Self-transformation: Body, Mind, and Spirit

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore a conception of self-transformation that attempts to provide a holistic account covering a range of body, mind, and spirit. I draw upon Kym Maclaren's exploration of the role of the body inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (body); the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (mind [language]); and Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalism (spirit). I present the case that each of these approaches develops important aspects of self-transformation and can be seen as complementary. I explore this in relation to philosophy as a practical activity, drawing upon Pierre Hadot's perspective of philosophy as a way of life.

Keywords

hermeneutics, philosophy, philosophy as a way of life, phenomenology, transcendentalism

Pierre Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life is a vision of philosophy as a lived practice that transforms the philosopher, a perspective that he developed through his explorations of ancient philosophy (see Hadot 1995, 1995/2004). In Hadot's view, this practical emphasis, although never completely lost in modern and contemporary philosophy, is something that should be rekindled. For Hadot, theoretical discourse in ancient philosophy was not in the abstract but was used to support practical practices and self-transformation, and he writes "theory is never considered an end in itself; it is clearly and decidedly put in the service of practice" (1995, p. 60). Within this conception of philosophy, both theory and practice have a place, but theory is to be used to support the practice of self-transformation. It is suggested that the thought of Kym Maclaren, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Ralph Waldo Emerson all have affinities with this conception of philosophy in that the point of their perspectives are not to just espouse a

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theoretical philosophy, but rather that it is intended to help promote change and self-transformation. Thus, whether we are considering Maclaren's existential and bodily-based account (body, inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty), Gadamer's self-understanding (mind [language]), or Emersonian transcendentalism (spirit), it is suggested that each thinker provides an important theoretical orientation that may help to encourage self-transformation and, together, may contribute towards a holistic conception of self-transformation that covers body, mind, and spirit.

Maclaren

Kym Maclaren, in her article "Emotional Clichés and Authentic passions: A Phenomenological Revision of a Cognitive Theory of Emotion," articulates a bodily based conception of emotion, one that moves beyond "emotional clichés" towards what she calls "authentic existential passions." Her argument revolves around drawing upon a bodily based account of participatory experience, which questions and surpasses traditional dualistic mind and subjective based accounts of experience, pointing towards a bodily intelligence which emphasizes the interaction and co-evolution of meaning with the lived bodily experience of engaging with the world. Although this account is nuanced, an important point she derives from this is that we do not consciously form all of our meanings; rather, many are passively received or co-evolved in relation to those around us and our bodily experience of interacting with the world and become habitual patterns. She relates this conception to emotions, which, in her view, are not sufficiently explained by cognitive accounts that focus on choice and conscious judgments, but rather, are more passively received in many situations from our previous patterns of engagement, and she writes "intelligent bodily responses to the environment are neither explicitly willed, nor the caused effect of unconscious thought processes; rather the sensed world, itself, *motivates* movement" (Maclaren, 2011, p, 51, emphasis in original). In her account, in many situations we do not have an active choice, or to make such a choice may be very challenging because of our attachment to habitual patterns and how they may be held in place by the world around us and incline us in certain directions.

An important concept she formulates is authentic existential passions, which she proposes is "a more radical conception of passivity and its role in subjectivity" (Maclaren, 2011, p. 59). She relates this to genuine questions, which break apart habitual meanings and conceptions of self and how we live, and these are emotions that overtake us and are different from emotional clichés. Emotions from authentic passions are like first order speech and she relates them to conceptions of primary and poetic language, creative meaning and authenticity, in contrast to second order emotional clichés that reinforce habitual patterns and talk. In respect to authentic existential passions, she gives the example of the death of a close loved one who was the center of one's world, and the challenges of this, where one's life and everyday routine was intertwined with another. In this situation, a person is faced with a crumbling world, but must carry on. The center of their life is gone which prompts not an isolated questioning, but a questioning of their life, which, for Maclaren, calls for creative transformation, and to this end draws upon R.G. Collingwood to suggest artistic expression as one means to accomplish this. It is through the expression itself that we may gain some distance from the experience and creatively transform our lives. Maclaren describes an authentic passion:

This is what it means, I propose, to be put fundamentally into question, to live as a question, and thus to experience an existential passion. It is to be a subjectivity or an experiencing in which subject and object are not yet fully realized, in which how things mean and who one is are still in flux; it is to be an experiencing which calls not for a mere endorsement of familiar meanings, but for self-overcoming, for some creative form of expression in which a new grasp on the world is realized—however provisionally— and one newly "becomes oneself" (at least until the next breakdown of meaning). (p. 62)

Maclaren's account of the transformative potential of authentic passions finds resonance with Emerson's perspectives. For example, he writes:

The death of a dear friend, wife, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. (1983, p. 302)

These challenging experiences can spur us towards growth and transformation and are not just something that is just intellectually engaged with, but are events that as we experience them have the potential to profoundly change us.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer also speaks of the importance of experiences of suffering and how we may not be spared the experience of having our anticipations frustrated, which may encourage an openness to new experience and a realization of our human finitude. Gadamer discusses the experience of limitation more generally rather than more devastating experiences Maclaren and Emerson are thinking of, and he remarks that "every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation," (1960/1989, p. 356) and later notes "the experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. In him is realized the truth value of experience" (p. 357). For Gadamer, these smaller upheavals may encourage revising our prejudices towards broader and more fluid perspectives, a process of self-transformation. This process arguably has an affinity with philosophy as a way of life and is a life practice:

Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. It too is ultimately part of the vocation of man—i.e., to be discerning and insightful. (p. 356)

For Gadamer, the approaches of cultivating openness and flexibility, which emphasizes openness and recognition of our human finitude, is a process that may lead to self-transformation and is an ongoing task that is never completed, a "vocation of man," or, said another way, a "way of life."

Thus, all three thinkers hold conceptions of the importance of openness towards new possibilities that can encourage self-transformation and have affinities with the approach of philosophy as a

way of life. I now turn to exploring further aspects of Gadamer and Emerson's thought and considering how their perspectives may both differ from and complement Maclaren's.

Gadamer

Gadamer has concerns about excessive purposefulness and mastery, in respect to method and perspectives of scientism more generally. His hermeneutics provides an account of understanding that is self-understanding, meaning that we change in the process of interpretation. This is not something that can be willfully controlled, but has the character of an event, and is something that we participate in. For Gadamer, at the heart of his approach is a sense of dialogue and openness to the other through conversation. An important part of this is learning to take the risk of being open and to embrace change and growth, and working towards this openness is fundamental to Gadamer's thought and can be seen as an important hermeneutic practice.

For Gadamer, humans are finite beings embedded within their language and tradition, which are flexible and dynamic and prejudices are positive in that that they are our entry points into understanding and they can evolve. Although it is not possible to get beyond all prejudices, they can be brought into play to change one's self-understanding, and through, for example, the transformative effects of openness to the other and by following the subject matter in conversation and interpretation, there can be a movement towards broader and more flexible perspectives.

I will now turn to briefly to explore Gadamer's conception of the "I and Thou" relation, which Gadamer explores in relation to tradition, textual interpretation and people (see Gadamer, 1960/1989), although the focus here will be verbal conversation. Gadamer explains how there are three ways of approaching a Thou, with the idea that one may learn to respect the other in openness rather than turning a relation towards one's own ends. The first way is a type of predictive approach where one understands a person similarly to any other object, and seeks to predict behavior, and he remarks that "from the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man" (p. 358). If this approach is taken, there cannot be a true dialogue or openness to the other, as one is caught up in interpreting the other in terms of one's own preconceptions and self-serving goals. Gadamer points to a second way of relating "the Thou is experienced and understood in that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgment the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness" (p. 359). Although this is a more adequate way of relating to a Thou than the first approach, it still has shortcomings. He gives an example of charity or welfare work, and contends that from this point of view there is a claim to know the Thou better than they know themselves and that this is not a true listening because there is a claim to know the other in advance. This is obviously a more subtle failure. Gadamer discusses a third way:

> In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. (p. 361)

Openness involves being able to acknowledge one's finitude and to recognize how one may be governed by prejudices. This involves a willingness to bring one's prejudices into play by being open to the other and by following the subject matter, which may lead towards new perspectives. Gadamer notes that this is not slavish obedience, but rather, "openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so" (p. 361). This approach of moving towards more open perspectives in relation to a Thou could be seen as a type of practice that may encourage self-transformation.

Maclaren (2011) presents examples of how people are creating problematic situations based on their habitual responses, and also points to how potentially there could be far better interpersonal interactions. On her account, these routine responses are less a matter of choice or conscious awareness and more a way of following habitual patterns, where emotional clichés may be used by people in relationships to create and perpetuate unproductive relations that serve to keep them from deeper questioning. Gadamer's perspectives may help lead from habitual egotistic and limiting patterns towards more authentic and respectful dialogue. For Gadamer, it is important to be open to learning and be willing to risk one's preconceptions, to be open enough to know that one does not know and to be willing to ask questions, and the point in dialogue is not to win the argument but to engage in questions and answers, where the conversation partners need to be with one another and both directed by the subject matter. For Gadamer, it is important to learn to listen to the weight of the argument, not try to argue the other person down, and there is an art of good questioning. The aim is for both speakers to come to agreement over the subject matter (keeping in mind that there will always be some differences), where they may move beyond previous points of view, a fusion of horizons. Understanding of the subject matter takes the form of language and "is the coming-into-language of the thing itself" (1960/1989, p. 378). Gadamer writes "every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language," (p. 378) which is worked out in conversation. This has implications for self-understanding and self-transformation, as "to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 379). This points to the opportunity and risk, as we do not know beforehand which beliefs will be changed, where we can be surprised and "pulled up short" and our provisional meanings are re-defined, with the opportunity for expansion and enriched self-understanding. Maclaren points to the role of others in expanding our perspectives and transformation, although her emphasis is primarily through "the ways that they themselves live toward us and our shared world, through their bodily intentionalities" (2009, p. 41). In this respect, it is suggested that Gadamer's perspectives provides a linguistically based account that compliments Maclaren's bodily based perspectives. Now, Maclaren's account of the role of others is nuanced and she points to the potential limitations of our interactions as well:

> Other people play an essential role in producing such a constrained situation—and thus they play a role in the production of compulsions and regressions—for they resist attempts at configuring the situation, and therefore rule out certain potential resources as not viable. But at the same time, others can lend us new existential resources for making sense of our situation. (p. 42)

Thus, the other can either facilitate or constrain one's freedom, and no doubt this is true whether we consider our community as linguistically, bodily based, or both. This is an important point, and what is one to do if the environment is not very supportive? For example, Thoreau's famous words "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (1854/2004, p. 117) may point towards both individual choices and collective structures that may not support human flourishing in its fullest sense.

Emerson

Emerson's transcendentalism gives a strong reminder of our own inner resources and why there is a need to listen within. With his conception of self-reliance, there is a strong rallying cry towards individual integrity, creation, and freedom and to move away from limiting habits and patterns. As Maclaren (2011) points out, people are often caught within their habits, which may be reinforced and co-created by others. A strong emphasis in Emerson's thought is to work against this tendency. Against following societal norms, he writes, "society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" (Emerson, 1983, p. 261); against our own habitual patterns asks, "why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place?" and later notes "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" (p. 265); and against following what others may impose on us, he remarks that "nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind" (p. 261). He also recognizes that we may pay a price for following ourselves, as "for nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face" (p. 264). For Emerson, humankind suffers from a general state of conformism and adults have largely lost touch with themselves. Given this, we must rally ourselves from this false dependency and learn to cultivate the inner fortitude to listen to and follow oneself. In this process, we must learn to trust our own intuition to a greater extent and rely on rational perspectives and argument less. Although friendship and learning from others were important for Emerson, his conception of self-reliance provides important resources to encourage the individual impetus towards self-transformation, and he notes that "nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles" (p. 282). Emerson is not pointing towards withdrawing from the world, but a way of being in the world that is true to oneself; for example, he writes "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" (p. 263). Now, although it is important for Emerson to cultivate integrity whatever the external circumstances, there is also a strong emphasis in his thought towards manifesting ideals in reality, and in his later thought he was increasingly concerned about social causes, such as his support of the anti-slavery movement.

For Emerson, humans are connected to nature and it is helpful to go outwards toward nature, as it helps profoundly reconnect with oneself. For example, Emerson writes "the ancient precept, 'Know Thyself,' and the modern precept, 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim" (p. 56). He notes that "in the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith" (p. 10). For Emerson, by poetically and profoundly encountering nature, one can be brought back to oneself. For example, he writes "the waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise,

and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right" (p. 11).

Conceptions of overcoming fear and being courageous are also important for Emerson, as is a sense of cheerfulness and optimism. For Emerson, the deeper one moves within, there is a connection to a public and collective power which we each can draw upon and each of us have an individual connection to this inner light, and there is compatibility between one's own individuality and the Divine, and one is being self-reliant by one's deep connection and spiritual receptivity.

Although Emerson is encouraging the receptivity to genius, this is what everyone has but few use, so there is a democratic emphasis in that this is possible for everybody to do, and if everyone or at least a critical mass did, society would be reformed. Emerson (1983) writes:

> The things which are dear to men at this hour are so on account of the ideas which have emerged on their mental horizon, and which cause the present order of things as a tree bears its apples. A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits. (pp. 407-408)

For all of Emerson's idealism, he was also aware of the challenges to achieve and incorporate these insights. He notes "our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences" (p. 385). Emerson is a thinker of sudden epiphanies that may be integrated into oneself and one may grow from, but he is also well aware of the propensity to backslide. For example, he writes "well, in the space of an hour, probably, I was let down from this height; I was at my old tricks, the selfish member of a selfish society" (p. 205). Emerson does not expect some final knowledge, as "the life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end," (p. 404) suggesting a series of ongoing expansions where the self is redefined in a greater whole, placing an emphasis on flux and creative growth and becoming. Emerson has an important place for receptivity and passivity, and he writes "our thinking is a pious reception," (pp. 418-419) and of the "abandonment to the nature of things," (p. 459) and that we must learn to trust our intuition. Lawrence Buell remarks that Emerson "was drawn to models of conduct that deemphasized conscious choice in favor of attention to an inner voice" (Buell, 2004, p. 73). Each of us has her own path; for example, Emerson (1983) writes "insist on yourself; never imitate" (p. 278). For Emerson, creative expression is important and, as shown when he remarks that "the man is only half himself, the other half is his expression," (p. 448) and his spiritual perspectives are in the here and now, as indicated when he writes "the invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common" (p. 47).

Although, as discussed above, for Emerson a crisis or challenging situation may be a spur towards creative change, it is also vital to draw upon one's own resources to encourage a meaningful life. In this respect, although profound receptivity is important for Emerson's thought, so is a concerted and conscious effort to help wean oneself away from habitual tendencies and encourage deeper reflection and receptivity. However, the model for this is not that of rational self-mastery (although this may play a part) that Maclaren raises some concerns about, but rather

opening towards the experience of the authentic and spiritual depths of oneself and the creative impetus and change that comes from this experience.

Discussion

Although Maclaren, Gadamer, and Emerson present different theoretical positions, self-transformation is an important aspect of all three thinker's perspectives, albeit they go about it in different ways. In this section, I will explore an example of how each position may complement the others.

Although Maclaren's points to the importance of authentic passions, in her account, authentic passions are something that happen to us and are not of our choosing. As such, she does not suggest as a normative conclusion that we are to strive to be authentic and avoid emotional clichés. In this respect, she writes, "because we are habitual beings, we will always and inevitably experience emotional clichés" (Maclaren, 2011, p. 63). Maclaren, although raising concerns about cognitive theories of emotion, also points out that they have an important point in terms of individual choice and taking responsibility for our emotions. Maclaren writes:

> An essential task, then, in dealing with our emotions is to ask what judgments they enact, whether the situation could have been determined in other ways, and what the particular route that we were compelled to take reveals about ourselves and our relations with our environment. Through this kind of reflection, and through a commitment to developing new habits of making sense of ourselves, others, and the world, we can in fact transform ourselves and become people who are regularly moved to take up the world in ways that better recognize and respect the reality of our interpersonal situations and the people with whom we live. Though we may be condemned to emotional clichés, we need not be condemned to constantly reiterating ourselves and reinscribing the same problematic ways of being with others (p. 63)

However, she also recognizes the need for compassion in this process due to the challenges involved and the need for support and new resources to be established that promote transformation. Maclaren (2009) discusses the process of becoming a subject and how this involves moving beyond absolute towards more relative and flexible conceptions of self. These points of view would seem to find resonance both with Gadamer's standpoint of moving past our dogmatic conceptions towards more open perspectives and Emerson's viewpoint of moving beyond our habits towards dynamic change and flexible perspectives that are always evolving.

For both Gadamer and Emerson, like Maclaren, the need to manage our everyday reactions, judgments, and prejudices are also important. To give a practical example, let us look at jealousy and competition in a broad sense, where someone has something that one wishes that one could have or one is too concerned about one's standing in relation to others, too often leading to envy, anger, and resentment, this no doubt being a good example of an emotional cliché or of rigid representational thoughts or judgments. Gadamer explains that for Plato, the concern for the facts of the matter in the process of shared understanding excludes *phthonos,* which Gadamer defines as:

Phthonos (see the interpretation of *Philebus* 48ff below)[1] means concern about being ahead of others or not being left behind by others. As such, its effect in conversation is to cause an apprehensive holding back from talk that presses toward discovering the true state of affairs. So talk that is guided by this kind of consideration for oneself is characterized by a proviso: that the talk about the facts of the matter should reflect back on the talker in a way that distinguishes him or her in a positive way. This proviso prevents the talk from adapting freely to the connections in the subject matter and thus prevents, precisely, an unreserved readiness to give an account. (Gadamer, 1931/1991, pp. 44-45)

The concern here is that because of attachment to one's own status in relation to others and conceptions of oneself, one may hold to dogmatic conceptions rather than staying with the subject matter and giving an account based on this. Although this is from an early work of Gadamer's on Plato, it is suggested that this may be an important aspect of a hermeneutic approach[2] of moving towards more openness to the other in that it may help loosen reasons for holding onto dogmatic perspectives (e.g., competition with others, wanting to be ahead, etc.), helping to encourage self-transformation. For Gadamer, the orientation of openness to the other and following the subject matter is something that must be continually worked at so that one does not blindly fall into repeating habitual judgments and prejudices; rather, one is to bring prejudices into play for potential revision. In his discussion of *phthonos* in his interpretation of the passages of the *Philebus* mentioned above, Gadamer seems to be emphasizing the problem of an ill-will towards others and competitive orientation, and he explains:

So *phthonos* can be understood in the widest sense as: in being toward others, looking back at oneself and determining one's being toward them on the basis of this concerned regard for oneself. Its contrary can be understood, formally, as the absence of such a regard—not really as the "not begrudging" that looks back just as much but as a being toward something shared which is not contestable (is not withheld from the other person when one possesses it oneself); or, still more exactly, whose possession does not distinguish one of us over the other because it is something in which you and I are *alike*, are *the same (psychē, auto)*. (p. 186, footnote 28, emphasis in original).

In his interpretation, Gadamer seems to be emphasizing moving past comparing and competing with others to both help reveal the subject matter in conversation and enable a reorientation towards things that are shared between people in their commonality. In respect to the latter, let us briefly consider Gadamer's aesthetics. For example, his conception of the festival is also a perspective that moves past our everyday purposes and identities towards more holistic experience and commonality, his conception of the tragic is something that points towards experiences that are common to all, and *theoria* with its emphasis on participation, more

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[1] Pages 183-186, where Gadamer explores *phthonos* further.

[2] For example, Dostal (2010) points to the importance of Gadamer's Greek studies and especially those on Plato for Gadamer's own hermeneutic thought. Kidder (1995) writes: "It is recognized now that Gadamer's lifelong companionship with Greek philosophy has profoundly affected his thought, such that it is impossible to understand his 'original' contributions in separation from his scholarly interpretations" (p. 83).

relational perspectives, and commonality also points in this direction (see Gadamer, 1977/1986, 1960/1989). These are all conceptions that may promote a practical re-orientation away from perspectives such as competition and jealousy and their focus on things that some have to the exclusion of others, towards what people have in common. In this respect, Gadamer's emphasis here seems to be less on learning not to be jealous about specific things, but rather points towards a more radical re-orientation towards commonality, a shift that can be seen as part of the self-transformative practice of hermeneutics and part of a hermeneutic "way of life." Here hermeneutic theory informs hermeneutic practice.

In respect to jealousy, Emerson (1983) has a different account of how to look at the situation when we see someone who has something we do not, one that moves beyond envy:

> If I feel overshadowed and outdone by great neighbours, I can yet love; I can still receive; and he that loveth maketh his own the grandeur he loves. Thereby I make the discovery that my brother is my guardian, acting for me with the friendliest designs, and the estate I so admired and envied is my own. (p. 301)

On Emerson's account, when someone else has something, they have actualized it whereas we have this in potential. Contributing to Emerson's conception is that our inner state of mind is reflected in our outer experiences and we are all divine and are interconnected, and so we can look towards our commonwealth to find resources. That is why Emerson can write "the young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more" (p. 448). The moral of this for Emerson is that we can learn from others, who remind us of our own depths and resources so that we can bring to expression a creative life in our own unique way, and if we all did this we would individually and collectively live richer lives. In this case, a situation that could "normally" elicit envy is transformed by having the resources to make a positive inner choice to reframe the situation, which may lead towards potential growth. Maclaren (2009) draws on case studies with children experiencing sibling rivalry and jealousy at the arrival of a new baby in the family, and her interpretation points to the importance that those around them help give them opportunities to redefine their roles, the bodily aspects of this, and the positive transformation this may encourage. Emerson's approach is more oriented within a spiritual conception and individual choice, whereas Maclaren's is bodily-based and centered around on a change in the environment, but both point towards positive reframing that encourages positive transformation, and both point to resources in the environment that may encourage a change in our lived logic. In this respect, William James points to the importance of both the individual and community: "the community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community" (James, 1897/1956, p. 232). This brings us back to the importance of both making individual choices and developing supportive and compassionate communities that encourage positive individual and collective experience, and Maclaren, Gadamer, and Emerson each have important perspectives to help encourage this. Each thinker highlights important aspects and together provides a more holistic account of dynamic change and self-transformation which incorporates accounts of receptivity, conscious choice, experiences of interconnection (be they bodily, linguistic, or spiritual), profound experiences of nature and aesthetic experience, the need for both individual and collective impetus and support for change, and other aspects. This can be seen as part of a lived practice and philosophy as a way of life, where both individual and

collective efforts may be made to work towards moving past dogmatic points of view (be they individual or collective) which may not serve, encouraging a move towards more relational perspectives and more meaningful relations that support individual and collective flourishing.

Conclusion

In closing, Maclaren, Gadamer, and Emerson all point towards developing more holistic conceptions of self and community that may help lead towards positive transformation. It has been suggested that these approaches can be related to Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life, where the emphasis of philosophy is to promote practical change, and how each of these three thinkers provides valuable resources in this respect. While Maclaren emphasizes the body, Gadamer language (mind), and Emerson spirit, the divide between body/mind/spirit is somewhat artificial as these are all deeply intertwined, and each thinker has aspects to their thought that overlap and reach beyond this simple categorization. However, it is also suggested that there is an important point in emphasizing the differences as well, as each approach can reveal (and conceal) aspects of experience and taken together can provide a more holistic account of experience that may collectively encourage transformation and human flourishing.

Acknowledgement

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