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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
AND
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH MORALISTS

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

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BY

SUZANNE MARRS

Norman, Oklahoma

1973

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

AND

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH MORALISTS

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PREFACE

The idea for this study occurred to me one day quite by chance as I read Emerson's essay Nature immediately after having read excerpts from Shaftesbury's Characteristics. It seemed to me that Emerson was remarkably like Shaftesbury, that he was not rejecting England and the eighteenth century as I had always believed he was. I thus set out to determine whether Emerson's critics had seen the same similarities that I had, and when I found that they as a rule had not, I began to explore the works of eighteenth-century Englishmen and of Emerson in order to define their relationship to my own satisfaction.

As I read, three major ideas seemed to recur over and over in the works of Emerson and eighteenth-century writers like Butler, Shaftesbury, and Price. The idea of self-reliance based on the God within seemed to permeate them all. The idea of correspondence between man and nature seemed to be a concept Emerson shared with his eighteenth-century English predecessors. And the idea of compensation, of evil offset by good, seemed to be a third area of common concern.

In the following pages then I shall first deal with the existing scholarship on Emerson's relationship to eighteenth-century England and attempt to point out what I believe to be shortcomings in it. After doing this, I hope to define precisely the Emersonian doctrines of self-reliance, correspondence, and compensation and to show that they are anticipated to a considerable extent in the works of eighteenth-century English moralists. I realize, of course, that I shall not be talking about all of Emerson's major ideas. No man as complex as Emerson can be summed up in three short phrases. But if I am able to show that three concepts acknowledged to be of importance to Emerson are also of importance in eighteenth-century England, I believe Emerson's status as a rebel against this period will have been seriously called into doubt.

Many thanks go to Dr. David P. French and Dr. Bruce Granger who read and judged this study in its various stages of development. They have generously given much time to me, and I am very appreciative.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used in the text of this study.

W The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson. Centenary Edition. 12 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904-4.

JMN The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1819-1848), eds. W. H. Gilman and A. R. Ferguson. 9 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960-71.

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON
AND
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH MORALISTS

CHAPTER I

EMERSON, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND, AND THE CRITICS

Scholars have consistently denied the significance, if not the existence, of eighteenth-century English anticipations of Emersonian self-reliance, correspondence, and compensation. Although Harold C. Goddard as early as 1908 persuasively suggested in Studies in New England Transcendentalism that transcendentalism springs from a blend of eighteenth-century rationalism and sensibility, major studies of Emerson's philosophy have tended to ignore or oppose his argument.[1] Some critics, of course, have recognized and discussed eighteenth-century anticipations of Emerson's ideas, but even they have tended to treat such anticipations in a rather cursory fashion.

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[1]Harold C. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), p. 14 and p. 32.

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Extensive studies of Emerson's philosophy tend to view it as the antithesis of eighteenth-century English thought. Indeed, the major studies of Emerson's philosophy cited by Floyd Stovall in Eight American Authors either picture Emerson's relationship to Augustan England as a basically negative one or avoid discussing it at all.[2] H. D. Gray's Emerson, A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of its Chief Exponent (1917), a book Stovall calls "the earliest and one of the best books devoted exclusively to a study of Emerson's philosophy," largely ignores eighteenth-century England. Aside from citing Berkeley as a source for Emerson's idealism, Gray finds little that Emerson and neo-classicism hold in common.[3] He questions the influence which Hutcheson is supposed to have had on William Ellery Channing, and he emphasizes Emerson's hostility to Locke.[4] Furthermore, he views Emerson as a "consistent mystic,"[5] a phrase which could hardly be used to describe the typical eighteenth-century Englishman. Yet a

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[2]Floyd Stovall, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in Eight American Authors, ed. James Woodress et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 37-84.

[3]Henry David Gray, Emerson, A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of its Chief Exponent (Palo Alto: Standford University Press, 1917), p. 35.

[4]Gray, p. 18 and p. 22.

[5]Gray, p. 47.

careful examination of Emerson's work will, I hope, reveal a very distinct parallel between Hutcheson's mentor Shaftesbury and Emerson and will also reveal that Emerson's mysticism is tempered by a good deal of eighteenth-century rationalism.

Paul Sakmann's R. W. Emerson's Geisteswelt (1927) is the next important study of Emerson's ideas. Sakmann, a German, quite naturally tends to emphasize Emerson's similarities to German rather than English thinkers. He does give credit to Berkeley and Hume for their influence upon Emerson's thought, but on the whole he associates the eighteenth century in England with a "cold, rational conception of nature as a machine," a conception he believes Emerson to be in revolt against.[6] But I believe we shall find that Emerson's concepts of correspondence and compensation owe much to the rationalistic view of nature held in the English Enlightenment.

F. O. Matthiessen's classic American Renaissance (1941) presents a reexamination of Emerson's philosophy, but perpetuates the belief that Emerson "was in reaction against the formal logic of the eighteenth century," against "the formulas of eighteenth-century rationalism."[7] And Matthiessen argues that Emerson's belief that the poet must write about himself "put him in fundamental opposition to the norm of

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[6]Paul Sakmann, Emerson's Geisteswelt (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1927), p. 117.

[7]F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 7.

the previous century, as it had been made explicit, for instance, by Shaftesbury . . . ."[8] Matthiessen is surely correct in saying that Emerson did not write in the very formal, very logical manner of eighteenth-century men and that his writing tends to be more personal than does the writing of many eighteenth-century English figures. Yet Emerson, as we shall see, shares the beliefs of many eighteenth-century rationalists, and if some eighteenth-century men do not talk about themselves directly, their talk is nevertheless quite personal beneath the masks of formality which they wear.

A very distinguished work, Sherman Paul's Emerson's Angle of Vision (1952), offers still another consideration of Emerson's thought, especially of his belief in correspondence. And Paul, unlike his predecessors, suggests that Emerson does have some affinity with the eighteenth-century in England:

> Dedicated to the Lockean understanding, early nineteenth-century New England selected from the manifold riches of the eighteenth-century those elements of method and philosophy which, in terms of their spiritual needs, were showing most the effects of hardening and inutility. It had been slow to grasp the subterranean currents of emotion already present in Edwards' use of Hutcheson, which actually culminated in Wordsworth as a response to the irreconcilable belief in both physical mechanism and spiritual free will.[9]

Paul thus recognizes that similarities between Emerson and

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[8]Matthiessen, p. 67.

[9]Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 13-14.

the eighteenth-century English strain of sensibility exist, but he suggests that Americans tended not to be aware of these similarities.

Yet Paul stresses differences rather than similarities between Emerson and his eighteenth-century English forebears. Most importantly, he suggests that the static view of the universe held in eighteenth-century England is totally different from the dynamic universe Emerson perceives. He writes that eighteenth-century optimism

> unrolled a future as irremediable as the past. The cosmic certainty that whatever is, or has been, is right and good, left change to the uninterrupted Newtonian mechanism. Change was linear, merely the reorientation in time and space of bodies smoothly operating to the divine purpose, but in themselves, will-less and isolated. Nowhere did the system admit of growth in the organic sense. Nowhere did it admit the perception that anticipated the future. For Emerson it admitted only an optimism of submission.[10]

Paul makes a valid point when he argues that Emerson in the course of his career came to reject the static concept that "whatever is, is right" and to believe in melioration along the scale of being. But he neglects eighteenth-century figures like Thomson, Akenside, and Young who also believe in melioration. His view of eighteenth-century England is clearly too limited here and needs to take account of what he himself elsewhere calls "the manifold riches of the eighteenth century."

In addition, Paul writes that Emerson believes the

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[10]Paul, p. 18.

basis of self-reliance, "the self and its experience of dependence on a higher source for spiritual power," to be antithetical to eighteenth-century English thought.[11] But we shall see that references in Emerson's journals link Shaftesbury and Price to this concept. And I hope to demonstrate that a variety of other eighteenth-century moralists anticipate Emersonian self-reliance, even though Emerson may not have recognized such a parallel between his work and theirs.

One year after Paul's book was published, Stephen Whicher's Freedom and Fate (1953) appeared, offering the most positive statement to that date of Emerson's relationship to the eighteenth century. Whicher's purpose in his book is to provide a spiritual biography of Emerson, not to discuss Emerson's debt to the eighteenth century in England, but he does briefly suggest areas of similarity. For instance, Whicher notes that the "tradition of the 'moral sense'" seen in Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Stewart was "easily enlarged under later intellectual influences, into a full belief in the God within us."[12] Further, he suggests in a rather oblique way that Emerson's concept of compensation is an Enlightenment idea.[13] And he also discusses the oft noted

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[11]Paul, p. 9.

[12]Stephen E. Whicher, Freedom and Fate, An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1953; rpt. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1961), p. 14.

[13]Whicher, p. 37.

similarity between Emerson and Berkeley.[14] However, Whicher does not go beyond suggesting the existence of these similarities. His interest lies in other directions.

Whicher's study seems to lay a basis for a reexamination of Emerson's relationship to the eighteenth century, but scholars in the sixties have steered away from such a reexamination. Philip L. Nicoloff in his book Emerson on Race and History (1961) tends instead to see Emerson as opposed to the eighteenth century in England. He writes that "The whole rationalistic postulate behind eighteenth-century historical study was diametrically opposed to Emerson's belief that history was essentially a record of man's moral growth."[15] Later in his book he does find that Emerson makes some use of "the great scientific tradition of the eighteenth century," but he also argues that Emerson's faith that the universe is "progressive, ameliorative," opposes that tradition.[16] Nicoloff thus chooses not to discuss the progressive view of history put forth by an Anglican apologist like Edmund Law or by a rationalist like Richard Price.

Jonathan Bishop in his Emerson on the Soul purposely avoids discussing possible sources for Emerson's works, but this policy at times leads him into distortions of Emerson's

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[14]Whicher, p. 15.

[15]Philip L. Nicoloff, Emerson on Race and History, An Examination of English Traits (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961), p. 93.

[16]Nicoloff, p. 101.

position. For instance, he finds compensation to be "Emerson's most idiosyncratic contribution to ethical thought,"[17] whereas the faith that virtue is rewarded in this world permeates eighteenth-century England. In addition, Bishop argues that the eighteenth century made Newton the "archenemy of the imagination,"[18] without considering the very positive effects eighteenth-century disciples of Newton had upon Emerson.

Maurice Gonnaud's Individu et Societe dans L'oeuvre de Ralph Waldo Emerson (1964), like Bishop's study, does not seriously concern itself with parallels between Emerson and eighteenth-century England. Gonnaud notes that Stephen Whicher has already considered Emerson's relationship to Locke, Hutcheson, Berkeley, Hume, and Stewart and that he therefore will not cover that ground again.[19] Gonnaud does briefly note, however, similarities and differences in the economic views of Emerson, Mandeville, Hume, and Smith and does discuss Emerson's fondness for Burke.[20]

William M. Wynkoop's Three Children of the Universe, Emerson's View of Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton (1966) is yet another study unconcerned with eighteenth-century

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[17]Jonathan Bishop, Emerson on the Soul (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 72.

[18]Bishop, p. 52.

[19]Maurice Gonnaud, Individu et Societe dans L'Oeuvre de Ralph Waldo Emerson (Paris: Didier, 1964), p. 39.

[20]Gonnaud, p. 63 and pp. 186-87.

England. This book centers instead on Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton as the embodiments of Emerson's Knower, Doer, and Sayer. But, whereas Wynkoop does discuss the significance of Coleridge to Emerson's thought when he considers Coleridge's literary criticism, he tends to make short work of eighteenth-century critical opinions. He finds, for instance, that Johnson's "criticism . . . could not satisfy" Emerson and therefore does not explore it extensively.[21] Wynkoop's belief in the relative unimportance of Emerson's relationship to eighteenth-century England is thus implicit in his study.

Finally, Michael H. Cowan's very stimulating book City of the West: Emerson, America and the Urban Metaphor (1967) is only slightly concerned with neoclassicism in England. Cowan notes that Emerson "kept in touch with the metaphors and themes of this literature through his lifelong reading in the neoclassicists."[22] And he argues that "popular romantics in America did not really protest against neoclassical precepts as had many European Romantics, but rather grafted various Romantic modes of literature and architecture onto that neoclassicism."[23] Yet Cowan does not

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[21]William Wynkoop, Three Children of the Universe (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 76-79.

[22]Michael H. Cowan, City of the West: Emerson, America, and the Urban Metaphor (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 126.

[23]Cowan, pp. 130-31.

develop these very suggestive statements. Indeed, he seems to overlook, for instance, the progressive view of history in Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire when he writes that

> The lesson taught by Rome often seems too dark for Emerson's comfort (JMN, 2, 164), since it implied that man's movement through time was governed by a series of vicious historical cycles. As he read Gibbon's recounting of Italy after the fall of the Empire, he was depressed by the impression that 'each year is a disastrous repetition of tyranny, revolution, and bloodshed . . . .'[24]

Emerson may truly have believed that Gibbon pictured history in cyclical terms, but it is clear that Gibbon's moderately progressive view of history foreshadows Emerson's own.

Thus, major studies of Emerson's philosophy published early in this century tend to ignore his relationship to eighteenth-century England or to suggest that the relationship is one of revolt. And although Stephen Whicher suggests a positive connection between Emerson and the eighteenth century, the major studies of the sixties have failed to pursue energetically this rich vein, choosing instead to perpetuate the earlier views.

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However, though not so extensively nor so centrally concerned with Emerson's philosophy as Whicher, a number of critics have shared his belief in Emerson's relationship to eighteenth-century England. These scholars have variously

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[24]Cowan, p. 135.

found self-reliance, correspondence, or compensation to be doctrines which clearly link Emerson to his neoclassical forebears.

Hesitant to directly suggest that Emerson's belief in self-reliance has eighteenth-century roots, several critics have nevertheless recognized Emerson's reliance upon the eighteenth-century concept of the moral sense, a concept which is, as Whicher points out, essential to Emersonian self-reliance. Merrell Davis in "Emerson's Reason and the Scottish Philosophers" (1944) persuasively argues that Emerson's belief in Reason is very much like Stewart's belief in the moral sense. Indeed, he asserts that "Emerson was familiar with the idea of an intuitive moral faculty 'coeval with the first operation of the intellect,' from his reading and study of Stewart during his undergraduate days at Harvard."[25] More explicitly, John Gerber (1949) finds distinct parallels between statements by Emerson and Adam Smith on self-reliance, though he does not emphasize Smith's very un-Emersonian materialistic bias.[26] And Alexander Kern (1953) finds that Richard Price and the Scottish common sense school play a central role in establishing Emerson's belief in the moral sense, but he like Davis does not push on to

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[25]Merrell R. Davis, "Emerson's Reason and the Scottish Philosophers," NEQ, XVII (1944), 218-19.

[26]John C. Gerber, "Emerson and the Political Economists," NEQ, XXII (1949), 338-39.

suggest a similarity in the area of self-reliance.[27]

Joel Porte, however, in Emerson and Thoreau, Transcendentalists in Conflict (1966) does find Richard Price to be one source for Emerson's belief in the God within, the belief which is the essence of Emersonian self-reliance:

> Since Price has defined 'understanding' as that which apprehends absolute truth, God's 'nature' (eternal mind and eternal truth) is His 'understanding.' But man, too, has the faculty of 'understanding,' which enables him immediately and intuitively to participate in this eternal mind. Thus, man's 'understanding' and 'God' (God as eternal truth rather than eternal will) have deftly come together.[28]

Porte here suggests that Price anticipates Emerson's belief in the God within, for Price believes that man like God can apprehend absolute truth. However, Porte does not go on to discuss other eighteenth-century English sources for this belief. Instead his emphasis is on Emerson's moral philosophy.

Finally, J. Blakeney Richard in his article "Emerson and Berkeleian Idealism" (1970) suggests that Emerson shares with Berkeley a belief in "a transcendental reality toward which human reason was constantly striving."[29] And he

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[27]Alexander Kern, "The Rise of Transcendentalism, 1815-1860," in Transitions in American Literary History, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 264-66.

[28]Joel Porte, Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1966), p. 73.

[29]J. Blakeney Richard, "Emerson and Berkeleian Idealism," ESQ, No. 58 (I Quarter 1970), p. 92.

further argues that "God-reliance . . . becomes the very core of both Berkeley's and Emerson's philosophies . . . ."[30] Finally, he writes that a belief in correspondence is essential to both Berkeley's and Emerson's beliefs in self-reliance: "both men can be 'self-reliant' because both believe that 'the voice of nature, which speaks to our eyes, is not liable to that misinterpretation and ambiguity that languages of human contrivance are unavoidably subject to.'"[31] This conclusion is particularly impressive because the quotation from Berkeley sounds distinctly Emersonian.

In addition to finding an eighteenth-century basis for self-reliance, critics have suggested that Emerson's belief in correspondence links him to the eighteenth century. Harry Hayden Clark in his essay "Emerson and Science" (1931) makes valuable suggestions concerning Emerson's relationship to eighteenth-century English correspondence without developing them:

> An interesting study could be made of the way in which Emerson derived, in various degrees, his fundamental doctrine of the correspondence and analogy between matter and mind, natural history and human history, from such sources as Butler's Analogy, Paley's Natural Theology, Wollaston's Religion of Nature, Newton (whose theory of the centrality of matter in accordance with the law of gravity suggested Emerson's theory of ethical centrality), Plato (whose 'celestial geometry' affirms the coincidence of science and virtue),

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[30]Richard, p. 94.

[31]Richard, p. 95.

> Coleridge, Bacon, Swedenborg, Goethe, and Wordsworth.[32]

Butler, Paley, and Wollaston are, of course, eighteenth-century English moralists, and Clark's comment suggests a valuable study which could be made, but which he chooses not to make. He recognizes that Emerson's belief in correspondence may well come from the eighteenth century, but he does not develop this idea beyond a further note upon Butler's influence. Like Clark, Joel Porte suggests that correspondence links Emerson to the eighteenth century, but he too presents this idea without developing it.[33] He finds that "Emersonian correspondence is closer to eighteenth-century Christian evolutionary theory than to anything else," but does not go on to explore this similarity.

Finally, critics have seen compensation as a neo-classical concept which endures in Emerson's thought. Clark notes that the eighteenth century may be a source for Emerson's doctrine of compensation when he writes "that the substance of the later essay 'Compensation' appears in the Journals of 1826 (II,70-78) in connection with Emerson's praise of Butler's Analogy and its doctrine of 'a most exact and benign adaptation.'"[34] But again, Clark does not have the space to develop fully the relationship between

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[32]Harry Hayden Clark, "Emerson and Science," PQ, X (1931), 226-27.

[33]Porte, p. 13.

[34]Clark, pp. 226-27.

eighteenth-century and Emersonian compensation.

Joel Porte echoes Clark's suggestion that compensation ties Emerson to the eighteenth century. Most notably, he cites these famous lines from Pope's "Essay on Man" to suggest that Emersonian compensation is a neoclassical concept: "God sends not ill if rightly understood,/For partial evil is universal good."[35] Yet Porte seems to confuse Pope's rather static view of the universe with a melioristic view when he calls a belief in meliorism "the basis for eighteenth-century optimism."[36] He, in fact, fails to note that Emerson's view shifts from just such a static concept to a melioristic attitude more like Priestley's than Pope's.

Thus, if the major studies of Emerson's philosophy find him to be antithetical to neoclassicism, there are critics who have perceived distinct similarities between Emersonian and Augustan doctrines of self-reliance, correspondence, and compensation. Yet no critic has examined the extent of these parallels or explored their subtleties. The eighteenth-century English anticipations of Emerson's philosophy clearly need further study.

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[35]Porte, p. 12.

[36]Porte, p. 12.

CHAPTER II

EMERSON, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND, AND SELF-RELIANCE

> Here is the root of all romanticism; that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so arrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities have a chance and you will get Progress.[1]

Surely T. E. Hulme's definition of this root of romanticism is essential to understanding Emersonian philosophy, for especially in his most radical works Emerson proclaims the doctrine of self-trust. But to regard his proclamation of self-sufficiency in the present as a rejection of the past in general and of eighteenth-century England in particular may be quite misleading. Indeed, Joel Porte argues,

> it is worth noting that many of Emerson's major ideas bear a striking resemblance to those of the Age of Reason--that Emerson . . . is intellectually much more a man of the eighteenth century than he is of the nineteenth--and that what Orestes Brownson called 'the material soulless philosophy of the last century' accounted in general for a good deal of Transcendental gospel.[2]

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[1]T. E. Hulme, Speculations, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, 1936), p. 116.

[2]Porte, p. 11.

It seems in order, therefore, to examine the essence of Emerson's position on self-reliance, to look carefully at eighteenth-century English statements which insist on self-reliance, and then to determine whether Emerson renounces the eighteenth century.

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Emerson's concept of self-reliance in the early years of his career as an essayist (1836-1841) is truly radical. Not content to argue merely for free will as opposed to fate, he discovers that "God must be sought within, not without,"[3] and believes, as Stephen Whicher persuasively argues, the divinity of man's soul to be "an original intuition of the private man, a principle of independence, creativity and youth, the mainspring of all heroism and greatness."[4] Such a view of the soul inevitably involves confusion and possible contradiction; by finding God in man, Emerson makes self-reliance and God-reliance, freedom and fate, power and form very similar. But Emerson believes that finding the God within frees man from seeking external validation for his beliefs and actions and allows him to share in the power of God.

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[3]Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of . . ., ed. W. H. Gilman et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960-71), III, 4. All future references to Emerson's journals and notebooks for the years 1819-1848 will be to this edition and will be made parenthetically in the text. Hereafter cited as JMN.

[4]Whicher, p. 51.

This extreme philosophy of self-reliance arises to some extent from Emerson's particular situation in his home of Concord. Henry Seidel Canby notes that

> The world for Emerson was and remained a Concord, where of one hundred men and women, seventy were rising in the world, economically, intellectually, or spiritually, five had symptoms of greatness, twenty at most were clods, and five imbecile, degenerate or rawly Irish. From no other society could a theory of the infinite potentiality of man on his own responsibility and by his own endeavors have so easily arisen . . . .[5]

Concord certainly provides an environment conducive to the sort of optimism and individual effort in which Emerson believes, though Canby seems mistaken when he asserts that the world was always to be a Concord for Emerson. Later in his career Emerson comes to see a world which makes his philosophy difficult to maintain, but early in his career, his world is Concord and his philosophy is self-reliance.

Nature (1836) most notably espouses this doctrine. Indeed, here Emerson reasons that "man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite."[6] Man can feel himself one with God, can know a transcendent reality. Moreover, Emerson writes that

> From the child's successive possession of his several senses up to the hour when he saith, "Thy will be

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[5]Henry Seidel Canby, Classic Americans (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), p. 157.

[6]The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903-4) I, 64. All future references to Emerson's essays will be to this edition and will be made parenthetically in the text. Hereafter cited as W.

> done!" he is learning the secret that he can reduce under his will not only particular events but great classes, nay, the whole series, and so conform all facts to his character. . . . One after another, his victorious thought comes up with and reduces all things, until the world becomes at last only a realized will,--the double of the man. (W, I, 39-40)

Emerson suggests that because he has the God within, man can see beyond the physical world of appearances and intuitively perceive the spiritual order of the creation. And he further suggests that because man is a "creator in the finite," the order of nature will be his double just as it is the double of the Creator. Thus, for Emerson the God within is the source of tremendous self-confidence, for it guarantees that the perceptions of an individual are not distortions but are absolute truths. It guarantees that man's intuitive belief that the "axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics". (W, I, 33) is an eternal truth, not a transitory dream.

The God within is also a source of practical power for Emerson, for it allows man confidently to pursue in action what he believes to be right. The history of Jesus and the "achievements of a principle, as in religious and political revolutions, and in the abolition of the slave trade" (W, I, 73) are but two examples of practical power which can come from a belief in the God within. Knowledge that one's actions are sanctified eliminates any hesitation about undertaking action, Emerson seems to suggest.

Because he believes man can possess this intellectual and practical power, Emerson urges him to scorn slavish

dependence upon the past. Thus, he begins Nature by noting, "Our age is retrospective. It builds sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes." (W, I, 3) In Nature, therefore, Emerson finds the God within to be the source of man's power and freedom, to be the source of his self-reliance, and finds dependence upon the past and failure to recognize the God within to be sources of limitation.

Emerson argues along similar lines in "The American Scholar" (1837). In this address he finds that the duties of the scholar "may all be comprised in self-trust" (W, I, 100). And he later indicates the full meaning of that term:

> It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so is it ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin, it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has anything in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. (W, I, 105)

Emerson suggests that insofar as man knows God to be within, he can see nature to be a symbol of himself. If he feels himself divine, man need not see the universe as inert matter but can see its unity and spiritual significance. Emerson believes the American scholar will have the intellectual power to perceive the meaning of the world around him only when he views the world from the perspective of God and trusts that his perceptions are God's. The source of man's

power here as in Nature is thus the divinity of his soul. The scholar must learn that "The world is nothing, the man is all" and that in himself "slumbers the whole of Reason" (W, I, 114). Emerson does acknowledge here more clearly than he does in Nature the importance of the past, especially of past literary efforts:

> It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy,--with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all time from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said. (W, I, 91-92)

Emerson writes that men of all times, even the neoclassical Dryden, have shared the same insights into eternal verities. But he elsewhere notes that no man can exclude local references from his work and that each age must therefore produce its own books, must bring forth its own men of divine vision (W, I, 88).

If Emerson stresses self-sufficiency as opposed to limitation in "The American Scholar," he also does so in "The Divinity School Address" (1838). In this speech directed to Harvard College's divinity students, Emerson asserts that "the gleams which flash across my mind are not mine, but God's" (W, I, 132). And although this may seem to suggest that man is not in control of himself, Emerson believes that the divinity within is the source of true

independence. Because he finds God in man, Emerson believes man shares in the power of God and is not merely subject to it. Indeed, he writes of Jesus Christ, "Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World." (W, I, 128) Man may freely choose, Emerson argues, to recognize the divine within himself, to accept the power of insight that is legitimately his. But he believes that this sort of self-knowledge "is an intuition; it cannot be received at second hand" (W, I, 127). A minister, Emerson tells the future ministers in his audience, can truly rely upon himself when he has faith that God is within. And with such faith the minister will no longer need to mechanically follow the practices of the Wesleys and Oberlins (W, I, 145). He will be able to make his church come alive.

Finally, the concept of self-reliance permeates Essays: First Series (1841). Emerson again locates God in the soul of man. In "History" he finds that "every man is a divinity in disguise . . ." (W, II, 31). In "Self-Reliance" he writes that "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity" (W, II, 64). In "Compensation" he finds that "Jesus and Shakespeare are fragments of the soul" (W, II, 124). In "The Over-Soul" he asserts that "within man is the soul of the whole" (W, II, 269). And Emerson pictures the divinity

within as a source of power for the individual:

> Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. (W, II, 47)

Here in "Self-Reliance" Emerson paradoxically calls for man to trust himself while at the same time he acknowledges that man's greatness comes through acceptance of God's will. By sharing in the power of God, he suggests, man becomes self-reliant, for he is no longer subject to outside forces. Man need not defer to tradition, books, or advisors, if he will merely look within himself.

A similar argument is advanced in "The Over-Soul," though the rhetoric here is much more restrained:

> 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. 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. All reform aims, in some one particular, to let the great soul have its way through us; in other words to engage us to obey. (W, II, 271)

Emerson suggests that intellectual, moral, and emotional self-reliance all originate in the God within. When man feels God within, he transcends his material desires and

intellectually and intuitively perceives the unity of the creation. And this vision of unity is not a dream, for it is validated by the inner deity. In addition, when man feels God within, he has moral power. He knows how to act and knows that his actions are virtuous because they are inspired by God. Finally, when man is one with the Over-Soul, he views the world with love, a positive emotion rather than a self-destructive one. Man can thus be truly self-reliant, Emerson argues, when he knows God to be within.

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The basis of Emersonian self-reliance is therefore the God within. The God within brings man intellectual, moral, practical, and emotional power, and that power allows him to be self-sufficient. Yet this idea is not uniquely Emerson's, and it is certainly not foreign to eighteenth-century England. English common-sense moralists share Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance to a considerable extent, and British intellectual moralists share in the ideas on which this doctrine is based.

The eighteenth-century English common-sense moralists most clearly anticipate Emerson's belief in self-reliance. Leslie Stephen defines them as that group of philosophers who believe in vital truths even though those truths cannot be demonstrated by pure reason. This group finds that logic does not put God and virtue on a secure basis, but believes that both God and virtue can be known intuitively. To the

rationalists this philosophy thus seems "mere empiricism," for it abandons the effort to prove moral dogmas deductively. And to the empiricists such a philosophy is objectionable because it possesses "an authority requiring no confirmation from experience."[7] But to Emerson the beliefs of the common-sense moralists must be agreeable, for he argues that intuition is man's highest faculty, and he denies the validity of mere empiricism.

More specifically, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and a common-sense moralist, anticipates Emerson's position on self-reliance, for he too believes in the God within. Indeed, Theocles, his spokesman in The Moralists (1705), states:

> thought we own pre-eminent, and confess the realest of beings, the only existence of which we are made sure by being conscious. All else may be only dream and shadow. All which even sense suggests may be deceitful. The sense itself remains still; reason subsists, and thought maintains its eldership of being. Thus, are we in a manner conscious of that original and eternally existent thought whence we derive our own. And thus the assurance we have of the existence of being above our sense and of thee (the great exemplar of thy works) comes from thee, the all true and perfect, who hast thus communicated thyself more immediately to us, so as in some manner to inhabit within our souls, thou who art original soul, diffusive, vital in all, inspiriting the whole.[8]

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[7]Leslie Stephen, A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, 3rd ed. (1902; rpt. London: Harcourt, Brace, 1962), II, 13.

[8]Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics, ed. John M. Robertson (London: Grant Richards, 1900), II, 112.

Shaftesbury thus finds God within, for he believes that God contrives "in some manner to inhabit within our souls." And for Shaftesbury the God within brings a sort of self-reliance or intellectual power because it alone assures man of the existence of God and of the order of the whole. As R. L. Brett notes, "Shaftesbury pins his faith to the intuitive apprehensions of the universal mind by the individual mind."[9]

Moreover, Shaftesbury, like Emerson, finds reality in thought, finds that the world of the senses may "be only dream and shadow." As Ernest Tuveson writes, Shaftesbury "furthered the process by which, as Panofsky has said, the dualism between Christian and classical 'ceased to be real, . . . because the very principle of reality was shifted to the subjective human consciousness.'"[10] Shaftesbury 130 years before Emerson thus suggests that man is self-sufficient because reality must be known through intuition rather than sensory perception of externals.[11] But Shaftesbury elsewhere denies that the world of sense is an illusion,[12] and he certainly is far more interested in moral

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[9]R. L. Brett, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (London: Hutchinson's Univ. Library, 1951), p. 65.

[10]Ernest Tuveson, "The Importance of Shaftesbury," ELH, 20 (1953), 283.

[11]Richard vaguely suggests a similar parallel in terms of Berkeley's thought in his article cited in the notes to Chapter I.

[12]Shaftesbury, II, 287.

power than he is in experiencing transcendent reality. In addition, Shaftesbury does not suggest that man can achieve a total oneness with God, and consequently he does not experience the great surge of power Emerson does. Still, the similarities between Emerson and Shaftesbury are greater than their differences, for they differ only in degree, not in kind.

Shaftesbury's belief in the moral sense also anticipates Emerson's belief in the God within and in self-reliance. Shaftesbury states that man has a "sense of right and wrong" which is "as natural to us as natural affection itself" and is "a first principle in our constitution and make."[13] He does not identify this sense with the God within; he does not deify it. But like the God within, the moral sense is a source of independence for man. A belief in man's natural goodness, in his moral sense, Shaftesbury suggests, should open the way "to free men from the perversions engendered by religious dogmas and zeal, from false, derogatory ideas of human nature, and from artificial customs which separate man from nature, God from nature, and all three from the unity in which they should exist."[14] If men believe in a moral sense which can guide them, they need not debate over which narrow religious dogmas to follow. If men believe in a moral sense, they can see their own worth

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[13]Shaftesbury, I, 260.

[14]Tuveson, "The Importance of Shaftesbury," p. 276.

and not feel depraved. And if men are naturally good, they need not look to a future life for redemption, but can find fulfillment in this life. The moral sense, like the God within, is thus a source of freedom and power. Small wonder then that Emerson records in his journal on July 6, 1831, the following comment:

> Shaftesbury's maxim, That wisdom comes more from the heart than the head. 'Do the will, know the doctrines.' Impera parendo. Obedience is the eye which reads the laws of the universe. For the moral sense is the proper keeper of the doors of knowledge . . . . (JMN, III, 269)

Emerson cites Shaftesbury in his journal because the concept of the moral sense is an important one to him, and as Whicher notes it is easily enlarged "into a full belief in the God within us."[15] Shaftesbury and those who perpetuate his belief in the moral sense--Hutcheson, Reid, Stewart, and Brown--thus clearly anticipate Emerson's concept of self-reliance.[16]

A common-sense moralist who is very different from Shaftesbury and his followers also anticipates Emerson's concept of self-reliance. Bishop Joseph Butler truly stresses self-trust. He writes in "Sermon III" that man "from his make, constitution, or nature, . . . is in the strictest and most proper sense a law unto himself. He hath

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[15]Whicher, p. 15.

[16]See the article by Merrell Davis cited in the notes to Chapter I, and see also Alfred J. Kloeckner, "Intellect and Moral Sentiment in Emerson's Opinions of 'The Meaner Kinds' of Men," AL, 30 (1958), 322-38.

the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it."[17] And for Butler the "rule of right within" or the conscience is identical to the God within. As Stephen notes, "The God whom Butler worships is, in fact, the human conscience deified."[18] Moreover, Butler describes conscience in very Emersonian terms. He finds it to be "a sentiment of the understanding or a perception of the heart."[19] Neither purely rational nor purely emotional, it is truly an intuition.[20] Butler thus clearly foreshadows Emerson's 1833 assertion that "A man contains all that is needful to his government within himself. He is made a law unto himself. . . . The highest revelation is that God is in every man" (JMN, IV, 83).

Yet this search for similarity must not be carried too far. If Butler deifies the conscience and makes it the source of moral power, he does not envision it as a source of great intellectual power. For Emerson the God within brings both. But for Butler the order of the universe is often inexplicable and must be accepted on faith. Moreover, Butler's sense of evil in the world darkens his view of self-reliance; his concept of man's nature does not lead him into the

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[17]Joseph Butler, Works, ed. W. E. Gladstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), II, 69.

[18]Stephen, I, 248.

[19]Ernest C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 123.

[20]Butler, I, 245-46.

optimism that Emerson or Shaftesbury's concepts lead them to. But this difference can perhaps best be considered when we discuss compensation in Chapters IV and V.

Despite these differences, Bishop Butler, a man whose works Emerson carefully studied at Harvard,[21] anticipates clearly the basis of Emersonian self-reliance. In fact, the idea of conscience is so closely linked to Emerson's belief in the God within that Porte writes "that Emerson's experience of God turns out to be no more than the shock of conscience."[22] We have seen the God within to be more than a name for the conscience, but perhaps it is primarily Emerson's word for this inner light.[23]

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[21]E. W. Todd, "Philosophy at Harvard College," NEQ, 16 (1943), 79-80.

[22]Porte, p. 91.

[23]If Butler's deification of the conscience anticipates Emerson's belief in the God within, it also represents a belief held by a good many eighteenth-century English divines. Robert South, for example, preaches a sermon in 1691 in which he argues,

> It cannot after this, with any Colour of Reason be doubted, but that the Holy Spirit of God, whose Power, and Influence to do Good is much greater, than that of the wicked Spirit to Evil, does frequently inject into and imprint upon the Soul many blessed Motions, and Impulses to Duty, and many powerfull Avocations from Sin. So that a Man shall not only (as the Prophet says) hear a Voice behind him, but also a Voice within him, telling him which way he ought to go. (Helen C. White et al. eds., Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose (New York: Macmillan, 1952), II, 194.)

South, like Emerson and Butler, finds God within and believes the God within to be a source of moral and practical strength. Of course, South argues that the God within cannot always be such a source of strength and advises his

Finally, John Norris, one of the Cambridge Platonists who had so much influence upon Shaftesbury, closely approximates Emerson's position on self-reliance. In his Essay toward the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World he argues for self-reliance on the grounds that man possesses the divine within himself. He states that the Truth

> will tell thee that she is in God, and that he eternally contemplates and loves her, and rejoices in her ever charming, and never fading Beauty. And if this does not satisfy, she will farther tell thee, that she is in thy self, because of the intimate Union thy Soul has with its Creator, and that she keeps an Oracle within thy own Breast and that instead of hunting after her among Books (which for the most part is seeking the living among the Dead) thou needst but enter into thyself to consult her, and receive her Answer. For the Word is nigh thee, and thou carriest thy Divine Master and Teacher, Truth, within thy own Bosom as unmindful as thou art of thy self and her, while she teaches thee in the School of the Breast, even that eternal and universal Reason that shines upon all Minds with a pure steady and uniform Light, gives to all Men the same common Answers, and instructs them while they think they teach themselves, or learn from others, by whose Participation they are Rational and Intelligent, and in whose inward Light they see and understand whatever they

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congregation to use the scripture as a supplement to their internal lights. South does not, therefore, picture man to be as self-sufficient as does Emerson, but he does share nevertheless in the doctrine of self-reliance. Similarly, Yorick's sermon in Tristram Shandy seems almost to echo South's. Yorick argues that man should attend to his inner light but also argues that he must validate private inspiration by refering to scripture read with the aid of calm reason (Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1965, p. 100). And R. S. Crane's article "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, I (December, 1934), 205-30, discusses numerous clergymen who believe man has a natural love of good which guides him. Butler, therefore, furnishes a major example of the similarity of the eighteenth-century conscience and the nineteenth-century God within. He in anticipating Emerson is not a voice in the wilderness.

> know, even the increated [sic] Word and Wisdom of God . . . .[24]

Norris here finds that man's soul has an "intimate Union" with its Creator. And he further finds that for this reason man should look for the truth within himself and not in books. Such an argument, of course, sounds much like the one advanced in "The American Scholar," and Norris clearly foreshadows Emerson's view of self-reliance as expressed there. Moreover, the God within allows Norris to understand that the sensible world is not the real world, that the world of ideas or the intelligible world is truly real. But Norris does differ from Emerson in two distinct ways. First, he seeks "participation in a transcendental God."[25] He does not seek to internalize God to the same extent that Emerson does. And secondly, Norris does not really see moral or practical power emerging from his concept of the God within. However, Norris does clearly suggest the idea of God within, and he does experience the intuitive, intellectual power which Emerson was to find as a result of this idea.

If the common-sense moralists foreshadow Emerson's actual concept of self-reliance, the intellectual moralists anticipate its basis. Emerson undoubtedly would object to the assertion by these moralists that man should rationally rather than intuitively determine how to act in a given

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[24]John Norris, An Essay toward the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World (London, 1704), I, 390.

[25]Tuveson, "The Importance of Shaftesbury," p. 269.

situation, for he writes, "We love characters in proportion as they are impulsive and spontaneous" (W, II, 133). But these moralists suggest that man can rationally determine how to act only by viewing a particular situation in terms of "a small number of truths" which are "intuitively apprehended."[26] And Emerson himself believes in such a priori truths. Indeed, he argues that man is not truly self-reliant if he must depend on external validations of his beliefs.[27] He writes that the knowledge that God is within must be an intuition; one cannot learn of this through reading or experience. Thus, it is especially significant that Emerson records in his journal for 1820 Dugald Stewart's comment on the intellectual moralist Dr. Samuel Clarke: "The argument a priori has been enforced with singular ingenuity by Dr. Clarke" (JMN, I, 377). Emerson is quite aware early in his career of this eighteenth-century English concept which he will later adopt.

Emerson's affinity for the concepts of intellectual moralists is probably best seen in his relationship to the works of Dr. Richard Price. Emerson at first doubts the importance of Price, for he writes in his journal for March 14, 1821:

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[26]Stephen, II, 6.

[27]Though, in a sense, the correspondences to man which Emerson finds in nature serve as external validations of his beliefs, he believes that man must intuitively know God to be within before he can perceive these correspondences. See p. 76 of this paper for a fuller discussion of this point.

> I am reading Price on Morals [1758] & intend to read it with care and commentary. I shall set down what remarks occur to me upon the matter or manner of his argument. On the 56 Page Dr. Price says that right and wrong are not determined by any reasoning or deduction but by an ultimate perception of the human mind. It is to be desired that this were capable of satisfactory proof but as it is in direct opposition to the sceptical philosophy it cannot stand unsupported by strong and sufficient evidence. I will however read more and see if it is proved or no. (JMN, I, 51)

In 1821 Emerson is reluctant to accept a belief that right and wrong are known intuitively by "an ultimate perception of the human mind." But by 1836 he has accepted the existence of the intuitive power Price postulates and has deified it. Price's "ultimate perception of the human mind" thus anticipates Emerson's God within, and both are sources of moral power. They allow man confidently to distinguish between right and wrong. And such confidence is the essence of self-reliance.

Emerson's concept of self-reliance and of the God within is thus clearly anticipated in a variety of eighteenth-century works. No eighteenth-century English writer, however, believes in so complete an internalization of God as does Emerson. Shaftesbury sees God as "inhabiting" man; he does not talk of man becoming "the creator in the finite." Butler deifies man's conscience, not man himself. And Norris does not center his essay on man so much as he does upon the existence of a noumenal world--an ideal world in the mind of God rather than in the mind of man who is one with God. No eighteenth-century English writer, therefore, can suggest as

Emerson does that man can become the equal of Jesus Christ if he will simply realize his potential. Eighteenth-century English concepts of self-reliance are thus not identical to Emerson's, but eighteenth-century views surely anticipate Emerson in a very definite manner. The self is more central and more exalted in early Emersonian thought than it is in eighteenth-century English writing, but Emerson unquestionably shares with some eighteenth-century Englishmen a vision of God within and a belief in self-reliance on that basis.

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However, there is a tension in Emerson's thought early in his career. He does not always find self-reliance easy to achieve. And nowhere is his difficulty in becoming truly self-reliant more clearly seen than in the essay "Circles" (1840). Here Emerson pictures man as ever-growing in the power of self-reliance, but also describes man's awareness that only in transitory moments can he be divine. On the positive side, he writes that "The life of a man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul." (W, II, 304) The individual, Emerson asserts, can grow constantly in practical, moral, and intellectual power, can continually draw new circles. But the idea that man evolves toward God, that man

develops, that he cannot become divine at once and remain so, is also a disturbing one for Emerson:

> Our moods do not believe in each other. Today I am full of thoughts, and can write what I please. I see no reason why I should not have the same thought, the same power of expression tomorrow. What I write, whilst I write it, seems the most natural thing in the world; but yesterday I saw a dreary vacuity in this direction in which I now see so much; and a month hence, I doubt not, I shall wonder who he was that wrote so many continuous pages. Alas for this infirm faith, this will not strenuous, this vast ebb of a vast flow! I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall. (W, II, 306-307)

A sense of the God within and of self-reliance is thus difficult to achieve, Emerson writes, because man's faith is not strong enough. Only at intervals does our faith assure us that God is truly within and that therefore we can be self-reliant.

The difficulty Emerson finds in "Circles" is atypical of his early work. But it becomes quite frequent in his later essays, for his belief in self-reliance suffers severe intellectual and emotional blows between 1841 and 1844. Emerson's reading of Lyell's geological studies brings him "a sense of the undreamed-of immensity and brute violence of the processes of nature" and makes the egoism of his early works seem "ridiculous."[28] And the death of his young son in 1842 surely brings Emerson to the realization that man's power is a rather paltry thing in the face of such facts. Emerson, of course, had faced and transcended great personal

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[28]Whicher, p. 146.

tragedy before; the death of his first wife and of his brother Charles did not prevent his development of the theory of self-reliance. But after young Waldo's death Emerson is able to find the God within only in fleeting moments. The possibility of consistently locating God in the soul is gone. Yet, as Whicher notes, Emerson saves his faith by "transferring it from the impotent self to the all-disposing fate. Before the parsimony of the God within, he anchors his faith on the God in the universe."[29]

In Essays: Second Series (1844) Emerson certainly moves away from extreme self-reliance. He does refer to "divine persons" in "Character" (W, III, 108, 113). In "The Poet," however, it is only the poet whom he identifies with God. And, as Whicher notes, the poet brings man only an "intoxicating glance of the inaccessible ideal."[30] In "Manners" Emerson calls for self-reliance, but he does not suggest that the basis for self-trust is the God within. He writes that in social gatherings "we excuse in a man a great many sins, if he will show us a complete satisfaction in his position . . . ." (W, III, 132). Such self-reliance hardly need be based on the God within.

In "Nature" Emerson at times seems to hold his radical faith in the self, but even in this essay he tends to place limitations upon the power man can possess. At

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[29]Whicher, p. 124.

[30]Whicher, p. 138.

the end of the essay Emerson certainly suggests that man can find the God within. He argues that if "we feel that the soul of the workman streams through us, we shall find the peace of the morning dwelling first in our hearts, and the fathomless powers of gravity and chemistry, and over them, of life, preexisting within us in their highest form" (W, III, 194). If we know God to be within, Emerson suggests, we can perceive the spiritual significance of all things. We can see how the laws of physical nature are also laws of our own being. We can, in short, perceive the unity of creation if we view it from the divine perspective.

But even in "Nature" Emerson writes that "No man is quite sane; each has a vein of folly in his composition, a slight determination of blood to the head to make sure of holding him hard to some one point which nature has taken to heart" (W, III, 185). Here Emerson feels that self-trust may be a "vein of folly," may not be based on the God within. Self-trust may prompt a man to hold hard to one idea rather than attempt to see interrelationships between ideas; self-trust may be a necessary self-deception, insuring that an important idea will be expressed, but warping the individual's perspective. Indeed, Emerson writes that "The poet, the prophet has a higher value for what he utters than any hearer, and therefore it gets spoken" (W, III, 187). As we have seen, Emerson ends this essay on a note of faith in man's possibilities, but he devotes considerable space to

these doubts in man's ability to consistently find the God within. He begins to suggest that faith must also be placed in "Nature" which "sends no creature, no man into the world without adding a small excess of his proper quality" and that self-reliance exists in a very different form than he had earlier supposed (W, III, 185).

Emerson's most serious doubts in the viability of self-reliance in its radical sense appear in "Experience." In this essay, Emerson writes that

> It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments. We have learned that we do not see directly but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors. Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects. Once we lived in what we saw; now, the rapaciousness of this new power which threatens to absorb all things engages us. Nature, art persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas. Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast. The street is full of humiliations to the proud. As the fop contrived to dress his bailiffs in his livery and make them wait on his guests at table, so the chagrins which the bad heart gives off as bubbles, at once take form as ladies and gentlemen in the street, shopmen or barkeepers in hotels, and threaten or insult whatever is insultable in us. 'Tis the same with our idolatries. People forget that it is the eye which makes the horizon, and the rounding mind's eye which makes this or that man a type or representative of humanity, with the name of hero or saint. (W, III, 75-76)

Emerson here then argues that man creates his own world, that perhaps there are no objects, that heart burn may be the cause of what we see, or rather think we see, about us. In Nature, believing in the God within, Emerson had joyfully

proclaimed that "thought comes up with and reduces all things until the world becomes at last only a realized will." But in "Experience" he doubts that God is within and therefore feels that reducing the world to a "realized will" may not show man's intuitive, intellectual power so much as his inability to transcend the "colored and distorting" lense which he is. The validity of spiritual insight is surely in question when man no longer partakes of the authority of God.

When Emerson does argue for self-trust in "Experience," therefore, he does so in a spirit much different from the one he manifested in Nature:

> And we cannot say too litle of our constitutional necessity of seeing things under private aspects, or saturated with our humors. And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks. That need makes in morals the capital virtue of self-trust. We must hold hard to this poverty, however scandalous, and by more vigorous self-recoveries after the sallies of action, possess our axis more firmly. The life of truth is cold and so far mournful; but it is not the slave of tears, contritions and perturbations. It does not attempt another's work, nor adopt another's facts. It is a main lesson of wisdom to know your own from another's. (W, III, 81)

Here then self-trust is advocated only grudgingly. It is seen as a kind of necessary poverty. We must have self-trust, says Emerson, even though it keeps us from seeing the whole, because it enables us to keep to our necessary tasks by imagining them to be of importance. Emerson does not state that God incarnates himself in man; rather he argues that God encourages man to trust in his very limited self so

that he will not be distracted by the "importunate frivolity of other people" and so that he can be "greatly useful."

Yet even in "Experience" Emerson suggests that for fleeting moments man can know God to be within, can have partial insight into the order and unity of creation. He writes that "The consciousness in each man is a sliding scale, which identifies him now with the First Cause, and now with the flesh of his body" (W, III, 72). And he adds that though moments of unity with the Over-Soul be few, man must "be suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time. It takes a good deal of time to eat or to sleep, or to earn a hundred dollars; and a very little time to entertain a hope and an insight which becomes the light of our life." (W, III, 85) Trapped by subjectiveness, man can still escape in moments of insight. But these moments of insight are merely that. They cannot bring the power Emerson had earlier envisaged as coming from a faith that God is within.

This modified view of self-reliance continues to be seen in Representative Men (1850). In this volume Emerson's faith tends not to be in the self as an incarnation of God, but in a Divine Providence which beneficently orders the universe. In "Plato" Emerson perceives unity as that which absorbs all, including man (W, IV, 53). No longer does man absorb everything into the self. In "Swedenborg" Emerson praises the Swedish philosopher because "he elected goodness

as the clue to which the soul must cling in all this labyrinth of nature" (W, IV, 144); Emerson does not suggest that Swedenborg should have found God within. And in "Napoleon" when Emerson praises self-reliance, it is not a self-reliance based on the God within, but one based on "the mere force of such virtues as all men possess" (W, IV, 247).

But if man cannot trust totally in his own powers, Emerson believes he can trust in a God who is largely external to man. In "Uses of Great Men" Emerson writes that the "destiny of organized nature is amelioration" (W, IV, 35); his faith here lies in a power outside of man, though destiny decrees man shall grow in power. Similarly in "Montaigne" Emerson writes,

> Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work but to be worked upon; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause . . . . (W, IV, 186)

Here Emerson finds that man's task is not to work, but to be worked upon. His faith is in providence, not in the self. It is natural then that he finds Napoleon to be a "child of destiny" (W, IV, 231), that he argues in "Shakespeare" that a great man is "forced onward by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries" (W, IV, 190), and that he believes Goethe was "born to write" (W, IV, 262). In Representative Men power is seen as largely external to man; man's fate is beneficently directed by the First Cause.

This is not to say that Emerson has come to believe in determinism. On the contrary, he continues to believe in self-reliance even as he argues that there is a providential order. He has merely abandoned the radical claim that man can be god, that man can have total access to the mind of God. Thus, he writes in "Shakespeare" that

> A great man does not wake up on some fine morning and say, 'I am full of life, I will go to sea and find an Antarctic continent: today I will square the circle: I will ransack botany and find a new food for man: I have a new architecture in my mind: I foresee a new mechanic power:' no, but he finds himself in the river of the thoughts and events, forced onward by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries. He stands where all the eyes of men look one way, and their hands all point in the direction in which he should go. The Church has reared him amidst rites and pomps, and he carries out the advice which her music gave him, and builds a cathedral needed by her chants and processions. He finds a war raging: it educates him, by trumpet, in barracks, and he betters the instruction. He finds two counties groping to bring coal, or flour, or fish, from the place of production to the place of consumption, and he hits on a railroad. Every master has found his materials collected, and his power lay in his sympathy with his people and in his love of the materials he wrought in. What an economy of power! and what a compensation for the shortness of life! All is done to his hand. The world has brought him thus far on his way. (W, IV, 190-191)

In Nature Emerson had encouraged man to build his own world, but here Emerson finds that the great man works from within a given world. The circumstances into which he is born unavoidably shape his achievement. Man must be self-reliant in the sense that he must actively pursue the goals toward which his age directs him, but Emerson does not suggest that he need be divine. The radical nature of Emersonian self-reliance is thus gone. No longer does Emerson envisage the

self-reliant man as capable of possessing unlimited power. The self-reliant man may become great by doing all that is constitutionally possible for him to do, but Emerson suggests that there are indeed limits to man's possibilities.

In The Conduct of Life (1860) as in Representative Men this shift in Emerson's definition of self-reliance is clearly seen. Even in this late volume of essays, Emerson does not relinquish his belief in self-reliance. But here, the power that Emerson had formerly hoped to find in man, he sees largely as acting upon him. He admits that "A man's power is hooped in by a necessity which, by many experiments, he touches on every side until he learns its arc" (W, VI, 19). And he writes that efforts to deny the power of this necessity are futile: "The force with which we resist these torrents of tendency look so ridiculously inadequate that it amounts to little more than a criticism or protest made by a minority of one, under compulsions of millions" (W, VI, 19). In Nature Emerson's dream was that man, because of the God within, could control the world; here he envisions the world controlling man.

Yet the existence of fate does not cause Emerson to despair. He continues to find that man can be self-reliant within the limitations of fate. In "Fate," for instance, he offers two sources of power for man: thought and the moral sentiment. Thought, he writes, can bring man power because fate is a "name for facts not yet passed under the fire of

thought; for causes yet unpenetrated" (W, VI, 31). To intellectually understand anything from an engine to a philosophical concept, Emerson suggests, is to have power over it. Thus, he goes on to write that "Just as much intellect as you add, so much organic power. He who sees through the design, presides over it, and must will that which must be. We sit and rule, and, though we sleep, our dream will come to pass." (W, VI, 27) Emerson here sees thought as a source of power. Intellect, man's ability to see the unity in things, to see that spiritual as well as physical laws permeate creation, gives man the power on which self-trust can be based. Indeed, when man perceives the beneficent laws of the universe, his private desires become one with God's. He comes to want what is fated to be. He is no longer the victim of unforeseen or undesired events.

Another source of power upon which self-reliance can be based lies in the moral sentiment. Emerson finds that intellect allows man to perceive truths, but that man needs the moral sentiment if he is to have the will to live by those truths:

> If thought makes free, so does the moral sentiment. The mixtures of spiritual chemistry refuse to be analyzed. Yet we can see that with the perception of truth is joined the desire that it shall prevail; that affection is essential to will. . . . Whoever has had experience of the moral sentiment cannot choose but believe in unlimited power. Each pulse from that heart is an oath from the Most High. (W, VI, 28-29)

Emerson suggests that both intellect and emotion, thought and the moral sentiment, are essential if man is to have

freedom and power. Without the moral sentiment, he writes, man may find himself unable to act or to influence others. If, for instance, an idea of his is challenged, man may be willing to give it up. But if an idea he believes to be a moral good is challenged, he will not easily relinquish it. The moral sentiment is thus productive of self-reliance, for it can prompt a man to stand firmly by his inspirations.

Emerson thus finds God in man even in "Fate." The intellect and the moral sentiment in man prove that "the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him." But we must remember that Emerson does not believe the God within can wholly define man's nature. In "The Over-Soul" Emerson had found that "What we commonly call man,--the eating, drinking, planting, counting man,--does not represent himself, but misrepresents himself." But in "Fate" Emerson believes that "the eating, drinking, planting, counting man" is as real as the divine man. He believes that man "betrays his relation to what is below him,--thick-skulled, small-brained, fishy, quadrumanous, quadruped ill-disguised, hardly escaped into biped" (W, VI, 22). God is within, but that fact does not completely define man, and the limitation of fate must be accepted as an important part of life. Man is inevitably both animal and god, and vast powers are therefore not immediately available to him. However, Emerson reconciles himself to the power of fate by suggesting that this force gradually becomes the

power of self: "If Fate is ore and quarry, if evil is good in the making, if limitation is power that shall be, if calamities, oppositions, and weights are wings and means,--we are reconciled" (W, VI, 35). The radical self-reliance of Nature is thus seriously qualified. Emerson in "Fate" believes that man can gradually escape his relation to what is below him and move toward the self-trust he had seen as easily accessible in his early essays.

In other essays in The Conduct of Life Emerson is not this hopeful. In "Power," an essay in which one would expect Emerson's most affirmative statement of self-trust to appear, he can only argue that "We must reckon success a constitutional trait" (W, VI, 55). Health or temperament may determine what a man achieves. To be self-reliant a man can no longer merely recognize that God dwells within him and is a source of tremendous power. Instead man's ability to be self-reliant is determined at birth and has limits. Similarly in "Culture" Emerson moves away from a radical belief in self-reliance. Here he finds man's self-trust to be a limiting rather than a broadening characteristic: "Nature has secured individualism by giving the private person a high conceit of his weight in the system. The pest of society is the egotists. The man runs round a ring formed by his own talent, and falls into admiration of it, and loses relation to the world" (W, VI, 132). Far from rejoicing in self-trust, Emerson here sees it only as a grim necessity.

It is needed to insure individual effort, but it distorts an individual's view of the world around him.

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From the time of Essays: Second Series, therefore, Emerson moderates his stance on self-reliance. He comes to see the power that man can possess as limited, to see man as man, not as God. And in moderating his position, Emerson at times moves closer to those eighteenth-century moralists we have already considered. In addition, however, Emerson's alterations in his view parallel other eighteenth-century English concepts. His belief that man can grow in power, can evolve toward union with God harkens back to views expressed by Thomson, Akenside, and Young. His doubts about the reliability of the self, especially as expressed in "Experience," surely recall the writings of David Hume. And his late tendency to depict physical forces controlling man suggests that Emersonian self-reliance has been affected by necessitarian views like those of Joseph Priestley.

We have seen that Shaftesbury, Butler, and Norris differ from Emerson primarily in the extent to which they find God within man. They all locate the divine principle within man, but they do not suggest that man can know unlimited power, that man can become a god. In the second part of his career as an essayist, Emerson moves toward agreement with these writers, for he suggests that it is only

in moments of insight that man can become totally one with God. He agrees that man is limited.

But perhaps the limits he sees go beyond those seen by the common sense moralists. Perhaps Emerson's modified position on self-reliance is more clearly anticipated in a small, rather insignificant book published in 1745 and read much later by Emerson.[31] John Mason, a non-conformist clergyman and author, in his book Self-Knowledge argues as does Emerson for an investigation of self. He writes: "Know thyself, is one of the most useful and comprehensive precepts in the whole moral system: and it is well known in how great a veneration this maxim was held by the ancients . . . ."[32] But for Mason, as for Emerson late in his career, knowledge of self is often knowledge of one's own limitations. Mason does not talk, as Shaftesbury and Norris do, of man's ability to experience a sense of union with God. Instead he writes,

> A man that knows himself will deliberately consider and attend to the particular rank and station of life in which Providence hath placed him; and what is the duty and decorum of that station: what part is given him to act--what character to maintain; and with what decency and propriety he acts that part or maintains that character.[33]

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[31]Kenneth Walter Cameron, Emerson the Essayist (Raleigh, N.C.: Thistle Press, 1945), p. 332.

[32]John Mason, Self-Knowledge, 15th ed. (London, 1809), p. 3.

[33]Mason, p. 29.

Mason in this passage in no way suggests that man can partake of God. He is interested instead in the fixed rank or station in which he believes man must live his day-to-day life. Emerson, of course, believes in meliorism in his late essays, and so is little inclined to view man in a fixed position. But he does argue in some essays that man had best realize his role, had best accept his limitations. In "Experience" he finds that the life of truth "does not attempt another's work, nor adopt another's facts." And in "Power" he writes that "You must elect your work; you shall take what your brain can, and drop all the rest" (W, VI, 74). Emerson, like Mason, then at times believes man must recognize and accept his limitations.

However, in "Circles" and "Fate" Emerson's consolation for man's limited power, for his inability to be wholly self-reliant, lies in his belief that man can constantly grow in power. This evolutionary view, however, is not foreign to eighteenth-century English literature. James Thomson surely anticipates it. In Liberty (1735), for instance, Thomson writes of Pythagoras,

> He taught that life's indissouluble flame,
> From brute to man, and man to brute again,
> For ever shifting, runs the eternal round;
> Thence tried against the blood-polluted meal,
> And limbs yet quivering with some kindred soul,
> To turn the human heart. Delightful truth!
> Had he beheld the living chain ascend,
> And not a circling form, but rising whole.[34]

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[34]James Thomson, The Poetical Works, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971),

Thomson here suggests that Pythagoras's philosophy could have been improved if he had seen that man mounts up the chain of being, that man progresses toward union with God. Thomson, of course, unlike Emerson, sees this progression taking place in successive reincarnations. But he clearly anticipates Emerson's melioristic view of the powers of an individual.

Similarly, Mark Akenside sees man as capable of mounting through the great chain of being and of drawing closer and closer to union with God. He writes in The Pleasures of the Imagination (1744),

> . . . in their stations all may persevere
> To climb the ascent of being, and approach
> For ever nearer to the life divine.[35]

Here again we see Emerson's melioristic position foreshadowed. Indeed, Emerson even uses a metaphor much like Akenside's to describe man's gradual growth in power when he writes in "Circles" that "Step by step we scale this mysterious ladder: the steps are actions; the new prospect is power" (W, II, 305). Moreover, in a later edition of his poem Akenside writes that man's union with the "life divine" cannot be achieved, though man can grow closer to God. And in this qualification he clearly anticipates Emerson's

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pp. 341-42. See also G. R. Potter, "James Thomson and the Evolution of Spirits," Englische Studien, 61 (1926-27), 57-65.

[35]Mark Akenside, The Poetical Works (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1857), p. 108. See also G. R. Potter, "Mark Akenside, Prophet of Evolution," MP, XXIV (1926), 55-64.

position in "Fate." Akenside, like Thomson, believes this melioration occurs through successive reincarnations, but like Thomson he definitely anticipates Emerson's belief that limitation is power in the making.

Finally, Edward Young anticipates Emerson's view of self-reliance. Young sounds very much like the later Emerson in his poem Night Thoughts (1746). In this poem, as Lovejoy notes,[36] the poet sees that stars evolve from obscure to bright, urges Lorenzo to imitate the stars, and adds:

> When minds ascend,
> Progress, in part, depends upon themselves . . .
> O be a man! and thou shall be a god!
> And half-self-made! Ambition how divine![37]

Man, Young suggests, can depend upon himself, can be self-reliant, and can grow toward the power and perfection of God. Emerson surely argues along similar lines in "Circles."

The skepticism that at times marks Emerson's thought after 1841 has more obvious eighteenth-century parallels than does his meliorism. David Hume clearly anticipates Emerson's fear that man may be trapped within the prison of the self, that man may be a very limited creature who is unable to see beyond himself. Hume writes that

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[36]Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (1936; rpt. New York: Harper, 1960), p. 261.

[37]Edward Young, "The Complaint: or Night Thoughts," in Minor English Poets 1660-1780, eds. Alexander Chalmers and David P. French, New Edition (New York: Blom, 1967), V, 203.

> when we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which at first view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found upon a nearer scrutiny, to be derived from it. The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, augmenting, without limit those qualities of goodness and wisdom.[38]

Implicit in this passage is the idea that man creates, if somewhat mechanically, his own world, including even his concept of God. Hume thus anticipates very definitely the doubts Emerson expresses in essays like "Experience" and "Montaigne." Indeed, Emerson even echoes Hume's words when he states that "God is but one of its [the mind's] ideas" (W, III, 75).

Finally, though Emerson is no materialist, his belief in fate is foreshadowed in the works of eighteenth-century English materialists. Joseph Priestley, who unlike Emerson believes that spirit and matter are one, writes:

> I maintain that there is some fixed law of nature respecting the will, as well as the other powers of the mind, and every thing else in the constitution of nature; and consequently that is never determined without some real or apparent cause, foreign to itself, i.e. without some motive or choice, or that motives influence us in some definite and invariable manner; so that every volition or choice, is constantly regulated, and determined, by what precedes it. And this constant determination of mind, according to the motives

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[38]David Hume, The Philosophical Works, ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose (1882; rpt. Darmstadt, Germany: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964), IV, 15.

> presented to it, is all that I mean by its <u>necessary determination</u>.[39]

Priestley does not deny that man makes choices; he merely argues that those choices are based upon motives which invariably influence man in a given way. Similarly, Emerson in "Power" states that self-reliance is a "constitutional trait." Man is inevitably led by his physical and mental nature into given areas of endeavor. In addition, in "Montaigne" Emerson suggests that man's task is "not to work but to be worked upon." He pictures man in the same sort of passive role as Priestley does. Priestley's determinism thus anticipates Emerson's view of man as controlled from without. But Emerson does not consistently adopt this view; he advances and then retracts it as Priestley does not. Emerson's belief in fate is then less rigid than Priestley's, but it does share in the necessitarian views of this eighteenth-century Englishman.

Emerson thus draws together a wide variety of philosophies in moulding a second definition of self-reliance. He continues to some extent to share the beliefs of those eighteenth-century English moralists whose views appear in his early essays. But he adds to these ideas concepts from melioristic, skeptical, and deterministic thinkers. The result is pure Emerson, but that result is not obtained through a rejection of the eighteenth century. A variety of

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[39]Joseph Priestley, <u>Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity</u> (London, 1777), pp. 7-8.

eighteenth-century English traditions are most clearly perpetuated in Emerson's late concept of self-reliance.

Throughout his career, therefore, Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance is closely tied to eighteenth-century English beliefs. His radical concept of self-reliance builds upon ideas in the works of common-sense and intellectual moralists, though it asserts that man has greater power in this world and readier access to a noumenal world than eighteenth-century ideas might suggest. And Emerson's modified concept of self-reliance brings him even closer to these eighteenth-century beliefs and further suggests that he shares some beliefs with skeptics like Hume and determinists like Priestley. Emerson thus clearly gives continued life to eighteenth-century English concepts in his nineteenth-century American writing.

CHAPTER III

EMERSON, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND, AND CORRESPONDENCE

Harry Hayden Clark suggested in 1931 that an interesting study could be made of the ways in which Emerson derived his doctrine of correspondence from eighteenth-century English figures like Butler, Wollaston, and Paley.[1] Yet since that time little has been done along these lines. Sherman Paul in his book Emerson's Angle of Vision does discuss the doctrine of correspondence at length, but even he only briefly deals with its relationship to eighteenth-century thought. Thus, it seems fitting that Clark's suggestion should be followed here. This chapter will examine Emerson's theory of correspondence and consider how closely it parallels views held by eighteenth-century English moralists.

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Emerson best defines what he means by correspondence in the early part of his career as an essayist when on

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[1]Clark, pp. 226-27.

February 1, 1835 he writes to his future wife Lidian, "I am a poet in the sense of a perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially of the correspondence between these and those."[2] To believe in correspondence is, for Emerson, to believe that the nature of man's soul can be seen in the natural world. Thus, in Nature he finds that the "sky with its eternal calm, and full of everlasting orbs, is the type of Reason" (W, I, 27). As the sky is calm rather than tempestuous, the intuition is calm and confident of what it perceives; as the sky is full of everlasting orbs, the Reason is in touch with everlasting truths. Man's intuitive power is a harmony of the soul which corresponds to a harmony in nature.

Yet Emerson does not believe such symbols are merely arbitrary metaphors which have no existence apart from the individual mind which created them. As Vivial Hopkins notes,

> While the artist's perceiving of spirit in objects does represent an activity of his own mind, it also constitutes a response to the spirit that exists in natural forms. When the artist's 'inner eye' really opens, the spirit in nature plainly manifests itself to his vision.[3]

Emerson thus believes that correspondences are "constant and pervade nature" (W, I, 27). Because God is within both man and nature (W, I, 64), he reasons, man and nature are

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[2]The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), I, 435.

[3]Vivian C. Hopkins, Spires of Form (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), p. 36.

necessarily and inevitably symbolic of each other. And, Emerson argues, the more clearly man realizes that God exists within himself, the more clearly he will see that nature is a symbol of his soul. Indeed, he writes that "in proportion as a man has in him anything divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form" (W, I, 105).

This is not to say that Emerson believes natural facts correspond to spiritual facts on a one-to-one basis. Emerson's esteemed Swedenborg believes they do and writes that

> The animals of the earth correspond in general to affection, mild and useful animals to good affections, fierce and useless ones to evil affections. In particular, cattle and their young correspond to the affections of the natural mind, sheep and lambs to the affections of the spiritual mind; while birds correspond, according to species, to the intellectual things of the natural mind or the spiritual mind.[4]

But Emerson himself never proposes such a fixed natural symbolism. Instead, he objects to works of art being so revered that the symbols in them come to be regarded as fixed. The interrelatedness of all things, he believes, enables each symbol to play innumerable roles.

Such is Emerson's belief in correspondence, and it can be seen throughout his early works. It is most certainly prevalent in Nature (1836). In this essay, for instance, Emerson writes that

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[4]Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and its Wonders and Hell (New York: Swenborg Foundation, 1939), no. 110, as cited by Whicher, pp. 87-88.

> The river, as it flows resembles the air that flows over it; the air resembles the light which traverses it with more subtile currents; the light resembles the heat which rides with it through Space. Each creature is a modification of the other; the likeness in them is more than the difference, and their radical law is one and the same. A rule of one Art or a law of one organization holds true throughout nature. So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of Nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit. For it pervades Thought also. Every universal truth which we express in words, implies or supposes every other truth. Omne verum vero consonat. (W, I, 44)

Emerson notes that we can perceive one law running through everything around us and suggests that this law of unity extends into the realm of abstract ideas. The similarity of the currents present in water, in air, in light, and in heat suggests the similarity of the currents of thought present in the mind, the currents of truth, justice, love. Yet nowhere in this passage does Emerson state that these similarities are merely the creation of an individual mind. Indeed, he has already noted that

> The relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men. It appears to men or it does not appear. When in fortunate hours we ponder this miracle, the wise man doubts if at all other times he is not blind and deaf . . . . (W, I, 33-34)

For Emerson, therefore, correspondences have existence apart from the perceptions of an individual; they are not the "dreams of a few poets," but exist in the mind of God. Yet to exist in the mind of God does not make correspondences fixed, for Emerson asserts that every truth "supposes every other truth" in this unified creation.

In "The American Scholar" (1837) Emerson paints a similar picture of correspondence, although he does not make such explicit assurances of its absolute existence. In this address he writes that man must learn

> that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his own attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim. (W, I, 87)

Nature, Emerson here suggests, is an image of what fallen man may achieve. It is the standard by which man may measure his own development. Thus, the correspondences between man and nature truly exist. Indeed, Emerson can recommend the study of nature as a way of learning the full potential of the self only if correspondences between the ideal man and nature are not arbitrary, but are absolute. If nature furnishes no more than enlightening metaphors, it can hardly become an integral part of the discipline of psychology. Yet, it should be noted that Emerson does not seek to establish fixed and detailed correspondences between man and nature in this essay. On the contrary, he defines the similarities between man and nature in the broadest terms; nature's beauty is the beauty of the mind and nature's laws are the laws of the mind. Such correspondences are hardly of the literal nature of Swedenborg's.

The essay "Compensation" (1841) continues the view

of correspondence we have seen in Nature and "The American Scholar." In this essay Emerson writes that

> Every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature. Every thing is made of one hidden stuff; as the naturalist sees one type under every metamorphosis, and regards a horse as a running man, a fish as a swimming man, a bird as a flying man, a tree as a rooted man. Each new form repeats not only the main character of the type, but part for part all the details, all the aims, furtherances, hindrances, energies and whole system of every other. Every occupation, trade, art, transaction is a compend of the world and a correlative of every other. Each one is an entire emblem of human life; of its good and ill, its trials, its enemies, its course, and its end. (W, II, 101)

Emerson suggests that no matter where man looks in nature, he may see and learn to understand his own condition. The unity, the interrelatedness of the creation guarantees this. There is no one symbol to which he must turn in order to understand himself. His form is everwhere in nature. The tree which knows both the beneficence of rain and the cruelness of drought is but one representative of man who knows the joy of love and the sorrow of loss. And here again Emerson offers correspondence as a discipline, not as a method or mode of seeing. He asserts forcefully that "Every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature." He does not merely suggest that a correspondential vision may help us to understand ourselves even though the correspondences are illusory. No, the analogies exist more absolutely than do sensory perceptions, and Emerson seems to feel here as he did in Nature that the wise man doubts if he is "not blind and deaf" when he does not see them.

Finally, in "Prudence" (1837-1838) Emerson again presents this uniformitarian concept of correspondence. In this essay he argues that

> The world of the senses is a world of shows; it does not exist for itself, but has a symbolic character; and a true prudence or law of shows recognizes the co-presence of other laws and knows that its own office is subaltern; knows that it is surface and not centre where it works. Prudence is false when detached. It is legitimate when it is the Natural History of the soul incarnate, when it unfolds the beauty of laws within the narrow scope of the senses. (W, II, 222)

Emerson clearly states then that the natural world we see around us is not real, but is only appearance, and he just as clearly states that the symbolic character of this world gives it significance. Not the "world of senses" per se, but the world of senses as the "Natural History of the soul incarnate" is legitimate. This is but to say that a valid consideration of nature must concern itself with parallels between man's soul and the external world. Symbols thus are not arbitrary devices for explaining mankind, but naturally suggest the true reality with which the prudent man needs to be in contact. And here, as elsewhere, Emerson refuses to describe a fixed set of symbols, preferring to suggest the similarities between man and nature in a general rather than a literal and more limited fashion.

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This then is the essence of Emerson's early view of correspondence. He perceives analogies between man, nature, and God. He believes these analogies actually exist and are

not the creations of a "few poets." And he refuses to allow these analogies to become fixed, believing instead that the unity of nature allows one symbol to suggest many things. But this definition of correspondence is hardly unique. Swedenborg, the Swedish mystic, most directly inspires this concept. And, more importantly for the purposes of this study, it lies clearly within eighteenth-century English traditions as well. Common-sense, intellectual, and even utilitarian moralists anticipate Emerson's stance on correspondence.

The common-sense moralists most distinctly anticipate Emerson's major ideas in this area. Like Emerson they find analogies between man and nature, and like Emerson they tend to give them an absolute existence.[5] John Norris, one of the Cambridge Platonists who was so influential upon the common-sense moralist Shaftesbury and who continued to write in the eighteenth century, certainly offers this view of correspondence. In The Theory and Regulation of Love (1688) he writes,

> this Affection call'd Gravity in Bodies is nothing else but that first Impression or Alteration made upon them by the various Actings of those Effluviums or Streams of Particles which issue out from the Womb of that great Magnet, the Earth . . . so in the like manner this radical Complacency and Connaturality of the Soul toward Good (which I call her Moral Gravity) is nothing else but that first Alteration of Impression which is made upon her by the streaming Influences of the Great and

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[5]The common-sense thinkers I refer to are those discussed by Leslie Stephen--Shaftesbury and Butler.

> Supreme Magnet, God, continually acting upon her by his active and powerful Charms.[6]

Norris states here that man's attraction to the good corresponds to the physical attraction of objects for the earth. In Emersonian terms, he finds that a harmony of the soul and a harmony of nature correspond.

Moreover, in a later work (1704) Norris asks, "For is not the Natural World the Object of Divine Revelation as well as that of Sensible Perception?" And he immediately answers, "I grant it is so."[7] For Norris, therefore, the world of nature corresponds to the truths found in the Bible. God, he suggests, reveals his will in nature as well as in Scripture. And to argue that God's will is revealed in nature is to suggest that correspondences between natural and spiritual truths exist absolutely. Like Emerson, Norris denies

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[6]John Norris, The Theory and Regulation of Love (London, 1723), p. 29, as cited by Michael Macklem, The Anatomy of the World (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1958), pp. 100-1. Macklem goes on to write that the idea of moral gravitation is an important one in the first forty years of the eighteenth century in England. He quotes this passage from a sermon which Richard Bentley preached in 1717 as evidence: "'every least particle of body . . . has its operation and passion perpetual and reciprocal with all the rest of the world besides it; such an alliance being established between all the matter of the universe, that the whole is linked together by mutual attraction or gravitation . . .'" (p. 101). And Macklem also cites works by Thomas Rundle (1734), George Turnbull (1740), John Reynolds (1735), David Mallet (1728), and John Bancks (1738) which use this same metaphor. Norris is thus representative of a good many eighteenth-century figures who foreshadow Emersonian correspondence.

[7]Norris, Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World, I, 189.

that correspondences are the dreams of a few poets.

Finally, Norris, like Emerson many years after him, refuses to turn nature into a fixed symbol system. Indeed, he writes:

> For is not Truth every where? So the necessity of the thing will constrain us to acknowledge. For is it not every where as well as alwais [sic] Intelligible, may it not be any where consulted and attended to, and does it not every where give its Answers and diffuse its Light, and is it not also perceived every where alike and after one and the same uniform Manner? But how can all this be if it be not every where, if it be not Omnipresent as well as Eternal, equally unconfined to Place as well as Time.[8]

Abstract truth, Norris writes, can be perceived everywhere because God is omnipresent and reveals his will in natural law rather than in isolated phenomena. The unity of nature, the self-similarity of all phenomena, he almost seems to suggest, eliminates the need for a fixed symbol system.

Similarly, Shaftesbury holds what was to become an Emersonian concept of correspondence. Indeed, R. L. Brett's description of Shaftesbury's view of correspondence might well describe Emerson:

> Shaftesbury's problem in dealing with nature was to find some alternative to the mechanistic account which had become so dominant in the previous century and which, he considered, made nonsense of morality and the arts. As mechanism was based on an analogy between nature and the machine, so his own account is an analogical one. In the first place, he goes back to the analogy which he found in Greek thought (and in particular in Xenophon's Memorabilia) and compares nature with the human body. As in the human organism the mind animates the body, so in nature there is a

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[8]Norris, Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World, I, 189.

> spirit diffused through all things which governs the body, not body which governs or gives rise to mind. This is true both of the individual organism and of the whole of nature for Shaftesbury; the human organism is a reflection of the larger, outside world.[9]

For Shaftesbury, as for Emerson, the human organism and the outside world are analogous. Shaftesbury believes that as God orders nature so that each species may thrive in its environment, the mind of man should order the demands of his "passions, appetites, imaginations, fancies . . . ." He argues, in short, that man should seek to be one with the "principle and original self" who governs nature.[10] The analogy between man and nature thus leads him to what would later be called an Emersonian concept of prudence.

Moreover, Shaftesbury like Emerson believes this analogy between man and nature to have an absolute existence. Shaftesbury finds a "rule of one Art" at work in nature and concludes that the natural world may "be viewed as symbolical of a world lying behind sense appearances, just as a poem expresses imperfectly the incommunicable conception which exists in the poet's mind."[11] The world of senses, Shaftesbury thus suggests, is not the only world. The symbolic character of nature is more significant than its physical character, and man should "never admire the

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[9]Brett, p. 66.

[10]Shaftesbury, II, 105.

[11]Brett, p. 68.

representative beauty except for the sake of the original."[12] Here then Shaftesbury establishes the symbolic aspect of nature as its essence, for he suggests that nature is truly symbolic both of the "original" or of God and of man insofar as he partakes of God. The man who views nature only as matter merely experiences "the absurd enjoyment which reaches the sense alone."[13] It should be noted, in addition, that Shaftesbury's picture of nature as a divine work of art indicates that a one-to-one relationship between the harmonies of man's soul and those of nature cannot be established. Like symbols in a poem, natural objects have a significance beyond themselves, but, as in a poem, that significance defies easy translation into narrow, allegorical terms.

Finally, although he typically talks more of human than of external nature, Joseph Butler views correspondence much as Emerson was to view it. In The Analogy of Nature he proposes to compare "the acknowledged dispensations of Providence, or that government which we find ourselves under, with what religion teaches us to believe and expect; and see whether they are not analogous and of a piece."[14] And for Butler, the dispensations of Providence do include the conditions we find in nature. He thus seeks to show that the laws of nature are of a piece with the laws of man and the laws of

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[12]Shaftesbury, II, 126.

[13]Shaftesbury, II, 126.

[14]Butler, I, 15.

God. For instance, he argues that the imperfection of many men does not prove that man's imperfection is intended by God. And he uses an analogy to the natural world in supporting his point:

> For, of the numerous seeds of vegetables and bodies of animals, which are adapted and put in the way, to improve to such a point or state of natural maturity and perfection, we do not see perhaps that one in a million actually does. Far the greatest part of them decay before they are improved to it; and appear to be absolutely destroyed. Yet no one, who does not deny all final causes, will deny, that those seeds and bodies, which do attain to that point of maturity and perfection, answer the end for which they were really designed by nature; and therefore that nature designed them for such perfection.[15]

As the maturity and perfection of a blooming daffodil is easily accepted as the goal of nature, the maturity and perfection of man should as easily be accepted as the goal of God, Butler reasons. Like Emerson, Butler finds clear analogies between man and his environment.

However, he does not use such analogies as absolute "confirmation and illustration of his a priori ethical system."[16] He states only that analogies are very probable indications that man and nature are both governed by a beneficent Creator.[17] And he goes on to argue that man's ignorance of the methods of nature parallels his ignorance of God's purposes and that man's faith in the order of nature

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[15]Butler, I, 131.

[16]Porte, p. 91.

[17]Mossner, p. 81.

despite this should be matched by a faith that God's purposes are beneficent.[18] Emerson, on the other hand, suggests that man's ignorance of nature is one with his ignorance of self, but he suggests that man must strive to understand nature in order to fully know himself. He does not argue as Butler does that man should accept his lack of knowledge. Instead he argues that man should constantly seek to increase his knowledge and power. Yet these differences are relatively minor; Emerson shares to a great extent in Butler's concept of correspondence. If Butler does not assert that correspondences exist absolutely, he believes nevertheless that they very probably do. And if he argues for religious faith on the grounds that man's ignorance of nature parallels his ignorance of God, he is nevertheless arguing by analogy.

Norris, Shaftesbury, and Butler are thus three common-sense moralists who quite clearly anticipate Emerson's doctrine of correspondence. But the works of intellectual moralists also intrinsically suggest the view of nature Emerson was to hold, for these writers identified God with nature. For them, God "moves the stars and directs the course of a bubble. The moral as well as the material universe is absolutely dependent on his laws."[19] Emerson desires that analogies between the laws of nature and the laws

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[18]Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (1940; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 77.

[19]Stephen, II, 3.

of man's being be perceived. And this attitude of the intellectual moralists is very close to his desire. More specifically, William Wollaston in The Religion of Nature Delineated (1724) humanizes "the scientific universe of the Enlightenment,"[20] for he sees the reflection of man in the natural world. He applies to psychology, for example, the principle that every action meets with an equal and opposite reaction:

> The causes of pleasure and pain are relative things: and in order to estimate truly their effect upon any particular subject they ought to be drawn into the degrees of perception in that subject. When the cause is of the same kind, and acts with an equal force, if the perception of one person be equal to that of another, what they perceive must needs be equal.[21]

Wollaston here describes the causes of human pleasure and pain in the language of physical science. The force which produces a given amount of pleasure in one person is equal to the force which produces pleasure in another only if the amounts of pleasure produced are equal. And Wollaston goes on to argue that an immoral action can never be a force producing pleasure. Thus, a century before Emerson asserts that "the axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics," Wollaston finds man's character symbolized in a law of physics.

But Wollaston's quantitative psychology would surely

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[20]Kern, p. 275.

[21]William Wollaston, The Religion of Nature Delineated, 5th ed. (London, 1731), p. 33.

be very objectionable to Emerson. Perhaps Wollaston is closer to Emerson in the following passage:

> To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the Author of nature upon them, whose uppermost faculty is reason: as the dictates of it in particular cases are the particular laws, to which they are subject. As there are beings, which have not so much sense, and others that have no faculty above it; so there may be some, who are indued with reason, but have nothing higher than that. It is sufficient at present to suppose there may be such. And if reason be the uppermost faculty, it has a right to controll the rest by being such. As in sensitive animals sense commands gravitation and mechanical motion in those instances, for which their senses are given, and carries them out into spontaneous acts: so in rational animals the gradation requires, that reason should command sense.[22]

Wollaston here suggests that as the animals are controlled by their highest faculty, man should be controlled by his, his reason. And to be controlled by reason for Wollaston is to act according to accepted moral laws. Wollaston believes that the man who acts immorally denies the essence of his being and concludes that no one acting reasonably would do this. Thus, nature serves Wollaston indirectly as a sort of moral standard against which to judge himself. And Emerson overtly postulates just such a standard in "The American Scholar." Though Wollaston's reason is not what Emerson would define as man's highest faculty, his belief in correspondence is much like Emerson's. Moreover, Wollaston's belief that correspondences are given in the scheme of things anticipates Emerson's. Wollaston finds that analogies spring from the "general law" which governs both man and nature.

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[22]Wollaston, p. 104.

They are in no sense arbitrary. Yet, despite these similarities, Wollaston does not place so great a significance upon correspondence as does Emerson. Indeed, the religion of nature which he delineates is more often solely human than it is human reflected in physical nature.

Finally, two very different utilitarian moralists anticipate Emerson's stance on correspondence. Bishop Berkeley closely anticipates Emerson's belief that nature is symbolic when he argues that the natural world corresponds to the divine: "whithersoever we direct our view we do at all times and in all places perceive manifest tokens of the Divinity: everything we see, hear, feel or anywise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the power of God . . ."[23] Berkeley here writes that all sensations which we receive in observing the natural world are symbolic of God. And he believes these signs to stand in the will of God, to be constant. Indeed, Berkeley writes, in language that sounds distinctly Emersonian, that "the voice of nature, which speaks to our eyes, is not liable to that misinterpretation and ambiguity that languages of human contrivance are unavoidably subject to."[24] In addition, Berkeley like Emerson avoids a fixed symbol system. He does not postulate

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[23]The Works of George Berkeley, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), I, 342.

[24]George Berkeley, The Principles of Human Knowledge in Berkeley's Philosophical Writings, ed. David M. Armstrong (New York, 1965), p. 76, as cited by Richard, p. 95.

one-to-one relationships between particular sensations and particular attributes of God. However, Berkeley does differ from Emerson in an extremely significant way. He finds nature to be symbolic of God; Emerson finds it to be symbolic of God and of the God within man. Yet, if they differ in the correspondences they perceive, Berkeley and Emerson agree that correspondences exist.

In addition to Berkeley, William Paley must be seen as an utilitarian moralist who foreshadows Emerson's doctrine of correspondence. Religiously far more orthodox than Emerson, Paley nevertheless finds that correspondences between man and nature support his orthodoxy. He argues, for instance, that the beneficent rain which falls in some areas and not in others is much like the coming of Christianity to some cultures and not to others. And he concludes from this parallel that God's failure to insure the universal acceptance of Christianity is not so important as his granting that some people may experience it.[25] Paley thus establishes a clear correspondence between the workings of the natural and the human worlds. However, Paley is basically different from Emerson, for as Leslie Stephen notes, "Paley finds God in nature by the help rather of small contrivances than of the general order."[26] Emerson, as we have seen, does not. He

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[25]The Works of William Paley (Philadelphia: Crissy and Markley, 1850), p. 378.

[26]Stephen, I, 352.

sees correspondence as pervasive in nature and finds that even the laws of physics and astronomy symbolize the depth of man's moral nature. Moreover, when Paley does talk extensively about nature, he tends to view it only as the effect which proves the cause, God; he does not typically regard nature as a symbol. Yet Paley's proof of God from the order of His creation does suggest rather obliquely Emerson's view of correspondence. Paley's discussion of the principle of compensation, for instance, foreshadows Emerson's own. Paley suggests that a principle of compensation exists in the natural world; the fact that birds have gizzards to make up for their lack of teeth is but one of his many examples illustrating this principle.[27] And Paley further believes that the compensations seen in nature prove the existence of God. Emerson modifies this assertion and suggests that the compensations seen in nature correspond to the advantages which offset every loss man experiences. Paley then clearly anticipates Emersonian correspondence, though he does so much less directly than a writer like Shaftesbury.

Thus, Emerson perpetuates views expressed by eighteenth-century common-sense, intellectual, and utilitarian moralists in espousing his doctrine of correspondence. His beliefs that the attributes of man and of external nature correspond, that such correspondences are not metaphoric but

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[27]Paley, p. 440.

real, and that no one-to-one relationships between man and nature should be held rigidly are all beliefs held by a variety of eighteenth-century moralists. Yet there is a key difference between these two approaches to correspondence, one which goes beyond the typical discussion of the abstract nature of eighteenth-century writing. Where Shaftesbury "endeavors to be one with" God and finds correspondences between man and nature insofar as he is constitutionally able to achieve union,[28] Emerson says simply that man can be one with God and nature can be his double. Where Berkeley says God is nature, Emerson says one should study nature in order to know himself. And where Norris and Wollaston find moral principles in nature, Emerson finds not only such principles, but also an emblem of man himself. Emerson, in short, finds nature to be a double of man while his eighteenth-century English counterparts tend to be more restrictive in the correspondences they perceive. Emerson thus offers a much more exalted view of the self in his doctrine of correspondence, for he finds all of the natural world focused on man. He finds that correspondences suggest the depth of human nature, the importance of man the individual, the self's possibilities for power.

One can profitably speculate about the reasons for this difference in emphasis between eighteenth-century English and Emersonian correspondence. We have seen that

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[28]Shaftesbury, II, 105.

eighteenth-century writers like Shaftesbury, Butler, and Norris at times share Emerson's concept of the God within, but that they do not locate God within man so consistently as does Emerson early in his career. Emerson thus presents a more radical concept of self-reliance than do his English predecessors. And Emerson's greater self-trust is seen in his greater emphasis upon the self as the focal point of all nature. The focus of God's creation, of nature, quite inevitably is on the man who has the Creator within. Moreover, only a man with the greatest of self-confidence (or one who needs to convince himself of his own worth) could assert that the natural world is his double without fearing that perhaps the correspondences he sees are illusory. This fear overtakes Emerson in "Circles," but in other early essays he is not bothered by it. Indeed, once his self-confidence permits him to proclaim the existance of correspondences between man and nature, those correspondences reinforce his self-trust. They come to seem external sources which validate the beliefs of the self-sufficient, isolated man. Finding nature to be an emblem of man results from self-trust, but in a circular fashion it also provides evidence justifying that trust. Emerson's doctrine of correspondence thus clearly differs from eighteenth-century English doctrines in its exaltation of the self, but it just as clearly shares with these doctrines a firm belief in the existence of natural symbols.

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Between Essays: First Series (1841) and Essays: Second Series (1844), Emerson's view of correspondence changes substantially. This doctrine is, as we have seen, closely related to his belief in self-reliance, and events between 1841 and 1844 combine to chasten Emerson's faith in man's possibilities for power. The death of his young son Waldo was such a tremendous source of grief that to Samuel Ripley "it seemed obvious enough that, since young Waldo's death, Emerson could never be the same again."[29] Moreover, Emerson was forced to confront other unpleasant facts less close to his heart. The possibility for work on a projected railroad caused Concord to be flooded by poor Irish laborers, and Emerson's view of man's prospects must have been affected. And Emerson's study of geology and realization of how vast the history of the earth was made him conscious of the smallness of an individual as opposed to nature.[30] Such factors then cause Emerson to alter his view of the self. He moves away from a vision of unlimited possibilities for man to a picture of the free man hooped in by necessity. And since the correspondences Emerson perceives are inseparably related to his concept of the self, his view of correspondence necessarily shifts also. He at times comes to suggest that

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[29]Ralph L. Rusk, The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Scribners, 1949), p. 294.

[30]Whicher, pp. 145-146.

natural symbols are relative things, that they spring from the minds of limited individuals and have no absolute existence. However, he more typically continues to say that correspondences are given in the scheme of things, but does so without suggesting, as he did in his early essays, that they greatly exalt man.

In Essays: Second Series both of these new attitudes toward correspondence manifest themselves, although Emerson opens the volume with a restatement of his earlier view. "The Poet" presents a view of correspondence which is neither tinged with skepticism nor tempered in its view of man's possibilities. Here Emerson finds that nature is a symbol, that the poet as representative man is divine and should match the splendor of nature, and that symbols should be kept fluid rather than becoming fixed. But Emerson also says that he looks in vain for such a poet. And the discouragement of this statement points toward the altered view of correspondence we shall see in the volume's other essays.

In "Experience," for instance, Emerson suggests that correspondences are products of individual minds and are not given in the scheme of things. He writes that "Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast" (W, III, 76). Emerson seems to suggest here that nature is totally subjective, that it is not a "projection of God in the unconscious" (W, I, 64) but is merely a product of temperament, and that

therefore the symbols in nature like those in literature are creations of individual minds. But Emerson is still able to maintain some faith in the self and by implication in correspondence even in this skeptical essay, for he writes that "it is not what we believe concerning the immortality of the soul or the like, but the universal impulse to believe, that is the material circumstance and is the principal fact in the history of the globe" (W, III, 74). This impulse to believe moves us toward the Ideal, toward the truth, even if we cannot have absolute confidence in the symbols we perceive.

In contrast, "Character" tends to be less skeptical than "Experience" and to present a tempered version of the earlier concept of correspondence. For instance, Emerson writes:

> Everything in nature is bipolar, or has a positive and a negative pole. There is a male and a female, a spirit and a fact, a north and a south. Spirit is the positive, the event is the negative. Will is the north, action the south pole. Character may be ranked as having its natural place in the north. It shares the magnetic currents of the system. The feeble souls are drawn to the south or negative pole. (W, III, 97)

This passage sounds much like Emerson's earlier statements about correspondence. Emerson presents a correspondence between the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and he nowhere suggests that this correspondence is a "shadow which we cast" (W, III, 76). It truly exists. Moreover, no one-to-one system of correspondences is proposed, for "everything is bipolar." Yet the correspondence between natural

polarity and the polarity of human nature does not emphasize the importance of man to the extent that earlier correspondences had. Man seems to be another example of a universal law rather than the focal point of all correspondences. The example of a man who relies on intuition as opposed to the man who is chained to matter is but one of several polarities Emerson lists, though surely the most important in the list. Clearly, then, the emphasis on man's significance has been tempered here; the emphasis on the order of the whole has been increased.

In "Nature" Emerson seems to regain the faith in correspondence and man's significance which he had expressed in "The Poet" and in his earlier works. He writes that "we traverse the whole scale of being, from the centre to the poles of nature, and have some stake in every possibility" (W, III, 195-196). Nature in all its parts once again seems to be a symbol of man; man seems to be the focus of nature. Yet Emerson paints a less exalted picture of man elsewhere in the essay. He writes that

> so poor is nature with all her craft, that from the beginning to the end of the universe she has but one stuff,--but one stuff with its two ends, to serve up all her dream-like variety. Compound it how she will, star, sand, fire, water, tree, man, it is still one stuff, and betrays the same properties. (W, III, 180-181)

Emerson thus suggests that there are laws which run throughout nature and which are true for all of her creatures. The "whole code of her laws may be written on the thumbnail," he

writes. The law of compensation, for instance, he finds true in all realms. The tree, the bird, the man all know that disadvantage will be offset by advantage. Yet, here as in "Character," man seems less powerful. He is made of the same atoms as the rest of nature, and Emerson mentions man only as another example in a list of nature's creations which must obey the same laws. The radical egoism of correspondence before 1841 is missing in this passage.

In Representative Men (1850) this altered view of correspondence persists. Emerson, for instance, describes Plato's belief in correspondence, but he does so in much more restrained terms than he had used in his early works. He writes that

> being from one, things correspond. There is a scale; and the correspondence of heaven to earth, of matter to mind, of the part to the whole, is our guide. As there is a science of stars, called astronomy; a science of quantities, called mathematics; a science of qualities, called chemistry; so there is a science of sciences,--I call it Dialectic,--which is the Intellect discriminating the false and true. (W, IV, 62)

Emerson here finds as he had earlier that mind and matter correspond, and that the correspondence is not arbitrary. He does not suggest that the correspondences merely exist in an individual's mind, but asserts simply that "things correspond." Moreover, Emerson continues to describe these correspondences in general terms, avoiding too literal a view of them: thought and substance correspond, he asserts, because they come from the same Source. Yet the earlier

egoism seems gone. The self is not the focus of concern as it has been. Emerson does not write that "nature is the opposite of the soul," does not write ecstatically. Instead he merely states that there are correspondences "of heaven to earth, of matter to mind, of the part to the whole." The exultant tone is gone; the old egoism has been modified.

A similar shift in tone can be seen in "Swedenborg." Emerson objects to the theological implications of the symbols Swedenborg finds in nature. He writes that "Swedenborg and Behmen both failed by attaching themselves to the Christian symbol, instead of to the moral sentiment, which carries innumerable christianities, humanities, divinities, in its bosom" (W, IV, 135). Emerson, in a sense, maintains his early position here. He writes that symbols from nature represent divinities in man. And he elsewhere notes that these symbols are both real and fluid: "The central identity allows any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being" (W, IV, 121). But Emerson avoids the rhetoric which proclaims man to be a creator in the finite. Instead he writes that symbols are attached to the moral sentiment which contains innumerable divinities and transcends the bounds of particular faiths. He finds the moral sentiment rather than the entire mind to be divine and to correspond to nature. The old hyperbole is gone and Emerson's view of the possibilities that nature reveals for the self has clearly been chastened.

Finally, in The Conduct of Life (1860) Emerson's belief in correspondence continues to show this modified nature. One reason this revised view of correspondence persists and grows in strength may be Emerson's European trip of 1847-1848. The essays in The Conduct of Life originally were lectures given in the 1850's after Emerson's return from that trip. And Rusk notes that he returned "with a better understanding of the kind of world in which most persons lived."[31] Indeed, Emerson's Aunt Mary felt that this trip caused Emerson to move "beyond the mists rainbow visions of transcendental philosophy."[32] Whatever the reason, Emerson's doctrine of correspondence in this late volume emphasizes both the skeptical and the tempered versions of his earlier concept.

However, in "Beauty" Emerson shows some of the earlier egotism which characterized his discussions of correspondence. He writes in this essay that man holds himself too cheaply:

> All the elements pour through his system; he is the flood of the flood and fire of the fire; he feels the antipodes and the pole as drops of his blood; they are the extension of his personality. His duties are measured by that instrument he is; and a right and perfect man would be felt to be the centre of the Copernican system. (W, VI, 283)

The universe is centered on man, Emerson writes. He contains the essence of all that is. The poles of the globe

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[31]Rusk, p. 357.

[32]Rusk, p. 358.

correspond to the poles of his nature, to his Reason and understanding, his spirit and sense. Yet, elsewhere in The Conduct of Life Emerson backs away from such statements.

In "Worship" Emerson certainly does not paint such a picture of man's place in the natural world:

> Our recent culture has been in natural science. We have learned the manners of the sun and of the moon, of the rivers and the rain, of the mineral and elemental kingdoms, of plants and animals. Man has learned to weigh the sun, and its weight neither loses nor gains. The path of a star, the moment of an eclipse, can be determined to the fraction of a second. Well, to him the book of history, the book of love, the lures of passion and the commandments of duty are opened; and the next lesson taught is the continuation of the inflexible law of matter into the subtile kingdom of will and of thought; that if in sidereal ages gravity and projection keep their craft, and the ball never loses its way in its wild path through space,--a secreter gravitation, a secreter projection rule not less tyrannically in human history, and keep the balance of power from age to age unbroken. For though the new element of freedom and an individual has been admitted, yet the primordial atoms are prefigured and predetermined to moral issues, are in search of justice, and ultimate right is done. Religion or worship is the attitude of those who see this unity, intimacy and sincerity; who see that against all appearances the nature of things works for truth and right forever.
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> It is a short sight to limit our faith in laws to those of gravity, of chemistry, of botany, and so forth. Those laws do not stop where our eyes lose them, but push the same geometry and chemistry up into the invisible plane of social and rational life . . . . (W, VI, 218-219)

Emerson proclaims here that the laws of nature are the laws of men, that just as gravity holds the planets in their proper orbits, it assures that men's activities work for the right. And Emerson obviously believes this correspondence to exist absolutely. He is not merely creating a metaphor.

He asserts that the law of gravity extends "into the invisible plane of social and rational life." Moreover, as he had early in his career, Emerson talks in general terms here. He does not seek to define the symbolic meaning of each effect produced by natural law. But the old egoism which marked Emerson's early essays is missing here. Correspondence here does not show man's power, but his reliance upon beneficent laws. Emerson grants that man is free, but he does not picture him as effecting revolutions, as bringing about the triumph of a principle through his own efforts. Rather he assures man that despite his impotence, right will be done. Nature is thus no longer a symbol of man the individual so much as it is of the moral laws which govern men in general. Correspondences here do not exalt man so much as they provide him with peace of mind.

In "Illusions" as in "Experience" Emerson is skeptical of the validity of correspondence. In this essay he suggests that all reality may be the creation of a limited man's limited mind and that therefore correspondences may be illusory. Indeed, he writes that

> Our conversation with nature is not just what it seems. The cloudrack, the sunrise and sunset glories, rainbows and Northern Lights are not quite so spheral as our childhood thought them, and the part our organization plays in them is too large. The senses interfere everywhere and mix their own structure with all they report of. (W, IV, 311)

The senses, Emerson argues, keep us from seeing things as they are. The physical eye itself distorts the stimuli it

receives. And Emerson goes on to say that passions, sentiments, and ideas can produce similar distortions (W, VI, 319). The correspondences we see, he thus implies, do not exist absolutely: "The intellect is stimulated by the statement of truth in a trope, and the will by clothing the law of life in illusions." But Emerson is not content with this skeptical attitude, and he immediately adds that "the unities of Truth and of Right are not broken by the disguise. There need never be any confusion in these" (W, VI, 324). He suggests that though the correspondences we perceive may be illusions, absolute Truths do exist and can be known.

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Thus, the hyperbole in discussions of correspondence and the trust in the reality of correspondences is modified in the second part of Emerson's career as an essayist. The correspondences in his later works tend not to exalt the self in an unqualified fashion, and correspondences at times appear to be relative symbols, to be products of individual minds.

The tempering of the degree to which correspondence exalts mankind surely brings Emerson even closer to those eighteenth-century Englishmen who share his belief in nature's symbolic character. Emerson's belief that despite all appearances the "primordial atoms are prefigured and predetermined to moral issues" suggests Butler's belief that

moral laws like natural laws are constantly at work, even though man may not be able to see them. Neither view exalts man. And the flatness of Emerson's assertion that "Everything in nature is bipolar," including man, recalls the subdued tone in Wollaston's statement that every creature in nature must be governed by its highest faculty. But perhaps because Emerson increasingly respects the power of fate late in his career, his ideas harken back most clearly to those of the necessitarian David Hartley. Hartley, like Emerson, tends to believe that "the axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics," for he argues that science should be studied because there are numerous "Connexions of Truth of all kinds with those most amiable and important doctrines, which Religion, Natural and Revealed, teaches us."[33] He like Emerson believes these analogies to truly exist. Man does not fabricate these similarities but discovers "The analogous natures of all the things about us."[34] And he like Emerson refuses to establish a system of one-to-one correspondences, believing that "all things comment on each other in endless reciprocation."[35] Finally, Hartley, like Emerson late in his career, does not use correspondence to exalt man. On the contrary, he believes everything in nature

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[33]David Hartley, Observations on Man (1749; rpt. Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), Part 1, p. 433.

[34]Hartley, Part 1, p. 343.

[35]Hartley, Part 1, p. 343.

combines to exalt God: "Everything sweet, beautiful, or glorious, brings in the idea of God, mixes with it, and vanishes into it."[36] Thus, although Emerson does not share in Hartley's materialism, he undoubtedly comes to resemble Hartley and other eighteenth-century English moralists when he tempers the radical egoism of his early stand on correspondence.

However, Emerson's skeptical stance on correspondence, his suggestion that symbols are relative, is unlike the eighteenth-century views of correspondence we have seen. One might be able to see Butler's probable analogies as an oblique anticipation of this view. Yet surely Emerson's relativistic position has closer eighteenth-century English parallels. It closely resembles the philosophy of Hume and the views of nature seen in works by George Crabbe and Anne Radcliffe, for instance.

Hume most clearly anticipates the skepticism which would tinge Emerson's later works. He writes, for example,

> If we can depend on any principle which we learn from philosophy, this, I think, may be considered as certain and undoubted, that there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection.[37]

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[36]Hartley, Part 2, p. 313.

[37]Hume, III, 216. Hume does not find this conclusion disconcerting because he believes standards of beauty and behavior have been established by custom: "There is a sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to

Hume suggests here that the mind of man determines what he values and what he sees, that there are no absolute values or truths. Emerson, of course, never fully accepts this position. He believes throughout his career in ultimate spiritual realities, but in the later part of his career as an essayist he at times argues that the individual inevitably distorts those realities, inevitably shapes them in his own image as he perceives them in nature. And this causes Emerson to doubt the viability of correspondence. If man cannot trust his perceptions, he can scarcely claim that the correspondences he sees exist absolutely. Emerson thus shares somewhat in Hume's sceptical attitude when he writes that correspondences are relative rather than absolute.

This relativistic view of correspondence is also anticipated in the works of George Crabbe and Anne Radcliffe. Emerson finds reading Crabbe's poems "all one with taking a dose of medicine," but he acknowledges that "Crabbe knew men" (JMN, V, 345). And perhaps one way in which Crabbe knew men was in his realization that the mind distorts what the eyes present to it. In "The Lovers Journey," he

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make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners" (III, 219). However, for Emerson this is not enough. He hopes to use nature as a standard of excellence which fallen man has never fully but may yet achieve. But when Emerson loses confidence in man's ability to know God within, he comes to feel that man inevitably distorts what he perceives in nature, inevitably shapes it in his own image rather than discovering his image there. And as a consequence, he tends to view correspondence as a less viable doctrine.

certainly argues that this is true. The lover when expectant and when disappointed views the same landscape in entirely different terms because

> It is the Soul that sees; the outward eyes
> Present the object but the Mind descries;
> And thence delight, disgust, or cool indiff'rence
> rise . . .[38]

For Crabbe, therefore, correspondences could never have an absolute existence because man determines what he sees rather than seeing analogies that stand in the mind of God. Crabbe's approach to experience then clearly anticipates Emerson's relativistic view of correspondence, for Emerson like Crabbe finds that there are "deceptions of the passions" (W, VI, 319) which affect one's view of nature.

Like Crabbe, Anne Radcliffe in The Mysteries of Udolpho suggests that the mind of man may distort what he sees. The Count of Chateau-le-Blanc explains that while nature has not changed in the course of his life, his view of it has:

> "though the grand features of the scenery admit of no change, they impress me with sensations very different from those I formerly experienced."
>
> "Did these scenes," said Blanche, "ever appear more lovely than they do now? To me this seems hardly possible."
>
> The count, regarding her with a melancholy smile, said, "They were once as delightful to me, as they are now to you; the landscape is not changed, but the time has changed me; from my mind the illusion, which gave spirit to the colouring of nature, is fading fast! If you live, my dear Blanche, to revisit this spot, at the

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[38]George Crabbe, Tales, 1812 and other Selected Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), p. 220.

> distance of many years, you will, perhaps, remember and understand the feelings of your father."[39]

Radcliffe here suggests that one's reaction to nature changes as one's mind changes and develops; she suggests that what is seen is distorted by the perceiver. If such is the case, correspondences can hardly be constant and pervade nature. Radcliffe's position thus foreshadows the basis for Emerson's relativistic view of correspondence which emerges in Essays: Second Series and troubles him throughout the rest of his career.

Eighteenth-century English writers thus clearly hold the tempered view of correspondence Emerson was to adopt. And a skeptic like Hume foreshadows the skeptical view of correspondence Emerson was at time to hold. In the later part of his career, then, Emerson is far from being in revolt against the Age of Reason. Instead, his doctrine of correspondence ties him closely to it.

Emerson thus moves from a rather self-centered doctrine of correspondence in which he has absolute faith to a view of correspondence which is centered less on the self and is at times even relativistic. But whatever his position on correspondence, he follows closely in traditions established by eighteenth-century English moralists. Norris, Shaftesbury, Butler, Wollaston, Berkeley, Paley, and Hume provide in the

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[39]Anne Radcliffe, Mysteries of Udolpho (New York: Dutton, 1931), II, 145.

eighteenth century all the elements which would prove essential to Emersonian correspondence in the nineteenth.

CHAPTER IV

EMERSON, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND, AND COMPENSATION: PART I, VIRTUE REWARDED

Compensation has been recognized as a doctrine which links Emerson to eighteenth-century English thought. Indeed, Joel Porte finds that eighteenth-century optimism "implies and contains Emerson's principle of compensation."[1] And Stephen Whicher argues that Emersonian compensation is really an Enlightenment concept.[2] But it does not lie within the scope of Porte's or Whicher's study to discuss fully the nature of Emersonian compensation and its relationship to eighteenth-century English thought. It thus seems appropriate to attempt such a discussion here.

Henry F. Pommer says that Emerson's doctrine of "Compensation lived essentially unchanged through years of stress and of calm because its roots went down to the very foundation of Emerson's thought and personality."[3] And Pommer is

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[1]Porte, p. 12.

[2]Whicher, p. 37.

[3]Henry F. Pommer, "The Contents and Basis of Emerson's Belief in Compensation," PMLA, 77 (1962), 248-49.

surely correct in maintaining that Emerson believes in compensation throughout his career. Yet I believe he is incorrect in suggesting that this concept remains unchanged. Emerson's belief in compensation, like his belief in correspondence, is inevitably related to his evolving view of the self, and thus it necessarily changes somewhat during the course of his career.

Throughout his works Emerson offers two main definitions of compensation, viewing it as the principle which rewards virtue and punishes evil and viewing it as the assurance, in Pope's words, that "all partial evil" is "universal good," that "Whatever is, is right."[4] The first definition is clearly centered upon the individual who by his free choice of good or evil is rewarded or punished. The second definition, which Whicher might call a counterpunching definition,[5] is just as clearly centered less upon the individual and his choices and more upon the beneficent scheme of things which offsets any suffering. Thus, although both of these definitions recur throughout Emerson's career, his view of compensation as virtue rewarded tends to be most important early in his career as an essayist when he finds all things centered in the individual, and his view of compensation as the principle which makes partial evil universal

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[4]Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Louis I. Bredvold et al. (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 384.

[5]Whicher, p. 39.

good tends to be most important later in his career when he sees the individual as a man rather than a god. Both views, as we shall see, are common to eighteenth-century English thought.

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Early in his career as an essayist when his belief in man's freedom is at its height, Emerson inevitably emphasizes his faith that man's choice of good over evil is rewarded. Indeed, without the freedom to choose, reward can have little significance. Living in Concord, seeing his friends rise "economically, intellectually, or spiritually,"[6] Emerson quite easily can believe that virtue brings both private emotional rewards and, though he less often suggests this, social and material rewards.

In Nature Emerson certainly says that virtue is rewarded. He asserts that "When men are innocent life shall be longer and shall pass into the immortal as gently as we awake from dreams" (W, I, 71), and he adds that you can achieve such innocence "as fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind" (W, I, 76). In poetic terms, Emerson here suggests that the man who centers his life around the ideas of universal order, God, and love rather than the satisfaction of his senses will have a fuller and more meaningful life because he has based it on eternal

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[6]Canby, p. 157.

concepts rather than temporal circumstances. And he believes that time is a deceptive element. When one lives a life based on sensation, time moves rapidly, for the pleasures are transitory. But when one lives a life of innocence, time seems somehow suspended, for the pleasures endure. Life for Emerson is therefore longer, in a metaphoric sense, when one follows in the paths of virtue. Compensation is thus a significant concept in Nature, and it is only to be expected that Emerson would note in his journal for 1836 that "nothing needs so much to be preached as the law of Compensation out of the nature of things, that the good exalts & the evil degrades us not hereafter but in the moment of the deed" (JMN, V, 192). Psychological or spiritual rewards, he believes, are attendant upon virtue in this world, not in the next.

In "The Divinity School Address" Emerson quite naturally, given the occasion of his speech, continues his moral emphasis in discussing compensation:

> Thus in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire. He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled. He who does a mean deed is by the action itself contracted. He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity. If a man is at heart just, then so far is he God: the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. (W, I, 122)

Here Emerson suggests that to act justly is to act naturally

and to become one with God.[7] The just man is spiritually safe from all harm, his life is based on a concept which is eternally true, and he gains the majestic quality we associate with a man who is incorruptible. To realize your own nature by acting virtuously, Emerson writes, brings great spiritual rewards. And later in the address Emerson adds that practical as well as spiritual rewards accompany virtue:

> Thefts never enrich; alms never impoverish; murder will speak out of stone walls. The least admixture of a lie, for example, the taint of vanity, any attempt to make a good impression, a favorable appearance,--will instantly vitiate the effect. But speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance. Speak the truth and all things alive or brute are vouchers and the very roots of the grass underground there do seem to stir and move to bear you witness. (W, I, 123)

Emerson writes in this passage that an effort to deceive will inevitably fail whereas speaking the truth will help you toward your desires. It is a natural law, he believes, that honesty succeeds and dishonesty fails. And he metaphorically suggests this when he states that "the very roots of the grass underground there do seem to stir and move to bear you witness" when you speak the truth. The doctrine of compensation in "The Divinity School Address" thus clearly emphasizes compensation as a sort of "self-administering

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[7]When Emerson argues that a reward of virtue is the incoming of God, he is arguing in a somewhat circular fashion. Indeed, in "The Over-Soul" he finds that virtue results when a man possesses the God within (W, II, 271), but in "The Divinity School Address" he finds that when a man is virtuous, then that man is God (W, I, 122).

principle" of justice at work in the universe.[8]

However, Whicher's persuasive argument that compensation is not a major doctrine in these radical essays must be noted:

> as a faith to live by, compensation had its limitations. It was inherently a defensive faith, a counterpunch . . . . The reward it guaranteed for virtue, to be sure, was an exception, but here the limitation was the moral condition put on good fortune. We can understand, then, that when Emerson found a basis for the assertion of unconditional good, in his discovery of the God within the soul, the law of compensation slipped to a subordinate place in his thoughts. Then his inner limitations virtually evaporated before his limitless possibilities; and the outer world glowed with a vast promise in which all things were tuned and set to good. A creed that could be reduced, as he once wrote, to the single article, 'Goodness is the only Reality,' clearly underwrote his security much more handsomely than the minimum coverage provided by compensation.[9]

Whicher here suggests that the concept of virtue rewarded is not especially important to the radical essays because it places a "moral condition . . . on good fortune." He is undoubtedly correct in suggesting that Emerson objects to following an external code of behavior in order to achieve good fortune. But for Emerson, following one's own nature is tantamount to following rather conventional moral codes.[10] Thus, if Emerson argues that goodness will be the only reality when man realizes his true nature, he is actually placing a moral condition on the achievement of good fortune. In

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[8]Pommer, p. 253.

[9]Whicher, p. 39.

[10]See Porte, pp. 82-83 for similar conclusions.

Nature it is the innocent who finds life longer, and in "The Divinity School Address" it is the just man who receives the safety, immortality, and majesty of God and the evil man who is punished because he "goes out of acquaintance with his own Being." Moreover, "The Divinity School Address" suggests that man's inner limitations evaporate "before his limitless possibilities" only insofar as he is benevolent:

> the world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool; and whatever opposes that will is everywhere balked and baffled, because things are made so, and not otherwise. Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he. (W, I, 123-124)

To be benevolent, to have the "spirit" of "love, justice, temperance," is for Emerson equivalent to truly living. These values make life meaningful; without them a man lives merely a death in life, without them one becomes a sort of Prufrock. Thus, even when he is denying the existence of evil, Emerson continues to emphasize his definition of compensation as virtue rewarded, for virtue brings life while evil brings only death. This virtue, one must hasten to add, however, is not so much a virtue of action as it is a feeling, a "sentiment" from which actions can arise. Thus, one is not compensated in Emerson's scheme for mechanically and calculatingly doing good works but for possessing the spirit of virtue.

In Essays: First Series Emerson continues this emphasis upon compensation as virtue rewarded, on compensation as

a self-administering principle of justice. In "Compensation," for example, he argues that

> The soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law. We feel its inspiration; but there in history we can see its fatal strength. "It is in the world, and the world was made by it." Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance is all parts of life. . . . The dice of God are always loaded. The world looks like a multiplication-table, or a mathematical equation, which turn it how you will, balances itself. . . . Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty. (W, II, 102)

Emerson, using mathematical terminology worthy of an eighteenth-century rationalist, here specifically states that every virtue is rewarded. And he goes on to add that rewards exist "first in the thing, or in real nature; and secondly in the circumstance or apparent nature." Both internal and interpersonal rewards come to the virtuous man. Virtue can bring "a serene eternal peace" (W, II, 123). And it can also insure that relationships with others will be enhanced. Indeed, Emerson counsels, "Love and you shall be loved. All love is mathematically just, as much as two sides of an algebraic equation." (W, II, 116)[11]

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[11]It should be noted that Emerson is no Pollyanna in this essay. His description of the martyr could never encourage a hedonistic pursuit of virtue.

> A mob is a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason and traversing its work. The mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast. Its fit hour of activity is night. Its actions are insane, like its whole constitution. It persecutes a principle; it would whip a right; it would tar and feather justice, by inflicting fire and outrage upon the houses and persons of those who have these. It resembles the prank of boys who run with fire-engines to

Similarly, in "Spiritual Laws" compensation is a major doctrine. In this essay Emerson suggests that virtue may bring a man social advantages:

> Always as much virtue as there is, so much appears; as much goodness as there is, so much reverence it commands. All the devils respect virtue. The high, the generous, the self-devoted sect will always instruct and command mankind. Never a sincere word was utterly lost. Never a magnanimity fell to the ground. Always the heart of man greets and accepts it unexpectedly. A man passes for what he is worth. What he is, engraves itself on his face, on his form, on his fortunes, in letters of light, which all men read but himself. Concealment avails him nothing; boasting, nothing. There is confession in the glances of our eyes, in our smiles, in salutations, and the grasp of hands. His sin bedaubs him, mars all his good impression. Men know not why they do not trust him; but they do not trust him. His vice glasses his eye, demeans his cheek, pinches the nose, sets the mark of the beast on the back of the head, and writes, 0 fool! fool! on the forehead of a king. (W, II, 158-59)

Here again Emerson argues that virtue is rewarded and vice punished. The sincere and magnanimous man will be respected; the dissembler will not. The compensation meted out to evil, he argues, is failure in the world of experience. All the world can recognize the liar; all men recognize insincerity

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> put out the ruddy aurora streaming to the stars. The inviolate spirit turns their spite against the wrongdoers. The martyr cannot be dishonored. Every lash inflicted is a tongue of fame; every prison a more illustrious abode; every burned book or house enlightens the world; every suppressed or expunged word reverberates through the earth from side to side. Hours of sanity and consideration are always arriving to communities, as to individuals, when the truth is seen and the martyrs are justified. (W, II, 119-20)

The reward of honor which the virtuous man achieves in this passage is not a reward which would prompt a self-seeking pursuit of virtue. Yet, as we have seen, Emerson typically paints a much more attractive picture of virtue's rewards.

and concealment and distrust the false man. Compensation is thus the principle which guarantees social as well as emotional rewards and punishments for a man's choice of good or evil.

Finally, the emphasis upon compensation as the reward for a free choice of virtue continues in the essay "Prudence." And in this essay, more than in any other, Emerson identifies worldly prudence and disinterested virtue:

> The prudence which secures an outward well-being is not to be studied by one set of men, whilst heroism and holiness are studied by another, but they are reconcilable. Prudence concerns the present time, persons, property, and existing forms. But as every fact hath its roots in the soul, and if the soul were changed, would cease to be or would become some other thing, therefore the proper administration of outward things will always rest on a just apprehension of their cause and origin; that is the good man will be the wise man, and the single-hearted the politic man. Every violation of truth is not only a sort of suicide in the liar, but is a stab at the health of human society. On the most profitable lie the course of events presently lays a destructive tax; whilst frankness proves to be the best tactics, for it invites frankness, puts the parties on a convenient footing, and makes their business a friendship. Trust men, and they will shew themselves great, though they make an exception in your favour to all their rules of trade. (W, II, 236-237)

Virtue, Emerson suggests, has both material and psychological benefits. The man who chooses "truth, frankness, courage, love, humility, and all the virtues" finds that they contribute significantly to "the art of securing a present well-being" (W, II, 240). In short, Emerson believes that honesty literally pays in the world of business. But the man who chooses virtue, he goes on to write, also chooses life itself. Emerson suggests that to lie is to commit suicide, is

to violate your very nature and condemn yourself to a death in life. Heroism, holiness, and good business relations thus all spring from virtue, and compensation is a law of life.

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Thus, in his early essays Emerson consistently emphasizes his definition of compensation as a principle of reward for virtue. And that principle tends to bring rewards which are primarily emotional or spiritual, but which can also be material or social in nature. Yet this definition is not, as Jonathan Bishop suggests, an idiosyncrasy of Emerson's.[12] This view is also significant in eighteenth-century English writing to an extent which has never been fully discussed in relation to Emerson. It is central to the utilitarian moralists, it appears in the writings of intellectual and common-sense moralists, and it is essential to the whole cult of sensibility which was so prominent in eighteenth-century England.

The utilitarian moralists clearly anticipate Emerson's belief that virtue is rewarded, though they do so in a fashion highly objectionable to Emerson. By definition these moralists believe that virtue is what man approves and vice what he disapproves. Locke, for instance, the earliest writer of this school, contends that "Good or evil are nothing but pleasure and pain, or that which occasions or

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[12]Bishop, p. 72.

produces pleasure or pain in us."[13] For Locke, therefore, as Stephen writes, "Virtue is approved because visibly conducive to happiness, and conscience is merely our opinion of the conformity of actions to certain moral rules, the utility of which has been proved by experience. It is no mysterious judge laying down absolute decisions for inscrutable reasons."[14] Emerson surely shares Locke's belief that virtue brings happiness, for he writes that obeying the moral sentiment can bring "a serene eternal peace." And he asserts that his love of others brings him love in return. But Emerson differs significantly from Locke, for he does not believe virtue can be defined solely by the results it produces. Indeed, virtue for Emerson is sanctioned by the Over-Soul and by the God within. It is not an artificial human construct based only on experience. Emerson writes in "Compensation" that the "soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law." A moral sentiment prompts us to virtue, he suggests, not the desire of rewards guaranteed by the principle of compensation. Thus, Emerson does not believe one pursues virtue for the sake of its effects. He only writes that disinterested virtue will bring contentment along the way. Locke, however, we should note, does not believe that defining virtue by its effects makes its nature

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[13]John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. A. C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), I, 474.

[14]Stephen, p. 69.

uncertain. As Stephen suggests, "his notion seems to be that in moral questions we are reasoning about certain things of which we know 'the precise real essence,' because they are entire 'ideas in the mind.'"[15] And such a stance is quite similar to the one Emerson takes, for Locke seems to believe that morality does have what is tantamount to an absolute existence.[16]

Hume, the next major utilitarian moralist of the eighteenth century, also anticipates Emerson's belief in compensation as virtue rewarded. Hume suggests that virtues must be defined as customs which have arisen because of the emotional pleasure attendent upon them or because of their utility to oneself and to others. Thus, he believes in the virtues of industry, discretion, frugality, cheerfulness, magnanimity, tranquility of mind, good manners, modesty, cleanliness because they bring both emotional and material rewards.[17] They serve to "advance a man's fortune in the world," to "increase his power of self-enjoyment," and to "render him a more valuable member of society."[18] Emerson accepts a similar set of virtues and sees the same effects resulting from them. The magnanimous man, he suggests, will

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[15]Stephen, p. 72.

[16]Porte draws a similar parallel between Locke and Emerson, pp. 82-83.

[17]Hume, IV, 225.

[18]Hume, IV, 246.

always be respected (W, II, 158) and humility will advance a man's situation in the world (W, II, 240). Yet Hume, like Locke, differs substantially from Emerson in that he bases his definition of virtue solely on experience and custom. He seeks no other sanction for it, and he at times recommends a rather calculating pursuit of virtue: "To love the glory of virtuous deeds is sure proof of the love of virtue."[19] Emerson strives to avoid this sort of attitude. At the opening of "Compensation" he mocks those people who hope to gain the "Houses and lands, offices, wine, horses, dress, luxury" in heaven that they are denied here, and he implies that our goal should be virtue, not the consequences of virtue (W, II, 94). Yet insofar as Hume believes man to act naturally from altruistic motives, he more closely resembles Emerson. Hume argues that man takes joy in the good fortune of others, even when that good fortune is purchased at his expense. He seems to deny the hedonistic qualities which otherwise might be associated with his view of virtue. Hume still argues that the existence of the natural inclination for altruism can only be verified by observation, but like Emerson he denies in such cases that virtue is purely selfish.

The intellectual moralists do not stress the rewards of virtue as much as do the utilitarians. On the contrary, they emphasize reason as the faculty by which man consciously

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[19]Hume, III, 156.

conforms his actions to sanctified standards of virtue rather than stressing the consequences of an action. Yet, they do write that emotional rewards accompany virtuous actions. Richard Price, for instance, denies that the rewards which come to the virtuous man furnish the primary motivation for acting virtuously:

> it is evidently contradictory to suppose, that the desire of the pleasure attending virtue, or arising from the reflection upon it, can in any instance be sole motive to the practice of it. For a person to propose acting thus, is exactly the same as for him to propose acting from one motive, in order to have the pleasure of reflecting that he has acted from another.[20]

To act virtuously in order to experience self-approving joy is impossible, Price suggests, because one always knows that his ulterior motive is not admirable. But Price admits that the reasonable decision to act virtuously can be reinforced by the emotional pleasures which attend it:

> Self-approbation, and self-reproach, are the chief sources of private happiness and misery. These are connected with, and entirely dependent on, our consciousness of practising or not practising virtue. . . . Virtue and vice, therefore, from the natures of things are the immediate and intimate causes of private happiness or misery.[21]

Virtue, Price writes, is the source of contentment; virtue truly brings self-approbation, if man does not pursue the good only for its rewards. And Price also writes that "to

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[20]Richard Price, A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals (London, 1757), p. 389, as cited by Winston H. F. Barnes, "Richard Price: A Neglected Eighteenth-Century Moralist," Philosophy, XVII (1942), 172.

[21]Price, Review (1757), pp. 95-96, as cited in Barnes, p. 173.

every rational mind properly disposed, morally good actions must for ever be acceptable, and can never of themselves offend; and morally evil actions must for ever be disagreeable, and can never of themselves please."[22] A virtuous action can never in itself make you unhappy and an evil action can never in itself make you happy. Thus, like Emerson, Price rejects a calculating pursuit of virtue while at the same time stating that virtue brings emotional rewards. In fact, Price's belief that virtue brings self-approbation suggests Emerson's approval of the "self-devoted" sect which consists of virtuous men, his approval of men who have the confidence to "instruct and command mankind" (W, II, 158). However, Price places much less emphasis upon the rewards of virtue than does Emerson, and his statements about virtue rewarded are typically more restrained than Emerson's. He merely finds virtue to be an immediate cause of private happiness; he does not write that virtue brings all nature to one's aid. But such differences do not obscure the basic similarities, and Price the intellectual moralist anticipates Emerson's early stance on compensation.

In a similar fashion, William Wollaston finds virtue to be a source of contentment for the man who chooses it:

> As the true and ultimate happiness of no being can be produced by any thing, that interferes with truth, and

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[22]Richard Price, A Review of the Principle Questions and Difficulties in Morals, 2nd ed. (London, 1769), p. 93, as cited by Porte, p. 72.

> denies the natures of things: so neither can the practice of truth make any being ultimately unhappy. For that, which contradicts nature and truth, opposes the will of the Author of nature . . .; and to suppose, that an inferior being may in opposition to His will break through the constitution of things and by so doing make himself happy, is to suppose that being more potent than the author of nature and power of that very being himself, which is absurd. And as to the other part of the proposition, it is also absurd to think, that, by the constitution of nature and will of its author, any being should be finally miserable only for conforming himself to truth, and owning things and the relations lying between them to be what they are.[23]

In his cautious fashion Wollaston words his version of compensation rather negatively. He argues that lies cannot make one happy and that truth cannot make one unhappy. And since he identifies any virtuous action with truth, he indeed suggests that virtue is a prudent course of action, though he chooses to recommend it as the reasonable course of action. Virtue insures that one will never be miserable while vice insures that one will never be happy. Clearly, Wollaston's statement is far from Emerson's optimistic proclamation of compensation in tone, but in essence it is very similar.

Like the intellectual moralists, the common-sense moralists do not emphasize a utilitarian view of virtue. They believe that when man acts naturally, he acts virtuously, and consequently they do not stress the result of an act so much as the sentiment which leads to it. Yet these moralists do recognize the rewards which are a by-product of

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[23]Wollaston, pp. 38-39.

virtue. Willey writes of Bishop Butler, for example, ". . . it is not Butler's purpose to justify virtue on the score of its pleasantness; yet he feels free to use that argument, when it seems desirable, in order to refute those who seek pleasure in vice."[24] Butler clearly does not want to recommend a hedonistic pursuit of virtue, but just as clearly he does suggest that there are definite emotional rewards attendant upon virtue: "The temper of compassion and benevolence is itself delightful; and the indulgence of it, by doing good, affords new positive delight and enjoyment."[25] Furthermore, Butler indicates that more tangible rewards may also result from virtue:

> It should seem, that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavor to secure and promote it, which is, I think, very much the meaning of the word prudence, in our language: it should seem, that this is virtue; and the contrary behavior faulty and blamable: since, in the calmest way of reflections, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourselves and others.[26]

Butler here argues much as Emerson was to in "Prudence" that prudence and virtue are not opposed but complementary. To seek one's own interest is to act virtuously and vice versa. Thus, Emerson and Butler both stress a disinterested pursuit of virtue, but both also find that emotional and material rewards come to the virtuous man. Perhaps Butler is more

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[24]Willey, p. 91.

[25]Butler, II, 73.

[26]Butler, I, 404.

restrained than Emerson, for he cautions that whatever exceptions there are to this rule "shall be set right at the final distribution of things"[27] whereas Emerson believes that all shall be set right in the here and now. But surely such a difference does not invalidate the substantial similarities we have seen.

Shaftesbury, much more the optimist than Butler, is a common-sense moralist who anticipates Emerson's position even more closely. Shaftesbury, like Emerson, does not recommend a hedonistic search for the joys of virtue. Indeed, he believes that a good man can be content "even though experiencing discomfort or unpleasant sensations."[28] But although Shaftesbury does not picture virtue as bringing sensual delight, he does believe that genuine contentment comes to the virtuous man. For Shaftesbury, then, the rewards of virtue are primarily emotional, though they ideally include "physical well-being too."[29] And he well describes these emotional rewards:

> To love, and to be kind; to have social or natural affection, complacency, and good will, is to feel immediate satisfaction and genuine content. 'Tis in itself original joy, depending on no preceding pain or uneasiness, and producing nothing beside satisfaction merely. On the other side, animosity, hatred, and

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[27]Butler, II, 75.

[28]Stanley Grean, Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1967), p. 236.

[29]Grean, p. 232.

> bitterness, is original misery and torment, producing no other pleasure or satisfaction than as the unnatural desire is for the instant satisfied by something which appeases it. How strong soever this pleasure therefore may appear, it only the more implies the misery of that state which produces it. For as the cruellest bodily pains do by intervals of assuagement produce (as has been shown) the highest bodily pleasure, so the fiercest and most raging torments of the mind do, by certain moments of relief, afford the greatest of mental enjoyments to those who know little of the truer kind.[30]

Shaftesbury writes that virtue brings the greatest and most lasting contentment possible to man and that vice brings only misery and torment. He suggests that the pleasure one might take in releasing his anger and hatred is not really a pleasure but only a moment of respite from the perpetual torment hate produces. He suggests, therefore, like Emerson, that man truly lives only when he is benevolent.

In addition, Shaftesbury's position on compensation calls to mind the cult of sensibility which sprang not only from his teaching, but also from the preachings of Restoration and eighteenth-century divines. And the "self-approving joy"[31] which characterizes this cult anticipates the psychological rewards Emerson was to find in virtue. Eighteenth-century clergymen, for example, typically exhaust "the resources of their rhetoric in depicting the exquisite pleasure which the good man feels in contemplating his own

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[30]Shaftesbury, I, 334.

[31]R. S. Crane, "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, I (December, 1934), p. 227.

benevolent deeds."[32] Charles Brent, for example, preaches a sermon in Bristol in 1704 which asserts that

> There is for certain, even now, a most Divine and Heavenly Pleasure in doing Good; a Pleasure that is suited to the truest Movings of Humanity, that gratifies the purest of all our natural Inclinations, that Delights and Comforts even to the cherishing of our own Flesh, that runs along with our Affections and our Bowels so very sympathetically, that some good Men have indulged and epicuriz'd in it, till they have been tempted to call it downright Sensuality: And yet a Pleasure without the least Abatement or Allay. A Pleasure too, that doth not lye lingering in the Futurities of a World to come, but commences with our very Act, nay before it; beginning even with our very Intensions: For we are no sooner entring upon a Design of serving Mankind, but we take up great Sums of Delight and Alacrity upon it, beforehand; and one Advantage here is, that the Pleasure does not leave us as soon as the Work is done, but lasts as long and lively upon our Minds, as our Memories will serve us to recollect it . . . .[33]

The wording here is too extreme for Emerson even in his most florid moments, and the pleasures Emerson finds in virtue never approach the sensuality Brent describes. But the ideas Brent expresses are very similar to Emerson's. The man who chooses the good experiences great satisfaction and contentment. Like Emerson, Brent argues that the virtuous man is rewarded in this world for his actions; he need not wait for the day of judgment. Brent differs from Emerson in his failure to qualify his assertion, to point out that virtue may involve tremendous suffering even while it brings

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[32]Crane, "Suggestions," p. 228.

[33]Charles Brent, Persuasions to a Publick Spirit (1704), pp. 15-16, as cited by Crane, "Suggestions," p. 229.

contentment. But his similarity to Emerson overrides this difference.

Not only ministers like Brent put forth this concept which Emerson would call compensation. The literature of sensibility and sentimentality is filled with it. In Richard Steele's The Conscious Lovers, Bevil Junior notes, "If pleasure be worth purchasing how great a pleasure is it, to him who has a true taste of life, to ease an aching heart, to see the human countenance lighted up into smiles of joy, on the receipt of a bit of ore which is superfluous and otherwise useless in a man's own pocket."[34] Since we constantly spend money for pleasure, Steele writes, we might well consider spending it to aid others, for that provides true pleasure. In Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield Dr. Primrose asserts that he "felt a secret pleasure in doing my duty without reward,"[35] but surely his "secret pleasure" is a reward. And in Richard Cumberland's The West Indian, Belcour finds "true delight in rescuing a fellow creature from distress."[36] This important strain in eighteenth-century English literature thus presents a

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[34]Richard Steele, The Conscious Lovers, in British Dramatists, eds. G. H. Nettleton et al., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1969), p. 453.

[35]Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield, in Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), IV, 22.

[36]Richard Cumberland, The West Indian, in British Dramatists, eds. G. H. Nettleton et al., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1969), p. 723.

principle of compensation which assures emotional rewards for virtuous actions. But it also suggests, as Emerson himself at times was to do, that more tangible rewards may result from virtuous action. Bevil Junior wins the hand of Indiana and the fortune he did not know she possessed. The virtuous Dudley of The West Indian unexpectedly inherits his grandfather's estate. And Dr. Primrose discovers his daughter's fiancé to be rich. Like Emerson, Steele, Cumberland, and Goldsmith find that virtue has both emotional and material rewards.

Perhaps the closeness of this relationship between Emersonian compensation and this eighteenth-century cult of sensibility can be fully appreciated only when the similarity of Emerson's ideas to other aspects of sensibility is noted. R. S. Crane defines the distinguishing traits of sensibility as a belief in virtue as universal benevolence, a belief in benevolence as feeling, and a belief in benevolent feelings as natural to man.[37] And Emerson early in his career shares these beliefs to a considerable extent.

Crane asserts that the eighteenth-century man of feeling believes in virtue as universal benevolence, that he is a preacher of social virtues who defines charity as a general kindness to mankind and who feels an active desire to relieve their sufferings.[38] Emerson certainly shares in

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[37]Crane, "Suggestions," pp. 208, 214, and 220.

[38]Crane, "Suggestions," p. 211.

these beliefs. In "Character," a Second Series essay close in spirit to the First Series, he writes that

> We have no pleasure in thinking of a benevolence that is only measured by its works. Love is inexhaustible and if its estate is wasted, its granary emptied, still cheers and enriches, and the man, though he sleep, seems to purify the air, and his house to adorn the landscape and strengthen the laws. People always recognize this difference. We know who is benevolent, by quite other means than the amount of subscription to soup-societies. It is only low merits that can be enumerated. Fear, when your friends say to you what you have done well, and say it through; but when they stand with uncertain timid looks of respect and half-dislike, and must suspend their judgment for years to come, you may begin to hope. Those who live to the future must always appear selfish to those who live to the present. (W, III, 103)

Here Emerson defines benevolence as a "general kindness to mankind" just as his eighteenth-century predecessors do. He suggests as they do that benevolence goes beyond cold alms-giving. The benevolent man, says Emerson, has a love which is "inexhaustible," which seems to "purify the air." But Emerson does not stress benevolence to the same extent that these eighteenth-century men of feeling do. He believes that man's development of himself is most important and writes in "Self-Reliance," "do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor?" (W, II, 52) He seems to suggest, as Richard Price does, that "other duties apart, I ought to prefer my own good to another's."[39] But both Emerson and Price surely believe self-love and benevolence

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[39]Barnes, p. 167.

to be compatible. Emerson suggests that true benevolence consists in encouraging self-reliance in others; indeed, his essays are a vivid example of that sort of benevolence. And Price lists both duty to self and benevolence as obligations which man must accept.[40]

In addition, the eighteenth-century man of feeling defines benevolence as feeling and so does Emerson. Charles Hickman in a sermon at the beginning of the eighteenth-century writes: "It is not a sign of Goodness in Man, to have no Passion in him, for such a Man is apparently Good for nothing at all. He does not hate his Brother, 'tis true: But then he does not love him neither."[41] For Hickman, the proper emotion, love, is a sign of goodness. Virtue or benevolence is a feeling as well as an action. Emerson certainly shares in this belief. He writes in "Friendship" that

> In poetry and in common speech, the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt toward others are likened to the material effects of fire; so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering, are these fine inward radiations. From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good will, they make the sweetness of life. (W, II, 191)

Here then Emerson specifically defines benevolence as an emotion which is "felt toward others." And in "The Divinity School Address" he suggests this same definition when he

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[40]Barnes, p. 167.

[41]Charles Hickman, Fourteen Sermons (1700), p. 265, as cited by Crane, "Suggestions," p. 219.

refers to the "sentiment of virtue." This belief in virtue as emotion thus further links Emerson to eighteenth-century English sensibility.

Finally, Emerson, like the eighteenth-century men of sensibility, finds benevolent feelings to be natural to man. We have already seen this in our discussion of Emerson's essays. For instance, the following familiar passage from "The Divinity School Address" establishes virtue as natural to man: "So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he" (W, I, 124). To be without benevolence, Emerson suggests, is to be without life. Benevolence is as natural and essential to man as breathing. Emerson in 1836, instead of Tindal in 1730, might well have written that man "naturally loves his own species, and is full of pity, tenderness & benevolence."[42]

There are thus some rather striking similarities between Emerson and the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility. One must recognize, of course, that he differs from them in distinct ways. We have seen that he emphasizes self-help more than do these English writers and that he does not luxuriate in "self-approving joy" in the almost sensual fashion that many men of feeling do. Emerson does not typically use the term "pleasure" and "delight," the stock phrases of the men of feeling. He finds that virtue brings majesty,

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[42]Matthew Tindal, Christianity as Old as the Creation (1731), p. 49, as cited by Crane, "Suggestions," p. 226.

respect, and life itself. In short, he seems to find contentment more than delight and a sense of purpose more than pleasure to be the rewards of virtue.[43] But Emerson does share somewhat in every tenet which these writers hold. And his closeness to them suggests the closeness of his doctrine of compensation to their beliefs.

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Thus, Emerson's position on compensation early in his career as an essayist is hardly a unique one. He shares that position with utilitarian, intellectual and common sense moralists and with those writers who lived by the doctrine of sensibility. However, important as the concept of virtue rewarded is to Emerson, he does not continue to maintain this concept as strongly after 1841 as he had before. As he becomes increasingly conscious of human suffering and as he moves away from great aspirations for individual men towards a trust in the beneficent tendency which works for the good of the whole, Emerson quite naturally tempers his faith in the principle which rewards individual achievement. He continues to believe in virtue rewarded, but his exultant assertions of it are largely gone.

In Essays: Second Series the different tone of Emerson's belief in an automatic principle of justice at work in the universe is immediately seen. In "New England

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[43]This very difference can also be seen in a comparison of Emerson with the utilitarians.

Reformers," for instance, he says of the "Law" of justice,

> "Work," it saith to man, "in every hour, paid or unpaid, see only that thou work, and thou canst not escape the reward: whether thy work be fine or coarse, planting corn or writing epics, so only it be honest work, done to thine own approbation, it shall earn a reward to the senses as well as to the thought: no matter how often defeated, you are born to victory. The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." (W, III, 283)

"The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." This is certainly Emerson's position in the earlier works, but it is just as certainly phrased in a much more subdued manner. Emerson does not promise to the honest worker that his "life shall be longer and shall pass into the immortal"; he does not promise that man shall have "the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God." Neither does he promise that virtue will cause "all nature and all spirits" to "help with unexpected furtherance" or that "as much goodness as there is, so much reverence it commands." The tone of "New England Reformers" is far more restrained than the tone of Emerson's earlier essays.

Similarly, in "Manners" Emerson says, "The secret of success in society is a certain heartiness and sympathy." Indeed, he argues that acceptance in society springs from "good nature,--expressing all degrees of generosity, from the lowest willingness and faculty to oblige, up to the heights of magnanimity and love" (W, III, 141). In his early essays Emerson is not centrally concerned with acceptance in society. His emphasis is on the private spiritual or

psychological rewards of virtue rather than such practical rewards. Moreover, in "Manners" Emerson does not deal as optimistically with practical rewards as he might have earlier. In "Prudence" Emerson found that virtue and success in society can be one if men will but see clearly. But in "Manners" Emerson deals more with the actual situation than with an ideal situation. He realizes that virtue and social success are not always complementary:

> We may easily seem ridiculous in our eulogy of courtesy, whenever we insist on benevolence as its foundation. The painted phantasm Fashion rises to cast a species of derision on what we say. But I will neither be driven from some allowance to Fashion as a symbolic institution, nor from the belief that love is the basis of courtesy. (W, III, 142)

Emerson believes that the elements of courtesy may be hardened into fashion, that the formula for introductions originally intended to make individuals comfortable may become an empty form used unfairly to judge the socially inexperienced. In the world of society, then, Emerson finds that virtue is rewarded, but he acknowledges limitations to this assertion, limitations he sought to abolish in "Prudence."

In Representative Men a similar modification of the earlier view occurs. In "Plato: New Readings," for instance, Emerson notes that Plato believes virtue to be rewarded:

> Plato affirms the coincidence of science and virtue; for vice can never know itself and virtue, but virtue knows both itself and vice. The eye attested that justice was best, as long as it was profitable; Plato

> affirms that it is profitable throughout; that the profit is intrinsic, though the just conceal his justice from gods and men. (W, IV, 83)

Justice is profitable; virtue is scientific. Virtue seems to bring spiritual rewards, for its profit is intrinsic. But again the rhetoric stressing the desirability of virtue and the inevitability of its rewards is missing. Emerson's tone is much quieter here than it had been earlier. In "The Divinity School Address" Emerson had argued, "If a man is at heart just then so far is he God." But in "Plato: New Readings" no such resounding assertion is made.

In "Swedenborg" this shift in tone is equally noticeable. Emerson continues to talk about compensation in ethical terms, but here he suggests that the rewards of virtue may not be so great as he had earlier believed. He writes that Swedenborg

> elected goodness as the clue to which the soul must cling in all this labyrinth of nature. Many opinions conflict as to the true center. In the shipwreck, some cling to running rigging, some to cask and barrel, some to spars, some to mast; the pilot chooses with science,--I plant myself here; all will sink before this; "he comes to land who sails with me." Do not rely on heavenly favor, or on compassion to folly, or on prudence, on common sense, the old usage and main chance of men: nothing can keep you,--not fate, nor health, nor admirable intellect; none can keep you, but rectitude only, rectitude for ever and ever! And with a tenacity that never swerved in all his studies, inventions, dreams, he adheres to this brave choice. (W, IV, 145)

In this passage Emerson continues to believe that virtue is rewarded. He holds Swedenborg up for our admiration when he writes that Swedenborg chose goodness as the guiding

principle in his life. But the reward Emerson now posits for virtue seems to be of a different nature than those he had earlier described. In 1836 he had written that "the good exalts & the evil degrades us . . . in the moment of the deed" (JMN, V, 192), and in "Compensation" the martyr felt honor even as he was tortured (W, II, 120). But in this passage Emerson calls Swedenborg's decision for virtue a brave choice, and suggests, for a moment, that man must live in a perpetual shipwreck trusting that virtue will eventually bring him to shore and to God. The rewards of virtue here thus no longer seem so immediate as they had earlier. It should be noted, however, that earlier in this essay Emerson asserts that "He who loves goodness, harbors angels, reveres reverence and lives with God" (W, IV, 138). Such a positive statement suggests that Emerson is not in full retreat from his pre-1841 position but is merely qualifying it.

Finally, in "Napoleon" Emerson's tempered assertion of virtue rewarded continues. This essay, like "Prudence," is not concerned with spiritual matters so much as it is with the art of success in more mundane affairs. But here Emerson writes, as he did not in "Prudence," that a lack of scruples may be a positive asset in achieving success in the world of experience:

> It is an advantage, within certain limits, to have renounced the dominion of the sentiments of piety, gratitude, and generosity; since what was an impassable bar to us, and still is to others, becomes a convenient weapon for our purposes; just as the river which was a

> formidable barrier, winter transforms into the smoothest of roads. (W, IV, 228)

Emerson suggests that ignoring moral concerns may be an advantage to a politician and soldier like Napoleon. A Napoleon can sacrifice troops easily when it is necessary; he can "steal, slander, assassinate, drown and poison" as his interests dictate. Such a concession to the power of evil is a far cry from Emerson's assertion in "Prudence" that all the virtues contribute to "the art of securing a present well being." But Emerson, even in "Napoleon," believes evil to be an advantage only "within certain limits." Indeed, he writes that Napoleon's lack of moral principle was ultimately the cause of his downfall:

> He did all that in him lay to live and thrive without moral principle. It was the nature of things, the eternal law of man and of the world which balked and ruined him; and the result, in a million experiments will be the same. Every experiment by multitudes or by individuals, that has a selfish aim, will fail. The pacific Fourier will be as inefficient as the pernicious Napoleon. As long as our civilization is essentially one of property, of fences, of exclusiveness, it will be mocked by delusions. Our riches will leave us sick; there will be bitterness in our laughter, and our wine will burn our mouth. Only that good profits which we can taste with all doors open, and which serves all men. (W, IV, 258)

Once again Emerson finds that virtue is rewarded on both the practical and spiritual planes of life. But he has reached this conclusion by way of a detour which earlier in his career he would not have been forced to take.

Finally, in The Conduct of Life this shift in tone continues to be evident. In "Wealth" Emerson argues much as

he had in "Prudence" that virtue and business success go hand in hand. But now he seems less naive than he had in the earlier essay. He even admits that a "thirst for wealth" is advantageous to a man in the business world:

> The pulpit and the press have many commonplaces denouncing the thirst for wealth; but if men should take these moralists at their word and leave off aiming to be rich, the moralists would rush to rekindle at all hazards this love of power in the people, lest civilization should be undone. (W, VI, 95-96)

Not merely the virtues of "truth, frankness, courage, love, humility" bring success. The love of monetary power brings it also. And Emerson seems almost to define this "thirst for wealth" as a virtue itself:

> The subject of economy mixes itself with morals, inasmuch as it is a preemptory point of virtue that a man's independence be secured. Poverty demoralizes. A man in debt is so far a slave, and Wall Street thinks it easy for a millionaire to be a man of his word, a man of honor, but that in failing circumstances no man can be relied on to keep his integrity. (W, VI, 90)

The man who desires to be virtuous, Emerson suggests, must also desire to secure his financial independence because poverty and debt may render virtue impossible. The desire for wealth is thus, when properly subordinated to the desire for virtue, a positive virtue, a positive good. Early in his career, Emerson at times argues that virtue can result in wealth, but he does not acknowledge that the lack of wealth might make virtue difficult to achieve. On the contrary, in his early essays Emerson typically scorns such material concerns. In "Compensation," he writes that he does "not wish any more external goods" (W, II, 123). And in his

journal for 1839 he writes, "The poor therefore are only they who feel poor and poverty consists in feeling poor. The rich as we reckon them, and among them the very rich, in a true scale would be found very indigent, very ragged." (JMN, VII, 301) Here Emerson suggests that a thirst for wealth leads to spiritual poverty, not to virtue. Between 1839 and 1860, then, Emerson has managed to take great account of the reality of experience. His audience is now "a prosperous middle class group," and Emerson accepts and translates their values "by successive ascensions, into moral and personal terms."[44] Emerson no longer tends to scorn wealth, but now accommodates it more fully than ever before into his ethical system.

If "Wealth" suggests that Emerson has a more realistic picture of the relationship between virtue and material success, "Illusions" suggests that he no longer expects quite the spiritual rewards he had earlier envisioned as resulting from virtue. He still clearly believes that virtue is rewarded, but he no longer sees that reward in such unqualified terms:

> We cannot write the order of the variable winds. How can we penetrate the law of our shifting moods and susceptibility? Yet they differ as all and nothing. Instead of the firmament of yesterday, which our eyes require, it is today an egg-shell which coops us in; we cannot even see what or where our stars of destiny are. From day to day the capital facts of human life are hidden from our eyes. Suddenly the mist rolls up

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[44]Whicher, p. 164.

> and reveals them, and we think how much good time is gone that might have been saved had any hint of these things been shown. A sudden rise in the road shows us the system of mountains, and all the summits, which have been just as near us all the year, but quite out of mind. But these alternations are not without their order, and we are parties to our various fortune. If life seem a succession of dreams, yet poetic justice is done in dreams also. The visions of good men are good; it is the undisciplined will that is whipped with bad thoughts and bad fortunes. (W, VI, 321-322)

Emerson says, in a rather skeptical mood, that we live in the midst of illusions, unable to remain in contact with ultimate realities. But he denies that this skeptical view of experience should alter our view of compensation, for "poetic justice is done in dreams also." Poetic justice, the reward of virtue, comes to man whether he is able to see ultimate realities or not, so long as he strives for what he believes to be good. In "Illusions," therefore, a belief in compensation is maintained, but the spirit in which it is offered is a chastened one.

However, it must be noted that in the essay "Worship" Emerson approaches the old tone, very forcefully stating that virtue is rewarded:

> Every man takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well. He has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun. What a day dawns when we have taken to heart the doctrine of faith! to prefer, as a better investment, being to doing; being to seeming; logic to rhythm and to display; the year to the day; the life to the year; character to performance;--and have come to know that justice will be done us; and if our genius is slow, the term will be long. (W, VI, 215-216)

Here the rhetoric is once again expansive. Virtue will turn

a "market-cart into a chariot of the sun," will assure that "all goes well," will effectively alter the attitude with which one approaches each day. Emerson offers a very positive assertion that virtue is rewarded. But even in "Worship" these psychological or spiritual rewards are different from those he had earlier stressed. Emerson does not write that virtue is the "incoming of God" as he had in "Compensation," for instance (W, II, 122). Thus, even in this essay, Emerson does not equal his most radical claims for the benefits of virtue.

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Thus, Emerson's belief that virtue is rewarded becomes more subdued after 1841. But this difference in tone does not totally differentiate him from the eighteenth-century traditions in which we have seen him following. In fact, his subdued tone brings his later works closer to the ideas of Price and Wollaston than his earlier works had been. Emerson's quiet assertion that the "reward of a thing well done is to have done it" suggests Price's statement that it is "contradictory to suppose that the desire of the pleasure attending virtue . . . can be the sole motive to the practice of it." And Emerson's simple statement that virtue is "profitable throughout" and that the profit is "intrinsic" recalls Wollaston's conservative belief that the "true and ultimate happiness of no being can be produced by anything, that interfers with truth, and denies the natures of things."

Emerson's shift of tone does, however, definitely separate him from the writers of sensibility. Indeed, late in his career he seldom equals the often excessive rhetoric of the men of feeling. But it is interesting to note that Shaftesbury, one of the men who inspired the cult of sensibility, at times qualifies his assertion of virtue rewarded in the same way as does the later Emerson. Shaftesbury sounds much like the Emerson of "Illusions," for instance, when he writes that no scepticism can endanger the belief that virtue is compensated:

> For let us carry scepticism ever so far, let us doubt if we can, of every thing about us, we cannot doubt of what passes within ourselves. Our passions and affections are known to us. They are certain, whatever the objects may be on which they are employed. Nor is it of any concern to our argument how these exterior objects stand: whether they are realities or mere illusions; whether we wake or dream. For ill dreams will be equally disturbing; and a good dream (if life be nothing else) will be easily and happily passed. In this dream of life, therefore, our demonstrations have the same force; our balance and economy hold good, and our obligation to virtue is in every respect the same.[45]

Emerson finds that "poetic justice is done in dreams also," and Shaftesbury here similarly finds that "a good dream . . . will be easily and happily passed." Both writers deny, therefore, that a skeptical view of experience can alter the fact that virtue is truly rewarded. Of course, Shaftesbury deals only with a hypothetical situation and elsewhere he

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[45]Shaftesbury, I, 336.

denies unconditionally the skeptical view of experience.[46] But nevertheless, Emerson must still be seen as operating within the bounds of accepted eighteenth-century English doctrines in his late as well as his early statements that virtue is rewarded.

In addition, one modification Emerson makes in his assertion of virtue rewarded resembles statements made by Shaftesbury's antagonist, Bernard Mandeville. When Emerson argues that a thirst for wealth is essential to the existence of civilization, he sounds much like Mandeville in "The Grumbling Hive." In this poem Mandeville allegorically describes society as a bee hive and writes that avarice in the society or hive contributes to the common happiness:

> Thus vice nursed ingenuity
> Which joined with time and industry,
> Had carried life's conveniencies,
> It real pleasures, comforts, ease,
> To such a height, the very poor
> Lived better than the rich before
> And nothing could be added more.[47]

The desire for wealth improves the standard of living of all, Mandeville here suggests, and in doing so, he anticipates Emerson's statement that "civilization should be undone" without a thirst for wealth. Yet Emerson does not sanction "vice" the way Mandeville does. For example, Emerson does

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[46]Grean, p. 15.

[47]Bernard Mandeville, "The Grumbling Hive; or Knaves Turned Honest," in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Louis I. Bredvold et al. (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 333.

not believe luxury to be a good. He desires wealth to be spent for universities, for museums, for spanning continents with railroads. And in this desire he seems much like Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury finds that the pursuit of wealth, when properly controlled, can be a virtue:

> Now as to that passion which is esteemed peculiarly interesting, as having for its aim the possession of wealth, and what we call a settlement of fortune in the world: if the regard towards this kind be moderate and in a reasonable degree; if it occasions no passionate pursuit, nor raises any ardent desire or appetite; there is nothing in this case which is not compatible with virtue, and even suitable and beneficial to society. The public as well as private system is advanced by the industry which affection excites. But if it grows at length into a real passion, the injury it does the public is not greater than that which it creates to the person himself. Such a one is in reality a self-oppressor, and lies heavier on himself than he can ever do on mankind.[48]

Shaftesbury writes that the aim to possess wealth can encourage virtue in the individual and can advance the society so long as it does not become greed. The desire for wealth prompts industry in the individual and helps society thrive economically. Yet Shaftesbury seems to place a lower value on the desire for wealth than does Emerson in "Wealth." He does not write that poverty may be a terrific handicap in man's efforts to attain virtue and contentment. And he believes man's wish for money should be a moderate one, whereas Emerson suggests that society needs men who desire riches. Thus, Emerson seems to lie midway between two opposed eighteenth-century English thinkers when he modifies

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[48]Shaftesbury, I, 326.

his original assertion of virtue rewarded. He steers a mid-course between Shaftesbury and Mandeville in his essay "Wealth."

Therefore, Emerson maintains a rather constant vision of compensation as a principle which rewards the good and punishes the evil. But as his confidence in the self fades and his consideration of experience increases, the exultant tone of his early position is modified and even at times tinged with skepticism. And significantly, in his development of this concept which is so central to his philosophy, Emerson largely follows in eighteenth-century English patterns. His radical faith, his moderation, his skepticism all have neo-classical parallels, and Emerson the rebel is far from revolutionary in his consideration of compensation as virtue rewarded.

CHAPTER V

EMERSON, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND, AND COMPENSATION: PART 2, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT

Although virtue rewarded is an important concept to Emerson, it does not provide him with a sufficient explanation of the moral order of the universe. It does not explain why one good man is given great talent and another is not. It does not explain why a good man can experience great personal tragedy. In an effort to justify, if not explain, such incongruities, Emerson offers a second definition of compensation: "All things are double against one another, said Solomon. The whole of what we know is a system of compensations. Every defect in one manner is made up in another. Every suffering is rewarded; every sacrifice is made up; every debt is paid." (JMN, II, 340-41) Here Emerson suggests that virtue is rewarded in the sense that "every sacrifice is made up." But he suggests also that there are compensations for the suffering which is inherent in the scheme of things. He argues that the loss of loved ones, the lack of talent, the inequality of conditions in society

are offset by positive benefits. Man may find suffering a blessing, deformity an advantage, deficiency in one skill a concentration of force in another. And in so arguing, Emerson places himself well within the boundaries of eighteenth-century English thought.

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This definition of compensation is not so important early in Emerson's career as an essayist as it becomes later. Indeed, as Whicher notes, such a definition is inherently a "defensive faith,"[1] and in his most radical essays Emerson is clearly on the offensive. In Nature he calls for man to establish his "kingdom . . . over nature" (W, I, 77); in "The American Scholar" he issues America's intellectual declaration of independence; in "The Divinity School Address" he calls for a revitalized clergy, free from the control of the past. In such works, Emerson's strategy is not to emphasize compensations for man's limitations or for his status as a victim of forces beyond his control. Emerson wants instead to stress man's power and his freedom from limitation. Thus, the emphasis in the early essays is clearly upon the rewards which come when man follows the directions of the God within.

Yet even in his early essays Emerson seems at times to place his faith in a defensive doctrine of compensation. At times he argues, as Whicher recognizes, that compensation

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[1]Whicher, p. 39.

teaches the "indifferency of circumstances."[2] Most notably, he espouses this view in "Compensation" when he finds that

> Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good. Every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse. It is to answer for its moderation with its life. For every grain of wit there is a grain of folly. For every thing you have missed you have gained something else; and for every thing you gain, you lose something. If riches increase, they are increased that use them. If the gatherer gathers too much, Nature takes out of the man what she puts into his chest; swells the estate but kills the owner. Nature hates monopolies and exceptions. The waves of the sea do not more speedily seek a level from the loftiest tossing than the varieties of conditions tend to equalize themselves. (W, II, 98)

Emerson here suggests that every condition in life has advantages which offset its disadvantages or disadvantages which balance its advantages. The farmer, he goes on to write, may think the power and prestige of the Presidency are to be envied, but the farmer has peace of mind and privacy, something the President can never have (W, II, 99). The specific conditions under which we live, Emerson therefore implies, are a matter of indifference, and man can be content wherever he is.

But Emerson typically seeks not to emphasize the indifference of conditions so much as the positive benefits which can come from suffering, loss, or deformity. He writes, for instance, that

> A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment, a loss of wealth, a loss of friends, seems at the moment unpaid

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[2]Whicher, p. 39.

> loss, and unpayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a dear friend, wife, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in your way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of the character. It permits or constrains the formation of new acquaintances, and the reception of new influences, that prove of the first importance to the next years; and the man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden-flower, with no room for its roots, and too much sunshine for its head, by the fall of the walls and the neglect of the gardener, is made the banian of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighborhoods of men. (W, II, 126)

Emerson suggests then that one is compensated for the very real loss of a friend, wife, brother, or lover by the beneficent revolution the loss causes in one's way of life. And he goes on to indicate that our defects as well as our griefs may benefit us:

> The stag in the fable admired his horns and blamed his feet; but when the hunter came, his feet saved him, and afterwards, caught in the thicket, his horns destroyed him. Every man in his lifetime needs to thank his faults. As no man thoroughly understands a truth until first he has contended against it, so no man has a thorough acquaintance with the hindrances or talents of men, until he has suffered from the one, and seen the triumph of the other over his own want of the same. Has he a defect of temper that unfits him to live in society? Thereby he is driven to entertain himself alone, and acquire habits of self-help; and thus, like the wounded oyster, he mends his shell with pearls. (W, II, 117)

Our defects may prevent us from achieving some goals, Emerson writes, but in compensation they may be the cause of our achieving others. Am I unable to achieve great things in mathematics? Very well, then I will concentrate my

efforts on the study of history and know it that much better. Such is Emerson's argument.

However, Emerson writes that compensations come not only in the form of practical benefits in the world of experience, but also in the form of spiritual insights. He asserts that "In the nature of the soul is the compensation for the inequalities of condition" (W, II, 123). Because we all partake of the Over-Soul, because the "heart and soul of all men" are one, Emerson argues, differences in condition are illusory. When we discover the nature of our souls, he suggests, "this bitterness of His and Mine ceases" (W, II, 124). If man but realizes that all men are united by their participation in the Over-Soul, differences in power, wealth, prestige will seem unimportant. The true nature of the soul will compensate us for those differences. But in a sense, to argue along these lines is to argue that there is no need for defensive sorts of compensation. If inequalities are illusory or unimportant, why need we be consoled? Emerson himself recognizes this and writes that "There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit, its own nature" (W, II, 120). But Emerson's emphasis in "Compensation" is on the importance of compensation, and he moves away quickly from doubt in its significance.

The defensive doctrine of compensation does not appear only in the essay "Compensation." In "Love," for instance, Emerson notes:

> Every thing is beautiful seen from the point of the intellect, or as truth. But all is sour if seen as experience. Details are melancholy; the plan is seemly and noble. 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, the rose of joy. Round it all the Muses sing. But grief cleaves to names and persons and the partial interests of to-day and yesterday. (W, II, 171)

Here Emerson suggests that the abstract, eternal truth which we can draw from experience compensates us for the pain of experience. He suggests that one may find "incongruities, defects, and disproportion" in one's spouse, for instance, but that there are compensations:

> The soul which is in the soul of each, craving for a perfect beatitude, detects incongruities, defects, and disproportion in the behavior of the other. Hence arises surprise, expostulation, and pain. Yet that which drew them to each other was signs of loveliness, signs of virtue: and these virtues are there, however eclipsed. They appear and reappear, and continue to attract; but the regard changes, quits the sign, and attaches to the substance. This repairs the wounded affection. (W, II, 186)

Emerson writes that we may love someone at first for his acts of consideration, for the "flowers, pearls, poetry" he sends us (W, II, 185) and that we are consequently doomed to be disappointed when such tokens cease to come. But he adds that we truly love the impulse which prompted the specific acts of love and that that impulse is constant. In the substance of love we find compensation for the absence of specific signs.

A final example of this defensive definition of compensation lies in "The Over-Soul." Here Emerson clearly

argues that, in Pope's words, "whatever is, is right":[3]

> You are running to seek your friend. Let your feet run, but your mind need not. If you do not find him, will you not acquiesce that it is best you should not find him? for there is a power, which, as it is in you, is in him also, and could therefore very well bring you together, if it were for the best. You are preparing with eagerness to go and render a service to which your talent and your taste invite you, the love of men and the hope of fame. Has it not occurred to you that you have no right to go, unless you are equally willing to be prevented from going? O, believe, as thou livest, that every sound that is spoken over the round world, which thou oughtest to hear, will vibrate on thine ear! Every proverb, every book, every byword that belongs to thee for aid or comfort, shall surely come home through open or winding passages. (W, II, 293-94)

Emerson writes that though our desires to publicly support a cause or to privately aid a friend be frustrated, the knowledge that our failure is for the best compensates us. He believes that the Soul, which exists within every man, beneficently orders events, beneficently coordinates our activities. Our individual disappointments are offset by our knowledge that they contribute to the good of the whole. This Emersonian belief surely has a Popeian ring to it.

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Such is Emerson's second definition of compensation. He believes that every situation has built-in advantages which offset its limitations. Although early in Emerson's career this definition is far less important than the idea of virtue rewarded, it does exist. And it is typical of the eighteenth century as well as of Emerson. Indeed, this view

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[3]Pope, p. 384.

of compensation permeates Enlightenment England, appearing most explicitly in the works of Shaftesbury and his followers and in the poetry of men as different as Pope and Gray. Samuel Johnson may object to Pope's belief that in "partial evil" lies "universal good," but he is atypical.[4] The concept which was to become Emerson's defensive definition of compensation is of major importance throughout the eighteenth century in England.

Shaftesbury typically anticipates Emerson's radical views, and his emphasis upon virtue rewarded continues that pattern. But as a secondary line of defense, Shaftesbury, like Emerson after him, also argues that "partial evil" is "universal good." Early in "The Moralists" Philocles says to Palemon:

> "Much is alleged . . . to show why Nature errs, and how she came thus impotent and erring from an unerring hand. But I deny she errs; and when she seems most ignorant or perverse in her productions, I assert her even then as wise and provident as in her goodliest works. For 'tis not then that men complain of the world's order, or abhor the face of things, when they see various interests mixed and interfering; natures subordinate of different kinds, opposed one to another, and in their different operations submitted the higher to the lower. 'Tis on the contrary from this order of inferior and superior things that we admire the world's beauty, founded thus on contrarieties, whilst from such various and disagreeing principles a universal concord is established.
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> "Thus in the several orders of terrestrial forms a resignation is required, a sacrifice and mutual yielding of natures one to another. The vegetables by their

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[4]Samuel Johnson, "From the Literary Magazine: or, Universal Review," in Eighteenth-Century English Literature, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson et al. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1969), pp. 1009-1016.

> death sustain the animals, and animal bodies dissolved enrich the earth, and raise again the vegetable world. The numerous insects are reduced by the superior kinds of birds and beasts, and these again are checked by man, who in his turn submits to other natures, and resigns his form a sacrifice in common to the rest of things. And if in natures so little exalted or preeminent above each other, the sacrifice of interests can appear so just, how much more reasonable may all inferior natures be subjected to the superior nature of the world!"[5]

Philocles, speaking for Shaftesbury here, suggests then that on the great chain of being the interests of one link must be subordinated to the interests of a higher link and that in subordination lies the good of the whole chain. Man, occupying an intermediate position on the chain, may thus have to sacrifice his interests for the good of higher orders of being, but at the same time lower orders of being are sacrificing their interests for the good of man. Like Emerson, Shaftesbury thus finds that every state of life has advantages which offset its disadvantages. And he further argues that mankind is compensated for its suffering by the knowledge that its pain contributes to the moral order of the universe. In Emersonian terms, he finds that though the details may be melancholy, the plan is beautiful.

Shaftesbury's disciples offer similar arguments. For example, Henry Home, Lord Kames, justifies the existence of pain, a seeming evil:

> pain and distress are productive of manifold good ends, and . . . the present system could not well be without them. In the first place, pain is necessary, as a

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[5]Shaftesbury, II, 22.

> monitor of what is hurtful and dangerous to life. Every man is trusted with the care of his own preservation; and he would be ill qualified for this trust, were he left entirely to the guidance of reason. . . . In the next place pain is the great sanction of laws, both human and divine. There would be no order or discipline without it. In the third place, the distresses and disappointments, which arise from the uncertainty of seasons, from the variable tempers of those we are connected with, and from other cross accidents, are wonderfully well adapted to our constitution, by keeping our hopes and fears in perpetual agitation. Man is an active being and is not in his element, but when in a variety of occupations.[6]

Kames certainly offers only those compensations which Emerson would consider temporal in nature. He does not find that the oneness of all mankind renders pain unimportant. But Kames does suggest that there are compensations in the scheme of things which offset the evil of pain. Pain helps the individual by warning him of dangers to his health. And the variety pain brings to life balances the suffering it causes. After all, Kames almost seems to ask, can there be happiness without unhappiness? He thus suggests, as Emerson was to do, that a "deep remedial force underlies all facts."

Though not a disciple of Shaftesbury, Soame Jenyns should perhaps provide a final example of this Shaftesburian line of thought, if only because Dr. Johnson's attack has made him one of its most famous spokesmen.[7] Jenyns writes:

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[6]Henry Home, Lord Kames, Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion (Edinburgh, 1751), pp. 370-71.

[7]Johnson, pp. 1011-1012. Dr. Johnson presents a devastating attack on Jenyns' argument, and especially on the arguments cited in this study. Johnson finds, for example, that poverty can be both demeaning and demoralizing

> Poverty, or the want of riches, is generally compensated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments, than those who possess them are usually bless'd with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly recompensed by a more useful kind of common sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling world. The sufferings of the sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, and sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in the rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper education. It is the basis of all subordination . . .: and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the divine wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive; in man whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philosopher and the peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations.[8]

Here Jenyns states, as Emerson was to do, that a lack of talent in one field is offset by a concentration of force in another. A man may lack talent as a writer, but that lack is usually offset by a common sense which enables him to move

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and concludes that Jenyns and Pope "perhaps never saw the miseries which they imagine thus easy to be born." And he finds that gross ignorance can be as dangerous as perverted knowledge and concludes that it must not be seen, as Jenyns would have it seen, as an opiate for the poor.

[8]Soame Jenyns, A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil, as cited by Johnson, pp. 1010-11.

ahead in the business world, Jenyns suggests. Jenyns also suggests here what Emerson would have rejected, that ignorance is a compensation for poverty. He writes that ignorance is an opiate which allows men to endure the physical and mental anguish poverty brings. The poor man condemned to digging ditches might find his life unbearably boring if he were educated enough to enjoy using his mind, Jenyns implies. Emerson would never argue along these lines. Indeed, Emerson finds that man's ability to use his mind, his ability to intuitively perceive the oneness of all men, is a prime compensation for inequalities of condition. Still, the basic similarity persists, for both writers believe that there is a compensation in the scheme of things for every deficiency.

It is not merely in the abstract reasonings of philosophers and moralists that the doctrine "whatever is, is right" appears. Indeed, it permeates the literature of the period as well. For instance, Pope and Gray, representative of two very different eighteenth-century poetic traditions, share this concept of compensation. Pope, the coiner of the phrase "whatever is, is right," defines compensation early in the "Essay on Man":

> Respecting Man whatever wrong we call,
> May, must be right, as relative to <u>All</u>.
> In human works, tho' labour'd on with pain,
> A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;
> In God's, one single can its <u>End</u> produce,
> Yet serves to second too some <u>other Use</u>.
> So Man, who here seems principal alone,
> Perhaps acts second to some Sphere unknown,

Touches some Wheel, or verges to some Gole;
'Tis but a Part we see, and not a Whole.
When the proud Steed shall know, why Man restrains
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains;
When the dull Ox, why now he breaks the clod,
Is now a Victim, and now Aegypt's God;
Then shall Man's Pride and Dulness comprehend
His Action's, Passion's, Being's, Use and End;
Why doing, suff'ring, check'd, impell'd; and why
This Hour a Slave, the next a Deity?[9]

Here Pope suggests that an individual life is part of a whole which man cannot see or comprehend. Hence, he goes on to add, man cannot with justice condemn God for allowing his desires to be "check'd." Indeed, Pope argues, an individual disappointment may contribute to the good of the world as a whole. Emerson takes much the same position in "The Over-Soul" when he argues that all is for the best even though our desires be frustrated. Yet unlike Pope, Emerson typically does believe that man can share the perspective of God, that man can view the world from the "point of intellect" and see the beautiful plan. However, Pope is not content to base his argument solely on man's ignorance, and he moves on to positive assertions that compensation does exist. He writes that there are advantages to every station in life:

Whate'er the passion, knowledge, fame, or pelf,
Not one will change his neighbor with himself.
The learned is happy nature to explore,
The fool is happy that he knows no more,
The rich is happy in the plenty given,
The poor contents him with the care of Heaven.
See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing,
The sot a hero, lunatic a king;
The starving chemist in his golden views

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[9]Pope, p. 370.

Supremely blessed, the poet in his Muse.
See some strange comfort every state attend,
And pride bestowed on all, a common friend;
See some fit passion every age supply,
Hope travels through, nor quits us when we die.[10]

Pope, as Emerson was later to do, here asserts the indifferency of circumstances, the advantages which attend every role in life. The scholar, the king, the beggar all know happiness, all know advantages which offset the disadvantages of their positions. Pope recognizes that man may encounter seeming evils, may suffer at the hands of tyrants, may have to live in poverty. But as Emerson was later to do, he finds "a counter-statement as ponderous."

Gray perpetuates the emphasis upon defensive compensation in his mid-century poetry. In "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard" he argues that the talents of rural laborers may have been neglected simply because these men were poor and unknown. He suggests that a rustic poet, given the opportunity, might have become another Milton. But Gray goes on to add that the lot of the poor not only circumscribed their accomplishments but also

their Crimes confin'd;
Forbad to wade through Slaughter to a Throne,
And shut the Gates of Mercy on Mankind,
The struggling Pangs of conscious Truth to hide,
To quench the Blushes of ingenuous Shame,
Or heap the Shrine of Luxury and Pride
With Incense, kindled at the Muse's Flame.
Far from the madding Crowd's ignoble Strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;

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[10]Pope, p. 376.

Along the cool sequester'd Vale of Life
They kept the noiseless Tenor of their Way.[11]

Like Emerson, Gray finds that the poor farmer's life has advantages over the politician's. If poverty keeps a man from becoming a great statesman, Gray argues, it also keeps him from becoming a great tyrant. He thus anticipates Emerson's nineteenth-century assertion that every condition in life has its compensations.

Thus, Emerson and these eighteenth-century Englishmen share a vision of a morally ordered world, a world in which every defect, every incident of suffering, every loss is offset by good. However, Emerson does differ significantly from these writers. He tends to find compensations existing on the individual level. He may feel that the oneness of mankind is compensation for his individual suffering, but a sense of this oneness is achieved only as he is able to take Jesus and Shakespeare and "conquer and incorporate them in my own conscious domain." Emerson may hint that an individual's suffering can result in benefit to "wide neighborhoods of men," but he emphasizes that the suffering serves as a "guide of genius" for the individual. Pope, Gray, Jenyns, and Kames all suggest that there are individual compensations for suffering. But on the whole the eighteenth-century writers emphasize general rather than individual

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[11]Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard," in Gray and Collins Poetical Works, ed. Austin Lane Poole, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 94-95.

compensations. They see individual suffering as contributing to the good of the whole. Shaftesbury argues that as animals must be slaughtered for the welfare of man, perhaps man must suffer for the welfare of higher orders. In the suffering of man is the good of the universe, and that is our compensation, Shaftesbury suggests. Kames writes that pain must exist as a sanction for the laws which insure the general welfare of mankind. And Jenyns believes that the pain of one man in some way may aid all mankind.[12] Such arguments for compensation on the general level are thus far more significant in the eighteenth century than they are in Emerson's early works. Yet surely the very distinct similarities we have seen between Emerson's defensive definition of compensation and eighteenth-century definitions overweigh this one difference. The common belief in an ordered world in which "whatever is, is right" must be held before a difference in the nature of compensations can even be discussed. In eighteenth-century England, therefore, numerous writers clearly anticipate Emerson's defensive doctrine of compensation.

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Emerson's emphasis on this defensive doctrine, which is slight early in his career, becomes increasingly

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[12]Dr. Johnson responds to this argument by writing: "He has told us of the benefits of evil, which no man feels, and relations between distant parts of the universe, which he cannot himself conceive" (p. 1015).

significant after 1841. As his faith in the individual's ability to build his own world decreases and as his respect for the facts of experience grows, Emerson increasingly needs assurance that life is meaningful. The defensive doctrine of compensation thus rises in importance. But this doctrine as it had existed early in his career proves insufficient to provide the needed reassurance. Indeed, as Basil Willey notes in speaking of eighteenth-century England, such a belief can ultimately produce pessimism rather than optimism:

> What emerged then as the chief outcome of this kind of optimism was a gospel of helplessness. The status quo represents the last word of divine wisdom and goodness; the scale of being is fixed and unimprovable: what then is left to us but to content ourselves with the station, both in the cosmical and the social scale, to which it has pleased God to call us? No improvements are to be expected; to demand them is in fact impious.[13]

Merely to accept the world without hope for its improvement would have been an impossible task for Emerson. He thus develops a melioristic definition of compensation, one which mediates between pessimism and optimism and which suggests that the tendency toward improvement in the world is compensation for its present imperfection. Emerson had, of course, suggested earlier that suffering is offset by its beneficent future consequences. And this idea tends to be increasingly important as Emerson comes to accept the Lamarckian concept of evolution. He comes to believe that individual suffering is offset not only by specific

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[13]Willey, p. 55.

consequences but also by the beneficent, evolutionary tendency of which it is a part. All things move toward perfection, Emerson writes, and in this tendency is the compensation for the suffering we must endure in a temporarily imperfect world. Emerson thus continues to believe "whatever is, is right," but the basis of this belief more often lies in the future than in the present moment. Though we must live in the present, Emerson suggests, we must trust that compensation lies in the future.

As early as 1841 Emerson begins emphasizing this progressive or melioristic definition of compensation.[14] In "The Method of Nature," an address given at Waterville College in Maine, Emerson states that nature inexorably moves toward a beneficent purpose and that this movement is compensation for individual suffering. He writes that the cost of producing a great man far exceeds his worth, but finds consolation for this fact in the melioristic movement of nature:

> All is nascent, infant. When we are dizzied with the arithmetic of the savant toiling to compute the length of her [Nature's] line, the return of her curve, we are steadied by the perception that a great deal is doing; that all seems just begun; remote aims are in active accomplishment. We can point nowhere to anything final; but tendency appears on all hands: planet, system, constellation, total nature is growing like a field of maize in July; is becoming somewhat else; is in rapid metamorphosis. (W, I, 202-03)

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[14] Essays: First Series, published in 1841, consists largely of essays written in the late 1830's. An essay like "The Method of Nature," written in 1841, tends therefore to be more melioristic than does Essays: First Series.

If life seems imperfect to us, Emerson suggests, if even great men seem petty, we should not despair. He believes that we can draw consolation from the movement of all things toward perfection. Nature works to a "universal and not to a particular end" (W, I, 201). And as a consequence Emerson believes we should not view life as absurd because of particular failures by men, but should trust in the beneficent tendency to which each man contributes.

If the melioristic tendency of the universe is compensation for present imperfection in "The Method of Nature," it is also a prime source of consolation in "The Young American." In this address to the Mercantile Library Association in Boston (1844), Emerson presents an almost grim sort of compensation. He instructs his audience to

> Remark the unceasing effort throughout nature at somewhat better than the actual creatures: amelioration in nature, which alone permits and authorizes amelioration in mankind. The population of the world is a conditional population; these are not the best, but the best that could live in the existing state of soils, gases, animals and morals: the best that could yet live; there shall be a better, please God. This Genius or Destiny is of the sternest administration, though rumors exist of its secret tenderness. It may be styled a cruel kindness, serving the whole even to the ruin of the member; a terrible communist, reserving all profits to the community, without dividend to individuals. Its law is, you shall have everything as a member, nothing to yourself. For Nature is the noblest engineer, yet uses a grinding economy, working up all that is wasted to-day into to-morrow's creation;--not a superfluous grain of sand for all the ostentation she makes of expense and public works. It is because Nature thus saves and uses, laboring for the general, that we poor particulars are so crushed and straitened, and find it so hard to live. (W, I, 372-73)

Emerson says here that compensation for individual ruin lies

in the ability of Nature to use all things for improvement of the future. Insofar as Destiny uses individual loss as its raw material, it is cruel, but insofar as it is melioristic it is cruelly kind. A man may know no personal benefit from the railroad he slaves to help build, but benefits which are essential to the country will accrue for future generations (W, I, 374-75). Emerson thus presents a tough-minded view of compensation as "amelioration" in "The Young American."

This belief is also evident in Essays: Second Series, most notably in "Nature." In this essay Emerson finds that

> Geology has initiated us into the secularity of nature, and taught us to disuse our dame-school measures, and exchange our Mosaic and Ptolemaic schemes for her large style. We knew nothing rightly, for want of perspective. Now we learn what patient periods must round themselves before the rock is formed, then before the rock is broken, and the first lichen race has disintegrated the thinnest external plate into soil, and opened the door for the remote Flora, Fauna, Ceres, and Pomona, to come in. How far off yet is the trilobite! how far off the quadruped! how inconceivably remote is man! All duly arrive, and then race after race of man. It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul. Yet all must come, as surely as the first atom has two sides. (W, III, 179-80)

Emerson thus believes that the universe has developed through a slow progress, and he implicitly suggests that man will continue to develop over the ages as part of that progress. The growth in man's power is thus a slow but inevitable part of the progress of the world as a whole. Mankind's advance to future greatness is "heralded by the appearance of

superior individuals" like Plato.[15] And our consolation for being the insignificant creatures we are at present, Emerson suggests, lies in the greatness toward which the race is moving.

This melioristic definition of compensation continues to be important in Representative Men. In "Uses of Great Men" Emerson writes that "the destiny of organized nature is amelioration" (W, IV, 35). In Plato: New Readings" he notes that "Modern science, by the extent of its generalization has learned to indemnify the student of man for the defects of individuals by tracing growth and ascent in races . . ." (W, IV, 80). And in "Montaigne" Emerson offers perhaps his most distinctive picture of melioristic compensation:

> The lesson of life is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and the centuries say against the hours; to resist the ursurpation of particulars; to penetrate to their catholic sense. Things seem to say one thing, and say the reverse. The appearance is immoral; the result is moral. Things seem to tend downward, to justify despondency, to promote rogues, to defeat the just; and by knaves as by martyrs the just cause is carried forward. Although knaves win in every political struggle, although society seems to be delivered over from the hands of one set of criminals into the hands of another set of criminals as fast as the government is changed, and the march of civilization is a train of felonies,--yet, general ends are somehow answered. We see, now, events forced on which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of ages. But the world-spirit is a good swimmer, and storms and waves cannot drown him. He snaps his finger at laws: and so, throughout history, heaven seems to affect low and poor means. Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great

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[15]Frederick William Conner, Cosmic Optimism (Gainesville, Florida: Univ. of Florida Press, 1949), p. 64.

> and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams. (W, IV, 185-86)

If you have been victimized by rogues, ruled by knaves, Emerson writes, know that compensation exists in the form of a beneficent tendency. Evil may flourish, but it will eventually aid the "march of civilization" and serve "general ends." The motive for enacting civil rights legislation may be political expediency, but that legislation will eventually serve to aid many people, a modern day Emerson might write. And in taking this view of compensation, Emerson continues to be very tough-minded. He argues that our consolations may not be personal, we may always be governed by morally defective men, but that we can find a "general consolation" in the fact that through "years and centuries" the good of the whole is served.

If "Montaigne" is the one essay which most clearly espouses the progressive definition, The Conduct of Life and especially "Considerations by the Way" take up where it leaves off:

> Good is a good doctor but Bad is sometimes a better. The oppressions of William the Norman, savage forest laws and crushing despotism made possible the inspiration of Magna Carta under John. Edward I. wanted money, armies, castles, and as much as he could get. It was necessary to call the people together by shorter, swifter ways,--and the House of Commons arose. To obtain subsidies, he paid in privileges. In the twenty-fourth year of his reign he decreed "that no tax should be levied without consent of Lords and Commons;"--which is the basis of the English Constitution. (W, VI, 253)

For every evil, Emerson argues, there is a compensation in the future. We cannot avoid the rule of evil men; we may

suffer unjustly under them. But their evil may bring good to those who follow us. Our consolation must lie, therefore in the tendency of all things toward the general good. Personal suffering, Emerson asserts, is little enough to pay for the good of future generations.

Emerson takes a similar position in "Fate" as he continues to find that compensation lies in the melioristic tendency of nature:

> Fate involves the melioration. No statement of the Universe can have any soundness which does not admit its ascending effort. The direction of the whole and of the parts is toward benefit, and in proportion to the health. Behind every individual closes organization; before him opens liberty,--the Better, the Best. The first and worse races are dead. The second and imperfect races are dying out, or remain for the maturing of higher. (W, VI, 35)

In this passage Emerson not only says that individuals grow in power, but also that races or generations grow toward perfection. He suggests that consolation for the imperfection of the present moment lies in the future improvement of the race. We may suffer calamities, we may be victimized by men or by nature, but "Every calamity is a spur and valuable hint" (W, VI, 36). Steam was once a danger, but Watt and Fulton observed and then harnessed it. Every calamity, physical or spiritual, moves us toward a similar good, and in that movement, Emerson writes, lies the compensation. Man must therefore learn to take "sides with the Deity who secures universal benefit by his pain" (W, VI, 47).

A late and most eloquent assertion of progressive

compensation appears in the North American Review of May, 1878. "The Sovereignty of Ethics," drawn from several lectures Emerson gave in the 1860's, can thus well furnish our final example of this definition of compensation:

> 'Tis a long scale from the gorilla to the gentleman--from the gorilla to Plato, Newton, Shakespeare--to the sanctities of religion, the refinements of legislation, the summits of science, art and poetry. The beginnings are slow and infirm, but it is an always-accelerated march. The geologic world is chronicled by the growing ripeness of the strata from lower to higher, as it becomes the abode of more highly-organized plants and animals. The civil history of men might be traced by the successive meliorations as marked in higher moral generalizations;--virtue meaning physical courage, then chastity and temperance, then justice and love;--bargains of Kings with people of certain rights to certain classes, then of rights to masses,--then at last came the day when, as the historians rightly tell, the nerves of the world were electrified by the proclamation that all men were born free and equal. (W, X, 186-87)

Emerson writes that all things progress. Our concept of virtue becomes increasingly refined over the course of the years, so that love replaces force as the quality we most value. And history has shown that the right to freedom and equality has gradually come to be claimed for all men. Thus, Emerson suggests that we should endure our present sufferings, confident that they contribute to the improvement, both morally and socially, of mankind. Indeed, he writes,

> Thus a sublime confidence is fed at the bottom of the heart that, in spite of appearances, in spite of malignity and blind self-interest living for the moment, an eternal, beneficent necessity is always bringing things right; and though we should fold our arms,--which we cannot do, for our duty requires us to be the very hands of this guiding sentiment, and work in the

> present moment,--the evils we suffer will at last end themselves through the incessant opposition of Nature to everything hurtful. (W, X, 188-89)

All things, Emerson argues, necessarily and inevitably move toward right. If man should cease striving for the good and merely observe the course of his life, the evils he suffers would continue to disappear because "Melioration is the law" (W, X, 188). Yet Emerson notes that man must not become passive, for he believes that man is the agent through which the beneficent necessity works to right wrongs. Still, the principle of melioristic compensation is clearly advanced here. The compensation for individual suffering is the inevitable movement of the universe to end that suffering.

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Emerson in the later part of his career as an essayist thus places much greater weight on his defensive view of compensation than he had earlier in his career. But he modifies that definition, emphasizing the melioristic tendency of the universe as the source of compensation. However, this modification does not move Emerson away from eighteenth-century English traditions. Indeed, the idea of progress comes to full flower in the eighteenth century, appearing in the works of sceptics like Gibbon and Hume, of rather darkly optimistic writers like Butler, and of optimists like Priestley.

Gibbon surprisingly espouses a sort of melioristic

compensation in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. He does not foresee a glorious future which will offset the wretched present, but he does argue that progress is real and that we live in a much more congenial time than did the ancients:

> The discoveries of ancient and modern navigators, and the domestic history of traditions of the most enlightened nations represent the human savage naked in mind and body, and destitute of laws, of arts, of ideas, and almost of language. From this abject condition, perhaps the primitive and universal state of man, he has gradually arisen to command the animals, to fertilise the earth, to traverse the ocean, and to measure the heavens. His progress in the improvement and exercise of his mental and corporeal faculties has been irregular and various; infinitely slow in the beginning; and increasing by degrees with redoubled velocity: ages of laborious ascent have been followed by a moment of rapid downfall; and the several climates of the globe have felt the vicissitudes of light and darkness. Yet the experience of four thousand years should enlarge our hopes and diminish our apprehensions: we cannot determine to what height the human species may aspire in their advance towards perfection; but it may safely be presumed that no people, unless the face of nature is changed, will relapse into their original barbarism.[16]

Gibbon here suggests that the unfavorable conditions in which we live may cause apprehensions about the future of our society. But he believes the tendency of history to show that we shall not lapse back into barbarism. Poverty, corruption, violence may cause us to fear that our civilization is on the road to destruction, but history, Gibbon would argue, shows that such problems do not reverse the melioristic tendency of the whole. Gibbon, like Emerson,

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[16]Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (New York: Modern Library, 1932), II, 96-97.

accepts the world because he is sure there are compensations which offset evils. Indeed, he writes, "We may therefore acquiesce in the pleasing conclusions that every age of the world has increased and still increases the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge, and perhaps the virtue, of the human race."[17]

Hume argues along lines similar to these. In his "Essay on the Populousness of Ancient Nations," for instance, he notes that slavery was widespread as an institution in ancient times, and then adds that

> to one who considers coolly on the subject it will appear, that human nature, in general, really enjoys more liberty at present, in the most arbitrary government of EUROPE, than it ever did during the most flourishing period of ancient times. As much as submission to a petty prince, whose dominions extend not beyond a single city, is more grievous than obedience to a great monarch; so much is domestic slavery more cruel and oppressive than any civil subjection whatsoever.[18]

Implicit in this passage then is a melioristic definition of compensation, for Hume suggests that we are compensated for "civil subjection" by the fact that such subjection is so much easier to bear than was the slavery of earlier times. It is more pleasant to live in Franco's Spain, Hume might argue, than it was to live as a slave in the American South. But the importance of Hume's melioristic definition of compensation must not be exaggerated, for as Bury notes, "he

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[17]Gibbon, II, 98. J. B. Bury in his book The Idea of Progress (New York: Dover, 1960) takes note of this passage and the previous passage from Gibbon's work.

[18]Hume, III, 385.

was too sceptical to suppose that any general synthesis of history is possible, or that any considerable change for the better in the manners of mankind is likely to occur."[19]

In addition to Hume and Gibbon, Bishop Butler anticipates Emerson's progressive definition of compensation. Emerson, in fact, cites in his journal of 1826 an article from the Quarterly Review which contained these "prodigious fine remarks" (JMN, III, 51) by Bishop Butler:

> "It is not easy," says Butler, "even for our most reasonable men, always to bear in mind the degree of our ignorance." That ignorance affords a full and satisfactory answer to all objections against the perfection of the scheme, whether of the natural or of the moral world, and thence against the wisdom, justice, and benevolence of the common Parent and Preserver of them both.[20]

Like Pope, the article and Butler here suggest that what seems unjust to limited human minds would seem perfectly just if man could share the perspective of God. Compensation in this passage is thus defined as a principle which insures that seeming evil is positive good. But neither the article nor Butler presents a static view of compensation. Indeed, the article goes on to quote with approval Butler's assertion that "We are placed . . . in the middle of a scheme, not a fixed but a progressive one, every way incomprehensible--incomprehensible in a manner equally with

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[19]J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress (New York: Dover, 1960), p. 220.

[20]"Review of Transactions of the Geological Society," Quarterly Review, 34 (September, 1826), 540.

respect to what has been, what now is, and what shall be hereafter."[21] Butler here presents a melioristic view of compensation, a view Emerson was to wholeheartedly adopt almost twenty years later. And in a passage not quoted, Butler clarifies this view, writing that God accomplishes his "natural ends by slow successive steps."[22] He admits that we may be unable to understand how these steps contribute to a good end, but argues that we must trust that they do. Butler suggests, therefore, that compensation lies in the faith that present suffering contributes to God's progressive development of the universe. Butler, rather than Emerson, might well have written that a "beneficent tendency is always bringing things right." However, Butler stresses man's ignorance far more than does Emerson. Both Butler and Emerson view evil as beneficent because essential to a progressive system, but perhaps Butler looks evil, in Basil Willey's words, "more directly in the face and with a more disillusioned eye."[23]

The similarity between Butler and Emerson seems more significant when one realizes that Butler is representative of a group of Anglican apologists who between 1699 and 1745 sought to "vindicate the beneficence of God's providence and

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[21]Butler, II, 251, as cited in the Quarterly Review, p. 539.

[22]Butler, II, 251.

[23]Willey, p. 78.

especially to combat deism by reinterpreting the history of revelation itself, and consequently of the whole spiritual and moral experience of mankind, in terms of a continuous and necessary movement from worse to better."[24] William Worthington argues, for instance, that all parts of nature "are endued with a Principle not only to preserve their state, but to advance it" and thus believes that "every Thing has a Tendency to its own Perfection."[25] He thus implies that we can bear the imperfection of the present because it is but a step on the way to perfection. And Edmund Law, like Worthington, argues that progress is inevitable. He admits the virtues of primitive races and confesses that some evils come from civilization, but he concludes,

> if they [commerce, arts, etc.] have abated the force of some of the natural virtues, by the luxury which attends them; [they] have taken likewise the sting of our natural vices, and softened the ferocity of the human race, without enervating their courage.[26]

For Law, therefore, man is clearly progressing toward "true charity, or universal benevolence" and in that progress lies compensation for the lack of charity in the present.

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[24]R. S. Crane, "Anglican Apologetics and the Idea of Progress," MP, XXXI (1934), 274.

[25]William Worthington, An essay on the scheme and conduct, procedure and extent of man's redemption, wherein is shewn from the Holy Scripture, that this great work is to be accomplished gradually (1743), p. 223, as cited by Crane, "Anglican Apologetics," p. 299.

[26]Edmund Law, Considerations on the Theory of Religion, 6th ed. (Cambridge, 1774), p. 239, as cited by Ernest Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1949), p. 149.

Emerson's purpose is not to combat deism or to uphold Anglicanism, but his melioristic view of compensation is certainly quite similar to the one held by these divines. Like them, he seeks to vindicate the beneficence of providence through a melioristic view of human history.

Joseph Priestley can well serve as a final example of the eighteenth century's progressive doctrine of compensation. Priestley argues that

> the full persuasion that nothing can come to pass without the knowledge and express appointment of the greatest and best of beings, must tend to diffuse a joyful serenity over the mind, producing a conviction, that notwithstanding all present unfavorable appearances, whatever is, is right; that even all evils, respecting individuals or societies, any part, or the whole of the human race, will terminate in good; and that the greatest sum of good could not, in the nature of things, be attained by any other means.[27]

Priestley here argues that the "whole of the human race will terminate in good"; he suggests that mankind will eventually experience perfection, though they must endure evils at present. And he asserts that the existence of evils is necessary to the production of the final perfection. He thus establishes in 1777 the essential ingredients of Emerson's melioristic doctrine of compensation. Moreover, although Priestley's use of the phrase "whatever is, is right" may suggest that his belief in compensation is static rather than melioristic, the following statement clearly indicates the progressive nature of Priestley's concept:

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[27]Priestley, Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity, p. 109.

> It seems to be the uniform intention of divine providence, to lead mankind to happiness in a progressive, which is the surest, though the slowest method. Evil always leads to good, and imperfect to perfect. The divine being might, no doubt, have adopted a different plan, have made human nature and human governments perfect from the beginning. He might have formed the human mind with an intuitive knowledge of truth, without leading men through so many labyrinths of error. He might have made man perfectly vertuous, without giving so much exercise to his passions in his struggles with the habits of vice. . . . but though it would be impiety in us to pretend to fathom the depth of divine councils, I think we may fairly conclude, that if this method of proceeding had been the best for us, he, whom we cannot conceive to be influenced by any thing but his desire to promote the happiness of his creatures, would have pursued it. But a contrary method has been adopted in every thing relative to us.[28]

Priestley thus states that all things necessarily and progressively move toward perfection and argues that this progressive movement leads man to happiness. A tendency toward perfection and happiness is then the compensation Priestley discovers for the ignorance, the spiritual failings, and the discontent which exist as he writes. And such a discovery certainly anticipates Emerson's assertion that "Through the years and the centuries . . . a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams."

However, significant differences between Emerson and these eighteenth-century English meliorists must be noted. Gibbon and Hume, for instance, find compensation more in a retrospective than in a prospective view of history. Gibbon

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[28]Joseph Priestley, An Essay on the First Principles of government; and on the nature of political, civil, and religious liberty (London, 1768), pp. 78-79, as cited by Crane, "Anglican Apologetics," p. 380.

finds that a look at the past can "enlarge our hopes and diminish our apprehensions," and Hume finds satisfaction in the fact that "human nature in general really enjoys more liberty at present . . . than it ever did during the most flourishing period of ancient times." These writers therefore tend to emphasize advantages over earlier times as compensation for present distresses. Emerson, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the perfection which lies in the future as the compensation for our present suffering. Indeed, in "Culture" he asserts that "The time will come when the evil forms we have known can no more be organized" (W, VI, 166), and this assertion is surely typical.

In addition, Priestley and Law tend to see the progress of the universe in different terms than does Emerson. They envision what Willey would call a "Baconian paradise."[29] Priestley argues that in this paradise toward which all things move,

> nature, including both its materials, and its laws, will be more at our command; men will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable; they will probably prolong their existence in it, and will grow daily more happy, each in himself, and more able . . . to communicate happiness to others.[30]

Priestley here describes his ideal in very tangible terms. He sees the world progressing toward technological, medical,

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[29]Willey, p. 195.

[30]Priestley, Essay, p. 6, as cited by Willey, p. 195.

and agricultural achievement and believes an increase in happiness and good will toward men will be realized concurrently and partially as a consequence. His mentor Hartley is certainly convinced "that the arts and sciences not only improve in themselves but by their improvement facilitate a general progress in religious and moral understanding."[31] And Law explicitly argues that developments in commerce and the arts have "softened the ferocity of the human race." Emerson, like Priestley, Hartley, and Law, emphasizes man's increasing control of nature. Indeed, in "The Young American" Emerson stresses the spiritual progress encouraged by the development of trade. Yet he does not fully accept this sort of technological meliorism. In "Nature," for example, he writes:

> We anticipate a new era from the invention of a locomotive or a balloon; the new engine brings with it the old checks. They say that by electromagnetism, your salad shall be grown from the seed, whilst your fowl is roasting for dinner: it is the symbol of modern aims and endeavours,--of our condensation and acceleration of objects; but nothing is gained. (W, III, 195)

Emerson thus tends to regard technological progress as of secondary importance. It alone cannot bring the new era he wishes to see. He sees a developing emphasis upon love rather than physical courage as a more important progressive movement in the universe, and as one which does not depend upon technology to make it possible.

The emphasis by Law and Priestley upon tangible

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[31]Crane, "Anglican Apologetics," p. 372.

evidences of progress points up another significant difference between Emerson and many eighteenth-century progressivists. Frederick William Conner suggests this difference when he writes that progress in the eighteenth-century French tradition "rested on the Lockeian conception of human nature as molded from without, and this was the complete contradiction of Emerson's transcendentalism."[32] We have seen that eighteenth-century English meliorism is far from a complete contradiction of Emerson's philosophy. But, nevertheless, Conner's statement is a valuable one, suggesting that at times the operation of Emerson's principle of compensation differs from the operation of some eighteenth-century principles. Law, for example, believes in Locke's concept of the association of ideas. And Law reasons that as these associations become more complex "religion by degrees" becomes so too.[33] Man's spiritual progress is thus for Law largely a function of the associative principle. Emerson, however, does not see progress in terms of increasingly complex ideas becoming available to man. He believes that evil can eventually serve to enhance the quality of men's lives, that the abuse of slaves in the West Indies, for instance, stimulated the British government to emancipate those slaves (W, XI, 105). And he also believes that great, inspired men appear

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[32]Conner, p. 64.

[33]Law, p. 226, as cited by Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia, p. 149.

infrequently among us and through the force of their inspiration expand the possibilities for moral and intellectual advancement. He asserts that "When Nature has work to be done, she creates a genius to do it" (W, I, 207). We do not mechanically associate ideas and therefore progress, Emerson would say. Rather we are periodically inspired and moved ahead by great men.[34] Yet even this difference between Emerson and Law cannot obscure their very basic similarity. Indeed, both men believe that the principle of compensation is "self-administering." Miraculous, divine intervention is not necessary in either view, for the universe is so ordered that compensation in the form of progress inevitably appears.

Emerson's futurist perspective, his objection to equating technological and spiritual progress, and his rejection of Lockeian psychology thus differentiate him from some eighteenth-century English meliorists. Despite these differences, however, the fundamental similarities persist, and Emerson's melioristic concept of compensation lies clearly within established eighteenth-century English traditions. Both Emerson and his predecessors believe that evil is good in the making, that imperfection in self and others is progressively being eliminated. A melioristic view of

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[34]Conner, pp. 64-65. Conner uses a very similar argument to effectively refute Mildred Silver's contention that Emerson does not believe in general progress as a law of nature. See Mildred Silver, "Emerson and the Idea of Progress," AL, XII (1940), 1-19.

compensation exists a century before Emerson makes it a central tenet in his works.

Thus, a defensive doctrine of compensation is an element in Emerson's thought throughout his career as an essayist, and the importance of this doctrine grows as Emerson comes to see it in melioristic terms. Yet eighteenth-century English writers, those men Emerson supposedly rejects, anticipate his use of this doctrine in both stages of its development. Indeed, the eighteenth century is not only the period in which Pope proclaimed "whatever is, is right." It is also the period in which a belief in progress comes to full flower. In terms of his defensive definition of compensation, Emerson might therefore be appropriately called a man of the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters we have seen substantial similarities between the nineteenth-century American philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the philosophies of a wide variety of eighteenth-century English moralists. Indeed, eighteenth-century writers as different as Shaftesbury and Hume, Price and Gibbon, Norris and Hartley anticipate three of Emerson's major doctrines--self-reliance, correspondence, and compensation.

For Emerson, self-reliance grows out of God reliance. The self-sufficient man, he argues early in his career, is the man who knows God to be within and who finds Him to be a source of intellectual insight, moral decisiveness, and practical power. And this concept is certainly not alien to Enlightenment England. Shaftesbury's moral sense, Butler's conscience, and Price's intuitive ability to know a priori truths all perform functions which Emerson attributes to the God within. And Shaftesbury and Norris suggest that the sense of union man can feel with God is truly real. They

thus overtly anticipate Emerson's assertion that man and God are one.

After 1841, however, Emerson's belief in self-reliance and the God within tends to be unstable. Emerson at times argues that man evolves toward union with God, though he cannot achieve that union immediately. He typically suggests that man is hooped in and limited by fate. And he at times believes that man is trapped within himself, that his private perceptions may be illusions rather than the insights of the God within. Yet here again eighteenth-century parallels exist. Thomson, Akenside, and Young picture man as evolving toward a higher order of being. Writers like Priestley clearly suggest that man is limited by fate. And Hume's skepticism distinctly anticipates Emerson's doubt in man's ability to perceive absolute realities.

If Emersonian self-reliance exists in large part one hundred years before Emerson, Emersonian correspondence does as well. Emerson's doctrine of correspondence suggests that man and nature are analogous, that the analogies we can draw between them exist absolutely, and that these analogies cannot be affixed to unalterable significances but must remain fluid. And eighteenth-century English concepts of correspondence suggest much the same thing, though they do not use analogies to exalt man so much as does Emerson's doctrine. Norris finds the natural world the object of divine revelation and refuses to limit significances of natural

objects. Shaftesbury suggests that man and nature are analogous, that their relationship truly exists, and that the symbols we find in nature cannot be limited in meaning because nature, like a poem, cannot be literally translated. Butler too finds one law for man and nature, though he believes that we can only gain a probable knowledge of ourselves and of God through the study of nature. And Wollaston, Paley, and Berkeley also anticipate, though to a lesser extent, Emerson's belief in correspondence.

In the second half of his career, Emerson less often sees correspondences as exalting man, and he comes at times to doubt the existence of correspondence. But his modification of his doctrine so that it does not glorify the individual surely brings him closer to those eighteenth-century writers who anticipate his early position on correspondence. And his skepticism clearly links him to Hume and less clearly ties him to writers like Crabbe and Radcliffe who emphasize the way in which a man's mental condition affects his perception of nature.

Finally, anticipations of Emersonian compensation permeate Augustan England. Emerson offers two definitions of compensation. He sees it as a principle which rewards virtue, and he sees it also as a principle which guarantees that "whatever is, is right." And both definitions have roots in eighteenth-century Britain. Compensation as virtue rewarded is the prominent definition early in Emerson's

career when his faith in the individual is at its height. The psychological and material rewards he depicts as coming to the virtuous man are also depicted by utilitarians like Locke and Hume who, unlike Emerson, define virtue by the rewards it brings, by intellectual moralists who tend to be more temperate in the rewards they posit, by common-sense moralists like Butler and Shaftesbury, and by writers of sensibility who suggest that virtue inevitably brings man a self-approving joy. In the second half of his career, moreover, Emerson continues to proclaim this doctrine. Even though skepticism challenges his faith in the self and his faith in correspondence, he continues to believe in the principle of virtue rewarded. Like Shaftesbury, he suggests that virtue is rewarded whether we live amidst illusions or realities. Still, after 1841 Emerson's assertions of this doctrine tend to be restrained. But this very restraint moves Emerson closer to the cautious statements of Price and Wollaston.

Emerson's belief that "whatever is, is right" tends to be a somewhat static concept early in his career and to become melioristic later. In his early essays, he suggests as do Shaftesbury, Kames, Jenyns, Pope, Gray, and numerous other eighteenth-century Englishmen that "partial evil" is "universal good." He believes that man may find suffering a blessing, deformity an advantage, deficiency in one skill a concentration of force in another. But later in his career,

Emerson shifts his position somewhat and asserts that "whatever is" contributes to the creation of "what is right." He suggests that the compensation for present imperfection in the scheme of things is that it purchases future improvement for mankind as a whole. And this concept is implicit in the beliefs which Hume, Gibbon, Butler, Law, and Priestley all hold in progress.

When I began this study, I hoped to be able to call the view of Emerson as a rebel against eighteenth-century England into serious doubt by showing that a variety of eighteenth-century moralists from diverse schools of thought anticipated three of Emerson's major doctrines. That hope has been largely fulfilled. Self-reliance, correspondence, and compensation tie Emerson to Augustan England and suggest that he might well be styled a man of the Enlightenment.

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