

EMERSON AND NIETZSCHE'S 'BEYOND-MAN'

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In his restorative study of Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann speculates about possible models for Nietzsche's image of the man beyond-man, the *Übermensch*. He mentions Lao-Tze, Lucian, Herder, Jean Paul and Goethe in this regard. However, there is a book in his extensive bibliography by Stanley Hubbard, *Nietzsche und Emerson* (1958), that offers significant clues to the primary source of the image of a future man who will serve as a paradigm of man perfected. This is briefly discussed by Hubbard and was previously mentioned in Eduard Baumgarten's *Das Vorbild Emersons im Werk und Leben Nietzsches* (1957). Despite these reports on the strong relationship between the thought of the American poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the iconoclastic German philosopher, philosophers have generally failed to pursue this link between two thinkers who seem, on the surface, to have little in common.

American literary critics have been aware of the influence of Emerson on Nietzsche for some time now. As long as thirty-five years ago, Stephen Whicher noted that in Emerson's 'good conduct' theory of heroic existence there is the sub-text of the thinker and writer's envy of the man of action. "The Nietzschean Superman," he observed, "is already half-explicit in Emerson's hero."¹ More recently, G.W. Allen, reiterating an observation of Baumgarten's, suggested that the idea of the *Übermensch* was influenced by Emerson's conception of the "Over-Soul" (*Überseele*).² This is a false lead,

¹Stephen Whicher, *Fate and Freedom: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 69.

²Gay W. Allen, *Waldo Emerson: A Biography*, New York, 1981, p. 378. In his *Nachlaß*, Nietzsche refers to Emerson's "oversoul" as a projection of perfection to a being beyond the world. His notation does not indicate any interest in following Emerson in his idealization of a quasi-oriental divinity. Like the far more typical emphases of Emerson on the perfectibility of man in this world, Nietzsche is concerned with an immanent ethico-religious ideal, a "myth" of the future that is a realizable possibility and one that is compatible with the scientific conception of actuality. Nietzsche refers to the *Überseele* as a "phantasm" into which everything good and great has been transferred. *Sämtliche Werke*, New York and Berlin, 1980, Band 8, p. 562.

especially since Nietzsche refers to the "Over-Soul" in his *Nachlaß*, but does *not* relate it to his image (*Gleichnis*) of the man who would be beyond-man as he has been.

Erik Thurin, in *Emerson as Priest of Pan*, saw more clearly than others the depth of the relationship between Emerson and Nietzsche, particularly in regard to the *Übermensch* concept. He correctly saw that Emerson (who had been a Unitarian minister before he left the church) was a disillusioned Christian who sought to create a "new ethic," a "new religion," and a fresh cultural ideal that would replace what he saw as the decline of "historical Christianity." Emerson, Thurin accurately points out, placed his hope in a superior individual of the future: "He That Shall Come." And he reports Emerson's belief that the tragic fate of so many religious avatars, including Jesus Christ, shows us an image of the "dying god," the young man whose heroic spiritual endurance is displayed in suffering and death. Emerson craved a "victory to the senses," an actual embodiment of spirituality, strength, beauty, and power. Jesus did well, Emerson admits, but "he that shall come shall do better."³ Thurin goes too far when he characterizes Emerson's paragon of the future as "a kind of Antichrist."⁴ But what he says touches on an important aspect of Emerson's radical ethico-religious ideal: it is decidedly post-Christian.

Despite the recurring interest in Emerson in American literature, which has actually increased in recent years, there has been no sustained attempt to pursue the relation between the impressionistic thought of Emerson and the philosophy of Nietzsche.⁵

As early as the 1830's Emerson was projecting a moral ideal for man that would emphasize the distinction between an honest, independent, and self-sufficient individual and the majority which accepts the *status quo* and conforms to the values and beliefs of its times. At first, he spoke of the committed man of faith, the paradigm of which he called "the genuine man." After his break with organized religion, he began to present a portrait of the ideal self-reliant nonconformist who was not cowed by public opinion. In "Self-Reliance" he affirmed a philosophy of individualism that, ironically, has been described as a non-technical parallel to the philosophy of existentialism. This is ironic because a conscientious study of Emerson's writings and a tracing of a surprising number of his ideas to their presence in Nietzsche's positive thought reveals that he was a contributor, *via* Nietzsche, to continental

³Erik Thurin, *Emerson as Priest of Pan*, Lawrence, 1981, p. 216.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵The only full-length study of the relationship between Emerson and Nietzsche's philosophy in English that I am aware of is an unpublished manuscript of mine, "Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity" (1985).

existentialism. In fact, it is his images and ideas that find their way into Nietzsche's early admiration of "great men," his portrait of the existential hero in *The Gay Science*, and, as we shall see, the image of the *Übermensch*.

Although Emerson is thought of as a celebrator of democratic life, a different emphasis can be found in his *Essays*. It could rightly be called "aristocratic radicalism." He deplored the concern that was given to "masses" and he often disdains what he called the "quadruped nature" of the majority. While praising geniuses, historical heroes, spiritual leaders, and accomplished men of all kinds, he lamented the conformity and mediocrity of men in the modern age. In his declaration of independence from European influence on American letters, "The American Scholar," he proclaimed that today "Men have become of no account." Men today, he said, are called "the mass" and "the herd." In a thousand years there are, at best, one or two men who approximate what man ought to be.⁶

As if attacking his contemporary in Denmark, Kierkegaard, Emerson calls his age one of "introversion," an age in which men have forgotten how to act. Then, paralleling Kierkegaard, almost in his language, Emerson proposes a subjectivistic philosophy of life in which man will not only seek "to know," but "to be," to exist. The world, he insists, exists for man, for his edification, for his education, for his personal development. A scholar needs to be self-trusting, self-directed, independent, spiritually strong, a student of nature, able to endure drudgery and neglect, and unintimidated by "popular judgments." As he prescribes strenuous virtues, even military virtues, for his ideal "scholar," Emerson clearly creates the blueprint for Nietzsche's depiction, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, of the "warrior of knowledge." And, at the same time, he moves towards his description of the self-reliant individual.

The social world is described, in "Self-Reliance", as "in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members." The primary 'virtue' it demands is conformity. If one would lead a "genuine" life and become an individual, nonconformity is essential. Although Emerson appears to offer the possibility of what may rightly be called authentic existence to everyone, here and there he hints that the ethic of self-reliant independence may only be for the few. The "great," who are inevitably misunderstood (as Nietzsche will remember in *Ecce Homo*), are his true audience. Greatness, he avers, is future-oriented and its sign is a strong "character." This is required to "affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times." The "true man" will manifest the essence of virtue and life: spontaneity and instinct. A self-reliant individual will display goodness, but it will be a good-

⁶*The Portable Emerson*, ed. Carl Bode, New York, 1981, p. 64. (Hereafter cited as *PE*.)

ness with "some edge to it." "Self-existence" is the primary attribute of divinity and it should be the trait of the true individual as well.

Emerson's depiction of the "true man" is presented against the background of the "unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society," of "the mob;" of an age in which, as Nietzsche will later say, in amplified language, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, "Man does not stand in awe of man." At times, Emerson resorts to martial language, then quickly adds a civilized qualification. He urges us

to enter into the state of war and wake Thor and Woden, courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts. This is to be done in our smooth times by speaking the truth.⁷

One of the chief virtues of Emerson's independent and "solitary" individual is honesty, just as *Redlichkeit* or "honesty" will become Nietzsche's most prized virtue. Virtually all of the virtues and characteristics attributed by Emerson to his "superior" individuals are adopted by Nietzsche. There is no single place in which Emerson presents his ethics of individuation — it is interspersed throughout his two series of *Essays*, *Representative Men*, and *The Conduct of Life*. The expressions of his thought are literary and fragmentary. Nietzsche often synthesizes dispersed insights and observations of Emerson and, typically, intensifies and magnifies them. What complicates his use of Emersonian ideas and themes is that he gradually, over a long period of time, increases the strenuous demands he makes for qualification as a "supreme" individual; but in doing this he is not gradually 'discovering' new images or *aperçus* in Emerson's works: he had already read Emerson's writings carefully and appreciatively (having discovered him at the age of seventeen) before he wrote any of his published works. However, over the years—from 1862 to 1888—Nietzsche read Emerson again and again and gradually adopted aspects of his thought as his own philosophical development progressed. This adoption of his images, insights, ideas, and, on occasion, style may very well often have been unconscious. His identification with Emerson was, as he admits, very strong.

Emerson —I have in a book never felt myself so much at home and in my home as— I dare not praise it, it is so close to me.⁸

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸*Werke*. GOA, Leipzig, 1901ff., XII: 179. An early, but unused, draft of a section in his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, shows how much Emerson meant to him. "With his essays, Emerson has been a good friend and cheered me up even in black periods. He contains so much *skeptis*, so many possibilities, that even virtue attains *esprit* in his writings. A unique case! I enjoyed listening to him even as a youth." Erich Podach, *Friedrich Nietzsches Werke des Zusammenbruchs*, Heidelberg, 1961, p. 236.

Repeatedly, in his essays, Emerson contrasts the qualities of the creative individuals of the "energetic class" with the deficiencies of the uncreative majority. Despite his reputation for love of the common man (which is occasionally expressed) there is a strong core of elitism in Emerson, even a radical elitism. He celebrates in "Power" the vital, healthy, and creative "plus man" (which Nietzsche's German translation renders "*Überschußmensch*") who has a magnetic "personal power." He finds these traits in the "masculine" Michelangelo and Cellini. He claims that whenever these "exempts" appear "immense instrumentalities organize around them." Unlike such "strong" individuals, "the multitude have no habit of self-reliance or original action."⁹

Over and over again, Emerson express admiration for "manly" virtues, for those who express their surplus energy in a creative, positive striving for the good, the better, the best. The "search after power" or, as Nietzsche says, the "striving for power," is presented by Emerson as a basic drive in all organic beings that is rooted in nature and is its fundamental tendency. As is the case for Nietzsche, this *nisus* towards power is manifested in a multiplicity of forms. In religious aspirations, in the daring of the hero, in the drive for artistic excellence, in the modern pursuit of prestige, money, wealth. Nietzsche later encountered Richard Wagner's portrayals of the longing for *Macht* in his music dramas, as well as his Schopenhauerian message of the renunciation of the pursuit of power. At first, given the composer's and his mutual admiration of Schopenhauer, he accepted Wagner's quasi-religious surrender of the striving for power and the renunciation of the will to live. But shortly thereafter he turned against what he later called this life-denying nihilism and embraced Emerson's positive concept of power. To complicate matters, Nietzsche found a critical discussion of the "lust of power" in F.A. Lange's *History of Materialism*.¹⁰ Ironically, Lange presented a psychological theory, in embryo, that replicated, in some respects, that of Emerson. It is the fusing of Emerson's and Lange's observations on power and its relation to man's natural history, as well as its conscious or unconscious pursuit, that percolates in Nietzsche's mind and stimulates the creation of a theory of a universal will to power in all beings. It was *not* a theory he "discovered" though his own reflections, observations, and experiences.

Long before the foreshadowing of the *Übermensch* in *The Gay Science*, and before his unveiling of his paragon in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Niet-

⁹*The Conduct of Life. The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Boston and New York, 1860, VI: 74-75. (Hereafter cited as COL.)

¹⁰Cf. G.J. Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche*, Berlin and New York, 1983, Chapter X, "The Lust of Power and the Will to Power".

zsche said that he imagined "something higher and more human above me." And he envisioned a new man "who is full and measureless in knowledge and love and vision and power."¹¹ This man is described in obviously Emersonian language and is a composite of Emerson's early depiction of a "true man." The image of an ideal person is presented in the context of a discussion of the "circle of culture" and a critique of German culture *circa* 1874. A central theme of this essay, "Schopenhauer as Educator," is that society *ought* to work for the production of "great men." In the manner of Emerson, Nietzsche refers to a personified nature that "works" towards the generation of "the individual higher specimen." Therefore, culture, as the transformed continuation of nature, ought to continue this process by establishing the conditions for the possibility of the emergence of "great redeeming men." Despite its title, this essay is permeated by vintage Emersonian sentiments. And it is a first step on the ladder leading to the *Übermensch*.

Throughout his essays, Emerson praises "naturalness" as a virtue. He finds it exemplified in the ancient Greeks. The ideal person, he tells us, will be a synthesis of nature and spirit, a person in whom the antagonisms of nature are kept in a controlled dialectical tension.

Emerson worries over the hypercivilized modern man who displays a "Corinthian" over-refinement. Or, alternately, he condemns the mediocrity of the typical modern man. On both scores, of course, Nietzsche follows Emerson and augments his criticisms, lashing out at the "decadence" and the leveling mediocrity of the men of his day. Moreover, he incorporates Emerson's emphasis on the paradoxical tensions or "antitheses" in the superior individual and identifies it as his central characteristic. In this regard, he interprets the exceptional individual in terms of his understanding of the "antithetical forces" of nature *and* he interprets nature in terms of his conception of the strong individual who contains within himself a host of contradictory drives, impulses, and passions that are mastered and serve as a source of creative energy.

The ethico-religion that Emerson sketches is centered on the basic tendency of nature, growth, just as Nietzsche's naturalistic ethics is based upon the same principle. He also seeks a "victory to the senses" in morality and proposes an aesthetically construed image of the moral individual. Emerson's "*plus-man*" is described as possessed of superabundant vitality and health. More specifically, he describes the extraordinary person in artistic, sculptural terms. He is a living statue in which nature and art have been synthesized. The traditional separation of morality from nature and beauty, he insists, has led to the presentation of an unattractive, negative morality of

¹¹SW 1, UB III, Sect. 6, p. 385.

weakness. Morality for Emerson, as later for Nietzsche, takes on the coloration of an *aesthetic* ideal.

Emerson wants to see the preservation of the natural "vital force" that one often finds in the primitive savage. Through civilized refinement, an excess of introversion, and the excessive inhibition of "naturalness," modern man has, despite the material advances in his cultures, become weaker than his more primitive ancestors or contemporaries. He acknowledges that the natural drives of man, especially those of his "natural egotism" and his deep "search after power," are potentially dangerous. And his resolution of this problem clearly anticipates (and influences) Nietzsche's theory of the *sublimation* of primordially rooted natural drives.

The superior individual, Emerson tells us, will retain the energy and strength of natural drives and passions, the spontaneous, dynamic energy of physical powers, but would prescind the *excess* which, if overtly expressed, would lead to social, moral, and personal chaos. In "Power" and elsewhere Emerson says everything that will be incorporated in Nietzsche's prescription of the "spiritualization" of man's natural propensities. Thus, it is said that the "plus condition of mind and body" is frequently found in an "excess that makes it dangerous and destructive." Hence, the need for restraints or "absorbents" to mollify it. Even "physical force" or power is of no great value if that is all there is. What is desired, to use Emerson's image, is not a destructive conflagration, but fire enough to warm our hearth.¹²

Nietzsche elaborates on Emerson's insights and holds that the natural urges and drives that man has inherited from the natural history of *homo natura* ought to be "sublimated" or "spiritualized." Emerson, like Nietzsche after him, finds in man an organically determined natural egoism and "love of power" that is normally only looked upon as an evil, but which can be the material for the making of exemplary individuals. Whoever is able to recapture or restore this powerful natural propensity, while controlling and channeling it, could become what Emerson variously calls a "central," "complete," or "synthetic" man.

What Emerson, in a general way, and Nietzsche in a specific, dramatic way, proposes is a kind of Hegelian self-suppression of powerful natural drives: they are negated in their crude and coarse form and preserved by virtue of the discipline of "sublimation."

Many of Emerson's insights and asides are worked up in Nietzsche's psychology of morality. The negative affects (hatred, envy, covetousness, and the lust to dominate) are inheritances from man's long, painful, and violent natural history. Nonetheless, they are essential to the "economy of life." In

¹²"Power", *COL*, 71.

fact, they must be "enhanced if life is to be further enhanced."¹³ Naturally, he does not mean that they should be "enhanced" in their coarse form. Rather, they must be transformed into positive, constructive passions. No morality worthy of the name, not even Nietzsche's naturalistic "morality of growth," prescribes the full expression of primordial affects or drives. As he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, each "morality is...a bit of tyranny against "nature."¹⁴ And, realizing that his antinomian principle, "beyond good and evil," is a "dangerous slogan" and subject, as he accurately predicted, to misunderstanding, he reminds us that this does *not* mean "beyond good and bad."¹⁵ And in his preface to *Daybreak* he tells us that his critique of traditional, negative moralities is "out of morality," in the service of a new, positive, and affirmative morality.

Nietzsche's morality, like that of Emerson, is directed against past moralities that, as Emerson put it, propose an "Iceland of negations." A "herd morality" (which echoes Emerson's vituperations against a 'morality' of conformity and the "quadruped" values of the majority) is a morality of utility which makes right and wrong relative to whatever promotes the happiness (=pleasure) of the "greatest number." Since the majority often changes its mind about what produces "happiness," an ethics of utility is temporally determined and, hence, relativistic and *ad hoc*.

Modern morality, for Nietzsche, is designed for temperate people, for the domesticated and the tame. It is basically a group morality or a "morality of custom." Following Emerson, and borrowing his language, Nietzsche says that such a morality slanders any independent spirituality, the ability to stand alone, "self-reliance." Such a group morality is said, in the manner of Emerson, to value conformity, submissiveness, modesty, and a "mediocrity of desires."¹⁶

The image of the man "beyond-man" is central to Nietzsche's counter-movement against the values of his times. Such a person will be, in Emerson's phrase, a "sovereign individual." Before Nietzsche, Emerson feared cultural dissolution if man loses respect for man and no longer has "superior chronometers" or "exempts" to admire. He lamented "the cynicism of the streets," the negative effects of an economic practice that was a "system of selfishness," and saw his age as one of great "transition." Emerson's various descriptions of "He That Shall Come" are simply incorporated by Nietzsche in his post-Christian ethico-religious ideal of the "overman." And the social

¹³SW 5, *JGB* Sect. 23, p. 38.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Sect. 188, p. 108.

¹⁵SW 5, *GM* 1, Sect. 17.

¹⁶SW 5, *JGB* Sect. 201, p. 121-123.

atmosphere he describes as the antithesis of his cultural ideal is comprised of many of the elements in Emerson's cultural criticisms.

So specific is the direct influence of Emerson on Nietzsche's edifying thought that obscure details in the former's works are injected into his writings. For example, in *Zarathustra*, the prophet says that "To lure many away from the herd—that is why I have come." This is practically a quotation from notes added to *The Conduct of Life* by Emerson's son, Edward. Aware that his father has harsh things to say about the majority in society (e.g., "The mass are animal in pupilage, and near chimpanzee."), he explains that his father wanted to call man back to self-respect, to draw the individual out of "the herd." His father's harshness "was directed to the man who sacrifices his manhood for the mass."¹⁷ There is no doubt that Nietzsche read Emerson's works with microscopic care and learned a great deal from his wisdom literature.

The cultural hero described throughout many of his *Essays* is self-legislating, self-reliant, strong (in a psychospiritual sense), self-respecting, "noble." What is especially striking is that Emerson's paragon is characterized as a person who can look at the ugly, disturbing, and frightening realities of existence without blinking or turning away. The "sovereign individual" is able to accept the unpleasant, deplorable negativities in man; to face the "horrors of depravity," the dreadful necessities of nature, the random accidents that destroy human beings as if they were dolls. All of this is striking because precisely this capacity to look deliberately into "the heart of darkness" of existence advocated by the "genteel" Emerson is central to Nietzsche's entrance requirement for *Übermenschlichkeit*:

This kind of man...conceives reality *as it is*; he is not estranged, removed from it; he is *reality itself*; even in himself he has all its dubious and fearful qualities, *without which man cannot have greatness*.¹⁸

Here Nietzsche combines two Emersonian ideas: the facing of reality in all its contradictions, sufferings, and absurdities and the antithetical nature of the superior individual. Even calling such a being "reality itself" is only drawing out the implications of Emerson's belief that man perfected would be the culmination of the general tendency of nature, the apogee of nature and spirit, beauty and power.

The road to "greatness," Emerson tells us, demands "fire," energy, strong passions. In culture and in the individual

¹⁷COL, "Notes", 403.

¹⁸*Werke*, GOA, XV: 122.

everything is worked up and comes in use,—passion, war, revolt, bankruptcy...folly...blunders, insult, ennui.¹⁹

Extraordinary individuals, like all men, contain within themselves, according to Emerson's pre-Darwinian rudimentary theory of evolution, potentially dangerous, organically rooted, tendencies. Remnants of the behavior of ferocious species are found in man. In the motto to "Nature" he epitomizes this view: "striving to be man, the worm/Mounts through all the spires of form." Nietzsche often paraphrases Emerson on this score when depicting the "tigerish" nature of man that lies beneath a civilized veneer. But in *Zarathustra* he speaks directly in Emersonian terms. He asks,

do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man?...You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm.²⁰

Emerson was concerned with promoting the development of "semi-gods" who would exemplify "transcendent power." He longed for a higher culture in which man's nature-induced striving for perfection would be realized in actuality. He finds in history models of what man can be. It is such members of what he calls the "affirmative class" who have been the spearheads of civilization. We are ennobled and inspired when we find historical figures who are well-turned-out. For, an

aboriginal might gives a surprising pleasure when it appears under conditions of supreme refinement... Michael Angelo...surpassed his successors in rough vigor, as much as in purity of intellect and refinement.²¹

All such "*plus* men" display a "positive power", overflowing vitality, robust health, keen concentration, a capacity to overcome "resistances," strength of will, self-discipline. These traits distinguish them from others and persuade them to recognize their "transcendent superiority." In the modern world, Emerson laments, we find very few "finished men;" we find many who are parts of what a "complete" man should be. Great accomplishments require the "courage of genius," a "quantity of power." The "how" of the existence of the exceptional person (especially comportment and style) means as much in Emerson's portrait of "sovereign individuals" as it does in Nietzsche's enlarged portrait of the "beyond-man." The "complete man" ex-

¹⁹"Considerations By the Way", *COL*, 262.

²⁰*SW* 5, "Prologue", Sect. 3.

²¹"Power", *COL*, 72.

udes "personal power," the subtle power of good manners that naturally flows from self-reliance.²²

Emerson's unique individual will display integrity and strong character. Moreover, his comportment will manifest "great style." Here is a highly specific characteristic that immediately suggests Nietzsche's remark that the one thing needed is "To "give style" to one's character."²³ This trait is described as a rare art, a shaping of one's first and second nature, a self-constraint of strong passions, a disciplining of the crudeness of nature in one's self. Here Nietzsche simply expresses compactly and elegantly precisely the traits of Emerson's ideal person.

In Kaufmann's study of Nietzsche, he reaches back to Lao-Tze's thought to find analogies to Nietzsche's joining together in one person character, style, and subjective power. But he could have found in "Behavior" and other essays of Emerson the American template of the ideal of the existential hero.

Emerson laments that there has never yet been a man, in an exemplary sense, just as Nietzsche laments in *Zarathustra* that "there has never yet been a superman."²⁴ This was one, amongst many, of the instances in which he consulted the heavily underlined passages in his copy of Emerson's *Versuche*. In "Character," from which this slightly modified line is taken, Nietzsche also underlined the following: "This great defeat is hitherto our highest fact."²⁵ Although such instances of derivation were noted by Baumgarten and Hubbard, they only scratched the surface of the profound relationships between the American thinker and his unknown German disciple.

The "noble" individual that Emerson tirelessly praises is present, in large measure, in *The Gay Science*. There Nietzsche repeats Emerson's observation (in "Considerations By the Way") that passionate, 'immoral' individuals have often "advanced mankind the most" — their malfeasance, as Emerson put it, producing public or cultural good.

In this same work Nietzsche lambasts the bourgeois commercial class in language reminiscent of that of Emerson. He contrasts the members of this growing class to those with "noble" presence. The trait of "nobility" (*Vornehmheit*) is espoused by Emerson with an enthusiasm that Nietzsche later emulates.

²²"Behavior", *COL*, 181-186. As is the case with Nietzsche, Emerson's "sovereign individuals" are contrasted to the sameness of modern men who threaten "to melt the world into a lump." "The great," Emerson tells us, "are the exceptions which we want, where all grow alike." "Uses of Great Men", in *Representative Men, Nature, Addresses and Lectures*, Boston and New York, 1876, p. 30.

²³SW 3, FW Sect. 290, p. 530.

²⁴SW 4, AsZ II: 119.

²⁵S. Hubbard, *Nietzsche und Emerson*, Basel, 1958, p. 72.

Nietzsche goes out of his way to praise noble individuals and to identify the busy, anti-contemplative, unintellectual, "vulgar" members of the commercial class with America. Is there any reason to wonder where he may have gotten *that* impression of *Amerika*?

The experimental attitude towards life, the charge that we "be our own experiments" and think experimentally, is a specifically Emersonian prescription. "I am only an experimenter... I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred, none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no past at my back."²⁶ Virtually in Emerson's language, and certainly in his style, Nietzsche describes existential 'heroes' as "the new, the unique, the incomparable, making laws for ourselves and creating ourselves! And for this purpose we must become the best students and discoverers of all the laws and necessities in the world."²⁷ Practically every trait ascribed to Nietzsche's image of the energetic, liberated man is derived from Emerson's portrait of his 'hero.'

The existential hero of *The Gay Science* already resembles the *Übermensch*. For such a person represents the "ideal of a humanly superhuman well-being and good-will" who exudes a "healthiness," who will appear to the typical man as "inhuman."²⁸

In projecting his image of the beyond-man, Nietzsche rarely departs from Emerson's numerous attempts to create a model of the man he said would seem to be "superhuman" or, as Nietzsche read this term, *Übermenschlich*. In one of his early lectures, "Religion", Emerson foreshadows his depiction of the self-mastered individual. It is quoted in the notes to *The Conduct of Life*.

The man of this age must be matriculated in the university of sciences and tendencies flowing from all past periods. He [...] should be taught all skepticisms and unbeliefs, and made the destroyer of all card houses and paper walls, and the sifter of all opinions, by being put face to face from his infancy with Reality.²⁹

This tough-minded individual will view all aspects of his life as "mutable," will pierce through to the core of morality and, by this means, overcome the skepticisms he has lived through. Emerson's edifying image of his paragon is such as "to uplift us to a life so extraordinary, one might say superhuman."³⁰

²⁶"Circles", *PE*, 238.

²⁷*SW* 3, *FW* Sect. 335, p. 563.

²⁸*Ibid.*, Sect. 382, p. 637.

²⁹"Notes", *COL*, 399.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 400.

Emerson later adds to his portrayal of a superhuman being a catena of traits. To moral character is added might and beauty, insight and will, power and wisdom. Asking himself in his journals why we tend to seek out beauty anywhere we can find it, he answers in a way that should be familiar to any reader of *The Birth of Tragedy*: "as an asylum from the terrors of finite nature."³¹ For art, according to Nietzsche, serves precisely this purpose. The ancient Greeks, he says, saw lucidly "the terror and horror of existence" and, in order to endure life, created the illusory dream-world of art.³²

In *Zarathustra* "sublime men" are required to have the courage to face the negativities of existence and affirm life nonetheless. Some individuals have "the neck of the ox" but lack the "eye of the angel." Some have strong passions, but not the tranquility of "beauty." Already thinking of the *Übermensch*, Zarathustra exclaims:

To stand with relaxed muscles and unharnessed wills; that is the most difficult thing for you sublime men to do!... I desire beauty from no one else as much as I desire if from you, you men of power. May your goodness be your final self-overpowering.

I believe you capable of any evil; hence, I desire of you the good...

You should aspire to the virtue of the column. The higher it rises, the more fair and graceful it grows; but inwardly it is harder and better able to bear more weight.³³

The images, the tone, and the content of this allusion to the beyond-man are derived from Emerson's characterizations of his "superhuman" being. For the "true man" action and inaction are alike. The assured and powerful person who is natural can relax gracefully and express his power "obliquely and not by the direct stroke."³⁴ Such an "exempt" is a unity of the natural and the poetic, a kind of living statue that has many aspects. "A great man is a new statue in every attitude and action." This spiritually strong person is a "reserved force" that influences others by his presence.

Emerson consolidates his thoughts about the living image of greatness, which is a synthesis of power and grace, in a compressed literary image that is recognizable as a precursor of Nietzsche's sculpturesque man of tensed power.

"O Iole! how did you know that Hercules was a god? 'Because,' answered Iole, 'I was content the moment my eyes fell on him. When I beheld Theseus, I desired that I might see him offer battle... but Hercules did not

³¹ *Ibid.*, 424.

³² *SW* 1, *GT* Sect. 3, pp. 35-36.

³³ *SW* 4, *AsZ* II: 152.

³⁴ "Experience", *PE*, 280.

wait for a contest; he conquered whether he stood, or walked, or sat, or whatever thing he did."³⁵

The signs of the psychospiritually strong person are "the good nature of strength and courage," "repose in energy," "power at rest." Illustrations of the similarities between Nietzsche's descriptions of the *Übermensch* and Emerson's dispersed characterizations of "sovereign individuals" could be multiplied beyond necessity.

The "superhuman" man that Emerson dreamed of is the apogee of his affirmative religion of life and existence in a world deemed "sacred." Although he does not say that sovereign individuals would give a meaning to the earth, he says everything included in that idea. A "perfect man," he says, would be "the center of the Copernican system," the embodiment of power in an aesthetic form, would be "columnar in the landscape." Moreover, he, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, will possess a "bestowing" virtue. In "Boston Hymn" he writes that

I cause from every creature
His proper good to flow;
As much as he is and doeth,
So much he shall bestow.

Emerson repeatedly directs our attention to *this* world, to the beatitude of peak experiences, to the sacredness of the world, to the need to overcome the natural, organic egotism we have inherited. He, like Nietzsche, concludes his conception of existence by proposing the Hegelian-like self-suppression of the individuality he forcefully praised. The free, gift-bestowing virtue attributed to the *Übermensch* is frequently suggested by Emerson. The liberated, spiritually strong person has a reverent attitude toward the sacred and "circular" process of life.

A person embracing a "bestowing virtue," for Nietzsche, is "beyond praise and blame."³⁶ This is a state of being that Emerson attributes to the "genuine man" who no longer feels bound by the conventional values of society. The "sovereign individual" celebrates the "ecstasy" of life and, in place of the Christian motto, "remember death" (*momento mori*), substitutes Goethe's motto: "Think on *living*." The essence of "bestowing virtue" for

³⁵"Character", *Emerson's Essays*, New York, 1906, p. 263.

³⁶In "Character" Emerson refers, with approval, to a theologian's admonition that a genuine "man can neither be praised nor insulted." *Emerson's Essays*, p. 262. In "The Transcendentalist" this attitude is expressed in the form of an antinomianism borrowed from the Christian tradition. This orientation is later embodied in Nietzsche's "dangerous slogan", "beyond good and evil." Before Nietzsche, Emerson had already suggested a post-Christian modality of antinomianism which contained a morally volatile potential.

Nietzsche, is creating beyond ourselves. This, in a sense, is Emerson's fundamental project — the creation of an edifying image of man perfected and the creation of a blueprint for a new culture centered on a "religion of character." Nietzsche clearly expresses Emerson's goal when he asserts that he envisions "a man who will justify the existence of mankind, for whose sake one may continue to believe in mankind."³⁷

Nietzsche's image of the *Übermensch* is indebted, in numerous respects, to Emerson's dispersed descriptions of "transcendent" men who are projected into the indeterminate future. The influence of the American poet and essayist on this aspect of Nietzsche's visionary thought is neither incidental nor slight. For Nietzsche dramatizes, enhances, and fulfills Emerson's fragmentary and impressionistic vision of what man may yet become. The presence of so many of Emerson's *aperçus* and ideals in the depiction of the existential hero and, *a fortiori*, in Nietzsche's continually refurbished "myth," as he calls it, of the *Übermensch* shows that Emerson's poetic thought directly entered the stream of nineteenth century continental philosophy.

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³⁷SW, 5, GM I, Sect. XII, pp. 277-278. Nietzsche's "supreme men" are clearly meant to represent a type of spiritual aristocrat. Emerson's "transcendent men" are depicted in the same way. Thus, for example, in "Uses of Great Men" Emerson asserts that "I like a master standing on legs of iron, well-born, rich, handsome, eloquent, loaded with advantages, drawing all men by fascination into tributaries and supporters of his power." *Representative Men*, etc., p. 27. In later depictions of his avatars of the future, he stresses spiritual power and inner strength, admitting that the members of the social aristocracy are not necessarily "the best." Nietzsche later repeats this shift from a "master morality" to a *geistige Aristokratie*.