core of subjectivity to be a participation in the universal and impersonal divine. It is not that we share tastes, hobbies, circumstances, or practices, but that I know you to be my companion by the same intuitive and divine knowledge by which I know who I am. Friendship is a vocation. This is an idea Emerson read in Montaigne, who writes, "If I am pressed to say why I loved him, I feel unable to find words to answer that, and can only say, 'Because it was him, because it was me.'"[193] Any attempt to enumerate the reasons for this love must fail because what I love in the friend is something deeper and more perduring than accidental aspects of her ego. Montaigne writes,

> It is not simply an individual consideration, or two or three such considerations, or a thousand, it was some quintessence of every possible consideration which seized my will and led it to immerse itself and lose itself in his—and which seized his will and led it to immerse itself and lose itself in mine, with a hunger and rivalry that were the same for both of us.[194]

In less metaphysical terms than Emerson employs, we can say that the friend has a *je ne sais quoi* which is the basis of our attraction. Since we are attracted based on some unknowable and unspeakable affinity between our divinity friendship is wholly outside our will and must come to us.

Friendship emerges in relationships such that friends realize retroactively that they have become friends, rather than setting out to become friends or deciding when to become friends.[195] This unchosen and fortuitous nature of friendship is already described in Montaigne, who writes of his first encounter with Boétie, "Beyond any reasoning of mine, and beyond any individual point I might make, there lies an unfathomable and indescribable power, or fate,

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[193] Montaigne, p. 26
[194] Montaigne, p. 27
[195] See also Emily Dickinson's "55," where she writes that friendship grows from seeds "which blossom in the dark," and not, to extend her analogy, in the light of reason. Dickinson, p. 30.

which brought about this union… I think this was through some divine ordinance."[196] Montaigne marvels at the unlikely odds that while traveling he would attend a festival and meet a man in a crowd who would become his dearest friend.

For Emerson, friends are gifts from God, and they reveal God's nature. He writes, "I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts?... My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me."[197] Though most people would likely insist that friendship must be a free choice—two people cannot be forced to be friends—it must also be recognized that authentic friendships, while not coerced, also are not freely chosen. True friendships, like true loves, are not the product of the will or calculation. One cannot choose to fall in love, to be in love, or to fall out of love. The fall associated with love is something which one suffers, and with which one must come to terms. Friendship, and love more generally, exhibit the same phenomenologically retroactive freedom that was introduced regarding Emersonian subjectivity above.[198] If there is work to be done regarding friendship it is work that must be done to make oneself a more commodious receiver of friendship. Thus, Emerson writes, "The only way to have a friend is to be one."[199]

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[196] Montaigne, p. 26
[197] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 203
[198] It is because I take fortuitousness to be central to Emerson's understanding of authentic friendship that I reject Robinson's reading of "Friendship" as moving from lower friendships that happen by chance to higher friendships that are willfully cultivated. Robinson's reading misses the passage towards the end of the essay where Emerson continues to emphasize the fortuitous nature of friendship as a gift. For example: "Friendship demands a religious treatment. We talk of choosing our friends, but friends are self-elected. Reverence is a great part of it." (p. 210).
[199] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 211

The final reason for the rarity of authentic friendship is that friendship is slow to develop and takes time.[200] Aristotle references a proverb that says, "People cannot know each other until they have eaten the specified [measure of] salt together."[201] Some versions of this proverb specify that people must have shared enough meals to have eaten a pound of salt together before they can know each other well enough to be friends. For Aristotle, friendship requires familiarity, confidence, and more than just affection, the knowledge that the friend is worthy of affection (e.g., that she can be trusted to keep her promises, that she pursues the good[202]), and this all takes time to develop. Emerson explains friendship's slowness in terms of the divine affinity between friends. He writes that friendships based on partial ego traits are quick to develop but also shallow, whereas slowly developing relationships between divine cores are "poetic, pure, universal and great as nature itself." He writes,

> Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclusions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fiber of the human heart... But we have aimed at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in the whole garden of God, which many summers and many winters must ripen. We seek our friend not sacredly,

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[200] Montaigne departs from Aristotle here, claiming that his friendship with Boétie was immediate. "We were embracing each other when all we knew of each other was the name. And at our first meeting… we were so readily accepted by each other, that from then on nothing was as close to us as we were to each other." p. 26

[201] Aristotle. 1156b.27.

[202] Aristotle's outworking of political friendship differs markedly from Schmitt's on this issue in a way that allows for the politics of cynicism in Schmitt. Whereas Aristotle insists that friends must be in pursuit of the good (and not merely *our* conception of the good), Schmitt allows that I might recognize that my political friends utilize morally reprehensible methods and that they are morally evil. For Schmitt, political friendship is based solely in the shared pursuit of a political end. He writes that the friend-enemy distinction "can neither be based on any one antithesis [e.g., good and evil, beautiful and ugly] or any combination of other antitheses, nor can it be traced to these. If the antithesis of good and evil is not simply identical with that of beautiful and ugly, profitable and unprofitable, and cannot be reduced to the others, then the antithesis of friend and enemy must even less be confused with or mistaken for the others… It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions" (*The Concept of the Political*, pp. 26-27).

> but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain.[203]

Friendships that are held together by wine and dreams are those Aristotle understood as based in pleasure, whereas friendships based on the tough fibers of the human heart are those based in virtue. Authentic friendships, which are an unchosen affinity between the intuitive movement of people's thoughts, and which demand sincerity and tenderness, take time to develop.

Slowness makes friendships rare in an obvious way, since there just are likely to be fewer friendships to be found at any one time than there would be if they developed more quickly. But more important is the way this slow development fits poorly with the increasing speed and busyness of the modern world. Emerson witnessed the emergence of this fast and busy modern life in the emergence of capitalism as a way of life during the Jacksonian Market Revolution.[204] Our friendships also speed up and become a matter of busyness, when for example, we allow virtual interactions on social media to replace face-to-face and body-to-body interactions in the world. For Emerson, true friendships take time, togetherness, and

[203] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 205

[204] In Daybreak, section 175, Nietzsche also describes the emergence of capitalism as a cultural logic: "Fundamental Basis of a Culture of Traders.—We have now an opportunity of watching the manifold growth of the culture of a society of which commerce is the soul, just as personal rivalry was the soul of culture among the ancient Greeks, and war, conquest, and law among the ancient Romans. The tradesman is able to value everything without producing it, and to value it according to the requirements of the consumer rather than his own personal needs. 'How many and what class of people will consume this?' is his question of questions. Hence, he instinctively and incessantly employs this mode of valuation and applies it to everything, including the productions of art and science, and of thinkers, scholars, artists, statesmen, nations, political parties, and even entire ages: with respect to everything produced or created he inquires into the supply and demand in order to estimate for himself the value of a thing. This, when once it has been made the principle of an entire culture, worked out to its most minute and subtle details, and imposed upon every kind of will and knowledge, this is what you men of the coming century will be proud of" (pp. 178-179).

shared experience, not the thoughtless busyness of a person scrolling through social media and reacting through predetermined moods to the curated moments of another person's day.

Recognizing the rarity of true friendship is important for Emerson and his forerunners, Aristotle and Montaigne, since they want to remind us that not everyone we call a friend actually lives up to their conceptual requirements for friendship. People we enjoy only because of how we can profit from them, either materially or through an increase in pleasure, are not candidates for authentic friendship. Emerson thinks we can be distracted by these lower friendships of profit and social gain, forgetting the more authentic friendship that leads to one's education and perfection. True friendships are rare because they exist only between virtuous people and virtuous people are rare, and because friendships are slow to develop and outside of our control to procure. That friendship is essential for one's self-reliance means that authentic freedom requires other people who are necessarily beyond one's control. Thus, self-reliance is reliant on other people and authentic freedom is given to one from beyond one's will.

Friendship is reciprocal and generous

Friendship is a relationship of reciprocity for Aristotle, Montaigne, and Emerson, but Emerson leaves room for the possibility of a one-sided friendship of complete altruism. For Aristotle and Emerson, the reciprocity of friendship means that each friend aims at the other's development towards her own way of manifesting the good (Aristotle) or the divine (Emerson). In a more complicated way, Montaigne claims that reciprocity amounts to a thoroughgoing union of friends such that they merge their wills. This merging of the wills tempers each person's inclinations such that they are guided by virtue and their souls are refined. Emerson's

comment on the possibility of one-sided friendship suggests that friendship contributes to self-reliance not only because friends leap-ahead and free the other to herself, but also because in one's love for the friend one is already being freed to oneself.[205]

For Aristotle, reciprocity is essential to friendship. It is a minimal requirement that the friends have affection for one another and that they each know about the other's affection. Friendship is generous for Aristotle, at least in the case of virtue friendship, since the friends are interested in what they can offer each other rather than how they can profit or find pleasure in the relationship. In virtue friendship, one's affection is based on one's generously willing the other's good for her own sake. Thus, this reciprocity pushes friends more in their own directions.

Reciprocity of debts and obligations between friends breaks down for Montaigne because he describes a complete union between friends. There can be no such reciprocity when two have become one. "In the friendship I am talking about," he writes, "souls are merged one in the other, and so wholly mingled that they efface each other and can no longer find the seam at which they are joined."[206] Friends are so merged for Montaigne that he claims duties, obligations, and debts are dissolved. He writes, "A secret which I have sworn to reveal to no other person, I can reveal without perjury to someone who is not another: he is me."[207] Thus, Montaigne makes an important modification to Aristotle's claim that the friend is another

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[205] A complete discussion of Heidegger's forms of solicitude, leaping-in and leaping-ahead, comes in Chapter Five. On Heidegger's account, leaping-in is a way of taking over the other's difficulties and putting an end to her pain, which also denies her the possibility of growth and education through overcoming. In this way, leaping-in is akin to Nietzsche's theories on pity and compassion. Leaping-ahead is a way of pro-voking (i.e., calling forth) and en-couraging (i.e., supporting the heart) the other so that she can face her life and become who she is.
[206] Montaigne, p. 26
[207] Montaigne, p. 30

oneself. For Montaigne the friend is me immediately, and we are so unified that reciprocity, along with inequality, cannot apply.

Montaigne claims that friends know each other completely and merge their wills. He recounts the tale from Plutarch of Tiberius Gracchus, a Roman tribune executed for allegedly fomenting a plebeian uprising. After Gracchus's execution his friend Caius Blossius was questioned by a consul who asked whether Blossius would have done anything for Gracchus, including burning down the temples. Blossius replied that Gracchus would never ask such a thing, but when pressed, he admitted that he would do *anything* that Gracchus had asked. Montaigne claims that Blossius

> Ought not to have offended the consuls by this last bold admission, and ought not to have gone beyond his expression of confidence about the will of Gracchus. Even so, those who censure his reply as being seditious do not properly understand the mystery of friendship, and do not realize that he had perfect knowledge of the will of Gracchus and perfect sway over it. They were more friends of each other than citizens, more friends of each other than friends or foes of their country, than friends of ambition or subversion. They had perfectly entrusted themselves to each other, and were like horses harnessed together with each holding the reins of the other's inclination, and each guided by virtue and reason (indeed, it is impossible for friendship to be conducted on any other basis) ... Had they diverged in their actions, then they were not friends of each other according to my criterion.[208]

Gracchus and Blossius do not only have a reciprocal knowledge of each other, they have a reciprocal sway over one another's will so that they provide each other with virtuous and reasonable guidance. The final sentence of this passage can be read as a reference to Plato's allegory of the charioteer in *Phaedrus*, where he describes a tripartite division of the psyche. Plato describes the psyche as like a chariot pulled in different directions by a horse that seeks the material world and another horse that seeks the spiritual world. The charioteer must rein in

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[208] Montaigne, p. 27

the horses and drive the chariot towards heaven and contemplation of the forms. Montaigne retells Plato's intrapsychic allegory on an intersubjective level, revealing the pursuit of virtue and goodness to be a social project between friends. For Montaigne, we are not each driving our own chariot and struggling to control competing aspects of our soul; rather we have a co-pilot in the friend. The struggle to control one's inclinations becomes a shared project of friends who are guided by virtue and reason. Montaigne thought this was an effective means of controlling the other's wayward inclinations because he sees the reciprocal devotion and trust of friendship to amount to a complete merging of the wills. Friendship is a reliable way to be guided by virtue because, according to Montaigne, "it is impossible for friendship to be conducted on any other basis."

Many of the most distinctive features of Emersonian friendship are already evident in Sermon CXL. The main theme can be taken from the passage the sermon explicates, 1 Corinthians 10:24: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." Friendship is the proper relationship between individuals who are on the road of self-development, and friends are necessary for one's development. By seeking my friend's development, I am myself developed while gaining support and motivation for my own development. In choosing this quote from 1 Corinthians as a launchpad for his discussion of friendship, Emerson points to a quality in which friendship exceeds other relationships: friendship is exceedingly generous, giving one back to oneself and promoting the other's vision of her future self, rather than my vision of her.

One's own development is advanced by one's working to provide appropriate conditions for the development of one's friends. Emerson writes, "It is plain that all selfish passions are mean, and all social ones, i.e., all that seek the good of another as such, are

noble."[209] He claims that social action gives life meaning when he says that when one feels the fear of death,[210] one should "Go and see the death of one who spends the last breath in devoted serving of others." He goes on,

> When unawares we are surprised by any cowardice, either in the apprehension of death or of evils on this side of it, let us take refuge immediately applying ourselves to an active interest in the welfare of those persons who have the nearest claim on us: it will bring the courage and conscience and God to aid.[211]

Thus, when one is stymied in one's own development, one can take an active interest in the development of one's friends and thereby gain the self-reliance of courage, conscience, and intuition. It is important to recognize this capacity for friends to provide assistance to one another without getting in the way of the other's development and without making her dependent rather than self-reliant. In Sermon CXLIX (1832), Emerson claims, "If God has given you the power to do favors, to be the benefactor of your friends, look carefully to see whether you have exercised that trust tenderly, and have done all you could to soften the pain of dependence."[212] Charity, given in an unfriendly way, can be detrimental to the one who receives it since it takes away the opportunity for education and growth while simultaneously causing humiliation. It is significant that Emerson, even in these early examples, makes room for charity between friends. Emerson has often been taken to be entirely against all charitable

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[209] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons*, vol. 4, p. 49

[210] Cf. Sermon XXXIX, where Emerson says that one's reaction to the thought of one's own death is indicative of whether one has squandered time or spent it well. He writes, "If you turn pale at it [i.e., the thought of death], if there seems to you any terror in the thought, especially if you find it seems an eternal night—then you have not spent the year well—then you are not yet alive—you have noble faculties which you have never used… The best part of your being is yet wholly unknown to you, perhaps is every day farther from being known" (In *Sermons*, vol 4, p. 45-46).

[211] Sermon CXL, p. 49

[212] *Sermons*, p. 108

relations due to his frequent critique of socialist communes and passages where he seems to deride charity:

> Do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong… The education at college of fools; the building of meeting houses to the vain end to which many now stand; though I confess with shame I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold.[213]

But here too, Emerson is not against charity per se, but merely against the anonymous charity of relief organizations and governments, which effaces the becoming of both the receiver and the giver. This is a foolish philanthropy that promises to take away suffering with a pecuniary cure that provides generic resources rather than those that would help the sufferer grow and find meaning. In "Self-reliance," Emerson writes that practical and effective help ought to be rendered:

> Regret calamities if you can thereby help the sufferer; if not, attend to your work and already the evil begins to be repaired. Our sympathy is just as base. We come to them who weep foolishly and sit down and cry for company, instead of imparting to them truth and health in rough electric shocks, putting them once more in communication with their own reason. The secret of fortune is joy in our hands.[214]

Practical and effective help comes in rough electric shocks that support the other's health and ability to confront the world and fate as opportunities. Instead of sympathetically wallowing in shared suffering we help by supporting the other's healing and capacity for joy. Friendly assistance helps the other without condescendingly solving her problems for her. Friends help each other during rough times not primarily by charitable provision of material goods—though they do this as well—but by helping the other to become more self-reliantly herself. Far from

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[213] "Self-Reliance," in *EW*, p. 135

[214] "Self-Reliance," In *EW*, p. 148. Cf. the discussion of mitfreude at the end of Chapter Four.

a philosopher of selfishness, Emerson understands generosity, which characterizes friendship, to be the mood in which one drops the skeptical view of others as separate, unknowable individuals. Generosity is the mood by which one shows one's recognition of our shared being and mutually implicated existence.

Towards the end of "Friendship" Emerson explores the possibility of one-sided friendship. While others, including Whicher, have read these comments as confirmation of Emerson's anti-social and egoistic tendencies, I read this one-sided friendship as a form of extreme generosity. A one-sided friendship is a friendship where I love another, but she does not return my love. Of such a friendship, Emerson writes,

> Why should I cumber myself with regrets that the receiver is not capacious? It never troubles the sun that some of his rays fall wide and vain into ungrateful space, and only a small part on the reflecting planet. Let your greatness educate the crude and cold companion. If he is unequal, he will presently pass away; but thou art enlarged by thy own shining, and, no longer a mate for frogs and worms, dost soar and burn with the gods of the empyrean.[215]

One does receive many things generously from the friend—the joy and benefit of conversation, expanded ideas, thoughtful stimulation—but the friend is also generous simply in giving one a chance to love and to act. In one's love of the friend, and the letting be of the intuitive movement of one's thought and affection with regard to the friend, one is already becoming self-reliant.

Friendship is generous in its giving of itself as a gift and as an opportunity to love, and more generous in its giving oneself back to oneself for the first time in freedom. In "Friendship," he writes, "I will receive from them [i.e., my friends], not what they have, but what they are. They shall give me that which properly they cannot give, but which emanates

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[215] "Friendship," in *EW*, pp. 213-214

from them."[216] This is an existential generosity, richer than the profit one is able to obtain in lower friendships of pleasure and utility, or those fast-paced friendships wherein one greedily "aim[s] at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness."[217] This existential generosity is what Emerson describes as the deep affinity between the divinity in people. Not a relationship based on what one has or who one presents oneself to be, but a relationship between the deepest part of who two people are. Beyond exposing the intuitive movements of her thought to me, the friend helps me to uncover the intuitive movement of thought in myself. He writes,

> High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts. These are new poetry of the first Bard,—poetry without stop,—hymn, ode, and epic, poetry still flowing, Apollo and the Muses chanting still.[218]

Friends free one to oneself in moments of encouragement and the drawing out of oneself beyond one's current self. In our conversations and in the friend's capacity to mediate society and solitude, the friend opens the possibility for my self-reliance, giving me my freedom and my future.

Friendship establishes equality of value while recognizing differences in merit

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes two types of equality: proportionate and numerical. Numerical equality between people is satisfied when each person is seen as indistinguishable and receives an identical share. Proportionate equality is satisfied when individuals are evaluated in terms of merit, and each receives a share proportionate to their

[216] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 213
[217] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 205
[218] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 203

merit. Aristotle thinks that both types of equality are at play in friendship. Numerical equality is primary as it sets limits on who can be friends. Two people need not be perfectly equal to be friends, but there is a limited range of inequality that can exist between oneself and one's friends. Though Aristotle thinks there are no hard or explicit limits to this range, he does think increasing inequality makes friendship increasingly untenable.

> This becomes clear if there is a wide disparity between the partners as regards their virtue, vice, wealth, or anything else. For then they are no longer friends or even expect to be friends… Persons much inferior to them do not expect to be friends with kings, nor do insignificant people expect to be friends with the best and wisest men.[219]

When people lack numerical equality, a friendship can exist between them only if they establish proportional equality such that the person who is greater receives a share of affection greater in proportion to her superiority.[220] Aristotle already thinks such proportionate distribution is just, but he goes on to provide further justification in the case of friendship. Even if it seems unjust that friends should love each other unequally, he reminds us that friendship is about giving affection, not receiving it, and so the inferior friend who loves more also progresses more and benefits more in the friendship.[221]

Montaigne rejects the notion of proportionate equality between friends and, in line with his idea of the radical merging of souls, claims that friends must also establish radical numerical equality by holding all things in common. Though there is no reason to think that Montaigne and Boétie lived up to this standard, he claims that true friends share everything in

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[219] Aristotle, 1158b33-1159a2

[220] Aristotle, 1158b25

[221] The idea that friendship is about giving affection rather than receiving affection can be read alongside Christian traditions of thinking about charity and the generosity of the needy. For Erasmus, generosity lies with the person who requires charitable assistance, since the needy person creates the possibility of expressing charity.

common. He writes, "Since they truly hold all things in common—the will, thoughts, judgements, goods, wives, children, honor and life—, and their harmony with each other makes of them one soul in two bodies (to use Aristotle's very apt definition), they cannot lend each other or give each other anything."[222] Throughout the essay, Montaigne repeats the idea of friends merged into a single subjectivity and he never tempers these claims of unity with any idea of inequality or separation between friends.

The equality Emerson discusses between friends establishes equality of value while recognizing inequality in merit. This means that though one friend may have superior merit (e.g., she is a professor, and I am a graduate student) they can still be friends if they come to the friendship as equals with equally sure expressions of their self-reliance. Emerson makes room for friendships between social, economic, and spiritual classes, but never describes something like Aristotle's limited range within which equality is established by proportionate regard. In fact, in Sermon CXL, he explores the idea that God might be the ideal friend. The times when Emerson discusses inequality as inimical to friendship show one friend to be more self-reliant while the other is "a mush of concession." He writes in "Friendship," "I ought to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference how many friends I have and what content I can find in conversing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. If I have shrunk unequal from one contest, the joy I find in all the rest becomes mean and cowardly."[223] This recognition of the other's unequal merit alongside the recognition of our equal value in friendship is akin to the logic of Emerson's simultaneous recognition of each individual's unique identity as founded on underlying unity. Whereas Aristotle's and Montaigne's

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[222] Montaigne, p. 29

[223] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 206

friendships are premised on material equality, Emersonian friendship requires the self-reliance of each person.

Friendship contributes to self-reliance and is needed most by self-reliant individuals

A common critique of Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance, and of perfectionism generally, is that these philosophies are egotistical and antisocial, focusing on the development of the individual to the apparent exclusion of concern for others. As Kateb glosses the critique: "The very idea of association disturbs self-reliant people when association moves out of a small circle of friends."[224] Critics who develop these lines misunderstand self-reliance as an economic and material self-sufficiency, along the lines of the self-made man, who would have no need of the material support of others. They miss that self-reliance is an existential way of being in-tune with the intuitive movement of thought, and that this in-tuneness requires other people.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes two forms of egoism. The first form is a vice and applies to a person who takes an unjustly large portion of the good for himself. The second, virtuous form—which superficially resembles Emersonian self-reliance—describes a person who loves and obeys his most authentic self. Aristotle writes of the virtuous egoist,

> He assigns what is supremely noble and good to himself, he gratifies the most sovereign part of himself, and he obeys it in everything. Just as a state and every other organized system seems to be in the truest sense identical with the most sovereign element in it, so it is with man. Consequently, he is an egoist or self-lover in the truest sense who loves and gratifies the most sovereign element in him.[225]

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[224] Kateb, p. 186
[225] Aristotle, 1168b.29-30

This virtuous egoism inclines one towards noble actions which are a benefit both to one's community and to one's personal well-being. While Aristotle's perfectionism is egoistic and driven by self-love, it is the egoism of one self-reliantly in-tune with genius, not the egoism of one who selfishly denies the other.

While Aristotle thinks friendship is necessary for all lives, he claims that it is supremely necessary for the life of a well-developed man. His most straightforward reasoning for the necessity of others is that no matter how happy a person is, that happiness would be made greater by being shared with other people. He points out that even if we take a person's happiness to be based on economic and material self-sufficiency, such a person would still need friends to be truly happy since true happiness requires doing good works for other people.[226] Being a highly developed and virtuous person, far from making one more independent of others, makes friendship even more necessary for one's well-being.

> The actions of persons who have a high moral standard are pleasant to those good men who are their friends in that they possess both qualities which are pleasant by nature, i.e., they are good and they are their own; it follows that a supremely happy man will need friends of this kind. His moral purpose or choice is to observe moral actions which are good and which are his own, and such are the actions of a good man who is his friend.[227]

A good person will want to live in a world of good and virtuous action, and the best actions are those which are not only virtuous but also mine. Since the Aristotelian friend is by definition virtuous and another myself, the friend's actions are the best possible actions one can observe performed by another. Thus, a highly developed person who seeks to live in a good world will surround herself with friends.

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[226] Aristotle, 1155a9
[227] Aristotle, 1169b35-1170a2

Besides making the world better through their actions, friends provide the best possible opportunity for one's own virtuous action. One must do good works, for good works are the mark of a good person. But good works are better when they are performed in the service of a friend rather than in the service of a stranger. He writes, "The best works done and those which deserve the highest praise are those that are done to one's friends," so a supremely good man will need friends to provide the occasion for his good works.[228] As young people, friends help us avoid errors; as adults, friends help us to have opportunities for noble actions; in old age, friends provide care. In each instance friends are there "to enhance our ability to think and to act."[229] Friends facilitate the cultivation and maintenance of a good life so that no matter how happy one is, one would always have a greater and more complete happiness in the presence of friends.

Similarly, Emersonian self-reliance in no way implies antisocial self-sufficiency. Friendship contributes to self-reliance, and the desire for friendship increases with the depth of one's self-reliance. In the manuscript, Emerson summarizes the friend's contribution to one's life in terms of education. He writes,

> There is a use which is rendered to us by our friends which is not mercenary or finite, but is absolute <productive of an eternal benefit,> & everlasting & is the very highest office which one being can render another. It is, that, *we educate each other*. It is, that, one man is trained up to the knowledge of what he is & what he can do, by the instrumentality of other men; that by our mutual action, conversation, and observation, our powers are exercised & so disclosed to us.[230]

He is clear already in Sermon CXL that the desire for friends increases with the perfection of the individual. He writes,

[228] Aristotle, 1155a9
[229] Aristotle, 1155a15
[230] Manuscript, in Kalinevitch, p. 54

> The better men they are, the better friends they will be… No man becomes better without becoming more affectionate… A true friend is the ideal object which every human mind seeks and with an earnestness proportionate to its improvement… So distinct is this desire, so steady its increase with the improvement of the mind, that it is capable of becoming a sublime motive to virtue.[231]

Self-reliance is a state that requires constant maintenance and growth through engagement with friends.

Far from developing one towards solipsism, self-reliance points toward a new form of society based on love. This is the future community of love Emerson dreams of at the end of "Politics." Already in Sermon CXL he has visions of this society of self-reliant friends: "Feel that you are contending in the cause of the all good, for by this steadfast service you are forming yourself for that fellowship of those who are now all over the creation serving the same law, and by force of virtue you shall be brought near to each other."[232] Self-reliant people act without regard to the expectations of society, but this does not mean that they retreat from society or relations with other people. The emergence of self-reliance signals a new society of love, generosity, and pluralism.

Friendship's contributions to self-reliance

The many ways friendship contributes to perfectionism can be organized into three loose categories: those that contribute to knowledge, those that stimulate one to development, and those that mediate society and solitude. Friendship contributes to knowledge generally because, Emerson thinks, the faculties for affection and intellection grow together. Since friendship is a tremendous source for affection, it contributes substantially to one's ability to

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[231] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons*, p. 50-52
[232] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons*, p. 52

think and experience the world. Emerson writes that friendship makes the world young, which is to say that friends open the possibilities of the world for us.

Emerson says that friends are gifts that reveal God, and I take this not to mean the Christian god, but the impersonal divine which is the core of subjectivity and the basis of friendly affinity. Emerson also says that the friend offers a true reflection of oneself, amplifying one's thoughts and ideas. Because only one who is on the road to perfection can be a friend, the perfecting friend is an example and stimulus for one to pursue one's own education. The friend contributes to one's education by serving as an example and providing a stimulus, but never by leaping in and solving one's problems. For Emerson, as for Nietzsche, problems and difficulties are opportunities for growth.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for the political contours of friendship, friendship mediates society and solitude, functioning as a testing ground where one learns to be more like one's private self in public. Though Emerson's interpretation of Aristotle's friend as another myself begins with the pedestrian claim that the friend extends my powers of observation, he eventually comes to the understanding of the friend as one who destabilizes the coherence of my subjectivity. This has significant implications not only for the way Emerson understands the relationship between private and public realms of action but also for the ways he understands the intersections of democracy and aristocracy, equality and hierarchy, and individuality and community. In all these ways the friend establishes the conditions for one's education to perfection and frees one to become who one is.

Friendship opens a world

The most fundamental way in which friendship contributes to self-reliance is by opening the possibility of knowledge of the world and the thinking and speaking of oneself.. The early Emerson of the sermons and unpublished manuscript on friendship describes how friends contribute to self-knowledge by providing additional perspectives which one can add to one's own. The more mature Emerson of the *Essays* eschews, like Nietzsche after him, the Delphic imperative to self-knowledge and makes room for the speaking and arrival of one's higher self. Thus, Emerson conceives the epistemological role of friendship in more complex ways ultimately arguing that friends help one to become oneself by providing moments of self-reliance (i.e., in the glance and conversation) so that one can become who one is without already needing to know who one is.

The special role of significant others in founding the world is perhaps most strikingly evident during the existential upheavals and loss of world that occur when significant others come and go from one's life. Such upheavals have often been recognized by philosophers who write about the loss of a loved one, but love's arrival can be similarly violent and world shattering. Augustine, in *Confessions*, writes movingly of the loss of his dear friend and the experience of world loss that ensued. He writes, "'Grief darkened my heart' (Lam. 5:17). Everything on which I set my gaze was death. My hometown was a torture to me; my father's house a strange world of unhappiness; all that I had shared with him was without him transformed into a cruel torment."[233] Though Augustine, later in life as the reflective author of the text, says this friendship was not a true friendship since he and his friend were not Christians and so not cleaved "to one another by the love which 'is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom. 5:5)," he says the friendship was still "a sweet

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[233] Augustine, IV.iii.7

experience," and he deeply mourns the loss of his friend.[234] Given Augustine's latter comments on death, grief, and the proper orientation of love towards God, it is precisely because he was not yet a Christian with the proper orientation of love that Augustine grieves and experiences the death of his friend as a loss of his world. He writes, "If I had said to my soul 'Put your trust in God' (Ps. 41:6, 12), it would have had good reason not to obey. For the very dear friend I had lost was a better and more real person than the [Manichee] phantom in which I would have been telling my soul to trust."[235] If Augustine loved his friend with a proper Christian love, then he would have loved his friend for the sake of God, not as he did, in the Aristotelian way, for his friend's own sake.

Recall, too, that the death of a friend, Boétie, motivates Montaigne's career as a philosopher. Montaigne provides none of Augustine's kind of description of agonizing mourning for Boétie, but pain is palpable behind his text, for example, when he claims that he would prefer to write letters, but because his friend is dead, he must instead write essays. His suffering is palpable in the way the essay ends with long quotations on the pain of mourning from Horace, Virgil, Terence, and Catullus, as if Montaigne, for once, is at a loss for his own words. In 1571, eight years after the deaths of Boétie and Montaigne's father, Montaigne went into relative seclusion for ten years while he wrote the *Essais*. Emerson writes about his experience of world loss after the death of his son, Waldo, who we can also call Emerson's friend, since through their love they freed each other to themselves.

Cavell discusses the significance of mood for the appearance of the world in Emerson. Moods play a role in Emerson's epistemology similar to that of a category in Kant's: "Dream

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[234] Ibid.
[235] Augustine, IV.iv.2

delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus."[236] Like the categories that pre-reflectively structure experience in Kant's epistemology, Emersonian moods color the world so that what one experiences depends largely on one's mood. In the poem which opens "Friendship," Emerson shows how friends color and give meaning to the world.

> A ruddy drop of manly blood
> The surging sea outweighs;
> The world uncertain comes and goes,
> The lover rooted stays.[237]

The sense of friendship in these lines is of stability and groundedness in the otherwise unpredictable ebb and flow of nature. The friendship he is discussing in this poem is the higher, virtuous friendship that contributes to self-reliance, not the more common understanding of friends as people we enjoy being around, which Emerson discusses as fast and fleeting. After many years of separation, Emerson writes that seeing his friend's face again is an image of kindness as reliable as the rising sun. He goes on to describe how that friendly sun lights up the world with new meaning and optimism.

> My careful heart was free again—
> O friend, my bosom said,
> Through thee alone the sky is arched,
> Through thee the rose is red,
> All things through thee take nobler form
> And look beyond the earth,
> The mill-round of our fate appears
> A sun-path in thy worth.[238]

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[236] "Experience," in *EW,* p. 309
[237] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 201
[238] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 201

The physical world takes on a more beautiful appearance in the presence of the friend, and one glimpses how physical things are related to a spiritual reality. More than transforming the physical earth, the friend transforms one's perspective on one's own life such that one's fate becomes loveable. The mill-round of fate seems to foreshadow Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, though here the friend makes the grinding return of the same into novelty and light. Though the sun retraces its path each day, the day also marks movement into the future and not the mere return of the same.

He ends the poem gesturing towards the friend's ability to make loveable not only the world and fate, but the intuitive movement of thoughts, the love for which is another way of describing self-reliance. He writes,

> Me too thy nobleness has taught
> To master my despair;
> The fountains of my hidden life
> Are through thy friendship fair.[239]

One is taught not by the friend's instruction, but by her example of nobleness. The friend does not teach by interfering with one's affairs, she teaches just by being-in-the-world. She teaches to overcome despair, which is here the despair apparently usually felt in relation to the fountains of hidden life. I take these fountains of hidden life to be the intuitive movements of thought which in the mood of self-unreliant conformity we silence and ignore. In their persistence these fountains can become a torment and cause for the self-unreliant person to despair. The friend teaches one to love and let flow hidden fountains, first in personal conversations that are experiences of sincerity and self-expression, and eventually, through the mediation of society and solitude in everyday life.

[239] Ibid.

One of the greatest contributions of friendship is that friends help one to experience the voice of God as the spontaneous movement of thought. As discussed in Chapter One, Emerson believes that at the most foundational level each person is rooted in God and experiences the communication of God as intuition. Intuition is not only the voice of God, but in providing a vocation, it is a provocation to one's higher self. Relying on intuition—being in-tune with it—is a definition of self-reliance. Thus, when Emerson discusses the friend's ability free one, he discusses this in terms of the friend's helping one to better know God and speak one's thoughts. Emerson's unpublished manuscript on friendship is a systematic treatment of how friendship contributes to self-knowledge. In it, he explores three modes of self-knowledge: one learns about oneself from direct observation of the friend, who is another myself; one learns from one's own increased capacity for expression, which is stimulated by the friend, especially in conversation; and one learns by action, which supplements contemplation, and which one is called forth to perform by friends.

Self-knowledge emerges in friendship both because the friend directly teaches one about oneself and because the friend draws out of one a fuller expression of oneself. Sermon CXL references Aristotle twice: claiming that the friend is another self, and with the well-known quote, "O my friends, there is no friend." In this sermon, Emerson's explanation of these ideas is pedestrian. He writes,

> As many friends as a man hath, so many times is his presence multiplied, for all these see for him, hear for him, act for him in all places where they go. It is a true enlargement of man's being, for their experience is trusted like your own, and their virtues impose obligations on you. A true friend is another self. The arms of friendship reach around the world.[240]

[240] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons,* p. 50

As another oneself the friend expands one's knowledge of the world and oneself since one can learn from the friend's experiences as well as one's own. Emerson develops and clarifies this interpretation in the manuscript, where he explains that because the friend lives a different life, one punctuated by different fortunes and problems, and because the friend shares in one's virtues, by observing one's friend's experience one can learn how someone like oneself would behave in those circumstances.

True friendship can only exist between good people, who are on the way to self-reliance, and a good person is a demonstration of the good. For Emerson, a person's character is largely unchanging. Behind the shifting moods and ego identities of a life abides character. A person of good character, one who exhibits traits of self-reliance, will tend to behave well and self-reliantly in any situation. There may be deviations from time to time, but overall, her behavior will be a practical example of the good and virtuous life. As an example of the good, and as a self-reliant person who manifests her intuitive thought, the friend exposes her divinity, which is the same divinity in me. He writes,

> All men are mirrors of the other. All our acquaintances are a living Scripture Wherein we see God's judgment on a great variety of actions written out. They are collectively a series of experiments by which every day the most important practical conclusions are taught us.[241]

I can learn lessons about the consequences of other ways of acting just by observing my friend, seeing how she deals with life and how her actions result in happiness or misery. He adds, "The life of those best known to you has been a daily teacher to you… It has been moreover a running commentary upon your own life."[242] When I observe my friend's life it is not just that I get information about an alternative way of life and its consequences, I am also given a critical

[241] Manuscript, p. 55
[242] Manuscript, p. 55

perspective on my own life. The friend's life is not only a guide for how one ought to live, but also a standard by which one can measure the life that one has lived.[243]

In the second part of the manuscript Emerson introduces the idea that friends stimulate one to a new and greater articulation of one's ideas, largely through conversation. He writes that in the presence of friends,

> We become more & greater than we were alone… I say that the end of friendship of all commerce with other minds is excitement to our own mind… and it is the noblest office of this fine relation that it invites the soul to disburden itself of all its thoughts & attain thereby to a better self understanding.[244]

In the sharing of ideas during a friendly conversation, one is invited to drop anxiety over the other's judgment. One shares freely and tests out ideas in conversation with friends and in doing so not only develops those ideas but develops a better understanding of oneself. One gains self-knowledge not only through expression of one's ideas, which makes them more concrete, but also in the way the friend reflects one's ideas back from her own perspective. In "Friendship," Emerson writes, "High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts."[245] Friends can enlarge the meanings of one's thoughts because as another myself, they create a space where one is comfortable sharing one's thoughts freely and even flamboyantly. Friends can do this because they are other and yet intimate, mediating society and solitude so that in their company one learns to be publicly who one is privately.

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[243] Emerson suggests that biographies of great men can serve a similar function to the friend in providing an example of the virtuous life: "In the writer's opinion, in some one respect, this particular man represented the idea of *Man*; and, as far as we accord with his judgement, we take the picture for a standard man & so let every line accuse or approve our ways of thinking & living" (p. 55). This comment on biographies functioning as teachers is not something that shows up in Emerson's later writing on friendship.

[244] Manuscript, pp. 55-57

[245] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 203

The third and final section of the manuscript claims that others stimulate one to action, which is the fulfillment of the contemplative and conversational stimulation the friend provided in section two. In this section Emerson suggests that action in special situations, like the flow of conversation, can be a practical example of self-reliance. In friendly conversation one can be sincere, dropping social conventions, manners, and dissimulation to expose the intuitive movement of thought. Some situations which call for immediate action are likewise able to reveal the intuitive movement of one's thought, and thus one's divinity. He writes,

> Will it do when the child falls into the water, or the house is <burning> |in flames| or the beggar |standing| in the street, or the <invalid fainting> |sick falling into convulsions|, to sit & say "'What is this to the universe & me?' No, we are to act promptly & the natural feeling on every occasion is the <best guide> |finger of God|.[246]

In moments of emergency and crisis, which call for immediate action, one leaps into action in a way that could be described as thoughtless. In leaping into action, one leaves behind anxiety about the maintenance of one's ego identity and other's social expectations and gets a taste of self-reliant reconciliation with the intuitive movement of thought. The finger of God, which we experience as our unquestionable duty in such situations, calls one to self-reliance. In a Kantian mood, Emerson suggests that duty is the sign of the universal: "Actions done for their own sake alone, because they were natural true & right, have increased your power & made you acquainted with that increase… My present consciousness is always the result of all my past actions."[247] One's experience of duty reveals to oneself who one is. I experience my duty as a most authentic expression of who I am, and yet my duty is not something I choose but something I experience from within as always already chosen. My duty is what *I must* do. A

[246] Manuscript, p. 58
[247] Manuscript, p. 59

child in distress calls for my help irrevocably because the call is the call of my own conscience expressing intuitively on this occasion my duty, and thus my character. If I self-reliantly leap into action, I express the intuitive movement of my thought. If I feel too strongly the hobgoblins of conformity and self-preservation and these prevent me from responding to the call of duty, I express self-reliance's opposite: the selfish skepticism about our mutually implicated existence.[248]

Friendship provides provocation and encouragement

The idea that friends provide a necessary stimulus for education and self-actualization runs throughout Emerson's writing on friendship. In his early manuscript he writes that we acquire self-knowledge "*through the increased activity which society produces in our own faculties.* Society acts upon all men as a stimulus."[249] In the essay, he describes the way the approach of a potential friend inspires a fit of anxious action to present a better self.

> His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him. The house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat is exchanged for the new, and they must get up a dinner if they can… He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish. Having imagined and invested him we ask how we should stand related in conversation and action with such a man, and are uneasy with fear. The same idea exalts conversation with him. We talk better than we are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so

[248] Though Kalenevitch discusses the third section as having to do with friendship, on my reading Emerson broadens his perspective here to consider how other people in general provide opportunities for self-revealing action. He never mentions friendship in these paragraphs and in his example provides many people (i.e., a child, a beggar, an invalid) none one of whom is a friend, per se. My reading here agrees with my reading of friendship's purpose in mediating society and solitude: Friends help teach us through stimulation and conversation how to me in public who we are in private. In both texts, friendship cultivates in one a readiness and ability for public action.

[249] Manuscript, p. 55. Within the context of his discussion, it is clear that by "society," Emerson means to refer to the society of a few good friends, not the at-large society which demands conformity in "Self-Reliance."

> that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers.[250]

The friend does not merely make one want to be better, the friend draws that better self out in such a way that one self-reliantly overcomes others' expectations and one's own anxious commitment to autobiographical continuity. Throughout Emerson's writings, the friend is someone who inspires and stimulates action by providing another perspective on oneself, by providing an example of virtuous living, by agonistically reflecting the unflattering truth about oneself and urging one on to one's higher self. Insofar as the friend is one who provides a necessary stimulation to education and self-actualization, one becomes self-reliant through one's relationship with the friend. In providing this stimulation the friend frees one to become who one is, giving one back to oneself in a way that one cannot experience in solitude or in other relations that lack friendship's generosity and truth. The friend forces one to be free by reminding one of the existential imperative one has before oneself to become who one is. The friend assures one that one can do it, without telling one what it is one must do or how to do it.

Without the stimulation of the friend one's thoughts would not find expression, they would not be developed in the free and intuitive interplay of two minds, and one would miss one of the main practices by which self-reliance emerges in society: conversation. In the manuscript he writes, "In solitude long conditioned we become less than men" and our ideas do not come to maturity since they are not fleshed out in the work it takes to explain ideas to another. "The effort to present the thought to another mind enabled us to present it with a fullness not attainable to solitary musing."[251]

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[250] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 202

[251] Manuscript, p 56

Friendship thus has the structure of solicitude which Heidegger describes as leaping-ahead. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes different modes of solicitude by which Dasein relates to other Dasein. In addition to the "deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another," as when in the busyness of everyday life we pass one another by and relate through the thoughtless performance of our respective social roles, there are positive modes of solicitude where one Dasein has concern for the care of another. Heidegger describes two forms of positive solicitude: *einspringen*, "leaping-in," and *vorspringen*, "leaping-ahead." When Dasein leaps-in for another, it stands in for the other and takes over the work of the other in such a way that it takes away the other's care, possibly preventing the authentic coming to expression of the other's being. When Dasein leaps-ahead of the other it takes care of the other in such a way that it does not take over the other's problems and stand in for her, but rather makes it possible for the other to become herself authentically for the first time. Heidegger writes that leaping-ahead gives Dasein's care "back to him authentically as such for the first time." Though Heidegger has been accused of neglecting the role of other Dasein in *Being and Time*, here Heidegger gives other Dasein a foundational role in the possibility of Dasein's authentic being. It is only through others leaping-ahead that one is, "for the first time," freed to oneself and able to "become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it."[252]

Whereas leaping-in concerns the other's ontic care for this or that concrete issue, which as ontic I can disburden the other of, leaping-ahead has to do with the other's existential potentiality-for-Being as such, a potentiality that can never be handed over to another. Leaping-ahead "pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a

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[252] Heidegger. p. 159; H. 122

'*what*' with which he is concerned."[253] Taken together with Heidegger's discussion of fear and anxiety, we can say that Dasein can leap-in for the other in her fear but never in her anxiety. When I leap-ahead of the other, my concern for the other is not merely that she should do the work of facing this ontic issue on her own so that she can deal with it when she faces it again. Leaping-ahead has nothing properly to do with the ontic issue that the other faces; leaping-ahead is all about the ontological structure of Dasein's being as it becomes transparent and free to itself. Leaping-ahead helps the other to know herself and to be herself, precisely by not stepping in for her and instead, as Emerson writes, "Stand[ing] aside; giv[ing] those merits room; let[ting] them mount and expand."[254] Leaping-ahead requires a delicate touch that motivates while getting out of the way, and which characterizes the work of teachers, therapists, personal trainers, and coaches of all sorts. Whereas a teacher frees me to my intellectual development, a therapist to my emotional and psychic development, and a personal trainer to my physical development, the friend is someone who leaps-ahead in the most authentic way and frees me to my development as such.[255] Thomas Carlson's discussion of Emersonian self-reliance goes beyond the obvious figures of teachers in Emerson's essays to show how nature provokes Emerson to freedom through a call "that calls to him—through its beauty and its mystery."[256] An educative and provocative love that leaps-ahead is one that does not provide a plan or an answer, but that reminds one of one's own incomprehensible character and the creative potential that emerges there.[257]

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[253] Heidegger. p. 159; H. 122
[254] "Friendship," in *EW*, p. 210
[255] The significance of friendship and Heidegger's intriguing claim about "the voice of the friend" will be explored in Chapter Five.
[256] *With the World at Heart*, p. 177
[257] Ibid., p. 178

In Chapter One, I showed how conversation is related phenomenologically to self-reliance. Here, I extend that analysis to show how conversation contributes to perfectionistic self-development. One of the most recurrent themes by which Emerson discusses the way a friend frees one to oneself and one's development is conversation. Emersonian conversation is not a talent or skill that some people have and others lack. Conversation is a practice that becomes possible when people drop convention and dissimulation to relate self-reliantly. In "The Heart," he writes,

> In able conversation we have glimpses of the universe, perceptions of immense power native to the soul… such as we cannot at all attain unto in our solitary studies. The highest conversation seems to be a marriage of the intellect and the affections and to derive from these last the exhilaration which distinguishes it from the lonely hours of thought.[258]

In the presence of the friend and in the practice of conversation one can have a powerful experience of one's potential. He compares the friend to a sundial that indicates the time only when the sun shines on it. The friend alone or in unfriendly company loses her genius and is unable to express her divinity.[259] He expresses the same idea in more concrete terms when he describes how someone can face writer's block even when writing on their subject of expertise, but when it is time to write a letter to a friend "forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words."[260]

When he discusses perfectionism in terms of conversation it is easy to see why and how a person on the path of perfectionistic self-development would need other people. One cannot have a conversation with oneself, and one cannot have a great conversation, which are the only ones Emerson includes here, with just anyone. To the extent that self-expression and self-

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[258] "The Heart," in *EL*, p. 292
[259] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 210
[260] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 202

development take place in conversations, these perfectionistic pursuits are contingent on one's having friends who are worthy and able conversation partners. This is one important way in which self-reliance implies a reliance on other people. Emerson writes that more self-reliant people will have more need for friends since their ideas are more in need of sharing: "This is attested by the hungering of sympathy that is manifested by every mind in proportion to its powers."[261] But, as I have already discussed, Emerson thinks people worthy of such affection and conversation are rare, and thus we spend our lives in search of friends who would be worthy of hearing our greatest thoughts. This leads him to the idea that our lifelong search for conversation partners might reveal that God is the ultimate friend. The "anxiety to find a mind so perfect[,] one that shall be equal to all the offices of friendship, capable of confidence, open as the day, full of wisdom, and full of tenderness" raises the question whether

> God is the Friend, whom always we seek; and that he has formed the soul capable of entering into the most intimate relations with him; and whether this be not the just light in which to regard him as the Friend of the soul?... Has he not made these affections for the contemplation and enjoyment of himself, and when we become more obedient shall we not perceive the meaning of the revelation that 'God is Love'?[262]

Readers who support the traditional pessimistic reading of "Friendship," put forth by Whicher and Kalinevitch, would likely find in this passage evidence that Emerson has no regard for living individuals and, in an Augustinian mode, directs his love at God alone. Emersonian friendship is directed at God, but this is in no way pessimistic or directed away from the individual since unlike Augustine's transcendent God, Emerson's God dwells immanently and finds expression in the living other.

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[261] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons*, p. 52

[262] Sermon CXL, in *Sermons*, p. 53

Though conversation is the practice most associated with friendship and its perfectionistic potential, in his manuscript Emerson claims that conversation is not enough for education and that action is also needed. In this third section of the manuscript Emerson discusses how action "acquaints us with our nature," such that we learn who we are through what we have done.[263] He writes, "We do not learn by conversation alone. It is the sauce of life but not the substance. The end of life is Action." Conversation is an important part of the perfectionist development of self-reliance, it helps us to draw out who we are and to exercise the limits of that self, but here Emerson stresses the need to then act and actualize that self in one's life since, for Emerson, doing is becoming. He writes,

> By every sacrifice, he is more powerful, by every indulgence, a more perverted being. So that my consciousness is always the result of all my past actions. Is it not plain, then, that they have been our teachers that they have made us masters of our own powers that they have interpreted, illuminated this inwardself & made us aware of its vast capacity & illimitable aims… Contemplation is the habitual duty of a few men & the exclusive duty of no man. As long as we live we are continually impelled to action. I say a higher office that contemplation is action & yet—yet—even this resolves itself again into the same explanation of ourselves.[264]

If one wants to know who one is most authentically in the intuitive movement of thought, one can look at who one is in the flow of conversation and at the things one has actually done in the course of one's life. Emerson thinks the character thus uncovered will be the same regardless of which route one follows.

Conversation is important for Emerson not only because in the flow of conversation friends self-reliantly expose the spontaneous movement of their thought, but specifically because in good conversation this exposure happens in the presence of a friend who provides

[263] Manuscript, p. 59
[264] Manuscript, p. 59

both the opportunity to express and the challenge to develop understanding. Emersonian conversation is a communal practice by which each individual becomes more herself. Arsić's reading of conversation and friendship is pessimistic about the possibility of individuals' being led back to themselves, and so goes further than Emerson's description of conversation as the practice and consummation of friendship to claim that conversation is equally the failure of friendship. While conversation can be seen as a merging of two minds, Arsić reminds us that words and communication imply a distance and difference between the speaker and the hearer, and that "the two that exist in closeness will have to part."[265]

Friendship mediates society and solitude

The final way friendship contributes to self-reliance is that friendship mediates society and solitude so that one can learn to be in public who one is in private. This being publicly who one is privately is one way of defining self-reliance. Emerson writes,

> We should judge our improvement by our approach to the state of mind which solitude & company are both alike… That society is therefore best & unobjectionable which does not violate your solitude but permits you to communicate the very same train of thought. And then will one true heaven be entered, when we have learned to be the same manner of persons to others that we are alone; say the same things to them we think alone & to pass out of solitude into society—without change or effort. He that can live thus shall unite the outward and the inward, his lower desires to his higher, which is the end of life, in the language of Scripture, *reconciling himself to God*.[266]

Friends play an important part in this reconciliation of the private with the public, which ultimately leads to the reconciliation of the human with God (i.e., self-reliance), because friends are the first people with whom one can be sincere, dropping all forms of dissimulation

[265] Arsić, p. 198
[266] Manuscript, p. 58

and anxious ego maintenance. Emerson seems to come to realize the significance of friendship for mediating society and solitude only towards the end of his decade of writing on friendship, tentatively in “The Heart” and with force in “Friendship.” In both pieces he describes how friendship overcomes skepticism about other people, which for Emerson is the skepticism about humanity’s underlying unity—a sentiment he reiterates in his 1870 *Society and Solitude*, in a revised passage written over 30 years earlier in both “The Heart” and “Friendship.” Skepticism as the denial of the self’s essential intersubjectivity and rootedness in God was for Emerson “slow suicide.”[267] In “Friendship” he explains how the two most important elements in friendship, truth and tenderness, make the friend the first person with whom one can self-reliantly express oneself. It is thanks to this combination of truth and tenderness that one learns to be self-reliant in friendships. Since the competing pulls of society and solitude stand in every individual’s way of self-reliance, understanding how to live and act moderately in both realms is a perennial concern for Emerson. He explores these issues most fully in his 1870 collection of essays, *Society and Solitude*. In the essay of the same name, Emerson argues that life is to be lived along a diagonal path that runs midway between society and solitude. He claims that solitude is the realm of the mind, a necessary condition for genius, and is associated with the perspective of strict science (i.e., philosophical skepticism), whereas society is the complementary realm of the hands, cooperation, and experience (by which skepticism is refuted).

Emerson begins “Society and Solitude” with a kind of fascinated amusement as he tells a tale of a humorist whom he came to know. Though the humorist is a virtuous man of great ability, and a conversation partner whom Emerson uncharacteristically enjoys, he is awkward

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[267] “Resources,” *Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 8, p. 138

in larger social gatherings. As a result, the humorist runs from society and hides from view.[268] He dresses so as not to be noticed, and he wants to be alone so much that he claims he is willing to die in order "to put diameters of the solar system and sidereal orbits between me and all souls."[269] Emerson interprets this reclusive behavior as a condition of genius, pointing out several examples of great men who apparently lived in isolation. He writes,

> Nature protects her own work. To the culture of the world an Archimedes, a Newton is indispensable; so she guards them by a certain aridity. If these had been good fellows, fond of dancing, port and clubs, we should have had no Theory of the Sphere and no Principia. They had that necessity of isolation which genius feels. Each must stand on his glass tripod if he would keep his electricity. Even Swedenborg, whose theory of the universe is based on affection, and who reprobates to weariness the danger and vice of pure intellect, is constrained to make an extraordinary exception: "There are also angels who do not live consociated, but separate, house and house ; these dwell in the midst of heaven, because they are the best of angels.[270]

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[268] "He left the city; he hid himself in pastures. The solitary river was not solitary enough; the sun and moon put him out. When he bought a house, the first thing he did was to plant trees. He could not enough conceal himself. Set a hedge here; set oaks there, – trees behind trees; above all, set evergreens, for they will keep a secret all the year round. The most agreeable compliment you could pay him was to imply that you had not observed him in a house or a street where you had met him. Whilst he suffered at being seen where he was, he consoled himself with the delicious thought of the inconceivable number of places where he was not. All he wished of his tailor was to provide that sober mean of color and cut which would never detain the eye for a moment. He went to Vienna, to Smyrna, to London. In all the variety of costumes, a carnival, a kaleidoscope of clothes, to his horror he could never discover a man in the street who wore anything like his own dress. He would have given his soul for the ring of Gyges. His dismay at his visibility had blunted the fears of mortality. 'Do you think,' he said, 'I am in such great terror of being shot, – I, who am only waiting to shuffle off my corporeal jacket to slip away into the back stars, and put diameters of the solar system and sidereal orbits between me and all souls, – there to wear out ages in solitude, and forget memory itself, if it be possible?'" ("Society and Solitude, p. 7). Compare the recluse's dismay at being seen with Emerson's earlier work on the glance, which reveals the other in the act of thinking. The recluse fears to be seen thinking, he conceals his thoughts from society and is a symbol of anxious skepticism.

[269] "Society and Solitude," p. 7

[270] "Society and Solitude," *CW*, vol. VII, pp. 2-3

Reclusivity opens a space for the person of genius to be fully dedicated to her work without distraction, so that her electric energies can be focused on her projects. Among our neighbors we are prone to curious "peeping": "a pusillanimous desertion of our work to gaze after our neighbors."[271] Emerson claims that such reclusive tendencies are part of the constitution of people of genius, and that though geniuses have fine thoughts, when it comes to practical matters of social interaction and communication they regularly "cannot do anything useful, not so much as write one clean sentence… The ministers of beauty are rarely beautiful in coaches and saloons."[272]

In "The Heart" and "Friendship" Emerson develops the perspective of strict science as a way to discuss the philosophical skepticism of other people, which he uniquely develops as people's skepticism about our fundamental monism.[273] In "The Heart" he writes,

> Society is the insatiable appetite of the soul. In strict and stern science it must be confessed that all persons that surround you must seem to you as the thoughts, opinion, emotions, affections which have taken body and on which as upon diagrams the student soul reads better than in the abstract its own nature and law. In strict science it must be confessed that all persons, the very nearest and dearest, underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness.[274]

We can see here the allusion to the skeptical view of other minds as drawn from one's inability to access the content of those minds. It is merely by analogy that one assumes those other bodies are centers of experience. This strict Humean perspective, which Kant adopts, acknowledges the validity only of empirical knowledge, of which there can be none regarding other people's minds. Since other minds are outside of one's possible experience, they are

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[271] "Spiritual Laws," *CW*, vol. II, p. 164
[272] "Society and Solitude," p. 3
[273] See Chapter One on Emerson's metaphysics of rootedness.
[274] "The Heart," in *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, p. 279

outside of one's possible knowledge.[275] Again in "Friendship" he writes, "In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. In strict science all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness."[276] Finally, over thirty years later in "Society and Solitude," he combines the comments on strict science with lines from the opening passage of "Friendship":

> But how insular and pathetically solitary are all the people we know! Nor dare they tell what they think of each other when they meet in the street. We have a fine right, to be sure, to taunt men of the world with superficial and treacherous courtesies!
>
> Such is the tragic necessity which strict science finds underneath our domestic and neighborly life, irresistibly driving each adult soul as with whips into the desert, and making our warm covenants sentimental and momentary.[277]

In this final passage, we can see how Emerson thinks the philosophical skepticism about others manifests in everyday behavior. One doubts that the other is another instantiation of the same soul as oneself, and so anxiously and selfishly insulates oneself in courtesies. Emerson is clear in this final passage that it is characteristically adult and philosophical to have such skepticism of other people, whereas children and scholars view the world from a position of neutrality and openness.[278]

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[275] Emerson uses the term "strict science" one other time of which I am aware: in his speaking notes for his lecture, "Laws of Mind," which is part IV of the *Philosophy of the People* series delivered in the spring of 1866. His use of the term here confirms my suspicion that by strict science Emerson means to refer to skepticism in an essentially Kantian form. In "Laws of Mind," in a section on subjectivity and the Kantian understanding of the contributions of subjectivity to experience of the world Emerson writes, "The sun borrows his beams from you. Joy and sorrow are radiations from us. The material world in strict science is illusory. Perception makes. All our desires are procreant. What we are, that we see, love, and hate. A man externalizes himself in his friends, his enemies, and his gods."

[276] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 204

[277] "Society and Solitude," p. 4

[278] Carlson notes that Emerson understands students and children to share the qualities of openness and incompleteness which make it possible for them to learn and develop. In "Society and Solitude," Emerson brings out the similarity between adults and some philosophers, who

In his book, *Becoming Who We Are*, political philosopher Andrew Norris helpfully shows how Cavell interprets Emersonian skepticism not as "an epistemological position but rather an existential stance" which makes the "ordinary recede before us."[279] For Cavell, the skeptical demand for proof of the world and other people can only be made from an artificial (e.g., Cartesian) perspective that is abstracted from one's lived being-in-the-world. The skeptical game of questioning the existence of the backside of an object or of other people can only be played in a contrived space that lacks worldhood (i.e., time, space, and the possibility that one might move one's body to get a perspective on the object's backside). Ringing Nietzschean tones, Norris shows how this skepticism is a life-denying rejection of the world and its call for Cavellian acknowledgement and acceptance.

The logic of Cavell's skepticism and the demand for acceptance mirror the basic logic of many theologians such as Tillich and Caputo, who locate the divine beyond any concepts of God. For Tillich, to ask for proof of God is precisely to have the wrong, faithless existential orientation to God. Just as for Tillich, there can be no evidence that would prove God, so there can be no concrete evidence that would reveal the other according to the skeptic's demand for

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are corrupted by their commitment to systems, parties, and political interests. Of the solitary philosopher he writes, "I have seen many a philosopher whose world is large enough for only one person. He affects to be a good companion ; but we are still surprising his secret, that he means and needs to impose his system on all the rest." Compare this with his comments on the neutrality of children, and on adults as committed to partial interests in "Self-reliance": "Infancy conforms to nobody; all conform to it; so that the babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle with it… The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of nature. A boy is in the parlor what the pit is in the playhouse; independent, irresponsible, looking out from his corner on such people and facts as pass by… But the man is as it were clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has acted once with *eclat* he is a committed person… There is no Lethe for this. Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality! Who can avoid all pledges and, having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unfrightened innocence—must always be formidable."

[279] Norris, p. 51

certitude. To enumerate the reasons I love my beloved would degrade my love and make it a fetishistic attachment to the beloved as an object or idol. Dickinson describes how love cannot be itemized but only acknowledged in the lover's actions and way of accepting the beloved in a shared world. She writes, "Extol thee – could I? Then I will / By saying nothing new — / … Perceiving thee is evidence / That we are of the sky."[280] The demand for proof, explication, and evidence of the other is a temptation to unworld the world and the other, as Norris notes, "by trying to force them to become us, by making the world and the other as such objects of knowledge. The truth of skepticism is that of our self-alienation, not of our ignorance."[281] The skeptic's desire to consume the other by making her knowable is unrelated to any desire to love the other or let her be herself. The skeptic is motivated by the narcissism of shunning the world and other people and the shirking of responsibilities for them.[282]

The skeptic seeks to know the other to deflect from the urgency of the call to acknowledge and accept the other. The skeptic demands a knowledge that would allow a choice to be made regarding the other and her being. Acceptance, the affirmation of "one's commitment" to the nature and value of the world, is a risky and uncomfortable business since it requires a conversion of the self to "one's self and to one's world and those with whom one shares it."[283] Cavell describes acknowledgement as a way of being-with, not knowing about, the other. He writes that acknowledgement is "a harmony, a concord, a union, a transparence, a governance, a power—against which our actual successes at knowing, and being known, are poor things."[284] To acknowledge the other and to accept the other imply a commitment to a

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[280] Dickinson, "1643", p. 673
[281] Norris, p. 84
[282] Ibid., p. 92
[283] Ibid, pp. 91-93
[284] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 440

new state of affairs that differs from and changes the constellations of one's previous commitments. To acknowledge is not to fit the other into one's comfortable and familiar categories and schemes of knowledge, but to courageously (as Tillich might say) and hospitably (as Derrida might say) remake the world with the other.[285] The refusal to accept and acknowledge the other is a symptom of what Norris calls "our deep discomfort with our finitude":[286] the realization that my finitude and the future of the world are exposed in risky ways to the acceptance and acknowledgement of others. This is the narcissistic fantasy of being able "to speak without speaking to someone, to speak without being someone who needs or wants to speak, and who wants and needs to be addressed."[287] As Norris astutely points out, the overcoming of skepticism is an ethical and political imperative since "our individual autonomy and our membership in a community with others are constitutive of one another."[288] This imperative is one which, as Norris points out and as I develop in my discussion of the vocation (See Chapter Five), includes obedience to oneself. Russell Goodman helpfully shows how friendship is Emerson's main way of overcoming skepticism. He writes, "Emerson shows us that a kind of lived skepticism concerning others is a feature of our lives, but that the accomplishments of friendship are too; and that in its powerful effect on us, friendship instills a hope for something better than the best friend we have."[289] Thus, as I argue throughout this dissertation, freedom requires loving, friendly relationships to oneself, others, and the world.

Emerson's conception of skepticism, clearer in his earlier writings including "The Heart," is skepticism about all people's participation in an underlying unity, which he develops

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[285] See Chapter Five for my discussion of Tillich on courage and Derrida on hospitality.
[286] Norris, p. 10
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid, p. 6
[289] Goodman, p. 73

both in terms of metaphysical monism and ethical and political community.[290] He writes in "The Heart,"

> This is the unity, the community of men, this perception and acknowledgment of a strictly identical nature of which all the individuals are the organs…. As soon as I attempt to separate my individual nature and deeds and possessions from the rest, to withdraw my interest from the common soul and confine it to my person and property, then instantly my neighbor feels the wrong, feels that here is appropriation, here is not love, and shrinks from me as far as I have shrunk from him.[291]

We share one human community and one human nature with untold faces. Modern egoism is supported by the skeptical and inhospitable walling off of oneself in one's ego, which goes along with the attempt to similarly confine the other as separable and manageable in her knowability. The recognition of this unity—in the triumph of friendship over skepticism, egoism, and domination—is the first step towards an ethics and politics appropriate to the emergence of self-reliance.

Skepticism about other people is apparent at several points in Emerson's work. Emerson's twist is that he does not think people live with an everyday skepticism about the existence of other people's minds so much as we live with a mistaken background assumption that colors all interactions with other people. This is the assumption that the other people one deals with are essentially other: not me. Emerson thinks that the strict scientific pursuit of philosophy leads inevitably to the realization that we are each individual entities separated by space and time, and the fact that we can relate at all becomes a mystery. But he thinks there is another view, the everyday view of experience and nature, which reveals that we are one, bound together by a universal affection which society trains each person to ignore. Emersonian

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[290] See Chapter One on rooted subjectivity.
[291] "The Heart," in *EL*, pp. 284-85

skepticism about the unity of things marks the opening passage of “Friendship,” where he writes,

> We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the selfishness that chills like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to whom yet we honor and who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in the church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knowth.[292]

The skepticism that we are all one is overcome by the knowledge of the heart. We behave selfishly in society, withholding our words and affection. We feel that we want to be connected and we recognize that urge in another when we catch her glance, but (and this is more explicit in the 1870 statement in *Society and Solitude*) adults and philosophers are averse to society because they are committed to particular systems and worldviews.

This skepticism also marks the closing passages of “Politics,” where Emerson connects skepticism to the problem of the politics of violence, which he thinks dominates the antebellum world (many racist and classist versions of which continue to characterize contemporary expressions of political violence and domination) and stand in the way of the development of self-reliance. In this passage he proposes a politics of love that would overcome the politics of violence and domination founded on the skeptical refusal to see the other as another myself along monistic lines. He writes, “The power of love, as the basis of a State, has never been tried.” But he tempers his optimism realizing that selfishness, the essential manifestation of skepticism, demands government by violence: “there will always be a government of force where men are selfish.” He goes on,

> There is not, among the most religious and instructed men of the most religious and civil nations, a reliance on the moral sentiment and a sufficient belief in the

[292] “Friendship,” in *EW,* p. 201

> unity of things, to persuade them that society can be maintained without artificial restraints, as well as the solar system… What is strange too, there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love.[293]

He points to reformers who have claimed the authority of the universal moral law felt by every individual, but he claims that every such reformer has finally in some portion admitted "the supremacy of the bad State." He writes, "I do not call to mind a single human being who has steadily denied the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature." In these lines he may be referring to Kant's ultimate support of the state over the individual, or perhaps Luther's support of the princes during the German Peasants' Revolt, but whoever he has in mind these reformers did not self-reliantly trust their moral vocation and so fell back on the politics of violence and domination. It is ultimately only by overcoming this skepticism through love and friendship that a new non-violent, perfectionistic politics of friendship can emerge, and society can begin to cultivate the self-reliant potential of all people.

Emerson recalls the perspective of strict science in "Society and Solitude" to provide some explanation for why philosophical minds tend to be reclusive: since philosophy (i.e., for Emerson, Cartesian or Humean skepticism and also Kantian idealism) ultimately reveals all people as infinitely distant and ultimately unknowable. He writes,

> Dear heart! take it sadly home to thee, – there is no cooperation. We begin with friendships, and all our youth is a reconnoitering and recruiting of the holy fraternity they shall combine for the salvation of men. But so the remoter stars seem a nebula of united light, yet there is no group which a telescope will not resolve; and the dearest friends are separated by impassable gulfs.[294]

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[293] "Politics," in *EW,* p. 388
[294] "Society and Solitude," p. 14

We spend the innocence of life—before having committed oneself to systems and worldviews—making friends and living socially, but as adults—whom Emerson distinguishes from children primarily in their thoughtless commitment to ideology—and particularly as philosophers we become convinced of our infinite remoteness. The telescope reveals the nebula to be stars remote from one another, but the telescope is a particularly scientific and technological perspective (here, a scientific perspective developed in the philosophical skepticism of other people). Using the natural, experiential perspective of the naked eye the nebula, like individuals, is revealed as a unity.

The perspective of strict science needs to be supplemented with the perspective of nature and experience, which shows all people to be naturally social. In "The Heart," after describing the solitude of the soul "when we inspect its absolute nature in strict science," he writes,

> Meantime let not this absolute condition be any moment confounded with the relative and actual. The solitude of essence is not to be mistaken for a view of our position in nature. Our position in nature is the reverse of this… We are tenderly alive to love and hatred. The most selfish, the most able, the most solitary man will find his being woven all over with a delicate net—vital in every part—of fear, of hopes, loves, and regrets that respect other people.[295]

Even the most selfish or solitary person lives in a world that is made meaningful through relations to other people. In nature, "We see that our being is shared by thousands who live in us and we live in them."[296] Thus, the skepticism about other people drives us to increasingly reclusive behavior and distrust of others. But life in the world, when lived with the childlike, scholarly, and self-reliant openness to novelty, provides powerful evidence of the interdependence of our existence and shared lives.

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[295] "The Heart," in *EL*, p. 280
[296] "The Heart," in *EL,* p. 281

In "Friendship," Emerson discusses the competing pulls of society and solitude in terms of "the ebb and flow of love."[297] This alternation between the affectionate pursuit of other people and the reclusive return to solitude are typical of the lives of those who pursue lower ego friendships: those who aim "at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness," who "descend to meet," and who seek from friendship "a subordinate social benefit."[298] When a person is pulled back and forth between these states it is not that they oscillate because they value each state on its own merits. Rather, such a person moves into society for a while to enjoy solitude more and moves into solitude for a while to enjoy society more. He writes,

> Each electrical state superinduces the other. The soul environs itself with friends that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; and it goes alone for a season that it may exalt its conversation in society. This method betrays itself in the whole history of our personal relations… Thus every man spends his life in search after friendship.[299]

Such a person is not dwelling in solitude or in society, but always fleeing from both. As Emerson wrote in his journal on June 12, 1838, "Solitude is naught & society is naught. Alternate them & the good of each is seen."[300] One can only enjoy what one already has by depriving oneself for a time of "these uneasy pleasures and fine pains."[301]

From paragraph 11, Emerson's discussion centers on a more authentic form of friendship. This hinge in the essay has received different readings. Whicher and Kalinevich read this as a turn from a discussion of actual friends to a discussion of the ideal of friendship. Robinson sees the essay moving from friendships which are not chosen to friendships which are intentionally cultivated. Goodman sees the essay transitioning from skepticism, which

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[297] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 204
[298] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 205-206
[299] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 204-5
[300] *J*, vol. 7, p. 14
[301] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 205

amounts to disappointment in human relations, to hope for a more satisfying friendship. Goodman comes closest to the reading I develop, which interprets the transition as one from friendships based on ego traits and the "touching and clawing" of personality, to friendships which are based on an affinity of the impersonal divine core of Emersonian subjectivity. These higher friendships are not only more durable, but they also create a space where one can dwell in both society and solitude simultaneously. The friend, as another myself, and as the person most able to help me overcome skepticism about the metaphysical unity of nature, unsettles the boundary between society and solitude.

Emerson introduces another type of friendship characterized by truth and tenderness. Tenderness is the idea that friends are bound by love and is especially significant for Emerson's ethics and politics. Emerson thinks community is generally conceived in terms of "modish and worldly alliances" which treat love like a commodity and see people as related by duties and obligations.[302] He writes, "We are beholden to men by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate—but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love."[303] Friendship is an example of a community based on love, and provides hope that such a community can exist among people on a broader scale. This is the hope which Emerson explores in the final passages of "Politics."

Truth is the idea that friends can be sincere with one another, so they can show the other their spontaneous thoughts. He writes, "Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins." In social situations, even when there is only one other

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[302] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 208
[303] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 208

person, one hides one's true self behind manners, social conventions, and one's own anxious concern for the maintenance of autobiographical continuity. But,

> A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another.[304]

Friendships are built on trust and a degree of familiarity that allows the friends to be comfortable around one another. The friend is someone whose judgment one does not fear, but one seeks. In the company of one another, friends drop the anxious concern for the maintenance of their ego identities, and they drop the social games of misdirection which keep people from ever really knowing one another, so that they expose the movement of their intuitive thinking.[305] Whereas in the glance one is exposed accidentally and at a distance by anyone who happens to catch my glance, in conversation one is exposed thinking in an intimate and sustained way. Friends make great conversation partners because they allow one to be sincere so that who one feels oneself to be in the most private spaces of one's life can expose itself. As another myself, and as someone with whom one can be tender and sincere, the friend opens a space for the cultivation of self-reliance. In "Friendship," he writes, "A friend is a sane man who exercises not my ingenuity, but me."[306] The society of the friend is a testing ground or

[304] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 207
[305] This is similar to Irving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, which considers individuals as actors who move between "onstage" performances of a managed public identity and "backstage" expressions of one's more authentic self in private. For Emerson, there is not only an inter-psychic division between one's onstage and backstage performance, but also the intra-psychic division between one's anxious commitment to autobiographical ego continuity and the divine movement of intuitive thought. Self-reliance requires one to overcome both hurdles: one must admit to oneself who one knows oneself to be, so that one can become this person even privately, and one must be able to show this self to other people.
[306] "Friendship," in *EW,* p. 208

practice for living self-reliantly in society at large. One does not only learn who one is through friendship, one gets practice being that person so that one can eventually be more that person in public.

Conclusion

Emerson's thinking on friendship, like his philosophy generally, is an eclectic synthesis of ideas from his expansive reading. Though he provides few direct references to other authors, he alludes to Aristotle and Montaigne in more and less overt ways over the course of his decade of writing on friendship. Through his reading of Aristotle and Montaigne, Emerson thinks about the definition and experience of friendship, though by the time he publishes *Essays: First Series*, he has developed his own original understanding of how friendship makes self-reliance possible. Friendship contributes to self-knowledge, it provides motivation and encouragement for self-development, and it gives one practice at being publicly who one is in private. Conversation is a practice that provides an experience and way of cultivating self-reliance and for becoming more self-reliant in public. Friendship is also a practice for living in society because it helps us to overcome our skepticism about our mutually implicated social existence and underlying unity. Overcoming this skepticism is the first step towards overcoming the politics of violence and coercion so that a society based on love can unlock people's self-reliance and the infinite potential that brings.

Chapter Three: Nietzschean Perfectionism and the Will to Power

"As iron sharpens iron, so one friend sharpens another."

-Proverbs 27:17

As with Emerson, moral perfectionism and self-development lie at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy of life. Also as with Emerson, this trend in Nietzsche's thought has lent itself to readings of his work as hyper-individualistic, unethical, apolitical, and, far worse, to its appropriation since his death by naive fascists. This chapter provides a reading of Nietzschean perfectionism in light of the Nietzschean psychology of the will to power. I show how the Nietzschean subject is divided along psychological lines between unconscious drives and the conscious ego. I go on to show how Nietzschean perfectionism has several meanings that can be grouped into two general and related trends: one ought to work to become who one is, and one ought to work to cultivate and train one's drives. Whereas Nietzsche denies the existence of freedom insofar as the will is always overdetermined by the unconscious drives, he leaves room for freedom in cultivating the drives. In the final section, I lay out the main obstacles Nietzsche identifies to self-overcoming, setting the stage to show in the next chapter how friendship answers these problems.

Unethical, apolitical egoist

Though there are often contradictions within Nietzsche's corpus and often bewilderingly divergent interpretations of his work, there can be little question that Nietzsche's work is motivated by and seeks to instigate an affirmation of life. The affirmation of life, the

development and discharge of the will to power, and a focus on health are recurring themes in Nietzsche's work, though readers are often in disagreement about what to make of these. The centrality of these ideas and the valorization of examples of strong people who manage to affirm life in Nietzsche's work lead some interpreters to read Nietzsche as being concerned with the development of strong individuals alone. While Nietzsche is undoubtedly concerned with the development of strong individuals, this discussion of friendship shows how Nietzsche understands life, self-development, and enjoyment as embedded in friendly relationships.

Karl Barth, in *Church Dogmatics*, offers Nietzschean subjectivity as an example of the conception of non-relational, egoistic humanity that he critiqued from the position of his own formulation, built upon Martin Buber's I-Thou distinction, of human being as the essentially intersubjective and temporal "I am in encounter." Barth's narrow reading of Nietzsche as "the prophet of humanity without the fellow-man" misses the dynamics of friendship that make Nietzsche's thought much closer to Barth's than Barth realized. Barth describes the non-Christian view of humanity, which he attributes to Nietzsche, as

> a being which is basically and properly for itself, so that although it may be vaguely recognized in others it can and is seen immediately and directly only in the self. According to this constantly victorious conception humanity consists in the fact that I am, that I am for myself, and neither from nor to others… basically and properly it is without them or against them or only secondarily and occasionally with them and for them. 'I am'—-this is the forceful assertion which we are all engaged in making.[307]

Barth's non-Christian view of humanity has a skeptical inability to recognize the necessary and constitutive role of relations with other people. These are the early humans of Hobbes's state of nature rather than the essentially relational subjectivity found in Emerson, Nietzsche,

[307] p. 229

or Heidegger. These are subjects that blasphemously restate the divine illocution, "I am," [308] and engage the narcissistic and vain fantasy of becoming the ground of their own existence.

In Barth's reading, Nietzsche's philosophy aims at creating highly developed and isolated individuals who have no need for others and find others a burden. He writes of Nietzsche that

> The new thing in Nietzsche was the fact that the development of humanity without the fellow-man… reached in him a much more advanced, explosive, dangerous and yet also vulnerable stage… The new thing in Nietzsche was the man of 'azure isolation,' six thousand feet above time and man; the man to whom a fellow creature drinking at the same well is quite dreadful and insufferable; the man who is utterly inaccessible to others, having now friends and despising women; the man who is at home only with the eagles and strong winds.[309]

Barth's focus on the egoistic aspects of perfectionism and the critique of charity overlooks the role of agonistic friendship in Nietzsche. Barth argues that Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality is fundamentally connected to his strong and egoistic assertion of the "I am." Barth thinks that Nietzsche finds pleasure in isolation, going so far as to say that even in life Nietzsche was loved but "could not love in return."[310] Thus, for Barth, Nietzsche's critique of

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[308] In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer contrasts the uncertainty and anxiety of the nihilist who, on the basis of arbitrary choice, speaks, "I am," with the certitude of Jesus's dutiful and committed assertion, "I am." Bonhoeffer writes, "The Pharisee considers Jesus a nihilist, a man who knows and respects nothing but his own law, one who keeps saying 'I am,' a blasphemer of God. On the other hand, no one can detect in Jesus the uncertainty and anxiety of someone who acts arbitrarily. Instead, his freedom gives him and those who belong to him something peculiarly certain, unquestioning, radiant, something beyond strife, something irresistible in their actions. The freedom of Jesus is not the arbitrary choice of one among countless possibilities. Instead, it consists precisely in the complete simplicity of his action, for which there are never several possibilities, conflicts, or alternatives, but always only one. Jesus calls this one option the will of God… There is only *one* will of God." *Ethics*, vol. 6, p. 313

[309] p. 240

[310] p.234

Christianity is grounded in Nietzsche's reclusiveness and desire to be free of the neighbor's intrusions. Barth writes of Nietzsche,

> What he called Christian morality—confronts the real man, the superman, this necessary, supreme and mature fruit of the whole development of humanity, with a form of man which necessarily questions and disturbs and destroys and kills him at the very root. That is to say, it confronts him with the figure of the suffering man. It demands that he should see this man, that he should accept his presence, that he should not be man without him but with him, that he must drink with him at the same source. Christianity places before the superman the Crucified, Jesus, as the Neighbor… It wills that he should recognize in them [i.e., those before his eyes] his neighbours and himself. It aims to bring him down from his height, to put him in the ranks which begin with the Crucified, in the midst of His host… Dionysus-Zarathustra is thus called to live for others and not for himself.[311]

Barth describes a Christian life that is fundamentally a life with and for others, and he offers Nietzsche as the antithesis of this, missing the side of Zarathustra's character that calls him down from the mountains in search of friends. Barth develops a rich conception of the essentially intersubjective self through a development of Martin Buber's I-Thou distinction. Barth argues that the assertion of the "I" of "I am" always assumes the other. The "I" is metaphysically implicated in the "Thou," and so any assertion of self is always embedded in networks of linguistically mediated relationships.

Barth asks the question, "What is meant by 'I?'"[312] Uttered by a human, "I" can never be the isolated and self-sufficient I of a God who speaks "I AM." For a person to say "I" implies that there is another, one who hears and who is addressed and one from whom "I" am distinguished. An "I" who can be addressed and who can understand me cannot be an object and so must be another subject who can "make a similar declaration to me."[313] To address the

[311] p. 241
[312] p. 244
[313] Ibid.

other, in ways with which Cavell would also agree, means that the other is the kind of entity who also inhabits this world. To say "I" is already an acknowledgement "that I am not without him in my sphere, that this sphere is not just mine but also his."[314] Barth misses how close he is here to Nietzsche, for whom the I is a mere grammatical fiction covering up an even more radical intersubjectivity than in Barth. For Nietzsche, the "I" is the grammatical correlate of the illusory conscious and free ego produced by the encounter of the unconscious (i.e., the person as will to power) and the world. The relationality Nietzsche uncovers beneath the I is a confluence of the many histories and forces that contribute to one's becoming.

Barth describes human existence as intersubjective from the start: "'I am in encounter'...I am in encounter with the being of the Thou, under his claim and with my own being constituting a claim on him."[315] In contrast to the picture attributed to Nietzsche of humanity without the fellow-man, Barth describes the humanity of Jesus, which "consists in His being for man." Based on this, Barth claims that all human existence is living with and for other people. He writes,

> Humanity absolutely, the humanity of each and every man, consists in the determination of man's being as a being with others, or rather with the other man. It is not as he is for himself but with others, not in loneliness but in fellowship, that he is genuinely human, that he achieves true humanity… We are thus satisfied to describe the humanity generally with which we are now dealing as a being of the one with the other, and we shall have to show to what extent this includes a certain being of the one for the other.[316]

Barth describes how ethical human existence with and for one another begins as a way of "being in which one man looks the other in the eye,"[317] where "there is mutual speech and

[314] Ibid.
[315] p. 247
[316] p. 243
[317] p. 247

hearing,"[318] and where "we render mutual assistance in the act of being."[319] When we do these things gladly, he writes, "This can be called the last and final step of humanity."[320] The I-Thou relation in Barth is not only the basis of a distinction between me and you, it is always also the call to ethical action and acknowledgment of the other in our shared world. While Barth reads Nietzsche's critique of compassion and charity as the foundation of an egoism that does not value the other, he does not recognize that Nietzsche's theory of friendly agonism aims to create that foundation on more ethical and generous grounds.

In *The German Mind: A Philosophical Diagnosis*, George Santayana finds in Nietzsche an unethical egoism that he thinks characterizes German philosophy generally. Santayana misses the significance of friendship and agonism in Nietzsche, so he presents a reading of Nietzsche as championing an aggressive, autarchic, and narcissistic subjectivity. He writes, "Nietzsche expresses the false and pitiful notion that we can be interested in nothing except in ourselves and our own future. I am solitary, says the romantic egotist, and sufficient unto myself. The world is my idea, new every day: what can I have to do with truth?"[321] Santayana's reading focuses narrowly on Nietzsche's philosophy of self-development, overlooking friendship and Zarathustra's need for living companions who want to follow themselves.[322] Santayana's Nietzsche despises other people and seeks to annihilate the neighbor since they threaten to spoil his joy. Santayana writes of his Nietzsche's ethics, "How beastly was the precept of love! Actually to love all these grotesque bipeds was degrading. A lover of the beautiful must wish almost all his neighbours out of the way. Compassion, too, was a

[318] p. 252
[319] p. 260
[320] Ibid., p. 265
[321] Santayana, pp. 128-29
[322] First Part, section 9, p. 135

lamentable way of assimilating oneself to evil. That contagious misery spoiled one's joy, freedom, and courage."[323]

Santayana's Nietzsche understands power sometimes as "contempt for the will of others" and chiefly as "dominion over natural forces and over the people, that is to say, wealth and military power." This individual understands freedom in purely negative terms as the freedom to be unconstrained. Santayana writes, "To be trained and harnessed, an accession of power detestable to Nietzsche. His Zarathustra had the power of dancing, also of charming serpents and eagles."[324] But this freedom from constraint and training is precisely the freedom Nietzsche critiques in his description of the freedom of the last humans. For Nietzsche, the highest and most creative freedom emerges in contexts of constraint and rules. Santayana here describes Zarathustra's dancing and charming of snakes as if they are entirely unconstrained and random exercises of arbitrariness. Santayana makes a reasonable interpretation of Zarathustra as dancing in a completely Dionysian, childlike explosion of joyfulness that is marked by thoughtless arbitrariness. But dancing well and charming wild animals are skills that require training and an internalization of rules that allow one to interpret the situation. For Nietzsche, freedom emerges in contexts of inevitable constraint, resistance, and human finitude.

As Kaufmann argues, Nietzsche's biting critiques of democracy and socialism, his perfectionism and philosophy of the Übermensch, and his naturalistic emphasis on the breeding and health of human animals were given greater centrality under the editorship of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. [325] Ideologically motivated readers cherry-picked and perverted Nietzsche's

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[323] Santayana, pp. 130-31
[324] Santayana, pp. 126
[325] Kaufmann, p. 8

philosophy into a groundwork for fascism. Nazi philosopher and professor of politics in Berlin, Alfred Baeumler, wrote of Nietzsche in his 1931 *Nietzsche: der Philosoph und Politiker*, in which he synthesizes Nietzsche with Nazism: “Der Deutsche Staat der zukunft wird nicht eine Fortsetzung der Schöpfung Bismarcks sein, sondern er wird geschaffen werden aus dem Geiste Nietzsche und dem Geist des Grossen Krieges.”[326] (The German state of the future will not be a continuation of Bismarck’s creation, but will be created out of the spirit of Nietzsche and the spirit of the Great War). Baeumler contributed to Nietzsche's Nazification outside of the academy as well, through radio broadcasts and articles written for the Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*. As political philosopher and historian of German thought Max Whyte describes, "Numerous German intellectuals considered Nietzsche the herald of the ‘German awakening’ and sought to locate his philosophy at the very core of National Socialist ideology."[327] Whyte explains how Baeumler and Heidegger each interpreted the rise of Nazism in terms of a world historical Nietzschean transvaluation of values. Baeumler continued his nazification of Nietzsche when he was invited to edit the four volume *Nietzsche Ausgabe*. In all his work, Baeumler sought to uncover and liberate Nietzsche's alleged philosophical system from behind Nietzsche's allegedly insignificant literary style.[328] Baeumler constructed this system, which he defined as "heroic realism," through analyses of *Will to Power*, leaving aside many of the earlier texts and ideas such as eternal recurrence and the Dionysian. According to Whyte, "Baeumler interpreted the thesis of the will to power in the most literal and militaristic terms as a doctrinal truth, founded on a Heraclitean metaphysics of agonistic becoming."[329]

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[326] Baeumler, *Nietzsche: der Philosoph und Politiker*. pp. 180-182.
[327] Whyte, “The Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich,” p. 171
[328] Ibid, p. 179
[329] Ibid., p. 180

Baeumler, along with other Nazi political theorists such as Ernst Horneffer and Kurt Hildebrandt, interpreted Nietzschean agonism in terms of a struggle for domination among races and nations. Whereas Baeumler claims that Nietzsche's view of the world is essentially Heraclitean and that his agonism arises from enmity and the will to dominate others (pushing Nietzsche in the direction of Carl Schmitt), I read Nietzsche as a reader of Emerson whose agonism is a component of a larger philosophy of friendship (and thus push Nietzsche in the direction of contemporary theorists of agonistic pluralism such as Arendt, Cavell, and Chantal Mouffe).

The divided subject

The Nietzschean subject, like the Emersonian subject, is a divided self. Whereas Emerson understood this division in metaphysical and spiritual terms, Nietzsche interprets the divide along psychological lines, in terms of what he calls the will to power and the ego (*Ich*) or consciousness (*Bewusstein*). Nietzsche's account is like Emerson's in that the conscious ego is understood to be a superficial, socially interpolated, and anxiously managed image of oneself. The most important difference is that for Emerson, behind the ego lies a deep core of divinity to which one gives voice in self-reliance, whereas for Nietzsche there is ultimately no possibility of giving voice to the presymbolic and preconscious war of drives. A coherent subjectivity relies on one's *not* being aware of this aspect of oneself. Nietzschean perfectionism is not aimed at the revelation of the spontaneous movements of thought, but rather at the cultivated direction of the ostensibly spontaneous movements of thought. Like Emerson, Nietzsche sees the conscious ego as a means of exercising and enjoying the freedom associated with arbitrary choice and consumption, while ultimately interpreting this freedom as no

freedom at all. For Nietzsche, freedom lies not in the conscious, egoistic phenomenology of choice and consumption, which is always overdetermined by drives, but rather in the protracted cultivation and training of instincts.

This idea of freedom as cultivation of the instincts and the long-term commitment to a goal is behind Nietzsche's repeated claim that part of what it means to be a highly developed human is to posit moralities. When Zarathustra gives his speech "On Self-overcoming" his main theme is not any type of individual project or psychological therapy for becoming a more authentic version of oneself, but the positing of moralities. The positing of moralities is the kind of deep level freedom that is not the freedom of choice and consumption, but the freedom to develop one's instincts and to train the underlying psychological apparatus that overdetermines any choice. "Whatever lives, obeys. And this is the second point: he who cannot obey himself is commanded."[330] But he does not mean here that one will be commanded by some other person or tyrant. He means that this person will be commanded by instinct unless he can obey himself in the training and cultivation of the instincts. Thus, in a typically Nietzschean fashion, which I will unfold over the course of the chapter, freedom emerges from obedience and unfreedom.

The will to power appears (by name) only a few times in Nietzsche's published works, and typically as a kind of intersubjective struggle in the world for the development of life. In *Gay Science*, sections 349 and 350, he describes the will to power as a force impelling all life to expansion and the pursuit of greater power even at the risk of life itself. He writes that all life naturally "aims at the expansion of power and in so doing often enough risks and sacrifices self-preservation… In nature, it is not distress which rules, but rather abundance,

[330] *Zarathustra*, "On Self-overcoming," p. 226

squandering—even to the point of absurdity."[331] The willingness to risk life for power is evidence for Nietzsche that the will to power is fundamental. Already, at the most foundational level, Nietzsche identifies life with the pursuit of enjoyment rather than the mere avoidance of suffering. Thus, Nietzsche's perfectionism is already evident in the biological will to power. Zarathustra says, "And life confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself. Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold: but all this is one, and one secret."[332] The growth appropriate to the will to power is not merely an expansion and proliferation of the self, it is necessarily also a development towards greater complexity and novelty.[333]

The will to power is revealed in its full psychological complexity and subtlety only in the posthumously published *Will to Power*. Here Nietzsche describes the subject as divided between the unconscious and presymbolic drives of the will to power and the conscious ego.

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[331] *Gay Science*, section 349

[332] *Zarathustra*, "On Self-overcoming," p. 227

[333] Nietzsche's vitalist understanding of the world as driven by the will to power has often been seen as a response to Schopenhauer's conception of the will. The concept of a vital power that unfolds the world is also a theme of Emerson's. See, for example, his essay "Power" where he writes, "There is not yet any inventory of a man's faculties, any more than a bible of his opinions. Who shall set a limit to the influence of a human being? There are men, who, by their sympathetic attractions, carry nations with them, and lead the activity of the human race. And if there be such a tie, that, wherever the mind of man goes, nature will accompany him, perhaps there are men whose magnetisms are of that force to draw material and elemental powers, and, where they appear, immense instrumentalities organize around them. Life is a search after power; and this is an element with which the world is so saturated,—there is no chink or crevice in which it is not lodged,—that no honest seeking goes unrewarded. A man should prize events and possessions as the ore in which this fine mineral is found; and he can well afford to let events and possessions, and the breath of the body go, if their value has been added to him in the shape of power. If he has secured the elixir, he can spare the wide gardens from which it was distilled. A cultivated man, wise to know and bold to perform, is the end to which nature works, and the education of the will is the flowering and result of all this geology and astronomy." (*Conduct of Life*, Ch. 2, "Power." Available at: <https://lyrics.lol/artist/27149-ralph-waldo-emerson/lyrics/161599-the-conduct-of-life-chap-2>).

In section 485, he writes, "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm." And again, in section 490: "The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary... [Maybe there is] a kind of aristocracy of 'cells' in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command? My hypotheses: The subject as multiplicity." Prior to the level of conscious thought, the subject's interpretation of the world and her motivations in it are determined by unconscious drives. When I sit to write and experience this as a freely chosen way to spend my day, what has occurred, logically prior to my choice, is an unconscious battle between my several drives that has been decided in favor of my will to write. When one drive establishes its hegemony and drives the ego to pursue its end, one experiences this in consciousness as a free choice. Freedom of choice is merely the experience of freedom without the content of freedom. This is the psychological correlate to Nietzsche's genealogical claim that free will is an illusion perpetuated to make some people guilty: Priests perpetuate the illusion of free will to punish and manage the slavish masses, and the slaves get enjoyment from the limited, and largely virtual expression of their will to power in choice and consumption.

The subject's inability to experience and comprehend her drives is a necessary part of what allows her to be who she is. This is the constitutive lack at the core of Nietzschean subjectivity, the point at which knowing oneself and giving an account of oneself must necessarily fail precisely so that one can have coherent-enough knowledge of oneself. He writes,

> The relative ignorance in which the regent is kept concerning individual activities and even disturbances within the communality is among the

> conditions under which rule can be exercised. In short, we also gain a valuation of not-knowing, of seeing things on a broad scale, of simplification and falsification, of perspectivity… The danger of the direct questioning of the subject about the subject and all self-reflection of the spirit lies in this, that it could be useful and important for one's activity to interpret oneself falsely.[334]

One's cohesive and communicable identity is haunted by the unspeakable abyss of unconscious drives and instincts. Precisely that to which Emerson sought to give voice in self-reliance, Nietzsche places beyond language. Drives manifest themselves pre-linguistically and pre-symbolically, and thus any linguistic or symbolic account of the drives is fallen and idolatrous. This unspeakability is a function of the inadequacy of the culturally determined symbolic order to represent the unconscious, and the delusional or traumatic rejection of aspects of oneself and one's desires that are deemed shameful.

Nietzsche understands the unconscious as a cohort of competing drives, where one's actions in a situation are determined by the victorious drive. The conscious ego—the realm of personal experience and the phenomenology of freedom—is an epiphenomenon in this scheme: a contingent characteristic that humans have evolved recently, and which serves as the basis for modern concepts of justice and punishment. He writes, "'The subject' is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum."[335] In *Will to Power*, section 524, he explains that consciousness is a faculty humanity has evolved to get along in social life, making possible communication and the pursuit of interests that require collaboration. He describes consciousness as a social handmaiden of the ruling will to power:

> a higher court rules over these things cannot be doubted—a kind of directing committee on which the various chief desires make their votes and power felt. 'Pleasure' and 'displeasure' are hints from this sphere…. Usually one takes consciousness itself as the general sensorium and supreme court; nonetheless, it

[334] *Will to Power*, section 492
[335] *Will to Power*, section 485

> is only a means of communication: it is evolved through social intercourse and with a view to the interests of social intercourse.[336]

Nietzsche often discusses this fictitious substratum of subjectivity as an effect of an accidental feature of grammar in Indo-European languages: the subject-predicate structure of complete sentences. Since people use these linguistic categories to speak about reality, they come to believe that reality correspondingly is carved up into independent, subjective actors and their actions. In other words, the grammatical subject becomes a metaphysical subject.

The grammatical and metaphysical fictions of the subject are confirmed by the phenomenology of consciousness produced around the ego. The ego's consciousness is fed by two streams: one sourced in the unconscious battle of drives, the other sourced in the world and flowing in through perception. Language figures importantly in Nietzsche's theory of subjectivity again since he thinks, along Kantian lines, that the ego produces conscious experience by linguistically and symbolically representing the presymbolic drives of the will to power and unorganized sense data. "This is what I consider true phenomenalism and perspectivism: that due to the nature of animal consciousness, the world of which we become conscious is merely a surface—and a sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator."[337] That the world of experience is a world debased by generalities is a necessary outcome of any culturally determined symbolic rendering since those symbols pre-exist and fail to communicate the idiosyncrasy of my mental state or perception in any moment of my life. Since the symbolic and linguistic orders outstrip the individual, and the individual must adopt some symbolic and linguistic order to be

[336] *Will to Power*, section 524
[337] *Gay Science*, section 354, p. 213

understood (i.e., to live), even the most precise communication is always miscommunication, and our life together is a gamble.

It is more problematic for Nietzsche that language does not merely miss the true idiosyncrasy of mental states, but since all languages are essentially herd behaviors, mental states are always translated in terms of the herd. He writes in *Gay Science*, section 354, "Our thoughts themselves are continually as it were outvoted and translated back into the herd perspective... We simply have no organ for knowing, for 'truth': we 'know' (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as is useful to the human herd, to the species." Because any thought or perception is already organized according to the terms of the herd, human consciousness tends towards conformity. The action of the herd is evident in the way language makes equal things (e.g., mental states, perceptions) that are truly unique and not fungible. When I say today that I am happy, I know that my happiness yesterday was not an identical mood, though I use the same word to describe it. Similarly, my happiness and your happiness are on any occasion unlikely to be identical moods though we use the same word to describe them.[338] Nietzsche claims that consciousness operates by a procedure of leveling. He compares the symbolizing work of consciousness to the gruesome myth of Procrustes, who invited travelers to rest in his house along the road, and once they fell asleep, he fit their body to the size of his bed by stretching or amputating their limbs. In *Will to Power*, section 501, he writes, "All thought, judgment, perception, considered as comparison, has as its precondition a 'positing of

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[338] See cultural anthropologist Renato Resaldo's excellent ethnographically informed reflection on the death of his wife and his journey towards the celebration of anger, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." Resaldo uncovers not only how emotions are culturally and linguistically determined, but also how one's ability to recognize, experience, and respond to emotions is determined by cultural and linguistic categories. (Rosaldo, Renato. *The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief*, pp. 115-138)

equality,' and earlier still a 'making equal.' The process of making equal is the same as the process of incorporation of appropriate material in the amoeba."[339] I explained above how the will to knowledge operates according to an imperialistic logic of greed and consumption; now we see how the ego manifests greed in the equalizing and leveling tendency of cognition. Language translates each of my unique ideas and emotions into something you can experience as familiar and your own, but therefore never gets at the truth I am trying to speak. As Lacan writes, language "petrif[ies] the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject."[340] Since one must be understood to live, one must sacrifice oneself to get oneself back in reality.

Where the Emersonian subject is divided along metaphysical lines, and the goal of perfectionism is to allow for the manifestation in the world of one's inner divinity, the Nietzschean subject is divided along more psychological lines, in ways that foreshadow Freud's more systematic theory of drives and the unconscious. Like the Emersonian subject, Nietzsche's conscious ego is a superficial, socially and culturally interpolated, and anxiously maintained representation of one's presymbolic and prelinguistic affects, drives, and moods. Nietzsche goes beyond Emerson to show how the ego is conditioned not only by one's more-or-less conscious attempts to anxiously maintain a coherent identity in society but also by the linguistic and symbolic structure of the mind that already sets up humans for the herd mentality. Where Emerson wants to provide an outlet for the spontaneous movement of thought, Nietzsche—again in ways foreshadowing psychoanalysis—thinks it is necessary for the maintenance of a coherent identity that certain aspects of the self, including the drives, remain

[339] *Will to Power*, section 501, pp. 273-274
[340] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 207

in the useful blind spots of consciousness. Nietzschean perfectionism, as I show in the next section, is not about giving voice to what lies beyond egoistic consciousness, but the protracted cultivation and training of the drives.

Nietzschean moral perfectionism

Nietzsche's exploration of morality leads him to repeated critiques of life-denying moralities that promote pity and charity, largely in the historical forms of Christianity, democracy, and socialism. While Nietzsche is loath to establish his own religion or posit his own moral system—"I do not want to be a holy man," he writes in *Ecce Homo*, "sooner even a buffoon."[341]-—it is at least clear that Nietzsche would prefer life-affirming moralities. Whereas slave moralities tend to make people weaker and more diseased over time—for example in the dialectic of introspection, guilt, and punishment by which Christian morality develops in *Genealogy of Morals*—life affirming moralities lead to healthier and more joyful individuals and societies. In the preface to *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes, "This modern philosophers' predilection for, and overestimation of pity is really something new: it was precisely on the un-worthiness of pity that the philosophers had agreed until now. I name only: Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld, and Kant—four spirits as different from each other as possible, but united in one respect: in the deprecation of pity."[342] As Kaufmann notes, Nietzsche's opposition to moralities of pity is neither an eccentricity of his philosophy nor a reaction merely to Schopenhauer. According to Kaufmann, "Nietzsche thought that almost all the great philosophers of the past, from Plato to Kant, had agreed that self-perfection was the

[341]"Why I am a Destiny," section 1, p. 326
[342] *Genealogy of Morals,* section 5, p. 19

goal of morality."[343] But what in Nietzsche's thought Kaufmann describes as self-perfection—and what in more Nietzschean terms might be called will to power, becoming oneself, or even life—is left, perhaps necessarily, somewhat unsettled. There are two related trends in Nietzsche's thought on perfectionism: one that can be summed up in his exhortation to "Become what one is," and the second in the notion that freedom lies not in the will but in the cultivation of the instincts.

Nietzschean moral perfectionism can be thought of as the existential manifestation over the course of a life of the will to power's basic "drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold."[344] In *Gay Science*, he begins to translate this essentially biological drive into a critical, psychological account of oneself: "Life—that is: continually shedding something that wants to die; Life — that is: being cruel and inexorable against anything that is growing weak and old in us, and not just in us."[345] The progress of the will to power in a human life eventually depends on a self-critical perspective that is able to identify and root-out weakness and life-denying tendencies. In other words, perfectionism is the bad conscience Nietzsche would like humans to develop regarding all life-denying ideals and ascetic practices. This self-critical attitude is a central feature of Nietzschean and Emersonian perfectionism. In this way, Nietzsche bases the positive development of oneself on an essentially negative and self-critical perspective.[346] Later in his career, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he suggests that one's strength of spirit can be measured by one's ability to deal with the truth. Strength of spirit is something that would be both a requirement for self-overcoming and a result of self-overcoming. He

[343] Kaufmann, p. 365
[344] *Zarathustra*, "On Self-Overcoming," p. 227
[345] *Gay Science*, Book 1, section 26, p. 50
[346] Cf. the theme of freedom from constraint that runs throughout Nietzsche's work.

writes, “the strength of a spirit might be measured by how much of the 'truth' he would be able to stand," and "to what degree it would need to be watered down, . . . and falsified."[347] He describes the strong person as one who is able to affirm life and the eternal recurrence, who rejoices in this world without the desire to flee to opioid fantasies or ideal worlds.

In *Genealogy of Morals of Morals*, he discusses the highly developed individual as the sovereign individual who has a protracted will and the right to make promises. He describes this type of person as “like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for autonomous and moral are mutually exclusive).”[348] The sovereign individual has mastery over himself, which “also necessarily gives him mastery over other circumstances, over nature, and overall more short-willed and unreliable creatures.”[349] He is able to posit morals, “he possesses his *measure of value,*” and he has the perspective of the pathos of distance. Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual’s sense of superiority thus: “Looking out upon others from himself, he honors or he despises; and just as he is bound to honor his peers, the strong and the reliable (those with the *right* to make promises)... he is bound to reserve a kick for the feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so.”[350] His sense of superiority is not based in class, race, sex, or any of the other traditional modes of hierarchy and oppression; rather it is a superiority based on being the type of person who has the right to make promises, or what Nietzsche calls “the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*.” He describes responsibility as “the consciousness of this rare freedom, the

[347] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book 2, section 39, p. 49
[348] *Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2, section 2, p. 59
[349] Ibid, p. 60
[350] Ibid

power over oneself and over fate, [which] has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct."[351]

Having a protracted will and the right to make promises is another way of saying the sovereign individual has mastery over inclinations and instincts. In her everyday life and choices, the sovereign individual remains overdetermined by drives and inclinations; her sovereignty lies with the long-term training and cultivation of the drives. Having the right to make promises is an existential orientation of the self, not an ethical imperative. When faced with options to break a promise (e.g., fate), the person who has the right to make promises simply does not encounter these options as available choices. She, like all people, is always driven and unfree with regard to which option she chooses, but she can decide to become the person who makes a style of choices through cultivation and training. Her right to make promises is the freedom from ever being driven to break a promise—her power over herself and fate—a freedom attained through protracted cultivation and training. One does not become oneself through a series of daily choices (e.g., to go to the gym or to sleep in). One becomes oneself by engaging in the practices of being oneself[352] so that the choice never—or only rather rarely in extreme limit situations—presents itself as a choice. I have yet to become myself (e.g., a truth teller, a lover, a gym-goer, an "I" who can also say "we") if I still confront a choice.

Nietzsche thinks the decision to cultivate instincts goes along with the decision to develop culture. In *Human, All Too Human*, he writes, "Men are capable of *consciously*

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[351] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book 2, section 2, p. 60

[352] Several phenomenological anthropologists have come to the general conclusion that belief starts in ritual and practice. Thus, we can say that Christian belief does not begin with believing the things Christians believe but in doing the things Christians do. Through ritual, one is freed for faith and a vocation. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of habitus (*The Logic of Practice*), or Tanya Luhrmann's ethnographic study of ritual and perceptions of God among American Evangelicals (*When God Talks Back*).

resolving to evolve themselves to a new culture, whereas previously they did so unconsciously and fortuitously."[353] He follows the common 19th century trend of viewing cultures as developing on an evolutionary path, but in stark contrast to the logic and necessity at work in the Hegelian historical outworking of *Geist*, Nietzsche claims that consciousness is precisely what the history of culture has so far lacked. For Nietzsche, progress is always possible, but never necessary, and so humans who want a better future are well advised to do what they can to ensure progress happens. "They can now create better conditions for the propagation of men and for their nutrition, education and instruction, manage the earth as a whole economically, balance and employ the powers of men in general."[354] This proposition of a rationally administered economy and culture suggests that Nietzsche's critique of socialism is aimed narrowly at the idea of equality of outcomes. Indeed, the kind of long-term commitments to rational goals and the slow, biological, and cultural cultivation of humanity that characterize Nietzsche's great politics would be difficult to carry out under the changing moods of a democracy. This is another example of unfreedom, in the form of commitment and training, producing freedom.

The paradox of emancipatory unfreedom is at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy of life and his repeated exhortation to become what one is. It is important that Nietzsche uses the present tense third person "*is*."[355] Compare this with the modern, capitalist notion that one should become who one wants to be. The Nietzschean project of becoming stretches into the future, but that which one is to become, one already is. Who I am calls to me as a vocation and

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[353] *Human, All Too Human*, Section 25, p. 25

[354] Ibid

[355] The emphasis on the present tense is evident in other iterations of the statement, including Pindar's and Emerson's (from "Considerations by the Way," where he extolls "the escape from all false ties [and] the courage to be what we are").

does not present itself as one of a menu of options (e.g., a butcher, a baker, a brewer) available to my everyday, egoistic freedom of choice and consumption. In *Human, All Too Human*, he writes that becoming what one is means "to become a talent… which means to discharge it [i.e., one's inborn talent] in works and actions."[356] An inborn talent is not something one could choose, but a mark of one's being with which one must reckon, and which one must incorporate into life through actualization or, less happily, repression. The most significant characteristics of who one is are precisely the unchosen contexts within which one makes everyday choices and experiences freedom. When this context collides with reality in tragic and anxiety producing ways one must be open in loving and hospitable ways to the world and its stars.

Norris describes talent in Emerson's more spiritual terms when he discusses the idea of partiality. He quotes Emerson in "The American Scholar," where he writes, "There is One Man, present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty."[357] Partiality is the mark of the individual and constituted by finitude and called in particular directions. Postmodern theologian and Emerson commentator Donald L. Gelphi describes this phenomenon in Emerson as "bias," a dialectic overcoming of the young Emerson's concern for virtue and his more mature focus on spontaneity.[358] Gelphi discusses the bias and eccentricity of genius as something to be discovered, given "unswerving fidelity," to husband with "one's limited creative powers to effect the task to which one has been metaphysically predestined."[359] Partiality opens my possibility through my finitude and not according to the accidents of my choice or what I have foregone. Partiality distinguishes humans from the

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[356] *Human, All Too Human*, section 263, p. 125
[357] *EW*, pp. 43-44
[358] Gelphi, p. 72-73
[359] Gelphi, p. 75

divine, impersonal, One Man while also being the mode in which the divine manifests in the lives of particular humans. According to one's talents one falls to work and becomes a scholar or farmer, rather than Humanity Thinking or Humanity Farming. Thus, like partiality, talent frees a person in certain directions while also limiting the individual's possibilities. Norris writes, "However great one's attained perfection with these tools or any others, it is an instrumental, reified perfection that in the end confines… Man Farming, like Man Thinking, calls to us in our 'abstraction' to be and do *for ourselves* what he now is and does."[360] Norris points beyond an individual's bad faith falling to work in confining directions to the possibility of being called to perform the work of universality for oneself.

In his journal from 1843, Kierkegaard famously describes this retroactive structure of human existence: "It is really true what philosophy tells us, that life must be understood backwards. But with this, one forgets the second proposition, that it must be lived forwards."[361] Affects, moods, and beliefs emerge phenomenologically prior to one's choice and determine one's way of being-in-the world presently. Whereas Emersonian self-reliance indicates a revelation of the spontaneous movement of one's thoughts in the present and over the course of a life, Nietzsche adds to this the possibility precisely of training the spontaneity of thought to move in certain directions. It would be wrong to think of this training and cultivation in terms of spontaneity or determinism, or a free or unfree will. The moment of decision is a moment of recognition. One finds oneself, like Dante, already in the woods on a journey motivated by love. One hears oneself responding before one can say that one has heard the call. Thus, becoming who one is indicates something akin to a Lutheran response to a

[360] P. 201

[361] Søren Kierkegaard, *Journalen* JJ:167 (1843), *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, Søren Kierkegaard Research Center, Copenhagen, 1997—, volume 18, page 306.

vocation—*Hier stehe ich. Ich kann auch nicht anders!* Nietzsche insists, too, that the vocation is cultivated in learning to love the world and thus that one is responsible for one's calling.

When it comes to answering the question of how one becomes oneself, Nietzsche is typically, provocatively elusive, suggesting a lifestyle rather than providing a systematic program. When he raises the question in *Ecce Homo*, he responds largely by explaining his preferred climates and favorite foods. Such lifestyles have a major influence, according to Nietzsche, on the type of human animals a society breeds. Certain diets and climates are more conducive to sovereignty and self-becoming than others. Besides a conducive, four related themes recur in Nietzsche's work: self-critique and the overcoming of immature errors, affirmation of life, positing moralities, and having a vocation. Self-critique and the affirmation of life seem potentially in tension, but for Nietzsche the affirmation of an entire human life is supported by self-critique and overcoming. The affirmation of life means at least two things for Nietzsche: giving up otherworldly fantasies and affirming the eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche thinks self-development takes place through the overcoming of challenges. Facing a major, or even life-threatening event, one responds with all of one's effort, talent, and strength. One also faces the more psychological problem of fitting challenging and world-shattering events into the coherent and meaningful story of one's life. Nietzsche recognizes that life in the world is unavoidably painful. He thinks life-deniers deal with suffering by imagining an alternative, pain-free reality, and compassionately working to stop pain when they encounter it in others. Conversely, healthy, perfectionistic individuals face pain by giving it meaning (i.e., a goal; turning bare, ascetic suffering into suffering-for-something) and working to overcome it. In *Gay Science*, section 19, he writes,

> Examine the lives of the best and the most fruitful people and ask yourself whether a tree which is supposed to grow to a proud height could do without

> bad weather and storms: whether misfortune and external resistance, whether any kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, mistrust, hardness, greed, and violence do not belong to the *favorable* conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible? The poison from which the weaker nature perishes strengthens the strong man—and he does not call it poison.[362]

Pain is not merely an unfortunate reality of life that we must accept, it is the *sine qua non* of self-development. We intentionally cause ourselves pain to develop when we complete a grueling workout or when we study. In our world, it is even a privilege for which people pay to experience these types of pain. He describes this exalted pain in *Genealogy of Morals*, where he explains how pain leads to great health:

> What is more offensive or more thoroughly calculated to alienate, than giving any hint of the exalted severity with which we treat ourselves? And again how conciliatory, how full of love does all the world show itself towards us so soon as we do as all the world docs, and "let ourselves go" like all the world. For such a consummation we need spirits of “different” calibre than seems really feasible in this age; spirits rendered potent through wars and victories, to whom conquest, adventure, danger, even pain, have become a need; for such a consummation we need habituation to sharp, rare air, to winter wanderings, to literal and metaphorical ice and mountains; we even need a kind of sublime malice, a supreme and most self-conscious insolence of knowledge, which is the appanage of great health.[363]

Whereas in these examples one becomes stronger mentally or physically by struggling with an appropriate type of resistance, Nietzsche thinks one becomes a stronger and more developed person by facing the more existential resistances and frustrations of life in the world (e.g., the loss of love, the failure of a career, and ultimately one’s own death). It is only by facing these types of resistance that one develops strength and virtue, so we can begin to see how the thoughtlessly compassionate removal of another person’s suffering robs her of a chance to become herself.

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[362] p. 43
[363] Section 24, second essay

Santayana critiques Nietzsche's philosophy of pain in a somewhat heavy-handed way when he suggests that Nietzsche values pain and suffering as a sign of greatness rather than a means to growth. It feels that evil is good in the present; it is so intense a thing to feel and so exciting a thing to do. Here we have what Nietzsche wished to bring about, a reversal of all values. Santayana summarizes his reading of Nietzsche's ethics when he writes, "To do evil is the true virtue, and to be good is the most hopeless vice. Milk is for babes; your strong man should be soaked in blood and in alcohol. We should live perilously; and as material life is the power to digest poisons, so true excellence is the power to commit all manner of crimes."[364] But Nietzsche does not, as far as I can tell (and Santayana provides no references), suggest that evil is good because it offers an intense physiological or emotional experience. Nietzsche does not suggest that one should live perilously and swallow poison because these are thrilling activities or commit crime to take advantage of others. Nietzsche thinks we become stronger largely through the courageous encounter with pain and suffering, but this does not make him a masochist and it does not mean he values meaningless or ascetic suffering. Santayana accuses Nietzsche of valuing disease because it makes possible the science of healing, but this is not the logic of Nietzsche's argument. Nietzsche acknowledges the inevitability of evil and suffering without valorizing these in themselves. Nietzsche thinks suffering can be valuable when it is meaningful and given a goal, but he does not value or enjoy pain in itself.

Giving up other-worldly fantasies means giving up the Platonic, Kantian, Christian, notion of a world of completion and perfection beyond the world we experience as painful and partial. Nietzsche thinks that the positing of an alternative, pain-free reality is a compassionate reaction to pain that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to see one's everyday suffering as

[364] p. 134

meaningful and productive. He formulates an extreme version of life affirmation in his notion of the eternal recurrence: “The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?”[365] While self-development takes place through processes of critique and self-overcoming, it simultaneously demands that one approach the world and every moment in the mood of yes-saying and affirmation. Rather than demanding that the world conform to one’s desires, perfectionism demands that one re-work oneself in light of what the world gives.

Nietzschean self-critique can be simultaneously self-affirmation because critique is aimed not at self-effacement but rather at the overcoming of errors. Like humanity itself in its long history, the life of a human is supported and made coherent through the support of useful errors. In *Gay Science*, section 307, he writes,

> Something you formerly loved as a truth or a probability now strikes you as an error; you cast it off and believe your reason has made a victory. But maybe that error was necessary for you then, when you were still another person—you are always another person—as are all your present ‘truths’, like a skin that concealed and covered many things you weren’t allowed to see yet. It is your new life, not your reason, that has killed that opinion for you… When we criticize, we are not doing something arbitrary and impersonal; it is, at least very often, proof that there are living, active forces within us shedding skin. We negate and have to negate because something in us wants to live and affirm itself.[366]

These errors are the delusions, dissociations, and repressions that hold together a healthy-enough human ego. They include not only everyday blindness to the unconscious battle of the drives and the nonconscious regulation of our bodies, but also the repressed traumas and

[365] *Gay Science*, section 341
[366] *Gay Science*, pp. 174-75

narcissistic fantasies that maintain a coherent biography. Nietzsche thinks the value of truth and error lies in their utility, and so errors can be valuable if they become opportunities for self-overcoming. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that one's present truth is more veridical than one's past error; one can only trust that one's current truth is more useful, healthier, and a harbinger of a more joyful future.

Becoming oneself is the actualization of a vocation, but of a vocation that can be cultivated for those with protracted wills. Becoming who one is does not mean becoming a radically freely chosen self, though this is what it has in many ways come to mean in contemporary capitalist culture. Becoming who one is means becoming who one knows oneself to be and has thus far been unable fully to articulate, overcoming one's useful errors without the assurance of the advent of truth or being. It is self-revelation and the articulation of parts, not creation ex nihilo, and related to choice and consumption only in the illusions of capitalists. Nietzsche thinks free will is an illusion and claims that one becomes what one is through the training and cultivation of the instincts and drives that are the true determinants of the will. This training requires a protracted will, and as I show in the next chapter, friends.

Obstacles to self-overcoming and deficient modes of solicitude: conformity, charity, greed, and vanity

Nietzsche discusses three related obstacles to self-overcoming: conformity to society and morality, conformity specifically to moralities that promote charity or equality, and the psychological phenomena of greed and vanity. The pressures to conform in social life, both with the normative opinions and morality of one's broader society and with one's own past and future (i.e., autobiographical consistency), are common themes in Nietzsche work and

familiar also from Emerson (cf., the hobgoblins of small minds). Nietzsche writes of our "vain desire to be regarded as thoroughly consistent and homogeneous in nature and thought; for this wins respect and gives confidence and power."[367] As I explain below, Nietzschean vanity is the attempt to convince others of something precisely so that one can believe it oneself. Thus, the vain desire to be consistent and homogeneous in the eyes of the other is at bottom an anxious attempt to flee the inconsistency, precarity, and unspeakability that is constitutive of a self.

Nietzsche thinks that conformity to morality works according to the same thoughtless logic as conformity to social norms in general, so he prefers that individuals avoid taking up and living according to any universal moral codes. While he is suspicious of any hegemonic and universal moral code, he is especially critical of life-denying moralities that promote unnatural ethical ideals, such as Christianity's promotion of neighbor love, and its conceptual outworking in compassion, charity, and pity. In contrast to these ostensibly altruistic virtues, Nietzsche promotes egoistic action, ultimately the only kind of action of which he thinks humans are capable. Nietzsche, like Emerson, rehabilitates the Aristotelian notion of virtuous egoism to show how self-love allows for love of other people. Contrary to the Nietzschean vices of charity, in which I efface the other in a performative effacing of myself, and vanity, in which I efface myself in a performative effacing of the other, proper self-love and friendship (i.e., proper love of the other) go together as the modes appropriate to self-developing individuals of relating to themselves and to other people. Society and morality frustrate the human animal and demand that it not be who and what it is (i.e., will to power). At best, society and morality allow humans to interpret and articulate themselves through borrowed and

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[367] "Confusion of Cause and Effect," section 608

imprecise symbols. Friendship allows for the creative and therapeutic release of aggressivity and the will to power; or, in other words, friendship allows for the fully embodied articulation of a temporally ecstatic subjectivity that outstrips the stability and imprecision of any system of cultural symbols.

In Nietzsche's early book, *Daybreak*, friends are counted on the side of the herd. In this book friends appear as a throng of needy and demanding people who are impediments to one's self-development. Friends develop a flawed picture of who one is and communicate that flawed image back. One is assigned a social identity and takes it up as one's own truth, even though it is an identity based on the fleeting opinions of other people. He writes,

> The great majority of people, whatever they may think and say about their "egoism," do nothing for their ego all their life long, but only for a phantom of this ego which has been formed in regard to them by their friends and communicated to them. As a consequence, they all live in a haze of impersonal and half-personal opinions and of arbitrary and, as it were, poetic valuations: the one always in the head of another, and this head, again, in the head of somebody else—a queer world of phantoms which manages to give itself a rational appearance![368]

Generally, when people aim to take care of their identity and cultivate it, they have in mind this social ego. Nietzsche describes the cultivation of the socially defined ego as "pseudo-egoism." Though in this early text, Nietzsche includes friends among those who form and communicate arbitrary opinions about a person, he revises this opinion in the middle period texts. The transition in his thought clarifies how Nietzsche eventually comes to understand the intersubjective generosity of friendship. Whereas the arbitrary opinions of the herd take one away from oneself, producing a phantom in the minds of other people, the friend provides new possibilities for action and being-with, and thus being-oneself. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche's

[368] "Pseudo-egoism," section 105

thoughts on friendship are clearly undeveloped as he even attributes the category of friendship to Christian ethics, an opinion sharply at odds with his more mature writings. He writes, "There is an enormous strain and distance between envy and friendship, between self-contempt and pride: the Greek lived in the former, the Christian in the latter."[369] In the middle and late works, friendship comes to signify typically Greek relationships of agonistic development, whereas Christian morality is explained in terms of charitable and compassionate neighbor love.

A regular theme in Nietzsche, as in Emerson, is the threat of conformity to society in one's self-presentation. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes, "Sometimes in the course of conversation the sound of our own voice disconcerts us and misleads us into making assertions which in no way correspond to our opinions."[370] At issue here is not the sometimes-startling experience of hearing one's voice, as when one hears one's recorded voice, but rather the externalization of one's thoughts and the vulnerable exhibition of one's inner world. What disconcerts the conversation partner in this example is precisely the pseudo-egoistic concern for the social ego in light of which the speaker self-censors and misrepresents herself. The anxious and self-conscious presentation of the curated ego is not limited to the things one says, it infects one's entire way of being. "No one is grateful for the politeness the man of *esprit* exhibits when he accommodates himself to a company in which it is not polite to exhibit *esprit*."[371] By creating a pressure to conform one's spirit to one's company, and to comport oneself in a polite manner, society becomes an obstacle to self-becoming at the basic level of self-presentation.

[369] "Inimitable," section 69
[370] "The danger in our own voice," section 333, p. 139
[371] "In company lacking esprit," section 324, p. 139

Nietzsche's critique of manners and politeness as a hindrance to self-revelation and authentic communication echoes Emerson's critique of manners, but Nietzsche goes further to claim that morality as such depersonalizes the individual and promotes conformity. Moralities take many forms and present radically different values, but as he writes in *Gay Science* section 116, "These evaluations and rankings are always an expression of the needs of the herd." Whatever benefits the herd "is also the highest standard of value for all individuals. With morality the individual is instructed to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function… Morality is herd instinct in the individual."[372] Like manners and politeness, morality is a particularly strong form of social conformity insofar as the individual internalizes not only the rules but also develops the bad conscience associated with breaking the rules, such that the individual polices herself independently of external coercion.

While morality as such presents an obstacle to self-overcoming, contemporary Christian morality is particularly problematic insofar as it is life-denying, putting forth as ethical values equality and charity. Nietzsche is critical of ideologies that promote equality because they level humanity, preventing the full development of some people and preventing the kind of intersubjective pathos of distance that he thinks is necessary for the non-reactionary and non-vain positing of values. As I suggested above in my discussion of the sovereign individual, the pathos of distance is not, as it is often taken to be, primarily an attitude of contempt and disgust for other people.[373] In *Gay Science*, Book 3, section 243, Nietzsche writes

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[372] *Gay Science*, p. 114

[373] For example, analytic philosopher of mind Mark Alfano's claim that Nietzsche understands the pathos of distance to be a virtue associated with disgust and contempt. He claims that the pathos of distance is an attitude of contempt for the world, other people, and oneself. Alfano claims that the emotional reaction of contempt and disgust are the ground for Nietzschean morality. However, the pathos of distance cannot be the source of virtue if it is itself, as Alfano claims, a virtue. The pathos of distance cannot be, as he claims, an emotional reaction to other

that the pathos of distance is the basic ability "to feel 'this is not good.'"[374] But this feeling of something else as not good, when it is felt by someone who has the right to feel it, is far from a reaction of contempt. It is rather the non-morally charged recognition that something is not noble. The way masters recognize and value things in general is not with regard to good and evil, but good (i.e., noble, or "like us, insofar as we have protracted wills") and bad (i.e., not noble, or "unable to promise, along with all this entails").

Contempt and disgust for the other is precisely the position of resentment from which, in *Genealogy of Morals*, the slaves posit their life-denying morality. The pathos of distance is contrary to vanity since although they are both positions from which one posits values (which accounts for Zarathustra's praise of vanity), the pathos of distance allows one to posit values based on a strong sense of oneself. The masterly pathos of distance is not reactionary nor is it directed first at an evaluation of other people; it is rather the experience of one's own superabundant health and only secondarily the witness of other people's lack. Thus, the slavish, reactionary (i.e., Christian, democratic, socialist) understanding of equality is a "desire to draw everyone down to oneself (through diminishing them, spying on them, tripping them up)."[375] He does think it is possible to conceive of a masterly, life-affirming, and perfectionistic equality, more as a process and not an outcome, as a desire "to raise oneself and everyone else

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people since the pathos of distance is precisely the non-reactionary, self-affirmative ground of noble morality. Far from contempt and disgust, the *pathos* of distance implies suffering and grief on the part of those who experience it. This is a distance that is opened by the superlative love of the nobles for self and world, and their recognition of the slavish incapacity for such love in others. Disgust and contempt might be ways of creating distance, but for Nietzsche this is a method of the resentful priests who posit unhealthy morals. See: Alfano, Mark. "A schooling in contempt: emotions and the pathos of distance." pp. 121-139 in *The Nietzschean Mind*. Edited by Paul Katsafanas. Routledge: NY. 2018.

[374] *Gay Science*, p. 148

[375] *Human, All Too Human*, "Two kinds of equality," p. 300

up (through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success)."[376] The most basic distinction between these types of equality, from which all other important differences between them arise, is that the desire to draw everyone down is a manifestation of the morality of charity and pity, whereas the desire to build up people is cultivated by agonism and the sharing of joy in friendship. In *Daybreak*, section 134, he writes,

> Pity, in so far as it actually gives rise to suffering—and this must be our only point of view here—is a weakness, like every other indulgence in an injurious emotion. It increases suffering throughout the world, and although here and there a certain amount of suffering may be indirectly diminished or removed altogether as a consequence of pity, we must not bring forward these occasional consequences, which are on the whole insignificant, to justify the nature of pity.[377]

He compares the increase in suffering caused by sharing suffering in compassion (*Mitleiden*) to the increase of joy when it is shared in friendship (*Mitfreude*). Far from bringing the sufferer out of suffering, compassion drags down the healthy person into a mood of suffering and pain. Compassion and the ideologies of equality to which it leads are characteristic of the last men, who think: "Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same… We have invented happiness."[378]

Because compassionate and humanistic moralities of equality tend to aim at leveling, Nietzsche thinks egalitarian projects are anti-political, which is to say, they stand in the way of perfectionism and the cultivation of a good life. For Nietzsche, as for Emerson, the entire point of the state is to protect and promote the development of individuals. But such protection, if it becomes too complete, cuts off the individual from the very difficulties and challenges that are the condition of self-becoming and individuality. He writes in *Human, All Too Human*,

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[376] Ibid
[377] p. 85
[378] *Zarathustra*, Prologue, section 5, p. 130

"The state is a prudent institution for the protection of individuals against one another: if it is completed and perfected too far it will in the end enfeeble the individual and, indeed, dissolve him—that is to say, thwart the original purpose of the state in the most thorough way possible." He describes the problem not merely as one of a state that seeks too much to protect its citizens, but as a state that too much protects them from each other. This is a state based on a political instantiation of neighborliness as the universal non-aggression and toleration of other people. Such a society would be a cage for the instinctively aggressive Nietzschean human, and he explains in *Genealogy of Morals*, "Essay Two," how the morality of neighborliness leads to the internalization of aggression and myriad forms of self-torture and bad conscience.

A fundamental aspect of Christianity's life-denial is the idea that pain and suffering are without meaning of their own and are to be compensated by the perfect and eternal justice of Heaven. Pain-averse worldviews are supported and made possible by modern technology, opioids, and civilization, which, Nietzsche thinks, make it increasingly possible to avoid pain and thus to imagine being-in-the-world without pain. In *Gay Science*, section 48, he writes, "The general inexperience with both sort of pain and the relative rarity of the sight of suffering individuals have an important consequence: pain is hated much more now that formerly; one speaks much worse of it; indeed, one can hardly endure the presence of pain as a thought and makes it a matter of conscience and a reproach against the whole of existence."[379] This pain-averse morality is not only contingent on modern political and technological developments, but it is worthy of critique and overcoming insofar as it promotes pity (i.e., the will to end suffering through charity). Because this pain averse morality posits an alternative, pain-free reality, and because it devalues one's suffering in the attempt to make being-in-the-world pain-

[379] *Gay Science*, p. 61

free, it removes for the suffering person many of the struggles which are the very condition of her self-becoming. More than removing one's struggles, the pain averse morality prevents one from experiencing pain as meaningful and productive of self-becoming.

Because pity sees all suffering as to be avoided, it thoughtlessly aims at putting an end to the suffering of any person. Pity misses what Nietzsche draws attention to: the emancipatory and productive potential of meaningful suffering. Suffering is meaningful when it is suffering *for* some end. Compare the meaningful suffering of a person who withholds food to diet or as part of a spiritual practice, with the meaningless suffering of starving people or of people with eating disorders.[380] Nietzsche compares meaningful suffering to pregnancy, during which is suffered as part of a productive process. He writes, "The pangs of the woman giving birth hallow all pain; All becoming and growing—all that guarantees a future—involves pain."[381] Pity seeks to end suffering tout court, without consideration of possible ends or benefits that may come from a process that is itself unavoidably painful and difficult to endure. When a compassionate person ends suffering, they also remove a potential source and opportunity for the sufferer's self-development. Nietzsche's critique of compassion and pity, like Emerson's, does not amount to a claim that people should never help one another, only that we ought to avoid pitying forms of solicitude. He thinks friends can help one another not by removing the source of the other's pain, or helping the other to avoid or suppress pain, but rather by helping the other to give meaning to pain—to give it a goal—and construct a new world of joy and self-becoming in light of the certitude of pain and the often-inscrutable sources of suffering.

[380] See discussion on the ascetic ideal, below.
[381] *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," section 4, p. 562

Pity stands in the way of the other and her suffering, but beneath this apparent altruism lies a destructive conflict between the suffering person's and the compassionate person's wills to power. The suffering person's will to power is evident in the attempt to excite pity through a display of suffering. Nietzsche writes that when you encounter someone who is trying to excite pity,

> Ask yourself whether their eloquent moaning and complaining, their displaying of misfortune, does not fundamentally have the objective of hurting those who are with them… all their weakness notwithstanding, they possess at any rate one power: the power to hurt. In this feeling of superiority of which the manifestation of pity makes him conscious, the unfortunate man gains a sort of pleasure; in the conceit of his imagination he is still of sufficient importance to cause affliction in the world. The thirst for pity is thus a thirst for self-enjoyment, and that at the expense of one's fellow men.[382]

Nietzsche thinks suffering is an unavoidable part of life and that what matters is how one makes that suffering meaningful, incorporating it into one's life and projects. The hysteric who seeks to excite pity uses their suffering not as a tool for self-reflection and development, but rather as a weapon to inflict suffering on other people and thereby experience power and enjoyment.

At the same time, the compassionate person who extends charity to the other also manifests a more polymorphous will to power, which goes beyond the pursuit of enjoyment, seeking to dominate and possess the needy person. In *Gay Science*, section 14, he writes, "When we see someone suffering, we like to use this opportunity to take possession of him; that is for example what those who have become his benefactors and those who have compassion for him do, and they call the lust for new possessions that is awakened in them 'love'; and their delight is like that aroused by the prospect of a new conquest."[383] Charitable sacrifices are "made for *our* [i.e., the charitable person's] desire for power or for the

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[382] *Human, All Too Human*, section 50, p. 38
[383] *Gay Science*, p. 40

preservation of our feeling of power."[384] Pity is essentially self-regarding. The pain the charitable person aims to end is ultimately her own pain and discomfort at witnessing the suffering of another. Ending the other person's suffering is merely a means to ending one's own discomfort. Charity need not even bring any meaningful end to the other's suffering to perform the ideological task of ending the charitable person's suffering. One is allowed to feel absolved of others' suffering through charitable action, rather than engaging in the kind of political action that would help people to face and overcome the sources of their suffering. Charitable contributions are even included in the price of some items (e.g., carbon offsets included with plane tickets or donations to indigenous people included with bottled water) so that one purchases not only the commodity but also absolution for one's participation in the exploitation of other people and the environment.

In *Confessions*, Augustine writes of the pleasure he takes from being a spectator of the suffering of others in theatrical shows. He wonders how it could be that people would find such enjoyment in witnessing the suffering of other people since it is painful to witness suffering. He concludes that "only, when he himself suffers, it is called misery [*miseria*]; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy [*misericordia*: 'misery of the heart']."[385] Augustine plays on an earlier distinction he draws between human vices and their virtuous divine reflections[386] to distinguish between the feigned and enjoyable mercy humans show one another and God's authentic mercy that, as Augustine writes, "hovered over [him] from afar."[387] Augustine writes that the enjoyment arises from the knowledge that the spectator in

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[384] *Gay Science,* section 13, p. 39
[385] *Confessions*, Book III.ii (2), p. 36
[386] Ibid., Book II.vi (13), p. 31
[387] Ibid., Book III.iii (5), p. 37

the audience need not help the suffering person and is invited "only to grieve."[388] In theatrical performances, audiences complain precisely when they are not caused to feel the pain of the other to whom they need not respond, "but if he feels pain, he stays riveted to his seat enjoying himself."[389] Augustine argues that mercy cannot exist without suffering, and thus, since mercy is agreeable, agonies can be an object of love. Thus, human mercy is twisted and runs "down into a torrent of boiling pitch, the monstrous heats of black desires into which it is transformed."[390] Augustine writes that "a more authentic compassion… contains no element of pleasure."[391] This is all a fallen version of God's compassion which is "far purer and freer of mixed motives."[392] Whereas human mercy is motivated by secret enjoyments that start in the other's suffering, God's mercy hovers over Augustine "from afar."[393] God's mercy makes room for Augustine's experiments and failures, provoking him silently from afar.

As an expression of the will to power, charity is not merely about reducing the charitable person's suffering, but also, more fundamentally, about increasing her enjoyment. This is an understanding of pity that Nietzsche elaborates in several places. In *Daybreak*, section 133, Nietzsche describes the way people approach those who are suffering,

> It is misleading to call the suffering that we experience at such a sight, and which may be of a very different kind, commiseration. For in all cases it is a suffering from which the suffering person before us is free: it is our own suffering, just as his suffering is his own. It is thus only this personal feeling of misery that we get rid of by acts of compassion. Nevertheless, we never act thus from one single motive: as it is certain that we wish to free ourselves from suffering thereby, it is also certain that by the same action we yield to an impulse of pleasure. Pleasure arises at the sight of a contrast to our own condition, at the knowledge that we should be able to help if only we wished to do so, at the

[388] Ibid., Book III.iii (2), p. 36
[389] Ibid.
[390] Book III.11 (3), p. 36
[391] Book III.11 (3), p. 37
[392] Ibid.
[393] Book III.iii (5)

> thought of the praise and gratitude which we should gain if we did help, at the very act of helping, in so far as this might prove successful (and because something which is gradually seen to be successful gives pleasure to the doer); but even more particularly at the feeling that our intervention brings to an end some deplorable injustice,—even the outburst of one's indignation is invigorating.[394]

The charitable person thus takes pleasure in the pathos of distance between herself and the pitied person, and the feeling of power manifested in her arbitrary will to withhold or render help. The charitable person takes pleasure from the social esteem earned by helping a pitiable person, and the vain identification of oneself as a warrior of justice. Even if charitable and compassionate action does nothing to alleviate another's suffering, outbursts of indignation—as are typical of political rhetoric and online discourse—allow for a release of energy that contributes to a delusion of action. Charity and compassion act as placebos since they are effective at ending the charitable person's suffering and increasing her enjoyment—which is to say, they satisfy the will to power—regardless of whether they have caused a material change in the world or other people's conditions.

Charity provides enjoyment for the compassionate person because it demonstrates her superiority over the pitied person. Compassionate people seek out opportunities for compassion and charity not to build up the pitied person, but rather to build up themselves. In *Daybreak*, section 224, Nietzsche describes compassionate people's reaction to the suffering of their neighbor: "He is in distress, and straightway the 'compassionate' ones come to him and depict his misfortune to him. At last they go away again, satisfied and elevated, after having gloated over the unhappy man's misfortune and their own, and spent a pleasant Sunday afternoon."[395] Nietzsche thinks that humans, as aggressive animals, get instinctual pleasure at

[394] p. 84
[395] *Daybreak*, p. 137

witnessing the suffering of another and seeing the powerful laid low. In *Human, All Too Human*, section 103, he writes,

> Pity has the pleasure of the other as its objective just as little as wickedness has the pain of the other as such. For it conceals within itself at least two (perhaps many more) elements of a personal [i.e., selfish] pleasure and is to that extent self-enjoyment: first as the pleasure of the emotion, which is the kind represented by pity in tragedy, and then, when it eventuate in action, as the pleasure of gratification in the exercise of power. If, in addition to this, the suffering person is very close to us, we remove from ourselves the suffering we ourselves feel by performing an act of pity.[396]

Pity and compassion are powerful emotions, and although he sometimes writes of them as painful to witness, he thinks they can also provide enjoyment to the witness. This is the pleasure and enjoyment of tragedy—it allows one to experience deep pity for the characters, then get back to regular life unscathed.

Charity is part of what produces and maintains the bad conscience Nietzsche thinks is typical of modern, life-denying moralities. The natural tendency of the will to power is egoism, but when modern moralities frame egoism as evil, charity becomes a way to deal with the guilt of having persistent egoistic tendencies. In *Daybreak*, section 148, he writes

> In the future, then, will these very actions be less frequently performed, since they will be less highly esteemed? Inevitably! Or at all events for a fairly long time, as long as the scale of valuations remains under the reacting influence of former mistakes! But we make some return for this by giving back to men their good courage for the carrying out of actions that are now reputed to be selfish, and thus restore their value,—we relieve men's bad consciences! and as up to the present egoistic actions have been by far the most frequent, and will be so to all eternity, we free the whole conception of these actions and of life from its evil appearance! This is a very high and important result. When men no longer believe themselves to be evil, they cease to be so.[397]

[396] *Human, All Too Human*, p. 55
[397] pp. 147-48

Charity begins as an ascetic practice that allows one to suppress bad conscience and guilt. Charity becomes an ascetic ideal: the ostensibly unegoistic, self-sacrificing care for the other as good in itself. Charity as an ascetic ideal increases bad conscience because it makes one responsible for the other's suffering and guilt insofar as the other continues to suffer, which is to say, insofar as the other continues to live. Nietzsche thinks that rather than an infinite responsibility for the other, one ought to take responsibility for oneself. One ought to develop oneself towards greater health and greater possibilities of joy that can be shared with friends, encouraging their joyfulness rather than denying the meaning of their struggle and attempting to suppress it.

"Pity, my friend, is a kind of hell—whatever the adherents of Schopenhauer may say," wrote Nietzsche, in an 1883 letter to Overbeck.[398] The pitied person experiences a kind of hell since they experience the superiority of another person in facing and overcoming their personal struggles. In the thoughtless, leaping-in of the compassionate person, the pitied person is infantilized and treated as incapable of enduring suffering. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche goes so far as to claim that we ought to be ready even to increase pain and suffering if it leads to a good outcome. He writes,

> Ought the nature of true morality to consist for us in fixing our eyes upon the most direct and immediate consequences of our action for other people, and in our coming to a decision accordingly? This is only a narrow and bourgeois morality, even though it may be a morality: but it seems to me that it would be more superior and liberal to look beyond these immediate consequences for our neighbour in order to encourage more distant purposes, even at the risk of making others suffer,—as, for example, by encouraging the spirit of knowledge in spite of the certainty that our free-thought will have the instant effect of plunging others into doubt, grief, and even worse afflictions. Have we not at least the right to treat our neighbour as we treat ourselves?[399]

[398] In Kaufmann, p. 59
[399] *Daybreak*, p. 146

Meaningful suffering is a privilege one gives to oneself (e.g., training, studying, and exercising), and which one should not withhold from others. For Nietzsche, to love the neighbor ought to mean precisely to extend the same type of criticality and therapeutic challenges to the other that the self-developing person prescribes to oneself.

Besides getting in the way of the other person's development, and although it remains an expression of the will to power, charity ultimately gets in the way even of the charitable person's self-development. Zarathustra speaks of this type of charity in "The Friend": "Some cannot loosen their own chains and can nevertheless redeem their friends." When one's own path of self-overcoming becomes too difficult or when life's challenges become too traumatic, the charitable person can distract herself with the problems of other people. The other's problems may be more trivial than one's own, and so one can take enjoyment and a sense of overcoming from solving the other's problems. Even if her problems are not more trivial, they are at least new problems, which one can approach with the spectator's curiosity. Because charity is interpreted as a virtue, there is even good conscience attached to the charitable person's self-neglect. "Your love of the neighbor is bad love of yourselves. You flee to your neighbor from yourselves and would like to make a virtue out of that."[400] Whereas neighbor love is self-neglect, friendship is a love of the other that is also love of oneself. The egoism in friendship is, in part, a bad conscience at the idea of an other-regarding morality that denies self-love. Proper egoists and true friends feel guilty precisely when they show pity.

Walter Kaufmann notes the distracting quality of charity and attributes to Nietzsche the claim that only those who have attained self-mastery ought to expend energy on helping other people. Kaufmann cites Nietzsche's claim in *EH*, Book I, section 8: "My humanity does not

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[400] *Zarathustra*, "On love of the neighbor," p. 170

consist in sympathizing with men but in enduring my sympathy for them. My humanity is a perpetual self-overcoming."[401] Kaufmann distills two claims from these lines. First, Nietzschean morality means "mastery of the impulses." Second, Kaufmann writes, "until we have achieved self-mastery and self-perfection, we should be best advised to concentrate on this—by far the most important—task, instead of scattering our efforts. Running off to help others would likely be a weakness, psychologically: giving alms to others is easier than making something of oneself."[402] Kaufmann sees the way charity is able to distract one from one's own project of self-overcoming, but his claim that only highly developed people who have "achieved self-mastery and self-perfection" ought to spend energy on others seems wrong. Undoubtedly, thoughtlessly "running off to help others" would be for Nietzsche a sign of psychological weakness and slavishness compared to the non-reactive strength of the person who acts slowly and thoughtfully. However, Nietzschean perfectionism is an unending process of self-becoming over the course of a life and can never be "achieved" in a way that would allow, on Kaufmann's reading, for helping others. There must be room for helping others, in some fashion, while one is on the way to self-mastery. More than this, self-development and self-mastery unfold only in relation to other people who are themselves progressing towards self-mastery. It is easy to see how a perfectionistic egoism is at odds with Nietzsche's interpretation of Christian charity.

Nietzsche is also careful to distinguish his idea of healthy egoism from vanity. Vanity is a concept Nietzsche explains at length in his early period, returning to it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he connects it with the slave morality. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche's

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[401] In Kaufmann, p. 371
[402] Ibid.

theory of vanity can be read as a modification of the Hegelian intersubjective struggle for recognition. Nietzsche writes of the healthy, unvain (or modest) individual, “As a rule, the individual wants through the opinion of others to confirm the opinion he has of himself and to ratify himself in his own eyes.”[403] Whereas a healthy person attempts to convince others to take her to be the way she takes herself to be, the vain person has no individual take on herself that could motivate a struggle for recognition. The vain person has no belief in herself and must acquire an idea of herself from others. But having no belief in herself to begin with, the self reflected from others is a play of images and deceit. Nietzsche writes of the vain person, “He seduces others to a false, much too high assessment of himself, yet then submits to the authority of these others: that is to say, he induces an error and then believes in this error.”[404] The vain person convinces another of a lie and, based on the apparent authority of the other, comes to believe the lie. Thus, in vanity one’s deception is not directed only at the other, but ultimately at oneself. Nietzsche writes, “The vain man does not wish so much to be prominent as to feel himself prominent; he therefore disdains none of the expedients for self-deception and self-out-witting.”[405] Like a sophist, the vain person is concerned more with convincing others of an idea than with the reality or truth of that idea. More than a sophist, the vain person must believe her own lie and seek relations with those who will enable and confirm her delusion. In a typically Nietzschean move, this dynamic feeds itself and builds momentum: “The more he loses himself the more he has to endeavor to regain his position by means of the opinion of others.”[406] The vain person, having no coherent self-conception, convinces the other

[403] “Vanity,” section 89, p. 48
[404] Ibid.
[405] *Human, All Too Human*, “Self-enjoyment in vanity,” section 545, p. 185
[406] *Human, All Too Human*, “Vain exceptionally,” section 546, p. 185

of a lie and adopts the lie, further foreclosing any possibility of self-discovery and expression. With self-knowledge further foreclosed, the vain person must rely more on the opinions of others and the cycle repeats. Vanity, far from self-love, is the path of self-alienation.

Nietzsche introduces vanity as a kind of anti-friendship when he writes, “Only where the good opinion of others is important to someone quite apart from advantage or the desire to give pleasure do we speak of vanity.”[407] This should be read in the context of Aristotle’s three types of friendship. In Aristotle’s typology, the good opinion of the other comes together with advantage or desire to produce friends of utility or pleasure. Good opinion matters alone in an even more deficient and unfriendly relationship, such as with a vain person.

Vain people are not good candidates for friendship, and their vain relationships with other people are inimical to self-development. Vain people are not only bad candidates for friendship because they present false images of themselves to one another, but also because they are so busy with the creation and management of their self-presentation that they are unable to take account of the other. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes “When two people who are equally vain meet they afterwards retain a poor impression of one another, because each was so concerned with the impression that he wished to make on the other that the other made no impression on him.”[408] The vain person’s inability to relate to others arises from a radical lack of self-knowledge–or, we might say, the inability to posit a goal–and a corresponding inability to communicate with self-knowledge, as well as an inability to break out of anxious self-centeredness long enough to recognize the other.

[407] Ibid.
[408] “Clashing Vanities,” section 338, p. 140

Nietzsche's ideas about vanity undergo some modification as he matures, though he is critical of vanity overall. In *Daybreak*, 385 he suggests that all people are to some extent vain, and he opens the way to considering whether some vain deceptions are necessary for the maintenance of a healthy psyche. He writes, "We are like shop-windows, where we ourselves are constantly arranging, concealing, or setting in the foreground those supposed qualities which others attribute to us—in order to deceive ourselves."[409] If we are all involved in this kind of widow arranging, then one aspect of having a coherent identity might be constitutive contributions from vain errors and deceptions. That Nietzsche takes some errors to be helpful and potentially necessary in the maintenance of an identity is reflected in his claim that errors have been necessary and useful in the history of humanity. In *Gay Science* section 115, he describes how errors can be therapeutic for the critical person who eventually recognizes the error. He describes this playing out over the course of human history when he writes,

> Man has been educated by his errors: first he saw himself only incompletely; secondly, he endowed himself with fictitious attributes; thirdly, he placed himself in a false rank order in relation to animals and nature; fourthly, he invented new tables of goods and for a time took them to be eternal and unconditioned… If one discounts the effects of these four errors, one has also discounted humanity, humaneness, and 'human dignity.'[410]

These errors acted like braces, supporting a developing humanity, but once developed, humanity ought to shed these supports. A vain person uncritically accepts the error and perpetuates it. Thus, the essential problem with vanity is not the communication and confirmation of error in one's relationships, but the uncritical way in which the vain person accepts and becomes the error.

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[409] *Daybreak*, section 385
[410] p. 114

In “On Human Prudence,” Zarathustra sees some value in the vain person’s construction of herself, though with no grounding in the real core of her subjectivity, her performance is mere entertainment. Zarathustra proclaims that he “spare[s] the *vain* more than the proud,” since hurt vanity leads to tragedy whereas hurt pride leads to the development of something better. Vain people are not the kind of people with whom one can engage in a friendly, agonistic relationship because their self-concept relies entirely on what they receive from the other. If an agonistic partner attacks a vain person, the vain person tragically loses the source of her good opinion of herself. An injury to pride is the kind of noble agonism that in friendship creates the potential for a greater development and pride. Zarathustra adds to this that he spares the vain because they provide him good entertainment, saying, “They are the physicians of my melancholy and keep me attached to life as to a play.” Vain people are fun to watch for Zarathustra since they at least “are good actors: they act and they want people to enjoy looking at them… they enact themselves, they invent themselves.” The vain person is at least more actively engaged in a project of self-construction than the last men or the residents of Motley Cow, although Zarathustra sees through their charade.

While Nietzsche typically praises projects of self-construction, the vain person’s self-construction is problematically based in a form of unhealthy modesty (i.e., an inability to show oneself). The vain person’s self-construction is not a manifestation of will to power, but rather existential nausea: “At bottom, his heart sighs: what am *I*?” Lacking a self-reliant sense of himself, “It is from you that he wants to acquire his faith in himself; he nourishes himself on your glances, he eats your praise out of your hands.”[411] And not because the vain person has too great a love of self, but precisely because out of pathological modesty the vain person is

[411] “On Human Prudence,” p. 255

unable even to reveal himself to himself. The problem is not that the vain person's identity is an act or based on errors and lies (which are constitutive of any healthy-enough psyche), but rather that the vain act is a masochistic attempt to affirm oneself entirely through the will of another. Usually, a healthy-enough identity is held together by certain more-or-less neurotic delusions and symptoms, but the vain person's entire identity is a delusion produced and maintained through false, bad-faith relations with other people.

Greed, possessiveness, and a drive to consume, all go together to make both erotic love and the will to understanding impediments to self-development. Nietzsche often refers in an unqualified way to both family relations and erotic relations as love. Both fail for similar reasons to provide the conditions for self-development, and so they can be discussed together. In *Gay Science*, section 14, Nietzsche anticipates Freud when he makes the claim that love and greed are rooted in the same instinct. This instinct is named twice, once by those who have what they desire and so call others greedy, and those who lack what they desire and so valorize their pursuit. He claims that the greedy desire for property underlies neighbor love, the will to truth, and the obsession with novelty.

Lovers greedily desire to possess the beloved as he is, and not as he might become. In Zarathustra's speech, "The Friend," women are discounted as candidates for friendship since their love—characterized here as vain and oppressive—conceals "a slave and a tyrant." Nietzsche writes, "Woman's love involves blindness and injustice towards everything that she does not love."[412] This line can easily be read to imply that womanly love is highly preferential, but this reading loses its force since Nietzsche is here comparing womanly love to friendship, which Nietzsche praises precisely in terms of its preferential nature. What distinguishes

[412] "The Friend," p. 169

friendship from womanly love in these lines is that friendship is not blind and unjust to what it does not love in the friend because it is not yet available to be loved: the friend's future self. He writes,

> Sexual love, however, is what most clearly reveals itself as a craving for new property: the lover wants unconditional and sole possession of the longed-for person; he wants a power over her soul as unconditional as his power over her body; he wants to be the only beloved, to live and to rule in the other soul as that which is supreme and most desirable.[413]

The erotic lover, according to Zarathustra, desires the beloved as he is, and wants in return to be desired as he is. Erotic love does not love in the beloved *primarily* a future possibility of who he might become, but his current being, and desires that his being should persist.

Greed and possessiveness are revealed also in the will to knowledge, and they play a foundational role in the unfolding of the will to power. In *Will to Power*, section 657, Nietzsche writes, "'Nourishment'—is only derivative; the original phenomenon is: to desire to incorporate everything."[414] This greed is at the heart of the will to power, since life seeks not merely to persist, but to grow and spread itself through the incorporation of other material. He describes this greed as a motivating force for all life, beginning with primordial protoplasm. "Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same."[415] This taking into oneself can also be described as transforming what is other and outside into more of oneself. In the most general terms, greed is the desire to consume otherness in an imperialistic sedimentation and concretizing of one's own being.

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[413] Ibid.
[414] *Will to Power*, p. 347
[415] *Will to Power*, section 656*,* p.346

In *Gay Science*, section 355, Nietzsche connects the will to knowledge with anxiety in the face of the unknown. In discussing the will to knowledge, he writes,

> Nothing more than this: something unfamiliar is to be traced back to something familiar… The familiar means what we are used to, so that we no longer marvel at it; the commonplace; some rule in which we are stuck; each and every thing that makes us feel at home:—And isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover among everything strange, unusual, and doubtful something which no longer unsettles us?[416]

The will to knowledge operates according to the same logic of greedy incorporation as Nietzschean love and nourishment. In seeking to know something, the knower transforms what is unfamiliar into what is familiar from one's individualized and culturally embedded perspective: to what is commonplace and allows one to be at home in the world. Knowledge is here presented as the anxious attempt to fit into one's world an unsettling and anomalous novelty. Ritual and ideological methods of dealing with anomy have been discussed in several anthropological, legal, and theoretical contexts,[417] but Nietzsche's tone is decidedly imperialistic. Friendship, as I show in the next chapter, is a love that generously seeks to build up the other rather than to possess him. It is a model of knowing oneself through unfolding and uncovering oneself, rather than greedily incorporating all that is new into more of the same.

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[416] *Gay Science*, section 355, "The origin of our concept of 'knowledge,'" p. 214

[417] The problem of novelty and managing anomy are at the heart of Peter Berger's theory of world construction and world maintenance. He argues that a cultural world provides meaning to the lives of the people who participate in it. Mary Douglas's classic of comparative religion, *Purity and Danger*, explores this dynamic in terms of cultural beliefs and rituals about pollution. She defines dirt, cross-culturally, as "matter out of place," (p. 36) and explains behaviors ostensibly aimed at hygiene in terms of the management of ambiguous and anomalous phenomena which confound normative categories. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum's book, *From Disgust to Humanity*, discusses modern American culture and the legal management of sexual practices that are considered non-normative, anxiety producing, and disgusting. For a look at anomaly from the perspective of the anomalous, Irving Goffman's *Stigma* offers an insightful analysis of the performative ways socially anomalous individuals reconcile their own self-image with the stigmatized image others have of them and try to impose upon them.

Chapter Four: The Significance of Friendship for Nietzschean Perfectionism

> "Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."
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> -Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*[418]

Nietzsche's writing on friendship has been largely overlooked despite Walter Kaufmann's discussion of friendship as a foundational concept in Nietzsche's psychology, perfectionism, and critique of pity. Though Kaufmann does not provide a systematic analysis, he identifies many of the main ways that friendship promotes perfectionism and serves as an alternative to pity. He writes,

> Pity and altruism must be curbed by those who want to perfect themselves; but Nietzsche—his own Hyperborean loneliness notwithstanding—thinks that friendship may ease the way. Here man does not flee from himself or exert his will to "power" cheaply by indebting others to him. In friendship man can sublimate his jealousy into a keen spiritual competition, and the friends may vie with each other to make something of themselves that will delight, inspire, and spur on the other... The friend is less likely to shirk the task of self-perfection than are those who profess to love their neighbors.[419]

Kaufmann identifies the two fundamental roles of friendship in Nietzsche's philosophy: The sublimation of violent emotions into agonistic love as motivating ongoing mutual self-development and the provision of a corrective to the will to dominate implicit in charity.

Kaufmann's analysis traces Nietzsche's philosophy of friendship back to his biography and his relationships with figures such as Wagner, Overbeck, Salome, and Ree. Kaufmann writes,

> Some of the lasting elements of Nietzsche's thought, however, are inseparable from these personal experiences: the friendship with a man of great creative genius; the jealous aspiration to excel the friend and, begotten by it, the deep

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[418] p. 362
[419] Kaufmann, p. 389

> insight into the artist's soul—the starting point of Nietzsche's depth psychology and one of the decisive inspirations of his later conception of the will to power.[420]

Kaufmann describes the agonistic dynamic between Wagner and Nietzsche as each sought to outdo the other in their careers, and he shows Nietzsche complaining in letters about the pity his friends have shown him: "Pity, my friend, is a kind of hell—whatever the adherents of Schopenhauer may say."[421]

While the theme of friendship features prominently in Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, the first attempt to give a systematic account of Nietzschean friendship came with political theorist Ruth Abbey's 1999 article, "Circles, Ladders and Stars," where she distinguishes three types of Nietzschean friendship. Some friends are parts of circles, these are friends who gather around a central friend, and who have friendships with each other that are fundamentally based on the friendship with the central person. Friends who are parts of ladders are friends who are more transient and utilitarian in one's life. These are friends who learn from one another and develop in one another's presence, but who ultimately end the friendship when one person has no more to offer the other in terms of motivating education and development. Star friendships are the final type, these are friendships where both friends pursue their own self-development in cooperation. Abbey makes too much of this typology, which Nietzsche does not develop beyond the two sections on which Abbey bases her reading: *Human, All Too Human* 368 and *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* 242.

Abbey makes Nietzsche's theory of friendship into a version of Aristotle. Her circle of friends brought together by a mutual love of a central friend operates according to a logic of

[420] Ibid, pp. 30-31
[421] Nietzsche, "Letter to Overbeck," in Kaufmann, p. 59

enjoyment like the lowest form of Aristotelian friendship. Her ladder friendship is a relationship based entirely in mutual utility, and which dissolves upon the end of the friend's usefulness. Star friendship is the only form that pursues a goal higher than the friendship and the friends themselves, akin to Aristotle's virtue friendship.

Abbey makes a few other claims that will be refuted in the course of this chapter. She claims that friendship is only significant to Nietzsche's middle period, being pushed aside by Nietzsche's emphasis in the late period on self-development as a project of solitary and highly developed individuals. Along with Verkerk, I find Nietzsche's commitment to the meaning of friendship to extend into the late period, even if the term "friendship" is scarce. I argue that it is precisely the absence of friendship in *Genealogy of Morals* that accounts for the devolution in morality that text exposes. Abbey also claims that friendship blurs the subjective boundary between individuals. This is a dramatic claim for which Abbey provides scant textual evidence. In a single aphorism from *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes, "Be honest to yourself and whoever else is a friend."[422] Abbey takes this line to mean that since I am a friend, and other people are friends, we both ambiguously occupy the same subjective position. Besides offering no other evidence for such subjective blending—a blending which I take to be wholly absent from Nietzschean friendship—Abbey's reading even of this line is questionable. That I am "*a* friend," and that other people are also capable of being "*a* friend" does not imply that we are both the *same* friend, much less does it imply some intersubjective blending akin to Montaigne's friends who efface the seam that binds them.

[422] *Daybreak*, section 556

Finally, Abbey makes the questionable claim that deception is a regular and acceptable part of healthy friendships.[423] She reads *Gay Science*, section 16, and *Human, All Too Human*, section 360, as making the claim that it is acceptable to deceive one's friends if the deceit will spare the friend emotional pain. But this claim does not fit with the larger context of Nietzsche's understanding of the power of truth and criticality in friendship. As I show, friendship is precisely about not sparing the friend when the truth is hard to swallow. It is precisely the sometimes painful, challenging, and agonistic nature of sharing difficult truths that allows friends to provide the conditions for each other's self-development. Besides this, in the specific lines to which Abbey refers, Nietzsche does not advise deception amongst friends, but only among people who are bashful. Bashful people who are pained by truth and with whom one must be deceitful are hardly good candidates for Nietzschean friendship.

Without referring to Kaufmann, she corrects his reading of Nietzsche's use of friendship as an alternative to pity. Nietzsche's critique of pity is not a claim that people should refrain from helping one another; friendship provides the conditions under which we can help each other without the negative aspects of pity and charity. Robert Miner, Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University, attempts to correct Abbey, maintaining that Nietzsche's critique of pity is absolute and that the positive aspects of solicitude afforded by friendship should be conceptually distinguished as sympathy (*Mitgefühl)*.[424] A pitying person understands suffering as categorically evil and to be removed, and so reacts thoughtlessly to end the suffering of anyone they meet. As Nietzsche explains, the pitying person wants to end suffering immediately. This is not an other-regarding emotion since the pitying person truly desires to

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[423] Abbey, p. 26

[424] See my discussion below on sympathetic joy (*Mitfreude*)

end her own discomfort at the sight of another person's suffering. Sympathy is, for Miner, a mood in which one understands that some suffering is compatible with and potentially necessary for one's development, which Miner understands in terms of a search for truth. Thus, sympathy is not thoughtlessly reactive, but moved by a genuine concern for the other.[425] Miner's distinction is helpful in highlighting the different motivations for solicitude; however, his distinction makes pity an entirely self-regarding emotion, and sympathy an entirely other-regarding emotion, a claim which runs up against Nietzsche's repeated insistence that human action is necessarily egoistic. Miner misses that under the conditions of friendship, I can act for the other's interest because it is simultaneously my own.

Miner's reading claims friendship serves an essentially epistemological role in the pursuit of philosophical truth. While he is correct to identify a goal for friendship, his idea that this goal is philosophical truth is not well supported by Nietzsche's writings and runs counter to Nietzsche's understanding of the value of a truth that could be a universal goal for all people. Willow Verkerk responds to Miner by substituting for truth an ongoing procedure of "passionate knowledge seeking." She describes friendship as allowing for the development of a "hermeneutics of suspicion," where friends learn from each other to develop a criticality towards their own unquestioned truths and methods for reaching truth.

Whereas for Nietzsche, understanding typically takes place by way of making the unfamiliar into the familiar,[426] Verkerk claims that friendship breaks this habitual way of knowing so that one can observe and embody another person's perspective. Friendship "allows for openings to occur in one's knowledge base, reflective openings that would not be so easy

[425] Miner, pp. 64-65
[426] See, *Gay Science*, section 355, and the discussion below.

to come to in solitude."[427] For Verkerk, the goal of friendship is not a stable and universal truth that can be reached, but "the ongoing agonistic engagement of perspectives."[428] Miner's and Verkerk's readings miss that the Nietzschean will to knowledge is fundamentally an imperialistic transformation of the unfamiliar into the familiar that aims at preventing any unforeseen reappearance of the unfamiliar and new. These readings overlook Nietzsche's exploration, in *Genealogy of Morals*, of the excoriating and deleterious demand to know and to provide an account of oneself and one's guilty motivations. They overlook the essential unknowability and unspeakability of the self as preconscious and presymbolic will to power.

Both Miner and Verkerk claim an essentially epistemological role for friendship, missing the larger ethical and existential issues connected with becoming oneself. In Verkerk's 2020 book, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, she updates the emphasis of her reading so that "passionate knowledge seeking" comes to mean something more existential. Verkerk's book provides a reading of friendship as a therapeutic in the process of self-overcoming. She argues that through friendship one "can shape the drives into an orientation that allows for self-overcoming."[429] Verkerk is quite helpful in bringing to light the problems associated with Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming, though she does not explain fully how friendship answers these problems. She points out the fundamental difficulty for any project of self-overcoming if we assume, with Nietzsche, that subjects lack free will, being overdetermined by nature, society, and the will to power.

Verkerk identifies three types of friends in Nietzsche based on the different emphases he places on certain characteristics of friendship in different books. She identifies friends of

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[427] Verkerk, p. 285
[428] Verkerk, p. 288
[429] Verkerk, p. 100

joy, agonism, and bestowal. While Verkerk is helpful in bringing attention to the three emphases, she overstates the degree to which these are three different types in Nietzsche's thought. Any friendship that would qualify as a Nietzschean friendship must, I claim, exhibit all of these. Higher and lower types of friendship are not determined by the absence or dominance of any of the characteristics, but by the degree to which all three of these characteristics are developed.

While Verkerk's entire typology is questionable (i.e., that a friend is either joyful, agonistic, or generous), particularly questionable is her claim that only one type of friendship is generous: her so-called "bestowing friendship," which is performed by Zarathustra—a friendship that, I claim, is also clearly joyful and agonistic. She bases her formulation of the bestowing friend on Zarathustra's announcement that he has come to teach "the creating friend who always has a completed world to give away [i.e., bestow]."[430] She goes on to sharply distinguish this from agonistic friendship, saying that the bestowing friendship shows no competitiveness between the friends. She identifies this as the friendship of a teacher or mentor, but still maintains that this is a non-agonistic relationship.[431] She builds up a description of the bestower from her reading of Zarathustra's speeches "On the Gift Giving [i.e., Bestowing] Virtue" and "Three Sins."

Leaving aside Verkerk's description and analysis of the bestowing subjectivity, it is doubtful that bestowers are a class of friends that Nietzsche wants to carve out from other types of friendship. Verkerk's claim rests on connecting the descriptions of bestowers from the latter two verses (i.e., "On the Gift Giving Virtue" and "Three Sins") and the creating friend through

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[430] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Love of the Neighbor," p. 174
[431] Verkerk, p. 38

the shared use of the word "bestow." But bestowing cannot be a form of friendship the way Verkerk describes it. She writes, "The bestower wants to express their mastery over the other through teaching and bestowing and their friend wants to be a student and receive the gift of the bestower."[432] Teachers do not, I think, bestow knowledge on students, nor do friends bestow upon each other their becoming. Far from bestowal, friendship and teaching are relations of provocation and creating room for the other. There may be bestowals along the way of a friendship, but it would not make sense to speak of a friendship essentially characterized by bestowal as Verkerk does. Verkerk's bestowal obeys a logic too like that of the ideological domination typical of charity. She writes,

> In the character of Zarathustra, the bestower is exemplified as a position of leadership, self-assurance, and power… The bestower has reached a place of self-mastery having attained both knowledge and power that sets them apart from their past selves and other people… In Nietzsche's ethics of friendship, the bestower leads through teaching and commanding others who have yet to accumulate the wisdom they hold.[433]

But education, especially as performed by Zarathustra, is an agonistic and dialectical relationship that does not follow the one-sidedness of Verkerk's bestowal. As Zarathustra remarks, "And why should Zarathustra not learn from the people when the people learn from Zarathustra?"[434] Zarathustra is a teacher and a friend, but he is not a master bestowing truth or issuing commands. He is a provocateur and sympathetic enjoyer.

As explained in the previous chapter, Nietzsche thinks the tendency to be part of the herd runs deep in humans and that we are already set up for conformity by the structure of our minds. In *Gay Science* section 11, Nietzsche explains his theory that the ego, or consciousness

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[432] Verkerk, p. 101
[433] Verkerk, p. 105
[434] "On Redemption," p. 249

(*Bewusstsein*), is an epiphenomenon, one that is a late and potentially temporary development in human evolution.[435] He goes on in *Gay Science* section 354 to claim that consciousness is the way the human mind mediates between the preconscious drives of the will to power and the external world. Because consciousness is a translation of the will to power into concepts and language borrowed from culture, consciousness tends to misrepresent the idiosyncrasies of the will to power as they are interpreted in terms of the herd. He writes, "The world of which we can become conscious is merely a surface-and-sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator,- that everything which enters consciousness thereby *becomes* shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark."[436] Verkerk claims that friends can help one overcome this herd cognition by helping one to break the habit of taking up the herd interpretation. Verkerk argues, convincingly, that one's relation to a friend differs from herd relations in ways that provide otherwise unavailable perspectives on oneself. However, she is not clear on how the friend's perspective, which must itself be conditioned by the concepts of the herd, could overcome one's own herd-thinking. If my friend's cognition is conditioned by the terms and symbols of the herd, then it cannot be that I simply add her herd perspective to mine. Instead, I argue, the friend allows new directions of action and possibilities for becoming myself. More than providing the epistemological benefit of having an additional perspective on oneself, the friend expands one's existential

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[435] Nietzsche's diminishing of the role of the ego is another way in which he anticipates Freudian psychoanalysis. In "The Ego and the Id," Freud writes that with regard to the id the ego is like "a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse… obliged to guide it where it wants to go."

[436] *Gay Science*, section 354, p. 213

possibilities. The new perspectives my friend provides are not essentially perspectives from which she sees me; they are new possibilities for my way of being-in-the-world.

Verkerk is more helpful when she explains how friendship overcomes the apparent contradictory strands in Nietzsche's perfectionism: That one should take up a self-critical perspective on oneself in pursuit of self-overcoming, but also that one lacks free will. Verkerk explains that while consciousness is an effect of the will to power, through self-critique and the critical perspective made possible by friends, one can cultivate the will to power itself. She writes, "Nietzsche's conception of the will to power as a multiplicity of interdependent, striving drives implies that overcoming is always occurring at an unconscious level [i.e., as one organization of the drives overcomes another]. But, through self-critique and the critique of agonistic friends, one can consciously exercise overcoming as well."[437] Thus while one is unfree and overdetermined in everyday choices—precisely, in the capitalist world, where we tend to locate our most valuable expressions of freedom—one can cultivate the will to power so that it expresses itself reliably in certain ways. She writes, "The refined practices of a knowledge-seeker can penetrate into the routine operations of the unconscious will to power and open up new pathways for interpretation and sublimation."[438] Though the promotion of specific virtues would be anathema to Nietzsche, his ideas here about asceticism, training, education, and the cultivation of habitual choice making are reminiscent of Aristotle's virtue ethics. It is based on these ideas that I articulate, in Chapter Five, Nietzsche's understanding of freedom as positing goals and learning to love.

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[437] Verkerk, p. 92
[438] Verkerk, p. 92

The role of friendship in Nietzsche's perfectionism: Egoism, agonism, and aggression

Friendship is a relationship conducive to self-development and the healthy manifestation of the will to power. Nietzsche often contrasts the ancient ethical ideal of friendship with the modern, Christian ideal of neighbor love. Friendship is a relationship of agonistic love, in which friends struggle with one another and through this struggle their capacities and creativity are drawn out and developed. Christian neighbor love is a detriment to perfectionism since it levels distinctions, charitably rushes in to end suffering, and denies the meaning of a sometimes-painful life. Christian morality more generally, and as described in *Genealogy of Morals*, is a detriment to perfectionism because it promotes a will to truth, self-introspection, and the excoriating turning of the will against itself, making human animals weaker and sicker. Friendship is a structure of love and solicitude that allows people to take care of each other without getting in the way of their self-development.

In this section, I show how friendship contributes to the project of self-overcoming and how friends help one another to overcome the obstacles to self-overcoming laid out in the previous chapter (i.e., conformity, charity, vanity, and greed). Following Aristotle and Emerson, Nietzschean friendship is built on a foundation of virtuous egoism and aimed at the perfectionistic, self-critical unfolding of a self. This general structure of friendship is antithetical to Nietzschean vanity, rooted in one's inability to recognize oneself and proceeding towards increasing alienation from oneself. Greed stands in the way of self-overcoming due to epistemological levelling as well as the desire that the other, as one's erotic possession, remains his present self. Following Emerson, Nietzsche describes a generous friendship that gives one back to oneself through a love that looks toward the future. Friends desire that the other should become more herself and more her own, never that she should become an extension of me or

my property. Friendship generously allows a space between me and the other, respecting her strangeness (to me as well as to herself) so that she can become herself, and avoids the impossible demand that she should know and give an account of herself. While charity removes the sources of suffering that are potentially sources for one's self-development, friendship's agonistic love is ready even to increase the sources of one's suffering if that suffering benefits one's development. Agonism also allows for a creative release of aggression, responding to the psychological problems of the repression and internalization of human aggression in civilization.[439]

That agonism is at the heart of Nietzschean friendship and provides the energy to drive forward perfectionistic self-development has been widely noted in the secondary literature.[440] While some progress has been made in unpacking the ways Nietzsche thinks friendship and other people contribute to self-development, especially in Willow Verkerk's *Nietzsche and*

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[439] The problem of human aggressivity in civilization is one which I discuss in terms of Nietzsche and Freud, but this issue lies at the root of much modern political philosophy, notably in the social contract theories of early modern philosophers. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes imagines the social contract as a means of establishing society to bring humanity out of the state of nature and the war of all against all. In, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau sees aggressive jealousy and desire for self-esteem as the forces needing to be brought under control by the social contract, though for Rousseau aggressivity is a problem of social life.

[440] See philosopher Yunus Tuncel's *Agon in Nietzsche*, where he outlines the Greek ideal of agonism among warriors and in the Olympic tradition. Tuncel provides a very brief discussion of the possibility of a modern politics of agonism but concludes that Nietzsche's politics are unable to be reduced to traditional and common political categories such as democracy or fascism. He writes, "It may be best to steer away from such concepts as democracy and the like, which keep the search [i.e., for Nietzsche's social and political vision] only on the surface and prevent it from plunging into depths" (p. 234). See also the excellent contributions made by philosopher of religion and politics Graham M. Smith in his book *Friendship and the Political* and by political philosopher Chantal Mouffe in her book *Agonistics*. Smith, by way of a discussion of Freud and Kierkegaard, and Mouffe, by way of Schmitt, find in Nietzsche's agonism support for a revival of political engagement and debate in a pluralistic, radical democracy that values the ongoing openness of multiple perspectives in agonistic contestation rather than the closure of political decision. Cavell thinks agonistic competition among friends is a driving force of moral perfectionism that prepares the way for the approach of America.

Friendship, a systematic account of how friendship compares to other, deficient modes of solicitude is lacking. In the previous chapter charity, vanity, and greed were identified as three deficient modes of solicitude standing in the way of self-development. In this section, I explain how the agonistic nature of friendship avoids and overcomes these deficient modes of solicitude. Instead of the vain attempt to manipulate the other into believing a lie about oneself, friendship is a challenge to the other to manifest herself. Instead of the greedy attempt to turn the other into something familiar and to hold her as she is presently, friends delight in the other's incalculability and growth in unknowable directions. Instead of the thoughtless and charitable drive to extinguish suffering, the agonistic friend helps the other to give suffering meaning.

Nietzsche's critique of charity and compassion is directed at Christianity in a broad sense, and more specifically at Schopenhauer, who claimed that the foundation of ethics and human intersubjectivity is the emotional participation in another's suffering typical of compassion. But Nietzsche thinks an ethics of shared pain results in an overall increase in pain, whereas he would prefer a morality that increases joy. In *Daybreak*, section 80, he writes that Christian compassion for the other's suffering and "profound suspicion of all the joy of one's neighbor, of his joy in all that he wants to do and can" are two sides of the same coin.[441] The skeptical and inhospitable suspicion of the neighbor's ways of finding joy and exercising her capacities is the truth of the ideology of compassion: the neighbor should not have the same opportunities to explore and develop herself. One exercises this type of compassion to make the neighbor dependent and pitiful. In section 137, he writes, "To view and imbibe the experiences of another as if they were ours—as is the demand of a philosophy of pity—this

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[441] *Twilight*, p. 79

would destroy us, and in a very short time."[442] The nature of a person's suffering—whether it is meaningful and what they may need to face their suffering—is precisely what cannot be grasped in pity because in pity one views the other's suffering as if it were one's own.

I showed in the previous chapter how this overtaking of the other's suffering gets in the way of the other's self-development as well as one's own. But Nietzsche is not against all forms of solicitude, and in rare moments he even writes well of pity. In *Human, All Too Human*, he writes, "One should, to be sure, *manifest* pity, but take care not to possess it."[443] One should render assistance without becoming a pitying person. One should do what one can for the needy without taking up the thoughtless and domineering stance of charity. In a similar tone, Zarathustra proclaims that you should be "pure air and solitude and bread and medicine for your friends."[444] Nietzsche is not against mutual aid and assistance, but rather the condescension of charity that makes the other dependent, humiliated, and stifled.

Compassion and pity should be imperceptible to the friend for whom one has pity. In Zarathustra's speech "On the Pitying" he writes, "If I must pity, at least I do not want it known; and if I do pity, it is preferably from a distance."[445] In Zarathustra's speech "The Friend" he writes, "Your compassion should be a guess—to know first whether your friend wants compassion. Perhaps what he loves in you is the unbroken eye and the glance of eternity. Compassion for the friend should conceal itself under a hard shell, and you should break a tooth on it. That way it will have delicacy and sweetness."[446] A person who is suffering in a meaningful way may not want to have their suffering alleviated and may be helped more by a

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[442] Ibid., p. 138
[443] *Human, All Too Human*, section 50, p. 38
[444]*Zarathustra*, "The Friend," p. 168
[445] *Zarathustra*, "On the Pitying," p. 200
[446] *Zarathustra*, "On the Friend," p. 169

friend who can provide encouragement and be an example of strength. There will be compassion between friends, but they will not infantilize one another. The friend helps the other without making the other helpless, precisely by encouraging the friend to her own strength and meaning.

My help for the friend should not make things easy for the friend; I should give the bare minimum when it comes to charity. "But if you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a hard bed as it were, a field cot: thus will you profit him best. And if a friend does you evil, then say: 'I forgive what you did to me; but what you have done to *yourself*—how could I forgive that?' Thus speaks all great love: it overcomes even forgiveness and pity."[447] Friendship is a great love, beyond pity and forgiveness: I cannot pity you and I cannot forgive you because I love you with a love that wants you to become who you are. The injury you inflict on yourself in revealing your evil will is more problematic than the injury you inflict upon me. Through forgiveness, I can be done with the injury you have done to me, but my forgiveness cannot help what you have done to yourself in revealing yourself as evil. My friendship can still reach you despite your unforgivable evil and encourage you to change. Forgiveness and charity are modes of solicitude more appropriate to neighbor love, which in its universality is unconcerned with whether *you* become who *you* are. Moving beyond forgiveness and charity means no longer to assume the inherent value of these ideals, and even to explore the potential value of their opposites.

Agonism is a Greek ideal that describes the relationship between two warriors who spar and challenge one another out of a desire to help the other grow stronger.[448] As Nietzsche

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[447] *Zarathustra*, "On the Pitying," p. 202

[448] See Chapter Two for a discussion of agonism in Emersonian friendship.

scholar Yunus Tuncel explains, agonism is “the personal fight of the contestant through which his talent comes forth.”[449] The agonistic battle makes the contestant stronger by placing her in a situation where she must rely on her full potential beyond that of which she knows herself to be capable. The battle calls forth the contestant’s self and stretches her capacities to new limits. In the battle one must become who one is or die.

Kaufmann points to the emphasis on agonism as one aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy that, read naively and out of context, was used by his fascist appropriators.[450] Kaufmann also identifies agonistic friendship as an aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy that can be seen in his biography. Kaufmann writes, “It was Wagner's presence that convinced Nietzsche that greatness and genuine creation were still possible, and it was Wagner who inspired him with the persistent longing first to equal and then to outdo his friend.”[451] Like Emerson, Nietzsche sees agonism as the proper dynamic between friends who are striving for their own self-development. However, Nietzsche develops agonism between friends in ways that have greater psychological and theological significance. Nietzsche thinks agonism provides the basis for an ethical love that can support self-development without the pitfalls of neighbor love, charity, and compassion. Agonism also provides an important psychological function for Nietzsche insofar as it allows for a productive venting of aggressivity. Agonism becomes productive when the friend cuts through my illusions, providing the motivation for my own self-critical perspective on myself, and when the friend stands as an example of one who is highly developed and provokes my jealous pursuit of my own development.

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[449] Tuncel, p. 112
[450] Kaufmann, p. 388
[451] Kaufmann, p. 30

Jealousy can be a powerful motivation, though one that may be difficult to maintain and ultimately unfulfilling if it aims at the inauthentic and reactionary pursuit of another's accomplishments. Jealousy between friends, in the mode of agonism, is not a jealousy of what the other possesses so much as a jealousy of what the other has become. After an explanation of the way different people (i.e., societies and individuals) hang their own tables of value over themselves, Zarathustra speaks of the role of jealousy in Greek friendship: "'You shall always be the first and excel all others: your jealous soul shall love no one, unless it be the friend'—that made the soul of the Greek quiver: thus he walked the path of his greatness."[452] This is a jealousy not to have what the other has accomplished or obtained, but to have formally the same self-overcoming in one's own life that the friend has in her life. When one sees that the friend is on the path to becoming herself, one becomes jealous and motivated to get underway on one's own path to self-development.

Already in *Gay Science*, Nietzsche sets up agonism as an alternative to the compassion and charity taught by the priests of life-denying religions in *Genealogy of Morals*. Whereas the noble knights seek friends who can be worthy opponents, the slavish priests seek oppressive relations of compassion and charity with those weaker than themselves. In *Gay Science*, he writes,

> An easy prey is something contemptible for proud natures; they take delight only at the sight of unbroken persons who could become their enemies...; they are often hard towards someone who is suffering, for he is not worthy of their contention or pride—but they are the more obliging towards their *equals*, against whom it would be honorable to fight and struggle *if* the occasion should arise. Spurred by the good feeling of *this* perspective, the members of the knightly caste became accustomed to treating each other with exquisite courtesy.[453]

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[452] "On the Thousand and One Goals," p. 170

[453] *Gay Science*, section 13, p. 39

The knights do not make a Schmittian friend versus enemy distinction; the knights have their friends in their enemies, and thus treat them with exquisite courtesy. Knights delight in the person who *could* become an enemy against whom it *would* be honorable to fight *if* the occasion should arise. They show courtesy to the friend-enemy because such agonistic companions increase their own vitality and capacity for joy. These knights seek friendly and agonistic relations with their equals and thus liberate their perfectionist potential. The noble and upbuilding agonism of the knights is compared a few lines later with the ideologically oppressive and debilitating compassion of the priests: "Compassion is the most agreeable feeling for those who have little pride and no prospect of great conquests; for them, easy prey—and that is what those who suffer are—is something enchanting. Compassion is praised as the virtue of prostitutes."[454] In *Genealogy of Morals*, it is the compassionate lie—or as Nietzsche calls it, "a mere affect medication"—of the priests that provides a meaning for the slaves' suffering and shackles them to the excoriating cycle of introspection, guilt, and the turning of the will against itself.[455]

In *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche constructs a myth that explains the emergence of life-denying religions and, at least in the case of Christianity, their ultimate self-deconstruction. Much of the underlying motivation behind major developments in his myth depends on human aggressivity and attempts to contain it in civilization. Aggressivity is a complex phenomenon with several sources and forms in Nietzsche's thought. Insofar as the will to power is a will to expend energy and risk life in the pursuit of dominating and incorporating others, all life has a certain tendency to aggression. He writes in *Gay Science*, "The great and small struggle rules

[454] Ibid
[455] *Genealogy of Morals*, Book Three, section 16, p. 128

everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power and in accordance with the will to power, which is simply the will to life."[456] And again, in *Genealogy of Morals,* he writes, "Life operates *essentially*, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction, and simply cannot be thought at all without this character."[457] More than a mere biological characteristic of life, humans cultivate and breed a high degree of aggressivity in themselves as a way to cope with the war of all against all in pre-social and early social arrangements. This aggressivity, which would have made sense when the population needed to defend themselves against invaders, persists like an ill-adapted, evolutionary survival in modern human animals who are "enclosed within the walls of society and peace."[458] Prevented by society from unleashing these aggressive tendencies on the neighbor and fellow citizen, civilized people are forced to turn this aggressivity in the only available direction: back on themselves in the form of bad conscience.[459]

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[456] *Gay Science*, section 349, p. 208

[457] *Genealogy of Morals* Essay Two, section 11, p. 76

[458] Ibid, section 16, p. 84

[459] A persistent question of modern political philosophy is the threat of essential human aggressivity seething beneath the thin veneer of civilization. His witness of the eruption of this aggressivity during the First World War prompted Freud to develop a theory of humans as fundamentally driven towards death as well as love. In his unfortunately overlooked essay, "Reflections on War and Death," Freud writes, "The very emphasis of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' makes it certain that we spring from an endless ancestry of murderers for whom the lust for killing was in the blood, as possibly it is to this day with ourselves" (p. 16). During the 19th and 20th century, utopian projects of communal living sought differently to balance and restrict the aggressive tendencies by liberating the erotic drives, as worked out, for example, in Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. While communities based on the unleashing or prohibition of sensual eroticism, or the expansion or denial of family, have proven untenable, perhaps universally, I take Emerson and Nietzsche to suggest the potential of a community based on love in the form of friendship and the sublimation of aggression in agonism. In "The Young American," Emerson writes that a politics of love and labor will succeed the contemporary politics of trade: "This was one design of the projectors of the Associations which are now making their first feeble experiments. They were founded in love, and in labor. They proposed, as you know, that all men should take a part in the manual toil,

Though Nietzsche is not clear on this point, the reader can assume that this self-directed aggression and bad conscience caused by life in society do not apply to the noble, knightly class, who would have discharged their aggressive instincts on their enemies and friends at will. The internalization of aggression would be felt primarily by slaves, who are unable to assert themselves and consequently become infected with resentment. He writes in *Genealogy of Morals of Morals*, "This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent… this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings."[460] The first domino to fall in Nietzsche's genealogy is the priestly class's release of their long-frustrated aggression in their unfriendly rejection of the knights. Nietzsche writes, "He who knows these 'good men' [i.e., the knights] only as enemies knows only *evil enemies*."[461] We can understand what Nietzsche means here by an evil enemy, by looking at what he says, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* about friendly enemies: "In a friend one should still honor the enemy. Can you go close to your friend without going over to him? In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him."[462] As I have described in Chapter Three, a friend who is also an enemy is an agonistic friend. Vain and unable to find self-value in the agonistic relationships of the knights, the priests align their interests with those of the slaves to accomplish an ideological revolution against the knights.[463]

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and proposed to amend the condition of men, by substituting harmonious for hostile industry" (*Emerson's Complete Works,* Vol. 1, p. 305).

[460] *Genealogy of Morals* section 17, p. 87

[461] *Genealogy of Morals* section 11, p. 40

[462] *Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Discourses," section 14: "The Friend," p. 168

[463] Compare the vain priests' rejection of the agonistic other because it negates their sense of self with the psychoanalytic narcissist who refuses to be found wanting, and who manipulates others' opinions to deny her own vulnerability.

The unfriendly and jealous rejection of otherness by the priests, seen in Essay One regarding the knights, is repeated in Essay Three with the priests' final rejection of the slaves as willful sinners on par with the knights.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 261, Nietzsche connects his earlier thoughts on vanity with his myth of the slave revolt. He describes vanity as the mood and style of comportment of those with a slave mentality. Whereas those with a noble morality posit values based on their own way of life, slaves discover their values through a reactionary negation of the masters' way of life. Having no good opinion of themselves, slaves convince others of an artificial opinion about themselves and ultimately adopt that artificial opinion themselves (i.e., that the priests are good). Nietzsche says that a noble-minded person would have difficulty imagining "beings who seek to arouse a good opinion of themselves which they themselves do not possess—and consequently also do not "deserve,"—and who yet BELIEVE in this good opinion afterwards."[464] This suggests that vanity is not an ontological option in the knight's world, or at least a very limited option that would at any rate have been unimaginable to their noble minds. The knight might demand that other people adopt her own valuation of herself, and she may get pleasure and utility from their opinions of her, but these are not vanity since they are based on how the knight actually takes herself to be.

Nietzsche goes on in the same section to claim that the modern tendency to democracy—and by this here he means equality—is a symptom of "the blending of the blood of masters and slaves."[465] Modern democratic humans take from the masters "the originally noble and rare impulse of the masters to assign a value to themselves and to 'think well' of

[464] *Gay Science*, section 261, p. 208
[465] *Gay Science*, section 261, p. 208

themselves."[466] But this demand is confronted by the more deeply ingrained slavish phenomenon of vanity and the demand that one's good opinion of oneself be based on the good opinion of another. Nietzsche writes,

> It is "the slave" in the vain man's blood, the remains of the slave's craftiness—and how much of the "slave" is still left in woman, for instance!—which seeks to SEDUCE to good opinions of itself; it is the slave, too, who immediately afterwards falls prostrate himself before these opinions, as though he had not called them forth.—And to repeat it again: vanity is an atavism.[467]

Vanity is the original, unfriendly outlook of the priests and slaves—opposed to agonism—in their ideological revolution and revaluation of noble morality. Neighbor love, as Nietzsche describes it, is a more refined and spiritualized form of the primordial phenomenon of vanity. Neighbor love and vanity both seek to dominate the other in the service of producing a better opinion of oneself, and thereby foreclose any possibility of self-development. Both are aimed at ending one's own suffering: In charity one avoids the painful witness of the other's suffering; in vanity one represses the anxiety of an unexplored, traumatically unspeakable, and self-unreliant identity.

The slaves are the great sufferers in Nietzsche's myth. They never find an opportunity to discharge their own aggressive energies because they are constitutionally unable to discharge these energies. Slaves are on the side of the priests "because they are the most impotent. It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred."[468] But unlike slaves, priests are eventually able to discharge their aggression in accomplishing the revaluation of morals and their performance of self-torture. Masters discharged their aggression in the old, noble

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[466] Ibid
[467] Ibid
[468] *Genealogy of Morals* First Essay, section 7, p. 33

regime, and this was good: "The knightly-aristocratic value judgements presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with that which serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity."[469] Because masters are constitutionally the kind of people who discharge their aggression, they continue to do so, though after the slave revolt this is considered evil. Priests, the other noble class in Nietzsche's myth, also discharge their aggression, but through ideological and performative means. Out of their inability to productively realize aggression or sublimate suffering, slaves become the great self-torturers. Unlike the priests who torture themselves as a mark of distinction and an expression of their own will to power, the slaves' bad conscience is self-destructive and debilitating.

Since civilization organizes war and administers justice, individuals living in society are denied the "festival pleasure"[470] of inflicting pain on either enemies or neighbors, so they internalize their aggression, discharging it on themselves. Lacking the capacity for agonistic struggles, slaves and priests are constitutionally unfit for friendship. They desire charity instead of struggle, and an end to pain as such. Friendless and frustrated, they develop the subtle and constant forms of self-torture that come with bad conscience,[471] the most highly developed and cruel form of which is the Christian God, whose ultimate perfection and power instill in humans "the maximum feeling of guilt and indebtedness on earth."[472]

On Nietzsche's account, all people suffer because real life is part suffering. Slavish people suffer differently than noble minded people since slaves experience their suffering as

[469] Ibid
[470] Ibid, Second Essay, section 6, p. 66
[471] Ibid, section 16, pp. 84-85
[472] Ibid, section 20, p. 90

meaningless. For suffering to have a meaning means, for Nietzsche, that the suffering is *for* something, or that it has a goal. Meaningful suffering provides the sufferer with something she wants, or it develops her so that she can become who she is. The distinction between meaningful and meaningless suffering can be understood in terms of Nietzsche's distinction between ascetic practices and ascetic ideals. Ascetic practices are ways of suffering that aim to achieve a goal. An ascetic ideal is a way of suffering because one's morality proclaims that self-denial and the turning of the will against itself are good in-themselves. Asceticism becomes an ascetic ideal when the denial of pleasure becomes the pleasure of denial. The ascetic ideal is not only a model for the difference between meaningful and meaningless suffering, but also the response to meaningless suffering. Nietzsche thinks humans can endure suffering so long as it is meaningful, writing, "He *desires* it, he seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering."[473] In order to get a meaning for their everyday, ordinary suffering the slaves turn to the priests. The priests diagnose the slaves' suffering in terms of their guilty wills and prescribe as treatment for suffering the excoriating ideal of the "will to nothingness," which is the self-examination, confession, and destruction of the guilty and sinful will.[474] The positing of a perfect God and the harsh excoriation of the will are both symptoms of frustrated aggression and the unfriendliness (i.e., compassion and charity) of neighbors.

Although Freud claimed not to have read Nietzsche until later in life,[475] his myth of the civilization of humanity and development of morality bears striking similarities to Nietzsche's.

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[473] *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay Three, section 28, p. 162
[474] Ibid, p. 163
[475] In 1925, Freud wrote: "The large extent to which psychoanalysis coincides with the philosophy of Schopenhauer - not only did he assert the dominance of the emotions and the supreme importance of sexuality but he was even aware of the mechanism of repression - is

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud claims that social relations are grounded in the erotic drive and the need, in the face of nature, for cooperation with others. He writes, "Eros and Ananke have become the parents of human civilization."[476] Because cooperation provides only a weak community bond, most of the work of producing social solidarity is accomplished by love. The same love that exists on the most intimate level between sexual partners binds together families, friends, and societies.

> The love which founded the family continues to operate in civilization both in its original form, in which it does not renounce direct sexual satisfaction, and in its modified form as aim-inhibited love… Love with an inhibited aim was in fact originally fully sensual love, and it is so still in man's unconscious… Genital love leads to the formation of new families, and aim-inhibited love to 'friendships.'[477]

The fundamental problem Freud identifies is that as aim-inhibited erotic impulses extend toward less-sexual libidinal bonds they face increasing frustration. He writes, "In the course of development the relation of love to civilization loses its unambiguity. On the one hand love comes into opposition to the interests of civilization; on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions."[478] Love opposes civilization by keeping individuals invested in smaller communities, such as the family, and refusing to let them be fully at the disposal of society. Civilization opposes love by requiring the inhibition of the erotic aim in broader social relationships. The aim-inhibited love characteristic of family relations, friendships, and

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not to be traced to my acquaintance with his teaching. I read Schopenhauer *very late in my life.* Nietzsche, another philosopher whose guesses and intuitions often agree in the most astonishing way with the laborious findings of psychoanalysis, was for a long time avoided by me on that very account; I was less concerned with *the questions of priority* than with keeping my mind unembarrassed." pp. 59-60 Freud, S. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 20).

[476] Freud, p. 80

[477] p. 82

[478] p.83

neighbors is inherently frustrating since it must suppress the desire for genital satisfaction at the root of all love as Freud understands it.[479]

Freud muses that if we could split ourselves, so that our intimate relations could freely pursue erotic genital satisfaction and our social relations could be fully cooperative and utilitarian, there would be no need to inhibit the erotic aim. Since we cannot partition our drives in this way and since societies are largely held together thanks to the stronger and more energetic erotic attachments, civilized morality must find ways to inhibit the erotic aim. But the inhibition of the erotic aim is costly, both in terms of the energy required to suppress the aim and in terms of the neurotic symptoms that emerge around such suppression.[480]

Freud thinks the reason civilization relies on erotic bonds despite their high cost is that humans are fundamentally aggressive and antagonistic towards one another. He thinks "a powerful share of aggressiveness" is among our natural instinctual endowments and that the close presence of other people in civilization (i.e., neighbors) is an enticement to satisfy our aggressiveness.[481] He writes, "Hence, therefore, the use of methods intended to incite people to identification and aim-inhibited relationships of love; hence the restriction upon sexual life, and hence too the ideal's command to love one's neighbour as oneself."[482] Freud says this commandment would be reasonable if the neighbor was similar enough that one could love oneself in the neighbor; if the neighbor was better than oneself so that one's ideal could be loved in the neighbor; or if the neighbor happened to be a special relation of one of one's own special relations (e.g., my friend's child). Of course, in any of these cases one would have other

[479] *Discontents*, p. 90
[480] p. 89
[481] p. 94
[482] p. 96

motives for restraining one's aggression, making the command superfluous. But for Freud, the command to love comes up against the harsh reality that "not all men are worthy of love."[483] More than this, he writes,

> I must honestly confess that he [i.e., the neighbor] has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred… If it will do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me… Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power.[484]

Because neighbors present one with the potential satisfaction of unconscious and suppressed aggressive tendencies—especially in the neighbor's disturbing proximity, which haunts and threatens to witness one's everyday life—Freud thinks the commandment to love the neighbor and the command to love the enemy are ultimately the same.[485]

The erotic identification with one's neighbors is supported by the presence of someone foreign on whom aggression can be vented. In the absence of a foreign presence, the foreign can be produced from one's own community through the narcissism of small differences. But even with these occasional opportunities for the venting of aggression, everyday civilized life does not allow for the full satisfaction of aggressive instincts.[486] Aggression that cannot be realized in relationships with other people is internalized in the creation of the super-ego. He

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[483] p. 82. Nietzsche agrees with Freud on the unlovability of many people. Nietzsche writes in a section of *Daybr*eak titled "Hatred of one's neighbor": "Supposing we felt towards another as he feels towards himself... then we would have to hate him if, like Pascal, he found himself hateful. And that is probably how Pascal felt about humanity as a whole; as did the earliest Christians, who, under Nero, were, as Tacitus reports, 'convicted' of odium generis humani (hatred of the human race)" (Book 1, section 63, p. 38). The irony, from a Nietzschean perspective, is the command to love other people as a centerpiece of a theology that denies the lovability of life and the world.

[484] p. 92

[485] p. 93

[486] Indeed, Freud here overlooks the possibility that opportunities for the expression of aggression may actually cultivate greater aggression rather than releasing and discharging aggression.

writes, “The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment.”[487] He thinks we are forced to find substitute satisfactions for the foregone satisfaction of genital eroticism and aggression. The healthiest thing for a person in such a situation is to sublimate the drives and find satisfaction in the enjoyment of art and the pursuit of knowledge.

Freud gave a more detailed account of aggression and frustration in his earlier *Future of an Illusion*, where he claims that humans share universal and unconscious desires for incest, cannibalism, and murder, which must be prohibited by any stable social order. Society provides humans with mental assets that provide the motivation for people to willingly sacrifice the pursuit of their instinctual desires. Perhaps the most valuable mental asset is religion, which answers to basic human wishes for fatherly protection, immortality, and justice. The best outcome on the Freudian model is to turn the aggressive energy in productive ways. As he writes in *Civilization and its Discontents*, “Opposition is not necessarily enmity; it is merely misused and made an occasion for enmity.”[488] Of course, while this means that opposition need not be enmity, it also implies that enmity is the manifestation of an aggressive drive that is always seeking an opportunity to manifest itself. For both Freud and Nietzsche, religion develops from the necessary repression of desire and the internalization of aggression in social life. Whereas Freud thought substitute satisfactions and opportunities for sublimation are required to redirect the drives in productive ways, Nietzsche puts forth friendship as a form of agonistic love that discharges aggressivity in creative and emancipatory directions, providing a therapeutic for the Nietzschean bad conscience.

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[487] p. 114
[488] p. 96

Nietzsche often discusses agonism as a tense synthesis of friendship and enmity, claiming that a friend must be capable precisely of being one's enemy. Zarathustra strikes this note three times in his speech "The Friend":

> If one wants to have a friend one must also want to wage war for him: and to wage war, one must be *capable* of being an enemy… In a friend one should still honor the enemy. Can you go close to your friend without going over to him?... In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him.[489]

In each of these lines, friends are enemies in their mutual resistance to each other and their refusal to go over and take up the other's opinions and points of view. We are closest when we bring ourselves together in all our individuality and not when we self-unreliantly modify our behavior in light of the other's expectations and partialities. As with Emerson—and as Cavell shows in his discussion of remarriage films[490]—I can love you only if I can experience and be with you in all your authentic spontaneity. In this way, we are enemies insofar as we remain distant, incalculable, and aggressively ourselves. But agonism is more than this, it is also productive and moves each friend along the path of development rather than the paths of destruction or assimilation.

But Nietzsche does not think it is all war and aggression between friends, and even the meaning of agonism lies beyond aggression in the increase of enjoyment. Nietzsche discusses the positive forms of solicitude between friends in terms of benevolence and sympathetic joy (*mitfreude*). In a journal fragment from 1876 he writes,

> Die welche sich mit uns freuen können, stehen höher und uns näher als die welche mit uns leiden. Mitfreude macht den "Freund" (den Mitfreuenden),

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[489] *Zarathustra*, "The Friend," p. 168
[490] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*

> Mitleid den Leidensgefährten. —Eine Ethik des Mitleidens braucht eine Ergänzung durch die noch höhere Ethik der Freundschaft.[491]
>
> [Those who can rejoice with us are higher and closer to us than those who suffer with us. Sympathetic joy makes the "friend" (the sympathetic enjoyers), pity makes companions in suffering. —An ethic of pity needs to be complemented by the even higher ethic of friendship.]

In this early journal entry, he describes the ethics of friendship as a complement to the ethics of compassion, though as we have seen, in his later work he comes to reject compassion. He revised this relationship by the time he wrote *Gay Science*, six years later. Here he writes,

> You will also want to help—but only those whose distress you properly *understand* because they share with you one suffering and one hope—your *friends*—and only in the way you help yourself: I want to make them braver, more persevering, simpler, more full of gaiety. I want to teach them what today is understood by so few, least of all by these preachers of compassion (*Mitleiden*): to share not pain, but *sympathetic joy* (*Mitfreude*)![492]

Nietzsche uses the similarity between the German words *Freude* ("joy") and *Freund* ("friend") to signal that friendship is a relationship related to joy. In the secondary literature, commentators often use the somewhat inelegant and unhelpful literal translation of *Mitfreude* as "joying-with,"[493] whereas a more accurate translation is "sympathetic joy." "Joying-with" lends itself to a misunderstanding of Mitfreude as sharing joy with another on the model of Aristotle's second form of friendship—for example when friends share the joy of engaging in an enjoyable activity together (e.g., drinking wine or watching a sunset together)—this does not adequately capture the meaning of Mitfreude. Mitfreude is not a joy one shares with another, but rather a joy one experiences when one witnesses the flourishing and enjoying of another. Mitfreude can

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[491] "Oktober—Dezember 1876 19 [1-120]." Available *The Nietzsche Channel*: <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/notebooks/german/nachb/nachb19.htm#9>. Accessed on Jul 1, 2022.
[492] *Gay Science*, Book IV, Section 338, p. 192
[493] E.g., Derrida and Miner.

be compared helpfully to its antonym, more familiar in English, *Schadenfreude*: the joy one feels at witnessing another's misfortune. Jean Paul, the nineteenth century German romantic author, gives an example of the phenomenon in his novel *Titan* where he writes, "Wer die zarteste Mitfreude fühlen will, der sehe nicht frohe Kinder an, sondern die Eltern, die sich über frohe freuen" (If you want to feel the tenderest *Mitfreude*, do not look at happy children, but at parents who are happy about their happy children).[494] Emerson describes his own experience of Mitfreude in "Spiritual Laws," where he writes, "The good soul nourishes me and unlocks new magazines of power and enjoyment to me everyday."[495] It is not merely that the friend is enjoyable or that she increases the enjoyability of things; the friend increases my capacity to enjoy the world and life.[496]

While the compassionate person thoughtlessly leaps in to end the other's suffering, the friend helps not by removing suffering but by increasing joy, health, and the other's capacity to overcome; by being like the happy parent whose joy infects the observer. In this way, friends help one another by providing models of good living and the meaningful incorporation of

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[494] Jean Paul. *Sämmtliche Werke XXII***:** *Titan,* p. 229 (G. Reimer: Berlin. 1827)

[495] "Spiritual Laws," in *EW*, p. 187

[496] Kierkegaard's concept of upbuilding, in *Works of Love*, can also be understood as an example of mitfreude. Upbuilding is the definitive characteristic of Kierkegaardian love: through experiences of upbuilding people come closer to themselves and God. He describes two scenes of the upbuilding power of sympathetic joy: "When we see a solitary person managing by commendable frugality to get along thriftily with little, we honor and praise him… but we do not say that it is an upbuilding sight. When, however, we see how a housewife, one who has many to care for, by means of frugality and wise thriftiness lovingly knows how to confer blessings on the little so that there is enough for all, we say that this is an upbuilding site. The upbuilding consists in this, that we see the housewife's loving solicitude… When we see a large family packed into a small apartment and yet see it inhabiting a cozy, friendly, spacious apartment—we say it is an upbuilding sight because we see the love that must be in each and every individual, since of course one unloving person would already be enough to occupy the entire place. We say it because we see that there actually is room where there is heartroom" (pp. 213-214). The creation and expansion of heartroom and hospitality for the other is the foundation of Kierkegaard's ethics in *Works of Love*.

suffering into a life. In Zarathustra's words, "Physician, help yourself: thus you help your patient too. Let this be his best help that he may behold with his eyes the man who heals himself."[497] While friends undoubtedly should help one another when it is needed and requested, especially in the face of meaningless suffering, one is helped along the path of self-development and the overcoming of oneself more by people who expand one's capacity to experience mitfreude and meaningful suffering. Nietzsche wants solicitude without the oppressive ethics of charity, and I take this to leave room for the provision of material assistance to those who need it in the face of meaningless suffering. Where suffering can become meaningful, one should help in the mode of taking joy at the other's successes rather than amplifying, reflecting, and appropriating her pain for the satisfaction of the will to power.

The productivity of political struggle and the necessity of struggle for a thriving liberal democracy are ideas motivating contemporary political philosophies of agonistic pluralism. In her 2013 book, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, political philosopher Chantal Mouffe critiques the "post-political centrist consensus" that she then thought characterized most Western liberal democracies. Influenced by Carl Schmitt's definition of the political as the drawing of the friend-enemy distinction, Mouffe claims that the centrist consensus was post-political since it made no room for real political struggle between positions that would be truly opposed. The post-political consensus limits the types of political positions available in a society. But consensus building is not the original goal of democracy according to Mouffe, who thinks the limitations of available political positions frustrates people's political passions.[498] She writes, "To satisfy their desire for a 'voice,' existing representative institutions have to be

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[497] *Zarathustra*, "On Free Death," p. 189
[498] Mouffe*, p.* 6

transformed and new ones established, so as to create the conditions for an agonistic confrontation where the citizens could be offered real alternatives. Such a confrontation requires the emergence of a genuine left able to offer an alternative to the social liberal consensus dominant in centre-left parties."[499] Thus, the problem of Mouffe's political moment is similar to what Nietzsche and Freud identified insofar as they all see humans as frustrated in their inability to vent passions.

Mouffe argues that a thriving liberal democracy relies on the proliferation of political positions, constituted by their differentiation from other opinions, and an ongoing agonistic struggle between them. She writes, "The denial of the 'political' in its agonistic dimension is… what prevents liberal theory from envisaging politics in an adequate way… The very condition of possibility of the formation of political identities is at the same time the condition of impossibility of a society from which antagonism can be eliminated."[500] Through Mouffe's lens, the emergence of right-wing populism in the United States can be understood as a reaction to the left's refusal and inability to embody the revolutionary expectations of the working class.

Mouffe's agonistic pluralism can be read as a Nietzschean response to Carl Schmitt's claim that the political is defined as the making of the friend-enemy distinction.[501] His definition of the political does not describe a kind of action, but rather a kind of relationship. Schmitt's conception of the political enemy as antagonistic follows the Freudian concept of the neighbor as one who intrudes, frustrates, and activates aggression, though for Schmitt these are shared, social responses to the other. Schmitt understands this distinction to be based on public concerns rather than private feelings about other individuals. He describes the friend-enemy distinction

[499] Mouffe, p. 120
[500] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, pp. 3-5
[501] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 26

as dividing people into groups of those who share a vision of the world and the action required to bring it about (i.e., friends), and those who share opposing visions and plans (i.e., enemies). For Schmitt, politics is fundamentally about making this distinction and coordinating with friends to overcome enemies. Politics is at stake when groups confront each other as enemies who they are capable of going to war with and killing. Any aspect of one group's identity that comes into conflict with and threatens an essential aspect of another group's identity can become the salient quality over which the groups are willing to fight. When a group of people identifies the enemy with whom they are willing to go to war, then that group has become a political community.[502]

Schmitt critiques liberalism on several fronts, but most significantly for the current discussion he points to liberalism's denial of the need for political decisions and actions since liberalism refuses to make the friend-enemy distinction. Because liberalism embraces ideas such as pluralism and multiculturalism, and because liberalism extends the rights of citizenship even to non-liberal members of societies, liberalism aims to address conflicts through discussions and compromise, rather than through the political drawing of a friend and enemy divide. The liberal ideology of tolerance seeks to figure others as friends, even if they are at odds with the community's understanding of themselves and the world. Thus, a liberal society is ready to extend the rights of citizenship even to illiberal racists and fascists. Liberalism's neutralization of politics means that liberalism is ultimately unable to provide the kind of markers of identity that would be the basis for a friend-enemy distinction. Since Schmitt follows Hegel's argument that identity emerges from opposition, the liberal refusal to have and oppose enemies means that a liberal society will have a thin and weak sense of identity. This

[502] Ibid., pp. 37-45

depoliticized and weak sense of community comes together with governmental bureaucracy to remove any sense that people are involved in grand projects for which they might be called and willing to die. The liberal neutralization of politics robs people of the goals and struggles that give life meaning. Schmitt thinks a liberal society will eventually become a society of people unwilling to fight and die for their ideals, and capable of experiencing meaning only in consumption and entertainment.[503] Thus, the liberal neutralization of the political and the erasure of the enemy creates the same sort of nihilism that Nietzsche described after the death of God. In this state of liberal nihilism, the community is unable and unwilling to defend itself against other political communities, internal and external to the state, that are willing to draw the friend enemy distinction.

Mouffe argues, along Nietzschean lines, against the Schmittian notion of politics as antagonistic in order to promote political agonism. She sees the other who can be both a friend and an enemy as the most productive other. She writes, “A central task of democratic politics is to provide the institutions which will permit conflicts to take an ‘agonistic’ form, where the opponents are not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus.”[504] Mouffe does not deny the Schmittian antagonism fundamental to politics, but she aims for antagonism and political passions to be sublimated in the agonistic struggle with other citizens as adversaries (whom, I say, we may even love for their opposition and otherness) rather than enemies to be destroyed, banished, or from whom we should secede. She writes,

> The friend/enemy relation concerns a negation which cannot be overcome dialectically… Here, Schmitt is, of course, right that such an antagonism cannot be accommodated within a political society because it will lead to the destruction of the political association… The difference is that in the case of agonism we are not faced with a friend/enemy relation but one between

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[503] Ibid., p. 68
[504] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. xii

> adversaries who recognize the legitimacy of the demands of their opponent. While knowing that there is no rational solution to their conflict, adversaries nevertheless accept a set of rules according to which their conflict is going to be regulated.[505]

Thus, Mouffe does not seek to make the other into a friend with whom I can agree—this would lead back to the frustrating post-political consensus—nor does she want to see the other as an enemy we are ready to annihilate. Mouffe argues for a politics of agonistic contestation where political passions can be exerted in the struggle for the future without delegitimizing or annihilating those who disagree.

Derrida's response to Schmitt's political use of the concept of friendship opens onto his theory of political hospitality. Where Schmitt organizes the political around the friend-enemy distinction, which always begins with the hostile identification of the enemy whom we friends are ready to kill, Derrida begins with the concept of the radically hospitable friend. The Schmittian reversal is apparent in his article "Hostipitality," where he writes, "The welcomed guest is a stranger treated as a friend or ally, as opposed to the stranger treated as enemy."[506] In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida uncovers the contours of a canonical concept of friendship in Western culture which he thinks has been an organizing factor in the history of Western political theory. He thinks this canonical concept of friendship is phallocentric, since cultural and literary exemplars of friendship have been male. The canonical concept of friendship is closely related to the concepts of fraternity and brotherhood. These phallocentric social ties that characterize friendship have also come to characterize politics (For example, in the French motto: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*) so that democracy, where it exists, is limited to those who

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[505] Mouffe, p. 138.
[506] p. 4

share in the brotherhood of citizenship.[507] Derrida deconstructs the canonical notion of friendship "in the name of more democracy," in the name of a democracy to come that is not reducible to fraternal and phallocentric concepts of citizenship.[508] "A new concept of democracy grounded… on this groundless experience of friendship, which should not be limited in the way it has been, and a concept of democracy that would redefine the political beyond the cosmopolitical."[509] John Caputo, a leading interpreter of Derrida, explains Derrida's politics as "a *call* for *another* concept of friendship, without the canonical one, and by extension another, and a more porous, concept of democracy… without the dominant concepts of national identity, citizenship, national borders, and immigration laws that now prevail."[510] This is a new democracy and hospitality to come that we cannot administer; we can only prepare ourselves for its arrival in the encounter with the other, whoever she might be.

Derrida rearticulates a concept of friendship as the basis for his democracy to come and his radical hospitality. He unpacks the problems and contradictions of hospitality in his article "Hostipitality," where he shows how hospitality and hostility are implicated etymologically and politically. Derrida shows how "hospitality" and "hostility" share a common root in the Latin "*hostis*" (a public enemy or stranger). He then identifies an aporia in hospitality, since being hospitable involves a few inhospitable moments. If a host is to welcome a stranger hospitably into his home, it can only be on condition that everyone involved recognize that it is his home, that the host is the patron, the master of the household, and thus has a right to extend hospitality there. Hospitality is an essential openness to what and who will come, but it is also "a

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[507] Derrida, "Interview," pp. 3-4
[508] Ibid.
[509] Ibid., p. 6
[510] Caputo, "Who is Derrida's Zarathustra?" p. 187

reaffirmation of mastery and being-oneself in one's home."[511] Thus, hospitality is always conditioned by the recognition of the host's patronage and the placing of the guest in a role of subjection, along lines that can be compared to Nietzsche's critique of charity. Hospitality also places the other in the place of the stranger who is opposed to the family, nation, citizens, and fraternal brotherhood, which for Derrida are all faces of the canonical concept of friendship.[512] For these reasons, Derrida claims that "hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is."[513] Thus, hospitality is not a concept that can be known in advance, but rather an experience "which proceeds beyond knowledge towards the other as absolute stranger." [514] Hospitality goes beyond itself as a concept when it is ready for the coming of the other whoever she may be. It is a non-conceptual readiness and openness to the other that corresponds to the other's non-conceptual, non-calculable, and unforeseeable way of showing up in the world. Derrida deconstructs the canonical concepts of friendship and hospitality to make room for friendly and hospitable encounters and experiences of the other that would sustain a democracy dissociated from any regime and located in the "experience of equality, justice, and respect for the singularity of the other."[515]

I take it to be a consequence of his genealogical method that Nietzsche would not recommend a simple restoration of the ancient ethics of friendship any more than he would prescribe a thoughtless return to master morality. The contemporary world calls for a higher, more interesting, more mature ethics that does not resolve the tensions between neighborliness

[511] Derrida, "Hostipitality," p. 14
[512] Ibid., p. 8
[513] Ibid., p. 14
[514] Ibid., p. 8
[515] Derrida, "Interview," p. 5

and friendship, but rather develops these tensions to their highest degrees; an ethics of friendship that is informed by the history of the ethics of neighbor love. The acknowledgement of the other in the modern world—as I take Cavell to show us in his discussions of remarriage, and Mouffe in her theory of agonistic pluralism—must be of the other as neighbor and friend. This requires the extension of agonistic love to one's fellow citizen, and calls for an individuality that makes possible community and of a community that supports the pursuit of individuality.

Chapter Five: Freedom, Commitment, and Friendship

"The human being does not 'possess' freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom… possesses the human being."

-Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth"[516]

Emerson and Nietzsche have each been critiqued for their emphasis on individual development, which allegedly takes the place of having anything useful to say about social, ethical, and political life. In this chapter I show that Emerson's and Nietzsche's apparent exclusion of the political in light of the individual is already a political stance, one that locates freedom in the lives of individuals. Theirs is a freedom that must be appropriated and lived in the lives of individuals who are becoming themselves. It is precisely not a freedom that can be found in the ideologies of groups and classes; although it is a freedom that might rely on group freedoms, it is not a freedom that can be satisfied by group freedoms. Hegemonic ideologies of freedom, as Gramsci already knew, tend to rely on the oppression of some groups to whom freedom is denied and the partial oppression even of those groups who enjoy freedom.

Since the strength of Emerson's commitment to abolitionism has been questioned by contemporary readers who are taken aback by his alleged avoidance of the topic of slavery even during the height of the Civil War, I bring to light in the following section the political significance of Emerson's philosophy regarding freedom. I show how though Emerson avoided specific political fights (for the most part), his philosophy contributed in important and intentional ways to the promotion of freedom and human flourishing for all. Though Emerson approached the issue of slavery with less rhetorical urgency than modern readers

[516] *Pathmarks*, p. 145

might expect from one of the leading intellectuals of nineteenth century America, his philosophy is strongly abolitionist and provided the groundwork for white Americans to understand the necessity of abolition for the freedom of all people. I argue that Frederick Douglass's transcendentalist abolitionism proceeds, in part, by way of his reading and adoption of Emerson's critique of hegemonic ideologies of freedom. Both Douglass and Emerson argue that the dominant nineteenth century understanding of freedom–as the freedom to choose, own, and consume–was compatible with and perhaps reliant upon the unfreedom of slaves. I show how Nietzsche critiques this modern, capitalist understanding of freedom in his discussions of the guilty free will and the invented happiness of the last humans. I argue that the freedom to choose, own, and consume, which has been the dominant understanding of freedom in U.S. politics and culture at least since the Jacksonian market revolution, is a mere experiential freedom, and one which supports one's lostness in the self-unreliant ego. The phenomenology of freedom in choice, ownership, and consumption is a distraction from the more authentic freedom of the commitment to becoming oneself and it is a distraction from the unsightliness of others who suffer under political regimes that deny them opportunity to become themselves. So long as one feels free (i.e., able to choose and consume), one need not take up the dreadful project of becoming actually free or of treating as urgent the emancipatory struggles of one's neighbors.

In place of the essentially capitalist freedom of arbitrary choice, consumption, and ownership that produces the mere egoistic phenomenology of freedom, Emerson and Nietzsche understand the most complete and authentic form of freedom as based in commitment. I bring Emerson and Nietzsche into discussion with Heidegger to show how individuality, autonomy, and fulfilling exploration of one's creativity and development of one's capabilities require the

recognition of the self as essentially intersubjective. I argue that Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger share a dialectical, post-Protestant understanding of freedom wherein one becomes free through loving commitments to the world, oneself, and other people. Emerson discusses this dynamic in terms of the unchosen and spontaneous nature of thought (typified in the phenomenology of the glance and conversation) and the givenness of a vocation, or we could say in Heideggerian terms, the existentielle and existential forms of self-reliance.[517] The existentielle form of self-reliance is the everyday, lived experience of being oneself, whereas the existential form of self-reliance is the structure of one's being as open to and loving commitments and vocations. Nietzsche gives us phenomenological and existential examples of freedom through commitment. We encounter this phenomenologically in the artist's and poet's emancipation through the conventions of their art, and in the undertaking of ascetic practices. He gives us the existential form of freedom as commitment in his account of the sovereign individual. In the final section, I discuss Heidegger's digression on the friend in *Being and Time*, showing how he brings together Dasein's self-becoming with solicitous relations with others. I describe a freedom based in commitment to oneself and loving, solicitous relations with others.

The value of Emerson's and Nietzsche's contributions to ethics and politics have long been derided by those who see their emphasis on individual development to neglect other people. In a satirical essay from the early 1840s, "The Transcendental Bible," Lidian Jackson

[517] As Paul Tillich writes, ontological language is always analogical: everyday ways of comporting oneself and coping with the world and other people are indications (in Heideggerian terms, "formal indications") of the structure of existence. If a philosopher wants to speak about the structure of existence, she must rely upon the analogies of everyday life. Existentielle or ontic phenomena are the everyday, lived phenomena that indicate the existential and ontological structures of Dasein's being.

Emerson launches her own hyperbolic attack on her husband's ethics. In a section entitled "Duty to your Neighbor," she writes,

> Loathe and shun the sick. They are in bad taste, and may untune us for writing the poem floating through our mind.
>
> Scorn the infirm of character and omit no opportunity of insulting and exposing them. They ought not to be infirm and should be punished by contempt and avoidance.
>
> Despise the unintellectual, and make them feel that you do by not noticing their remark and question lest they presume to intrude into your conversation.
> Abhor those who commit certain crimes because they indicate stupidity… Justify those who commit certain other crimes. Their commission is consistent with the possession of intellect. We should not judge the intellectual as common men. It is mean enough to wish to put a great mind into the straight-jacket of morality.
>
> It is mean and weak to seek for sympathy; it is mean and weak to give it. Great souls are self-sustained and stand ever erect, saying only to the prostrate sufferer "Get up, and stop your complaining." Never wish to be loved. Who are you to expect that? Besides, the great never value being loved…
>
> If you have refused all sympathy to the sorrowful, all pity and aid to the sick, all toleration to the infirm of character, if you have condemned the unintellectual and loathed such sinners as have discovered want of intellect by their sin, then are you a perfect specimen of Humanity.
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> Let us all aspire after this Perfection! So be it.[518]

Emerson, apparently well pleased with the satire, referred to it as "The Queen's Bible." Delores Bird Carpenter explains that "Queenie" was his nickname for Lidian. Lidian exposes the points of Emerson's philosophy that become the familiar refrain of Emerson's critics: he shuns the needy and focuses on individual intellectual achievement; he expects people to become self-made and to have no need of others. While this dissertation in part aims to correct egoistical readings of Emerson through a more sensitive attention to his writing, it is significant that the

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[518] Ellen Tucker Emerson, in "Lidian Emerson's 'Transcendental Bible,'" by Delores Bird Carpenter. *Studies in the American Renaissance* pp. 91-95 (1980).

egoistic reading was familiar to Emerson in his own day, and he seems to have taken it lightly. He was able to smile at this critique in its superficial misunderstanding, which Lidian magnifies.

Legal philosopher Martha Nussbaum claims that when it comes to serious political philosophy, Nietzsche "has [almost] nothing to offer that is not utterly childish."[519] She summarizes Nietzsche's work as an "attack on egalitarianism," backed by "no argument at all. It is an unsorted and incoherent group of remarks that don't really add up to anything."[520] John Rawls has a more substantive critique of Nietzsche in *A Theory of Justice*, where he rejects Nietzsche's work as a possible foundation for a system of justice on the basis of Nietzsche's perfectionism. Rawls summarizes Nietzsche's perfectionism through a reading of a quote from *Schopenhauer as Educator*, where Nietzsche writes, "Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings—this and nothing else is the task… for the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? ...Only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable specimens."[521] Rawls rejects this position as a violation of his first principle of justice, which posits that all members of society should have equal access to the greatest possible system of rights, where those rights do not infringe upon the rights of others. Rawls also finds Nietzsche's perfectionism to be in violation of his difference principle, which states that social and economic inequalities ought to be distributed in such a way that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. On Rawls's reading, Nietzsche's perfectionism would have the greatest

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[519] Nussbaum, Martha. "Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?" pp. 1-13 in *Internet Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 5.
[520] Ibid, p. 7
[521] Rawls, p. 286, ff. 50

rights and advantages accruing to the most advanced members of society. He likens Nietzsche's politics to classical utilitarianism and writes, "Unless there are bountiful resources, the sum of value might be best increased by very unequal rights and opportunities favoring a few."[522]

Rawls suggests that a perfectionist political system requires a teleological principle which is the perfection that society strives to manifest. On his reading, perfectionism permits the limiting of some people's rights if this brings about the telos of society in even a few people's lives. This is "a teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science and culture."[523] Thus, he explains, the Greek institution of slavery would be justified by achievements in Classical philosophy and art. Additionally, from the perspective of Rawls's original position, it is irrational to posit a teleological principle that could be the standard of a perfectionist project since that principle might run counter to one's actual pursuits, capacities, and beliefs outside of the original position.[524] Rawls rejects Nietzsche's perfectionism since it runs counter to his notion that in a well-ordered society, citizens "do not use the coercive apparatus of the state to win for themselves a greater liberty or larger distributive shares on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value."[525] Rawls misses the non-teleological structure of Nietzschean (and Emersonian) perfectionism, which aims at the exploration and development of human capacities without the problematic normativity in Rawls's account of perfectionism. Rawls worries that perfectionism will reward

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[522] Ibid. p. 290
[523] Rawls, John. *A Theory of* Justice. p. 286
[524] Ibid p. 288
[525] Ibid. p. 289

the most developed with the greatest shares of social resources. It is true that Nietzsche sometimes argues for a class society of workers who support more developed creators of culture; it is also true that he takes the greatest benefits of this system to be the cultural products which the working class also enjoy.

Though some have been quick to dismiss the ethical and political value of Emerson's and Nietzsche's philosophies for modern liberal society there has been greater attention to their contributions, thanks largely to the work of Stanley Cavell, though there remains little agreement on how they should be read. In Chapter One, I introduced readings of Emerson from Newfield, who charges Emerson with the emergence of a unique American willingness to obey authority, and Anderson, who locates in Emerson the origins of modern American narcissism. Don Dombowsky, Frederick Appel, and Hugo Drochon have each published excellent readings on Nietzsche's politics, focusing on his anti-Democratic, aristocratic visions of society.[526] In the following sections, I develop a more liberal reading of Emerson and Nietzsche, following political philosophers such Cavell, Derrida, and Andrew Norris. I argue that Emerson and Nietzsche often appear aloof when it comes to questions of politics because they are both suspicious of normative understandings of freedom.

Emersonian and Nietzschean critiques of ideologies of freedom (freedom as arbitrary choice, ownership, and consumption)

Freedom, for Emerson, is not a state of being that can be described and articulated in advance of having actualized it in life. Emersonian freedom does not reside, as it does for example in Kant or Hegel, in one's acting in accord with laws that outstrip the individual. The

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[526] See: Appel (1999); Dombowsky (2004); and Drochon (2016)

Hegelian model operates with a hegemonic ideology of freedom that is concretized in law (i.e., the Hegelian universal) and determined by other people often in other times.[527] One problem with hegemonic ideologies of freedom is that they fail to capture the complex and changing needs of a human life. The freedom outlined in law may not provide the freedoms necessary to support a full and meaningful life, especially as that life is lived in contexts increasingly removed from the historical context of the outlining of law. Gelphi describes Emerson's transcendentalist individualism as holding "each individual as a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed," rather than a utilitarian (and, we could say classically Enlightenment) individualism that "views society as arising from a contract that individuals enter into in order to advance their own self-interest."[528] A hegemonic, political understanding of freedom might leave one without certain freedoms that would be necessary for the living of a full life.

In this section, I show how Emerson and Frederick Douglass pushed this argument against hegemonic understandings of freedom to a further extreme, arguing that hegemonic ideologies of freedom not only produce unfreedom but, at least in some cases, rely upon unfreedom. Emerson and Douglass both put forth abolitionist arguments grounded in a philosophical critique of the dominant ideology of freedom in nineteenth century U.S. culture: freedom as the freedom to choose, own, and consume. This was a freedom propagated by the economic developments accompanying the Jacksonian market revolution, during which time, as Charles Sellers has argued, capitalism developed beyond an economic system to begin to define in U.S. culture and thinking.

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[527] See: *Philosophy of Right*
[528] Gelphi, p. 4

Political philosophers such as Andrew Norris (by way of Cavell and Rousseau) and Frank Ruda (by way of Luther and Freud) have called attention to ideologies of modern oppression that replace real political freedom with the phenomenology of freedom in choice.[529] Norris points out that economic changes during the nineteenth century led to "a growing identification in law and public consciousness of freedom with freedom of contract."[530] Emerson already perceived this ideology at work, writing,

> I say, do not choose; but that is a figure of speech by which I would distinguish what is commonly called choice among men, and which is a partial act, the choice of the hands, of the eyes, of the appetites, and not a whole act of the man [i.e., arbitrary choice and consumption]. But what I call right or goodness is the choice of my constitution; and that which I call heaven, and inwardly aspire after, is the state or circumstance desirable to my constitution.[531]

Emerson describes the freedom of choice as a partial act when it is directed at the world. The choices of the hands, appetites, and eyes are willful and egoistic choices, in the making of which one turns from the spontaneous movements of thought and becomes lost in a merely virtual experience of freedom. Emersonian freedom is realized not in consumeristic choosing and consuming but in committing to one's constitution and in living a life desirable to that constitution. This is a freedom that must be realized in the life of each individual, and thus it is incompatible with predetermined ideologies of freedom that support some people's freedom through the oppression of other people. Emerson and Douglass understood this essentially capitalist ideology of freedom to be compatible with and reliant upon the unfreedom of slaves. Recognizing that hegemonic ideologies of freedom can exclude and oppress some people, Emerson and Douglass argue for freedom as self-reliance.

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[529] See Norris, p. 101. See also, Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*.
[530] Norris, p. 179
[531] "Spiritual Laws," *EW*, p. 176

Emerson critiques the dominant cultural and political ideologies of freedom in nineteenth century America as distractions from his formulation of individual emancipation as self-reliance. He thinks that people have become complacent with ideologies of freedom that offer partial freedom or virtual freedom and only to some people. He says of his fellow Americans, "There is nothing more disgusting than the crowing about liberty by slaves, as most men are, and the flippant mistaking for freedom of some paper preamble like a 'Declaration of Independence,' or the statute right to vote, by those who have never dared to think or to act."[532] The freedom celebrated by Americans is shallow and not the kind of freedom that would be needed for the self-reliant emancipation of thought and action. The freedoms contained in constitutions and expressed in suffrage are undoubtedly valuable freedoms for anyone who values democracy, as Emerson did. But these freedoms are not sufficient to guarantee the self-reliance and self-realization of an individual, and for Emerson this is what a complete notion of freedom must support.

Besides being insufficient conceptions of freedom even in the life of a person who fully enjoys these freedoms, hegemonic conceptions of freedom are not extended to the entire population. The history of American independence and democracy has shown a problematic compatibility with and reliance upon the unfreedom of racial and cultural minorities, women, and the poor. As Emerson bluntly admits at the beginning of his speech on the Fugitive Slave Act, "I have lived all my life without suffering any known inconvenience from American Slavery. I never saw it; I never heard the whip; I never felt the check on my free speech or action."[533] Emerson draws attention to the problem with any hegemonic concept of freedom:

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[532] "Fate," *The Conduct of Life*, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, in 12 vols. Fireside Edition (Boston and New York, 1909). Vol. 6 The Conduct of Life). *p. 12*
[533] "The Fugitive Slave Law," *EW*, p. 780

that it can be put to use towards the oppression of some people, while those who enjoy freedom turn a blind eye to the unsightly exploitation of others. He instead argues for self-reliance, as the freedom to become who one is, a freedom that must be realized and appropriated in the life of each individual. Emerson considers hegemonic political freedoms to be shallow in their failure to extend to everyone and their failure to fully emancipate anyone.

Another problem Emerson identifies with American freedom is that this freedom is understood in terms of the capacity to own, choose, and consume—a type of freedom associated with capitalism as it became a way of life during the Jacksonian market revolution. Emerson even justified the Civil War as a way to prevent the South from "disinfecting us of our habitual proclivity [i.e., for self-reliance], through the affection of trade."[534] In "The Chardon Street Convention," Emerson criticizes the virtual freedom of capitalism in terms of "a pusillanimous preference of our bread to our freedom."[535] He says of the evils of slavery that they show "our prosperity had hurt us, and that we could not be shocked by crime. It showed that the old religion and the sense of the right had faded and gone out; that while we reckoned ourselves a highly cultivated nation, our bellies had run away with our brains."[536] The enjoyment of their prosperity and the pursuit of the satisfaction of their appetites replaced piety and reason, distracting Emerson's country people from the crime of slavery.

Even political freedoms were subordinate to the essentially capitalistic understanding of freedom, since political freedoms were generally reserved for those who enjoyed the capitalist freedoms of ownership and consumption. But Emerson identifies a more subtle

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[534] "The Emancipation Proclamation," *EW*, p. 805
[535] "The Chardon Street Convention," The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Lectures and biographical sketches, Vol. 10, p. 586
[536] "Fugitive Slave Law," *EW*, pp. 784-85

problem with capitalist freedom. As merely virtual freedom, capitalist ownership, choice, and consumption support a powerful and compelling experience of freedom that becomes a distraction from rampant political and existential unfreedom, and the project of becoming oneself. The highest aim of politics for Emerson is a freedom that can be measured only in the life of the individual.

> It [i.e., a politics of love and individual emancipation] was never adopted by any party in history, neither can be. It separates the individual from all party, and unites him at the same time to the race. It promises a recognition of higher rights than those of personal freedom, or the security of property. A man has a right to be employed, to be trusted, to be loved, to be revered.[537]

Emersonian politics cannot be party politics since parties always aim at a hegemonic conception of freedom in the image of the party rather than in the lives of the individual. Emerson's politics separate one from parties and returns one to the human race insofar as they aim at a freedom appropriate to the human: the freedom to become who one is through the creative exploration and development of one's capabilities. Emerson's politics advances a critique of the ideologies of freedom as personal liberty and the security of property, which are insufficiently distributed and lack the educative potential to support self-becoming and real emancipation. We require an economic and political system that supports all people's exploration of the world and themselves and the development of their capabilities and that does not limit such exploration and development to those who can buy it. As Norris writes, "The American craving for the merely instrumental and hence false goods of wealth and power is cured by waking and leaping to the true good of growth or 'upbuilding' that promises only a splendor that is itself useless."[538] In place of property and choice, the freedom to become

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[537] "Politics," *EW*, p. 388
[538] Norris, p. 202

oneself requires for all people meaningful employment, challenging education, and mutual trust.

Emerson critiques the notion that property could be the foundation of a true freedom at the end of "Self-Reliance," where he puts it plainly:

> The reliance on Property… is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things for so long that they have come to esteem the religious, learned and civil institutions as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on property. They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is.[539]

In these lines, Emerson claims that property has become a defining characteristic in American culture. Property is that by which Americans measure esteem for oneself and others. Religious, cultural, and civil institutions are valued only because they support property and ownership. Even other people get interpreted on the basis of their property. He writes,

> But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has if he sees that it is accidental–came to him by inheritance, or gift, or crime; then he feels that it is not having; it does not belong to him, has no root in him and merely lies there because no revolution or no robber takes it away. But that which a man is, does always by necessity acquire; and what the man acquires, is living property.[540]

Property, as accidental in the Aristotelian sense, is not the true measure of a person and so a freedom defined by property and transactions of property can be at best a partial conception of human freedom. The true measure of a person is self-reliance or self-becoming (what one has made of oneself), and the fullest notion of freedom is a freedom sensitive to self-reliance. This is a freedom not essentially concerned with property, but with what Emerson calls one's "living property," one's self-reliant becoming, which cannot be taken away. Although we sometimes speak of lives being taken, this taking lacks the transactional nature by which property might

[539] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 152
[540] Ibid.

be separated from its owner and appropriated by another. So, while we speak of lives being taken, this cannot mean that a life is property.

Mark C. Taylor distinguishes between choices, which he thinks are characterized and conditioned by our belonging to a rational system, and decisions, by which rationalities are themselves determined. He claims that choices are sensible only within a particular moral or practical schema. Decisions relate to the acceptance of a schema. He writes, "The freedom of decision is more profound than the freedom of choice. This existential freedom engenders anxiety, which is the apprehension of possibility as such… the awareness of the unavoidable freedom to define oneself in the absence of any certain or secure norms to provide support or guidance."[541] Since a decision takes place outside of a rational, moral, or practical schema, decisions are essentially irrational and require a leap of faith. Whereas decisions are the anxiety-producing moments by which one becomes oneself, choices are mere expressions of a scheme that one has chosen or been given by society. As Norris writes, "Merely fulfilling the desires one happens to have is not yet to express desires that are *one's own*, expressing *oneself*."[542] Expressing and satisfying thoughtless desires (i.e., choices) in which one has been brought up or that one has taken up from others is not the kind of emancipatory freedom associated with deciding on the context of choosing so that one's choices are organized according to one's self-becoming.

Taylor thinks that modern capitalism encourages people to understand their freedom in terms of choice while distracting from the significance of the freedom associated with decisions. Taylor writes, "For many people, choice has become an unquestionable good. This

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[541] "Madness of Choice," p. 5
[542] Norris, p. 203

excessive veneration of choice is the foundation of much non-liberal economic theory as well as certain versions of liberal democracy."[543] But, in this situation, our choices are among alternatives defined by "differences that make no difference."[544] Taylor argues that modern capitalism demands the proliferation of choice because it demands the perpetual expansion of the market. He thinks markets can spread spatially by opening new locations and attracting new customers, but eventually markets must turn to temporal expansion by the constant production of new product models and choices. Once the iPhone is available to a geographically wide consumer base, Apple can continue to grow their market not only by finding new customers, but also by speeding up the frequency at which their current customers buy new products. Taylor points to psychologist Barry Schwartz's work that correlates the proliferation of choice with the diminution of happiness and satisfaction in consumer society.[545] Taylor argues that in modern capitalism "choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize… the fact that some choice is good doesn't necessarily mean that more choice is better."[546] Taylor thinks that "as choices proliferate, anxiety increases."[547] Schemata provide rules, principles, and norms that "allow a person to discriminate among different alternatives in ways that fulfill desire and [lend] life meaning and purpose."[548] But as choices proliferate, criteria become less effective and "different options begin to seem arbitrary and finally meaningless."[549]

[543] "Madness of Choice," p. 4
[544] Ibid.
[545] Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice.*
[546] "Madness of Choice," p. 4
[547] Ibid., p. 5
[548] Ibid, p. 29
[549] Ibid.

Capitalism supports not only a false idea of what counts as freedom (i.e., choice, consumption, and ownership instead of self-reliance); it makes people less self-reliant and more conformist. Emerson claims that "our dependence on these foreign goods [i.e., property] leads us to our slavish respect for numbers."[550] He goes on to describe political leaders who become leaders only after being assured the support of their party. He suggests that this respect for property makes us democrats, but by calling it a "slavish respect for numbers," he suggests that democrats follow the unthinking mob. The slavish reliance on property becomes the slavish reliance on other people, which turns one from divine spontaneity and "is the want of self-reliance."[551] He continues, "Not so, O friends! will the God deign to enter and inhabit you, but by a method precisely the reverse. It is only as a man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner."[552] Emerson here means the foreign support of others who would confirm one's vain opinions. Founding a conception of freedom on property supports the pursuit of freedom through external goods; as a corollary of this, freedom that relies on property supports the reliance on other people, making one timid. Self-reliant freedom is something that must be appropriated in each individual's way of living and without the vain support of foreign sources.

Still, that one must act without foreign support and without conforming to society does not amount to autarchy. Emerson thinks that by turning towards oneself one turns towards God. Thus, while self-reliance is not reliance on property, or anything external, he will say that "Self-reliance… is reliance on God."[553] While self-reliance is a turning towards oneself, it is a

550 "Self-Reliance," in *EW*, p. 153
551 Ibid.
552 Ibid.
553 "The Fugitive Slave Law," *EW*, p. 788

turning that amounts to a willingness to hear and to listen for the call of one's vocation. Emerson writes, "He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of himself and elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles."[554] Emerson describes self-reliance as a giving over of oneself: One throws oneself unhesitatingly (or, in Cavell's language, thankfully) on one's thought, which is received.

Frederick Douglass articulates a transcendentalist critique of freedom in "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?" where he admonishes his audience for their "national inconsistencies." The central motif of the lecture is the double nature of U.S. freedom, which provides liberty to some through the enslavement of others. For Douglass as for Emerson, U.S. liberty requires and calls forth U.S. slavery. Speaking on Independence Day, Douglass laid bare the inconsistencies of his fellow citizens:

> I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common.—The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.[555]

Douglass begins with the simpler claim that liberty has been extended to some people while excluding others. This claim already implies a latent critique of the capitalist mode of freedom, since this is a freedom hoarded, enjoyed, and bequeathed to one's children as if it were property. Since political freedoms such as voting were largely rooted in the owning of property,

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[554] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 152-153

[555] Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1999), p. 194

Douglass's metaphor tracks closely with the actual state of things. He then pushes the stronger claim that American liberty and American slavery are the same force applied to different people. The same freedom that brings life and healing to some, brings stripes and death to others.

Douglass identifies the same hypocrisy in the U.S. rhetoric of freedom. Americans celebrate the concept of liberty when it is applied to themselves or those who fight tyranny in other countries, but they are silent on the domestic tyranny in which they more-or-less directly participate and on which their way of life depends.

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham…your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy–a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. You are all on fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland; but are as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America. You discourse eloquently on the dignity of labor; yet, you sustain a system which, in its very essence, casts a stigma upon labor. You can bear your bosom to the storm of British artillery to throw off a threepenny tax on tea; and yet wring the last hard-earned farthing from the grasp of the black laborers of your country.[556]

Again, he claims that U.S. liberty exist alongside slavery in ridiculous ways. Americans are willing to go to war over the price of tea, meanwhile enjoying a way of life made possible by the total exploitation of slaves in their own country. They romanticize hard work while their country is carried on the backs of others. But Douglass suggests the relationship is more complicated. More than merely coexisting with slavery, the American rhetoric of freedom is used to cover up the crimes of slavery. The cover up is not essentially aimed at hiding U.S.

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[556] Douglass, p. 197

crimes from the view of other nations. More essential is the need to cover up the unsightly crimes of slavery so they are not seen by Americans themselves. The American rhetoric of freedom allows Americans to experience themselves as engaged in a project of human liberation while their society is supported by slavery.

Douglass implicates U.S. religion in his spelling out of the hypocrisy of American freedom. Like the rest of the population, churches were willing to overlook the crimes of slavery and the unfreedom of others, if the liberties of the churches were maintained. He writes,

> Did this law [i.e., the Fugitive Slave Act] concern the "mint, anise, and cumin"—abridge the right to sing psalms, to partake of the sacrament, or to engage in any of the ceremonies of religion, it would be smitten by the thunder clap of a thousand pulpits… The fact that the church of our country, (with fractional exceptions), does not esteem "the Fugitive Slave Law" as a declaration of war against religious liberty, implies that the church regards religion simply as a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and not a vital principle, requiring active benevolence, justice, love, and good will towards man. It esteems sacrifice above mercy; psalm-singing above right doing; solemn meetings above practical righteousness.[557]

Douglass's critique of religion as stultified by ceremonies and traditions that ignore the true message of Christianity mirrors the logic of Emerson's critique of religion, though Douglass's is premised on religion's silence in the face of slavery. Douglass suggests that the Fugitive Slave Act ought to be taken by the church as an attack on religious liberty, since what religion is most essentially about–"a vital principle, requiring active benevolence, justice, love, and good will towards man"—is precisely what the Slave Act forbade in requiring the handing over of Black people. Douglass describes the church, like the self-unreliant egoist, as busy in the consumerist construction of an identity through external means, greedy in enjoyment of a personal sphere of liberty, and forgetful of their true vocation.

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[557] Douglass, p. 202

The critique of the modern notion of the subject as coherent, present, and grounded in consumerism and ownership is at the heart of Mark C. Taylor's thought. Taylor echoes the Marxist critique of capitalism as a system for the production of needs and opportunities for consumption. He thinks that the idea of the subject as a consumer and possessor supports the idea of the ego as self-sufficient, separate from others, and needing to maintain itself against the intrusions of others. He writes, "The 'logic' of oneness implies an economy of ownership in which *one* seeks security by struggling against dispossession, impropriety, and expropriation."[558] The subject grounded in ownership and consumption is skeptical of its underlying unity with the rest of existence and so greedily hoards and inhospitably appropriates what it can. Taylor writes

> The consumer seeks to possess, appropriate, and incorporate otherness wherever it is encountered… The sovereign subject who seeks total mastery joins utility and consumption to form utilitarian consumerism. The result of this union is an economy of domination based on the principal of ownership. Ownership, in turn, presupposes both propriety and property. The accumulation of property is intended to secure the identity and insure the proprietary of the hoarding self.[559]

Taylor thinks that the modern psyche equates personality and property: One is insofar as one owns oneself. Indeed, an idea of self-ownership and one's body as one's possession is at the root of modern contract theory. Locke's theory of property is largely rooted on the claim that "every Man has a Property in his own person."[560] As an owner of itself, the self aims to be present and secure in itself and its possession of itself. Taylor thinks this understanding of the self emerges in response to the theory of God, starting in Plato but characterizing much of

[558] *Erring*, p. 130
[559] *Erring*, p. 27
[560] *Second Treatise*, section 27

Western theology, as absolute self-presence. "The self-presence of the self-conscious subject reflects the self-presence of absolute subjectivity."[561]

Nietzsche critiques freedom in two main ways: as the free will invented by priests to make humanity guilty, and as the freedom of the last humans. The freedom of the will invented by priests and the freedom of the last humans are similar in that they are both types of negative freedom associated with arbitrary choice and consumption. For Nietzsche, the ideology of free will maintains that one is free insofar as one can choose what to do and how to live, with the consequence that one becomes responsible and guilty. He thinks humans are overdetermined by instinct and environment like all other animals, and the ideology of free will is a purely virtual experience of freedom: One is free if one can experience one's weakness as a virtuous choice one has made about how to live. The ideology of free will promises the capacity to choose from a menu of options how one will live one's life. But Nietzsche argues that the ideology of free will is a priestly invention that produces the experience of freedom without the reality of freedom. As he puts it, the tree of knowledge (i.e., the ideological stance of the priests, with the metaphysics of truth and free will) is to be distinguished from the tree of life, since the tree of knowledge offers "Probity, but no truth; appearance of freedom, but no freedom."[562]

The freedom of the last humans is another experience of freedom without emancipation. Free insofar as they are not challenged in pursuit of a goal and insofar as they are not responsible for anything, the freedom of the last humans is a purely private matter of invented happiness. The environment may be in crisis, racism may be rampant, the pandemic

[561] *Erring*, p. 42
[562] *Human, All Too Human*, "The Wanderer and His Shadow," section 1: "Of the tree of knowledge," p. 302

may enter another wave: freedom for the last humans is the ability to isolate oneself from responsibility for such issues and for the future in the selfish enjoyment of purely private and personal freedoms.

Nietzsche claims that "To satisfy many even superfluous needs, and that as fully as possible, is a training for servitude."[563] The satisfaction of many superfluous needs is a training for servitude since it becomes a distraction from the satisfaction of our most needful needs. His critique of the freedom of the last humans follows the same logic of Boétie's description of the training for servitude. Boétie tells a story of how the Persian King Cyrus dealt with rebellion among the Lydians after capturing their city. Cyrus maintained order by establishing brothels and games and ordering the Lydians to use them. Entertainment "and other such drugs were the bait that lured ancient nations into servitude, they were the price at which freedom was sold… The common rabble is crying out to be exploited in this way, for they delight in nothing more than gluttony."[564] According to Boétie, tyranny requires that a population voluntarily submit to a tyrant, and through the proliferation of private enjoyments populations are made to be the types of populations who will choose a political submission and existential unfreedom gilded with personal liberty. The rejection of responsibility for the world and one another through the selfish enjoyment of private freedom is a way of giving up the existential and political freedoms that support what Emerson and Nietzsche consider to be a full life.

This is the same logic that underwrites the distinction between individualism and individuality, which Norris describes in his discussion of Mill, Tocqueville, and Emerson. On this account, individuality goes along with individual liberty, contributing to the possibility of

[563] *Human, All Too Human*, "The Wanderer and His Shadow," section 318: "Signs of Freedom and Servitude," p. 389
[564] Boétie*, Slaves by Choice*, p. 57

individual self-exploration, the expansion of one's capacities, and the becoming of oneself. Individualism is the private enjoyment of oneself and the satisfaction of one's desires, which is a distraction from one's duties to other people and society. Norris notes that individualism "makes possible the emergence of a new mode of paternalistic despotism" that undercuts the kind of personal exploration and expansion characteristic of healthy individuality.[565] Norris follows Mill in arguing that "a good society is one composed of genuine individuals," and a good state is one (as I argue in Chapter Four) that allows individuals to participate in governance through the agonistic practice of debate.[566]

Nietzsche's naturalistic psychology leaves no room for free will (though he also denies an unfree will, an apparent contradiction that I untangle below in discussing Nietzsche's concept of learning to love). Nietzsche thinks a person is largely determined by the psychological drives of the will to power and the environment. In a way that makes many modern readers legitimately uneasy—considering the unsightly genocides and casual project of cultural destruction in the contemporary world—but which comports with the beliefs of some ancient Greek philosophers,[567] Nietzsche thinks that one's breeding and physical health are determinants of one's character. Where one has been made strong by nature, in a deterministic sort of way, one experiences the satisfaction of one's will and interprets this as freedom of the will. That the philosopher philosophizes has more to do with upbringing and diet than any free choice. He writes,

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[565] Norris, p. 183

[566] Ibid, p. 184

[567] Notably, in Book V of *Republic*, Plato describes the practices for breeding a healthy population by allowing only "the best" men and women to have children, while executing the babies of "inferior" people along with those who have been born "defective" (459e-460c; pp. 1087-1088). According to popular myth, Spartans practiced infant execution by throwing unfit babies into the gorge at Kaiadas.

> It is as if the silkworm sought freedom of will in spinning... A man unconsciously imagines that where he is strong, where he feels most thoroughly alive, the element of his freedom must lie. He thinks of dependence and apathy, independence and vivacity as forming inevitable pairs.—Thus an experience that a man has undergone in the social and political sphere is wrongly transferred to the ultimate metaphysical sphere.[568]

Thus, free will is a way of describing the phenomenology of the discharge of the will to power. But the will to power is not under one's conscious control, so free will is a mere experience of freedom.

Not only is free will an experience of freedom without emancipation, but like Emerson and Douglass, Nietzsche thinks this experience of freedom is compatible with unfreedom. For Nietzsche, habitual unfreedom can itself come to be experienced as freedom.

> So long as we do not feel that we are in some way dependent, we consider ourselves independent—a false conclusion that shows how proud man is, how eager for dominion. For he hereby assumes that he would always be sure to observe and recognise dependence so soon as he suffered it, the preliminary hypothesis being that he generally lives in independence, and that, should he lose that independence for once in a way, he would immediately detect a contrary sensation.—Suppose, however, the reverse to be true—that he is always living in a complex state of dependence, but thinks himself free where, through long habit, he no longer feels the weight of the chain? He only suffers from new chains, and "free will" really means nothing more than an absence of feeling of new chains.[569]

Nietzsche is claiming that in the modern world, sometimes we feel free and sometimes we feel unfree. We think that when we feel free, we are free. But he thinks that even when we feel free, we are still chained. We just feel free because we are moving in the familiar directions that our chains habitually drag us. Free will is the absence of *the feeling* of new chains, but not a true absence of chains. Given Nietzsche's naturalistic and deterministic view of the human animal,

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[568] *Human, All Too Human*, "The Wanderer and His Shadow," section 9: "Origin of the Doctrine of Free Will," p. 305

[569] *Human, All Too Human*, "The Wanderer and His Shadow," section 10, "Absence of Feeling of New Chains," p. 305

any idea of free will is fantasy. If such an animal is to be free, it must free itself by giving itself a goal and chaining itself to a star. This is an orientation towards the future and the world that cannot be settled in terms of a free choice. To give oneself a goal, to chain oneself to a star (or, in Emerson's words, "to hitch his wagon to a star"[570]), to fall in or out of love, to believe or not—though these are decisions that never present themselves as free choices, these are the decisions for which one must become free because they are the decisions by which one becomes free.

Nietzsche thinks free will is an ideology of freedom invented and operationalized for the enslavement of humanity. Free will allows people to interpret and experience themselves as free despite their metaphysical and political unfreedom: human animals are overdetermined like any animal, and politically, they are the servants to the priests. The idea of a free will seems natural due to the subject-predicate structure underlying human language. Nietzsche thinks this grammatical convention is an accident of language that comes to structure the way humans experience themselves as free actors in the world. The tendency to experience the world as made up of agents and patients is operationalized, according to *Genealogy of Morals*, by the priestly class. To accomplish their ideological revolution, the priests not only redefine the knights' way of life as evil, but they also define their own slavish way of life as good. Instead of confronting their slavish way of life as an aspect of their impotence to live a great life, they interpret their slavishness as a free choice, "as if the weakness of the weak–that is to say, their *essence*, their effects, their sole, ineluctable, irremovable reality–were a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a *deed*, a *meritorious* act."[571] Interpreting weakness as chosen,

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[570] "Civilization," in *Complete Works*, vol. VII: *Society and Solitude*, p. 29
[571] *Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, section 13, p. 46

and thus as good, requires an understanding of the human as not determined by instinct and environment, but as “a neutral independent ‘subject,’” free to choose its character and way of being-in-the-world as if from a menu of options.[572] Thus, the first ideological use of the invention of the subject and free will is to valorize the slavish way of life.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche critiques the fantasy of self-creation through free will as it is taken up by egoists in modern society. It is the idea of individualism as “pull[ing] oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the slough of nothingness” that has often been attributed to Emerson and Nietzsche, and which this project, in part, aims to correct. He writes,

> The desire for "freedom of will" in the superlative, metaphysical sense, such as still holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated, the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society therefrom, involves nothing less than to be precisely this CAUSA SUI, and, with more than Munchausen daring, to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the slough of nothingness.[573]

Free will makes one responsible for one’s choices, diverting responsibility from the many other circumstances that determine one’s actions and responses to the world. Such a subject cannot

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[572] Ibid. See, too, Dickinson “910,” (p. 430), where she compares the circuitous paths of a life to the fantasy of a life calculated in advance. The fantasy of the autarchic self with free will places the weight of the choice on the individual rather than with predestination and vocation, such that she must not only suffer her destiny, but she must have the guilt of having chosen her destiny. She writes,

> Experience is the Angled Road
> Preferred against the Mind
> By – Paradox – the Mind itself –
> Presuming it to lead
>
> Quite Opposite – How Complicate
> The Discipline of Man –
> Compelling Him to Choose Himself
> His Preappointed Pain –

[573] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter 1, section 21, p. 28

be guilty or responsible for any action since every action is the result of a network of causes that includes other people and the world, and that stretches back into history. The concept of a subject who is fully self-created and self-caused implies a fully responsible and guilty subject.

While I have emphasized the degree to which the will is overdetermined by biology and environment in Nietzsche's work (an emphasis I take to be justified by his own emphasis in this direction), he also denies that the will is unfree. He writes,

> If anyone should find out in this manner the crass stupidity of the celebrated conception of "free will" and put it out of his head altogether, I beg of him to carry his "enlightenment" a step further, and also put out of his head the contrary of this monstrous conception of "free will": I mean "non-free will," which is tantamount to a misuse of cause and effect.[574]

Nietzsche denies the physical determinism of a position that considers humans to be fully determined cogs in a clockwork universe. Humans are not free to choose what kind of animals to be or what kind of characters to have (e.g., whether to be predators or prey, Caesars or slaves). Nietzsche thinks one is free to the degree that one can give oneself a goal and orient one's life towards that goal. But this too is a freedom run through with necessity since a goal that could emancipate one towards one's own becoming must be an all-consuming ultimate commitment. It must be a goal that one does not merely desire or consider, but one which is necessary.

Essays Two and Three of *The Genealogy of Morals* explain how the priests use the ideology of the neutral subject and free will towards the oppression of slaves. Individuals are indebted to society because society provides protection. In return, individuals are expected to obey norms. Breaking norms is like not repaying a debt to society and is thus associated with an expectation of punishment and pain: the bad conscience. Because they interpret themselves

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[574] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter 1, section 21, p. 29

as neutral subjects able to choose whether to obey norms, they experience themselves as guilty. Part of what makes the slaves weak is their inability to find meaning in their everyday human suffering, and thus to grow from it. Nietzsche thinks meaningless suffering is intolerable to any human, so the slaves turn to the priests for an interpretation of their suffering. The priests provide the idea of free will, which serves both to explain why the slaves suffer (i.e., as just punishment for their willfulness) and provides a therapy (i.e., the eradication of the will). In this way, the ideology of the free will becomes the basis for the methods of self-torture associated with the bad conscience as well as the unhealthy and excoriating self-examination associated with the eradication of the will. The slaves interpret themselves as free all the while being overdetermined by instinct and the environment. They understand themselves as free based on their experience of choice-making rather than committed self-making.

Another problematic form of freedom is associated with the last humans, the decadent and narcissistic form of humanity that experiences itself as free precisely in the avoidance of the type of pain and struggle associated with self-becoming. The last humans are one possible future for humanity after the death of God. In the place of God, the last humans narcissistically see themselves and their way of being as the highest goal. They fail to imagine the possibility of anything greater for themselves or their future and seek merely to maintain the status quo. Even if they could muster the imagination, they lack the capacity for healthy self-evaluation and the stamina to undertake the project of perfectionistic development.

> Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man. 'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the last man, and he blinks. The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small… 'We have invented happiness,' says the last men, and they blink.[575]

[575] *Zarathustra*, First Part, section 5, p. 129

Unable to imagine a goal for human development other than their own way of being, they hold themselves to be "the goal and the zenith… the meaning of history."[576] Rather than critiquing their own way of being to make way for higher and healthier ways of being, they aim at the narcissistic proliferation of their own way of being. Satisfied with their invented happiness, the last humans happily forego the difficult and painful paths towards greater joys. Nietzsche writes of the last men, "Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same… One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened… One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night… 'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."[577] As invented, their happiness is not a true or natural happiness; it is a happiness conditioned by the limited understanding and inventiveness of humans at a particular time and place, rather than the happiness appropriate to their nature. As a happiness of little pleasures, it is a happiness supported by superficial enjoyments rather than the fulfillment of self-becoming. Theirs is the happiness of capitalist choice and consumption of a variety of pleasures, and which is a distraction from the project of self-becoming. The happiness supported by convenient and ready daily pleasures is one we know today to require the enslavement and unhappiness of people in the unsightly provinces of global capitalism. It is supported by the denial of pain evident in our contemporary addictions to opioids and social media. Invented happiness is more readily available, less risky to pursue, and distracts from the dreadfully profound and generous happiness of self-development.

Insofar as the last humans subscribe to an ideal of freedom, it is clearly not the Emersonian and Nietzschean ideal of freedom as self-reliant self-development. Their

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[576] *Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, section 11, p. 43
[577] *Zarathustra*, First Part, section 5, p. 130

understanding of themselves as free is fulfilled in their experience of comfortable invented happiness. Their freedom is precisely opposed to the will to power since they avoid risking life for something greater. They do not understand freedom as self-development; they understand it as personal enjoyment. They do not see freedom as something that must be realized and unfolded in the life of each individual, they think they have invented happiness, as a predetermined and hegemonic ideology that can be calculated and distributed.

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche suggests that modern humans have already become the last humans. He writes,

> People live for the present, they live at top speed,—they certainly live without any sense of responsibility; and this is precisely what they call "freedom." Everything in institutions which makes them institutions, is scorned, loathed and repudiated: everybody is in mortal fear of a new slavery, wherever the word "authority" is so much as whispered.[578]

Nietzsche critiques modern freedom as the mere freedom from responsibility, a freedom that is enjoyed in the present and has no concern for bringing about a future, or the sacrifice and responsibility this would require. Living only for the present, modern humans lack the right to make promises, which Nietzsche thinks is definitive of the truly free sovereign individual. Living for the present and free from responsibility, their freedom is the freedom of arbitrary choice and consumption. Free from responsibility, they experience freedom insofar as they can do whatever they want. They think authority runs counter to freedom, whereas for Nietzsche it is essentially through "the will to tradition, to authority, to responsibility for centuries to come"[579] that the truest human freedom is exercised. As I show in the next section, Nietzsche thinks the most authentic and complete freedoms emerge through commitment: poets and

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[578] *Twilight*, section 39: "Critique of modernity," p. 543-544
[579] Ibid.

artists are freed by commitment to conventions, ascetic practices and discipline help one achieve goals, and the sovereign individual is made sovereign through unshakable will and commitment to keep promises. Lost to the freedoms of arbitrary choice and consumption, and blind to the emancipatory potential of responsibility and commitment, Nietzsche's modern humans are turned from the freedom associated with perfectionistic self-development.

Following Emerson, and a long line of Christian thinkers on freedom before him, Nietzsche critiques personal liberty as a distraction from a more authentic freedom associated with self-becoming and rooted in commitment. In a section of *Twilight of the Idols* titled "The kind of freedom I do not mean," Nietzsche writes,

> In an age like the present, it simply adds to one's perils to be left to one's instincts. The instincts contradict, disturb, and destroy each other; I have already defined modernism as physiological self-contradiction. A reasonable system of education would insist upon at least one of these instinct-systems being 'paralysed' beneath an iron pressure, in order to allow others to assert their power, to grow strong, and to dominate. At present, the only conceivable way of making the individual possible would be to 'prune' him:—of making him possible—that is to say, 'whole.' The very reverse occurs. Independence, free development, and 'laisser aller' are clamoured for most violently precisely by those for whom no restraint could be too severe—this is true in politics, it is true in Art. But this is a symptom of decadence: our modern notion of "freedom" is one proof more of the degeneration of instinct.[580]

The modern notion of freedom that Nietzsche does not mean as his form of freedom is the careless freedom of arbitrary private liberty. More private liberty makes one more unfree since the instincts emerge in an infinite struggle with one another. One is not freed through a greater emancipation of the instincts, but on the contrary through the taming of some instincts. The modern notion of freedom locates freedom with the choosing and consuming conscious ego, whereas I argue that Nietzsche understands freedom to be the positing of goals. Positing a goal

[580] *Twilight*, section 41, "The Kind of Freedom I do Not Mean," pp. 545-555

is a way of pruning the instincts if we consider that having and pursuing a goal is often experienced as the ascetic struggle of foregoing other pleasures. While it is true that a writer becomes a better writer through the practice of writing, the writer oftentimes experiences this journey not as one of developing one's writing skills in specific ways through concrete exercises, but precisely as the avoidance of distraction and the pruning of superfluous instincts so that one's writing has room to grow. As I argue in the next section, Nietzsche brings together freedom and necessity in the positing of a goal.

Commitment and the freedom to become oneself

Emerson

The idea of a commitment that frees one to become oneself (i.e., a vocation), is at the core of Emerson's concept of self-reliance. As explained in Chapter 1, while self-reliance is a kind of independence from society and oneself, it does not amount to an arbitrary freedom to choose any random future possibility. Instead, self-reliance is a commitment to oneself and the spontaneous movement of one's given thoughts. The freedom entailed in self-reliance is the freedom to become oneself: something largely unchosen and to which one is called. As he puts it in "Spiritual Laws," "No man need be perplexed in his speculations. Let him do and say what strictly belongs to him."[581] But like the freedom described by Luther, "doing and saying strictly what belongs" to one is not necessarily the psychologically easier option and entails subtle forms of unfreedom as commitment to oneself and one's vocation. Emerson understands this call to be constitutively indistinct so that even as one begins to respond to the call one can never fully comprehend or foresee how one is actualizing oneself; one must simply do one's

[581] *EW*, p. 172

work. Though the vocation is indistinct, it calls one to work and opens a world of activity and meaning.

A major misconception among Emerson's interpreters is that self-reliance is a type of radical creativity or a non-conformity by which one creates oneself as if ex nihilo. Self-reliance is not the essentially consumeristic freedom of one who cobbles together an identity from a marketplace of options or who leaps into autarkically posited possibilities. Self-reliant non-conformity relies on a commitment to oneself (i.e., to the spirit that moves in the spontaneity of one's thought). In an 1841 speech delivered to the Society of the Adelphi at Waterville College, Emerson compares the self-reliant person to a child who has been taken by the ear and forced to walk in new directions,

> I conceive a man as always spoken to from behind, and unable to turn his head and see the speaker. In all the millions who have heard the voice, none ever saw the face. As children in their play run behind each other, and seize one by the ears and make him walk before them, so is the spirit our unseen pilot. That well-known voice speaks in all languages, governs all men, and none ever caught a glimpse of its form. If the man will exactly obey it, it will adopt him, so that he shall not any longer separate it from himself in his thought; he shall seem to be it, he shall be it. If he listen with insatiable ears, richer and greater wisdom is taught him; the sound swells to a ravishing music, he is borne away as with a flood, he becomes careless of his food and of his house, he is the fool of ideas, and leads a heavenly life. But if his eye is set on the things to be done, and not on the truth that is still taught, and for the sake of which the things are to be done, then the voice grows faint, and at last is but a humming in his ears. His health and greatness consist in his being the channel through which heaven flows to earth, in short, in the fulness in which an ecstatical state takes place in him.[582]

In these lines Emerson describes self-reliance in some of his most explicitly mystical language. The self-reliant person abides by the guiding spirit with "spontaneous impression with good-

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[582] *The Method of Nature: An Oration, Delivered Before the Society of the Adelphi, in Waterville College, in Maine, August 11, 1841*. Boston: S. G. Simpkins, 1841. Pp. 18-19

humored inflexibility."[583] This is a freedom not of arbitrary choice but of inflexibility and commitment to one's vocation, which calls through the movements of thought. When Emerson cautions against setting one's eyes on the things to be done instead of the truth to be taught, he is claiming that one's commitment to a vocation is weakened, he means that one is focused on the value and meaning of what they are doing instead of how they are living. It is not by calculation or plotting that the Emersonian subject becomes self-reliant, but by getting out of the way, or in Eckhartian terms "letting-be" (*Gelassenheit*).

While the phenomenology of commitment is precisely that of having no choice, or no longer having a choice, Emerson distinguishes between commitments that are emancipatory and those that produce unfreedom. He writes of the unfree, bad faith commitment of fitting oneself where one falls: "The man fits himself as well as he can into the customary details of that work or trade he falls into, and tends it as a dog turns a spit. Then he is part of the machine he moves; the man is lost."[584] The heartless commitment associated with fitting oneself where one falls–as in a commitment to which one binds oneself, but to which one has not been called (e.g., the grind of an unfulfilling career, the hopelessness of a failed relationship, or silence in the face of injustice)—is the thoughtless non-choice of being a machine. Thus, some commitments can be a way of working to put off a vocation. Self-reliance is the committed choosing of oneself over the arbitrary choices available in the marketplace of socially prepared possibilities, a sovereign commitment that forecloses the choice of not choosing oneself, and a response to a living vocation.

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[583] "Self-Reliance," in *EW*, p. 132
[584] "Spiritual Laws," *EW,* p. 177

There are also commitments that support the most authentic freedom, that of self-reliant self-becoming, though as with all commitment, the phenomenology remains that of having no choice. Emerson leaves little room for the fantasy of an autarchic self-creating and self-positing subject when he writes, in "Spiritual Laws," "We are begirt with laws that execute themselves."[585] While this suggests the subject's determination by the physical world, a theme running through Emerson's work is the mutual implication of natural laws and spiritual or moral laws. He writes in "Nature," "The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind."[586] Viewing humanity as part of the natural world, Emerson believes the same law-governed behavior of nature characterizes human spirituality. As roses need not choose or possess to thrive and become themselves, so humans need only obey the divine influx of thought. He writes,

> We need only obey. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word. Why need you choose so painfully your place and occupation and associates and modes of action and of entertainment? Certainly there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of balance and willful election. For you there is a reality, a fit place and congenial duties… If we would not be mar-plots with our miserable interferences, the work, the society, letters, art, sciences, religion of men would go on far better than now, and the heaven predicted from the beginning of the world, and still predicted from the bottom of the heart, would organize itself.[587]

Lest the reader take this emphasis on commitment to be an idiosyncrasy of "Spiritual Laws," Emerson makes a strikingly similar point in "Self-Reliance":

> Trust thyself… Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so… betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being.[588]

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[585] "Spiritual Laws," *EW*, p. 174
[586] "Nature, *EW*, p. 14
[587] "Spiritual Laws," *EW*, p. 176
[588] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 133

Whereas in "Spiritual Laws," the emphasis is on obeying the laws of nature as a manifestation of God's will, in "Self-Reliance" he shifts the direction to trusting oneself. For Emerson, this is merely a shift in perspective on the divine monism that unites nature with the individual. In both essays the point is not to create oneself ex nihilo, but to find one's home in the world and to become who one is.

He provides a succinct summation of his thoughts on the unchosen and fatal character of a vocation in "Self-Reliance," where he writes,

> Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err in the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so… My willful actions and acquisitions are but roving; the idlest reverie, the faintest native emotion, command my curiosity and respect… Perception is not whimsical, but fatal.[589]

Where we would typically think about perceptions as the sensations that enter the mind through the sense organs, I claim that here Emerson means to include the perception of one's vocation, which one perceives in thought. This reading is supported by his suggestion that these perceptions are to be expressed. Thus, the "involuntary perceptions" of which he writes include the spontaneous movements of thought that one hears in the delicatest ear of the mind. One's vocation is an example of an involuntary perception. He brings the unchosen quality of a vocation together with the gratuitousness of love when he writes, in "Society and Solitude," that one's vocation is "not chosen by his parents or friends, but by his genius, with earnestness and love."[590] A vocation is an unchosen calling that one must manifest and to which one responds–as one responds to love–even in the attempt to avoid or deny its call. Attempts to

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[589] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 141

[590] The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and solitude [Vol. 7], p. 118

willfully choose and acquire aspects of oneself on the model of capitalist freedom are a distraction from the fatality of the self one is called to become.

One of the main reasons that one might err in the expression of one's vocation is that a vocation is constitutively and necessarily indistinct in two ways: the vocation can be comprehended only retrospectively, and the vocation calls, proximally and for the most part, in a non-theoretical way. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson writes that all people are representatives of a "divine idea," and that "None but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried."[591] A person holds strange and unknown capabilities that oftentimes show-up only in their exercise. Emerson here suggests that one's capabilities and possibilities are discovered retroactively, only in having already actualized those possibilities. The self-reliant person throws herself into her vocation even though the vocation becomes clear only in its having been lived.

One is called even if unable, as one usually is, to give an account of the vocation. One need not have explicit theoretical or conceptual knowledge of the content of the vocation. In "Spiritual Laws," Emerson writes, "That he [i.e., the person absorbed in everyday action] should be able to give account of his faith and expound to another the theory of his self-union and freedom. This requires rare gifts. Yet without this self-knowledge there may be a sylvan strength and integrity in that which he is."[592] Theoretical knowledge of a vocation requires significant introspection and the understanding of oneself as having been called, and introspection can never be sure. But Emerson thinks that even if most people live their

[591] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 133
[592] "Spiritual Laws," *EW*, p. 173

everyday lives without this type of theoretical knowledge, they are still responding to the call in their way of being-in-the-world—their way of expressing their self-union and freedom.

Though one typically lacks any clear sense of that to which one is called and therefore lacks a specific sense of how to realize the vocation in an efficient and calculative way, Emerson thinks one manifests oneself most authentically when working at something that gives life meaning. Whatever this work is, the path to self-becoming is getting to work and doing one's work in the best way possible, not by trying to choose and create a self in a willful way or attempting to calculate a future. Who one is is not a choice one ever makes, which, in a Calvinist register, should relieve one's doubts and fears but throws one back on the need for utter commitment and unshakable faith. Emerson writes, in "Immortality,"

> A wise man in our time caused to be written on his tomb, "Think on living." That inscription describes a progress in opinion. Cease from this antedating of your experience. Sufficient to to-day are the duties of to-day. Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours or ages that follow it.[593]

To think on living and to cease from antedating one's experience means to live in the present responding to the world. To exist before one's experience is to experience the paralyzing doubts and fears associated with the attempt to take responsibility for and calculate a future, rather than finding oneself at home in the world. One works not towards the direct actualization and arrival of a vocation, but towards the preparation of the world and oneself for the vocation's futural call. Emerson's Calvinism is at play again when he counsels everyday work as the method for overcoming doubt and realizing one's vocation.

[593] "Immortality," The Complete Works, Vol. VIII. Letters and Social Aims, p. 329

Doing one's work is a way of pursuing a vocation since the vocation opens a meaningful world of possibility and unifies one's way of being-in-the-world. The vocation does not speak to one in an articulate voice. The vocation opens a world, and it is precisely as having before one an open world that one hears the call. The vocation calls one to one's ultimate commitment, and though it cannot be articulated it is the basis upon which all other commitments and activities become meaningful. The vocation ex-cites[594] one towards the world, as he writes in "Spiritual Laws,"

> Every man has this call of the power to do somewhat unique, and no man has any other call… Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one space in which all space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion…. This talent and this call depend on his organization, or the mode in which the general soul incarnates itself in him.[595]

In these lines, Emerson speaks of the call as talent, which is to say one's way of being-in-the-world and being at one's best and most effective. Talent is a particular and unique feeling of homeliness in the world, because in the direction of one's talents the world presents myriad free flowing possibilities. Exercising a talent is a way of calling forth the self in an exciting encounter with the world. While the talents that call one to work are an indication of one's constitutively unclear vocation, Emerson comes back again to the unchosen and fatal quality of talent. Talents are not chosen; they depend on the way the monistic divinity individualizes itself in the person. Thus, we have the trope of the tortured genius who suffers under the compulsion of their overwhelming talent, such as Vincent van Gogh–or Emerson, or Nietzsche, who once wrote in a letter to Overbeck, "My philosophy, if that is what I am entitled to call what torments me down to the roots of my nature, is no longer communicable."[596] Such a

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[594] Latin, *exciere*: To call forth or to call out; to summon.
[595] "Spiritual Laws," *EW*, p. 177
[596] "Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, 2 July 1885," in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. x

calling may be experienced as a burden, though it is dialectically through this burden that one is most freed. We can think, too, of the young Augustine's burdensome vocation to love God in *Confessions*. This is a vocation Augustine is unable to deny and yet unwilling to accept, captured in his conflicted prayer, "O Lord, grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."[597]

Though the call is manifest most clearly in particular talents, it opens the entire world. As my most authentic way of being myself, the call interprets and gives meaning to everything in my world. Emerson writes,

> It must be that when God speaketh he should communicate, not one thing, but all things; should fill the world with his voice; should scatter forth light, nature, time, souls, from the centre of the present thought; and new date and new create the whole. Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away–means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour. All things are dissolved to their centre by their cause.[598]

The religious dimensions of self-reliance as a response to a vocation are clear in these lines, when the influx of divine wisdom motivates the passing away of teachers, texts, and temples. Emerson's own religious awakening and conversion away from Unitarianism over the issue of the Eucharist is palpable here. But more than merely disturbing one's foundation and the possibility of conformity, which alone might lead to nihilism, the call fills the world and scatters forth beings, populating the world with meaning. The self-reliant person works and lives absorbed in commitment to a vocation, and in this way lives in a world.

The vocation is individual and personal, it calls one to manifest talents according to one's own style. One is not called in this or that specific direction towards a concrete profession or goal; rather one is called to be oneself through the exercise of talents. One is called to teach,

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[597] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII, vii (17), p. 145
[598] "Self-Reliance," *EW*, p. 142

but not to teach on the model of this or that teacher one has observed, and not to construct willfully for oneself the vain persona of a teacher, for example by dressing and presenting oneself in a professorial style. In the hour of vision, one sees how self-reliance is mutually implicated, through vocation, with the opening of the world. One discovers who one is to become, for the most part, in the contours of the world.

> When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not known by any accustomed way… It shall exclude example and experience… The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well. Vast spaces of nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea; long intervals of times, years, centuries, are of no account. This which I think and feel underlay every former state of life and circumstances, as it does underlie my present, and what is called life and what is called death.[599]

In describing how the call opens a world, Emerson often draws attention to temporal aspects of being called. The call gives meaning not only to the things one encounters in the world, but also to the temporal duration of a life. The way one is called now, in the current moment, is one's most authentic calling, and it gives meaning to one's past and future. One who is called "lives now, and absorbs future and present into the present hour," and "that which I think and feel underlay every former state of life and circumstances, as it does underlie my present, and what is called life and what is called death." The hour of vision, during which one experiences the call, is a moment of experiencing one's most authentic way of being towards the call. Such a moment, or an hour, is a revolution since it gives meaning and direction to one's future possibilities, but also retroactively frames and gives meaning to one's past.

By calling one to work in exciting directions, the vocation calls forth both the world and one's way of being-in-the-world, or one's character. A vocation is more foundational than

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[599] Ibid., p. 143

a talent since whereas a talent can give meaning to a portion of the world, a vocation is what gives meaning to the world as such and unity to one's character. A vocation unifies one's way of being-in-the-world so that the vocation is apparent in everything one does. Emerson distinguishes the self-reliant person, whose vocation motivates her entire life, from the self-unreliant person whose way of being is not motivated or unified by an ultimate concern.[600] In "Self-Reliance," Emerson writes,

> The object of the man, the aim of these moments, is to make daylight shine through him, to suffer the law to traverse his whole being without obstruction, so that on what point soever of his doing your eye falls it shall report truly of his character, whether it be his diet, his house, his religious forms, his society, his mirth, his vote, his opposition. Now he is not homogeneous, but heterogeneous, and the ray does not traverse; there are no through lights, but the eye of the beholder is puzzled, detecting many unlike tendencies and a life not yet at one.[601]

The self-reliant person's life is organized around an ultimate concern, and that concern organizes and colors her actions. One whose life is self-reliantly organized by a vocation to environmentalism will act in everyday ways that conform with this ultimate concern for the environment: not only her willful choices, but her talents, her way of comporting herself, and her understanding of herself, others, and the world are gathered around her concern for environmentalism. One who fails to heed the call or who self-unreliantly turns from the call lives a conflicted life in an unorganized world; her projects are laborious and unexciting; she plods along eager for distraction in a murky and unwelcoming world.

Because the vocation gives meaning to every part of a life in a unified and coherent way, self-reliance cannot come about through the satisfaction of partial desires, arbitrary

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[600] See the discussion below on Tillich's elaboration of faith as a state of concentrated and directed living in relation to an object of ultimate concern.

[601] "Self-Reliance," p. 187

choices, or self-construction. The vocation—or as Emerson calls it here, one's character—makes sense of one's everyday actions. He writes,

> No man can violate his nature. All the sallies of his will are rounded by the law of his being… We pass for what we are. Character teaches above our wills… There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions, so they be each honest and natural in their hour… Your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.[602]

All people act in incoherent and inconsistent ways, but Emerson thinks these inconsistencies are merely apparent inconsistencies when we consider self-reliant actions. Self-reliant actions, those that manifest the spontaneous movements of thought, all serve to indicate one's vocation and one's relation to that vocation. Even when those actions seem contrary or out of line with a rational pursuit of one's vocation, they indicate the circuitous psychic routes by which a person is driven towards their end.[603]

Norris helpfully shows how the Emersonian vocation announces itself in relationships. His understanding of the role of the exemplar develops many of the same lines about perfectionistic self-development that I have developed here under the theme of friendship. The exemplar is a person who lives well and becomes who she is, and thus puts me to shame insofar as I have failed to become who I am. The exemplar provokes a feeling of shame at my attained self and motivates me to work towards becoming my more developed, unattained self. In this way, one becomes free to become who one is through the action of the exemplar. Norris discusses the exemplar's emancipatory action as a refiguration of the Kantian idea of autonomy

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[602] Ibid., p. 138

[603] The human pursuit of desire along circuitous paths is one of Lacan's basic contributions to psychoanalysis. Whereas Freud posited an opposition and struggle between the drives to explain why people pursue happiness by unhappy means, Lacan described the death drive and the sex drive as a single force, showing that one's failures and frustrations are surplus enjoyments along the way of pursuing, and denying oneself, one's object. See: *Ecrits*, p. 53

as obeying the law that one gives to oneself. He writes that one's attraction to the example of the exemplar takes the place of submission to the law in Kant.[604] Because one's freedom runs through the figure of the exemplar, Norris notes, the exemplar "threatens to reduce this rethinking of Kantian autonomy to a novel form of heteronomy."[605] But Norris is right that for Cavell and Emerson (and, as I show below, for Nietzsche and Heidegger), "heteronomy is precisely what the exemplary other forecloses."[606] One is attracted to the exemplar and to one's project of self-becoming in a way that is truly emancipatory. This is not the form of politically submissive commitment that Newfield fears Emerson introduced into U.S. culture,[607] but a commitment that draws one into the process of making decisions and speaking for oneself. In Cavell's work, this emancipatory commitment takes the form of attraction or reception. The exemplar does not offer a path to follow, and the idea is not that I should do and become what the exemplar has done and become. The exemplar is exemplary in her capacity to become herself and thus she provokes me to become myself. Norris rightly points out that our attraction to the exemplar (or our relationship with the friend) provokes one to become oneself "by averting oneself from and in conformity… The exemplary other inspires my conversion, my 'revolutionizing' of myself, and does so by performing just such a conversion on himself."[608]

Norris opposes attraction, the "rightful call we have upon one another," to the skeptic's handsome clutching and drive for mastery.[609] He continues, "The attraction here is to another who represents or exemplifies what I might be but am not now. The exemplary other… will

[604] Norris., p. 211
[605] Norris, p. 210
[606] Norris, p. 213
[607] See Chapter One for my discussion of Newfield's *The Emerson Effect*
[608] Norris., p. 212
[609] Norris, p. 210

correct the individual's self-misunderstandings" and open the way to a virtuous community.[610] Though Norris does not explicitly equate the exemplar with the friend—perhaps to leave room for other less friendly exemplary relationships—his language and use of Cavell has friendly tones. Norris quotes Cavell's characterization of this attraction as "the relation to the friend." Norris comes close to Aristotle's definition of the friend as another myself when he writes, "The exemplary other is for me (is the other he is) because I recognize myself in him."[611] Carlson discusses the other who frees one to oneself and one's world in terms of the teacher. He, along with Cavell and Norris, thinks this educative love (for Carlson, all love is potentially educative, playing "a singular and indispensable role in the educative work of liberation and creative self-surpassing"[612]) can exist in other relationships including those with nature, one's children, and parents.

Grounded in an active engagement with the world, Emerson's notion of freedom and self-becoming only emerges in the actualization of a free and flourishing life. One need not know who one is in advance because one learns who one is in becoming who one is. For Emerson, the call reaches from the depths of one's divine interior and opens before one a world of fulfilling action. In conversations with friends—through the example of exemplars, conversations with teachers, life with family, and encounters with nature—one hears the call echoed and finds the provocation to become who one is.

Nietzsche

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[610] Ibid.
[611] Ibid., pp. 210-211
[612] P. 184

The notion of freedom as emerging from commitment and unfreedom is a motif that runs throughout Nietzsche's philosophy. This is a consequence of Nietzsche's naturalism and theory of the will to power. For Nietzsche, living a human life is to create oneself within the limits imposed by nature and circumstance. Since he denies free will, he thinks one creates oneself by having a direction, which one pursues committedly. The incapacity for having such a direction, and thus for authentic freedom, characterizes the way of life of the wandering last humans. He discusses other examples of freedom emerging from constraint in the way users of language, artists, and poets are freed through their use of conventions, the way ascetic practices allow one to achieve goals, and in the way the sovereign individual becomes sovereign through her protracted will. The overt relationship between self-love (*Selbstsucht*) and self-discipline (*Selbstzucht*), which Nietzsche plays with in many places throughout his oeuvre, is lost in English translation.[613]

He discusses the unfree and uncommitted person in terms of a wanderer, a figure similar in important ways to the last human: "Wanderer, who are you? I see you walking on your way without scorn, without love, with unfathomable eyes."[614] Wandering is the state of a life that lacks a concentrating and directing vocation. Wanderers lack a vocation and so rove from the indulgence of one talent or desire to the next in an ununified way, having no sense of who they are. The wanderer lacks scorn as well as love, either of which could serve as a calling, directing principle. Nietzsche's critical take on wandering here seems at odds with what he writes about the nihilistic potential of goal directed living and the emphasis placed upon the Dionysian enjoyment of becoming by readers such as Taylor. For Taylor, wandering or erring

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[613] Cf., *EH*, "Why I am so Clever," section 9, p. 254
[614] *Beyond Good and Evil*: Section 278, pp. 223-24

is a philosophical and a/theological method of thinking and becoming that overcomes the dialectical epistemology and teleological metaphysics of Western thought. After the death of God, Taylor's a/theological human subject is revealed as an unstable function of the interplay of complex and uncountable forces, a subject readily found in Nietzsche. Whereas Christian metaphysics describes humanity as fallen from a state of grace, plentitude, and perfection into a temporary sojourn in the temporal world that ultimately ends in a return to completion in God, Taylor sees lack and errancy as primordial to the a/theological subject. For Taylor, the original and ultimate states of completion are fantasies used to narrativize and justify a life and history that ought to be valued as they are, without recourse to the justifying logic of a teleological eschatology and soteriology. Erring and wandering calls "into question the exclusive opposition between what is and what ought to be," so that "becoming no longer needs to be validated by reference to past or future but can be valued at every moment."[615]

While ungrounded wandering without an ultimate and final goal is certainly one aspect of Nietzsche, he also affirms the usefulness and propaedeutic function of aims that are not final, but merely useful errors and untruth. Life should have direction and desiderata without those desiderata becoming teleological sources of meaning or justifications for the world and life. Even Taylorian wandering and erring, while free of any telos or goal orientation, would seem to have a direction, however provisional and unstable, insofar as it is in motion. Nietzsche's logic on this point can be unpacked in terms of the Tillich's notion of ultimate faith and the God beyond being. Tillich explains that faith is always directed at something, even though one most often has no explicit awareness of the contents of one's own ultimate

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[615] Taylor, *Erring*, p. 157

concern.[616] In *The Courage to Be*, Tillich describes the object of one's faith not as a telos or goal, but as that which gives one direction and concentration. In the face of anxiety about doubt and the meaninglessness of the world, one can flee to faith in idolatrous and historical images of God, or one can courageously turn towards absolute faith in the ground of being beyond theistic concepts of God.[617] For Tillich (and for Nietzsche), the death of God means that theistic concepts of God fail to provide meaning to the modern world and so modern humans are driven "either to nihilism or to the courage which takes nonbeing into itself."[618] Theistic concepts of God serve a purpose—Nietzsche would call them useful errors that reveal the value of error—the problem is not with theistic concepts but with the way one relates to such concepts when they fail. In a section of *Gay Science* titled "In favour of criticism," Nietzsche writes, "Something you formerly loved as a truth or a probability now strikes you as an error; you cast it off and believe your reason has made a victory. But maybe that error was necessary for you then, when you were still another person—you are always another person—as are all your present 'truths.'"[619] Nietzsche writes Taylor writes that the death of God "is felt both as a loss and a liberation. It drives one either to nihilism or to the courage which takes nonbeing into itself."[620] On Tillich's account, one can mature to absolute faith only by having experienced the doubt and meaninglessness that comes with the failure of theism in the modern world. If Nietzsche values aims it is not as teloi that provide narrative cohesion and meaning to a life, but as responses to the world that give direction to and concentrates the play of forces

[616] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 17
[617] Tillich, *Courage to Be*, p. 182
[618] Ibid., p. 143
[619] Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, section 307, pp. 174-75
[620] Ibid.

underlying the Nietzschean self. This concentration is a love, or a habit, or an error that one can have and loose, and by losing regain oneself in a more mature and healthy way.

Opposed to the wandering last humans are those healthy and creative humans who aim at creating beyond themselves the Overman—a non-teleological aim without explicit content and which is always deferred, but which clears a direction in Nietzsche's thought about the human and its health. Whereas Emerson understood the vocation in more plainly religious ways, as the voice of God manifest through the spontaneity of thought, Nietzsche articulates a non-metaphysical vocation on two distinct levels: human society as a whole is called to prepare the way for the Overman, and on the psychological level each individual is called through an organizing idea to become who she is. He writes of the Overman as a goal for humanity, one which gives a purpose and supports the meaningfulness of everyday life.

> Our very essence is to create a being higher than ourselves. We must create beyond ourselves. That is the instinct of procreation, that is the instinct of action and of work.—Just as all willing presupposes a purpose, so does mankind presuppose a creature which is not yet formed but which provides the aim of life. This is the freedom of all will. Love, reverence, yearning for perfection, longing, all these things are inherent in a purpose.[621]

The essential point for the current discussion is not merely that the Overman gives an aim to life, but that it is by having such an aim that life is made free. Where the wanderer lacks a unified direction, the Overman inspires love, reverence, yearning, and longing, which are ways of orienting oneself towards a life-and-world-ordering ultimate concern. In a section of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled "The desire for suffering," Nietzsche writes, "When I think of the desire to do something, how it continually tickles and goads the millions of young Europeans who cannot endure boredom and themselves, I realize that they must have a yearning to suffer

[621] *Twilight*, "Explanatory Notes to 'Thus Spake Zarathustra,'" section 45, p. 269

something to make their suffering a likely reason for action, for deeds. Neediness is needed!"[622] When he says that neediness is needed, he means the kind of πενία that Plato took to be essential for love. What is needed to combat modern decadence and the lack of a will to become oneself, is a goal that could inspire an absolute need. For a goal to be the kind of goal that can give direction to a life, it must be the kind of goal that is not optional because it is only by accomplishing it that one becomes who one is.

On the intrapsychic level of the individual, a life is organized through the domination of one of the drives, which begins in one's having a goal. Following Emerson, Nietzsche thinks the apparent inconsistencies and incoherence of a life are symptoms of the circuitous means by which humans pursue goals. Having a life that is organized around self-becoming allows one to love one's fate, including the pain. He writes, "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*… Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it… but *love* it."[623] If one has a commitment to become who one is, then fate, as the path of that becoming, becomes loveable. Fate is the circuitous path of detours and education necessary for one to become strong enough to become who one is. Amor fati is a love not only for oneself and the necessity of one's animal existence, but for the path by which one becomes oneself in the world. For Nietzsche, these apparent inconsistencies are the errors by which one is educated and the means by which one tames and prunes superfluous instincts to allow the ruling idea to rule. In *Ecce Homo*, he writes,

> The organizing 'idea' that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down—it begins to command; slowly it leads us back from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means towards a whole—one by one, it trains all *subservient*

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[622] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Section 56, p. 64
[623] Section 10

> capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, 'goal,' 'aim,' or 'meaning.'[624]

The organizing idea that subconsciously compels one towards a goal functions like the Emersonian vocation in its unchosen and unclear nature. A life is driven in unexpected directions to face challenges and develop scars whose meaning and usefulness can be understood only retrospectively. To avoid nihilism, one must be able to posit new goals, be the kind of person who can be called by those goals, and have those goals be the kinds of goals that can call one needfully. If one can posit goals that call one to live with commitment, then one can be free and authentically at home in a meaningful world.

Nietzsche contrasts the way the ancient Greeks cultivated commitments to their ruling ideas with the way modern humans are ruled by a democratic collective of ideas. In a section titled "Tyrants of the Spirit," he writes,

> In our age anyone who was so completely the expression of a single moral trait as are the characters of Theophrastus or Moliere would be regarded as sick and one would in his case speak of an *'idee fixe.'* The Athens of the third century would, if we could pay a visit, seem to us populated by fools. Nowadays the democracy of *concepts* rules in every head—*many together* are master: a single concept that *wanted* to be master would now, as aforesaid, be called an '*idee fixe.'* This is *our* way of disposing of tyrants—we direct them to the madhouse.[625]

On Nietzsche's account (which should be read in the mood of myth rather than history), the intersubjective pluralism of Athens has become the intrapsychic pluralism of modern people. Where the Athenians were individually excited and oriented by their fixed ideas, and thus able to engage in robust democratic debates and politics, the minds of modern people are nervously and nihilistically paralyzed under a dynamic pluralism of competing ideas that are never able

[624] *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Clever," section 9, p. 254
[625] *Human, All Too Human*, Book II: The Wanderer, "Tyrants of the Spirit," section 230, p. 368-369

to be finally ordered in a rational system. Political and social democracy worked in Athens since each person had meaning and freedom, a fixed idea that not only made sense of an individual life but made sense of the individual's life in the polis.

Whereas Emerson understood the vocation in explicitly religious and metaphysical terms, as the voice of God directing one's thoughts and life, Nietzsche thinks one must live one's life in relation to a goal that one posits. The goal must be self-posited, since one who is unable to posit goals is vulnerable to the nihilism of the death of God. But it is unclear how an animal without free will could posit anything, and positing a life orienting goal would be a supreme exercise of free will. He describes the phenomenology of learning to have and to let go of goals—to live in relation to something as if it was one's ultimate concern, but also in a way that one can transition to another—in terms of having brief habits and learning to love. A habit can be understood along the lines of an organizing idea, like the Athenians' fixed ideas. Because it is merely habitual and not essential, and especially because it is brief, a brief habit is a way of organizing one's being-in-the-world with regard to a goal that is temporal (though to which one must commit oneself eternally). Nietzsche writes,

> I love brief habits and consider them an invaluable means for getting to know *many* things and states down to the bottom of their sweetness and bitterness; my nature is designed entirely for brief habits, even in the needs of its physical health and generally *as far as* I can see at all, from the lowest to the highest. I always believe *this* will give me lasting satisfaction–even brief habits have this faith of passion, this faith in eternity–and that I am to be envied for having found and recognized it, and now it nourishes me at noon and in the evening and spreads a deep contentment around itself and into me, so that I desire nothing else, without having to compare, despise, or hate. And one day its time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that now disgusts me but peacefully and sated with me, as I with it, and as if we ought to be grateful to each other and so shake hands to say farewell. And already the new waits at the door along with my faith… and this new thing will be the right thing, the last

> right thing. This happens to me with dishes, thoughts, people, cities, poems, music, doctrines, daily schedules, and ways of living.[626]

Nietzsche describes habits as means to knowing things and to finding satisfaction. A habit organizes one's behavior around a central idea. In some cases (i.e., probably less in the cases of dishes and poems, and more in the cases of thoughts, doctrines, and ways of living) one has the faith in eternity, that this habitual obsession is enduring and will provide ongoing satisfaction. Nietzsche highlights a paradoxical temporality in his idea of a habit. While in the grips of a habit, one must experience the object of the habit as final, eternal, and total such that it can organize one's life and lend meaning to one's projects. Yet habits are mutable and may be replaced by other habits, which one takes up again in an eternal and total way. Brief habits are a model for a resilient and non-nihilistic orientation towards commitments that give meaning to one's projects.

The idea here is not that a multiplicity of brief habits give life meaning, but that such habits are an analogy for the kind of commitment one needs for one's projects to be meaningful. If habit is a way of giving oneself over to one's drives (and thus, with Cameron, we might even find in habit a form of impersonality), then habit can be seen as an indulgence and affirmation of one's becoming. When habits can be loved in their brevity, one the mutability and instability of these ways of being. The love of brief habits is the resilience and unending excitement of the Dionysian in the face of loss. Brief habits follow a logic structurally like the logic of productive errors in Nietzsche or conceptual articulations of God in Tillich. Brief habits, errors, and concepts of God eventually fail and become open to deconstruction, and thus play a role in pushing the subject beyond all idolatrous and nihilistic goals and toward

[626] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book IV, section 295

the ground of being (for Tillich) or the play of unconditioned becoming (for Nietzsche). The love of brief habits opens one up to becoming and new ways of being given over to oneself and one's drives without the nihilism, thoughtless distraction, and unproductive repetition of addiction, obsession, and rigid attachments without end.

Nietzschean goals are also non-teleological goals, since the positing of a telos is a route to nihilism when we fail to achieve our goals and, worse, when we realize that the telos has merely been attributed to the world. He discusses the problem with teleological views of the world and the possibility of non-teleological goals in section 12 of *The Will to Power*. Here, he describes how teleological goals can constitute meaning since they show how the process of living achieves something. Nihilism takes over when "one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*."[627] One might have ontic goals in one's life (e.g., to get a degree, to buy a house, to lose 10 pounds); these are goals that can be worked towards through ascetic practices, that give meaning to one's suffering, and that can be achieved or missed. But becoming and the living of a life are not able to be defined by these ontic goals since becoming and living a life aim at nothing—the unconditioned and unknown self beyond oneself.

Cavell's perfectionism is more radically open in its self-critical and hopeful disposition. Whereas I read Nietzsche's perfectionism as involving life orienting commitments to goals (which is to say, not commitment to a single goal that could become a telos), Cavell's perfectionism is less directed by goals than by the shining examples of exemplary people. As Norris explains, Weber (following Nietzsche) diagnosed modernity in terms of life's lacking an organizing principle. As Norris explains, such a principle, for Weber, requires "a resolute

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[627] *Will to Power*, section 12, "Decline of Cosmological Values," p. 12

commitment, [whereas] Cavell emphasizes the need for an open disposition—for hope."[628] Without a final goal, Nietzsche's and Cavell's perfectionism differs from traditional versions, which posit a clear telos in terms of a substantive account of human nature and human flourishing so that the methods of human development can be calculated.[629] Norris writes that "Cavell's perfectionism sharply deviates from this tradition in its refusal to describe in any detailed way what human nature is, or what its perfection would look like."[630] For the tradition, the goal helps one to know how to live and how to arrange the world to support that life. But Cavell wants one to live as "awake to one's life, and hence to those with whom one lives it."[631] This means finding meaning in one's own life and developing one's capacities in ways that support and reveal that meaning. As Norris writes, "The model of perfection he [Cavell] embraces is one that gives pride of place to autonomy, the ability of individuals and communities to develop their capacities in new and unexpected ways, to respond creatively to unanticipated and as-yet-unformulated claims and challenges, and to find new and richer ways of being."[632] We need goals that give life meaning without making other meaningful goals impossible; we need goals that prepare us for grander and further goals; we need love and brief

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[628] Norris, p. 221

[629] For a contemporary version of a substantive political perfectionism, see Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to human development and justice. Nussbaum posits a list of 10 capabilities central to a flourishing human life (E.g., life; bodily health; bodily integrity; imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; relations with other species; play; and political and material control over one's environment) (*Women and Human Development*, pp. 78-80). Nussbaum and Judith Butler have criticized one another over the issue of having a substantive telos, which Nussbaum thinks is necessary to support strong claims for justice, whereas Butler finds such claims to be paternalistic in silencing of local voices. Butler understands such political normativity in terms of "a violent circumscription of the possible—that is to say, certain lives are not considered lives, certain human capacities are not considered human" ("Changing the Subject," in *The Judith Butler Reader*, p. 355).

[630] Norris, p. 216

[631] Ibid.

[632] Ibid.

habits not opium and addiction. In having and striving for goals without a final goal one lives in a world that it exciting and full of meaning, and one lives a life that is always new. The issues of goals and directions in Nietzsche may be intractable since in his more Dionysian moods he affirms the radical affirmation of becoming, and yet elsewhere he repeatedly affirms and recommends directions, however vague, that lead away from decadence, sickness, and the denial of life. As he writes in *The Will to Power*,

> *Weakness of the will*: that is a metaphor that can prove misleading. For there is no will, and consequently neither a strong nor a weak will. The multitude and disgregation of impulses and the lack of any systematic order among them result in a "weak will"; their coordination under a single predominant impulse results in a "strong will": in the first case it is the oscillation and the lack of gravity; in the latter, the precision and clarity of the direction.

Such a life is given direction, if only temporarily, not by what Taylor calls the narrativizing and validating functions of teleological goals, but by the provisional and unstable ordering of the will to power.

That an unfree animal could be compelled to pursue a goal needfully is perhaps less mysterious than the claim that this unfree animal must *posit* its own goal. While a thoroughly satisfying solution to this problem may be logically impossible, we can get close to the phenomenology of an unfreely posited goal by understanding the positing of a goal in terms of the hospitality associated with falling in love or with having a great destiny. Freedom is associated with hospitality as a way of being open for that which excites a commitment and organizes a world. In "Friendship," Emerson wrote, "To have a friend, be a friend."[633] We could revise this for Nietzsche and write: To have a goal, be a lover of the world. Having a goal is not a willful act of articulating for oneself an explicit path to some concrete end; as if

[633] "Friendship," *EW*, p. 212

one could enumerate a set of qualities one desires in a friend then find that person and become great friends. Having a goal is a way of being open to being called by the world in an unyielding way. Being open to the call of the world as it comes from unexpected directions that shatter and remake our habitual ways of being is a resilience one must cultivate. This is what Nietzsche means when he says that we must learn to love and when he confesses his own love for brief habits. Zarathustra prays, "O thou my will! Thou cessation of all need, my *own* necessity! Keep me from all small victories! Thou destination of my soul, which I call destiny! Thou in-me! Over-me! Keep me and save me for a great destiny!"[634] Zarathustra addresses his will as his own necessity and destiny—even the destination of his soul, which, in more protestant terms, we could call his predestination. It is by having a destination—a destination that is a necessity and a destiny rather than a choice and so is encountered in the mode of predestination—that one becomes free.

Kierkegaard discusses the way of being non-nihilistically committed to a goal in his often-cited journal entry of August 1, 1835, where he equates truth with subjectivity. He writes,

> What I really need is to get clear about what I must do, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find a purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth for me, & to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die… Of what use would it be to me for truth to stand before me, cold and naked, not caring whether or not I acknowledged it, making me uneasy rather than trustingly receptive… This is what I needed to lead a completely human life and not merely one of knowledge, so that I could base the development of my thought not on — yes, not on something called objective — something which in any case is not my own, but upon something which is bound up with the deepest roots of my existence [Existents], through which I am, so to speak, grafted into the divine, to which I cling fast even though the whole world may collapse. This is what I need, and this is what I strive for.[635]

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[634] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part Three, "Old and New tablets," section 30, p. 326

[635] Journals & Papers of Søren Kierkegaard, IA. Entry from August 1, 1835. Available at <http://www.naturalthinker.net/trl/texts/Kierkegaard,Søren/JournPapers/I_A.html>. Accessed April 21, 2022.

Kierkegaard's point is not that all truth is radically subjective, but that what gives my life meaning must have the quality of truth for me. He does not want to suggest that scientific truth is meaningless, but rather that scientific truth, and all truth, can lend meaning to a life only if one encounters it as something one can strive for. There is a kind of objective, scientific, and natural truth, but these public truths are for most people not the kinds of truths that can orient and give meaning to a life. For Kierkegaard, the more urgent search for truth is not for truths about the natural world detached from human concern, but the truths that motivate my concern "at the deepest root of my existence." For Kierkegaard, a life is given meaning by having a truth for which it can strive.

In a section titled "One must learn to love" Nietzsche uses the example of learning to love a piece of music to think about the process by which one learns to love anything at all, including oneself. He writes, "This happens to us in music: first one must *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate and delimit it as a life in itself."[636] The first stage in learning to love is being able to recognize the other as an individual, unique from others—not merely unique in the manner that all individuals are unique, but unique in type as a potential object of my love. In music, learning to hear the individual parts of a composition is a process of being open to the piece of music through training the ear. The skillful familiarity that allows one to feel the contours of a piece is a loving commodiousness, a hospitality for all the fine distinctions the other has to offer, and not a calculative penetration, scientistic isolation, or theoretical analysis.

[636] *The Gay Science*, Book IV, section 334, p. 186

Once one has hospitably opened oneself to the other as a unique other, one needs to develop a greater hospitality for the intrusion of the other's strange and incalculable individuality. He writes, "then one needs effort and good will to *stand* it despite its strangeness; patience with its appearance and expression, and kindheartedness about its oddity."[637] Nietzsche thinks that once one trains the ear to hear a melody, there is a threat that one might reject the melody as strange and foreign in its newness. Nietzsche means something deeper than the everyday idea that loving another requires that one love the other along with all his unexpected quirks and the reality of his nakedness. More significantly, the intrusion of the loveable is a metaphysical revolution that threatens to disrupt the habits and rhythms of everyday life in fantastic ways. Love requires hospitality even when this strange intruder threatens to disturb the foundation of the world and turn one head over heels.

The third movement in learning to love is when the lover acquires a taste for the beloved's strangeness and the beloved becomes the object of the lover's desire. This implies a needfulness regarding the beloved's familiar otherness. "Finally comes a moment when we are *used* to it; when we expect it; when we sense that we'd miss it if it were missing; and now it comes to relentlessly compel and enchant us until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers, who no longer want anything better from the world than it and it again." At this point, the lover's world has been reorganized and made meaningful by care for the beloved. The lover's world would be deprived in significant ways if the beloved were missing because the beloved, as the object of an ultimate commitment, supports the meaningfulness of the world. He goes on,

> But this happens to us not only in music: it is in just this way that we have *learned to love* everything that we now love. We are always rewarded in the

[637] Ibid.

> end for our good will, our patience, our fair-mindedness and gentleness with what is strange, as it gradually casts off its veil and presents itself as a new and indescribable beauty. That is *its thanks* for our hospitality. Even he who loves himself will have learned it this way–there is no other way.[638]

Thus, for Nietzsche, love starts as ξενία and ends as πενία. For Nietzsche, the beloved is not merely a gratuitous gift from the world. It takes work on the part of the lover to become hospitable and commodious, not only for the arrival of the gift of a beloved, but, with even more generous hospitality, to be lovers of the world.[639]

If self-love follows a similar process of education, then we can understand why proper self-lovers are rare: since it is likely more difficult to know oneself than to know another, and many never learn to hear their own melody. If one is to love oneself, one must also be ready to love the constitutive strangeness in oneself and be courageously open to becoming oneself though that project can never be clear or secure and must be experienced as a giving over of one's ego in radical hospitality to who one is. Learning to love provides a model for how an animal who lacks free will could posit for itself a goal: not through the consumerist model of choice and consumption as if there were a series of equally available and acceptable goals ready for the choosing, but on the model of a self-therapy that makes one a hospitable and commodious lover of the world. Zarathustra's prayer continues, "That I may one day be ready and ripe in the great noon... ready for myself and my most hidden will: a bow lusting for its arrow, an arrow lusting for its star… a sun itself and an inexorable solar will, ready to annihilate in victory!"[640] One who is lovingly open to the world is a bow lusting for an arrow, ready to

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[638] Ibid.

[639] I take the issue of learning to love to be at the foundation of much of Derrida's political philosophy, which is often greatly concerned with the status of refugees and immigrants. See, for example, his article "Hostipitality," where he confronts the challenges of hospitality in a sometimes-unfriendly world.

[640] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part Three, "Old and New Tablets," section 30, pp. 326-327

be excited towards myriad goals. But all one can do is ripen and ready oneself for the coming of one's hidden will.

Paul Tillich develops his radical theology and concept of faith as a response to these issues in Nietzsche. Tillich takes up the existentialist and psychoanalytic position—given various formulations by philosophers not limited to Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger—that one's identity is given shape and cohesion by something or someone in the world to which one relates through desire or care.[641] Tillich's explicitly theological contribution to this discussion

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[641] The self-certainty of Descartes's self-confirming consciousness that is certain of itself because it is aware of itself thinking and doubting has been the target of critiques by philosophers who emphasize the essentially intersubjective nature of existence. In *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel claims that "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (paragraph 178, p. 111). Recognition is foundational for Hegelian subjectivity. I cannot know myself to be how I take myself to be unless others also take me to be in that way. The need for intersubjective recognition of one's identity and the desire to have others take one as one takes oneself to be is the motivation for Hegel's much discussed master-slave dialectic.

In the opening pages of *Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard provides a conceptual explanation of the emancipatory potential of commitment. In these passages, Kierkegaard develops a Hegelian notion of subjectivity in existentialist directions. Kierkegaard describes the self as, "a relation that relates itself to itself," but then modifies this by adding that the self is not the relation, but "the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation." Kierkegaard emphasizes the active and temporal dimension of selfhood by qualifying his statement in this way. Kierkegaard explains the self as a synthesis between the infinite-eternal-free and the finite-temporal-necessary. But again, the self is not a settled relationship between these relata, but the relation's relating to itself. In more Heideggerian terms, we can think of the relation's relating to itself as the relation taking a stand on itself, and we can say the self is defined by the stand it takes on its being (i.e., its synthetic relation).

Kierkegaard thinks that an entity defined as a relation that relates itself to itself must originate in one of two ways: it "must either have established itself or have been established by another" (*Sickness Unto Death*, p. 14). He argues that since the human self is subject to two types of despair, logically it must have been established by another. He says that a self that established its own foundation could despair only in the form of not willing "to be oneself," willing to "do away with oneself," and thus establishing oneself anew or ending one's existence (ibid). Only a self that is established by another could "in despair… will to be oneself" (ibid.). In despair to will to be oneself is a way of saying that the self must always be in the position of taking a stand on its existence, despairing at the constitutively unsettled nature of selfhood. He adds that a self takes a stand on its existence by taking a stand on "another." Kierkegaard writes, "This second formulation is specifically the expression for the complete dependence of

posits faith as the organizing principle of an identity. In *Dynamics of Faith*, he writes that "personality is not possible without faith"[642] and that faith is a necessary aspect of human existence. He understands faith in terms of one's ultimate concern, so that one's identity is gathered towards that for which one is ultimately concerned, be it one's country, pursuit of success, love, or religion. One's ultimate concern gives meaning to one's world and one's life.

> As the ultimate concern is the ground of everything that is, so ultimate concern is the integrating center of the personal life. Being without it is being without a center. Such a state, however, can only be approached but never fully reached, because a human being deprived completely of its center would cease to be a human being. For this reason one cannot admit that there is any man without an ultimate concern or without faith. The center unites all elements of a man's personal life… Faith… is the centered movement of the whole personality toward something of ultimate meaning and significance.[643]

Tillich understands faith to be absolutely essential for human freedom and moral action. Thus, he reiterates the essentially Protestant logic, which we saw in Emerson and Nietzsche, of a freedom that emerges through commitment. Tillich writes, "Faith is a matter of freedom. Freedom is nothing more than the possibility of centered personal acts. The frequent discussion in which faith and freedom are contrasted could be helped by the insight that faith is a free, namely, centered act of the personality. In this respect freedom and faith are identical."[644]

To understand how faith could be the basis of freedom, we need to understand Tillich's concept of faith as a self-affirming relation to the ultimate. He rejects the naive understanding of faith as leaping over or bridging a cognitive gap so that one believes something otherwise

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the relation (of the self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating itself to that which has established the entire relation" (ibid.) For Kierkegaard and for Hegel, the self becomes a self through its relation to another.

[642] *Dynamics*, p. 20

[643] *Dynamics*, p. 106

[644] *Dynamics*, p. 5

unbelievable. As he writes, "Faith is not an opinion but a state. It is the state of being grasped by the power of being."[645] Faith is an organized and directed way of living grounded in the receptive structure of grace (or Emersonian thinking, or what I have called Nietzschean love for the world) towards one's ultimate concern. The object of one's ultimate concern is not the object of one's choice: it calls and grasps one, in Caputo's terms "insisting."[646]

Tillich's faith can be understood as an antithesis to existential anxiety. Tillich takes up the Heideggerian and Freudian distinction between fear, as an emotion directed at concrete things in the world, and anxiety, as a general underlying unease that is directed at nothing in the world because it is directed at death. Whereas anxiety is directed at nothing, he writes of faith that "there is no faith without a content towards which it is directed,"[647] "be it nation, success, a god, or the God of the Bible."[648] Whereas anxiety threatens one with the dissolution of one's life, faith provides its cohesion. Whereas anxiety is directed ultimately at the possibility of the end of all possibilities, faith is the promise of new and sustained possibilities.

Tillich understands faith as one's way of relating to one's ultimate concern and, ideally, to the ultimate itself. He writes that to have an ultimate concern is to be "grasped by the ultimate."[649] But Tillich's death of God theology emerges precisely here over his recognition that an ultimate concern that organizes a life and world might become unbelievable. Tillich

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[645] *Courage*, p. 173

[646] Caputo describes the phenomenology of divine insistence in terms of a call from the event beyond the horizon of the possible. As beyond being, God does not exist but rather insists. "I treat the name of God as the name of an inexistence, an insistence, a call that is visited upon us and demands our response, so that God and the divine omnipresence are more radically emptied into the world. 'God, perhaps' means that the name of God is the name of the chance event, one of the names, one of the events, which are innumerable and impossible." (*The Insistence of God*, p. 13)

[647] *Courage*, p. 10

[648] *Dynamics*, p. 17

[649] Ibid., p. 99

thinks faith that is directed at images and concepts of God is an idolatrous faith that necessarily eventually reveals itself as insufficient to the ultimate God beyond concepts.[650] The failure of idolatrous faith leads to existential despair, or what Nietzsche called nihilism:

> In idolatrous faith preliminary, finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy. The inescapable consequence of idolatrous faith is 'existential disappointment'... This is the dynamics of idolatrous faith: that it is faith, and as such, a centered act of the personality; that the centering point is something which is more or less on the periphery; and that, therefore, the act of faith leads to a loss of the center and to a disruption of the personality.[651]

Having an idol as the object of one's ultimate concern means organizing a life around a concern for something that is not able to provide cohesion to a life because it is not ultimate and will eventually be seen as such. Losing this kind of ultimate concern makes the world meaningless and disrupts the cohesion of a life. Nietzsche provides several ways for thinking about how to respond to nihilism. Above, I showed how Nietzsche describes a method of learning to love;

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[650] Transcendentalists often espoused apophatic or neoplatonic theology that figure God as infinite and eternal, and thus beyond all concepts. The recognition of divinity beyond symbolic representations in ritual was part of Emerson's motivation for breaking with Unitarianism over the issue of the Eucharist, as well as the idea, as Norris points out, that Emerson had come to consider the individual a site of revelation (p. 181). Donald Gelphi reiterates these ideas in his excellent account of Emerson's religious life. Gelphi agrees with standard readings of Emerson's turn to intuition as a response to skepticism, arguing that "such a God eludes sensory perception. Nor will any analytic argument for God's existence satisfy the mind's drive to self-evident truth. Gelphi argues that it was not skepticism alone but also "the lure of religious enthusiasm" for this God of intuition that drove Emerson to break with Unitarianism (pp. 6-17). The God beyond concepts is at the heart of Dickinson's religiosity, for example in the height of a mystical encounter where she writes, "Infinitude – Had'st Thou no Face?" ("564," pp. 274-75). Also, in poem "694," where she describes how people shrink from glory in order to worship "that small Deity." See, too, poem "765," (p. 374), where she writes how her own relationship with God is based on the removal of relative ideas and the adjustment of herself to God beyond the idolatry of concepts.

> The Absolute – removed
> The Relative away –
> That I unto Himself adjust
> My slow idolatry –

[651] Ibid., p. 12

Tillich builds his response in terms of Nietzschean courage, which he develops as absolute faith.

In *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich discusses courage as a faith that takes doubt into itself, as an expression of faith's finitude and as a higher affirmation of the ultimate. Courageous faith "does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction."[652] To avoid existential disappointment, faith should courageously accept that the concrete objects of faith might prove to be idols. Tillich writes of faith, "It is aware of the element of insecurity in every existential truth. At the same time, the doubt which is implied in faith accepts this insecurity and takes it into itself in an act of courage. Faith includes courage. Therefore, it can include doubt about itself."[653] Part of the reason the traditional Christian morality ends in nihilism is that, as Nietzsche and Freud point out, it cannot enjoy its contents while also doubting them.[654] A morality that could courageously accept into itself its own self-doubt—along the lines of Kierkegaard's Abraham's faith by virtue of the absurd[655]—would be a morality that need not

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[652] Ibid., p. 101

[653] Ibid., p. 20

[654] Nietzsche discusses how Christianity promotes a morality that insists upon and takes for granted the value of truth. The question of the value of truth for life, and whether we might find more enjoyment in falsity or evil is the starting point for much of Nietzsche's moral philosophy. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 4, he writes, "The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment." Freud discusses this in *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he describes the illusory character of art as opposed to the delusion of religion. Whereas illusions can be "recognized as such without the discrepancy between them and reality being allowed to interfere with enjoyment" (p. 50), delusions require belief.

[655] In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard discusses Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as a supreme act of faith since Abraham believed, by virtue of the absurd, that he would get Isaac back. "But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac. By virtue of resignation, that rich young man should have given away everything, but if he had done so, then the knight of faith would have said to him: By virtue of the absurd, you will get every penny back again—believe it!" (*Fear*

become dysfunctional and unbelievable because it has become doubtful.[656] "We are never able to bridge the infinite distance between the infinite and the finite from the side of the finite. This alone makes the courage of faith possible. The risk of failure, of error and of idolatrous distortion can be taken, because the failure cannot separate us from what is our ultimate concern."[657] Tillich's faith recognizes that eventually any concrete content of concern must become unbelievable. His faith is resilient against the threat that these contents might lose their meaning because it aims at the ultimate ground of being beyond all concrete contents.

Beyond courageously incorporating its own self-doubt, Tillich's absolute faith is resilient even when its object of ultimate concern is revealed as an idol and becomes unbelievable. This is the faith that sustains Tillich in-spite of the death of God, which he takes to be the death of concepts of God rather than the death of God as God is for God. Tillich's signaling of a God beyond concepts and being seems sometimes similar to apophatic, Neoplatonic mystical theologies such as Plotinus's "One" beyond being, the Pseudo-Dionysius's "hyperousia,"[658] or Meister Eckhart's *er war was er war* (i.e., he was what he was).[659] Tillich distinguishes his position from apophaticism since whereas these theologians see concepts as preliminary and propaedeutic to an experience of God, Tillich thinks in the modern world concepts have become unbelievable and meaningless. In *The Courage to Be*,

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and Trembling, p. 56). This absurdity is the suspension of the universal and the knight of faith's acceptance of infinite resignation.

[656] Morality vs. moralism as perfectionism and the courage to be: these are ideas in Tillich that will become important in the discussion below of Heidegger. Tillich's courage, and Nietzsche's love, should be understood alongside Heidegger's resolute being (*Entschlossenheit*).

[657] p. 105

[658] *On the Divine Names*, Chapter II. 7

[659] Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, p. 200

Tillich describes the courageous faith that has incorporated doubt and meaninglessness as "absolute faith":

> The faith which creates the courage to take them [i.e., doubt and meaninglessness] into itself has no special content. It is simply faith, undirected, absolute. It is undefinable, since everything defined is dissolved by doubt and meaninglessness… A faith which has been deprived of any concrete content, which nevertheless is faith and the source of the most paradoxical manifestation of the courage to be.[660]

Having lost believable concepts of God due to doubt and meaninglessness, absolute faith aims beyond all concepts at the absolute. He writes, "It is without a special content, yet it is not without content. The content of absolute faith is the 'God above God.'"[661] Absolute faith is resilient against nihilism in the wake of the death of God because, as Tillich reads Nietzsche, the death of God signals the death of the idolatrous God of concepts, not the absolute God above God to which one relates in absolute faith. He writes, "Theism in all its forms is overcome in the experience we have called absolute faith. It is the accepting of the acceptance without somebody or something that accepts. It is the power of being-itself that accepts and gives the courage to be."[662] Tillich thinks that atheism is the logical response to theism and that absolute faith is anchored in God beyond being.

Tillich finds in Nietzsche a response to the death of God and nihilism similar to that discussed above in brief habits, though where brief habits have a less metaphysical implication about a succession of objects of concern, Tillich's courageous absolute faith moves from an idol of God to the ground of being beyond all objects. This can be understood as a radical version of the Augustinian logic of a rightly ordered *caritas* that loves only God and other

[660] *Courage*, pp. 176-77
[661] p. 182
[662] p. 185

things in God. This is a guard against nihilism since even if one loses the idolatrous object of one's ultimate concern, one maintains a courageous faith directed beyond individual idols at the ultimate. In *Dynamics of Faith*, he writes,

> Every faith has a concrete element in itself. It is concerned about something or somebody. But this something or somebody may prove to be not ultimate at all. Then faith is a failure in its concrete expression, although it is not a failure in the experience of the unconditional itself. A god disappeared; divinity remains. Faith risks the vanishing of the concrete god in whom it believes. It may well be that with the vanishing of the god the believer breaks down without being able to re-establish his centered self by a new content and ultimate concern.[663]

Like Augustine's caritas—which aims beyond the useful objects of the world at that which alone is truly loveable, God—Tillich's faith aims beyond the doubtful and meaningless concepts of God to the absolute. This rightly ordered faith can survive the loss of the conceptual idol without falling into nihilism in the way of the young Augustine after the death of his friend. Love reveals myriad exciting opportunities for the creative exploration and development of one's capabilities with and for other people and thus is, as Dickinson describes it, "The Exponent of the Earth."[664] Love sustains a resilient world of myriad possibilities and commitments that can lend meaning to a life.

Nietzsche is on one account more hopeful than Tillich, since Nietzsche thinks one can respond to the death of God and the loss of meaning by cultivating a loving and commodious relationship to the world. Tillich thinks absolute faith and the resilience not to break down after the death of God are part of the structure of being, but also granted by grace to some people more than others in a way that is entirely out of human hands. In his more Nietzschean moments, Tillich ascribes courage to the nature of being itself, as that by which being

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[663] *Dynamics*, p. 18
[664] Dickinson, "917," p. 432

overcomes non-being in order to exist. In these moments, Tillich describes the courage to be in ways reminiscent of Nietzsche's will to power. He writes,

> Being has nonbeing 'within' itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life. The ground of everything that is not a dead identity without movement and becoming; it is living creativity. Creatively it affirms itself, eternally conquering its own nonbeing. As such it is the pattern of the self-affirmation of every finite being and the source of the courage to be.[665]

Tillich even echoes Nietzsche's naturalism when he claims that biology conditions the courage to be of individuals and cultures:

> Neurotic individuals and neurotic periods are lacking in vitality. Their biological substance has disintegrated. They have lost the power of full self-affirmation, of the courage to be. Whether this happens or not is the result of biological processes, it is biological fate. The periods of a diminished courage to be are periods of biological weakness in the individual and in history.[666]

Where Nietzsche and Tillich agree on the givenness—we might say, the predestination—of one's strength, courage, and capacity to affirm oneself, they part ways when Nietzsche makes room for learning to love while Tillich relies upon grace.

Tillich writes that the courage to be is bestowed through grace: "Courage is a possibility dependent not on will power or insight but on a gift which precedes action… The power of 'self-affirmation in spite of,' i.e. the courage to be, is a matter of fate… Religiously speaking, it is a matter of grace."[667] We must remember to read Tillich's grace non-theistically as "a gift which precedes action" without presuming there is a giver of the gift. In bringing together the ideas of courage (i.e., the way out of nihilism), the gift, and grace, Tillich leaves nothing to be done by individuals. As we have seen, Tillich describes faith as a "centered movement of the

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[665] p. 34
[666] p. 79
[667] *Courage*, p. 84

whole personality toward something of ultimate meaning and significance."[668] But this does not mean that faith can be chosen or willed, rather all people have faith since no human exists without a center that corresponds to something of ultimate concern. Faith is something common to all people, but the courage to direct faith beyond idols to the ultimate ground of being is something outside the hands of the individual following the logic of gratuitous grace. He writes that some people are given more courage than others: "The integrating power of faith… is dependent on the subjective and objective factors. The subjective factor is the degree to which a person is open for the power of faith, and how strong and passionate is his ultimate concern. Such openness is what religion calls 'grace.' It is given and cannot be produced intentionally."[669] The subjective factor of faith, one's openness for the power of faith "is given and cannot be produced." While Tillich argues that faith and courage are conditions of all human life, he also makes the claim that some people are given more courage than others. Because it is "given and unable to be produced intentionally" there is nothing one can do to cultivate courage, some people are just left less open and less courageous than others.

Bringing Tillich and Nietzsche together over the question of the aftermath and the response to the death of God brings out a constellation of ideas at the heart of Christian theology: grace, free will, learning, and loving. Where Tillich describes courage as a gratuitous gift, I have shown how Nietzsche provides a curriculum for learning to love. In considering the relationship between grace and learning to love, we chart a more subtle distinction than that debated between Augustine and Pelagius, since Nietzsche is no Pelagian. To understand this, we must interrogate the kind of freedom that characterizes learning and particularly

[668] *Dynamics,* p. 106
[669] *Dynamics*, p. 109

learning to love. Such learning is a cultivation of what Carlson calls the essentially childlike or student-like quality of humanity and of each human as incomplete and called to exploration, development, and "ongoing birth."[670] This is an ongoing birth of the self that invites an ongoing birth of the world.

The cultivation of the love of the world in Nietzsche, is the opening of a heart, which is not an act of the will. When Nietzsche describes his propaedeutic for learning to love, it is striking that one learns to love not through the willful practicing of the skill of loving, but by opening one's heart through silence, patience, and hospitality (a radical hospitality, free of hostility or conditions). One can be patient and hospitable, but whether love shows up, and whether patience and hospitality will become having learned to love are questions to which the world must respond. Learning to love opens one to love without producing love, which remains a gratuitous gift that is in no way an act of the will. It is something that arrives, if it arrives, by one's undoing. In a radical hospitality and commodiousness that is finally not kenotic since it is in this way that the self is revealed in its loving. Unlike grace and the gift that always precedes action, loving is a gift for which one can prepare the way although it always exceeds action, arriving from beyond the horizon of one's possibilities.

Where Tillich focuses on the theological consequences of the death of God, Mark C. Taylor also brings to light the anthropological significance of this death. For Taylor, the death of God corresponds to the emergence of a self-centered and egoistic subject supported by the ethics and politics of modern capitalist choice and consumption. Taylor writes,

> When man is represented as the image of God, the self also appears to be self-identical, self-present, and self-conscious. The *proper* theological subject is the solitary self, whose self-consciousness assumes the form of an individual 'I' that defines itself by opposition to and transcendence of other isolated subjects.

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[670] *With the World at Heart*, P. 175

> Such a self is primarily and essentially a *unique individual*. The ostensible uniqueness… of the autonomous subject is a function of its separateness from everything else.[671]

Reading the course of subjectivity through Hegel's master-bondsman dialectic, Taylor thinks that as this modern subject attempts to separate and distinguish itself from others, it undergoes an (often highly destructive) process that leads to the realization of "unavoidable commonality, which grows out of inevitable relationships with others."[672] Taylor starts from the logical truism that in order to separate and distinguish oneself, one requires others from whom one has become distinguished and separate. He goes on to make the more interesting, Nietzschean claim, that the subject is a temporal and temporary intersection in a network of forces that defy understanding and rational choice. He writes,

> Fabricated from transecting eccentric structure, the deindividualized subject is never centered in itself. This is not to imply that a secure, definable center can be located outside the individual. To the contrary, the noncentered relational network in which the self is entwined decenters the subject and thereby establishes the *radical* eccentricity of subjectivity.[673]

Taylor's subjectivity is radically intersubjective, emerging as a temporal confluence of relations that outstrip the self and thus dispossess the self of itself. Taylor adds to this notion of networked and intersubjective subjectivity the additional Heideggerian claim that the subject is constituted through its own dispossession in terms of death.[674] Thus, the death of God is finally realized for Taylor in the a/theological death of the subject as defined through ownership, possession, and consumption. The main political implication of Taylor's view of

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[671] *Erring*, p. 130
[672] p. 132
[673] p. 139
[674] p. 140

subjectivity is that “With the realization of the total reciprocity of subjects, the entire foundation of the economy of domination crumbles.”[675]

Crumbling economies of domination, self-possession, and autarky are at the heart of Thomas Carlson’s recovery of mystical anthropology. A more authentic freedom is, as Carlson argues, based not in the self’s possession of itself, but along the lines sketched by Gregory of Nyssa and other mystical theologians, in the incomprehensibility of the self to itself. For Carlson, the capacity for human creativity emerges from the constitutively neotonic and incomprehensible nature of the human.[676] Self-creation does not take place through the assertion of one who says “I AM.” Rather as Carlson argues, ““I receive myself, as a self, only through relation to the outward and the strange, which thus constitute and condition me intimately.”[677] Where Taylor focuses on how one is constituted and emancipated through networks of relations in the world, Carlson brings out the significance of temporality and the self’s reliance on “temporal depths that I neither ground nor ever catch up with.”[678]

When Nietzsche discusses self-becoming in *Gay Science*, he is clear that he does not have in mind an autarchic self-creation on the model of Sartre,[679] but a becoming that is

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[675] p. 134
[676] Carlson develops this discussion in Chapter 1 of *The Indiscrete Image* and returns to it in *With the World at Heart* (pp. 164-166).
[677] Carlson, *With the World at Heart*, p. 168
[678] Ibid., p. 173
[679] On Sartrean autarchy see *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre describes the infinite responsibility and freedom of human existence insofar as it is condemned to freedom. He writes, “The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being… In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that *there* is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation… He must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it… It is senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are” (p. 576).

permeated by necessity—in these lines, the necessity of physics. Freedom is not in the willful direction of the drives, but in the positing of a necessary goal towards which one is driven once it has been posited. By positing a goal, the self gives direction to the otherwise uncoordinated drives. He writes,

> We, however, want to become who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! To that end we must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists in order to be creators in this sense… So long live physics![680]

As regular members of the natural world, humans are determined in essentially law governed ways under the influences of their environment, culture, education, and animal drives. Necessity runs through the world as it runs through human animals. Nietzsche wants human animals to become accepting and even celebratory of what is necessary in them, even if those necessities—drives for power and enjoyment—clash with traditional moralities. As a physicist, one becomes who one is not through the essentially consumeristic freedom of everyday choices—the positing of any random goal, or the choices and consumption associated with everyday life in capitalism—but by taking control of the conditions that support one's way of being. We take control of these conditions through the positing of goals and the taming of unhealthy and superfluous drives. Nietzsche writes, "OBEDIENCE in the same direction, there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living."[681] The needful pursuit of a goal makes suffering meaningful: it suggests ascetic practices and ways of ordering a life, it calls one towards the talented and skillful use of equipment, brings one into relations with others, and enriches the world. As Nietzsche explains

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[680] *Gay Science*, section 335, p. 189

[681] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book V, section 188

it, the human animal is constitutively constrained by its environment and body. Freedom is not freedom from these constraints, but freedom through the artful arrangement and addition of constraints.

Since Nietzsche thinks linguistic and artistic expression proceed by the same logic of freedom emerging from unfreedom, his ideas on creativity in the linguistic and artistic realms can shed light on his understanding of individual emancipation and self-development. Against the arbitrary and negative freedom of laisser-aller, Nietzsche describes emancipation through constraint: by constraining distracting and superfluous drives, we allow our healthy drives to grow and bring us closer to our goals. He writes,

> In contrast to laisser-aller, every system of morals is a sort of tyranny against "nature" and also against "reason", that is, however, no objection, unless one should again decree by some system of morals, that all kinds of tyranny and unreasonableness are unlawful. What is essential and invaluable in every system of morals, is that it is a long constraint. In order to understand Stoicism, or Port Royal, or Puritanism, one should remember the constraint under which every language has attained to strength and freedom—the metrical constraint, the tyranny of rhyme and rhythm. How much trouble have the poets and orators of every nation given themselves!—not excepting some of the prose writers of today, in whose ear dwells an inexorable conscientiousness—"for the sake of a folly," as utilitarian bunglers say, and thereby deem themselves wise—"from submission to arbitrary laws," as the anarchists say, and thereby fancy themselves "free," even free-spirited. The singular fact remains, however, that everything of the nature of freedom, elegance, boldness, dance, and masterly certainty, which exists or has existed, whether it be in thought itself, or in administration, or in speaking and persuading, in art just as in conduct, has only developed by means of the tyranny of such arbitrary law, and in all seriousness, it is not at all improbable that precisely this is "nature" and "natural"—and not laisser-aller![682]

Strength and freedom in language come about precisely through the constraints and rules of language. The additional constraints and conventions of poetic writing free the poet in artistic

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[682] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book V, section 188

directions unavailable to the essayist—thus, Emily Dickinson protests, "They shut me up in Prose."[683] Nietzsche goes on to make a similar point of artists in general:

> Every artist knows how different from the state of letting himself go, is his "most natural" condition, the free arranging, locating, disposing, and constructing in the moments of "inspiration"—and how strictly and delicately he then obeys a thousand laws, which, by their very rigidness and precision, defy all formulation by means of ideas (even the most stable idea has, in comparison therewith, something floating, manifold, and ambiguous in it).[684]

On Nietzsche's account, the artist's moments of inspiration are not experienced as the negative freedom to do any arbitrary thing, but as a compulsion to manifest inspiration. As Emerson writes in his journal, "No man can write well who thinks there is any choice of words for him. The laws of composition are as strict as those of sculpture & architecture… There is always a right word, & every other than it is wrong."[685] Manifestation of inspiration is a fully law-governed affair, though governed by laws that the artist incorporates and performs skillfully, rather than by having some explicit thematic and conceptual formulation of the laws. Emerson may be able to strike upon the only right word, but he could never provide a guidebook of explicit rules for producing this word. Nietzsche writes,

> Artists have here perhaps a finer intuition; they who know only too well that precisely when they no longer do anything "arbitrarily," and everything of necessity, their feeling of freedom, of subtlety, of power, of creatively fixing, disposing, and shaping, reaches its climax—in short, that necessity and "freedom of will" are then the same thing with them.[686]

If great creative achievement were the result of arbitrary choice, then any amateur would be well positioned for great productions, perhaps better positioned than the master trained in style

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[683] Dickinson, "613," p. 302
[684] Ibid.
[685] *JMN*, vol. 3, pp. 270-71
[686] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book VI, section 213

and convention. Great artists are freed to their great artistic productions precisely by their skillful familiarity with and subtle use of rules.

Nietzsche thinks that morals have this same capacity to lay the foundation for the emergence of supramoral and sovereign individuals. "One may look at every system of morals in this light: it is 'nature' therein which teaches to hate the laisser-aller, the too great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons, for immediate duties—it teaches the NARROWING OF PERSPECTIVES."[687] The narrowing of one's focus and the taming of the drives go along with being hospitable in the positing of a goal. Where being hospitable allows aspects of the world to become loveable, the narrowing of perspectives fixes one needfully on the goal. In *Genealogy of Morals*, he writes of the historical training of humanity in the "morality of mores" as the first step towards the emergence of the sovereign individual. Training in morals is a way in which human animals are made "to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and consequently calculable."[688] Through morality, people are made to be calculable in that they can be relied upon to behave in certain ways since they have been made uniform with one another. Morality tames the animal drives so that one can become a part of society. It is only among animals who have a degree of moral and social uniformity that a practice like promise keeping makes sense. But surprisingly, Nietzsche says it is only the individual who grows beyond the moral and social "straitjacket," the sovereign individual, who has the right to make promises.

The sovereign individual is free thanks to her protracted will, which enables her to cultivate the will to power. Significantly, the sovereign individual is defined not in terms of a

[687] *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book V, section 188
[688] *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay Two, section 2, p. 59

capacity to choose any arbitrary future. She is free precisely as a keeper of promises, which implies an immovable commitment. "His own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises*… The emancipated individual, with the actual *right* to make promises, the master of a *free* will."[689] If the sovereign individual is to keep promises, then the sovereign individual must be reliable and calculable (a quality conferred by her experience with morality), she must have a memory so that she can remember her promises, she must have the resilience to come through in spite of the appearance of obstacles and alternatives and, perhaps with more difficulty, the strength to control herself in order to ensure that the keeping of the promise is realized in the future. The sovereign individual is not freed through the use of free will, she is rather the master of free will, she is free in that she is able to tame the free will in light of a commitment.

The sovereign individual grows out of necessity, uniformity, likeness among others, and regularity to be "like only to himself, liberated again from morality, custom, autonomous and supramoral."[690] Thus, the sovereign individual is like Kierkegaard's knight of faith in that she is made autonomous by becoming supramoral. Nietzsche could be describing Kierkegaard's Abraham when he writes that the sovereign individual is "like only to himself, liberated again from morality and custom, autonomous and supramoral (for 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive)."[691] Such an individual is liberated *again* from morality having been brought up through morality and not liberated in terms of the aesthetic avoidance of morality. Nietzsche suggests that the sovereign individual can engage in a teleological suspension of the universal in light of her commitment to her promise: "for 'autonomous' and

[689] Ibid.
[690] Ibid.
[691] *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay Two, section 2, p. 59

‘moral’ are mutually exclusive.”[692] Nietzsche’s explanation of promise keeping makes use of the same logic as positing a needful goal. It is only the supramoral individual who can posit goals rather than conforming to hegemonic social projects. The sovereign individual not only has the right to make promises because she is sovereign, but she also becomes sovereign—free to be who she is—through her having the capacity to keep promises (and thus the right to make promises). When the sovereign individual promises, it is the kind of commitment that forecloses arbitrary choices which may present themselves since the sovereign individual is “the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will.”[693] Promise-keeping gives her life and world an orientation. Promise-keeping demands the work of keeping at bay the distractions and events that threaten to intervene in achieving a goal. The sovereign individual is freed to become who she is through her capacities for promise-keeping: positing goals and pursuing them needfully with an iron will.

The figure of the sovereign individual appears by name once in Nietzsche’s writings, in section 2 of “Essay Two” of *Genealogy of Morals*, though I take this individual to be indicative of the characters of both Zarathustra and the Antichrist, of whom Nietzsche writes more often. These are figures able to posit and pursue goals. He writes of the Antichrist, “This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; the bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man.”[694] The sovereign individual is like the Antichrist and Zarathustra in that they are able to posit the kind of needful goals that support a meaningful

[692] Ibid.
[693] Ibid.
[694] *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 2, section 24, p. 96

world. The positing and living towards these goals are an individual project, so Zarathustra and the Antichrist can be the kinds of people who encourage others to have goals, but they cannot posit goals that would give meaning to the lives of other people.

For Emerson, the vocation is a religious and metaphysical reality, the real voice of God speaking through one's thoughts and giving meaning and order to one's life. For Nietzsche, one needs a vocation in one's life, one needs to live needfully for some life-orienting goal. But one's life orienting goal is something that one must learn to love—and courageously to love again. For Emerson, the vocation is fully given by God; For Nietzsche, one posits a goal, but must live towards that goal *as if* it were fully given, along the lines of the Emersonian vocation. Nietzsche's world still gets its meaning from the goal, and so one must *need* the goal and not merely want it.

Heidegger

Another philosopher of the individual, Martin Heidegger's philosophy of the authentic individual, in *Being and Time*, sees friendship as integral to self-becoming and ethical relationships. While the significance of friendship in *Being and Time* has largely been overlooked, in light of the philosophy of friendship I have traced thus far, I aim here to show how friendship is a fundamental way of Dasein's authentic being with other authentic Dasein and for them to push each other towards authenticity. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger occasionally makes short, almost poetic digressions that stand out of his typical dry systematicity. In one such digression, Heidegger introduces "the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it."[695] Though Heidegger does not discuss the figure of the friend

[695] *Being and Time*, p. 206, H. 163

again in the text, the voice of the friend speaks in the background of Heidegger's discussion of authenticity and Being-with. The voice of the friend calls Dasein to authenticity and allows Dasein to establish authentic relations with others, relations where Daseins leap forth to liberate each other to their ownmost potentiality for being-their-Selves (i.e., their self-reliant self-becoming). Though the voice of the friend rises to the surface of Heidegger's discussion only at this one, somewhat cryptic point, its appearance here has implications for understanding the central themes of Dasein's authenticity and Being-with.

In his essay, "Heidegger's Ear," Derrida writes that friendship shows up as an example that "gives to be read and carries in itself *all* the figures of *Mitdasein* as *Aufeinander-hören*. All the figures of *Mitsein* would be figures of the friend, even if they were secondarily unfriendly or indifferent… To be opposed to the friend, to turn away from it, to defy it, to not hear it, that is still to hear and keep it, to carry with self, *bei sich tragen* the voice of the friend."[696] I go further than Derrida—who defends the hypothesis that friendship is Dasein's primordial way of Being-with—showing that Dasein's own resoluteness requires the voice of the friend, and that in this way Dasein's ability to be authentic is conditioned by solicitous relationships with other people.[697]

In its average everyday way of living, Dasein is lost in the 'they.' For the most part, Dasein avoids the dreadful project of taking a stand on its being by living inauthentically in the way of the 'they.' Dasein does what 'they' do, Dasein says what 'they' say, Dasein lives how 'they' live. In this way, one experiences freedom as the avoidance of the dreadful burden

[696] Derrida, "Heidegger's Ear." p. 176

[697] Though Derrida potentially assumes this, he does not defend this thesis explicitly.

of living authentically. In the snare of inauthenticity, one experiences freedom precisely in one's unfreedom and conformity. Heidegger writes,

> With Dasein's lostness in the 'they,' that factical potentiality-for-Being which is closest to it (the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concernful and solicitous Being-in-the-world) has already been decided upon. The 'they' has always kept Dasein from taking hold of the possibilities of Being. The 'they' even hides the manner in which it has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly *choosing* these possibilities. It remains indefinite who has really done the choosing. Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity.[698]

Lost in the 'they,' Dasein escapes the burden of taking an authentic stand on its being and hands over the task to the 'they,' which leaps-in with a publicly available interpretation of the world and being. Heidegger writes that Dasein makes no choices when it is lost in the 'they,' which is correct if we understand choices in a limited way, as the choices relevant to one's existence, which are the only choices that concern Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Lost in the 'they,' one still makes everyday consumeristic and egoistic choices around consumption, though fails to recognize, encounter, or make decisions about life. One hands over freedom regarding being, and contents oneself instead with the experience of freedom supported by consumeristic choices such as what to purchase, where to vacation, or how to sell one's time. What Heidegger calls inauthenticity and being lost in the 'they' are forms of what I have introduced as the experience of freedom without emancipation.

Heidegger says that for Dasein to bring itself back from inauthenticity it must "*make up for not choosing*," which means "choosing to make this choice–deciding for a potentiality-for-Being."[699] Similar to the Emersonian vocation and the Nietzschean goal, this choice is Dasein's choice to have a conscience, which is a choice to be resolutely open to being called

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[698] *Being and Time*, p. 312, H. 268
[699] Ibid., p. 313, H. 268

to an authentic engagement with the world and other people. It is only the choice to make up for not having chosen one's potentiality-for-Being that amounts to an authentic choice (i.e., a choice that is truly free and not merely accompanied by the phenomenology of freedom), and this is a choice accomplished in Dasein's resolute taking a stand on its Being.

Living authentically is the exception for Dasein. Living authentically is an occasional modification of Dasein's everyday lostness in the 'they.' Heidegger relates Dasein's potential for authentic self-becoming (i.e., Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self) to Dasein's existential openness to the world as *hearing*: Dasein's resoluteness is a way of hearing the call of conscience. He brings together resolute Dasein's hearing the call with another mode of Dasein's openness through hearing: "Being-open as Being-with for Others."[700] Heidegger explains the existential possibility of hearing as the structure of Dasein's existence as open to the call of conscience and other Dasein (who, in their own resoluteness can become for Dasein another 'conscience'), thus distinguishing the existential structure of Dasein's hearing from the ontical capacity for acoustic perception.

Resolute Dasein discloses a world authentically on the basis of it choosing to want to have a conscience and listening to the call, whereas everyday Dasein for the most part discloses an inauthentic world by listening-away to the 'they.' When resolute Dasein discloses an authentic world on the basis of guilt that is attuned to the call, it simultaneously discloses and encounters Others in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-them-Selves. Thus, through a way of listening (i.e., of being open to the world and others) provoked by the call of conscience, Dasein becomes resolutely open to its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being and for the first time encounters the world and others in their ownmost-potentiality-for-Being.

[700] *Being and Time*, p. 206, H. 163

> Dasein 'knows' what it is itself capable of, inasmuch as it has either projected itself upon possibilities of its own or has been so absorbed in the 'they' that it lets such possibilities be presented to it by the way in which the 'they' has publicly interpreted things. The presenting of these possibilities, however, is made possible existentially through the fact that Dasein, as a Being-with which understand, can *listen* to Others. Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the 'they,' it *fails to hear* its own Self in listening to the they-self.[701]

Dasein's way of being vis-a-vis its ownmost-potentiality-for-being is listening. Listening to the public interpretations and idle talk of the 'they,' Dasein lives inauthentically in the 'they-Self,' accepting the world, self, and possibilities presented by the 'they.' Dasein can accept the public possibilities of the they because Dasein has the existential structure of openness to others that Heidegger describes as listening to others (auf Anderer *hören*). He writes, "As a Being-in-the-world with Others, a being which understands, Dasein is 'in thrall' to Dasein-with and to itself… Being-with develops in listening to one another."[702] Thus, Dasein is open to its own possibilities through the same existential structure by which it is open to other Dasein.

Inauthentic listening away to idle talk is the everyday way Dasein avoids the anxiety of taking a stand on its existence and experiences freedom without emancipation. Heidegger exposes this virtual freedom when he writes, "In the face of its throwness Dasein flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self."[703] Real freedom, for Heidegger, is not an open field of random and unconstrained possibilities, nor is it the freedom of choice and consumption, which occupies those who are lost in the 'they.' Real freedom means a commitment to a possibility where this commitment forecloses commitments to other possibilities. He writes, "Freedom, however, *is* only in the choice of o n e possibility–that is,

[701] Ibid., pp. 315-16
[702] Ibid, p. 206
[703] Ibid, p. 321

in tolerating one's not having chosen the others and one's not being able to choose them."[704] Becoming authentic starts in overcoming the idle listening away to the 'they,' and this change in hearing is a committed response to the call of conscience. He writes,

> Dasein fails to hear itself, and listens away to the 'they'; and this listening-away gets broken by the call if that call, in accordance with its character as such, arouses another kind of hearing, which, in relationship to the hearing that is lost, has a character in every way opposite… the call must do its calling without any hubbub and unambiguously, leaving no foothold for curiosity. *That which, by calling in this manner, gives us to understand, is conscience.*[705]

Resolute Dasein's mode of hearing is made possible by the call of conscience; it listens in a way that precludes the curious listening-away to idle talk and the curious exploration of possibilities presented by the 'they.' In the call of conscience, we can hear the "voice of conscience" that speaks at the end of Nietzsche's "Schopenhauer as Educator": "Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself."[706] And as Carlson notes, this voice speaks the Augustinian intention of love, "that the self be itself."[707]

When Heidegger describes conscience as a call, he states explicitly that he does not intend this call to have theological implications. The Heideggerian call is neither a direct experience of God, nor does it contribute proof of God's existence. Yet, despite himself, he repeatedly discusses the call in theological and even mystical terms. He says that the "call comes *from* me and yet *from over me*,"[708] reflecting Augustine's conception of God as *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.[709] When Heidegger writes that "the call is from afar to

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[704] Ibid., p. 331
[705] Ibid., p. 316
[706] "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 125
[707] Carlson, p. 181
[708] Ibid., p. 320
[709] *Confessions* Book III, vi(11). Though Augustine conceives God as more inner than his inmost and higher than his highest, when, in *Confessions*, he finally responds to his calling, the voice is that of a child from the neighboring house chanting, "Tolle lege, tolle lege" (VIII,

afar," he references Psalm 42:7, "*Abyssus abyssum invocat*," a text foundational for late medieval—especially Beguine and Ekhartian—conceptions of mystical *unio indistinctiones*.[710] Despite his recourse to mystical language, Heidegger insists that "the fact that the call is not something which is explicitly performed *by me*, but that rather 'it' does the calling, does not justify seeking the caller in some entity with a character other than that of Dasein."[711] Though Heidegger distinguishes his existential concept of conscience from the traditional concept in radical ways, he holds onto explicitly Protestant ideas about conscience as a voice that must be followed.[712]

Despite these overt theological suggestions, Heidegger maintains that the call comes from Dasein and calls to Dasein: "*In conscience Dasein calls itself*."[713] Heidegger describes a division or doubling of Dasein as Dasein calls from "*the very depths of its uncanniness* [i.e., unhomeliness]"[714] to Dasein as lost in the 'they.' He writes,

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xi(29)). Besides this somewhat unexpected externalization and temporalization of the call, Augustine's conversion narrative is marked by the additional irony that he responds to this call through the methods of divination when he opens his Bible at random for advice. He writes, "I seized it [i.e., the Bible], opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in stride and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Rom. 13:13-14)." This method of using the Bible as an oracle was a practice associated with drawing lots in late antiquity (See: William E. Klingshirn (2002). "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* v.10:1. pp. 77-130), and which Augustine explicitly condemns, reducing it to chance when performed by astrologers with books of poetry. In a section where he derides the practices of astrologers, he writes, "So when someone happens to consult the pages of a poet whose verse and intention are concerned with a quite different subject, in a wonderful way a verse often emerges appropriate to the decision under discussion" (Book IV, iii(5), pp. 55).

[710] See: Bernard McGinn, "Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism." pp. 435-452: 2014.

[711] *Being and Time*, pp. 320-21

[712] Cf. Luther's defense at the Diet of Worms, "My conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience."

[713] *Being and Time*, p. 320

[714] Ibid., p. 321

> *Conscience manifests itself as the call of care*: the caller is Dasein, which, in its thrownness (in its Being-already-in), is anxious about its potentiality-for-Being. The one to whom the appeal is made is this very same Dasein summoned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being (ahead of itself…). Dasein is falling into the "they" (in Being-already-alongside the world of its concern), and it is summoned out of this falling by the appeal.[715]

Everyday inauthentic Dasein "flee[s] *into* the 'at-home' of publicness"[716] and the they-self, a familiarity from which Dasein must be called back by its anxious and unhomely encounter with the nothing of the world[717]—which is the world's neediness of one's individualized concern. The experience of the uncanniness and unhomeliness of the world can be captured in the phenomenology of the breakdown of an equipmental totality: the anxious confrontation with the world when equipment fails to perform, and one is thrown back in an individualized way on the dreadful burden of making sense of a situation. While the befuddled response to an unresponsive phone or a broken pencil captures the phenomenology of unhomeliness, Heidegger is more concerned with the existential sort of unhomeliness that characterizes the undoing of the world. This is the uncanniness felt in the wake of a crisis that makes one's familiar way of being oneself inaccessible and forces one to take a stand on existence. The traumatic loss of love or its inconvenient arrival, the failure of a career, or the loss of home: Such uncanny events disturb the world at its foundations, evicting Dasein from the world and making familiar ways of being impossible. But uncanniness is not merely a breakdown of the meaningfulness of the world; it is the unhomely place from which Dasein calls itself to give the world and life authentic meaning.

[715] Ibid.
[716] Ibid., p. 234
[717] Ibid., pp. 234; 321

If the call arouses a new kind of hearing that is attuned to anxiety rather than idle-talk, Dasein is pulled out of the 'they-self' and into guilt: a painful fall from thoughtless bliss into thoughtful agony. Heidegger writes that the call appeals to Dasein, calling Dasein to its "own Self. Not to what Dasein counts for, can do, or concerns itself with in being with one another publicly, nor to what it has taken hold of, set about, or let itself be carried along with."[718] The call addresses Dasein as its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being, eschewing public and they-based evaluations, Dasein's own attempts to maintain a public appearance that it has taken hold of, autobiographical continuity with what it has set about, or the thoughtless ways it has been carried along by the 'they.' Because the call appeals to Dasein in its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being (i.e., as an entity that discloses a world and self in taking a stand on its existence), only the self of the "they-self" is appealed to, so "the *'they'* collapses… The Self, which the appeal has robbed of this lodgment and hiding-place, gets brought to itself by the call."[719] The call does not call Dasein to an analytical or psychological analysis of itself: "The call passes over everything like this and disperses it, so as to appeal to that Self, which, notwithstanding, is in no other way than Being-in-the-world."[720] It is not a call to explicit knowledge of oneself, but a call to a resolute way of Being-in-the-world and becoming who one is.

The call reveals to Dasein that Dasein is an entity which must take a stand on its existence, which Heidegger here discusses in terms of Dasein's guilt. Dasein's guilt is an existential structure of Dasein's existence, not a moral judgment about how Dasein has lived. Dasein is not guilty *of* anything. Dasein is guilty since its existence is constituted by a lack

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[718] Ibid, p. 317
[719] Ibid.
[720] Ibid., p. 318

upon which Dasein projects itself. To reiterate, this is no ethical failing on Dasein's part; it is the structure of Dasein's existence and relatedness to the world of its concern.

Inauthentic Dasein flees in the face of its own nothingness, which shows itself most acutely in the unhomely encounter with the world's nothingness. Authentic Dasein confronts its nothingness by taking a resolute stand on its being, and in this resolute stand-taking the world and others are disclosed authentically. The call calls Dasein: "*Schuldig!*"—which Macquarrie and Robinson translate as "Guilty!" but which could as appropriately be translated, "Debtor!" Dasein is guilty or indebted in all the ways that its existence is constitutively ecstatic and grounded in a nullity. From its uncanny eviction from the world Dasein calls to itself lost in the 'they.' Heidegger writes, "The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* [Anruf] to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty."[721] Confronted with guilt–with Dasein's constitutive lack and the dread recognition that life and the world are made meaningful only on the basis of the stand Dasein takes–Dasein, for the most part, flees again to its lostness in the they.

However, Dasein may respond with resoluteness to the call by "wanting to have a conscience" in the "reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety."[722] Choosing to have a conscience is not a consumeristic kind of choice, as if Dasein might choose from a menu of possible consciences; it is choosing to be the lack that Dasein is. Jean-Francois Courtine goes so far as to describe Dasein's response to the call in terms of obedience: "Situated within obedience to being, required by it, attentive to its calling,

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[721] Ibid., p. 314
[722] Ibid., p. 343

man is the one who responds to the call, who answers for it and by that fact allows being to unfold in presence."[723] Courtine's reading pushes Heidegger's call of conscience close to the Emersonian and, more generally, Protestant structure of an unchosen and predestined vocation that gives meaning to the world. He describes resoluteness as a "reticent self-projection." Dasein's self-projection is not a speaking into existence of itself (on the model, perhaps, of Biblical creation); it is a silent listening forth. Heidegger writes,

> In understanding the call, Dasein is *in thrall to its ownmost possibility for existence. It has chosen itself…* Understanding the call is choosing; but it is not a choosing of conscience, which as such cannot be chosen. What is chosen is *having*-a-conscience as Being-free for one's ownmost Being-guilty… This does not mean that one wants to have a 'good conscience,' still less that one cultivates the call voluntarily; it means solely that one is ready to be appealed to [*Angerufenwerden*].[724]

Dasein does not choose how or whether to be called, Dasein merely chooses, if it hears the call, to be open and free for the call. Resolute Dasein exists in the mode of readiness for the call.

From uncanniness, Dasein calls to itself lost in the they, but the calling is neither voluntary nor distinct. Heidegger writes, "The call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so. 'It' calls, against our expectations and even against our will."[725] The "it" that here calls to Dasein is the same "it" that, elsewhere, "gives" to Dasein. This is an "it" that must not be interpreted along theological lines, though it reaches Dasein "*from beyond me and over me*" and motivates Dasein's disclosure of the world. As the source of the call "it" coincides with

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[723] Courtine, Jean-Francois, "Voice of Conscience and Call of Being," in *Who Comes After the Subject?* edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy., p. 90

[724] *Being and Time*, p. 334

[725] Ibid., p. 320

Dasein in the unhomely, but "it" calls with an alien voice. Dasein's unhomely encounter with the world in crisis evokes from Dasein an unplanned and unexpected call to Dasein-lost-in-the-they (i.e., to itself in its everyday mood). It would be too much to say that the call calls Dasein in unexpected life directions (e.g., out of one career and into another). Such an Emersonian idea of vocation is too ontic for Heidegger. The Heideggerian call of conscience calls Dasein back into its guilt, and from there Dasein can take a stand on its being and give its life something like a direction (i.e., an ownmost-potentiality-for-being-*its-Self*). Calling Dasein back into the nullity and question of its being, the call has nothing explicit to say about how to live or take a stand on existence.

The Heideggerian call is constitutively indistinct in that it reveals itself as a disclosing "giving-to-understand" that affects Dasein with "the momentum of a push—of an abrupt arousal."[726] He writes that, "Our understanding of what is 'called' is not to be tied up with an expectation of anything like a communication."[727] The call is not properly of the world—Dasein calls from its unhomely place with "an *alien* voice"[728]—and thus the call is neither linguistic nor conceptual nor anything ready-to-hand, since it is through the call that Dasein is pushed in the direction of having for the first time an authentic world. Insofar as the call reaches Dasein in-the-world and lost in the 'they,' it calls indistinctly by keeping silent. "The call of conscience fails to give any 'practical' injunctions, *solely because* it summons Dasein to existence, to its ownmost potentiality-for-being-its-Self."[729] The call cannot give explicit or practical instructions because it is not a call to this-or-that specific goal. Heidegger goes so far

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[726] Ibid., p. 316
[727] Ibid., p. 318
[728] Ibid., p. 231
[729] Ibid., p. 340

as to describe the call as a form of reticence, which calls to Dasein in the mode of keeping silent. "The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell… The call dispenses with any kind of utterance… *Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent*."[730] It calls Dasein to take a stand on its being and to become itself. Thus, whereas the talkative 'they' readily leaps-in for Dasein, the call excites in silent provocation. The call cannot provide practical or calculative instructions because as long as Dasein is, its being is an issue for it, and if Dasein listens to the call then Dasein is precisely called out of the 'they' and takes up this issue (i.e., its guilt) with resoluteness.

Heidegger's point about the call as silent and dispensing with utterance is not meant to describe the call only as a pre-linguistic mode of disclosing the world, but also to indicate that as calling Dasein back to itself, the call gives nothing that Dasein could gossip about with another. He writes, "It gives the concernfully curious ear nothing to hear which might be passed along in further retelling and talked about in public."[731] Calling Dasein back to its guilt, the call does not give Dasein anything that could be passed along as advice or gossip to another. Dasein cannot write to an advice column or go to a therapist to get help interpreting the call. Dasein is not called to know itself; it is called to be itself. Dasein must take a stand on its being and resolute Dasein takes this stand necessarily without fleeing to the 'they.' Though Dasein is called in this individualizing way, Dasein is not therefore anti-social or unfriendly. As I show below, Dasein's friends cannot take a stand for it, but they can help Dasein to pursue and actualize itself, not through psychological and analytical investigation of the call but by allowing Dasein to unfold its way of being.

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[730] Ibid., p. 318
[731] Ibid., p. 322

Having been called out of the 'they-self,' resolute Dasein seems antisocial and narcissistically involved in pursuits that cannot be communicated or justified to others. But Heidegger insists that the precise opposite is true. Even if its pursuits cannot be communicated to others, resoluteness does not isolate Dasein or make it "a free-floating 'I.'" Rather, resoluteness "pushes it [i.e., Dasein] into solicitous Being with Others."[732] When Dasein understands the appeal of the call in the way of resoluteness, Dasein is not only confronted with its own ownmost-potentiality-for-being-its-Self (i.e., its project of becoming who it is authentically), but the world and other Dasein are disclosed in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves. It is only when Dasein approaches its own life in resoluteness that it can see other Dasein in their potential resoluteness, as friends. Thus, as I explain in the following paragraphs, the ontic friend points the way to the existential friend "whom," Heidegger writes, "every Dasein carries with it."[733] Heidegger writes,

> This *authentic* disclosedness modifies with equal primordiality both the way in which the 'world' is discovered… and the way in which the Dasein-with of Others is disclosed… Both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves… Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others.[734]

Heidegger claims that it is Dasein's Being vis-a-vis the ready-to-hand that acquires a definite character here. When Dasein responds with resoluteness to the call, the ready-to-hand shows itself in its most concernful aspects. One's concern for the hammer and the possibilities afforded by the hammer become definite and one's ownmost—whether one is a master

[732] p. 344
[733] p. 206
[734] p. 344

carpenter for whom the hammer affords myriad practical possibilities, or a novice for whom the hammer affords considerably fewer possibilities—when one responds resolutely to the call.

Far from isolating Dasein in egoistic projects of self-development, "Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates."[735] It is only in its resolute commitment to its own potentiality-for-being-its-Self that Dasein discloses an authentic world and for the first time sees the non-publicly interpreted face of other Dasein in their potentiality-for-being-them-Selves, as people who might become who they are. Fleeing to the 'they,' inauthentic Dasein encounters the world and other Dasein as they have been disclosed by the 'they.' Inauthentic Dasein does not see another's potential for becoming a self and disclosing a world of resolute concern; inauthentic Dasein encounters another as disclosed and always already evaluated by the 'they.' For example, inauthentic Dasein is limited in dramatic and tragically common ways by the 'they's' highly limited and fickle standards of beauty, success, and fraternity which disclose some people as unworthy of love or solicitude. Resolute Dasein encounters other Dasein authentically and without regard to public evaluations based on what a person is good for or worth. Resolute Dasein encounters the other in her naked guilt, as witness to her throwness and prophet of her potential-to-be. It is only resolute Dasein that can co-disclose with other resolute Dasein their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and resolute Dasein performs this service by leaping-ahead in being the 'conscience' of others and calling them forth in silence. Heidegger claims that "When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of others."[736]

[735] Ibid.
[736] p. 344

He places conscience in quotes because one Dasein cannot actually become the conscience of another since the conscience is just an existential structure of Dasein's being, but Dasein can communicate and converse with the other in such a way that the other becomes dislodged from the 'they.' This is the kind of conversation Dasein has with friends who co-disclose their ownmost potentiality-for-being-their-Selves.

"The friend whom every Dasein carries with it" calls to Dasein, and it is in hearing the voice of this friend that "Dasein is open for its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being" itself and with others.[737] As Holderlin writes in an August 1798 letter to Neuffer,

> Hear yourself! This is what makes us grow. If we get confused about ourselves, about our I, our *θεῖον* [divine], or whatever name you want to give it, then all art and all pain are in vain. This is why it is so important to hold firmly together and to tell each other what is in each of us; that is why the greatest harm we do to ourselves is to separate and isolate ourselves through miserable rivalry, etc. because the call of the friend is essential to be once again in unison with ourselves.[738]

For Holderlin, the friend gives orientation to one's life by providing one the opportunity to leap forth in language and action and become oneself. The voice of the friend brings one out of one's anxious and distracted confusion and hesitation to self-unity, transparency (as Kierkegaard would describe it), and resolute action. The call of the friend opens the opportunity for one to say what one cannot say by oneself and creates the corresponding possibility of being able to hear oneself and that part of oneself that is ready to grow and is divine, "or whatever name you want to give it." The end of rivalry and the beginning of friendship begins in the firm holding together that allows each to tell the other what is in her because each remains hospitably open to the other.

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[737] p. 206
[738] Quoted in Fédier, p. 9

But who is this friend carried by every Dasein and whose voice indicates Dasein's openness in this way? Derrida helpfully reminds the reader that within the context of Heidegger's discussion of fundamental ontology, the friend should be interpreted as an ontological structure of Dasein's being. Derrida writes that "the 'who' of friendship, the voice of the friend so described, belongs to the existential structure of Dasein. This voice does not implicate just one passion or affect among others. The 'who' of friendship, as the call (*Ruf*) that provokes or convokes 'conscience' and therefore opens up responsibility, precedes every subjectal determination."[739] The call of the voice of the friend cannot answer the question "Who calls?" or "Who hears the call?" since it is through the call that Dasein is first called to be itself. Quoting Blanchot, Derrida writes that the question "Who has been the subject of this experience?" already contains its own answer: Who has been the subject of this experience. In other words, the subject of the experience is not a closed and settled "I," but an open and indefinite "Who?"[740] Jean-Luc Nancy and Courtine agree with Derrida's reading that the friend represents an internal division of Dasein as it calls to itself. Courtine writes, "I am this foreign and/or friend's voice. Risen up from within and coming upon me from high above, the call is the voice of ipseity."[741] Nancy interprets the figure of the friend along lines similar to Courtine, as a division within Dasein. He writes, "The distinction to be made, and decided on, is also the difference between the ontical self of the existent (along with the selves of others) and the 'friend' that the existent carries with it. Neither the same nor the other, the 'friend' perhaps names only this difference itself."[742] The voice of the friend that Dasein carries with it is not

[739] "Eating Well," p. 110
[740] Derrida, *Who Comes After the Subject?* p, 110
[741] Courtine, p. 89
[742] Nancy, p. 92

the audible voice of an ontical friend in the world but is rather the condition of Dasein's thinking and being. The voice of the friend is the voice of thought, as Arendt describes it, "All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought."[743]

Agamben finds evidence for the existential structure of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle writes that besides desiring the friend's existence one "must also include his friend's existence in his consciousness, and that may be accomplished by living together with him and by sharing each other's words and thoughts."[744] Focusing on the inclusion of the friend's existence in one's consciousness, Agamben offers the novel reading that for Aristotle, "the friend is not another I, but an otherness immanent to selfness, a becoming other of the self… the desubjectification at the very heart of the most intimate sensation of the self."[745] Where the traditional interpretation of Aristotle focuses on the friend's being "another myself," Agamben draws attention to the intriguing claim that one must take the friend's existence into one's consciousness. Agamben does not take the naive reading that by living with the friend one eventually internalizes the friend's voice, but rather makes the existential claim that the friend's intimate strangeness is the foundation for a co-feeling of being capable of founding an ethics and politics of the other. The human community is held together in a way that is distinct from animal collectives since we share not merely in the same

[743] *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 174
[744] Aristotle, 1170b.10-11, p. 266
[745] Agamben, "The Friend," in *What is an Apparatus?* p. 34

substance, but in a shared experience of being. Agamben thinks this "originary political 'synesthesia'" is the foundation of any functioning democracy.[746]

Christopher Fynsk goes further and interprets the friend as a witness of Dasein's death. "In its German form, the phrase… might be read as saying that Dasein is open for its most proper potentiality for being–its death–in its hearing and as a hearing of the voice of its friend." Fynsk seems to have Cicero in mind when he claims that the friend, who one knows will one day witness one's death, and thus becomes a representation in the present of one's death.[747] Fynsk writes that "the friend *gives* to the other, speaks of, its possible death."[748] Fynsk acknowledges that his reading is at odds with what Heidegger says about the individualizing force of death, he maintains that the friend is always with Dasein and so "Dasein can understand and, thus we might say, participate in the death of the other."[749] He goes on,

> We might recognize the other as providing the intervention necessary for drawing Dasein out of its subjection to the they and drawing it before its death. The hero (a kind of model) or the friend would then be the instigator or cause of Dasein's freedom. Thus, when Dasein is left to pass under the 'eyes of Death' (*SZ*, 382/434), the visage that it encounters could well be that of the one who has summoned Dasein–the other who is Dasein's cause. The scene of death would thus be a scene of recognition insofar as Dasein would already have encountered the visage that it meets here.[750]

It is not only the Ciceronian point that the friend will outlive one and become a witness of one's death, but the more Heideggerian point that in calling Dasein out of its inauthenticity the friend calls Dasein to the most authentic position of facing death.

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[746] Ibid., p. 37
[747] Though Cicero and Fynsk claim that the friend is the witness and representation of one's death in the present, it may make more sense to think not of an individual friend as serving this function, but of all friends as the potential witnesses of one's death and thus as representations of that future death in the present.
[748] Fynsk, p. 43
[749] Fynsk, p. 43
[750] Ibid, p. 49

In his essay, "Voix de l'ami," French philosopher and translator of Heidegger François Fédier interprets the Heideggerian friend through Montaigne's discussion of friendship in the *Essays*. He quotes the *Essays*, Chapter 28, where Montaigne writes, "Our voluntary freedom has no production which is more properly its own than that of affection and friendship." Fédier takes this line to be a reference to Boétie's treatise "On Voluntary Servitude." Indeed, Montaigne's claim that friendship proceeds from freedom can be read as a response to the final paragraphs of Boétie's essay, where he writes that friendship cannot exist among tyrants or the supporters of tyranny. Boétie writes,

> There is no doubt that the tyrant is never loved, and loves nobody. Friendship is a sacred word, it is a holy thing, and it exists only between good people, and is kindled only by mutual esteem… Evil men are not companions one of another, they are conspirators. They have no mutual affection, but a mutual fear: they are not friends, but accomplices.[751]

Boétie goes on to write that a tyrant is "beyond the bounds of friendship" since his favorites and those closest to him "are the very people who have taught him that he is all-powerful, and that he is bound by no law or duty, and that he may count his will as synonymous with reason, and that he has no peer."[752] Since the tyrant is singularly superior to all others, he is elevated beyond the reach of friendship (similarly to Aristotle's gods) and loving agonism with others. Fédier's claim is that "à partir de la servitude volontaire, aucune entente véritable de l'amitié ne saurait avoir lieu (starting from voluntary servitude, no true understanding of friendship can take place)."[753] The kind of friendship Montaigne and Heidegger value is a friendship that emerges only in contexts of voluntary freedom.

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[751] Boétie. *Slaves by Choice*. p. 69
[752] Ibid.
[753] Fédier. "Voix de l'ami." Available at <http://parolesdesjours.free.fr/ami.pdf>. Accessed: April 22, 2022. p. 6

As discussed in Chapter 1, voluntary servitude is Boétie's description of the state of people living under tyranny. Since they refuse to overthrow the tyrant and retake their natural freedom, Boétie thinks these people implicitly choose to be slaves. Fédier interprets Montaigne's voluntary freedom along the lines of Heideggerian authenticity. He writes, "Ce que d'ordinaire on prend pour la 'liberté' n'a tout simplement rien à voir avec 'nostre liberté volontaire'... laquelle n'est proprement nôtre que si nous sommes capables d'exister à l'aune de notre pouvoir-être le plus propre."[754] ("What we usually take for 'freedom' quite simply has nothing to do with 'our voluntary freedom'... which is properly ours only if we are capable of existing by the measure of our ownmost ability-to-be.") The freedom of arbitrary choice and consumption, which in the modern world is usually taken for freedom as such, is not the most meaningful freedom and not the freedom which supports friendship. Arbitrary freedom—we can say on the basis of Fédier's reading of Montaigne—is an involuntary freedom. This is a freedom which one has not chosen, which one is thrown and forced into. In Mark C. Taylor's terms, we can say this involuntary freedom is choice without decision, or ontic rather than ontological freedom: arbitrary choices among a menu of options and within a rational choice making context, without the freedom to decide upon the menu or context. Voluntary freedom is a freedom that one takes up and decides upon. It is the resolute response to the call to live one's ownmost-potentiality-for-being.

Based on his reading of Montaigne's chapter "On Friendship," Fédier concludes that the call to live one's ownmost authentic life reaches each friend through the other. Friends contribute reciprocally to each other's self-becoming, "les amis ont part mutuelle l'un à l'autre, de sorte qu'il faut à chacun la part de l'autre pour devenir qui il est… Et cela a lieu

[754] p. 7

réciproquement, de sorte que chacun est appelé par l'autre à venir jusqu'à soi-même" ("friends have a mutual share in each other, so that each one needs the other's share to become who he is… And this takes place reciprocally, so that each is called by the other to come to himself.")[755] Fédier notes that the German word *beide* ("both") is related to *bei* ("near", i.e., the nearness of the friend whom Dasein carries), which Heidegger relates to *bin* ("I am").[756] Thus, Fédier shows that Dasein's being is contingent upon friendly mutuality and reciprocity, uncovering the essentially intersubjective core of Dasein's subjectivity.

Dasein's subjectivity is not only essentially intersubjective, but also given and provoked by the call of the friend and the world, or what Mark C. Taylor calls the "divine milieu," or what Emerson calls "nature," or what Nietzsche calls "becoming." Fédier writes,

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[755] p. 8

[756] Though Fédier points to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, this move is made more clearly in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," where Heidegger relates being (*bin)*, dwelling (*bauen*), and nearness (*bei*). In "Being, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger unpacks this etymological genealogy through the word *Nachbar* (neighbor), "the near-dweller." Heidegger writes, "*Bauen, buan, bhu, beo* are our words for *bin*… What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen* to which the word *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the way in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Bauen*, dwelling." See *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 144-46. In making these etymological connections, especially in *Being and Time*, Heidegger relies on Grimm's *Kleinere Schriften*, where Grimm relates "bei," "bauen," and "bin" (See: *Being and Time*, p. 80, f.3). As Carlson points out in *With the World at Heart*, Grimm helps Heidegger to see how Dasein's in-ness as dwelling is less of a spatial issue than it is a form of familiarity: "In" is related to dwelling, and "an" is related to familiarity. Thus, the neighbor is not most fundamentally one who dwells in my proximity, but one with whom I am familiar. Carlson goes on to show how in the etymology traced by Grimm and Heidegger, this familiarity is even a form of love since "*colo" is the common root of "habito*" (I dwell) and "*diligo*" (I love). Similarly, we can trace the etymology of "friend" from the Old English *freond* and the Proto-Germanic *frijōjands.* These words can be traced to the Proto-Indo-European root *prī-*, which means both "to love" and "to be free." *Prī-* shows up more obviously in Eastern European words for "friend" such as the Slovenian *prijatelj* or the Czech *přítel*, though it is also the root of the Old English *freo* ("free," "not in bondage," "acting of one's own will") and *freogan* ("to free," "to liberate," "to love," "to honor"). Thus, the friend can be understood as the embodiment of liberation and love—one who frees and loves, or one who frees through love.

“Le soi-même qui nous est le plus propre ne peut pas être réduit à la recollection égotique d’un Moi. Dans l’être soi-même du *Dasein* quelque autre déploie son règne, en l’occurrence le *θεῖον*–‘ou quel que soit le nom que tu veuilles lui donner’” ("The self that is most proper to us cannot be reduced to the egoistic recollection of an I. In the self-being of *Dasein* some other unfolds its reign, in this case the *divine*, 'or whatever name you want to give it'").[757] Fédier’s divine signals the totality of natural, social, and historical forces that flow together in the unstable unity of the subject. This is a self that most properly dispossesses the self of itself.

Besides networks of contemporary relationships, Carlson shows how this (post)modern subject is distributed, especially with regard to its thinking, temporally in terms of its secularity. His interpretation of the Emersonian secular—which, I claim is another instance of Fédier’s divine, “or whatever name you want to give it”—is of a “natural, temporal immensity”[758] which outstrips every individual and serves as the incomprehensible ground of thought. Carlson describes the secular as

> The indeterminate temporal depths and human masses that yield [modern] life… The nature in which all human creation already participates… A temporal immensity that exceeds the measures of our experience, of our thinking, and of our traditions… An unknowing condition of our thinking nature, whose experience for Emerson proposes the logic, and pretense, of expertise.[759]

Carlson reads the Emersonian secular as the living accumulation of human thought and expression which conditions and supports any contemporary thought. As thinkers we inherit and contribute to this ongoing human expression. In its exercise of creative capacities and pursuit of self-becoming, the self relies on networks of relations that span space and time.

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[757] Fédier , p. 10. The divinity Fédier invokes in this line is to be understood according to the deconstructive theology of the Derridean event or of the Heideggerian *es gibt*, of a gift without a giver.
[758] Carlson, p. 173
[759] Ibid., pp. 171-172

Carlson follows Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (among others) in pointing out that modern technoscientific culture encourages a busyness that distracts from the authentic sources of self and thought. This is a distraction that goes along with the economic and political ways modern people are distracted from their freedom and flourishing. Where I have discussed the possibility of overcoming distraction through friendship, and we have seen Norris and Cavell discuss it in terms of the exemplar, Carlson discusses this possibility in terms of the educative potential of love for other people and the world. We have seen Carlson discuss such provocative love in terms of parental love with Emerson and his son Waldo, in the relationship between a teacher and student, and even in our relationships to nature, grief, and God, which in their incomprehensibility call the self to its own incomprehensibility, speaking in Emerson, "much like the call of God in Dionysius."[760]

The provocation of the voice of the friend does not push Dasein towards a fantasy of autarchic self-assertion; rather it reveals Dasein's most proper self as given and supported by networks of relation. Fédier claims that through the voice of the friend "l'appel intime du divin (ou de quelque autre nom que nous puissions le nommer) devient purement et simplement audible" ("the intimate call of the divine (or of whatever other name we can name it) becomes purely and simply audible").[761] The voice of the friend reminds one precisely that one is emancipated to one's self-becoming through the intimate divine and intersubjectivity that unfolds its reign within us. Fédier's conception of subjectivity is, like Taylor's, dispossessed and given over always already to networks of relations that outstrip the individual. Fédier writes, "Qu'y a-t-il donc en nous? Non pas ce qui est 'nôtre' au sens habituel d'une possession

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[760] *With the World at Heart*, p. 177. NB: Carlson is referring to Pseudo-Dionysius, the fifth century mystical theologian, not Nietzsche's Dionysius.
[761] p.10

qui nous isole en nous rendant indépendant" (So what is it in us? Not what is "ours" in the usual sense of a possession that isolates us by making us independent).[762]

The intimate otherness interior to one's being calls one to a freedom which likewise is most one's own without it being one's possession. This tension draws out the fact that one's freedom is not one's private possession since it requires the support of intimate others, but also that freedom as such cannot be understood according to the economy of possession since what is most one's own is precisely something one can never possess. What is properly one's own is no possession, but rather an orientation that one takes up in response to the encounter with the world and the call of other people. He writes of this otherness that

> elle nous libère pour notre liberté propre, liberté que nous ne possédons jamais, mais qui nous concerne comme ce qui, en nous, nous est le plus propre. En tant que *Dasein* — c'est-à-dire comme être capable, dans la limite de sa propre finitude, d'être ouvert jusqu'à être libre—nous sommes destinés à écouter la voix qui nous enjoint ce qui, en propre, nous revient, à savoir d'exister en répondant de ce qui nous fait être.
>
> (it frees us for our own freedom, a freedom that we never possess, but which concerns us as what, in us, is most our own. As Dasein — that is, as being capable, within the limit of its own finitude, to be open to the point of being free—we are destined to listen to the voice that enjoins us, and this is something that is properly ours, to exist by answering for what makes us be.)[763]

As Fédier points out, Dasein's freedom is always freedom conditioned by finitude and thus freedom needs others who can expand it by provoking and exciting one's capacities in new directions. He writes,

> Que tout Dasein porte auprès de soi la voix de l'ami atteste qu'être le là ne se peut aucunement par soi seul. Dépendant de la voix de l'ami, le Dasein est toujours- déjà un être ensemble. Autrement dit: c'est par cette voix qui s'adresse à lui d'ailleurs que de lui-même, qu'il est disposé à faire l'épreuve de la finitude où il s'agit pour chacun de se trouver soi-même.

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[762] p. 10
[763] pp. 11-12

> (That every Dasein carries near it the voice of the friend attests that being the there cannot be done by oneself alone. Dependent on the voice of the friend, Dasein is always-already a being together. In other words: it is by this voice, which is addressed to one from elsewhere than from oneself, that one is disposed to undergo the experience of finitude where it is a matter for each one of finding oneself.)[764]

Alone and unloved, Dasein would confront its finitude in guilt, humiliation, and nihilism. Called by the friend, as Dasein always is, one finds the courage and capacities to become oneself.

The voice of the friend is not the phenomenal voice of an ontical friend. Corresponding to the existential structure of Dasein's openness to the world as hearing, Dasein's hearing the voice of the friend is a way of Dasein's being resolutely open for its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being (i.e., Dasein's becoming itself in the mode of Emersonian self-reliance) and Being-with-others. What is interesting and significant is that in this passing remark, Heidegger equates conscience with the friend as the 'it' that calls Dasein to its guilt, thus introducing a kind of intersubjectivity into the existential structure of conscience. To understand how this could be, we need to turn to Heidegger's striking claim that "When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others."[765] These Others with whom Dasein is resolute in a solicitous and co-disclosive way are Dasein's friends.

That Dasein's ownmost-potentiality-for-Being is related to Dasein's Being-with in the existential capacity for hearing, and that Heidegger thinks Dasein carries near to it a friend who speaks, means that Dasein is constituted (like Emersonian and Nietzschean subjectivity, and in ways analogous to the constitution of the meaningfulness of the ready-to-hand) in networks of relationality. Some philosophers working in Heidegger's wake have argued (in the

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[764] p. 12
[765] p. 344

wakes of Descartes and Husserl) for the priority of the individual, for example the Sartrean *pour-soi* that encounters the other as a threatening mystery and sighs, "L'enfer, c'est les autres," or the Levinasian subject that begins in ontological isolation which it must learn to overcome in ethical and temporal relations with others.[766]

Mark C. Taylor brings out the political significance of the kind of intersubjective subjectivity found in Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. On Taylor's account, the a/theological affirmation of the death and dispossession of the subject creates the possibility of generosity, carefreeness, and delight. He writes,

> Generosity presupposes a psychology of sacrifice and an economy of spending that subvert the possessive psychology of mastery and the acquisitive economy of domination… Generous expenditure breaks the circle of appropriation and possession by overturning the principles of utility and consumption. When

[766] The trajectory of Levinas's thought traces the overcoming of ontological isolation in the recognition of the ethical priority of the other. See Levinas, *Time and The Other*, where Levinas writes, "Thus from the start I repudiate the Heideggerian conception that views solitude in the midst of a prior relationship with the other. Though anthropologically incontestable, the conception seems to me ontologically obscure." Levinas goes on to critique Heidegger for claiming that Dasein is thoroughly relational, all the while "the analyses of *Being and Time* are worked out either for the sake of the impersonality of everyday life or for the sake of solitary *Dasein*" (p. 40). Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* can be understood as an attempt to reconcile Descartes with the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Sartre claims that Dasein's essential intersubjectivity leads to monism and, more problematically, undermines the possibility of real social (ontic) relationships. Sartre's Cartesian retort to Heidegger is that "Human-reality remains alone because the Other has the nature of a contingent and irreducible fact. We *encounter* the Other; we do not constitute him… If the Other is capable of being given to us, it is by means of a direct apprehension which leaves to the encounter its character as facticity" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 274). We can note in Sartre's skeptical encounter of the other the abstracted Cartesian position which Cavell claims is typical of skepticism generally. For Sartre, relationships with others are fundamentally antagonistic, and "conflict is the original meaning of being-with-others" (Ibid., p. 386). For Sartre, the other's look reveals to oneself one's shameful finitude and unfreedom. In Sartre's play, *No Exit*, Sartre's idea of hell is a world where one's sense of self is fully co-relational and intersubjective. His characters in hell reside in a sitting room with no mirrors and under the unwelcome judgment of one another. The Sartrean encounter with the other in antagonism and humiliation is the opposite of Cavellian acceptance and acknowledgement.

> freed from preoccupation with protecting private property and sovereign selfhood, one is able to spend without demanding return.[767]

The mortal and intersubjective self is never in possession of itself, and so it has no motivation to hoard the gifts of the world and guard itself against others. The dispossessed self "discloses the impossibility of ownership" of itself and of the world.[768] Whereas the capitalist and theological subject seeks security behind walls, the a/theological subject becomes carefree through its affirmation of its own dispossession, which supports radically generous expenditure. He writes,

> In contrast to the needy self, which yearns for completion, the desiring subject does not want fulfillment... Having realized that death is in life and life in death, that presence is in absence and absence in presence, the empty subject no longer seeks the satisfaction that fills, completes, and closes… The desiring subject discovered an other within that forever disrupts the calm of simple self-identity. By refusing to transform desire into need, the subject consents to its own incompletion… If the subject is not driven to repress the other 'within,' it is not driven to oppress the other 'without.'[769]

Desire accepts the otherness in oneself, whereas need seeks to appropriate otherness: appropriating the other, denying her otherness to satisfy a fantasy of narcissistic completion. Refusing to transform desire into need means allowing the other to be other near me and as other to contribute otherness to me and the world.

On Taylor's account, the desiring subject experiences delight instead of the satisfaction of needs. He explains delight as "*enjoyment without possession*," writing,

> The nonpossessive enjoyment of improper subjects calls into question the psychology of mastery and the economy of utility and consumption… Delight replaces self-affirmation, which attempts to negate negation [i.e., death] by negating otherness, with an affirmation of negation that is impossible apart from acceptance of the other. Instead of struggling to reduce difference to identity,

767 p. 143
768 Ibid.
769 p. 147

> the one who delights acknowledges the identity of difference and appreciates the difference of identity.[770]

Where the capitalist subject is always careful to protect itself, the dispossessed subject becomes carefree—and with Derrida we could say, "radically hospitable"—through, as Taylor writes,

> the realization that the subject is incurable. Contrary to expectation, to be incurable is to be secure, i.e., to be without (*se*) cure or care (*cura*)... Carefreeness involves risk, radical risk; radical risk, which is embodied in total expenditure; total expenditure, which is absolute sacrifice; absolute sacrifice, which is nothing less than self-sacrifice. In this careless venture, one discovers the identity of the sacrificer and the victim: the sacrifice of identity.[771]

Incurability is the condition of one who affirms essential dispossession in one's mortality and intersubjectivity. To be incurable and thus carefree is to be prepared to die, not only the death that comes for us all one day, but to choose to die now to one's narcissism and open oneself to life, as Ricouer would say, "with and for the others."[772] To be carefree is not to be without care for the other, it is opening oneself to acknowledgement of "the identity of the sacrifice and victim" in the interdependence of things and the rootedness of all things in impersonal and universal nature. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, this is the sort of acknowledgement Emerson and Cavell thinks is foundational for friendship and that I and Cameron associated with self-reliance. Against the skeptical and xenophobic tendencies of the stingy capitalist egoism, the recognition of underlying co-dependence is a radically risky venture requiring the sacrifice of oneself in affirmation of one's belonging to the "divine milieu"[773] of the world and relationships. The problems and promises of the contemporary world call for the recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of things, though these are the ethics and

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[770] Ibid.
[771] p. 144
[772] *Oneself as Another*, p. 172
[773] p. 137

politics least supported by our contemporary culture, economics, and politics. As Taylor points out, the democratic and egalitarian dreams of network culture have largely given way to the realities of new digital walls, ideological polarization, and social narcissism.

The friend could be Dasein in its uncanniness. But the voice of the friend, one would imagine, calls to Dasein in a friendlier and less-accusatory way than conscience, not to the nullity of Dasein's guilt but to becoming who it is (i.e., its ownmost-potentiality-for-being-its-Self). Being called to one's ownmost-potentiality-for-Being is not an event in time, but an orientation towards life, and so Dasein encounters its ownmost potentiality-for-being, if it encounters it and to the degree to that it encounters it, in the voice of the friend. Every Dasein carries the friend, as the existential possibility of Dasein's resolute becoming who it is. As Fédier writes, "la liberté… traverse tout ce que vous dit votre ami (freedom… runs through everything your friend says to you.)"[774] When Dasein lives resolutely towards its ownmost-potentiality-for-Being-its-Self, then the friend speaks in friendly tones of resolution and encouragement.

Conclusion: Friendship facilitates emancipatory commitments

In this chapter I have explored transcendentalist and existentialist critiques of liberal, capitalistic conceptions of freedom as the freedom to choose, consume, and own. While these freedoms allow one to feel free, they distract from and cover up the more meaningful and emancipatory freedom of becoming who one is. Being able to choose, consume, and own may contribute to one's overall ability to become who one is, but these forms of freedom are not sufficient. The ideology of capitalistic freedom is not only a distraction from the freedom to

[774] Fédier, p. 10

become who one is, but the enjoyments it affords to some people have been made possible by the unsightly oppression and slavery of others. I have argued that the freedom most appropriate to a human being is the freedom to become who one is. This is a freedom that cannot be formulated in constitutions; it can be defined only in the living of a life. It is a freedom that cannot be differentially distributed and so it cannot tolerate the oppression of some people towards the emancipation of others. This is easier to see for Emerson than Nietzsche, whose "grand politics" clearly describes a two-tiered society of masters, or cultural producers, and slaves, or those whose work creates a surplus that supports cultural producers. However, Nietzsche's naturalism allows him to understand most people as animals who are fulfilled and freed to become who they are precisely in the role of worker. It is democracy's unnatural insistence that the strong and weak become who they are not that amounts to unfreedom for Nietzsche. It is capitalism's unnatural denial to some of the supports and opportunities for self-becoming where he might have seen unfreedom today.

For Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, three philosophers whose philosophy of the individual is haunted by their Christian roots, freedom is found in a commitment to a goal or a vocation. This is a vocation that is unchosen and non-specific, yet in its calling it gives a life direction. The vocation is disclosed not as an explicit goal that could be reached or approached through practical or calculative means. It is disclosed in the meaningfulness of the world, its open avenues of exciting engagement, and the voices of friends.

Friends allow one to disclose one's calling, for oneself and for others, in friendly interactions, such as conversation. In this way one discloses one's calling without needing to know oneself or give an account of the calling. One reveals it and manifests it in one's being with one's friends in the world. Friends encourage one to take up one's calling, they encourage

one to become oneself without saying who that self is. Friends make the world lovely and encourage the loving approach of new goals and vocations. Their agonistic love supports the pursuit of a vocation, however constitutively indistinct and necessarily beyond one's reach the goal remains. Friends are the condition of real emancipation in life. Friendly solicitude lends itself not only to an understanding of what it means to be free in an individual life, but of how we learn to love and be free—in other words, to be friends—with our strange neighbors in political life.

CONCLUSION: Friendship and Modern Loneliness

The emergence of modern capitalism was accompanied by new ethical and political understandings of freedom and human flourishing grounded in modern egoism. Max Weber described the *summum bonum* of this way of life as directed by neither eudaemonism nor hedonism, but "the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life."[775] The pure capitalist mood is not aimed at seeking profit to transform it into pleasure, but the pursuit and reinvestment of unending profit. Weber argues that the Calvinist attempt to quell anxiety about predestination by finding signs of election in one's good works and success at a vocation established a way of being in the world greatly in line with what is needed for the success of capitalists: hardworking people who reinvest rather than enjoying their money. Economist Edmund Phelps celebrates the overcoming of traditional, communitarian values by the modern values of individualism, self-expression, and exploration. There is a broad consensus among historians (e.g., Sellers and Appleby), political philosophers (e.g., Arendt, Cavell, Norris, and Schmitt), and theologians (e.g., Bonhoeffer, Taylor, and Tillich) that modern capitalism has grown alongside modern egoism.

The modern egoist is fundamentally skeptical of reliance on other people. Skeptical and untrusting, he cannot relate to others because he refuses to acknowledge others and cannot see that all are one. Suspicious, he refuses to take the word of his neighbor and so is incapable of being a compatriot. Vain and out of touch with himself, the modern egoist curates an image first for the other and then for himself. Covetous, he aims at possessing more to seem more. Addicted, he swallows up a finite globe in search of an impossible satisfaction and fixates on an ontical call. Inhospitable and narcissistic, he is affronted by the existence of unsightly others

[775] Weber, p. 18

and refuses cohabitation. Averse to pain, he is ready to turn oceans to plastic and his garden to ash to secure a convenience. Averse to pain, it bears repeating, the egoist takes the opium, avoids the challenge, and looks away from unsightly suffering, destruction, and the slipping away of the economic, environmental, and political conditions of his own way of life. Technology supports all this and promises a reality finally cleansed of unsightly others.

Witnessing the emergence of this modern egoism, Emerson and Nietzsche responded with a subjectivity that aims at self-becoming and relies on friendship. Friends are generous and hospitable, ready to share the world and wish that the other be who she is. They are reliable and trust one another, making good conversation partners who allow to be said what cannot be said in solitude and creating a common world. Courageous lovers of the world, they are ready to engage in an agonistic love and to have excitement without end. Educators and liberators, they provoke self-critique and encourage thought. Gratuitous gifts, they teach a freedom that cannot be chosen or possessed since, like friendship, it chooses and possesses you.

Through an exploration of Emerson's and Nietzsche's philosophies of friendship, this research contributes to studies of Emerson's significance for Nietzsche and modern philosophy more broadly. I show how Emerson's and Nietzsche's ethics and politics have been misinterpreted and misappropriated based on their individualism and perfectionism, and I uncover the essentially social character of their individuality in its reliance on friendship. I show how their work on friendship contributes to modern ethics and politics—for Emerson, by supporting thoughtfulness, overcoming skepticism, and mediating society and solitude, and for Nietzsche, by overcoming modern greed, vanity, and pain aversion, and supporting the politics of agonistic pluralism.

The project brings Emerson and Nietzsche to discussions in economics, political philosophy, and religious studies on the emergence of the modern ego, which finds support in capitalist and liberal conceptions of freedom as arbitrary choice, consumption, and ownership. It shows how for Emerson and Nietzsche, individualism and communitarianism are not exclusive and that a strong individualism relies on solicitous and agnostic relationships with others. I explore Emerson and Nietzsche alongside other Protestant and post-Protestant theorists of vocation to show how a fuller conception of freedom as the freedom to become oneself (i.e., to creatively explore oneself and develop one's capacities over the course of a life) is based on commitment to something unchosen. I bring this line of thought to full development in Chapter Five, where I explain Heidegger's claim that all Dasein carries with it "the voice of the friend,"[776] thus contributing to conceptions of Dasein as essentially intersubjective and opening new ground for thinking about the ethics of solicitude in *Being and Time*. I argue overall that many of the most urgent crises in our modern world have been created and supported by the skeptical, greedy, and antagonistic individualism that emerged alongside modern capitalism and that has been further developed through technology and social media.

In Chapter One, I interpreted Emersonian subjectivity and self-reliance considering Emerson's broader religious ideas about the immanence of God in each human. I responded to contradictory readings in the secondary literature, of Emerson as the father of American narcissism and submission, through a description of the spiritual core of subjectivity as the basis for a monism foundational to Emerson's ethical and political thought. The chapter thus contributes to understandings of Emerson's spirituality and the religious foundations of

[776] *Being and Time*, p. 206

transcendentalist individualism as a response to the emergence of modern egoism. I provided a novel reading of self-reliance as a process of becoming oneself in the phenomenology of glances and conversations, and in the existential project of freely exploring and developing one's capacities over the course of a life.

In Chapter Two, I provided the first reading of Emerson's philosophy of friendship that tracks the concept's development from its emergence in his Sermon CXL. I explored the development of Emersonian friendship in dialogue with two of Emerson's major sources, Aristotle and Montaigne, showing how they each connect friendship to the project of becoming oneself. I argued that friendship is a provocation to thought and a mediation of society and solitude that allows one to become oneself without first needing to know oneself. This chapter accomplishes important work unpacking the role of friendship in Emerson's philosophy, particularly regarding Emerson's claims that conversation is "the practice and consummation of friendship"[777] and that "conversation is the worship" of the Over-Soul.[778]

In Chapter Three I showed how Nietzsche psychologizes the philosophy of the divided self with his theory of the will to power, which I claimed can be understood as a forerunner of the Freudian unconscious. I argued that Nietzsche's moral perfectionism requires emancipatory unfreedom, a freedom that shows up in Nietzsche's concepts of asceticism and the sovereign individual. I identified four obstacles to self-overcoming—conformity, charity, greed, and vanity—setting up the discussion in Chapter Four of how friendship responds to these. I unpacked Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality and neighbor love, contributing to

[777] "Friendship," in *Essential Writings*, p. 209
[778] "The Over-Soul," in *Essential Writings*, p. 237

understandings of Nietzsche by demonstrating how neighbor love functions in ways essentially opposite to friendship in his work.

Chapter Four explained the significance of friendship for Nietzsche's perfectionism and developed the significance of Nietzschean agonistic friendship for modern political thought. I discussed the problems of suppressed and internalized aggression in Nietzsche and Freud, arguing that Nietzsche's agonistic friendship is a creative and productive outlet for human aggressivity. I provided a novel reading of *Genealogy of Morals* that understands Nietzsche's account of the emergence of modern morality in terms of the displacement and absence of friendship. I contribute to discussions of Nietzsche in political philosophy, developing his understanding of the friend who is an enemy as a pluralistic and agonistic response to Schmitt's theory of the political as emerging from the life and death distinction between friends and enemies.

Chapter Five unpacked the ethical and political significance of friendship for an understanding of freedom and a flourishing human life. I brought together Emerson, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, three philosophers whose philosophies, I claim, bear the marks of their Christian roots. I argued that their understandings of freedom and self-becoming are structured according to the basic logics of predestination and vocation. I showed how the vocation creates a life of meaningful action in Emerson, and how a vocation makes suffering meaningful for Nietzsche. I explained how Nietzschean freedom is based on the apparently contradictory claims that an unfree animal must posit its own goals and that though these goals must be eternal we must be ready for new goals. I explained these apparent contradictions in terms of learning to love and having brief habits. Using the groundwork of the previous chapters, I

analyzed Heidegger's claim that Dasein carries with it "the voice of the friend,"[779] reading this in the context of his further claims that Dasein's Being-with is grounded in hearing and that resolute Dasein can become the "conscience" of other Dasein. I thus uncovered previously unrecognized contours of Dasein's essential intersubjectivity and Heidegger's ethics in *Being and Time*.

Future directions

This research on the emancipatory potential of friendship sets the stage for a second project on the ethical and political significance of isolation, loneliness, and oppression. When thinking about the origins of totalitarianism in the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt often returned to the themes of loneliness and the absence and impossibility of friendship. In her essay on Lessing in *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt shows how friendship supports the possibility of a free and full human life. She writes that "for the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a polis. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest."[780] Arendt explains that it is only through friendly discourse that the world created by *homo faber* becomes a common world supportive of common sense and political action, which is the action by which humans realize their being most fully. For Arendt, it is not only the things in our world that become what they are through friendly discourse; she claims that "in the course of speaking of it [i.e., the world] we learn to be human."[781]

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[779] *Being and Time*, p. 206
[780] *Men in Dark Times*, p. 24
[781] Ibid., p. 25

To understand this claim, we can turn to Arendt's explanation, in *The Human Condition*, of the *vita activa*, which is ordered most rightly when animal laboring (the maintenance of biological life) and human work (the creation of a cultural world) are supportive of free action, which Arendt always understands as political action. Since certain types of labor are necessitated by nature and certain ways of working are necessitated by the world, it is only by way of political action that humans are truly free to initiate new projects and ways of being. Political action can take place only in the public sphere, which itself relies on the public world and common sense that emerge in friendly conversations that recognize the plurality of ways of being human. She writes, "Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men… corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[782] This means that the world is inhabited by people who have myriad ways of being in the world and that there is not a hegemonic or normative way of being, which would render other ways of being inhuman and potentially worthy of extermination. If any way of being is worthy of extermination, as Arendt reveals in her condemnation of Eichmann, it could only be ways of being that are based in the drive to exterminate and refuse cohabitation to others.

When Arendt thinks about the twentieth century origins of totalitarianism, she often returns to the theme of modern loneliness, which she distinguishes from both isolation and solitude. She explains solitude as the straightforward absence of other people, a state that may be productive of new and engaging ways of encountering the world, as for example in the creative solitude of an artist or philosopher (though Arendt does critique the problematic withdrawal from politics typical of the contemplative life). Isolation is a condition Arendt

[782] *The Human Condition*, p. 7

associates with tyranny and pre-totalitarianism. Isolation is the result of the annihilation of the public sphere such that there is no possibility of organized coordinated political action. Tyrannical regimes promote isolation by dismantling public spaces of face-to-face encounter, agonistic debate, and friendly conversations that are required for the emergence of a common world. Isolated people are free in comparison to lonely people since they are still free in the private sphere where they can be involved in the world in private ways (e.g., enjoying economic freedom and consumption though lacking political freedom). Isolation is exacerbated by the emergence of modern capitalism which prioritizes the economic processes related to labor over political action. In the classical world, people engaged in labor and fabrication to support the higher end of engaging in political action. But in the modern world, politics and culture are put to use for the satisfaction of the desires of humans as *animal laborans*. Tyrannical and totalitarian regimes reduce humans to animals who no longer seek political freedom but who aim merely at the ongoing satisfaction of desires through consumption and arbitrary choice. She writes, "In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice, only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable." This is the victory of animal laborans over homo faber, "Where all human activities have been transformed into laboring…. Isolation then becomes loneliness."[783]

She writes that totalitarianism "is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all,

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[783] *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 173

which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man."[784] In loneliness, individuals are fully estranged from the world, other people, and even their own thoughts. Prevented from friendly conversations in a pluralistic and agonistic public sphere, they lose their common sense and shared understanding of truth so that political action becomes impossible. The lonely individual is committed to the truth of the regime as the only truth available and as the deductive first-premise from which truth derives.[785] Arendt writes, "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., that standards of thought) no longer exist."[786] Separated from other people and the common world, the lonely individual can no longer think her own thoughts or experience her own experiences. The lonely person engages in self-coercive censoring of thought and experience so that the lonely person no longer belongs to the world, she belongs to the regime and its logic. The lonely person becomes thoughtless, calculating truth and experience on the basis of ideology.

Arendt argues that thoughtlessness and loneliness are the general moods of totalitarianism. Made lonely and thoughtless, people are ready to become the instruments of ideological terror that bases itself in pseudo-scientific understandings of the world (e.g., Nazi racism based in Darwinism, or Marxist class revolution based in the logical unfolding of history). Thoughtless and lonely people are rejected from the world, and rejection is maintained through ongoing terror that prepares one to reject others from the world and nature. She writes,

> The Greeks called this humanness which is achieved in the discourse of friendship *philantropia*, "love of man," since it manifests itself in a readiness

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[784] Ibid., p. 173

[785] *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 166

[786] Ibid. p. 172

> to share the world with other men. Its opposite, misanthropy, means simply that the misanthrope finds no one with whom he cares to share the world, that he regards nobody as worthy of rejoicing with him in the world and nature and the cosmos.[787]

It was Eichmann's refusal to share the earth that Arendt determined to be his true crime in the final pages of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In her "Epilogue" and "Postscript," she offers her own analysis of Eichmann's crimes, describing how his banal thoughtlessness supported his willingness to reject the other from the face of the earth.[788] In a final soliloquy, Arendt pronounces a second death sentence on Eichmann, who had already been executed:

> Just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.[789]

Eichmann's thoughtlessness and radical inhospitality can be understood in terms of the loneliness of living under totalitarianism. His thoughtlessness was supported by a regime that destroyed the social conditions of thinking what one thinks.

The cohabitation of the earth Arendt calls for requires more than a mere willingness to live near the other as neighbors; it requires the gift of friendship which supports conversation and a shared world where action is possible. She writes that "this has very little to do with tolerance… but it has a great deal to do with the gift of friendship, with openness to the world, and finally with genuine love of mankind."[790] The gift of friendship is the gift of hearing the voice of the friend even if it causes pain and reveals the unsightliness of the world and history.

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[787] Ibid., p. 25
[788] *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 287-88
[789] *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 279
[790] *Men in Dark Times*, p. 26

This is the gift of living hospitably with the other in conversation and not merely near the other who is tolerated. The contemporary U.S. has seen a withering of the public sphere and the emergence of political loneliness due to the emergence of new technologies, polarizing political practices, the thoughtless retreat to party ideologies, and the narcissistic and vain avoidance of exposure to the agonistic encounter of political conversation.

Inspired by Arendt's theories of loneliness, cohabitation, and oppression, this project will explore the ethical and political consequences of friendlessness. It explores the role of religion in maintaining social solidarity in the work of sociologists of religion such as Peter Berger, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, as well as in the political theories of Augustine, Aquinas, and Carl Schmitt. It explores religious lives that are sustained and made meaningful by solitude and intimacy with God, especially in medieval Christian mysticism and monastic theology, and in the work of American transcendentalists such as Emily Dickinson and Henry Thoreau. Grounded in a reading of Stanley Cavell, it explores the conditions of reconciliation and the maintenance of a common world after the death of God.

On Arendt's account, "Beginning… is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom."[791] Friends, as we have seen, create the possibility of thought, action, and new beginnings. In a world where politics, technology, and culture create increasing isolation and distrust and where the drive for more consumption, choice, and convenience have spoiled the environment, the politics and ethics of friendship remind us of our essential connectedness and mutual pursuits of self-reliance. Perhaps nowhere are new beginnings more ready than in the shared joy of friendship and conversation. What words could be sweeter than those of friendly conversation? Friendship is a love and a space where we will

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[791] *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 177

that each other should become who we are. And so, I end with wishes of new beginnings and bright dawns, my reader, my friend—with wishes that conversations continue and that we should become who we are.

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