Rousseau and Emerson on Solitude, Sympathy, and the American Indian

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This essay asserts that solitude encourages sympathy. This is counterintuitive – Scottish moral sense theorists, for example, held that humans’ sociability encouraged their sympathy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Ralph Waldo Emerson refute the Scots’ argument. For both Rousseau and Emerson, solitude allowed aimless contemplation, encouraging the contemplator to imagine himself as another person. Imagining and sharing another’s mental states taught sympathy. Rousseau and Emerson personally experimented with this, taking solitary nature walks that cultivated their faculty of sympathy. Finally, the Scots, Rousseau, and Emerson grounded their arguments on sympathy on descriptions of American Indians – for the Scottish theorists and Rousseau, the Indian hinted at the innateness of sympathy, while for Emerson, contemplating the Indian taught compassion.

Rousseau and Emerson hold solitude encourages sympathy. This is odd - one would expect solitude discourages pity. Hobbes, for example, asserts natural man is solitary, and thus lacks sympathy. Scottish moral sense theorists like Hume and Smith claimed that man is sociable, and thus sympathetic. Canonically, sociability is tied to sympathy. Thus the question for this essay: how does solitude provoke sympathy?

Solitude invites aimless contemplation. In daydreaming, one imagines oneself as another, imagining the other’s feelings, and sympathizing with the other. Rousseau and Emerson personally experienced this. In *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* Rousseau recalls his flight to a secluded wooded island. He walked the island in aimless reverie, and returning to society, maintained his haphazard thought. Imagining himself as his companions, he shared their emotions. Emerson, frustrated with Jacksonian slavery and Indian removal, left politics to take solitary nature walks. He slipped into contemplation, eventually imagining himself as the African American slaves of which he read. This sympathy pushed him to abolitionist activism. “In the woods, we return to reason,” to our sympathetic moral intuition, Emerson writes. For both Rousseau and Emerson, solitude allows the aimless, unstructured thought that awakens our natural sympathy.

The American Indian informed Rousseau and Emerson’s ideas on sympathy. Eighteenth-century Scottish moral sense theorists held that Native Americans demonstrated man’s natural, innate faculties, including compassion. Rousseau drew on the Scotsmen Hutcheson and Hume in attributing pity to Native Americans. For Rousseau, solitary contemplation approximated man’s original, innocent, and sympathetic state. Emerson too adopted the Scots’ belief in innate sympathy – moral sense theory was perhaps the greatest influence on Emerson’s thought. Writing a century after Hume and Rousseau, Emerson was unconcerned with the state of nature and natural man. Rather, he looked to race science, which asserted that Indians and African Americans were doomed to extinction at the hands of whites. Indian removal, along with slavery, provoked Emerson’s sympathy, and a chance to educate white Americans in compassion.

This essay proceeds in three steps. First it briefly introduces Scottish moral sense theory, which held sympathy occurred in society of others. Second, it recounts Rousseau’s response to the Scots, which asserted solitary contemplation encourages pity. Finally, it recounts Emerson’s response, which like Rousseau’s, holds solitude brings one closer to others. The paper moves chronologically, and thus is also a genealogy of Indians’ role in moral sense theory. The paper runs from Hutcheson’s 1725 work on Indians and sympathy, to Hume’s in 1738, to Adam Smith’s debates with Rousseau in the 1750s, to Emerson’s writings in the mid-1800s.

**I. Indians and Scottish Moral Sense Theory**

In the seventeenth century, English debate on the innateness of sympathy hinged on descriptions of American Indians. To English observers, Indians revealed man’s original, innate qualities, untainted by civilization. Hobbes’ natural man, driven by an inborn “restless desire of power after power,” lacked compassion and thus lived in solitude – famously his life was “*solitary*, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) buttressed this assertion by repeatedly recounting the savagery of Indians. What little sympathy Indians had was not innate or unconscious, but came through civilized reason. Indians, Hobbes claimed, had rudimentary language, and thus the capacity to reason, and form moral truths – “the savages of America are not without some moral sentences” he wrote.[[1]](#endnote-1) Hobbes drew widespread backlash. Locke too claimed Indians represented natural man, writing “Indians in America, [are] still a pattern of the first ages in Asia and Europe.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Yet in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke rejected Hobbes’ innately brutal savage by asserting that humans largely lacked inborn qualities. Locke did grant humans had an innate, God-given faculty of reason which, if properly developed into right reason, led them to be “rational and industrious,” not “contentious and quarrelsome.” Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, grandson of Locke’s patron, also refuted Hobbes in his 1699 *Inquiry Concerning Virtue*. Like Locke, Shaftesbury claimed God granted man reason, adding that this reason led man to sympathy.[[3]](#endnote-3)

By the eighteenth century, the rebuttal to Hobbes shifted north to Scotland. Francis Hutcheson’s 1725 *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* followed Shaftesbury in claiming empathy was ingrained in human nature, but more particularly, Hutcheson claimed empathy was so innate as to come unconsciously. As John B. Radner writes, “Hutcheson tries very hard to free both the feeling of compassion and whatever action follows this feeling from thinking; for thinking of any sort would be an opening to selfish calculation. So he emphasizes that the feeling of compassion is instantaneous and virtually automatic…not the product of any sort of reflection.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Since man empathized unreflectively, he impartially sympathized with friends and strangers alike. Hutcheson admitted that empathy, sharing the pain of others, was unappealing to Hobbes’ self-interested individual, but since empathy was automatic, the Hobbesian individual would have no choice but to empathize with others. Thus Hutcheson refuted Hobbes. Further, Hutcheson debunked the hyperbolic travel literature that portrayed American Indians as merciless savages. Among Indians he found an uncorrupted “simplicity of manners, and innocence of behavior” that revealed man’s innate moral sense. Hutcheson concluded that Europeans and Native Americans shared much, including a common moral sense.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Two of Hutcheson’s pupils, David Hume and Adam Smith, revised Hutcheson’s moral sense theory. For Hume and Smith, sympathy was neither automatic nor unconscious. In his 1738 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume responded a spectator could only roughly infer another’s mental state through behavioral cues. To sympathize with the other took an extra step – imagination, conjuring “a lively notion” of the other’s feeling. Since it took “a great effort of imagination to form such lively ideas of even the present sentiment of others,” sympathy was a difficult and a voluntary exercise. Sympathy grew easier as the observed person grew more expressive, particularly when in pain.[[6]](#endnote-6) Finally, for Hume, sympathy was an innate faculty of man, and one that pointed to man’s natural sociability. He asserts, against Hobbes, that “’tis utterly impossible for men to remain any considerable time in that savage condition, which precedes society…[man’s] very first state and situation must be esteem’d social.” Thus, even Indians live sociably: “this we find verified in the *American* tribes, where men live in concord and amity among themselves without any establish’d government.”

Smith followed Hume in asserting sympathy required imagination. Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) opens: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel,” Smith claimed, “…it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of what are [their] sensations.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Rather than sharing in the feelings of another, we can imagine them, though “weaker in degree.” In seeing a man stretched on the rack, we shudder at the pain we would feel in his place. This is not self-interested fear that we will someday be in the victim’s place; rather, we imagine we are the victim, and the pain he feels. “Men of the most robust make,” Smith claims, “observe looking upon sore eyes [of another] they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason.” The strongest affects are those of bodily suffering or pleasure, common to all humans.

Sympathy requires deliberation. First, Smith’s sympathy entails one contemplate another’s mental state. One will not mirror the rage of an angry man if his grievance is unknown: “[t]here are some passions of which the expressions excite no sympathy…As we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves.” The angry man, unable to communicate his frustration, grows angrier when he sees we do not approve of it. Second, even with adequate information, one may willingly withhold sympathy. If sympathy is voluntary, when do we grant it and when do we withhold it? Smith suggests we imagine ourselves as an impartial spectator, and grant approbation and disapprobation accordingly.[[8]](#endnote-8) Following Hutcheson, Smith claims humans are naturally and impartially sympathetic, but Smith adds that sympathy is contingent on our deliberation about others’ behavior. We constrain the impartial spectator with rules drawn from our personal experience and from society. Spectators derived from different cultures will have different moral codes. Smith writes “[e]very age and country look upon that degree of each quality which is commonly to be met with in those who are esteemed among themselves, as the golden mean of that particular talent or virtue.” The moral sentiments of a people depend on their development, on the age in which they live.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Writing in the early eighteenth century, Hutcheson and Hume relied on sparse secondhand accounts of Native Americans, and discussed primitive human societies in vague, speculative terms.[[10]](#endnote-10) By the middle of the century – Smith’s time – Scotsmen populating the American colonies regularly contacted Indians. Roving Scottish naturalists staffed American universities, Scottish settlers and missionaries flocked to the frontiers, and Scottish soldiers fought Britain’s Indian wars. Accounts of Indian warriors’ hardiness and sternness filtered back to Scotland, informing the Smith’s work.[[11]](#endnote-11) Smith asserted Indians were primitive and solitary, blunting their moral sensitivity. Smith’s argument was economic – he claimed division of labor increased productivity, allowing increased leisure time. The leisurely diversions of theater and literature trained audiences to imagine themselves as the drama’s characters. A society trained in moral imagination would be more inclined toward sympathy. Smith claimed Indians lacked division of labor and the leisure time to develop their aesthetic and moral sense.[[12]](#endnote-12) Smith writes: “If our own misery pinches us very severely, we have no leisure to attend to that of our neighbor: and all savages are too much occupied with their own wants and necessities, to give much attention to those of another person. A savage, therefore, whatever the nature of his distress, expects no sympathy from those about him.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

This stoicism was the Indians’ chief fault, but also their chief virtue. Throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* Smith lauded self-restraint or “self-command,” particularly in the face of death. Smith asserts “We are disgusted by that clamorous grief” with which some confront death, but “reverence that silent majestic sorrow” of Socrates, who stoically faced death in the *Crito.* Similarly, when an American “savage is made prisoner of war and receives, as is usual, the sentence of death from his conquerors, he hears it without expressing any emotion, and afterwards submits to the most dreadful tortures without ever bemoaning himself…the spectators express the same insensibility; the sight of so horrible an object seems to make no impression on them.” Smith admires the Indians’ for this “heroic and unconquerable firmness.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

**II. Rousseau on Solitude, Reverie, and Pity**

In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), Rousseau affirms Hutcheson’s assertion that sympathy is reflexive, not deliberative, as Hume and Smith claim. *The Discourse* claims reflection – the ability to reason sequentially – is not a faculty of solitary, primitive man. “All the kinds of knowledge that demand reflection,” Rousseau clarifies in a footnote “all those acquired only by the concatenation of ideas perfected only successively, appear to be beyond the grasp of savage man, owing to the lack of communication with his fellow man.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Incapable of sequential reasoning, Rousseau’s Caribbean savage lacks foresight, selling his bed in the morning and tearfully repurchasing it in the night. Rousseau explains “His soul, agitated by nothing, is given over to the single feeling of his own present existence, without any idea of the future, however near it may be, and his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the end of the day.”[[16]](#endnote-16) Savage man feels *amour de soi*, the impulse toward self-preservation, but like animals, he responds to pleasure and pain as he meets them, lacking a sense of his own future or his death. Here Rousseau intentionally rebuts Hobbes. For Hobbes, natural man is aware of the potential of his death. For Rousseau, natural man is ignorant of this threat, and thus is less bellicose than Hobbes claims.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Consequently, *amour de soi* is largely an innocent passion.

Rousseau’s savage is innately sympathetic. Primitive man does not differentiate himself from his surroundings, making his home as he finds it in nature. Nor does he distinguish himself from his fellow man, for he is tied to them through pity, imagining their suffering as if it were his own.[[18]](#endnote-18) This pity predates self-interested calculation, which Rousseau dubs “reflection.” Pity is “a virtue all the more universal and all the more useful to man in that it precedes in him any kind of reflection, so natural that even animals sometimes show natural signs of it.” Rousseau recounts the angst of a prisoner unable to save a child from a crazed animal. “What anguish he must suffer at this sight,” Rousseau concludes. “Such is the pure movement of nature prior to all reflection. Such is the natural force of pity, which the most depraved mores still have difficulty destroying.” And later: “Pity is what carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering.”[[19]](#endnote-19) Here Rousseau follows Shaftesbury and particularly Hutcheson.[[20]](#endnote-20) For Hutcheson, “compassion is instantaneous and virtually automatic…not the product of any sort of reflection.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

Man eventually leaves his primitive, solitary state for society. Entering society, man develops language, and, per Hobbes, language yields reason. Words allow man to conceive of universals existing independently of particular objects. Linking words into a sentence strings universal concepts into a meaningful chain, the grounding for reflection. This opens man’s troubles. Rousseau asserts: “most of our ills are our own making, and…we could have avoided nearly all of them by preserving the simple, regular, solitary lifestyle prescribed to us by nature. If nature has destined us to be healthy, I almost dare to affirm the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature, and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal.” Humans gather in primitive society, but natural variation privileges some over others. Gathered around their huts or beneath a tree, humans observe some are better dancers or singers than others. Public reflection on difference implants in man an awareness of himself as distinct from others, yielding *amour-propre* – vanity and the desire for approval.[[22]](#endnote-22) This desire yields instrumentality and forethought, and men plan to better themselves relative to others. Pity atrophies. As Locke notes, property and enclosure of land follow, and from that, rules of justice to enforce division. Difference in natural talents favors some over others, the distribution of property becomes lopsided and protected by law. Rousseau concludes “a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the entire human race to labor, servitude, and misery.”[[23]](#endnote-23)

In *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1778)*,* Rousseau posits that through solitary contemplation, civilized man regains his primitive sympathy.[[24]](#endnote-24) *The Reveries* recount Rousseau’s flight from persecution and refuge on a secluded island on Lake Bienne, near Bern, Switzerland in 1765. For five weeks he wandered the island in quiet, unstructured reverie. Returning to society, Rousseau maintained this impulsive, haphazard thought. Rousseau found his natural, innate impulse toward sympathy guided his interactions with others. In sum, solitude invites unstructured thought, which stirs one’s natural inclination toward pity.

*The Reveries* open as Rousseau flees to his wooded island seeking solitude. He seeks to forget his persecutors, writing “I might forget [the world’s] existence, and that it might forget mine.” Embracing his exile, he wishes never to see “any inhabitant of the continent to remind me of all the different calamities they have taken pleasure in heaping on me for so many years! They would soon be forever forgotten.” Solitude helps Rousseau forget his detractors by fixing his mind on nature, rather than his fellow man. Later he claims “I never meditate, I never dream more explicitly than when I forget myself. I feel ecstasies and inexpressible raptures in blending, so to speak, into the system of beings and in making myself one with the whole of nature.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

This self-forgetting happens in nature. Rousseau pocketed Carl Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturea*, identifying plants as he walked. Frequently he would return with samples, assembling a herbarium he kept long after he left the island. “Botany,” he claims, “makes me forget men’s persecutions, their hatred, scorn, insults.” He adds “I clamber up rocks and mountains, I go deep into values and woods in order to slip away, as much as possible, from the memory of men and the attacks of the wicked.”[[26]](#endnote-26) Immersing himself in nature, he forgets the attacks of others, and gradually, he forgets himself, becoming one with his surroundings. Like the Caribbean savage, in reverie, he loses sense of time, and with it memory. The Caribbean savage is surprised to find he sold his bed in the morning, having forgotten this. Similarly, Rousseau forgets his tormentors and himself.

Forgetting the judgment of others, Rousseau slips from instrumental, civilized reflection to haphazard reverie. He contrasts reverie and reflection in *The Reveries*’ seventh chapter: “Reverie relaxes and amuses me; reflection tires and saddens me; thinking was always a painful and charmless occupation for me.” One afternoon Rousseau rows into the middle of the lake. He recalls “and there, stretching myself out full-length in the boat, my eyes turned to heaven, I let myself slowly drift back and forth with the water, sometimes for several hours, plunged into a thousand confused, but delightful reveries.” He reiterates: “without any trace of time’s passage; without any other sentiment or deprivation or of enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear, except that alone of our existence, and having this sentiment alone fill it completely as long as this state lasts, he who finds himself in it can call himself happy.” Like the savage of the *Second* *Discourse* whose “soul, agitated by nothing, is given over to the single feeling of his own present existence,” Rousseau feels only the sentiment of being. However, Rousseau consistently notes he cannot fully return to this savage state, for these moments are “too rare and too rapid to constitute a state of being.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

Reverie quiets *amour-propre*. Later pausing by the lakeshore, Rousseau finds “some weak and short reflection about the instability of things in this world arose, an image brought on by the surface of the water.” “Reflection” here has twin meanings. Rousseau sees his image reflected in the water, aware of himself as distinct from his surroundings.[[28]](#endnote-28) Second, this pushes him to contemplate his unfortunate fate at the hands of others, interrupting the reverie. “But soon these impressions were erased” by the uniform, timeless lapping of the waves, which “plunged [my soul] into a delightful reverie in which night would often surprise me without having noticed it.” Waves break the image of Rousseau in the lake, distracting him from his self-reflection.

Reverie is a sentiment of connection to the world, opposed to reflection on man’s distinction from the world. When one retreats into the solitude of nature, “[a] sweet and deep reverie takes possession of his senses then, and through a delicious intoxication he loses himself in the immensity of this beautiful system with which he feels himself one. Then, all particular objects elude him; he sees and feels nothing except in the whole.” Rousseau’s use of “elude” is deceptive. Rather than suggesting particular natural objects are beyond his grasp, Rousseau implies he merges with all natural objects while in reverie. For Rousseau, this connection is a bodily one. The primitive savage, “agile, fleet-footed, and vigorous,” moves seamlessly through nature. When threatened by predators, “[n]atural arms, which are tree branches and stones” supplement his hands. Hottentots of southern Africa exemplify this handiness for Rousseau. Quoting a contemporary source, he claims the Hottentots have “such a sure hand,” they can peg a target with a stone with such skill, it seems “their stone is carried by an invisible hand.” [[29]](#endnote-29) Objects do not impede the savage, but are ready at hand. Here Rousseau anticipates Heidegger’s claim that a human is most peaceful when at harmony with the objects in the world.[[30]](#endnote-30)

Finally, reverie encourages sympathy. In reverie, Rousseau is unconcerned with the future. Without prospective, instrumental thinking, Rousseau does not use others instrumentally, and thus can sympathize with others. Rousseau opens the sixth chapter of *The Reveries* with an example. On a nature walk, Rousseau crossed paths with a disabled child and on impulse gave the child alms, expecting no gratitude in return. Coming from fleeting inclination, rather than hope of future reward, this “tendency was intense, true, pure, and nothing in by most secret self ever belied it.” For Rousseau, this was a moment of sympathy, particularly of shared contentment: “following the *impulses* of my heart, I could sometimes make another heart content.”[[31]](#endnote-31) As Charles Butterworth notes, it is “[b]ecause he follows his feelings, rather than the dictates of his reason,” Rousseau acts in accord with “his natural goodness combined with his excessive pity.”[[32]](#endnote-32)

As he returned to society, Rousseau’s impulsive reverie, and thus his sense of sympathy, atrophied. As Rousseau repeated this walk and donation to the boy, “[t]his pleasure, having become a habit, was inexplicably transformed into a kind of duty I soon felt to be annoying.” Eventually Rousseau came to anticipate the child, making donations to assuage his guilt, the child in turn used him for alms, and the relationship grew instrumental. Rousseau thus concludes: “the continuation of the very attentiveness that had charmed me at first no longer struck me as anything but an almost unbearable annoyance…from these first good deeds, which my heart poured out effusively, were forged chains of subsequent liabilities I had not foreseen and whose yoke I could no longer shake.” In reverie, with no sense of time, Rousseau does not expect future interactions, cannot informally contract with the child, and thus his gift is an innocent, sympathetic one. With the prospect of future interactions, he views the child merely as a means to assuage his guilt, and the relationship is corrupted.

**III. Emerson on Solitude, Imagination, and Sympathy**

Emerson’s idea of sympathy drew on Hume, Smith and Rousseau. Following Rousseau, Emerson claimed solitude encouraged haphazard reverie, which in turn sparked the moral imagination. This moral imagination stirred sympathy, a point Emerson took from Hume and Smith.

Emerson subscribed to Scottish moral sense theory throughout his life. In the early nineteenth centuries, moral sense theory dominated America’s colleges. At Harvard Emerson likely read Shaftesbury, Locke’s *Essay*, and Hutcheson, and penned an 1821 dissertation on Hume and Smith’s moral sense theory.[[33]](#endnote-33) The following year, Emerson declared in his journal that the sympathy was a “law which pervades all intelligent beings…a rule coextensive and coeval with mind.” In 1829, Emerson became a pastor at Boston’s Second Church, placing him in conversation with Boston Unitarians, many of whom also subscribed to moral sense theory. In the following decade, Emerson drifted toward political activism, and by the 1840s, to abolitionism. He became a moral suasionist, using vivid descriptions of slavery to stir sympathy in his listeners. Suasionists adopted this tactic from the Scots.[[34]](#endnote-34) Emerson lectured across the North – in at least eight addresses between 1844 and 1861, Emerson affirmed humans’ innate moral intuition opposed slavery. As anti-slavery conversation faltered as the Civil War loomed, Emerson realized violence could also awaken the moral sense in others, praising John Brown for stirring Northerners’ moral sense. As Neal Dolan concludes: “We have found the Scottish Enlightenment idea of moral sentiment at the heart of much of Emerson’s writing; indeed, it is arguably the cornerstone of his entire intellectual edifice.”[[35]](#endnote-35)

Emerson also read Rousseau. He first read *Emile* as an undergraduate, returning to the work in 1825 and again in 1833.[[36]](#endnote-36) Around this time, he drafted journal entries on Rousseau’s *Social Contract and Confessions*, and his 1836 essay “Nature,” strongly recalls Rousseau’s romantic description of the natural world.[[37]](#endnote-37) The following year, troubled by Indian removal, Emerson took solitary, contemplative walks. Rousseau particularly informed Emerson’s practice of contemplative self-interrogation. In an 1844 journal entry, he refers to himself as “a worse self-tormentor than Rousseau.” Thirteen years later, in his 1857 “Country Life,” Emerson admits he admires Rousseau’s solitary nature walks.

Like Rousseau, Emerson felt solitary self-interrogation encouraged sympathy. How does one self-interrogate? Not, says Emerson, through popular politics, for there individuals will lose themselves in Jacksonian conventions, parades, and caucuses. He recounts the 1834 election: “Noisy Election; flags, boy processions, placards, badges, medals, bannered coaches – everything to get the hurrah on our side. That is the main end.” Parties clothe their ambition in noble principles – this was true of Jackson’s populist attack on the National Bank – but Emerson claims mass politics cannot provide moral education. Such education requires distance from party politics: “Conventions vote & resolve in multitude…It is only as a man detaches himself from all support & stands alone, that I see him strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is not a man better than a town?” He adds: “A whig victory…raises your spirits & you think easy days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. It can never be so. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the attainment of principles.”[[38]](#endnote-38)

Emerson posits an additional reason why one must retreat from mass politics: to participate in an unjust political order is to grow complicit in its injustices. When one supports the Jacksonian Democrats, one supports the slavery and Indian removal on which the party rests. As Jack Turner notes “Self-reliance and complicity are inversely proportionate: the greater one’s complicity, the lesser one’s self-reliance.”[[39]](#endnote-39)

Reform societies fought slavery and Indian removal, but were little better than parties. In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson fumes “do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor?...There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be; but your miscellaneous popular charities…alms to sots.”[[40]](#endnote-40) Charities and aid societies, while well-intentioned, cannot reveal one’s complicity; this comes through solitary contemplation.

Disillusioned with political and reform parties, Emerson took solitary nature walks. He asserts “A man feels that his time is too precious[,] objects within reach of his spirit too beautiful than that his attention should stoop to such disfigurements as Antimasonry or Convent Riots or General Jackson.” He asks “if a man should go to walk in the woods & should there find suspended on the oaks or bulrushes electioneering placards,” whether such placards would “exalt his meditation,” answering “In the hush of these woods I find no Jackson placards affixed to the trees.”[[41]](#endnote-41)

The nature walk let Emerson forget conventional politics. While walking, his thought shifted from the party and reform society to the natural world. The method of his thought shifted too. Political deliberation is sequential and purposeful. The student of politics binds himself to his party’s platform. Speeches, conventions, and newspapers direct his train of thought. Emerson practiced not deliberation but contemplation. While walking, he pondered objects as he met them, stooping over shrubs and pocketing pebbles, each thought sudden and independent of the last. He writes: “Nature abhors the old… every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition.”[[42]](#endnote-42) With no sense of past or time, Emerson wandered for hours, pondering aimlessly. In “Country Life,” Emerson compares his walks to those of Rousseau, later noting nature helps him forget politics: the benefit of “nature is to foster the peculiar genius of each man. That uncorrupted behavior we admire in the animals, and in young children” – the forgetful – “belongs also to…the man, who lives in the presence of nature.” In nature, one is autonomous, nurturing his own *peculiar* genius, rather than one dictated by habit or custom.

But Emerson disavows complete amnesia. He lambasts those who forget the political injustices in which they are complicit, especially affluent Northerners who consumed Southern cotton and Caribbean sugar.[[43]](#endnote-43) They forget these injustices by limiting them to the South or the Caribbean, “a great way off.” For Emerson, this forgetting is intentional: “If any mention was made of [slavery’s] homicide, madness, adultery, and intolerable tortures, we would let the church-bells ring louder, the church-organ swell its peal and drown the hideous sound.” The reference to the church is telling, for an unreflective donation to an abolitionist, religious, or temperance society was akin to purchasing ignorance, merely “alms to sots.”

One should remember complicity in slavery. In his 1841 “Self-Reliance,” Emerson mocked the abolitionist’s “incredible tenderness for black folks a thousand miles off,” reminding him “love afar is spite at home.” Empathy begins locally with “*my* poor,” with local laborers. In “New England Reformers,” he asks “Why should professional labor and that of the counting-house be paid so disproportionately to the labor of the porter and wood-sawyer?” Worse, these laborers, seeking credit, must grovel before the banker and lawyer. In his relative wealth, Emerson realizes the wide disparity between “the lot of me and the lot of thee, my poor brother, my poor sister.” Through daily commerce, Emerson encountered these laborers, developing solidarity with them. “Trade,” he muses, “gives me pause to think.” Writing in early 1844, Emerson still shied from political action, deriding socialism as a fad and the egalitarian communism of St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen as mindless conformity.[[44]](#endnote-44)

In his August 1844 “Emancipation” address, Emerson reversed his position, advocating political action against evils at home and abroad. He asserted New England’s textile mills abused both local New England laborers and slaves on distant cotton plantations. [[45]](#endnote-45) Love belonged both at home and afar. After 1844, Emerson devoted his energies not to the labor question, but to abolition by revealing complicity in distant slavery. In an 1855 lecture, he critiques a Northern mill owner not for his labor practices, but for ignoring the source of his cotton.[[46]](#endnote-46) Elsewhere he recalls his own “dreadful debt to the southern negro.”[[47]](#endnote-47) As before, trade reveals one’s debts. Contemplation is a specific kind of introspection – retrospection – remembering one’s past wrongs and their attendant debts. So, when one learns he is complicit, he ought to take this complicity as an obligation to aid those from whom he profits. Retrospection reveals specific debts to specific people.

Massachusetts life insulated Emerson from slavery. He occasionally witnessed Northern runaways and freemen impressed into servitude. These memories punctuated his contemplative walks. Memory “has its own vagaries and interruptions. Memory has a personality of its own, and volunteers or refuses its information at its will, not mine.” Emerson recalled black neighbors who, traveling south, were impressed into slavery:

As I have walked in the pastures along the edge of the woods, I could not keep my imagination on those agreeable figures, for other images intruded on me…poor black men of obscure employment as mariners, cooks, or stewards, in ships, yet citizens of this our Commonwealth of Massachusetts – freeborn as we – whom the slave-laws of the State of South Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana have arrested.

Yet Emerson did not witness the plantation slavery from which he benefitted. His personal experience, and thus his memory, was limited to Northern niceties, “coffee and toast, with a daily newspaper,” and like many Northerners, he could place slavery “a great way off.” To overcome this distance, Emerson mixed memory and imagination. Recollections of vivid conversations with abolitionists sparked his imagination: “if we saw the whip applied to old men, to tender women; and, undeniably, though I shrink to say so – pregnant women set in the treadmill for refusing to work…if we saw these things with eyes, we too should wince.”[[48]](#endnote-48) Note the “if” – Emerson never saw these images, but imagined he had, blending them with his own memories. Imagination let Emerson transcend his limited personal experience and empathize with distant Southern and Caribbean slaves. Imagination also made the mundane profound. As a boy’s imagination reveals his pocketknife to be a magic blade, so Emerson’s imagination revealed a teacup of sugar to be a national sin. Through imagination, “the new virtue [is] shown in some unprized old property,” and one’s possessions become a grave evil. Imagination connected Emerson’s thoughtless private consumption of cotton and sugar to national politics, revealing obligation.

The nature walk stimulated this imagination. Here Emerson shunned Northerners’ rote, habituated thought for haphazard contemplation, inviting imagination’s sudden interruption. He deemed “imagination a spontaneous act…a perception and affirming of a real relation between a thought and some material fact.” On his walks, he affirmed the relation between the “material fact” of his consumption and his antislavery intuition.[[49]](#endnote-49)

Imagining slavery so horrified Emerson that he abandoned quietude. Emerson understood imagination as the faculty of making mental images, seeing what was not physically present. He wrote “This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees.”[[50]](#endnote-50) Though not physically in the South or Caribbean, through imagination, his intellect could be “where…it sees,” as if he witnessed slavery firsthand. Further, his intellect could be “what it sees,” as Emerson imagined himself in the place of slaves, experiencing enslavement firsthand. This pushed Emerson from mere concern over slavery to gut-wrenching empathy. Here Emerson echoes Smith’s claim most stoic men “observe that in looking upon sore eyes they very often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate than any other part of the body is in the weakest.” The resemblance is no coincidence, as Emerson knew Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* well. For both Emerson and Smith, imagination stirs empathy. Seeing another suffer, one imagines himself suffering, and actually suffers, wincing against the images, feeling soreness in his own eyes. Visions of slavery upset Emerson’s gut too: “the blood is moral: the blood is antislavery: it runs cold in the veins: the stomach rises in disgust.”[[51]](#endnote-51) Emerson suffered far, far less than slaves, but enough to trigger action.[[52]](#endnote-52) Shannon Mariotti insightfully calls Emerson’s thinking *theorizing*, from the Greek *theoria*, meaning both to see and to contemplate.[[53]](#endnote-53) For Emerson, contemplation was a means to sight: when his thoughts wandered, he imagined slavery, and saw his consequent political obligations.

Emerson imagined himself both slavery’s perpetrator, through commerce, and victim, through empathy. Many abolitionists felt guilt, not empathy. Per David Bromwich, Lincoln held “an injustice you aim to correct had better be seen not from the point of view of the victim, but from the perspective of the agent who commits the injustice…With Lincoln on slavery…the pressure for reform comes from a redefinition of self-respect or sympathy with myself.” Rejecting commerce is “not a question of what I owe the sufferer but of what I owe myself.” Jack Turner insightfully notes Emerson refused tainted goods and laws as a means to his own self-reliance, to his “recovering innocence.” Emerson’s other sort of imagination, empathy, drew him from this private self-improvement to improvement of others, to politics. This dual imagination is the insight of Emerson’s abolition. Imagining himself not only as the perpetrator, but also the victim, Emerson transcended his private quest for moral purity, turning to other-regarding public action.[[54]](#endnote-54)

Solitary contemplation drew Emerson back to society. One might think Emerson sought Isaiah Berlin’s classical negative liberty from government, or sought positive liberty, “the traditional self-emancipation of ascetics and quietists…who have fled the world, and escaped the yoke of society or public opinion, by some deliberate process of self-transformation.”[[55]](#endnote-55) Both definitions of liberty reject the society of others, so neither fits Emerson. Rather, to Emerson one is self-reliant when he autonomously realizes his bonds to others, anticipating feminists’ “relational autonomy,” which to Nancy Hirschmann “is based not on rights but on responsibility, not on separation but on connection, not on autonomy as rejection of or reaction to others but on relationship and interaction with others.”[[56]](#endnote-56) In the solitude of “the woods, we return to reason,” to moral intuition. There, memory follows “its will, not mine.” One cannot choose his memories, imaginings, or debts, but he can walk in places that evoke the right debts. Autonomy is not rejecting bonds, but walking in the right place to see and welcome the right bonds.

Even in society, Emerson returned to solitary contemplation. In an 1851 antislavery speech, he urged “every time a man goes back to his own thoughts…these moments counterbalance the years of drudgery.” Emerson’s visions of slavery were fleeting, momentary, and being involuntary, interrupted his urban life.[[57]](#endnote-57) Even urban walks, with their chance meetings, provoked sudden contemplation. Emerson recalls a fellow Massachusettsan who, by coincidence, “walking in New Orleans, found a freeborn citizen of Nantucket…working chained in the streets of that city, kidnapped.” Moving carefully through cities, avoiding convention halls, parades, and rallies, but keeping an eye for unexpected lessons, one keeps contemplative. “To go into solitude,” Emerson concludes, “a man needs to retire as much from his chambers as from society.”[[58]](#endnote-58)

After his initial thoughtful isolation, Emerson alternated between action and solitude. Contemplation pushed political action, and witnessing the political world provoked further contemplation. On learning Boston lawmen captured runaway slave Thomas Simms, Emerson returned to his journals, contemplating a theory of civil disobedience. This spurred his public speeches and activism urging abrogation of the Fugitive Slave Act. Per Kateb, “proper solitude looks to the perpetual interruption of itself by relationships, by social involvement.” This alternation accords with not only Emerson’s personal experience, but also with human experience of the world, which cannot be permanently apolitical. This also debunks the traditional reading of Emerson as a classical liberal who felt the individual preexisted politics. To Levine and Malachuk, Emerson held that that “individuals precede the state and that because of human imperfection all institutions that humans create are also imperfect…standard arguments in traditional liberal thought.”[[59]](#endnote-59) For Emerson, as for Rousseau, no individual could be eternally pre-political.[[60]](#endnote-60) Rather, once morally enlightened, Emerson alternated between apolitical contemplation and political action, mixing solitude and society. Solitary contemplation prefaces political action, which occasionally pushes one back to solitude.

Emerson entered reentered politics with an open letter opposing President Martin Van Buren’s Indian removal policy. The 1838 letter was a hesitant first foray into activism, prefacing Emerson’s later, more confident abolitionism. In his journal, Emerson reflects: “Yesterday went the letter to V[an] B[uren]…I write in my journal, I read my lecture with joy – but this stirring of the philanthropic mud, gives me no peace. I will let the republic alone.” Yet he recants: “I stir in it for the sad reason that no other mortal men will move, and if I do not, why it is left undone.”[[61]](#endnote-61) A self-assured public speaker and writer, none of Emerson’s ambivalence enters the letter. He letter opens decrying an 1835 treaty dispossessing Georgia’s Cherokees. The treaty received neither the consent of the full Cherokee people nor the American people, “a crime that deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country…the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion liberty, will stink to the world.” Consequently, he asserts white Americans sympathize with the Indians: “the mercy that is in the hearts of all men, from Maine to Georgia, does abhor this business…It is in our hearts the simplest commandment of brotherly love.”[[62]](#endnote-62)

Emerson wrote on American Indians in nearly all of his collected journals, but rarely on Indians’ moral sense. Writing nearly a century after Smith and Rousseau, Emerson was not invested in debates over the state of nature and natural man. Instead, Emerson followed nineteenth-century race science. The anthropologist Samuel George Morton pioneered the field, collecting Native American skulls and publishing his observations in his 1839 *Crania Americana*. Morton sorted and named races by descending skull volume; they were: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay, Native American, and Negro. To Morton, physiology hinted at behavior. Indians, at the bottom of the hierarchy, were “averse to cultivation, slow in acquiring knowledge; restless, revengeful, and fond of war.” Morton was read widely, by Southern intellectuals seeking to justify slavery, but also by Northerners. Louis Agassiz, a Harvard professor and friend of Morton, legitimized Morton’s theory through evolutionary biology. Agassiz ranked species by embryonic development, noting mammal embryos begin with fish gills, but eventually pass that stage. Some human embryos, he wagered, developed further than others before birth: “The brain of the [adult] Negro…is that of the imperfect brain of a 7 month’s infant in the womb of a White.” For Agassiz, Indians and blacks were the victims of arrested embryonic development, and thus permanently inferior, living fossils.[[63]](#endnote-63) Blacks, Indians, whites, and all other races, each fixed at a different point in evolution, were thus different species. Agassiz was widely admired by Boston intellectuals, including Emerson, who eventually became Agassiz’s colleague and friend. In August 1858, the two took a camping trip, after which Emerson relied on Agassiz as a naturalist. In his journals, Emerson repeatedly refers to Agassiz, who he lauds as a clear speaker with a firm grasp on nature.[[64]](#endnote-64)

Emerson applied Agassiz to Native Americans. In his journals, Emerson lauds Agassiz’s embryo studies, and like Agassiz, he applies this to race. He muses in an 1838 journal entry “the negro is older than [the Indian], & they older than the white man. The negro is preAdamite.” Two years later, he repeats: “The negro must be very old & belongs, one would say, to the fossil formations.” The embryonic distinction between whites and Indians yields physical differences. A white man sees “with a certain degree of terror the new physique of a foreign man; as a Japanese, a New Zealander, a Calabrian. In a new country how should we look at a large Indian moving in the landscape on his own errand. He would be to us as a lion or wild elephant.”[[65]](#endnote-65) Emerson tempered Agassiz’s claim the races were distinct species, asserting each race “shades down imperceptibly into the next, and you cannot draw the line where a race begins or ends.”[[66]](#endnote-66) But Emerson’s word “down” is revealing, for he retained Agassiz’s hierarchy of races, never doubting Indians’ and blacks’ inferiority. Emerson also romanticized Indians’ physical difference. For Emerson, as for many antebellum New Englanders, race science affirmed Rousseau’s noble savage.[[67]](#endnote-67) Following Rousseau, Emerson felt man atrophied in society. Indigenous man, on the other hand, was strong and solitary:

What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two men, and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. If the traveler tells us truly, strike the savage with a broad axe, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the block into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave.[[68]](#endnote-68)

The Indian exemplified Emersonian self-reliance – the quote above comes from Emerson’s essay of the same name.

Emerson relegated Indians and blacks to extinction. Whites, rational and industrious, turned their physical environment, vegetable, animal, and human, to their will. Whites subdued blacks as slaves and dispossessed and exterminated Indians. Emerson mourns the loss of “Pines a thousand years old. Every year they must go farther for them: they recede, like beavers & Indians, before the white man.” Since Emerson, following Agassiz, believed Indians’ and blacks’ inferiority was fixed and immutable, these groups could not fight their fate. Whites would abuse them to extinction. Emerson was surprised both groups had survived so long: “What right has [the African American] to be intruding into the late & civil daylight of this dynasty of the Caucasians & Saxons?” Emerson asks. “It is plain that so inferior a race must perish like the poor Indians…‘the Indians perish because there is no place for them.’ That is the very fact of their inferiority. There is always place for the superior.” He reiterates in the same volume, “We in Massachusetts see the Indians only as a picturesque of antiquity…‘Their day is o’er.’”[[69]](#endnote-69)

Why, if Indians were doomed to extinction, did Emerson try to save them? For Emerson, contemplation of Indians educates the moral sense. Two years after his letter to Van Buren, Emerson reflects “the Indians perish…Yet pity for these was needed, it seems, for the education of this generation in ethics. Our good world cannot learn the beauty of love in narrow circles & at home in the immense Heart, but it must be stimulated by [something] somewhat foreign & monstrous, by the simular [sic] man of Ethiopia.” For Emerson, empathy with the “foreign & monstrous” Indian or African American required a great exertion of the imagination, much greater than required to sympathize with the local and familiar. Abolitionists and Indian activists spread vivid stories of slaves’ and Indians’ suffering, pushing their listeners to exercise their moral imagination. The activist taught pity. Elsewhere, Emerson asks “How can such a question as the Slave Trade” or “the treatment of Indians [which] are pregnant with doctrine…pass over a Nation without leaving some ethical conclusions laid up in the mind of all intelligent citizens?” Emerson praised Northern backlash to the 1851 Fugitive Slave Act on similar grounds. The Act, returning escaped slaves south, was “like a university to the entire people. It has turned every dinner-table into a debating club, and made every citizen a student of natural law… general principles are laid bare…It was one of the best compensations of this calamity.”[[70]](#endnote-70) For Smith and Rousseau, the theater taught one to sympathize with familiar, characters, similar to oneself; for Emerson activism taught whites to sympathize with the people frighteningly different from themselves.

In conclusion, solitude teaches sympathy. This is counterintuitive – Hobbes’ natural man was solitary and thus unsympathetic, while Hutcheson and Hume asserted natural,savage man was sociable and sympathetic. Rousseau and Emerson reject this. Instead, they claim solitude spurs aimless contemplation, which encourages the imagination. Imagination lets one mirror the feelings of another, the root of sympathy.

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 58, 77, 454. For American Indians’ influence on Hobbes’ state of nature and ideas of sympathy, see Edwin Curley, “Introduction” in *Leviathan*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xxii n24, and John B. Radner, “Sympathy in British Moral Thought,” in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9.1 (1979), 189-210. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* ed. Peter Laslett. (New York: Cambridge University Press), 339. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press), 24-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Radner, “Sympathy in British Moral Thought,” 193. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Daniel Carey. *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 20060, 150-1, Hutcheson quoted 184-6; Daniel Carey, “Reconsidering Rousseau: Sociability, Moral Sense, and the American Indian from Hutcheson to Bartram,” in *The British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21 (1998), 25-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Hume quoted in Radner, “Sympathy in British Moral Thought,” 197-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Alexander Broadie, “Sympathy and the Impartial Spectator” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*. Ed. Knud Haakonssen. (New York: Cambridge, 2006), 158-63. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 5-10. Smith also notes the impartial spectator can be used to judge one’s own behavior. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, 241. Shaver, Robert Shaver, “Virtues, Utility, and Rules” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*. Ed. Knud Haakonssen. (New York: Cambridge, 2006), 193, 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Troy Bickham, “American Indians in the British Imperial Imagination, 1707-1815,” in *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Stephen Foster. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 246. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 246-50; Roger L. Emerson, “American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots Philosophers, in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9.1 (1979), 211-36. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ronald L. Meek, *The Ignoble Savage*. (New York: Cambridge, 1976), 115-25. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 241. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, 291, 242-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. “The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *The Basic Political Writings*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Andrzej Rapaczynski, *Nature and Politics: Liberalism in the Philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau*.(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 231-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Rousseau. “The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 53-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Babbitt, Irving. *Rousseau and Romanticism*. (Transaction Publishers, 1991), 179. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Radner, “Sympathy in British Moral Thought,” 193. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. *Amour-propre*, if controlled, can push one to virtuous behavior. A*mour-propre* can even encourage pity. In nature, *amour de soi* grounds pity, for when man sees another suffer, he imagines himself as the suffer, and his self-love moves him to aid the sufferer. In society, *amour-propre* can fill the same role. See Laurence D. Cooper, *Rousseau and Nature: The Problem of the Good Life.* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999), 119-136. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rousseau. “The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 42-70. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Rousseau, following Smith and many Scottish moral sense theorists, held education in aesthetics and exposure to the theater could serve the same role. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or, On Education*. Trans. Alan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 222-5, 334. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Trans. Charles Butterworth. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 63,71, 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 99-103. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, 66-8. Similarly, in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau mocks the solitary hermit who retreats from society. Reform must come from within society. He addresses the hermit: “Retake your ancient and first innocence; go into the woods to lose sight and memory of the crimes of your contemporaries, and have no fear of cheapening your species in renouncing its enlightenment in order to renounce its vices. As for men like me, whose passions have forever destroyed their original simplicity, who can no longer feed on grass and acorn[s], nor get by without laws and chiefs…all those latter ones will attempt, through the exercise of virtues they oblige themselves to practice while learning to know them, to merit the eternal reward that they ought to expect for them. They will respect the sacred bonds of the societies of which they are members,” see Rousseau. “The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 94. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Eli Friedlander, *J. J. Rousseau: An Afterlife of Words.* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2004), 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 87-92. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Davis, Michael. *The Autobiography of Philosophy: Rousseau’s* The Reveries of the Solitary Walker. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 75, emphasis added. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Butterworth, Charles. “Interpretive Essay.” *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Trans. Charles Butterworth. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. John Edward Shcamberger, *Emeron’s Concept of the Moral Sense,* Ph.D Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1969, 36-89;Edgeley W. Todd, “Philosophical Ideas at Harvard College, 1817-1837,” *New England Quarterly*, 15 (march 193), 63-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Carey, “Reconsidering Rousseau: Sociability, Moral Sense, and the American Indian from Hutcheson to Bartram,” 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Neal Dolan, *Emerson’s Liberalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 201. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Gilbert F. LaFreniere “Rousseau and the European Roots of Environmentalism,” Environmental History Review, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 41-72. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Neal Dolan, *Emerson’s Liberalism*, 80. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Emerson, *Journals*, IV, 333; VII 403, 125. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Turner, *Awakening to Race*, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Emerson, *Journals*, V, 29; VII 292; IV 369. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), 455, 289. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Frank, “Standing for Others,” 390; Neal Dolan, *Emerson’s Liberalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 216; Turner, *Awakening to Race*, 31-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Emerson, “New England Reformers,” 452-6 [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Gougeon, “Emerson, Self-Reliance, and the Politics of Democracy,” 194; Len Gougeon “Historical Background,” in *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings*. ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) xxx; Dolan, *Emerson’s Liberalism* 216-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Lecture on Slavery” in *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings*. ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 97; Shannon Mariotti, “Emerson’s Transcendental Gaze and the ‘Disagreeable Particulars’ of Slavery,” in *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alan M. Levine, and Daniel S. Malachuk (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 329-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Man the Reformer,” in *Emerson: Political Writings*, ed. Kenneth Sacks (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 103. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Memory.” In *Emerson’s Complete Works*. Vol. XII ed. James Elliot Cabot. (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), 66-9; Emerson, “Emancipation,” 843-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Poetry and Imagination,” in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Letters and Social Aims*, Vol. VIII (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 6, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), 331-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004) 4; Emerson, “Emancipation,” 834. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Emerson understood he could not speak for slaves, whose suffering outstripped his own. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Mariotti, “Emerson’s Transcendental Gaze,” 305. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. David Bromwich, "Moral Imagination." *Raritan* 27 (2008), 15-6. Turner rightly notes rejecting commerce also spurs action. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Isiah Belin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford, 1970), 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Nancy Hirschmann, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom.” *Political Theory* 24.1 (1996): 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Previous accounts of Emerson’s epiphanies considered them apolitical insights into nature. See Gene Bluestein, “Emerson’s Epiphanies.” The New England Quarterly , 39.4 (Dec., 1966) : 449-54. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Address to the Citizens of Concord,” in *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings*. ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 58; Emerson, “Emancipation,” 848. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, 98; Levine and Malachuk, “Introduction,” 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Elizabeth Povinelli usefully problematizes the pre-political or “prior” liberal individual in “The Governance of the Prior.” *Interventions* 13.1 (2011): 16-22. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*. Vol.s III-VII. ed. William Gilman, Alfred Ferguson, Merrell Davis, Merton Sealts, and Harrison Hayford. (Harvard University Press, 1965), V, 475-479. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Emerson, “Letter to Martin Van Buren,” in *Emerson: Political Writings*. (New York, Cambridge, 2008), 49-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Agassiz quoted in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2001), 97-116. Even supporters of Lamarckian and Darwinian theories of evolution, who opposed Agassiz, admitted Native Americans lagged millennia behind whites in development. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Emerson, *Journals,* XIII, XV. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Emerson, *Journals,* VII, 74, 84, 393. Elsewhere, he tempers this foreignness: “The most Indian thing about the Indian is surely not his moccasins or his calumet, his wampum or his stone hatchet, but traits of character & sagacity, skill, or passion which would be intelligible to all men and which Scipio or Sidney or Col. Worth or Lord Clive would be as likely to exhibit as Osceola & Black Hawk,” see *Journals* VII, 206-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Emerson quoted in Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson’s Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 177. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Joshua David Bellin, “Native American Rights,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 200. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Emerson, *Journals,* VII, 393, IX, 175, 495; elsewhere Emerson admits blacks might be able to improve themselves, see Walls, *Emerson’s Life in Science*, 178. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Emerson, *Journals*, V, 440; Emerson, “Address to the Citizens of Concord,” in *Emerson: Political Writings*. (New York, Cambridge, 2008), 144. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)