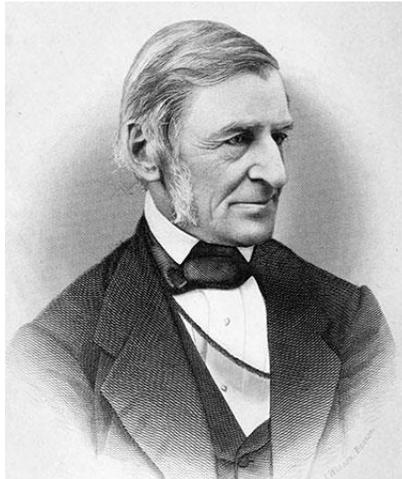


Notes for Emerson's Essays: "History" and "Self Reliance"

2018 Richard J Walters Jr



Talking Points

Emerson, from his essay "Nature" (1836)

- "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."

Transcendentalism:

- Oxford English Dictionary: "an idealistic philosophical and social movement that developed in New England around 1836 in reaction to rationalism. Influenced by romanticism, Platonism, and Kantian philosophy, it taught that divinity pervades all nature and humanity, and its members held progressive views on feminism and communal living. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were central figures."
- Professor Ashton Nichols, in a lecture on "Emerson, Thoreau, and the Transcendentalist Movement" in The Great Courses Series from the Learning Company: "It derives from the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant, it's proponents emphasize the divine in nature, the value of the individual and of human intuition, and a spiritual reality which transcends sensory experience while also providing a better guide for life than purely empirical or logical reasoning. The term refers to a cluster of concepts set forth by a number of individuals, rather than to a formal philosophy."

- It is a reaction to the rationalist and materialist philosophies of men like John Locke and David Hume. Emerson and other Transcendentalist are looking for truth that transcends the senses.

Immanuel Kant and Transcendentalism

- “I call all knowledge transcendental if it is occupied, not with objects, but with the way that we can possibly know objects, even before we experience them.” (Critique of Pure Reason, A12, B26)
- “Everything intuited or perceived in space and time, and therefore all objects of a possible experience, are nothing but phenomenal appearances, that is, mere representations, which in the way in which they are represented to us, as extended beings, or as series of changes, have no independent, self-subsistent existence apart from our thoughts. This doctrine I entitle transcendental idealism.” (Critique of Pure Reason, A491, B520)
- Idealism: “systems of thought in which the objects of knowledge are held to be in some way dependent on the activity of mind”

Emerson Quits the Pulpit and Travels to Europe. He is befriended by the British Romantics: Coleridge, Wordsworth and Carlyle.

- Romanticism: “a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.”
- From Wordsworth’s “Ode to Immortality”

*“THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.”*
- Coleridge translated Kant, and this is the version that Emerson would have read.
- Carlyle and Emerson remain lifelong friends. It was Carlyle who said “No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men.”

Emerson returns home and writes “Nature.” Soon after he begins a career as a lecturer, forms the Transcendental Club (originally the Hedge Club), and the publication “The Dial.”

- Noted members of his club: Frederic Henry Hedge, George Ripley, Amos Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, Henry David Thoreau, William Henry Channing, Elizabeth Peabody and Margret Fuller.
- Transcendentalists stood for:
 - Crucial importance of the individual self
 - The need for completely unfettered expression of the individual mind
 - Advocated a separate, inner light that might guide each man or each woman
- Translation and dissemination of “ethical scriptures” or sayings from any culture that have ethical import outside of the culture to which they belong.

- Emerson's Journal
 - "The highest revelation is that God is in every man."
 - No need for intercession.
- Did not join the others including Bronson Alcott when they started Fruitlands, a community founded on Transcendental idealism. It failed.
- Thoreau at least sets out to live Emerson's Transcendental philosophy and journals his experience in his book "Walden." We will discuss "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience" next month.

Godfather of William James right after his own son, Waldo, died of scarlet fever.

- James is a reactionary to Emerson's idealism.

Later years:

- As an abolitionist, he supported Lincoln, and met with him and spoke at a memorial service for him in Concord after he died.

Problems with Transcendentalism:

- Are transcendental ideas different for everyone? Classic problem of relativism, and idealism or what is "true for me"
 - "The god of the cannibals will be a cannibal, of the crusaders a crusader, and of the merchants a merchant." (from his essay "Civilization")
- What can exist outside of our 5 senses, and how would we prove that it exists?

Practical Aphorisms coined by Emerson

- "Hitch your wagon to a star"
- "Trust thyself"
- "A minority of one"
- "The only way to have a friend, is to be one."
- "What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not been discovered."

“HISTORY”

1. History exists in the mind of men. It was made by men, but Emerson seems to suggest something close to Plato’s concept of “recollection” in this essay. Is he suggesting that all history pre-exists in the mind as a blueprint prior to ever learning it? Whatever he believes about the origin of history, he definitely feels that it is accessible to any man, at any level of society.
 - a. **“There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent.”**
 - b. “But the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as laws.”
 - c. “Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him.”
 - d. **“It is remarkable that involuntarily we always read as superior beings. Universal history, the poets, the romancers, do not in their stateliest pictures, —in the sacerdotal, the imperial palaces, in the triumphs of will or of genius,—anywhere lose our ear, anywhere make us feel that we intrude, that this is for better men; but rather is it true that in their grandest strokes we feel most at home. All that Shakespeare says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself. We sympathize in the great moments of history, in the great discoveries, the great resistances, the great prosperities of men;—because there law was enacted, the sea was searched, the land was found, or the blow was struck, for us, as we ourselves in that place would have done or applauded.”**
2. History only has meaning if you apply it to your own life. Emerson makes this point several times, in several different ways. What he is saying separates history from “fact” and rather treats history as a set of lessons a person must compare with their own experiences and internalize such that it has meaning “for them.”
 - a. “The fact narrated must correspond to something in me to be credible or intelligible. We, as we read, must become Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner; must fasten these images to some reality in our secret experience, or we shall learn nothing rightly.”
 - b. **“The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary. Thus compelled, the Muse of history will utter oracles, as never to those who do not respect themselves. I have no expectation that any man will read history aright who thinks that what was done in a remote age, by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day.”**

- c. “The world exists for the education of each man. There is no age or state of society or mode of action in history to which there is not somewhat corresponding in his life.”
 - i. Philosophical definition of **“Correspondence”** refers to a similarity between things. “As above, so below.” is an example of how a higher plane might correspond with the lower plane of existence. But the other meaning of the word, having to do with some form of communication is not left out. As in the previous example, the higher plane must communicate the similarity to the lower plane. So, to say that things correspond, is to say that they are connected, and resemble one another on account of this connection.
 - d. “He should see that he can live all history in his own person. He must sit solidly at home, and not suffer himself to be bullied by kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world; he must transfer the point of view from which history is commonly read, from Rome and Athens and London, to himself, and not deny his conviction that he is the court, and if England or Egypt have any thing to say to him he will try the case; if not, let them for ever be silent.”
3. History is not “fact” but more “fable.”
- a. “Babylon, Troy, Tyre, Palestine, and even early Rome are passing already into fiction. The Garden of Eden, the sun standing still in Gibeon, is poetry thenceforward to all nations. Who cares what the fact was, when we have made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an immortal sign? London and Paris and New York must go the same way. ‘What is history,’ said Napoleon, ‘but a fable agreed upon?’”
4. History is subjective.
- a. **“We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself,—must go over the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know.”**
 - b. “All inquiry into antiquity, all curiosity respecting the Pyramids, the excavated cities, Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis,—is the desire to do away this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now. Belzoni digs and measures in the mummy-pits and pyramids of Thebes, until he can see the end of the difference between the monstrous work and himself. When he has satisfied himself, in general and in detail, that it was made by such a person as he, so armed and so motivated, and to ends to which he himself should also have worked, the problem is solved; his thought lives along the whole line of temples and sphinxes and catacombs, passes through them all with satisfaction, and they live again to the mind, or are now.”
5. Emerson is a transcendentalist, and so believes in the unity of nature as the unity of one soul with one message.
- a. “Every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance.”

- b. "Nature is a mutable cloud which is always and never the same. She casts the same thought into troops of forms, as a poet makes twenty fables with one moral."
 - c. "The identity of history is equally intrinsic, the diversity equally obvious. There is, at the surface, infinite variety of things; at the centre there is simplicity of cause."
 - i. He gives as an example of this the many forms of Greek history which all point to a unity with nature. Greek Civil History, Literature, Philosophy, Architecture, Built Geometry, and Sculpture.
 - ii. "Thus of the genius of one remarkable people we have a fourfold representation: and to the senses what more unlike than an ode of Pindar, a marble centaur, the Peristyle of the Parthenon, and the last actions of Phocion?"
 - d. "Nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws. She hums the old well-known air through innumerable variations."
6. Emerson points to the thing that is identical in all things as its spirit. It is the spirit of a thing that we observe when it is doing its function, in accordance with nature.
- a. "In a certain state of thought is the common origin of very diverse works. It is the spirit and not the fact that is identical. By a deeper apprehension, and not primarily by a painful acquisition of many manual skills, the artist attains the power of awakening other souls to a given activity."
 - b. "It has been said that 'common souls pay with what they do, nobler souls with that which they are.' And why? Because a profound nature awakens in us by its actions and words, by its very looks and manners, the same power and beauty that a gallery of sculpture or of pictures addresses."**
7. Again: the essence of a thing is found in that thing performing its function. The function is the blueprint.
- a. "Santa Croce and the Dome of St. Peter's are lame copies after a divine model. Strasburg Cathedral is a material counterpart of the soul of Erwin of Steinbach. The true poem is the poet's mind; the true ship is the ship-builder. In the man, could we lay him open, we should see the reason for the last flourish and tendril of his work; as every spine and tint in the sea-shell preexists in the secreting organs of the fish."
8. Don't forget that Emerson is a poet. He demonstrates his talent with words and images in several examples to illustrate the points above.
- a. "The man who has seen the rising moon break out of the clouds at midnight, has been present like an archangel at the creation of light and of the world."
 - b. "The Gothic cathedral is a blossoming in stone subdued by the insatiable demand of harmony in man. The mountain of granite blooms into an eternal flower, with the lightness and delicate finish as well as the aerial proportions and perspective of vegetable beauty."
9. History is to be understood by each man though an act of generalization.
- a. "In like manner all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized."

10. Emerson dives into a long set of examples of historic facts that must be seen in context to be understood.
 - a. “In the early history of Asia and Africa, Nomadism and Agriculture are the two antagonist facts. The geography of Asia and of Africa necessitated a nomadic life. But the nomads were the terror of all those whom the soil or the advantages of a market had induced to build towns. Agriculture therefore was a religious injunction, because of the perils of the state from nomadism.”
 - b. “Sacred cities, to which a periodical religious pilgrimage was enjoined, or stringent laws and customs, tending to invigorate the national bond, were the check on the old rovers; and the cumulative values of long residence are the restraints on the itineracy of the present day.”
 - c. “The pastoral nations were needy and hungry to desperation; and this intellectual nomadism, in its excess, bankrupts the mind through the dissipation of power on a miscellany of objects. The home-keeping wit, on the other hand, is that continence or content which finds all the elements of life in its own soil; and which has its own perils of monotony and deterioration, if not stimulated by foreign infusions.”
11. Emerson gives another example of historical facts that must be seen in context. This Greek example also shows that people have different intellectual phases of their life. And, it is this commonality of phases for every person that makes history a pathway to understanding for each person individually.
 - a. “What is the foundation of that interest all men feel in Greek history, letters, art, and poetry, in all its periods from the Heroic or Homeric age down to the domestic life of the Athenians and Spartans, four or five centuries later? What but this, that every man passes personally through a Grecian period. The Grecian state is the era of the bodily nature, the perfection of the senses,—of the spiritual nature unfolded in strict unity with the body.”
 - b. “The manners of that period are plain and fierce. The reverence exhibited is for personal qualities; courage, address, self-command, justice, strength, swiftness, a loud voice, a broad chest. Luxury and elegance are not known. A sparse population and want make every man his own valet, cook, butcher and soldier, and the habit of supplying his own needs educates the body to wonderful performances.”
 - c. “The costly charm of the ancient tragedy, and indeed of all the old literature, is that the persons speak simply,—speak as persons who have great good sense without knowing it, before yet the reflective habit has become the predominant habit of the mind.”
 - d. “Adults acted with the simplicity and grace of children.”
 - e. “The attraction of these manners is that they belong to man, and are known to every man in virtue of his being once a child; besides that there are always individuals who retain these characteristics. A person of childlike genius and inborn energy is still a Greek, and revives our love of the Muse of Hellas.”
12. Emerson returns to his point that History is personal and subjective.
 - a. “When a thought of Plato becomes a thought to me,—when a truth that fired the soul of Pindar fires mine, time is no more. When I feel that we two meet in a perception, that

our two souls are tinged with the same hue, and do as it were run into one, why should I measure degrees of latitude, why should I count Egyptian years?"

- b. "The student interprets the age of chivalry by his own age of chivalry, and the days of maritime adventure and circumnavigation by quite parallel miniature experiences of his own. To the sacred history of the world he has the same key. When the voice of a prophet out of the deeps of antiquity merely echoes to him a sentiment of his infancy, a prayer of his youth, he then pierces to the truth through all the confusion of tradition and the caricature of institutions."
13. Occasionally, true geniuses appear and write new chapters into history. This is the beginning of the doctrine of the reformers, or the Great Man Theory of History.
- a. "Rare, extravagant spirits come by us at intervals, who disclose to us new facts in nature. I see that men of God have from time to time walked among men and made their commission felt in the heart and soul of the commonest hearer. Hence evidently the tripod, the priest, the priestess inspired by the divine afflatus."
 - b. "Jesus astonishes and overpowers sensual people. They cannot unite him to history, or reconcile him with themselves. As they come to revere their intuitions and aspire to live holily, their own piety explains every fact, every word."
 - c. "Again, in that protest which each considerate person makes against the superstition of his times, he repeats step for step the part of old reformers, and in the search after truth finds, like them, new perils to virtue. He learns again what moral vigor is needed to supply the girdle of a superstition. A great licentiousness treads on the heels of a reformation. How many times in the history of the world has the Luther of the day had to lament the decay of piety in his own household! 'Doctor,' said his wife to Martin Luther, one day, 'how is it that whilst subject to papacy we prayed so often and with such fervor, whilst now we pray with the utmost coldness and very seldom?'"
 - d. "When the gods come among men, they are not known. Jesus was not; Socrates and Shakespeare were not."
 - e. "The power of music, the power of poetry, to unfix and as it were clap wings to solid nature, interprets the riddle of Orpheus. The philosophical perception of identity through endless mutations of form makes him know the Proteus."
14. Emerson talks about transmigration or reincarnation of souls.
- a. "The transmigration of souls is no fable. I would it were; but men and women are only half human. Every animal of the barn-yard, the field and the forest, of the earth and of the waters that are under the earth, has contrived to get a footing and to leave the print of its features and form in some one or other of these upright, heaven-facing speakers. Ah! brother, stop the ebb of thy soul, —ebbing downward into the forms into whose habits thou hast now for many years slid."
15. Stepping outside the box is where real men of Genius come from.
- a. "Those men who cannot answer by a superior wisdom these facts or questions of time, serve them. Facts encumber them, tyrannize over them, and make the men of routine, the men of sense, in whom a literal obedience to facts has extinguished every spark of that light by which man is truly man. But if the man is true to his better instincts or

sentiments, and refuses the dominion of facts, as one that comes of a higher race; remains fast by the soul and sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple into their places; they know their master, and the meanest of them glorifies him.”

- i. Emerson uses Goethe “Faust,” particularly Helena, as an example here.
 - b. “All the fictions of the Middle Age explain themselves as a masked or frolic expression of that which in grave earnest the mind of that period toiled to achieve. Magic and all that is ascribed to it is a deep presentiment of the powers of science. The shoes of swiftness, the sword of sharpness, the power of subduing the elements, of using the secret virtues of minerals, of understanding the voices of birds, are the obscure efforts of the mind in a right direction. The preternatural prowess of the hero, the gift of perpetual youth, and the like, are alike the endeavour of the human spirit "to bend the shows of things to the desires of the mind."
16. Nature presupposes history. This is an alien concept to many present day thinkers. Emerson, as a transcendentalist, believed that design in nature was proof that man was “intertwined with the whole chain of organic and inorganic being.” Given the proper environment, his nature would flourish.
 - a. “A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world. His faculties refer to natures out of him and predict the world he is to inhabit, as the fins of the fish foreshow that water exists, or the wings of an eagle in the egg presuppose air.”
 - b. “A mind might ponder its thought for ages and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day. Who knows himself before he has been thrilled with indignation at an outrage, or has heard an eloquent tongue, or has shared the throb of thousands in a national exultation or alarm? No man can antedate his experience, or guess what faculty or feeling a new object shall unlock, any more than he can draw to-day the face of a person whom he shall see to-morrow for the first time.”
17. History is to be read and written by examining the two facts that: “the mind is one” and “nature is correlative.”
 - a. Correlative: having some sort of correlation or dependency between statements.
 - b. “Thus in all ways does the soul concentrate and reproduce its treasures for each pupil. He too shall pass through the whole cycle of experience. He shall collect into a focus the rays of nature. History no longer shall be a dull book. It shall walk incarnate in every just and wise man. You shall not tell me by languages and titles a catalogue of the volumes you have read. You shall make me feel what periods you have lived. A man shall be the Temple of Fame. He shall walk, as the poets have described that goddess, in a robe painted all over with wonderful events and experiences;—his own form and features by their exalted intelligence shall be that variegated vest. I shall find in him the Foreworld; in his childhood the Age of Gold, the Apples of Knowledge, the Argonautic Expedition, the calling of Abraham, the building of the Temple, the Advent of Christ, Dark Ages, the Revival of Letters, the Reformation, the discovery of new lands, the opening of new sciences and new regions in man. He shall be the priest**

of Pan, and bring with him into humble cottages the blessing of the morning stars, and all the recorded benefits of heaven and earth.”

18. We can't know things from any other perspective but our own. This means that we will only ever half-know things that others or different species know from experience.
 - a. "...it is the fault of our rhetoric that we cannot strongly state one fact without seeming to belie some other.”
 - b. “Hear the rats in the wall, see the lizard on the fence, the fungus under foot, the lichen on the log. What do I know sympathetically, morally, of either of these worlds of life? As old as the Caucasian man,—perhaps older,—these creatures have kept their counsel beside him, and there is no record of any word or sign that has passed from one to the other.”
19. Emerson wants us to look more toward nature. In it we can find symbols to help talk about the things that we most desperately want to communicate. In it we can find “our” history: meaning the history of our own nation.
 - a. “...what does history yet record of the metaphysical annals of man? What light does it shed on those mysteries which we hide under the names Death and Immortality? Yet every history should be written in a wisdom which divined the range of our affinities and looked at facts as symbols.”
 - b. “I am ashamed to see what a shallow village tale our so-called History is. How many times we must say Rome, and Paris, and Constantinople! What does Rome know of rat and lizard? What are Olympiads and Consulates to these neighboring systems of being? Nay, what food or experience or succor have they for the Esquimaux seal-hunter, for the Kanaka in his canoe, for the fisherman, the stevedore, the porter?”
 - c. “Broader and deeper we must write our annals,—from an ethical reformation, from an influx of the ever new, ever sanative conscience,—if we would truelier express our central and wide- related nature, instead of this old chronology of selfishness and pride to which we have too long lent our eyes. Already that day exists for us, shines in on us at unawares, but the path of science and of letters is not the way into nature. The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer's boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary.”

Self-Reliance

This essay builds upon what was already outlined in "history." You can look at it as a bunch of suggestions:

1. Think for yourself
 - a. **"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius."**
2. Believe that your own thoughts are important.
 - a. "A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his."
3. Don't back down under pressure.
 - a. "Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side."
4. Be independent.
 - a. "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till."
5. Be brave.
 - a. "God will not have his work made manifest by cowards."
 - b. **"Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort and advancing on Chaos and the Dark."**
6. Embrace your stage of life, and use the strengths of each.
 - a. "God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not to be put by, if it will stand by itself. Do not think the youth has no force, because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! in the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak to his contemporaries. Bashful or bold then, he will know how to make us seniors very unnecessary."

7. Don't be tied down by fears of inconsistency. Don't let your public image stop you from adapting to the times and speaking your true mind.
 - a. "But the man is as it were clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account."
8. Be a non-conformist.
 - a. **"Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs."**
 - b. "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness."
9. Devote yourself to your function or calling in life.
 - a. "I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me."
10. Realize that your only duty is to yourself, and the excellence of your own incarnation.
 - a. "Then again, 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? I tell thee thou foolish philanthropist that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong. 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; the education at college of fools; the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which many now stand; alms to sots, and the thousand-fold Relief Societies;—though I confess with shame I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked dollar which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold."
 - i. Many are surprised to read this coming from Emerson. Note that he is not saying men should not be charitable, but rather they should not keep dead charities alive. They shouldn't throw away their money where it will be wasted.
 - b. **"Men do what is called a good action, as some piece of courage or charity, much as they would pay a fine in expiation of daily non-appearance on parade. Their works are done as an apology or extenuation of their living in the world,—as invalids and the insane pay a high board. Their virtues are penances. I do not wish to expiate, but to live. My life is for itself and not for a spectacle. I much prefer that it should be of a lower strain, so it be genuine and equal, than that it should be glittering and unsteady."**
11. Do not surrender your rights.
 - a. "I cannot consent to pay for a privilege where I have intrinsic right."
12. Be unapologetically your own man. There are two things to avoid.
 - a. Avoid Conformity.

- i. "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."
 - ii. "The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character. If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society, vote with a great party either for the government or against it, spread your table like base housekeepers,—under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are: and of course so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself. A man must consider what a blindman's-buff is this game of conformity."
 - iii. "If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation."
 - iv. **"For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlor. If this aversation had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs. Yet is the discontent of the multitude more formidable than that of the senate and the college. It is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated classes. Their rage is decorous and prudent, for they are timid, as being very vulnerable themselves. But when to their feminine rage the indignation of the people is added, when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment."**
- b. Avoid Consistency.
- i. **"The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them. But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? It seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely**

even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day. In your metaphysics you have denied personality to the Deity, yet when the devout motions of the soul come, yield to them heart and life, though they should clothe God with shape and color. Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.—'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.'—Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."

13. Men communicate what they believe through their every action. Always being who they are. Character is cumulative, like the overall vector of a sailing ship.
 - a. **"We pass for what we are. Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment."**
 - b. "There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions, so they be each honest and natural in their hour. For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem. These varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of thought. One tendency unites them all. The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing. Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now. Greatness appeals to the future. If I can be firm enough to-day to do right and scorn eyes, I must have done so much right before as to defend me now. Be it how it will, do right now. Always scorn appearances and you always may. The force of character is cumulative."
14. Be honorable.
 - a. "Honor is venerable to us because it is no ephemera. It is always ancient virtue. We worship it to-day because it is not of to-day. We love it and pay it homage because it is not a trap for our love and homage, but is self-dependent, self-derived, and therefore of an old immaculate pedigree, even if shown in a young person."
15. Live here, where you are from; in the present time.
 - a. "Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things."

- b. "Where he is, there is nature. He measures you and all men and all events. Ordinarily, every body in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes place of the whole creation. The man must be so much that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design;—and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients."
16. The world is made by great men. Be great.
- a. **"An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man; as, Monachism, of the Hermit Antony; the Reformation, of Luther; Quakerism, of Fox; Methodism, of Wesley; Abolition, of Clarkson. Scipio, Milton called "the height of Rome"; and all history Resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."**
- b. "But the man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these. To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book have an alien and forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, 'Who are you, Sir?' Yet they all are his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession."
- c. "Why all this deference to Alfred and Scanderbeg and Gustavus? Suppose they were virtuous; did they wear out virtue? As great a stake depends on your private act to-day, as followed their public and renowned steps. When private men shall act with original views, the lustre will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen."
17. Be spontaneous. (Let's not forget that Emerson is a poet.)
- a. "What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science- baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct."
18. We are one with nature. Be harmonious with nature.
- a. "We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause."
- b. "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault. Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm."
19. Be simple and allow the divine to speak through your work.
- a. "Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away,— means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour. All things are made sacred by relation to it,—one as much as another. All things are dissolved to their centre by their cause, and in the universal miracle petty and particular miracles disappear. If therefore a man claims to know and speak of God and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old mouldered nation in another country, in another world, believe him not. Is the acorn better than the oak which is its

fulness and completion? Is the parent better than the child into whom he has cast his ripened being? Whence then this worship of the past? The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul.”

20. Appreciate your own importance. Your perfection.
 - a. “Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.”
21. Appreciate where you come from and the time in which you live.
 - a. “But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.”
22. Be one with God (nature and goodness).
 - a. “When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn.”
 - b. “And now at last the highest truth on this subject remains unsaid; probably cannot be said; for all that we say is the far-off remembering of the intuition. That thought by what I can now nearest approach to say it, is this. When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name;—the way, the thought, the good shall be wholly strange and new.”**
 - i. This is very reminiscence of the stoic appreciation of nature and search for happiness by living in accordance with nature.
23. Circumscribe your passions.
 - a. “The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well.”**
24. Be powerful in your convictions. Be self-reliant.
 - a. “All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain.”
 - b. “Power is, in nature, the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul.”**
25. Do not be distracted. Keep your power through focus on your particular genius.
 - a. “Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it.”

- b. “But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation. At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door and say,—‘Come out unto us.’ But keep thy state; come not into their confusion.”
 - c. “The power men possess to annoy me I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near me but through my act. ‘What we love that we have, but by desire we bereave ourselves of the love.’”
26. Declare your independence.
- a. “Check this lying hospitality and lying affection. Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, ‘O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth’s. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities. I shall endeavour to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife,—but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me and the heart appoints. If you are noble, I will love you: if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men’s, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth. Does this sound harsh to-day? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and if we follow the truth it will bring us out safe at last.’— But so may you give these friends pain. Yes, but I cannot sell my liberty and my power, to save their sensibility. Besides, all persons have their moments of reason, when they look out into the region of absolute truth; then will they justify me and do the same thing.”
27. Live by your own code, and know that it is a harder road, not easier.
- a. “I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can discharge its debts it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day.”
28. Emerson diverts to bemoan the current state of man. This is very similar to what we saw in John Stuart Mill’s thoughts in “On Liberty.”
- a. “The sinew and heart of man seem to be drawn out, and we are become timorous, desponding whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons.”
 - b. “We are parlor soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born.”
 - c. “If our young men miscarry in their first enterprises they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is ruined. If the finest genius studies at one of our colleges

and is not installed in an office within one year afterwards in the cities or suburbs of Boston or New York, it seems to his friends and to himself that he is right in being disheartened and in complaining the rest of his life. A sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who teams it, farms it, peddles, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always like a cat falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these city dolls."

29. Seize the day!

- a. "Let a Stoic open the resources of man and tell men they are not leaning willows, but can and must detach themselves; that with the exercise of self-trust, new powers shall appear; that a man is the word made flesh, born to shed healing to the nations; that he should be ashamed of our compassion, and that the moment he acts from himself, tossing the laws, the books, idolatries and customs out of the window, we pity him no more but thank and revere him;—and that teacher shall restore the life of man to splendor and make his name dear to all history."

30. Let your life be your prayer.

- a. **"Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action. The prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar, are true prayers heard throughout nature, though for cheap ends."**
- b. "The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide; him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire."

31. Through your greatness, the world will follow you.

- a. "Every new mind is a new classification. If it prove a mind of uncommon activity and power, a Locke, a Lavoisier, a Hutton, a Bentham, a Fourier, it imposes its classification on other men, and lo! a new system. In proportion to the depth of the thought, and so to the number of the objects it touches and brings within reach of the pupil, is his complacency. But chiefly is this apparent in creeds and churches, which are also classifications of some powerful mind acting on the elemental thought of duty, and man's relation to the Highest. Such is Calvinism, Quakerism, Swedenborgianism."

32. Do not travel to be happy. Be content first with who you are, and then travel like a king!

- a. "It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Travelling, whose idols are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans."
- b. "In manly hours we feel that duty is our place. The soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he is at home still and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance that he goes, the missionary of wisdom and virtue, and visits cities and men like a sovereign and not like an interloper or a valet."

- c. **“He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth among old things. In Thebes, in Palmyra, his will and mind have become old and dilapidated as they. He carries ruins to ruins.”**
 - d. “At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from.”
- 33. Do not imitate others, be original. Live in your own world, in your own time.
 - a. “We imitate; and what is imitation but the travelling of the mind? Our houses are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties, lean, and follow the Past and the Distant.”
 - b. **“Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession.”**
 - c. “Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare. Do that which is assigned you, and you cannot hope too much or dare too much.”
- 34. Don't try to improve society, improve yourself.
 - a. “As our Religion, our Education, our Art look abroad, so does our spirit of society. All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves.”
 - b. **“Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For every thing that is given something is taken. Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts.”**
 - i. See Emerson's theory of compensation for more details on this.
 - c. “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 traveller tell 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 blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave. The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle. He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun. A Greenwich nautical almanac he has, and so being sure of the information when he wants it, the man in the street does not know a star in the sky. The solstice he does not observe; the equinox he knows as little; and the whole bright calendar of the year is without a dial in his mind. His note-books impair his memory; his libraries overload his wit; the insurance-office increases the number of accidents; and it may be a question whether machinery does not encumber; whether we have not lost by refinement some energy, by a Christianity entrenched in establishments and forms

some vigor of wild virtue. For every Stoic was a Stoic; but in Christendom where is the Christian?"

- d. "Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them."
35. Again, be great. Great men make history.
- a. "Phocion, Socrates, Anaxagoras, Diogenes, are great men, but they leave no class. He who is really of their class will not be called by their name, but will be his own man, and in his turn the founder of a sect."
 - i. Galileo
 - ii. Columbus
 - iii. Napoleon
36. Make your own fortune.
- a. "Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long that they have come to esteem the religious, learned and civil institutions as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on property. They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has if he see that it is accidental,—came to him by inheritance, or gift, or crime; then he feels that it is not having; it does not belong to him, has no root in him and merely lies there because no revolution or no robber takes it away."
 - b. "It is only as a man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail."
37. Don't be superstitious. Be principled and above all else, be your own man.
- a. **"A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."**