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ALAN LOPEZ

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Your turn now, my turn next

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist" (*Essential*)

## Emerson's Bayonet

THIS ESSAY WILL DISCUSS RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S argument in "Politics" (1844) for a "nation of friends" (398). I read his proposition as a response to his lament, in "Politics," that "the power of love, as the basis of the State, has never been tried" (388). By a careful reading, I show how we can understand "Politics" as a response to the social contract tradition of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau—a response grounded in what Sharon R. Krause describes as a way of thinking organized around a "sentiment-based account of judgment and deliberation" (139). My interest in Emerson is in his writings on law and sovereignty, specifically in the rich language of metaphor by which he tells us of that relation.<sup>1</sup> "Politics" is infused with meteorological significance, the key figures of which—appearing also in "Friendship," "The Poet," "The Fugitive Slave Law," and "Circles"—return us to his guiding concern in "Politics," which is what it means to try love and friendship as the basis of the state. To say I am interested in Emerson's political thought and what it can say of our commitments to each other is to say I am interested in his framing of the law as friendship and love, hence as philosophy. I begin my reading with Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), a treatise on the social contract tradition written nearly two-hundred years before "Politics." The question of trying friendship in Emerson recalls, more than any other theorist within that early modern social contract tradition, Hobbes's similar formulation. Though Hobbes was unable to embrace the ideas of friendship he advocates in *Leviathan*, his reasons for that inability speak to concerns contemporary to Emerson, on the often unspoken "basis" (388) of friendship, which is consent and

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trust. Emerson appeals to this trust on the closing two pages of “Politics,” the same trust Hobbes could never accept because of the certainty he required of himself: the *entrusted responsibility* (Derrida 6) for my “[li]ffe]” or “death” (12) to another “human being” (13), and not only this, but a human being “whom I am to fear” (Derrida 13).

#### EMERSON’S MAYS AND MUSTS

Emerson dramatizes this tension as the difference between Whig and Tory, Mays and Musts. In Emerson, Mays and Musts represent the conflict between idealism and materialism, the pull on us by “the sense of right and duty, on the one hand, and the material necessities on the other: May and Must” (786). He explains it as the difference between “go[ing] for what has been, for the old necessities—the Musts,” and “go[ing] for the Better, for the ideal good—for the Mays.” But Emerson’s is only a tenuous tension, for “each of these parties must of necessity take in, in some measure, the principles of the other” (“The Fugitive Slave Law” 786). Though as a Tory I strive for the good, this is in part, if I am honest with myself, an appeal to some aspect of my Whiggish tendencies, the idea, for instance, as he observes in “Character,” that I ought to “keep the old and trodden round” (261). Conversely, and this is the pull from the other direction, though I ought to keep the old and trodden round, my embrace must be gentle instead of sure, alert to the fact that “this old age ought not to creep on a human mind” (261). This is the “middle measure,” as it were, to which Emerson refers in “Politics” (385). Idealist and materialist pull me in different directions. However, both pull with the same territorial purpose, what Emerson describes as the “wish” of “each . . . to cover the whole ground; to hold fast and to advance” (385). His language of incompatibility is actually intentional; it is his quiet way of reminding us that while May and Must share the same aim—to spin us in their respective orbits—they differ in how we ought to spin in that orbit: “one lays the emphasis on keeping, and the other on advancing” (385). Emerson’s most literal example of this conflict is perhaps “We are all conservatives, half Whig, half Democrat, in our essences: and might as well try to jump out of our skins as to escape from our Whiggery,” expressed in “The Fugitive Slave Law” (785–86). Mindful of Emerson’s more vivid description of this tension elsewhere, what he calls those “two forces in Nature, by whose antagonism we exist” (786), we can see Emerson’s point as not quite that we are all

Whigs. Rather, it is that elements of conservatism—including conservatism of self—comprise the struggle within us all.<sup>2</sup> Still, we do try to “escape” our Whiggery; after all, this is an antagonistic tension. And it is this tension, the pull on us from the Whig and the “reformer” (“Politics” 389), that Emerson plays out around a single act in “Politics,” what he calls the “surrender of the bayonet” (388).

## EMERSON AND HOBBS

Emerson tells us that the surrender of the bayonet is our way of quitting and putting “an end” to the “government of force” (“Politics” 388). Consequently, I surrender my bayonet toward this goal, the “Better.” This, however, leads to a paradox. Even if I, perhaps naively, surrender my bayonet—surrender any further appeal to a “system of force”—I cannot ask the same of another, nor take as valid his/her covenanted word to do so (388). This follows Hobbes’s thesis, in *Leviathan*, that “[a] Covenant not to defend my selfe from force, by force, is alwayes voyd” (98).<sup>3</sup> So long as I recognize this “Right” of “every man” “not [to] lay down their Right,” “then there is no Reason,” Hobbes insists, “for any one, to devest himself of his” (92). Indeed, to do so, he continues, would be “to expose [myself] to Prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose [myself] to Peace” (92). Because I cannot have this guarantee, insofar as I surrender my bayonet for myself, I similarly drop the bayonet against myself, opening myself, perhaps, to “Peace” (92), but also to “Death, Wounds” (98).<sup>4</sup>

Hobbes’s insistence that “no man can transferre, or lay down his Right to save himselfe from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment, (the avoyding whereof is the onely End of laying down any Right)” in brief is this idea that “the promise of not resisting force, in no Covenant transferreth any right; nor is obliging” (98). Hobbes’s claim would seem to immediately come under attack in Emerson. In the moment I surrender my bayonet, and thus, as Hobbes puts it, “*lay downe [my] Right to*” the bayonet (92), what have I done but “*la[in] down [such] a Right to save [myself] from Death*”? (98). And even if I could covenant with others to do the same, so would we open ourselves to violence from other “armed men” (98). Hobbes has something similar in mind when he says that while I may “Covenant thus, *Unlesse I do so, or so, kill me,*” I “cannot,” on the contrary, “Covenant thus, *Unlesse I do so, or so, I will not resist you, when you come to kill me*” (98).<sup>5</sup>

Though Hobbes's language gives us little room to clearly distinguish the two situations—and one can ask why an individual would even feel him or herself obliged in the first instance, as some do disagree with his assertion that “Covenants entered into by fear . . . are obligatory” (97)—this for Hobbes is the conflict between “Right” (*Jus*) and “Law” (*Lex*), the RIGHT OF NATURE and the LAW OF NATURE (91).<sup>6</sup> Hobbes explains the Right of Nature as “the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgment, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto” (91). This right, or the liberty of each individual “to do what hee would; . . . according as his judgment, and reason shall dictate to him,” may, however, conflict with the Law of Nature, that “Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved” (91). While Hobbes does not identify the problem as such, this is the inherent “Absurdity” (93) or “contradict[ion]” (93) within his “Articles of Peace” (90), those articles that follow from the “Lawes of Nature” (90).<sup>7</sup>

Hobbes's premise to *Leviathan* is simple: “Peace is Good” (111).<sup>8</sup> From this premise follows his exhortation “*That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre*” (92). Where problems emerge is in how I ought to go about “endeavour[ing] Peace,” especially if I am also to take to heart “that Law of the Gospell,” the idea that “Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them” (92) Hobbes in this instance referring to performance of the “Contract” (94). The Law of the Gospell, he explains, is the idea that if “*a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himselfe[,] he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe*” (92). Following Hobbes, my difficulty is determining “when others are so too” willing to endeavour peace, for “if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as [me]; then there is no Reason for [me], to divest [myself] of [mine]” (92). The challenge becomes all the more difficult if we are to be faithful to Hobbes's introductory observations in *Leviathan*.

He warns us here “never” to “read another by his actions . . . so perfectly,” or, in other words, to assume for ourselves that “legib[ility]” reserved “onely to him that searcheth hearts,” i.e., God (10). His warning arises out of what he calls the “blotted and confounded” “characters of mans heart,” the recognition, as he puts it, that “the constitution[s] [of] individuall[s] . . . do so vary, and they are so easie to be kept from our knowledge, . . . with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erroneous doctrines” (10).

This is Hobbes's lament. While I may “looketh into” myself, and “thereby read and know” what I myself “considereth” and “doth”—taking seriously Hobbes's “*Read thy self*”—hence while I may know what I “*think, opine, reason, hope, feare,* and upon what grounds,” never “shall [I],” as clearly, “read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions”; for I shall never possess the “key,” God's key, by which I might know, indeed “decypher,” whether what is called for is “trust,” or “diffidence,” whether another “is himself a good or evil man” (10). We will recall that “the first and Fundamentall Law of Nature” says, “*That every man, ought to endeavor Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it*” (92). Hobbes says I do this by “lay[ing] down [my] right to all things,” as in “such Rights, as being retained, hinder the peace of Mankind” (100). He defines this as the “second Law” of “Nature” (92). His problem is squaring this second Law of nature, my laying down my right to all things, with the “Right of Nature; which is, *By all means we can, to defend our selves*” (92). This is a conflict to the extent that I accept his thesis that I can never divine the intentions of another's heart, and so never know whether another is a “good or evil man”; it would be helpful if I knew this before I laid down my right to such things as hinder the peace of mankind.

In a sense, knowing this is Hobbes's remedy. Recall, as Hobbes also insists, that I endeavor peace, and so lay down this right, only when I know that others “*are so too*” inclined, what he, reasonably enough, says is an individual's own appeal to “*defence of himselfe*.” However, he has already told me that I can never know just when this is; to know this, according to Hobbes, is to know, absolutely, that one's designs toward peace are sincere, hence not “counterfeit”; it is, as it were, to assume possession of God's “key.” In a sense, there never is a time, in Hobbes's formulation, when I could be said to “h[a]ve hope of obtaining [peace]”: the threat of the counterfeit will always impose itself on me, the possi-

bility that the individual, before whom I lay down my bayonet, is, in fact, an “evil man.” Consequently, to the extent that I do endeavor peace at all, I do not, in fact, uphold the law of nature, for I have violated Hobbes’s clause to the second law: I may endeavor peace only when I know others are similarly inclined. Because I cannot have this assurance—at least not absolutely—what I intend as a gesture of peace, the surrender of the bayonet, takes on, for Hobbes, an entirely new meaning, one incompatible with any rational aim toward peace. My gesture of peace becomes, in Hobbes’s vernacular, a “Covenant not to defend my selfe from force, by force” (98).

In and of itself, Hobbes’s second law of nature is fine. Indeed, for him it is the only basis for peace. “For so long as every man holdeth this Right, of doing any thing that he liketh,” he explains, “so long are all men in the condition of Warre” (92). Where this right becomes prohibitive is when it is carried out without the assurance that others will similarly “*lay down [their] right to all things*” (92); it is with this assurance, for instance, that I may “*be contented with so much liberty against other men, as [I] would allow other men against [me]*” (92). Likewise, it is the absence of this assurance that finds me as so much “Prey.” Hobbes appeals to that risk in prohibiting my endeavor in these circumstances, what is my “do[ing] that, which is destructive of [my] life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same” (91). What he refuses to recognize—and doubtless this could be twisted by a Machiavellian figure—is that the seeking of “Peace” is, if only for a time, always the becoming of “Prey.” My gesture of peace means something to another because I have, in my appeal to peace, lain down my bayonet before (and before) another. This is not my saying I will *never* defend myself; rather, for the moment, the moment in which my bayonet is dropped and another’s still raised, I wish no longer to be seen as an enemy; I, in other words, am defenseless and will not retrieve my bayonet if another also surrenders his or hers. However, so strong is Hobbes’s belief in the depredations of this “naturall Right of every man to every thing” (91), his worries over the inability to know the heart of another, that even a moment, for Hobbes, is a moment too long “to *lay downe a . . . Right to any thing*” (92).

Hobbes says there are two ways by which I may “lay” “aside” a “Right,” what he refers to as my “*devest[ing]*” myself “of [my] Liberty,” which is “either by simply Renouncing it; or by Transferring it to

another" (92). "By *Simply* RENOUNCING," he notes, I "care not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth," and by "TRANSFERRING," I "intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person, or persons" (92). Yet nor are these actions performed in a vacuum. Renouncing and transferring of rights, Hobbes holds, are performative gestures. Their intelligibility, whether the distinction of one from another, or the simple identification of an act as "renouncing," depends upon what he calls a system of "Signification," or "Signes" (93).<sup>9</sup> "The way by which a man either simply Renounceth, or Transferreth his Right," he explains, is either by "a Declaration, or Signification, by some voluntary and sufficient signe, or signes" (93). By these "Signes," which may be "Words onely, or Actions onely; or (as it happeneth most often) both Words, and Actions," I "doth so Renounce, or Transferre; or hath so Renounced, or Transferred the same, to him that accepteth it" (93). Still, these acts do share one limitation, which concerns just what I may transfer or renounce. In keeping with Hobbes's language that transference or renouncing is done "by some voluntary and sufficient signe," whatever I transfer or renounce, I do so only "in consideration of some . . . good," as in a Right "reciprocally transferred to [myself]; or for some other good [I] hopeth for thereby" (93). This criterion, of a "Good to [my]self" (93), is Hobbes's positive version of the negative right of nature. It is, also, his litmus test for those rights that are inalienable, or what he says "no man can be understood by any words, or other signes, to have abandoned, or transferred" (93). One such limit-case is my voluntary decision to "lay down the right of resisting them, that assault [me] by force, to take away [my] life" (93). Hobbes says we ought to account such actions, made by another, as those made by an individual "ignorant of how such words and actions were to be interpreted" (94). For if he did know, Hobbes observes, he would, of course, realize that "he cannot be understood to ayme thereby, at any Good to himself" (93).

Hobbes's is thus an interesting scenario. One is inclined to say that just as I may never know whether the heart of another is counterfeit or not, so may I, likewise, never know whether another is really insistent on assaulting me, let alone taking my life. Yet, using Hobbes's reasoning, this is a chance I cannot take. His justification returns us to his criterion that any renunciation must be in the service of a good to myself. This is, also, Hobbes's most explicit reference to the problem of time. Along with understanding such gestures as performative, he



understands them as temporal.<sup>10</sup> Though he is unclear on how soon a good must evince itself before me, he is clear that there must be “some” good I, at least, “hopeth for thereby” (93).<sup>11</sup> I trouble my hopeful receipt of this good, according to Hobbes, in the “patience” to which I subject myself “consequent” to laying down my bayonet, that patience by which I wait and see “whether they intend [my] death or not” (93). My error, Hobbes would say, is my taking a little too literally this notion of “hope,” which, so long as it is only “hope,” is no defense against those intent on injury. While I wait for some “signe,” a “declaration” of another’s own intentions toward peace, there is, meanwhile, nothing to “secur[e]” me, to “preserv[e]” my safety (93). While I wait for a “declaration,” an outstretched hand, maybe, by which I may overcome a life so “weary,” so do I watch and “seeth men proceed against [me]” (93). This is why Hobbes’s is a “repudiation” (Cheah 55) of this patience, the law’s inability to protect me from this “pressing danger” “of violence” (Hussain 108). However sincere my patience, it is, in a sense, patience for a peace always already “despoyle[d],” since this peace, even if achieved, is only at the price of “[my]selfe,” or only at the price of that “Good to [my]selfe” (Hobbes 93). Corey Brettschneider, drawing from George Kateb, describes Hobbes’s position as an example of his “matchless advoca[cy] for the right to life” (69), Hobbes’s belief that an appeal to “the common good cannot replace or counterbalance the most basic interests and rights of the individual” (57). Since for Hobbes I value my own life above anything else, beyond even my own ability to sacrifice it, such is a “signe” I could never “be understood . . . [to] mean” or to take as my “will” (Hobbes 93).

Because I cannot be sure that in my defenselessness I will not come under attack from others, I keep my bayonet raised. I do so not through appeal to the Right of Nature, but through my earlier “Obligation” (98) to the Law of Nature, which “bindeth” (Hobbes 91) me before any subsequent “consent” (98) I may give to another to the contrary.<sup>12</sup> A question thus presents itself. “With the niceties of constitutional authorization exhausted, with the claims of legal propriety spent,” how, as Nasser Hussain asks, is “[a people] to survive”? (2). “Someone,” Hussain continues, “has to be able to act” (2).

Hussain’s “question of law and emergency” (3) is Emerson’s predicament, what Eva Horn, following Jorge Luis Borges, describes as the problem of “enmity” in “the twentieth century” (162). When I surren-

der my bayonet, I signify to another my wish to overcome a system of force. Yet this is all I can ask of another, which is recognition of my wish to do so. This is what troubles me in Emerson's "Politics": the recognition of the limitations placed on me by that "ideal good" to which, presumably, we all aspire, which in asking "surrender of the bayonet" asks the very thing I may only ask of myself, and not even of myself.

## EMERSON AND LEVINAS

Working my way out of this quandary found me reading again how Emerson talks of this surrender on the closing page of "Politics." If my surrendered bayonet is a gesture of peace, it is because I have surrendered my right to self-defense, to recognize another's, and this not in order that my neighbor may join me, though this is invited, not to show that his/her bayonet is unnecessary, as I can speak only for myself, and arguably only for this moment, but to show this neighbor that I no longer see him/her as an enemy. Though maintenance of the bayonet is the suggestion of enmity, so is it, for Emerson, the suggestion of peace, for it is recognition that "of persons, all have equal rights, in virtue of being identical in nature" ("Politics" 379). It is my recognition of another's "autonomy" and "subjectivity" (MacAvoy 33), as in another's decision to reciprocate (or not) my gesture toward peace (33). This recognition of another's autonomy begins with the recognition of this similarity between myself and another, the acknowledgment that we are both in a system of force, hence as much friend as enemy to one another. In brandishing our bayonets, we are both appealing to our own rights of self-defense against a potential enemy in a system of force. Yet such difference is never maintained, as I must wonder if a potential friend is an enemy; a potential enemy a friend. This "heteronomy" (MacAvoy 33) "haunt[s]" ("Politics" 387)—because poses as a question—my relation to another.

I, in a sense, defeat this heteronomy in my "face to face" encounter with my neighbor (MacAvoy 30). It is, of course, my neighbor before whom I "submit [my]self" (30) and surrender my bayonet. However, it is not because of my neighbor that I do so. Prior to my neighbor—and prior even to myself—the "good" "constrain[s]" (30) me and compels me to act. The good, that is, is what "I [most] strive to reach" (30), and what I appeal to in this act of mine. When I surrender my bayonet, though, I would seem to trouble my reaching of this good, for I am now

defenseless. Yet this gesture remains the possibility of peace. And this because it is the radical “interruption of the self by [a] self” (Derrida 51), what Sarah Beckwith describes as my recognizing myself as before another human being (7).<sup>13</sup> I have responded to my “neighbor” (Derrida 13) in surrender of my bayonet before him/her. My neighbor may not respond to me. Still, I cannot help but “call” this “neighbor” of mine, and if only in that “à-Dieu” (13) that is my surrender, since what I have done, in this act, is *entrusted* the *responsibility* (6) for my “li[fe]” or “death” (12) to another “human being” (13), and not only this, but a human being “whom I am to fear” (13). This is my recognizing what it means to be “in a relation with the good” (MacAvoy 30), which is to be in a “relation with the other” (30). Hence, this is my understanding of what Levinas means when he says “peace” is “beyond a certain concept of the political” (qtd. in Derrida 80) and yet “retains a political part . . . participates in the political.” Peace is the surrender of my bayonet before my neighbor, because what compels me is not, in fact, “being” itself (Derrida 13), that of my neighbor, though our beings are at stake, but those “modest . . . silences . . . brief or discreet conversations,” “questions,” “answers,” which have come to shape this occasion of my surrender before a neighbor. My surrender is prior to being—in excess and yet part of the political—because, as a gesture, it is “anterior to all dialogue” (13).

Responsibility to my neighbor—construed as arising from my even more fundamental responsibility to the good—is thus also freedom from my neighbor. It is the freedom to disregard my neighbor’s decision to maintain or surrender his/her bayonet (MacAvoy 35n14). Discreet questions and answers have gotten me to the point of a face-to-face encounter with this neighbor. What I appeal to, however, in surrender of the bayonet itself, is my “trust,” “infinite” for Emerson, in that “beneficent necessity which shines through all laws” (“Politics” 384). This necessity says—if I have any hope of surviving my surrender—that what “secures person and property against the maligninity or folly of the magistrate” (382) are not “law[s]” and their “institutions” (378), those “things” (381) merely “expedient to meet a particular case” (378), but “the mind[s] of men” (379).

Emerson asks my recognition of this “beneficent necessity” when he suggests “the power of love, as the basis of a State” (“Politics” 388). I assume this “love” when I “recogni[ze]” that there are “higher rights

than those of personal freedom, or the security of property," as in the rights belonging "to the order of nature" ("Politics" 388). These are rights that because of "a purely moral force" were "never adopted by any party in history, neither can be" (388). I recognize these higher rights when I recognize the good; this recognition is why I do not disregard my neighbor. In recognizing the good, I recognize what is "due from [me]," which, as the good, is not only my understanding of those responsibilities I owe "to others and to [myself]," though this as well, but my "reflect[ions]" on those responsibilities (387). I cross this reflection when I am "impatient to show some pretty talent as a substitute for [my] worth," as if by merely dropping my bayonet I absolve myself of that "constrain[t]" (387) imposed upon by the good. Indeed, this constraint merely begins by my taking "notice of [my] companions" (387). More than dropping of my bayonet, mine must be this recognition of another as "a single human being" (389), as in surrender of the bayonet not only on behalf of a human being but recognition of another's right, as a human being, not to reciprocate this gesture of mine. This recognition distinguishes a "system of force" from a "nation of friends," as it is the awakening, even of "a single human being," from his/her solipsistic slumber: my realization of the influence of others on me but, more presently, of my "act[ions] on [them]" ("Nominalist and Realist" 399)—for I too have a bayonet. With my realization of this difference—that difference which first compels me to "stop before [an] object" (399)—is my surrender before another. But more than this, it is my recognition that this "object" before me is a human being, too. This is my understanding that there are ways other than force with which to found a state (399).

Surrender of my bayonet may lead to death or wounds. But even it does, accusations of error would be misplaced, misrecognizing as they do Emerson's larger point, radical though it admittedly is, that "a single human being . . . has . . . denied the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature" ("Politics" 389). My gesture, though perhaps an object of "contempt," "disgust," is also, "for a moment," an embodiment of the "grandest and simplest sentiments," and this because the gesture, whether performed or not by "thousands of human beings," is first, and this is all it needs to be, that gesture signifying "a knot of friends, or a pair of lovers" (389).<sup>14</sup>

This is Emerson's "power of love." It is "faith" in our "moral nature." I appeal to this faith when I ask, less in word than in deed, whether "a

nation of friends [could] devise even better ways” (“Politics” 388). Because I am to find faith in our moral nature, a nation of friends is not the idea that others—including myself—must blindly surrender their bayonets.<sup>15</sup> This is only a simpler, but no less coercive use of “force” (388) than that possessed by “our barbarous society” (387).

Emerson’s nation of friends makes its “presence” known with “the appearance of character” but also that of the “wise man” (386). I partake of this wisdom when I realize that my “prayer[s] and piety” (386) while “grand” (389) are, to the extent they remain only my prayers, not acts that “alter the world” but instead so much “dust” that I “throw . . . in [its] eyes” (387), “dust” that is the response, another’s, that what is “not sufficient for me” is not necessarily “what is unfit” (385) for another. Though it is the good upon which I act, mine is, until this good is shared with another, “the undertak[ing] for another,” and to this extent “the same thing,” whether “in numbers, as in a pair” or “in the government of the world,” which is “my going to *make* somebody else act after my views” (385).

“Politics,” then, is this challenge to find within ourselves that “sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire [others] with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love” (388). By giving up our “selfish” tendencies, so may we “abjure the code of force” in favor of the “moral sentiment” that comes with “sufficient belief in the unity of things” (388). Emerson asks of the “timid,” the “conservative” (388), the “partial reformer” (389) “faith” not in the “authority of the laws” (389), a “system of force” (388), but in the sufficiency of “our moral nature” (389).

#### EMERSON AND THE SOCIAL-CONTRACT TRADITION

Emerson’s is not a new problem. One thinks of the early modern social contract tradition—to which Emerson does not belong—which begins with Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) and continues with Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762). But though these works long precede “Politics”—and though Emerson, to my knowledge, does not substantively engage either Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau—I want to suggest that by bringing their works into dialogue with his, we arrive at an interesting alternative to those early modern narratives of the social contract. Emerson does propose a social contract. But this contract refers not to the move from a state of nature

to civil society, which he derides as the “bad State” ( “Politics” 389). Such a move “ignore[s]” (Reed 210) the insurrectionist tone of his nation of friends. It is a tone captured, for instance, in his call for “a single human being who [will] steadily den[y] the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature” (389); “hence the less government the better—the fewer laws, and the less confided power” (386). Taken together, Emerson’s nation of friends, his “air-pictures” (389), suggest something a little more dangerous, what I read as a call to a return to a state of nature from civil society.

Before we can make sense of what Emerson is moving us toward, with his nation of friends, we must understand what he is moving us from, in this case civil society. One place to begin is Gershom Carmichael’s *Supplements and Observations upon Samuel Pufendorf’s On the Duty of Man and Citizen according to the Laws of Nature, composed for the use of his students in the Universities* (1724). The work, presently in edited form as *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Carmichael*, is a distillation—with “additions and amendments”—of Carmichael’s own 1702–3 lectures on moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. While at Glasgow, Carmichael was chair of moral philosophy, succeeded by Francis Hutcheson (xv) and later Adam Smith, Hutcheson’s student. Carmichael’s focus, as indicated, is two of Pufendorf’s major works, *De Officio Homini et Civis* (1673), whose 1707 translated edition he also read, which includes extensive commentary by Jean Barbeyrac; and, in a class of its own—and out of which was originally conceived *De Officio Homini et Civis*—the massive *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (1672), whose 1706 translated edition he also “consulted” (19), which includes too commentary by Jean Barbeyrac. It is Pufendorf’s *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* Carmichael draws from in his own definition of civil society, which, he says, “may be defined, more briefly and no less aptly, as an *appropriate number of men, joined in a union of their wills and resources under one supreme ruler, for their mutual protection and security*” (153). Carmichael was not without influence in arriving at his definition of civil society, however. Throughout his *Supplements and Observations*, including his chapter “On the Origin of Civil Society, or the Original Contract,” he notes his indebtedness to John Locke and his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). In his *Second Treatise*, for instance, Locke writes that “God hath . . . appointed government” as a “proper remedy” to that “confus[ed] and

disorder[ed]" (121) state where all individuals, "by nature" (163) find themselves, "all free, equal, and independent" (163).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the theological affinity is even clearer when we finish Carmichael's thought:

God has instructed men by the nature of things interpreted by the dictates of right reason that it is a necessary condition of the dignity, peace, and security of the human race when grown to a multitude, that, by the circumspection of their liberty in some respects, they should gather together into states and submit themselves to civil governments. And he has enjoined civil government by the law of nature itself as a mean to these ends. (155)

In appealing as much to reason as to God as the basis of civil society—what Hobbes describes as an appeal "consisting partly in the Passions, partly in . . . Reason" (90)—Carmichael joins himself with both Locke and Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, for instance, Hobbes describes that original "ill condition" (90) "the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe," as "that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (88). Between the two, though, Carmichael remains closer to Locke.

Carmichael's distance from Hobbes turns on how Hobbes's account gives way to accounts of civil society by early modern jurists Gottlieb Gerhard Titius and Jean Barbeyrac. Hobbes's *Leviathan* is founded on the assumption that "before constitution of Sovereign Power," hence in that time wherein "all men ha[ve] right to all things," so there is "necessarily . . . Warre" (125), rather than "Justice" or "Injustice" (101). Such logic, Carmichael writes, suggests that "the earliest societies were not established by covenant or by general agreement" but, as Barbeyrac writes, "plainly owe their rise to the Cunning and Management of some ambitious Mind, supported by force" (qtd. in Carmichael 146n3)—as if "*civil society*" owes its formation to one or more individuals "*strong enough to conquer [their] neighbors and bring them into subjection*" (147). Carmichael says this is an "error" (147) of Titius's and Barbeyrac's. Though Carmichael refers to Locke's *Second Treatise* (129, para. 127), he may also have in mind Hobbes's understanding of the state of nature as "every man . . . Enemy to every man" (89)—especially when he (Carmichael) refers to that time "before societies had been formed at all [as

when] men might be constantly harassed by troublesome neighbors, beaten, robbed of their property" (147). Such enmity, even if "only a cessation of Armes for feare of one another," is still a "condition not [of] Peace" (Hobbes 125). It is unlikely there could arise "a common power to keep them all in awe" (88). Yet this, Carmichael continues, is what Titius and Barbeyrac suggest, and what Hobbes, ironically enough, says, "while men are in the naturall condition of Warre, cannot be done" (100): the establishment of "some coërcive Power, to compell men equally to the performance of their Covenants" (100–101). Writing almost one hundred years after Hobbes, Hutcheson, in his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria, with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, describes Hobbes's origin of civil society as an example of causal fallaciousness, as in the "presuppos[ition of a] civil power . . . constituted previously to that conquest they suppose to have produced the first civil power" (237).

Carmichael's, however, is not Hutcheson's later take on this "state of *natural liberty*" (Hutcheson 127), either, what Hutcheson refers to as that time "of peace and good-will, of innocence and beneficence, and not of violence, war, and rapine" (127). Hutcheson refers to the original "sense of duty in our hearts, and the rational consideration of [our] interest[s]" (127) before such duty is corrupted by "strong selfish desires" and "impetuous passions" (235). Unlike Hobbes, Hutcheson insists that "men [are] not generally so depraved, and that even humanity and conscience incline them to give aid to any who happened to be wrong" (237). However, Hutcheson is also careful to note that "multitudes would omit this duty though fear and cowardice, if it exposed them to danger" (237). Hutcheson differs from Hobbes in much the same way Carmichael does. Hutcheson believes in a general "just[ness]" and "honour" among us, in our belief in those "eminent moral virtues," including "goodness, justice, fortitude" (236). Nevertheless, Hutcheson is also sensitive to "how much injustice, depravation of manners, avarice, ambition, and luxury prevail among [us]" (236). This sensitivity recognizes that we "have it generally in [our] power much more certainly and effectually to make others uneasy and miserable, than to make others easy and happy" (128) and thus says that "without civil power, [we] cannot be preserved in safety" (236). Hutcheson's optimistic faith, though, allows him to say—in contradistinction to Hobbes—that "not only the dread of injuries, but eminent virtues, and our natural



high approbation of them have engaged men at first to form civil societies" (236).

Anticipating Hutcheson's notion of "eminent virtues" by twenty-some years, Carmichael describes the social contract as an act of "persuasi[on]" (Carmichael 146) rather than "force" (148), hence as an act of "consent" (147). A people, "fear[ful] of mischiefs to arise either from the weakness or vices of men" (Hutcheson 235)—what Rousseau calls that condition "where the obstacles to their preservation . . . prove greater than the strength that each man has to preserve himself in that state" (59)—agree to "confer" their "*natural liberty*" upon a "sovereign ruler" (Carmichael 156), what Rousseau describes as the "total alienation by each associate of himself and all his rights to the whole community" (60) and this in exchange for the "stipulated protection from the whole body, with all the other advantages of a civilized life, not only for himself but for his posterity" (Hutcheson 241). Out of this act materializes Carmichael's "sovereign civil government" (156) and Rousseau's "*body politic*" (61). Although Rousseau is less theologically inspired than Carmichael—Rousseau describes this "social pact" (61) as merely that instant "each one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will" (61)—both Carmichael and Rousseau reach the same conclusion as to the purpose of the "sovereign" (62) or why we "exchange" our "natural freedom" for "civil freedom" (60). It is "to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all" (60). Rousseau appeals to this argument in framing the social contract as "a reciprocal commitment between society and the individual" (62), what Carmichael even earlier defined as "a *double obligation, one, of the citizens with one another, the other a mutual obligation of the ruler and his subjects*" (147). This mutuality, in turn, is what both have in mind in describing the social contract as a "union . . . as perfect as it can be" (60), though Carmichael's "I say, civil government is rightly ascribed to the authorship of God, even while it is constituted directly by men" (155) does move him closer to Locke than to Rousseau: "Immediately, in place of the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association creates an artificial and corporate body composed of as many members as there are voters in the assembly, and by this same act that body acquires its unity, its common *ego*, its life and its will" (Rousseau 61). By this "total alienation by each associate

of himself and all his rights to the whole community" (60), "each man gives himself to all, [since] he gives himself to no one; and since there is no associate over whom he does not gain the same rights as others gain over him, each man recovers the equivalent of everything he loses, and in the bargain [civil society] he acquires more power to preserve what he has" (61). The difference between "a state of liberty" and "civil life" is not suppression of those "many dangers in a state of liberty," as they persist there, too (Hutcheson 239). Rather, it is that "in civil life we have a much surer prospect of protection from injuries by the united force of all" (239).

Emerson intersects with the social contract tradition at this point. "Politics" is the flipside of Carmichael's and Rousseau's argument for civil society. In a state of liberty, each covenants with each toward protection from injuries by the united force of all, the culmination of which is civil society. Emerson's nation of friends asks that I covenant toward exposure to injuries from all, for "wild liberty develops iron conscience. Want of liberty, by strengthening law and decorum, stupefies conscience" ("Politics" 384). Unlike Hobbes and Pufendorf, who paint a state of liberty as the most frightful monster of all (Hutcheson 239),<sup>17</sup> here, as David E. Johnson remarks "the price of freedom is absolute vulnerability to the other, to whatever or whoever may come" (287).

#### EMERSON'S POLITICS

Any politics ascribed to Emerson must reconcile itself with his caveat in "The Fugitive Slave Law": "every man speaks mainly to a class whom he works with and more or less fully represents" (779). As if anticipating the question on who comprises his audience, Emerson responds: "My own habitual view is to the well-being of students or scholars. And it is only when the public event affects them, that it very seriously touches me" (779). Emerson's emphasis on moral sentiment and fellow feeling would seem incongruent with his picture of the scholar, who decries public involvement. But Emerson is not claiming identification with the scholar or student; he is claiming identification with events concerning scholar and student. Nevertheless, there is a sense of exclusion in these passages, especially his "what I have to say is to them" (779). "It is to these that I am beforehand related and engaged," he says, "in this audience or out of it—to them and not to others" (779). Using a dash to emphasize his loyalty, Emerson leaves no doubt as to where his

loyalties lie. He is, however, merely playing with his audience's presumed understanding when he "say[s] the class of scholars or students— [for this] is a class which comprises in some sort all mankind" (779). Indeed, he has in mind not simply all mankind but "man in the best hours of his life" (770). It is that difference which earlier took the shape of May and Must and is here the difference between how we exist "virtually" and how we exist "actually" (779). With the newspaper as his synecdoche, Emerson unfolds a picture of an 1854 society incorporating the suburban businessmen on their trains into the city shops, counting room, yards, and warehouses, as much as the newsboy, politics, finances, philosophy, and religion (779). These readers comprise "the readers and thinkers of 1854," and this is why we can say he refers to the readers and thinkers of 1854 and the classes this "class has come" to represent (779). For his point is not that there is no "chaff" (779) "in what [student or scholar] brings" (780). On the contrary, it is that within this "crude mass" of politics, finance, philosophy, and religion are "fact, thought, and wisdom . . . from all regions of the world" (780).

Yet Emerson pulls back from this liberal cornucopia of figures some pages later, when he observes that in Massachusetts "there has always existed a predominate conservative spirit" ("The Fugitive Slave Law" 785). He concedes that the Whigs "are a safe company to follow, and even agreeable" (786). However, he pauses when considering his affiliation to that "material necessit[y]" (786), as if solidarity would foreclose his liberal tendencies in the other direction. "But if we are Whigs," he writes, "let us be Whigs of nature and science, and so for all necessities. Let us know that, over and above all the *musts* of poverty and appetite, is the instinct of man to rise, and the instinct to love and help his brother" (786). Emerson's concern is the Whig's dismissal of this instinctual love for one's brother. Because such love is not mandated by the same rules as appetite, it may fall prey to the caprices of selfishness.

#### EMERSON AND FRIENDSHIP

Emerson, though, does identify boundaries in our expressions of love, lest we overstep the basis of our friendship with another: "Let him not cease an instant to be himself," he writes in "Friendship" (210). Emerson is referring to those two natural tendencies that can develop in friendship, which is either my tendency to shape my friend into an

image of myself, or my friend's tendency to shape himself/herself into the image I have of him/her. Both are misguided, for they ignore that "rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party" (210). He describes this mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness as rare. It is rare because of our difficulty in finding that right mean: if in our friendships we are not falling too much on the side of "antagonism," we are falling too much on the side of "compliance" (210). Still, what irks him is less an overabundance of antagonism or compliance than a feigned antagonism or compliance: "Let me be alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy" (210). Now, if we read him generously, Emerson could be suggesting that if one is compliant, one should be compliant; if one is antagonistic, one should be antagonistic. One should not, in other words, betray one's real sympathy. Emerson, though, does not equally weigh compliance and antagonism. There is a difference, when it comes to friendship. He is getting at something specific: not compliance but antagonism. His point is that all things being equal, friendship is not compliance but antagonism. And this is true, even if that sincerity comes at the price of the friendship. If mine is a friendship so fragile that I hesitate in the request to "pay [my] friend the compliment of truth," become perturbed in moments of "silence," why, I might ask, "need [I] be so eager to seek him?" he writes in "Character" (388). "If we are related," then "we shall meet" (338). True friendship embraces differences in the knowledge that friendship is only as strong as my ability "to do without it" (210). In those moments when I choose to be my friend's "echoe" instead of a "nettle in [his/her] side," offer "concession" (210) when what is expected is "resistance," I injure our friendship.

My search for this balance can break a friendship. But if so, the friendship was not sincere to begin with. Once I forget that "the only joy I have in his being mine, is that the *not mine* is *mine*," hence once I become "fear[ful]" of losing another, so do I lose the friendship ("Friendship" 210). When I attempt to bend "these disparities" against their will, what I do when I forget "that the *not mine* is *mine*," I do not strengthen our "alliance"; I merely undo that "deep identity" which, "beneath these disparities, unites [us]" (210). "To a great heart," Emerson writes, a friend will be as if "a stranger in a thousand particulars," differences which in the wrong hands may be "regard[ed]" as so much

“property” but in the right ones as “the noblest gift” (210). I honor and reciprocate the nobility of my friend’s gift, indeed, honor the nobility of the friendship, when I realize that however great the “buttons” on the gift may be, they are merely the ornamental polish to what most piques my interest inside, and what I aspire to “grow” closer to, which is the gift of his/her “thought” (210). Emerson’s language of buttons is intentional. If I “must needs him” so “close to” myself that my friend’s buttons are as visible as his “merits,” it is not friendship I seek, but “spectacle” (210). Friendship, he holds, is not sameness; it is difference. It is the celebration of the differences between his/her “merits” and my own, the former of which I see not when looking at myself, but only when I “[s]tand aside,” where I can “give those merits” the “room” to “expand” (210). For what I give room to, in standing aside, is our friendship, which, as friendship, “demands” as much the “freedom” to “expand” as the freedom to wilt (210).

Emerson’s position is a counterpoint to the Tory’s accommodation of the Whigs: the Whigs ought to similarly try to accommodate the Tory’s sympathetic tendencies. I read Emerson’s point on sympathetic accommodation in “Friendship” as his returning to his discussion of Mays and Musts in “The Fugitive Slave Law,” which, like “Friendship,” concerns the relation of freedom to obligation. Indeed, both essays are his attempt to answer his question on how to negotiate the relation between Mays and Musts. It is a question whose answer, I want to suggest, lies in rethinking the relation between friendship and the political as in fact temporal.

#### EMERSON’S FLOWERS

“Politics” is his response, in the form of a philosophical metaphor, to two dominant understandings of the state. We encountered these figures (Cadava 74) in “The Fugitive Slave Law” as Mays and Musts. However, they begin in “Politics” as “young citizen” and “old statesman” (“Politics” 378). If the elder statesman’s is a picture of the state in “rigid repose, with certain names, men and institutions rooted like oak trees to centre, round which all arrange themselves” (378) the young citizen’s is a more palliative rendering.<sup>18</sup> In this view, names, individuals, and institutions are not oak trees rooted to the ground, but are “fluid,” without “roots” or “centres” (378). This is thus the difference of time. Whereas the latter reflects a logic of “freeze,” the former reflects a

logic of "flow" (West 36). In making sense of my relations with others and with myself, I appeal to a meteorological prism, imagining myself beginning as "flow" and concluding as "freeze," starting without and discovering myself with roots and centres. Nor is this an insignificant metaphor of Emerson's, which he foregrounds in "The Poet" but anticipates in "Circles."

"Nothing is secure," he writes in "Circles," "but life, transition, the energizing spirit" (261). "The past," he continues, "is always swallowed and forgotten" (261). This is fine, depending on one's point of view, even liberating. In "Circles," though, the tone of this forgetfulness is regret. Emerson chastises those who hold on to the past. They do not have the "adroitness" to "keep the old and trodden round" while also "mak[ing] a new road to new and better goals" (261). It is a sentiment already revealing his desire to temper his language of "always forgotten," to position our act less as one of forgetting than of balancing. And he does this, subsequently drawing us to another contrast. While we may find ourselves helpless before "this incessant movement and progression which all things partake," we know that this "incessant movement" "could never become sensible to us but by contrast to some principle of fixture or stability in the soul" (260). His mentioning the stability of the soul, while admittedly didactic, once more reveals his point as not nihilistic abnegation of the past. Indeed, as evidenced in his language of "adroitness," it is that we learn how to balance this "incessant movement" of time: that we understand how to "carr[y]" "the powers of the old," "the energies of the past" (261). For Emerson, this balancing is no further than that point beyond which I no longer care to distinguish between the "new" and the "vacant and vain"—when, in other words, my "fluid and volatile" (252) nature, the same by which I loved and aspired, enjoyed the fleeting experience of things as they "renew[ed], germinate[d], and sprung" (260), is as "settled" as my soul (261).

Doubtless, I am inclined to wrap my hands around this circle of time, especially when I find, for instance, "old age" "creep[ing] on a human mind." Still, I should not feed this tendency, which for Emerson arises out of my acquiescence to that "hardest task in the world": "to think" (266).<sup>19</sup> I am thinking of Emerson's "Intellect" and his example of an individual "explor[ing] the basis of civil government" (266). The individual "intend[s] his mind without respite, without rest, in one

direction,” and without fail his “best” efforts “avail him nothing” (266). In looking so intently at the thought in front of him, the explorer blinds himself to those “thoughts” that “are flitting before him” (266). This “devotion to a single thought” (269) is understandable. Indeed, for Emerson it is misguided only in the supposition that this intense concentration will let me “apprehend” what others “dimly forebode” (266). Not that the explorer has exhausted all options. Soon I try a different tactic: to let go, “walk abroad” (266). But I am stymied here, too, finding myself “as far from it as at first” (266). Finally, I wait patiently for “the truth [to] take form and clearness to [me],” “as if [I] needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought” (266). But again I am thwarted, as I move from the library to the clouds and the observatory. Like “the air, which is our natural element and the breath of our nostrils . . . if a stream be directed on the body for a time, it causes cold, fever, and even death” (269–70). In my blind devotion to a single thought, my “fasten[ing]” my “attention on a single aspect of truth . . . [and] that alone for a long time” (269) I similarly find myself “cold,” with “fever,” or even “d[ying]” (270). It is the dying that comes not from an unrelenting concentration, but from my misrecognizing “distorti[on]” for truth (269). Like the running stream and the air I breathe, I see a dropped bayonet—hence open myself to “new thoughts” (261)—not when thought “for a long time,” as if a thought were forcibly dissimulated into some “single aspect of truth” (269). I do so merely when thought from time to time, from different perspectives, “up, down, around,” with “no enclosures” (269). For then I see with the “uncommon[ness]” and “inspir[ation]” (268) that accompanies “labor[ing] with [one’s] brains” (266)—that labor which “leav[es me]” not with “familiari[ty],” but “wonder” and “stupid[ty]” (268).

I may never find the source of my “most wonderful inspirations” (268), to remain with Emerson’s “Intellect.” Perhaps, though, I will “see” “the ray of light” which “passes invisible through space”—metaphorized here as a fallen bayonet (268). And this not with “instruction” (268) but by turning to my imagination:

For as soon as we let our will go and let the unconscious states ensue, see what cunning draughtsmen we are! We entertain ourselves with wonderful forms of men, of women, of animals, of gardens, of woods and of monsters, and the mystic pencil

wherewith we then draw has no awkwardness or inexperience, no meagreness or poverty; it can design well and group well; its composition is full of art, its colors are well laid on and the whole canvas which it paints is lifelike and apt to touch us with terror, with tenderness, with desire and with grief. Neither are the artist's copies from experience ever mere copies, but always touched and softened by tints from this ideal domain. (269)

This "ideal domain" belongs to the painter and the poet—Emerson's skaters of time's circle.

And it is a domain I previously eschewed. I did not—as the explorer—see the fall of my neighbor's bayonet. Indeed, I could not see it, since I—like the "stillness and composed attitude of the library" in which I sought my answer—was "embalmed" ("Intellect" 264). I tried to "separate [truth] by the intellect," and thus to seek through "deliberation" only what "[my] spontaneous glance shall bring [me]" (264). Yet this embalming is what I thought I "wanted" all along (266).<sup>20</sup> The artist sees truth, but only for a moment, what Emerson describes as when we "rise from [our] bed, or walk abroad in the morning after meditating the matter before sleep on the previous night" (264). For it is in these moments, when "[I] have little control over [my] thoughts," hence "do not determine what [I] will think," that my "senses" are most "open" (265)—those same senses that, "trusting" only "instinct," now "suffer the intellect to see" (265) those "passion[ate] flashes" that "momentar[ily]" "[a]light" my "dark chamber" (267), and thus, in that moment, ask me to "believe" (265). After all, though "God enters . . . into every individual," it is only "by a private door" (264).

#### EMERSON AND SKATING WELL

The "art of [living] life," Emerson writes in "Experience" (314) and returns to in "Circles," lies not in grinding our "concentric circles" to a halt ("Circles" 258)—the explorer's dream—but in learning how to "skate well on them" ("Experiences" 314). The "slight dislocations" I find in nature (258)—"fever, intemperance, insanity, stupidity, and crime" (261)—are not meant to be "smothered" over (268). Indeed, only when I lose myself and my balance (270), hence am forced to confront the spontaneous, do I see the good. And what I see—as he notes in "Spiritual Laws"—is that "the last analysis can no wise be made"



(175). “Hope” and “aspiration” may not stop me from “grow[ing]” old, even dying (261). They can remind me, however, as I once more find my “eyes uplifted” and my “wrinkles smoothed,” that the “actual” is still not the “necessary” (261). It is my remembrance—“those brief moments” (“The Over-Soul” 236) in which I discover myself “perfumed again with hope and power” (“Circles” 261)—that May and Must are just two sides of the same circle.

And it is, I suspect, what so charms Emerson about the Over-Soul. While “th[at] universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related . . . is . . . self-sufficing and perfect in every hour,” and Emerson means this literally, as in the “act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, [being] one,” we, as mortals here on earth, must content ourselves with “liv[ing] in succession, in division, in parts, in particles” and so with “see[ing] the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree” (“The Over-Soul” 237). This is Emerson’s best example of what in “The Poet” he calls our division between “flow” and “freeze” (302), a division that finds him looking back to his “Spiritual Laws.” Although the imagery in both essays is close to his discussion of the lived life in “The Over-Soul” and its own insistence on life as “succession” and “division,” the twist he adds in “The Poet” and “Spiritual Laws” is to imagine our being in the world—“piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal and the tree”—not as an example of succession but of a continuum. As children, we see the world as “flow.” “Rigid” roots and centers disappear within the “fluid[ity]” of a “consciousness” that imagines itself “inexhaustibl[y]” “immortal” (“Spiritual Laws” 175). As adults, though, we see through the “simplicity of nature”; its “wild fertility”—which we earlier took to go on “for ever and ever”—we now see as “formed,” “done” (175). Still, mine is a choice, “between truth and repose” (“Intellect” 271). If I find myself in repose, perhaps I have taken myself too seriously, forgotten those “particles” (“Politics” 378) that still go around me.

I can, of course, resist time, what Emerson calls the “contracting influence of so-called science” (“Experience” 311). Yet as we saw earlier in “The Over-Soul,” “Intellect,” “Circles,” “The Poet”—and arguably “The Fugitive Slave Law” and “Politics”—Emerson does not ask that I mourn this loss of the universal. He asks that I remember its appearance “in the secondary form”: not the universal from “*all sides*” (398) wherein “all persons, all things which [I] have known, are here present”—

Hobbes's view of Nature in which "[I] should be imprisoned and unable to move" ("Nominalist and Realist" 399)—but the universal as a circle.

In turning my eyes to the particles that go around me—as I move from May to Must—Nature's "attributes" now "burst in on [me]" ("Nominalist and Realist" 398), rooted as I increasingly seem to be. I am dazzled by the "speed of [their] rotation," but I also know, from my reaction, that "a new whole [has] formed" (398). My hope for longevity lies in remembering that what appears as a "representation complete in the experience of each mind" (398)—my becoming Must—was that portrait arrived at through several "conscious steps" of mine (399). It is Emerson's plea for patience, as much for myself as others—a plea anticipated in "Friendship" and echoed "The Fugitive Slave Law"—the hope that I "infer the genius of nature from the best particulars," thus with "a becoming charity," indeed humility (399). He refers to this humility in "Nominalist and Realist" when, for instance, he says that while "every man is a channel through which heaven floweth," it remains my responsibility to "see the parts wisely" (399). But he also does so when he says "care" should be "taken that the whole tune be played," which I take to be the same point: his hope that I recognize that "something spherical and infinite in every man"—including myself (398). An oak tree is also "a piece of pure nature . . . large as morning or night, and virtuous as a brier-rose" (398). How do I resolve this contradiction? By understanding "the secret of the world," that "all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and return afterwards again" (398–399). "Your turn now, my turn next" (398), Emerson says, winking. Emerson's is as much that childhood embrace of spontaneity and uncertainty as the foundation of a politics, the idea—terrifying and hopeful—that "nothing is dead" (399), not even ourselves.

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#### NOTES

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1. On Emerson and meteorology, see Cadava.

2. Hägglund offers a powerful reading of survival as a constitutive condition. While I may “desire” to “remove” “mutability, corruptibility, and violability,” believing they represent “a lack of being,” they are, rather, just those “features . . . essential to everything that is desired” (9).

3. DeGabriele offers a nuanced reading of this problem in Hobbes from the perspective of Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

4. In Hobbes, “WARRE consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known” (88).

5. Brettschneider offers an instructive account of what Hobbes and Rousseau share in contemporary debates on capital punishment.

6. Hobbes continues: “For example, if I Covenant to pay a ransome, or service for my life, to an enemy; I am bound by it. For it is a contract, wherein one receiveth the benefit of life; the other is to receive mony, or service for it; and consequently, where no other Law (as in the condition, of meer Nature) forbideth the performance, the Covenant is valid” (97–98). While this may raise some eyebrows, especially Hobbes’s insistence of the validity of contract in a state of nature, it is in keeping with his larger point, that “before the time of Civill Society, . . . there is nothing can strengthen a Covenant of Peace agreed on, . . . but the feare of that Invisible Power, which they every one Worship as God; and Feare as a Revenger of their perfidy” (99). But then, incredibly, he insists this holds “even in Common-wealths,” where “if,” for example, “I be forced to redeem my selfe from a Theefe by promising him money, I am bound to pay it, till the Civill Law discharge me” (98). Compare with Hutcheson’s much narrower interpretation of validity in obligation and contract: “But when I am forced to contract through fear of evils unjustly threatened . . . we must distinguish whether these evils are threatened under some plausible shew of right as might possibly impose upon an honest man, or on the other, by openly avowed injustice, without any such shadow of right. . . . [Thus] where violence is used or threatened, without any pretence of right, to extort promises or contracts, they cannot be obligatory. By such violence the author of it plainly abdicates or forfeits all the rights of men; all the benefits to be claimed from the law of nature, or the humanity of his fellows; as he openly professes himself a common enemy to all, free from any social tye” (164–65). For Hutcheson—to draw from Hobbes, who replaces God with civil society—“whatsoever I may lawfully do without Obligation, the same I may [not] lawfully Covenant to do through fear” (Hobbes 98).

7. I am grateful to David E. Johnson for this insight.

8. My reading of Hobbes owes a great deal to Hamacher's "Wild Promises." I am indebted to David E. Johnson for his own reading of Hamacher's essay in my graduate seminar with him at the University at Buffalo in fall 2004, "Hobbes and Locke and the Politics of Language."

9. See Marcus on the intersubjective relation between signs and their receipt, doer and audience, "presence and mediation, display and distance, acting and watching, talking and listening" (1005).

10. See Hussain for an illuminating discussion of the right of "necessity" as "a temporal condition" (109).

11. This is, in different language, what Brettschneider describes as Hobbes's appeal to "reason" "as [that] forward-looking process by which an individual understands the benefits he or she will receive" (76n31).

12. The Law of Nature "bindeth" me since what the law "forbiddeh" (113), above even "breach of Covenant" (113), is that injury to myself. This is the injury, for Hobbes, I can only invite by such a covenant, a covenant, in turn, I can only "refuse to do" (113). Such is an instance, then, as DeGabriele observes, where my appeal to the "spirit" of the "law" is in conflict with, and acquiesces before, the "letter" of the "law" (1).

13. On recognition as responsibility in Shakespeare, see Beckwith.

14. Reading Cavell on Emerson and aversive thinking, Lysaker and Rossi observe: "If we avert ourselves from this form of society, however, we simultaneously embrace another form of society—society as friendship, as the company of those whom we respect, desire, and cherish" (66–67). My only reservation would be the certainty of friendship supposed by that surrender of the bayonet, a friendship that I suggest is only signified. This certainty diminishes the time Cavell appeals to in his theory of friendship, where "since aversion is a *continual turning away* from society, it is thereby a *continual turning toward* it" (59). Still, I would draw back from Cavell's systolic and diastolic metaphor of "turning." The metaphor is overly teleological in its expression of my relation to friendship, denying the extent to which, as Arsić observes, my turning away from one community is not necessarily my "turning toward . . . acceptance" of another (88). Cavell's metaphor leaves no room for my finding of that "rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness" ("Friendship" 210), Emerson's, by which I, at each turn, can "consent" (210) to "pay [a] friend the compliment of [my] truth" ("Character" 338), in this instance my surrender of the bayonet, later, my friendship, the consent that is again that reminder, mine as much as another's, that "before there can be very one, [t]here must be very two" (210). When I turn toward another society, say, the "other party" (210), I turn, first, toward another individual, and "if we are related" (338), our recalling Emerson's ironic understanding of friendship as our capacity to avoid the other, then "we shall meet" (338), hence not necessarily so. Any individuals I discover afterward, following surrender of my bayonet, are individuals I perhaps "respect" but not, at least not yet, and maybe never, "desire" or "cherish," or even see as "friends."

15. On the problem of sentimentalism in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Miguel Méndez's *Pilgrims in Aztlan* (1992), see Michaelsen.

16. Locke cites his source as Romans 13.3, "God hath . . . appointed government."

17. In his editorial gloss of this passage in Hutcheson, Luigi Turco writes: "The [anonymous] translator, as well as Hutcheson, may have in mind those passages of Pufendorf, such as *Di iure nat.* 2.2.2. or *De officio* 2.1.9, where Pufendorf is echoing Hobbes, *De cive* 1.13" (Hutcheson 239).

18. Though I am reversing Emerson's positioning of these metaphorical figures, such is, I hope, the spirit with which Emerson intended us to read the metaphor.

19. On thinking in Emerson, see Arsić.

20. My reading of this masochistic aspect of the explorer is gratefully indebted to Arsić's brilliant reading of the letters between Abelard and Heloise ("On Leaving No Address").

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