According to American anthroposophists, Rudolf Steiner is supposed to have said that everything Emerson taught in his lectures could serve as a foundation for Anthroposophy. Steiner’s remark is widely believed though not verified, as far as I know. In the 1964 issue of The Golden Blade, a well-regarded, long-standing British annual devoted to Anthroposophy, the American journalist, poet, biographer, and anthroposophist, Virginia Moore (1903–1993), mentions Steiner’s appreciation of Emerson’s thought.¹

Moore says that Steiner “called Emerson’s Representative Men ‘one of the greatest achievements of the spiritual striving of humankind.’” (He owned a copy and you can see it with penciled marks in the margins at the Goetheanum in Dornach Switzerland where his library is archived.) Moore speaks of Emerson as “noble” and as “one of the greatest spirits of the nineteenth century” and she corroborates the belief that Emerson and Anthroposophy overlap, saying in her somewhat airy style, “Steiner once remarked (as reported on excellent authority) that . . . the whole of Anthroposophy could be built up” on the essays Emerson created out of the lecture courses that originated from his journals.”²

Moore closes her essay with a quotation from the ending of Emer-

---

son’s “Divinity School Address” (1838) in which he longs to find a teacher of spirituality:

I look for the new Teacher who shall follow so far these shining laws [of the spirit] that he shall see them come full circle . . . ; shall see the world to be the mirror of the soul; shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought . . . is one with Science, with Beauty and with Joy. ³

Closing her article, Moore comments on Emerson’s description of the teacher he yearns for: “There are other ways of describing Rudolf Steiner, but this would serve . . . . We can leave it there.”

In the following pages, I would like to “leave it there” by integrating Emerson’s prophetic voice with “Spiritual Science,” a term Steiner frequently used for Anthroposophy. The integration I have in mind will illustrate how both men emphatically trust human thinking for its intuitive nature and how they both perceive matter as having its source in spirit, which means among other things, that they perceive matter and spirit able to exist as a unity not, ultimately, in opposition to one another. Finally, both Emerson and Steiner see freedom as a matter of self-reliance and see selfhood as the seed from which community, rather than isolation, can develop when the “I” in any one of us becomes conscious of the “I” in others.

Spirit has primacy for both men. That said, however, the qualities of each man’s writing (as distinct from their views) differ sharply. Where Emerson’s writing is literary and lyrical, Steiner’s is ontological and scientific. Steiner’s writings and lectures serve the cultural mission of his life: to clarify the scope and nature of spirit, showing that spirit existence—its being—lives in matter as well as in infinity. Spirit substance, like spirit science, is not an oxymoron. Rather, it consists of cognitive experiences encountered by an evolving, human consciousness that can understand the invisible as ultimately visible, find infinity intimately present, and recognize macrocosmic lawfulness in its microcosmic form.

³. See Whicher, Stephen E., ed. Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: an Organic Anthology, pp. 115–16.
Steiner’s books and lectures teach by planting a thought seed that will awaken his readers, one by one, to the commonality of their individuality. Emerson writes journal entries, lectures, and essays to behold and explore his own thought by transforming it into writing.

An affinity for oratory lives in Emerson’s writing. He experiences writing as utterance—that which makes inner outer. Through writing, Emerson makes his own thought real for himself as much as for his readers. That feature brings to his journals, correspondence, lectures and essays the dynamic mix of intensity and surprise that characterizes them. The “speaker” in Emerson’s essays is almost always seeking how to regard, appreciate, and perhaps apprehend more deeply what he called “questions of whence and whither”—those questions that we ask in our hunger to know what, where, and why we are. For both men, an abiding focus on spirit as source of all realities, including material ones, forms the foundation of their work. Immersed in questions of whence and whither, their speeches and writings aim to engage their audiences in those mysteries. Emerson is performing, through language, his inner life of thought, feeling, and desire, while Steiner offers his audiences representative thoughts he selects from his vast contemplative inquiry—his meditative research—so that the thought he chooses ripens in his readers, preparing them to experience for themselves how a subtle but real presence of spirit lives in their own inner being. Fundamental themes shared by both men make Emerson’s Americanism clearly, if implicitly, part of Steiner’s own thought and suggest that Steiner’s is perhaps more American than might otherwise be expected or noticed. In short, listen to Emerson’s prophetic voice and you hear Steiner’s Anthroposophy.

Freedom and Individuality

America: land of the free, home of the brave, where individuality rules, not class or tribe. Once the land of endless frontiers and eternal hope, America, it was expected, would provide opportunity for all who seek it, and protection for all who need it. Of course this American dream has not yet materialized. As
a dream it inspired generations of pioneers, immigrants, and refugees, but few thinking people today believe that the dream has power any more. The dream has gone; its ideals have failed. Equal opportunity has degenerated into a bureaucratic legalism eager to erase “difference,” the hallmark of individuality. At the same time, rugged individualism has been replaced by an arrogant, even ruthless, individualism, which disregards community life and has no feeling for social justice. As for Yankee ingenuity, no longer is it expected to make a better mousetrap and create prosperity. It survives now only as caricature of itself in the consumerist culture that America exports by marketing to adolescents of all ages fads of every kind—sex, sneakers, celebrities, phobias.

The rampant, impoverished American culture at home and worldwide reveals a mistake, but not a failure. The mistake happened when a sense of entitlement to physical comfort, ease, and security corrupted the original idealism in America. At its best the American dream is a vision of evolving soul capacities that can and will belong to human beings anywhere in the world who can summon the strength to desire and claim them. Such capacities are those of an evolving consciousness in the souls of modern human beings—modern, that is, since the European renaissance according to Steiner’s spiritual research. Steiner (1861–1925) speaks of “the consciousness soul” as an important metamorphosis in humanity’s ability to cognize the mystery of the “I” and even to use such cognizing for creating a new metamorphosis in human souls, which Steiner speaks of as Spirit Self.4 Similarly, from his early thirties until ageing dimmed his intellect in the 1860s, Emerson (1803–1882) heralded the desire to awaken and become active in the experiment of transforming soul life.

If one wants to revisit the “American” ideals to try to understand them and begin to practice them creatively, Emerson’s

---

prophetic voice can guide that search worthily. But his guidance depends on readers and listeners who are able to receive his words as life-giving speech. In the tradition of prophets and poets, Emerson has to be read esoterically, not just exoterically. He said as much himself in “Circles” (circa 1840), his essay about orienting toward the future rather than the past:

There are degrees in idealism. We learn first to play with it academically, as the magnet was once a toy. Then we see in the heyday of youth... that it may be true, that it is true in gleams and fragments. Then its countenance waxes stern and grand, and we see that it must be true. It now shows itself ethical and practical.5

The “stern and grand” countenance of his demanding optimism calls us to think grandly about our potential but sternly about our current status. In the above lines from “Circles” for example, the exoteric and the esoteric balance one another: At the start, attention catches glimpses of a truth. Then the fragmental glimpses solidify to the point of grandeur. At that point, the “ethical and practical” of everyday life balances the grandeur and at the same time confirms its truth.

On the subject of mental health, for another example, Emerson always insisted that individuals are healthiest, most themselves and at the same time most fully human when they are most completely attuned to the cosmos:

The height of culture, the highest behavior, consists in the identification of the Ego [usually he calls it “Self”] with the universe; so that when a man says, I hope, I find, I think, he might properly say, The human race thinks or finds, or hopes.

Then, lest his audience misunderstand his quasi-imperialistic assertions, Emerson immediately adds,

And meantime he shall be able continually to keep sight of his biographical Ego—I have a desk, I have an office, I am

hungry...as offset to his grand spiritual Ego without...con- founding them.\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{Intuitive Selfhood}

Emerson really had only one topic, the self and its essentially intuitive character. To perceive your own self, or anyone else’s, you have to intuit it. “Absolute life,” he often calls it, as in the following passage from an 1837 journal.\textsuperscript{7} He is pondering “the infinitude of the private man,” his favorite paradox, which holds that the one way all humans are alike is that each of us is unique. “I could not be” he writes in his journal, “but that absolute life circulated in me; and I could not think this without being that absolute life.” To “think this” meant, of course, to intuit this.

Intuitive understanding underlies Emerson’s whole principle of Self-Reliance, the radical individualism for which he is most famous. The very first paragraph of his essay on self-reliance (1839–1840) says that your own thinking is the unobserved element in your life of thought and that this deficiency needs correction. You should learn to notice your own thinking and give yourself credit for it:

\begin{quote}
A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, \textit{because it is his}.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{6} From “Powers and Laws of Thought” in the lecture cycle “Natural History of Intellect,” which Emerson gave numerous times in various forms from the mid-1840s until the mid-1860s but never edited for publication. Included in the Centenary edition of Emerson’s \textit{Complete Works}, edited by his son Edward W. Emerson (vol. 12, p. 62). This passage, which exists in Emerson’s notebooks, is excluded in other editions of the cycle. For the history of the twenty folders that Emerson intended to turn into essay form but did not manage to do before he became too old, and for the contents of those folders, see Ralph Waldo Emerson, \textit{Natural History of the Intellect}, preface by the editors, Maurice York and Rick Spaulding, pp. i–xix.

\textsuperscript{7} See Stephen E. Whicher, ed. \textit{Selections}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{8} Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” \textit{CW}, Essays vol. 2, p. 43, emphasis added.
About fifty-five years later Steiner would say the same and would elaborate the significance of this simple and virtually universal mistake of failing to notice your own thought as a process because it is your own. Steiner showed that ordinary thinking can discover its own intuitive nature—Emerson’s “light which flashes... from within.” Once ordinary thinking discovers that the thinking process can notice its own existence, a fundamental capacity awakens in the thinker. Steiner elaborates, saying that the awakened thinking lives “within” as a body-free thinking; in that form it can begin to fan intuition’s spark-like power until eventually the capacity for intuition strengthens and can reliably motivate decisions that have been freely found or made.

Steiner describes these key discoveries in a well-known passage in chapter 9 of his Philosophy of Freedom (1894). His brilliant description shows first that true thinking (not the ordinary kind) is body-free; second, that it observes itself through the thinking experience; and third, that humans’ body-free, essential thinking exemplifies intuition, the same intuitive ability that Emerson views as necessary for knowing oneself and for performing self-reliance. Emerson held that one can develop one’s own intuition (which is nothing less than one’s own self) so fully that one can rely on it, and only it, to authorize moral deeds. In his Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom, Steiner affirms that when human beings enact a free deed they do so out of an evolved “ethical individualism.”

Ethical Individualism and Free Deeds

Continuing now with Steiner’s anthroposophic version of self-reliance, consider first his spiritual scientific discovery that thinking is a “self-supporting entity”; it needs no explanation from outside itself. Thinking sustains itself and observes itself, needing

9. The following passages are taken from the American version of Steiner’s Philosophie Der Freiheit, called Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom, trans. Michael Lipson, introduction by Gertrude Reif Hughes. Note: The English-language editions of this book have several titles, The Philosophy of Freedom being the most frequently used.
nothing but itself to notice its own processes. Steiner describes the phenomenon this way:

Those who find it necessary to explain thinking as such by appealing to something else—such as physical processes in the brain or unconscious mental processes lying behind observed, conscious thinking—misunderstand what the unprejudiced observation of thinking provides. To observe thinking is to live, during the observation, immediately within the weaving of a self-supporting spiritual entity. . . . We shall then see in what appears in consciousness as thinking, not a shadowy copy of reality but a spiritual essence that sustains itself. Of this spiritual essence we can say that it becomes present to our consciousness through intuition. *Intuition is the conscious experience, within what is purely spiritual, of a purely spiritual content. The essence of thinking can be grasped only through intuition.*

Steiner’s careful, scientific observation and analysis shows that thinking observes itself without any other process being involved. With that experience, Steiner uncovers a core characteristic of the human thinking process: it is in itself body-free. That is why its essence can be “grasped only through intuition”—the same thought quality that Emerson ranks high in his views of both thinking and selfhood.

Later in chapter 9 of *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path,* Steiner develops his form of self-reliance. He calls it “Ethical Individualism,” a phrase that many readers find difficult to understand even in the original German. Probably, the difficulty arises because readers tend to expect that by “ethical” or “moral” Steiner means some sort of obedience to a code of agreed-upon, moral actions and standards. Not so. He means exactly the opposite! For Steiner, as for Emerson, morality has nothing to do with authority coming from another person, community, code, or scripture. By “ethical individuality” Anthroposophy means a freely chosen deed executed by one’s self, and intended toward the good as judged by one’s own inner understandings of, and intuitions about, moral concepts and possibilities. Such an ethical

10. Ibid., pp. 136–137, emphasis added.
deed issues from the self, because the self trusts its ability to perceive the rightness of the deed in question.

If you didn’t know better you could think that Steiner is elaborating Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” when he speaks about trust here, so completely do both men focus on motivation as the interesting problems of “self-reliance” and “ethical individualism.” Indeed, in this regard the two phrases share a single meaning; they both point to the same capacity—the ability to trust yourself without permission from others. In cases of real authority Anthroposophy’s individuality-based morality relies on no authority other than the self, from whom the deed will issue and who is the same self that views the deed as truly moral in that situation—no matter whether others may view the deed as good, or necessary, or even view it at all.

Anthroposophically speaking, then, there can be moral deeds that an individual is able to perceive and authorize as moral, right, and free—a deed that he or she knows to be not wrong, or at least not merely self-indulgent. Here is the famous paragraph in which Steiner names the capacity he has described. (Notice that Steiner connects intuitive convictions to the acting individual’s particular situation, but has nothing to say about the situation itself or about how it is viewed generally. In other words Steiner is not implying that the circumstances themselves are somehow creating or shaping the free deed):

The sum of ideas active within us, the real content of our intuitions, constitutes what is individual in each of us, notwithstanding the universality of the world of ideas. To the extent that the intuitive content turns into action, it is the ethical content of the individual. Allowing this intuitive content to live itself out fully is the highest driving force of morality. At the same time, it is the highest motive of those who realize that, in the end, all other moral principles unite within it. We can call this standpoint, ethical individualism.11

11. See ibid, chap. 9, pp. 149–150. The remainder of the chapter offers important arguments and descriptions that address predictable questions about anarchy and so forth. In doing so, those pages offer a feast of Steiner’s delicate, suggestive, and brilliantly articulated reasoning about what constitutes a free deed—a content that reassures and
Trust in Intuitive Thinking

The 1894 preface of his book on the nature of freedom declared Steiner’s interest in, and intentions for, the new thinking and the vital spiritual knowledge that new thinking could bring to human lives and cultures. Emerson’s trust in the constellation of selfhood, freedom, and participatory receptivity resides almost audibly in the following words of Steiner’s, as he begins the Preface: 12

Truth that comes to us from without always bears about it the stamp of uncertainty. We want to believe only what appears to each of us inwardly as truth. . . . We no longer want merely to believe; we want to know.

Steiner continues in this manifesto-like style to articulate the kind of knowing he seeks, which he expects his readers to recognize as justified and as desirable to identify or cultivate in their own knowing:

Belief demands the recognition of truths that we do not quite understand. But whatever we do not completely comprehend goes against the individual element in us that wants to experience everything in its deepest inner core. The only knowing that satisfies us is the kind that submits to no outer norm, but springs from the inner life of the personality.

Nor do we want the kind of knowing that has become frozen once and for all in academic rules preserved in encyclopedias valid for all time. We consider ourselves justified in proceeding from our intimate experiences, our immediate life, and ascending from there to apprehension of the whole universe. We strive for certainty in knowledge, each of us in our own way. . . .

Today, no one should be compelled to understand. We expect neither recognition nor agreement from those who are not driven to a given opinion by their own particular, individual needs. 13

---

12. Steiner, Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path, appendix 2, the 1894 Preface, pp. 254–255.

13. Ibid.
Practitioner Consciousness: From True to Valid

The 1894 preface articulates Steiner’s expectations by speaking of truth as a spiritual capacity that sparks a further capacity in those who are ready to respond. His treatment of truth implies that something like a practitioner consciousness needs to stir within the reader if the truth Steiner is describing is to become valid. That is, before the spiritual truths could become spiritual realities they need to be received consciously by human individuals. By perceiving the potency of truth with their own receptive, self-reliant knowing, those individuals would become the veritable practitioners of truth’s spiritual power and would thus generate the power of that reality in fellow human beings and perhaps other earthly beings.

Steiner frequently said that *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1894), which had begun as his doctorate dissertation *Truth and Knowledge* (1892), would be read long after the rest of his approximately forty written books had been forgotten along with the volumes of his lecture courses (containing some sixty thousand lectures). He hoped that individuals with a certain heartfelt thirst would find and absorb his Anthroposophy when they met it in his foundational book about freedom, under its various titles. Such readers would be individuals whose selfhood was not isolated but open and transporting, like a big cup or a chalice.

In the way that Emerson longed for a teacher who could validate his hopes and help him elaborate his trusting but—he felt—insufficiently developed insights, Steiner longed for an audience who would be inclined and ready for the new science of the spirit he knew he could instill in their heartfelt thoughts. In the twenty-six years since that first edition in 1984, Steiner had seen in his readers too little of the kind of active reading and thinking he had envisioned they would achieve. Precisely for that reason he wanted to continue printing the 1894 preface in later editions of the book where he had first presented his intentions and the orientations that would guide his readers toward the new view of spirit they needed and sought. In his Preface Steiner concedes that only a few of his readers understand his book, what with deadly
stereotyping in the surrounding culture and a rampant “automat-
ism, devoid of individuality” (how readily Emerson would have
welcomed this diction). Still, Steiner recognizes warmly that some
do absorb the book’s message and want to rise toward its require-
ments. His heart lives in this early book of his. Against odds and
with strong hope, he entrusts it to those who are ready for it. His
tone is more candid than hopeful, but it is also generous, even a
kind of blessing: not just truth but grace and truth:

I am under no illusion…how much, [in] my time, automatism
devoid of individuality, prevails. But I am also just as aware
that many of my contemporaries seek to orient their lives in
the direction that I have suggested here. I would like to dedi-
cate this book to them. It is not supposed to give “the only
possible” path to the truth, but to describe the path taken by
one for whom truth is central.14

**Intuition: Building with Knowledge**

In Emerson’s view, intuition is actually the indwelling divin-
ity of each human being. We are made of it and so is the world.
Intuition is the life that pulses through self and world as “abso-
lute life.” It lives in us as thinking or “perception” and around
us as world. Circumstances were real to Emerson but never pri-
mary and never final. Circumstances were no more or less than
an expression of the divine human that made them and could
therefore also change them. If your circumstances are bothering
you, he says in the Journal entry about the absolute life, “as fast
as you can, break off your association with your personality and
identify yourself with the Universe.”15 That is, as fast as you can,
ignore your merely biographical self and claim your Universal
one. Excellent advice if one can manage to follow it.

About two decades later, in his great essay on “Fate,” the first
piece in *The Conduct of Life* (1860), which was the last book
collection Emerson made of his essays, he describes fate as the
self in disguise. He calls this self in disguise “the secret of the
world,” and describes it as “the tie between person and event.”

16 He urges his audience to penetrate that secret connection; if they did, he says, they would perceive that they and their circumstances were not two but one. “A man will see his character emitted in the events that seem to meet [him], but which [actually] exude from and accompany him.” 17 When you achieve this self-reliant insight, you transform something alien and limiting into something known and supporting. You accept it, own it. You recognize your circumstance as your self, your fate as your destiny. He urges his audience to penetrate that secret connection. Then they would perceive that they and their circumstances were not two but one.

Emerson’s approach to self as the divine and reliable soul-spiritual core in each one of us forms the basis for his wisdom and his optimism. He found, as Steiner also did, 18 that optimism gives a more realistic evaluation of life than pessimism. Just as reductive thinking accepts individuality as egotistic but misses its subtle yet strong powers for creating and serving community, so one can make the mistake of viewing Emerson’s optimism (and Steiner’s) as a wishful outlook that lacks truth, realism, and depth. In the same way, perceiving Emerson’s prophetic voice and outlook esoterically instead of exoterically produces a deeper and wider standpoint from which to value his affirmations and wise pronouncements.

In fact, lack of esotericism in the bourgeois Protestantism of his time made Emerson resign, only two years after his ordination, from the Unitarian Church in Boston where he served as a minister. It was 1832, he was twenty-nine years old. In a famous Address delivered at the Harvard Divinity School, he explained why he could no longer celebrate the sacrament of communion. He had been reading what for him was modern philosophy—especially Coleridge who led him to the “amazing revelation” that a god dwelt in his own heart. To the Divinity School students, Emerson said:

17. Ibid, 42.
18. See *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, chap. 13, “The Value of Life: Pessimism and Optimism.”
Jesus Christ...saw with open eye the mystery of the soul.... He saw that God incarnates himself in man and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World. He said, “I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or see thee, when thou also thinks as I now think.”

Emerson deplored what exoteric Christianity had made of this message. “In the next age,” he continues, they “caught this high chant from the poet’s lips, but then said”—and here Emerson ventriloquizes the exoteric corrupters: “This was Jehovah come down out of heaven. I will kill you, if you say he was a man.” With bold strokes Emerson satirizes the clannish treatment of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. For him, passive response from congregations to the “high chant” of the original message scorns its grandeur and the strength of its blessing. Such lazy, indeed corrupted, reduction of religious thought and discourse angered Emerson. It lacked sufficient reverence, wonder, and gratitude. He wanted his audience to see how only an esoteric understanding could perceive that Christ’s divinity had entered humanity and had become the indwelling divinity of each human individual and of the Earth itself.

With a now famous accusation, Emerson drove home the difference between the two views: “That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen.” The first claim fortifies him as had the “amazing revelation” he had learned from Coleridge, when reading him taught Emerson that God dwells in his own heart. The second claim belongs to the dualistic pronouncements and ruthless pieties that distressed Emerson because they distorted fundamentally the full implications of esoteric Christianity. By mistakenly receiving Christianity’s truths as dogma, Emerson said, the ordinary thinking of the congregation (and many of their preachers) turned an essentially miraculous event into a merely freakish one:

20. For views on “esoteric” and “exoteric” consult http://www.kheper.net/topics/esotericism/esoteric_and_exoteric.htm.
The word *miracle*, as pronounced by Christian churches gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.”\(^{21}\)

By means of its dichotomizing logic, institutional Christianity had made miracles an exception instead of perceiving and presenting miracles as integral to earth’s and humanity’s ever-transforming life and as merging earth into unity with heaven. Emerson himself, however, refused to operate within a dualism that was content to make the human being a wart on the divine existence when in fact human beings are endowed with the potential capacity to receive divinity’s life-giving presence.

In short, transcendence is *immanent* for Emerson, “not somewhere else but here,” to borrow a phrase from the poet, Adrienne Rich.\(^{22}\) The paradox of immanent transcendence characterizes Emerson’s esotericism and his entire quest as an American Romantic. His optimism, his individualism, and his allegedly ahistorical conviction that each one of us is entitled to “enjoy an original relation to the universe”\(^ {23}\)—these three intertwined principles of Emerson’s are not so much goals as givens. He experiences these given certainties as real, and he does not expect his audience to look to him for assurance of their truth. Rather, he seeks audiences who can experience that the given contains potential capacities belonging to each one of them, to be developed and used creatively.

Emerson designed his prose to challenge and hearten. It does not stoop to persuade. It offers neither exemplary narratives of how to live nor systematic proofs. Although every essay announces some form of his lifelong belief in each individual’s access to the universally available power that he sometimes called the “Over-Soul,” he constructed each essay and lecture to

\(^{21}\) *CW*, vol. 1, “Divinity School Address,” 132.

\(^{22}\) Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*. The words constitute the title of Part Three of her three-part book; they also serve as the title of the first poem in that part (40–45), and they are used near its end: “…lives that must be lived not somewhere else / but here (45).

invigorate rather than convince his audience, because “the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul,” not assent or dissent (“American Scholar,” 1837). This is why we should listen to him, not to be won over to some position he has established but to join him and others like him in a search for the kind of truth that lives and constructs realities.

Emerson can activate our souls. He knew and loved the “thoughts that always find us young and keep us so” (“The Over-Soul” 1838), bringing with their revelation both astonishment and a surge of vitality. Such American love of youthfulness can be called immature, but only in caricature. Like Steiner, he loved the new because he was devoted to the future. He cultivated intuition because it was and is the way to perceive the individuality of all humans, born and unborn. Each of us is a divine earthling, Emerson knew, and the Earth itself is the planet where we receive the modern version of an initiation by learning to know our selves, our planet, and our cosmic status ever more realistically. A modern and futuristic view of everyday life as initiation is similarly central to Steiner’s thought. His *How To Know Higher Worlds* (1904–05) gives a thorough example of Steiner’s practical yet profoundly esoteric chapters on meditative exercises, cultivating reverence and humility, and the cognitive aspects of human consciousness as it develops.

If we as human beings dare to accept and cultivate the possibilities that Emerson and Steiner present us with, we can let Emerson’s austere yet worshipful vision of our role in the Earth’s future inspire us to rely, despite all our insufficiencies, on developing our own evolving capacities.

And so I think that the last lesson of life, the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience,

25. CW 2, p. 272.
a necessitated freedom. Man is made of the same atoms as the world is, he shares the same impressions, predispositions, and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure.