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Emerson and Unamuno on the Value of Society and Solitude

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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My dissertation attempts to understand the value of sociality and solitude in a good life. I explore this question in the writings of the Basque poet, novelist and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno and the foremost American transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson. One chapter is devoted to each author's views on solitude; another, to each author's reflections on society. Both authors support the view that the value of society and that of solitude depend on one another.

In the first chapter, I distill Emerson's distinctive understanding of solitude as a relation involving newness, intuition and inwardness. Solitude allows us to tap into a transpersonal mind as both the creator and a universal wellspring of inspiration. The environing natural world supports this process, attuning the mind to the inspiration that emanates from the aboriginal self. The results of this process eventually come to light; they are communicated to and embraced by other persons.

The second chapter inscribes the relationship between the civilization and the solitary individual in Unamuno's agonistic epistemology, which posits both an irresolvable tension and interdependence between reason and faith, and between the universal and the singular. Unamuno advocates living by a personal, incommunicable truth. I show that his retelling of the tale of Don Quijote illuminates and motivates this ideal.

Chapter 3 traces the themes of love and friendship through Emerson's work. My starting point is Emerson's reflection on his bereavement at the death of his son Waldo. To make sense of those reflections, I examine other writings that suggest that sociality is a necessary condition of existence and perception. Such a view is contrasted with one Emerson calls the *impersonal* , which accords persons ephemeral, symbolic value. I try to show how Emerson's clashing views can be harmonized.

In chapter 4, I examine Unamuno's two accounts of the role society plays in the quest for immortality. Like Emerson, Unamuno ties sociality to existence. In The Tragic Sense of Life, he argues that suffering leads to all-embracing compassion which discloses a transpersonal

consciousness, the Living God, who can guarantee our immortality. In How to Make a Novel, Unamuno suggests we can aspire to endless life through the conversation of literature, which joins individuals of different ages. I conclude the chapter by showing how Unamuno's literary theory illuminates the relationship between Don Quijote and Sancho and, by extension, human relations in general.

for Cissie

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Agonia	Miguel de Unamuno. *La agonía del Cristianismo*. (1925) Madrid: Alianza, 2000
Agony	Miguel de Unamuno. *The Agony of Christianity*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan. Princeton: Bollingen, 1974
CoL	Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Conduct of Life*. (1860) Charleston, SC: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001.
CW	Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Complete Works*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885-1894
DQ	Miguel de Unamuno. *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. (1905) Madrid: Alianza, 2000
E&L	Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte. Library of America, 1983
EL	Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Early Lectures* in three volumes, ed. Spiller and Whicher. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1972
Mist	Miguel de Unamuno. *Mist: A Tragicomic Novel*, trans. Warner Fite. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000
Novel	Miguel de Unamuno. *Cómo se hace una novela*. (1927) Madrid: Alianza, 2002
TSL	Miguel de Unamuno. *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1970), trans. Anthony Kerrigan. Princeton: Bollingen, 1990

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Multitude, solitude—equal and interchangeable terms for the active and fertile poet. Whoever does not know how to people his solitude does not know either how to be alone in a busy crowd.
-- Charles Baudelaire

INTRODUCTION

The present essay had its beginnings in conflicting, unsystematic perceptions that long preceded my formal philosophical education. It seemed to me, on the one hand, that the part of my life spent in the company of others was trite and shallow compared to my hours of solitude and, on the other, that uninterrupted solitude could breed lassitude and erode the substance of life. Much later, I discovered two philosophers in whose work the questions I ruminated on acquired unsuspected depth: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Miguel de Unamuno. Both bring society and solitude into focus through philosophical reflection of the highest order. In the following pages, I turn to their works to inquire what value society[1] and solitude have in life.

One of my first aims in this inquiry is to clarify what is at stake in solitude. Is it simply the proximity or absence of another person that divides what sometimes appear to be two such dissimilar conditions? Or is physical distance simply the roughest of indexes of something else? Why is solitude, however we cash it out, important? My rough starting assumption was that, as my epigraph suggests, solitude is a state of mind. Emerson and Unamuno, each in their own way, confirm that and show that the solitary state of mind they characterize is

[1] Although solitude will turn out to be a complex notion that each author elaborates in different ways, my use of "society" in this text chiefly refers to Maurice Natanson's simple definition: "Sociality, then, is what happens *between* selves." (Natanson 47)

both valuable in itself and essential to achieving other ends. I believe they make a convincing case that solitude is a necessary condition for a good life.

It is perhaps common to think of solitude as privative. To some extent, my authors bear this view out: both of them describe ways in which other persons can engage the agent, keeping him from his noblest calling. However, neither thinker believes solitude is *merely* privative. Both articulate concepts of solitude that include positive components like openness to nature and self-knowledge.

Some of us have sensed, as I mention above, that purely individual existence is somehow crucially lacking. But just what does it lack? Both authors help flesh out such misgivings, arguing that sociality is necessary to existence—not instrumentally necessary, but constitutive of what it is to live. However, given their different preoccupations and perspectives, they go in different directions with that insight. Unamuno's chief concern is overcoming death, while Emerson is more concerned with perception. Their accounts of how life among others can support immortality and philosophical grasp are complementary; both deepen our understanding of the value of sociality.

Conceptually, of course, society and solitude are inextricably related—we tend to think of the latter as the negation of the former. I will argue, however, that the interrelation goes well beyond that: the value of society depends on solitude and vice-versa. For both Emerson and Unamuno, I will argue, the goods we achieve in solitude come to fruition through or among other people. Conversely, the ends of society they describe—individual survival and true perception of

ideas— may not, in their very concept, involve other persons. To that extent, it might not be unreasonable to describe them as solitary.

Both these authors present the reader and commentator with non-trivial challenges that deserve to be addressed here. Emerson's polarity logic plays out in his writings as a ceaseless stream of tensions, clashes and contradictions between, and sometimes within, essays. Similarly, Unamuno ties life to struggle and contradiction and cultivates tensions, believing that to be defined is to be finished. Clearly, the common interpretative assumption of consistency has to be applied charily here. One effect of these figures' agonistic style is to complicate efforts to trace the evolution of their thought over time, since different views coexist in their work simultaneously. Another is to call into question any attempt to extract a consistent, linear argument from their work, as I do in the present essay. I do not believe these texts' recalcitrance discredits any reading like mine, but it does place some checks on it that I wish to acknowledge. It is a rare exegesis indeed that exhausts a great author, but I want to emphasize that mine avowedly does not. I tease out certain strands of thought I believe are to be found in the works of Unamuno and Emerson. Anyone pursuing a comprehensive appreciation of either thinker, even just of his take on the value of society and solitude, would be well advised to seek other perspectives on and in the relevant texts.

My reading is also partial as concerns the material covered. I focus on essays and lectures, which I believe lend themselves most readily to philosophical address. Unamuno's drama and novellas, and both authors' journals and poetry

constitute a rich mine which I tap only very selectively, one whose insights might qualify or supplement those in the essays.

In both authors, I concentrate on what I consider especially rich periods in their long careers. The texts I read by Unamuno were written between 1905 and 1927. That is, they are all subsequent to the so-called crisis he is said to suffer in 1897, brought on by his infant son's meningitis. My discussion of Emerson concentrates on work written between 1836 and 1844. The theme of society and solitude appears front and center in the author's book by that name published in 1870. There, Emerson retreats from his agonistic method and articulates a well defined view, viz., that solitude is an ideal practicable only by superior men, while the rest of us profit from seeking society as a concession to our debilities. The earlier, agonistic material I focus on seems to me to offer more nuanced, probing views of the value of society and solitude. This material, while largely continuous with the lectures that precede it, offers classic, more compacted statements of thoughts Emerson developed from his early years as a minister and lecturer. After 1844, society and solitude recede from the foreground for a long time. However, no one work from the earlier period articulates a complete, self-contained appraisal of society and solitude; insights into this subject are dispersed over a plethora of essays. While Unamuno does offer more extended commentary on relevant issues in individual works, I believe his views become much tighter and more compelling when we take together the mutually reinforcing arguments from diverse texts. For the sake of eliciting and analyzing the authors' views on the central themes, I have chosen to focus not on differences and discontinuities

but rather on piecing together views from their sundry texts that are as comprehensive and incisive as possible. Tracing and confronting the discontinuities, contrasts and shifts among texts may well be a rewarding task for future work. (For example, does either of Unamuno's paths to immortality obviate the other?)

The present work devotes two exegetical chapters apiece to the topic of society and solitude. Each of those exegetical chapters examines one author's view of the topic. The section on solitude and the section on society both conclude with a brief comparative commentary that brings both authors' thoughts together. Chapter 1 focuses on Emerson's self-reliance. Here, solitude is an essential condition of an ethic that advocates fresh perception and ceaseless creation untrammeled by tradition and convention. Emerson bases his advocacy of solitude on a metaphysics that posits a transpersonal mind as both the creator and a universal wellspring of inspiration. Solitude, Emerson believes, allows us to tap this primal source. The environing natural world supports this process, attuning the mind to the inspiration that emanates from the aboriginal self. The results of this process eventually come to light; they are communicated to and embraced by other persons. Toward the end of the chapter, I examine why, according to Emerson, sociality militates against access to a mind common to all persons.

Chapter 2 shows how solitude informs the ethics of Unamuno. I begin the discussion by laying out some of the foundational elements of his philosophy such as his irrationalist epistemology, his view of *conatus* as the essence of every

living individual and the agonistic structure of his thought. I then discuss the relation Unamuno describes between society and individual, Christendom and the solitary Christian. Unamuno urges on every individual fealty to his or her own unique vision, which he does not believe can be shared or communicated. Like Emerson, he thinks life in society can hinder us from living by our highest values. I focus on Don Quijote, in Unamuno's retelling of Cervantes' novel, as an exemplar of the way of life Unamuno advocates. Quijote cuts a solitary figure, living by values that are incomprehensible to those around him, pursuing an ideal known only to himself. This ideal, importantly, is another person, Dulcinea del Toboso; in this respect, solitude turns out, as it does for Emerson, to envisage a higher social condition.

Chapter 3 traces the themes of love and friendship through Emerson's work. My starting point is Emerson's reflection on his bereavement at the death of his son Waldo. To make sense of those reflections, I examine other writings that suggest that sociality is a necessary condition of existence and perception. Such a view is contrasted with one Emerson calls the *impersonal* , which accords persons ephemeral, symbolic value. I try to show how Emerson's clashing views can be harmonized.

In chapter 4, I examine Unamuno's two accounts of the role society plays in the quest for immortality. Like Emerson, Unamuno ties sociality to existence. In The Tragic Sense of Life, he argues that suffering leads to all-embracing compassion which discloses a transpersonal consciousness, the Living God whose cognizance of us can guarantee our immortality. In How to Make a Novel,

Unamuno suggests we can aspire to endless life through the conversation of literature, which joins individuals of different ages through the rapport between author and reader. I conclude the chapter by showing how Unamuno's literary theory illuminates the relationship between Don Quijote and Sancho and, by extension, human relations in general.

I. The Ethics of Solitude

Plato's most celebrated parable, the allegory of the cave, ends with an imperative: the lone seeker who has made his way out of the shadows, immeasurably enlarging his knowledge and understanding of reality by beholding the sun in the firmament and the world in its light, should return to the place where other men dwell, the cave. If he were to do so, however, he could not simply resume the life he led there hitherto. Now, he would hold in meager esteem the satisfactions his fellow prisoners vie for and would "go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do." (Plato 516d) The pattern of Plato's fable is reenacted in the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Miguel de Unamuno. The life that each of them advocates includes a moment in which the individual stands apart from society and the claims of the public world upon him are checked—either as a necessary precursor to ingress to a higher truth (which may demand a refusal of sociality) or, on the other hand, as a consequence of the isolating perceptions the individual has reaped in solitude. As in the Greek allegory, when the individual returns to the common world, his relation to it has been transformed; it is no longer the familiar form of participation or belonging that binds the mass of its members together.

The first two chapters of this essay will explore the value of solitude in connection with the self. For both thinkers, the self provides both the impetus and the means for the seeker's withdrawal into solitude; for the sake of the self, one brackets or leaves the shared dimension of existence and, in doing so, is thrown

upon the self's own resources. It must be said that for both Emerson and Unamuno, the departure aims at the reunion. The ideal that motivates each one's advocacy of solitude is in some sense intersubjective, as each makes explicit. "My love of the multitude is what leads me to flee from it. As I flee it," writes Unamuno, "I am seeking it." ("Soledad" 31) "I go alone that I may meet my brother as I ought," explains Emerson in "The Protest."[2] Thus, I ask my reader to bear in mind that these chapters are only a partial exposition of the way relations with others figure in the good life each author conceives of; they must be read in conjunction with the second half of the essay to arrive at a complete, or at least balanced, appreciation of the subject.

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[2] *Early Lectures* in three volumes, ed. Spiller and Williams. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1972), vol. III, p. 96. Cited hereafter as *EL*.

We live in this human scene as in a theatre, where an adult mind never loses itself so completely in the play as to forget that the play is a fiction; and he judges it, not for what it pretends to present, but for the stimulus and scope of the presentation. So in the whole verbal, sensuous, and moral medium through which we see the world we may learn not to see the world falsely but to see ourselves truly, and the world in its true relation to ourselves.
-- Jorge Santayana

1. **Self-Reliance**

This section will be devoted to Emerson's understanding of the nature and value of solitude. I will argue that in his pages, solitude is an expansive idea that encompasses far more than social withdrawal—a gesture whose meaning for Emerson we can't begin to understand without taking into account the rich conception that underlies it. To be solitary, I will try to explain in detail, is to assume the position of creator with respect to the outer world—a perspective rooted in a metaphysics that casts a larger, transpersonal self as the fountainhead of creation. Solitude, thus understood, turns out to be deeply intertwined with Emerson's ethics of self-reliance. I will discuss how it impacts his relations to texts, to nature and to other individuals. One broad point that emerges from this inquiry is that solitude is by no means solipsistic or worldless but itself a mode of relation.

Solitude, for Emerson, turns out to be a condition for what I will call originality. Originality has two aspects, which I will call newness and inwardness.[3] Newness simply refers to bringing forth something unexampled.

[3] This terminology is not Emerson's and I will lay no great stress on it. I simply use it here to peg crucial aspects of his ethical thought which he does not name or indicates by myriad names. As I see it, two of his most important lectures, the *Divinity School Address* and *The American Scholar* are first and foremost exhortations to originality in the areas of religion and literature, respectively.

Inwardness indicates a perception's provenance in immanent divinity. Such perceptions cannot be inscribed in the outer world. They may be catalyzed or evoked by our experience of it but ultimately they are truths of the soul and cannot be reduced to facts anent what lies outside us. I take inwardness to be closely linked to the distinction Emerson draws between tuition and intuition. "We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin."[4] As I understand it, intuition is a foundational perception that cannot be assimilated to the causal connections and relations of ideas out of which we weave our picture of the world—it is prior to these. Although the term appears seldom in Emerson's work, and the contrast with tuition even more seldom, I believe his exhortations to originality always imply a call to ground our thought in intuitions rather than in the derivative representations we erect on them. "Meanwhile, whilst the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never, it is guarded by one stern condition; this, namely; it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand." (*E&L* 79) The value of solitude lies in its making originality possible.

Emerson characterizes man as "a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe." (*E&L* 953) It should come as no surprise, then, that solitude can exist in tension with other aims and perspectives. A look at Emerson's later essays might show it to be at odds with necessity. Here, focusing

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[4] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 269. Henceforth cited as *E&L.*

on the earlier[5] essays, I will show how it participates in a dialectic with conservatism and sociality.

For the purposes of this discussion, the character of the ethos of Emersonian self-reliance can be evoked by a handful of signature lines from the homonymous essay:

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,--that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost… Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is, that they set at naught books and traditions and spoke not what men but what they thought… Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the cry of voices is on the other side.
>
> Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string…These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members… The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion… Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. (*E&L* 259-65)

As I understand it, the values Emerson is concerned with defending against society are those of universality and originality. Social existence, he believes, can lead us to compromise those values for several related reasons. Being in the social state often or usually entails a kind of self-forgetfulness that induces us to conduct our lives according to outward signposts rather than inner promptings. Often these can mislead us about how to live, diverting our concern and aspirations from

[5] The period I focus on are the years from 1836 to 1844, since that is where I find the present themes most richly developed in Emerson's work. There is considerable continuity in Emerson's work as a whole and I sometimes refer to writings from outside this period when doing so can enrich our understanding of the view developed over the aforementioned years.

matters of the spirit to petty, artificial pursuits of no account. However, Emerson believes that conformity as a way of life is categorically, not contingently, mistaken. That is, to guide one's life by conforming is always an error, not only when the patterns of existence we mimic are foolish ones. It is the imitative method of choice itself that is flawed, not only or even necessarily the outward course chosen by its light. This is because, in Emerson's view, an integral part of a good life is a receptiveness to an inner source that forever expresses itself in new ways. To live by reproducing familiar ways of life is, on this view, not to live in the full sense of the word. Even the way in which being with others can bring our own self into focus can, he warns us, foreclose the spontaneity that characterizes self-reliance. Here I will unfold Emerson's reservations, sketched above, concerning social existence and, by contrast, the values realized in the self-reliant life.

I begin by noting that Emerson's self-reliance is not an appeal to the individual, concrete, finite, historically situated self (although we will see later that that self has a part to play). Rather, "the trustee… the aboriginal Self on which a universal reliance may be grounded" (*E&L* 268) is a larger self we may refer to as the Over-Soul, the universal Intellect or the God within. As Stephen Whicher puts it, when we speak of "Self-reliance[,] the capital letter must always be understood." (Whicher 51) Thus, although the focus of this essay is ethical, not metaphysical, it behooves us to start out with an understanding of this Emersonian self.

In spite of what Emerson's terminology might suggest, this Self has less in common with the Christian deity of received tradition than with the Will described by Emerson's coeval Arthur Schopenhauer. Since Schopenhauer is a more familiar figure in the pantheon of great thinkers and since Emerson's affinities and dissimilarities with him mark crucial aspects of the latter's picture of the self, I will adopt Schopenhauer's Will as a useful frame of reference in this overview.

Like the Will, the Self is a creative force objectified—without being reducible to them--both in each individual self and in the phenomenal world as a whole: "Who are we and what is Nature have one answer in the life that rushes into us… as geologists say every river makes its own valley, so does this mystic stream. It makes its own valley, makes its banks and perhaps the observer too."[6] Here and elsewhere, Emerson's characterizations of nature can seem indistinct and elusive. The word functions more like a poetic symbol than a technical term, evoking a reticulum of related ideas. In the present discussion, I take "Nature" to refer primarily to (1) the primary creative power that forges the world; and (2) the handiwork of this power, including the landscape, physical processes, "art, all other men, and my own body." (*E&L* 8)

The primordial unity of soul and world is what guarantees the latter's intelligibility to us. This applies both to the natural world (*CW* XII 19) and to the

[6] Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Complete Works*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885-1894), vol. XII, p. 15. Cited henceforth at CW. That this creative power is also a destructive force is something Emerson does not stress to nearly the same extent Schopenhauer does. Nonetheless, the view is hardly foreign to him. He highlights that aspect of nature most prominently in the late essay "Fate" (1860, revised in 1876) but at least as early as in "Heroism" (published as part of Essays: First Series in 1841), he alerts us to "a certain ferocity in nature, which, as it had its inlet by human crime, must have its outlet by human suffering." (E&L 373)

vicissitudes of the human race played out on the world-historical stage. (*E&L* 237) Just as Schopenhauer thinks that we come closer to the nature of the world through the experience of our embodiment, the world as will, Emerson often suggests that looking inward will afford us a truer perception than looking outward. This is why he sometimes appears to cast the outer world (what Schopenhauer would call 'the world as representation') as a lesser objectification of the spirit—for example, when he characterizes nature as "this shadow of the soul, or other me." (*E&L* 60) (This shadow, however, can occupy a very important place in the moral life, as I shall discuss momentarily.)

It is crucial to Emerson's ethics that the Soul is a repository of shared ideas, values and understandings:

> There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent. (*E&L* 237)

If Emerson privileges private, inner perception over the "not I" as a conduit to insight, he often takes the view that those insights are cultivated for the sake of enriching the common understanding. His exhortations to self-reliant thought invoke the prospect of thought becoming public, chorused by "the universal voice," as the end of and motivation for independent introspection. The reasons for this and the checks Emerson may place on it will be discussed in more detail below.

Importantly, while in Schopenhauer the intellect is an accidental, subordinate offshoot of the blind Will, intellect and providence are essential attributes of Emerson's benign Over-Soul. That providence governs not only the laws of Nature but also human conduct, at least when we achieve the openness of reception to it; "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity." (*E&L* 269) Emerson inscribes the human mind in the divine. The two are certainly not identical but they are continuous; "as there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins." (*E&L* 387) Thus, although he often describes the action of the larger soul on the individual in terms suggestive of what Kant would call heteronomy, the resources we tap when we plumb "the internal ocean" are deeply, truly our own. "To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which relies, because it works and is." (*E&L* 272) This caveat is meant to cancel the connotation of "reliance" as having recourse to some power foreign to ourselves. "For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes, when we know least about it." (*E&L* 447)

In a surprising marriage of Kantianism and irrationalism, Emerson singles out two utterances of the spirit which the self-reliant agent can trust to conduct himself: Instinct (most prominently in "Literary Ethics," "Self-Reliance," and "The Transcendentalist") and the sense of moral obligation ("The Divinity School

Address," "Character," "The Sovereignty of Ethics."). This is in marked contrast to Schopenhauer, for whom morality arises through and sustains a *release* from the tyranny of instinct.

Since the soul that speaks through our instincts and conscience is the same that creates and animates the world around us, self-reliance can sometimes mean attending to the values Emerson finds encoded in our natural environs. The Concord sage holds that "every natural process is a version of a moral sentence. The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference." (*E&L* 29) Nonetheless, inner experience lies closer to the center than material nature. The value of nature as a symbol of morality lies in the inward-looking perceptions it catalyzes: "Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself." (*E&L* 60)

We now have a basic picture of the larger universal self Emersonian self-reliance appeals to. It is both a creative power and an "immense intelligence" from which the world—including persons, events and material nature—springs. It speaks in the individual through the voice of instinct and conscience. From this universal mind common to all, there flows an endless stream of new thoughts, values and perspectives. With this basis in mind, let's begin to examine Emerson's ethical views, the life he advocates and its metaphysical basis.

The action of self-reliance, what the self-reliant agent does, is to descend continuously into the inexhaustible depths of the common mind and bring to

light[7] undiscovered truths found therein (in passages we shall turn to later on, Emerson calls this "grasp"). On the face of it, it is far from evident why this has to be a solitary task or why it should be in tension with social existence. A vital first step in clarifying this is to understand what kind of solitude is a component of Emerson's conception of self-reliance. It soon becomes clear, at any rate, what it is *not*, namely a solipsistic withdrawal into the privacy of inwardness. A thought that recurs throughout his work is that access to the self's boundless wealth is mediated by intercourse with the Not-I. "The world, — this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself." (*E&L* 60) "From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things" (*E&L* 387), painting them the color of the soul.

What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the

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[7] My formulation is deliberately broad, since the way in which these intuitions are disclosed varies from text to text—I distinguish at least three major variants. In "The Poet," Emerson writes: "For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression." (E&L 448) This is a need the individual shares with the universal self; nature always seeks new expressions. Emerson places the greatest emphasis on the form of expression his works achieve: articulate expression, the eloquence through which "shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech." (E&L 60) But action, he suggests at one point, can achieve a fuller expression: "Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act." (E&L 62) (That the total act is a fallback for someone to whom the partial act has become unavailable is explained by the fact that Emerson is speaking here of the scholar, with whom action is "subordinate… but essential." (E&L 60) Neither, however, represents a necessary or full disclosure of the self's wisdom. Of original, creative utterances—that is, of those nourished by self-knowledge—Emerson says "The sentiment they instill is of more value that any thought they may contain." (E&L 259) Similarly, character makes itself known through means subtler than action: "We pass for what we are. Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment." (E&L 266) This is why Emerson can say "I ask primary evidence that you are a man, and refuse this appeal from the man to his actions. I know that for myself it makes no difference whether I do or forbear those actions which are reckoned excellent." (E&L 263) The primary evidence, it follows from the preceding quote, is the soul's *pneume*, which does not give itself coarsely, through tangible actions, but in rarefied effluvia.

form and the gait of the body; -- show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature. (*E&L* 69)

For Emerson, the task of self-understanding looks outward at the forms that emanate ever from the soul, at the valley the stream gives itself. In Nature, this is linked explicitly to solitude:

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. (*E&L* 9)

Enlarging upon these few lines will lead us to some essential aspects of Emerson's view of solitude. The passage contrasts our communion with nature, which is said to be solitary, with our communion with texts, which is said not to be. What is it that thus differentiates them? We have already said that material nature arises from the universal source self-reliance hearkens to. This accounts for why appearances in nature can, for Emerson, function as a kind of visual dictionary of spiritual facts. They are pre-verbal appearances of what the poet will carry over into language:

I believe in the existence of the material world as the expression of the spiritual or the real, and in the impenetrable mystery which hides (and hides through absolute transparency) the mental nature, I await the insight which our advancing knowledge of material laws shall furnish.

Every object in nature is a word to signify some fact in the mind. But when that fact is not yet put into English words, when I look at the tree or the river and have not yet definitely made out what they would say to me, they are by no means unimpressive. I wait for them, I enjoy them before they yet speak. I feel

as if I stood by an ambassador charged with the message of his king, which he does not deliver because the hour when he should say it is not yet arrived. (*CW* XII 5)[8]

This passage sets the elements contrasted in Nature in an unexpected relationship: the natural world is the harbinger of the word, the text fulfills the promise we sense in nature. In speech, the spirit at last delivers itself of its regal message. How could this sunder our solitude? In the larger frame of things, we shall see that Emerson privileges possibility and promise above their consummation, which has only a transient validity: "Yet a little waving hand built this huge wall, and that which builds is better than that which is built… Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some general law presently to disclose itself. There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us." (*E&L* 404-5) Solitude will be inextricably linked with inextinguishable newness. However, a more specific answer lies in an aspect of Emerson's conflicted relation with texts which B. L. Packer articulates with admirable clarity:

But can this transfer of the world into consciousness take place if the Not-Me assumes the shape, not of sensible objects, but of a prior *text*? After Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx, he still had to contend with Laius, who was not so easily disposed of. The objects of the natural world may thank us for our translating zeal, but no prior text wishes to be reduced to the status of brute prefiguration. When such a reduction does occur—as in the "hermeneutical fiat" that turned the Torah of the Jews into the Old Testament of the Christians—it cannot be accomplished without violence. For a prior *text* is the product of a

[8] Cf. also the discussions of language in "History" and chapter IV of Nature.

consciousness exactly as central to itself as ours is to us, and what it demands from us is not interpretation but submission. If it is, from our point of view, a part of the Not-Me, it is nonetheless a Not-Me with a voice, a Not-Me that speaks, and—what is worst of all—says precisely those things which I wished to say, was about to say. (Packer 110)

The expected message is, after all, the message of a king. The majesty we admire in it does not paliate but reinforces the fact that it commands. (As Ayn Rand would put it, "We are enslaved only by what we admire.") "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years." (*E&L* 58) The production of poetry is the consummation of self-reliance in the mind that actively studies to discover nature's secrets. Its handiwork, however, can strangle the self-reliance of those who inherit it to the extent that that inheritance displaces fresh creation. The tradition that inflects the meanings I utter "warps me out of my own orbit." The ignominy of discovering another voice that "says precisely those things which I wished to say, was about to say" is not that I find my words anticipated but that I follow in its trail. The remedy to this is to fight fire with fire, to advance beyond the texts that, through our love for them, enchain us. "When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker, to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men." (*E&L* 408) The right we thereby recover could be described, without reductionism, as the freedom to think.

Is this "anxiety of influence" obviated by the objection that texts, too, call for interpretation, that they have only as much life as we bring to them? Emerson himself will insist on this point:

> We all know, that, as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were broiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men have existed, who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only would say, that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, "He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out the wealth of the Indies." There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. (*E&L* 59)

Emerson says it takes a "strong head," like a strong stomach, to be an inventor through but also in spite of one's reading. If strength is a capacity to overcome resistance, it may be called for because texts, as Packer indicates, resist assimilation. But why should it be thus? Packer's claim that a text, as the product of a consciousness like my own, refuses to be reduced to "brute prefiguration" is surely to the point. Yet by itself it does not tell the whole story or place it in its distinctively Emersonian context. I believe it is crucial here that, just as Emerson sees appearances in nature as expressions of spiritual facts, words are supposed to be symbols for natural facts (and, hence, of the spirit twice removed). "Words are signs of natural facts… Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance." (*E&L* 20) Moral or poetic discourse, then, is an indirect revelation of nature. "Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit, it is fluid,

it is volatile, it is obedient." (*E&L* 48) Perhaps the strength Emerson refers to is the capacity to see through poetry's concretizations to the protean, self-renewing power that generates them. This, I take it, is the alternative to "the absence of spirit." Through that strength, we live in the awareness of the openness of thought, an openness that belongs to our own nature:

> We assume, that all thought is already long ago adequately set down in books,--all imaginations in poems; and what we say, we only throw in as confirmatory of this supposed complete body of literature. A very shallow assumption. Poetry has scarce chanted its first song. The perpetual admonition of nature to us, is, 'The world is new, untried. Do not believe the past. I give you the universe a virgin today.' (*E&L* 101)

What I want to take away from this discussion is an understanding of Emersonian solitude: to be solitary, in the sense the Concord sage advocates, is to occupy the perspective of "the simple power anterior to all action and construction," (*E&L* 417) a perspective prior to and independent of the full range of its creations.[9] From this position, there is nothing but the self to rely on: although self-reliant solitude does not deny or devalue the validity of the externalities we dwell in, it does call upon us to appreciate them as conditions that are always up to us to found anew. If we linger with this thought a moment, it becomes poignant that it casts man as being utterly alone (all-one), yet also implies a deep embrace of the world, which can in no way be alien to me. It does not, however, imply a

[9] These include ideas, values, commitments, practices and institutions, as I will emphasize for the purpose of discussing its ethical implications, but in fact comprehend as well the course of history, the skeins of the web of fate, the whole of the visible world: "That which I think and feel underlay every former state of life and circumstances, as it does underlie my present, and what is called life and what is called death." (E&L 271)

rudderless world or throw us upon anything we would typically call subjectivism. This is partly because, as we have already noted, the universal spirit speaks within us, albeit above our individual wills, through the promptings of conscience and instinct.

Further, in spite of everything, we are not with outward moorings. I noted before that self-reliance looks outward at the Not-Me. I would like to devote some space to elucidating Emerson's relation to Nature because it condenses so much of his ethical outlook.

Among the self's emanations, material nature occupies a privileged place, thanks to its ability to recall us to the inward source. This is partly because, as an objectification of the universal spirit, it symbolizes spiritual facts. Of course, the theoretical, religious, poetic and cultural expressions to which Emerson denies permanent validity also purport to represent spiritual facts and, presumably, do so for the time being when they are successful. Part of what may differentiate nature from these is its provenance in the purely universal part of the spirit, the involuntary powers. "Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due." (*E&L* 269) This distinction, which may reproduce the tuition-intuition dichotomy, is presumably what grounds Emerson's faith in nature and instinct alike. Secondly, although nature and language may both symbolize spiritual facts, it is only the latter that reifies. (This is why nature, unlike a text, does not challenge us even as it nourishes us.) In fact, Emerson

suggests that communion with nature has the power to dissipate the ossifications of thought by lying always beyond them:

> The man who stands on the seashore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange. Whilst I read the poets, I think that nothing new can be said about morning and evening. But when I see the daybreak, I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearian, or Miltonic, or Chaucerian pictures. No; but I feel perhaps the pain of an alien world; a world not yet subdued by the thought; or, I am cheered by the moist, warm, glittering, budding, melodious hour, that takes down the narrow walls of my soul, and extends its life and pulsation to the very horizon. (*E&L* 102)

The moral significance that pervades nature is not any of the fey, particular values we bring forth. Just as in Kant, the content of the universal law boils down to its universality, the meaning Emerson discerns in nature is perennial newness:

> But go into the forest, you shall find all new and undescribed. The screaming of the wild geese flying by night; the thin note of the companionable titmouse, in the winter day; the fall of swarms of flies, in autumn, from combats high in the air, pattering down on the leaves like rain; the angry hiss of the wood-birds; the pine throwing out its pollen for the benefit of the next century; the turpentine exuding from the tree; -- and, indeed, any vegetation; any animation; any and all, are alike unattempted. The man who stands on the seashore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange. (*E&L* 101-2)

Nature embodies the solitude of self-reliance and the newness it establishes:

> These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to

them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. (*E&L* 270)

The rose simply lives out of its own nature. It is a plenitude that does not look outward, patterning its existence on what has preceded it or on what surrounds it. I believe this figure beautifully captures the significance of Emersonian solitude but hope that the preceding discussion put us in a position to appreciate its depth and implications.

What I want to do in the balance of this section is to unfold Emerson's ethics of self-reliance and show how they grow out of the conception of solitude expounded above, how, as he makes explicit, being alone with our thoughts prescribes a certain orientation toward others:

From this transfer of the world into the consciousness, this beholding of all things in the mind, follow easily his whole ethics. It is simpler to be self-dependent. The height, the deity of man is, to be self-sustained, to need no gift, no foreign force. Society is good when it does not violate me; but best when it is likest to solitude. (*E&L* 195)

I would like to start by getting out of the way some of the more obvious objections the notion of an ethics of solitude might elicit. Wouldn't, one might worry, anything we could rightly call an ethics demand an awareness of others? And doesn't Emersonian solitude call on us precisely to eschew that awareness, to be oblivious to other people, just as a flower recks not of other flowers?

Certainly an element of detachment is important to self-reliance. However, this is not the same as avoidance, obliviousness or seclusion. I have already emphasized that the self-reliant cultivation of truth, in Emerson's account, looks outward, draws from the world the material it will convert to thought. It must be noted that intersubjective experience, like nature, can feed this transfiguration. In the Divinity School Address, he records his dismay at a sermon by a preacher who had not learnt "the capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth."[10] (*E&L* 85) What marks that failure is that "[h]e had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined." That is, his words were empty because they were not nourished by his life among others.

Emersonian solitude entails an attunement and receptivity to the soul's inner voice but this influx can certainly express itself publicly in word and deed. For example, in "Politics" Emerson notes that "real government is ever this Theocracy whose seat is not in the heart of only one man or one set of men, but in the heart of every man." (*EL* III 246) Similarly, "the justice which is now claimed for the black, and the pauper, and the drunkard is for Beauty,--is for a necessity to the soul of the agent, not of the beneficiary." (*E&L* 206) The flower does not perfume the air for our pleasure, the thrushes do not sing to delight us, the self-reliant agent is just in obedience to his character, not for another's sake. The ethical dictation of the universal intelligence is received privately but can be enacted publicly. Let us see what it calls for.

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[10] I have suggested that this "capital secret" is not exclusive to the preacher's, or to any other, profession but is the action of self-reliance.

I have said that being solitary entails occupying the perspective of the creative power, a position of independence from anything external. How is this independence enacted? The answer, I believe, lies in Emerson's notion of "abandonment" which, as B. L. Packer astutely points out, has two components:

> When Emerson says, "The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment," he is punning, for abandonment pertains in different ways to the center and to the circumference. The way of life requires abandonment *of* the ossified circumference of past thought in favor of the new truth rupturing and pushing beyond it; it requires abandonment *to* that central principle of life, higher than reason or even faith, which in its first protests against all forms of limitation "already tends outward with a vast force, and to immense and innumerable expansions." (Packer 136-7)

Although it is helpful to distinguish these forms of abandonment, I would not say Emerson is "punning." Rather, I would say that the positive and negative forms of abandonment—surrender to the afflatus of the universal creative spirit and detachment from its past productions—necessitate each other. Fresh creation only becomes possible when we take our leave of the old forms we hitherto inhabited; to embrace a new perspective, to adopt a new way of life, *is* to abandon what preceded it.

I believe that bearing in mind the injunction to abandonment lends credence to some of Emerson's pronouncements on society which might seem gratuitous on their own, such as the claim that "Man is fallen; nature is erect," (*E&L* 546) or that "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the

members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater… Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." (*E&L* 261) It is perhaps natural for a critical reader to at first meet these assertions with skepticism. Few will doubt that society *can* be stifling and tyrannical, that *some,* or even many, are and that resistance is the right response to such conditions. But shouldn't we balk at saying *categorically* that society conspires against the manhood of its members, that nonconformity is morally requisite under *every* social arrangement? If this were really the case, why call for nonconformity, which usually aims at modifying some part of extant social arrangements, rather than for wholesale abandonment of the social state?

I am going to argue that the radical, literal meaning of Emerson's words advances a tenable and cogent view. I want to underline the words "*everywhere… every one*" and "manhood." The first set flags that Emerson takes himself to be saying something about the social state *per se*, not just something that applies to some communities of even that just happens to apply to all of them. The second emphasizes that what society undercuts in its members is something central to their humanity, something crucial to the kinds of beings we are. Notably, when he remarks our fallenness he also advances his observation as a claim about our species.

We saw above that Emerson (1) thinks that language, at a remove from nature, reifies the facts it symbolizes by detaching them from their protean source; and (2) is leery of the effect canonical texts can have of displacing or undermining the generation of new ideas. It should be clear that it is not only in our literary

undertakings that our originality can be thus threatened; Emerson locates the same perils more tangibly in "the world" as a whole. His lecture "The Protest" describes a contrast between the fates of "the men of genius… who from a finer organization, yield freer passage to the universal soul" and that of the majority. Since what speaks through the genius is the mind common to all, the difference between the genius and the herd is not of kind but of degree; the latter "are fired with the same thought but it is too ineffectual a flame."

Then arise new and painful appearances. The soul prompts them also to create their usages and words and works. But the world resists them at every step. The law of the mind is one: the law of the members is another. God the soul says one thing; the whole world says or seems to say another. Then arises War… The dissonance of which I speak is involuntary and necessary. It is a necessity flowing from the nature of things. What is the front the world always shows to the young spirit? Strange to say, The Fall of Man. The Fall of Man is the first word of history and the last fact of experience… What is the account to be given of this persuasion that has taken such deep root in all minds? What but this that it is an universal fact that man is always in his actual life lapsing from the Commandments of the Soul? … He is encumbered by his own past. His past hour mortgages the present hour. Yesterday is the enemy of Today. His deed hinders him from doing, his thought from thinking; his former virtue is apt to become an impediment to new virtue.

Each individual is born sane. [His] instincts are true. His affections pure. His senses are keen; his intellect curious; he tastes the knowledge of good and evil. But he finds in society a nurture for his vice which it does not offer his virtue. His vice is bribed. His virtue sad and unsaluted in society. His virtue accuses their customs. (*EL* III 86-7)

Whereas genius "establishes its own modes, tastes, schools," Emerson thinks the mass of men forsake by the age of thirty the instincts that place them at odds with society's demands. The claim that "man is fallen, nature is erect" should be read in light of the passage above. Nature's uprightness lies in its uncorrupted newness; man's fallenness, in his propensity to disavow his fresh truths in deference to the past—a way of abdicating his solitude.

The view that society makes demands of this kind on every one of its members is compelling. If we raise the question of what it means to belong to a society, it is hard to think of an answer that does not entail individuals making themselves reckonable, adopting shared conventions and practices. It is equally hard to imagine a society evolving without any of its members ever challenging those commonplaces. These dynamics are fleshed out in the observations Robert Pirsig (a contemporary descendant of Emerson by way of James and Whitehead), makes on a case study by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict. The concreteness and perspicuity of these comments warrant quoting them at some length:

> Sometimes you can see your own society's issues more clearly when they are put in an exotic context like the *brujo* in Zuñi… As Phaedrus thought about this context again and again it became apparent there were two *kinds* of good and evil involved.
>
> The tribal frame of values that condemned the *brujo* and led to his punishment was one kind of good, for which Phaedrus coined the term "static good." Each culture has its own pattern of static good derived from fixed laws and the traditions and values that underlie them. This pattern of static good is the essential structure of the culture itself and defines it. In the static sense the *brujo* was very clearly evil to oppose the appointed authorities of his tribe. Suppose

everyone did that? The whole Zuñi culture, after thousands of years of continuous survival, would collapse into chaos.

But in addition there's a *Dynamic* good that is outside of any culture, that cannot be contained by any system of precepts, but has to be continually rediscovered as a culture evolves. Good and evil are not *entirely* a matter of tribal custom. If they were, no tribal change would be possible, since custom cannot change custom. There has to be another source of good and evil outside the tribal customs that produces the tribal change.

If you had asked the *brujo* what ethical principles he was following he probably wouldn't have been able to tell you. He wouldn't have understood what you were talking about. He was just following some vague sense of "betterness" that he couldn't have defined if he had wanted to. Probably the war priests thought he was some kind of egotist trying to build his own image by tearing down tribal authority. But he showed later on that he really wasn't. If he'd been such an egotist he wouldn't have stayed with the tribe and helped keep it together…

He was the precursor of deep cultural change. A tribe can change its values only person by person and someone has to be first. Whoever is first obviously is going to be in conflict with everybody else… Probably he wasn't telling anyone to do this or to do that so much as he was just being himself. He may never have seen his struggle as anything but a personal one…

Whatever the personality traits were that made him such a rebel from the tribe around him, this man was no "misfit." He was an integral *part* of Zuñi culture. (Pirsig 131-2)

Although this is not the place for an exhaustive comparison of Pirsig's and Emerson's ethics and their underlying metaphysics, there is an evident affinity between what the former calls "Dynamic good" and the active principle Emerson discerns in nature and the soul. However, the Concord sage also grants the

necessity of what Pirsig calls "static good," which he figures using the persona of Neptune: "I fear. There is not only the alternative of making and not making, but also of unmaking. Seest thou the great sea, how it ebbs and flows? so is it with me; my power ebbs; and if I put forth my hands, I shall not do, but undo. Therefore I do what I have done; I hold what I have got; and so I resist Night and Chaos." (*E&L* 173) Conservatism, as Emerson calls it, is predicated on a mistrust of the generosity of providence; Neptune fears the dissolution of old forms not because he is averse to fresh creation *per se* but because he does not have faith that anything will succeed what the flow of change carries in its wake. Emerson accepts conservatism not because he endorses its premise but because he sees it and its antagonist—"reform," innovation, creation—as complementary and mutually necessary opposites:

> Conservatism is more candid to behold another's worth; reform more disposed to maintain and increase its own. Conservatism makes no poetry, breathes no prayer, has no invention; it is all memory. Reform has no gratitude, no prudence, no husbandry…
>
> And so whilst we do not go beyond general statements, it may be safely affirmed of these two metaphysical antagonists, that each is a good half, but an impossible whole. Each exposes the abuses of the other, but in a true society, in a true man, both must combine. (*E&L* 175)

This evaluation has a metaphysical correlate: Emerson finds (as he will later say of cruel fate and the seemingly hostile elements) that conservatism has deep roots in the soul:

> The fact is very strange and the cause of it perhaps too deep in our constitution and too subtle to be explored, to know why we are such slaves of

Custom; why it is so much easier to repeat an old, than to invent a new act; why we decline creation; why we dread to speak our own speech; and even to pray our own prayer; and had rather find a proverb to express our thought, or a text as the vehicle of our worship. (*EL* 87)

I find this a strong position. After all, given that the soul is the fountainhead from which the world flows, it is not easy to understand how (1) an alien opposition with no roots in the soul could find purchase there to check its spontaneous working; or (2) society could be constituted in opposition to the soul that generates it. A spirit of uncorrupted spontaneity could never generate a society that pressed the demand for conformity.

Thus, Emerson's advocacy of solitude must be understood in the context of a fundamental *agon* that is rooted in the soul and enacted in the outer world, the strife between creation (which implies destruction) and preservation.[11] Since he does not wish to see that struggle concluded by either pole's victory, it is likely that the motives for Emerson's frequently one-sided exhortations to abandonment parallel his pronouncement that "[t]he doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction of the doctrine of love when that pules and whines." (*E&L* 262) When too many of us are hamstrung by "a foolish consistency," when "I am hindered of meeting God in my brother, because he has shut his own temple doors, and recites fables merely of his brother's, or his brother's brother's God"

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[11] Although he does not attempt to explain what actuates and sustains it, Stanley Cavell seems to also have discerned this dynamic when he says that "for him [Emerson] to say 'self-reliance is the aversion of conformity' is to say that his writing and the dominantly desired virtue of his society incessantly recoil from, or turn away from one another; but since this is incessant, the picture is at the same time of each incessantly turning *toward* the other." (Cavell 193) Incidentally, the congruence between his reading and mine does not extend to the position that "self-reliance" chiefly designates Emerson's own writing.

(*E&L* 276), extolling abandonment may serve a corrective purpose that would not be as well served by the picture of ebb and flow. As such, the ideal of abandonment is not, by itself, a goal to be achieved but a rallying cry that can help restore the balance of the endless flux.

Is Emerson's emphasis on instinct as a privileged mode of abandonment perhaps an outgrowth of the strategy of addressing the imbalances he perceives around him? Abandonment, after all, should be possible not only in but *through* self-consciousness. The realization that we have placed ourselves in thrall to past genius, that, for example, we have Shakespearized for two hundred years, is already to have transcended it; it is to see that things could be otherwise, that the features of literature (or any other human endeavor) embodied in an exemplar are mutable, one way among an infinitude. Unless it is invisible and unacknowledged, the tyranny of the past can be but partial and unstable at worst. I take the liberating potential of reflectiveness to be a moral of the following comments in "The American Scholar":

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical: we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness,--

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? … If there is any period one would desire to be born in,--is it not the age of Revolution; when the

energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? (*E&L* 67-8)

Here Emerson counters both nostalgia for the static quality of the past and a Schilleresque hankering for naïveté with the rewards opened up by reflection. Those rewards are intrinsic to self-awareness: the new comes about when one man realizes he need not reproduce the practices he has inherited. When it becomes manifest in his acts and handiwork, the new awakens other men to the possibility that emanates from their common soul. That awareness, I believe, is what defines "a new era." Further, solitude, the perception of the self's independence from everything it has brought forth, is more plausibly construed as a reflective state of mind than an instinctual one.

So why, in light of all this, do Emerson's characterizations of self-reliance so often stress the instinctual, unreflective nature of the independence he advocates? "Every man," he tells us, "discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due." (*E&L* 269) By "voluntary acts of his mind," I assume he means those produced, rather than received, by the narrow, merely individual self; the others, if I understand correctly, come from "that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me," showing me that "I am a pensioner; not a cause, but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up, and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come."(*E&L* 385) The soul's own perceptions emerge not from my poor cogitation but from the influx of the

greater, universal self. Thus, I receive them passively, “in the attitude of reception,” so uninvolved with their production that I may count myself a surprised pensioner with respect to them. “I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation.” (*E&L* 262) Shunning one’s family, of course, involves shunning the demands they press, including the demands for conformity and accountability. A greater trust is due to a prompting that resists explanation so thoroughly that to attempt it would be a waste. “The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why.” (*E&L* 414)

Why should the ideal of action be beyond explanation, beyond knowing why? One answer may lie in the very observation I made in support of the emancipatory power of reflection: even critical observation, even a dialogue of challenge, is already informed by the same framework it seeks to undermine. To engage a theoretical position, to debate a course of action, I must operate within the same conceptual coordinates it is set in. As long as I do so, the possibility of innovation will always be circumscribed by that framework. The prospect of breaking out of it appears to be part of what motivates Emerson’s encomium of instinct:

> The vision of genius comes by renouncing the too officious activity of the understanding, and giving leave and amplest privilege to the spontaneous sentiment… Men grind and grind in the mill of a truism, and nothing comes out but what was put in. But the moment they desert the tradition for a spontaneous

thought, then poetry, wit, hope, virtue, learning, anecdote, all flock to their aid. (*E&L* 100)

But is it really possible to be outside conceptual precincts altogether? It may or may not be to a Rousseauian savage but surely it is not to Emerson's readers in an "age of introversion." In this connection, it is worth noting that unreflective spontaneity is linked to an experience that is in principle exceptional, both within a population and within the individual life it graces, the call of genius. Elsewhere, Emerson will circumscribe still further the possibility of surrender to blind instinct:

I mean, we have yet no man who has leaned entirely on his character, and eaten angels' food; who, trusting to his sentiments, found life made of miracles; who, working for universal aims, found himself fed, he knew not how; clothed, sheltered, and weaponed, he knew not how, and yet it was done by his own hands. Only in the instinct of the lower animals, we find the suggestion of the methods of it, and something higher than our understanding… Man owns the dignity of the life which throbs around him in chemistry, and tree, and animal, and in the involuntary functions of his own body; yet he is balked when he tries to fling himself into this enchanted circle, where all is done without degradation. Yet genius and virtue predict in man the same absence of private ends, and of condescension to circumstances, united with every trait and talent of beauty and power. (*E&L* 197-8)

Here even genius does not *achieve* completely instinctual activity. Rather, like the instinct of the lower animals, it is a harbinger of that possibility. (I will not pause here to question whether it is right to yoke instinct to "the absence of private ends.") This is plausible enough; since genius introduces change, it probably

remains to some extent in dialogue with other selves. But the view that we have only suggestions, rather than concrete instances of men becoming transparent vessels through which instinct does its work, implies that ingress to "this enchanted circle" is one aspect of the "unattained but attainable self" (*E&L* 239) which Emerson thinks literature suggests to each individual, a suggestion of the better self he can be. If acting without knowing why perforce remains unattained by those who read and ponder Emerson's words, it is nonetheless an ideal they can cherish and cultivate, a horizon they can walk toward.

Even with this qualification, Emerson's emphasis on unreasoning, instinctual originality clearly shows us one way in which solitude, in the rather abstract, spiritual sense his texts extol, can imply solitude of the commonplace variety, "mechanical isolation": it points us to a region that is beyond understanding, even self-understanding and, hence, beyond discourse and dialogue. I have already suggested that for Emerson we never actually leave the space of understanding but always, rather, withdraw from within it toward its boundaries. It remains to be discussed how other aspects of Emerson's ethics function as a check on the call to solitude. First, however, let us look at how spiritual solitude plays out in the world, what kind of life it dictates when one seeks it in a society that conspires against it.

The two mainstays of Emerson's picture of the solitary life are action that springs from attunement to inner promptings and a concomitant disregard for the values and standards of the herd. The solitary man acts only out of spiritual necessity; his sensitivity to it makes the routine of mere philistines distasteful to

him and leads to a salutary reticence toward, though not complete withdrawal from, public and economic life. This begins as a purely negative gesture of refusal of the way of life the mass of men have settled into:

> To every young man and woman, the world puts the same question, "Wilt thou become one of us?" And to this question the soul in each of them says heartily, No… No matter though this young heart do not yet understand itself; do not know well what it wants; knows nothing but that it is ill at ease, sorely pinched by your conventions, and does not like Dr. Fell; and so contents itself with saying No; No; No; No; to unamiable tediousness;--or breaks out into sallies of extravagance; cherish it nevertheless. There is hope in extravagance; there is none in Routine. (*EL* III 90)

To this No we might reply, with Nietzsche, "Free *from* what? As if this mattered to Zarathustra! But your eyes should tell me brightly, free *for* what." Emerson, however, does not offer a concrete, monolithic answer to that question. His value is a meta-value, the perennial originality of thought:

> It is a sign of our times, conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living, from which no solid fruit has yet appeared to justify their separation. They hold themselves aloof: they feel the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them, and they prefer to ramble in the country and perish of ennui, to the degradation of such charities and such ambitions as the city can propose to them. They are striking work, and crying out for somewhat worthy to do! What they do, is done only because they are overpowered by the humanities that speak on all sides; and they consent to such labor as is open to them, though to their lofty dream the writings of Iliads or Hamlets, or the building of cities or empires seems drudgery. (*E&L* 199)

What stymies the active soul is the incommensurability between the expression it seeks and the possibilities that constitute worldly existence. “Much of our reading, much of our labor, seems mere waiting: it was not that we were born for… So little skill enters into these works, so little do they mix with the divine life, that it really signifies little what we do, whether we turn a grindstone, or ride, or run, or make fortunes, or govern the state.” (*E&L* 205) Perhaps it is this sense of disproportion and divorce that spurs Emerson to say “I ask primary evidence that you are a man, and refuse this appeal from the man to his actions. I know that for myself it makes no difference whether I do or forbear those actions which are reckoned excellent.” (*E&L* 263) “For myself,” here refers us to that inner dimension of life by which the outer must be judged. The insufficiency of worldly action and creation with respect to the spirit extends even to those productions wherein thought mingles with materiality: “All literature, all art is really below and not above the aspirations of the youth. Nothing that is done satisfies him. He wishes the perfect, the illimitable. He finds in it instantly the bonds of the Finite.” (*EL* III 93) Thus, from the philistine perspective, the solitary agent is distinguished by his unproductiveness: “The prudent, wrinkled friends admire when this long holiday of books and walks and young company is to end and John is to choose his employment and settle down to it. Employment! I am now employed in the gravest and most universal manner. I shall never desist from doing these same things you see me now do.” (*EL* III 94) As we have seen, it is central to Emerson’s vision of solitude that he privileges the vital, creative

principle above its handiwork. The visionary soul's material barrenness reflects this priority as well as the vacuity of the ends to which society calls for production. The solitary agent will neither squander his energies on inanities nor be deceived that any endeavor that can be brought to concretion, the finite, can mine the depths of the spirit.

Society threatens solitude precisely by demanding fealty to worn usages, dead deities and bankrupt institutions—empty husks the spirit has voided. Of course, the demand is never framed in those terms. Rather, it stems from self-forgetfulness, obliviousness to each individual's creative potentialities and is pressed from within that stupor:

> Men such as they are, very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money,--the "spoils," so called, "of office." And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. (*E&L* 66-7)

Men in thrall to that dream, doubtless a false dream arrived through the gates of ivory, forget the source of value within and locate the good in society's contrivances. Emerson believes there is a real danger that even a dedicated spirit may be subdued by the insistence of the masses on this empty creed:

> Astonished at this irreconcilable diversity, he stands for a time suspended, and is only able to resist society with his sturdy negative. After a brief period, he renounces his opposition and overcome by the multitude of voices, by his own treacherous senses, he compromises. He gets weary of struggling against the stream alone; he postpones for a time hostilities. He gets amused and busy with a trade, a calling, politics or pleasure. He makes a feebler and feebler refusal and at

last decides that his opposition was very youthful and unadvised and gives in his adhesion to Old Times and the wisdom of our ancestors, and goes down stream to darkness and to death. (*EL* III 99)

The death in question is not physical extinction. What it might refer to is perhaps elucidated in this passage by Herman Hesse:

Sadly, Siddhartha went to a pleasure garden that belonged to him, closed the gates, sat under a mango tree, and felt horror and death in his heart. He sat and felt himself dying, withering, finishing. Gradually, he collected his thoughts and mentally went through the whole of his life, from the earliest days which he could remember. When had he really been happy? When had he really experienced joy? … He had tasted it in the days of his boyhood… Then he had felt in his heart: "A path lies before you which you are called to follow. The gods await you." And again as a youth when his continually soaring goal had propelled him in and out of the crowd of similar seekers, when he had striven hard to understand the Brahmins' teachings, when every freshly acquired knowledge only engendered a new thirst, then again, in the midst of his thirst, in the midst of his efforts, he had thought: Onwards, onwards, this is your path… How long was it now since he had heard this voice, since he had soared to any heights? How flat and desolate his path had been! How many long years he had spent without any lofty goal, without any thirst, without any exaltation, content with small pleasures and yet never really satisfied! Without knowing it, he had endeavored and longed all these years to be like all these other people, like these children, and yet his life had been much more wretched and poorer than theirs, for their aims were not his, nor their sorrows his. (Hesse 83-4)

Emerson can help us distinguish the life and death laid out in this passage. Life is an eager and continuous striving along a path that leads to the gods. Ever it seeks new knowledge, yet does not rest or linger long with what it reaps. "Sense pauses:

the soul pauses not. In its world is incessant movement." (*EL* III 89) Death, by contrast, is a sterile, static abiding by settled tuitions—hence, "a flat path" to dissolution. Although one can become static by resting in one's own established aims and pleasures (which thereby cease to be aims and pleasures), Siddhartha arrived at that state through imitation, patterning his life after those of "children" whose aims and sorrows were not his. "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till." (*E&L* 259) As I understand it, the "toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till" is the active perception the individual brings to bear on his own life, forging an original, unmediated vision. Envy is ignorance of the fact that this vision, which no one can produce for me, is the only thing worth aspiring to, that "[t]he one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul." (*E&L* 57) Imitation is suicide precisely because it forsakes the soul's activity. Thus, when Siddhartha discovers that he has "played the fool with fools," (*E&L* 205) he also realizes that his life has been poorer than those he mimicked because even the folly he practiced was not his own.

What could drive a man to such depths, so far from himself? Emerson suggests it is the force of public opinion. Contrasting the social bondage of adults with the aloofness and independence of children, he writes: "But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or

spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this." (*E&L* 261) The "must" in this passage suggests that the appraisal of others has a normative power that binds one willy-nilly, while the last sentence compounds the implication of inexorability. One is fixed by the eyes that gnaw one's lonely image, inevitably moved, if not always overcome, by the judgments one reads in them—I take this to be what it means for them to "enter into his account." To balance this, Emerson points out elsewhere in the same essay that "[t]he power men possess to annoy me, I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near me but through my act." (*E&L* 273) That is, the opinions of others do not possess or constitute a power that forces itself upon one, passively and helplessly suffered. "Curiosity" here must be taken loosely. It is not that one is in thrall to the opinions of others through a wish to find out something but, rather, that our regard for those opinions invests them with the power to sway us. That there is no Lethe for this spell is also gainsaid in the same essay: "you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." (*E&L* 263) That one can preserve the independence of solitude even under the gaze of the multitude implies that one can, if not forget about public opinion altogether, at least grant it no weight its merits do not command.

The destitution Hesse's passage evokes attends the renunciation of what Emerson teaches us to understand as solitude. Once the individual hypostasizes any of the soul's creations, believing it to be a static good, and ceases to look inward for the late plurals of the good, he is cut off from the source of value. While the wisdom of the soul descends upon us bidden or unbidden at unforeseen moments, Emerson's account implies that the surprised pensioner must at least pave the way for it through a life of searching and openness. To look outward for concretizations of the soul's creative process rather than undertaking it afresh, in dialogue with the depths to which each individual self is an inlet, is to close oneself off to living insight and, thereby, to exclude the good from one's life. This is why, for Emerson, it is so important to maintain one's independence of spirit and philosophical aloofness.

I would like to conclude this section (and lay some ground for the third chapter) by showing how a demand for sociality is implicit in Emerson's ethic of self-reliance and in the metaphysics that underlie it. The next section will scrutinize some of the perplexities that arise from this unintuitive conjunction.

A generation after Emerson, George Herbert Mead writes:

Mind, as constructive or reflective or problem-solving thinking, is the socially acquired means or mechanism or apparatus whereby the human individual solves the various problems of environmental adjustment which arise to confront him in the course of his experience, and which arise to confront him in the course of his experience, and which prevent his conduct from proceeding harmoniously on its way, until they have thus been dealt with. And mind or thinking is also—as possessed by the individual members of human society—the means or mechanism or apparatus whereby social reconstruction is effected or accomplished by these

individuals. For it is their possession of minds or powers of thinking which enables human individuals to turn back critically, as it were, upon the organized social structure of the society to which they belong (and from their relations to which their minds are in the first instance derived), and to reorganize or reconstruct or modify that social structure to a greater or less degree, as the exigencies of social evolution from time to time require. Any such social reconstruction, if it is to be at all far-reaching, presupposes a basis of common social interests shared by all the individual members of the given human society in which that reconstruction occurs; shared, that is, by all the individuals whose minds must participate in, or whose minds bring about, that reconstruction. And the way in which any such social reconstruction is actually effected by the minds of the individuals involved is by a more or less abstract intellectual extension of the boundaries of the given society to which these individuals all belong, and which is undergoing the reconstruction—an extension resulting in a larger social whole in terms of which the social conflicts that necessitate the reconstruction of the given society are harmonized or reconciled, and by reference to which, accordingly, these conflicts can be solved or eliminated. (Mead 308-9)

For my purposes, the passage is useful in highlighting Emerson's affinity with lines of thought from which he is in other respects quite distant. Emerson would not agree with Mead that the mind is socially acquired nor would he characterize it primarily as a problem-solving device. However, such a view echoes Emerson's conviction that the individual mind is rooted in a transpersonal soil (albeit transcendental, not empirical). Most importantly here, I believe Emerson's philosophy exemplifies the upshot of Mead's argument above. As I understand it, when Mead says intrasocial conflict is resolved "by a more or less abstract intellectual extension of the boundaries of the given society to which these individuals all belong," he means that what is brought to bear is a projection of

the community in an idealized state. What this means for Mead is an expanded, more inclusive society where the elements that clash in the existing one are harmonized and reconciled. Emerson does not seek to mediate conflicts (he thinks superannuated ideas will give way to the new) but he, too, thinks nonconformity is focused through the projection of an idealized community. In both cases, one appeals to an ideal society against a fallen one:

> The reason why an ingenious soul shuns society, is to the end of finding society. It repudiates the false out of love of the true. You can very soon learn all that society can teach you for one while. Its foolish routine, an indefinite multiplication of balls, concerts, rides, theatres, can teach you no more than a few can. Then accept the hint of shame, of spiritual emptiness and waste, which true nature gives you, and retire, and hide; lock the door; shut the shutters; then welcome falls the imprisoning rain, -- dear hermitage of nature. Re-collect the spirits. Have solitary prayer and praise. Digest and correct the past experience; and blend it with the new and divine life. (*E&L* 105-6)

One retires to this "dear hermitage of nature" out of shame at the spiritually empty forms of association practiced around us. Abiding there serves "the end of finding society" by replenishing our spirits, fitting one for worthier bonds of communion. Emerson makes it explicit that this is part of the motivation for, not just a consequence of, the solitary individual's withdrawal:

> The higher the style we demand of friendship, of course the less easy to establish it with flesh and blood. We walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables. But a sublime hope cheers ever the faithful heart, that elsewhere, in other regions of the universal power, souls are now acting, enduring, and daring, which can love us, and which we can love. We may congratulate ourselves that the period of nonage, of follies, of blunders, and of shame, is

passed in solitude, and when we are finished men, we shall grasp heroic hands in heroic hands. Only be admonished by what you already see, not to strike leagues of friendship with cheap persons, where no friendship can be. Our impatience betrays us into rash and foolish alliances which no God attends. By persisting in your path, though you forfeit the little you gain the great. (*E&L* 352-3)

Here social withdrawal is characterized as a stage, which finds us in preparation for a nobler social state. One goes alone that one may, in due course, meet one's kin as befits both. That this "period of nonage" works on the individual, tempering and perfecting him, comes as no surprise in light of our discussion so far: solitude, which rests content with nothing extant, is the greatest stimulus to fresh intuition. (That the opportunity for godlike fellowship will coincide with the fruition of the "finished man's" spiritual maturation is perhaps an article of faith for Emerson, who believes the paths of individuals are arranged by providence to cross for beneficent purposes: "I am in the habit of thinking, --not, I hope, out of a partial experience, but confirmed by what I notice in many lives, --that to every serious mind Providence sends from time to time five or six or seven teachers who are of the first importance to him in the lessons they have to impart." (*CW* X 102-3))

What I wish to stress is that Emerson does not reckon the unsocial state a perfect stopping point. Rather, he often suggests that social withdrawal paves the way for "a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded". (*E&L* 230) "Rash and foolish alliances" are refused out of fealty to the ideal of the best possible associations:

these persons are not by nature melancholy, sour, and unsocial,--they are not stockish or brute,--but joyous; susceptible, affectionate; they have even more than others a great wish to be loved. Like the young Mozart, they are rather ready to cry ten times a day, "But are you sure you love me?" Nay, if they tell you their whole thought, they will own that love seems to them the last and highest gift of nature; that there are persons whom in their hearts they daily thank for existing,--persons whose faces are perhaps unknown to them, but whose fame and spirit have penetrated to their solitude,--and for whose sake they wish to exist. To behold the beauty of another character, which inspires a new interest in our own; to behold the beauty lodged in a human being, with such vivacity of apprehension, that I am instantly forced home to inquire if I am not deformity itself: to behold in another the expression of a love so high that it assures itself,--assures itself also to me against every possible casualty except my unworthiness;--these are degrees on the scale of human happiness to which they have ascended; and it is a fidelity to this sentiment which has made common association distasteful to them. (*E&L* 200)

The passage clearly indicates that Emerson attaches a unique importance to other persons. At the same time, there are indications—such as his locating happiness in beholding beauty enshrined in a person, rather than in beholding a person—that the seat of value lies not within the confines of an individual persona but in that which transcends it. The extent to which solitude, for Emerson, may infuse even our relations with others will be explored in the third chapter of this essay.

Emerson's exhortation to self-reliance is at the same time an exhortation to speech: "Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost,--and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment." (*E&L* 259) Here he seeks to

motivate his reader to cherish his inmost convictions with the prospect that eventually those convictions will be shared. The solitary agent is to deliver himself of his secret thoughts in order to see them disseminated among his fellow men. If this promise is something worldly, it would seem the *vox populi* is elevated to the status of the trumpets of the Last Judgment. While this may be surprising in light of Emerson's many misgivings about the herd, it is hardly an *ad* hoc statement. It must be remembered that what one abandons oneself to in solitude is the influx of a spirit that is common to all:

For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that, which men in crowded cities find true for them also. (*E&L* 64)

To give utterance to what descends upon the individual in solitude is already to speak with a voice that is universal in its provenance. If that voice should echo among men, it would become universal in a more quotidian sense: the thought, like its source, would be shared by all people. This, I take it, is what it would mean for the inmost to become the outmost, for the solitary to become a commonplace. Emerson also offers a more explicit indication that it is in the nature of thought to find its fate in the shared world:

A perception, it is of a necessity older than the sun and moon, and the Father of the Gods. It is there with all its destinies. It is its nature to rush to expression, to rush to embody itself. It is impatient to put on its sandals and be gone on its

errand, which is to lead to a larger perception and so to new action. For thought exists to be expressed. That which cannot externize itself is not thought. (*CW* XII 28)

Thus, he advocates externalizing our perceptions not as a contingent goal but as a demand intrinsic to thought itself.

The foregoing discussion raises a number of questions. Perhaps the most obvious is a skeptical one: how do we know that anything like an immanent universal spirit exists? While this element of Emerson's thought may at first blush produce an impression of ontological recklessness, upon close examination one finds the commitments it entails are few and plausible. First, he assumes that there exists a creative power. Since the existence of the creation is uncontroversial, this assumption does not seem farfetched. Second, he assumes that there is a ground of meaning common to all humanity. To whatever extent we find our fellow men intelligible, this assumption, like the first, appears plausible. Indeed, we arguably stake ourselves on this hypothesis whenever we attempt to express ourselves. Last, he assumes the unity of the creative force and the universal ground. To whatever extent the world is intelligible to us, this does not sound like an unreasonable way to account for that intelligibility.

In what remains of this chapter, I want to focus on an aporia that may appear to threaten his advocacy of self-reliance and which this reader, for one, does not find as easy to accommodate. Why should self-reliance demand withdrawal from those other objectifications of the universal spirit? If the same self we rely on can express itself and inspire every individual, why should self-

reliance be better served by solitude than by dialogue? It may well be, of course, that the expression of the soul is occluded in some men, that their speech and deeds are not rooted in the universal source we (in some sense, at least potential) share with them.

I find this question curiously neglected in the secondary literature on Emerson, even in those commentaries that focus on the tension between Emerson's advocacy of self-reliance and social participation. Stanley Cavell and George Kateb, to offer two notable examples, are concerned with showing how the ethics of self-reliance can be reconciled with a democratic politics. Cavell writes "the particular disdain for official culture taken in Emerson and Nietzsche (and surely in half the writers and artists in the 150 years since 'The American Scholar,' or say since romanticism) is itself an expression of democracy and commitment to it. Timocrats do not produce, oligarchs do not commission, dictators do not enforce, art and culture that disgust them. Only within the possibility of democracy is one committed to *living* with, or against, such culture." (Cavell (1990), 50) This may be,[12] but Emerson's enjoinders to solitude, I hope to have shown, go well beyond cultural critique, even if he engages in it not infrequently. Cavell doesn't scrutinize the connection between social resistance and its ground in a universal self, even though he raises a question that cries out for such discussion when he asks "But if his ground, or anyone's, will prove to be unexceptional (except for the endlessly specifiable act that it is one's

[12] Or, again, it may not be. It is not my purpose here to scrutinize Emerson's political leanings but it seems to me that anarchy, since it is not ruled by an *arche* or principle, would be better positioned to carry out an incessant reception of the constant newness Emerson calls for. Ingenieros points out that anarchists have always responded warmly to Emerson.

own life on that ground), why the tone of moral urgency in showing it, declaring it?" (40) George Kateb, on the other hand, documents the Transcendentalists' wariness of the political life but argues that democracy embodies some of the virtues of the individualism they advocate.

One might say that the impersonal individual aims to acquire an indefatigable capacity to know and love impersonally. The view of all three writers is that a democratic society is best justified as a preparation for this individuality, and is indeed justifiable as the only society in which such individuality can exist as a possibility for all. It makes possible what goes beyond it. (Kateb (1984) 349)

On that basis, he urges that

[i]t would be good if people who are inclined to the fuller realization of the democratic individuality conceptualized by Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, were to feel ready to compromise with themselves a bit… If by entering political life they enter a world lower than the one they leave, they may not perfect their democratic individuality; they may necessarily act inconsistently with their ideal; they may even hurt themselves with power. But because they enter it reluctantly, they may improve the chances that the political artifice that sustains their individuality will be safer. They can tell themselves that they help to sustain what sustains their best. (358)

Whatever else may be said about this argument, I think it is fair to say that through its concern with evaluating a specific form of political organization, it

overlooks or understates the extent to which a very similar tension is internal to Emerson's thought. This is not a tension between universality and participation in democracy or even political participation in general but between the solitude that, for Emerson, leads to universality and the inherently public character of universality's fulfillment. It is because commentators of note do not even register that tension that I feel it is incumbent on me to belabor my worry a bit further.

In Kantian terms, we might say that there is a practical contradiction in the maxim of shutting one's ears to society, descending into one's own depths (which are also everyone else's) and voicing what one finds there so that it may become the universal voice. Nobody could publicize his insights if no one else would accede to listen. On what grounds does Emerson adjure us to stop up our ears and refuse dialogue? The conviction that the every individual is or at least can be a conduit for the selfsame spirit from which my own best impulses and inspiration spring does not obviously lead to this insouciance. If anything, it would appear to dictate that I attend carefully to my fellow man for insight and spiritual nourishment.[13] This difficulty is not just another tension in Emerson; we would not get very far if we tarried with every one of his conspicuous contradictions. What distinguishes this one is that a position is being advocated on a basis that appears to undermine it: Emerson encourages us to close ourselves off to dialogue in the name of universality, in the expectation that the perceptions this leads us to

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[13] This line of thought is not unknown to Emerson, figuring prominently in later essays such as "Uses of Great Men" or "The Poet," where great men are valued—and presumably listened to—for giving utterance to the secrets of all mankind. While this may be a more straightforward position, it is worthwhile to examine how its complement in the middle essays can be argued for. And even in the later essays, the poet is said to be "isolated among his contemporaries, by his truth and by his art." (E&L 448)

will be communicated to others and “become the universal voice.” The premise that the insight we pursue can be universally shared calls into question the necessity of withdrawal to its attainment. If we seek truths accessible to all, couldn’t dialogue at least move us closer to discerning them?

To make Emerson’s position more compelling (if not entirely unproblematic), I undertake two complementary inquiries here, (1) an explication of the value Emerson assigns individuality vis-à-vis the universal; and (2) a close look at what it might mean for a thought to be universal.

To justify the scruple of avoiding forms of communion that involve taking one’s direction from another for the sake of a value that is supposed to be universal, I believe the universal must depend on some contribution that the unique individual as such can make. Although this dependence of the universal on the particular may not be a highly intuitive idea, I believe Emerson turns out, if we read closely, to be making a good case for it.

Perhaps Emerson’s most obvious--though not, in my view, most useful—gesture in this direction is found in comments he makes on the idea of what I called, early in the preceding section, truth’s inwardness:

Meanwhile, whilst the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never, it s guarded by one stern condition; this, namely; it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or wholly reject; and on his

word, or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing. On the contrary, the absence of this primary faith is the presence of degradation. (*E&L* 79)

In context, the distinction between instruction and provocation seems fairly clear: instruction would be the direct transmission of knowledge from one individual to another, while provocation is simply a stimulus for an individual to seek the truth in the only place it is to be found, within or, what amounts to the same, to attend to intuitions rather than stopping at tuitions. It is worth underlining, however, that the truth is conditioned by its universality as much as by its inwardness; the injunction that I "wholly reject" a (purported) truth I cannot discover within myself presupposes that truth can always be shared (thought not communicated), setting a single, albeit private, standard for all. By itself, however, this hardly dissevers the presumptive connection between universality and the value of dialogue—it simply checks the expectations we might hold anent the latter's potentialities. More will have to be said.

A cornerstone of Emerson's valuation of individuality, plurality, difference is his belief in nature's multi-perspectival wealth of meaning. This view underlies a number of Emersonian positions we have already discussed, such as his emphasis on the newness of reception and his charge that languages reifies the inherently fluid natural significations it symbolizes. It is articulated more explicitly in his critique of Swendenborg's project of cataloging nature's meanings:

He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion;--a horse signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich,

that; an artichoke, this other; and poorly tethers every symbol to a several ecclesiastic sense. The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught. In nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts, as each particle of matter circulates in turn through every system. The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being. In the transmission of the heavenly waters, every hose fits every hydrant. Nature avenges herself speedily on the hard pedantry that would chain her waves. She is no literalist. (*E&L* 676)

Although the natural world functions as a dictionary of symbols that disclose spiritual facts, there is no fixed link between any one symbol and a given meaning. Rather, any symbol can express any fact—depending on the axis of vision. I take Emerson to be expounding an aspect of his universalism when he speaks of "the central identity." As I understand it, it refers to the common root of all the spirit's objectifications, a bond that subsists between each and all. It is this unity that makes each symbol as inexhaustible as the universe. What this envisages is not a perception of a concentrated totality like, for instance, Blake's beholding a world in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour. Rather, the symbol reveals "all the qualities and shades of real being" in *succession*, a series (to adapt Emerson's words in another context) of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. The pedantry that would chain nature's waves is the same he attributes to the world when he writes "This one fact the world hates, that the soul *becomes*; for that for ever degrades the past, turns all riches into poverty." (*E&L* 271) The hatred of an active principle that perpetually calls our meanings

and values—our riches—into question, refusing them finality, is continuous with the prejudice that a universal truth must be monolithic and invariant. It is the very opposite of Emersonian abandonment.

The endless process through which old meanings are shed that nature may reveal herself from a new perspective can take place both within an individual life and at the collective level. However, Emerson seems to accord the former a certain primacy, since it is what drives the evolution of the collective understanding. "Greek history is one thing to me; another to you… The moment a man of genius pronounces the name of Pelasgi, of Athens, of the Erutrian, of the Roman people, we see their state under a new aspect." (*E&L* 103) Emersonian genius is not to be identified too closely with any specific exceptional individual[14]; it stands for the best in each of us, the possibility he extols of living from the depths of the common spirit. Nonetheless, since it is distinguished by the action of disclosing an unexampled perspective, it must be unique and non-intersubstitutable in each instance. Although every individual who abandons himself to the influx of the spirit draws on a common, universal Self, the soul does not speak alike through any two individuals. If, as I have suggested, the action of Self-reliance is to bring to light nature's meanings, perhaps Self-reliance must always also be self-reliance in the more quotidian sense—that is, it depends on the specificity of the individual. I would like to develop this thought by reading Emerson's pronouncements on the ends of individuality in light of it.

Perhaps Emerson's most direct commentary on the value of the individual appears in mythic form:

[14] Cf. Cavell (1990), pp. 52-3 for discussion of this point.

It is one of those fables, which out of an unknown antiquity, convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,--present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parcelled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,--a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man. (*E&L* 53-4)

It is of philosophical and not just antiquarian interest to note that this is not exactly a myth out of an unknown antiquity—it is as much a reversal as an appropriation of the myth of the circle men related by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium.* In that myth, the gods punish the hybris of the circle men who

attempt to storm Olympus, and neutralize their threat by dividing them, thereby condemning to forever seek their original unity. Emerson's transformation of this tale marks his philosophical divergences from it. First and foremost, it is a benefit rather than a misfortune that plurality supervenes—it does not prevent man from assailing the gods but, rather, allows him to be more useful to himself (in what way, we shall soon inquire). There is no antagonism between man and god and no Olympus to lay siege to, for god and Olympus lie within man. Thus, it is the Soul itself that gives itself plurality. There is no striving for a return to a primal unity, for the original oneness is never lost. It can, however, be forgotten, unexpressed or unacknowledged—this is a chief distinction between the spirit's own individuation and its counterfeit in the social state: the individual proper retains a vital connection to the universally human, to the common soul. On the other hand, under the division of labor, man "scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft." (*E&L* 54) In other words, man can be enriched by the diversity of the common spirit's expressions but only when men embrace their tasks as such. The loss or occlusion of one's connection to this transcendental ground is what Emerson likens to an amputation from the trunk. If the division of labor is an adequate representation for the plurality society contemplates, one would expect it to be at best a rough figuration of what Emerson means by the division of Man into men. It may well be that the farmer and the scholar each perform, in different ways, the office of being Man. However, this crude way of individuating men—and the uniformity it implies within the ranks of, say, scholars and farmers—seems more appropriate to the

perspective of the fallen state than to the view of solitude discussed in the previous section. I will try to show that Emerson has, indeed, a more nuanced vision of individuality that differs from the specialization of labor in more than just the awareness it retains of its connection to the universal.

Emerson says Man was divided into men that he might be more helpful to himself. How are men, plural, helpful to each other and to Man (the universal) in ways that Man, singular, cannot be to himself? His next clause offers an answer of sorts: Man was divided into men as a hand is divided into fingers, to better answer its end. Thus, there is an end to Man that is better served by plurality than by unity. What that end might be is perhaps illuminated by Emerson's elucidation elsewhere of the image of the hand:

The grasp is the main thing. Most men's minds do not grasp anything. All slips through their fingers, like the paltry brass grooves that in most country houses are used to raise or drop the curtain, but are made to sell, and will not hold any curtain but cobwebs. I have heard that idiot children are known from their birth by the circumstance that their hands do not close round anything. Webster naturally and always grasps, and therefore retains something from every company and circumstance. (*CW* XII 44-45)

It seems obvious that the hand here figures the action of the mind. The condition of not grasping anything is equated with the condition of idiocy. By contrast, the mind that always grasps "retains something from every company and circumstance." And what might that something be?

The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts… It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought… Precisely in proportion to the depth of the mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

Or, I might say, it depends on how far the process had gone, of transmuting life into truth. (*E&L* 56)

The above passages illustrates what can be retained from experience: from the Heraclitean surge of life, the mind extricates and preserves impressions by transmuting them into poetic or philosophical understanding.[15] To carry out this transfiguration, I propose, is what Emerson means by grasping. In this connection, I want to underline the importance the above passage attributes to the individual: the scholar imparts to the world "the new arrangement of his own mind" and the thought extracted from experience soars "in proportion to the depth of the mind from which it issued." Of course, there is a sense in which the idea issues from the mind that is common to all men and bears the imprint of that universal mind but it is hard to see how the statements just cited could refer to that common source: in order to identify an idea patterned after the arrangement of the scholar's own mind as something new or to distinguish its depth according to the mind it issued

[15] It need not concern us here that in many other places Emerson will call into doubt whether ideas actually stand outside the flux of becoming. In fact, I believe this is congenial to the argument I develop here about the importance he assigns plurality.

from, that mind must itself be distinct. Indeed, Emerson will tie the specificity of a perception to the uniqueness of the individual who thinks it and valorize this tie:

In every man's mind, some images, words, and facts remain, without effort on his part to imprint them, which others forget, and afterwards these illustrate to him important laws. All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud…
Each mind has its own method. A true man never acquires after college rules. What you have aggregated in a natural manner surprises and delights when it is produced. For we cannot oversee each other's secret. (*E&L* 419)

Each individual soul is such in virtue of its being a power to translate the world into some particular language of its own… You admire pictures, but it is as impossible for you to paint a right picture, as for grass to bear apples. But when genius comes, it makes fingers…
A man, a personal ascendancy is the only great phenomenon. When nature has work to be done, she creates a genius to do it… A man should know himself for a necessary actor… The thoughts he delights to utter are the reason of his incarnation… Did he not come into being because something must be done which he and no other is and does? If only he *sees,* the world will be visible enough… Hereto was he born, to deliver the thought of his heart from the universe to the universe, to do an office which nature could not forego, nor he be discharged from rendering, and then immerge again into the holy silence and eternity out of which as a man he arose. (*E&L* 122-4)[16]

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[16] It may be of interest to note in passing that Friedrich Nietzsche, a reader of Emerson who propounds a more unambiguously individualistic ethic, follows him in linking individuality with a principle that governs each man's seeing and valuing: "This, however, is the most means by which an inquiry into the most important aspect can be initiated. Let the youthful soul look back on life

The first thing I want to underline in these passages is their continuity with the discussion so far. Emerson is again talking about retaining impressions from experience by converting it into truth, the power he calls grasp (note the recurrent motif of the hand). Nature commissions the individual to utter its truth. There is a sense in which it would be trivial to note that this expression is always individual, that the universal as such is mute. But it is not so trivial to say that the principle that governs that expression in each person—his or her "particular language"--is what makes the person an individual. Numerical distinctness, by itself, is of little importance here; what is essential to nature's purpose is the singular manner in which the genius makes her truth vocal. And speaking this truth in his or her own voice is, on this view, the individual's *raison d'etre*—a necessity that in Emerson's characterization seems to amount to a destiny. (This, we may note, shows from another angle why Emerson equates imitation with suicide, since abdicating my unique angle of vision implies turning my back on the purpose my life can have.)

The preceding paragraphs have, I hope, enlarged our understanding of Emerson's notion of grasp. I now want to assay an interpretation of his metaphorical pronouncements anent individuality on the basis of that understanding. To recapitulate, Emerson says Man was divided into men to better

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with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and their sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self." (Untimely Meditations p. 129) A footnote on this page of the edition cited remarks the importance his reading of Emerson had for Nietzsche. I will have another word to say about this inheritance below.

serve his end. As I read it, that end is "grasp," the translation of life into wisdom through the elaboration and retention of timeless perceptions out of the stream of events. Our author indicates that the exercise of this power is always relative to the individual: it unfolds from his or her unique vantage point (a specificity that clearly includes the configuration of the individual's sensibilities and not only or chiefly his circumstantial particularity), in his or her particular language. "Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object fall successively into the subject itself." (*E&L* 489) In fact, Emerson holds that this personal way of seeing is what makes the individual an individual. My reading implies that the division of Man into men supports the perception and articulation of truth. How does it do so?

It may or may not be a substantive claim to say that individuality, as our author thinks of it, helps Man better serve his end by situating knowledge, focusing the truth through a particular lens. Emerson does assert something in this vein: "The termination of the world in a man, appears to be the last victory of intelligence. The universal does not attract us until housed in an individual." (*E&L* 122) While such statements may have great corrective value in some contexts, it seems to me they shed little light on the value individuation has for grasp. This is because it is not easy to imagine what a universal unsituated by connection to particulars would look like; from the perspective of the individual, this "last victory of intelligence" may be the first. I mention this Emersonian position because it is consonant with the metaphors of grasp and division and may be part of what he seeks to convey with them. However, I am going to argue that

more central to understanding them is the epistemological dimension of Emerson’s view of polarity.

Man was divided into men, just as the hand was divided into fingers, that he might better serve his end. The function of the hand and the function of Man, we have said, is grasp. But does the division into fingers allow the hand to grasp better? Or are fingers necessary for it to grasp at all? Would a fingerless appendage be a hand? It seems that the power to grasp does not belong to an individual finger. Can the same be said of individual thoughts and thinkers? Emerson writes,

Our geometry cannot span the huge orbits of the prevailing ideas, behold their return, and reconcile their opposition. We can only obey our own polarity… What to do? By obeying each thought frankly, by harping, or, if you will, pounding on each string, we learn at last its power. By the same obedience to other thoughts, we learn theirs, and then comes some reasonable hope of harmonizing them. (*E&L* 943)

This idea is advanced on the same page as a comment on two distinct problems, the question of how to synthesize the prevailing ideas of our time into consistent, applicable practical wisdom and on what Emerson calls the “double consciousness” of the irreconcilable, undeniable poles of freedom and necessity. I suspect its relevance is not circumscribed by these particular issues but that it states a general epistemological principle: obeying opposing thoughts in turn, we learn the power of each and may discover the possibility of harmonizing them.

Grasp, then, emerges between poles; it is not tied to any one idea but is sparked by the interplay and succession of opposites. To support this, however, it behooves me to clarify what is meant by harmonizing opposites.

It is safe to say that Emerson's corpus, marked by a constant collision of opposing ideas, embodies the approach described above and, in turn, illuminates the view that undergirds it. The prospect of harmonizing opposites does not lie in a further thought that synthesizes the two. "Fate," the essay cited above, contains not only one of Emerson's most explicit statements on the action of opposites but also his most notable application of the idea. The opening lines that introduce the issue of spanning opposites declare "To me, however, the question of the times resolved itself into a practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?" (*E&L* 943) This signals that what is sought in the attempt to compass "the prevailing ideas" is practical wisdom, a discernment of what to do. When Emerson brings his method to bear on the antinomy of freedom and determinism, he arrives at the following counsel:

One key, one solution to the mysteries of the human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom, and foreknowledge, exists, the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one, and the other foot on the back of the other. (*E&L* 966)

If the meaning of this counsel is not altogether transparent, the point I wish to take from it is, I hope, more or less self-evident: it does not efface or resolve the

duality it addresses but advocates the use of it to carry us forward. This, I suggest, is just a representative exercise of self-reliance, which must be exercised in the recognition that one's own self, like the world, is constituted by polarity.

Let's bring this back to the division of Man into men. If the truth is to be sought in the field generated by opposites and men are individuated by the singular outlook each offers on the world, it would seem that plurality, individuality, is indispensable to grasp because it creates the multiplicity within which perspectives diverge, collide, set off one another. "The world stands by balanced antagonisms. The more peculiarities are pressed the better the result." (*CW* XII 49) Thus, individuals are essential to the expression of nature's inexhaustible, layered secret as well as to each other's understanding. Seeing through contradictions demands, on the one hand, that one enter fully into one's own perspective, develop one's own autonomous voice and vision, but also that one remain in dialogue with the opposing views, even to the extent of entering into them to learn their power. Solitude is the most propitious condition for finding one's vision. The genius who regards the world as fluid is freest to impart to it the design of his own mind because he is unfettered by received preconceptions of how he should engage it. However, since Nature outstrips any one perspective, descrying it requires that I go outside myself. If, as I have suggested, grasp is the action of self-reliance, self-reliance is also always Other-reliance, since by its nature it requires an attunement to divergent ways of seeing—the very difference that, for Emerson, individuates individuals.

I hope I have shown that Emerson has an intriguing, provocative view of solitude and individuality. However, his position—like any philosopher's—is open to doubts and reservations. I would now like to comment on one aspect that strikes me as especially problematic. It might seem that the uses Emerson's account of individuality makes of flux and fixity undercut each other. This compasses several possible points of contention. One of them is the attribution of something like a fixed principle of perception to the individual. This can be a worry in more than one context. First, one might wonder, why should the individual be a constant in the world of flux the spirit itself creates? Second, to the extent that the individual, through his well-defined, characteristic vision, does represent a constant, doesn't this call into question the idea of submitting to opposing thoughts? Can I truly be said to have deeply understood the power of a contrary perspective without embracing it? Finally, if I really can enter into diverse and contrary perspectives, doesn't this call into question the use of perspective as the basis of individuation? If every perspective is available to every man, have we really discovered any use in the division of Man into men? Couldn't a lone thinker, perhaps with a little diligence, generate the oppositions which adumbrate Nature's secret?

The first two of the above of questions presuppose that constancy and flux rigidly exclude each other. This is not a self-evident presupposition and two of Emerson's recreant, disparate heirs explicitly disclaim it with respect to the self. "I seem," writes John Dewey, "to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to

assimilate something from each and yet striving to carry it forward in a way that is logically consistent with what has been learned from its predecessors." (Dewey 155) Similarly[17], for Friedrich Nietzsche, the measure of a life is the unity and complexity one can achieve in it; the greatest individuals, those who can forge out of the greatest diversity of experiences and forces in their souls a coherent whole. (Winchester, 141) This is not to say that cleaving to one's own vision and entering into another's cannot be in tension. The dialectic Emerson exemplifies in the opposition between Reformer and Conservative can surely play out in the mental life as well as in outward action. The difficulty of combining unity of diversity doubtless explains in part why Nietzsche and Emerson reckon it a great achievement. "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." If we read this pronouncement in light of Emerson's exhortation to multiperspectival impersonality, we realize that the great man is great not merely in virtue of the force of will with which he resists the influence of the crowd. Rather, to forge continuity where none appears demands the ability to view opposites in a new light—that is, genius. As Emerson describes it, a person's vision is a foundational method or principle that organizes his perceptions. The individual cannot abdicate his way of seeing—it does not desert him in the transition from a thought to its opposite. (Indeed, might not the oppositions that appear to one be a function of

[17] One might balk at seeing Nietzsche lumped with a model of "logical consistency," since he had a notoriously low opinion of it, preferring the musical variety. However, Dewey contemplates an expansive sense of the logical that is explicitly cognizant of Emerson. See Konvitz and Whicher, 24-25.

one's way of seeing?) One can, however, develop or fail to develop greater discernment through it, see a wider or broader panorama.

The inability to abandon my distinctive way of seeing would seem to imply that I can't really enter into anyone else's. This does, indeed, turn out to be Emerson's position: "Each mind has its own method… What you have aggregated in a natural manner surprises and delights when it is produced. For *we cannot oversee each other's secret*." (*E&L* 419, emphasis added) This might seem inconsistent with Emerson's injunction to yield successively to different and opposite thoughts, as well as with the valuation of individuality predicated on its ability to produce revelations that arise between conflicting viewpoints. How can I measure the difference between my thought and my brother's when I cannot, in principle, apprehend his? The gulf between one mind and another appears to be a special case of Emerson's larger claim that "souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with." (*E&L* 473) However, it must be remembered that it is not instruction but *provocation* that we can, for Emerson, receive from another mind. This is, I have suggested, due in part to his view that truth reveals itself only through intuition, but it would seem to follow as well from the incommensurability between one mind's method and another's. As long as another mind can *provoke* me to thought and apprehension, the value of plurality is not undercut by my inability to penetrate into that mind's secret. Thus, *pace* the misgivings I expressed above, individuality in Emerson turns out to be irreducible and necessary.

The unbridgeable distance between individuals fosters, or ought to foster, the independence of spirit that is central to Emersonian solitude:

"I like that every chair should be a throne, and hold a king. I prefer a tendency to stateliness, to an excess of fellowship. Let the incommunicable objects and the metaphysical isolation of man teach us independence. Let us not be too much acquainted. I would have a man enter his house through a hall filled with heroic and sacred sculptures, that he might not want the hint of tranquility and self-poise. We should meet each morning, as from foreign countries, and spending the day together, should depart at night, as into foreign countries." (*E&L* 522)

Emerson does not spell out how this isolation is supposed to teach us independence but it is not so difficult to piece together. The crucial point is the realization that (as an old teacher of mine once put it) we live as we dream, alone; that although the provocations of others may impart an impetus or direction to the course of an individual's existence, no two individuals can coinhabit the same reality. The peril of the illusion that we thus coexist is that it can easily lead me to seek in another mind the perceptions that, according to Emerson, I alone was born to reap.

In the end, it would be reasonable to wonder whether our enquiry has not effected a reversal. What I set out to scrutinize in this section was whether it made any sense to repudiate influence, custom and imitation, as Emerson enjoins us to, for the sake of a truth that is said to be universal. The gist of the answer I have traced is that it does because the universal never reveals itself as a totality; it is

given not merely in the aggregate but in the conjunction, the contrast and the interstices between diverse perspectives. This is why the individual voice must be preserved for the universal to find expression. However, invoking irreducible plurality and "the metaphysical isolation of man" call into question why we should view these expressions as different views of a single universal. The unbridgeable alterity of the individual vision certainly seems to undercut the view that every man is an inlet to the same and all of the same. I suggest that Emerson can only use these arguments consistently if the plurality of expressions grow out of or supervene on a substrate that is not plural. In the third chapter, I will suggest that he does hold such a view and scrutinize the reasons we may have for accepting it.

* * *

"Oh, don't be so reticent! I can feel there's something special about you. There's a look in your eyes… I'm positive you communicate with spirits. I'm not asking out of idle curiosity, Sinclair. No, I am a seeker myself, you know, and I'm so very alone."

"Go ahead and tell me about it. I don't know much about spirits. I live in my dreams—that's what you sense. Other people live in dreams, but not in their own. That's the difference."

-- Herman Hesse

I understood the silence of the heavens; I never understood the words of men.

-- Hölderlin

2. **Christian Agony**

A distinctive understanding of solitude is also pivotal to Unamuno's ethics. That understanding is deeply intertwined with the Basque author's irrationalist epistemology. Thus, the first of this section's three parts will describe that epistemology in detail. I will lay out and do my best to motivate the opposition and mutual dependence he describes between reason, on the one hand, and faith and life on the other. Second, I will argue that the antagonism he sees between civilization and the single individual reproduces the dialectic of life and reason. Central to the relation Unamuno envisages between society and solitude are his claims that (1) the Christian is separated from society by a personal, incommunicable truth; and that (2) civilization lives on the fruits of the individual's solitude. While the second of these will be addressed in the fourth chapter, I devote much of this one to elucidating the first claim in light of Unamuno's retelling of the tale of Don Quijote. I will suggest that the case of Quijote shows us that the individual's own truth is self-knowledge, specifically of a kind gained through romantic love and the struggle against death.

My starting point will be the relation our author describes between knowledge and life. If one can speak of life having a principle, a vital principle, this is, for Unamuno (drawing on Spinoza's concept of *conatus*), the impetus each being has to persist in its being and, at the same time, to seek to transcend it by ever becoming more than it already is. [18](*TSL* 43) "A man is only fully a man when he wishes to be more than a man."[19] (DQ 68)

A life, then, is anything but constant—it is a perpetual striving, growth and change. But, as Unamuno sees it, change is precisely what reason cannot countenance:

> Strictly speaking, reason is the enemy of life.
>
> Intelligence is a dreadful matter. It tends toward death in the way that memory tends toward stability. That which lives, that which is absolutely unstable, absolutely individual, is, strictly speaking, unintelligible. Logic tends to reduce everything to identities and genera, to a state where each representation has no more than one single selfsame content in whatever place, time, or relation the representation may occur to us. But nothing is the same for two successive moments of its being. My idea of God is different each time I conceive it. Identity, which is death, is precisely what the intellect seeks. The mind seeks what is dead, for the living escapes it. It seeks to congeal the flowing stream into blocks of ice. It seeks to arrest the flow. In order to analyze a body it is first necessary to reduce it or to destroy it. In order to understand anything, it must first be killed, laid out rigid in the mind. Science is a cemetery of dead ideas, even though live ideas are born of it. Worms, also, feed upon corpses. My own thoughts, tumultuous and agitated in the recesses of my mind, once torn up by their roots

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[18] See Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*], trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Bollingen, 1990), p. 43. Cited henceforth as *TSL*.
[19] Miguel de Unamuno, *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*, (Madrid: Alianza, 2000), p. 68. Cited henceforth as *DQ*. Throughout this thesis, where no English-language edition is referenced, translations are this author's.

from my heart, poured out upon this paper and here fixed in unalterable form, are already the cadavers of thought. (*TSL* 100-01)

Given certain plausible premises, the above view of reason as anti-vital follows more or less directly from the equation of life with *conatus* and the Dionysian flux. In order for something to become an object for reason, it must in some sense be assimilated to the known. It is not possible to think of an object in relation to others unless they are represented as being in some sense comparable—i.e., in some respect identical. Nor can we reason without assuming that the meaning of our terms will hold constant.[20] It might appear that Unamuno is running together different points when he opposes both "the absolutely unstable" and "the absolutely individual" to reason in the same breath, especially since his arguments juxtapose the protean nature of life and the static character of thought. After all, there is nothing incoherent about a static individuality. However, from the point of view of the reductive cognition he describes, flux and distinctive individuality represent the same thing, namely an exception, a gap in its dominion, an enclave outside the system.

The individual—which in Unamuno's account is equated with the vital and irrational—is external to the known. But this is not to say that reason and its opposites (faith, life and will—all of them expressions of *conatus*) are isolated and independent from each other. "Reason and faith are enemies of each other and neither can maintain itself without the other. The irrational seeks to be made rational, and reason can operate only on the basis of the irrational. They must rely

[20] A less evident assumption Unamuno needs to impugn reason as anti-vital is that thinking is, at least in our case, part of what it is to live, rather than an instrumental adjunct to life.

on each other and associate—but associate in battle, for battle is a form of association." (*TSL* 123-4) Why does our author think they are intertwined and interdependent?

Unamuno characterizes two chief respects in which he thinks faith depends on reason. First,

> Faith in immortality is irrational. Nevertheless, faith and life and reason are mutually in need of each other. The vital longing is not properly speaking a problem, it can not be given any logical status, it can not be formulated in propositions rationally disputable; but it poses itself as a problem the way hunger poses itself as a problem. Likewise the wolf, when it hurls itself upon its prey to devour it or upon a she-wolf to impregnate it, can not state rationally, or logically pose, the "problem" of its impulse. (*TSL* 123)

The analogy suggests both the heterogeneity of, and the close connection between, *conatus* and reasoning. Hunger, on the one hand, is not a conceptual production—it doesn't depend on beliefs about the organism's physiological needs or even on prior acquaintance with food. On the other hand, responding to it will almost inevitably entail means-ends reasoning, which operates on conceptual representations.

Further, Unamuno, continues,

> And if, as I have said, faith—life—can sustain itself only by depending upon reason, which will make it transmissible—transmissible, especially, from me to myself; that is, reflective and conscious—then, by the same token, reason can sustain itself only upon faith, upon life, even if it is merely upon faith in reason, upon faith which is good for something more than knowledge, upon faith which is good for living. And yet, faith is not transmissible or rational, and neither is reason vital.

> Will and intelligence have need of one another, and that old aphorism *nihil volitum quin praecognitum*, nothing is willed but what is previously known, can be inverted without being as paradoxical as may seem at first sight: *nihil cognitum quin praevolitum*, nothing is known but what is previously willed.[21] (*TSL* 125)

This passage continues the argument discussed above for faith's dependence on reason: to come to terms with his irrational need, the individual has to thematize or rationalize it. However, coming to terms with it, we realize, isn't limited to instrumental reasoning. It also includes becoming conscious of myself in relation to my situation and the capacity to express that need to myself and to others. It is in this sense that the irrational demands to be rationalized. But Unamuno also claims the rational depends on the irrational. The premise that leads him to conclude that "nothing is known but what is previously willed" is to be found earlier in the text in the argument that the will to live creates the world as we know it:

> Knowledge remains at the service of the need to go on living, primarily at the service of personal survival. And this need and this instinct have created in man the organs of knowledge and given them the range they have. Man sees, hears, touches, tastes and smells whatever he must see, hear, touch, taste and smell in order to go on living… If he does not perceive colors below red or beyond violet, it is perhaps because those between red and violet suffice for his purposes of self-preservation… Knowledge, then, is primarily at the service of the instinct of self-preservation… And thus it may be said that the instinct of self-preservation itself makes the world's reality and truth perceptible to us. For it is

[21] Anthony Kerrigan renders this as "willed," probably in order to emphasize the polarity of intellect and will. While that may be closer to "*volitum,*" the Spanish "querido" could just as well be translated "wished for," "loved" or "desired." I mention this to help the reader appreciate the connection I draw below to another of Unamuno's arguments.

this instinct which chooses—from the unfathomable and limitless world of the possible—everything that exists for us. (*TSL* 27-28)

Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color: what becomes manifest to us out of the boundless plenitude of creation is what meets our vital needs. This is why reason can only operate on the irrational: because all reason has access to in the fathomless universe, itself irrational, is what *conatus*, the irrational vital impulse, shows it. Reason, for Unamuno, is not in any sense its own ground. The matter it can act on comes to it from without, furnished to it by the will to live.

Despite their mutual dependence, reason and the will clash—most pointedly, for Unamuno, on the central issue of personal immortality. The anxious heart cries out for assurance that the individual will endure beyond the threshold of death. And this assurance, he believes, reason cannot provide. On the contrary, it denies even the validity of the question. This is because, Unamuno thinks, a complete explanatory model of the world can be assembled without positing anything like a soul—let alone its imperishability. (*TSL* 121) It is our hope for an afterlife that conjures this elusive entity. But the recognition that that inextinguishable hope is irrational by no means quells it. Hoping despite reason's gainsaying of our hope, we enter the state of what Unamuno calls "vital skepticism," wherein faith and reason contend unendingly for our assent. Or at least, Unamuno tells us in one of his most characteristic lines, the struggle ought not to conclude: "For my part I do not want to make peace between my heart and my head, between my faith and my reason; I prefer that they be at war." (*TSL* 132) This preference is presumably grounded in his position that "we live solely

from contradictions." (*TSL* 17) It is not self-evident why one should find contradictions essential to life but I will offer a brief argument that there are persuasive reasons for this (reasons culled from Unamunian positions, although he does not combine them into systematic argument I sketch here).

When Unamuno bemoans that methodical Cartesian doubt is "very cold, a not very vitalizing force, and, above all, rather artificial," (*TSL* 119) we glean that the belief he seeks is not cool and dispassionate, like a merely dispositional belief, but an ardent, vitalizing conviction. To entertain such a conviction, I suggest, cannot be a passive or static state; it must always be an *act* of the spirit. What kind of act? Perhaps an overcoming. On this view, it is the opposition to the belief that energizes it. Unamuno has said that nothing can be known that has not first been desired. But, as Plato would point out, what we desire is that which we are not in possession of. The doubt that opposes the belief debars us from certainty. Perhaps, then, attaining the conviction consists in wresting it from our fears and misgivings; its strength, the strength we invest in doing so. In that case, it should be clear why Unamuno wishes for strife between his heart and head, for the passionate conviction he strives toward is forged in this fundamental *agon*. This is why Unamuno will even equate dogmatic or unreflective faith, "that faith without a shadow of a doubt, that faith of stupid charcoal burners" with infidelity,[22] since to renounce doubt is also to forsake the possibility of belief.

Perhaps Unamuno's most trenchant and compacted pronouncements on solitude are contained in his portrayal of the Christian estranged from and at war

[22] *TSL* 134. Kerrigan's translation of *infidelidad* as "lack of faith" seems to weaken Unamuno's point here, that closing oneself to doubt constitutes a kind of apostasy.

with Christendom. It must be said at the outset that this is not a descriptive characterization of the conduct of Christians in the world but an exhortation, a vision of the solitary way of life our author advocates.

In the introduction to The Agony of Christianity, Unamuno records a reflection prompted by the inscription "I am the way, the truth and the life" in a Parisian church:

> I once again felt myself on an island and wondered—or dreamed rather—whether the way and life are the same thing as truth, whether there isn't some contradiction between truth and life, whether it is not truth that kills illusion and life that maintains it. And then I thought of the agony of Christianity, the agony of Christianity in itself and each of us. Though, in actual fact, is there any Christianity outside each one of us?
>
> And hence the tragedy. For truth is something collective, social, even civil; truth is what we agree to be true and by which we understand each other. And Christianity is something individual and incommunicable. And thus the reason why it agonizes in each of us.[23] (*Agony* 5)

We have already seen how reason and life are opposed. Here, this antagonism is connected with the opposition between sociality and personal singularity. What aspects of the (rational) truth-life opposition are crucial to the agony Unamuno refers to? The passage highlights three polarities:

1) Nurturing illusion versus destroying it.
2) Individuality versus collectivity.
3) Intelligibility versus incommunicability.

[23] Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity,* trans. Anthony Kerrigan, (Princeton: Bollingen, 1974), p. 5. Cited henceforth as *Agony*.

I will bracket the first of these for now; the importance of illusion should emerge from the discussion of Don Quijote at the end of this section. I begin, instead, with the individual nature of Christianity and the collective nature of truth. The truth, Unamuno tells us, is what most or all of us hold to be true.[24] This consensual truth presupposes intelligibility: for all hands to agree upon a proposition, it must be possible for that proposition to be publicized, communicated to the community at large. In some sense, it must be inscribed in a commonplace—symbolized, for example, in a shared language or designating a plane of experience that is intersubjectively available. However, Unamuno also distinguishes another kind of truth:

> I must confess that the greatest confidence I can have in my soundness of judgment has been given to me at those moments at which observing what others do and what they don't do, listening to what they say and what they keep quiet, the fleeting suspicion has arisen in me that I might be mad.
>
> It is said that to be mad is to have lost one's reason. Reason, but not truth, for there are madmen who utter the truths the rest keep quiet because it is not rational or reasonable to utter them and this is why they are reckoned mad. And what is reason? Reason is that which we all agree on, all or at least most of us. The truth is something else, reason is social; the truth, normally, is completely individual, personal and incommunicable. Reason unites us and truths separate us. (*Novel* 103-4)

It should be clear that Christianity's opposition to collective truth lies not in its being *false* in any sense of that term but in its being singular and thus removed from the common space in which consensus and convention can be founded. The struggle between Christendom, unified by its acceptance of certain views, and the

[24] This kind of truth is privileged by later thinkers such as Pierce, Dewey and Habermas.

solitary Christian, set apart by his own truth, embodies the opposition between reason and life. Yet we have seen that life and reason need each other, that the irrational seeks to be rationalized (which amounts to the private seeking to the disclose itself, to become public) and that reason can only act upon the irrational. This would lead us to expect that Christian society or civilization and the single individual's faith are also indispensable to each other. This turns out to be precisely Unamuno's position:

> Since Christendom cannot live without or outside civilization and culture, Christianity agonizes. And so does Christian civilization, which is an innate contradiction. And both—Christianity and what we call Graeco-Roman or Western civilization—live through this agony, live off this agony. If the Christian faith, agonic and despairing, dies, our civilization will die; if our civilization dies, the Christian faith will die. (*Agony* 61)

Like Kant's *noumena*, inaccessible in principle to representation, the Christian individual's incommunicable secret unavoidably, if paradoxically, raises the question of what on earth such a secret might be. Further, it is not evident why either of the antagonists in the war between the Christian and civilization should depend upon the other. In fact, just before he avows that dependence, Unamuno makes it clear that "Protestantism and Catholicism may be judged in their relation to civilization. But christianhood[25], evangelical christianhood, has nothing whatever to do with civilization; and nothing to do with culture." (*Agony* 60) At

[25] I use this neologism to replace Anthony Kerrigan's rendering of *cristiandad* as "Christianity," which misleadingly effaces the distinction between *Cristianismo* and *cristiandad*. In Unamuno's usage, the latter designates not a body of doctrine but "the [personal] quality of being a Christian." "Cristiandad", our author acknowledges, has come to signify the community of Christians, just as "humanity" has come to collectively designate those who possess the quality of humanity. "But this is manifestly an absurdity, for community kills christianhood, which involves only isolated souls." (Agony 14)

various points in the text cited, he will underscore that it has even less to do with matters of policy, questions of social welfare and other vicissitudes of the life men lead in common. What, then, can the Christian, *qua* Christian, gain from his brethren in the aggregate, when his final concerns lie far afield from the picayune temporal pursuits they share in? How, by the same token, can civilization derive anything from the incommunicable secret of the inner man, when this is both inaccessible and irrelevant to it? My emphasis in the balance of this section will be to shed some light on what Unamuno might take to be a personal, incommunicable truth and to explore its significance in the life of the individual. This should put us in a good position for exploring the antagonistic, symbiotic relationship between individual and civilization in the last chapter. But a few observations about that relationship are in order here.

Extrapolating from the dialectic we examined above between rational and irrational suggests that civilization, which deals with the intersubjectively available on the basis of rational principles, has need of the irrational, which the single individual contributes, as the matter it acts upon. It is possible to read Unamuno's rather vague comment that "[h]istory is a matter of burying the dead so that we may live from them" (*Agony* 57) along these lines. (The suggestion that dead, rather than living, individuals sustain civilization hardly comes as a surprise, given the opposition Unamuno posits between reason and life.)

Our author's dialectic also suggests that the individual cannot express or become aware of the irrational principle—that is, become self-aware--outside a social context. This would explain his words of caution to a correspondent:

"Only in society will you find yourself; if you isolate yourself from it you will only come upon a phantom of your true self. Only in society do you acquire your whole meaning, but detached from it." (Adentro 231)

Here, acquiring solidity or one's whole meaning could very well amount to giving self-conscious expression to one's vital, personal secret.

While passages like these in Unamuno's more abstract philosophical pronouncements allow us to form some idea of his view of solitude, I believe the strongest argument for it and most distinct portrayal emerge in the pages of his re-telling of Cervantes' tale of Don Quijote. In the remainder of this section, I will read Unamuno's Don Quijote with a view to elucidating the Unamunian understanding of solitude, paying special attention to its ethical implications and the role the self plays in it.

The well known story of Don Quijote can be outlined in few words. Gripped by a delusion in which he is cast as a knight errant, the middle aged Alonso Quijano leaves his family hearth to wander the backwaters of the province of La Mancha in the company of his venal squire, Sancho. All that he sees acquires an epic cast, transfigured by the molten light of his madness. Don Quijote encounters convicts as galley slaves, trulls as damsels in distress and windmills as giants. He confronts each such delusory encounter as befits a knight, endeavoring to combat injustice and liberate the oppressed—to the derisive amusement of the philistine burghers around him. Unamuno's approach to this tale, the one the present commentary will pursue, focuses on Quijote as a moral exemplar—in the words of Schopenhauer, as "an allegory of the life of every man

who, unlike others, will not be careful merely for his own personal welfare, but pursues an objective, ideal end that has taken possession of his thinking and willing; and then, of course, in this world he looks queer and odd." (WWR I 241)

What makes the Christian solitary? Unamuno's discussion of Don Quijote, a representative figure, shows us that what separates an individual from others is self-knowledge:

> "I know who I am!"—says the hero, because his heroism makes him know his own self. The hero can say "I know who I am," and herein lie both his strength and his misfortune. His strength because, since he knows who he is, he has no reason to fear anyone, save God, who made him who he is; and his misfortune, because he alone knows, here on earth, who he is, and since the others do not know, all that he does or says will appear to them to be said or done by one who does not know himself, a madman…
>
> It is a great and terrible thing for the hero to be the only one who sees his heroism on the inside, in his very entrails, and for the rest to see it only on the outside, in his extrails.[26] This is what makes the hero live alone amidst men and this solitude serves him as comforting company… It is not enough to exclaim "I know who I am!", it is necessary to know it, and the deception soon becomes evident when someone says it and doesn't know and perchance doesn't even believe he knows. And if he says it and believes it, he will bear with resignation the adversity of others who judge him with the general law and not with God. (DQ 67-8)

This passage reiterates the connection between madness, solitude and individuality and their opposition to social existence. Here the secret that estranges the Christian from other men is simply (or not so simply) the knowledge

[26] Unamuno's play here on the words "entrañas" (entrails) and "extrañas" (strange) cannot be rendered into English.

of his own self. Even before we press further to ask what form self-knowledge will take, it is worth asking why Unamuno thinks the hero is inured by it against all fear except the fear of God. This attribution would seem to depend on the premise that all one ever hopes or fears for, all that is ever at stake for the hero, is self-knowledge. Whatever may be said for this view, it is certainly not self-evident. What seems to me the most plausible way of taking this claim is that the individual self contains the principle of whatever woe and weal one is open to. Although much remains to be said in this connection, I hope even at this point the claim that, for example, the glory of Dulcinea and the menace of the giants come to Don Quijote from within his own self, has some *prima facie* plausibility. Given his view that it is will or desire which makes the objects of knowledge available to us--"*nihil cognitum quin praevolitum"*—it is clear that Unamuno would regard Don Quijote in this respect as a figure of us all. If, then, as Unamuno holds, self-knowledge serves the hero as a bulwark against all fear, this may be because it discloses the very horizons of personal destiny, circumscribing whatever vicissitudes affect our fortune.[27] Having read his fortune in his entrails, the hero can never be in dread of the unknown; he is in possession of his life's principle.

Unamuno's conception of self-knowledge is implicit in our discussion of the above passage but becomes more explicit just below it in the text:

Don Quijote discoursed with his will, and when he said "I know who I am!", what he said was nothing other than "I know who I wish to be!". For all

[27] Beyond those horizons, standing here for the irreducible contingency of the individual's constitution and, derivatively, of life, lies God. As it will become clear, this is an atypical moment in Unamuno. Throughout his writings, God's creativity usually parallels human creativity and only in the form of mortality does contingency intrude on individual self-creation. However, the rôle He plays here is certainly consistent with our author's privileging of the irrational dimension of the self.

human life hinges on this: the man knows who he wishes to be. What you are should matter little to you; what is paramount for you is what you wish to be. The being you are is no more than a caducous and perishable being, who eats the fruits of the earth and whom the earth shall some day eat; what you wish to be is your idea in God, the Consciousness of the Universe: it is the divine idea of which you are a manifestation in time and space. And the impulse that propels you toward that person whom you wish to be is nothing other than the homesickness that draws you to your divine home. (DQ 68)

Self-knowledge, then, is a form of knowledge that collapses any putative divide between knowing and willing: the hero discovers who he is in the act of willing to be. Paralleling Kant's privileging practical over theoretical truth as the highest achievement of reason, Unamuno grants this self-knowledge through the will ascendancy over whatever inert, static facts can be discovered about the individual: what one is is of no importance beside what one wishes to be. There is the suggestion, on the one hand, that it derives this ascendancy from being the spatiotemporal expression of a self that is—like the Schopenhauerian idea of a person—outside time and space. On the other hand, the argument clearly takes some of its force from the self's orientation toward the future:

> And inasmuch as a person is a will, and will always has reference to the future, whoever believes, believes in what is to come—that is, in what he hopes. We do not believe, strictly speaking, in what is or what was, except as warranty for and as substance of what is to be. (*TSL* 209)

Since Unamuno sees *conatus*, which always aims at the future, as the essence of each individual, he finds in the people we passionately long to be a greater reality than that possessed by the people we merely are.

Now, as a first step toward understanding the solitude of the individual Christian, let us ask in light of the above view of personal reality: who is Don Quijote? Unamuno's commentary repeatedly highlights that the Knight of the Sad Countenance is spurred by two inextinguishable yearnings. The first is the hankering after renown as a means to eternal life:

> The anxiousness for glory and renown is the intimate spirit of quixoticism, its essence and its reason for being… What is essential is to hand one's name down through the centuries, to live in the memories of people. What is essential is not to die! Not to die! Not to die! That is the final root, the root of roots of quixotic madness. Not to die! Not to die! Longing for life; longing for eternal life is what gave you immortal fame, my lord Don Quijote; the dream of your life was and is not to die. (DQ 279)

Second, Don Quijote is driven by his love for Dulcinea del Toboso, an anima[28]-like figure that Alonso Quijano, Don Quijote's sane alter ego, originally projects onto Aldonza Lorenzo, a woman he has but glimpsed a handful of times—a Beatrice to Quijote's Dante:

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[28] In Jungian psychology, the anima is "the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definitive feminine image" that "every man carries within him." (Jung (1981) 198). Jung remarks that "this perilous image of Woman… stands for the loyalty which in the interests of life he must sometimes forgo; she is the much needed compensation for the risks, struggles, sacrifices that all end in disappointment; she is the solace for all the bitterness of life. And, at the same time, she is the great illusionist, the seductress who draws him into life with her Maya—and not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects, but into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another." (Jung (1976) 150) Erich Neumann underlines that the anima "lures and encourages the male to all the adventures of the soul and spirit, of action and creation in the inner and the outward world." (Neumann 33) Although the anima is not the image of this or that individual woman, what man apprehends of it he apprehends through projection, a process through which a content of the unconscious is transferred to an outer object, usually a person or symbol, and thereby experienced as something the ego reckons external and "real." Thus, "every mother and every beloved is forced to become the embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image." (Jung (1976) 148) The intrapsychic union of anima and animus, the male and female imagos, is a catalyst for religious experience. (Ulanov 127) Close parallels to many of these ideas will become evident in the discussion of Dulcinea. A thorough comparison of Jungian thought and Unamuno's would find others, such as the maternal-filial element in romantic love, that are outside the scope of the present reflections.

> Don Quijote… observed that if it were not for the courage Dulcinea infused in his breast, he would not be able to kill a flea, for it was not his courage, but Dulcinea's, which, taking his arms as the instrument of its deeds, brought them to fruition. And so it is forsooth that when we conquer it is Glory that conquers for us. "She fights in me and triumphs in me, and I live and breathe in her and have life and being." (DQ 135)

As Don Quijote sees it, he, in the capacity of a hero, simply functions as a vessel for noble impulses whose fountainhead lies not within him but in his muse. In doing so, he gives expression to his longing for her.

Below, I try to elucidate the solitude of the single individual on the basis of the longing that, according to our author, constitutes his essential self. In doing so, I would like to begin to underline how, in Unamuno's thought, the individual and the universal shape and interpenetrate each other. As a first approximation, I want to suggest that the passions at the center of Don Quijote's self—love and death—are two universal aspects of the human condition which nonetheless individuate persons absolutely. Since Unamuno's perspective on death will be prominent in the last chapter, my emphasis here will be on the first of these; my discussion will address Unamuno's understanding of the quest for immortality as part of the *telos* of love. However, in order to better appreciate what the two have in common, I want to first say a few words about how why and how death individuates.

First, Unamuno observes that the prospect the Christian responds to is not the end of the shared world but "a foreboding of his own individual world's end… of the world he [bears] within himself." Although, as we shall see, Unamuno

thinks salvation can be sought with others, the cataclysm each seeks to be saved from is uniquely his own. "Under the pain of death, of perishing altogether, each [of the Christian faithful] had to create an individual religion, a *religio quae non religat*: a paradox, in short. For as human beings we live together, but each one dies alone, and death is the supreme solitude." (*Agony* 20) My mortality shadows only me; my death can befall no one else. I can only fear death for my own self.[29]

Second, since death is "the supreme solitude," the consummation of being alone, Unamuno thinks solitude inherently refers us to this prospect:

> the human question, I must repeat once again: the human question is the question of what will become of my consciousness, of yours, of that other's and of everyone's, after each of us dies. Anything other than facing this is making noise to not hear ourselves. And this is why we fear solitude so much and seek the company of others.
>
> Each seeks society only to flee from himself, and thus, what foregather and converse are only vain shadows, miserable specters of men. (Soledad 34)

Here dialogue, like rational thought, is depicted as an absconding from the dimension of the individual's uniqueness, which in this passage assumes the grim visage of one's ownmost horizon, death. Unamuno implies that persons who thus

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[29] Tolstoy attributes the following reflections to his moribund Ivan Ilyich: "The example of a syllogism which he had learned in Kiezewetter's *Logic*: 'Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal,' had seemed to him all his life to be true as applied to Caius but certainly not as regards himself. That Caius—man in the abstract—was mortal, was perfectly correct; but he was not Caius, nor man in the abstract: he had always been a creature quite, quite different from all others. He had been little Vanya with a mamma and a papa, and Mita and Volodya, with playthings and the coachman and nurse; and afterwards with Katya and with all the joys and griefs and ecstasies of childhood, boyhood and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Was it Caius who had kissed his mother's hand like that, and had Caius heard the silken rustle of her skirts? Was it Caius who had rioted like that over the cakes and pastry at the Law School? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at sessions as he did?" (Tolstoy 137) In this passage, death—or, rather, the resistance to death wherein Unamuno locates the essence of the individual—refers the subject to the concreteness of his lived experience where, according to Unamuno and Emerson, the most singular and personal opens up into the universal.

fearfully seek refuge in each other cannot truly meet because by shirking the self-confrontation foreshadowed in silence, they leave behind the substance of themselves. The conditions for the kind of togetherness he advocates instead will begin to emerge in our discussion of Don Quijote.

Even if we prescind from the specific self depicted in the portrait of Don Quijote, we can say in general of the self as Unamuno thinks of it that, since it is revealed in the experience of longing to be (and its underside, the dread of not being), it can only be apprehended from the *first person* perspective, by the one who *actively* entertains the desire. *Both* of the aspects stressed give us reason to consider self-knowledge a solitary perception but it may not be evident how the second does. The active character of this cognition is crucial in light of the importance Unamuno places on doubt. As we have seen, our author thinks the categories and concepts of reason are dead and static. On the other hand,

> The way to live, to struggle, to struggle for life and to live on the struggle, on faith, is to doubt. We have already said as much in another work, recalling the Gospel passage: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24) A faith that does not doubt is a dead faith. (*Agony* 10)

The passage is representative of Unamuno's wariness of closed questions and settled answers. He often insists that to be defined is to be dead. Fittingly, then, self-knowledge is not, in his view, a finished, consummated knowledge:

> And I have made myself a problem, a question, a project of myself. How does one resolve this? By making of the project a trajectory, of the problem a *meta-problem*; by struggling. And thus struggling, civilly, plumbing myself as a problem, as a question, for me, I shall go beyond and into myself… (*Novel* 146-47)

Self-knowledge is never completed but is constantly produced by the self-seeker. (In more contemporary terms, we might say that for Unamuno, existence precedes essence.) But this precludes any understanding of the self founded on established concepts, such as social or professional roles. Thus, as Unamuno happily realized, the solitary individual is not readily intelligible to others.

On the other hand, the self envisaged in Don Quijote's longings is a self projected into the outer world; his conception of the self he longs to be is framed in relation to the not-I. It is hard to imagine how this could be otherwise. Can we conceive of a self that is not situated, not shaped by circumstance? What would such a self consist in? Unamuno warns against this divorce of the quest for the ideal from the quotidian:

> Do you really believe that one can put one's life and soul into a work that is undertaken out of love for Dulcinea and so that it will make you famous, not only in the present but in the centuries ahead, if we are not spurred to it by the little miseries of the shabby placelet or the big place where we eat, sleep and live? The best book of Universal History, the most enduring and extensive and most truly universal, would be the book of whoever managed to relate with their full life and depth the quarrels, the gossip, the intrigue and scheming that go on in Carbajosa de la Sierra, a town of three hundred neighbors, between the mayor and the mayoress, the male and female schoolteachers, the secretary and his girlfriend, on the one hand, and on the other the priest and his lady, uncle Roque and aunt Mezuca, all of them aided by a chorus of both genders. What was the Trojan War to which we owe the *Iliad*? (DQ 232)

Here, Unamuno singles out everyday life in everyday circumstances as the ground from which the hero's quest for immortality must spring. Underlying this

is his view that the genuinely universal is concentrated in each individual life and can only be discovered therein:

> It has been said and repeated a thousand times that what is greatest and most lasting in art and literature was built with limited materials, and the whole world knows that what is gained in extension is lost in intensity. But to gain in intensity is also to gain extension, paradoxical as it may seem; and to gain duration. The atom is eternal, if it exists. What belongs to each man belongs to them all; the most individual is the most general. And for my part, I would rather be an eternal atom than a fugitive moment of the whole universe. (DQ 233)

By linking the eternal to the universal, the passage suggests that the quest for immortality must be a quest for insight. If the eternal, the atom, lies at the heart of each life, then seeking it demands self-scrutiny, fathoming the secret of one's own existence. Unamuno's general pronouncement that this endeavor must be anchored in ordinary life is followed by mention of several examples of the kind of particulars he thinks contain the universal. To appreciate the significance of the repeated pairing of male and female in his examples, we must turn to our author's analysis of Don Quijote's investment in his love for Dulcinea del Toboso.

In Novalis' tale "The Disciple of Sais," the apprentice adept who unveils the goddess beholds first his own countenance and then his beloved's—the beloved is himself and that unity is apprehended through the divine. The figure of Don Quijote's Dulcinea, I will suggest, is a scarcely subtler statement of a similar position. The narrative records the circumstance that prior to embarking on his adventures as Don Quijote, Alonso Quijano espied Aldonza Lorenzo, his

Dulcinea, from afar on only four fleeting occasions in twelve years. In these few glances, he conceives for her a love that ascends to the religious:

> "Oh lady of my acts and motions, illustrious and incomparable Dulcinea of Toboso, if it is possible for the prayers and supplications of this, your tempestuous lover, to reach your ears, I beg you to hear them, for they are nothing other than my entreaties not to deny me your favour and protection now that I have such need of them!" (DQ 194)

If, in quasi-Humean fashion, we ask ourselves where in these evanescent glimpses of a country woman we can locate the glory that excites Don Quijote's adoration and spurs him to deeds and questing, we are likewise forced to the conclusion that it is only to be sought within the knight's breast. Coleridge could well have addressed himself to Dulcinea when he wrote

> And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when
> The woodman winding westward up the glen
> At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
> The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
> Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
> An image with a glory round its head;
> The enamored rustic worships its fair hues,
> Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues![30]

Don Quijote, himself an "enamored rustic," worships an ethereal, elusive apparition he unwittingly projects, a production of his own self. Unamuno underlines this when he says of Dulcinea:

> True, he [Don Quijote] had made her, he had made her in pure faith, he had created her with the fire of his passion; but once created, she was herself and he received his life from her. Against everyone, I forge my truth with my faith but

[30] STC, "Constancy to an Ideal Object"

> once she has been thus forged, my truth will avail and sustain itself alone and I will draw life from it. (DQ 272)

The glory Don Quijote beholds in Dulcinea is immanent to his own self but can only be seen at a remove; the glorifying artist's eye cannot turn upon itself. The ideal begins as a dream in the soul of the poet but, the passage suggests, it can attain an independent existence in the external world which can, in turn, nourish and sustain its creator. Unamuno elucidates a general rationale for this process of self-decentering:

> The end of man is humanity, humanity personified, made into an individual and when he takes nature as his end, it is by first humanizing it. God is the ideal of humanity, man projected to infinity and eternalized there. And thus it must be. Why do you speak of the anthropocentric [or pathetic] fallacy? Don't you say that an infinite sphere has its center at every point, at any of them? For each of us, the center is in oneself. But it cannot act if it is not polarized; it cannot live unless it is decentered. And whither should it decenter but toward another like itself? Man's love for man—I mean man's love for woman—has produced all wonders. (DQ 135)

In romantic love, which Unamuno accords pride of place, the self enshrines in another self the ideal it produces. The object it thereby gives itself spurs it afresh to the creation of "all wonders." In more general terms, the self, for Unamuno, is the seat of creation. We have already seen how, on his account, its vital needs constitute the world. The passage above suggests that a crucial part of dwelling in that world is projecting itself into it as an object. In this connection, our author's commentary on Don Quijote's devotion to Dulcinea is telling:

[Don Quijote] prays first to God and then to Dulcinea; to God in silence and to Dulcinea aloud. First with God, yes, but alone, without any need to make ourselves hoarse by shouting to make ourselves heard, for He hears even the exhalation of our silence; but with Dulcinea, we need to speak loudly and invoke her with a swelled chest and a full mouth, among men. (DQ 194)

In the self-decentering that occurs in Romantic love, the passage tells us, the ideal conceived in the soul's solitary depths is transposed into the region of the sayable. Since we have already seen that our author identifies the domain of what can be intersubjectively signified and publicly communicated with the general and the rational, seeing this inward, individual conception voiced loudly "among men" should give us pause; it would seem that a very significant divide in Unamuno's thought is being bridged here.

To better appreciate the importance of the above account, I would like to take some time to scrutinize Unamuno's understanding of silence and its connection to divinity:

Why dialogue with others? There are no true dialogues, because the conversations that would deserve to be called that are conversations of the kind that don't deserve to be remembered. Almost all of those which pass for dialogues, when they are alive and leave us some imperishable memory, are nothing but interlaced monologues; you interrupt your monologue every now and then to allow your interlocutor to resume his own; and when he occasionally interrupts his, you resume your own. So it is and so it ought to be.

So it ought to be. It would be best if we did nothing but monologue, which is to dialogue with God; to speak to God; to pray day after day and moment after moment, each of us in his own prayer, and for our diverse prayers to gradually fuse into one as they began to ascend toward God, so that they reached His eternal and infinite ears as a single prayer, the eternal monologue of poor, pained

humanity. And thence, from the breast of God, the human prayer returns to us; the voice of God in our own heart, the echo of peaceful silence, is nothing more than the voice of the centuries and of men. Our intimate life, the life of true solitude, is a dialogue with all men. (Soledad 33)

What distinguishes dialogues from "interlaced monologues"? Presumably it is that the former unfold in commonplaces, coded in signifiers understood in the same way by both parties; the dialogue is mutually intelligible, interlaced monologues are not. The monologue would be spoken in the individual's own language, distilling the secret of his or her existence in utterances intelligible to no one else. This, I propose, is key to what Unamuno means by "silence," which is not the quiet of the tomb or anything privative, but an open field in which the "voice of God in our own heart" can sound undimmed. Unamuno's view of the individual is not solipsistic—he doesn't believe persons are so disparate as to be completely dissimilar to each other. Rather, he seems to think that our common humanity cannot be externalized and communicated in the same way as any intentionality directed at the outer world. By having recourse to words and symbols, retreating from one's incalculable singularity into the commonplace for the purpose of dialogue, one can only mar and occlude the voice of God. God, the echo of the universal that unites humanity in a plaintive prayer[31], can only be apprehended by the individual who hearkens to the silence of his or her own inwardness; he then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds.

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[31] If Unamuno's characterization of God is less than intuitive, I hope it will become more compelling in the last chapter, where His relation to man is discussed at length. For now, it is enough that silence allows one to hear His voice within.

The following passage elucidates the import of Unamuno's conception of silence:

> *Nada*! Here is the word at the bottom of our special brand of Spanish nihilism—or better, our *nada*-ism, to distinguish it from the Russian variety… *Nada*-ism has never been better defined than it was by the painter Ignacio Zuloaga, when he showed a friend his portrait of *The Wineskin Seller of Segovia*, a monster rendered in the manner of Velázquez, a deformed and maudlin dwarf, and exclaimed: "If you could only see what a philosopher he is! … He says nothing!" *Nada*! It was not that the monster-philosopher said there was nothing or that everything was as nothing or comes to nothing, but simply that he said nothing. Perhaps he was a mystic submerged in St. John of the Cross's dark night of the soul… Perhaps Spanish painting is the purest expression of the virile philosophy of Spain. The wineskin-seller of Segovia, by saying nothing about nothing, is freed from the obligation of thinking. He is a real free-thinker. (*Agony* 47)

The "obligation of thinking" would presumably refer to requirements such as consistency and intelligibility that are constitutive of the very endeavor of communicating. Unamuno, as we have seen, affirms the necessity of these constraints and advocates dwelling in the tension between public reason and inward passion. Nonetheless, we can appreciate that the wineskin-seller (or the artist who portrays him) who abdicates speech thereby emancipates himself from the rational strictures that govern intersubjectively intelligible discourse. Since he does not subordinate his conceptions to those strictures, does not assay to say anything, the contradictory, irrational, singular elements of his soul are unfettered. (That this would prompt Zuloaga or Unamuno to term him a philosopher probably

has to do with two features of philosophy, as it is commonly conceived of: it is a craft that (1) cultivates self-knowledge; and (2) discloses universals.)

This discussion, I hope, has put us in a position to appreciate a tension implicit in the self-decentering our author describes in his commentary on Don Quijote's love for Dulcinea. Unamuno, as we have seen, identifies the voice of God with the echo of the speechless, solitary recesses of the soul. Silence, then, functions as a kind of clearing wherein the solitary individual can approach the divine. This should kindle some skepticism that the intimate link between silence and religious experience can be severed, that prayer can successfully become articulate and devotion assume the focus on the shared outer world characteristic of speech. I will argue that the text bears out this skepticism: there are indications in Unamuno's text that the self-decentering involved in Quijote's love for Dulcinea must and ought to fail. This necessary failure, I will suggest, is central to Christian solitude.

Early in the tale of Don Quijote, we find evidence that the secret of Dulcinea may be intractable to externalization. En route to Murcia, the knight of the sad countenance crosses paths with a bevy of Toledan merchants who are on their way to buy silk, whom he urges to confess that "there is no maiden in the whole world more beautiful than the empress of La Mancha, the incomparable Dulcinea of Toboso." (DQ 63) Unamuno observes that

> this is one of Don Quijote's most quixotic adventures, that is, one of those that most uplift the heart of those redeemed by his madness. Here Don Quijote doesn't fight to favor the needy, to right wrongs or redress injustice, but for the conquest of the spiritual kingdom of faith. He wanted to make those men, whose

moneyed hearts only saw the material kingdom of riches, confess that there is a spiritual kingdom, and to redeem them thereby, in spite of themselves.

The merchants didn't give up easily; hard to peel, accustomed to swindling and bargaining, they bargained for their confession, excusing themselves on the grounds that they didn't know Dulcinea. And here Don Quijote's quixotery mounts and he exclaims: "If I showed her to you, what would you be doing in confessing such an evident truth? The importance of it lies in that without having seen her, you must believe, confess, affirm, swear and defend it." Admirable Knight of Faith! And how deep his sense of faith was! He was of his people, who also went, with a sword in their right hand and Christ in their left, to make remote peoples confess a creed they didn't know. Only sometimes they changed hands and held the sword up high and struck with the crucifix. "Uncommon, overweening people," Don Quijote rightly called the merchants, for what greater act of pride is there than to refuse to confess, affirm, swear to and defend the beauty of Dulcinea without having seen her? But they, obtuse in their faith, insisted and like the contumacious Jews, who asked the Lord for signs, asked the knight to show them a portrait of that lady, "though it be the size of a mustard seed." (DQ 63-64)

Don Quijote's question to the merchants is telling: what would they be *doing* in simply acknowledging a visible, outward fact? Assent to such things is a passive deed, fundamentally heterogeneous with the creative faith that produces the vision of Dulcinea. Who would behold her beauty must produce her himself; she is not to be found in the world. It should be evident that this is not a contingent fact—that this madman happens to have dreamed up a muse with no material counterpart—but a deep necessity: the beauty that commands the hero's adoration isn't, cannot be, reducible to any visual impression or to any description. Thus, when Don Quijote subsequently encounters Aldonza Lorenzo

and observes her coarse forms, his devotion is undiminished. After all, it had been kindled by glances too few and furtive to admit much sensory information. It does not rest on any visual representation and cannot directly be dislodged by one although, of course, merchant eyes too fixedly focused on the world without can become blind to it.

We, as readers, are in the same position as the Toledan merchants. We cannot apprehend the beauty Don Quijote worships. If we endeavor to read sympathetically and try to any extent to feel the passion the text attributes to him, the best we can do to evoke such a feeling is to interpose in place of Dulcinea our own conception of what elicits such reverence from us, a figure we would respond to roughly (as roughly as language approximates it) as Don Quijote does to his muse. Each of us must conjure an ideal of his own. Dulcinea, as the object of this individual, Don Quijote's yearnings, remains as unknown to us as our ideal does to him; we cannot oversee another's secret.

However, as Unamuno eloquently elucidates, the more significant silence is that which lies between Don Quijote and Dulcinea:

> Glances from far within, muffled sighs she never became aware of, the quickened beating of your heart, prisoner of her spell each of those four times you furtively enjoyed the sight of her. And this love restrained, this love arrested in its flow, since you didn't find in yourself the boldness or resolve to lead it to its natural terminus, this poor love tilled your soul and was the fountainhead of your heroic madness. Wasn't it so, good Knight? Perhaps you yourself did not suspect it.
>
> Go into yourself and plumb and scrutinize what you find there. There are loves that cannot break the cup that contains them and therefore spill inward, and there are unconfessable loves, which a formidable destiny oppresses and

constricts in the nest from which they hatched, their own excess locks them in; their tremendous fatality sublimates and aggrandizes them. Imprisoned there, ashamed and hiding from themselves, bent on obviating themselves, struggling to die, since they cannot flourish by the light of day, in view of everyone and, least of all, bear fruit, they become the passion of glory and immortality and heroism.

Tell me here alone, my Don Quijote; tell me: wasn't the intrepid valor that led you to your deeds the outburst of those yearnings of love you didn't dare confess to Aldonza Lorenzo? If you were so courageous before everyone else, isn't it because you were a coward before the target of your longing? From the intimate entrails of the flesh, the yearning to perpetuate yourself, to leave your seed on this earth, accosted you; the life of your life, like the life of every man's life, was to eternalize life. And since you didn't manage to defeat yourself to give your life losing it in love, you longed to perpetuate yourself in the memory of people. See, Knight, that the yearning for immortality is nothing but the flower of the yearning for descendants.

Didn't your inability to break that fearful embarrassment, to fill your hours with the kisses and caresses of that damsel laborer of El Toboso lead you to fill them instead with readings of knightly tales? Didn't you seek in those earnest readings a palliative, at the same time as provender, for the flame that consumed you? Only unhappy love is fecund in the fruits of the spirit; only when its natural course is closed off to it does it shoot up heavenwards like a geyser; only temporal sterility yields eternal fertility. And your love, my Don Quijote, was unhappy because of your insuperable and heroic timidity. Perhaps you were afraid to profane it by confessing it to the very one who kindled it; you were afraid of first besmirching it and then wasting and losing it if you brought it to its vulgar, accustomed conclusion. (DQ 96-97)

In this passage, love, an impulse that aims at an other, is sublimated and transformed in solitude before finally finding expression in the world. Echoing Plato's Diotima, Unamuno links love to the impulse to self-perpetuation—in the

first instance, the perpetuation of the flesh through procreation. In Don Quijote's case, however, this impulse is locked into silence and turned inward. Why does it suffer this fate? Unamuno characterizes the "destiny" that "oppresses" unhappy loves as "their own excess… their tremendous fatality." Perhaps this excess consists in their outstripping the possibilities of this-worldly life. On this reading, the tale of Don Quijote would not just recount the sad accident of a man who happened to focus on a drab country girl a profound desire she could never fulfill. Rather, Quijote and Dulcinea would stand as universal figures for the disproportion between quixotic love and the meager character of reality, between inner glory and outer squalor. The perception of this excess may have been what led the poet Luis Cernuda to characterize love as a question without an answer. In any case, one senses that Aldonza Lorenzo could no more grasp Don Quijote's love for her than the Toledan merchants could. His love is perforce secret, silent and, thereby, solitary. Again, I suggest that here Unamuno attempts to make good his claim that the most personal discloses the universal. While the ethos of courtly love may be far removed from the simple country girl's ken, the cartoonish disproportion in this story simply calls our attention to a gap that always subsists even between lover and beloved; the ideal evoked by the sight, presence or anticipation of the beloved remains incommunicable

It is clear that Unamuno believes that love's resistance to expression leads Don Quijote to the path of a knight errant. I do not think he gives a complete explanation of how it does so. Forthwith, I will try to make the strongest possible argument for it based on what the passage does say. Don Quijote perhaps senses

obscurely that the ideal he worships transcends the world about him, just as it outruns the powers of speech. This would explain the seemingly unaccountable fact that he only glances furtively at Aldonza four times in a dozen years—he is chary of the fragility of love's spell and realizes that the pressures of reality can jeopardize it. Confessing his love to the uncomprehending Aldonza would profane it by throwing it out into the shared world. One aspect of such an exile would be the subordination of the ideal to experience—a conception that is projected onto the world becomes susceptible to being molded by it. This is the first step toward losing one's love by "bringing it to its vulgar, accustomed conclusion," where it is dissipated completely into outer existence.

Silence preserves love in its inwardness and irreducible singularity; unspoken, it remains ensconced in the inner life from which it sprung. Naturally, however, certain of its features remain the same regardless of whether it seeks outward expression. One of these is its drive to self-perpetuation. I have found Plato's Symposium invaluable in understanding this, since it makes explicit an understanding of this impetus that Unamuno relies on but doesn't articulate. Thus, I would now like to listen briefly to this text. First, Diotima's speech clarifies the relation between love's twin longings for an ideal and for immortality:

"You see, Socrates," she said, "what Love wants is not beauty as you think it is."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Reproduction and birth in beauty."

"Maybe," I said.

"Certainly," she said. "Now, why reproduction? It's because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must

desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever. It follows from our argument that Love must desire immortality." (Plato 206E – 207A)

Although Unamuno would probably not agree that the desire to possess the good is more fundamental than the longing for immortality, this passage's explanation of how the two are conjoined can help us understand him. When Diotima says love desires "reproduction and birth in beauty," I take her to mean that the lover wishes to perpetuate himself in the beautiful. In the account she gives, love begins as the love of a beautiful body. (Symposium 210A) In that case, "reproduction and birth in beauty" would presumably involve begetting upon said body, thereby perpetuating both the lover and the beauty he loves in his offspring. This is the yearning to "leave your seed on this earth" that "accosts" Don Quijote "from the intimate entrails of the flesh." But he makes no attempt to satisfy that need *in that form*. Never approaching its outward object, he turns his eternalizing need inward; Don Quijote can only reproduce in his own soul the beauty that draws him. Plato characterizes this condition thus:

"Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely *are* those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget…" (Symposium 208E – 209A)

To bring to birth in his own soul, rather than in offspring of flesh and blood, the beauty he loves, Don Quijote first turns to books of knightly tales, which can indoctrinate him in a beautiful or noble life. Ultimately, we might say his birthing consists in his living the life of a knight errant, carrying out beautiful deeds. This characterization depends on Diotima's view that beauty is one and that the beauty the lover discerns in a beautiful body is the same as the beauty of souls or "the beauty of activities and laws." (Symposium 210C) That equation explains why the beautiful speeches of books can feed and fan Don Quijote's love since they are, after all, showing him the beauty he longs for. In any case, I propose that the "eternal fertility" Unamuno credits Don Quijote with is this procreancy of beauty within the soul itself. The knight's unhappy love for Dulcinea "tills his soul" by preparing it to bring forth beauty.

The "eternal fertility" Unamuno describes is the result of solitude. In order for love to "till the soul," its natural course—physical procreancy in the shared, outer world—must be "closed off to it." Through solitude, then, the self can become the birthplace of beauty. However, I said before that love, as Plato describes it, aims at perpetuating both the lover and the beauty he loves. The beauty that is reproduced in the hero's soul remains as perishable as that mortal self. In order to fulfill love's *telos* and preserve both, the self must be immortalized. However, for the hero who has cultivated beauty in his own soul and whose life is invested in this self-creation, offspring of flesh and blood would seem like an inadequate vehicle for self-perpetuation, since his existence is not chiefly that of a body but that of an idea. Perhaps this is why the Knight of the

Sad Countenance, pregnant with an idea, seeks his immortality through heroic deeds in the memory of others, since memory *can* keep an idea alive:

> Eagerness for glory and renown is the intimate spirit of quijotism, its essence and raison d'etre… The key is leaving one's name to the centuries, to live in the memory of the people. The key is not to die! Not to die! Not to die! That is the final root, the root of roots of quixotic madness. Not to die! Not to die! Eagerness for life; eagerness for eternal life is what gave you immortal life, my lord Don Quijote; the dream of your life was and is not to die. (DQ 279)

As we shall see in chapter 4, Unamuno will claim this quest to transcend death as a universal human endeavor and specifically as his own end in writing and ours in reading. However, it should be clear that at this point in the argument, an important reversal has taken place. We said that the redirection of the pursuit of immortality from the biological life to the mental was the result of love's solitary condition. But here, that selfsame inward turn becomes the source of one's need for others. Unamuno underlines this in his discussion of immortality through resurrection:

> The resurrection of the flesh, the Judaic hope—Pharisaic, psychic, almost carnal—entered into conflict with the immortality of the soul, the Hellenic, Platonic, pneumatic, or spiritual hope. And therein lies the tragedy, the agony, of St. Paul—and of Christianity. For the resurrection is something physiological, something completely individual. But only a recluse, a monk, a hermit can carnally rise in his flesh and live alone—if such a feat is to live—alone with God.
>
> The immortality of the soul, on the other hand, is a spiritual matter, a social matter. Whosoever creates for himself a soul, whosoever creates a work, lives in it and through it lives in other men, in Humanity, for as long as Humanity lives. And thus he lives in History. (*Agony* 21)

At this point in the exposition, the tension our author describes might remind us of *el hermano Kierkegaard*'s characteristic reversals. While this would dovetail with Unamuno's avowed love of contradictions, I believe this passage marks a departure only from the emphasis of the preceding discussion of silence. An individual's bodily existence is public inasmuch as it is visible, intersubjectively accessible. Whatever else it might imply, physical existence has to be understood as existing in a plane coinhabited by other bodies. Materiality, in this sense, is public. On this view, hoping for immortality in this dimension—either through procreation or resurrection—would involve projecting an existence among others. The inner life, by contrast, is known directly only to itself and, Unamuno believes, cannot be shared.

On the other hand, as Unamuno points out here, a body as body can (in principle, if not in fact) exist without having anything to do with other existents. In this sense, the immortality of the flesh is "something completely individual." This is contrasted with the inner, mental or spiritual life which, the passage suggests, cannot be "completely individual" because it is possible only through participation in "History," a social endeavor. This perspective will bear much elucidation. The last chapter will explore what "History" means for Unamuno and how this claim for the shared nature of the spiritual life can be reconciled with his insistence on its incommunicability. To conclude this section, I simply want to underline the ethical implications of our discussion.

I have suggested that Unamunian solitude is isomorphic with faith in its juxtaposition with reason and the universal. Faith, for Unamuno, "is adherence,

not to a theory, not to an idea, but to something living, to a real or ideal man, it is the faculty of admiring and trusting." (DQ 121) From this, we may gather that his portrait of Don Quijote is not simply an analysis of a curious character but a profession of faith, an exhortation to a certain way of life. What distinguishes that way of life? As the focus of my exegesis suggests, I believe solitude is central to it. We have characterized solitude as the self-aware life of the irreducibly individual that cannot be assimilated to the general categories of reason. The normative implication of this would be for each individual to live from depths of his or her own specific self. The negative form of this imperative is that the Christian should refuse the good models and conventions and instead turn inward to chart his own course. This is why "Christ came to bring us agony: struggle and not peace," since the Christian will be at war with any accepted order. Unamuno underlines this with scriptural pronouncements such as "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother… And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." (Matt. 10:36) This enmity, no doubt, is based on the fealty tradition and "common sense" demand of the Christian:

> Since their shriveled and dried up judgments are incapable of giving birth to any imagination whatsoever, they cleave, as though to an immutable norm of conduct, to the obstinate, contrary images that were entrusted to them, and since they don't know how to forge a path cross country or through the thick of the jungle, gaze fixed on the north star, they insist that the rest of us go aboard their rickety cart through the roads of the path of public service. (DQ 211)

Lacking any capacity to adapt or innovate, these narrow minds ascribe to their received ways the status of orthodoxy and authority, looking askance at

deviations from them. Of course, those of his own household are best positioned and often most invested in demanding such submission from the madman whose inner voice urges him to try his own path. However, what Unamuno fiercely repudiates are not familial ties per se but the imposition of conformity upon the individual's originality. What he advocates, as I understand, is the expression of what reason can never express.

And the upshot of all this? I have argued that Don Quijote's love for Dulcinea provides an example of a Christian's irreducibly personal, incommunicable truth. Are there useful generalizations to be drawn from the example? What it suggests is that the individual's own truth is an ideal, conceived inwardly but enshrined in the idea of another person, which serves the agent as a principle by which to live. This ideal structures the individual's experience of the world. The knight errant, for example, finds in the trials of life opportunities for heroism to become worthy of his lady. We may assume that worth, in that context, is measured by standards of values encoded in his unspoken ideal. These values will be unintelligible to others—Don Quijote cuts a ridiculous figure in the eyes of those around him, probably including Aldonza Lorenzo—but Unamuno advocates devoting one's life to them without reckoning, without reservations.

In closing, I would like to critically evaluate the way of life Unamuno advocates. Is Don Quijote really an exemplar of a good life? Surely this character has a nobility we can admire, an earnestness we can draw inspiration from. However, this is not all that distinguishes him. There is also the matter that, one might be tempted to say, he is deluded, inhabiting an unreal world. But perhaps

this formulation begs certain questions, appealing most to those who would privilege the commonsense understanding Unamuno disdains. I hope I can avoid this by characterizing the hero's madness as a complete incongruence between his deeds and his avowed ends. To bring this out more clearly, consider what is perhaps his most celebrated battle, his assault on the windmills he takes for giants. Disregarding Sancho's admonition that these are windmills, not giants, Don Quijote charges them and breaks his lance. In Unamuno's gloss, these windmills are indeed giants, the giants of technology modern man is in thrall to. (DQ 74) He salutes Quijote for having the courage to seek his own health within himself, rather than depending on the artifacts of progress. Now, whatever one's estimation of technology, it seems clear that Don Quijote's attack on it in this form is completely ineffectual, as his sallies against quotidian "menaces" tend to be throughout the book. The knight's deeds are gestures rather than effective actions; it is hard to argue that they achieve anything beyond expression. I do not minimize the importance of that; the last chapter will discuss the role Unamuno assigns it. But it is clear that Quijote generally fails to achieve something we might roughly describe as engaging and affecting his environment. So, why does Unamuno hold this up as an exemplary life?

One reason might be Unamuno's wariness, already noted, of completion and finality. The hero who remade the world after his wishes, one might worry, would no longer have anything to strive for. The impetus for Don Quijote's glory, after all, is his discord with his outward reality. Changing the world would remove that impetus.

In this form, the response seems rather weak. It should be remembered that the root of the tension Unamuno recommends dwelling in is the *agon* between reason and feeling on the question of personal immortality. This struggle and the projects it gives rise to—immortalizing one's name, becoming worthy of Dulcinea--are inherently open-ended; it is hard to argue that fecklessness in the quotidian engagement with the world nourishes them. The ethos that calls upon the Christian to oppose his personal vision to the mass understanding is not necessarily better served by what the world calls failure than by what it calls triumph.

Unamuno, as we have seen, argues that Quijote's love for Dulcinea is transformed by finding no worldly satisfaction—in lieu of the procreancy of the flesh, he aspires to the immortality of the spirit; the unfulfilled yearning "tilled his soul." Could *this* argument be extended to more quotidian endeavors like battling the forces of industrialization? I don't rule out such a possibility but I don't see it cashed out in the text. To validate this line of argument, one would need an account of how the project is transposed into the inner life when it fails in the outer world since this is how love, on Unamuno's account, acquires its spiritual fecundity. It may be a stumbling block for this line of response that social maladies cannot plausibly have the personal significance Unamuno attributes to love and death. However, the analogy needn't extend that far; showing it to have any kind of higher value would support the position that this is, after all, an exemplary life.

But perhaps Don Quijote's "delusions" have a redemptive value that doesn't parallel that of unfulfilled love. Perhaps one need not look for a transformation or sublimation at all. Their value may lie in themselves. Unamuno sometimes takes Cervantes to task for having misunderstood his own creation. Clearly, then, he would not expect his own interpretation to preclude alternative readings. Perhaps what Don Quijote sees in the windmills aren't the giant forces of industrialization but just what he says: giants, as well as the mythic realm they people. On this view, Quijote's visions lie outside means-ends rationality altogether and have an altogether different kind of value. It would be a mistake, then, to regard him as, e.g., an ineffectual opponent of the forces of industrialization; he is something else, a visionary. Although Unamuno's interpretations of Quijote's specific deeds do not support this, there are strains in his commentary consonant with such a reading. For example, in a Platonic mood, our author wonders,

> Is there in the eternal and infinite Consciousness no eternal idea of your people, my Don Quijote? Isn't there a celestial Spain of which this earthly Spain is but an imitation and a reflection in the poor centuries of men? Isn't there a soul of Spain as immortal as the soul of each of her children? (DQ 284)

Now, if this supernal homeland does exist, might it not contain giants rather than windmills? Perhaps what distinguishes the celestial Spain from its poor earthly imitation is the fictive veil the artist's eye draws over it. On this view, Don Quijote's beholding effects a transfiguration categorically more valuable than instrumental action.

On the other hand, the choice of Don Quijote as an exemplary life might be grounded in a view, derived from Kant and Kierkegaard, that sets a higher value on the individual will's self-determination according to a principle it gives itself than on any tangible effect it might thereby bring about. On this view, it is Quijote's courage and steadfastness that earn him exemplary standing *despite*, not because of, his ineffectiveness with relation to the outer world. Unlike the previous view, this one would not divorce Quijote's task from the outer, intersubjective world. On the contrary, it pays homage to his resolution and efforts toward it. The choice of an outwardly ineffectual hero as an exemplar simply underscores that the heroic will has a value independent of its outcomes. On this view, Don Quijote needn't be more admirable than, say, Amadís de Gaula but he is a more effective figure for a pedagogy of autonomous heroism: he preserves us from the error of thinking that the hero's glory lies in his outcomes rather than in his self-determination.

It should be noted that even though the last interpretation I suggest privileges the self as the locus and measure of value, it rests on a different stance than the reading of Quijote as a visionary who recreates the world through the power of the imagination. It is difficult to admire the will's self-determination vis-á-vis the world while disdaining the world it orients itself toward; to do so would be at best an unstable irony. On the other hand, to admire Quijote's flights of fantasy in themselves is very consistent with a view of the world as squalid, mean and less worthy of attention than the world within. Unamuno's ambivalence toward the world, oscillating between scorn for mundane life and a desperate

embrace of it, offers us no means or reason for deciding between these views of Quijote: “Some reader may see a basic contradiction in everything I am saying, as I long on the one hand for unending life, and on the other hand claim that this life is devoid of the value assigned to it. A contradiction? I should say so!” (*TSL* 17) The implication of Unamuno’s philosophy is to keep us open to both these views of Don Quijote or any other paragon.

I now turn to a question that will turn out to be significant with respect to Emerson. Unamuno says that the self objectifies itself and the ideal it produces in another, that

> The end of man is humanity, humanity personified, made into an individual and when he takes nature as his end, it is by first humanizing it. God is the ideal of humanity, man projected to infinity and eternalized there. And thus it must be. Why do you speak of the anthropocentric [or pathetic] fallacy? Don’t you say that an infinite sphere has its center at every point, at any of them? For each of us, the center is in oneself. But it cannot act if it is not polarized; it cannot live unless it is decentered. And whither should it decenter but toward another like itself? Man’s love for man—I mean man’s love for woman—has produced all wonders. (DQ 135)

But why? Why should the end or the ideal be personalized, personified? I won’t cavil here on the need for self-decentering. I take it that the self needs this separation from its end in order to act toward it; a subject’s intentionality can only aim at an object. But why should that object be another person? I suspect this is a deep question no essay will ever exhaust. Surely it cannot be dismissed with a remark like “whither should it decenter but toward another like itself?” I do not think Unamuno is being cavalier when he says this. Rather, I suspect the absence

of argument signals the foundational status this view enjoys in his thought. However, even within this framework, it should be possible to say something more about what this axiom implies. I suggest that when Unamuno states that "the end of man is humanity personified," this end is something for which we act; the very attribution of an end to man implies regarding the person as an agent, as someone who brings about ends. The end of which our author speaks is an end by which to live. The converse of this is that action is tied to persons; for every action, there is always someone who acts. The complex of values, motives, abilities and dispositions that sets ends and governs actions is the individual's character or self. This is why a person is uniquely suited to embodying a practical ideal. What Quijote sees in Dulcinea is the character that acts as he attempts to act; this is how I understand his declaration that "She fights in me and triumphs in me, and I live and breathe in her and have life and being."

Emerson's impersonality, which I now turn to, appears to offer an alternative to Unamunian self-decentering.

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Emerson and Unamuno: The Ethics of Solitude

Emerson and Unamuno assign solitude a similar ethical role. Both see the private dimension of individual existence as the seat of values that are inevitably threatened by the social condition, since the necessary conditions for social cohesion compromise those values. Change or innovation is a crucial part of what both authors think the solitary self can accomplish. In this connection, both authors emphasize language and expression. Emerson turns to nature as a bulwark against the reifying effect of language, while Unamuno advocates an individual religion which dispenses with any commitment to mutual intelligibility.

Both thinkers believe the conflict they describe is necessary. For Unamuno, the individual Christian and collective Christendom nourish one another even as they also challenge each other; Emerson expounds the perspectives of both the Reformer and the Conservative. Accordingly, neither advocates complete withdrawal from the shared life. Indeed, both advocated engagement with the other. For Emerson, this “not I” can often be the natural world rather than the social, although, crucially, both spring from the same primary creative power. However, he is guided by an ideal of universality which thought can only approach by being communicated; clearly, this calls for engagement with other persons. The other is even more important to Unamuno’s ethic of solitude, since he believes self-knowledge is only possible through self-decentering, which aims at (but cannot touch) another.

The far greater prominence of the personal in Unamuno marks a major difference between two thinkers whose views of solitude, I hope I have shown, have much in common. I believe the rationale for Emerson's apparent elision of the personal will emerge from the discussion of Emersonian impersonality in chapter 3.

A second important difference between the two is Emerson's Over-Soul, which is at once the substance of our solitude and the metaphysical ground for the communion Emerson envisages. As we shall see, Unamuno also features a transpersonal universal mind. For Emerson, the individual is always and originally open to the Over-Soul. For Unamuno, on the other hand, the discovery of the living God is made through a spiritual transformation mediated by the individual's relations with others.

3.- **Emerson: Friendship beyond Persons**

The texts of Ralph Waldo Emerson contain pronouncements on persons and interpersonal relations that seem to strike jarring contrasts. The following citations are representative of this clash:

A new person is to me a great event and hinders me from sleep. I have often had fine fancies about persons which have given me delicious hours… (*E&L* 343)

I wish to speak with all respect of persons, but sometimes I must pinch myself to keep awake, and preserve the due decorum. They melt so fast into each other, that they are like grass and trees, and it needs an effort to treat them as individuals. Though the uninspired man certainly finds persons a conveniency in household matters, the divine man does not respect them: he sees them as a rack of clouds, or a fleet of ripples which the wind drives over the surface of the water. (*E&L* 581)

Without attempting at this point to exhaustively characterize each position, I will term these respectively the personal and impersonal perspectives, trusting that the difference between them is intuitively conspicuous enough to begin with. What I will try to show here is that the above perspectives in Emerson's thought should not be considered polar opposites; rather, the impersonal is an outgrowth of the personal. I will argue that Emerson's advocacy of the impersonal is grounded in a very deep view of the crucial epistemic importance of our relations with others

and of the fragility of the goods at stake in our affections.[32] First, I will try to illuminate the experience of loss and bereavement by examining arguments that hold our relations with others to be indispensable to self-knowledge and a vital understanding of the world; this is what is threatened when we are riven from those we have loved. I will then explain why Emerson propounds impersonality as a wise response to that peril and describe the style of friendship that follows from his ethics: although there is no remedy for the impermanence of our affections, impersonality builds upon the understanding they afford us in order to arrive at a deeper insight into the world.

A natural starting point for this discussion is Emerson's most famous analysis of loss and bereavement. In the opening of the essay "Experience," he writes:

> Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through nature and should not know our place again. (*E&L* 471)

[32] Although there are doubtless substantive and interesting distinctions between, say, friendship and filial love, Emerson's analysis (unlike Unamuno's in the preceding chapter) is concerned with what our affections have in common, not with what differentiates them. Thus, though friendship is the relationship most often discussed, the present discussion follows Emerson's own work in discussing the various ties between persons more or less interchangeably.

A few paragraphs later, he elaborates:

There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hopes that there, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers. Was it Boscovich who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with… In the death of my son… I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,--no more. I cannot get it nearer to me… some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous…The Indian who was laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop…

I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition. Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates. We may have the sphere for our cricket-ball, but not a berry for our philosophy. Direct strokes she never gave us the power to make; all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents. Our relations to each other are oblique and casual. (*E&L* 472-3)

The occasion for this essay is the death of Emerson's son, Waldo. Yet, although the text is a lamentation of sorts, it is not Waldo's passing that is mourned (that Emerson does memorably in the poem "Threnody"). Rather, it mourns the end of mourning--the passing of grief and, crucially, of the love that underlay it. Because the hopes Emerson invested in human affection have been

poignantly called into question, his reflection here throws them into relief.[33] That is why this passage deserves our close attention in this context.

What condition would satisfy the demand Emerson makes here of himself, of human nature? It would not be his son's immortality, their indefinite coexistence in this vale of tears; as I said above, it is not Waldo's passing that is being mourned here. Rather, as a first approximation, I would say it would be his perpetual relevance, in joy or sorrow, to the one who loved him. The willingness to pay "the costly price of sons and lovers," the recognition that loss would not be an excessive cost for that indissoluble bond, values the meaningfulness of a painful love above the comfort of indifference.

But what does pain mean—or fail to mean ("I grieve that grief can teach me nothing")—to our author in this context? The passage alludes to the "evanescence and lubricity of *all* objects" (emphasis added) and ends by drawing conclusions about Nature, Emerson's most comprehensive metaphysical principle. Clearly, then, he is not only talking about his relation to his son or even about human affections in general. Rather, those issues open onto a larger philosophical problematic.

Emerson's comments in the above passage revolve around two desiderata. First, ingress to reality—a reality below the illusory surface--is presented as an unfulfilled hope for the sake of which we would endure grief and bereavement (in

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[33] A word about the chronology of these texts is in order. "Experience" is part of Essays: Second Series, published in 1844, three years after the First Series and roughly a decade after the journal entries in which Emerson pays friendship the most sustained thought. However, as will become clear in the course of this discussion, I don't believe the misgivings so masterfully articulated in "Experience" first occurred to him after Waldo's death in 1842 but are suggested in many earlier texts. Biographically, Emerson would have had at least two previous occasions to think such thoughts, the deaths of his brother William and his first wife, Ellen.

vain, as it turns out). Second, much of what he says alludes to a foiled search for knowledge: a surfeit of lethe threatens our perception, rather than our life; Nature deflects our inquiring gaze and philosophy—the domain of real knowledge, as we know from Plato—is scarcely nourished by a small berry, while the cricket-playing bourgeois life is vouchsafed an ample sphere of illusion. It is far from obvious what either of these expectations entails, how the two are related or even whether they are the distinct. For example, would knowing our place in Nature (which is presumably real) be identical with occupying it? A necessary condition for doing so? Would the soul come to know its objects by touching them or are these separable actions? And why pin these lofty ontological or epistemic hopes on human affection?

In the following pages, I will try to address these questions.

"Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret," Emerson tells us in Nature. (*E&L* 9) The instrument of her secrecy highlighted most often in our author's work is her multiplicity, the myriad forms in which she shows herself.[34] In an Unamunian vein, Emerson also regards death as a formidable barrier with which nature conceals our destiny from us.[35] Their "evanescence and lubricity " keeps nature's objects at an unbridgeable distance from us as they perpetually recede from our grasp:

I have seen the softness and beauty of the summer-clouds floating feathery overhead, enjoying, as it seemed, their height and privilege of motion, whilst yet they appeared not so much the drapery of this place and hour, as forelooking to

[34] Cf., for example, the essays on Montaigne and Swedenborg in Representative Men or the poem "The Sphynx."
[35] Cf. "The Senses and the Soul" in the *Dial* Essays of 1842.

some pavilions and gardens of festivity beyond. It is an odd jealousy: but the poet find himself not near enough to his object. The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers before him, does not seem to be nature. Nature is still elsewhere. This or this is but outskirt and far-off reflection and echo of the triumph that has passed by, and is now at its glancing splendor and heyday, perchance in the neighboring fields, or, if you stand in the field, then in the adjacent woods. The present object shall give you this sense of stillness that follows a pageant which has just gone by. What splendid distance, what recesses of ineffable pomp and loveliness in the sunset! But who can go where they are, or lay his hand or plant his foot thereon?… It is the same among men and women, as among the silent trees; always a referred existence, an absence, never a presence and satisfaction. Is it, that beauty can never be grasped? In persons and in landscapes equally inaccessible?... To the intelligent, nature converts itself into a vast promise, and will not be rashly explained. Her secret is untold. (*E&L* 553-4)

Emerson's accounts of nature's elusiveness are themselves variegated and diverse. What she withholds seems to vary from passage to passage: understanding, satisfaction, direct contact. This is the same variety we find in the passage from "Experience" with which we began. It is never obvious what he believes we are stinted of. Emerson complains of nature's secrecy but never seems to address to her a clear question. I beg the reader's patience; I will argue shortly that this seeming vagueness is carefully, philosophically considered.

The essay "Friendship" again raises the issue of nature's inscrutability:

I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frostywork, but the solidest thing we know. For now, after so many ages of experience, what do we know of nature, or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men. But

the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, which I draw from this alliance with my brother's soul, is the nut itself, whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell. (*E&L* 346)

For my purposes here, the passage is distinctive in two important ways. First, nature's remoteness is linked to a lack of self-knowledge: we do not know Nature or ourselves. Conversely, this implicitly ties self-knowledge to understanding of Nature—either because one kind of knowledge yields the other or because the same obstacles debar us from both. Second, crucially, Emerson affirms or points to positive knowledge of Nature—viz., it is the husk that covers the joy I draw from human affection. But can this really articulate a substantive metaphysical claim? Is it not at best a romanticized turn of phrase extolling friendship?

To begin to appreciate the import of Emerson's answer, let us note how it fits one formulation of the issue: "To Be is the unsolved, unsolvable wonder. To Be, in its two connections of inward and outward, the mind and nature… Who are we and what is Nature have one answer in the life that rushes into us." (*CW* XII 15) Let us provisionally take this to be our working question, "What is Nature?," and examine the answer Emerson offers.

What are we to make of the juxtaposition of, first, the claim that after many ages we have gained no knowledge of nature and then the affirmation that we know its inner essence? I suggest this is an echo and variation of Kant's epistemology, which disavows theoretical knowledge of things in themselves, while maintaining that, as members of the intelligible world as well as the

sensible, the law of the former is revealed to us in the operation of practical reason within ourselves, specifically through the claim of the moral law. The above passage, in a similar manner, links the elusive knowledge of nature to self-knowledge. But what is the content of the insight into nature Emerson ties so closely to knowledge of ourselves?

The "unsolved, unsolvable wonder" of Nature is said to have two "connections", the inward and the outward—or, in more imagistic terms, the husk and the nut, which are said to correspond to the mind and Nature, respectively. As I pointed out in the first chapter, "Nature" is a term with a network of related meanings in Emerson. Here, I suggest "Nature" as "outward connection" refers to material nature or the realm of phenomena known to us through the senses, while mind, the inward, refers to thought in the broadest sense, to inner experience. Nature yields its secret to us not in that outer "husk and shell", its phenomenal aspect but as the inner, the thing or "nut itself." Arthur Schopenhauer argued that we could have knowledge of the thing in itself because we *are* it; that we apprehend it in our intimate relation to our own bodies, in the act of willing, viewed from the first person perspective. Perhaps Emerson likewise believes that self-knowledge allows us to fathom the essence of existence and also refers us inward but he locates this knowledge in a very different experience, "the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, which I draw from this alliance with my brother's soul." Indeed, revelation or "the announcements of the soul," are characterized in very much the same terms as "varying forms of that shudder of awe and delight with which the individual soul always mingles with the universal soul." (*E&L*

393) Since, as we shall see forthwith, commerce between two individual souls implies commerce with the universal, it is difficult to divorce Emerson's characterizations of friendship and revelation.

Our author does not systematically expound this broad, ambitious metaphysical claim. Rather, he develops a related epistemological position I will trace here, that our relations with other people afford us our understanding of the world. The two dovetail. For example, the metaphysical position above helps us understand Emerson's claim that "[i]n all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God." (*E&L* 390) On the reading I propose, Emerson is not claiming that every conversation includes statements that semantically imply something about God. Perhaps it is that in "conversation, which is the practice and consummation of friendship" (*E&L* 349), we exercise something akin to the divine creative principle. Further, in the latter half of this section I will argue that friendship can also reveal ideas or impersonal aspects of Nature—Emerson sometimes refers to these as "God."

If I am correct about what Emerson is trying to discern, the nature of the inquiry may justify his trying to lead his reader with indefinite references to unsolvable wonder and the secret of nature rather than coming out with a question like "What is nature?" By its very form, such a question would demand an answer of the order "nature is such and such." But perhaps knowing nature's secret isn't a matter of assenting to any given propositions but of effecting this alliance of souls—not a matter of thinking thoughts but of carrying out a spiritual motion.

“The nature of these revelations is the same; they are perceptions of the absolute law. They are solutions of the soul's own questions. They do not answer the questions which the understanding asks. The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after.” (*E&L* 393) If we take strictly the claim that “[w]ho are we and what is Nature have one answer in the life that rushes into us,” it seems this is a practical question: perhaps the question of who we are is answered in the unfolding of “the life that rushes into us” as we become who we are. The problem of existence—“To be, the unsolvable wonder”—would be best solved by existing well and fully. The connection I develop below between reality and human relations supports the view that Emerson considers those relations an essential part of that plenary existence.

For Emerson, love and friendship show us the reality of the world. In “Friendship,” he credits friends with saving us from a kind of solipsism by showing us an external existence as real and indubitable as our inner life: “I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my own being, in all its height, variety and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.” (*E&L* 348) This capacity of the friend’s to show me an “existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own” against a backdrop where nothing I behold commands the same certainty as my own being needs to be explained. Emerson’s characterization of this “masterpiece of nature” as reproducing my own being “in all its height, variety and curiosity” suggests a simple explanation: I have Cartesian certainty of my inner life or mental

experience and cannot doubt that someone who behaves outwardly so much like I do, voicing similar perspectives, enjoys an inner existence like my own.[36] While this explanation is coherent, it does little to illuminate why I should doubt the reality of the outer world in the first place. Further, it should be noted that Emerson still refers to this appresentation as *semblance*. I believe, then, that we must attend to subtler suggestions in the text to understand the nature of his solipsism and how friendship frees us from it.

I will start by underlining the similarity this characterization of the friend bears to Emerson's account of nature. Nature, like the friend, is distinguished by its resemblance and congruence with oneself: "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." (*E&L* 56)

Yet in both cases, it is crucial that this resemblance is not sublated into complete identification. "Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE." (*E&L* 8) Thus, Emerson likewise says of the friend that "[t]he only joy I have in his being mine, is that the *not mine* is *mine*… There must be very two, before there can be very one." (*E&L* 350)

These affinities between the individual's relation to nature and to the friend make it all the more puzzling that the one should be the object of

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[36] Stanley Cavell relates "Experience" to Cartesian skepticism and reads Emerson's essay as addressing the "problem of other minds" (Cavell (2003), 85-100). Although Cavell's reading is too different from mine to directly intersect it, the parallel may fertilize other thoughts in this connection.

skepticism, the other, the key to overcoming that skepticism. My suggestion will be that this inability to "see [anything] in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own" is the selfsame problem alluded to in Emerson's references, discussed above, to nature's secrecy or elusiveness and that the friend allows us to finally grasp Nature. The skepticism he addresses is not a theoretical doubt but a condition in which our connection to Nature is occluded—a homelessness that is figured in "Experience" as a "ghostlike" inability to touch nature or another soul.

In the essay "History," Emerson exhorts the reader to grasp the world's unity and correspondence with his own existence:

> This human mind [the Over-Soul] wrote history, and this must read it. The Sphinx must solve her own riddle. If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience. There is a relation between the hours of our life and the centuries of time… The student is to read actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary… The world exists for the education of each man. There is no age or state of society or mode of action in history, to which there is not somewhat corresponding in his life. Every thing tends in a wonderful manner to abbreviate itself and yield its own virtue to him. He should see that he can live all history in its own person. He must sit solidly at home, and not suffer himself to be bullied by kings or empires, but to know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world; he must transfer the point of view from which history is commonly read, from Rome and Athens and London to himself, and not deny his conviction that he is the court, and if England or Egypt have any thing to say to him, he will try the case; if not, let them for ever be silent. (*E&L* 237, 239-40)

The classical precedent to the above argument is Plato's claim in the Republic that the structure of the city is that of the human soul writ large, so that knowledge of the one can illuminate the other. For Emerson, however, the soul's outer homologues include far more than the *polis*. In this passage, he exhorts the reader to "read" the history of mankind with reference to his or her own individual existence. Only when he uncovers this correspondence does the historical record "have any thing to say to him." Could this be the contact with reality alluded to in "Experience" "for which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers"? In any case, I suggest it is not merely one way of seeing among others. By reading its own work, this individual emanation of the universal mind comes to understand itself. Nothing but this understanding of Nature, the universal principle, appears to count as wisdom in Emerson's work. Should our world become thus intelligible, "vocal with speech" to us, we would have a sphere, not a berry, for our philosophy. However, as we have discussed, our author says much to suggest that the participation of other people is crucial to disclosing the nature's meaning:

> The world,--this shadow of the soul, or *other me*, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next to me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech… So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. (*E&L* 60)

This reiterates the idea, expounded at greater length in the previous citation, that it is through personal experience that the world about us becomes meaningful. What it adds is a more explicit indication that this is a joint venture. The image of the seeker grasping the hands of those who form a ring about him directly evokes a sense of community. Perhaps a subtler affirmation of this is his characterization of the world assimilated and transfigured through experience as becoming "vocal with speech," since, as we previously saw Emerson (and Unamuno) emphasize, language is intrinsically intersubjective. Thus, the revelation of the world, the world of apprehended experience, is given not to one man alone but in communication. To adapt a phrase of Byron's to our present purposes, we might say that knowledge, on Emerson's view, was born a twin.

Having advanced the ambitious suggestion that relations with others allow us to discover and touch the world's reality, it behooves us to further characterize the relation that permits or performs this disclosure. Emerson writes,

> There can never be deep peace between two spirits, never mutual respect, until in their dialogue each stands for the whole world. (*E&L* 352)

What can it mean for an individual *in dialogue* to stand for the world? I suggest it refers to a mutual attunement in which the conversation becomes the lens through which the two friends approach life as a whole, a boundless, searching meditation in which the world is apprehended as the object of discussion. Love, Saint-Exupéry wrote, consists not in gazing at each other but in looking outward together. Emerson might add that, perhaps paradoxically, while

it is the world that makes such togetherness possible, it is through dialogue—as discussed above--that souls can touch nature.

In the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued that I can have certitude of the existence of others in the experience of pride or shame. His phenomenology of said emotions purports to show that in those responses, I know myself as an object for another subject and that this implies the presence of another transcendence. Emerson's account supports a parallel--although importantly different—argument about the existence of others. The dumb abyss becomes vocal with speech only through the collaboration of my interlocutor. On this view, the crucial symmetry between persons is not what Sartre calls "transcendence" but the creative capacity they exercise in dialogue. When I experience the reality of the world in this way, I also implicitly experience the reality of my co-creator. Thus, skepticism about the world and skepticism about other persons are overcome in the same moment. This, I believe, is why our "ghostlike" condition depicted in "Experience" is an inability to touch both Nature and another soul—the two are tightly linked.

"*Do you love me*? means, Do you see the same truth?" (*E&L* 679 – 80) As we saw in our discussion of solitude in the first chapter, Emerson believes each individual's vision is irreducibly singular; "we cannot oversee each other's secret." Thus, we might wonder whether, on his view, the love described here is ever possible, whether two individuals can see the same truth. But this cavil presupposes that truth arises *within* a stably defined perspective. That assumption is in tension with the dialogical vision of truth discussed above and the spirit of

abandonment expounded in the first chapter and, on the whole, alien to Emerson's way of seeing. "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred." (*E&L* 413) The Concord sage accords this constant flux pride of place in perception: "Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to form into other forms." (*E&L* 1105) What this suggests is that the disclosure of Nature's secret occurs *between* rather than within perspectives. One reason dialogue may be so propitious to this is that in any searching conversation, the interlocutors' perspectives must remain fluid and responsive; responding to dialogue will likely involve frequent departures and new beginnings—what Emerson calls abandonment. The truth he thinks both parties see in love needn't be a single outlook but rather an encounter in which the interlocutors confront and affect each other's visions.

If, indeed, the alliance of souls affords us knowledge of nature, this brings into focus the threat to our perception "Experience" refers to. The dissolution of this bond, its erasure by time and separation, would also, it stands to reason, erode the knowledge of Nature that can only be attained through this union. We glide ghostlike through Nature because the passing of affection also bereaves us of our understanding of her that Emerson ties to self-knowledge and to "the problem of his [man's] destiny."

In this light, the reflections with which "Experience" opens now seem far more closely intertwined than they appeared at first glance.

Let us now focus on the relation between friendship and self-knowledge.

In a journal entry of 1834, Emerson notes that some friendships are sought for pragmatic purposes such as mutual aid. However, he distinguishes another kind that is sought for a different purpose: "The object of this intercourse is, that a man may be made known to himself to an extent that solitude is not practicable." The existential import of this self-knowledge enlarged by society emerges clearly in the following passages:

What I am I cannot describe any more than I can see my eyes. The moment another describes to me the man I am—pictures to me in words that which I was feeling and doing, I am struck with surprise. I am sensible of a keen delight. I be, and I see my being, at the same time. (*EL* II 56-7)

The young man reveres men of genius because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is… For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression. (*E&L* 448)

Emerson's figure for the absence of self-knowledge in the first of the above passages inevitably recalls his famous celebration of ecstatic solitude:

Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,--no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving

me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,--my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances,--master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. (*E&L* 10)

While the transparent eyeball regards the superfluity of human relations, the passages that precede it above proclaim its insufficiency, delighting instead in being *and seeing one's being*. "Our moods do not believe in each other." (*E&L* 406) In certain moods, the invisibility of the eye is experienced as a lack and limitation; self-transparent being is but half a man. If we take seriously Emerson's claim that expression is the other half, being among others would seem to acquire ontological import. In an existential variant on the Berkeleyean *esse est percipi*, living in diaphanous solitude, however exalted, is not to exist fully. Here I will argue that "expression," the perquisite of full existence, involves the agent becoming known to himself and others.

The young man reveres the men of genius because they are more himself than he is—that is, they express more clearly and vividly his own perceptions. They thus make him visible to himself, make him self-aware. This, Emerson thinks, is the same office friends perform for us--he likens them more than once to planets reflecting the light of our own star. But what is the basis and nature of this reflection? One intuitively appealing interpretation is that friends reflect each other like mirrors, through the symmetry of their souls vis-à-vis each other. This is, indeed, a part of Emerson's meaning. In an Aristotelian vein, he notes that

"[i]n the last analysis, love is only the reflection of a man's own worthiness from other men. Men have sometimes exchanged names with their friends, as if they would signify that in their friend each loved his own soul." (*E&L* 352) However, as I will explain at length, the very ability of another soul to perceive ours is at least as important a component as any resemblance (though I do not rule out that said ability may depend on affinities).

The painful secret each studies to utter, as I understand it, is his own self, "his expression"—painful *because* it is secret, striving to come to light. And what brings it to light? Emerson enumerates a motley crew of endeavors through which we seek expression, from art to politics and avarice. What is conspicuously absent in this list is *thought*. That absence, I suggest, should be viewed in light of the following observations:

> The mind now thinks, now acts; and each fit reproduces the other… Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. (*E&L* 62)

What marks the difference between the partiality of thinking and the totality of action? I believe these correspond to the partiality of the man himself and the totality he achieves through his other half, expression. What distinguishes action from thought is its publicity, its presence in the shared world. It is worth noting that in the passage above, action supplies the incapacity of self-contained thought for the purpose of *imparting* truth—that is, of impressing it upon another.

It seems fair to say that, given this characterization, action is one way in which the inmost (the private) in due time becomes the outmost (the public or shared). In this connection, I find Hannah Arendt's reflections help illuminate Emerson's:

> In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says or does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose, as though one could dispose of this "who" in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities. On the contrary, it is more likely that the "who," which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remain hidden from the person himself, like the *daimõn* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters. (Arendt (1958), 179-80)[37]

There are obvious and important resemblances between the "who" Arendt thinks is disclosed in one's interaction with others and the secret Emerson thinks we study to utter, our other half, our "expression". Neither is given through an intentional articulation; rather, each emerges in the course of one's most variegated activities among others. "But do your work, and I shall know you" (*E&L* 264) is a proposal always implicit in the encounter between one individual and another, where the "work" in question is the entire conduct of life. The

[37] Arendt's analysis may seem an incongruous complement to a reflection on relations such as friendship, since she asserts in the following paragraph that the "who" is disclosed "where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them." However, whether or not she is correct about this being a condition for disclosure, it dovetails with the impersonality of Emersonian friendship, which I discuss below in detail.

invisibility of the “who” to the agent corresponds to the transparency of the self (symbolized by the *daimõn* and the eyeball, respectively). For both authors, other people are the means of overcoming this, since they can see something that belongs, but is not visible, to us. This seems to lead to a view of intersubjective dependence like the one articulated in a recent philosophical article:

> To come to terms with ourselves, we often look to others and are saddened when potential friends remain strangers. The reasons for this go rather deep. As long as we live, we don’t quite know what our life amounts to. We are not sure whether we have chosen the right kind of goals, what our accomplishments are worth, what our character really is, or what was the true nature of our motives in some crucial decisions. As Sartre in *No Exit* has Garcin worry whether he really is a coward, so we may have doubts about some central features of ourselves… Because there is an objective uncertainty about all interpretation, including self-interpretation, we need reassurance that there is some redeeming goodness in ourselves and that some of our traits and achievements would justify praise, not censure. A life, observed Vladimir Nabokov, is a commentary on an abstruse, unfinished poem. Abstruse, because we who live it often don’t quite understand it, and what makes matters even worse (and what drives people to insist on the possibility of an afterlife) is that our existence is most likely to come to an end *before* we can fathom it and extract its possible meaning.
>
> That is why we need others. (Kolenda (1988), 46)

To appreciate this more keenly, let us return for a moment to the opening passage of “Experience.” Who is “the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales”? What old belief is this and what do we enter through the door the

Genius guards? As far as I can tell, this alludes to the closing scene of Plato's Republic, in which a group of souls is met in the afterlife by the Fates and asked to select the lives they will live next:

> But when, to conclude, all the souls had chosen their lives in the order of their lots, they were marshaled and went before Lachesis. And she sent with each, as the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice, the genius that he had chosen, and this divinity led the soul first to Clotho, under her hand and her turning of the spindle to ratify the destiny of his lot and choice; and after contact with her the genius again led the soul to the spinning of Atropos to make the web of its destiny irreversible, and then without a backward look it passed beneath the throne of Necessity. And after it had passed through that, when the others also had passed, they all journeyed to the Plain of Oblivion, through a terrible and stifling heat, for it was bare of trees and all plants, and there they camped at eventide by the River of Forgetfulness, whose waters no vessel can contain. They were all required to drink a measure of the water, and those who were not saved by their good sense drank more than the measure, and each one as he drank forgot all things. (Plato, 620c – 621a)

In the myth, the soul that enters a new life loses the knowledge of what it has been; its own peculiar plot is known only to supernal forces. This, of course, makes sense within specific religious beliefs. However, that myth—and Emerson's use of it--also raise issues that are not tied to any religious framework. One who departs this life leaves behind with others the memory of what his life was. However, the myth of forgetting equally reminds us that one who *enters* this life is not in possession of its meaning—and perhaps never gains full possession of it. "Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair;

there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight." The beginningless and endless series may be the ongoing story of humankind, a drama one is called upon to participate in and shape but which no individual ever authors from the ground up. Conversely, Emerson underlines that the world shapes the individual or, rather, that the correspondence between man and nature is crucial to the individual's becoming who he is:

> A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world. His faculties refer to natures out of him, and predict the world he is to inhabit, as the fins of the fish foreshow that water exists, or the wings of an eagle in the egg presuppose air. He cannot live without a world. Put Napoleon in an island prison, let his faculties find no men to act on, no Alps to climb, no stake to play for, and he would beat the air and appear stupid. (*E&L* 254)

It is not just that the world unlocks my thoughts and makes me acquainted with myself. The world is a "shadow of the soul" inasmuch as it "fits" the individual, opening up possibilities that correspond to his potentialities. It can thus serve as a field into which he can project himself, putting into play latent capacities that would perforce lie fallow in isolation. There is no other path to self-knowledge. Thus, while solitude may be an invaluable and necessary component of a life well-lived, Emerson's analysis suggests that it can only be one facet. Yet while society adds a dimension to individual existence, Emerson emphasizes that it can also threaten the freedom and integrity he locates in solitude. The first chapter of this thesis explored in depth what our author thinks

is at stake in solitude, so I will assume here that his wariness of life among others has been sufficiently explicated.

To recapitulate, Emerson has claimed that our grasp of reality—including self-knowledge and our understanding of nature--is necessarily mediated by our relations with other persons. Thus, it inherits the fragility of the relations it depends on; the passing of our affections and of their objects also bereaves us of the reality we touched through them, leaving us adrift and ghostlike. To make matters worse, social existence, even when it is pursued for the sake of gaining reality through expression, can compromise the values the Concord sage associates with solitude. What I want to suggest is that the distinctive features of the style of friendship he advocates—crucially, its impersonality--are meant to negotiate these pitfalls. By rethinking the banal conception and practice of friendship, Emerson will seek a steadier, less vulnerable contact with reality.

The term "impersonality" doubtless has broad connotations. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use it to refer to the body of arguments in Emerson's work that the source of value in human relations lies outside or beyond individuals. However, it is impossible to approach this without an understanding of the general picture of how our author thinks thought and contemplation can transcend the narrowly individual sphere of existence, so I begin by laying out this more comprehensive framework.

Perhaps the most explicit expression—and the one most relevant to the present discussion—of Emersonian impersonality is found in the pages of "The Over-Soul":

I live in society; with persons who answer to thoughts in my own mind, or express a certain obedience to the great instincts to which I live. I see its presence to them. I am certified of a common nature; and these other souls, these separated selves, draw me as nothing else can. They stir in me the new emotions we call passion; of love, hatred, fear, admiration, pity; thence comes conversation, competition, persuasion, cities, and war. Persons are supplementary to the primary teaching of the soul. In youth we are mad for persons. Childhood and youth see all the world in them. But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all. Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God. (*E&L* 390)

Our engagement with persons, our youthful mad passion for them, leads us, according to Emerson, to the impersonal, which he equates with "our common nature." What is this impersonal and how can our affections lead us to it?

I suggest the impersonal is the abiding idea that Emerson, in a quasi-Platonic vein, thinks we discern through the flux of appresentations:

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. (*E&L* 709)

Other persons, Emerson makes it trenchantly clear, can appear among "the mutable and fleeting":

I wish to speak with all respect of persons, but sometimes I must pinch myself to keep awake, and preserve the due decorum. They melt so fast into each other, that they are like grass and trees, and it needs an effort to treat them as

individuals. Though the uninspired man certainly finds persons a conveniency in household matters, the divine man does not respect them: he sees them as a rack of clouds, or a fleet of ripples which the wind drives over the surface of the water. But this is flat rebellion. Nature will not be Buddhist: she resents generalizing, and insults the philosopher in every moment with a million of fresh particulars. It is all idle talking: as much as a man is a whole, so he is also a part; and it were partial not to see it. (*E&L* 580-581)

The torpor that threatens one here in the presence of a melting cascade of persons echoes a passage from "Experience" with which we began this discussion: "Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter." What I take both to refer to is the elusive, unstable sense of reality we feel or fail to feel in the presence of persons. The philosopher's searching gaze sweeps across humanity but cannot long hold any one person in focus; they soon dissolve into the idea they instantiate—"our common nature"--a higher or broader perception where our gaze can come to rest. Emerson admits—indeed, insists—that this way of seeing is partial. I will argue forthwith that access to both perspectives--the general or impersonal and the particular or personal--is crucial to his vision of human relations, since it opens up a more enduring reality and thereby allows the seeker to "bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence."

Emerson's above characterization of the individual fading into the general and Nature's rejoinders to the contrary makes no explicit mention of interpersonal affection. Nonetheless, it can plausibly be said that beholding another in his or her

individual specificity is crucial to love and friendship. At any rate, the transition from the personal perspective to the impersonal can be highly significant in the context of the affections:

> Let your greatness educate the crude and cold companion. If he is unequal, he will presently pass away; but thou art enlarged by thy own shining, and, no longer a mate for frogs and worms, dost soar and burn with the gods of the empyrean. It is thought a disgrace to love unrequited. But the great will see that true love cannot be unrequited. True love transcends the unworthy object, and dwells and broods on the eternal, and when the poor interposed mask crumbles, it is not sad, but feels rid of so much earth, and feels its independency the surer. Yet these things may hardly be said without a sort of treachery to the relation. (*E&L* 354)

Love unrequited is, of course, an instance of love mortally threatened. That threat is eluded, in this account, by transcending the personal toward the universal, discovering, behind the inconstant beloved face, the genuinely beloved abiding idea. This discovery—a form of abandonment—allows the lover to "bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence." That an idea—mediated and obscured by a person—is the genuine and proper object of our affections is a proposition Emerson endeavors in various contexts to instill in the reader. Friends and lovers, properly regarded, come to stand for something outside themselves, for an aspect of Nature that is not tied to any individual or, indeed, to persons. Bearing out our author's view that "even love, which is the deification of persons, must become more impersonal each day" (*E&L* 335), a person means the most to us when she appears least like a person:

> The lover cannot paint his maiden to his fancy poor and solitary…Though she extrudes all other persons from his attention as cheap and unworthy, she indemnifies him by carrying out her own being into somewhat impersonal, large, mundane, so that the maiden stands to him for a representative of all select things and virtues. For that reason, the lover never sees personal resemblances in his mistress to her kindred or to others. His friends find in her a likeness to her mother, or her sisters, or to persons not of her blood. The lover sees no resemblance except to summer evenings and diamond mornings, to rainbows and the song of birds. (*E&L* 332)

What the passage suggests is that to love people is to discover in them something beyond themselves. Emerson describes two corollaries of affection's ability to disclose the impersonal. First, it makes other persons instrumental in our education, in the ever-deepening understanding of nature that existence itself brings.

> I am in the habit of thinking, --not, I hope, out of a partial experience, but confirmed by what I notice in many lives, --that to every serious mind Providence sends from time to time five or six or seven teachers who are of the first importance to him in the lessons they have to impart. (*CW* X 102-3)

Second, relatedly, it assimilates partings between persons to the salutary flow and renewal of ideas:

> It were a pleasant inquiry to follow into detail their ministry to our education, but where would it stop? We are associated in adolescent and adult life with some friends, who, like skies and waters, are coextensive with our idea; who, answering each to a certain affection of the soul, satisfy our desire on that side… When much intercourse with a friend has supplied us with a standard of excellence, and has increased our respect for the resources of God who thus sends a real person to outgo our ideal; when he has, moreover, become an object of

thought, and, whilst his character retains all its unconscious effect, is converted in the mind into solid and sweet wisdom,--it is a sign to us that his office is closing, and he is commonly withdrawn from our sight in a short time. (*E&L* 31)

The friend, Emerson suggests here, appears to us as the outward embodiment of an idea we need to bring to light in consciousness. Having performed their appointed office, the friends part ways. Emerson suggests this is no cause for regret:

> I chide society, I embrace solitude, and yet I am not so ungrateful as not to see the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded, as from time to time they pass my gate. Who hears me, who understand me, becomes mine,--a possession for all time… My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me… High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts… Will these, too, separate themselves from me again, or some of them? I know not, but I fear it not; for my relation to them is so pure, that we hold by simple affinity, and the Genius of my life being thus social, the same affinity will exert its energy on whomsoever is as noble as these men and women, wherever I may be. (*E&L* 342-3)

If a friend whose path briefly intersects mine can become "a possession for all time", perhaps it is because he (like "the great man") stands for an idea. To move beyond an idea as one's understanding deepens is not to suffer a loss:

> If, in the hours of clear reason, we should speak the severest truth, we should say, that we had never made a sacrifice. In these hours the mind seems so great, that nothing can be taken from us that seems much. All loss, all pain, is particular; the universe remains to the heart unhurt… For it is only the finite that has wrought and suffered; the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose. (*E&L* 305)

The "clear reason" alluded to here is the perspective of the Eternal Cause or Over-soul, the universal fountainhead that is undiminished by the passing of any of its multitudinous emanations, enriched by the flux. From this perspective, sacrifice is inconceivable because what is essential is inexhaustible; the creative force that has once clothed an idea in flesh can do so again and the same affinities will bind each incarnation. The meeting and parting of friends is no more to be regretted than the evolution and enlargement of our understanding, which it accompanies and catalyzes.

Impersonality, then, saves us from the loss of the world to which partings can otherwise give way. However, the world it preserves is a world transfigured.

> The actions and events of our childhood and youth, are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions,--with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it, than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,--remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption… In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. (*E&L* 61)

Although this characterization does not explicitly take account of friendship, the alert reader will notice how closely it mirrors what we have already seen of Emerson's analysis of interpersonal relations: the fact "soars into

the empyrean," just as love does when it "transcends the unworthy object"; the deed "detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind" just as the impression of our friend's character is "converted in the mind into solid and sweet wisdom." I take it, then, that the more general account above illuminates friendship's transition to the impersonal: the friend is known as an idea retrospectively, once the passion he stirs in me has subsided and is no longer "a part of life" through which my affections circulate.

Friends afford us a purchase on the world in at least two distinct ways, corresponding to the personal and impersonal modes of relationship. In one, they allow us to disclose ourselves and bring the world to life in a particular light by coinhabiting it; in the other, they let us see beyond it. Although the personal leads to the impersonal, it should be clear that the impersonal cannot *include* the personal, for the simple reason that an idea cannot see me or share the world with me. The impersonal is solitary. If it could exist by itself, therefore, such a world would be vulnerable to the skepticism we discussed earlier. But it is doubtful that it can ever exist by itself. Even before addressing Emerson's more detailed account of the ascent to impersonality, I take it to be overwhelmingly plausible prima facie that friendship cannot be established without some involvement of the affections. The impersonal thus depends on the personal; as it concerns friendship, it is an offshoot of the personal. Perhaps that is one reason why Emerson says love's object cannot be unmasked "without treachery to the relation", since discrediting the personal is also to undermine the impersonal by, as it were, calling its premises into question.

I want to close this chapter by addressing the practical aspect of Emerson's theory of friendship. If we embrace this ideal of friendship, how do we live it?

Plato famously characterized the way of life he advocated as a preparation for death. Analogously, we might say that Emerson directs us to approach the affections with a view to encumbering ourselves with little dross, eyeing the celestial rather than binding ourselves to the earthy and inessential, that we may shed the latter with ease at the proper juncture, when our affections pass away as all ephemera must.

"In our youth we are mad for persons." Emerson's evocation of this madness helps us appreciate the depth of the hopes we at first (mis)place in other persons at every encounter, while cautioning us that our expectancy will go unfulfilled:

> See, in any house where virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes. A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him… Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us. He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish… The same idea exalts conversation with him. We talk better than we are wont… For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers. But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects, into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the

order, the dress, and the dinner,--but the throbbing of the heart, and the communications of the soul, no more. (*E&L* 341-2)

It is almost dangerous to me to "crush the sweet poison of misused wine" of the affections. A new person is to me a great event and hinders me from sleep. I have often had fine fancies about persons which have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day; it yields no fruit. (*E&L* 343)

What excites such a keen sense of anticipation in us and opens our hearts to the commended stranger is, on Emerson's analysis, something to which no particular personality can correspond: the abstract, universal idea of virtue. Because (as I explain below) persons are narrower than the ideals they evoke, they can never fulfill the hopes they arouse—a point Emerson makes more trenchantly with respect to the case of romantic love:

Therefore, the Deity sends the glory of youth before the soul, that it may avail itself of beautiful bodies as aids to its recollection of the celestial good and fair; and the man beholding such a person in the female sex runs to her, and finds the highest joy in contemplating the form, movement and intelligence of this person, because it suggests to him the presence of that which indeed is within the beauty, and the cause of the beauty.

If, however, from too much conversing with material objects, the soul was gross, and misplaced its satisfaction in the body, it reaped nothing but sorrow; body being unable to fulfil the promise which beauty holds out… (*E&L* 333)

Moreover, Emerson suggests that the encounter itself subtly corrupts those who would meet:

> We are armed all over with subtle antagonisms, which, as soon as we meet, begin to play and translate all poetry into stale prose. Almost[38] all people descend to meet. All association must be a compromise, and, what is worst, the very flower and aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other. What a perpetual disappointment is actual society, even of the virtuous and gifted! (*E&L* 345)

If meetings between people—even virtuous and gifted ones—*necessarily* mars or occludes their beauty, I suggest that is because it forces them, to some extent, out of contemplation. "We know better than we do." (*E&L* 391) We can best approach perfection through contemplation because we can perceive the ideal but not enact or become it. Vision is potentially unlimited; it can, in principle, canvas any number of perspectives. This is a solitary quality. On the other hand, responding outwardly to a person or situation always involves staking a particular position, since it is impossible to not respond on the basis of one's partialities and definitions. Society's demand for conformity helps bind the actor to the position his act forces him into:

> As soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this. (*E&L* 261)

More importantly, however, there exists in principle no adequate outward expression of infinite receptivity. The ideal is inexhaustible; speech and action are definite. As George Kateb elaborates,

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[38] When Emerson repeats this claim in "The Over-soul," he dispenses with the "almost." (E&L 391)

Really, how could determinate being or specific doing and acting follow from the cultivation of a readiness to lend oneself to contrasting or even directly opposed ideas and values, practices and institutions? What Emerson says of Plato can apply to Emerson himself: "his garment, though of purple, and almost sky-woven, is an academic robe, and hinders action with its voluminous robes" ("Swedenborg; or the Mystic," *Representative Men*, p. 677). Some of one's particular commitments and engagements must survive sympathetic understanding of forces antagonistic to oneself or a sense of their beauty or appropriateness or necessity. But in comparison to the universe in one's liberated mind, being merely oneself, as well as doing and acting as oneself, can feel like such a narrowing of possibility and such a forcing of choice as to look capricious or willful. Grace lies in impersonality. (Kateb (2000), 31)

The widest—and therefore best—aspect of a person is, for Emerson, his encompassing vision. But, although another person can stimulate this faculty in me, it is never to be met with in interpersonal interaction, which precludes in principle its expression. Thus, our author admonishes:

The laws of friendship are austere and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals. But we have aimed at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in the whole garden of God, which many summers and many winters must ripen. We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain. (*E&L* 345)

I believe the clutching and grasping Emerson decries here is the (possibly contradictory) wish that the ideal of a person show itself concretely, crudely, that it could become wholly present in finite word or deed. But what is the alternative to this?

It should be remembered from the first chapter of this essay that for Emerson, the facts of nature are inherently moral. Thus, the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects" and the inability of souls to touch give rise to a normative insight:

> I like that every chair should be a throne, and hold a king. I prefer a tendency to stateliness, to an excess of fellowship. Let the incommunicable objects of nature and the metaphysical isolation of man teach us independence. Let us not be too much acquainted… We should meet each morning, as from foreign countries, and spending the day together, should depart at night, as into foreign countries. In all things I would have the island of a man inviolate. Let us sit apart as the gods, talking from peak to peak all around Olympus. No degree of affection need invade this religion. This is myrrh and rosemary to keep the other sweet. Lovers should guard their strangeness. (*E&L* 522)

While these directives may seem metaphoric and imprecise, it is not hard to elucidate some points they make. The friends who meet fleetingly only to part again do so "as from foreign countries" because they do not belong to the same sphere—that is, they do not dwell in the commonplaces they share but visit them from their solitary homes, from their irreducible singularity. This is the "strangeness" they guard—their individual lives never disappear into the common.

Respect for individuality—one's own and one's friend's—is an important part of Emersonian friendship. However, it is also a means of keeping the banal and ephemeral at bay and hewing to the ideal—"our common nature" or the impersonal—since, for Emerson, only friendship that discloses that dimension is worthy of the name:

> Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them? Why insist on rash personal relations with your friend? Why go to his house, or know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant? Leave this touching and clawing. Let him be to me a spirit. A message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance from him, I want, but not news, nor pottage. I can get politics, and chat, and neighbourly conversation from cheaper companions. Should not the society of my friend be to me poetic, pure, universal, and great as nature itself? Ought I to feel that our tie is profane in comparison with yonder bar of cloud that sleeps on the horizon, or that clump of waving grass that divides the brook? Let us not vilify, but raise it to that standard. (*E&L* 351)

This exhortation is in itself quite simple and direct. Our earlier discussion of the propinquity between friends and nature allows us to appreciate its import, since those affinities are what help us apprehend nature through friendship.

But once the banal and everyday have been set aside, what medium remains for the friends to commune? The passage above mentions "a message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance." Sincerity, indeed, may even be latent in our very existence: "We pass for what we are. Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment." (*E&L* 266)[39] A breath or a glance is a spontaneous confession of our selves.[40] Messages and thought (as distinct from politics and chat), removed from the din of everyday busyness, truck

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[39] I take this effortless, unintended communication of virtue or vice to be part of the Emersonian "expression" already discussed.

[40] A friendship built almost entirely on glances is chronicled intermittently in Emerson's journal entries from his college years, 1820-22. See Richardson (190&ff) and Gonnaud (30-32) for commentary on this relationship.

chiefly in ideas, express approximations of the impersonal perceptions friendship leads us to. Thus, Emerson accords epistolary friendship a certain pride of place:

> The hues of the opal, the light of the diamond, are not to be seen, if the eye is too near. To my friend I write a letter, and from him I receive a letter. That seems to you a little. It suffices me. It is a spiritual gift worthy of him to give, and of me to receive. It profanes nobody. In these warm lines the heart will trust itself, as it will not to the tongue, and pour out the prophecy of a godlier existence than all the annals of heroism have yet made good. (*E&L* 351)

Perhaps the most perfect love, the marriage of the personal and the impersonal, is one where two individuals are bound by mutual regard for a shared thought:

> But of progressive souls, all loves and friendships are momentary. *Do you love me*? means, Do you see the same truth? If you do, we are happy with the same happiness: but presently one of us passes into the perception of new truth;--we are divorced, and no tension in nature can hold us to each other. I know how delicious is this cup of love,--I existing for you, you existing for me; but it is a child's clinging to his toy; an attempt to eternize the fireside and nuptial chamber; to keep the picture alphabet through which our first lessons are prettily conveyed… You love the worth in me; then I am your husband: but it is not me, but the worth, that fixes the love; and that worth is a drop of the ocean of worth that is beyond me. (*E&L* 679-80)

Love's ascent into the impersonal does not escape the Heraclitean flux. While it affords us a vision of an inextinguishable substrate underlying personal love, Emerson believes that our relation to the permanent, our perception, is irremediably dynamic: "The secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is

quicksand. This onward trick of nature is too strong for us: *Pero si muove*." (*E&L* 476) However, in the wake of the inevitable passing of our transient affections, impersonal beholding does, in a very real sense, rescue the purchase they afford us on the world by sublimating the vision of personal love into an idea. Viewed in this light, the lover whose love concludes is not destitute but enriched by the acquisition of transmuted wisdom and a renewed openness to the new loves with which the Genius of his life sees fit to instruct and delight him. "If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea." (*E&L* 709) The lover who recognizes that personal affection springs from and hearkens back to an infinitely wider fountainhead will cultivate a style of friendship that aims from the start at that universal source and scarcely cumbers itself with attachments to the ephemeral. Seen in this light, the succession of persons blends into the continuity of our communion with the universe. The impermanence of our affections and the "evanescence and lubricity" of the world they constitute is no tragedy but the workings of life's inexhaustible renewal. "The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment." (*E&L* 414)

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4. **Unamuno: Two Paths to Immortality**

For Unamuno, the value of relations with others lies in the prospect of overcoming our mortality. In the following pages, I explore two different accounts of this claim, focusing, respectively, on the texts The Tragic Sense of Life and How to Make a Novel. The first describes the discovery through compassion of a God who can grant us eternal life; the second seeks immortality in the conversation of literature. In the third part of the chapter, I return to The Life of Our Lord Don Quijote. Drawing on the literary theory examined in the second part, I will try to bring the camaraderie between Quijote and Sancho into focus as an exemplar of the kind of relationship Unamuno propounds.

i. Love, Compassion and the Living God

In chapter 2, I drew on Plato's Symposium to clarify why Unamuno characterizes Don Quijote's quest as a knight errant as an expression of the drive to procreate. Similarly, the process through which our author thinks we come to know God can be viewed as a variant of the ascent that, as that dialogue famously describes, eventuates in contemplation of the Form of Beauty. In both cases, knowledge of a single individual expands until it becomes knowledge of a universal. For both authors, the widening of this circle is propelled by Eros. However, the differences are significant as well. In Unamuno, the personal dimension does not recede as we enlarge our perceptions but is projected to infinity; the vision this process culminates in is not of an impersonal Form but of a personal deity. Although desire in Plato's ascent focuses on different objects as

the lover's discernment grows sharper, it remains the driving force throughout the ascent. In Unamuno, by contrast, desire withers under the onslaught of suffering and gives way to compassion before the single individual finds God.

Because (as we discussed in chapter 2) it is so closely linked to the primordial drive of *conatus*, Unamuno identifies sexual love as a necessary point of departure in the soul's journey toward God:

> Sexual love is the generative type of all other love. We seek to perpetuate ourselves in love and through love, and we perpetuate ourselves on earth only by dying, by yielding our lives to others. The humblest forms of animal life, the lowest of living beings, multiply by dividing themselves, splitting up, ceasing to be what they formerly were… To live is to give oneself, perpetuate oneself, to give oneself is to die. (*TSL* 147)

All that this animal love has in view is the individual's own pleasure and perpetuation; the other, Unamuno says, evoking Kantian terms of reproof, is enlisted merely as a means to that end:

> Love has been called a mutual egotism. And in truth, each lover seeks to possess the other, and even without being conscious of it or purposing it at the time, seeks self-pleasure in seeking self-perpetuation in and through the other. Each of the lovers is, for the other, an immediate instrument of enjoyment and a mediate instrument of perpetuation. And thus they are both tyrants and slaves, each one a tyrant over and a slave to the other simultaneously. (*TSL* 148)

Our author believes, however, that the character of love can be profoundly altered by misfortune and sorrow:

> And from the carnal and primitive love of which I speak, the love of the whole body with all its senses, the animal origin of human society, from this love and its lovemaking, arises spiritual, sorrowful love.
>
> This spiritual love is born of sorrow, from the death of carnal love. It is also born of the compassionate sense of protection which parents feel for helpless

children. Lovers do not love each other with true self-abandon, with a true fusion of souls—and not just of bodies—until the heavy pestle of sorrow has ground down their hearts by crushing them in a mortar of spiritual suffering. Sensual love joins their bodies but separates their souls, keeps them strangers to one another; but this love produces a fruit of their flesh, a child. And then let us say that this child, engendered out of death, falls sick and dies. And it comes about that over the dead body of their carnal fusion—but simultaneous spiritual separation and mutual estrangement—their bodies grow cool and estranged from each other as well, but their spirits join in sorrow, and then the lovers, now parents, embrace, and from the death of their child of the flesh there is now born a true spiritual love… For in truth, human beings love each other spiritually only when they have suffered the same sorrow, when they have long plowed the stony earth, joined together by the mutual yoke of a common grief. It is then that they know one another in their common anguish, and pity one another and love one another. For to love means to pity, and, though their bodies are united by pleasure, their souls are united by pain. (*TSL* 149)

This is a revealing tableau whose moral Unamuno, to my mind, does not sufficiently clarify: he does not explain how the lovers' bereavement meshes their souls together. I would therefore like to devote some space to attempting to elucidate thoughts the text leaves implicit. I draw here on Steven Crowell's recent commentary on the work of Werner Marx, which articulates several insights I believe Unamuno relies on.

As a starting point, it is surely plausible that the poignancy of the case of the dead infant and its relevance to Unamuno's exposition stem from the connection he has drawn between procreation and *conatus*. It is their carnal afterlife, the persistence of their flesh and blood, that is at stake for the parents. On this view, the child's passing is surely a powerful intimation of their own

mortality. Thus, to grasp the significance of their loss, we should attend to what death means to humans.

First, Crowell's reading of Marx affirms that death sunders the conceit of the individual's self-sufficiency, revealing instead one's fundamental poverty:

> Rather than lead me anxiously back to my own resources, thus disclosing an existential autonomy, death horrifies me and *shatters* my illusory autonomy, uncovering my absolute "neediness." Not necessarily linked to some specific fact that makes my impending death more likely, horror of mortality overcomes me when "it" will, individualizing me to reveal not a hero but a beggar. "Forlorn," revealed as bereft of the resources necessary to maintain my being, I "implore [my] fellow men for help, beg for the attention" of an Other who can no longer be indifferent to me. Kafka captures this in his image of the Bucket Rider: With "coal all spent; the bucket empty, the shovel useless; the stove breathing out cold" and "the sky a silver shield against any one who looks for help from it." I must either die or "seek aid from the coal dealer," the one who "means to me the very sun in the firmament." (Crowell 215-16)

Unamuno will have a good deal more to say about the lone individual's neediness and powerlessness to sustain himself. For the purposes of our present discussion, we may say that if the foregoing analysis is correct, the apprehension of their mortality will transform the relation between the two lovers by abolishing the "tyranny" each sought to exercise over the other; they may now turn to each other in supplication rather than despotism.

Unamuno's description of the lovers as attempting to "possess" each other recalls a Hegelian violence against the alterity of the Other in which the project of becoming everything is prosecuted through incessant consumption, assimilation

of what is other. Crowell suggests that the experience of mortality brings about an ethical moment which calls for an end to this ravenous feeding:

> Life loves the creative will-to-power, and to forget death is to unleash life's innocent rapacity. If in lacking the Near life maintains itself by overcoming distance in the elemental *agon* of appropriation, then death, as bringing into the Near, must include within itself a transforming distanciation, a moment of *reserve* that calls a halt to the appropriation of the Other. Though Marx does not say so, "reserve" would thus be a name for measure itself, the dimension in which life becomes ethical, existence human.
>
> It is solely by means of this reserve that the previously discussed modalities of intimacy and proximity lose their savagery. Love's jealousy, for example, cannot help but become possessive assimilation if left to its own devices, to the desire that "hungers" for satisfaction. If the relation with the beloved has a different character, will it not be because the lovers have first of all been neighbors? Without first existing in the Near—the originary revelation of the Other as neighbor—the lover's love is ruthless and tolerates no "separation." To say that the lovers want the best for each other, that they allow each other space to develop their own being, is already to acknowledge something other than the hunger of love, an ethical moment that now (perhaps paradoxically) appears as a moment of separation or reserve. To the extent that the lovers have not "trembled in their very being," then—i.e., to the extent that their intimacy is not subtended by death bringing them near, reducing them to a forlorn neediness that hearkens to the Other's claim beyond the insistent pulse of life, of the desire for gratification—to that extent their love may always expose its brutal face *without becoming other than love*. (Crowell 219, emphasis in the original)

The conception of the neighbor invoked here is as follows:

> Death reveals a new system of weightings among things and between human beings, bringing them *near* in the way characteristic of the neighbor in the eminent sense. My fellow man is not a stranger, but a fellow *mortal*, i.e., a *fellow*

sufferer toward whom I cannot be indifferent; he has become "my neighbor as one who shares my fate" in spite of all that divides us. Thus the affect of horror can pass over into that of com-passion, a specific neighborly intimacy that tends itself toward *universalization*. The "common fate" that binds me to the other as neighbour, then… is nothing but the universal state of mortality. (Crowell 216)

The universality of this sympathy Marx calls "neighborly" is, as we shall see, crucial to Unamuno's account of the discovery of the living God.

To summarize Marx's claims, the awareness of their mortality leads the lovers out of their rapacity toward an ethical relation in which their "hunger" is tempered and checked by a regard for the Other. Mortality does this by exposing the individual's insufficiency and neediness (which Unamuno will explore in depth)—"a need that allows me to *hear* the claim of the Other, to become attuned to his call calling out as one also in need." (Crowell 216) The significance of these claims will emerge more fully as we follow the meditation on mortality and compassion in Unamuno, who nevertheless goes beyond Marx, averring that these experiences lead through the ethical to the religious.

Unamuno writes,

To love spiritually is to feel compassion, and whoever feels most compassionate loves most. Men aflame with a burning charity for their fellowmen feel as they do because they have plumbed the depths of their own misery, of their own apparential insubstantiality, their own nothingness, and then, after turning their newly opened eyes upon their fellow, they have seen them equally wretched , apparential, subject to annihilation, and they have felt compassion and love for them. (*TSL* 150-51)

I take the above passage to characterize what Marx refers to as neighborly intimacy, the universal regard both authors credit with modulating egoistic love into an ethical feeling: the shattering cognizance of my own mortality that allows me to hear the Other's needful call, to hear it in a compassionate register. Now, it may seem odd to tie compassion so closely to mortality. After all, isn't pity commonly aroused by the real determinisms in another's life in contrast with our own—by difference rather than sameness? I believe there are two reasons why Unamuno grants death pride of place in this connection. First, in spite of his emphasis on the singularity of the solitary individual, Unamuno arguably inherits the Kantian project of finding a universal ground for moral regard, one that does not depend on the particular situation or constitution of the individual. Our author's irrationalism (which we discussed in Chapter 2), however, would hardly dispose him to adopt practical reason as a basis for this purpose. More importantly, as we shall see presently, the discovery of the living God rests on both sympathetic identification and compassion of all-embracing scope.

> Our own struggle to acquire, preserve, and enlarge our own consciousness causes us to notice, in the strivings and movements and revolutions of all things, the struggle to acquire, preserve, and enlarge consciousness to which everything tends. Underlying the action of those most akin to myself, my fellow man, I sense—or, rather, I co-sense[41]--a state of consciousness similar to that

[41] As a compromise, I abridge by one letter Anthony Kerrigan's translation "con-sense" here. Unamuno's hyphenated "con-sentir" plays on an esoteric acceptation of "consentir" as a pronominal verb, roughly meaning to be hurt, to sustain injury. Arguably, some such description would better convey the literal meaning of the sentence. The hyphen, however, is meant to stress that "con," the Spanish word for "with," is a building block of this verb, as it is of the noun "conciencia" (consciousness); I assume that Kerrigan hews more closely to the form than to the denotation of the original in order to preserve this implication. However, to the best of my knowledge, the prefix "co-" more nearly captures this in English than "con," which does not seem to have any standard meaning across the various English words it is part of.

which underlies my own actions. My brother's cry of pain provokes my own pain into crying out in the depths of my consciousness. I feel the pain of animals in the same way, and the pain of a tree when one of its branches is torn off, especially when my fantasy, which is the faculty of intuiting, of in-sight, is aroused.[42] (*TSL* 155-6)

To begin to appreciate the meliorative power Unamuno attributes to love, we should consider the above characterization of compassion in light of the following claim:

And if it is painful to have to cease to be one day, perhaps it would be even more painful to be oneself for all time and no more than oneself, never being able at the same time to be someone else, never being everything else as well… (*TSL* 152-3)

This echoing cry my brother's pain elicits within my own consciousness, I suggest, brings me as near as I can hope to becoming at the same time someone else, as illustrated vividly in the following lines from Whitman's "Song of Myself":

I am the hounded slave… I wince at the bite of dogs,
Hell and despair are upon me… crack and again crack the marksmen,
I clutch the rails of the fence… my gore dribs thinned with the ooze of my skin,
I fall on the weeds and stones.
The riders spur their unwilling horses and haul close,
They taunt my dizzy ears… they beat me violently over the head with their whip-stocks.

[42] Here I render "fantasia" as "fantasy" and "intuimiento" as "intuiting," replacing Kerrigan's choices of "imagination" and "intuition," with their more specific technical Kantian meanings that these epistemological attributions would inevitably evoke. I speculate that this is what prompts Unamuno to use "intuimiento" rather than the standard "intuición."

Agonies are one of my changes of garments;

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels… I myself become the wounded person,

My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe. (Whitman)

Now, although neighbors and persons may be the most immediate and natural objects of compassion, Unamuno indicates that this spiritual love can encompass more than humanity:

And from feeling compassion for other men, for those akin to you, beginning with those most akin to you, for those you live among, you go on to feel compassion for everyone alive, and perhaps even for that which does not live but merely exists. That distant star shining up there in the night will one day be extinguished and turn to dust and cease shining and existing. And as with the one star, so it will be with the whole of the starry sky. Poor sky! (*TSL* 152)

Analogies between man and world abound, of course. However, the discovery of the living God, in Unamuno's account, hinges on one particular affinity. In order to broaden compassion as he describes above, extending it to all creation, it is not enough to note, say, the transience common to man and star. Rather, in Unamuno's terms, compassion arises from "personalizing" the star—that is, from attributing consciousness or (what amounts to the same for him) suffering to it:

In order to love everything, in order to feel compassion for all things, human and extra-human, living and not living, you must feel everything within yourself, you must personalize everything. For love personalizes everything it loves, everything it pities. We pity, that is, we love, only that which is like us, and thus our compassion grows, and with it our love for things in the measure to which they are discovered to be in our likeness. If I am moved to pity and love the

luckless star which will one day vanish from the sky, it is because love, compassion, makes me feel that it possesses a consciousness, more or less obscure, which causes it to suffer because it is no more than a star doomed to cease being itself one day. For all consciousness is an awareness of death and suffering. (*TSL* 153)

The claim that suffering is an inextricable component of consciousness is not self-evident. Unamuno's argument for it seems to come in two parts. First, he points out that the individual only acquires self-awareness by coming up against his or her limitations:

Suffering is the way of consciousness, and it is through suffering that living beings achieve self-consciousness. To possess consciousness of oneself, to have personality, is to know and feel oneself distinct from other beings. And this feeling of distinctiveness is reached only through a collision, through more or less severe suffering, through a sense of one's own limits. Consciousness of oneself is simply consciousness of one's own limitation. I feel that I am myself when I feel that I am not others; to know and feel the extent of my being is to know where I cease being, the point beyond which I no longer am.

How would one know one existed unless one suffered in some measure? How turn inward, achieve reflective consciousness, unless it be through suffering? In pleasure one forgets oneself, forgets that one exists, passes into someone else, into an alien being, becomes alien-ated. And one turns inward, returns to oneself, becomes oneself again only in suffering. (*TSL* 154-55)

I take Unamuno to mean here that in the pleasure one feels in untrammeled activity—say, crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky--the self never comes into conscious focus, since the act's intentionality is directed wholly outward; the self is absorbed in its act. Only

when its intending is checked or challenged by the not-I does the self become aware.

A second reason for believing that suffering always accompanies consciousness is stated in relation to the Schopenhauerian Will:

> Will is a force that feels, that is, which suffers. “And which feels pleasure, too,” someone will add. But the capacity for pleasure is impossible without the capacity for suffering, and the faculty for pleasure is the same as the faculty for pain. He who does not suffer does not enjoy, just as he who does not perceive cold does not perceive heat. (*TSL* 162)

Pain and pleasure are both determinations of our sensitivity to variations in our weal. If there were no variation, we would experience neither one nor the other. If we are willing to accept that this sensitivity is an intrinsic or essential aspect of consciousness, it follows that to be conscious is to be exposed to suffering. It is hardly clear that Unamuno’s arguments do compel us to accept that conclusion. It is not obvious that to know oneself distinct from other beings entails suffering; such knowledge could be the basis of pride, for example. Unamuno might base this on his view of conatus’s drive to become everything, which would be foiled by the individual’s limits. However, while Unamuno links suffering simpliciter to consciousness, he does not make the much bolder claim that knowing oneself as distinct is the *only* source of suffering. This weakens the connection between individuality and consciousness, since suffering which arose from other conditions would, as per our author’s claims, lead to consciousness as well. This underscores that Unamuno offers no explanation of the ostensible connection between suffering and consciousness. To whatever extent the

plausibility of that connection relies on a link between individuality and consciousness, it is undermined by noting that perceiving one's limits is not a necessary condition for suffering. Unamuno's close identification of love and pity is also questionable. Finally, Unamuno characterizes consciousness as "awareness of death and suffering" but then goes on to treat suffering as a qualification of consciousness; he thus appears to equivocate between the views that suffering is an object of consciousness and that it is one of its properties. In the end, the link between suffering and consciousness may be better supported by *a posteriori* knowledge of the pervasiveness of suffering than by this analytic argument.[43]

The questionable arguments above bind consciousness inextricably to suffering. If we accept this point, then the animist assumption, the attribution of consciousness to everything, implies that the whole of creation can, indeed, be a proper object for compassion.

The universality the feeling of pity can attain reveals the living God to us:

> Love personalizes whatever it loves. We need only personalize an idea to fall in love with it. And when love is so great and vital, so strong and overflowing, that it loves everything, then it personalizes everything and discovers that the total Whole, the Universe, is also a Person with a Consciousness, a Consciousness which suffers, pities and loves, and is therefore consciousness. And this Consciousness of the Universe, which love discovers by personalizing whatever it loves, is what we call God. And thus our soul feels compassion for God and feels loved by Him, sheltering its wretchedness in the bosom of eternal and infinite wretchedness, which, in making itself eternal and infinite, constitutes supreme happiness itself.

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[43] Presumably it is also on *a* posteriori grounds that the psychoanalyst James Hillman describes the wound that brings us closer to death as increasing self-consciousness "as if we know something only as we lose it, in its limitation and decay." (Hillman 162)

> God, then, is the personalization of the Whole, the eternal and infinite Consciousness of the Universe, a Consciousness in thrall to matter and struggling to free itself from it. (*TSL* 153-54)

This passage's opening reference to love of a personified idea should put us in mind of Quijote's love for Dulcinea—an ideal garbed in flesh, as the second chapter discussed in detail. To perceive the living God, I take it, is a similar poetic act, discovering an immanent consciousness that underlies the universal experience of suffering and bestowing a human face on it. Personalizing God in this manner, in Unamuno's view, allows us to love Him and, as we shall see, makes our salvation possible.

Our author does not spell out in detail the cognitive process that leads to this perception. It seems plausible that once one acknowledges the universality of suffering, one no longer regards each suffering individual as an independent case but rather as an instance of a universal. However, it must be noted that in the relation Unamuno describes between man and God, the individual is not sublated into a higher universal (a fate he dreads as a form of death) or demoted to a position of lesser importance. Indeed, as it shall become plain, the universal in Unamuno exists for the sake of the individual.

As we discussed in chapter 2, Unamuno thinks cognition is guided by our vital needs and longing. The process that leads to the apprehension of God is no exception:

> Inverting the terms of the adage *nihil volitum quin praecognitum* we said that *nihil cognitum quin praevolitum*, we know nothing save what we have previously desired in one way or another, and we would be justified in adding that

we can not know, to any great degree, anything we have not loved, anything for which we have not felt compassion.

As love grows, the ardent longing to reach the uttermost, the innermost of all things, is extended to everything in sight, and compassion is felt for all. (*TSL* 151)

…we have at times an immediate feeling of God, above all in moments of spiritual suffocation. And this feeling—mark it well, mark it for all that which makes it tragic, and for the fact that the tragic sense of life itself springs from it—is a feeling of hunger for God, a lack of God. To believe in God is, in the first place, as we shall see, to wish for God to exist and to be unable to live without Him. (*TSL* 185)

We can perceive God, then, because we need and long for Him. But what is the basis of this need? Taken in isolation, some passages in Unamuno seem to suggest that the meaningfulness of life depends on God orchestrating or establishing some moral order:

The only way to assign a finality to the Universe is to give it a consciousness. For where there is no consciousness, there is no finality presupposing a purpose. And faith in God, as we shall see, is quite simply based upon the vital need to endow existence with a finality, to make it answer to a purpose. We need God, not in order to understand the *why*, but in order to feel and assert the ultimate *wherefore*, to give meaning to the Universe. (*TSL* 168)

However, there is no suggestion in Unamuno's text that discovering God discloses a new, independent finality. The end he connects Him to is already given: it is each individual being's impetus to persist in and enlarge its being. God does not give life meaning by bestowing a higher purpose on it but safeguards it from the absurdity extinction would reduce it to:

If we are all to die altogether—what is the point of everything! Wherefore? It is the Wherefore, the Wherefore of the Sphinx, that corrodes the marrow of our soul and that is the begetter of the anguish which stirs our love of hope. (*TSL* 48)

For Unamuno, fleeting, fey existence or existence without consciousness are less than fully real. We need God to preserve our conscious existence, to save us from annihilation:

We have created God in order to preserve the Universe from Nothingness, for all that is not consciousness, eternal consciousness, conscious of its eternity and eternally conscious, is no more than appearance. There is nothing truly real save that which feels, suffers, pities, loves, and desires—save consciousness. There is nothing substantial save consciousness. And we need God in order to preserve consciousness; not in order to think existence, but to live it; not in order to know the why and how of it, but to feel the wherefore of it. (*TSL* 170-71)

For this inquiry into the value of society, what is of greatest interest is not that God should grant us immortality but the premises which lead Unamuno to believe He can do so:

Man, in his consciousness, does not resign himself to being alone in the universe, or to being merely one more objective phenomenon. He wants to preserve his vital or passional subjectivity by making the entire universe alive, personal, and animated. For this purpose he has discovered God and substance, and God and substance keep reappearing in his thought in one disguise or another…

The most consistent—though also the most incongruous and unstable—idealism, that of Berkeley, which denied the existence of matter, of anything inert, extensive, and passive, and of the possibility of its giving rise to our sensations and serving as a substratum for external phenomena, this idealism is not, in its

essential nature, other than an absolute spiritualism, or dynamism, a supposition that every sensation comes to us, causatively, from another spirit, that is from another consciousness. And Berkeley's doctrine shows a certain affinity with those of Schopenhauer and Hartmann. The former's doctrine of the Will and the latter's doctrine of the Unconscious are already adumbrated in the Berkeleyean theory that to be is to be perceived; to which must be added: and cause another to perceive the one who is. (*TSL* 161)

If I understand correctly, Unamuno's point here echoes in somewhat earthier tones in this more recent passage by Hannah Arendt:

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. Nothing could appear, the word "appearance" would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist—living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize, and react to—in flight or desire, approval or disapproval, blame or praise—what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*… Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. (Arendt (1981) I:19)

Both thinkers underscore the inherent plurality of existence; to be is always to be for another. Unamuno, however, follows Berkeley in privileging God as the spectator for whom everything exists because he will not resign himself to life as a march from nothingness to nothingness.

In the passage above, Unamuno turns to Berkeleyean idealism as a bulwark against two scourges of the human condition. Surprisingly, the first of

them is solitude; clearly, “being alone in the universe” here lacks altogether the positive valence solitude had in Unamuno’s meditation on Don Quijote. What aloneness stands for in this context, I suggest, is death. The connection between death and solitude is adumbrated in Unamuno’s view that our thoughts naturally turn to mortal questions when we are by ourselves:

> the human question is the question of knowing what is to become of my consciousness, of yours, of that other’s and of everyone’s, after each of us dies. Anything other than facing this is to interject noise in order to not hear ourselves. And see here why we fear solitude so much and seek one another’s company. (Soledad 34)

However, based on the discussion in Tragic Sense of Life, we can conclude that this connection is philosophical, not merely psychological. Unamuno describes the development of spiritual love thus:

> When you reach your own nothingness, when you can not find an unshifting ground within yourself, when you can not discover your own infinity, let alone your own eternity, you will feel wholehearted compassion for your own fate, and you will burn with a sorrowful love for yourself, extinguishing so-called self-love… (*TSL* 152)

What is one’s own nothingness in the above passage? I suggest it is the insufficiency of an individual existence to maintain that existence. What I find within myself is not “an unshifting ground” but a void, for, alone, I do not and cannot have the wherewithal to exist. This is the situation of Kafka’s Bucket Rider who, “coal all spent; the bucket empty, the shovel useless; the stove breathing out cold; the room freezing,” must beseech another for the resources to

warm himself that he should not perish of cold. I suggest, then, that the need for God in Unamuno's thought should be understood along the following lines:

> "Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders?"—exclaims Rilke at the beginning of his *Duino Elegies*. The outcry reveals a profound human need which propels man to think of God as a person. The essence of this need may be perhaps expressed in a question: does my life proceed unwitnessed? An experience of a crisis, of a deeply felt emotion—suffering, joy, wonderment—is most likely to elicit this question. In such moments a man may have an irrepressible need to express "how it is with him." It is as if the experience I am undergoing did not quite have the necessary degree of reality—until it is externalized, that is, until I see it reflected in the soul of another. Only then, after my inwardly felt experience has penetrated the consciousness of another and has been faithfully perceived and reproduced there, only then, it seems, can I be assured of its real nature and can I come to terms with it. It is as if I had to put my private world outside myself into the soul of another, in order to appreciate its reality; I must see it *there*, truly recognized and understood by another. In this way, the other becomes a necessary part of my own reality, and especially so, if he is capable of focusing his attention on my deeply felt needs. (Kolenda (1964) 4)

To fully exist, on this view, involves being for another; to exist without end, Unamuno would add, is to be *for God*.

> If there is a Universal and Supreme Consciousness, I am an idea within it; and it is possible for any idea whatsoever in this Supreme Consciousness to die out? After I have died God will go on remembering me, and to be remembered by God, to have my consciousness maintained by the Supreme Consciousness, is not that, perhaps, to be? (*TSL* 164)

Surely it is in light of this conception of existence that we should understand the following ruminations of Augusto Pérez, the protagonist of Unamuno's tragicomic novel Niebla (Mist):

"This life of mine? Is it a novel? Or a *nivola*? Or what is it? All of this that is happening to me, and happening to the others about me, is it reality or is it fiction? May not all of it perhaps be a dream of God, or of whomever it may be, which will vanish as soon as He wakes? And therefore when we pray to Him, and cause canticles and hymns to rise to Him, is it not that we may lull Him to sleep, rocking the cradle of His dreams? Is not the whole liturgy, of all religions, only a way of soothing God in his dreams, so that he shall not wake and cease to dream us? Ah, my Eugenia!" (Mist 166)

Unamuno holds that the desperate hope for immortality is the fountainhead of all religion. (*TSL* 42 - 47) Augusto's soliloquy shows us that this genealogy is based on our author's personal conception of God and his interpersonal conception of existence: we can hope for immortality from God because He is endless and can behold us. Augusto frames the fear of death—a focal point of Unamuno's thought—as a dread of solitude, apprehension that the other will turn his face away from me.

"Man, in his consciousness, does not resign himself to being alone in the universe, or to being merely one more objective phenomenon." If I understand correctly, the second of these banes highlights another way in which Unamuno thinks we come to love and apprehend God. To be an "objective phenomenon" is to be part of an amoral universe which follows its course mechanically without regard for our values and longings and often runs roughshod over them. This gives rise to an absurdity Unamuno notes in our condition:

With knowledge and desire we can encompass everything, or almost everything; with will, nothing, or almost nothing. And contemplation is not happiness—no!; not if contemplation means impotence. And from the clash between our knowing and our ability to achieve comes compassion. (*TSL* 155)

The "objectivity" of phenomena, in this context, stands for their recalcitrance to our will; objectivity measures the chasm between vision and unyielding reality. Our author's discussion of tragic love shows how he thinks the experience of this absurd incongruence can lead us to a vision of the redemption most human beings hope for:

All this is felt more clearly and strongly whenever one of those tragic loves takes seed, grows roots, and flowers, although doomed to contend with the adamantine laws of Fate; one of those loves which are born out of due time or season, before or after the right moment, or outside the norm in which the world—which is custom—would have been willing to welcome them. The more barriers that Fate and the world with its law interpose between lovers, the stronger they feel impelled toward one another, and their pleasure in loving turns bitter, and the sorrow of not being able to love one another openly and freely increases, and they pity one another from the bottom of their hearts; and this mutual pity, which constitutes their common misery and their common felicity, provides fire and fuel for their love. And they suffer their joy in the enjoyment of their suffering. And they place their love outside the confines of this world, and the force of this poor love as it suffers beneath the yoke of Fate inspires them to intuit another world where there is no law above the liberty of love, another world where there are no barriers—because there is no flesh. For nothing inspires in us more hope or faith in another world than the impossibility of our love truly coming to flower in this world of flesh and appearances. (*TSL* 149-50)

Kant argued that, while as imperfectly rational beings we are aware of our subjection to the laws of natural necessity, in the experience of moral deliberation we are also conscious of belonging to an intelligible realm governed by the law of freedom. Unamuno, who is no rationalist, advances a variation on this claim: in love, we intuit a freedom and satisfaction more perfect than we can know upon this earth. "Love, especially when it struggles against destiny, overwhelms us with a sense of the vanity of this world of appearances and allows us a glimpse of another world where destiny is overcome and liberty is law." (*TSL* 45) When Unamuno says the law of freedom holds sway over this other world, I believe he means something quite different than Kant does by the same claim. It is not that our practical reason operates there undisturbed by the unfathomable vagaries of the sensual world but that this other world, in stark contrast to the essentially tragic visible, outward world, is congenial to our deepest needs. Perhaps tragic love's ability to disclose this beatific vision warrants our author's assertion that "Only unhappy love is fecund in the fruits of the spirit; only when its natural course is closed off to it does it shoot up heavenwards like a geyser; only temporal sterility yields eternal fertility." (DQ 97) The higher realm love intimates is, Unamuno argues, no less real than the visible, temporal world. After all, as we discussed in chapter 2, he thinks that world is also created by our needs. "For why should we deny objective reality to the creations of love, of the instinct for perpetuation, inasmuch as we grant it to those of hunger or the instinct of self-preservation?" (*TSL* 30) However, what is notable is that the invisible world is inherently intersubjective: embedded in the very structure of its conception is an

orientation toward another. That, indeed, is the upshot of our discussion so far; I have tried to show that the ends at the heart of Unamuno's ethics are bound up with our attitudes toward others. Love adumbrates a better world; compassion reveals the living God who can grant man immortality through His relationship with him.

ii). Life and Death as Literature

Like the material we have just discussed, Unamuno's theory of literature links the hope for immortality to a shared existence, while offering a more distinctive view of the inherent intersubjectivity of existence. Our author singles out literature as a ground where personal realities can converge and life can transcend the limits of individual finitude.

A good starting point for this discussion is Unamuno's literary figure for the relevant philosophical position, Jugo de la Raza:

> U. Jugo de la Raza, wandering by the banks of the Seine, along the piers, among the stands of old bookshops, chances upon a novel which, as soon as he has begun to read it, wins him over enormously, lifts him out of himself, immerses him in the novel's character—the novel of an autobiographical, romantic confession—identifies him with that other, gives him a history, at last. The rude world of his century disappears before his eyes. When he lifts them from the book for a moment and fixes them on the water of the Seine, it seems to him that that water isn't flowing, that it belongs to a motionless mirror, and he averts his horrified gaze and returns them to the pages of the book, of the novel, to find himself in them, to live in them. And, lo, here he comes upon a passage, eternal passage, wherein he reads these prophetic words: "When the reader reaches the end of this painful story he shall die with me." (*Novel* 96-97)

Jugo de la Raza is altogether overcome by these words; “He had felt on his forehead the wind from the Angel of Death’s fluttering wings.” His limbs atremble, he sets down the book, makes his way home, throws himself upon his bed and anxiously forswears reading any further in that tome or even wandering by the Seine, where the encounter might repeat itself.

> But poor Jugo de la Raza could no longer live without the book, without that book; his life, his inmost existence, his reality, his authentic reality had already been definitively and irrevocably joined to that of the character in the novel. If he went on reading it, living it, he ran the risk of dying when that character died, but if he didn’t read it anymore, if he no longer lived the book, would he live? (*Novel* 98)

Death, it seems, threatens Jugo de la Raza on two fronts. To read the book is to embark on a kind of life that may, as all mortal life does, eventuate in death. On the other hand, Unamuno raises the possibility that to refuse to read is to abstain from living.

To better make sense of these claims, it is helpful to consider Unamuno’s agonistic logic of life:

> A French materialist, I forget which one, said that life is the group of functions that resist death. And he thus defined it agonistically or, if you like, polemically. Life, then, was for him, struggle, agony. Against death and also against truth, against the truth of death.
>
> We speak of the ‘struggle for life’; but this struggle for life is life itself. It is the life and at the same time the struggle itself.[44]

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[44] Miguel de Unamuno, *La agonía del Cristianismo* (Madrid: Alianza, 2000), pp. 28-9. Cited henceforth as *Agonía*.

With this conception of life in mind, we can at least see how the threat of death that hangs over Jugo de la Raza is already entailed in Unamuno's identification (to be further explored below) of reading with living: to live is to struggle for life and to enter the fray is to expose oneself to losing this contest. Since life itself is death-bound, construing reading as a kind of living places reading directly in death's shadow.

Another comment in Unamuno's meditations seems to directly illuminate the disjunction that faces Jugo de la Raza:

> And the end of life is to fashion oneself a soul, an immortal soul: a soul that is itself the work. For when one dies, one leaves to the earth a skeleton and to history, a work, a soul—at least, that is, when one has lived or, in other words, when one has fought with the life that passes away for the life that remains. (*Agonía* 28)

I propose that we should understand Jugo de la Raza's disjunction along the terms of the above paragraph: to brave the terrors of reading would be to risk the life that passes away, whereas to eschew that struggle would be to forgo his chance at the life that endures. But what can he mean by each of these? I think these forms of living are, respectively, what Unamuno calls the personality and the reality of the historical subject:

> What is the historical Christ? It all depends on our way of feeling and understanding history. When I habitually say, for example, that I am more certain of the historical reality of Don Quijote than of Cervantes', or that Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello… made Shakespeare more than he made them, people think I am uttering paradoxes and take it as a manner of speaking, a rhetorical figure, when, rather, it is an agonistic doctrine.

> We would have to distinguish, above all, between the reality and the personality of the historical subject. *Reality* is derived from *res* (thing) and *personality* from *persona*… *Persona*, in Latin, was the actor of the tragedy or comedy, the one who performed his role in these. Personality is the role that is fulfilled in the story.[45]
>
> Which was the historical Socrates, Xenophon's, Plato's or Aristophanes'? The historical Socrates, the immortal, wasn't the man of flesh and blood who lived in such and such a period in Athens, but the one who lived in each of those who heard him, and the one who left his soul to mankind was formed of all of those. And he, Socrates, lives therein. (*Agonía* 44-45)

What is at stake, then, in Jugo de la Raza's reading is his historical existence: the life he lives in, for lack of a more exact term, public awareness. This is why Unamuno holds that

> Each of us is the son of his own works, it has been said, and Cervantes, son of the *Quijote*, repeated it. But isn't each of us at the same time the father of his works? Cervantes is the father of the *Quijote*. Wherefore, without conceptualism, one is one's own father and son, and the work is the Holy Ghost. (*Novel* 137-138)

It is through Don Quijote that Cervantes is born to the historical existence that Unamuno privileges as the more certain and enduring dimension of the person. But DQ is his own creation; it is in this sense that Cervantes achieves a metalepsis, fathering his own father and, inasmuch as DQ embodies the soul he leaves to history, fathering himself.

[45] The Spanish "historia", like the German "Geschichte", is used interchangeably to cover each of the meanings that English splits between "story" and "history". Unamuno is using the same term here as he does throughout the rest of the passage.

Based on the foregoing, we might say that by abstaining from the book, Jugo de la Raza is abdicating immortality by confining his life to the personal, perishable dimension of existence. (We shall speak below of what he would risk by participating in the literary or historical realm.) This position, however, almost certainly invites criticism, both from those who would accept Unamuno's claims for transcendence through creation and from those who would not. I'll begin with the former: without disputing what we have seen Unamuno say so far, one could still insist that the reader's participation in the literary-historical realm is essentially different from the writer's. Cervantes may aspire to immortality through the work he bequeaths to history but do I, his reader? After all, Don Quijote is Cervantes' offspring and creation, not mine. So how can it secure my immortality?

A first reply to this objection is to underline the symmetry of *el trato mutuo* through which reader and author create and transcend themselves. If Pascal, for example, is reborn in Unamuno's reading of his text and thereby achieves a kind of afterlife, it is equally the case that Unamuno or any other reader who, through his reading, is "reborn with Pascal in his century and milieu" (*Agonía* 38) thereby transcends the boundaries of his lifespan and personal existence.[46] This symmetry extends to our author's conception of what it is to be a reader or a writer. Just as father and son, for Unamuno, meld into one another, he is far from crediting any hard and fast distinction between author and reader. On

[46] In his essay on Moby Dick, Henry Murray suggests our spiritual evolution is based on a very similar dynamic, proceeding through "a series of passionate identifications" that allow us to provisionally become another. Unlike Unamuno, he is chiefly concerned with the moral opportunities this way of transcending ourselves opens up, such as the ability to see through our prejudices.

the contrary, their cooperation in creating the text seems to abolish their separateness:

> Have you understood me, reader? If I aim this question at you thus, it is to follow it immediately with what I have just read in an Italian philosophy book—one of my randomly chosen readings—*Le sorgenti irrazionali del pensiero*, by Nicola Abbagnano, which says: "To understand does not mean to penetrate the intimacy of another's thoughts, but only to translate it into one's *own* thought, into one's own truth, the underground experience in which one's own life and another's become fused." But doesn't this amount to entering into the entrails of another's thought? If I translate into my own thought the underground experience in which my life and yours fuse, reader, or if you translate it into your own, if we come to understand each other, to jointly light each other up, haven't I then penetrated the intimacy of your thought at the same time as you penetrated the intimacy of mine, which isn't mine or yours but common to both of us? Isn't it that my inner man, my intra-man, has touched, touches and is even joined to your inner man, your intra-man, such that I live in you and you live in me? (*Novel* 140)[47]

Following this conception, Unamuno speaks of being reborn through his reading as Kierkegaard or Pascal, just as they are reborn in him.[48] (*Agonía* 38) Significantly, as we saw in the first section, this act of becoming another, which

[47] In all likelihood, the sexual suggestiveness of Unamuno's language here is no accident. Rather, this claim is embedded in his larger view of love as union and assimilation: "The same thing happens not only with the Christ, but with every human and divine power, with every living and eternal man whom one knows with mystical knowing, an interpenetration of entrails; and that is that the knower, the lover, becomes the known, the beloved." (Agonía 37) More importantly, this highlights parallels between the paths to immortality Unamuno describes. As we shall see below, his claim that "To live is to give oneself, perpetuate oneself, to give oneself is to die" fits his view of the literary (after)life as well as it does the account of sexuality in which it appears.

[48] Similarly, Leonard Bernstein would speak of becoming the composer whose work he conducted. Perhaps the performing arts make the structure Unamuno ascribes to interpretation especially evident.

Unamuno credits to the faculty of "fantasy," is a crucial step in the discovery of the living God.

In other passages, Unamuno makes it clear that he regards reading as active and creative and, like writing, ultimately an act of self-creation. Commenting on John 19:30, he writes:

> "It is accomplished!", and "I place my spirit in your hands!" What is it that was thus accomplished? And what was that spirit that was thus placed in the hands of the Father, in the hands of God? His work was accomplished and his work was his spirit. Our work is our spirit and I am the selfsame work I fashion myself day by day and century by century, just as you, reader, are your own work, crafting yourself moment by moment, hearing me now as I speak to you. (*Novel* 137)

In other words, what can aspire to immortality, the soul, is identified with the work. And I, as reader, craft my (our) soul in my encounter with the author. Thus, if the soul is what can aspire to immortality, it does so as much through the reader as through the writer. When we try to conceive of reading and writing in Unamunian terms, it is perhaps more apposite to speak of unity than of symmetry, for both exercises are part of the execution of the same fundamental project: forging a self by crafting one's life story.

Other critics, however, might be less interested in wrangling with the details of this picture than in questioning its broad relevance. The appeal of the kind of immortality that literature, on Unamuno's view, makes possible is, one might argue, felt only by bookworms. If Jugo de la Raza forswears his book and all others, he won't perish; he'll be no worse off than, say, undergraduate students

at an American state university. Isn't it sheer pedantry to pretend that this is a matter of life and death?

But our author could well rejoin that this criticism presupposes a conception of reading whose poverty becomes striking when juxtaposed with his own. First of all, Unamuno conceives the act of reading far more broadly:

> All of us who live chiefly in and by reading cannot separate out characters in poems or novels from historical figures. For us, Don Quijote is as real and efficacious as Cervantes or, rather, the latter as much as the former. For us everything is a book, a reading; we may speak of the Book of History, the Book of Nature, the Book of the Universe. We are biblical. And we may say that in the beginning was the Book. Or History. For History begins with the Book and not with the Word, and before the Word, before History, there was no consciousness, there wasn't any mirror, there wasn't anything[…]
>
> To live in history and to live history! And one way of living history is by telling it, creating it in books. Such a historian—a poet, in virtue of his way of telling, of creating, of inventing an event that men thought had been verified objectively, outside their consciousness, that is to say, in nothingness—has provoked other events. It is rightly said that winning a battle consists in making one's own and others, friend and foe, believe it has been won. There is a legend of reality that is the substance or intimate reality of reality itself. The essence of an individual and of a people is their history and history is what is called the philosophy of history, the reflection every individual and every people form of what befalls them, of what transpires in them. (*Novel* 92-93)

If I understand Unamuno correctly, he is adopting the term "history" to designate all reflected experience, while the discipline we usually refer to as "history" he would call meta-history (he expresses that by calling it a "philosophy of history" because we all know that philosophy involves forming a reflective

conception of what it discusses). For Unamuno, nothing precedes or lies outside reflected experience—not even unreflected experience. In this sense, the world is the text of what he calls the Book of the Universe and reading is coextensive with living. What the narrative or legend gives us are not ideas about the thing but the thing itself.

A more or less evident implication of this rich conception of the text and of reading is that the audience of readers will turn out to be highly encompassing:

> Beware of falling into the diary! The man who hits upon keeping a diary—like Amiel—becomes the man of the diary, lives for it. He no longer takes notes in his diary on what he daily thinks, but thinks in order to jot it down. And at bottom, isn't that the same thing? One plays around with that dichotomy of the book of the man and the man of the book but are there men who are not of the book? Not even those who don't know how to read or write. Every man who is truly a man is the son of a legend, written or oral. And there is nothing but the legend, that is, nothing besides the novel. (*Novel* 144)

Simply put, if to read is to form a conception of oneself and the world, then to be human is to be literate.

It should now be clear what would be at stake in Jugo's choice to give up reading. Thus, I'd now like to turn to the other horn of his dilemma. If, as Unamuno says, to live is to read then it is clear why abstaining from reading would conjure the shadow of death. But why, then, would reading also be shadowed by death? What is the danger that faces Jugo in reading? I believe the ambiguity of the answers Unamuno offers actually show them to be multifaceted. Let us read closely:

To live in history and to live history, to fashion myself in my story, my Spain, and to make my story, my Spain, and along with it my universe and my eternity—that has been the tragic task of my exile.[49] We well know, it is well known, that history is legend, this story devours me and when it ends I shall end with it. This is a more terrible tragedy than that of the tragic Valentín of *La piel de zapa*. And not just my tragedy but the tragedy of all those who live in history, for it and through it, that of all citizens, that is, of all men—political or civil animals, as Aristotle would say—, the tragedy of all of us who write, the tragedy of all of us who read, the tragedy of everyone who reads this. And here the universality, the omnipersonality and the all-personality—*omni* isn't *totus*—not the impersonality, of this tale, erupts. It is not an example of *ego-ism* but of *we*-ism.

My legend!, my novel! That is to say, the novel others and I, my friends and enemies, my friend-self and my enemy-self, have made of me, of the one we call Miguel de Unamuno. And this is why I can't gaze at myself in the mirror for a while, because soon my eyes go behind my eyes, behind their picture, and from the moment I look into my gaze I feel myself drain from myself, return to unconsciousness, to the past, to nothingness. As if the future weren't nothingness as well! And yet the future is our all.

My legend!, my novel! The Unamuno of my legend, of my novel, the one my friends and enemies, my friend-self and my enemy-self, have made together, that Unamuno gives me life and death, creates me and destroys me, sustains me and drowns me. It is my agony. Am I as I believe I am or as I am thought to be? And thus these lines become a confession before my unknown and unknowable self; unknown and unknowable to myself. Thus I fashion the legend in which I shall bury myself. (*Novel* 94-95)

As I read it, what is given such a dramatic cast in this passage is a feature of reading our discussion had already highlighted, namely its intersubjectivity: the text is always the site of an encounter between self and other. While it is true that,

[49] This could also be translated as "the bane of my exile".

as we have seen, the self of the reader-writer is forged in this encounter, it is equally the case that I am here riven from myself. Through the encounter with the other, my life ceases[50] to be only mine. I am given over, in part, to the other, to my friend, to my enemy. I am what I am for myself but also—as I stressed in the first section of this chapter--what I am for the other. This is figured in the author's sense of being drained from himself when he looks into the eyes that behold him from the mirror—what he sees there is himself but it is also irremediably separate from him. This infection of the self by otherness, this alienation, will of course culminate in the moment when I will cease to be for myself and will remain only what I am for others—death. What leads up to that is my legend devouring me—a protracted dying. Yet herein lies also my hope for immortality, since the legend that devours me can outlast me, provided that I have "fought with the life that passes away for the one that endures", that is, used the transient temporal life to create something lasting by going outside myself, forging a self that will live on in history. This, I think, is why "the future is our all", even if it is only a dream (since at every moment we live in the present).

Here it is easy to anticipate that our author's ambitious claims for literature will invite further skepticism: "So, if a bunch of guys stand around telling stories at a bar, are they all immortal?" No; Unamuno doesn't claim anyone is immortal. However, his position does suggest that the members of this gathering exist more fully than they would if they did not engage in storytelling,

[50] I say "cease", but it should be clear from Unamuno's discussion that history pervades all of life, so that one is never in the state whose loss is lamented. (Indeed, one might question whether I *could*, even in principle, ever be a story for myself if I were not for another. As Rabbi Hillel asked, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I?")

especially if the tales they tell endure beyond the occasion or beyond their biological lifespans. Ultimately, of course, our author doesn't believe life can exist without some form of narration. "And what if he doesn't get published?" I see no implication in this theory that the life of the text is somehow impervious to contingency; the unpublished author is less likely to live on than one who is read widely. (Hume's lament that his Treatise had fallen stillborn from the press could be understood in this light.) A final worry might be that an analysis of reading might be hopelessly far removed from our ordinary, face to face interactions and might, therefore, fail to shed any light on bonds such as friendship that would appear more central to any discussion of interpersonal relations. I will not address this concern directly but my discussion of Sancho and Quijote in light of Unamuno's literary theory toward the end of this chapter should make it clear why I believe its insights are broadly applicable.

While reading may respond to our basic mortality, Unamuno makes it clear that the risk of death is also inherent in the literary life:

> But what was worst [about Unamuno's exile and spiritual crisis] is that I didn't write much at all, that I was sinking into a gloomy inactivity of expectancy, thinking about what I would say or do or write if this or that happened, dreaming the future, which amounts, I have said, to undoing it. And I read the books that fell by chance into my hands, without plan or concert, to satisfy that terrible vice of reading, the unpunished vice Valéry Larbaud speaks of. Come on! And what a delicious punishment! The vice of reading carries the punishment of continuous death. (*Novel* 99)

While this passage echoes the thoughts found in the last one cited, I believe it better brings out another aspect of the death that lurks in reading. An

essential aspect of the future is that it is always open, the tense of possibility. This, as I understand it, is why to dream or define the future, to try to collapse its possibility as one does by putting plans in place, is to undo it. But to dream is simply a variety of narrating. The function of the letter is to reify:

> The letter is dead; one cannot seek life in the letter. It is told in the Gospel (according to Luke, XXIV) that when the disciples of the Master went on Saturday to his grave to seek him after his death, they found the tombstone had been removed and the body of the Lord Jesus was missing, and when they were amazed at this, two men in shining garb appeared before them and asked: "Why do you seek the living here among cadavers?" In other words, why do you seek the word among bones? Bones do not speak. (*Agonía* 47)

> They wished to fix the word with the letter, but the agony grew. Bossuet was well able to say: "You alter, therefore you are not true!"; but it was replied "You do not alter, therefore you are death!". (*Agonía* 50)

The book with which Jugo has identified himself warns him succinctly of this peril: when he finishes reading it, he shall die with it. Reading, for Unamuno, need not come to an end; it can be the site of continuous rebirth as much as it is the site of a constant dying. His words, I believe, speak to us as a warning against a totalizing impetus that aims at finished meanings, closed horizons and settled meanings. The intersubjectivity or "we-ism" of literature, I believe, guards against this closure.

iii. Quixotic Relationships

Our discussion of Don Quijote in chapter 2 brought out that, in spite of his solitude, love was essential to his quest for immortality. In this section I will show that this figure also exemplifies the narrative path to immortality discussed above.

In Unamuno's analysis of literature, the text—more specifically, the novel—emerges as the medium of a distinctly social—that is, intersubjective—experience: the fusion and assimilation of the reader's inner man with the author's, a union in which they jointly seek refuge from mortality. Yet there is something unmistakably solitary about this communion. Walter Benjamin's commentary on the novel form suggests it is no accident that Unamuno singles out this genre as the locus of such an inward encounter:

> The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing. What can be handed on orally, the wealth of the epic, is of a different kind from what constitutes the stock in trade of the novel. What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness,

> the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living. Even the first great book of the genre, *Don Quixote*, teaches how the spiritual greatness, the boldness, the helpfulness of one of the noblest of men, Don Quixote, are completely devoid of counsel and do not contain the slightest scintilla of wisdom. (Benjamin, 87 – 88)

One interpretation of "the incommensurable" in the passage above is that it refers to the singularity of the individual which (as we discussed in chapter 2) Unamuno does not believe can ever be uttered in a common language. Whatever else they might disagree on, Unamuno clearly concurs with Benjamin that the novel of Don Quijote brings this incommensurability into stark relief. (I shall argue forthwith that Don Quijote offers an exemplary illustration of Unamuno's philosophy of literature.) Our author plainly believes the irreducible singularity of the individual inflects the encounter between author and reader, though he does not think it obstructs it:

> Cassou says my work does not blanch. Thank you. That is because it is the same as always. And because I make it in such a way that it can be another for the reader who reads it by eating it. What do I care, reader, if you do not read in it what I wished to put into it, as long as what you read lights you up in life? It seems stubborn to me for an author to distract himself explaining what he meant to say, for what we care about is not what he meant to say but what he said or, rather, what we heard. (*Novel* 76)

Reading, on this view, is inevitably metamorphic, requiring (as we discussed in the second section of the present chapter) translation into each reader's singular, individual perspective. Thus, the novel assembles a community of readers too disparate to meet otherwise—individuals divided by the chasm of

time and incommensurable ways of seeing.[51] (Indeed, it is crucial that author and reader not always be coevals, since only on that condition can their communion directly help them transcend the temporal horizons of their finite lives.) It is not hard to anticipate that there will be some dissonance in such encounters, which is very much in keeping with Unamuno's agonism. The creative reader, the one who can actively co-author the text, is not one who will passively assimilate the writer's views but he who will receive the work critically and shed new light on it, thereby ensuring both its continuity and renewal. (Unamuno even remarks that the dialectician typically arms those who would fight him.) Emerson says of his friend that "[t]he only joy I have in his being mine, is that the *not mine* is *mine*… There must be very two, before there can be very one." (*E&L* 350) The fusion of souls Unamuno envisages is likewise founded on difference; the text is forged in the dialectic tension between author and reader.

Unlike Benjamin, Unamuno clearly does not tie the novel indissolubly to the printed page; as we have seen, he considers the novel coextensive with human existence. The reader's solitude lies in the incommensurability of his thoughts, perceptions and experiences, not in reading behind closed doors. Such solitude

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[51] Without Unamuno's driving focus on the element of dialogue, though sharing his concern for coming to terms with death through art, the critic Arnold Weinstein seems to propound a very similar view of aesthetic experience:

> One of Emerson's central motifs is that of a waterway, a kind of flow which we navigate in our engagement with art, and at times this image is richly corporeal, becoming no less than a *bloodstream*. In this vision, the capacious world of art can be seen as a living organism, so that the act of reading or seeing a painting or play or film can be understood as an arterial event, a cardiac composition, while remaining a nurturance that is as much spiritual as it is material. To see art in these terms is to get clear of several clichés that might clutter our minds. First, the arts are not esoteric or frills, not at a remove from reality, but quite the opposite: they are immediate, experiential, and life-expanding. Secondly, this view envisions art not as a private affair, supposedly cued to the artist's personal world or even confined to your own personal sphere, but rather as an opening out, bidding to transport you (time-bound, land-locked you) to new times, new places, and ultimately new selves. (Weinstein xxvi)

can certainly endure in the midst of people—as it does, for example, in the case of Don Quijote. Since he becomes so fully the author of his own novel (or, in the words of Nietzsche, the poet of his life), Quijote is an exemplary figure for Unamuno's literary ethic. His tale, I suggest, shows how the novel might transcend the solitude of incommensurability to approach immortality.

In chapter 2, we saw Unamuno claim that "[t]he immortality of the soul… is a spiritual matter, a social matter. Whosoever creates for himself a soul, whosoever creates a work, lives in it and through it lives in other men, in Humanity, for as long as Humanity lives." (*Agony* 21) As we saw in detail, in Unamuno's interpretation Quijote undertakes exactly this task of self-creation for the purpose of immortality. Unamuno's avowed project of fashioning in his writing the legend in which he shall bury himself (*Novel* 95) must be understood along the same lines. What the author attempts through his words, the Knight of the Sad Countenance (who, it must not be forgotten, begins as a reader) attempts through his deeds. As far as I can see, Unamuno's analysis offers us no basis for distinguishing in principle between these two forms of said project; the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* blend in this analysis. "The true hero," our author observes, "is, knowingly or unknowingly, a poet, for what is heroism but poetry? Both have the same root, and if the hero is a poet in action, the poet is a hero of the imagination." (DQ 230) Nevertheless, Don Quijote may be the more compelling example insofar as we are more ready to believe that the efficacy of action is independent of other people's understanding. Emerson, for example, writes:

A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on the elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act… Those 'far from fame' who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. (*E&L* 62)

What this passage suggests is that one's acts can impress upon others individual perceptions or truths that words cannot readily make accessible to the understanding. Quijote's truths cannot be communicated; his judgments of justice, for example, are absurd and cannot be mediated by the universal. (This, I believe, is what Benjamin refers to when he says Quijote is devoid of counsel.) The actions born of this incommensurable understanding are met with ridicule and intolerance. Yet if, as Unamuno believes, the hero is a poet, it stands to reason he needs an audience. Unamuno indicates that Quijote's audience is Sancho:

He who fancies himself a leader is often to a great extent led, and the hero's faith feeds on the faith it can inspire in his followers. Sancho was humankind for Don Quijote, and Sancho, faint and sometimes ardent in his faith, fed his lord and master's. We commonly need to be believed in order to believe ourselves, and if it were not a monstrous heresy and even a manifest impiety, I would hold that God feeds on the faith we men have in Him. (DQ 166)

As the priest supposed, the Knight and his squire were forged in the same mold. What is greatest and most consoling about the life they made in common is not being able to conceive the one without the other, and that far from being two opposite poles, as some wrongly suppose, they were and are, not even two halves of an orange, but the same being viewed from both sides.

And thus, when they were left alone, the knight told his squire that "we set out together and made the same pilgrimage; a single fortune and a single fate has met us both" and that "I am your head and you're my part… and that is why whatever ill befalls me or you shall hurt you as yours would hurt me," very pregnant words in which the Knight showed how deeply he felt he and his squire were one and the same. (DQ 167)

Unamuno ends his chapter with his comment on these "very pregnant words" rather than elucidating their import. However, thanks to our discussion so far, we, his readers, are in a good position to understand the import of this relationship to Unamuno. The relationship between Quijote and Sancho brings together a number of relations—interpersonal and conceptual—we have already addressed. Crucially, I want to suggest that this dyad can be understood as author and reader. If indeed the knight errant's adventures are a quest to write a novel, the legend of his life, it seems reasonable enough to identify Sancho, the only witness to the entire adventure, as the reader of this novel. Beyond this, I shall argue that Quijote and Sancho enact in philosophically important aspects the relation Unamuno envisages between author and reader.

Earlier in this chapter, we saw Unamuno describe how compassion founded on awareness of their shared mortality could inaugurate an ethical relationship between individuals who had hitherto been bound only by mutual desire (an account I attempted to illuminate with the thought of Werner Marx). We also examined Unamuno's claim that what author and reader seek from each other is salvation from their mortality. In order to do so, the author must, as Unamuno puts it, be reborn in the reader. If, as per Quijote's "very pregnant

words," whatever befalls him or Sancho hurts the other as much, is it not because this deep rapport of com-passion subsists between them? That, at any rate, seems like the best warrant for Unamuno's conviction that Quijote will find in Sancho that immortality the author seeks from the reader:

> Sancho, who has not died, is the heir of your spirit, good knight, and we, your faithful, hope that one day Sancho will feel quijotism swelling in his soul, that old memories of his life as a squire will blossom, and that he will go home and don your armor… And then, my Don Quijote, that is when your spirit will become rooted in the earth… When your faithful Sancho, noble Knight, rides your Rozinante, bearing your shield and wielding your lance, then you shall resurrect in him and your dream will be realized. (DQ 306)

As we have seen, Unamuno thinks the immortality of the author consists in being reborn in the reader (whose being is also enlarged by becoming another). This is unmistakably the rebirth Unamuno augurs for Quijote through Sancho.

When Unamuno says the knight and his squire are inseparable, mutually necessary aspects of the same being, this cannot fail to remind us of the reciprocal relation he describes between writer and reader. However, I suggest that another aspect of their inseparability is the mutual dependence Unamuno finds between faith and reason (as seen in Chapter 2). Just as Don Quijote is an obvious archetypal figure of faith, the venal, calculating Sancho, mired in this-worldly concerns, is a caricature of rationality. In light of this, how should we describe Quijote's rebirth in Sancho? Can it be that his madness is translated into rational terms, that Sancho discerns the secret of Quijote's heart and brings it to light? Hardly. Conceptually, this would fly in the face of Unamuno's central belief in

the incommensurability and ineffability of the individual's vision. Rather, the narrative presents a crossing or reversal: After being knocked on the head, the dying Alonso Quijano regains his sanity and owns that his quest as knight errant has been but a mad dream, while Sancho assures him that he is indeed Don Quijote de la Mancha. Madness and the ideal are not assimilated to reason. If Sancho is transformed by sharing his existence with Don Quijote, it is not by understanding the knight but by abandoning his rational outlook. I believe the communion between author and reader is of this same nature. When Unamuno writes "What do I care, reader, if you do not read in it what I wished to put into it, as long as what you read lights you up in life? It seems stubborn to me for an author to distract himself explaining what he meant to say, for what we care about is not what he meant to say but what he said or, rather, what we heard," he makes it clear that author and reader are not bound by a shared understanding, which is what he equates with reason, but by com-passion. "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels," for how *he* feels cannot be articulated, translated into what we think; "I myself become the wounded person." The personal speaks to the personal without being mediated by the universal; something is kindled in the reader's soul by an influence he cannot comprehend. In short, poetry (including the poetry of life) operates, in Unamuno's view, as "the elemental force of living" one's insights does for Emerson. And Emerson's dictum that "Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul" (*E&L* 79) aptly encapsulates the view I think we find in Unamuno. In this soul to soul touch

lies the importance of other persons, for it increases life and offers it the prospect of transcending death.

* * *

Emerson and Unamuno both tie society to existence; both suggest that to be is to be for another, that existence depends on being perceived. If this shared premise is more central to Unamuno, perhaps it is because of his paramount concern with immortality. His reflections on endless life are not foreign to Emerson but rather, tangential. "The race of mankind," Emerson writes, "has always offered at least this implied thanks for the gift of existence, --namely, the terror of its being taken away; the insatiable curiosity and appetite for its continuation." (CoL 227) It is not hard to recognize in this anxious "insatiable appetite" Unamuno's *conatus*. However, in stark contrast to Unamuno, Emerson dismisses such disquiet:

> Of immortality, the soul when well employed is incurious. It is so well, that it is sure it will be well. It asks no questions of the Supreme Power. (CoL 227)
>
> Higher than the question of our duration is the question of our deserving. Immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in future, must be a great soul now. (CoL 228)

Emerson's comments appear to ring changes on Kant's argument in the Dialectic of the Second Critique that God and the immortality of the soul are legitimate objects of belief for practical, not theoretical, reasons. Unamuno accepts the connection between desert and immortality, endorsing its practical implications by urging his readers to "refuse to deserve death" and strive "to

make our annihilation—if annihilation be our portion—an act of injustice." (*TSL* 301) Nevertheless, as we saw in chapter 2, he recoils from "the incurious soul" as a travesty of genuine—that is, agonistic—faith.

Emerson's de-emphasis upon individual survival is consonant with his impersonality. It is plausible that to the extent that one finds persons "melt so fast into each other, that they are like grass and trees," the importance of individual existence—even one's own--recedes into the big picture, as persons become less significant than the ideas we intuit through them. Impersonality, however, is hardly foreign to Unamuno. It is Emerson, not Unamuno, who writes:

> Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed. The lover, beholding his maiden, half knows that she is not verily that which he worships… We doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation. (*E&L* 343)

But Emerson's pronouncement exactly describes the self-decentering Don Quijote carries out in his love for Dulcinea. The thin dividing line between Emerson and Unamuno may be the latter's insistence on *half* knowing that the person is not verily that which he worships:

> "Do not seek with false joys to gladden my true sorrows." Let us think of this notion of gladdening Don Quijote's sorrows; the sorrows of twelve years, the sorrows of his madness. For do you believe that Alonso the Good did not realize that he was mad and did not accept his madness as the only remedy for his love, as a gift of divine mercy? (DQ 182)

If madness is the only remedy for Don Quijote's love, it may be because this love is itself a kind of madness—the "madness for persons" Emerson associates with youth. Unamuno, in contrast to Emerson, refuses to follow Plato in severing the link between ideas and persons. While Emerson never personalizes the Over-Soul, Unamuno's Living God is decidedly patterned on the model of an individual. Unamuno, as we saw, offers no elaborate defense of his personal perspective: "For each of us, the center is in oneself. But it cannot act if it is not polarized; it cannot live unless it is decentered. And whither should it decenter but toward another like itself?" (DQ 135) In chapter 2, I tried to educe some of Unamuno's reasons from his own text. However, the juxtaposition with Emerson casts a somewhat different light on the question. Why does Unamuno refuse to openly believe an idea that plainly underlies his discussion? Emerson voices something of Unamuno's reticence when he says that impersonality may hardly be propounded without treachery to our affections—yet he goes on to incur such treachery. Perhaps Unamuno's agonic faith in a personal God and in Dulcinea is what sustains him. He might say that by depriving us of a personal not-I, impersonality would condemn us to the wraithlike condition evoked in the opening lines of "Experience."

To be sure, Unamuno does at times come close to the view that souls never touch, especially in his discussion of Quijote's solitary love for Dulcinea. The solitary Christian's ideal cannot be communicated or, as Emerson puts it, we cannot oversee each other's secret. Indeed, Unamuno stresses this ineffability of

the individual more than Emerson, who does not always allude to the "inmost"'s resistance to disclosure when he broaches the transition from the "inmost" to the "outmost," particular to universal. However, if my interpretation is correct, Quijote's relationship with Sancho shows that an individual's singular vision can touch another without making itself understood. (This, presumably, accounts for the single individual's capacity to nourish Christendom.)

Both Emerson and Unamuno describe a (non-Hegelian) dialectic in which society and solitude, universal and individual, feed and challenge one another. However, it may be fair to say that Unamuno remains firmly rooted in the personal, while Emerson's tends toward the impersonal universal. A transpersonal consciousness, for example, is an important element of both thinkers' metaphysics. However, for Unamuno, this consciousness, the Living God, is discovered or constituted for the sake of perpetuating the individual's existence. Conversely, while individuality is a keystone of Emersonian self-reliance, the highest merit he ascribes to solitude is that it affords the individual ingress to the universal mind. Emerson paints a world in which ephemeral persons blend, recede and finally dissolve into ideas. For Unamuno, on the contrary, ideas only fulfill their highest purpose when they take on human semblance. Both thinkers attest to the complexity of the notions of society and solitude. Quijote's love is solitary, for it cannot be shared, yet social as it focuses on another individual. Emerson directs us to a fountainhead that is common to all but can only be discovered alone and creates or reveals an innavigable sea between souls.

I believe these thinkers share many, many insights but view them through the prisms of different values and dispositions. Thus, the contrasts between them may illuminate fruitful tensions within the thought of each thinker, strengthening polar positions both authors try to encompass.

CONCLUSION

My purpose in this essay has been to shed some light on the value of society and that of solitude. I began with Emerson's ethics of self-reliance. I argued that solitude is central to self-reliance and a necessary condition for achieving all that in which Emerson finds value. The source of all good, for Emerson, is the universal mind and its perpetually new emanations can only be received directly—that is, inwardly, without the mediation of tradition, social norms, canons, interpretation or any other tuition. Reception, on Emerson's view, can never be a joint venture. Community, by contrast, is perforce built on what Unamuno would call fossils—remnants and corpses of past intuitions. It is not possible to be in the social state without dwelling in commonplaces, yet fresh perception may set us against the old ways at any time. Self-reliance, then, is solitary in at least two senses: it privileges perceptions that can only be received privately and undermines bonds such as customs, habits, common views and norms that hold together any community. Thus, by its very nature, society conspires against an integrity grounded in solitude.

The commonplaces that frame quotidian social existence are not all that can threaten solitude. Emerson is wary of canonical works, whose very brilliance can occlude the possibility of doing things otherwise. There are close parallels

between his wariness of government and his wariness of artistic exemplars. Emerson believes that laws encourage us to forget that every norm had its origin in individual perception and is always up to us to rediscover or, when appropriate, revise and refound. Emerson attaches unique importance to material nature, the environing physical world, because he believes that, in contrast to the works of men, it can convey the meanings of the universal mind without reifying them and thereby inhibiting fresh creation.

I suggested at the outset that the values of society and solitude were interdependent. Self-reliance has at least a couple of social aspects. First, it allows ideas to emerge from a transpersonal mind that is *common to all*. Second, Emerson indicates (though not consistently) that its consummation lies in the shared world—e.g., that what was once an individual perception becomes a law in society.

In Unamuno, individuality is one of a host of polarities arrayed against reason; life, madness, truth and faith are also conceptually opposed to it. Reason, in Unamuno's view, trucks in universals and therefore cannot assimilate the aforementioned aspects of existence. Because it is outside reason, understanding and language, Unamuno believes individual truth cannot be understood or communicated; reason's antipodes are solitary because they, like one's death, cannot be shared. In spite of this, he believes reason and its opposites depend on each other. As inimical as reason is to faith—notably to the faith in immortality—there is no better means available to us for coming to terms with the problem of our existence. Conversely, Unamuno believes that reason needs life and faith

because all its material comes to it from outside. In keeping with his agonistic outlook, our author does not seek to resolve the antagonism between reason and faith but to live in the tension between them—a condition he calls "vital skepticism."

Unamuno exhorts each reader to live by his or her singular, incommunicable truth. This credo is exemplified by the lonely figure of Don Quijote, who views the world through a unique optic. Because Quijote puts flesh on the skeleton of Unamuno's theory, embodying much of Unamuno's ethical view, I believe his tale deserves close philosophical scrutiny in this context. He allows us to envision how the theory might play out in the world and appreciate the intersection of the different aspects of the philosophy he represents. Quijote's own truth, his incommunicable secret, is his love of Dulcinea del Toboso, a figure he projects on a drab local girl. Driven out of his mind by his devotion to her, he embarks on a quest as a knight errant, accompanied by the venal Sancho, a cartoonish figure of rationality. Don Quijote is generally misunderstood by the denizens of La Mancha, to whom he appears ridiculous. This form of estrangement or solitude comes upon him through self-knowledge, which Unamuno equates with a clear perception of the person one passionately longs to be.

The discussion of Don Quijote may underline the bond between society and solitude more explicitly than any other broached in this essay. Unamuno describes a process of self-decentering, in which one's ownmost ideal takes on the form, at least, of another person, suggesting that an orientation toward another is

an irreducible component of moral motivation. In this connection, it is also worth noting that society, even though it is uncomprehending, since no one has access to the ideal of Dulcinea or perceives the inner meaning of Quijote's outlandish deeds, is the field in which Quijote seeks to enact his ideal and fulfill his destiny. Unamuno will also claim that, conversely, civilization depends on the single individual, feeding on the carcasses of bygone solitary insight. Unamuno's Christian solitude has much in common with Emerson's self-reliance. Both advocate an avoidance of conformity based on the belief that a special kind of truth that an individual can only access inwardly (*¡adentro!*) is the sovereign polestar by which each of us should conduct himself.

The clash between the personal and impersonal perspectives is perhaps the most striking example of Emerson's agonistic way of thinking—other persons are extolled and devalued even within the pages of the same text. I argue that Emerson's dejection at the remission of his grief over his infant son's death offers us an important window on his perspective on the value of relations with others. I point to various passages in "Experience" and other works that suggest that Emerson believes other persons afford us self-knowledge and a grasp of Nature that cannot be attained in solitude. One basis for this claim is the close resemblance between our relation to a friend and our relation to Nature. Another is that one's existence depends upon expression and its third person concomitant, perception. At the same time, Emerson also locates the source of the value youthful madness finds in persons outside persons themselves. Personal relations

serve to acquaint us with ideas. This is one more way in which society and solitude depend on one another.

Finally, Unamuno values sociality as a conduit to immortality. This plays out in two different ways, which we might roughly describe as religious and literary. He believes suffering calls a halt to egotism and initiates us into compassion. The enlargement of compassion proceeds until it embraces all of creation, which we perceive after the model of a person. Once we put a face on the encompassing all which we pity, we discover the living God. More explicitly than Emerson, Unamuno affirms that to be is to be perceived. Since God is infinite, he can grant us eternal life because to be an idea in the eternal mind is to exist eternally—a claim that would not stand without the equation of being perceived and being. There are indications, however, that the Living God is not discovered in communion with other people but by turning inward. Elsewhere, Unamuno suggests we can find immortality in the conversation of literature. The encounter between an author and a reader who are separate in time fuses both in the text they create together, thereby allowing each to transcend the temporal horizons that bind his physical existence. Unamuno privileges what he calls the "legend" or historical reality of the subject, indicating it is more certain, enduring and, therefore, real, than the man of flesh and blood. In this vein, for example, he avers that Don Quijote is more real than his "father," Cervantes. There is no reality outside the narrative, for Unamuno. At the same time, giving oneself over to this existence is a kind of death, since it wrests one's being from oneself and places it among other people—a process that is consummated when one ceases to

be for oneself. Since the literary afterlife is a boundless succession of transformations and resurrections, it is a fitting vehicle for the open, expanded being Unamuno thinks every living thing craves.

As insightful as both authors are, it should be clear that they do not exhaust the value of solitude or society. Both bring into focus forms of these modalities that they consider crucial to existence. However, there are others. For example, the companionship among friends at play is not obviously a case of each standing for an idea in the eyes of the other(s), which Emerson considers crucial to friendship. While the game arguably yields some kind of self-knowledge, it hardly seems to fit our author's observations on the relation between self-knowledge and society. Yet it seems equally implausible to assimilate this communion to the instrumental kind of friendship Emerson contrasts his own with. Similarly, while it may be a deep truth that, as Unamuno holds, our shared mortality binds men together, it is not evident that when two strangers who are about to die together turn to each other in solidarity, say, clasping each other's hands, they are seeking immortality. After all, neither expects his memory to live on in the other. Such observations do not invalidate our authors' reflections on society and solitude, but they do suggest the presence of other dynamics beyond the territory they illuminate so deftly. Finally, readers who place more stock in the potentialities of communication and interpersonal contact may balk at the privacy and inwardness of both authors' views of solitude *and* society. In contrast with Emersonian impersonality and Unamunian incommensurability, one might uphold the ethical importance of persons as other than vessels for ideals, personified or

otherwise. Does devotion to Dulcinea come at the expense of Aldonza Lorenzo? What value, if any, can the latter have for the Knight of the Sad Countenance?

Unamuno and Emerson show that the fulfillment of our highest values depends on society and solitude. If we accept their views of sociality, it is impossible to fully exist in solitude. At the same time, the achievements that, they believe, give life its worth depend on existence not being *only* social: living insight, authenticity and the voice of God, for example, can only be found in a space within, far from the madding crowd. Both agonistic thinkers describe a dialectic in which society and solitude fertilize and challenge each other. Perhaps the lesson to be learned from them is not a rejection of either facet of life but a deeper understanding of each that will teach us to better consciously mine their respective rewards.

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