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A Genealogy of Ideas: From Transcendentalism Onward

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Introduction

Any academic discipline can be thought of as an extended conversation. Experts in a field of study build upon what their priors did, engage with their contemporaries, and lay greater content from which those after them will proceed. Applying history to a field of study allows a historian to eavesdrop on that conversation. Philosophy, more than any other, lends itself to this practice. Philosophers often build on the work of those who came before them, either by re-imagining it or synthesizing it with something else. Starting in antiquity we have some of the works of great thinkers, as well as the responses of their anteriors, extending to those philosophers contemporary to us. Therefore, to apply history to philosophy one possible route is to treat the ideas of these authors as persistent artifacts, like more conventional varieties of historical primary sources. It is not the words or the paper that is the focus, but rather what those things convey. By following the influence one philosopher had on another a historian can develop a picture of how specific ideas evolved and their continuing relevance to different figures. Like a country, it is perfectly fair to focus on the current iteration of an idea, however that would not be history. Like a country, where a historian will examine the various events and people of its past, a different understanding of certain figures can be had by following their intellectual influences. This is the foundation for a genealogy of ideas. To develop a strong understanding of the ideas that influenced certain thinkers, through the intellectual development of the influence those ideas and their creators had on others, who in turn influenced another.

When someone studies philosophy they may not be first introduced to the work of an American. The U.S being a young nation, its homegrown philosophers have not had the same degree of influence elsewhere as more commonly known names in Europe and elsewhere. It is for this reason that applying a historical approach to the ideas of an American philosopher, in

a genealogy of ideas, to see how their ideas influenced others is fascinating. Transcendentalism was a 19th century movement that saw a diverse group of writers come together. Some of the names of those involved with the Transcendentalists may be familiar to an American audience, such as Henry David Thoreau. Though he could not be formally called a member of this group, Walt Whitman remained interested in the work and ideas of one Transcendentalist: Ralph Waldo Emerson, known to have been the father of the movement. A prolific essayist and philosopher, Emerson is the beginning for this genealogy of ideas. His influence has, as will be demonstrated, resonated across the globe and into recent memory through those who took up his work. Two ideas of Emerson's are the focus of this genealogy, Intuition and the Oversoul. From their admiration and reading Emerson, William James and Friedrich Nietzsche each took up one of these ideas and incorporated them into their own personal philosophy. Emerson's Intuition was James's interest whereas the Oversoul was Nietzsche's. From James, Japanese Philosopher Kitarō Nishida took to Intellectual Intuition. From Nietzsche, British singer-songwriter David Bowie took up Nietzsche's Overman. The chain of influence that dictates this intellectual history will flow through each of these figures. It begins with Emerson, continues to James and Nietzsche, and then Nishida and Bowie. In succession, the man prior to them influenced each of these figures. How that influence looked and what they did with it is the present subject. Through a historical account of these ideas, in a genealogical fashion, Emerson's impact on the above-mentioned figures will be evident.

Emerson was the earliest of these five men and lived throughout most of the 19th century. It is fortunate that all of them are relatively recent historical figures as their work is widely available. Their published works make up most primary source evidence, as that is where the ideas of interest are mostly found. In addition to published work, to understand important context are letters between the figure of focus to either friends or family. Beyond these primary sources, scholarly articles from journals and books are used as secondary

sources. Given the public and academic recognition of each of these writers there exists a fair amount of literature written on the subjects themselves as well as their ideas. What is less plentiful, however, is a scholarly effort to consider these people and their ideas in relation to one another. Some secondary sources note the intellectual influence of one thinker on one other, such as with Emerson and James, however, going beyond that single chain of influence has not been a major focus.

The wealth of secondary sources consulted aid in an understanding of how these different figures interacted because they establish solid basis for what exactly occurred. To draw any link of influence between each of the three (Emerson, James, Nishida. Then Emerson, Nietzsche, Bowie) it is necessary to definitively state that there was indeed a connection between each successive pairing, as well as what can be determined about the actual positions each figure held. Academics have often asked the question of how one person influences another, in any intellectual history, and often there is overlap. To determine that there is something more than a mere coincidence demands a consultation of what evidence exists towards how each figure was influenced by one another. By homing in on specific ideas it is therefore possible to discern that, for example, Emerson influenced James who influenced Nishida all in each other's dealing with a specific idea. Scholarly efforts have examined the connection between Emerson and James, and then James and Nishida. The similarity between what academics discerned about the influence of each pair therefore means all three can, in turn, be examined in a genealogical fashion. That link can be further reinforced by primary sources. By following the path pointed to by secondary sources, the exact evidence towards influence can be found in what each of these figures left behind. By focusing specifically on what a secondary source lists the influential link as, greater evidence can be found toward what exactly that influence was through primary sources, such as books, letters, and speeches (or, in the case of Bowie, a song). Considering the primary sources with the guidance of a secondary

source then allows for a very specific picture to be formed. A picture of what exactly the influence of one figure on another looked like, how the ideas changed from one to the next, and therefore what the third figure was working with when they received the idea.

This is the role of a genealogy of ideas, to synthesize primary and secondary sources towards a comprehensive account of how an idea, in this case Intuition and Oversoul, links Emerson, James, and Nishida, then Emerson, Nietzsche, and Bowie. Intellectual history can take a multitude of forms. When it deals with influence a genealogical account is not typically the form it takes. Thinkers tend to be influenced by their broad understanding of their priors or contemporaries, to draw chains of influence from that would be difficult as the ideas of the second are wholly their own regardless of to what degree they were influenced by the first. However, by treating ideas as historical objects and specifying one that links three figures that genealogical variety of influence becomes apparent. The ideas remain changing, but where influence becomes the persistent and historically salient object that link between successive generations of thinkers is evident. Though the ideas are often completely different, what remains the same as the historical fact that each iteration was reliant on the one before it. Therefore, how each idea took shape was determined by the influence that informed it. The influencer was, certainly, in turn the influenced. The idea that was their own was also dependent. History is the best tool to think of ideas this way as it does not have to contend with the philosophical issue of whether an idea can be considered the same. It is not concerned with that. Intellectual history simply asks how each succession of influence occurred and yields the answer of how different ideas took their shape regardless of what that shape was.

Chapter 1

The Necessity of Biography

The very foundation of a genealogy of ideas is the examination of the relationships between different thinkers. A critical component of these links is an understanding of those philosophical ideas themselves. What is demanded of an interested party is not a comprehensive knowledge of continental or analytic philosophy. However, a cursory grasp of who certain figures were and the specific ideas they wrote about is a necessary component for contextualizing the broader importance of these links. From a general understanding, and so appreciation, a deeper knowledge of the genealogical progression of certain ideas across the history of philosophy be accomplished. It is an understanding necessary for the practical realities of life itself, after all, many of the positions people presuppose within their social, cultural, and political experience, are ideas that originated with a long-passed philosopher. By following the development of specific ideas, it is possible to discern the which figures influenced others. It is for that reason a genealogy of ideas is a historically necessary consideration, as well as an efficacious model for considering these sorts of issues. Transcendentalism, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson and his posthumous reach, is one of many lines influence that could be traced. Through Emerson we can see how Transcendentalism is connected to Pragmatism; William James had a formative influence on Pragmatism and Emerson had such an effect on James. Nietzsche's influence on the 20th century onward hardly needs to be stated, and Emerson can also be found within Nietzsche's philosophy. James and Nietzsche alike found something in Emerson, so it is possible to discern Emerson's lasting influence through an examination of their relationship to him. This way, with this method, a person can grow in their understanding of the history of philosophy and, broadly speaking, contemporary life. To begin a genealogy of ideas demands a survey of those people that will be examined. An overview of who Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James,

Friedrich Nietzsche, Kitarō Nishida, and David Bowie were provides necessary background information. It will aid in developing an understanding of each man's role in a broader genealogy of ideas. By knowing who these people were, and what surrounded their lives broadly, the specific intellectual influence of Emerson on the latter two is put into perspective; the same goes for James and Nietzsche on Nishida and Bowie.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in Brief

Ralph Waldo Emerson lived throughout the 19th century, being born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1803 and dying in the same state (albeit in Concord) by the year 1882.[1] This means that he was in his sixties as the debate over slavery turned into the trumpets of cavalry. With the political turbulence leading into the Civil War, an understanding of Emerson's philosophical thought can begin through considering how he reacted to those events that surrounded him.

The role of the institution of slavery to the Civil War was far from lost on Emerson. It was an issue he fought against prior to and after the war. In 1850, he wrote about slavery that "there can never be peace whilst this devilish seed of war is in our soil. Root it out, burn it up, pay for the damage, and let us have done with it. . . I would pay a little of my estate with joy; for this calamity darkens my days."[2] Emerson did not view the coming war as inexorable, however he certainly anticipated it, especially because of the American institution of slavery. Emerson's hatred for slavery manifested into political action, when "in May 1851 Emerson delivered the first of two addresses on the fugitive slave provisions of the Compromise of

[1] Joel Myerson, *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000), 10.

[2] Ralph W. Emerson, *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (Boston: 1909), 202.

1850."[3] The political stage was not Emerson's home, he had little taste for it. However, his reaction to the evolving political landscape outweighed his aversion to the soapbox:

> Among the first to acknowledge that the political speech was unusual for him, Emerson explained his position by contending that there was "no option. The last year has forced us all into politics, and made it a paramount duty to seek what it is often a duty to shun" (W, xi, 179). It was impossible to forget about slavery when runaway and free slaves were hunted down in Northern streets.[4]

The hyperbole of Emerson's language sheds light on his philosophy. Certainly, in a literal sense, he could ignore events around him. Some may even criticize him for speaking after abolition efforts had been becoming more popular, prior to his own dive into politics. Nonetheless, the work he did when he did it highlights a part of how Emerson thought. He viewed morality in a specific way, as a matter of duty. Where a person has an obligation, and such a thing is tied to the activities occurring within their direct community. These reactions of Emerson, to the historical events unfolding around him, extend past the end of the Civil War.

In 1865, not long after the war ended, Emerson wrote a newspaper column lamenting the assassination of President Lincoln. He described Lincoln with grandiose praise, writing "The President stood before us a man of the people. He was thoroughly American, had never crossed the sea, had never been spoiled by English insularity, or French dissipation."[5] Emerson's admiration for Lincoln is clear, and was likely connected to Lincoln's action against slavery. Emerson's implicit praise for the United States reveals a further element to the man. That he held to and admired the tenants held up by the country and saw in Lincoln the fulfillment of them. Emerson did not admire Lincoln the politician, but Lincoln the man. These considerations about Emerson's reaction to the world around him paint a picture of an academic

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[3] Leonard Neufeldt, "Emerson and the Civil War," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 71, no. 4 (1972): 502–13.

[4] Ibid,.

[5] William Taylor Newton, *Uncollected Writings: Essays, Addresses, Poems, Reviews and Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (CITY - Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 167.

broadly unconcerned with politics. He saw politics as a way to fulfil moral obligations, and politicians as valuable insofar as they themselves are admirable people. This authenticity of Emerson is evident throughout his life.

Of Emerson's various activities, both as a hobby and profession, all may be understood within the umbrella term of intellectualism. His early life is best understood in academic terms:

> He entered the Boston Latin School in 1812, when he was nine years old, and Harvard in 1817, when he was fourteen. Emerson's years at Harvard were generally undistinguished. Although he enjoyed his readings in Latin and Greek classics, he performed no better than satisfactorily in either mathematics or philosophy. He eventually graduated thirtieth out of a class of fifty-nine. Between 1821, when he graduated Harvard, and 1825, he grudgingly occupied himself as a teacher in and around Boston. His only pleasures during these years seem to have been an occasional walking tour, a few rude attempts at poetry, reading in any classical or modern studies of science, philosophy, and literary history which he could get his hands on, and engaging in an extended correspondence with his aunt Mary about the books he was reading and about knotty questions of philosophy or theology as he encountered them in his readings or in the sermons he heard that promoted the liberal brand of Christianity that would soon emerge as Unitarianism.[6]

Though recorded as humble, the foreshadowing of the figure Emerson became is evident within this account of his youth and early adulthood. His interest in natural science indicates the sort of curiosity Emerson had; a disposition naturally tending towards broader academic and, certainly, philosophical interests. His attraction to the natural world eventually became a core component to Emerson's worldview.

The Emerson a person can read, through his published works, is flowing with a beautiful prose emblematic of somebody with a genuine love and appreciation for literature, both as a practice and a pastime. Emerson's erudite character got its beginning in his early education. Though he may not have been recognized as a young prodigy, Emerson's attraction to the classics, literature, philosophy, and history, in his youth, blossomed in his early work such as his ruminations on the natural world:

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[6] Joel Myerson, *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*. (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000), 11.

> Emerson's own personal transformation from the shell of the man he was when he left Boston for Europe in 1832 was completed with the birth of his son Waldo on 30 October 1836. Professionally, Emerson had hit his stride with the publication of *Nature*, and in the months just prior to its appearance, he joined a number of like-minded thinkers and writers to form a "symposium" in which they could discuss their radical ideas on philosophy and theology. In the Transcendental Club, which formally convened on 19 September, Emerson found his ideas reinforced by the beliefs and encouragement of others.[7]

Nature, being among the first major texts Emerson wrote, synthesized the childhood interests and explorations into a single coherent philosophical perspective. Hardly a scientific work, the Transcendentalism that appears in *Nature* revolves around an approach to the natural world through the lens of philosophy and an appreciation of the former in that vein. Though those involved may not have known it yet, the forming of a club by the same name was the beginning of the broader Transcendentalist movement, and subsequently, its lasting influence on other major cultural and philosophical figures.

This brief biography is far from a comprehensive account of who Emerson was, of course leaving out ominously shaping events in Emerson's life such as his early pastorship and the deaths of his first wife, brother, and son. The events selected for this biography are those which serve as markers for the exact perception of Emerson necessary for a genealogy of ideas. In highlighting his early interests and the Transcendentalist club as it was in 1836, Emerson comes off the page as a philosopher and inspirer who, from humble beginnings, went on to exert an influence not only among his family and New England peers, but across Western philosophy to today. It is an influence that reached far but did not neglect those close to home. William James excitedly took various bits and pieces of Emerson's philosophy and incorporate them into his own. James, the renowned father of Pragmatism, may have had a worldview more grounded in empiricism than Emerson, however that did not stop him from being influenced.

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[7] Joel Myerson, *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*. (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000), 24.

The context of these facts is critical for an intellectual history, without it the nature of how a figure was able to influence another becomes significantly more difficult to understand.

William James in Brief

William James, born in 1842, grew up in a time of tremendous technological innovation. The middle 19th century was in the center of the Modern Era, scientific advancement snowballed, as incredible discoveries were made, from the field of medicine to communication. This meant that, over the course of James's life, he was witness to world-shaping innovations as they occurred. A cursory glance at some of the major inventions of James's day can offer valuable context for the understanding of what sort of world he saw, and so, was responding to with his work.

International communication was revolutionized by the time James turned twenty-four. In 1866, a telegraph cable was laid across the Atlantic Ocean, connecting the U.S to the U.K.[8] Such a feat meant that news, instead of traveling by ship, could be transmitted directly. While passage over sea could take weeks, with the telegraph communication became a same-day matter (though this benefit did not occur overnight). The subsequent development of greater communication between two continents touched every realm of life, allowing for a far greater flow of information that was unprecedented in the world. Though the average citizen hardly owned their own personal telegraph line. By enabling a significantly faster level of communication Europe was brought that much closer to the US. Such a closeness may have been felt by the American people, especially someone interested in current events like William James. And it is that closeness which contributed to a certain demystification of the world at

[8] Chris Morash. "Re-Placing 'the Triumph over Time and Space': Ireland, Newfoundland, and the Transatlantic Telegraph." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 43 (2020): 58–79.

large. Instead of Europe being a neighbor of unfathomable distance, where even the wealthiest are inhibited, the mystique of it started to dissipate.

Beyond communication, other realms of life became demystified. In 1868, the first fossil of mankind's ancestor was discovered, the Cro-Magnon man. Just as communication made the natural world less of an obstacle, the discovery of Cro-Magnon brought humanity's genesis that much closer. Just as the laying of a trans-Atlantic cable demystified the reality of land, Cro-Magnon man did as much for the existence of man itself. In the same vein, there were tremendous medical advancements, in 1895 and 1897 respectively. Xray and Aspirin were invented, in that order, significantly advancing the field of medicine.[9] Within James's lifetime, not only was his origins less of a mystery but also some of the secrets of man's body were beginning to be solved as well. As medicine continued to advance, spurred on by these great inventions, ailments that once appeared incurable became manageable. Illness, like communication and origins, were becoming less of a mystery.

The world, for James and others, became a more grounded place, where science and technology overcame natural barriers. This new status quo seemed to echo the attitude of Pragmatists, who concerned themselves with the practical and pragmatic utility of philosophy; James was its founder. James existed within an intersection between various fields of study. Professionally, he was most involved with the field of psychology, but his personal interests extended into philosophy, the natural sciences and theology. The influence of Emerson on James furthered some of the latter's pursuits, however, the foundation for James's academic disposition began with his family:

> William James was born in New York City, January 11th, 1842. He was the eldest son of the Rev. Henry James of Boston, famous both as theologian and as writer. . . . The Rev. Henry James exhibited a curious combination of gaiety

[9] Tubiana M. Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, *Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen and the discovery of X-rays*. Bull Acad Natl Med. 1996 Jan;180(1):97-108. https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/expert-sets/101439/ ; Jonathan Miner and Adam Hoffhines, *The discovery of aspirin's antithrombotic effects*, *Texas Heart Institute journal* vol. 34,2 (2007): 179-86.

> and gravity, keen thought and great depth of feeling, with a turn for quip and jest. These traits were found in equal measure in his son William.[10]

Just as James's personality was in part instilled within him by his father, so too was the young man's curiosity and personal interests. William James's first foray into intellectual pursuits was a product of his upbringing. His father, who was friendly with Emerson, had interests that undoubtedly served as a form of inspiration for the young James. Whereas Emerson and Nietzsche alike encountered these sorts of fields within their formal education, James did so at the outset of his life through his father. A parent's role as a critical influence on their children is hardly speculative. William James is no exception, for his father, the accomplished Henry James, certainly served as a source for James's initial philosophical interests, given that it was "through his father's influence [William James] became widely read and well versed in philosophy."[11] James's early introduction to philosophy seems to have left a lasting impression that inspired his interests. In turn this was expanded upon as James began a more formal education. According to a biography offering a picture of James's life:

> Not only did he acquire a remarkable aptitude for analysis, but he saturated himself so thoroughly with the Swedenborgian spirit that he seems to have preserved throughout his life a secret predilection for the doctrines of the great mystic. William James's course of studies was not a very methodical one. His father having gone to live for a time in Europe, William James early familiarized himself with European languages and culture. He received instruction from special tutors in London and Paris. In 1857-8, he attended the college of Boulogne-Surmer; and in 1859-60 he studied in the University of Geneva. Then during the winter of 1860-61 he studied painting, under the direction of William M. Hunt, at Newport, Rhode Island.[12]

James's sporadic early years are more a testament to his father's intentions and interests than those James himself eventually pursued. James began his education with an orientation towards the arts and the humanities. His interest in this field eventually be replaced with studies

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[10] Emile Boutroux, Et al. *William James*. (New York, London: Longmas, Green, and Co. 1912), 5.

[11] Morton M. Hunt, *The Story of Psychology*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 147.

[12] Emile Boutroux, Et al. *William James*. (New York, London: Longmas, Green, and Co. 1912), 5.

and pursuits more typical of the common conception of who James was, although they never disappeared. James's attraction to the thought and work of Emerson is a testament to this fact, and so is the way James incorporated Emersonian ideas into his own worldview, bending the metaphysical and abstract to fit within a frame that is fundamentally scientific and empirical.

That is a frame for a worldview that began to take shape in James's early adulthood, as his "taste for science was uppermost in his nature. In 1861, at the age of nineteen, he entered the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. For two years he studied chemistry and anatomy there. Then in 1863 he entered the Harvard Medical School."[13] James remained with Harvard for the duration of his professional career, and became a significant figure, as he's currently known, during his time there:

> In 1880 he became assistant professor of philosophy. Several years later, in 1884 to be exact, he took part in the establishment of the American Society for Psychical Research. In 1885, he was made professor of philosophy, and in 1889 he took the chair of psychology. In 1889 he took the chair of psychology. During this period he wrote his first great work, Principles of Psychology (1890), in two large volumes, the importance of which was at once recognized throughout the entire world. This sufficed to assure him a foremost place in the history of the philosophic movement of our time.[14]

James wrote other major and influential works, such as the *Varieties of Religious Experience* during this time. His personal and professional interests led him towards psychology and philosophy, which is the concentration of his renown. However, those early influences, from both his father and education, never left him. The philosophical angle, even to some of his scientific ideas, is readily apparent within James's major works. It is that leaning towards the metaphysical which makes it possible to approach James with an eye to his connection with Emerson. That insofar as James, though he was focused on science and pragmatism, was still influenced by the philosophy of Emerson. Considering this, Emerson's influence on James can still be identified and so followed. Without it an intellectual history of

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[13] Emile Boutroux, Et al. *William James*. (New York, London: Longmas, Green, and Co. 1912), 5.

[14] Ibid, 7.

this chain of influence would be significantly hindered by the question of why, or even if it is true that, James came to be interested in Emerson in the first place.

Friedrich Nietzsche in Brief

Born two years after William James, Nietzsche grew during the same technologically tumultuous time. The world around James saw great innovations in communications, anthropology, and medicine. The inferences that can be drawn, based on what sort of advancing world James was surrounded by, could be applied in equal measure to Nietzsche. New means of communication represented man's overcoming of the physical limitation of distance. The discovery of Cro-Magnon man made tangible an evolutionary explanation for humanity's existence. Meanwhile, advances in medicine meant humanity acquired greater control over our bodily health. In terms of impactful events there is a difference in experience between Nietzsche and James. The latter never fought in a war, the former did.

The changes in the world, during the 19th century, are hardly limited to the listed innovations. Just as communications, anthropology, and medicine advanced, so too did technology relate to warfare. The American Civil War is known by many to be the first modern war, given the host of new weapons and methods that saw their first use by the war's end in 1865.[15] Five short years later, while Nietzsche was around 26, the Franco-Prussian War broke out.[16] Lasting from 1870 to 1871, the death toll of this conflict may not have grown to the scale of the American Civil War but that does not mean it was bloodless. Just over 180,000 military personnel were killed, alongside a further quarter of a million civilians.[17] Nietzsche, at this

[15] ND, *The First Modern War*, Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

[16] M. Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France 1870–1871,* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2001) , 12.

[17] Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492-2015*, 4th Ed. (United States: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2017), 187.

time a young man with an academic career, did not remain on the wayside. Within less than a month of the conflict's beginning, Nietzsche "interrupted teaching in 1870 to join the Prussian military, serving as a medical orderly at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War."[18] Though not fighting on the front the young philologist found himself in a unique situation. As a medical orderly he spent his service surrounded by those suffering the mutilating consequences of a modern war. Considering the broader range of his life, this means Nietzsche had first-hand experience with the destructive tendencies of humanity. To what degree this had shaped his worldview is a subject for a more scrutinizing look at Nietzsche's philosophy overall. For the task at hand, noting that he had this experience suffices. As a formative experience, warfare can hardly be discounted, nevertheless it is also pertinent to consider his broader development in brief.

Nietzsche showed promise early on. This was a promise that earned him a fruitful career that lasted the better part of his life. In 1844 Nietzsche was born in a small town near Leipzig, Prussia, and subsequently lost his father in 1849 and younger brother a year after that.[19]

Nietzsche's talents became apparent when he was admitted to a prestigious boarding school, known as Pforta, in 1858 with a full scholarship.[20] With a curriculum focused on "not the air of modern Europe but that of Greece and Rome, Goethe and Schiller," Nietzsche excelled in his studies in the humanities, albeit, he struggled with mathematics, as "he became so bad at it that, when it came to his *Abitur*, the school-leaving exam, the maths teacher wished to fail him, prompting another examiner to quietly ask, 'But gentlemen, are we really going to

[18] Dale Wilkerson, *Friedrich Nietzsche,* Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Source.

[19] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 597.

[20] Cameron F, Dombowsky*, Schulpforta, 1862. In: Political Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

fail the best pupil in living memory?'"[21] Such commentary from the teachers of a school with such renown display in unqualified terms the potential that Nietzsche expressed in his youth, having joined Pforta at the age of 14. It is this potential that was awarded very soon, for:

> At the beginning of 1869 the chair of classical philology at the University of Basel fell vacant. The departing incumbent, Adolf Kiessling, wrote to his former teacher, Ritschl, asking about Nietzsche, whose works he had read in *Rheinishes* [sic] *Museum.* In the reference he sent in reply, Ritschl wrote that in his thirty-nine years of teaching he had '*never* known a young man who had matured so early' He called him the leader of all young philologists in Leipzig and prophesied that he would become one of the foremost German classicists. . . . . The result of this academic networking was that on February 12, 1869, Nietzsche was appointed to the position. On March 23 he was awarded his doctorate, without examination, on the basis of the work published in the *Rheinisches Museum.*[22]

Whereas Emerson found the beginning of his renown amongst peers, Nietzsche did so with his academic mentors. His intellectual prowess was immediately recognized and rewarded with this position at Basel when Nietzsche was only 25. Though not yet the internationally lauded philosopher he became, Nietzsche was certainly successful. Nietzsche the philosopher, as a contemporary audience knows him, did not exist. He was Nietzsche the philologist, with a knack and a passion for the study of the Classics. That form began to change three years later, and Nietzsche the philosopher began with his first major book, one which echoes these prior classical interests, academically as well as philosophically:

> In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche calls for the living of Greek history in reverse. So what he calls for is something that will play, in modern life, the role that was played by the tragic festivals in the lives of our 'radiant leaders,' the Greeks, at the highest point of their culture. With Wagner, therefore, what he calls for is the rebirth of Greek tragedy in the 'artwork of the future'. The overridingly central message of *The Birth* - its raison d'etre - is thus the call for the birth of the Bayreuth Festival[23]

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[21] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112.

[22] Ibid,.

[23] Ibid, 168.

His early education, with its focus on a mixture of German romantics and the Classics, formed the basis through which the young Nietzsche approached and scrutinized the world around him. Such influences exerted a broader shaping force, giving to Nietzsche the knowledge and language from which his philosophy grew. This foundation is evident in "1872: *The Birth of Tragedy*," which was his first major philosophical work.[24] Publishing the book around age 28, Nietzsche offered his positions and ideas about the philosophy of art, writing:

> The tragic myth can only be understood as the transformation of Dionysiac wisdom into images by means of Apolline artistry; it leads the world of appearances to its limits where it negates itself and seeks to flee back into the womb of the one, true reality; at which point it seems to sing, with Isolde, its metaphysical swan-song: In the surging swell, Where Joys abound, In perfumed wavelets', Trembling sound, In the world's soft breathing, Whisp'ring round - To drown thus - sink down thus - all thought gone - delight alone![25]

Within the text Nietzsche offered his arguments about theater and its relation to the human person, through his understanding of the medium's role within Ancient Greece. His characterization of art as either Apollonian, Dionysian, or somewhere in between, allows for a categorization of artistic medium according to its social function. From his review of the role Attic tragedy played in antiquity, Nietzsche explicated the relation of this philosophical perspective to popular art forms contemporary to him. Consider the final lines of the above extract, which are a quotation included by Nietzsche from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.[26] Nietzsche's philological and classical background is on complete display within the *Birth of Tragedy*, this first major philosophical text of his proceeds from his understanding of antiquity. Though Nietzsche himself lambasted his own work as "badly written, clumsy, embarrassing,

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[24] Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168.

[25] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Geuss, Raymond et al., *The Birth of Tragedy*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1999), 144.

[26] Dmitry Murashev, *Tristan Und Isolde*.

with a rage for imagery and confused in its imagery," the historical significance of the *Birth of Tragedy*, for those desiring a good picture of his intellectual foundation, is clear.[27] This book is the first major culmination of the intersection of his philological talent and philosophical prowess. Friedrich Nietzsche, with his professional career established by 1869 at the University of Basil and early philosophical work, was at the end of his intellectual apprenticeship. The connection between Nietzsche's early thinking is accessible and understandable in the degree to which he took to Emerson. That is the very essence of an intellectual history, the history of these remarkable thinkers. Approaching the question of influence, where and why it happened, is the precise realm of this variety of historical inquiry.

Chapter 2

A Genealogy of Ideas

Emerson's impact on Nietzsche and James alike is the grounding basis for this genealogy of the ideas of Transcendentalism. It was around Emerson that the Transcendentalist club formed, drawn together, and inspired by his original contribution to a variety of philosophical questions. Beginning from the Unitarian tradition, Emerson proceeded to conceive of his own worldview of a polytheistic world intertwined with what he, personally, understood to be metaphysical reality. With such a foundation, Emerson then put to writing answers to an array of philosophical questions. These ideas, as well as how he presents them, were what attracted renown figures like Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau to Emerson. Those same ideas are what also influenced William James and Friedrich Nietzsche. Emerson emphasized the role intuition played in the ability of the individual to derive measures of truth about both the physical and metaphysical. This epistemological argument resonated with

[27] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Geuss, Raymond et al., *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1999), 44.

James, who in turn incorporated the notion of intuitive reasoning into his own broader understanding of epistemology. Emerson also wrote about what he termed the Oversoul, a metaphysical concept which expressed how individuals can come to an intimate understanding of the great thinkers who preceded them. Nietzsche, in the same vein as James, incorporated this into his broader philosophy of history. As such, the ideas of Emerson were taken up by James and Nietzsche alike, living on past Emerson within them. This is the essence of a genealogy of ideas, the following of philosophical ideas as they passed between great thinkers, changing with each. Just as in the case of the history of a nation, so too does the intellectual history of ideas call for scrutiny of their development.

James's Emersonian Connection

There is a peculiar difficulty to sifting through the relationship between Ralph Emerson and William James. Though a prolific writer, James tended to focus wholly on his ideas, rather than revealing how they developed. He seldom overtly admitted who influenced him. Nonetheless, the presence of Emerson within James's life is a historical certainty. Emerson had a close relationship with James's father.[28] Emerson was not merely the friend of James's father, James himself developed a relationship with the man, for "William James knew Emerson personally, read his later books as they were published, and often visited the Emerson household".[29] Whether that relationship turned into intellectual influence can be discerned with a preliminary examination of how James viewed Emerson.

In the Spring of 1903, the same year he gave an address at Emerson's Centenary, William James wrote to Theodore Flournoy. James, in his sixties by now, wrote "I am neither writing nor lecturing, and reading nothing heavy, only Emerson's works again (divine things,

[28] Marcus G. Singer, *American Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45.

[29] William T. Stafford, "Emerson and the James Family," *American Literature* 24, no. 4 (1953): 450.

some of them!) in order to make a fifteen-minute address about him on his centennial birthday."[30] The language James uses strongly implies his admiration for Emerson. However, such a judgment, derived from a single letter, is hasty. A broader survey will offer some degree of reliable insight into the way James thought about Emerson.

In an 1887 letter to archaeologist Charles Waldstein, James says "for the divine Henry Jackson, thank him again and again. His ale is royal stuff. I will make no comparisons between his and yours," to close a letter which began by thanking Waldstein for a "case of beer," he had sent to James.[31] By using the word 'divine,' to praise the man whose ale he had just complimented, demonstrates how James uses this word. It was certainly a kind of compliment, and the use of it regarding a brewer of ale does not diminish instances where James uses it for more serious topics. With this general contextual basis for the word 'divine' (as employed by James), instances of it can be better understood within their own context. In the same year as the first letter, James wrote to his brother Henry James. While discussing travel, William James mentions "the reading of the divine Emerson, volume after volume, has done me a lot of good, and, strange to say, has thrown a strong practical light on my own path."[32] Though James did not specify in what way Emerson's work has influenced him, he made certain his admiration for the man. The high praise associated with James's use of the word 'divine,' demonstrates this. Such a fact was only reinforced by James declaring the benefit of Emerson's writings in saying they have "done me a lot of good."[33]

These personal correspondences offer a series of implications as to how James viewed Emerson, though do not yet demonstrate necessarily the latter's influence on the former. In

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[30] William James, *The Letters of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) vol. 2, 157.

[31] Ibid, 1, 257.

[32] Ibid, 2, 159

[33] Ibid, 257.

1903, however, James gave a centennial speech commemorating the late Emerson. James spoke with an unqualified admiration, expressing a definitive intellectual appreciation and admiration, saying "the matchless eloquence with which Emerson proclaimed the sovereignty of the living individual electrified and emancipated his generation."[34] The laurels James attributes to Emerson are demonstrative of an admiration that goes beyond respect for an intellectual predecessor. James used language that describes Emerson as a salient force for the development of the people and so the philosophical thought of his time. This transcendent way in which James describes Emerson, and Emerson's effect on the world, leads to the conclusion that the former held the latter in high esteem. Given the circumstances of the speech, there is a valid concern of James having spoken with an eye to his audience. Those attending the Centenary were friends and admirers of Emerson. James acknowledges this at the outset with "an ideal wraith like this, of Emerson's personality, hovers over all Concord today, taking, in the minds of you who were his neighbors and intimates a somewhat fuller shape."[35] However the tone and admiration of his speech matches that of James's personal correspondences, with friends and family, when he spoke of Emerson. An intellectual history that attempts to examine the chains of influence between figures is reliant on these sorts of primary sources. They offer compelling evidence toward the claim that these figures not only knew but had a particular interest in the other.

James's Emersonian Character

It is a historical certainty that William James had a familial connection to Emerson. It seems equally certain that there existed an intellectual connection. However, Emerson and James were remarkably different thinkers. Their ideas bearing some similarity does not

[34] William James, *The Letters of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) vol. 2, 157.

[35] Ibid,.

immediately indicate influence. Among the scant indicators of a genealogical connection between the ideas of James, and those of Emerson, there does exist a handful of outliers that demonstrate the philosophical influence of Emerson on James.

It began in a very general form, "Emerson touched James deeply enough for him to index under "motto for my book" Emerson's phrase "advancing on chaos and the dark." Even closer to home was his indexing as "motto for my philosophy" this Emersonian apothegm: "We are born believing. A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples."[36] James wrote these comments, in his copies of Emerson's texts, as he was preparing to give a speech at a centennial celebration for Emerson. These notes he had made for them serve best as evidence for James's own reflection on what Emerson had meant for him as a broader philosophical mentor. It is within the epistemological concerns of James that we see his reflections on Emerson narrow into a clear influence. That is, into a genealogical connection of ideas.

The concept of intuition was explored by James and Emerson alike. This epistemological question asks whether the instinctual impulse of people possess truth. In a work published three years before his death, James wrote "I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand much in the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine do to the whole of human life."[37] This pessimistic outlook James had of human knowledge is the starting point from which he derives the value of intuition. That while mankind may lack the faculties to ascertain complete truth, the capabilities we do possess allow for degrees of it. Dr. Gregg Crane is a professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. Crane dove into the question of whether James was influenced by Emerson and was the one

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[36] Rombert Richardson, *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2007), 434.

[37] William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways Of Thinking Popular Lectures on Philosophy by William James* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1922), 619.

who discovered the question of intuition which connects these two figures. According to Crane, it is within this conception of epistemology that we see "James's ideas of intuition shares many defining traits with Emerson's."[38] It is a connection that James himself acknowledged:

> This higher vision of an inner significance in what, until then, we had realized only in the dead external way, often comes over a person suddenly; and, when it does so, it makes an epoch in his history. As Emerson says, there is a depth in those moments that constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences. The passion of love will shake one like an explosion, or some act will awaken a remorseful compunction that hangs like a cloud all one's later day. This mystic sense of hidden meaning starts upon us often from non-human natural things.[39]

Emerson's conception of intuition tends to lean toward the metaphysical. That is, firstly, in relating to the interpersonal relations between people. This is the focus of the paraphrase James offers, insofar as Emerson is considering intuition and its relation to the feelings and compulsions of love. In terms of metaphysics, Emerson also ascribes a broader and more abstract significance to intuition. Emerson viewed intuition as a doorway to a deeper understanding of ourselves in relation to the world. This is not to dismiss the ability of intuition to know the natural world, but that it also has power beyond it. James, as seen within this text, does not dismiss intuition outright but rather shifts its focus. He took the Emersonian definition of intuition and emphasized the ability of people to know the natural rather than the metaphysical world. Instead of dismissing Emerson, James incorporates him into his own philosophical perspective. Using the text *Obermann*, James declares his acceptance of the former part of Emerson's idea, "I felt all the happiness destined for man. This unutterable harmony of souls, the phantom of the ideal world, arose in me complete."[40]

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[38] Gregg Crane, *Intuition the Unseen Thread Connecting Emerson and James,* Modern Intellectual *History* 10, no. 1 (2013): 57–86.

[39] William James, *On Some of Life's Ideals*. (United States: H. Holt, 1900), 16.

[40] Ibid,.

It is well known that James viewed empirical knowledge as the sole avenue for knowing, however, this position does not prevent him from noting the function of intuition. There is no reconciliation of the two ideas needed, as James sees intuition as being founded in experience, where what has been experienced and forgotten returns. While the most recent quote may read like something distinctly Emersonian or mystical, the contextual nature of James's thought prevents the temptation of ascribing such labels to it. For James, intuitive feelings are powerful, incredibly powerful, however they still stem from experience.

James's ideas also come across as Emersonian in his writing regarding the practical application of intuition as seen explored within James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* Crane noted at length the sort of perspective James appeared to share with Emerson:

> Echoing Emerson's notion that intuition is quintessentially a firsthand experience that "transcends all proving," James says that analysis "will fail to convince you or convert you[,] if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions." Intuitions derive from "a deeper level of your nature" than mere rationalism, including "your impulses, your faiths, your needs, your divinations," This unseen and unseeable process finds its way to a "result" that is "truer than any logic-chopping rationalist talk, however clever, that may contradict it." Particularly in "the metaphysical and religious sphere," James observes, "articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion." For James, as for Emerson, intuition has two primary functions - as a practical guide and as an avenue of spiritual or mystic insight.[41]

James's belief was that reason and intuition are co-dependent. Evaluating intuition as possessing the same importance as reason may seem contrary to the theme of James's general philosophical beliefs. Aside from his importance to Pragmatism, James was tremendously influenced by John Stuart Mill. So important was Mill to James that he dedicated his book, *Pragmatism*, to him, writing "To the memory of John Stuart Mill from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader were he alive

[41] Gregg Crane, *Intuition the Unseen Thread Connecting Emerson and James,* Modern Intellectual *History* 10, no. 1 (2013): 57–86.

to-day."[42] Mill, an agnostic, viewed the question of truth and epistemology as "one of logic and not of semantics or some other study differing from pure logic."[43] Considering Mill's exceptional influence on James's worldview, it was peculiar for James to take to the epistemological significance of intuition. That is, the importance of something non-rational.

It is here that Emerson's influence on James is most evident. James reconciles what he took from the materially focused Mill with the metaphysically curious Emerson. That while James did not himself announce his incorporation for Emerson's work as loudly as he did so with Mill, the parallels between James's writing and Emerson make it undeniable. Crane notes a quote from Emerson on the practical appearance and functioning of intuition:

> We say, I will walk abroad, and the truth will take form and clearness to me. We go forth, but cannot find it. It seems as if we needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought. But we come in, and are as far from it as at first. Then, in a moment, and unannounced, the truth appears. A certain wandering light appears, and is the distinction, the principle, we wanted…[44]

Considering both the language and ideas being expressed by Emerson, Crane concluded that to "Compare James's description of the unlooked-for solution and Emerson's "unannounced truth," demonstrates the definitive influence of Emerson's writing on James."[45] The latter not only adopts the idea of the former, but also the manner with which Emerson expressed it. James wrote "the lost name comes sauntering into your mind, as Emerson says, as carelessly as if it had never been invited. Some hidden process was started into by the effort,

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[42] William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways Of Thinking Popular Lectures on Philosophy by William James* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1922), 10.

[43] Manley H. Thompson, "J. S. Mill's Theory of Truth: A Study in Metaphysics and Logic." *The Philosophical Review* 56, no. 3 (1947): 273.

[44] Gregg Crane, *Intuition the Unseen Thread Connecting Emerson and James,* Modern Intellectual *History* 10, no. 1 (2013): 57–86.

[45] Ibid, 82.

which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously."[46] Though with his own words, James directly referenced Emerson and Emerson's concept of intuition. The difference between the "unlooked-for solution," and "unannounced truth," is nominal. The parallel between the two thinkers point to a distinct and certain genealogical link. James inherited and adapted Emerson's ideas of intuition, and incorporated them into his own epistemology, and so, his greater philosophical worldview.

James is not thought of as a Transcendentalist thinker, and for good reason. Nonetheless, there is a clear link between Emerson and James. The latter read and was inspired by the epistemological idea of intuition of the former. James mentions, wrote in parallel to, and so was certainly influenced by this specific philosophical idea of Emerson's. While there are certainly more avenues wherein a genealogical link can be found, of varying degrees of certainty, the idea of intuition is the most noticeably and consequent. Whoever was influenced by James's view of intuition has necessarily been influenced by proxy by that of Emerson's.

By proceeding from the general to the specific, it is evident that Ralph Waldo Emerson had a distinct and formative influence on the ideas and philosophy of William James. There is little question about the many differences between the total philosophies of either writer, James takes a far more practical approach relative to Emerson. However, the Emersonian character is noticeable in some of James's work. The historicity of the close connection between James and Emerson, both the families and the significant writers, makes it functionally impossible for James to have never at least considered the thoughts and arguments of Emerson. Drawing proof of intellectual influence from that is the most difficult part. Crane identified the philosophical areas wherein Emerson and James crossed over and where among that crossing James influenced by Emerson. This acknowledgement is the first link in a chain of influence which,

[46] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* (United States: Seven Treasures Publications, 2009), 191.

ultimately, constitutes a genealogy of ideas tying Transcendentalism to subsequent thinkers. The understanding of something is intimately linked to a grasp of its history. Important to the broader endeavor to understand something like philosophy is a historical tracing of how different thinkers influenced others.

Nietzsche's Emersonian Affinity

Nietzsche's reading of Emerson began in his youth. Nietzsche's interest remained into his adulthood, up until the final years before his death. His lifelong admiration for the Transcendentalist is evident across a variety of sources, from sparing references to Emerson in his published works to his private correspondence.

Dr. Thomas Brobjer, a philosopher professor at Uppsala University, who wrote a comprehensive account of Nietzsche's influences, drew from Dr. George Stack, a retired professor of philosophy, who examined the historical evidence pointing towards Nietzsche's understanding and appreciation of Emerson: "Written at seventeen, Nietzsche's unpublished "Fatum und Geschichte" combined titles from two of Emerson's essays, quoted Emerson's "Fate," . . . . The essay is especially important because it shows the early influence of Emerson."[47] Knowing that Nietzsche owned and annotated his own copies of Emerson's work is an indispensable primary source for tracking his intellectual interaction with the latter's thoughts. Nietzsche's notes are a definitive indicator of what portions of Emerson's work he found most important, and so, were likely influential on him. Dr. Stack's transcriptions and translations of these notes allow access to Nietzsche's thinking, and most importantly, what parts of Emerson's philosophy stayed with Nietzsche over time. By drawing inferences from Nietzsche's unpublished works, through Dr. Stack, Dr. Brobjer demonstrates just how early Nietzsche encountered Emerson. Nietzsche was familiar with Emerson not just in passing but

[47] Anthony Graybosch, *Metaphilosophy* 26, no. 1 (1995), 158.

with his work at least by the age of 17 in 1861. This offers a concrete starting point from which to further examine the various notes and commentary Nietzsche left behind. Even further, given Nietzsche's youth at the time, it lends great validity to the position that Emerson was among the first important figures in Nietzsche's intellectual life. That his interaction with Emerson was important enough for Nietzsche to refer to it in his unpublished works, at 17, places Emerson in an early category within the collection of Nietzsche's influences. This line of reasoning comes from Dr. Brobjer, who drew such an inference. In the opening section of his book, devoted to Emerson, Brobjer claimed that "Nietzsche's very first important encounter with philosophy (before both Plato and Schopenhauer) was with the American philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson."[48] Declaring Emerson the categorical first for Nietzsche's philosophical life is a strong claim, difficult to justify in a broad sense since we cannot objectively know Nietzsche's academic progression. However, with what historical evidence that is currently known, referring to Emerson as "the very first important encounter," is more likely than unlikely. It is certainly true, however, given Nietzsche's age, that Emerson was both important and among the earliest if not the earliest.

That Emerson remained a significant figure for Nietzsche is demonstrated through a variety of sources. A person may be inspired by a figure, assimilate their ideas into his own worldview, and then subsequently forget that influence as the years pass. This was not the case for Emerson within Nietzsche's studies. Nietzsche remained a dedicated reader of Emerson according to Dr. Brobjer. Brobjer uncovered that "In 1863 Emerson was at the top of the list of Nietzsche's favorite readings (BAW II, p. 334)."[49] This source, coming from Nietzsche when he was aged 19, establishes Emerson has a firmer figure for Nietzsche than if the

[48] Thomas Bobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography.* (Ukraine: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 22.

[49] Benedetta Zavatta, "Historical Sense as Vice and Virtue in Nietzsche's Reading of Emerson." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 44, no. 3 (November 2013): 373.

references dried up for a period after the initial glimmer seen within his work at 17. That, two years later, Nietzsche was still considering Emerson an important author, points towards the lasting impact of the American thinker on Nietzsche, as Brobjer claims "Nietzsche began to read Emerson that year (1862) and read and reread him again almost every year."[50]

It was an impact that echoes, resoundingly, throughout Nietzsche's life. Loudly enough that, over 20 years after he compiled that 1863 reading list, Nietzsche still made references to Emerson. Brobjer notes that "In 1878 and 1879 Nietzsche continued to read Emerson (and also Schopenhauer and Plato)."[51] These piecemeal components are what indicate the lasting intellectual relationship Nietzsche had with Emerson, and they continue almost up to the end of his life. This fact, that Nietzsche read Emerson even further, establishes when " in an early draft to Nietzsche's autobiography *Ecce Homo* (1888), in which he described his own development and reading, he wrote: "Emerson, with his Essays, has been a good friend and someone who has cheered me up even in dark times: he possesses so much scepsis, so many 'possibilities,' that with him even virtue becomes spiritual [*geistreich*]."[52] Nietzsche, ten years later, still wrote and reflected on Emerson, even though his references to him, in Nietzsche's published works, are less visible. That Nietzsche, as Brobjer explains, included Emerson in his self-evaluation of his intellectual development casts aside any remaining doubt about the impact the great Transcendentalist had on Nietzsche. Though this section was struck from *Ecce Homo*, the consideration of it is just as potent. Nietzsche referred to many philosophical figures and influences throughout the final version of his autobiography. Emerson being missing from among this begs the question of how he compared to other figures, such as the often-mentioned Schopenhauer, in terms of importance for Nietzsche. While it may be said a thinker like

[50] Thomas Bobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography.* (Ukraine: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 22.

[51] Ibid, 90.

[52] Ibid, 42.

Schopenhauer was far more influential on Nietzsche than Emerson, this does not take away from the fact that Emerson did have some degree of influence on Nietzsche.

Though few, the references Nietzsche did make to Emerson shed a light on this influence's existence. Most notably, Nietzsche writes "Emerson possesses that kind-hearted and ingenious cheerfulness, which discourages all sternness; he does not by any means know how old he is already, and how young he will yet be."[53] Comments from a handful of his published works make up an important part of the broader historical evidence, but not the sole part. A published collection of various notes, letters, and other such references, titled *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, offer other glimpses into how Nietzsche viewed and interacted with Emerson over his lifetime. In Autumn of 1881, Nietzsche wrote a letter from which comes the comment "The most thoughtful author of this century has been an American [Ralph Waldo Emerson]."[54] Such unqualified praise from Nietzsche further solidifies the notion of Emerson's to him. Nietzsche also wrote the following, "Emerson, I've never felt so at home in a book," from the same year, making it certain that he held Emerson in high regard.[55]

Surveying the various sources from Nietzsche, with a great debt to Dr. Brobjer and Dr. Stack, the intellectual relationship between Emerson and Nietzsche becomes clear. Though they never met, Nietzsche held onto a lifelong admiration for the American, reading and annotating his works, from his youth up until the ten years prior to his death. He was impacted by Emerson's work, and the form that impact took serves as the foundation from which an analysis of this relationship can be conducted. The subsequent question is how Nietzsche's philosophy was influenced by Emerson's. Nietzsche's reading of Emerson is clear, the next

[53] ND, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. (London: Fisher Unwin, 1889), 176.

[54] ND, Werke, Band 1, Morgenröthe. Et Al. Nachgelassene Fragmente Anfang 1880 - Frühjahr 1881. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110881233 500. Original text: "Der gedankenreichste Autor dieses Jahrh[underts] ist bisher ein Amerikaner [Ralph Waldo Emerson]."

[55] Ibid, 486. Original: "Emerson ich habe mich nie in einem Buch so zu Hause."

step in this intellectual history, as a genealogy of ideas, is evaluating the evidence demonstrating how that reading transformed into a formal influence.

Nietzsche's Emersonian Attitude

Originality in major philosophers is a quality to be praised and admired. However, the nature of the study often leads to that originality being the product of a thinker's synthesis and interpretation of those other excellent philosophers before them. Friedrich Nietzsche, original and inspiring as he is, was no exception. This does not diminish the astounding insight of his work. Rather, it should be a cause for celebration; it means we can follow the genealogy of his ideas. Researcher Benedetta Zavatta did exactly this by studying the marginalia Nietzsche left behind in his personal copies of books and essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Her research offers a remarkably deep understanding of the development of Nietzsche's ideas. Through Dr. Zavatta's work, we can trace the influence of Emerson on Nietzsche's philosophy of history into subsequent thinkers that Nietzsche in turn influenced. Of these various ideas, that Zavatta discovered Emersonian influence in, one of the most notable is Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* or Overman.

The parallel between what Nietzsche called the Overman and what Emerson called the Oversoul points definitively to the influence of the latter on the former. Notably, Nietzsche took this idea of Emerson and made it his own. Nietzsche found within Emerson's writing a point of disagreement from which Nietzsche came up with the Overman. Zavatta notes and explains the evidence for Nietzsche's contention as it is found in his marginalia:

> There is one mind common to all individual men. 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. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind, is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent. (E I, 3; V, 1:
> Nietzsche underlined "universal mind" [*allumfassende Geiste*] in the German

> translation]. Nietzsche writes in the margin of the passage from the essay *History*: "No! But it is an ideal [*Nein, aber es ist ein Ideal*].[56]

Emerson argued that the human spirit is, in part, a collective. That with each person exists a metaphysical Self that relates to those of other individuals. The above extract, which Nietzsche commented on, is Emerson's commentary on the relation between the Oversoul and the capability of greatness an individual has. Having this metaphysical connection means people can tap more than the facts about past figures, but also the very conceptualizations of things that they had. Nietzsche makes his disagreement with this abundantly clear with the straightforward marking "No! But it is an ideal."[57]

While Nietzsche rejects the substance of Emerson's metaphysical Oversoul, there are other components of it that he finds agreeable. As an ideal, Nietzsche emphatically agrees that people ought to pursue an intellectual communion with their philosophical teachers. The substance of that pursuit is where Nietzsche differs from Emerson. Zavatta identifies how Nietzsche alters the Emersonian Oversoul, writing "In a note from the year 1878 Nietzsche explains better what he thought of Emerson's key idea: "Emerson p. 201 the 'Over-Soul' is really the highest result of culture, a ghost which all the best and greatest men created together" (NL 1878 32[13], KSA 8: 562)."[58] Instead of a literal metaphysical spirit, Nietzsche conceives of this Oversoul as the collective product of the contributions of all historical thinkers. It is simultaneously the result and the driving force of culture, comprising all knowledge from the sciences to the arts. Dr. Zavatta writes, "In his 1882 notebook of excerpts from Emerson's *Essays*, Nietzsche writes 'In every action is the abbreviated history of all becoming. Ego' (NL 1882 17[1], KSA 9: 666), he means something rather different from what Emerson had meant

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[56] Benedetta Zavatta. "Historical Sense as Vice and Virtue in Nietzsche's Reading of Emerson." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 44, no. 3 (November 2013), 189.

[57] Ibid,.

[58] Ibid,.

by these words."[59] Though certainly inspired by Emerson's musings, Nietzsche cannot reconcile the metaphysical aspect of them with his own position on metaphysics. Instead, Nietzsche sees this amalgamation as the benefit, in a purely material sense, of history. That by drawing on these lessons of past masters a person can incorporate them into themselves. It is in this sense that the Oversoul is, rather than any kind of mystical insight, a literal and important component to the development of the self. Insofar as a person draws on, internalizes, and makes use of the insight of past masters, they can advance their own selves. A part of Nietzsche's Overman is concerned with the Self and the development thereof. The Overman reaches their innate potential through these various intellectual sources that Emerson saw as metaphysical. Where Emerson sees mystic insight, Nietzsche sees learning. It is a very difficult learning that requires intense dedication and self-awareness, but it is learning all the same. Zavatta transcribed the following from Nietzsche's personal library:

> On the endpapers of his copy of the *Essays* Nietzsche wrote: "Not to see the new greatness above oneself, not to see it outside of oneself, rather to make of it a new function of one's self. We are the ocean into which all rivers of greatness must flow. How dangerous it is when our faith in the universality of our Self is aching! A plurality of faiths is required.[60]

Nietzsche's commentary definitively demonstrates that he did not reject Emerson's Oversoul. By total contrast, he adapted it. He cannot accept a comprehensive account of Emerson's Oversoul, which views mankind in a collective sense. Emerson was not a monist, however his view of the world as individuals each connected to a grander metaphysical spirit, is seen within the Oversoul. Indeed, the Oversoul is the necessary consequence of his worldview. Nietzsche, whose own ontological perspective was far from Emerson's, is more committed to the total individuality of the individual. Emerson was certainly concerned for the individual, however the metaphysical component of his thought led to a blurring of this concern

[59] Benedetta Zavatta. "Historical Sense as Vice and Virtue in Nietzsche's Reading of Emerson." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 44, no. 3 (November 2013), 190-191.

[60] Ibid, 191.

in the case of the Oversoul. Nietzsche had no such complications. Thus, his focusing on the person as individuals, in contrast to Emerson, leads to what Nietzsche termed the Overman. From his disagreement with Emerson that Nietzsche formalizes what became a famous component of his broader philosophy. Zavatta's translation, transcription and especially her interpretation of Nietzsche's marginalia, are critical in deriving and understanding this connection. It is without a doubt that Nietzsche read Emerson and took his work to heart. By reading Emerson's *Essays*, Nietzsche encountered the idea of the Oversoul and was very much influenced by it. A reaction that became the concept of the Overman. It is in this way that the Transcendentalists influenced Nietzsche and Nietzschean philosophy. Dr. Zavatta identifies and explores a litany of other instances wherein Emerson influenced Nietzsche. For understanding the lasting influence of Transcendentalism, however, focusing on the Overman suffices. The exceptional impact of this idea and Emerson's shaping of it is the second half of the foundation on which this intellectual history is built. A genealogical approach to ideas requires a specific idea to focus on in the same way a history of Troy requires the archaeological efforts that uncovered the (once believed mythical) city to know what we now do about it.

Chapter 3

Persistent Influence

This intellectual history has covered how Emerson's concept of Intuition and the Oversoul influenced James and Nietzsche respectively. In an isolated sense all three held distinct ideas. What genealogically connects them to the original in Emerson is Emerson himself. He plays the role of intellectual influence, though the ideas are different James and Nietzsche both were influenced by Emerson's perspective. There is no denying that both James and Nietzsche had other influences in the formulation of their varieties of Intuition (with James)

and the Oversoul (with Nietzsche). Nevertheless, the fact of Emerson's hand in this remains true, and through this the chain of influence can be followed further down the line. That influence is the core subject, and how it manifested in two more significant figures is to what it will be applied. Prior to an examination of that specific influence a brief explanation of what Emerson's ideas became, in James and Nietzsche respectively, is needed. Historical objects, in any history, must be explained even if they are themselves not the subject. While influence is the core of this intellectual history, what sort of ideas was the vehicle for Emerson's influence is pertinent towards having a comprehensive account of what this intellectual history endeavors to demonstrate. The historical influence of the philosophical ideas of Emerson.

Nietzsche's Overman

Critical to connecting Friedrich Nietzsche with David Bowie is understanding what idea Bowie was reacting to. Nietzsche's concept of the Overman, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* outlines a prospective idea of man's next paradigm-shifting advancement.

Nietzsche's vision was of a theoretical person whose values and philosophy are predicated on their physical experience, as opposed to principles derived from looking toward another world. This focus is evident immediately within the prologue "I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!".[61] The meaning of Nietzsche's use of the word "extraterrestrial," implies any perspective that emphasizes anything beyond our world. An example is the Christian belief in a heavenly reward after living a well-ordered life. Nietzsche does not specify a religion or worldview, meaning this book is not a specifically targeted critique. Rather, it applies to anything that posits the coming of a better life after death, or at least teaches that

[61] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.

man's focus ought to be on a next world. Overcoming man as it currently is does not mean the Overman no longer had to worry about philosophical issues. On the contrary, Nietzsche's concept outlines someone more capable of handling those sorts of questions. Zarathustra, in the prologue, declares his goal "to lure many away from the herd - for that I came."[62] The Overman should not be beholden to society in the sense people tend to be. Through tradition, a worldview, philosophy, and all subsequent values are passed from one generation to the next. Nietzsche's Overman did not rely completely on such things for answers to the fundamental questions that tradition generally functions to handle. However, the Overman is certainly not a perspective that demands a wholesale rejection of every facet of the cultural background a person is born into, Nietzsche wrote, "but a stronger force grows out of your values and a new overcoming; upon it egg and eggshell break. And whoever must be a creator in good and evil - truly, he must first be an annihilator and break values."[63] To break a value one cannot completely ignore it, to formulate new values there must be a basis on which to begin. Nietzsche's Overman is a being that formulates their own basis for knowledge, morality, goals, aesthetics, or anything else within the category of fundamental philosophical questions. The Overman may share some of the same positions as whatever broader social background he began in, however those similarities are coincidental.

The means for attaining this level of advancement is somewhat obscure. In a previous chapter the component of Nietzsche's Overman that is indebted to Emerson's Oversoul was outlined. Specifically, the idea that one should pursue the wealth of human learning as a grand synthesis of learning requires tremendous mental ability and fortitude. For the Overman to be they must have the raw intellectual power to pursue education of this magnitude. It is an

[62] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14.

[63] Ibid, 90.

overcoming of the human self as it currently is, not just philosophically, but comprehensively. Therefore, Nietzsche saw his idea as the next evolutionary step for man, because human nature itself must be superseded by a superior variety. That is what David Bowie takes aim at, as will be explored in the subsequent sections.

David Bowie in Brief

The figures considered so far, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, are all renowned for their contributions to philosophy. It may, therefore, be surprising that the subsequent focus is on David Bowie. James and Nietzsche were inspired and influenced by Emerson. Within James's work we see Emerson's belief in the importance of intuition, as for Nietzsche, he was influenced by Emerson's Oversoul. For James, this contributed to his idea of intuitive reasoning. Nietzsche, in turn, incorporated parts of Emerson into the Overman. Thus, the next step is to see how intuitive reasoning and the Overman alike evolved once more. An intellectual history, treating an idea as a vehicle for persistent influence, allows the opportunity to follow the development and evolution of ideas and even ideologies. To illustrate, one of the main differences between Nietzsche's Overman and Emerson's Oversoul is that the former eschews the metaphysical qualities of the latter. Ideas evolve and that reflects a great deal about the forces driving it. Acknowledging this fact offers an interesting understanding about these figures.

A genealogy of ideas is just as valid outside of philosophy as it is perfectly suited to it. Therefore, the work of the singer and songwriter David Bowie can function for Nietzsche in the same capacity that Nietzsche had for Emerson. Nietzsche had found inspiration in Emerson, and Bowie was similarly affected by his interest in the German philosopher. When someone thinks about history, they tend to think of events outside of their parent's lifetime. Hardly will

they think of a song their parents still listen to as a subject for historical examination. Yet history can take many forms and even things within living memory are deserving of historical treatment. An intellectual history, by nature of the abstract things it deals with, is just as suited to looking into the genealogical link of ideas that last to the present as a military history is for interviewing a Korean War veteran. There is no reason, therefore, to discount the historical relevance of someone like David Bowie. A multitude of Bowie's songs, especially within the album *'The Man Who Sold the World,'* are connected to Nietzsche's philosophy and Bowie's reaction to it. Notably, the song *'The Supermen,'* is explicitly Bowie's own interpretation and response to Nietzsche's Overman. That sort of continuation, from Emerson to Nietzsche to Bowie, is precisely the object for a genealogy of ideas. Therefore, an examination of the song and how Bowie conceived of the Overman is of great interest. Through this what can be revealed is how that idea, which began with Emerson, was reimagined with Nietzsche, and shifted further with David Bowie.

David Bowie's Supermen

On the 4th of November in 1970, David Bowie released his third album titled *"The Man Who Sold the World,"* in the US, followed by a UK release being published a few months afterwards.[64] Listening to any of the songs on this album can lead to a vague consternation. Bowie's voice often features in a fragmented way, made even more unsettling by the force of generally bizarre or even violent lyrics such as "I slash them cold, I kill them dead," from the

[64] Chris O'Leary, *Rebel: All the Songs of David Bowie from '64 to '76*. (Winchester: Zero Books. 2015), 125.

song titled *'Running Gun Blues,'* listed as the 5th in the album.[65] Those who know and or love David Bowie may find his variety of eccentricity less jarring than those encountering him for the first time. There are nine songs featured on this album, and the influences on all of them are as varied as the subject denoted by each's lyrics. Nietzsche's mark on Bowie's music is wide-ranging, with references to the philosopher appearing in other albums aside the above mentioned. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's Overman is salient in one specific song titled *The Supermen,* which is the 9th addition to *The Man who Sold the World*. Viewing this song as heavily inspired by Nietzsche is not a matter of inference or speculation, as "In 1976, Bowie told Radio 1's Stuart Grundy, 'I was still going through the thing when I was pretending I understood Nietzsche . . . A lot of that came out of trying to simplify books that I had read . . . And I had tried to translate it into my own terms to understand it so "Supermen" came out of that."[66] As with any person, Bowie's understanding of himself, his ideas, and the ideas of others, changed over time. His self-denigrating comment regarding his past understanding of Nietzsche is relatable given the pattern of intellectual growth plenty of people go through. Nevertheless, Bowie's *The Supermen* was incredibly popular those five years prior to the above interview and remains as much to today. His view of the Overman, the subject of the song, was disseminated to that wide audience. Therefore, though Bowie may not have held the position offered by *The Supermen* later in life, the reception of it remained far and wide. To what degree *The Supermen* had a clear impact on the thinking of those who listened to it is less clear and moves too far into the realm of speculation. Nevertheless, Bowie's thoughts as seen in the song can be understood with certainty. Given the nature of Bowie as a singer and songwriter, rather than as a philosopher like Emerson, James and Nietzsche, an analysis of his ideas necessarily

[65] David Bowie. "Running Gun Blues," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-running-gun-blues-lyrics.

[66] David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: David Bowie: The Definitive Story*, (Random House: New York, 2012), 233.

relies more so on inference than a literal reading of the work's lyrics. Interpreting Bowie, and linking what *The Supermen* describes, is feasible only because of Bowie's description of his own work as being directly inspired by Nietzsche. Without that, an analysis may be possible, but it is also far more tenuous. Fortunately, there is little doubt that *The Supermen* is Bowie's response to the Overman, further enabling for the following of the chain of the genealogy of ideas that began with Emerson, to Nietzsche, and ends here with David Bowie.

The very title of the song signals a specific break from Nietzsche. Where the German *Übermensch* can be translated to Overman or Superman, Bowie titles his work *The Supermen*, denoting the subject as a group of beings rather than a specific type. Bowie's Supermen are functionally distinct from humanity, however, remains related to mankind. The particulars of this difference are elucidated over the course of the first stanza of the song.

Bowie's song opens with the line "when all the world was very young," placing these beings as existing far before contemporary people do.[67] The precise time is vague, intentionally, what Bowie is describing is a group of beings that existed in relation to the age of the Earth. Sufficient lengths of time are difficult for us to conceptualize, and so, the era of the Supermen is exactly that. Bowie places the Supermen far away enough in time to make it improbable to properly conceptualize. That variety of mystery is referenced by Bowie's second line, which reads "and mountain magic heavy hung."[68] These vague descriptions hint towards something bizarre and powerful, yet the lack of specification dictates to a listener that Bowie's Supermen are a theoretical and ambiguous primordial ancestor to humanity. They are like us, though sufficiently distinct to be understood in only the most tentative terms. As such, the key ideas that Bowie has begun with are the conception of the Supermen as prior to mankind and beyond them. It is a clear and unqualified break from Nietzsche's philosophical idea, and yet

[67] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[68] Ibid,.

indebted to him, nevertheless. However, Bowie does begin to offer some measure of detail. The third line describes that "The supermen would walk in file," indicating an ordered existence.[69] That the Supermen, for Bowie, acted solely in accordance with some order because of their nature. Whether that something was their own will or an unchosen directedness remains to be seen. Rather than giving answers, Bowie shifts from physical descriptors of what these beings were to their relation to their home with the fourth line, "Guardians of a loveless isle."[70] Building from the question of order, Bowie refers to the Supermen as Guardians. This role of keeper extends some degree of responsibility to the Supermen, and, likely for Bowie, is tied to this conception of an ordered existence. However, this order and responsibility is not a source of fulfillment for these mystical creatures, as implied by the description of "a loveless isle," being their charge. Whatsoever the Supermen kept guard over was something uncaring and ungrateful for their presence and role. Certainly, land cannot offer gratitude in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, the term "loveless," can be understood to mean that the land does not offer anything to the Supermen. By contrast, a farmer who cares appropriately for his land will reap the rewards of it. As such, Bowie describes the impact of this fact on the Supermen, saying "And gloomy browed with superfear," in a definite reaction to the aforementioned line.[71] These Supermen are unhappy, and their displeasure is overt. Defining their emotion as a "superfear," implies their variety of despondency is like the beings themselves. It is incomprehensible to mankind. The burden they bear is not something we can possibly come to understand and can only work with Bowie's explanation. This leads into the sixth line, reading "Their endless tragic lives," that gives further explanation of who Bowie's Supermen were.[72]

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[69] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[70] Ibid,.

[71] Ibid,.

[72] Ibid,.

Firstly, Bowie clarifies distinctly that these beings experience life as a tragedy, living on in a pure unhappiness unlike what mankind can conceive. There is no reprieve for Bowie's Supermen for, secondly and more importantly, they are immortal. Bowie's defining their "endless tragic lives," offers only a picture of unending suffering, the Supermen cannot die and live only in their unique pain.[73] Whether that pain is more so caused by the condition of their ordered existence, or by immortality itself, is left up to the listener and or reader. As for the Supermen, the seventh line explains that they "could heave nor sigh," in a possible contradiction to the fifth line.[74] The former definition of the Supermen's life offers an outward expression of their reflection on it, however, this seventh line appears to claim that the Supermen could not express these feelings. Instead, all they can do is keep to their obligation. Drawing a distinction between being "gloomy browed," and being unable to "heave nor sigh," as two separate symbols of expression offers a possible answer.[75] The former defines a countenance whereas the latter an act. For Bowie, the Supermen's very bodies are reflective of their condition, however, in being ordered and unable to shirk that order they cannot act out these feelings. Bowie's negative implications regarding immortality are rather clear, and whether they are linked to a loss of freedom in the face of eternal life is displayed by the eighth line. Bowie sang "in solemn, per serenity," as the accompanying companion to the seventh line.[76] Given the prior descriptions, the word "solemn," takes on a wholly negative connotation, painting the Supermen as effectively stoically carrying out their existence in a grave manner.[77] Bowie links the reasoning for this back to the idea of order, with "per serenity," offering the

[73] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[74] Ibid,.

[75] Ibid,.

[76] Ibid,.

[77] Ibid,.

explanation beyond all the aforementioned as being for the sake of that order, insofar as we take serenity as being the product of order.[78] It is for the sake of this variety of peace that the Supermen exist, it is an ordered and peaceful life. Yet the Supermen are abjectly unhappy as a product of it. Not for their own sake do they exist in this way, but for an abstract status quo. Instead of an unwillingness towards this situation, these Supermen feel antipathy for it as Bowie completes this first stanza with "wondrous beings chained to life," describing their condition as prison-like.[79] These musings on immortality are unsettling, the discontent which Bowie portrays the Supermen appears to be attempting to mirror how he wants us to conceive of their own reaction to that same condition. In being chained, the Supermen must be unwilling participants in their immortal duty, prisoners of their very being. Nietzsche saw the Overman as the next step for humanity. Bowie flips this around and describes these theoretical Supermen as a past state that was nothing but a bane to those who experienced it. *The Supermen* are a thought experiment and, possibly, a warning.

The second stanza departs from the prior in its intention, the first focused on presenting a picture regarding Bowie's Supermen. Following this, the second stanza reiterates the three primary considerations intended to be conveyed with the broader idea of Supermen, those being their foreignness, their immortality, and their unique suffering. The first two points are touched on, once more, by the tenth and eleventh line, reading "strange games they would play then," and "no death for the perfect men," respectively.[80] It is important to note that the latter line refers to the Supermen as "perfect men," as opposed to the moniker they were introduced with.[81] Bowie, thus, confirms and emphasizes that the Supermen are an idea of a group of

[78] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[79] Ibid,.

[80] Ibid,.

[81] Ibid,.

beings which remain fundamentally human. The distinction is in their having attained perfection. Between these first two considerations and the final (that being the suffering of the Supermen) is the twelfth line that says, "life rolls into one for them."[82] Bowie describes the experience and perception of the Supermen, while simultaneously hinting towards the conclusion of the song and the satisfaction of what they long for. In describing life as rolling, Bowie ruminates over the experience of immortality as a continuous exercise, which was so by necessity. Describing that experience as "one," leaves the conception of that experience open ended.[83] It is plausible that Bowie hints towards the shifting of that sort of life from being continuous to discrete, meaning that the Supermen's immortality will come to an end. Alternatively, Bowie may also be suggesting that this unending and rigidly ordered experience diminishes the very act of experiencing. That everyone of this group thinks the same in acting and living in the same way, their conscious selves becoming blurred. Given the state of the Supermen as they've been described, these two possible inferences can be understood as being tending towards optimism in the former and pessimism with the latter. Bowie ends the stanza with "so softly a supergod cries."[84] Until this line, the Supermen had only been mentioned as a plurality and in relation to mankind. This shift in reference, to denoting an individual Superman and doing so as a "supergod," functions firstly to reestablish that the Supermen are a group of individuals (regardless of what the previous line referring to a single life may imply) and to reinforce their distinction from humanity. Further, while their conscious selves may appear effectively monolithic, they are still physically distinct from one another. Even so the Supermen do remain human, but they are beyond human enough and in a manner such that Bowie can describe them as gods. The words of this song function both literally and

[82] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[83] Ibid,.

[84] Ibid,.

expressively, the appearance of these two rhetorical intentions can be discerned based on what Bowie declares prior to a word's use. Given Bowie's own statement regarding Nietzsche being the inspiration for this song there is little question that Bowie's Supermen is discussing a group beyond mankind, which yet remains human. In holding to this consideration, the intention behind referring to them as supergods becomes definitive, that Bowie is not suddenly switching the subject of his work from a variety of human to a variety of deity. He is using the term "god," expressively to highlight the distinction between mankind and Supermen. By acknowledging the difference between words taken literally from those meant expressively, *The Supermen* and its meaning becomes far clearer and begins to make significantly more sense. The song is about a pure theory regarding a past iteration of humanity, to explore what it could become in relation to Nietzsche's idea of the Overman.

The third and second longest stanza (next to the first) further reiterates the primary characteristics of the Supermen that Bowie wants a listener to consider. These ideas consist of references to "uni-thought," emphasizing the ambiguity of selfhood, "no pain, no joy, no power too great," demonstrating the alienness of these theoretical beings, and "nightmare dreams no mortal mind could hold," making wholly explicit the incomprehensibility of the Supermen and their variety of suffering.[85] The final three lines indicate a significant shift in Bowie's tale of the Supermen. He offers further detail regarding the question of suffering in relation to these beings, with the twenty-first line reading "a chance to die," followed by "to turn to mould."[86] Significantly, Bowie has written something that sounds like a plea. His Supermen, in the face of their absurd suffering, desire death because it is the antithesis to their immortality and relative omnipotence. Bowie grants his creation that wish with the final two stanzas of the song. Each of them is four lines and are almost completely identical save for the last word of the

[85] David Bowie. "The Supermen," Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[86] Ibid,.

lattermost stanza. The second to last says “Far out in the red-sky, Far out from the sad eyes, Strange, mad celebration, So softly a supergod cries.”[87] Once more, there is the repetition of ideas of suffering, foreignness and the God-likeness of the Supermen. The stanza differs from the rest of the song with the line “Far out in the red-sky,” of which the meaning is not necessarily immediately clear.[88] Numerous religions and cultures have assigned meaning to the symbolism of a red sky. As was considered in the foregoing section, Bowie’s religious affiliation varied throughout his career. There is no single faith, or discrete worldview, from which the meaning he had in mind can be drawn. Commonly, and not just in the West, a red sky is associated with the rising or setting of the sun. Symbolically, this variety of imagery can be used to convey the end of something just as much as it can do so for the beginning. In the context of Bowie’s Supermen, the most tenable association appears to be that of change. These last two stanzas detail the Supermen achieving that death they long for. The final stanza is identical to the first except for its closing line which is “so softly a supergod dies,” as opposed to its preceding compatriot which ends with “cries.”[89] The symbolism of a red sky, whether it is meant to evoke a rising or setting sun, in conjunction with Bowie declaring that the Supermen can die, closes the song with a fitting sense of finality.[90] Thus Bowie leaves the Supermen with having attained what, by virtue of his description of them, they necessarily desired, reprieve from the unrelenting suffering of their immortal condition. Simply listening to the song, certainly, likely yielded such a comprehensive account of what Bowie is saying with it. *The Supermen* is the sort of piece a person must put effort into, much like philosophy, to understand what exactly Bowie was envisioning. With this demand satisfied, it becomes

[87] David Bowie. “The Supermen,” Genius.com. https://genius.com/David-bowie-the-supermen-lyrics.

[88] Ibid,.

[89] Ibid,.

[90] Ibid,.

possible to consider the Supermen as a philosophical concept and, therefore, explore how it relates to the idea which inspired it.

The Overman and the Supermen

Nietzsche's Overman is his conceptual theory for mankind overcoming itself. It can be thought of as a variety of evolution, wherein people or a person transcend the normal traditional moral and intellectual patterns that humanity has advanced through to date. It is the next big step. It is necessary to consider David Bowie's Supermen to conduct a comparison of the two. Given what can be drawn from the lyrics of the song, as seen in the previous section, a picture can be drawn of the Supermen and what Bowie likely intended with the idea. In short, the Supermen come across as a warning. For Bowie, this theoretical conception of a separate variety of mankind, distinct yet still human, serves to ask the listener (or reader) to consider the consequences if humanity strives for overcoming above all else. These Supermen are immortal beings noted to do nothing but, seemingly, exist for the sake of it. Bowie refers to them as guardians however it is for no fulfilling purpose, especially relative to the might of the beings themselves. The Supermen have conquered death and live in a complete stagnation with nothing to strive for. They possess power beyond conception and suffer none of what currently ails humanity. However, despite what is ostensibly a utopia, these Supermen are still suffering. For Bowie, there is no evolving left for the Supermen. These primordial final beings have achieved all and now can only bask in that achievement and do so to their eternal consternation until Bowie grants them the death they long for.

As such, it is possible to discern on what terms Bowie is disagreeing with Nietzsche. The Supermen are a taking to the extreme of Nietzsche's Overman. Bowie emphasizes the foreignness and bizarre nature of the Supermen, so different that they cannot be well conceived. It is not a timeline of advancement that Bowie is exploring, rather, he is thinking in terms of

successive change without the constraint of how long it may take for humanity to arrive there. If temporal constraints are not considered, Bowie is exploring the idea that these Supermen are what humanity will end up if it continues onward in a constant upward trend of evolution. The inexorable end up seeking progress is the end of the ability to do so; the Supermen stagnated and so too will man if simply given enough time and will. This song was inspired by Nietzsche, Bowie says so himself, and yet he appears to disagree with Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, the Overman is a hopeful beacon of what humanity can become. His conceptual evolution is a willing towards what we have the potential for; regardless of the difficulty it remains a possibility. Bowie comes across as unsettled by this. He is not anti-progress by any means, but rather Bowie is against the sort of desire for overcoming that he sees in Nietzsche's Overman. Bowie's song demands the question of what happens when that is accomplished, based on the assumption that this desire may manifest again. Those who overcame, growing comfortable with their new state as it becomes the new status quo, may very well wish to seek overcoming once more. It is a process that, insofar as time and resources remain feeble obstacles, can be thought of as a consistent pattern of achievement, restlessness, and overcoming. Bowie's Supermen are the result of that, and for him this inexorable stagnation is completely undesirable. Once mankind has lost the ability to pursue this pattern only suffering remains. The Supermen suffered, and in their suffering, man receives a warning against the pursuit of absolute greatness. Bowie does not want stagnation, either now or in the future. He wants to see progress measured, man's fallibility to be seen as a part of his life and not as an object to be defeated, even if that fallibility is something as foreboding as death itself. For Bowie, the conquest of death can lead to an insufferable subsisting, not living, filled only with regret.

James's Pure Experience

The next step for this intellectual history is to consider how intuition figured into James's broader epistemology. His broader ideas are distinctly empirical, and this does not constitute an internal contradiction for James, nor for a reader who has considered precisely how intuition figures into James's thought. Regardless, in order to genealogically follow James's influence, it is important to consider a better-known component of his epistemology. This is what James termed *pure experience* and was his response to a variety of philosophical ideas popular during his lifetime. James does not incorporate intuition into his description of pure experience in the given source, as this piece (from *The Journal of Philosophy Psychology and Scientific Methods)* is more polemical than it is a comprehensive explanation of his own ideas. Nonetheless, the better-known pure experience is a major vehicle for James's influence on another thinker, a subject explored in subsequent sections, who had little issue reconciling his current position on intuition with the empirical notions he had learned from James. The writing from this philosopher incidentally is reminiscent of Emerson more than James's ideas.

Nonetheless, prior to considering this influence, it was prudent to begin with what pure experience was according to James and how intuition fits with it. Titling his chapter "A World of Pure Experience," James begins the text by briefly describing his contentions with some popular epistemological theories:

> Transcendental idealism is inclining to let the world wag incomprehensibly, in spite of its Absolute Subject and his unity of purpose. Berkleyan idealism is abandoning the principle of parsimony and dabbling in panpsychic speculations. Empiricism flirts with teleology; and, strangest of all, natural realism, so long decently buried, raises its head above the turf, and finds glad hands outstretched from the most unlikely quarters to help it to its feet again.[91]

[91] William James. "A World of Pure Experience." *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 1, no. 20 (1904): 533.

James's problem with these ideas was their tendency toward a less than empirical way of thinking. Later on in the article, James outlines precisely the logical objection he has with such theories, however that is not a subject necessary for the present intention. Instead, James is using these ideas (and his issues with them) as a contrast to set up his personal substitute, which is the necessary subject. This is definitively clear by the second page of his article, wherein James wrote "I give the name of 'radical empiricism' to my *Weltanschauung*," in an unmistakable proclamation of both his originality and rejection of the popular schools of thought.[92] According to James, radical empiricism "must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced."[93] Short as it is, there is little to misinterpret with what is being outlined. Radical empiricism is a doctrine of literal pure experience, all knowledge is derived from what is sensibly known and there is no rational reason to deny what is sensed. Already, the role of intuition could be seen to fit within this worldview, if intuition is maintained as a product of the human person as opposed to the metaphysical sort encountered within Emerson. For defining his radical empiricism, James's argument hinges greatly on the continuous nature of experience as he understands it. The closing section of James's article summarizes this:

> To 'fulfill a function' in a world of pure experience can be conceived and defined in only one possible way. In such a world transitions and arrivals (or terminations) are the only events that happen, though they happen by so many sorts of paths. The only function that one experience can perform is to lead into another experience; and the only fulfillment we can speak of is the reaching of a certain kind of end. When one experience leads to (or can lead to) the same as another, they agree in function. But the whole system of experiences as they are immediately given presents itself as a quasi-chaos through which one can pass out of an initial term in many directions and yet end in the same terminus, moving from next to next by a great many alternative paths.

[92] William James. "A World of Pure Experience." *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 1, no. 20 (1904): 534.

[93] Ibid, 533.

The concept of pure experience is the cornerstone of James's radical empiricism. The idea defines knowledge in terms of what is perceived by the senses alone, this is what is denoted by experience. For James experience is a continuous process wherein one experience leads into another regardless of whether that other is an affirming or a rejecting of its prior. Parameters such as these pose no threat to intuition's inclusion in James's broader epistemology. James described intuition as an instance where "a person suddenly; and, when it does so, it makes an epoch in his history. As Emerson says, there is a depth in those moments that constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences.".[94] Intuition, regardless of how a person feels, is grounded in something experiential. There are a variety of plausible reasons for why an intuitive sense can feel incredibly strong. However, James sees no contradiction between his pure experience and intuition. If he did, he certainly casted off one or the other, whether that be looking beyond empiricism or rejecting intuition. As it is, the connection is clear. Knowing, for James, principally functions by way of *pure experience,* and intuition can be thought of as one of the possible ways in which a person approaches the multitude of things they have experienced. It is a connection which is explored in greater depth by someone roughly contemporary to James. He was a man born directly into the tumultuous Meiji Restoration of 19th century Japan.

Philosopher Kitarō Nishida found a great deal to consider within the work of William James, and so by proxy Ralph Waldo Emerson. The connection between these three thinkers is a grand testament to the influence that can be traced when considering philosophy through the historical lens of a genealogy of ideas.

[94] William James, *On Some of Life's Ideals* (United States: H. Holt, 1900), 16.

Kitarō Nishida in Brief

Important to establishing the connection between James and Nishida is a concise historical overview of information and events relative to his intellectual development. Michiko Yusa is a professor at Western Washington University who wrote and translated an extended biography covering Nishida's life. Her work will be the basis for this briefer account, with only the most important elements for a genealogy of ideas being considered.

Kitarō Nishida was from a small coastal village on the east coast of Japan, roughly 20 kilometers from the city of Kanazawa.[95] Rather significantly, the Meiji Restoration was in its "third year," by the time Nishida was born.[96] This, combined with the fact that he lived in a more rural area means that Nishida likely encountered the turbulent mixing of the inertia of tradition colliding with the pressure of Japan's incredibly swift modernization. His family "held the hereditary office of village mayor," which carried the obligation to organize "the affairs of several neighboring villages."[97] Nishida's early life, therefore, can be characterized by a relative degree of comfort and security. According to Yusa, "Nishida inherited from his father intensity and restlessness, and from his mother introspection and tenacity," both sides of which, though seemingly conflicting, certainly appear conducive towards success when framed within the context of academic and philosophical pursuits.[98] Indeed, manifested in Nishida whose "love of books was apparent from an early age," and lasted for the rest of his life.[99] These are the circumstances with which Nishida first began.

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[95] Michiko Yusa, *An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 3.

[96] Ibid, 7.

[97] Ibid,.

[98] Ibid,.

[99] Ibid.,

Prior to beginning formal education, Nishida "took private lessons from tutors to prepare himself," spanning "Chinese," and "mathematics," in a strong display of his own personal ambition toward and interest in learning at such a young age.[100] Nishida also showed promise early on. His father approached the well-known scholar Inokuchi Sei to work as a private tutor who was "Already in his seventies and was no longer taking students."[101] Sei agreed to tutor Nishida on the condition "that Kitarō teach Motoku's grandson the book of *Mencius*," in a clear acknowledgement of Nishida's proficiency with classical Chinese.[102]

Though his early academic talents appear to have been exercised within the broader humanities, "Nishida's adolescence unfolded in close connection with his pursuit of mathematics," according to Yusa.[103] Nishida's interest in math benefitted him beyond the diversifying of his already broad range of academic interests. Yusa quotes from some of Nishida's personal writings, wherein he explains his encounter with formal logic through mathematics, "I came to discover how interesting logic is. I think I was sixteen or seventeen then; I can still vividly recall where I read the book and how I read it."[104] Nishida's taking to logic through mathematics was the foundation for his later adoration for the study of philosophy. Yusa concludes the chapter on Nishida's early life here, summarizing the breadth of his interests by the time of his adolescence, which ranged from literature and poetry to mathematics. Philosophy, yet was not on this list.

Nishida was accepted into the Imperial University, where he made good on his burgeoning potential for philosophy. Yusa recounts that, after encountering philosophy through

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[100] Michiko Yusa, *An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 9.

[101] Ibid, 10.

[102] Ibid,.

[103] Ibid, 13.

[104] Ibid, 14.

his broader secondary education, Nishida intended to focus on the study of it at the university simply because "Nishida was attracted to philosophy."[105] That interest unfolded first through his personal relationships:

> There was a copy of Hegel's *Logic*, translated into English by William Wallace, and a copy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated into English by Max Muller. Nishida tried to read them, only to find them far over his head. Nishida took "philosophy" to mean "to inquire into the true reality of the universe." He and Yamamoto exchanged their views concerning the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and other philosophical problems.[106]

Exploring philosophy through discussion with his peers was the major way by which Nishida engaged with this interest of his. As he continued his education, Nishida's circle of friends expanded and so too did the variety of perspectives he was exposed to. According to Yusa, "prompted by their idealism, Nishida and his friends organized a literary circle, *Gasonkai* (Respect the Individual Society)," wherein they discussed and criticized each other's writing whether it be prosaic, philosophical or poetic.[107] With a talent being cultivated by great scholars and social influences guided by like-minded peers, Nishida's early years appear practically teleological. It is as if he was born to become a philosopher. Two major events, however, heavily influenced the life and thought of Nishida. During the Russo-Japanese War, Nishida's younger brother Hyōjirō was killed during an action by Port Arthur (located in modern day China) where the Russian's Pacific fleet was docked.[108] At the time Nishida was 34. He had a memoir for his brother published in a newspaper, but at the personal level, according to Yusa, "for the consolation of his soul, Nishida turned to Zen practice," in order to handle (if not

[105] Michiko Yusa, *An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 22.

[106] Ibid, 23.

[107] Ibid, 25.

[108] Ibid, 76.

alleviate) his grief.[109] Roughly three years later, Nishida's "second daughter, Yuko, died of bronchitis," while he was focused on his already decorated career.[110] As expected, "Yuko's death shook Nishida profoundly and made him realize that he had been preoccupied with his academic achievement and oblivious to the primary importance of life and his family," which, much like the death of his brother, "deepened Nishida's religious consciousness."[111] With such an experience considered alongside the broader picture of Nishida's intellectual development, it becomes little question why his affinity for an empiricist like James did not shake Nishida's religious disposition.

From an early talent in the humanities, to an appreciation for mathematics, both which culminated in a passion for philosophy, Kitarō Nishida's talents oriented him towards philosophy from an early age. His family had the means to assist Nishida, allowing him to study under capable teachers and find equally talented peers through a rich education. The tremendous personal loss Nishida endured was as much of an influence on his philosophy as these positive experiences. Like Nietzsche 26 years before him, Nishida demonstrated a level of promise and intelligence that came to academic fruition by his adulthood. Among the interests Nishida wrote on, his reflections on James's work stands out. How Nishida reconciled his religious foundation with the more materially focused James is an interesting contrast to tackle. It is one that the approach of a genealogy of ideas is ideal for. With the broader historical and intellectual context of Nishida's life clear, it is now possible to execute that approach and consider how Nishida interacted with James's view of Emerson's idea of intuition. This is the final link of the chain of influence termed a genealogy of ideas.

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[109] Michiko Yusa, *An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 77.

[110] Ibid, 86.

[111] Ibid,.

Kitarō Nishida's Pure Experience

Nishida was just as, if not more, interested in the concept of pure experience as James was. The content of Nishida's writing on this idea strongly implies James's heavy influence on his perspective. Within *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida devotes the entirety of the first part to pure experience. Where the genealogical connection comes into play is that within this section Nishida also considers intuition. It is certainly plausible for a thinker to unknowingly anticipate another, even if he was well-read on the person anticipated. However, Nishida makes a brief reference to James's perspective on intuition, thereby demonstrating that the intersection between these thinkers was not a mere coincidence. Nevertheless, as it pertains to Nishida's broader conception of pure experience, he said:

> To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought so by *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination.[112]

With his concise definition written, Nishida makes abundantly clear what he has in mind by the term pure experience. The distinction between his perspective and James's is in what Nishida emphasizes relative to James. Where James focuses on pure experience in terms of a variety of empiricism, Nishida refers to it in more personal terms. For him, to consider pure experience is to think of sensed things without bias, that is, as the very experience itself. These two focuses are perfectly compatible, their distinction appears to lie in the audience each respective author had in mind. James came across as argumentative, beginning his discussion by listing epistemological views he rejects, whereas Nishida's first considerations lack any trace of polemics. He wants to consider pure experience completely on its own, as something that "has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of facts as they are," in

[112] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 41.

order, as it appears, to explain a perspective as opposed to defending or attacking it or others.[113] While Nishida's description of pure experience is straightforward, he offers greater detail regarding some possible issues. He reconciles the issues of relegating pure experience to distinctly sensible objects and the existence of arguably abstract, and if true then possibly non-sensible, concepts:

> An abstract concept is never something that transcends experience, for it is always a form of present consciousness. Just as a geometrician imagines a particular triangle and takes it to be representative of all triangles, the representation element of an abstract concept is no more than a type of feeling in the present.[114]

Defined in this way, issues of metaphysics, self, or anything of an abstract nature, can still be understood within the realm of Nishida's pure experience. For Nishida, the very fact that the consideration of these concepts occurs within the mind means that they are not so distinct from something literally tangible as to be separated from pure experience. He describes this functioning by analogy, under the presumption that none denied that, though innately abstract, mathematical objects are real and or at least real enough to be considered by the empirical lens of pure experience. Given the previous definition of James's pure experience, it may appear as incongruous with Nishida's. The reality is, in fact, quite the opposite. In his *The World of Pure Experience* James focuses tremendously on the question of causality, and why causality operates better under his epistemology than those he opposes. He did not touch on the question of abstract experience as it is outlined by Nishida. However, the above quoted passage is not purely Nishida's work. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, translators of *An Inquiry into the Good,* added a footnote reading "Nishida's note is "James, *The Principles of Psychology, vol.I, chap.VII,"* Nishida's personal library, now mainly in an archive at Kyoto University, includes the 1890 edition published in New York by Henry Holt," in an explicit

[113] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 42.

[114] Ibid,.

reference to Nishida's own referencing.[115] Nishida, in his exploration of the dynamic between pure experience and abstract experiences, directly cited James. He credited him, albeit for what exactly is not written, and does so a few more times within the text. Regardless, a few definitive facts are revealed by this. Firstly, that Nishida had read James. Secondly, Nishida felt indebted to James enough for his ideas to credit him. Thirdly, and finally, that Nishida's conception of pure experience is not merely in line with James's but is partially predicated upon it. It is doubtless that Nishida's perspective on pure experience was influenced by James, however, that alone does not necessarily link Nishida to Emerson through James. What was declared as the genealogical link between Emerson and James was the concept of intuition and, so far, Nishida has not touched on the relationship between intuition and pure experience. Fortunately, later within this text, he does exactly this. The fourth chapter of the first section of *An Inquiry into the Good* is titled *Intellectual Intuition* and begins with the following description:

> Intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) is an intuition of ideal, usually trans-experiential things. It intuits that which can be known dialectically. Examples of this are found in the intuition of artists and people of religion. With respect to the process of intuiting, intellectual intuition is identical to ordinary perception, but with respect to content, intellectual intuition is far richer and more profound. Something of intellectual intuition as a kind of special mystical ability. Others think of it as an ideal fancy cut off from experiential facts. I believe, however, that it is the same as ordinary perception and that the two cannot be clearly demarcated.[116]

Nishida was demonstrably interested and influenced by James's writing regarding pure experience means that he necessarily encountered the role intuition played for him in this epistemology. Given that Nishida refers to intuition as, essentially, a deeper and more impactful form of perception, he does not ascribe to it the sort of metaphysical properties that, for example, Emerson had. Further, Nishida's emphasis on the impact of intuition is remarkably

[115] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 42.

[116] Ibid, 68.

like James, who held the very same position. Both thinkers viewed intuition as a physical process, as Nishida refers to it as no different from "ordinary perception," and as something people who experience it hold to be indicative of a greater degree of truth. Greater than what exactly is open to interpretation but given both thinkers were focused on an empirical means of knowing, they likely conceived of the importance people assign to intuition as being in relation to the more commonplace sense perceptions we have.

Though the preliminary definition Nishida offers of intuition greatly resembles, almost perfectly in fact, that of James, Nishida offers a far greater amount of description towards his perspective than James did. It is in this broader exploration he offers where Nishida ultimately reveals the influence he took from James, just as Bowie's *The Supermen* did with reference to Nietzsche. The first notable way Nishida does this is in his pursuit of the relationship between intuition and religion:

> The culmination of this profundity is found in the intuition possessed by a person of religion who, through human love, can intuit the oneness of self and other. Whether a person's extraordinary intuition is simply an idle fancy or truly an objectively real intuition hinges on its relationship to other things, on its effects.[117]

Though Nishida is offering more depth to his perspective on intuition than James did, the similarity within the religious focus is noticeable. Though an empiricist, James still found importance in religion. While Nishida proclaims his support for the distinctly empirical concept of pure experience, he demonstrates a similar high regard for religion as his influence had. It is key to note the function of intuition that Nishida describes. It is a reciprocal one, where someone capable of a strong intuition not only gains a powerful sense of another person, but in doing so also attains a better sense of self in that very contrast between themselves and other people. However, Nishida does not broach into anything metaphysical. Rather, he concludes

[117] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 69.

this thought by reminding the reader that an intuitive sense is essentially frivolous when divorced from something real in the empirical sense. He goes so far as to distinguish real intuition from something less so, labeling anything derived from anything other than experience as not actually an intuition. The exact operation of intuition, according to Nishida, is like the substantive contents of pure experience. He wrote "just as ordinary perception is considered merely passive, so is intellectual intuition considered a state of passive contemplation, however a true intellectual intuition is the unifying activity in pure experience," and in doing so brings his idea of intuition back to its proper place, as a function of pure experience broadly.[118] Where sensation is the content of pure experience, that is, we know what we do based on what we have perceived, intuition has a conclusive role for Nishida. As an anchor in a relay race is to the rest of the run, intuition functions to wrap the entirety of a person's perceiving together into a conceptualized whole. Nishida uses the term "unifying," and in doing so is describing intuition as the means by which the parts of a sensible object come together into oneness. When a person learns about the history of a country, the intuition of that learning is the sense said person has for that country considering all they know about it. It is what they think of when they hear the country's name, it is the broader feeling they have for it based on their knowledge of it. There is no precise list of what that sense is, as it is as varied as the sum of all the things all people have learned. With Nishida, however, what becomes clear is that this sense, whatever it may be for an individual, is what he views intuition to be.

While the precise way Nishida has defined intuition is evident, what is not is how James impacted it. Philosophers can and have anticipated one another, which certainly does not qualify as influence. Nishida's ideas bear striking similarity to James's; however, the relative few words James wrote on intuition pose a problem. It is certain that Nishida was influenced

[118] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 70.

by James's view on pure experience, however it is only plausible at present that he was so with regard to the question of intuition, within the discussion on epistemology. Though these are some curious coincidences, the likelihood of Nishida having been influenced by James appears tenuous. Fortunately, just as Nishida referred to James in his commentary on pure experience, he does so as well within his chapter on intuition. As he began concluding the chapter, Nishida wrote:

> Intellectual intuition thus underlies thinking. Thinking is a type of system, and at its base there must be an intuition of unity. As James said in "The Stream of Thought," regarding the consciousness that "the pack of cards is on the table," when we become conscious of the subject, the predicate is implied, and when we become conscious of the predicate, the subject is implied.[119]

Just as before this reference is accompanied with the appropriate citation. Given that Nishida is referring to an analogy, the worry is that he was using James to illustrate his point regarding intuition rather than as something indicating James's own position on the matter. Fortunately, the translator offers more context, writing in the footnote that "James writes that the various parts of the time-based statement "melt into each other like dissolving views, and no two of them feel the object just alike, but each feels the total object in a unitary undivided way."[120] With James's perspective listed, there is now little reason to doubt Nishida's being influenced by him. Previously, Nishida outlined his view regarding intuition as a unitive sense of perceived things, as a function of pure experience. As he concludes his chapter defining this, he directly references James expressing the exact same opinion. In citing James, it is thus demonstrably clear that Nishida was at least in part guided towards this position by his reading of James. He was influenced by the great Pragmatist and so, indirectly, with the Transcendentalist who first spoke on intuition first

[119] Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 71.

[120] Ibid.,

Pure Experience and Intuition

A genealogy of ideas is predicated on the notion that an idea can be treated as any other historical object. A core remains, regardless of how it has changed shape over the variety of hands it has passed through. That core is the chain of influence linking each thinker together. Kitarō Nishida in this one book alone, *An Inquiry into the Good*, refers to a wide variety of influences. He discusses ideas from thinkers from Socrates to Schelling. The shape of Nishida's interest and subsequent influence in James specifically goes beyond his epistemology, but through the lens of this genealogy of ideas must be confined to it. Nishida took up James's concept of pure experience and intuition. James drew intuition from Emerson, linking Nishida to Emerson.

Pure experience, according to James, is predicated on two fundamental arguments. Though James likely did not affirm that metaphysics is non-existent, epistemologically he believed that the subject of our intellect is material alone. Since knowledge of the material world can only be had through the sensations, James concludes that it is by experience that we learn things. Thus, the contents of what we know is dependent on pure experience. James was not the first to argue this, but nor did he wholly agree with his predecessors. For James knowledge operates in a continuous fashion. There is no strict delineation between how we see one experience versus another in the sense that our conceptualization of the object of experience is shaped by any given new experiences. In the face of this James said that, within the realm of knowledge, pure experience can only confirm, reject or alter the perception we have of any given sensible object. All this Nishida agreed with, synthesizing these ideas of James with what he already knew and what he learned as he continued with philosophy.

Intuition is the capstone for the subjects of pure experience. Not the object, as those remain the parts which stimulate a process occurring within the mind. Intuition deals with ideas of objects. Intuition is the means for conceptualization. Nishida offers the example of a learned

religious practitioner who has a powerful sense of themselves in contrast to others. James, in a totally different illustration, described how someone who knows what a deck of cards is can conceive of the packaging which holds them and the cards themselves as implying one another based on what the owner sees (either the pack or the deck, without the other). Like in the case of pure experience, Nishida almost completely agreed with James. Nishida held that intuition is the sense of a given thing that a person has, the precise feeling they associate with it as a concept. Therefore, it is unifying, as whatsoever a person knows about something will be held within the set of associations a person has when they contemplate that feeling they have in coordination with the object they have it of. The distinction between James and Nishida is in the focus. James, who appears to have had a stronger affinity for objects, focuses on the involvement of this unifying intuition in how we know the physical things we see. In his reaction to Emerson, James spoke of intuition as an *unlooked-for solution*. Where the unitive nature of intuition can bring forth thoughts and knowledge, we may have forgotten about something. Nishida, on the other hand, applies his notion to the practical relationships between people. His illustration is the greatest indicator of this. That our intuition, this feeling, is one of the best ways we get a sense of who we are because we have both an intuitive sense of ourselves and of other people as distinct from us.

James influenced Nishida in his interpretation of intuition, Emerson influenced James, therefore Nishida is linked to Emerson by the influential core of the idea that began with Emerson. This is the second and final full link, like with Bowie, showing how the ideas of one philosopher influenced those after him.

Conclusion

In his own time and place, Emerson touched a great deal of people with his work. Notable philosophers, generally, have such an impact. Their unique approach to a variety of issues, whether they be universal or niche, is often what causes their resonance contemporary to them and long after. Philosophy had and has the capacity for this because of its foundational nature. It is improbable to name a field of study that is not predicated on philosophy, impossible maybe. History itself has been the subject of a great number of philosophical debates. Like Emerson and the four figures influenced by him, the influential relationship between history and philosophy is demonstrably clear. It is a tight connection, how a history is written, how research is conducted, and how historical issues are handled all have their roots in a specific philosophical view. This closeness is what makes treating philosophy historically a curiosity, when these two subjects are considered, it tends to be the other way around. A genealogy of ideas does exactly this. It is an approach to intellectual history that emphasizes the persistence of influence through ideas regardless of how the ideas themselves change.

Those who are familiar may not immediately connect each of these strands, stemming from Emerson, through their respective chains of influence. Emerson influenced Nietzsche and James through his concepts of the Oversoul and Intuition respectively. James's view of intuition, and its epistemological role, in turn inspired Nishida. Nietzsche's Overman, derived in part from his reading of Emerson, was of tremendous interest to Bowie. With Nishida we see how far something like Transcendentalism can influence the developing thought of those nominally unassociated with it. This genealogy of ideas ended with Nishida and Bowie; however, further links certainly may exist. Nishida was a distinguished philosopher in his day, just like Emerson there is no telling who may be heavily inspired by him in the future. Each of these thinkers were of such importance to enough people that they have not been forgotten with

time, the accessibility of their ideas has been cemented as is proven by the fact that drawing these connections is possible in the first place.

That is the very nature of ideas. In a way they are more persistent than a literal physical artifact. Material decays whereas ideas live on as long as there is someone to consider them. Certainly, philosophical concepts change. Ironically, viewing ideas in this genealogical sense necessarily gives rise to a philosophical issue. The Ship of Theseus is a paradox dating far into antiquity. Theseus's story is simple enough. Theseus was the mythological Hero-King of ancient Athens, and it is said that he owned a glorious warship. As it accrued damage and needed repairs eventually every part had been replaced. The paradox asks whether the ship became a new ship entirely, if so then when that happened. In the same vein, when an idea's evolution becomes so different from how it began it is hard to determine when it stopped being the original idea. The saving grace is that the links of influence, often acknowledged by writers themselves, make it possible to follow who influenced who even if the idea being followed is completely different from its beginning.

A similar problem of persistence arises with friend groups. Innate to a person's social circle is the ebb and flow of the group's members. New friends come, old one's leave. Once all the original friends are gone, whether the group is still the same becomes uncertain. If there is a specific organizing variable for this group, then it could be said that if each new member seamlessly assimilated into that framework that they are no more distinct from the original group as those members are from each other. For if the new member is distinct, it is only by virtue of order. That being the case, then the group's persistence lies not in the original collection but rather with the very first member, which makes little sense in a discussion regarding the character and construction of a group. The solution appears to lie in something more collectivist. When a new member joins and becomes wholly undifferentiated from the group, meaning they are no longer seen as a "new friend," then they are equally as capable of

carrying on the group as any of the original individual members. Therefore, the friend group itself, as a collection, can persist regardless of the individuals insofar as each new member becomes as much a member as those before them.

An idea is more like a ship than it is a friend group. The latter, being a social phenomenon, is rather fluid in its existence. A ship is a ship in a more objective sense, an idea can be understood just as much as well. When considering ideas in terms of a historical lens the objectivity of their existence comes across as truer than not. A person comes up with something, and the various components of it that they consider will be all which they ever will. Certainly, later in life a person may recant some of their positions, but that is not a re-shaping of an idea any more than another thinker reinterpreting the original is. To grapple with this problem, we must turn back to the friend-group issue. Time and order are not what determine the existence of the group. In the same vein neither does time or order determine the existence of an idea, philosophical or otherwise. In both cases the temporal consideration seems to result in the same conclusion. Nobody comes up with the entirety of an idea immediately and simultaneously. In their head it develops and shifts, with some of the most consequential philosophical ideas often over a long period of time. Where then could the original idea be said to come to be? Just like the Ship of Theseus and the group of friends, it appears to exist once the constituent parts have come to a whole and the philosopher declares it so. For, unlike the ship and the friends, the nonmaterial nature of an idea necessarily means that it is only as much of a whole as the conceiver determines it to be.

In the case of Intuition, James's incorporation of it into his broader philosophy led to a notable change. The concept became stripped of its metaphysical significance as it had originally with Emerson. When Nishida took it up from James, he did not change much. Instead, he blended intuition with his own interpretation of James's broader epistemological idea of pure experience. The caveat is that Nishida did so without compromising his religious,

and therefore metaphysical, positions. Like Intuition, when Nietzsche took to the Oversoul he also stripped it of its metaphysical nature while holding to the core component of comprehensive learning. Bowie with his Supermen, on the other hand, rejected Nietzsche outright. Bowie's idea certainly is an entirely distinct philosophical position, even if it was born from Nietzsche influence. Given the nature of ideas, as being what they are depending on their originator, each of these figures created their own new concepts. They did not seamlessly incorporate something, leaving it completely unchanged. Closest to that was Nishida who took James's work in a form far closer to the original than any of the others. Yet, nevertheless, Nishida was not James. It is improbable, even with the distinct intention of copying an idea, to prevent one's own broader beliefs to color their understanding. Whether intentionally or not, the idea will shift in accordance with what pre-existed it in the mind of the person in question.

Certainly, these ideas are not persistent in the most literal sense. Treating them as such, however, is the first part for a genealogy of ideas. What follows is the line of influence connecting each of the figures in question. This is the first major goal, discovering and learning what connects each philosopher and how their own work evolved the original concept. In this case Emerson was the originator, but any idea from any person can be subject to that sort of thinking. Literally speaking the ideas are different in each iteration, but the factor of influence is persistent. It is in following those ideas that their influence can be discerned and examined, and therefore, Emerson's impact on the rest of those mentioned becomes clear. This is the purpose of a genealogy of ideas. Absent the influence of Emerson, Nishida and Bowie may have come to the same ideas that they had; however, speculation of that sort is not the realm of a historical inquiry. An examination of the historical movement of these ideas, and their influences, certainly is. Through that process what is demonstrated is a part of Emerson's philosophical legacy, through a historical approach to ideas.

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