Rights that are claimed in theory but that do not work in practice are, from a pragmatic perspective, not rights at all because the process of protecting them undermines the reciprocity between individual and community essential for democracy. The pragmatic reconstruction of this difficulty reconceives the nature of democracy and explains how the judiciary is well-suited through judicial review to extend rather than undermine democracy. In the end, a pragmatic reconstruction of law and an expansion of democracy are seen to walk hand in hand. [p.5]

Cogent, succinct, precise, accurate, and readable are the words that come to mind upon reading Sullivan’s text. With the skill of a surgeon he has gone to the exact points of error of several pseudo-pragmatic philosophers and cut out their flaw, or at least pin-pointed it with precision, and shown why the flaw is problematic within a philosophy of jurisprudence. More importantly, he has revived the nature of pragmatic thought in understanding the functionality of rights and democracy within a community of individuals.

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*Emerson & Self-Culture.* John T. Lysaker, University of Indiana Press, 226 pages, paperback, $24.95.

Whether we know it or not, we are all Emerson’s children. Any philosophical inquiry which fails to take Emerson’s insights into account has thereby deprived itself of an invaluable conversation partner. As a recognition of Emerson’s centrality to philosophical discourse, the project of *Emerson & Self-Culture* is one of great potential value to the future practice of philosophy. However, with the exception of a few notable moments, Lysaker’s book largely fails to deliver upon its promise. If Emerson’s insight is to have the influence upon philosophy that it rightfully ought to have, this will require a fundamental transformation of the terms in which we read, interpret, and discuss his work. We ought to regard Emerson less as a poet of illumination than as a thinker whose work remains incomplete; one whose views need to be synoptically drawn together, systematically analyzed, and critically interrogated just like the views of our contemporaries.
Both the faults and the accomplishments of *Emerson & Self-Culture* largely stem from the fact that it is first and foremost a reading of Emerson rather than an exploration of the consequences of his thought.

The method of the book is to take a particular Emersonian word or phrase and to amalgamate all of Emerson’s relevant quotations concerning that word or phrase scattered throughout his corpus. Each chapter receives one or more candidates for this treatment, the new terms often integrating some of the connotations of the previous ones. To offer a partial list of these choice words, there are: mood, involuntary perception, temperament, character, casualties, genius, friendship, and reform. No doubt, each names an important Emersonian concept. However, for the most part, Lysaker glosses Emerson’s passages without making a rigorous effort to define the terms that called the passages to mind in the first place. Accordingly, it is never made particularly clear just what any of the terms practically mean or what their implications for the argument are.

Throughout the course of the book, these terms are also assembled in various combinations in order to illuminate the central theme: “self-culture.” Unsurprisingly, the lack of clarity applicable to the parts does not result in a clear whole. After finishing the book, I have no idea what the necessary and sufficient conditions of self-culture are or even that I’d know it if I saw it. So far as I can tell, it’s Judith Butler’s notion of performativity in Emersonian drag. I’m not opposed to such an admixture in theory, but in this case I fail to see how the vague and tentative garb of self-culture improves upon or enriches performativity’s practical implications.

On the whole, the practical dimension of self-culture ought to have been given more explicit and thorough consideration. I would’ve liked for this book to instruct me as to how I might live a little better, how I might enculture myself. Sure, when all is said and done, I’m the one who’s got to do it but a little practical advice never hurt anyone. Occasionally, Lysaker’s personal anecdotes pop up to fill this gap, but they’re deployed primarily for the sake of illustrating a quotation from Emerson rather than in a way that might be of use to the reader in confronting her own unique problematic situations.
I got the most use out of *Emerson & Self-Culture* when reading it alongside one of the Emerson essays that it discusses. When utilized in this manner, Lysaker’s reading of “Self-Reliance” is helpful for seeing the nuances and complications buried in that most canonical of Emerson’s texts. However, *Emerson & Self-Culture* is of minimal use even for this modest but important purpose (supplementary reading) simply because the majority of the text is not comprised of readings of individual essays but of quotations on a given term or theme strewn throughout Emerson’s works. With respect to these citations, I found that almost invariably the context in which they appear in Emerson’s original texts was more illuminating, insightful, and comprehensible than the hypertext that is *Emerson & Self-Culture*.

Somewhat surprisingly, the most persuasive argument in the book concerns Emerson’s theology rather than his philosophy. Lysaker provides an essential discussion of the ambivalence and inseparability between the theodical and the theocidal poles of Emerson’s thought that is presented with great care and imagination. After highlighting these contrary tendencies, Lysaker constructs an Emersonian atheology that would definitively abandon the theodical in favor of the theocidal. As worthwhile as this discussion is, it could’ve greatly benefited from a consideration of Emerson’s idiosyncratic usage of Eastern religion, particularly Hinduism. How does the movement toward the theocidal relate to the Hinduization of Christianity that comprises an essential dimension of Emerson’s theological experiment?

The closest Lysaker comes to making a sustained philosophical argument is in his discussion of the place of “involuntary perceptions” in Emerson’s epistemology. Lysaker takes Emerson to be arguing that all of our judgments, ideas, and concepts come to us first and foremost as “involuntary perceptions” which impress themselves upon us with a fundamental immediacy. In this view, there is a givenness not just to what we feel but to what we know that may never be transgressed or surpassed; accordingly, there appears to be little room left for much of a distinction between belief and knowledge. Justification still has something of a role in this epistemology, but it is a role which always and only comes after the fact—that is, we justify what we already know. With good reason, Lysaker points out the similarities
between this notion of “involuntary perception” and Heidegger’s Verstehen. Unfortunately, the discussion does not go significantly further than noting this similarity. What about a consideration of how Emerson might be of use for clarifying and/or diffusing some of the fundamental problems in hermeneutics today? Without explicitly incorporating his insights into this kind of inquiry, Emerson is doomed to remain a thinker of merely historical interest.

In his essay “Intellect,” Emerson declared that genius is comprised by two equally necessary “gifts”: insightful thought and the publication of that thought. I take this to mean that unless our insights can be transposed into some sort of commercial, communal, and temporally-situated vehicle (i.e., some discernible and recognizable “language game”) their expansion, adaptation, and criticism by a sympathetic community will be significantly hindered. That is to say, without the role of public discourse any insight will wither and die if it can even be formulated in the first place. Accordingly, insight is genuinely itself only where it is willing to sacrifice some portion of its authenticity for the sake of being understood. This also implies that, from time to time, the publications of any and every genius need to be reissued in translation. To discover an Emerson who speaks poorly in a modern tongue may let us begin to hear his insight once more.

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This book, a volume in the Value Inquiry Book Series and also in Studies in Pragmatism and Values, covers a wide range of pragmatic approaches to education. The book is well worth-while for anyone interested in the topic.

The first of the four sections of the book, “Lessons from Classical Pragmatists,” presents essays on Peirce (by Phyllis Chiasson), James (by Celal Türer) and Mead (by Jürgen Oelkers). Perhaps the most intriguing essay in this group is Chiasson’s essay which places her philosophical