

Emerson's "Philosophy of the Street"

There is a traditional interpretation of the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson that portrays him as a champion of nature, wilderness, or country life and an opponent of the city, technology, or urban life. Such a view, though, neglects the role of human activity in the universe as Emerson saw it. Furthermore, this view neglects the proper relation between soul and nature in the universe and risks entailing a philosophy of materialism—an unacceptable position for Emerson.¹ An examination of Emerson's philosophy will show that it is not fundamentally hostile to urban life or technology, and that, in fact, an anti-urban position is opposed to the most central themes of Emerson's philosophical vision.

Three prominent interpretations that see Emerson as "anti-urban"² come from Sherman Paul's 1952 book, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience*; Morton and Lucia White's 1962 book *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright*; and Perry Miller's 1956 collection of essays, *Errand into the Wilderness*.

Both Paul and the Whites draw upon a text in Emerson's journals to suggest a connection between Emerson's dislike of the city and his philosophical views. The connection is based on the distinction Emerson makes between Understanding and Reason. The Understanding measures, calculates, compares, combines, and concerns itself with the present and expedient. The Reason simply perceives; it is what is commonly thought of as the soul.³ Emerson shows how Understanding and Reason correspond with City and Country:

The City delights the Understanding. It is made up of finites; short, sharp, mathematical lines, all calculable. It is full of varieties, of successions, of contrivances. The Country, on the contrary, offers an unbroken horizon, the monotony of an endless road, or vast uniform plains, of distant mountains, the melancholy of uniform and infinite vegetation; the objects on the road are few and worthless, the eye is invited ever to the horizon and the clouds. It is the school of Reason.⁴

The City is inferior because of its affinity with Understanding which is limited and finite and concerned with the particular. To see only particularity is to live secondarily, that is, to use only the individual and separate manifestations of a greater originating power instead of drawing directly on the entire unified power. The Country in its affinity with Reason promotes the individual's connection with God or Universal Being.

Paul writes that "the city (and society) dissipated [Emerson's] energy and concentration, and waylaid his senses;"⁵ and that the sympathetic correspondence between man and vegetable of which Emerson writes in "Nature"⁶ "followed from breaking the artificial bonds of city life and expanding with the horizon of the 'medicinal' fields."⁷

The Whites make the much stronger claim that Emerson regarded "his anti-urbanism as a theorem in a metaphysical system."⁸ According to them, "Nature" "was written partly in protest against nature's most palpable opposite, the growing American city;"⁹ and Emerson is a writer "who may be called anti-urbanist without any doubt."¹⁰

Perry Miller also presents Emerson as fundamentally hostile to the city and civilization. Miller writes that Emerson, from his rarefied position as a philosopher, "denounced or lamented the march of civilization."¹¹ Furthermore, Emerson and other of his contemporaries "identified the health, the very personality, of America with Nature, and therefore set it in opposition to the concepts of the city, the railroad, the steamboat."¹² Miller mentions a person who was "a thorough New Yorker and thus despised Emerson's metaphysics" thereby further suggesting that Emerson's philosophy is fundamentally antithetical to city life.¹³

But Paul, the Whites, and Miller all observe a conflict in Emerson's supposed views on the city and nature. Paul writes of Emerson's "gregarious" and "ambitious" nature which led him to the city to meet with friends and give lectures. The Whites write that "Emerson had his urban tastes, and they produced a conflict in him."¹⁴ Miller suggests that Emerson saw that not all people living in nature were noble, and that civilization and society did have their advantages. Miller claims that Emerson "could never successfully resolve within himself the debate between Nature and civilization."¹⁵ All three interpretations seem to agree that Emerson remained "anti-urban" in his role as a philosopher even as he found certain aspects of the city to be agreeable. The result for Emerson was an internal conflict between personal and philosophical views.

What are the implications of such interpretations? What exactly does it mean to say that Emerson is an "anti-urban" philosopher? It seems to mean that urban life is detrimental to human beings both physically and spiritually; and conversely that nature is a source of well-being. It seems to follow that the wisest would flee the city for the country. Indeed, the Whites contend that "to avoid conspiracy and trickery Emerson's poet and good man was to go to the woods. There he would not need to employ artifice or deception."¹⁶ These interpretations of Emerson seem to portray his thought as a shallow, Luddite philosophy that sees sal-

vation in some vague primitivist program of "getting back to nature," whatever that could mean. Furthermore, these interpretations seem to give his inner conflict between city and country the character of hypocrisy. That is, his philosophical views point in one direction, but he lived his life in another, opposite direction.

In contrast to the previously discussed writers, Michael H. Cowan, in his 1967 book *City of the West: Emerson, America, and Urban Metaphor*, writes, "We must avoid the temptation to label [Emerson's] metaphysics, epistemology, or aesthetics as necessarily or even basically 'anti-urban', in order to understand more fully his relation to the facts and metaphors provided by urban civilization."¹⁷ Cowan thinks the urban material in Emerson is not as significant of his views on urban life as it is of how he sought to make sense of experience that, in America, was increasingly urban.

Cowan even contends that Emerson as philosopher ran into theoretical difficulties in attacking the city. Since Radical Transcendentalism reduced everything including urban civilization to 'experience' and treated it all as surface illusion or symbolic manifestation of reality, then both city and country were equally expressive of the Over-Soul.¹⁸ Cowan claims that Emerson seemed to think, albeit with varying degrees of confidence, that he could fulfill his "vocation" or "calling" in Boston, that is, in the city.¹⁹ Furthermore, Cowan believes that Emerson was able to find in Paris "a tempered version of the blithe stimulations that in his essay *Nature* he had described finding on the Concord Common."²⁰ He quotes from Emerson's journals regarding arrival in a new city: "For the first time for many years you wake master of the bright day, in a bright world without a claim on you; —only leave to enjoy. This dropping, for the first time, the doleful bundle of Duty creates, day after day, a health of new youth."²¹

As for criticisms of the city, Cowan suggests, first, that at least some of them reflected less Emerson's philosophical commitments than his regional ones;²² and, second, that Emerson's reactions to urban life often were influenced by specific circumstances such as being tired, lonely, or depressed about being in a city far away from family and friends.²³

Cowan's interpretation suggests that Emerson's conflict regarding city and nature is not so simply located in his personal and philosophical views. Cowan writes that Emerson's affinities for urban life and his positive experiences in cities do not cancel the more common view of the man as a lover of nature and solitude. Rather it gives a more complex picture of Emerson's "inner life."²⁴

A conflict between the philosophical and the personal in Emerson seems even more unlikely if one takes seriously the interpretations of John Dewey, Robert C. Pollock, and John J. McDermott. Dewey writes that "reference to the immediate life is the text by which [Emerson] tries every philosopher."²⁵ So if Emerson's own philosophy is to accord with his immediate life, then, rather than an inner conflict, there must be place for the urban in Emerson's philosophy. Pollock seems to take this view when he writes that Emerson "brought...to his

philosophical reflections...an aesthetic sensibility which held him fast to a concrete and experiential method.”²⁶ He further states that Emerson’s thought possesses “a logic of life, which is validated in the depth of personal experience.”²⁷

McDermott believes that the central theme in Emerson’s work is *possibility*.²⁸ According to McDermott, Emerson’s message is that “We are to transform the obviousness of our situation by a resolute penetration to the liberating symbolism present in our own experience.”²⁹ But Emerson could not hold this if he in fact rejected urban life on philosophical grounds. Such a rejection would leave city-dwellers shut out from their immediate experiences until they took the mediate steps of abandoning the city for the country.

My aim is to show that not only is Emerson’s philosophy not fundamentally hostile to urban life but it speaks as directly to the experience of the committed urban citizen as it does to the nature-lover.³⁰ To this end I will draw support from different texts in Emerson’s writings, but I will concentrate on his 1836 essay “Nature.” Since my position concerns the place of nature and the city in Emerson’s philosophy this is the obvious focal point. And since I am challenging the traditional view, it will strengthen my position if I can draw support from a work rife with material often cited in support of that view.

The central message of “Nature” is that one should live and work according to one’s own experiences rather than tradition or authority. Tradition can discount one’s own experiences and limit one’s activity. But Emerson advocates that one should have “an original relation to the universe”³¹ because only in this way can one grow and increase human vitality. His essay is concerned with how nature works to this end.

In his opening remarks Emerson offers this definition of “nature:”

All that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.³²

Nature, in this philosophical sense, and soul or spirit are the only constituents of the universe. Emerson also recognizes the narrower term “nature” in its common usage along with the contrasting term “art.” “Nature” in common usage “refers to essences unchanged by man”; and “art” is the mixture of one’s will with nature. Emerson regards the operations of human beings as so insignificant compared to non-human operations that “nature” in the philosophical sense, the term with the wider extension, can make no difference to a statement made using “nature” in the common sense.³³ Right from the outset, this allowance of ambiguity seems to cast doubt on claims of Emerson’s “anti-urbanism.” Philosophically there is no distinction between nature and city—anything that is not soul, whether tree or taxi cab, is nature.

Emerson also writes of a “poetical sense” of “nature” by which he means “the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects.”³⁴ Nature, in this

sense, is exhilarating and rejuvenating to the mind open to its influence. This is the nature of the famous transparent eyeball that sends currents of Universal Being coursing through one.³⁵ According to Emerson, this experience of nature in which particulars disappear requires a mutual attunement of inward and outward senses.³⁶ Of this experience Emerson writes, "In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."³⁷ Yet, he goes on: "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit," so that one who is suffering finds no comfort in nature. At first, nature appears to possess healing powers. But then it appears that the human observer determines the effect nature has on him or her. Emerson resolves the contradiction by explicitly stating: "The power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both."^{38, 39}

Nature in the poetical sense is seen not by one who merely stands passively in the woods, but rather by one who is open to its influence, who experiences *actively*, who is *engaged*.⁴⁰ For Emerson, then, experience is not merely a presentation of distinct objects to an observer, rather experience is an interaction and an activity on the part of the experient. Indeed, Emerson writes in "The American Scholar" that "The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul."⁴¹ Nature alone can never have value; it is soul acting on nature that produces value. The delight and salvific power of nature is due to activity of soul. Nature in itself is not a panacea. Emerson warns that, as a source of strength and vitality, nature must be used temperately and wisely.⁴² If one is not temperate, then at times one may compound hardship by looking for relief in what can only reflect one's misery. This is dangerous because it may turn one away from poetic nature. One may see only natural objects and so risk a superficial view of nature that denies the vital role in the universe of what is human; one may risk materialism.

Natural objects have value only in harmony with spiritual activity, and this harmony is valuable because of its ultimate end:

All the uses of nature admit of being summed in one, which yields the activity of man an infinite scope. Through all kingdoms, to the suburbs and the outskirts of things, it is faithful to the cause whence it had its origin. It always speaks of Spirit. It suggests the absolute. It is the perpetual effect. It is a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us.⁴³

The purpose of nature is to reveal the unity of the universe and show Universal Spirit as its source, and in so doing to *perpetuate* life and vigorous spirit in human beings. This purpose is reflected in the structure of the essay: The four sections entitled "Commodity", "Beauty", "Language", and "Discipline" treat the ways in which nature contributes to the discovery of spirit and the unity of being, but each in a progressively larger field: first in the realm of animal needs, second in aesthetic desires, and third in the human need for meaning. In the fourth section

the uses of nature are shown to be connected in an educational function so that the uses appear unified in their aim of revealing unity. In the fifth section, "Idealism", the philosophical implications of the lessons of nature are taken up; and nature is shown to disprove its own absolute existence through its variability from different perspectives and at the hands of artists and philosophers. In the sixth section, "Spirit", the progressive character of the lessons of experience are made explicit. Mere idealism is not enough and Emerson shows how nature points beyond its own realm to spirit. Spirit always exceeds nature and always outruns any all-encompassing theory of nature. In his essay "Circles" Emerson writes that "our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle an other can be drawn; that there is no end in nature...."⁴⁴ There is no end so there is always more experience to be had. In the final section entitled "Prospects" Emerson writes of the implications of this progressive character for the spiritual life of human beings. Human activity can never be exhausted. The more active experience of nature one has, the stronger the relation to spirit becomes and the wider the scope of activity. Human beings are called by this fact to develop all their powers through engagement in the world.

The essay suggests that assessing Emerson's philosophy as hostile to urban life is misguided. Rather than distinguishing between "nature" and "city" as beneficial and harmful, Emerson distinguishes between what promotes vitality and power in human spirit—be it waterfall or phone booth—and what limits human activity—whether bear attack or bus accident. What promotes human activity is not mere nature—neither in the woods nor in neighborhoods—but active soul in harmony with nature so as to perpetuate human life.

There are many places in the essay "Nature" that emphasize this view but the section on language seems especially illustrative. In language, nature aids discovery of spirit in a threefold way. First, words are signs of natural facts. Even moral and intellectual vocabularies consist of words that were originally signs for natural facts. Second, particular natural facts are emblematic of particular moral facts. Third, Nature is the symbol of spirit.

Consider the second way more closely. Appearances in nature correspond to states of mind. For example, the lamb is innocence, the snake is spite, and light and dark are knowledge and ignorance. Emerson explains:

Man is an analogist and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the center of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man. All the facts in natural history taken by themselves, have no value, but are barren, like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life.⁴⁵

Just as a lens could not be understood *as a lens* without rays of light to focus,

human beings could not be analogists, makers of meaning, could not be understood as human, without objects to which to give meaning. Natural objects are necessary, but they are meaningless without human beings to focus relations and create meanings.

Emerson claims that words lose their vigor when one is motivated by secondary desires—money, pleasure, power, glory—rather than truth.⁴⁶ One is no longer actively engaged with nature and no longer a lens for relations but rather a mirror of symbols for the experiences of others. A speaker seeking to fulfill secondary desires relies on formulaic speech, platitudes, buzzwords, and even lies. Falsehoods do not serve truth; and unity or being is not revealed by words ripped from the context of others' experiences and pasted together in the service of vice.

At this point Emerson makes what may seem to be an incontrovertible "anti-urban" statement. He writes that the way in which language is corrupted by secondary desires suggests why country-life is better for powerful minds than the "artificial and curtailed life of cities."⁴⁷ He seems to be saying that country-life ensures a closer interaction with nature than city-life. Yet this cannot be true by definition of nature—it is in the city as much as in the woods. What is it about the city, then, that leads to a proliferation of secondary desires?

There is nothing inherent in the city that breeds artificiality and disconnectness just as there is nothing in the country that insures authenticity and continuity. (Surely, someone has been unoriginal and vicious in the countryside: some farmer has lied, some cowboy has robbed and beaten, some hermit has stealthily murdered.) The flaw is in secondary desires. They are secondary precisely because they can be fulfilled only through the activity of others, either by deceiving or exploiting others, or by pandering to the demands of others. None of these promotes a realization of the unity of all beings, but rather each assumes a spiritual otherness to be mastered or served. Cities, then, are attractive because larger populations provide greater opportunity for fulfillment, such as it is, of secondary desires.

This attraction for criminals and frauds is not an inherent flaw but rather a risk of the city. And there are also risks in living in an isolated wilderness: natural disasters, accidents, and lack of emergency aid (risks that are reduced in the city). Just as shysters and panderers are risks of society, moral and intellectual stagnation are risks of isolation. Furthermore, no one can live in complete isolation for one's entire life. According to Joseph L. Blau, Emerson "considered that without rooting in society any person is lost. People are nothing except in relation to other people...."⁴⁸ Indeed, even the lowest-functioning human beings have had some sort of socialization if they have survived past infancy. So the proposal that the cure for the evils of society is to completely reject society is really the ultimate cure for all evils, that is, death. Rather, the cure for secondary desires is an original relation to the universe—this can be in the city or the country.

Why then does Emerson express himself in terms that seem to denigrate the city? Because he is illustrating his philosophical point with examples from his ex-

perience. From 1800—three years before the birth of Emerson—to 1830—six years before “Nature” was published—the population of Boston grew from 24,937 to 61,392 and New York grew from 60,515 to 202,589. In 1840, the population of Boston had increased to 93,380 and New York had increased to 312,700.⁴⁹ What was probably most apparent to Emerson when he wrote “Nature” was the exploitation and vice that accompanied this growth, and he spoke of these evils in the obvious way. But, as Emerson’s discussion of language suggests, this form of expression may not be suited for all places and times,⁵⁰ and so it need not be taken as a wholesale philosophical condemnation of urban life.

Indeed, in an 1844 essay also entitled “Nature”, Emerson writes, “By fault of our dullness and selfishness, we are looking up to nature, but when we are convalescent, nature will look up to us.”⁵¹ It is current modes of human activity and not some eternal metaphysical hierarchy that determine the rhetorical status of nature in Emerson’s work. Emerson calls nature “a differential thermometer” meaning that it reflects the health of human relations to the environing universe. It is not nature itself that determines or restores health, but rather active human relations to the whole of nature; and mere nature pales beside human activity in its richest and fullest modes.

Human activity establishes harmonious relations with nature and expels secondary desires when it realizes Universal Spirit in nature. Spirit, according to Emerson, is the source of all being and is present behind and throughout all nature. It does not act on human beings externally, but rather *through* human beings. Emerson writes that spirit

does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man?⁵²

Nature has its source in spirit but is a lesser incarnation than human beings and is not subject to human will. The world’s “serene order is inviolable by us. It is, therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind.”⁵³ Nature now appears independent of active human spirit in contradiction to earlier claims. But Emerson’s point is that the human power to transform the world is not arbitrary—it must accord with the divine order and so serve spirit. To live harmoniously is to live neither at the mercy of the world nor as an exploiter for private ends, else one degenerates and makes distinctions in the universe more striking (including distinctions between self and other).

This again shows the mistake in the distinction between nature and city drawn in “anti-urban” interpretations of Emerson. The distinction is properly drawn between degenerate and vital relations established between humans and

the world. If the city inherently led to degeneracy, some object would have to lack all connection with spirit and preclude all further beneficial uses. But this lack is contingent on human activity, not nature.

In "The American Scholar" Emerson warns that one "must not be subdued by his instruments" (including idolized traditions that become ends in themselves) and so cut off from experiencing God directly.⁵⁴ Emerson is calling instead for humans "to use all their faculties" and to bring their entire force to bear on the world.⁵⁵ Anything less is to reverse the relation between soul and nature.

When the relation is rightly understood and spirit is seen to underlie everything, one sees "that each phenomenon has its roots in the faculties and affections of the mind."⁵⁶ And so Emerson writes that "The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common."⁵⁷ To understand this consider John J. McDermott's statement that

the most important philosophical question is still with us and it reads, why is there something rather than nothing? To this question there is neither a perceivable nor a conceivable answer, yet having asked it some two thousand years ago we are burdened with reasking it and probing its significance.⁵⁸

Is this not a question about the character, source, and reason of being, that is, of spirit? This would explain why there is neither perception nor conception of an answer. Emerson calls spirit ineffable essence that exceeds both language and thought.⁵⁹ The question remains a question for all times and places, precisely because anything—from the lowest, most common things in the universe to the most celebrated and awe-inspiring—may prompt it. The miraculous in the common is the very wonder of being; more concretely it is possibility. And it is wonderful and miraculous no less for its ubiquity and, perhaps, precisely because of it. Awareness of the ubiquity of possibility leads Emerson to declare, "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low."⁶⁰ Devotion to the common is found, according to Emerson, in "the literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life."⁶¹

Just as one need not look to traditions and institutions for truth; neither does one need to seek out sublime locations, or leave one's immediate surroundings. Emerson writes of "the shop, the plough, and the leger, referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing;...there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench."⁶² In his sermon "Find Your Calling" Emerson is explicit that all of this holds for the "great through the city presents." Consider the hod carrier, the carpenter, the scholar, the merchant, the sailor, the doctor, the surveyor, the esthete, the criminal, the jurist: each is "placed in these circumstances to learn the laws of the universe, and...these various instruments and callings serve the same use as the child's slate and spelling book, wherewith he also learns his lesson...."⁶³

Opportunity for realizing spirit exists regardless of instruments. It is up to the person to make experience count. Emerson writes that “no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.”⁶⁴ Spiritual renewal comes through the human being not natural objects whether rural or urban.⁶⁵

If one accepts my claim that Emerson is not fundamentally hostile to the city, at least one thing that follows is the danger of viewing urban life as inherently corrupting or alienating. This view amounts to a limitation of experience, to an idolization of an imagined nature that limits possibility. John J. McDermott addresses this exact problem from his philosophical position descended from Emerson through his intellectual heirs, James and Dewey. In his essay “Nature Nostalgia and the City: An American Dilemma”, McDermott claims that “at the deepest level of his consciousness urban man functions on behalf of nature metaphors, nature experiences, and a nostalgia for an experience of nature which neither he nor his forbearers actually underwent.”⁶⁶ The resulting situation is one in which possibilities of the urban context are left wholly unexamined in favor of an imagined nature. Instead of transforming the obviousness of the urban situation by reading the symbolism present in experience, instead of listening to the sermons preached by all things with which one deals, traditional formulations of nature are taken at second hand and accepted as superior to what may be found in urban experience.

What is the solution? McDermott writes that

We are under obligation to develop an enriched understanding of the relationship between urban structure and urban person.... We should be warned that nature nostalgia detaches us from the urban present and promulgates condescension, disinterest, and eventually hostility....It is time for a turning and a celebrating of the dazzling experiences we have but do not witness for all to share.⁶⁷

One must have an original relation to the universe and, for the urban dweller, be open to the philosophy of the street.

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NOTES

1. See “The Transcendentalist” in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971) 201-216.

2. I take the term "anti-urban" as applied to Emerson from Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press and The M.I.T. Press, 1962).

3. Emerson quoted in James Elliot Cabot, *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1888) 218; cited in Sherman Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952) 38. See also Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 23.

4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1909-1914); quoted in Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision*, 82, and in White and White, *Intellectual Versus the City*, 33.

5. Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision*, 82.

6. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 10.

7. Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision*, 81.

8. White and White, *Intellectual Versus the City*, 33. Something that is especially troubling about the Whites' position is that even as they claim that Emerson objects to urban life on metaphysical grounds they write that "With the details of Emerson's metaphysics and theory of knowledge we need not be concerned, they are not very clear" (White and White, *Intellectual Versus the City*, 25). One wonders how they are able to justify their claims about the implications of Emerson's metaphysics for urban life if they regard his metaphysics as, first, something the details of which we need not be concerned with, and, second, not very clear. Their words suggest that they do not take his philosophy seriously, and perhaps read him rather cavalierly. In any case, there seems to be a deficiency of charity in their reading which casts some doubt on the reasonableness of their claims — especially when considering the force with which they make their claims (as compared with the earlier work of Paul).

9. *Ibid.*, 24.

10. *Ibid.*, 33.

11. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956) 207.

12. *Ibid.*, 207-8.

13. *Ibid.*, 209.

14. White and White, *Intellectual Versus the City*, 27.

15. Miller, *Errand*, 215.

16. White and White, *Intellectual Versus the City*, 29.

17. Michael H. Cowan, *City of the West: Emerson, America, and Urban Metaphor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 4.

18. *Ibid.*, 15.

19. *Ibid.*, 7.

20. *Ibid.*, 12.

21. Emerson, *Journals*, 10,413-14; quoted in Cowan, *City of the West*, 12-13.

22. Cowan, *City of the West*, 7.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 13.
25. John Dewey, "Emerson—The Philosopher of Democracy," *The Middle Works: 1899-1924*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977) 188.
26. Robert C. Pollock, "A Reappraisal of Emerson," *Thought* 32 (March 1957) 88.
27. *Ibid.*, 89.
28. John J. McDermott, "Spires of Influence: The Importance of Emerson for Classical American Philosophy" in *Streams of Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986) 30.
29. *Ibid.*, 31.
30. My project differs from Cowan's in that where he disputes Emerson's hostility to the city in order to examine Emerson's uses of urban material "as metaphors for deeper concerns not specifically urban" (Cowan, *City of the West*, 1), I dispute it with an eye to addressing urban concerns.
31. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 7.
32. *Ibid.*, 8.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, 9.
35. *Ibid.*, 10.
36. *Ibid.*, 9.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 10.
39. The contradiction is *not* resolved by noting a distinction in the sense of nature, because in both cases Emerson is referring to nature in the poetic sense.
40. "The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle [of nature] most engages." Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 54, 293. This line includes revisions made by Emerson in the 1849 edition of *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*. References are given to both the original and the rejected variant in *The Collected Works*. In further references, I shall put the revision date in parenthesis followed by the page reference of the quoted variant.
41. *Ibid.*, 56, (1849) 293.
42. *Ibid.*, 10.
43. *Ibid.*, 37.
44. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, 179.
45. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 19.
46. *Ibid.*, 20.
47. *Ibid.*, 21.
48. Joseph L. Blau, "Emerson's Transcendentalist Individualism as a Social Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics* 31 (September 1977) 85.
49. U. S. Census cited in *American Urbanization: A Comparative History*, ed. Blake McKelvey (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973) 24, 37.
50. Indeed, in the present age one may observe the dangers of treating urban life and technology as inherently flawed and of appealing to an imagined pure na

ture or wholesome primitivism rather than working for the intelligent reform and improvement of society. Technophobia and deluded notions of a primitivist utopia have played significant parts in the Unabomber tragedies and the horrific events in Cambodia in the late 1970s.

51. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 104.

52. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 38.

53. *Ibid.*, 39.

54. *Ibid.*, 57.

55. *Ibid.*, 44.

56. *Ibid.*, 44, (1849) 291.

57. *Ibid.*, 44.

58. John J. McDermott, "Introduction" in *A Cultural Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) 2.

59. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 37.

60. *Ibid.*, 67.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 68.

63. Emerson, "Find Your Calling" in *Young Emerson Speaks*, ed. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1938) 163-64.

64. Emerson, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, 28.

65. This view may suggest a shallow interpretation of Emerson that states "you can bloom where you are planted regardless of the conditions of your environment." Thus, Emerson seems to advocate pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps, which places the responsibility for oppressive social conditions upon the oppressed. I do not accept such a reading of Emerson. It denies the revolutionary character of Emerson's message, namely that one must live according to one's own relation to the universe and not according to dead tradition. One who is oppressed accepts a certain role or social status prescribed by government, society, or tradition. But Emerson is claiming that one ought not take one's place in the universe at second hand. Of course, *this* message may then be corrupted. It may be seized by an oppressor and used to justify his or her tyranny. He or she may claim to be following a truth revealed through his or her own original relation to the universe. But the oppressor's actions put the lie to his or her words if he or she exploits and commodifies others and if he or she does not act with an appreciation of universal being. The tyrant is insulated and alienated and he or she promotes further alienation by imposing one law—and a harmful one—on everyone. Relevant to this point is Joseph L. Blau's article "Emerson's Transcendentalist Individualism as a Social Philosophy" in *The Review of Metaphysics* 31 (September 1977) 80-92, in which he argues against a characterization of Emerson's notion of self-reliance as "rugged individualism."

66. John J. McDermott, *The Culture of Experience* (New York: New York University Press, 1976) 180.

67. *Ibid.*, 199.