

**The Symbiosis between the Individual and Society in Ralph Waldo Emerson's
"The American Scholar," "History," and "Politics"**

by

Elizabeth Gillespie

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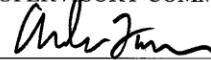
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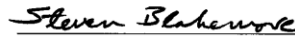
Elizabeth Gillespie

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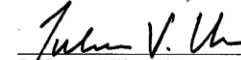
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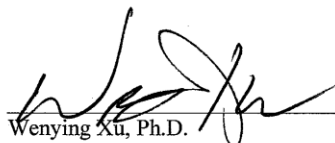
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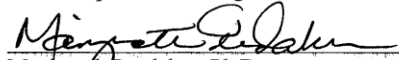
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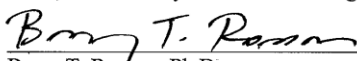
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Abstract

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This thesis will reveal a political dimension to Emerson's work, situating itself in the current scholarly movement to analyze Emerson from a different angle. Scholars have long heralded Emerson as a staunch individualist or transcendentalist, yet there has been a recent shift in literary studies to consider him from a social or political perspective. Emerson's emphasis on the individual does not diminish in any of the three essays that I have selected; however, he strongly urges every individual to contribute towards the amelioration of society. He also believes that an individual person has enormous potential to cause both great improvement and great harm, which is why a wise man or scholar is a paramount component to any society. Moreover, this thesis addresses topics that are particularly useful today, as Emerson's words are just as relevant to the political situation in the world now as they were in the 19th century.

The Symbiosis between the Individual and Society in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The American Scholar,” “History,” and “Politics”

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Introduction

Emerson, traditionally considered a proponent of individual transcendentalism, possesses a political potency not usually ascribed to him. While many of his essays center on nature and its influence on the individual, a close examination of selected Emersonian essays illuminates the political themes that underlie them. Recently, a few prominent scholars have turned their focus to Emerson's political consciousness in his essays, including Cary Wolfe, who opens with the observation that, "Driven in part by the growing influence of Marxist theory in American Studies and the challenging politicization of our culture by ideological critiques of all kinds, the current interest is centered less on the transcendentalist trying to make his break and his peace with the religious tradition, and more on the promise and peril of liberal individualism as it is mapped in his essays and lectures" (137). Emerson frequently heralds the power of the individual while also inputting his political beliefs; Emerson believes that an individual person possesses the capability to alter political situations and society in order to improve society for all of mankind. T. Gregory Garvey notes this when he says, "The Spirit offered Emerson a nonsectarian locus of faith that held out the possibility of reconciling belief in the divinity of the individual with the desire to facilitate social harmony in the nation as a whole" (15). A careful analysis of three of Emerson's essays, "The American Scholar," "History," and "Politics," reveals the progression of Emerson's political thought. Each essay emerged during a different period in Emerson's

life, yet in spite of these different years of publication, Emerson's political beliefs maintain a remarkable consistency. "Politics" is more explicitly political than "The American Scholar" and "History," although these two essays provide a framework that stresses individual power, a power that propels Emerson's thesis in "Politics."

"The American Scholar" was a speech given by Emerson before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard, on August 31, 1837. Prior to giving this speech, Emerson suffered from a variety of health and finance-related issues, as Robert D. Richardson, Jr. notes in his expansive biography of Emerson. Richardson details the various problems that plagued Emerson, including his brother's dire financial situation and his own health issues, as he became so ill by June that he was unable to study (260-261). In spite of these problems, or perhaps partially because of them, Emerson's thoughts became invigorated: "Adversity often gave Emerson a strange elation. All through this spring and summer he was living on the stretch; he had frequent moments of almost visionary intensity" (261). This "visionary intensity" helped craft Emerson's famous oration, "The American Scholar," an oration that he wrote after he was asked to give an address to Harvard. The crowd gathered to hear the speech was enormous, and his speech made such an impact that he was urged to publish it: "Emerson's friends urged him to publish the talk, which he quickly did, at his own expense. The edition of five hundred copies of 'The American Scholar' was sold out in a month" (263). Part of the immense appeal of this address was its applicability to every person listening, as Emerson's ideals set forth in "The American Scholar" promulgate the power of the individual, a power that has a universal and timeless appeal; the speech is "perennially fresh because what is being

liberated here is not America-not American literature or the American intelligentsia-but the single person” (265).

Specifically, in “The American Scholar,” Emerson seeks to redefine the scholar, or the intellectual, while also describing what some of the new scholar’s functions should be in society. This scholar could be any man, no matter what his station in life. The new scholar distinguishes himself from the traditional scholar in that he participates in society and leads other men, rather than confining himself reclusively into a study carrel, separated from the rest of humanity. The scholar values his private time while also reveling amongst his fellow men; the chief influence on the new scholar is nature, as opposed to historical books. Some of the necessary actions that this new scholar must take include taking a stand against hegemony, or refusing to submit oneself to the purported greatness of a selected few individuals. The new scholar will actively engage himself in politics, which can include revolutionizing that which needs reform. The major defining themes of “The American Scholar” include redefining traditional intellectualism and taking a stand against hegemony, which Italian Socialist Antonio Gramsci defines as, “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (1143). Michael Stryck notes this emphasis on taking a stand against hegemony in Emerson’s early essays: “Emerson’s early writings and speeches concentrate on how America can and must be different from the hegemony of the so-called paternal Old World” (143). While “The American Scholar” has traditionally been interpreted to focus on the “transcendentalist” possibility of an individual, a thorough reading of this essay from an alternative perspective reveals that the individual heralded

in this essay must take an active role in politics. Emerson's very redefinition of the scholar calls for the scholar to not remain isolated, but rather an active participant in the continuous molding and evolution of daily political life. "The American Scholar" lays the foundation for the type of individual who can have a potent, positive influence on government, an influence fully explicated in "Politics."

Emerson expands on ideas that he initially mentions in "The American Scholar" in a later essay, "History." "History" was also originally a speech before it was put into printed form, as it was part of a series of lectures given by Emerson. This series also included other famous Emersonian essays, as noted by Richardson, "Emerson did not publish these lectures because he later appropriated substantial sections for 'History,' 'Self-Reliance,' 'The Oversoul,' 'Art,' 'Thoughts on Modern Literature,' 'Spiritual Laws,' and 'Compensation'" (257). Emerson began work on this series of essays during the spring and summer of 1839, desiring to compose essays on the human condition that could rival those of Montaigne or Bacon (319). When working on this collection of essays, *Essays: First Series*, Emerson frequently reconfigured the collection's organization and chronology, although "History" always appeared first: "By July 8 Emerson had three essays in more or less finished form. Work went so well that he expected to be done by autumn. He tried out different sequences, but in all his plans the essay 'History' came first" (321). As "History" came first in each of his reconfigurations, it can be inferred that "History" possesses foundational elements and themes, specifically "a radical dechronologized conception of history" (257).

In this essay, Emerson redefines the traditional sense of history, in that it belongs in books and monuments that wholly separate themselves from men in the

current times. This redefinition recalls the way Emerson redefines the intellectual in “The American Scholar,” in that he dispels commonly held myths about history and the scholar, respectively. Emerson urges men to realize that they all comprise a singular mind, and that they all share a universal essence, an essence that originates from the natural world, a theme also set forth by Emerson in “The American Scholar.” Since men occupy one mind, everything in the past, present, and future possesses relevance for every man. There are no individual actions that do not impact the universal world and its subsequent history, and there are no universal events that do not impact the individual. History can include architecture, sculpture, civil history, and literature, but each of these four elements ultimately originate from nature, which itself intertwines itself intractably with man’s spirit. Emerson stresses that men must read history in light of their current circumstances; otherwise history will be little more than mere words, or fable. This relates to another theme in “The American Scholar,” wherein Emerson urges men to be active participants in their present lives and communities in addition to being schooled in classical history and literature. Emerson also highlights the notion that laws that have spanned the course of centuries ultimately do not differ that much from one another, as they usually materialize as an answer to circumstantial human concerns.

Emerson reiterates and explicates themes presented in both “The American Scholar” and “History” in his later essay, “Politics.” “Politics” was an essay published in Emerson’s second series of essays, or *Essays: Second Series*. These essays contain remarkable potency, as Richardson remarks, “*Essays: Second Series* shows no falling off in Emerson’s own powers...His language is fresh, full of epigrammatic force” (401). The essays largely focus on power, “almost all the essays are about power and most

were also about the authority of subjective knowledge” (400). During the publication of these essays, there were events that served as a point of distraction: “There were interruptions too. Early in September the address on emancipation was published separately as a pamphlet” (400). Thus, “Politics” was published during a highly politicized time, particularly with regards to slavery. The essay focused on “the relationship of the state to its constituent members” (400). In this essay, Emerson concurs with others about the necessity of a smaller government: “Emerson believed, as did Jefferson and Thoreau, that ‘the less government we have, the better’” (400).

In this essay, Emerson decries the current state of politics in both America and other countries. He declares that all governments are unoriginal because they all ultimately originate from similar backgrounds, much in the same way that he declares that all wars are unoriginal because they ultimately originate from the same cause in “History.” Emerson criticizes the current emphasis on property and other monetary issues in the legal system, as human rights are grossly neglected in comparison. Emerson makes a powerful assertion that corruption pervades every government, and he proceeds to criticize the various weaknesses of both of the dominant political parties in America. He stresses the necessity of a wise man to catalyze positive change in the political landscape, which echoes earlier sentiments in “The American Scholar.” He ultimately concludes that the less government, the better, although this will ultimately depend upon the mental development of the citizens. Stryck notes this dependence when he states, “lacking confidence in external reforms, be they governmental, legal, political, or even religious, Emerson left reform to the individual, and he sought to empower individuals through increased reliance upon themselves” (143-144). Self-

reliance and intellectualism are crucial components that a citizen must possess in order to justify less government.

While Emerson sometimes contradicts himself at various points over the course of his essays, he displays a remarkable continuity in attitude when it comes to politics. As illuminated in “The American Scholar,” “History,” and “Politics,” Emerson consistently stresses the power of the individual in catalyzing political change, particularly reform and revolution. Individuals must take a stand against hegemony and not fall into the particular ideologies of a dominant political party. Men must recognize that many political issues do not serve to better the overall state of humanity; rather, they serve to fulfill the desires of a select, privileged few. “Politics” takes a much stauncher political approach than “The American Scholar” and “History,” but a thoughtful analysis of these three essays reveals the underlying connection between them. “The American Scholar” and “History” lay the thematic foundation for Emerson’s frank declaration in “Politics”: “Hence, the less government we have, the better” (219).

“The American Scholar”

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson lays the framework for a “new” intellectual, and what their newfound responsibilities would entail. Throughout his speech, Emerson redefines his scholar, illuminating the distinctions between the traditional intellectual and the modern scholar. Emerson describes the three major fundamental influences on this new intellectual, as noted by John J. McDermott: “In his essay ‘The American Scholar,’ Emerson points to three major influences on the development of the reflective person: nature, history, and action or experience” (52). Emerson’s redefinition of the scholar holds immense significance, as Kenneth S. Sacks notes, “In redefining the duties of the intellectual, Emerson went far beyond his Transcendentalist colleagues-and about as far as anyone has gone since” (32). In addition to his redefinition of the scholar and the subsequent influences upon him, Emerson also describes the actions such an intellectual should undertake in order to serve society and mankind overall, most notably by taking a stand against hegemony. This redefinition lays a paramount foundation for Emerson’s later essays, as he refers frequently to such an individual in both “History” and “Politics,” yet he does not clearly define the individual in the aforementioned two essays as explicitly as he does in “The American Scholar.” In “The American Scholar,” Emerson details the traits, characteristics, behaviors and beliefs necessary to reconfigure oneself from a

“traditional” intellectual into an active participant in society, and these specific, individual tenets retain utmost importance throughout Emerson’s expository career. Emerson highlights the most important influence on the new intellectual early in his essay, which, as McDermott mentions, is “nature” (52). Emerson stresses that nature is the most important influence on the scholar: “The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages” (57). As Lawrence Buell notes, “Nature comes first because it is the most perennial: the resource literally for all seasons” (180). Emerson devotes discussion of the impact of nature on the scholar, or the intellectual: “What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,-so entire, so boundless” (57-58). Here, Emerson analogizes man’s spirit to the spirit of nature, an analogy that reminisces key ideas that Emerson sets forth in “The Over-Soul.” Emerson describes the soul as one that “looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her, leaving worlds behind her” (165). This looking “steadily forward” while “creating a world before her” and “leaving worlds behind her” echoes the idea of “there is never a beginning...but always circular power returning to itself.” In short, man’s soul does not birth itself, age, and then die; rather, his spirit mimics nature in that he renews himself and his spirit in accordance with the steady renewal of nature. However, when the influence of nature diminishes, man’s spirit diminishes, leaving him alienated between

themselves and their social function. This holds particular importance for politics, as many nations govern themselves based on practices and laws of the past, rather than the desires and needs of men in the present. Once men recognize the inextricable nature between the natural world around them and their own nature, they will realize the need for the continuous evolution of their own governing bodies. Men must look “steadily forward” when it comes to the improvement of society, not backward.

Within the opening paragraphs of “The American Scholar,” Emerson expresses his concern about the disunity between men and their work, or social function. Emerson raises his social concern when he declares that “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” (57). Society has broken down men into parts rather than distinct entities, and as a result, “The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry...The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship” (57). These declarations strongly reminisce Karl Marx, who would declare only a few years later, “With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity-and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally” (765). The alienation between men and their labor that Emerson describes in his images is also echoed by Marx: “In the conditions dealt by political economy this realization of labour appears as loss of

reality for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and object-bondage; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation” (765). Men do not value their work for anything other than the fact that it brings home profit, however minimal, in order to support themselves and their families. A man is merely a part of an entity, rather than an entity in and of himself; he is merely a “finger” or a “stomach,” not an entire body. This alienation directly results from a discontinuity between men and nature, which Marx notes: “The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labor is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces” (766). After describing the alienation between men and their work, Emerson declares that “In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the designated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*” (57). Emerson asserts the importance of the intellectual, or “man thinking,” though he has not fully explicated the role that this new thinker should play in a single, succinct sentence. He has not yet even fully defined the tenets of his proposed intellectual, although this is a definition that he explores in his essay. Before promulgating the responsibilities of an intellectual, Emerson devotes time to defining what the intellectual should be and should not be. In the process of this redefinition, Emerson also highlights the political responsibilities that such an individual must undertake.

Emerson acknowledges the notion of a traditional, or classic, intellectual. He notes that “the clergy,-who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day” (61), but he also believes that traditionally revered scholars include men such as Cicero, Locke, and Bacon: “Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon,

have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books” (59). The image of men fervidly studying in the libraries illustrates their scholarly nature, although this nature will ultimately not aid in their continuous intellectual growth. These young men’s thought process will stagnate because they do not take into account the power of their own individual thoughts; instead, they are relying solely on earlier philosophers for intellectual guidance. Emerson recognizes that Shakespeare is a renowned intellectual in Britain, yet the fervent reverence for Shakespeare has, to an extent, limited the artistic possibilities of some writers: “Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years” (60). Emerson does not seek to diminish the relevance of Cicero, Locke, Bacon, and Shakespeare, but he believes that their redoubtable reputation and influence stunts intellectual growth in some men. The traditional intellectual is inadequate because of their fundamental inaccessibility to most men. John T. Lysaker encapsulates Emerson’s belief in looking beyond heralded intellectuals to find one’s own intellectual growth: “For Emerson, it is not only human artifacts and mentors that open us to ourselves. The more-than-human world also sponsors self-knowledge” (158). Men can learn from other thinkers such as Cicero and Locke, but they can also learn from their own individual experiences. This classic intellectual is revered yet remote; he is merely aped from afar while remaining wholly separate from most men. The type of influence that such men have on other men is mediocre at best, which facilitates the need for a new intellectual, one who is capable of catalyzing his own thoughts and beliefs, thoughts and beliefs that hold the potential to

fundamentally and positively alter society. After acknowledging this need, Emerson proceeds to define the various tenets that characterize the new thinker and the subsequent responsibilities that accompany them.

One tenet involves the scholar's conservative usage of books. Emerson asserts that "books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst" (59). He acknowledges that reading books could be a worthwhile endeavor, but they should be relegated to "the scholar's idle times" (60). Idle is another word for not productive, illustrating Emerson's belief that the ideal scholar, or intellectual, will not spend the majority of his time perusing literary works and philosophical tracts. Lawrence Buell remarks that Emerson's attitude towards books may seem paradoxical: "In a move he presumably knew would sound counterintuitive for a talk in academia about the proper work of scholars, Emerson puts books second rather than first. Books are mighty monuments to the intellectual accomplishments of the past but by the same token potential stumbling blocks to original genius" (180-181). Emerson does not completely discount the usefulness of books, and he recognizes their value in that they are the product of highly esteemed intellectuals from the past. Thus, among the three influences that McDermott mentions, "history" (52) likely influences the scholar the least, at least in the traditional sense, as learning history normally entails reading innumerable historical books. Emerson believes that books are secondary to original thought, which supports his belief that political improvement is first and foremost grounded in men's needs in the future, and not their needs from the past.

Emerson does not only address the readers of books; he also addresses the composers of books: "Books are written on it by thinkers, not Man Thinking; by men of

talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles” (59). In other words, writers are “thinkers” but not Emerson’s proposed intellectual, “Man thinking.” As a result of relying on writers and readers for intellectual evolution, Emerson wryly remarks that “hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm” (59). Lawrence Buell notes the humorous usage of this word: “Therefore books, as [Emerson] mischievously asserts, are for ‘the scholar’s idle times’ rather than for times when the creative juices are flowing” (181). The usage of the word bookworm not only reveals the anachronistic nature of the clichéd term, but it also paints an image of the devout writer and reader as a diffident entity, an entity that is not formidable enough to spark an intellectual and political revolution. An intellectual should synthesize their academic knowledge with practical knowledge; this formidable synthesis will catalyze social, political, and scholarly evolution.

Emerson believes that a certain amount of solitude must be present in an intellectual’s life. The new scholar is one who pursues scholarly activities and thoughts during his own time, independent of other people’s influence. Emerson acknowledges the importance of the new intellectual’s solitary activities in shaping his future influence on society. He expresses this belief through his statement that “the private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy,-more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men” (66). A single man can formulate more revolutionary and scholarly thought than “any kingdom in history.” Emerson also offers an image of a private man’s pursuit of intellectual endeavors: “But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human

mind, which yet no man has thought of as such” (63). The new intellectual is not fettered to the chains of traditional intellectualism and intellectuals; Emerson expresses this convincingly in his phrase “which yet no man has thought of as such.” If a man has not thought of something yet, another man’s discovery can be considered a product of original thought. The new intellectual is introspective and creative, confident of seeing the world as it is through his own vision, a vision untainted by the heady influence of the esteemed, traditional intellectuals. This vision is what holds the power to catalyze an evolution in modern politics, as people will become less reliant upon anachronistic government procedures and will be able to create their own government, one that best answers the needs of individuals.

As such, the new intellectual should not isolate himself from mankind. Emerson refutes the traditional notion of the reclusive scholar: “There goes in the world a notion, that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian,-as unfit for any handiwork or public labor, as a penknife for an axe” (61). In other words, a scholar should not be reclusive; he should interact with other people. Emerson asserts that the intellectual is not merely a man of letters, or one who spends the duration of his time in a library setting. What distinguishes the ideal intellectual from a traditional intellectual for Emerson is his palpable action and active participation in society. Emerson promulgates the necessity of action: “Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth” (61). This statement supports Emerson’s notion that “thinking is a partial act” (63); in other words, thought without significant action and interaction, a trait ascribed to more traditional intellectuals, will not result in ultimate revelation or revolution. There must be a

hybridization of both action and thought to generate truly significant change in politics, as true political improvement depends upon action in collaboration with words, not just words. Words without action eventually prove meaningless and empty, as they cannot stand alone.

To stress the importance of action, Emerson states that “he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom” (62). The true intellectual will not rely only upon his own individual thinking for cognitive growth; he will also take tangible actions that will aid in facilitating his endeavors. Interaction and experience will help to solidify an intellectual’s growth and influence, not only solitary study. Emerson asserts that a scholarly man will lament any action that passes him by: “I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake...The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power” (61). Action is of paramount importance; John J. McDermott notes that “[Emerson] makes it apparent that he does not accept the traditional superiority of the contemplative over the active life...Living is a total act, the functionary, whereas thinking is a partial act, the function” (52-53). The new intellectual marks himself through both his actions and his knowledge; lacking either of these traits would stunt this intellectual’s growth. The new intellectual synthesizes original thoughts with action, a synthesis that will yield genuine change. McDermott mentions “action” (52) as one of the fundamental influences on the scholar; “action” here possesses more potency than the other influence, “history.” While history, to a certain extent, is necessary, it does not possess the power that action does. A balanced understanding of history in conjunction with active participation in the present will

yield the most beneficial results for a nation's government, rather than being imprisoned by historical norms.

Logically following his respective declaration that the intellectual should be an active participant in society, Emerson also declares that an intellectual should also serve as a leader or guide for other men. He expresses declaration through describing the new "office" of this scholar: "The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances" (63). This intellectual is not only a guide for men, but he is someone who will raise men's spirits and self-worth. He will have a potent influence on society because he actively involves himself through his own actions, leadership, and influence on others. The new intellectual will hybridize the past, present, and the future in order to successfully impact society and the world at large, as noted by Emerson: "The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges" (68). This intellectual will ameliorate societal conditions, not the traditional intellectual. This idea is central to "The American Scholar"; in his conclusion Emerson reiterates the power of the new intellectual: "What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him" (68). In this concluding sentence, Emerson also alludes to another trait of the new intellectual.

While dismantling the notion of the traditional intellectual and proposing the model for a new intellectual, Emerson also describes the type of man that could become

a paragon of intellectuality. He believes that any man with the motivation and willingness has the capacity to become an intellectual, regardless of their origin or their socially designated place in society. Emerson raises this question early in his essay, inquiring, “Is not, indeed, every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student’s behoof?” (57) He later answers this question by stating, “The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to...In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is progressive” (59). This answer reinforces the importance of the intellectual’s “active soul” while also noting the newness of this importance in declaring “it is progressive.” This active soul is not limited to men who have a particular status or office; it is something that “every man is entitled to.” Emerson applies this theory to himself near the end of his essay: “Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself” (66). Traditional intellectuals are not the only ones capable of subsuming the position of the new intellectual; the new intellectual is an office open to any motivated, industrious man. This would substantially alter politics, as the idea of a government position being open to any man is revolutionary; a man does not need to be born into a certain family or class to have even a chance at holding a position of power.

Regardless of which man assumes the role of the new intellectual, he must recognize the power of his own individuality and freedom. The power of individuality is a trait that Emerson espouses. Emerson alludes to the newness of the concept of individual power; near the end of his essay he states, “Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is, the new importance given to the single

person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual,-to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as sovereign state with a sovereign state;-tends to true union as well as greatness” (68). This implies that the idea of man having power as an individual is a new theory, a theory that has the power to affect politics, or a “political movement.” Emerson’s analogy of an individual man to a “sovereign state” also illuminates the political connotations that are replete throughout “The American Scholar.” A vital characteristic of the intellectual is his individuality and his independence, or freedom. Emerson underscores this by declaring, “in self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,-free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution” (64). The new intellectual is unique and free, two traits that lead to one of the most fundamental political messages in Emerson’s essay, which is the stand against hegemony.

Emerson asserts the importance of the new intellectual’s iconoclastic, nonconformist nature; in essence, the new intellectual must assume a stance against hegemony. Although Emerson does not explicitly use the term “hegemony,” he certainly alludes to it multiple times throughout “The American Scholar.” Antonio Gramsci offers a succinct definition of hegemony in his essay “The Formation of Intellectuals,” describing it as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (1143). Gramsci makes a plea for rectifying the two “levels” of society: “What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major super-structural ‘levels’: the one that can be called ‘civil society,’ that is the ensemble of organisms commonly

called 'private,' and that of 'political society' or 'the State.' These two levels correspond on the one hand to function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'judicial' government" (1142). Thus, if hegemony naturally does not occur within a society or nation, direct domination may result: "the apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed" (1143). In contrast to direct domination, hegemony is a non-violent political condition wherein the masses comply with the ideologies of those in power. Hegemony is not as perversely executed as direct domination; however, hegemony stifles or stunts men's scholarly thoughts and pursuits because it involves an unconditional acceptance of the dominant group's imposition on social and cultural life. Scholars such as Benedetto Fontana note Gramsci's usage of the word hegemony in both an economic and cultural sense: "hegemony also constitutes the generation of alliances by an increasingly preeminent social group. Thus, a group or class becomes hegemonic as it exercises intellectual and moral leadership over other groups in society in such a matter that the latter become 'allies' and 'associates' of the former" (29). Hegemony can dictate both legalities and ideologies; every country, regardless of what type of government defines it, subjects itself to the possibility of hegemony.

Emerson paints a despondent image of a hegemonic situation in America that clearly disturbs him: "Men in history, men in the world of to-day are bugs, are spawn,

and are called ‘the mass’ and ‘the herd’” (65). Emerson’s reference to the “mass” demonstrates both men’s concern with the majority of humanity falling by the wayside, while only a few men all the political and ideological power. Emerson continues his sympathetic portrayal of these men:

The poor and the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. They sun themselves in the great man’s light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make the great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. (65)

Emerson details how the “poor and the low” are obsequious; they do not mind being brushed aside “like flies” because they believe in the power and ostensibly superior intelligence of the dominant group. They will mold their lives, their philosophies, and their morality according to the dictums of the dominators, without seriously questioning the validity or the motivation of the elite’s actions. They find their personal fulfillment through the admiration of men designated superior by the social strata, and they do not realize that they are capable of becoming influential intellectuals themselves. These men are who Emerson refers to as “parrots” earlier: “In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men’s thinking” (57). A man bereft of original thinking that parrots another man’s

thoughts is essentially a victim of hegemony. They do not venture beyond the ideological boundaries set upon them from above, and as a result they deaden the opportunity to realize their potential as intellectuals. Emerson urges for these types of men to recognize their own potency, as he himself shows a predilection towards the common man: "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low" (67). Once these men recognize that they can choose their thoughts and beliefs, a natural awakening and revolution will occur in political society.

Emerson calls for the new intellectual to take a stand against hegemony. He asserts that the path the new intellectual takes will seldom be popular, at least initially:

Worse yet, he must accept,-how often! poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. (63-64)

The new intellectual will stand in opposition to the social norms and customs; he will formulate his own path in life, one that is shaped by his own scholarly endeavors and perception of the world. The new intellectual will embrace poverty and solitude when it is necessary in order to maintain his own mental and spiritual growth. He is leery of the society's institutions, including established schools and churches. He is self-reliant and self-motivated, impervious to the labels that educated society as a whole might place

upon him. Emerson's reference to "educated society" illustrates the connection to hegemony, as "educated society" usually comprises those who are in power, or who exert control over the masses. Despite the opposition from "educated society," the new intellectual is infrangibly confident: "These being his functions, it becomes to him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and only he knows the world" (64). The new intellectual should not purposely isolate himself from the world, but he can be a recluse if necessary. He will be confident in his vision and understanding of the world and of life; he is aware that "the world of any moment is the merest appearance" and that it is inherently unstable and evolutionary.

The new intellectual's steadfast devotion to his own intellect will result in a positive impact for humanity. Emerson details the power of the new intellectual's instinct and the eventual success that it will engender: "Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks" (64). The new intellectual will fulfill his role as a guide to other men; his solitary reflection and endeavors will serve to enlighten other men. Emerson explicates this fully through his examples of the poet and the orator:

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. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions,-his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses,- until he drinks his words because he fulfills for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his

wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. (64)

Success will come to the new intellectual. The success is not monetary or superficial in nature, but eternal in that it has a lasting impact on mankind because it improves society as a whole. The catalyst for the improvement is the development of individuals' relationship with other people. Robert C. Pollock notes this inspiration in Emerson's essays, stating that "[Emerson] succeeded in bringing sublime truths into an immediate and even matter-of-fact relation to everyday concerns, and indeed so effectively that he broke the spell of one's routine, whether of the mechanic, the cooper, the miller, or the lawyer, relating one's being and even one's very craft and skill to the universal scheme, so that each one felt that his life was truly intertwined with it" (44). This intertwining results in men not being mere parts, such as an "elbow" or "finger" (57) as Emerson mentions early in "The American Scholar," but rather complete entities who are no longer alienated from their work and society. Hans von Rautenfeld also recognizes how Emerson's proposed scholar will influence society: "Emerson's optimism consists in this: moral and political amelioration is possible as long as the public sphere remains open to the representation of alternative moral and political possibilities" (195). Alternative moral and political possibilities will likely conflict with the norms and rules set forth by the dominant class; this representation can be interpreted as progressive action against the pervasive influence and dominance of hegemony. The new intellectual proposed in "The American Scholar" will aid in the advancement of society by diminishing hegemony's influence.

The new intellectual will be able to connect with the common man; his scholarly pursuits will be of a useful, practical nature. In other words, since the new intellectual concerns himself with societal improvements, he will be an active participant in politics, even if this participation has the potential to endanger his life. Emerson explicitly states that the new intellectual must not eschew engagement with politics: “It is a shame to him if his tranquility, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption, that, like children and women, he is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes, peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up” (64). By analogizing an intellectual who avoids politics to an ostrich that buries its head, Emerson underscores the importance of the new intellectual’s participation in political, and potentially dangerous, endeavors. During Emerson’s life, abolition would be considered such an endeavor; Jay Grossman notes that “many of Emerson’s lectures and writings against slavery speak directly to the role the individual should assume in relation to the central political controversies of his age” (145). Hans von Rautenfeld also discusses the political connotations of Emerson’s essays: “in his writings Emerson directly and thoroughly engages the American experience of political democracy and that he rejects elitism in favor of an egalitarian understandings of the workings of this democracy” (185). This concern for politics reinforces the aforementioned characteristic that the new intellectual must possess: active participation in life. One such way that the new intellectual can be an active participant is by working actively against hegemony.

An examination of “The American Scholar” reveals the visionary potency of Emerson’s philosophical and political thought. Hans von Rautenfeld recognizes the lasting influence of Emerson’s political philosophies: “this fundamental model of the representative relation persists in modern political theory” (195). A curious fact to note about “The American Scholar” is that, in spite of the title, there is really nothing that is exclusively “American” about this scholar. Emerson only uses the full term “American scholar” in his essay twice, once at the introduction and once at the conclusion, a usage that seems to suggest conformity to speech conventions. The scholar that Emerson describes is one whose traits and actions do not require that he be of American origin. Emerson’s “Man Thinking” is one that has universal appeal, as noted by Lawrence Buell: “Emerson’s vision of man thinking was designed; in other words, more as a universal template for intellectuals than as the manifesto of cultural nationalism is it commonly read as being after the fact” (189). Thus, Emerson’s “Man Thinking” is one that has universal appeal and political relevancy for every nation. In addition to its modern relevancy, this “Man Thinking” holds significant relevancy in Emerson’s later essays, as he returns multiple times to the importance of the newly defined intellectual. Without this germinal definition, the theses of both “History” and “Politics” would not possess full cogency.

“History”

In “History,” Emerson redefines history similarly to how he redefines the intellectual or scholar in “The American Scholar.” Emerson does not define history by distinct centuries, peoples, governments, or wars. Instead, he depicts the underlying commonalities that unite every man from every century, a commonality that results from the universality of both mankind and nature, themes that also prevail throughout “The American Scholar.” Because of this, every law throughout history originates from a similar characteristic possessed by man. Emerson successfully undermines key distinctions between governments and laws through his redefinition of history, while stressing the importance of education. Emerson also argues that artifacts from specific historical ages, notably architecture, sculpture, civil history, and literature, possess inherent characteristics that ensure their connection to every man. “History” redefines the traditional notion of history and reveals its universal relevance to both the individual man and entire nations of men, explicating ideas initially proposed in “The American Scholar.”

Emerson opens “History” with a powerful, succinct declaration: “There is one mind common to all individual men” (105). Kerry Larson notes that this mind cannot be rejected: “The sameness evoked here can no more be accepted than rejected; it is a fact of existence that we automatically inherit, not a right we strive to achieve” (328). This

also echoes the idea of all men comprising a single soul, while still remaining a distinct entity in and of themselves. Emerson further explicates this idea when he follows his initial sentence with: “Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate” (105). With this imagery, Emerson invokes a similar theme to that in “The American Scholar;” in “The American Scholar,” Emerson remarks with displeasure that society has broken men down into parts, as either a “finger,” a “neck,” or any other assorted body part, rather than a whole “man.” However, the distinction between the similar themes is that in “History,” Emerson offers an image of man as a complete being, separate yet joined with his fellow men, or a “freeman of the whole estate” (105). “History” revisits themes or ideals that Emerson initially discusses in “The American Scholar,” often from a different perspective that arrives at the same conclusion, or thesis. These themes include the importance of individual thought and power, as well as a conscious avoidance of succumbing to hegemony. Both essays also diminish the traditionally accepted importance of history, stressing an importance on the present over the past.

Emerson continues this emphasis on the present over the past by offering cutting insight into the origin and creation of laws: “But the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preëxist in the mind as laws. Each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant, and the limits of nature give power to but one at a time” (105). Emerson underscores the significance of thought, a significance that echoes his insistence on the importance of “man thinking” in “The American Scholar.” “History” illustrates the result of “thought,” as “thought is always prior to the fact,” with “fact” being the antecedent for “laws.” Laws arise only after the emergence of thought, a

thought that changes depending upon the “circumstances predominant.” As Cadava notes, “for Emerson, institutional forms and laws declare the will of the moment in which they are born and in which they exist...every institution seems immutable and permanent until we recognize that it is the result of human thought and labor” (204).

Laws are not rigid and implacable; they subject themselves to change, though this change often can be reversible: “What the former age has epitomized into a formula or rule for manipular convenience, it will lose all the good of verifying for itself, by means of the wall of that rule” (108). Laws ultimately allow for only nominal control over humanity: “It is the universal nature which gives worth to particular men and beings. Human life as containing this is mysterious and inviolable, and we hedge it round with penalties and laws” (106). Laws are manmade creations that attempt to control and modify human nature, but ultimately this control’s duration is transient. After all, “every law which the state enacts, indicates a fact in human nature; that is all” (108). Laws do not materialize from any objective means; they originate from human needs that in turn result from human nature, which itself is universal and boundless. Eduardo Cadava notes Emerson’s frequent analogies between nature and ideas such as history, as he discusses “Emerson’s tendency to render political and historical issues in climatological or meteorological terms...time and time again, Emerson associates meteorological metaphors with the issues of politics, slavery, race, property, and speculation, both economical and philosophical” (184). The origin of issues such as politics, history, and their subsequent laws can be analogized to the ebb and flow of nature; their progression and evolution is circular, rather than linear.

Thus, the origin of present laws usually does not differ terribly from the origin of other laws in the past, as mankind evolves little in both its nature and its whims throughout history. Emerson illustrates this stagnancy in human nature with his declaration that “Man is explicable by nothing less than all his history. Without hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion, which belongs to it in appropriate events” (105). This declaration echoes ideas Emerson initially proposes in “The American Scholar,” when he heralds the influence of nature upon mankind in that it influences humanity’s continuous circular spirit: “The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature” (57). Emerson also alludes to the idea of “the human spirit [going] forth” in “The American Scholar” as well: “Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding, and beholden” (57). Consequently, both “History” and “The American Scholar” acknowledge the relative similarity of mankind across the centuries. This similarity results in the shared origins of laws, however different such laws may appear on the surface.

Emerson also diminishes the somewhat arbitrary boundaries between populations in various countries that seem to govern themselves differently: “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn, and Egypt, Greece, Rome, Gaul, Britain, America, lie folded already in the first man. Epoch after epoch, camp, kingdom, empire, republic, democracy, are the application of his manifold spirit to the manifold world” (105). The “thousand forests” symbolize the various nations, nation-states, or other reasonably structured groups of people, yet their membership in “one acorn” illuminates

their intertwined nature with one another, whether or not they should choose to acknowledge this. The coalescing of “kingdom, empire, republic, democracy,” distinctly defined governments, also illuminates the smaller distinction between these than their traditional definitions would suggest. Emerson’s “acorn” is akin to the previously mentioned “the whole estate.” This natural analogy that Emerson employs also echoes another similar analogy that he presents in “The American Scholar”: “Thus to him, this school-boy under the bending dome of his day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that Root? Is that not the soul of his soul?” (58) The “root” from “The American Scholar” is akin to the “acorn” that Emerson explicates in “History.” The root and the acorn both encapsulate all that lies in “the first man,” or “the soul of his soul.” These two natural images depict the interconnectivity between mankind, an interconnectivity that transcends both spatial and time boundaries.

To emphasize the importance of interconnectivity between men, despite the fact that they might have lived in entirely different eras, Emerson stresses the importance of learning from men in the past and applying this knowledge to one’s daily existence: “We as we must become Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner, must fasten these images to some reality in our secret experience, or we shall learn nothing rightly” (106). This assertion reemphasizes one of Emerson’s key ideas in “The American Scholar”: “The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar, is, the mind of the Past,-in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed” (58). The “past,” which can encompass literature, art, institutions, and other aspects, offers many opportunities for men to learn from. In

“History,” Emerson provides a more specific example of history to learn from; while in “The American Scholar” he asserts the important influence of the “past,” in “History” he suggesting becoming “Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner” in order to assimilate oneself with history. However, men should be careful not to become so immersed in history that they ignore their actions in the present.

Learning history in isolation or separation from one’s own daily existence will yield little use. Emerson underscores this “active learning” more clearly when he states, “The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and the books the commentary” (107). As in previous essays, Emerson reiterates the importance of present action while avoiding complete dependence on past men: “Of the universal mind each man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him. Each new fact in his private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crises” (105-106). Every man that currently exists is part of the “universal mind.” In a sense, the “universal mind” is constantly evolving with the continuous birth of new men; men are bound inexplicably to one another regardless of which time period they live in. This inexplicable bounding reminisces Kerry Larson’s discussion: “something buried deep within the soul that links the one to the many remains constant, even if it is not always acknowledged and made manifest to the same extent by different individuals” (331). In other words, something within each man’s soul “links” him to every other man, a linking with emphasizes the interconnectivity that Emerson espouses.

Emerson also stresses the importance of experience and action by remarking that “private experience” relates to “what great bodies of men have done,” and that individual crises are analogous to “national crises.” Within these statements, Emerson promotes the power of the individual while also describing the individual’s relationship to the society that surrounds him, and what responsibilities this relationship entails. This clearly echoes some of Emerson’s declarations in “The American Scholar,” wherein he states, “The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, -more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men” (66). A single man can be “more formidable” than an entire “monarchy,” which heralds the potency of the individual. “History” and “The American Scholar” recognize that one man’s private actions and thoughts have the power to shape society, and such men have a responsibility to do so.

This responsibility becomes clear in the following lines: “Every revolution was first a thought in one man’s mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era. Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again, it will solve the problem of the age” (106). This assertion recalls Emerson’s beliefs that he declares in “The American Scholar.” In “The American Scholar,” Emerson opposes hegemonic subversion of the masses and calls for men to take a stand against this subversion, even if it is unpopular, or even if this path involves “poverty and solitude.” Nevertheless, one infers from “The American Scholar” what Emerson makes explicit in this essay: revolutions and amelioration of societal conditions will not occur without both the private thoughts and actions of a solitary

man. The origin of a revolution lies within the mind of an individual man, an individual whose beliefs will result in an improved lifestyle for everyone. With revolution comes new laws, laws molded by “circumstances predominant,” and Emerson emphasizes the relevant nature of these laws for everyone: “Each new law and political movement has meaning for you” (106). Laws and political movements do not influence sporadic groups of people; they impact everyone, either overtly or subconsciously.

Lest people misunderstand the imperative nature of their own individual actions, Emerson intones, “This throws our actions into perspective” (106). Men’s intellectuality obligates them to take action “because a profound nature awakens in us by its actions and words” (111). This awakening must result in palpable action, action that results in the betterment of both the individual instigator and mankind as a whole. Similarly in “The American Scholar,” Emerson remarks, “Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary... Thinking is a partial act” (63). Clearly, men cannot simply luxuriate in their private thoughts; they must also channel these thoughts into tangible actions. An innate sense of right and wrong aids in catalyzing this action, and every man possesses a basic understanding of these, as Larson notes, “Universal and innate, basic concepts of right and wrong are available for all to see, written, as the saying goes, in the language of the heart. We are all equal in our common possession of a primal ethical knowledge, and we are capable, in principle, of exemplifying (perceiving, manifesting, acting upon) that knowledge to some degree” (331). Once people act on “that knowledge to some degree,” positive revolutions and reforms may occur. Peter S. Field also notes Emerson’s insistence on individual responsibility and action: “Emerson resolutely insisted that intellectuals like himself had

to fulfill their responsibility to the nation by reminding their fellow citizens of the importance, potential, and awesome obligation of every individual” (226). The “awesome obligation” certainly includes taking appropriate actions when necessary, whether these actions are large or small, so long as they serve to benefit society.

Education plays a major role in “History,” a role Emerson promulgates in his statement that “the world exists for the education of each man” (107). Furthering his earlier assertion that all of mankind is bound to one another, regardless of the era, Emerson declares that “there is no age or state of society or mode of action in history, to which there is not somewhat corresponding in his life” (107). Any man living in any era will find some similarity between his own life and the life of another, even if they are separated by thousands of years and miles. Upon realization of this learning experience, men will grasp the essence of historical study: “He should see that he can live all of history in his own person” (107). Every type of history relates to every man’s individual experience: “Civil and natural history, the history of art and literature, must be explained from individual history, or must remain words. There is nothing but is related to us, nothing that does not interest us-kingdom, college, tree, horse, or iron shoe, the roots of all things are in man” (111). “The American Scholar” also presents the importance of learning from others’ experiences: “I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of today” (62). Within these images, Emerson stresses interconnectedness amongst both mankind and natural imagery, an interconnectedness that cannot be dissolved by arbitrary laws or governmental establishments. In fact, Emerson frequently analogizes

nature and politics in an effort to prove that they both are intractable from human nature, as Cadava notes, “The analogy [Emerson] draws between our relation to both the natural occurrence of frost and occurrences in the political world suggests that the course of human events is as inexorable and authoritative as the laws of nature” (180). The “course of human events” can define the basic core tenet of history, which in turn demonstrates history’s relevance when looked at from a universal, natural lens. Essentially, history possesses no meaning and can be regarded as just “words,” if it has no substantive applicability to the present.

Emerson also believes that history can be utilized in order to recognize one’s independence and individual potency. Alluding to a disapproval of hegemony, Emerson asserts that “He must sit solidly at home, and not suffer himself to be bullied by kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world” (107). Men should not be submissive to great superstructures such as “empires” or “government.” Rather, they should recognize that their own individual power and intellectuality can surpass even the most arrogant of kings. Similarly, in “The American Scholar,” Emerson asserts his recognition of his own mental prowess: “Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself” (66). By recognizing his own individual potency, Emerson encourages other men to follow this path to self-realization. However, this realization of individual potency should not encourage men to distance themselves from one another. Men should reread history not as a separation from themselves, but rather as a part of themselves: “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 anything to say to him, he will try the case; if not, let them forever be silent” (107). Men should almost be defiant of forced ideologies that render some people superior towards others; they should “try the case” in light of such force.

Men should also recognize that national and international history are a part of his identity; if he happens to be Greek, he should note that “London” and “Rome” also form a part of his constitution. “The American Scholar” presents the notion that both national and international histories comprise an individual man’s history: “Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated on the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on the differences” (66). Emerson sees little difference between the respective ages that he mentions, concluding that “In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective” (66). Within these statements, Emerson breaks down the boundaries of historical eras and their respective ideologies. Breaking down spatial and ideological barriers supports the essence of a “universal nature” shared by mankind. Understanding history from this perspective will make his actions both reasonable and necessary, as Larson says, “the faith in knowing that a universal commonality or sameness [will] shine through and empower seemingly local and individual acts” (333). Acts that seem individual or local ultimately have a universal and global outcome; men do not and cannot act in complete isolation from each other.

Through his depiction of the intertwined nature between all of mankind and the common origins of all laws and governments, Emerson alludes to the overall relativity of the concept of time: “Why should we make account of time, or of magnitude, or of figure? The soul knows them not, and genius, obeying its law, knows how to play with them as a young child plays with greybeards and in churches” (109). Emerson espouses a circular, rather than a linear, notion of time with his emphasis on thematic and historical reincarnation: “Genius watched the monad through all his masks as he performs the metempsychosis of nature. Genius detects through the fly, through the caterpillar, through the grub, through the egg, the constant individual; through countless individuals the fixed species; through many species the genus; through all genera the steadfast type; through all the kingdoms of organized life the eternal unity” (109). This passage compares human history with the natural world; as the natural world consistently evolves and changes, yet ultimately remains the same, so does human nature. “The American Scholar” also presents the circularity of time: “There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning to itself” (57). As time is circular, and not linear, Emerson alludes to a theoretical relativity of time. Elsewhere in the text, Emerson justifies his reasoning for time’s irrelevance: “When a thought of Plato becomes a thought to me,-when a truth that fired the soul of Pindar fires mine, time is no more. When I feel that we two meet in a perception, that our two souls are tinged with the same hue, and do, as it were, run into one, why should I measure degrees of latitude, why should I count the Egyptian years?” (114) Emerson utilizes a personal connection that he made with a man from the past in order to illuminate the connections between

men in the present and men in the past, an illumination that reveals the underlying similarities between all men.

On a broader scale, monuments may be erected and wars may be fought, but these ultimately symbolize the unchanging qualities of humanity: “The identity of history is equally intrinsic, the diversity equally obvious. There is at the surface infinite variety of things; at the centre, there is simplicity of cause. How many are acts of one man in which we recognize the same character” (109). In other words, though historical events may appear diverse on the surface, they often originate from “one man,” who has a character that conforms to the similarity of all men. The number and variety of wars, governments, or revolutions is inconsequential when compared with all of history; as man’s character remains unchanged, so do the catalysts for the aforementioned events and organizations. Wars and governments may have different names or different definitions, but they ultimately trace themselves back to the universality of human nature. Cadava notes Emerson’s analogies between war and nature: “The natural history of frost crystallizes the elemental questions of the war into that of the relationship between life and death. In other words, the analogies that he draws between frost and the movements of war or politics suggest that, for him, the politics of war are founded on the coincidence of life and death” (191). By linking war to the universal life and death of both humanity and nature, a life cycle that is itself cyclical, the “simplicity of cause” for war becomes apparent.

Recognition of the universality and interconnectedness of human nature will verify the relevancy of history: “In like manner all public facts are to be individualized, and all private facts to be generalized” (112). This furthers Emerson’s earlier assertion

that every “mode of action in history” corresponds on some level to every man’s individual experience. Thus, Emerson emphasizes a hybrid of individuality and unity, a hybrid that he reinforces when he refers to a man’s private history in “The American Scholar”: “So there is no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by souring from our body into the empyrean” (62). The past experiences of a great mass of humanity, or “history” really can be “individualized,” while in turn an individual’s experiences can be “generalized,” as they are representative of the experiences of the whole.

In accordance with stressing the veracity and relevancy of history, Emerson discusses various methods of capturing history throughout the ages:

Observe the sources of our information in respect to the Greek genius. We have the *civil history* of that people, as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch have given it—a very sufficient amount of what manner of people they were, and what they did. We have the same national mind again expressed for us in *literature*, in epic and lyric poems, drama, and philosophy; a very complete form. Then we have it once more in their *architecture*, a beauty as of temperance itself, limited to the straight line and the square,—a builded geography. Then we have it once more again in *sculpture*, the “tongue on the balance of expression,” a multitude of forms in the utmost freedom of action, and never transgressing the ideal serenity. (109-110)

Emerson does not define history solely by the books; rather, he recognizes the historical relevancy of four major types of artifacts in examining past humanity: “Thus, of the

genius of one remarkable people, we have a fourfold representation” (110), with the four folds representing civil history, literature, architecture, and sculpture. Each of these folds relates to a certain era or time past, yet this does not diminish their relevancy for men and the modern world.

Emerson explicates how these four “folds” relate to both the past and the present. With architecture and sculptures, Emerson states a seeming paradox: “A Gothic cathedral affirms that it was done by us, and not done by us” (108). In short, past men physically constructed the Gothic cathedral, not present men; however, since all men are linked by a common genius, the Gothic cathedral is a conceivable product of all humanity. Emerson affirms this when he continues to say: “Surely it was by man, but we find it not in our man. But we apply ourselves to the history of its production. We put ourselves into the place and state of the builder. We remember the forest dwellers, the first temples, the adherence to the first type, and the decoration of it as well as the wealth of the nation increased; the value which is given to wood by carving led to the carving over the whole mountain of stone of a cathedral” (108-109). Men relive the construction of the Gothic cathedral by putting themselves “into the place and state of the builder” and by remembrance of other relevant elements such as “the forest dwellers” and “the first temples.” Christopher J. Windolph notes Emerson’s fascination with Gothic architecture: “The manner in which Gothic architecture acts, speaks, and looks made an impression on Emerson’s mind as well” (70).

Through this envisioning and reminiscence, men nearly feel as though they constructed the Gothic cathedral themselves, or would have been able to. Emerson extends this image to include the Catholic Church and its recognizable symbols: “When

we have gone through this process, and added thereto the Catholic Church, its cross, its music, its processions, its Saints' days and image-worship, we have, as it were, been the man that made the minster; we have seen how it could and must be. We have the sufficient reason" (109). Thus, the Gothic cathedrals and the Catholic Church represent the aforementioned "genius of one remarkable people." Though they may have been constructed in a different era, men today are able to gaze upon the cathedrals and churches and feel a sense of connection to the past men who built them; this connection results from the shared universal nature of mankind. Emerson confirms connection later in his essay, when he declares, "The Gothic cathedral is a blossoming in stone subdued by the insatiable demand of harmony in man. The mountain of granite blooms into an eternal flower with the lightness and delicate finish as well as the aerial proportions and perspective of vegetable beauty" (112). In essence, Emerson analogizes construction of Gothic cathedrals as akin to elements of nature, as Windolph remarks, "to see how architecture could and must be, then, is to understand that the best architecture is modeled on the lines on nature-that is, on organic forms that, once replicated in stone, reconcile man to nature and join human imagination to nature's art" (71). Emerson views architecture as representative of nature, just as history is representative of the natural course of history as mankind. Architecture does not represent something that belongs exclusively to one time period; rather, it serves to "reconcile man to nature and join human imagination to nature's art." Emerson's emphasis on learning about the origins of architecture, sculpture, or any other product of mankind also echoes itself in "The American Scholar": "Years are well spent in country labors; in town,-in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women;

in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions” (62). These years are “well spent” because they allow one to connect with the past by viewing history’s products; frequently these products include cathedrals or churches.

Emerson devotes more time to discussing the relationship between civil history and the universality of human nature. He opens his discussion with the valid question, “What is the foundation of that interest all men feel in Greek history, letters, art and poetry, in all its periods, from the heroic or Homeric age, down to the domestic life of the Athenians and Spartans, four or five centuries later?” (113) With this question, Emerson establishes the connection between men in the present and men in the past, and he proceeds to offer an explanation for the existence of this connection: “What but this, that every man passes personally through a Grecian period” (113). In other words, every man feels a sense of relatedness to the Greeks because he passes through a Greek stage himself throughout the duration of his life. As mentioned before, Emerson asserts that every man undergoes a period wherein he relates to the Grecian era in “The American Scholar”: “The boy is a Greek” (66). Thus, Emerson consistently stresses the connection between the Greeks and other men throughout his essays. In “History,” he provides more a more explicit depiction of what defines the Grecian era.

Emerson defines the tenets of the Grecian period: “The Grecian state is the era of the bodily nature, the perfection of the senses, -of the spiritual nature unfolded in strict unity with the body...the manners of that period are plain and fierce. The reverence exhibited is for personal qualities, courage, address, self-command, justice, strength, swiftness, a loud voice, a broad chest” (113). The Greeks stress qualities

whose benefits and relevance transcend the ages; qualities such as “courage,” “self-command,” “strength,” and “justice” are of paramount importance as they shape both men’s character and the society that results from the combined characters of men. The Grecian period also characterizes itself through the near absence of materialism: “Luxury and elegance are not known. A sparse population and want make every man his own valet, cook, butcher, and soldier, and the habit of supplying his own needs educates the body to wonderful performances” (113). The Grecian period defines itself by both its simplicity and honesty; the men of this era possess characteristics pursued or modeled, or that should be pursued or modeled, by men in the present era: “The attraction of these manners is, that they belong to man, and are known to every man in virtue of his being once a child; besides that there are always individuals who retains these characteristics” (114). These characteristics explain why there is a connection with Grecian history even “four or five centuries later.” Emerson further clarifies this when he states, “The Greek had, it seems, the same fellow beings as I” (114).

In addition to stressing the connection between the Grecian era and the present era, Emerson also discusses the relation between the other distinct ages and the present age: “The student interprets the age of chivalry by his own age of chivalry by his own age of chivalry, and the days of maritime adventure and circumnavigation by quite parallel miniature experiences of his own” (114). Men recognize similarities between certain periods of time and their own; these similarities justify the understanding and relevance of history. Should there be no similarities between the eras, then history would be “just words” (111), with the implication being that these words are bereft of meaning. Nevertheless, history consists of more than “just words,” as Emerson states,

“To the sacred history of the world, he has the sacred key” (114), which illuminates that every student of history can access a true understanding of life’s machinations. Such a student will recognize the common framework that unites all of humanity: “When the voice of the prophet out of the deeps of antiquity merely echoes to him a sentiment of his infancy, he then pierces to the truth through all the confusion of tradition and the caricature of institution” (114). The reference to “institution,” which can include churches and governments, as a “caricature” implies that each institution resembles a distortion of the same underlying principal nature of humanity; this principal nature unifies men and their actions throughout the ages. Likewise, in “The American Scholar,” Emerson notes how the increase of one’s knowledge will increase his understanding of the interconnectivity between all of mankind: “To the young mind, every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things, and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under the ground, whereby contrary and remote things cohere, and flower out from one stem” (58). Similarly to other points in both of his essays, Emerson employs natural imagery to convey his beliefs about the shared relationship amongst mankind. The idea of a universal essence linking mankind together corresponds to the “roots running under the ground” that aid in “tying things together.”

Emerson makes a convincing argument about the universality and timelessness of literature as it relates to man’s nature. He discusses the influence of tragedy on modern men: “The costly charm of the ancient tragedy and indeed of all old literature is,

that the persons speak simply,-speak as persons who have great good sense without knowing it, before yet the reflective habit has become the predominant habit of the mind” (114). Thus, people relate ancient tragedies because of their simple speech devoid of excessive reflection; Emerson associates these tragedies with the Greeks: “The Greeks are not reflective, but perfect in their senses and in their health, with the finest organization in the world” (114). Since every man passes through a stage in his life wherein “before yet the reflective habit has become the predominant habit of the mind,” or before reflection dominates simplicity, every man can relate on some level to the Greek tragedy. These tragedies speak to human experiences and emotions that are common to every man, regardless of nation or century: “The beautiful fables of the Greeks, being proper creations of the Imagination and not of the Fancy, are universal verities” (116). Emerson also recognizes the power of literature to influence men in “The American Scholar”: “The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it then 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 came to him, business, it went from him, poetry” (58). In short, literature encapsulates the mood of an era past, a mood that likely corresponds to the state of mind of men in the present. Books permit psychological access to the past, which is likely why Emerson asserts, “Books are the best type of influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth,- learn the amount of this influence, more conveniently,-by considering their value alone” (58). Thus, books provide an excellent lens into the past, so long as one does not overly involve oneself in literature at the expense of living in the present.

Emerson extends his discussion of literature to include poetry, which possesses more complexity than the simplicity of the Greek tragedies: “The universal nature, too strong for the petty nature of the bard, sits on his neck and writes through his hand; so that when he seems to vent a mere caprice or wild romance, the issue is an exact allegory” (117). Poets express sentiments that extend well beyond their own personal experience; Emerson mentions this initially in “The American Scholar”: “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” (64). The “spontaneous thoughts” of the poet relate not only to the poet but to other men; man’s universal nature utilizes the poet as a tool to express the emotions and thoughts of every man, not just the poet himself. The poet himself may not even recognize the gravity of his own poetry, as Emerson quotes from Plato: “Hence Plato said that ‘poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand.’” (117). Poets do not write poetry that stands distinctly apart from other men; every man discovers something in poetry that relates to his own experiences and life: “The advancing man discovers how deep a property he has in literature,-in all fable as well as in all history. He finds that the poet was no odd fellow who described strange and impossible situations, but that universal man wrote by his pen a confession true for one and true for all” (115). Poets do not occupy a world separate and remote from other men; they share the same world and the same experiences. In a sense, Emerson argues that poets are historians as they scribe “a confession true for one and true for all,” which assimilates to Emerson’s definition of history, as he believes that history possesses both simultaneous personal and universal relevance.

Emerson attributes the universality of human nature to the consistency of nature. He declares that “nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws. She hums the old well known air through innumerable variations” (110). This relates directly to his aforementioned definition of history, when he states, “the identity of history is equally intrinsic, diversity equally obvious. There is at the surface infinite variety of things; at the centre there is simplicity of cause.” This “simplicity of cause” directly corresponds to the “repetition of very few laws.” Nature also explains why every law at its core possesses similar characteristics to other laws throughout history. Emerson claims that “all laws derive hence their ultimate reason; all express more or less distinctly some command of this supreme illimitable essence” (106). “This supreme illimitable essence” also corresponds directly to the “repetition of very few laws.” Nature plays a paramount role in history; man’s universal nature results from the consistency of nature throughout the ages. Emerson alludes to the connection between laws and nature in “The American Scholar”: “Its beauty is the beauty of its own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments” (58). As nature remains unchanged, so does man. As Cadava notes, “Natural metaphors within Emerson are not merely tropes but also principles of articulation between language, politics, and history. These principles not only account for the force of tropes upon whatever we may call the ‘reality’ of history or politics but also the essential figurality at work within the movement and constitution of either history or politics” (197). In short, Emerson articulates the relationship between history and nature with metaphors that detail nature as “an endless combination” and a “repetition of very few laws.”

Emerson concludes "History" by stating, "History no longer shall be a dull book. It shall walk incarnate in every just and wise man. You shall not tell me by languages and titles a catalogue of the volumes you have read. You shall make me feel what periods you have lived" (119). Emerson calls for action and learning history through the behaviors and acts of other men, as history "shall walk incarnate in every just and wise man." Emerson urges against relying solely on books to learn history; he does not have interest in a mere recitation of "a catalogue of volumes" that a man has read. This conclusion echoes similar sentiments that Emerson stresses in "The American Scholar": "Books are written on it by thinkers, not Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles" (59). Books' value extends only to a certain point; if men only read to learn about history, rather than embody the characteristics of history themselves, then history will not "walk incarnate in every just and wise man." Through his redefinition of history, Emerson reveals the commonalities that underlie every man, every law, and every government. Also, similarly to "The American Scholar," Emerson stresses the power of the individual to shape revolution or reform, government or laws.

“Politics”

In “Politics,” Emerson revives ideas that he initially presents in both “The American Scholar” and “History.” He particularly emphasizes the power of the individual and the interconnectedness between all people, while also questioning the relative morality and usefulness of various laws in society. “The American Scholar” and “History” lay the foundation for much of the philosophy that underlies “Politics.” However, “Politics” distinguishes itself from “The American Scholar” and “History” in that its content is more explicitly political; Emerson discusses specific governments while detailing the numerous problems that plague both of the dominant political parties in America. After pondering the various drawbacks to the government and laws, Emerson proceeds to explain why less government will benefit mankind and society more than a large government presence.

Emerson opens “Politics” with a clear picture of how he views governments: “In dealing with the State, we ought to remember that its institutions are not aboriginal, though they existed before we were born” (213). This sentiment echoes Emerson’s earlier assertion in “History,” that “epoch after epoch, camp, kingdom, empire, republic, democracy, are the application of his manifold spirit to the manifold world” (105). In other words, little distinction exists between seemingly different forms of government, whether they be “empire,” “republic,” or “democracy.” Hence, these variations of government lack originality, as their core originates from the “manifold spirit to the

manifold world.” Since the State’s origins are not “aboriginal,” their origins can be traced back to the “manifold world,” which means that politics will likely be inescapable for every person. Politics embed themselves within every nation and every society, as Cadava notes, “the political climate prevails upon everyone. It makes impossible to avoid not only the consequences and calamities of war but also the questions that destined America to its civil crisis-questions that, for Emerson, exhibit the nature of politics” (180).

Emerson continues on to discuss the reasons for why the institutions of the State are not superior towards the individual, “that they are not superior to the citizen: that every one of them was once the act of a single man” (213). A subtle stand against hegemony presents itself within these lines, as hegemony normally entails all the citizens acquiescing to the ideologies of the State without questioning or protest, an acquiescence that silently acknowledges the State’s superiority to its citizens. This stand echoes a similar stand that Emerson takes in “The American Scholar,” wherein he urges men to recognize their own potentiality: “Everything that tends to insulate the individual,-to surround him with the barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state;-tends to true union as well as greatness” (68). In short, “Politics” and “The American Scholar” espouse the notion that every individual man could impact society and every individual man has something to contribute; governments are “not superior to the citizen” and each man may be treated as his own “sovereign state.” In a similar vein, Emerson also attributes laws to the act of a single person, stating, “every law and usage was a man’s expedient to meet a particular case: that they all are imitable, all alterable;

we may make as good, we may make better” (213). Again, Emerson recalls declarations that he initially presents in “History,” wherein he says, “each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant” (105). These “circumstances predominant” mirror “man’s expedient,” revealing a remarkable consistency in Emerson’s beliefs about laws.

Emerson presents a convincing image that illustrates the alterability of laws: “Republics abound in young civilians, who believe that the laws make the city, that grave modifications of the policy and modes of living, and employments of the population, that commerce, education, and religions, may be voted in or out; and that any measure, though it were absurd, may be imposed on a people” (214). These “young civilians” believe that laws dictate society, and that society’s foundation rests upon the creation and destruction of certain laws as they pertain to issues such as “commerce” and “education.” They fail to recognize the tenuous nature of laws, though “the wise know that foolish legislation is a rope of sand, which perishes in the twisting; that the State must follow” (214). “Foolish legislation” will not last, a transience that reflects the inherent changeability and the resulting unreliability, of laws. Emerson stresses a circular or cyclical nature of laws, stating that they will eventually cease to exist and return to where they originated: “The law is only a memorandum...Our statute is a currency, which we stamp with our own portrait: it soon becomes unrecognizable, and in process of time will return to mint” (214). These assertions echo earlier sentiments Emerson sets forth in “History,” when he declares that “Human life as containing this is mysterious and inviolable, and we hedge it round with penalties and laws. All laws derive hence their ultimate reason; all express more or less directly some command of these supreme illimitable essence” (106). This highlights the transience of specific laws,

as they originally form merely to “hedge” around “human life,” while also reinforcing the notion that laws generally originate from a similar circumstance, or “some command of supreme illimitable essence.” Thus, laws do not lay a foundation for governments, as they do not possess the timelessness and solidity to comprise such a foundation.

Perhaps partially due to the fluidity of laws, Emerson recognizes the farce that calls itself society: “Society is an illusion to the young citizen. It lies before him in rigid repose, with certain names, men, and institutions, rooted like oak-trees to the centre, round which all arrange themselves the best they can” (213). Society does not possess a solid structure although it attempts to simulate such a structure by propagating certain men and institutions as its roots. However, these men and institutions do not possess immunity to change, which explains why “the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no such roots and centres; but any particle may suddenly become the centre of the movement, and compel the system to gyrate round it” (213). Thus, institutions and certain men cannot constitute “roots” or “centres” because by their inherent characteristics, they are subject to change. The “particle” that Emerson refers to could represent a single man’s actions, actions that “suddenly become the centre of the movement.” This reminisces Emerson’s belief in the individual’s capability to catalyze a revolution in light of his private thoughts in “The American Scholar”: “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” (64). Once a man recognizes the mastery of laws in his own private thoughts, he may transmit this understanding to other men, a transmission that could result in compelling

“the system to gyrate” around the “centre of a movement” initiated by one man’s introspection. “History” also heralds the power of one man to foment a revolution: “Every revolution was first a thought in one man’s mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era” (106). Emerson sets forth a key idea in both “History” and “The American Scholar” that support his assertions in “Politics”: a private man’s thoughts, once shared with others, can synthesize a revolution, a revolution that will dismantle the “roots” and “centres” of government. As a result, institutions and men possess a dynamic, not a static, character because they live and breathe while under the influence of both men in the past and men in the present.

However, Emerson does not deny that society possesses a foundation: “But politics rest on necessary foundations, and cannot be treated with levity” (214). He argues that the foundation of politics and laws lie within Nature, that “Nature is not democratic, nor limited-monarchical, but despotic, and will not be fooled or abated of any jot of her authority” (214). Laws do not comprise the foundation of all governments; nature does. Nature possesses the timelessness and solidity that the laws do not, which is why those laws that “jot” the authority of nature will “in the process of time return to mint.” This reinforces Emerson’s earlier declaration in “The American Scholar,” wherein he highlights the influence of nature upon laws: “Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures,-when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of a gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever expanding knowledge as to becoming creator” (58). Since governments possess a similar foundation, a foundation traceable to nature, then distinctions between the various forms of governments are

minimal. This recalls Emerson's discussion of the origin of laws in "History": "Every law which the state enacts, indicates a fact in human nature; that is all" (108). Cadava notes Emerson's reliance on nature in order to interpret and react to the political climate that surrounds him: "In the broil of politics, Emerson the poet never speaks without measuring what he says or what he refers to against the movement and laws of nature. In this process, these natural metaphors take on specific historical, political, theological, and literary connotations" (197). The "movement and laws of nature" constitute the "necessary foundations" that politics rest upon, as nature is also emblematic of man's spirit.

Having briefly discussed laws and governments, Emerson proceeds to discuss the focal point of his essay, politics. Emerson defines politics as "the theory of politics, which has possessed the mind of men, and which they have expressed the best they could in their laws and in their revolutions, considers persons and property as the two objects for whose protection government exists" (214). Theoretically, politics exist for two reasons: protection of people and protection of property. Emerson asserts the importance of equal rights for every individual: "Of persons, all have equal rights, in virtue of being identical in nature" (214). Within these lines, Emerson also refers again to the concept of a universal nature that unites humanity, as he states that every person is "identical in nature." This reinforces Emerson's assertion of a common natural essence that binds all men in "The American Scholar": "What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find, -so entire, so boundless" (58).

Emerson also refers to the protection of property in “History”: “Property also holds of the soul, covers great spiritual facts, and instinctively we at first hold to it with swords and laws, and wide and complex combinations” (104). In both “The American Scholar” and “History,” Emerson alludes to the rights of persons and property, an allusion that he realizes more fully in “Politics,” wherein he offers a distinction between people and property.

While acknowledging the equality in everyone’s nature, Emerson brings attention to distinct inequalities in property: “Whilst the rights of all as persons are equal, in virtue of their access to reason, their rights in property are very unequal” (214). Emerson provides a somewhat humorous illustration of this inequality: “One man owns his clothes, and another owns a county” (214). Emerson sets up a dichotomy between the rich and the poor, while illuminating the unfair dominance of one over the other: “doubts have arisen whether too much weight had not been allowed in the laws, to property, and such a structure given to our usages, as allowed the rich to encroach on the poor, and to keep them poor” (215). In “The American Scholar,” Emerson also criticizes the gap between the rich and the poor, particularly the subsequent acquiescence of the poor to the wealthy: “The poor and low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified” (65). Emerson explains the reasoning for this contentment in “History”: “We honor the rich because they have externally the freedom, power and grace which we feel to be proper to man, proper to us” (106).

Due to this great honoring of the rich, Emerson believes that the rights of property become more important than the rights of people in politics, as he states, “it was not, however, found easy to embody the readily admitted principle, that property should make law for property, and persons for persons: since persons and property mixed themselves in every transaction” (215). Individuals and property become entangled and inseparable from one another, which can result in property having more value in society than an individual. Christopher Newfield notes the simultaneous protection of both persons and property by the laws of the American government: “When asked whether America exists for each person or the people, for private property or national providence, the antebellum consensus liberal simply answered, ‘both.’” (659). Such emphasis on both persons and property usually cannot equal the other, which leaves the possibility open for property having greater esteem than an individual person. When society values property more than people, it degenerates, a vision Emerson initially sets forth in “The American Scholar”: “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” (57). This logical assertion recognizes that if property is worth more than individuals, the individuals themselves may feel as though they are only “a good finger” or “an elbow,” as opposed to “a man.”

The possibility of property having a greater value than an individual forms the basis for Emerson’s argument against the superior value of property: “mainly, because there is an instinctive sense, however obscure and yet inarticulate, that the whole constitution of property, on its present tenures, is injurious, and its influence on persons

deteriorating and degrading; that truly, the only interest for the consideration of the State, is persons” (215). The “deteriorating and degrading” influence of property on people could entail avarice and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Emerson believes that property seems to warrant more protection than some persons; thus, persons, not property, should be the most valued, protected components of society.

Emerson calls for education and morality in both the government and the creation of laws: “the highest end of government is the culture of men; and if men can be educated, the institutions will share their improvement, and the moral sentiment will write the law of the land” (215). This call for education echoes his earlier assertion in “History”: “The world exists for the education of each man” (107). Every man should receive an appropriate education; moreover, every man should incorporate his education into his daily actions, as Emerson notes in “The American Scholar”: “Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom” (62). This rich “return of wisdom” is one that will aid in the “improvement” and “moral sentiment” in writing “the law of the land,” should each man synthesize his education and his action appropriately.

While Emerson decries society as an “illusion” in the beginning of “Politics,” he commences to criticize society in a more savage manner: “Society always consists, in greatest part, of young and foolish persons” (215). These “young and foolish persons” likely are the same “young civilians” that Emerson refers to earlier, the civilians who believe that manmade laws, or “foolish legislation,” not nature, form the foundation of the State. The young are foolish because they never received wisdom from their fathers: “The old, who have seen through the hypocrisy of courts and statesmen, die, and leave

no wisdom to their sons” (215). Emerson alludes to his distrust of the media when he states that the “young and foolish persons” will “believe their own newspaper, as their fathers did at their age” (215). The majority of the youth believe anything that the media, which the State controls, tells them; this unquestioning belief results in ignorance amongst the majority of the population. Instead of questioning what they read or what the government tells them, younger people become “parrots” of whatever they hear, which Emerson initially refers to in “The American Scholar”: “In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men’s thinking” (57). A man simply parroting what he hears from someone else highlights his general ignorance, as it does not display any original thought or challenges of his own.

Recognizing the danger of this ignorance, Emerson declares, “With such an ignorant and deceivable majority, States would soon run to ruin” (215). However, governments’ influence only extends to a certain limit, because “there are limitations, beyond which the folly and ambition of governors cannot go. Things have their laws, as well as men; and things refuse to be trifled with” (215). The “things” that Emerson refers to likely are components of nature, as natural laws will not be “trifled with” by any manmade laws. As Daniel S. Malachuk notes, “But this national law-which in the United States is clearly dedicated to commerce-is not the final law, nor does it define the true Necessity of the age” (423). In other words, laws cannot obscure the true needs and spirit of an age, even if they attempt to do so. Emerson alludes to this with an image of nature refusing to be misrepresented: “Cover up a pound of earth never so cunningly, divide and subdivide it; melt it to liquid, convert it to gas; it will always weigh a pound:

it will always attract and resist other matter, by the full virtue of one pound weight” (215). No matter how someone tries to convert, destroy, or tamper with a piece of Nature, they will be unsuccessful because they cannot demolish the inherent permanence of Nature. Emerson highlights Nature’s intractable relationship with everything associated with man, including various forms of government, in “The American Scholar”: “The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another, reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on for ever to animate the last fibre of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight” (58). “Strange constitutions,” “all new powers,” and “their class and their law” can be associated with Nature, as Nature is an indelible component of a man. Similarly, Emerson compares Nature to the spirit of man: “the attributes of a person, his wit and his moral energy, will exercise, under any law or extinguishing tyranny, their proper force,-if not overtly, then covertly; if not for the law, then against it; if not wholesomely, then poisonously; with right, or by might” (215-216). The “attributes of a person” are those which “refuse to be trifled with,” and they possess potency and permanence that not even the most dogged of laws or tyrannies will be able to subdue them. As Emerson notes in “History,” a man should “not suffer himself to be bullied by kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world” (107). A man must recognize his own individual power, and recognize the benefits that his power could have for mankind.

Emerson explicates the power of the individual man further when he declares, “The boundaries of personal influence it is impossible to fix, as persons are organs of moral or supernatural force. Under the dominion of an idea, which possesses the minds

of multitudes, as civil freedom, or the religious sentiment, the power of persons are no longer subjects of calculation” (216). The power of a man’s spirit cannot be quantified or calculated, as Emerson implies that the exercise of a man’s spirit posits infinite possibilities. The “dominion of an idea” that Emerson refers to includes “civil freedom” or “religious sentiment.” If these sentiments do “possess the minds of the multitudes,” they can become a reality rather than just an “idea.” Emerson cites historical evidence of this when he states, “A nation of men unanimously bent on freedom, or conquest, can easily confound the arithmetic of statisticians, and achieve extravagant actions, out of all proportion to their means; as, the Greeks, the Saracens, the Americans, and the French have done” (216). Men who strongly desire freedom will be able to accomplish freedom, even against the aforementioned “tyranny.” Their unquantifiable determination may yield innumerable results. This determination represents Emerson’s call for action in “The American Scholar,” wherein he states, “He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one, who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world’s eye. He is the world’s heart” (64). The “highest functions of human nature” include those that involve decisive action, action that realizes itself after a man’s intellectual introspection. Such a man would represent “the world’s eye” and the “world’s heart,” as he would see the destruction that a tyrannical government wreaks and have the love and compassion for his fellow man to rise up against tyranny and “achieve extravagant actions.”

Upon extolling the power of man’s individual spirit, Emerson begins to delineate specific governing institutions. He opens this idea through his statement that

“The same necessity which secures the rights of person and property against the malignity or folly of the magistrate, determines the form and methods of governing, which are proper to each nation, and to its habit of thought, and nowise transferable to other states of society” (216). Each nation’s governments originate from “the same necessity which secures the rights of person,” although these governments “are proper to each nation.” While governments may have a different label in different nations, all of these are the product of the fundamental tenets and desires of men. Emerson then specifies the attitude of American citizens towards their own government: “In this country, we are very vain of our political institutions, which are singular in this, that they sprung, within the memory of living men, from the character and condition of the people, which they still express with sufficient fidelity,-and we ostentatiously prefer them to any other in history” (216). In this statement, Emerson draws attention to the relative youth of the American government, particularly in comparison to other countries, as the “political institutions” in America “sprung within the memory of living men.” This statement also emphasizes the importance of present action, rather than reliance on the actions of men and governments in the past. Emerson offers a similar call against the strong influence of other older governments in “The American Scholar”:

“Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the serene remains of foreign harvests” (56). In other words, America must not parrot other governments; America should form a government appropriate to its citizens and its natural trajectory. The American government contains more meaning for its citizens because of its newness and its subsequent subjectivity to influence by its citizens.

Emerson also stresses that the American government's beliefs towards religion make the American government more palatable to its citizens: "Democracy is better for us, because the religious sentiment of the present time accords better with it" (216). Thus, the citizens would likely respect democracy more, particularly in light of previous dominating governments in other countries: "We may be wise in asserting the advantage in modern times of the democratic form, but to other states of society, in which religion consecrated the monarchial, that and not this was expedient" (216). The American government distinguishes itself from the Church; the Church does not possess any overt power over American laws and governing bodies in the way that it did in Europe. The ideal government recognizes the equality of all its citizens, as noted by Kerry Larson: "If Emerson can be said to have invented a religion of democracy, then its central tenet and inspiration is the summoning of an equality in the form of a radical likeness that connects each to all" (316). Later in her essay, Larson illuminates the connections between the Church and democracy: "At a time when clergymen were busy accommodating demands to secularize the Church, Emerson left the Church to sacralize democracy" (334). This distinction between government and religion also demonstrates a divergence from ideas set forth in "The American Scholar" and "History." While these two essays certainly advocate one man's individual power, and not submitting himself to the hegemonic ideologies of whatever nation-state that he dwells in, neither essay takes an explicit stand for the separation of church and government in the way that "Politics" does. However, these two essays certainly lay the groundwork for such a stand, as both essays advocate taking a stand against hegemony. As state-instituted religion frequently dominates the politics and ideologies of some countries, taking a

stand against hegemony could certainly include taking a stand against the coexistence of church and state.

Nevertheless, in spite of the separation between church and state, Emerson cautions against placing too much faith in the current American government: “But our institutions, though in coincidence with the spirit of the age, have not any exemption from the practical defects which have discredited other forms” (216). The “other forms” that Emerson refers to include other types of governments that prevail throughout the world, governments that Americans feel are inferior towards their own. Emerson recognizes the difference between the American government and other governments, but he also notes the similarities between them, as he notes in “History,” “This life of ours is stuck round with Egypt, Greece, Gaul, England, War, Colonization, Church, Court, and Commerce” (107). In other words, that which has “discredited other forms” of government, likely including “War” and “Colonization” also impacts the American government. Thus, the small differences that distinguish America from other countries will not result in the purity of the American government, as Emerson frankly remarks, “Every actual state is corrupt” (216). He then somewhat humorously says, “good men must not obey the laws too well” (216). Since laws originate from a corrupt state, a truly good man must not feel obliged to blindly follow every law set forth before him. Newfield notes this in his essay when he states, “sometimes the individual recovers sovereignty by replacing obedience to historical laws with the positing of personal laws out of the self” (669). This statement also echoes taking a stand against hegemony, as laws are those set forth by the “super-structure” of government, which recalls an ideal Emerson proposes in “The American Scholar”: “These being his functions, it becomes

him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and only he knows the world” (64). This supports following “the personal laws of self,” as a man will recognize the distinction between the law and morality. If every man were to do this, the tyranny of governments would prevail and man’s spirit would be stunted. Emerson does not completely oppose governments, but he does oppose complete obedience and belief in their value, as Cary Wolfe notes, “It is not that material forms and institutions like books, laws, and government are for Emerson completely worthless or impotent; it is rather that their value-their capacity to carry the truth of Reason or the power of Spirit-is finally dependent not upon the concrete specificity of the particular action or social form, but rather upon the individual’s ethical relationship to it” (142). “The individual’s ethical relationship” to laws and the government explains why “good men must not obey the laws too well,” as these laws may conflict with man’s individual morality and spirit.

After highlighting government corruption, Emerson proceeds to discuss the origin of various political parties that emerge as a result of the government, a discussion that differs from ideas set forth in “The American Scholar” and “History.” While Emerson does focus on origins and their political ramifications in both essays, he does not delve into a specific delineation of specific political parties in the way that he does in “Politics.” Nevertheless, his previous emphasis on origins lays the foundation for explicating the genesis of any major component of life, including government and its political parties. Emerson opens with the statement that “the same benign necessity and the same practical abuse appear in the parties into which each State divides itself, of opponents and defenders of the administration of the government” (216). In other

words, many of the government's flaws and controversies emerge within the parties that define such a government, regardless of whether the parties are "opponents" or "defenders" of "the administration of the government." Emerson provides sound reasoning for why parties form in the first place: "Parties are also founded on instincts, and have better guides to their own humble aims than the sagacity of their leaders" (216). In short, the "instincts" that found parties possess a purer nature than even the "sagacity" of the parties' leaders; Emerson emphasizes this in the next line, when he says that parties "have nothing perverse in their origin, but rudely mark some real and lasting relation" (216-217). Thus, the instincts that found the parties "have nothing perverse," yet the "lasting relation" of the parties has a rude nature. The initial founding of parties can be sharply contrasted with the lasting influence of parties, which Emerson qualifies further in his next major point.

Emerson believes that parties become corrupted because of the personalities of those men within parties: "A party is perpetually corrupted by personality. Whilst we absolve the association from dishonesty, we cannot extend the same charity to their leaders. They reap the rewards of docility and zeal of the masses which they direct" (217). Emerson proposes one reason for why "a party is perpetually corrupted by personality" in "The American Scholar": "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'" (65). In other words, men's avid pursuit of power likely can result in their subsequent corruption. Consequently, many leaders of parties become corrupted and then guiltlessly "reap the rewards" off of other people who trust in them and their purported principles. This recalls Emerson's depiction of the gullible masses in "The

American Scholar”: “Men in history, men in the world of to-day are bugs, are spawn, and are called ‘the mass’ and ‘the herd’” (65). This herd blindly follows their “leaders,” without any reasonable question about the manner in which these leaders engage in both politics and policies. Many times, these parties promulgate issues and perspectives that work against the people that support them, as Jason A. Scorza notes, “the norm of truth, in the context of politics, is much more concerned with the frank representation of perspectives, purposes, and values, and with the abilities of citizens to listen seriously to such representations, even if they appear to be threats to their own way of life” (96). American citizens should “listen seriously” and pay careful attention to their political leaders’ actions and words; Emerson cautions the power of politics in “History” with his declaration that “Each new law and political movement has meaning for you” (106). Awareness of present political practice is of paramount importance for citizens of a nation, as the subsequent laws and policies will have “meaning” for each of them.

The major problem that arises with parties is when circumstances, rather than problems, dominate their direction: “Ordinarily, our parties are parties of circumstance, and not of principle; as, the planting interest in conflict with the commercial; the party of capitalists, and that of operatives; parties which are identical in their moral character, and which can easily change ground with each other, in the support of many of their measures” (217). In other words, political parties found themselves on particular circumstances rather than concrete principles, similarly to the way that laws form, as Emerson depicts in “History”: “Each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant” (105). The formation of political parties is analogous to the formation of various laws; circumstances, rather than principles, dictate them. Scorza alludes to this

when he says, “The significance of Emerson’s vision should be obvious. Politics in liberal democracies has gradually degenerated into the worst conceivable version of Madisonian pluralism, with citizens divided and conquered by special interests, and public opinion manufactured by powerful media forces” (87). In short, parties focus on circumstantial rather than universal concerns; their circumstantial concerns often center on monetary or issues. The fact that parties “are identical in their moral characters” implies that one party does not necessarily possess more morality than another one; rather, both parties have differing viewpoints regarding various capitalist or other monetary issues.

Emerson bemoans the diminishing of ideals and concern for people within parties because of its corrupt members: “parties of principle, as, religious sects, or the party of free-trade, of universal suffrage, of abolition of capital punishment, degenerate into personalities, or would inspire enthusiasm” (217). Parties that may have been capable of catalyzing “universal suffrage” or the “abolition of capital punishment” lose their ability to “inspire enthusiasm” for these causes in light of the degeneration into “personalities.” Here, Emerson highlights the power of the individual again, except he stresses the negative power of the individual. An individual may have the power to catalyze powerful change, such as freedom, which he mentions earlier in the essay, yet an individual also has the power to obscure the purity of a party’s objectives when they pursue their own narrow concerns. Emerson highlights this with his statement that “The vice of our leading parties in this country...is, that they do not plant themselves on deep and necessary grounds to which they are respectively entitled, but lash themselves to fury in the carrying of some local and momentary measure, nowise useful to the

commonwealth” (217). Parties ignore the instincts that they were founded on and focus instead on “some local and momentary measure,” a measure that will likely not benefit principles that include “universal suffrage” and the “abolition of capital punishment.” Parties merely focus on what issue contains the most momentary popularity, regardless of whether that issue has any meaning for long term change or human rights. Daniel S. Malachuk notes Emerson’s concern with the monetary focus of American laws: “In Emerson’s view, modern governments are blind to this fundamental democracy and are focused instead on property. Unjust laws—from slavery to ‘agrarianism’—have thereby resulted” (423). Modern governments dwell on controversial issues that some support and some denounce, when in reality the issue likely does not deserve such great attention. Emerson alludes to a similar theme in “The American Scholar”: “The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half of mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy” (64). This highlights the fickle nature of many issues that receive considerable attention, attention enough to warrant being “cried up by half of mankind and cried down by the other half,” when in reality “the whole question” likely is not worthy of “the poorest thought.” These issues likely do little to improve human rights; instead, the majority of the issues concern themselves with property and money.

After deriding the motivations of political parties, Emerson moves into a more specialized discussion of the two distinct parties with a seeming paradox: “Of the two great parties, which, at this hour, almost share the nation between them, I should say

that, one has the best cause, the other has the best men” (217). One party has the best principles in theory, though not the best men to carry out these principles, while the other party has weaker principles in theory, though they have the best men to carry out these principles. Emerson clarifies this further: “The philosopher, the poet, or the religious man, will of course, wish to cast his vote with the democrat, for free-trade, for wide suffrage, for the abolition of legal cruelties in the penal code, and for facilitating in every manner the access of the young and the poor to the sources of wealth and power” (217). Thus, “wide suffrage” and “the abolition of legal cruelties” are among the principles that comprise the “best cause” Emerson refers to. However, voters cannot trust that those within the Democratic Party will fulfill citizens’ concerns for these causes: “But he can rarely accept the persons whom the so-called popular party propose to him as representatives of these liberalities. They have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it” (217). Since these “representatives” do not have “at heart” the means or ends to carry out the “hope” and “virtue” of democracy, the democratic party will be unable to fulfill the cause that they propose.

Conversely, the conservative party has able-bodied men, yet weak principles: “On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property” (217). Men in the conservative party possess desirable traits, such as moderation and cultivation, to carry out various causes; however, their aims and causes are weak and irrelevant to many people. Emerson emphasizes this when he states that the conservative party “vindicating no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no

generous policy, it does not build, nor write, nor cherish the arts, nor foster religion, nor establish schools, nor encourage science, nor emancipate the slave, nor befriend the poor, or the Indian, or the immigrant” (217). Tragically, the conservative party focuses nearly exclusively on the defense of property, while neglecting defense of important social causes and movements. The character of men in conservative party wastes itself on monetary and commercial interests, when their character could be harnessed to achieve much more powerful social progress.

The paradox of the two dominant political parties in America does not allow for progression of the nation and its government. Emerson highlights this when he says, “from neither party, when in power, has the world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation” (217). In other words, no matter which party leads the nation at the moment, there will be no benefit in “science, art, or humanity” because both parties have a major fundamental flaw at their core. As a result of this, “the spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless: it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends; but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness” (217). Parties corrupt their members, which in turn corrupt the government, or the State. Such corruption entails a “destructive and aimless” future, as the two parties seem irreconcilable with each other. As Scorza notes, “Applied to politics, the norm of truth cannot involve the telling of the literal truth in all instances because the practicalities of politics would never permit such a thing. Deception, misinformation, and misdirection are, for better or worse, part of the everyday arsenal of the politician, and always will be” (96). In other words, deception pervades

throughout the practice of politics, a deception that Emerson recognizes and seeks to diminish.

However, Emerson proposes a solution with regards to the government after ruminating upon the various positive and negative aspects of both political parties: “Hence, the less government we have, the better, -the fewer laws, and the less confided power” (219). Emerson believes that the power of individual morality and spirit will trump the need for a massively constructed government: “The antidote to this abuse of formal Government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual; the appearance of the principal to supersede the proxy; the appearance of the wise man, of whom the existing government is, is, it must be owned, but a shabby imitation” (219). The power and growth of individuality can supersede a corrupt government or other form of tyranny; the existing American government is but a “shabby imitation” in comparison with individual purity and morality. Emerson also alludes to the importance of a less expansive government and greater power of the individual in “The American Scholar”: “Wake them, and they shall quit this false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man” (66). The idea of leaving “governments to clerks and desks” while promoting “the upbuilding of a man” highlights Emerson’s respect for the individual above a governmental institution, and provides sound reasoning for his desire for “less confided power.”

With the growth of a wise man, government becomes less relevant: “To educate the wise man, the State exists; and with the appearance of the wise man, the State

expires” (219). Thus, a minimal amount of institutions must exist for the education of the wise man; these can include various educational facilities and other types of government products. However, once the wise man’s education nears completion and he may make his “appearance,” the government no longer possesses the same value. The reason for this is because the wise man can comprise the State: “The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy,-he loves men too well; no bribe, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable circumstance” (219). The wise man will not need an army for he will have no usage of violence; the wise man also does not have motivation that results from a desire for a “feast” or a “palace.” The wise man will embody the principles of the democratic party and the characters of the men in the conservative party; he will hybridize the best of both parties, which will render both parties obsolete should the majority of American citizens follow the wise man’s path. Malachuk recognizes this eventual obsolete state of the American government when he says, “Emerson concludes that the historical realization of Reason by more and more persons will not only lead to the separation of personal and property law but reveal the growing irrelevance of law, property, and even government” (423). This realization of Reason may originate from a single man, a realization that will embolden the spirits of his fellow men. Emerson discusses this in “The American Scholar”: “The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person, who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire...It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men” (66). The animation of “all

men” will result in “less confided” governmental powers and it will eventually realize the ideal of “less government.”

Emerson concludes his essay with the declaration that “the tendencies of the times favor self-government, and leave the individual, for all code, to the rewards and penalties of his own constitution, which work with more energy than we believe, whilst we depend on artificial restraints” (220). While acknowledging some of the weaknesses in individuals, namely personality, that result in the corruption of political parties, Emerson believes that the manifest spirit and power of individuality and wisdom will overpower corruption in the government if individuals enact this power. Wise individuals will not need the oppressive omnipresence of governments and ideologies of various political parties because they are able to think for themselves while simultaneously have compassion towards their fellow citizens. They will not concern themselves with momentary, monetary issues, such as property, but concern themselves with maintaining human rights for everyone, rights that include suffrage and freedom from legal cruelties, such as capital punishment. The state of politics in America is dire, but not irreparable, as demonstrated through Emerson’s insistence on reliance upon individual power. These individuals must be able to withstand conformity to a corrupt government, as Malachuk remarks, “the challenge faced by Emerson’s citizen is no different than that encountered by Machiavelli’s, or even Aristotle’s: to retain independence of mind in the face of corruption” (427). Society will only change if individuals do, as Michael Stryck notes, “Investing all hope in the individual, Emerson believed any lasting alteration of the whole could only be achieved through

alteration of each part. Individuals could only change society by changing themselves”
(142).

Conclusion

Emerson's staunch politics continue to intrigue people and scholars alike today. Randall Fuller notes the lasting impact of Emerson on scholars: "American scholars in the twentieth century have been keenly susceptible to Emerson's version of the aesthetic surplus...More specifically, they have felt called upon to follow Emerson's project of realizing American politics and culture by resisting it through a disruptive linguistic movement juxtaposed with brief, shimmering narratives of wholeness and integrity" (5). Thus, Emerson's political consistency and potency justify why he haunts people, as they feel "called upon to follow Emerson's project of realizing American politics" in today's world. Emerson's influence continued well into the twentieth century, as Len Gougeon illustrates, "Despite such occasional misreading, Emerson's message of liberation remained a potent force in American culture well into the twentieth century, and beyond. His writings were a source of inspiration to those involved in the pursuit of social justice from the women's movement, to the modern civil rights movement. Moorfield Storey, a Boston reformer who was destined to become the first president of the NAACP (1920-1929) was an Emersonian idealist who often quoted from Emerson's antislavery addresses in his own campaign for social justice" (173). Emerson served as an inspiration for Storey, who took Emerson's principles about the power of the individual to heart to affect social change during his own time; he "paid tribute to the lessons in liberal democracy that he had learned from America's most revered prophet"

(173-174). As such, “through his activism in the cause of social justice in the nineteenth century, Emerson helped to set the stage for inclusiveness, freedom, and equality in the twentieth century...that influence will carry over into the twenty-first century” (174).

Thus, Emerson’s political beliefs remain increasingly relevant today, as Gougeon declares, “on the threshold of the twenty-first century, he is more relevant and necessary than ever” (176). Specifically, Emerson’s criticism of the two parties that dominate the American government in “Politics” is eerily accurate, as modern scholars Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy note, “It is significant that the two-party political system (historically the most important hegemonic political practice in the United States) is crumbling. Long true and now more evident, Democratic politicians are joining Republicans in showering favors on corporate America as the quality of life for the middle class, working class, and poor, worsens” (297). This supports Emerson’s declaration in “Politics,” wherein he states, “Ordinarily, our parties are parties of circumstance, and not of principle; as, the planting interest in conflict with the commercial; the party of capitalists, and that of operatives, parties which are identical in their moral character, and which can easily change ground with each other, in the support of many of their measures” (217). “Showering favors on corporate America” could be analogous to “the party of capitalists,” and the idea that “Democratic politicians are joining Republicans” brings to mind the idea of “parties which are identical in their moral character.” Thus, conditions worsen for the majority of Americans who are in the middle and lower classes, and both dominant political parties exist for their own self-serving interests, doing little to benefit mankind. Emerson describes this perfectly when he declares, “From neither party, when in power, has the

world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation” (217). As these political parties dominate and shape virtually every facet of American life today, from public schooling to taxation to war efforts and domestic reforms, they possess the power to permanently impact America, for better or for worse.

Within the past several years, disenchantment with both of these parties has been growing, a disenchantment that recalls Emerson’s comments on the two political parties in “Politics.” In short, Emerson’s remarks on the American government in the nineteenth century could be applicable to the current practice of government in the twenty-first century today, which supports Emerson’s declaration in “History” that “there is no age or state of society or mode of action in history, to which there is not somewhat corresponding in [each man’s] life” (107). Disenchantment with the American government in the nineteenth century can correspond to disenchantment with the American government in the twenty-first century. This disenchantment could lay the foundation for a possible reconfiguration of the political system. Artz and Murphy refer to this with the statement, “The widespread public distrust in corporate America and the massive disaffection with the two major political parties leaves ample room for counterhegemonic invitations” (297). These “counterhegemonic invitations” can include actions by individual men Emerson sets forth in “The American Scholar,” wherein he declares, “The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances” (63), and that this scholar should trust in himself to guide other men, “in self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should

the scholar be, -free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, ‘without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution’” (64).

Artz and Murphy refer to these scholars’ roles in ameliorating society today: “Whether a counterhegemonic historic bloc will be assembled remains to be seen. Mostly, it depends on how well the ‘organic intellectuals’-the leaders of the working class, including its African-American, female, and other socially subordinate members and allies-respond to the awakenings, desires, interests, and needs of the subordinate majority” (301). These “organic intellectuals” are analogous to the scholars who “cheer,” “raise,” and “guide” other men; they are capable of catalyzing a reformation of society, which supports Emerson’s assertion in “History” that “every reform was first a thought in one man’s mind...every revolution was once a private opinion” (106). Once the “organic intellectuals” espoused by Artz and Murphy realize their “private opinion” about the state of American politics, a significant stand against the dominant political hegemony can occur: “Any successful counterhegemonic historic bloc in the United States will need to challenge the consumer culture, break with the two-party electoral system of Democrats and Republicans, organize independent oppositional political institutions, and create an ideological and cultural movement based on the values of participatory democracy, solidarity, and community” (304). Special interests have corrupted both parties that currently dominate the American political landscape, and this corruption can be reversed by individual potency and principles. Thus, Emerson’s continuous insistence on the power of the individual, and their capability to foment a revolution against dominant, hegemonic ideologies, remains as politically relevant in the twenty-first century as it did in the nineteenth century.

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