



WHITMAN'S NATURALISM

by

JOHN K. FORREST

A thesis submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

*(no letter to head)  
John's letter  
trying to get "Reality  
of Whitman" published -  
Henry Bacon took it  
Adl by Bacon -*

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

1942

*John K. Forrest*  
*1941 W. 96th St. 76-44*  
*10220 S. Van Ness L.A. 47*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|              |                                                                                        | Page |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER I    | INTRODUCTION                                                                           | 1    |
| CHAPTER II   | SCIENCE AND THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT                                                      | 16   |
| CHAPTER III  | THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVE MAN IN NATURE<br>AND THE IDEALIST REACTION AGAINST MECHANISM | 26   |
| CHAPTER IV   | WHITMAN'S VIEW OF THE "SOUL"                                                           | 44   |
| CHAPTER V    | WHITMAN'S FEELING FOR NATURE; AND HIS<br>CONCEPT OF NATURE AS THE SOURCE OF "ALL"      | 60   |
| CHAPTER VI   | NATURE, INCLUDING MAN, AS A DIALECTICAL UNITY                                          | 80   |
| CHAPTER VII  | NATURE'S "SCHEME," THE LAWS OF HISTORY AND<br>DEVELOPMENT                              | 93   |
| CHAPTER VIII | EVOLUTION IN NATURE'S "SCHEME"                                                         | 116  |
| CHAPTER IX   | WHITMAN'S OPTIMISM AS A NATURALISTIC CONCEPT                                           | 127  |
| CHAPTER X    | NATURE AND DEMOCRACY                                                                   | 141  |
| CHAPTER XI   | SUMMARY                                                                                | 158  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY |                                                                                        | 163  |

## WHITMAN'S NATURALISM

### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

Certain contradictions, real or apparent, in Whitman's thought have long been a puzzle and often an exasperation to his critics and to all thoughtful readers. One of these contradictions, one which I hope to show is not real but apparent, is the corner stone of his whole philosophy. In fact, it is perhaps the main problem which faces any person who, like Whitman, wishes to be scientific, empirical, naturalistic in his philosophy, and yet finds in mechanistic science no room for values he sees actually existent in the natural world. The contradiction appears very sharply in Whitman as he so often couples his pronouncements of the most forthright naturalism with statements to the effect that science and materialism are "not enough." The familiar lines which best present the paradox are those in "Song of Myself," where the poet boldly proclaims,

I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing.  
Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!

and then promptly qualifies with:

Gentlemen, to you first honors always!  
Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,  
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.<sup>1</sup>

It is this contradiction that has brought his latest biographer to

1. Inclusive, p. 43.

the blunt conclusion that Whitman simply attempted to "eat his metaphysical cake and have it too."<sup>1</sup> Professor Arvin concludes that the poet gives away to materialism and science with one hand and takes back with the other. This he considers a basic fault in what would otherwise be a satisfactory naturalistic philosophy. It is Arvin's judgment that in thus qualifying "materialism" Whitman indulges in "the insidious Transcendental habit of Indian-giving, of paying the most prodigal tributes to the achievements of the scientists and then negating his tributes with an all-too-ready 'but.'"<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of critics like Arvin, then, Whitman's philosophy is unsatisfactory because it is not thoroughgoing enough in its naturalism.

An opposite school finds fault with him precisely for the reason that he is too all-inclusive in his conception of Nature. These critics demand a "dual world," with "nature" necessarily separated and distinguished from "thought, or spirit, or the moral sentiment."<sup>3</sup> This demand they find fulfilled in Emerson, the Transcendentalist, but not in Whitman.

That "fluid and swallowing soul," as he describes himself, filled to overflowing with the joy of living, finding everything in the universe essential and therefore equally good, . . . patterning himself after "the great silent savage all-acceptive Mother" (Nature), was so supremely content with the beauty, the wonder, and the mystery of the All, with the sufficiency of being alive, that he completely ignored all those distinctions between personal and impersonal, temperament and spirit, nature and man, upon which all the wisdom of the ages rests.<sup>4</sup>

Whitman's view of Nature as "existing calmly in the divine scheme, containing all . . ."<sup>5</sup> is not acceptable to those who demand a dualism of "Nature" and "Spirit."

But there is another reason why this school finds unacceptable the philosophy which includes "All" in nature. It is that naturalistic philosophies

1. Newton Arvin, Walt Whitman, p. 203.
2. Ibid., p. 215.
3. Norman Foerster, Nature in American Literature, p. 204.
4. Ibid., p. 205.
5. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 140.

have come to be associated with the mechanistic, amoral approach of science.

"Nature" for the humanists means the natural order as envisaged by modern science, engaged as science in description, classification, the formulation of laws and the tracing of causes. "Nature," for them, implies a deterministic philosophy and applies therefore only to inert matter or the lower animal world, in which moral freedom is not found, nor that power to choose between right and wrong which is the essential condition of morality. Whoso ascribes human virtues to nature is therefore on the wrong track, and the logic of his thought is bound to lead us into confusion and relax the very spring of moral action. Again, there is, as humanist critics incessantly repeat after Emerson, a "law for men" and a "law for thing."<sup>1</sup>

All the Romantic poets, to a greater or less extent, were attempting to formulate a philosophy of Nature, and this knotty problem of how to reconcile mechanistic materialism and spiritual values in Nature was inevitably a central one.<sup>2</sup> Whitman, whose every instinct seemed to drive toward finding all reality and truth in nature, was especially aware of the dilemma and gives it a key place in both his poetry and prose. It is clear that he disavows mechanistic determinism; such a doctrine he labels "materialism" or, interchangeably, "scientism." Thus he is forced to express an apparent contradiction in his naturalistic philosophy: materialism and science are "first and last," but they are "not enough" for a complete view of Nature. The bristling problems raised by this contradiction permeate the thought of the nineteenth century, and Whitman, "flooding himself" with that age, necessarily concerned himself with them.

As to science itself, he heralded it as the "best gift of our age," "the light of the world, a sun, mounting, most illuminating, most glorious"; and he endeavored to "absorb whatever science indicates." But science carried with it the derivative mechanical philosophy. This view, in-

1. Joseph Warren Beach, "Reason and Nature in Wordsworth," Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. I, No. 3 (June, 1940), pp. 344-45.
2. Professor Beach's analysis of the views of Nature held by certain of the nineteenth century poets (J. W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry) centers to a large extent around this problem.

herited from the eighteenth century, conceived the universe as a vast mechanical contrivance, wherein every part had its place and function, the whole moving according to inexorable law. The logical corollary was that man himself must be a machine playing a predetermined part in the whole. The Romantic Movement was, of course, a reaction against this philosophy. In fact the whole Idealist philosophy stemming from Kant concerned itself with the inadequacy of mechanism to explain man and his relation to nature. The scientific view that all nature is matter and motion left too many basic questions unanswered. One alternative was to find two worlds, the natural and the supernatural. Many were the variations on this theme. To others, including Whitman, this "bifurcation of the universe" was unsatisfactory.

The science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had revolutionized the world;<sup>1</sup> but the mechanistic philosophy which accompanied that science could not solve the problem of man's subjective values and emotions, and the part they play in the scheme of things. The scientists of the eighteenth century viewed the mechanical universe from the outside, leaving out of account the role of subjective man as he views the world and takes an active part in it. This approach is epitomized in Laplace. "Laplace, like so many other philosophers, places himself, as it were, outside of the Universe which he wishes to explain; and like the spectator in a play, forgets himself entirely in the contemplation of the scenery

1. J. H. Randall, in his The Making of the Modern Mind, emphasizes the importance of this revolution when he says, "It was not humanism, and it was not the Reformation, that was destined to work the greatest revolution in the beliefs of men, however triumphant they seemed for centuries; it was science. Science was to build a new world to take the place of that broken at the Renaissance; science applied to the production of goods by power was to transform medieval society into the great sprawling chaotic civilization in which we live." p. 203.

before him."<sup>1</sup> But what Laplace and other thinkers of his school had forgotten, "the subjective factor, the position, reflections, and emotions of the beholder, constituted exactly that problem which, since the time of Kant, was attracting thinkers of the opposite school, notably in Germany."<sup>2</sup>

With Whitman, as with many modern naturalistic philosophers, this mechanistic view, the "older naturalism," was not tenable. "The older naturalism . . . linked its fortunes with extreme mechanicalism and sought to reduce man to a turmoil of blindly whirling atoms. It was a naturalism which linked itself with epiphenomenalism and saw no place or function for human intelligence."<sup>3</sup> Whereas it was just the role in Nature of man with

1. J. T. Merz, A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. III, p. 552.
2. Ibid.
3. Roy Wood Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 475. That this older naturalism "has been overcome," says Professor Sellars, "is cause for congratulation." The outcome of "philosophic reflection and scientific advance" has resulted in "a naturalism which acknowledges man's unique place in nature and the possibilities on the value-side of human life . . ." He continues, "The basic thesis of all naturalism is that man is a part of nature as an orderly and self-contained spatio-temporal system. But we now see that the great mistake of early naturalism was to think in terms of the inorganic sciences and not to realize the tremendous importance of new levels of activity and capacity. This false perspective led to the result that the internal variety and differentiation of things was ignored. Moreover, the whole question of values was disregarded." Ibid.

Professor Whitehead is one of the most acute of the modern critics of the "older naturalism." Whitehead also points out that the world of science, of crass materialism, is a world from which value has been completely eliminated. "Yet (in C. E. M. Joad's paraphrase of Whitehead's argument) poetry and music and art, no less than ethics and religion, testify to the recognition which value obtains from the human soul. . . . The intimations of the ethical and religious consciousness have as much right to be treated as objectively valid as the perceptions of the external world upon which science is based. 'The presuppositions of humanism' are as universal and as deserving of respect as those of science. If, then, we must choose between the two--and it is precisely this choice that science forces upon us--it is science that we must reject, in so far as science purports to give a complete and exhaustive account of the universe, to tell us what the

his emotions and ideals, that Whitman placed foremost in his philosophy. To him, the greatest themes are "man's idea of his own position in the universes of time, space and materials, his faith in the scheme of things, the destinies which it necessitates, his clue to the relations between himself and the outside world, his ability in intellect and spirit at any rate to cope and be equal with them, and with Time and Space."<sup>1</sup> These themes "are greater than Science, History, Art, Democracy, or any problems of the Utilities or prosperity or wealth or any sectarian Religion."<sup>2</sup>

This declaration of the "final and paramount" themes may fairly be taken as the very heart of Whitman's philosophy. Yet, if his thought is to be termed "naturalistic" the definition of the term must be widened, because these themes contain two basic elements which the "older (mechanistic) naturalism" fails to explain satisfactorily. The first, "man's idea of his own position in the universes of time, space and materials" and the "relations between himself and the outside world," we have already noted as an element not accounted for by "mechanicalism." The sec-

world is really like. For nobody, after all, really believes in it. It contradicts too many of our basic convictions." C. E. M. Joad, Guide to Philosophy, pp. 367-368.

1. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 169-170.
2. Ibid., p. 170. Whitman was very much preoccupied with the problem of Man's "clue to the relations between himself and the outside world," and that fact is one proof of his claim that he "flooded himself" with his immediate age. For this preoccupation is perhaps the most characteristic feature of nineteenth century philosophic thought. As pointed out by J. T. Merz: "The interests of science as well as those of common life are frequently better served by regarding only one side of the dualism [of spectator and spectacle], or by regarding the two sides alternately; but it is the object of philosophy, inter alia, ever and again to remind us that in reality the two sides are always present, that the twofold order of things inherent in the human constitution is indissolubly intertwined. It is perhaps not too much to say that the whole of nineteenth century philosophy is an attempt to give a clearer expression to the fact that this twofold order exists, and further to support the conviction that this dualism is resolved and has its source in some initial and underlying unity." Op. Cit., Vol. IV, p. 278.

*Brackets  
do not  
inter alia*

ond, in Whitman's words, is man's "faith in the scheme of things, the destinies which it necessitates." The "older naturalism" necessitates, if followed out logically, a "dead-level," mechanical view of nature's processes. Whitman, on the other hand, saw the world as developing in a succession of higher stages.

Here, again, because Whitman so departs from the "older naturalism," Professor Arvin criticizes him for what he considers to be his non-naturalistic position. "Least of all," says Arvin, "could he consistently appreciate the austerity of scientific method, its rejection of . . . purpose . . . "1 I must reserve elaboration of this philosophical problem of teleology and of Whitman's whole-souled faith in the purposeful "scheme of things" for later pages; I will simply point out here that the cause-and-effect, mechanical view does not satisfy as an explanation for all of Nature. J. T. Merz, in reviewing the progress of nineteenth century thought, explains that in the static, mechanistic view of Laplace, which accounted for the inanimate world, "the whole scheme reduces itself to a rearrangement of the constant quantities of masses and energy in space." And that this seemed feasible "by taking into consideration the simple laws of motion, the law of gravitation, and--in the sequel also--the exchangeability of heat and mechanical motion."<sup>2</sup> In this mechanistic scheme the explanation for development and the arrival of new forms in the biological world, could be left out altogether. But when it came to the evolution of organic life the phenomenon of growth and development had to be considered.

In the development of organic life, . . . and still more in that of the mental life of individuals and of mankind, a new principle appeared. This was the principle of growth, including order, progress,

1. Op. cit., p. 214.

2. Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 395.

and, at a later stage, what have been appropriately termed spiritual values and their increase.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly the problem Whitman was concerned with. His evolution was teleological because mechanical evolution did not explain for him those values he saw actually arising in the course of nature's processes.

Whitman, as will be shown, was a consistent naturalist in his sympathy for the scientific, objective spirit. On the other hand his whole philosophy is a disavowal of the attitude of mechanistic science that nature is amoral and purposeless. For him, it is the role of the Poet to indicate that there is value and purpose in Nature. It is incumbent upon him to

1. Ibid. To present this same point as made by a modern philosopher sympathetic with naturalism: "No one any longer holds, as Liebig and Laplace and Huxley did, that organic phenomena could be deduced from or predicted from or explained by properties and processes of atoms and molecules. 'Mechanists admit that in biology we have to deal with another element besides chemistry or molecular structure. This is variously called form, organization, or structure. Even as extreme a mechanist as Loeb insists that 'without a structure in the egg to begin with no formation of a complicated organism is imaginable.'" James Bissett Pratt, Naturalism, p. 72.

Professor Pratt later points out that this "structure" in living things presupposes some sort of teleology--purpose: "When I look in synoptic fashion at the entire problem of living things, the characters of individual organisms, and the whole story of their evolution, I find it impossible to avoid the impression of general persistent tendencies inexplicable by any imaginable kind of merely mechanically caused process. And if I try to satisfy myself with a purely "mechanical" solution, I find that the word has burst its bounds, and has taken on meanings utterly inapplicable to its literal or usual significance. As some of the mechanists themselves admit, 'something more' is needed. And this 'something more,' if it is to be serviceable for our problem, must include within it some form of teleology. This teleology need not be--and indeed from my point of view cannot be--a kind of external purpose, forced from without upon living things by some anthropomorphic Creator or Artificer. The facts of life and of evolution suggest rather--and I think rather plainly point to--some form of immanent but dynamic teleology. This does not mean a complete acceptance of any of the present vitalistic theories as they stand." Ibid., p. 85.

answer the burning questions of mankind concerning the world: "Wherefore"? "Whither"? Humanity comes,

With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-  
happy hearts,  
With that sad incessant refrain, Wherefore unsatisfied soul?  
and Whither O mocking life?

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children?  
Who justify these restless explorations?  
Who speak the secret of impassive earth?  
Who bind it to us? what is this separate Nature so unnatural?  
What is the earth to our affections? (unloving earth, without  
a throb to answer ours,  
Cold earth, the place of graves.)<sup>1</sup>

It is the task of the Poet to answer these questions. He must not only, through science, gain knowledge of the "cold, impassive, voiceless earth"; he must justify it and join with it the hopes of man.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)  
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their  
work,  
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist,  
the geologist, ethnologist,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists and inventors,  
shall be justified, . . .  
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth, shall  
be completely justified, . . .  
Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,  
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.<sup>2</sup>

We may characterize the approach of Newton Arvin as that of a critic who is sympathetic with the naturalistic philosophy but who is sensitive to deviations which might lead to a non-naturalistic subjectivism or supernaturalism. He goes so far as to assume that the currents of opposition against the (mechanistic) view of the Age of Reason, an opposition which Whitman reflects, were simply attempts to stem the tide of an enlightened

1. "Passage to India," Inclusive, p. 346.

2. Ibid., pp. 346-347.

materialism which was maturing in the eighteenth century. "The mind of the middle class in Whitman's time," he says, "shrank back from the austere implications of its own advance toward the understanding and the mastery of nature, physical and biological, just as, politically, it shrank back from the radical implications of its own liberalism, its own battle-cries of equality and brotherhood."<sup>1</sup> Arvin takes the view that "the liberal Protestant preacher, the metaphysical idealist, and the romantic poet . . . had been occupied in repairing the dykes which the materialism of the preceding century had broken through; in protecting the soil of middle-class life from the ravaging waters of disbelief."<sup>2</sup>

Granting that this whole movement, so condemned by Arvin, contained reactionary elements and furnished ammunition for anti-progressive forces, it cannot be dismissed so lightly. One needs only to point out that the philosophy of crass materialism, mechanicalism, can also be reactionary. If everything is fixed and predetermined, struggle for progress is useless, cynicism and defeatism become the logical attitudes. Whitman, with his early nurture in the eighteenth century Free Thought,<sup>3</sup> was not so much shrinking from its naturalistic implications as he was attempting to fit that thought into a philosophy of Nature which would include and explain

1. Op. cit., p. 169.

2. Ibid., p. 171. Arvin's whole approach minimizes the progressive role of the Idealist philosophy in the history of thought. Herbert Marcuse, in his recent "re-interpretation" of Hegel, has performed a much-needed service in placing the idealistic systems in their "socio-historical setting." The philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, he demonstrates, arose as a sympathetic response to the French Revolution. "The ideas of the French Revolution thus appear in the very core of the idealistic systems, and, to a great extent, determine their conceptual structure." Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 3.

3. Whitman, as Professor Arvin well illustrates, was a "grandchild of the Age of Reason," who inherited his respect for "the man of demonstrable science" in an "almost literal and personal sense, in

subjective man in his relation to the world, and the presence of value and purpose in nature.

With a firm belief in nature and her processes, Whitman demanded a naturalistic philosophy; but he was equally insistent that such a philosophy must account for all of nature, including its non-mechanical manifestations. His Naturalism, like that of many modern philosophers, is neither Positiv-

the sense at least that the echoes of rationalistic agitation had been audible even in that simple Brooklyn household in which he spent his early days." (Op. cit., p. 151) The echoes also came to him in certain widely-read writings of the period. Among the more popular of these books in the tradition of the Enlightenment were, besides the Age of Reason, Volney's The Ruins, and Frances Wright's A Few Days in Athens. The authors were all "the heirs of Locke, of Voltaire, of Holbach." Whitman's knowledge of Paine and his admiration for what Paine stood for is well known. As for Wright and Volney, he was constantly advising Horace Traubel to read "Fanny Wright's book," and told him on one occasion that Volney's Ruins was "another of the books on which I may be said to have been raised." Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, Vol. II, p. 445.

Much of Whitman's naturalistic bent was undoubtedly fortified by his immersion in the naturalistic spirit of these works (See the chapter on Whitman in J. W. Beach, op. cit.); but it was the mechanistic side of the philosophy of this "older naturalism" that he, along with "the liberal Protestant preacher, the metaphysical idealist, and the romantic poet," refused to accept. The world of Volney's Ruins is one "in which all events have their adequate causes and their inevitable effects; a world in which no mere accidents, no inexplicable miracles, whimsically interfere with the intelligible movement of phenomena; an inherently orderly world in which the principles of order are accessible to the inquiring reason." (Arvin, op. cit., p. 165) Even man, according to this "older naturalism," is subject to the same mechanical laws as the inanimate universe. "It is a world, as Volney said, 'governed by natural laws, regular in their operation, unerring in their effects, immutable in their essence.' They hold sway, these natural laws, not only in the sidereal heavens, not only in the behavior of the gases, not only in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, but in human experience, in the relations between man and man, as well." (Ibid.) Arvin recognizes that, "It was at this point that these early rationalists were betrayed by an excess of zeal. Morality, declared Volney sweepingly, is 'a branch of the science of physics'; and it was as 'a branch of general physics' that Frances Wright also had somewhat too simply described the philosophy of mind and conduct." (Ibid.)

ism<sup>1</sup> nor crass Materialism. The Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology states, in defining "Naturalism":

There is a growing use of the term to indicate a view which simply limits itself to what is natural or normal in its explanations, as against appeal to what transcends nature as a whole, or is in any way supernatural or mystical. . . . In view of the oscillation of the philosophical term, . . . (this) usage is in many respects to be preferred. For other meanings we have Positivism and Materialism covering the whole ground.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's Naturalism is best defined similarly, as that view which looks to nature itself for all explanations as against appealing to something transcending nature, to the supernatural. This naturalism is to be most accurately described by contrasting it with "Supernaturalism."

The tendency with many critics as exemplified in Arvin, is to contrast Naturalism with Idealism or Romanticism, which are considered, unfairly, to be not only its complete opposites but also its enemies.<sup>3</sup> A more legitimate distinction, and one which is a more accurate criterion of a philosophy, is that between Naturalism and Supernaturalism. With this distinction in mind, in inquiring as to whether Whitman's philosophy is naturalistic the most revealing considerations are whether he considers the material world as primary, the basis of, not secondary to, "spirit"; and whether he treats external nature as objective and real, not as a mere subjective reflection.

1. "The theory that the whole of the universe or of experience may be accounted for by a method like that of the physical sciences, and with recourse only to the current conceptions of physical and natural science; more specifically, that mental and moral processes may be reduced to the terms and categories of the natural sciences. . . ." The Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, Vol. II, pp. 137-138.
2. Ibid., p. 138.
3. A great part of the philosophical confusion in literary criticism is undoubtedly due to the fact that the narrower and "older" definition has become fixed upon literary naturalism. As Perrington points out, the philosophy to which Zola gave the name "naturalism" was "realism wedded to a deterministic sociology." Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. III, p. 180. Among the leading characteristics which came to be associated with the term were "an amoral attitude" and "a philosophy of determinism." Ibid., pp. 323-325.

Professor Arvin grants that "like Shelley, like Heine, like Baudelaire--and more than any of them--he was able to spell out the first invigorating syllables of a naturalistic credo." But like them "he recoiled from its full and final exactions, and fell back, if not upon Platonism or the Old Testament or Swedenborg, then upon an intuitionist theism that was for him the more natural equivalent."<sup>1</sup> Two of these assumptions are open to challenge. The first is that by holding that "materialism" (the crass materialism of the time) was "not enough" Whitman necessarily contradicts a naturalistic philosophy. The second is that he fell back upon a mystic intuitionism which abandoned science and was anti-intellectual and unprogressive.

This study will trace in Whitman's writings the elements of his naturalistic philosophy, and the main scientific and philosophic movements of his time as they are reflected there. In considering his "naturalism" it must be borne in mind that he repudiated the "older naturalism", crass materialism, and endeavored to formulate a philosophy which would explain all of nature, including the non-mechanistic elements. Our definition of Naturalism will be that view which finds all truth and reality in nature itself and does not look for them in some source above nature--the supernatural. In the process of the discussion we will be interested also in pointing out why Newton Arvin's assumptions are to be questioned. First, it will be shown that Whitman by the very fact that he held (mechanistic) "materialism" to be insufficient was not repudiating science; instead, that he was attempting to fit it in to what was actually a more progressive, and still "naturalistic," view of the world. Second, that when he stresses "intuition," "spirit," "religion," (and it may be granted that he put

1. Op. cit., p. 197.

more emphasis upon those elements as he grew older) he does not thereby fall back upon "Platonism or the Old Testament or Swedenborg," nor does he revert necessarily to obscurantism. Rather, he attempts to fit man's undeniable spiritual qualities into a naturalistic, progressive philosophy. In tracing Whitman's all-inclusive Naturalism we will endeavor also to answer the opposite school of critics--those who feel that his naturalism is unsatisfactory because "whose ascribes human virtues to nature is . . . on the wrong track, and the logic of his thought is bound to lead us into confusion and relax the very spring of moral action."

As the empirical, scientific point of view is the sine qua non of any naturalistic view we will first seek out Whitman's attitude toward science and see if his views left the way open for the non-empirical, completely subjectivistic approach. Next we must deal with the apparent contradiction between mechanistic science and the fact that important elements in nature, particularly in organic life and more especially in man, are not to be accounted for in the terms of physics and chemistry. This point involves an analysis of the first of Whitman's "greatest themes"--man's "position in the universes of time, space and materials" and the "relations between himself and the outside world." We will here be concerned in showing that his emphasis on the subjective, the "spiritual," was not a step backward in the march of progressive thought; on the contrary, that it was a reflection of certain elements in the Idealistic and Romantic movement which were necessary to the advancement of human thought toward knowledge of the real world.

The second of the "greatest themes," as Whitman sets them forth, is man's "faith in the scheme of things, the destinies which it necessitates." This concept involves the very heart of his philosophy: the view that

ours is a developing world, a world of purpose. Here we will trace the poet's ideas of History, Development, and Evolution as Nature's inexorable laws. His conception of these laws will be approached in their setting in the time. Again, it will be shown that the mechanical view of the eighteenth century, which tends to look upon nature, including the human organism, as a mere machine, is a static view and does not allow for growth, development, progress. The Idealist and Romantic movements, along with the new scientific concepts introduced with the advancement in biological science (all reflected in Whitman's thought), brought in elements which were a distinct step forward from the old, static approach.

It will remain to show, concretely, Whitman's conception of the goal of Nature's laws. Briefly, he believed that Nature is working toward the higher development of the "average man"; and that Democracy is the inevitable instrumentality which will bring to fruition this aim. But also, since the "religious element" is "at the core of democracy," "Religion" is a twin goal with Democracy in Nature's law of development.

## CHAPTER II

### SCIENCE AND THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT

If science was "not enough" for Whitman because its mechanistic implications did not allow for the values he felt to be in the world, he never wavered in his insistence that exact science and its findings had to be accepted and followed. The Poet as the supreme interpreter of man and his relation to the world is dependent upon science; scientists are the "lawgivers of poets":

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there--there the arms that lifted him first, and braced him best--there he returns after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler--the anatomist, chemist, astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician, historian, and lexicographer, are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is utter'd, they sent the seed of the conception of it--of them and by them stand the visible proofs of souls. If there shall be love and content between the father and the son, and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of the greatness of the father, there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of poems are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science.<sup>1</sup>

Another statement in the 1855 Preface (sometimes pointed to as evidence of the poet's exaggerated claims for himself) also indicates his accord with "exact" science: "Without being a scientist, I have thoroughly adopted the conclusions of the great sevens and experimentalists of our time, and of the last hundred years."<sup>2</sup>

It would be a mistake to approach the question of Whitman's knowledge of science solely from the point of view of what he knew of the technical

1. 1855 Preface, Complete Writings, V, p. 173. The ideas here, and some of the same phrases, are found in "Song of the Answerer," (1855) Inclusive, p. 143.
2. Complete Writings, V, pp. 200-201.

theories of the various sciences. It was not his way to master technicalities but to absorb underlying principles. The evidence for his knowledge of the technical details of the sciences is scanty, that for his grasp of basic scientific theories and of the scientific spirit is plentiful. As for the great figures of science and their works, the number he mentions is startlingly few in view of his obvious knowledge of scientific currents. Certainly a great part of such information he gained from talking with scientist friends, from scientific lectures which he frequently attended, and from newspapers and magazines that all his life he followed avidly.<sup>1</sup>

1. Of books of scientific import that he mentions, Chambers' Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge, Fowler's Physiology, Animal and Mental, Morse's School Geography and Atlas, Olmsted's Letters on Astronomy, Wellman's Illustrated Botany, Mrs. E. Lee's Memoirs of Baron Cuvier, and Justus Liebig's Chemistry in its Application to Agriculture and Physiology, almost exhaust the list. See Alice Lovelace Cooke, "Whitman's Indebtedness to the Scientific Thought of his Day," University of Texas, Studies in English, No. 14 (1934), p. 90.

Of the 574 clippings of his reading some seventy are on scientific subjects. Ibid. (See also Complete Writings, X) These clippings show his wide interest in science: "They are prevailingly literary and historical in their bearing, these pieces, as one would suppose beforehand, but dozens of them bear witness also to that curiosity about the physical world and its phenomena that Whitman came by so naturally. Here belong the old articles--now from the Democratic Review, now from the Living Age, now from one of the British quarterlies--on 'Botany,' on 'The Physical Atlas,' on 'Sir John Herschel,' on 'Lyell's Geological Tour.' Here belong the much larger number of newspaper pieces--pieces on astronomical matters ('Comets, Their History and Habits' or 'Physical Constitution of the Sun'), on geology (a review of Hugh Miller's Testimony of the Rocks), on biology ('Lowest Class of Animals' or 'Scenes on the Ocean Floor'), on travel and anthropology ('Barth's Discoveries in Central Africa'). Here belong those clippings that suggest how closely Whitman followed the Albany meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1856, and how much he may have absorbed from these newspaper reports of papers read at Albany by the great American savants--by Joseph Henry, for example, on acoustics, by Agassiz on vivi-

We may conclude, with Arvin, that "it was certainly not in the literature of the sciences that he did the bulk of his reading."<sup>1</sup> But in spite of the scanty evidence of his reading in science compared, for example, to that in the case of Emerson, we can be sure that Whitman was awake to the wide scientific interest of the time. "The years of Whitman's youth," says Arvin, "were years during which, after its fine precocity under Franklin, American science was rapidly coming of age. Leidy and Henry, Gray and Wyman were far from isolated figures. The man with the microscope, the man at the transit instrument, the man with the geologist's hammer--these men were coming to be more and more representative Americans. . . . Of all this the people were by no means unaware: to make them aware of it, indeed, was the function of the lyceums, the mechanics' institutes, the lecture series, which flourished all the while in so many cities and towns."<sup>2</sup>

It will not be the purpose here to present a detailed study of Whitman's knowledge and use of the science of his time, but to indicate the nature and extent of that knowledge. Professor Cooke in her study of his indebtedness to science has shown that his scientific knowledge was extensive and accurate.<sup>3</sup> His familiarity with the rudiments of chemistry

perity and oviparity, by Benjamin Peirce on tidal currents in Neptune's ring, by Dana on the geological history of North America, or by Schoolcraft on the Algonquin language." Arvin, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

1. Op. cit., p. 158.

2. Ibid., pp. 153-154.

3. Op. cit. John Burroughs, in a letter to Whitman, relates that he could not catch him in "any mistakes" in the "wood lore and natural history" in his poetry: "I catch them all napping. Emerson, Bryant, Whittier, Longfellow, etcetera. I shall have something to say about you with extracts, but I cannot catch you in any mistake, as I wish I could, for that is my game." Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 260. In commenting on the statement, Traubel reported to Whitman: "Brinton has said the

and his grasp of the important principle of the indestructibility of matter is evidenced, for example, in "This Compost." "The general interest in botany he reflects in such titles as 'Leaves of Grass' and 'Calamus,' in the hundreds of names of the different flora of the United States, and in the principles of the germination and propagation of the seeds."<sup>1</sup> Professor Cooke further points out that in the field of physics he was acquainted with the atomic theory and the law of conservation of energy.<sup>2</sup> The science of astronomy, increasingly popular in his time, had a particular fascination for Whitman. Many of his illustrations of the "vital laws" of the material universe he takes from that field. "The nebular hypothesis, . . . which had come to be popularly accepted in Whitman's time, is interwoven with the thought of several poems in *Leaves of Grass*."<sup>3</sup> He was familiar, too, with the action of centripetal and centrifugal forces and was fond of using these laws to illustrate the "unity of opposites" in the material world.<sup>4</sup>

same thing to me--that he has tried his best to find flaws in your science but has failed to do so." *Ibid.*, p. 261.

1. Cooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 108. Whitman shows his knowledge of these two principles in a statement in *Specimen Days*, worth quoting in full because he here also voices the decidedly anti-supernatural view that thought itself is but a product of "the motion of molecules of the brain": "Fifty thousand years ago the constellation of the Great Bear or Dipper was a starry cross; a hundred thousand years hence the imaginary Dipper will be upside down, and the stars which form the bowl and handle will have changed places. The misty nebulae are moving, and besides are whirling around in great spirals, some one way, some another. Every molecule of matter in the whole universe is swinging to and fro; every particle of ether which fills space is in jelly-like vibration. Light is one kind of motion, heat another. Every human sense is the result of motion; every perception, every thought is but motion of the molecules of the brain translated by that incomprehensible thing we call mind. The processes of growth, of existence, of decay, whether in worlds, or in the minutest organisms, are but motion." *Complete Writings*, V, pp. 36-37.
3. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
4. In his formative period Whitman, with many others, honestly attempted to follow empirical science, was greatly interested in

empiric

advancement over the static approach of the old mechanicalism that it entails, is the dominant idea of modern science, natural and social. Also it is no exaggerated claim that evolution and the whole idea of historical law are behind all that Whitman wrote. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, the nineteenth century brought in a completely new conception of the world as in active process of constant change and development. The new concept of history was intertwined with the rise of the theory of evolution; and Whitman's philosophy largely hinges upon this new and more scientific view of the world.

Of equal importance in Whitman's scheme of thought with his knowledge of scientific theory is his adherence to the scientific spirit. It was his habit to stress the spirit of science in preference to partisanship over particular theories; in this he was consistent with his own aim, which was to be a prophet of the future. He well knew that scientific theories must be modified as more knowledge is gathered; but he had faith that the scientific spirit must and would live forever. Perhaps the most precious element in the scientific spirit is that its one aim is the search for truth; and in that search it clears away superstition, dogma, tradition that stands in the way. This spirit of inquiry and of revolt against dogma is a constant theme in Whitman's writings. In defending his philosophy as naturalistic it is pertinent to bear in mind the basic essential of naturalism: "an earnest and courageous desire to find out and face the truth, no matter what it may be,"<sup>1</sup> to seek the truth about Nature, and in the search to follow the empirical, scientific discoveries of science. Whitman

1. James Bissett Pratt, Naturalism, p. 3. "One thing only would be fatal to Naturalism: and that is the adoption of a non-empirical point of view, the prejudging of the question, the dogmatic formation of a definite conclusion before or against the evidence." Ibid., p. 34.

reiterates this sentiment both in his prose writings and his poetry.

One of his strongest statements of his firm belief in the empirical approach is recorded by Traubel:

It is the crowning glory of our time that this new evangel (science) has appeared. There is no salvation if not in that: it is an appeal to nature, an appeal to final meanings--to facts, to the sum itself: it is an absolute surrender to the truth: it never asks us: Do you want this thing to be true? or, Is it ugly, hateful? but, Is it true, and if it is true that settles it. That's all there is to it--there's all there needs to be to it: that's enough.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, he continues, "science and literature are one, as they everywhere and always should be one in fact,"

and it is here, in such a noble equipment, that Heine lustrously shines. . . . In all imaginative work, all pure poetic work, there must especially come in a primal quality, not to be mentioned, named described, but always felt when present: the direct off-throwing of nature, parting the ways between formal, conventional, borrowed expression and the fervor of genuine spirit. Heine had it--so do all the big fellows have it. More than any other agent, science has been furthering it.

Traubel then asked Walt if this spirit was not also in the Leaves of Grass.

His reply is further proof of the tremendous importance he placed upon science in the broadest sense: the dogged insistence on the empirical, on "the fact" as the only basis of truth.

Oh! I hope so, I believe so: it has been in the air: I have sucked it in as the breath of life: unconsciously, not by determination, but with full recognition now of its great value, of its wonderful significance. Yes, Leaves of Grass would lose much if it lost that. That is the ground underlying all: the fact, the fact: that alone: the fact devotedly espoused, sacred, uplifting: The whole mass of people are being leavened by this spirit of scientific worship--this noblest of religions coming after all the religions that came before.<sup>2</sup>

1. Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 362.

2. Ibid., pp. 362-363. Further evidence that this spirit of crusade against dogma was more than a Romantic tendency but was part of the poet's scientific creed is found in other conversations with Traubel on the subject. His quick eye to detect defections in the scientific spirit is shown, for example, in his criticism of Monsieur Conway: "Conway's fault is that he lacks the scientific spirit--has had a glimpse of it, now and then makes use of

That Whitman had "sucked in" this spirit of science "as the breath of life" at the time of the first Leaves of Grass is borne out by the tone of the Preface as well as that of the poems. There he points out that it is science that clears away superstition and belief in the supernatural, and explains everything by natural law. "The whole theory of the supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it," he states, "departs as a dream." "What has ever happen'd--what happens, and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws inclose all."<sup>1</sup> The scientific, naturalistic view must deny the supernatural because "it is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women."<sup>2</sup> This view demands that men and nature must be accepted as they are and investigated with honesty. "Men and women, and the earth and all upon it, are to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted, and shall be done with perfect candor."<sup>3</sup>

Over and over Whitman insists that the poet must meet reality, modern discoveries, facts. He asks,

Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?  
Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in  
my strength, gait, face?  
Have real employments contributed to it? original makers? not  
mere amanuenses?  
Does it meet modern discoveries, calibres, facts, face to face?<sup>4</sup>

Complete honesty in the search for truth may be further emphasized here because Whitman many times indicates that he considers this the chief glory of the scientist. Discussing the evolutionists, the "master-men"

it, but lacks it as a characteristic. He is the advocate, the debater--more anxious to have his case or his man proved true than to be true." Ibid., p. 72.

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 174.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Inclusive, p. 294.

of the time, he tells Traubel, "I stand in awe before the men of science: they hold the key to the situation: they are the true discoverers: they are--they, with their utter abandon, honesty."<sup>1</sup> Again, in discussing E. L. Youmans, the chief popularizer of the views of Herbert Spencer in America, he says:

I like the scientific spirit--the holding off, the being sure but not too sure, the willingness to surrender ideas when the evidence is against them: this is ultimately fine--it always keeps the way beyond open--always gives life, thought, affection, the whole man, a chance to try over again after a mistake--after a wrong guess. <sup>2</sup>

He sees in the "greatest sages--Epicurus, Epictetus, Emerson, Darwin," this necessary element of readiness to yield, and adds: "All modern science is saturated with the same spirit, and in this exists its excuse for being."<sup>3</sup> But the high value Whitman put upon this quality is best shown in his exclamation to Traubel when he quoted to Walt "something Huxley said about evolution--that he did not hold it as a dogma but as a working hypothesis."<sup>4</sup>

Cried Whitman:

It is beautiful--beautiful--such a confession as that: the most glorious and satisfying spiritual statement of the nineteenth century. Can the churches, the priests, the dogmatists, produce anything to match it?<sup>4</sup>

It is with this spirit in mind that Whitman, in Specimen Days, called science "a sun . . . most illuminating . . . surely never again to set";

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 97-98.
2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 101.
3. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 517.
4. Ibid., p. 65. Another conversation with Traubel will serve to illustrate how he carried over this rebellion against rules and custom to the field of art. Traubel spoke of "an unconventional photographer who had met with hot professional opposition in making experiments looking towards the progress of his art." Whitman "forcibly exclaimed": "There it is over again--the same old bark: the canons: sticking to the old road--the prior claims of rule, custom: the old anti-Napoleonic objurgation: 'He ought to lose the battle--ought to lose it even if he does not--because he don't prepare to win it according to the rules!'" Ibid., p. 27.

Note, today, an instructive, curious spectacle, and conflict. . . . Science testing absolutely all thoughts, all words, has already burst well upon the world--a sun . . . most illuminating . . . surely never again to set. But against it, deeply intrench'd, holding possession, yet remains . . . the fossil theology of the mythical-materialistic, superstitious, untaught and credulous, folk-loving ages of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

A final element in Whitman's conception of science is the foundation for the optimism of his philosophy: the "celebration" of everything in the universe of nature.<sup>2</sup> His idea is that "science says to us":

Be ready to say yes whatever happens, whatever don't happen: yes, yes, yes. That's where science becomes religion--where the new spirit utters the highest truth--makes the last demonstration of faith: looks the universe full in the face--its had in the face, its good--and says yes to it.<sup>3</sup>

From this point of view "science" is synonymous with naturalism; the spirit of science to Whitman, then, is the spirit of naturalism.

We will see in later chapters the extent of Whitman's naturalistic beliefs and what place they take in his whole philosophy. In order to understand that place we must return to his treatment of the supreme paradox presented in the Introduction: on the one hand, the necessity of the empirical, scientific approach to the world, and on the other, the equal necessity of including as a part of Nature, Man with all of his emotions, values, ideals. As the poet put the case:

I have great faith in science--real science: the science that is the science of the soul as well as the science of the body (you know many men of half sciences seem to forget the soul).<sup>4</sup>

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 123.

2. The elements of Whitman's optimism will be discussed in Chapter IX.

3. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 363.

4. Ibid., p. 88.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVE MAN IN NATURE AND THE IDEALIST REACTION AGAINST MECHANISM

It was because science did not take into account the subjective, the "soul" of man, that Whitman found it insufficient to explain his all-inclusive "Nature." Man, after all, is a part of Nature; the "soul," which to Whitman included man's emotions, ideals, values, had to be accounted for in his Naturalism. It has been pointed out in Chapter I that the whole Idealist and Romantic movement concerned itself with this problem. Whitman not only reflected the ferment of thought on the relation of Man to Nature; he was also conscious of the philosophical problems involved. Because science was mechanistic he held "metaphysics" to be above science:

Meantime, the highest and subtlest and broadest truths of modern science wait for their true assignment and the last vivid flashes of light--as democracy waits for its--through first-class metaphysicians and speculative philosophes--laying the basements and foundations for those new, more expanded, more harmonious, more melodious, freer American poems.<sup>1</sup>

The internal evidence of his writings from the very earliest proves that he had imbibed the currents of philosophical idealism stemming from Kant. As the idealistic systems were part of the intellectual atmosphere of the time, this fact is not surprising.

Although his metaphysics has been called "unschooled and unsophisticated" he gives evidence in his "Sunday evening lectures" on the "great German metaphysicians" of having grasped the significance of some important philosophical problems. He begins the "lectures" by pointing out the difference between science and philosophy.

1. "Darwinism--(Then Furthermore)," Complete Writings, V, p. 280.

Science, strictly speaking, deals in positive facts, practical experiments, proofs. Philosophy combines them, applies them to solve the vast problem of universal harmony, ensemble, the idea of the all. . . . Metaphysics, defined by Kant . . . is according to another and perhaps still better description, that which considers the whole concrete show of things, the world, man himself, either individually or aggregated in History, as resting on a spiritual, invisible basis, continually shifting, yet the real substance, and the only immutable one.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction he makes here, that pure science necessarily solves problems in parts but that the problem of Life is one and undivided and thus demands the philosophical point of view, may be regarded as a reasonable one.<sup>2</sup> The further pronouncement, that the world rests on a spiritual basis, is a different matter, one which we will be concerned with later in studying Whitman's conception of the nature of reality.

A little further in the same "lectures" he states another reason science

1. Complete Writings, IX, p. 163. He adds, "This was the doctrine of Hegel."
2. We have already noted that Professor Whitehead is one of the most provocative critics of the view that mechanical science alone is sufficient as a philosophy to explain all of nature. In connection with this insufficiency he points out that "science bifurcates the universe." As C. E. M. Joad summarizes and explains Whitehead's argument: "Thus it (science) accepts some activities as relevant to its interpretation, such as, for example, those which are denoted by the concepts of energy, electricity, and force, and rejects as irrelevant all that is implied by the creative activity of the artist and the religious experience of the mystic. There is 'bifurcation' again in the distinctions between substance and qualities, cause and effect, thing and environment. Above all there is 'bifurcation' between mind and body, life and matter, spirit and nature. There, spread out in space is nature, and here, inserting itself into the bits of nature, which we call bodies, is life, producing effects upon bodies which are other than those which the laws of physics will enable us to predict, and introducing an element of arbitrary caprice which we call free will into the apparently orderly scheme of nature." Joad, op. cit., pp. 570-571.

Whitman's insistence that things be viewed in the "ensemble," the all, is a basic part of his philosophy. That at this point he had to take one foot from the path of mechanistic science is equally clear.

fails to answer all the problems of life. Mechanical science furnishes no satisfactory "clues" to the two questions he considers the "greatest themes": man's position in the world and his relation to objective nature; and the ultimate purpose, destiny of the world.

. . . Final and paramount to all is man's idea of his own position in the universes of time, space and materials, his faith in the scheme of things, the destinies which it necessitates, his clue to the relations between himself and the outside world, his ability in intellect and spirit at any rate to cope and be equal with them, and with Time and Space. These, and thoughts upon these come to the soul and fill and exercise it and remain of vital interest after it has exhausted all other fields. . . . They are the greatest themes. They are greater than Science, History, Art, Democracy, or any problems of the Utilities or prosperity or wealth or any sectarian Religion.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman's conception of the "scheme" of the world, its "purposes," will be considered in detail in later chapters. At present we will concern ourselves with the first problem, man's position in the world and the relation between himself and objective nature.

This question is of supreme importance, the poet repeats, because Man's soul is "restless and sad until it gets some clue however indirect to itself and time, Space and all the processes and objects that fill them."<sup>2</sup> Again,

1. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 169-170. He adds that one man, Hegel, "has lived and has bestowed on his fellow-men the Ariadne's thread to guide them through the maze" of questions concerning "man in the visible and invisible world": "I would not be understood to depreciate the Great Departments, the Specialties I have just named, but I say that compared with the question of man in the visible and invisible world the others become comparatively insignificant. Yourself, myself,--amid the baffling labyrinths--what am I, what are you here for?--give us some suggestion (however indirect or inferential), or clue, or satisfying reason--the world with its manifold shows--the beginningless, endless worder, Time--the other wonder Space--oneself, the darkest labyrinth, mightiest wonder. What triumphs of our kind out-topple this--that one, a man, has lived and has bestowed on his fellow-men the Ariadne's thread to guide them through the maze?" Ibid., p. 170.
2. Ibid., p. 182. At this point he declares, "Taking the advent of the nineteenth century for a chronological centre, the years sur-

he emphasizes that science alone fails to furnish the necessary clue. To solve the problem one must have "the thought of universality (ensemble, unity)--the conception of a divine purpose in the cosmical world and in history, the realization that knowledge and science however important are branches, radiations only--each one relative--is not only the grand antecedent background and appropriate entrance to the study of any science but to the fit understanding of the position of one's self in Nature . . ."<sup>1</sup>

If we bear in mind the reaction against mechanistic thought we may better understand why Whitman considered the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel to be "the most important emanation of the mind of modern ages and of all ages . . ."<sup>2</sup> We know that he was perhaps the most intense democrat in literature, that all his inclinations were toward progress, that his ambition was to be "Modern." Then how can his enthusiasm for the idealist philosophy be accounted for if, according to Arvin, that philosophy was anti-progressive, and "the liberal Protestant preacher, the metaphysical idealist, and the romantic poet" had, in their various ways, "been occupied in repairing the dykes which the materialism of the preceding century had broken through"?<sup>3</sup> Professor Arvin's approach to the problem of Whitman's deviation from materialism and science into the realm

rounding it are probably of an importance in the history of metaphysical science (the science that cognizes that which is above sense and beyond experience) beyond any others known." Ibid., p. 183.

1. Ibid. A little later in this same passage he stresses the importance of the philosophical approach in Democratic Vistas: "He has read my Vistas to little purpose who has not seen that the Democracy I favor (if forced to choose) willingly leaves all material and political successes to enter upon and enjoy the moral, philosophical and religious ones." Ibid., p. 184.
2. Ibid., p. 181.
3. Op. cit., p. 172.

of the Idealist philosophies assumes that the Idealistic movement was, in the main, a step backward from the materialistic thought of the Enlightenment. But as pointed out in Chapter I, Arvin, like some other literary scholars, is here distorting and oversimplifying the role which the Idealist and Romantic movement played in the advancement of thought.

We have seen that one of these elements of the Idealist philosophy--the analysis of subjective Man in his relation to the universe--was left out of account by eighteenth century materialism. This "older naturalism" did not acknowledge "man's unique place in nature and the possibilities of the value-side of human life."<sup>1</sup> If it may be taken as a "basic thesis of all naturalism" that man is a part of nature,<sup>2</sup> the Idealist philosophy plays a progressive role in emphasizing this problem left unsolved by the older naturalism. The mechanistic approach gave no clue to the question Whitman considered paramount: the relations between the "Me" and the "Not Me."

Before discussing Whitman's conception of this philosophical problem as he found it outlined by the "Idealist metaphysicians" and as he speculated upon it himself, let us look for a moment at a few of the sources that influenced him. A critic has stated that it is unlikely that Whitman bootlegged certain Idealist and Romantic concepts when they were readily at hand over every counter. Particularly available were some of the main ideas of the four "great German metaphysicians." It is not my purpose in this study to prove the exact source of these ideas in Whitman but to find from his own works his conception of them and to point out their general background in the Idealist movement.

1. Sellers, op. cit., p. 475.

2. Ibid.

Evidence is lacking as to just when Whitman came to knowledge of the "giant quaternion," but certainly he dealt in the terms of those philosophers from the time of the first Leaves. We do know that he was strongly influenced by the Transcendental movement, particularly by Emerson; it will help in the understanding of Whitman's philosophy to place that movement as a part of the general reaction against the mechanism of the eighteenth century. Edward Dowden explains the general outlines as follows:

The Transcendental Movement opposes the empirical philosophy of the eighteenth century, not like the Medieval Revival by a return to a past age, or an appeal to authority but by an appeal to something higher, more divine, in man, than the senses or the understanding; it opposes the mechanical deism of Paley and the mechanical atheism of La Mettrie by the discovery of God immanent and omnipresent in nature and in man. The German philosophical systems from Fichte to Hegel belong to this movement; it appears, modified by other elements, in the teaching of Wordsworth in his earlier years, of Coleridge, and of Carlyle; in the vague pantheism of Goethe; and in the lives and writings of that remarkable group of New England reformers, of whom Emerson and Theodore Parker have been the most widely known, and have indeed exercised an European influence.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the Idealistic elements in Whitman's philosophy were a part of the whole thought of his time makes the question of exact sources of these elements particularly difficult. It seems beyond doubt that he was influenced by Emerson prior to 1855, but also from the very first his own "flavor" is readily distinguishable. It might be said, as will be elaborated in later pages, that Emerson inclines to the Kantian subjectivity whereas Whitman is more insistent upon the active relation between Man and Nature found in the Hegelian philosophy. I cannot here go into the question of the similarities and differences in their thought; I wish simply to make the point that some of the Idealist elements in Whitman are also prominent in Emerson. To cite one example, Emerson's conception of the unity of man

1. Studies in Literature, pp. 5-6.

with the universe is similar to Whitman's. From time to time he expressed in his prose his feeling for man's oneness with the life about him. Such identity, as he reasoned in "The Over-Soul," is possible because the Over-Soul contains every man's particular being, and in it every man's being is "made one with all other" beings; thus the person seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one and the same. The similarity to Whitman is obvious.<sup>1</sup>

But if we can believe the poet's own words, he at least felt that the Leaves of Grass "tallies, in certain respects, the development of the great System of Idealistic Philosophy in Germany, by the 'illustrious four.'<sup>2</sup> The "Notice" of the 1872 edition of the Leaves, very probably written by Whitman, emphasizes again his consciousness of the philosophical problem of "spiritual" man in "material" nature:

. . . It is to be demonstrated, by study and comparison, that the same theory of the essential identity of the spiritual and the material worlds, the shows of Nature, the progress of civilization, the play of passions, the human intellect, and the relations between it and the concrete universe, which Kant prepared the way for, and Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel have given expression and statement in their system of transcendental Metaphysics--this author has, with equal entirety, expressed and stated in Leaves of Grass, from a poet's point of view--singing afresh, out of it, the song of the visible and invisible worlds--renewing, reconstructing, consistently with the modern genius, and deeper and wider than ever, the promises

1. Another of the basic ideas in Whitman, as will be illustrated later, is that nothing is fixed in nature. This is also a favorite theme of Emerson's. His essay "Circles," (1841) for example, contains the statement in various guises: only "external generation abides," "only eternal generation of circles proceeds." (Wks., II, 318) "Nothing is fixed in nature, new continents being built out of old planets and new races being "fed out of the decompositions of the foregoing; nothing is fixed in the industrial world, steam taking the place of sails and electricity of steam; nothing is fixed in art, Greek sculpture having melted away like ice and Greek letters being in a dying condition." (Wks., II, 302)
2. "Notice of 1875" (of Leaves of Grass), Richard M. Bucke, Walt Whitman, p. 211. For the evidence that Whitman himself wrote the "Notice" see Esther Shepherd, Walt Whitman's Poem, p. 360.

of immortality--endowing the elements of faith and pride with a vigor and ensemble before unknown . . .

Mody C. Boatright in his study of Hegelian ideas in Whitman<sup>1</sup> concludes that "his later works show that Whitman made no material addition to his thought after 1855." As to the time he first encountered the Hegelian philosophy Boatright states that "if Whitman is indebted to Hegel at all, his influence must have been felt before the publication of Leaves of Grass."<sup>2</sup> Whether these conclusions are strictly true or not, I hope to illustrate in later pages that all of the scientific and philosophical views with which we are dealing here were present in his work, at least in the germ, from the very first.

Boatright and others have traced parallels between Whitman's "lectures" on the German metaphysicians, particularly Hegel, and passages in Joseph Goetwick's German Literature, published in Philadelphia in 1854.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that the poet drew freely on this source. It is possible that he had access to this work before the first edition of the Leaves; one bit of evidence proves that he was referring to it at least in 1857.<sup>4</sup> Newton Arvin suggests other sources such as Frederick Hedge's Prose Writers of Germany, the Britannica, and Dana's American Cyclopaedia, that Whitman may have used.<sup>5</sup>

But one must avoid the mechanical conclusion that the poet drew all

1. "Whitman and Hegel," Texas University Studies in English, No. 9, (1929) pp. 154-150.
2. Ibid., p. 148.
3. See W. B. Fulghum, Jr., "Whitman's Debt to Joseph Goetwick," American Literature, XII (Jan., 1941), pp. 491-496; and for an earlier study of the same question, J. W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, pp. 374-375.
4. A note on Schlegel dated by the poet "157" is undoubtedly drawn from Goetwick. See Fulghum, op. cit., pp. 494-495.
5. Op. cit., p. 192; pp. 308-309. Arvin's conclusion as to the period Whitman looked "closely" into the German philosophers is that "the chances are that it was after two editions of Leaves of Grass had

of his understanding of the Idealist philosophy and his very obvious spontaneous enthusiasm for the German metaphysicians from these matter-of-fact sources. Even though he used Goetwick, for example, as a reference, he could not have gotten from Goetwick's somewhat humdrum pages the rather clear and certainly sympathetic understanding of those philosophers that he reflects in the "lectures."<sup>1</sup>

Even in the absence of more definite evidence of Whitman's sources of knowledge of the Idealist philosophers prior to 1855 it is hardly too much to assume that he had before that time "absorbed" some of their philosophy. Knowing his sensitiveness to the thought of his time it would be strange if he had not. A passage from William Douglas O'Connor's "Letter" of 1883 indicates what one of his admirers thought of Whitman's debt to the "giant quaternion." In the course of his defense of Whitman O'Connor answers a reviewer who charged that Whitman "echoed" Emerson. First, he states flatly that Whitman "had read Kant, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel, as Mr. Cook, if he had taken the trouble to read the book he was reviewing, could have seen plainly."<sup>2</sup> Whether we accept this statement or not we can assume that regardless of Whitman's exact sources, the concepts of the Idealist philosophy were in the air of the time; and that the poet, remarkably and truly "in rapport" with his time, absorbed them. In O'Connor's words:

appeared and perhaps mainly during the sixties." Ibid., p. 191.

1. For example, Whitman would never have been inspired in his whole-souled enthusiasm for these figures, particularly Hegel, by Goetwick's unexcited estimate of them in concluding his short summary: "In the above passage, which may perhaps be regarded as an attempt to do what is almost impossible (to give some brief and intelligible results of a voluminous and abstruse philosophy), it must be observed that there is no intention either to maintain or to dispute the truth of the principles stated." Joseph Goetwick, German Literature, p. 272.
2. Richard M. Bucke, Walt Whitman, p. 82.

The thought of that giant quaternion, which, in fact, is rather an expression of what is in the minds of men in our age, than anything that has been communicated to them by the four philosophers, is precisely the thought of which Mr. Emerson, in this country, like Cousin in France, is, in his writings, without any derogation to his own proper or originality, the carrier or interpreter; so that all the indebtedness Mr. Cook oracularly fancies, is referable to the German source both minds had drunk from, though in Walt Whitman's case it is easy to see that his own powerful and sensitive genius, naturally in rapport with the thought of his age, far better accounts for the ideas of his book than any acquaintance with the well-heads of modern philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

This passage assumes further significance because there is evidence that Whitman corrected proofs of O'Connor's letter and even supplied passages. *Rather Shepherd*, in Walt Whitman's Pose, has combed this evidence and concludes:

Since the "Letter" was proof-read, corrected, and edited several times by Whitman, the statements made in it by O'Connor can be taken to be substantially what Walt himself wanted the future generations to believe as to his relations with Emerson and as to the source and meaning of Leaves of Grass, so far as that meaning can be stated through the words of a friendly and understanding critic. Whitman allows O'Connor to say that he had read Kant, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel before he wrote Leaves of Grass.<sup>2</sup>

In dealing with the problem of Man's place in Nature as Whitman conceived it and as he saw it outlined in the "giant quaternion," constant reference will be made to his "lectures," perhaps not written until the middle sixties, and to the later essay, "Carlyle from American Points of View." These may be discussions after the fact as far as the 1855 Leaves is concerned, but nevertheless they shed light on the poet's concepts as expressed in the earliest poems. A passage from the essay will serve to

1. Ibid.
2. Op. cit., p. 360. We are not interested here in answering Mrs. Shepherd's contention that this statement of sources "does not tally with his earlier statements," and is therefore to be taken only as a part of Whitman's "pose" and as evidence of his mendacity.

show the importance Whitman placed upon this problem and to indicate his understanding of the respective positions of the German metaphysicians upon it. These philosophers were all concerned, of course, with the subjective and with man's relation to the world; but they differ sharply in their treatment of these questions. Whitman, in his "lectures" and in his treatment of the same material in the Carlyle essay, shows a clear understanding of their basic differences.

First, he points out that Kant explained "the laws of the human understanding," but left the question of the relation between the "Me" and the "Not Me" an "open one":

The most profound theme that can occupy the mind of man--the problem on whose solution science, art, the bases and pursuits of nations, and everything else, including intelligent human happiness . . . is doubtless involved in the query: What is the fusing explanation and tie--what the relation between the (radical, democratic) Me, the human identity of understanding, emotions, spirit, etc., on the one side, of and with the (conservative) Not Me, the whole of the material objective universe and laws, with what is behind them in time and space, on the other side? Immanuel Kant, though he explain'd or partially explain'd, as may be said, the laws of the human understanding, left this question an open one.<sup>1</sup>

1. Complete Writings, IV, pp. 318-319. In the "lectures" Whitman had summarized with a good deal of accuracy the historical sequence of the philosophies of Locke, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant in their treatment of the nature and role of the subjective. He says there: "Kant analyzes, dissects, dissipates the vast suffocating miasma that had so long spread impediments to philosophy--discusses much--clears away, removes, sometimes like a surgeon's knife--yet in fact and after all decides little or nothing--is of indescribable value--denies the possibility of absolute knowledge of the external world--begins with Hume--admits that we receive all the materials of our knowledge through the senses--but immediately rises above that admission. Long before, the speculations of Locke and the other materialists, had reached the formula that 'there is nothing in the understanding which has not arrived there through the senses.' Leibniz had replied, 'Yes, there is the understanding itself.' Kant's entire speculations are but a splendid amplification of this reply. He endeavors to get at and state the philosophy of the understanding. The problem of the relations between the understanding and the universes of material nature, he did not attempt to solve." Ibid., IX, p. 176.

Schelling, he proceeds to explain, went further than Kant and attempted to answer the question of the relation between the "Me" and the "Not Me." It is that the human mind and concrete nature are "in centrality and essence one":

Schelling's answer, or suggestion of answer, is (and very valuable and important, as far as it goes) that the same general and particular intelligence, passion, even the standards of right and wrong, which exist in a conscious and formulated state in man, exist in an unconscious state, or in perceptible analogies, throughout the entire universe of external Nature, in all its objects large or small, and all its movements and processes--thus making the impalpable human mind, and concrete nature, notwithstanding their duality and separation, convertible, and in centrality and essence one.<sup>1</sup>

As we noted in the Introduction, what the eighteenth century mechanists had forgotten, "the subjective factor, the position, reflections, and emotions of the beholder, constituted exactly that problem which, since the time of Kant, was attracting thinkers of the opposite school, notably in Germany."<sup>2</sup> But, as Whitman correctly understood, Kant and Fichte had tended to emphasize the subjective factor to the exclusion of the external world. "So great became this subjective interest, notably in the philosophy of Fichte, that the details of the scenery were, so to

1. Ibid., IV, p. 319. In the "lectures" (Ibid., IX, pp. 180-181) Whitman outlines Schelling's philosophy in more detail. He also summarizes the position of Fichte, pointing out the extreme subjectivism of his philosophy. "The difference between him (Schelling) and Fichte," he states, "is that Schelling's philosophy is more largely objective. The chief forte of it--seeking to counterbalance and restrain Fichte's all-devouring egoism--is the essential identity of the subjective and objective worlds . . . ." Fichte "founds and builds largely on the distinction between the I and the not I. Upon the fact that a man can only realize anything in its relations to himself, and from the capacities and measurements that constitute himself, he lays so much stress, that the whole universe becomes, in brief, the I as that is the only thinking subject, active principle and consciousness. His philosophy is simple, single, complete and logical as far as it goes." Ibid., IX, p. 179.

2. Herz, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 552.

speak, entirely forgotten in the interest of studying the attitude and the emotions of the beholder. Nature, or the external world, came to be regarded merely as an opportunity for developing and exercising the intellectual and active powers of the human mind, which was conceived as itself producing, on the provocation of an unknown external (Kant) or internal (Fichte) impulse, all the manifold and interesting features of the scenery which surrounded it."<sup>1</sup>

Whitman states Schelling's position, again correctly, as "more largely objective." Schelling, indeed, developed his "Philosophy of Nature" because it was his conviction that the view of Kant and Fichte, that nature merely afforded an opportunity for developing the powers of the human mind, "was slighting, unpoetical, and degrading."<sup>2</sup> This "Philosophy of Nature" centered in Schelling, "in whose mind it formed as much an opposition to the one-sided moralism and intellectualism of Kant and some of his followers as it also marked the desire to reconcile the mechanical with the ideal or artistic study of nature in the midst of which Schelling found himself placed."<sup>3</sup>

Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are for Whitman "the illustrious four who have originated and carried out, with epic succession and completeness, the modern systems of critical and transcendental philosophy."<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid., pp. 552-553.

2. Ibid., p. 553.

3. Ibid., pp. 547-548. Merz continues, "In this latter desire Schelling had indeed a forerunner to whom he frequently refers in the introduction to his 'Philosophy of Nature.' This was Leibniz, with whom, probably for the first time, the modern way of putting the matter made its appearance--viz., that Nature demands from the human mind to be mechanically described on the one side, and on the other, to be ideally interpreted, or, in other words, that every fact and phenomenon is as much the consequence of a mechanical cause as it is the means towards an ideal end."

4. Complete Writings, IX, p. 131. "Taking their whole philosophy, it is the most important emanation of the mind of modern ages and of

They "fit into each other like a nest of boxes"; but it is Hegel who "encloses them all."<sup>1</sup> If we can take Whitman's extravagant praise of Hegel at all seriously, he must have seen in that thinker the philosophy that best suited his own ideas. He declares, "Only Hegel is fit for America-- is large enough and free enough."<sup>2</sup> He again poses the problems of man's relation to nature in connection with Hegel: "The essential quality, nature, scope, position of Man in Time and Space. What is he? His soul? The relations between it and this manifold nature, the world, . . . the perplexing idea of immortality."<sup>3</sup> These problems, he states, "have directly or indirectly to do with any profound consideration of Democracy and finally testing it, as all questions and as underlying all questions";<sup>4</sup> and it is Hegel who throws the most light upon them. "And without depreciating poets, patriots, saints, statesmen, inventors and the like," Whitman declares, "I rate (Hegel) as Humanity's chiefest teacher and the choicest loved physician of my mind and soul."<sup>5</sup>

This unstinted praise is better understood if one realizes the historical importance of the Hegelian philosophy. According to J. T. Merz,

all ages, leaving even the wonderful inventions, discoveries of science, political progress, great engineering works, utilitarian comforts, etc., of the last hundred years in a comparatively inferior rank of importance--outstripping them all. Because it assumes to answer and does answer, as far as they can be answered, the deepest questions of the soul, of identity, of purposes worthy the world and of the relation between man and the material nature and workings of the external universes, not depreciating them but elevating man to the spiritual plane where he belongs, and where after all that physical comfort and luxury, with mental culture, and political freedom, can accomplish, he at last finds, and there only finds, a satisfaction worthy of his highest self, and achieves Happiness." Ibid., pp. 181-182.

1. Ibid., p. 181.

2. Ibid., p. 170.

3. Ibid., p. 172. Here he adds another problem, one which will be discussed in later chapters: "the dark problem of evil, forming half of the infinite scheme."

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

In the system of Hegel we not only meet with the final and greatest effort to solve the philosophical problem on the basis of an idealistic or spiritual conception, we also arrive at the true centre of modern thought in which many new departures have their origin. If we consider it in this light we are compelled to regard Hegel's philosophy as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, intellectual performance of the century, and this in its immense suggestiveness as well as in its gigantic failure.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Merz elsewhere reviews Hegel's philosophy as the "realization" of the ideas of the period. "It understood the greatness of Goethe and Schiller and the aims of the Romantic movement. . . . It had at the same time a full appreciation of the strictness of scientific method and the critical spirit which was then slowly but surely making itself felt in many departments of knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Further, it "participated in, and to a large extent directed, the historical interest . . ." Lastly, "it took as the highest subject of philosophic thought the religious problem, the attempt to put something better in the place of the narrow orthodoxy or the prosaic rationalism of the eighteenth century."<sup>3</sup>

One of the most serious limitations of the eighteenth century mechan-

1. Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 652.

2. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 471-472. This latter point, which will be illustrated in later pages, is one that is often overlooked in careless summaries of Hegel as an "Absolute Idealist," hence unscientific and uncritical. Whitman's enthusiasm for Hegel is not so strange and "contradictory" when we realize that he was aware that Hegel was in the tradition of the strictest scientific principles. As David G. Ritchie remonstrates: "I suppose the belief still prevails about Hegel that he is an a priori metaphysician who spins theories out of his head regardless of facts. And this reproach is held to apply with special force to his Philosophy of Nature. What Hegel himself says is something very different. 'Not only must philosophy be in harmony with experience, but empirical natural science is the presupposition and condition of the rise and formation of the philosophical science of nature.' The synthetic thinking of the philosopher must follow after and depend upon the results of the analytic process of scientific research."

Darwin and Hegel, p. 53.

3. Merz, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 472.

ism was the tendency of the spectator to place himself outside of the universe and to forget himself entirely in the contemplation of the objective world. Kant did bring out the oppositional unity of Object and Subject, but he conceived their union as active only on one side, the side of subjectivity. Schelling, as we have seen, attempted to remedy that "degrading" view. But it was Hegel who accomplished the task most successfully. He removed this one-sidedness and built his system on the conception that it was not in the "pure" object or in the "pure" subject that the Truth lay, but in the active interrelation between them, which interrelation produced a progressive transformation both of subject and of object. This dialectical view was latent in the earlier Idealist philosophers and played an important part in Romantic thought, but it was Hegel who developed it most fully.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman summarizes in his "lectures" this dialectical view of the relation between man's spirit and nature. In doing so, as pointed out by Professor Bostright,<sup>2</sup> he uses the same figure--that of the mirror--to illustrate the relationship which he had used in "Song of the Rolling Earth," of 1856:

1. This view that all of Nature is an active process is an immense advance, scientifically as well as philosophically, over the eighteenth century mechanicalism. We will see in later chapters the part this particular side of the dialectic played in Whitman's philosophy. But it will aid in the understanding of the complicated dialectical viewpoint to indicate here the importance of the idea of Hegel that nature is a process. In the eighteenth century, "Newton's Principia had served as a model of the scientific method: the collection and cataloguing of separate facts." (John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting, p. 36) In contrast, modern science recognizes the importance of processes in nature. "The fact that matter is motion, that there is a continuity of moving and becoming, has been very generally accepted. One cannot say that Hegel succeeded single-handed in tearing down the rigidity of the universe; this was due to a whole series of scientific discoveries. But Hegel played a major part in creating a system of thinking, by which these discoveries could be understood in relation to the life of man and to the world in which he lives." Ibid.
2. Op. cit., pp. 148-149.

As a face in a mirror we see the world of materials, nature with all its objects, processes, shows, reflecting the human spirit and by such reflection formulating, identifying, developing and proving it. Body and mind are one; an inexplicable paradox, yet no truth truer. The human soul stands in the centre, and all the universes minister to it, and serve it and revolve round it. They are one side of the whole and it is the other side. It escapes utterly from all limits, dogmatic standards and measurements and adjusts itself to the ideas of God, of space, and to eternity, and calls them at will as oceans, and fills them as beds of oceans.<sup>1</sup>

A little further on he mentions the "triplicate" dialectical process more specifically,<sup>2</sup> at the same time stressing the fact that according to Hegel the only absolute substance is Spirit:

Penetrating beneath the shows and materials of the objective world we find, according to Hegel . . . that in respect to human cognition of them, all and several are pervaded by the only absolute substance which is SPIRIT, endued with the eternal impetus of development, and producing from itself the opposing powers and forces of the universe. A curious, triplicate process seems the resultant action; first the Positive, then the Negative, then the product of the mediation between them; from which product the process is repeated and so goes on without end. In his Introduction to the Philosophy of History, this is illustrated in the portion on "History as a manifestation of Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

An inseparable part of the dialectical view, in Hegel's philosophy as well as Whitman's, is the concept that the world, including Man, is a unity. It is Hegel, says Whitman, who gives the clue to "the idea of the all":

He has given the same clue to the fitness of reason and fitness of things and unending progress, to the universes of moral purposes that the sciences in their spheres, as astronomy and geology, have established in the material purposes, and the last and crowning proof of each is the same, that they fit the mind, and the idea of the all, and are necessary to be so in the nature of things.<sup>4</sup>

1. Complete Writings, IX, p. 171. My italics.
2. As further evidence that Whitman did not turn to Costwick's German Literature for all of his Hegelianism, Costwick does not mention this well-known triplicate process.
3. Ibid., pp. 172-173.
4. Ibid., p. 173.

Whitman, then, found in Hegel what accorded best with his own answer to the question of the relation between the "Me" and the "Not Me." The two are a unity, an "ensemble," but a dialectical unity. Whether he had encountered Hegel's philosophy before 1856 or not, he expressed the idea of the dialectical unity in a poem of that date, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated,  
every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme . . .<sup>1</sup>

The detailed study of Whitman's application of the dialectical approach and his conception of reality as a dialectical unity will be reserved for Chapter VI. In the next chapter we will be concerned with further elaboration of his first "theme": the position of man, with his "soul," in relation to the "material" world. In connection with this we will consider the criticism that in "falling back" upon Idealism he necessarily contradicted his naturalistic philosophy.

1. Inclusive, p. 154.

## CHAPTER IV

### WHITMAN'S VIEW OF THE "SOUL"

The illustration of Whitman's concept of the "soul" of man in nature will require a review of our definition of terms. We have seen that it was the Idealist philosophy that brought back into consideration, after the emphasis of the eighteenth century upon the spectacle of nature, "the subjective factor, the position, reflections, and emotions of the beholder." But liberal critics in these days have come to be particularly suspicious of certain types of Idealism. After all, the "philosophers" of Fascism call up in support of their doctrines some of the German Idealists, notably Fichte. Such doctrines are anti-intellectual and anti-scientific; they are based on pure subjectivism, on blood-thinking and emotion. So today we find certain critics anxious to discover if Whitman's philosophy is a "safe" one: whether it leads to progress and does not leave the way open for a reactionary obscurantism. ✓ X

In order to make this question clear we must call to mind again the definition of terms made in the Introduction. We may say that pure subjectivism, emotionalism, is "dangerous" because it refuses to recognize the realities of the material world. If such a subjectivism constitutes "Idealism," however, Whitman was not an Idealist. To take the opposite extreme, if the term "Materialism" means a philosophy which refuses to accept non-mechanical manifestations in Nature, then he was not a Materialist. A fair definition must avoid such black-and-white categories. I have chosen, rather, other well-recognized grounds of distinction between the two philosophies. That is, if material Nature is historically and logically pre-

supposed in any speculation about Nature or Man, or about thinking itself-- the basic contention of Materialism is admitted. Conversely, any attempt to deprive material Nature of its primacy and its objectivity may be termed Idealism. Because of the confusion surrounding the terms, I have used "Supernaturalism" to describe the belief that "spirit" is primary and the only "real"; "Naturalism" for the view that material Nature is primary and objectively "real."<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, although Whitman was not always consistent, he succeeded in formulating a philosophy whose main "drift" is Naturalistic.

A reader who picked out from Leaves of Grass such single lines as

Allons! from all formulae!  
From your formulae, O bat-eyed and materialistic priests,

might assume that Whitman was casting aside materialism and hence the naturalistic philosophy. Rather, it seems clear, he was condemning the mechanistic philosophy which did not account for certain realities that he held most dear. The lines which precede those quoted above indicate what some of those realities are:

Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements,  
Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman considered the subjective values, liberty, faith, the emotions, to be as real as material things.

But I too announce solid things,  
Science, ships, politics, cities, factories, are not nothing,  
Like a grand procession to music of distant bugles pouring,  
triumphantly moving, and grander heaving in sight,  
They stand for realities--all is as it should be.

Then my realities;  
What else is so real as mine?  
Liberty and the divine average, freedom to every slave on  
the face of the earth,

1. See pp. 11-12.

2. "Song of the Open Road" (1856), Inclusive, p. 129.

The reft promises and lumine of seers, the spiritual world,  
 these centuries-lasting songs,  
 And our visions, the visions of poets, the most solid  
 announcements of any.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that, as the mechanistic materialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found no place in Nature for these spiritual realities, Whitman, like "the liberal Protestant preachers, the metaphysical idealists, and the romantic poets," had perforce to go beyond "materialism" and "science." In earlier chapters it has been noted that it was the habit of thinkers of the eighteenth century to view the mechanical universe from the outside, leaving out of account the part the spectator plays in relation to the spectacle. Chapter III was devoted to a discussion of the important and progressive role that the Idealist philosophy played in illuminating this problem. Whitman was fully aware of the implications of this advance over crass materialism. A few references will indicate the importance he placed on the subjective element.

An early reference to this question is found in a marginal note on an article in one of his big scrap-books, an article which Bucke judges "must belong to the fifties." The writer of the article says: "The mountains, rivers, forests and the elements that gird them round about would be only blank conditions of matter if the mind did not fling its own divinity around them." Whitman's note is: "This I think is one of the most indicative sentences I ever read."<sup>2</sup> This same emphasis on the subjective he calls one of the "original premises" of Democratic Vistas, making clear at the same time that "we must not say one word against real materials."

Much is there, yet, demanding line and outline in our Vistas, not only on these topics, but others quite unwritten. Indeed,

1. "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days" (1860), ibid, p. 404.
2. Complete Writings, IX, p. 53.

we could talk the matter, and expend it, through lifetime. But it is necessary to return to our original premises. In view of them, we have again pointedly to confess that all the objective grandeur of the world, for highest purposes, yield themselves up, and depend on Mentality alone. Here, and here only, all balances, all rests. For the mind, which alone builds the permanent edifice, haughtily builds it to itself. By it, with what follows it, are convey'd to mortal sense the culminations of the materialistic, the known, and a prophecy of the unknown. To take expression, to incarnate, to endow a literature with grand and archetypal models--to fill with pride and love the utmost capacity, and to achieve spiritual meanings, and suggest the future--these, and these only, satisfy the soul. We must not say one word against real materials; but the wise know that they do not become real till touched by emotions, the mind. Did we call the latter imponderable? Ah, let us rather proclaim that the slightest song-tune, the countless ephemera of passions arous'd by orators and tale-tellers, are more dense, more weighty than the engines there in the great factories, or the granite blocks in their foundations.<sup>1</sup>

In a passage in "Poetry To-Day in America" he makes the point that the conception of Nature itself depends upon its "subjective reflection from the person, spirit, age, looking at it." Here, too, he uses the word "eidolons" in a way that throws some light on the meaning he gave to that word. "What is Nature?" he asks.

What were the elements, the invisible backgrounds and eidolons of it, to Homer's heroes, voyagers, gods? What all through the wanderings of Virgil's Aeneas? Then to Shakspeare's characters--Hamlet, Lear, the English-Norman kings, the Romans? What was Nature to Rousseau, to Voltaire, to the German Goethe in his little classical court gardens? In those presentments in Tennyson . . . as in all the great imported art-works, treatises, systems, from Lucretius down, there is a constantly lurking, often pervading something, that will have to be eliminated, as not only unsuited to modern democracy and science in America, but insulting to them, and disapproved by them.

In contrast, the view "we have established in the West," presumably the one we will see Whitman express in his philosophy, is very different. Again, Nature exists objectively, but dialectically, consists "just as much in its subjective reflection from the person, spirit, age, looking at it,

1. Ibid., V, pp. 113-114.

and absorbing it . . ."

Not only is the human and artificial world we have established in the West a radical departure from anything hitherto known--not only men and politics, and all that goes with them--but Nature itself, in the main sense, its construction, is different. The same old font of type, of course, but set up to a text never composed or issued before. For Nature consists not only in itself, objectively, but at least just as much in its subjective reflection from the person, spirit, age, looking at it, in the midst of it, and absorbing it--faithfully sends back the characteristic beliefs of the time or individual--takes, and readily gives again, the physiognomy of any nation or literature--falls like a great elastic veil on a face, or like the molding plaster on a statue.<sup>1</sup>

The poet here recognizes and even emphasizes the subjective, but decidedly does not rule out the objective world or true knowledge of the world.

Newton Arvin is one of the liberal critics who has searched Whitman most exhaustively to find if he fulfills his claim to be a prophet of "the Modern" and of progress. He finds that Whitman made a brave attempt at formulating a naturalistic creed, but that "the backward drift of his idealism is not to be conjured away."<sup>2</sup> In "Song of the Open Road" (1856) Whitman writes,

Here is the test of wisdom,  
Wisdom is not finally tested in schools,  
Wisdom cannot be pass'd from one having it to another not  
having it,  
Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is  
its own proof,  
Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is content,  
Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and  
the excellence of things;  
Something there is in the float of the sight of things that  
provokes it out of the soul.

Now I re-examine philosophies and religions,  
They may prove well in lecture-rooms, yet not prove at all under  
the spacious clouds and along the landscape and flowing currents.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., pp. 222-223.

2. Op. cit., p. 221.

3. Inclusive, p. 127.

sp. Arvin sees in this sentiment "the germs of a lethal obcurantism." "Here," he says, "is already waiting, unwittingly to be sure, the justification for all unjustifiable superstitions and inequities, and as always, the appeal to pragmatic action, even to force, rather than to reason, is not very far in the distance:

How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!"<sup>1</sup>

Arvin continues, "It was no accident that this sentiment was followed almost at once, as it would have been in Carlyle, by the kind of sentiment that can always be turned to advantage by self-interested Supermen and Leaders:

All waits or goes by default till a strong being appears."

Arvin, the critical reader notices, slips into a common error: he assumes that if a philosophy can be used by reactionaries and obcurantists then it must be reactionary. Sometimes this may be true, especially when an important shift in emphasis occurs. However, if Arvin means here that Idealism is reactionary and Materialism progressive because of the uses to which they are put, his own reasoning can be turned against him. One of the most useful attitudes for the reactionary camp is that of a cynical determinism, and such an attitude is the inevitable logical conclusion of crass materialism. Moreover, it can be shown that Arvin was pointing to particular passages in Whitman to prove his point, whereas with the poet, to use his own words,

The words of my book [are] nothing, the drift of it everything.<sup>2</sup>

I do not assume that Whitman was never guilty of leaving open the door for "a lethal obcurantism" but that the drift of his work, including the "Idealistic" elements, emphasized naturalistic and progressive tendencies latent in the very nature of such beliefs.

1. Op. cit., p. 220.

2. "Shut Not Your Doors," Inclusive, p. 11.

Another common assumption, resulting from a certain black-and-white point of view, is that if a person postulates any kind of intuition he must be put down as subjectivist and obscurantist. That Whitman had a strong tendency towards mysticism is well known; but a certain intuition, a mystical feeling, is not incompatible with reason and a naturalistic philosophy, as witnessed in Pascal, Havelock Ellis, and other well known mystics. The crucial point which determines whether a mysticism may lead to obscurantism is whether the mystic ignores or denies the material world in his search for truth. This Whitman never did.

At times, it is true, he makes statements which might lead one to put him down as a complete subjectivist. For example, among his notes we find the following:

In Metaphysical Points, here is what I guess about pure and positive truths. I guess that after all reasoning and analogy, and their most palpable demonstrations of anything, we have the real satisfaction when the soul tells and tests by its own archchaic power--superior to the learnedest proofs as one glance of living night is more than quarto volumes of descriptions and of maps.<sup>1</sup>

But several things distinguish what Whitman appropriately called his "mystic realism" from what we may call a supernatural mysticism.

First, it will not be denied that he had a belief that the soul might be so "attuned" to "the immutable laws of things" as to "gravitate forever toward" the "absolute, the supernatural, the eternal truth."<sup>2</sup> Such a statement, however, is not inconsistent with naturalism; rather it may be interpreted as a recognition of the possibility that the human "soul," by a natural process of evolution, may be developing toward a deeper knowledge of truth. As we will see in a later chapter on Whitman's conception of evolution, he considers man's soul the highest product of Nature's evol-

1. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 142-143.

2. "Finale? It remains to be inquired and the inquiry has the most important bearing upon metaphysics and especially with reference

utionary process. "No reasoning, no proof" have established the soul. "Undeniable growth has established it."<sup>1</sup> In the poet's treatment of the Body-Soul, the soul is not something supernatural but is the highest stage of Nature's processes.

Another differentiating characteristic of his mysticism is that in his view any mystical, intuitional experience that may take place is a result of the interaction between the subjective spectator and the objective spectacle. In this respect his concept may be contrasted with "Transcendentalism." In Chapter III it was indicated that Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, although agreeing in their stress upon the subjective, varied in the importance they placed upon it in relation to the objective world. Kant and Fichte tended to place all importance upon the subjective, whereas Schelling, and particularly Hegel, brought in the necessity of the interaction between the subject and object. New England Transcendentalism, in its own interpretation of Kant, stressed the subjective to such an extent

to its future discoveries--whether after all allowance for Kant's tremendous and unquestionable point, namely that what we realize as truth in the objective and other Natural worlds is not the absolute but only the relative truth from our existing point of view; in other terms, that this is what we realize of the objective world by our present imperfect senses and cognizance and that what we thus realize would be entirely changed and perhaps overthrown and reversed if we were advanced to superior developments and points of view. It remains, I say, to be inquired (considered) whether there is not probably also something in the soul, even as it exists under present circumstances, which being itself adjusted to the inherent and immutable laws of things (which laws and the principal points of resemblance being the same throughout time and space, irrespective of apparitions, partialisms, processes, moods) does not afford a clue to unchangeable standards and tests--whether in its abyssic depths, far from ken or analysis, it (the soul) does not somehow, even now, by whatever removes and indirections, by its own laws, repel the inconsistent, and gravitate forever toward the absolute, the supernatural, the eternal truth. Perhaps this is what Fichte really meant." This statement appears toward the end of the "Sunday evening lectures" on the German philosophers. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 124-125.

1. But the soul is also real, it too is positive and direct,

that it predicated the intuition of truth as "above experience and independent of it":

From these and other Kantian conceptions a broad generalization was made, and the word "transcendental" came to be applied, in New England, to whatever in man's mental and spiritual nature is conceived of as above experience and independent of it. Whatever transcends the experiences of the senses is transcendental. Innate, original, universal, a priori, intuitive--these are words all of which convey a part of the thought swept under the larger meaning of the term. To the transcendentalists the name John Locke stood for the denial of innate ideas. "Sensationism" was the prevalent description of the doctrine of his Essay. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, reaffirmed the soul's inherent power to grasp the truth, and upon this basis went on to erect a metaphysical structure similar in its main outlines to the leading Platonic and idealistic philosophies of the past.<sup>1</sup>

Although we cannot here go into the intricacies of Emerson's philosophy, we may take note that his essay "The Transcendentalist" (1843) represents what I have chosen to call the supernaturalist point of view. "Mind is the only reality" (I, 333); an idealist is one who "takes his departure from his consciousness and reckons the world an appearance" (I, 332-333); such a one beholds "the procession of facts you call the world as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself, centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him." (I, 334) That which men "call the world" is "the shadow of that substance" which they are, "the perpetual creation of the powers of thought." (I, 334) The Idealist speaks of the world as an "Appearance," (I, 333; I, 47) of Nature as a "phenomenon, not a substance."<sup>2</sup>

No reasoning, no proof has establish'd it,  
Undeniable growth has establish'd it.

"A Song of the Rolling Earth," Inclusive, p. 190.

1. Harold C. Goddard, "Transcendentalism," Cambridge History of American Literature, Vol. I, pp. 334-335.
2. All references are to Emerson's Complete Works, 12 Vols., ed. Edward W. Emerson, N. Y., Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903.

Whitman's own contrast between his philosophy and that of Emerson is in point here. He says, in a letter of 1887 to W. S. Kennedy:

The basis and body and genesis of the L (leaves) differing I suppose from Em (erson) and many grandest poets and artists . . . was and is that I found everything in the common concrete, the broadcast materials, the flesh, the common passions, the tangible and visible, etc., and in the average, and that I radiate, work from, these outward--or rather hardly wish here but to remain and celebrate it all. Whatever the amount of this may be or not be, it is certainly not Emersonian, not Shakespeare, not Tennyson--indeed, the antipodes of E. and the others in essential respects. But I have not suggested or expressed myself well in my book unless I have in a sort included them and their sides and expressions too--as this orb the world means and includes all climes, all sorts, L. of G.'s word is the body including all, including the intellect and the soul; E's word is mind (or intellect or soul).<sup>1</sup>

Whitman's characteristic point of view, in contrast with the extreme emphasis on the subjective, is that any "intuition" of truth takes place as a dialectical process, an interaction between the subject and the material world of which he is a part. The symbol of the mirror recurs frequently in Whitman's writings, and this symbol perhaps best represents for Whitman the subtle relationship between Man and Nature. A strong statement of this interaction is to be found in his "Notes for Lectures on Religion," recently published in Walt Whitman's Workshop. He begins by describing the semi-mystical "Spirit of Nature":

To reduce everything to the Spirit of Nature, so sanely complacent, al fresco and imperturbable,--(as I sit here writing this--in the open air, down in the fields, alone at

1. W. S. Kennedy, Reminiscences of Walt Whitman, p. 76.

An important distinction between the "pure" Idealism, supernaturalism, as represented in Emerson's "The Transcendentalist," and a naturalistic philosophy is in the latter's assumption of the reality of time and space. Newton Arvin points out that, "Far from rebelling against space and time, indeed, or denying their reality, as the idealists did, Whitman could glorify them--even, paradoxically, in his mystic moments--as 'time eternal'; and far from being obsessed with the Unchangeable, like the orthodox visionaries, he felt a profane enthusiasm for change." Op. cit., p. 209.

White Horse, Oct 2, '76, the sun almost down, the evening shades beginning) & saturate everything that happens to said affairs with that imperturbable Spirit is the thought in my mind.

But, in the following passage he makes clear that this "Nature," is "real":  
 "Nature all so real--so whole--so compact, without flaw!" Also, the mirror that Nature holds is "faithful" (Nature itself holds the real, observable truth); and the relationship between Man and Nature is interesting:

The mirror that Nature holds and hides behind is deep and floating and ethereal and faithful.--A man always sends and sees himself in it--from himself he reflects the fashion of his gods and all his religions and politics and books and art and social and public institutions--ignorance or knowledge--kindness or cruelty--grossness or refinement--definitions or chaos--each is unerringly sent back to him or her who anxiously gazes.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman repeats again and again that nature is real, not merely a subjective reflection. The further dialectical concept that, as he intimates here and states more specifically in the "lectures," "the world of materials" reflects the human spirit, "formulating" and "developing" it,<sup>2</sup> shows that for him material nature is not only real but an active agent.

As the poet uses the term "soul" constantly we must review his concept of the soul to ascertain whether the drift of his philosophy here is toward Supernaturalism or Naturalism. To begin with, he makes it clear that the soul and the body are equally important, and emphasizes that he is the poet of both.<sup>3</sup> One cannot deny that at times the way he speaks of the soul sounds very much like supernaturalism. But if the naturalistic philosophy can be defined as one in which material Nature is primary and the "spirit" derivative, then the drift of his thought regarding the soul is naturalistic.

1. Walt Whitman's Workshop, pp. 50-51.

2. See above, p. 42.

3. "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul," "Song of Myself," Inclusive, p. 41.

Sometimes Whitman expresses the idea that the soul is "above all science," as in "Song of the Universal" (1874):

Lo! keen-eyed towering science,  
As from tall peaks the modern overlooking,  
Successive absolute fists issuing.

Yet again, lo! the soul, above all science,  
For it has history gather'd like husks around the globe,  
For it the entire star-myriads roll through the sky.<sup>1</sup>

Again, he expresses the sentiment that he is more sure of the "soul" than he is of "substances":

Quicksand years that whirl me I know not whither,  
Your schemes, politics, fail, lines give way, substances  
    mock and elude me,  
Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd soul,  
    eludes not,  
One's-self must never give way--that is the final substance--  
    that out of all is sure,  
Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life, what at last finally  
    remains?  
When shall we break up what but One's-Self is sure?<sup>2</sup>

But even though the soul may transcend the senses and flesh it receives "identity through materials."

O the joy of my soul leaning pois'd on itself, receiving  
    identity through materials and loving them, observing  
    characters and absorbing them,  
My soul vibrated back to me from them, from sight, hearing,  
    touch, reason, articulation, comparison, memory, and  
    the like,  
The real life of my senses and flesh transcending my senses  
    and flesh,  
My body done with materials, my sight done with my material  
    eyes,  
Proved to me this day beyond cavil that it is not my material  
    eyes which finally see,  
Nor my material body which finally loves, walks, laughs, shouts,  
    embraces, procreates.<sup>3</sup>

Taking his work as a whole, these references to the soul as being "above" the body, qualified as they are, cannot overbalance his many

1. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

2. "Quicksand Years" (1865), *ibid.*, p. 374.

3. "A Song of Joys" (1860) *ibid.*, p. 153.

statements that the material world is basic, and that the soul and the body are equal and inseparable. One of the best known and most unequivocal statements of his materialistic belief, in the "Notes on the Meaning and Intention of 'Leaves of Grass,'" accents the point.

All thorough writings preserve the equilibrium of the truth that the material world, and all its laws, are as grand and superb as the spiritual world and all its laws. Most writers have disclaimed the physical world and they have not over-estimated the other, or soul, but have under-estimated the corporeal. How shall my eye separate the beauty of the blossoming buckwheat field from the stalks and heads of tangible matter? How shall I know what the life is except as I see it in the flesh? I will not praise one without the other or any more than the other.

Do not argue at all or compose proofs to demonstrate things. State nothing which it will not do to state as apparent to all eyes.<sup>1</sup>

It is not necessary to labor the idea that Whitman made his poems of materials. His "sensuous eyes," as he called them, took in greedily all sights and sounds. His endless catalogues are probably the best evidence of his eagerness for the minutest details of the objective world. The material world is basic:

I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to  
be the most spiritual poems,  
And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality,  
For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of  
my soul and of immortality.<sup>2</sup>

1. Complete Writings, IX, p. 5.

2. "Starting from Paumotuok," Inclusive, p. 14.

Another legitimate test as to whether a philosophy is naturalist or supernaturalist, touched upon in previous pages, is the belief as to the origin of man: did God create him or is he a product of a material world? Although toward the end of his life Whitman questioned the particular theories of Darwin, he never seems to have wavered from his belief that man is a product of nature.

I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,  
I too had receiv'd identity by my body,  
That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I  
knew I should be of my body.

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," ibid., p. 136.

At times he expresses the relationship of body and soul by the paradoxical pronouncement that the body is the soul. In "I Sing the Body Electric" (1855), for example, he states:

And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?  
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?<sup>1</sup>

And later in the same poem, after cataloguing in some fifty lines the parts of the body, "head, neck, hair, ears, drop and tympan of the ears, eyes, eye-fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows," and so forth, he summarizes:

O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only,  
but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!<sup>2</sup>

Again, in "Starting from Paumonok" (1860), after stating that he will not make a poem but has reference to the soul, he explains that the body "includes and is" the soul.

Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern,  
and includes and is the soul;  
Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or  
any part of it!<sup>3</sup>

In some of his early poems, as "Song of Myself," he merely indicates that the "seen" and the "unseen" are inseparable:

Clear and sweet is my soul, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that  
it is so. . . .  
Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,  
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.<sup>4</sup>

But on at least one occasion, in lines which he added to a later edition (1867) of a poem in the original Leaves, he describes the relationship more definitely as a "paradox":

Will the whole come back then?  
Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-  
glass? is there nothing greater or more?  
Does all sit there with you, with the mystic unseen soul?

1. Ibid., p. 79.
2. Ibid., p. 86.
3. Ibid., p. 19.
4. Ibid., p. 26.

Strange and hard that paradox true I give,  
Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.<sup>1</sup>

His conversations in the last years of his life recorded faithfully by Traubel would indicate that he did not, as Arvin maintains, drift into a supernaturalistic view of the soul as he grew older. In one of these conversations, he stated: "It is said reproachfully of America that she is material, but that to me is her glory--the body must precede the soul: the body is the other side of the soul."<sup>2</sup> Again, in a discussion with Traubel about the question of the soul and the body, he said, "After the long period in which the other view was upheld--the contempt of the body, the horrible, narrow, filthy, degenerate, poisonous, distaste expressed in ascetic religions for the physical man--I confess that even materialism (gross materialism) is a relief, like a new day, like sunlight, like beauty--yes, like truth itself."<sup>3</sup> And being asked whether his conviction about the body was as firm as his conviction about the soul he answered, "Yes, just as firm--sometimes for earth reasons firmer. That is what should be and must be: a powerful loyalty to the body--to the body's desires, passions, appetites, all of them, well in rein, but alive, serving the soul, like a faithful steed."<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, the poet's treatment of the subjective and the "soul"

1. "A Song for Occupations," *ibid.*, p. 183. In the lines following he answers in the negative the question, "Does all sit there" with "the mystic unseen soul?" After cataloguing various occupations and industries, workers, materials, products, he concludes:

I do not affirm that what you see beyond is futile, I do not  
advise you to stop,

I do not say leadings you thought great are not great,

But I say that none lead to greater than these lead to.

*Ibid.*, p. 185.

2. Traubel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 109.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 168.

4. *Ibid.*

may appear, when considered in isolation, to partake too much of Idealism to be at home in any naturalistic philosophy. But it is particularly necessary with Whitman that one judge his thought as a whole. The "drift" of his words, it is well to repeat, is everything. His passages on the soul presented in this chapter, therefore, must be considered in their setting, in connection with other elements of his philosophy set forth in the succeeding chapters.

## CHAPTER V

### WHITMAN'S FEELING FOR NATURE; AND HIS CONCEPT OF NATURE AS THE SOURCE OF "ALL"

Whitman's feeling for Nature, similar to that of Goethe and Schelling, is at the center of his naturalism. In the present chapter we will be concerned, first, with his relationship to Nature, his feeling of identity with her. Next, we will see how he includes in Nature not only man's "soul," but also "all his attributes, animal, intellectual, moral." Finally, as Nature also includes "all the movements of history and civilization," we will consider the place of man's institutions, chiefly "politics," in "Nature's scheme."

It is not necessary to elaborate upon Whitman's delight in all functions of nature and the material world, in all sights and sounds. Opening the Leaves at almost any page one finds the evidence. He demands that the poets

. . . shall report Nature, laws, physiology, and happiness,  
They shall illustrate Democracy and the kosmos,  
They shall be alimentive, amative, perceptive,  
They shall be complete women and men, their pose brawny and  
supple, their drink water, their blood clean and clear,  
They shall fully enjoy materialism and the sight of products,  
they shall enjoy the sight of the beef, lumber, bread-  
stuffs, of Chicago the great city.<sup>1</sup>

From the very beginning of his career the poet declared that "at every hazard" he should let nature speak:

1. "Mediums" (1860), Inclusive, p. 399. Burroughs, in his Whitman, concludes that all his chapters of interpretation are "but slight variations of a single theme," Whitman's "reliance upon absolute nature." p. 169.

Creeds and schools in obedience,  
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but  
never forgotten,  
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,  
Nature without check with original energy.<sup>1</sup>

His strong naturalistic bent is also found in the sentiment he was fond of expressing, that "Nature includes All." "Lo! Nature (the only complete, actual poem), existing calmly in the divine scheme, containing all, content, careless of the criticisms of a day, or those endless and wordy chatterers."<sup>2</sup> And often he specifically points out that this "All" includes God. In a late poem, "As They Draw to a Close" (1871), he undertakes to tell "what underlies the precedent songs--of my aims in them." The seed he has "sought to plant in them" is the idea of the "joyous, electric all" encompassed by Nature:

Through Space and Time fused in a chant, and the flowing  
eternal identity,  
To Nature encompassing these, encompassing God--to the  
joyous, electric all.<sup>3</sup>

Arvin states that, although Leaves of Grass is contradictory, on its most characteristic side it embodies "a fresh creative feeling about physical nature and man's relation to it." Nature, continues Arvin, is not portrayed in the primitive sense "as an array of maleficent forces," or "its modern equivalent, the sense of nature's subhuman ruthlessness ('red in tooth and claw')." Nor is Whitman's view the romantic one that the physical world is "an enchanting spectacle or a collection of splendid pictures," or "a comforter of the downcast or a monitor for the bewildered."

1. "Song of Myself," Inclusive, p. 24. It was his worn volume of Epictetus, his constant companion through his last years, (See Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 207, pp. 422-423; Vol. III, p. 184) that contained this striking doctrine which he liked to think "over and over and over again" with that philosopher: "What is good for thee, O Nature, is good for me!" He adds, "That is the foundation on which I build--it is the source of my great peace." Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 422-423.
2. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 140.
3. Inclusive, pp. 414-415.

He does not even look at Nature as "an ideally living presence or an emblem of transcendental verity." There is something of this last, but it is not the typically Whitmanesque attitude. What is most characteristic is "a sense of intimate and unreflective harmony with nature as with a perfectly equal and reciprocal life, an identification of the poet's self with natural existences so complete and so tender that it can only be described as the self-surrender of a lover."<sup>1</sup>

The poem in Children of Adam, "We Two, How Long We Were Fool'd," expresses most sweepingly "the thought of entire identity with the life of nature."<sup>2</sup>

We two, how long we were fool'd,  
 Now transmuted, we swiftly escape as Nature escapes,  
 We are Nature, long have we been absent, but now we return,  
 We become plants, trunks, foliage, roots, bark, . . .<sup>2</sup>

As Arvin notes, the sort of thing expressed in the last line quoted has become a common metaphor in modern poetry. But, "as a deep, spontaneous experience it has become a commonplace neither in poetry nor in life. It belongs to the future much more than to the past, and we can hardly doubt that, as men come to have less and less reason to live in terror of nature, something like Whitman's lover-like emotion will prevail among them increasingly."<sup>3</sup>

It is not my purpose to make a detailed study of Nature in Whitman's poetry, but to indicate here the character of this "lover-like" emotion he had toward all physical sights and sounds. This feeling of identity with nature is an integral part of his Naturalism. He is perhaps most explicit about this feeling in certain passages in Specimen Days. After his

1. Op. cit., p. 253.

2. Inclusive, pp. 91-92.

3. Op. cit., p. 254.

stroke in 1873 he turned to Nature for cure. In the process he gave himself up to drinking in Nature's sights and sounds, and recording his feelings.

But now pleasantly imprison'd here under the big oak--  
the rain dripping, and the sky cover'd with leaden clouds--  
nothing but the pond on one side, and the other a spread of  
grass, spotted with the milky blossoms of the wild carrot--  
the sound of an axe wielded at some distant wood-pile--yet  
in this dull scene, (as most folks would call it,) why am I  
so (almost) happy here and alone? Why would any intrusion,  
even from people I like, spoil the charm? But am I alone?  
Doubtless there comes a time--perhaps it has come to me--  
when one feels through his whole being, and pronouncedly  
the emotional part, the identity between himself subject-  
ively and Nature objectively which Schelling and Fichte are  
so fond of pressing.<sup>1</sup>

The "presence" he feels can be explained by "neither chemistry nor reason":

How it is I know not, but I often realize a presence here--  
in clear moods I am certain of it, and neither chemistry  
nor reasoning nor esthetics will give the least explanation.  
All the past two summers it has been strengthening and  
nourishing my sick body and soul, as never before. Thanks  
invisible physician, for thy silent delicious medicine, thy  
day and night, thy waters and thy airs, the banks, the grass,  
the trees, and e'en the weeds!<sup>2</sup>

Nature is an antidote for the "modern tendencies . . . to turn every-  
thing to pathos, ennui, morbidity, dissatisfaction, death."

After an hour's ramble, now retreating, resting, sitting  
close by the pond, in a warm nook, writing this, shelter'd  
from the breeze just before noon. The emotional aspects  
and influences of Nature! I, too, like the rest, feel these  
modern tendencies (from all the prevailing intellections,  
literature and poems,) to turn everything to pathos, ennui,  
morbidity, dissatisfaction, death. Yet how clear it is to  
me that those are not the born results, influences of Nature  
at all, but of one's own distorted, sick or silly soul. Here,  
amid this wild, free scene, how healthy, how joyous, how  
clean and vigorous and sweet!<sup>3</sup>

Of all the aspects of Nature Whitman perhaps refers most often to the  
stellar universe. It is natural that his semi-mystical feeling for nature's  
"calming laws" should have been aroused by the grandeur of the heavens he

1. Complete Writings, IV, p. 186-187.

2. Ibid., p. 187.

3. Ibid., p. 194.

loved to contemplate. In Specimen Days he describes one of these semi-mystical experiences during which he is reminded of a similar experience connected with "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd":

One of the calm, pleasantly cool, exquisitely clear and cloudless, early spring nights--the atmosphere again that rare vitreous blue-black, welcom'd by astronomers. Just at 3, evening, the scene overhead of certainly solemnest beauty, never surpass'd. Venus nearly down in the west, of a size and lustre as if trying to outshow herself, before departing. Teeming, maternal orb--I take you again to myself. I am reminded of that spring preceding Abraham Lincoln's murder, when I, restlessly haunting the Potomac banks, around Washington city, watch'd you, off there, aloof, moody as myself: "As we walk'd up and down in the dark blue so mystic, As we walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night, As I saw you had something to tell, as you bent to me night after night, As you droop from the sky low down, as if to my side (while the other stars all look'd on), As we wander'd together the solemn night."<sup>1</sup>

Night, with him, transcends the day as the time when Nature addresses the soul.

✓ (I am convinced) there are hours of Nature, especially of the atmosphere, mornings and evenings, address'd to the soul. Night transcends, for that purpose, what the proudest day can do.) Now, indeed if never before, the heavens declared the glory of God. . . . There, in abstraction and stillness, (I had gone off by myself to absorb the scene, to have the spell unbroken,) the copiousness, the removedness, vitality, loose-clear-crowdedness, of that stellar concave spreading overhead, softly absorb'd into me, rising so free, interminably high, stretching east, west, north, south--and I, though but a point in the centre below, embodying all.

As if for the first time, indeed, creation noiselessly sank into and through me its placid and untellable lessons, beyond--O, so infinitely beyond!--anything from art, books, sermons, or from science, old or new. The spirit's hour--religion's hour--the visible suggestion of God in space and time--now once definitely indicated, if never again.<sup>2</sup>

This feeling for Nature is characteristic of the Romantic Movement, of course. We see in this passage as in many other places in Whitman an appeal

1. Ibid., pp. 229-30.
2. Ibid., p. 212.

to something beyond books, sermons, science: an appeal to the "spirit." But here again the inspiration for the insight is nature itself. In contrast with the eighteenth century mechanical view of nature, the Romantics saw in her as well as in their own souls a multitudinousness and indefiniteness, a spiritual warp interwoven with the mechanical woof.<sup>1</sup>

The feeling of identity with Nature includes also, in Whitman, an emotional kinship with animals. Man is "an animal like the others," but, of course, a mental being, with the "quality of understanding and telling how divine a thing an animal is."

I know well enough that man grows up becoming not a physical being merely, but markedly the mental being of the earth--the aesthetic and spiritual being, the benevolent and . . .

But the main thing is, in the same connection, that he is to be the seer of nature--he only can celebrate things, animals, and landscapes. His mentality is a quality to be used toward things, as his vision is used.

If he depart from animals and things he is lost.

In other words, man is not only an animal like the others, but he alone has the quality of understanding and telling how divine a thing an animal is--what life, matter, passion, volition, are.

He alone carries all the substances of the world by this quality in himself and illustrates them.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman feels a rapport with animals, they "show their relations" to him; mindful of the fact that man is part of the evolutionary scheme, the poet sees that they bring him "tokens" of himself.

1. Music and poetry are able to express these "free margins":

"Just before 10 P.M. cold and entirely clear again, the show overhead, bearing southwest, of wonderful and crowded magnificence. . . .

"With the sentiment of the stars and moon such nights I get all the free margins and indefiniteness of music or poetry, fused in geometry's utmost exactness."

*Ibid.*, p. 216.

2. *Ibid.*, IX, p. 148.

I think I could turn and live with animals, they're so placid  
 and self-contain'd,  
 I stand and look at them long and long. . . .  
 So they show their relations to me and I accept them,  
 They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in  
 their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,  
 Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?<sup>1</sup>

This feeling of identity with animals is, indeed, a characteristic note of  
 "Song of Myself":

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,  
Ye-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,  
 The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,  
 Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.

The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the oat on the house-sill,  
 the chickadee, the prairie-dog,  
 The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,  
 The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,  
 I see in them and myself the same old law.<sup>2</sup>

Here also appears another pervasive note of his poems and an under-  
 lying concept of his naturalism: he sees in the animals and himself "the  
 same old law." And it is by "the round earth's silent vital laws" that  
 everything must be tested. We shall see in later chapters the place of  
 the "scheme" of Nature in Whitman's philosophy. But here we may note the  
 place of this concept in his feeling for her. The laws of nature not only  
 enable man to understand his own being but "by subtle analogies" all other  
 things. In "Kosmos" (1860) he celebrates the person

Who includes diversity and is Nature,  
 Who is the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and  
 sexuality of the earth, and the great charity of the  
 earth, and the equilibrium also, . . .  
 Who, out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body  
 understands by subtle analogies all other theories,  
 The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of  
 these states.<sup>3</sup>

1. "Song of Myself," Inclusive, pp. 50-51.

2. Ibid., p. 54.

3. Ibid., p. 528.

"A Song of the Rolling Earth" (1856) is one long eloquent paean to natural laws, the "earth's words." There he says,

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not  
emulate those of the earth,  
There can be no theory of any account unless it  
corroborates the theory of the earth,  
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is  
of account, unless it compare with the amplitude of  
the earth,  
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality,  
rectitude of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that man is "an animal like the others" not only enables him to feel a rapport with Nature, but makes it necessary for him to understand his own being in naturalistic terms. In this respect, Whitman's treatment of sex is of the greatest importance not only as cogent evidence of his profound naturalism, but as a distinct contribution to the understanding of man himself.<sup>2</sup> Here again, to appreciate this contribution toward the scientific, naturalistic study of man we need to place it in contrast with the mechanistic approach. The eighteenth-century mechanist philosophy tended to picture man "as a purely logical machine, who first thinks of some end

1. Ibid., p. 189. In a later passage in this same poem appears a characteristic remark of Whitman's, which, if taken separately, would indicate the sort of philosophy that might lead to a "cloudy mysticism."

I swear I begin to see little or nothing in audible words,  
All merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings  
of the earth,  
Toward him who sings the songs of the body and of the truths  
of the earth,  
Toward him who makes the dictionaries of words that print  
cannot touch.

Ibid., p. 190. Here is the "romantic" touch that critics like Arvin fear as leading to intuitionism and anti-intellectualism. But does not Whitman always balance such statements with an insistence upon the concrete? This is a characteristic not found in the completely "idealistic" philosophy. A certain intuition, arising from concrete reality, is a legitimate, even necessary part of a naturalistic philosophy.

2. Whether one agrees with R. M. Bucke that Children of Adam contains "the most vital and important of all his poems," one must agree that they are central in his works. In comparing the philosophies of Emerson and Whitman, for example, it is significant that Emerson

which he desires, and then calculates the means by which that end can be attained."<sup>1</sup> But this picture of the abstract "man" failed to take into account that he is a "complex creature of impulse and passion and emotional preference," not a machine. One of the important steps in the advance of the science of human nature was the recognition that passion and emotion are a "natural" part of man's make-up and that these energies demand "certain definite normal outlets, failing which they will give rise to disastrous conflicts and outbursts. . . . Rousseau's insight was sounder than Helvetius'."<sup>2</sup>

The Romantics, then, did their part in the advancement of man's understanding of human nature in insisting upon the importance of basic "natural" emotional impulses.<sup>3</sup> Whitman was in the best tradition of the Romantics in this respect, but went further in his understanding of the scientific importance of a frank study of sex. In "A Memorandum at a Venture" he discusses the question of whether the topics "plainly and resolutely broach'd in the Children of Adam section of Leaves of Grass (should) be admitted in

*inches*

withdrew the light of his countenance from Whitman soon after they had disagreed on Whitman's treatment of sex.

1. Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind, pp. 503-504.
2. Ibid., p. 504.
3. It is interesting that Hegel is in the line of this movement toward "the restoring of her rights to nature." Brandes calls him "the originator of that pagan Hellenism, of which it was the fashion to accuse Young Germany." He continues, "And in his philosophy we can even detect the spirit which might evolve such a watchword as 'the emancipation of the flesh.' This was a French expression introduced by Heine into German literature, which was eagerly taken up by his admirers and imitators, and was specially execrated by the enemies and denouncers of the new literature. It certainly might be suspected of an immoral meaning in Heine's mouth and of an ugly meaning in Heinrich Laube's; but amongst the best of the men of the young generation it meant nothing but what Goethe and Hegel, too, had in reality desired. . . . What they desired was to make the laws of nature the rule of conduct, to release nature from interdict and ban." George Brandes, Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, Vol. VI, p. 230.

poetry and literature?" The answer is that a treatment of "the complete human identity" requires that they should. "True," he says, "I could not construct a poem which declaredly took, as never before, the complete human identity, physical, moral, emotional, and intellectual, (giving precedence and compass in a certain sense to the first,) nor fulfil that bona fide candor and entirety of treatment which was a part of my purpose, without comprehending this section also."<sup>1</sup>

He further makes it clear that the old attitude of repressing these matters, "the conventional one of good folks and good print everywhere," is "non-scientific" as well as "non-aesthetic, and eminently non-religious":

A non-scientific, non-aesthetic, and eminently non-religious condition, bequeath'd to us from the past (its origins diverse, one of them the far-back lessons of benevolent and wise men to restrain the prevalent coarseness and animality of the tribal ages--with Puritanism, or perhaps Protestantism itself for another, and still another specified in the latter part of this memorandum)--to it is probably due most of the ill births, inefficient maturity, snickering prurieny, and of that human pathologic evil and morbidity which is, in my opinion, the keel and reason-why of every evil and morbidity. Its scent, as of something sneaking, furtive, nephritic, seems to lingeringly pervade all modern literature, conversation, and manners.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that "sex contains all" is found in Whitman's earliest work.

In "A Woman Waits for Me" (1856) he says:

Sex contains all, bodies, souls,  
 Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,  
 Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery, the  
     seminal milk,  
 All hopes benefactions, bestowals, all the passions, loves,  
     beauties, delights of the earth,  
 All the governments, judges, gods, follow'd persons of the  
     earth,  
 These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself.<sup>3</sup>

1. Complete Writings, V, pp. 230-231.
2. Ibid., pp. 231-232.
3. Inclusive, pp. 86-87.

And again at the close of his career, in his "Backward Glance," he declares that "Leaves of Grass is avowedly the song of Sex and Amstiveness, and even Animality"; that as to the lines in which he attempted to "achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality," the "work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain as an entirety."<sup>1</sup> He steadfastly refused to make any compromise on the issue of sex.

The importance Whitman placed upon the "procreant urge of the world" is well known.

Urge and urge and urge,  
Always the procreant urge of the world.  
Out of dimness opposite equals advance, always substance  
and increase, always sex,  
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a  
breed of life.<sup>2</sup>

1. "From another point of view 'Leaves of Grass' is avowedly the song of Sex and Amstiveness, and even Animality--though meanings that do not usually go along with those words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature, intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted. Difficult as it will be, it has become, in my opinion, imperative to achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality, as an element in character, personality, the emotions, and a theme in literature. I am not going to argue the question by itself; it does not stand by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance--like the clef of a symphony. At last analogy the lines I allude to, and the spirit in which they are spoken, permeate all 'Leaves of Grass,' and the work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain as an entirety." "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" (Preface to November Boughs, 1898), Inclusive, pp. 533-534.
2. "Song of Myself," Ibid., pp. 25-26. It will be noticed that in these early lines Whitman uses the dialectical formulation: "the opposite equals advance."

But his emphasis on sex as "the root of roots: the life below the life"<sup>1</sup> shows that he had an insight into facts which recent psychology has brought to light. One does not have to accept the whole of Freudianism to recognize that it has increased immensely man's knowledge about himself. Granted that the importance of sex has been overmagnified by some moderns, psychological researches have certainly proved scientifically the interpenetration of sex in all man's actions and relations. So that today Whitman's pronouncement,

Sex: sex: sex: whether you sing or make a machine, or go to the North Pole, or love your mother, or build a house, or black shoes, or anything--anything at all--it's sex, sex, sex: sex is the root of it all: sex--the coming together of men and women: sex: sex,<sup>2</sup>

does not sound exaggerated in the light of modern scientific discovery. And if taken in Whitman's spirit such a statement can be in no way offensive or degrading.

Perhaps the judgment of his friend R. M. Bucke that his treatment of sex is a "result of profound, and the same time practical . . . science" is not so far wrong. Dr. Bucke, whose field was medicine, states that even if Whitman knew little or nothing of technical physiology,

in "Children of Adam" he has recognized and acted upon one of the deepest of all physiological truths (far too wide and deep to be set forth here), and in so doing has (on the supposition that his work will live) done more for the future of the human race than all the physiologists and doctors of this generation.<sup>3</sup>

But the term "nature" was not for Whitman limited to the physical, emotional man; it included also his "moral and spiritual consciences." He states in Democratic Vistas: "As by what we now partially call Nature is intended, at most, only what is entertainable by the physical conscience,

1. Fraubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 453.

2. Ibid., p. 452.

3. "Leaves of Grass and Modern Science," In Re Walt Whitman, p. 250.

app  
should be  
included" ✓

the sense of matter, and of good animal health--on these it must be distinctly accumulated, incorporated, that man, comprehending these, has, in towering superaddition, the moral and spiritual consciences, indicating his destination beyond the ostensible, the mortal."<sup>1</sup>

Nature, then, includes morality. In this belief also Whitman's philosophy is set apart from that of the supernaturalists. He does not disavow but rather proclaims "conscience," but the conscience has a natural, not a supernatural source. The "morality of Nature" seems a vague, Romantic phrase by itself; but Whitman specifies that it means, to quote Marcus Aurelius, "a living and enthusiastic sympathy with Nature":

Finally, the morality: "Virtue," said Marcus Aurelius, "what is it, only a living and enthusiastic sympathy with Nature?" Perhaps indeed the efforts of the true poets, founders, religions, literatures, all ages, have been, and ever will be, our time and times to come, essentially the same--to bring people back from their persistent strayings and sickly abstractions, to the costless average, divine, original concrete.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's general approach to ethics is that Man's duty lies in discovering Nature's laws and putting himself in tune with them. He "accepted" Nature completely, as any naturalist must, and considered her "good."<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that Nature is "moral" in the sense of morality as Man's subjective judgment. As the poet explains in a footnote to the Preface of 1876:

But in my clearest and calmest moods I have realized that as those Leaves, all and several, surely prepare the way for, and necessitate morals, and are adjusted to them, just the same as Nature does and is, they are what, consistently with my plan, they must and probably should be. (In a certain sense, while the Moral is the purport and least intelligence of all Nature, there is absolutely nothing of the moral in the works, or laws, or shows of

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 135.

2. "Nature and Democracy--Morality," Specimen Days, Ibid., p. 44.

3. For the discussion of this concept see Chapter IX.

Nature. These only lead inevitably to it--begin and necessitate it.)<sup>1</sup>

The naturalistic moralist is interested in knowing the best way for men to live in this world, and he seeks to find this way by studying Nature's laws. To emphasize this point it is well to review some of the alternative bases of ethics. It is clear, in the first place, that "the naturalistic moralist cannot be satisfied with any form of authoritarian ethics,"<sup>2</sup> ethics set forth by creed and dogma. Whitman's whole approach is antithetical to such a view.

Also, the critical, empirical approach has disproved the old appeal to "universality" in moral opinion.

It is in vain that Bishop Butler says: "Let any plain honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself; Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong? Is it good or is it evil? I do not in the least doubt but that these questions would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstances."

It would certainly be very convenient if all questions of morality could be settled in this simple and easy fashion, but since Butler wrote his sermons, new facts about moral convictions have come to light which show his belief in the universality of moral approval and disapproval to have been quite mistaken.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Butler's may be termed the intuitional school, and Whitman's viewpoint is likewise antithetical to such a non-naturalistic ethics.

Nor will the formalistic ethics of the Kantian school appeal to the naturalist. Kant founds his doctrine upon reason, but his subjective emphasis rules out the objective, empirical origins of morality.

. . . Kant's . . . explicit ruling out from ethics of everything of empirical origin makes it impossible for the naturalist to go very far with him. In fact, not only in method

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 198.
2. Pratt, op. cit., p. 144.
3. Ibid., p. 145.

do the two types of thinkers disagree but, seemingly, in aim as well. For the aim of the naturalistic moralist is to find a criterion for conduct, an ideal that shall be a guide for actual human living, which formalistic ethics in the nature of the case can never give.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman's ethical approach, in contrast with the Kantian, asserts that only in objective Nature can Man find the guide to conduct.

An attempt to be empirical and scientific in regard to morals is the "social approval" theory of morality, advocated by Hume. According to Hume, "as good empiricists we should merely observe and write down the various forms of approval and disapproval which different social groups have exemplified, and having done this much in careful and (if possible) in exhaustive fashion, we should stop there."<sup>2</sup> But in Professor Pratt's interpretation, this view really turns out to be nothing but the "old intuition or conscience ethics, which naturalism is most interested in opposing":

Though this Humean view of morality is still extremely popular in many quarters, the thoughtful naturalist will feel suspicious of it. In the first place he will want to know rather specifically what is the social group which determines the goodness or badness of an act. Every individual belongs to a large number of social groups, groups which often disagree in their approvals. Which of them shall be legislative of his duty: by whose opinion is his act to be judged good or bad? A little thought will reveal the fact that the only group which can be successfully defended is morally legislative for any individual is the group whose emotions of approval and disapproval he shares. In other words, this "social approval" view of morality turns out to be nothing but the old intuition or conscience ethics, which Naturalism is most interested in opposing.<sup>3</sup>

Another view, held by many naturalistic thinkers today, may be termed evolutionary ethics. And this is the one Whitman expresses. To put evolutionary ethics in its briefest form: the laws of Nature move in the

1. Ibid., p. 146.

2. Ibid., p. 148.

3. Ibid., pp. 149-150.

direction of the "good"; accordingly, Men's duty is to discover these historical laws of change and progress and pattern his conduct in accordance with them. Professor Pratt is critical of this position, interpreting it to assume that "relative value depends upon nothing but position in the chronological series. When it is said that we should not first make up our ideas of good and evil and judge evolution by them, but should put ourselves in line with Nature's changes whatever they may be, and help on the cosmic trend in the direction which it chooses, the meaning must be that of two stages or events in the cosmic series that is the better which is chronologically the later."<sup>1</sup> But this interpretation is too mechanical. The evolutionary view does not hold that every later event is better than the one preceding, but that the general trend of Nature is toward higher stages. Her development is not even; it is a process of struggle between progressive and reactionary forces. The forces of reaction cause "set-backs" and "retrogressions" (in Whitman's words); but inevitably, in the long run, progress triumphs.<sup>2</sup>

In summing up his discussion of naturalistic ethics Professor Pratt makes the further point that since "the psychological thesis of Hedonism is no longer tenable, the more critical naturalist has given up the ethical Hedonism that was dependent upon it."

He no longer seeks to justify conduct by appeal to one very limited type of "good" consequences, or to find intrinsic value in subjective states alone. All things are good which any sentient being wants or likes; and the things which sentient beings like and want are innumerable. Pleasure is one of them, but so are material things, acts, objective situations, other people's feelings, social conditions, and, most important of all, the objective achievement of purposes.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 154.

2. See Chapter IX, "Whitman's Optimism as a Naturalistic Concept," for a full discussion of this problem.

3. Op. cit., p. 162.

He concludes that "achievement of purpose" may be said to be "the thing which the mature mind cares for more than it cares for anything else." Taking Whitman's writings as a whole, it can be said that it is just this achievement of purpose, Nature's purpose, upon which the poet puts the highest ethical value.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman takes the naturalistic position that Nature includes All. That means the inclusion not only of "the material worlds of astronomy with the earth and sea," and "man with all his attributes, animal, intellectual, moral and spiritual"; but as well, "all the movements of history and civilization, wars, the shows of cities . . ."<sup>2</sup> Further light is thrown on the meaning and value he placed upon "Nature" by the characteristic contrast he was fond of making between the ways of nature and our "artificialized state of society." He saw quite clearly that the complexities of the rising industrial, money-making society were unhealthy and neither sane nor normal. This turning to nature in the face of certain brutalizing and dehumanizing characteristics of rising industrialism was, of course, a characteristic of the Romantic Movement. This attitude was an integral part of Whitman's philosophy, but the particular emphasis he gives to it is his own. He could see, with the other Romantics, that the rising industrialism was "flying in the face of nature" in that it threatened to "eat up" the "precious idiosyncrasy and special nativity and intention" of the personality of the individual man. But he balanced this belief with a profound faith in the law of historical progress, and even more significant faith that eventually the common man would come into his own and rid society of its "unnatural," "cancerous" tendencies.

1. The concept of "purpose" in Nature is presented in Chapters VII and VIII.
2. Notes and Fragments, Complete Writings, IX, p. 34.

It is the "lesson of Nature" that man's Being, the "object's self," should grow "according to its own central idea and purpose."

True, the full man wisely gathers, culls, absorbs; but if, engaged disproportionately in that, he slights or overlays the precious idiosyncrasy and special nativity and intention that he is, the man's self, the main thing, is a failure, however wide his general cultivation. Thus, in our times, refinement and delicacies are not only attended to sufficiently, but threaten to eat us up, like a cancer. Already the democratic genius watches, ill-pleased, these tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

The "democratic genius" is ill pleased, Whitman makes clear in Democratic Vistas, because certain "unnatural" movements are interfering with Nature's purpose: that the full worth and dignity of the "average man" should come into its own. Democracy, too, is a "younger brother" of Nature.<sup>2</sup> By that he meant that the tendencies of the day, "in these States," were "toward those vast and sweeping movements, influences, moral and physical, of humanity, now and always current over the planet, on the scale of the impulses of the elements."<sup>3</sup> In other words, "Nature's laws" are leading inevitably toward democracy. It is "natural" that the individual man should attain his full development, and this is possible only under democratic conditions.<sup>4</sup>

1. Democratic Vistas, Ibid., V, p. 98.

2. Ibid., p. 97.

3. Ibid. As we will see in the chapters on Whitman's evolutionary beliefs and on his Democracy, democracy for him is a natural product of evolution. As he states in one of his notes, the very law of self-preservation--demands equal opportunity for the masses of men: "Equality of all rights and persons is imperiously demanded by self-preservation--The cause of the ruin of all states that have been ruined has been that the whole body of the inhabitants without exception were not equally interested in the preservation of those states or cities--or that a portion were degraded." "Notes for Lectures on Democracy and 'Adhesiveness,'" Walt Whitman's Workshop, p. 58.

4. Whitman's literary criticism is outside the scope of this discussion, but it should be pointed out that in Democratic Vistas and elsewhere he also posits "true Nature" as "the test of all high literary and esthetic compositions": "In the prophetic literature of these States," he says, ". . . Nature, true Nature, and the true

There is also, then, a "politics of Nature." "One good of knowing the great politics of nature," he says in one of his Notes, "is to initiate their rectitude and impartiality in all the politics of the State. 1 In the poem "To a President" he criticizes him because he has not "learn'd the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality" of Nature:

All you are doing and saying is to America dangled mirages,  
 You have not learn'd of Nature--of the politics of Nature you  
     have not learn'd the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality,  
 You have not seen that only such as they are for these States,  
 And that what is less than they must sooner or later lift off  
     from these States.<sup>2</sup>

idea of Nature, long absent, must, above all, become fully restored, enlarged, and must furnish the pervading atmosphere to poems, and the test of all high literary and aesthetic compositions." He contrasts his view of Nature, "the whole orb, with its geologic history, the komos, carrying fire and snow, that rolls through the illimitable areas," with "the smooth walks, trim'd hedges, posies and nightingales of the English poets." Complete Writings, V, p. 135.

A passage from Specimen Days will also indicate his general approach:

"I cannot divest my appetite of literature, yet I find myself eventually trying it all by Nature--first premises many call it, but really the crowning results of all, laws, tallies and proofs. (Has it never occur'd to any one how the last deciding tests applicable to a book are entirely outside of technical and grammatical ones, and that any truly first-class production has little or nothing to do with the rules and calibres of ordinary critics?--or the bloodless chalk of Allibone's Dictionary? I have fancied the ocean and the daylight, the mountain and the forest, putting their spirit in a judgment on our books. I have fancied some disembodied human soul giving its verdict.)" Ibid., pp. 42-43.

In another passage in Specimen Days he contrasts a healthy view of nature, one which takes in "the perennial and democratic concretes at first hand," with the "abnormal," "morbid" view as represented by Poe: "By its popular poets the calibres of an age, the weak spots of its embankments, its sub-currents (often more significant than the biggest surface ones) are unerringly indicated. The lush and weird that have taken such extraordinary possession of nineteenth-century verse-lovers--what mean they? The inevitable tendency of poetic culture to morbidity, abnormal beauty--the sickness of all technical thought or refinement in itself--the abnegation of the perennial and democratic concretes at first hand, the body, the earth and sea, sex and the like--and the substitution of something for them at second or third hand--what bearings have they on current pathological study?" Ibid., IV, p. 287.

1. Ibid., II, p. 138.
2. Inclusive, p. 231.

And in another passage he draws an analogy between the truths of politics and the truths of the sciences: "There are leading moral truths underlying politics, as invariable and reliable as the leading truths in geology, chemistry or mathematics. These truths are the foundation of American politics."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "politics of Nature" may seem at first glance to be a fine-sounding Romantic sentiment, too vague to be realistic and of practical value. It may be just such a sentiment that Newton Arvin has in mind when he calls Whitman a "political illiterate." But taken in conjunction with Whitman's well-articulated definition of democracy (outlined in Chapter I) it is not as vague as it sounds. The basis of his democracy is a complete faith that the common man has the ability to work out his own destinies; more than that, a faith that it is inevitable by "Nature's laws" that he will do so.<sup>2</sup> It is this that the poet has in mind when he uses the term "politics of Nature."<sup>3</sup>

1. Complete Writings, IX, p. 144.

2. "Democracy has been hurried on through time by measureless tides and winds, resistless as the revolution of the globe, and as far-reaching and rapid." "Shakspeare--the Future," Ibid., V, p. 219.

3. It would be a fair interpretation, I think, to say that when he admonishes "a President" that he has not learned of the "politics of Nature," he means not only that the President does not understand that the laws of nature are inexorably leading to democracy, but also that as a logical consequence the government is for the common man, not the common man for the government.

The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who are here for him,

The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,

The Congress convenes every Twelfth-month for you,

Laws, courts, the forming of States, the charters of cities,

the going and coming of commerce and mails, are all for you.

"A Song for Occupations" (1855), Inclusive, p. 182.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATURE, INCLUDING MAN, AS A DIALECTICAL UNITY

Whitman looks at Nature, including the "spiritual" spectator as well as the "material" spectacle, as an "ensemble." Anyone familiar with his poetry will recognize that this idea of unity is all-pervasive, whether the poet is considering the unity of things in time, their unity as an interrelation of parts, or their unity as to the material and spiritual. Since past and future, part and whole, material and spiritual are not in the usual conception a unity but in a sense opposites, such a "unity of opposites" necessarily leads to some sort of dialectical approach.<sup>1</sup> Whitman's view from the first poems calls for a "unity of opposites." This doctrine, briefly, asserts that the character of reality is essentially contradictory--and at the same time asserts that these "opposites" which are everywhere to be found do not remain in metaphysical opposition, but also exist in unity.<sup>2</sup>

1. Dialectics is, of course, no invention of Hegel's. "Dialectics," says Hegel in his *Encyclopaedia*, "is no novelty in philosophy. Among the ancients Plato is termed the inventor of Dialectic: and his right to the name rests on the fact, that the Platonic philosophy first gave the free scientific, and thus at the same time the objective, form to Dialectic. . . . In modern times it was, more than any other, Kant who resuscitated the name of Dialectic, and restored it to its post of honor. He did it . . . by working out the antinomies of reason. The problem of these antinomies is no mere subjective piece of work oscillating between one set of grounds and another; it really serves to show that every abstract position of understanding, taken precisely as it is given, naturally veers round into its opposite." Quoted by J. Loewenberg in his *Introduction to Hegel*, pp. xvi-xvii.
2. As Hegel expresses the unity of opposites in a classic passage: "Positive and negative are supposed to express an absolute difference. The two however are at bottom the same; the name of either might be transformed to the other. Thus, for example, debts and assets are not two particular, self-subsisting species of property. What is negative to the debtor is positive to the creditor."

The "unity of opposites" is an integral part of the whole dialectical approach, but it is not all the Hegelian form connotes. In the dialectical view there is an active interrelation between opposites; for example, between subject and object. This concept in Whitman has already been discussed in Chapters III and IV. The correlative principle that all of Nature, including man's history, is an active process of transformation through the struggle of opposite forces we will encounter in Chapter VII, on Whitman's conception of History and Development. The doctrine of struggle will appear also in Chapter IX, in connection with the poet's active optimism.

Whitman found in the dialectic a method whereby he might include all of Nature in an "ensemble." Instead of being forced to view man either as a physiological mechanism or pure Mind or Soul, he could treat him as a synthesis of the two opposites; instead of having to choose between a strict determinism and complete free will, he could again include both; instead of restricting himself to the choice between complete, anarchic individualism or complete subjection to the State, he could merge them. Some examples of his application of dialectics to certain key problems will illustrate how through that approach he attempted to solve them.

True to his Romantic and Transcendental backgrounds he of course insisted on the supreme value of the individual. "Me," "You," are the important things in the world. The freedom and right to development and expres-

A way to the East is also a way to the West. Positive and negative are therefore intrinsically conditioned by one another, and are only in relation to each other. The North Pole of the magnet cannot be without the South Pole and vice-versa. If we cut a magnet in two, we have not a North Pole in one piece and a South Pole in the other. Similarly, in electricity, the positive and the negative are not two diverse and independent fluids. In opposition the difference is not confronted by any other, but by its other." The Logic of Hegel, p. 222.

sion of the individual man are paramount considerations.<sup>1</sup> But it is also characteristic of Whitman, and here in his emphasis he differed from his contemporaries, that he also had faith in the mass of the people. His was the thoroughgoing democratic conception that man is a social animal and only achieves full development of his individuality through acting with others. With great insight he poses the problem of the contradiction of individuality versus the demands of society in Democratic Vistas. "We shall," he says, ". . . quickly and continually find the origin-idea of the singleness of man, individualism, asserting itself, and cropping forth, even from the opposite ideas. But the mass, or lump character, for imperative reasons, is to be ever carefully weigh'd, borne in mind, and provided for. Only from it, and from its proper regulation and potency, comes the other, comes the chance of individualism. The two are contradictory, but our task is to reconcile them."<sup>2</sup> And in the footnote to these remarks he further outlines the paradox.<sup>3</sup>

1. "For, after the rest is said--after the many time-honor'd and really true things for subordination, experience, rights of property, etc., have been listen'd to and acquiesced in--after the valuable and well-settled statement of our duties and relations in society is thoroughly con'd over and exhausted--it remains to bring forward and modify everything else with the idea of that Something a man is (last precious consolation of the drudging poor), standing apart from all else, divine in his own right, and a woman in hers, sole and untouchable by any canons of authority, or any rule derived from precedent, state-safety, the acts of legislatures, or even from what is called religion, modesty, or art. . . . This idea of perfect individualism it is indeed that deepest tinge and gives character to the idea of the aggregate. For it is mainly or altogether to serve independent separation that we favor a strong generalization, consolidation." Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, pp. 68-69.
2. Ibid., p. 67.
3. "The question hinted here is one which time only can answer. Must not the virtue of modern Individualism, continually enlarging, usurping all, seriously affect, perhaps keep down entirely, in America, the like of the ancient virtue of Patriotism, the fervid and absorbing love of general country? I have no doubt myself

The paradox of the individual and the mass is not confined to the social organization but is present also in the whole scheme of things. It is only by the dialectical approach that one can see the position of the individual in that scheme.

Singularity  
Also  
multiplicity

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,  
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated,  
every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,  
The similitudes of the past and those of the future,  
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings,  
on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,  
The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,  
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,  
The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.<sup>1</sup>

A further illustration of Whitman's dialectic is his treatment of the contradiction between the rights of individual States and the necessity of the Union:

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,  
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only . . .<sup>2</sup>

The principle of the Union, "the right of ensemble," must be preserved; yet an equally sacred principle is the sovereign right of each State. "We must

that the two will merge, and will mutually profit and brace each other, and that from them a greater product, a third will arise. But I feel that at present they and their oppositions form a serious problem and paradox in the United States." *Ibid.*

A similar formulation of Whitman's is the expression of a sort of dialectical tried in describing the importance of the individual, isolated personality and the opposite but necessary love of his fellows, the two merging in a higher synthesis--Religion. As he states this in one of the unused American prefaces, recently discovered in manuscript: "The meaning of America is Democracy. The meaning of Democracy is to put in practice the idea of the sovereignty, license, sacredness of the individual. This idea gives identity and isolation to every man and woman--but the idea of Love fuses and combines all with irresistible power. The twain are in the following Song. A third idea, also, is or shall be put there, --namely, Religion,--the idea which swallows up and purifies all other ideas and things--and gives endless meaning and destiny to a man and condenses in him all things." Walt Whitman's Workshop, p. 171.

1. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856), *Inclusive*, p. 134.
2. "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" (1872), *Ibid.*, p. 379.

have both; or rather, bred out of them, as out of mother and father, a third set, the perennial result and combination of both, and neither jeopardized."<sup>1</sup>

Whitman also approached dialectically the crucial question of freedom of the will. A determinist philosophy, the philosophy of mechanistic science, finds no place for the working out of man's creative powers. On the other hand, it is necessary to any scientific point of view to hold that nature does not work anarchically but according to law. The poet saw in dialectics a way out of this dilemma. He understood well the scientific, historical principle that inexorable law governs the universe. He takes the naturalistic position from the first edition of the Leaves that one does not cevil at the past or the present, because everything takes place through necessity. This view, a central note in his poems, is unequivocally stated in the 1855 Preface:

What has ever happened . . . what happens and whatever may  
or shall happen, the vital laws enclose all . . . they are  
sufficient for any case and for all cases . . .<sup>2</sup>

As the antithesis, from the first he posits free will and struggle as a necessary part of life and Nature; he proclaims, "My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion."<sup>3</sup>

These two "opposite" ideas are present in Whitman's philosophy from the beginning,<sup>4</sup> and by 1867 at least, he was stating the paradox of free will and determinism as "freest action formed under the laws divine."<sup>5</sup> It was Hegel who destroyed the old idea that free will and necessity are fixed opposites--an idea "which is contrary to reason and to the facts of our

1. "Nationality--(And Yet)," Complete Writings, V, p. 264.

2. Inclusive, pp. 497-498.

3. "Song of the Open Road" (1856), Ibid., p. 132.

4. See Chapter IX for further analysis of these "opposite" elements in Whitman's thought.

5. Of Life immense in passion, pulse and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action, form'd under laws divine,  
The Modern Man I sing.

"One's-Self I Sing" (1867), Inclusive, p. 1.

daily experience."<sup>1</sup> According to Hegel man increases his freedom through the recognition of necessity. He saw "free will and necessity as a continually shifting system of relationships--the shifting balance of forces between the will of man and the totality of his environment."<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's formulation of the problem in a note entitled "Freedom,"<sup>3</sup> is a summary of the Hegelian point of view: "The whole Universe is absolute Law. Freedom only opens entire activity and license under the law. . . . While we are from birth to death the subjects of irresistible law, enclosing every movement and minute, we yet escape, by a paradox, into true free will."<sup>4</sup>

Strange as it may seem, we only attain to freedom by a knowledge of, and implicit obedience to, Law. Great--unspeakably great--is the Will! the free Soul of man! At its greatest, understanding and obeying the laws, it can then, and then only, maintain true liberty. For there is to the highest, that law as absolute as any--more absolute than any--the Law of Liberty. The shallow, as intimated, consider liberty a release from all law, from every constraint. The wise see in it, on the contrary, the potent Law of Laws, namely, the fusion and combination of the conscious will, or partial individual law, with those universal, eternal, unconscious ones, which run through all Time, pervade history, prove immortality, give moral purpose to the entire objective world, and the last dignity to human life.<sup>5</sup>

1. Lawson, op. cit., p. 37.

2. Ibid. Whether or not Whitman had encountered Hegelian doctrines at the time of the publication of "Song of the Open Road" in 1856, he had already conceived the idea that development was a series of struggles growing out of each other in dialectical fashion:

Allons! through struggles and wars!

The goal that was named cannot be countermanded.

Have the past struggles succeeded?

What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?

Now understand me well--it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

Inclusive, p. 132.

3. Complete Writings, V, pp. 297-298.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 298. It is important to note here, as a factor in considering the question of Whitman's naturalism in contrast with what we could term the "supernaturalism" of Hegel, that he omits

It was in the explanation of the relation between body and soul that the poet found the dialectical approach particularly useful. As illustrated in Chapter IV he was firm in his belief in the reality and importance of the body, but just as convinced of the reality of its "opposite," the soul. Typical of his expression of the relationship is his paradoxical pronouncement that the body is the soul.<sup>1</sup> According to the doctrine of the unity of opposites both the body and the soul could merge in a higher synthesis.<sup>2</sup> It seems inevitable, considering Whitman's view from the first that body and soul were both "real" and equal, and his further belief that the universe was not dichotomized but was one, that he should adopt the dialectical approach and should welcome with enthusiasm the philosophy of Hegel.

A slightly different way of expressing this same contradiction, and one which illustrates why the poet felt that "spirit" was an essential part of the Leaves, he set forth in a conversation with Treubel. He had

tying the concept of necessity to the Divine Spirit, the Absolute, as did Hegel. To Hegel, "the necessities of the logical process were conceived as manifestations, in the human mind, of the stages of the development or life of the Absolute. . . . The autonomy of practical reason with Kant, the fundamental act of consciousness with Fichte, led in Hegel's concept to the conviction that what appeared as necessary to us was merely the expression of the fundamental free and self-chosen manifestation of the Absolute, of the Divine Spirit." Marx, op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 651-652.

1. In a poem of 1875, "I Sing the Body Electric," he states:  
 And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?  
 And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?  
 Again, in a recently recovered "Introduction," he says: "The Body merged with & in the soul & the soul merged in the Body I seek."  
Walt Whitman's Workshop, p. 129.
2. Boastright sees, for example, in "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" the Hegelian triad: "Personality (Whitman) thinks of as a 'curious trio,' consisting of 'I,' 'my body,' and 'my soul.' Here is the Hegelian triad: soul, thesis; body, antithesis; 'I,' synthesis. This is the 'I' of the Song of Myself, for which there is no name in the dictionary." Op. cit., p. 138.

Add quotation  
 Spirit. 11

been emphasizing the importance of "demonstrable science":

In these noble days we say of laws of physical philosophy that we must try them and examine them for ourselves; they shall be exhibited to us. Nothing carries the day now but the clearly authenticated narrative and the solid, touchable, weighable, seeable, demonstrable substance and its action, and the plain reasons and proofs how and why.

Then Treubel asked, "But can you get rid of mystery?" Whitman replied:

No--nor get rid of reason: the two belong together--each is necessary to the other. . . . Mystery is not the denial of reason but its honest confirmation: reason, indeed, leads inevitably to mystery--but, as you know, mystery is not superstition: mystery and reality are the two halves of the same sphere.

And something of what the poet meant by "mystery" is made clear in his final remarks. Treubel reminded him that he had said in writing recently about him: "Leaves of Grass is not all flat on the ground. Some of it is on wings way up in the air." Whitman responded: "So it ought to be--so I hope it is: There would be no excuse for the book if it trailed and lost its banners in the mud."<sup>1</sup>

An inseparable accompaniment of the dialectical view, is the indissoluble unity, the "ensemble" of the universe. The poet's law "for the new and strong artists of America / For the fresh brood of perfect teachers, literate, the diverse savans and the coming musicians," is that

There shall be no subject but it shall be treated with reference to the ensemble of the world--and no coward or copyist shall be any more allowed.

There shall be no subject too pronounced--all works shall acknowledge the divine law of indirection . . .<sup>2</sup>

This way of looking at things as a connected whole seemed to him "like nature," and is contrasted with the old way of dealing with isolated units. He continues,

1. Treubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 468.

2. From the MS. notes for "Laws for Creation," Inclusive, p. 677.

They do not seem to me like what I saw in the arrièrs, in the  
old volumes and specimens.  
They seem to me like nature at last (America has given rise to  
them, and I have also)  
They seem to me like the sky with clouds--like trees with rustling  
leaves, like stretching waters with ships sailing in the  
distance,  
They seem to me at least as good as animals and as the rocks,  
earth and weeds.<sup>1</sup>

If, when Whitman says "America has given rise" to these works which  
illustrate the interfusion of the whole, he means that this point of view  
originated in the vast, free new world, he is of course in error. But as  
a matter of fact he indicates elsewhere, in his discussions of the German  
metaphysicians, for example, that he was well aware that the view of the  
world as an ensemble was an integral part of the philosophy of the nineteenth  
century. This way of looking at the world was not only a part of the Ideal-  
ist philosophy but is to be found in the best scientific thought of the time.  
J. T. Merz points it out as the view which "underlies or consciously governs  
nineteenth century thought in many directions; not only Metaphysics but also  
Psychology, Sociology, and--we may go further and say--not only all philoso-  
phical but also much of the best scientific thought."<sup>2</sup> His summary of this  
concept emphasizes its advance over the static, atomistic approach of the  
previous century:

Nowhere in the world of facts and phenomena do we meet things  
in their isolation; the phenomenal world is a connected whole,  
a continuum, in time and space, and to deal with single iso-  
lated or independent facts or phenomena leads away from an  
understanding of their true nature and a comprehension of their  
reality. . . . The greatest step taken in modern times within  
the natural sciences themselves has consisted in studying the  
objects of nature, not in isolation, but in their surroundings,  
and the processes of nature not independently but in their  
sequence in time. The whole vocabulary of modern natural  
science, such as "habitat," "environment," "evolution," and  
"solidarity," mark this change in thought; in fact, hand in  
hand with the increase of precision characteristic of the

1. Ibid.

2. Op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 536-537.

mathematical treatment, there has marched the opposite process of annulling conventional definitions and of breaking down traditional landmarks.<sup>1</sup>

It is Goethe "who probably represents nineteenth century thought more fully than any other, who influenced men's minds more lastingly, and gave them certainly a higher flight."<sup>2</sup> And it is to the personality and works of Goethe that we trace back this view of the world which may be called the "synoptic" as contrasted with the "analytical."<sup>3</sup> Again, some such advance was inevitable, inasmuch as the mechanical, analytical approach of the eighteenth century did not explain nature as it really was. This synoptic view represented in Goethe is also held "by some of the foremost naturalists of modern times."

To this view every object of contemplation, be it large or small, physical or mental, is a whole, a totality, which, in the actual "Together" of its apparent parts, reveals to us something which is lost as soon as we start to dissect or analyse it. In the most emphatic way this view looks at nature as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

The rationale of the view, as expressed by Goethe, very well sums up what Whitman was getting at and often expressed: "Nature is neither kernel nor shell; She is everything at once."

To this view the distinctions of external and internal, and of the different parts of any natural object, or of nature as a whole, disappear. This view lies on the borderland of poetry and science; of the intuitive grasp of the artist on one side and of the combined analytic and synthetic processes of the naturalist on the other. It produces, in some instances, the inspired creations of the poet and artist, and in others the ingenious contrivances of the artificer and mechanic.<sup>5</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 537. Cf. Randall, op. cit., pp. 416-417.
2. Merr., op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 302-303.
3. Ibid., p. 611.
4. Ibid., pp. 611-12.
5. Ibid., p. 613.

In Chapter III it was shown that Whitman had a good understanding of the general philosophical positions of Schelling and Hegel, and that he had a sympathetic enthusiasm for their conceptions of Nature. It was Goethe's synoptic view that influenced Schelling in his striving for the philosophical comprehension of nature.<sup>1</sup> Hegel, also, was greatly attracted to and influenced by Goethe's "sense of unity or totality in nature which the poet's feeling grasps, but which is apt to escape the analysis of the scientific understanding . . ."<sup>2</sup>

It is from the point of view of this general conception of the Unity of the world that we should look at Whitman's "vast similitude." Included in it is not only a monistic philosophy but also the historical perspective. No concept is more prevalent in his poetry than the idea that all events are interlocked in time, that the world is a "continuum in time." This is brought out particularly well in the poem "On the Beach at Night Alone" (1856).

1. Ibid., pp. 613-614.

2. "Goethe, who, as an old man of eighty-one, was more excited by the news of the dispute between Cuvier and St. Hilaire than by the news of the July Revolution, had forty years before (1790) published his Metamorphoses of Plants. Thus Hegel grew up in an intellectual atmosphere in which the conception of evolution, and especially of biological evolution, was no inconsiderable element. For Goethe's general view of nature he had the greatest sympathy--so much so indeed that he was led to defend Goethe's theory of colour against the Newtonian theory, a defence which has brought Hegel into much discredit with the modern scientific mind. What attracted Hegel in Goethe's view of nature (as Mr. S. Alexander has well pointed out in Mind, xl. p. 511), was that sense of unity or totality in nature which the poet's feeling grasps, but which is apt to escape the analysis of the scientific understanding (cf. Naturphilosophie, pp. 317, 318, 483); and it was perhaps worth while to remind the world that to regard light as composed of different colours is only a way of making the concrete facts of nature intelligible to ourselves. In the same spirit Hegel complains that the botanists of his time did not appreciate Goethe's Metamorphoses of Plants, and "did not know what to make of it, just because what was represented therein was a totality (eben weil ein Ganzes darin dargestellt wurde)."<sup>3</sup> Ritchie, Darwin and Hegel, p. 43.

✓  
Underline  
beginning and  
14-2-58

On the beach at night alone,  
 As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,  
 As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the  
     clef of the universes and of the future.  
 A vast similitude interlocks all,  
 All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets,  
 All distances of place however wide,  
 All distances of time, all inanimate forms,  
 All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different,  
     or in different worlds,  
 All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes,  
     the brutes,  
 All nations, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages,  
 All identities that have existed or may exist on this globe,  
     or any globe  
 All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,  
 This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,  
 And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.<sup>1</sup>

As the poet expressed this historical unity in "With Antecedents" (1860),  
 the past, present, and future "conjoint":

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,  
 And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time . . .<sup>2</sup>

Not only are time and space contained in the "One," but also matter  
 and spirit. It is a characteristic insistence of Whitman that the Body  
 and Soul are somehow a unity. (This view may be contrasted with that of  
 mechanical science, which, according to the argument of Whitehead reviewed  
 in Chapter I, "bifurcates the universe." According to this argument mech-  
 anistic science forces a "'bifurcation' between mind and body, life and  
 matter, spirit and nature."<sup>3</sup>

There, spread out in space is nature, and here, inserting  
 itself into the bits of nature, which we call bodies, is  
 life, producing effects upon bodies which are other than  
 those which the laws of physics will enable us to predict,  
 and introducing an element of caprice which we call free  
 will into the apparently orderly scheme of nature.<sup>3</sup>

Whitman's monistic view, like Goethe's, refused to accept this bifurcation  
 and demanded that the mechanical and "spiritual" be combined into a Unity.

1. Inclusive, pp. 221-222.

2. Ibid., p. 203.

3. Joad, op. cit., p. 571.

*Each*  
The poet makes the point in the very first of his "Notes on the Meaning and Intention of 'Leaves of Grass.'"

My poems when complete should be a unity, in the same sense that the earth is, or that the human body, (senses, soul, head, trunk, feet, blood, viscera, man-root, eyes, hair,) or that a perfect musical composition is.

Great constituent elements of my poetry--Two, viz.: Materialism--Spirituality--The Intellect, the Esthetic is what is to be the medium of these and to beautify and make serviceable there.<sup>1</sup>

We can say, then, that Whitman's "ensemble" refers to the unity of things in point of time, their unity as a whole as contrasted with the view that there is such a thing as an isolated part, their unity as to the material and the spiritual. A passage in "Starting from Paumotu" (1860) combines all three of these unities:

I will not make poems with reference to parts,  
But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble,  
And I will not sing with reference to a day, but with reference  
to all days,  
And I will not make a poem nor the least part of a poem but has  
reference to the soul,  
Because having look'd at the objects of the universe, I find there  
is no one nor any particle of one but has reference to the  
soul.<sup>2</sup>

But it must be remembered that along with his synoptic view, the insistence that everything must be considered as a part of the whole "scheme," Whitman stressed the importance of each of the individual "opposites." Here we must refer again to his dialectics. The Individual and the Mass, the Soul and the Body, are a unity; yet each opposite is important in its own right. Some sort of a dialectical approach seems inevitable when these contradictory demands are present. It was no wonder then that Whitman welcomed Hegel's dialectical scheme so enthusiastically. Whether he had read Hegel by 1856 or not, in a poem of that date he was demanding "The simple,

1. Complete Writings, IX, p. 3.

2. Inclusive, p. 19.

compact, well-join'd scheme," (and at the same time) "myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme."<sup>1</sup>

Whitman found that to Hegel "the whole earth . . . with its infinite variety, the past, the surroundings of to-day, or what may happen in the future, the contrarieties of material with spiritual, and of natural with artificial, are all, to the eye of the ensemble, but necessary sides and unfoldings, different steps or links, in the endless process of Creative thought, which, amid numberless apparent failures and contradictions, is held together by central and never-broken unity--not contradictions or failures at all, but radiations of one consistent and eternal purpose. . . ."<sup>2</sup> He felt that Hegel's scheme explained the universe "with a more consoling scientific assurance than any yet."<sup>3</sup> But, although he accepted Hegel's concept that there is an underlying Unity in the world, it is another question whether he also followed Hegel in the view that that Unity is Spirit. Hegel's philosophy is Absolute Idealism; to Hegel the Absolute is Spirit, and as an immanent principle it "manifests itself in the existing world, it is realized in nature and especially in human history."<sup>4</sup> Yet in spite of Whitman's sympathy with Hegelianism, the "drift" of his philosophy, as we have seen, is in the opposite direction, the direction of Naturalism. For Whitman, material Nature, instead of being a "manifestation" of the world of Spirit, is the source and test of "All"--material and spiritual.<sup>5</sup> The poet, in his own fashion, and perhaps not consciously, turned Hegel upside down, as did many of the group of "Young Hegelians." He found reality, not in Hegel's Geist, but in Nature.

1. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Ibid., p. 134.

2. "Carlyle from American Points of View," Complete Writings, IV, p. 320. Whitman's concept of the purposeful scheme of Nature will be the subject of the next chapter.

3. Ibid.

4. Marrs, op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 644-645.

5. See Chapter V.

## CHAPTER VII

### NATURE'S "SCHEME," THE LAWS OF HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The second of the "greatest themes," for Whitman, is man's "faith in the scheme of things, the destinies which it necessitates." There is no more characteristic strain in his writings than his "celebration" of historical law, the law of the "scheme of things"; and this historical approach, in contrast with the static, mechanical view of the eighteenth century, reflects what is perhaps the greatest advance in thought made by the Romantic and Idealist movements. With its corollaries, what will be termed the ideas of Development and Evolution, it is the greatest advance contributed by the nineteenth century. The present chapter and the one following will consider the poet's conception of Nature's "scheme," which for purposes of clarity will be taken up under two heads: the Laws of History and Development, and Evolution. The most controversial element of the scheme as far as Whitman's "naturalism" is concerned is the question of purpose in Nature; as pointed out in the Introduction, the idea of purpose in the natural world is ruled out by the "older Naturalism." In the discussion, then, we will necessarily be concerned with the concept of teleology as a legitimate element of a naturalistic philosophy.

One cannot understand Whitman's philosophy unless one realizes that when the poet lauds the person

Who . . . (constructs) the house of himself or herself, not for  
a day but for all time, sees races, eras, dates, generations,  
The past, the future, dwelling there, like space, inseparable  
together,<sup>1</sup>

1. "Kosmos," Inclusive, p. 329.

he expresses this new historical view that was the glory of the Romantic movement.<sup>1</sup> An understanding of the full implications of the advanced view is also necessary to see why he should state: "to me, Development, Continuity, Immortality, Transformation, are the chiefest life-meanings of Nature and Humanity, and are the sine qua non of all facts, and each fact."<sup>2</sup>

In order to appreciate the tremendous importance of the historical view in Whitman's scheme and in the history of thought one must contrast it with the previous static, mechanical conception. Josiah Royce, in The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, explains with great insight the significance of the new historical view as a concomitant of evolution. As he points out, "what used to be called historical research was something that in former centuries embodied a spirit very different from what we now know as the historical spirit."<sup>3</sup> Whereas natural history had formerly been merely a descriptive science, in the nineteenth century "it became truly historical, examined into the genesis of organic forms, and, in the field of geological study, set about the study of the succession of organic forms upon the earth's surface." The significant change was from a static view of the world to one of the universe as a process of change and growth.

In previous periods of modern thought, thinkers had deliberately neglected the history of things. Nature, not as it grows, but as it eternally is, was that which constituted the outer order known to the seventeenth century. Events had little concern to a doctrine like Spinoza's. Newton's conception of physical science was founded, indeed, upon the observation of the actual events of nature; but these events were to be explained, if possible, by eternal laws like gravitation, and history was to be absorbed in mechanism. When the eighteenth century turned its eyes towards the inner life,

1. For a penetrating analysis of the role of the Romantic movement in the development of the historical viewpoint see Josiah Royce, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, Lecture II, "The Rise of the Doctrine of Evolution," pp. 265-307.
2. Footnote to "Good-bye My Fancy," Inclusive, p. 444. My italics.
3. Op. cit., p. 274.

it still studied an ideally permanent thing called human nature, which savage life illustrated in its primitive innocence, civilized life in its artificial disguises, but which nothing in heaven or earth, except the will of its creator, could essentially change. But for our nineteenth century it is just the change, the flow, the growth of things, that is the most interesting feature of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

It is the new historical perspective, "the greatest step taken in modern times within the natural sciences," the viewing of "objects of nature, not in isolation, but in their surroundings, and the processes of nature not independently but in their sequence in time,"<sup>2</sup> that Whitman celebrates from first to last in all his work. It is too seldom appreciated that the spirit of this progressive view permeates the 1855 Preface. There he states that the greatest poet in order to bring "the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons . . . to bear on your individual character as you hear or read" must "compete with the laws that pursue and follow Time."<sup>3</sup>

What is the purpose must surely be there, and the clue of it must be there--and the faintest indication is the indication of the best, and then becomes clearest indication. Past and present and future are not disjoin'd but join'd. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be, from what has been and is. . . .<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid. As J. H. Randall explains this advanced viewpoint, "To understand any belief, any ideal, any custom, any institution, we must examine its gradual growth from primitive beginnings to its present form." He continues, "The character of an individual and the civilization of a nation are the result of a long development; they are to be judged and evaluated only in the light of a thorough knowledge of their past. And if man's life is such a slow growth, the universe to which it is the surest key must also be a process of evolution. Time and history are of fundamental importance. Viewed in such a light, the eighteenth-century science of human nature was utterly transformed. Every one of the conceptions that had sprung from Locke and Newton gave way to a quite different set; the genetic and historical method supplanted the analytical and mechanical, first in human affairs, and then in every branch of natural science . . ." Op. cit., pp. 417-418.
2. Mora, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 537.
3. Complete Writings, V, p. 169.
4. Ibid.

But perhaps the best example from the Preface is the opening paragraph.

The full significance of those lines is lost unless one bears in mind the background and importance of the new idea of historical development.

America does not repel the past, or what the past has produced under its forms, or amid other politics, or the idea of castes, or the old religions--accepts the lesson with calmness--is not impatient because the elough still sticks to opinions and manners in literature, while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms--perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house--perceives that it waits a little while in the door--that it was fittest for its days--that its action has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches--and that he shall be fittest for his days.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage lie the fundamental elements of Whitman's conception of the "scheme of things": the acceptance of the historical processes of nature and faith in their further development, and the true historical viewpoint that our life is built upon "former generations of men." His concept of the historical processes as progressive, no mere sunny optimistic belief of Whitman's<sup>2</sup> or of those thinkers who began to understand the new historical approach, will be discussed in later pages. For the moment we will consider the view that our life is dependent upon past growths. The new spirit recognized all the barbarisms past and present, yet saw that progress had been made. Also, that the gains were no "gift from above" but the result of hard-won achievements, with each generation building on the gains of former generations. As Royce points out, "After a fashion people had, of course, always recognized such dependence. But how deep and how concrete the new history found the dependence to be!"<sup>3</sup>

Our language, our institutions, our beliefs, our ideals, whatever in short, is mightiest and dearest in all our world,

1. Ibid., p. 161.

2. See Chapter IX.

3. Op. cit., p. 283.

all this together is a slow and hard-won growth, nobody's arbitrary invention, no gift from above, no outcome of a social compact, no immediate expression of reason, but the slowly formed concretion of ages of blind effort, unconscious, but wise in its unconsciousness, often selfish, but humane even in its selfishness. The ideals win the battle of life by the secret connivance, as it were, of numberless seemingly un-ideal forces. Climate, hunger, commerce, authority, super-  
 stition, war, cruelty, toil, greed, compromise, tradition, conservatism, loyalty, sloth,--all these cooperate, through countless ages, with a hundred other discernible tendencies, to build up civilization.<sup>1</sup>

Whitman in this spirit venerates the contributions to Democracy of "the mighty past" with its "ancient struggles." The "ship of Democracy" sails with valued freight not of the present only.

The Past is also stored in thee,  
 Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the  
 Western continent alone,  
 Earth's resume entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied  
 by thy spars,  
 With the Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink  
 or swim with thee,  
 With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars,  
 thou bear'st the other continents,  
 Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port triumphant.<sup>2</sup>

It is because he has a grasp of the new historical view that he sings "The Past--the infinite greatness of the past!" and continually points out, "For what is the present after all but a growth out of the past?"<sup>3</sup> He respects strange civilizations and old beliefs, for respect is essential to understanding. And when Whitman states that the "old accounts" "are true, without exception," it is fair to say that he means "true" in the sense that "all past days were what they must have been."<sup>4</sup> The poem appropriately titled "with Antecedents" voices this attitude:

1. Ibid
2. "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," Inclusive, pp. 380-381.
3. "Passage to India," Ibid., p. 343.
4. See Chapter IX.

O but it is not the years--it is I, it is You,  
 We touch all laws and tally all antecedents,  
 We are the sheld, the oracle, the monk and the knight, we  
 easily include them and more, . . .

I respect Assyria, China, Teutonia, and the Hebrews,  
 I adopt each theory, myth god, and demi-god.  
 I see that the old accounts, bibles, genealogies,  
     are true, without exception,  
 I assert that all past days were what they must have been,  
 And that they could no-how have been better than they were,  
 And that to-day is what it must be, and that America is,  
 And that to-day and America could no-how be better than they are.<sup>1</sup>

The laws of historical development include, of course, not only the  
 evolutionary growth of the material cosmos but also that of human institu-  
 tions. "These States" have grown out of "the preceding social and poli-  
 tical universes":

We see, as in the universes of the material cosmos, after  
 meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles, man at last  
 arises, born through them, to prove them, concentrate them,  
 to turn upon them with wonder and love--to command them,  
 adorn them, and carry them upward into superior realms--so,  
 out of the series of the preceding social and political uni-  
 verses, now arise these States. We see that while many were  
 supposing things establish'd and completed, really the grand-  
 est things always remain; and discover that the work of the  
 New World is not ended, but only fairly begun.<sup>2</sup>

Again, in one of his memoranda he indicates, as he does in his poems, that  
 "politics and religion" as well as geology follow the laws of historical  
 development.

A nation wonders how another nation can be what it is,  
 wonders how it can like what it likes and dislike what it  
 dislikes; a man wonders at another man's folly and so on.  
 But what a nation likes, is part of that nation; and what  
 it dislikes is part of the same nation; its politics and  
 religion, whatever they are, are inevitable results of  
 the days and events that have preceded the nation, just  
 as much as the condition of the geology of that part of  
 the earth is the result of former conditions.<sup>3</sup>

1. Inclusive, pp. 204-205.

2. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 149.

3. Ibid., IX, p. 118.

Whitman's continual emphasis upon historical law left no way open for the "great-man" theory of history. Not only is his whole conception of historical movements "in the great mass" opposed to that theory but he directly attacks it in conversations with Traubel. On one occasion Traubel had referred to Lincoln's "balance, poise," arguing: "We can imagine the War without Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, but with Lincoln not there at that time, what?" Whitman replied:

We must not give too much importance to personalism--it is easy to overcharge it--man moves as man, in all the great achievements--man in the great mass . . .<sup>1</sup>

At another time the question of books expressing the great-man theory was under discussion and he labeled them "poisonous, insidious," singling out "Carlyle's Frederick, Cromwell." Such a theory, he explained, was an oversimplification--"To judge of history as if all could be brought, expressed, in one fact--one little branch of knowledge--in one person! I am very impatient of stories which imply the concentration of all historical meanings in single eminent persons."<sup>2</sup>

So far we have considered the "new historical spirit" in Whitman chiefly as it concerned respect for and "acceptance" of the past and the full grasp of the significance of the past for the present. This is only a partial section of the complete view, which also includes the future.<sup>3</sup> The word "development," as contrasted with "history," will be used to describe the view that the universe is moving toward a goal in the future; in a word, that there is "purpose" in the movement of history. We have already quoted from the Preface of 1855 to illustrate the poet's historical approach. The

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 206.
2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 424. He adds, "I have read but little from Green--know practically nothing of him at first hand--yet I am convinced that he was on the right track--was not a great-man historian."
3. It is to be born in mind that one of the unities the poet insisted upon was historical unity, including the past, present, and future:

same quotation contains his idea of "development," of purpose in history. The greatest poet must "compete with the laws that pursue and follow Time"; and the laws of Time are purposeful laws: "What is the purpose must surely be there, and the clue of it must be there."<sup>1</sup>

This question of purpose poses the philosophical problem of teleology versus mechanism. It has sometimes been charged that the belief that the universe is purposeful necessarily means the rejection of the scientific, naturalistic view of the world; that a teleological philosophy necessarily entails subjectivism and supernaturalism. According to this view, insofar as Whitman believed the world was developing toward a goal his philosophy was not naturalistic. To use a statement of Newton Arvin's to point up the issue, Arvin assumes that because of his teleological view Whitman could not "appreciate" the "scientific method, its rejection of bias and desire and 'purpose'";

Still less could Whitman tolerate the assumption that the physical universe is in itself indifferent to human wish and purpose, that life is a product and not a transcendent condition of the natural order, and that the real freedom of the human will lies not in a defiance of physical causation but in a clearer and clearer knowledge of it. Least of all could he consistently appreciate the austerity of scientific method, its rejection of bias and desire and "purpose," its reliance on experiment and analysis, its elimination of all possible sources of subjective error, its readiness to submit to the demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>

Without claiming that Whitman was infallibly scientific we have seen in early pages that he paid high tribute to some of the very qualities of science that Arvin claims he could not understand. Above all other qualities he admired its complete "candor," "its readiness to submit to the demonstra-

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,  
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time.

"With Antecedents," Inclusive, p. 205.

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 169.
2. Op. cit., p. 214.

ted." Furthermore, Arvin's assumption that it is impossible to "except" the natural order and physical causation and yet read purpose into nature is not an undisputed issue. The "scientific" view that nature is completely purposeless has been challenged by both idealist and empirical philosophers since the time of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> This mechanical concept continues to be challenged by some of the most profound thinkers today, many of whom affirm that the element of purpose is not only compatible with a naturalistic philosophy but a necessary ingredient of naturalism.

1. "There are two motives which have led philosophers to the recognition of purpose within Nature, one idealist, one empirical. Plato was dominated by the former: the urge, namely, to explain the facts of the world, combined with the conviction that the only type of explanation consists in pointing out some good end which the facts in question will tend to achieve. . . .

"This type of insistence on teleology may have much to say for itself, but it is not Naturalism. It believes that purpose dominates the world, because it is convinced that explanation through purpose is the only thoroughly rational explanation. . . .

". . . But the motive chiefly responsible for (Aristotle's) conclusion that not only material and efficient causes but also final causes must be appealed to by the student of Nature was of a different type: a motive that has been profoundly influential in molding the conclusions of many naturalistic thinkers from his day to our own. This second and non-Platonic influence leading to a stress upon purpose in Nature is nothing new, but simply the fundamental empirical tendency of Naturalism to which we have so often referred. Aristotle and a long line of his followers, especially among philosophers and biologists, have recognized purposiveness in Nature because they could not shut their eyes to it. It seemed to be there, before their faces; and as good empiricists they felt it would be disloyalty to their life-long pursuit of truth if, out of the lesser loyalty to a preconceived theory, they should deny it or seek, artificially, to explain it away.

"Aristotle's universe, therefore, while material and efficient causes play their part in it, is shot through with final causation. This is not presented in the form of the "Design Argument" of the eighteenth century. Though Aristotle rejects Atomism he remains naturalistic. The purposes he finds are not foisted upon Nature from without. They are immanent and form an essential element of Nature herself. They are not presented as the work of a Creator. For Aristotle there is no Creator. The Cosmos is eternal. But Nature herself--especially living Nature--is full of unconscious, immanent purposes which steadily guide the lines of development which we find." Pratt, op. cit., pp. 24-29.

add quotes ✓

✓ Aristotle

✓

One of the important arguments against the mechanistic, purposeless view involves the distinction we have made between "history" and "development." As Professor Major states it, "mere change . . . from one form of existence to another is not development. Accordingly, the important question becomes: What is the aim or purpose of the evolutionary process?"

Unless it is possible to maintain a teleological view of this process, the world becomes in thought like a runaway locomotive; it makes a great commotion and is a great spectacle for the observers; but humanly regarded, it is irrational and its destiny is disaster. The world process, in order to be called rational, meaningful, significant, must have a goal, and since that process derives whatever meaning and significance it can have from the life, aspirations, and the achievements of human kind, that goal is necessarily conceived in relation to what men believes are the ultimate values.<sup>1</sup>

It may be objected that although one may say that man is "higher" in the scale of life than the squirrel because his life is more complex, such a view is subjective and "unscientific." "Science," it might be said, "has no answers to questions of this kind; and the man of science may even assert that 'higher' and 'lower' are merely human terms, human ways of regarding things; and that from the absolute point of view, there is no higher, no lower."<sup>2</sup> "But this," says Professor Major, quoting the answer to this "dead-level" view as expressed by W. T. Stace, "is to reduce the universe to a madhouse"; in such a universe "there is no lower, no higher, no good, no bad, no better, no worse, no sanity, no insanity; all is on a dead level; and, of course, in this view all is vanity."<sup>3</sup>

Another criticism of the view that natural law is purposeless, one that Whitman himself employed in his essay on Darwinism<sup>4</sup> and in a conversation with Treubel,<sup>5</sup> is that it does not explain the "reason of things," their origin.

1. David R. Major, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 117.

2. Ibid., p. 116.

3. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

4. Complete Writings, V, pp. 279-280.

5. Treubel, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 94-95.

It has been charged from Darwin's day to the present that the non-teleological view (Natural Selection) "could not explain the origin of living matter, but only the origin of separate species . . ."<sup>1</sup> "Darwinism, it came to be realized, gave a partial explanation of the non-survival of the 'unfit,' but told us nothing of the arrival of the 'fit.' And this, after all, is the central question."<sup>2</sup> Whitman is criticizing the mechanistic implications of the Darwinian theory when he states that it does not solve "the problem of origins, human and other."<sup>3</sup>

Further argument that the concept of "teleological causation" better explains all of nature than "mechanical causation" is outlined by C. E. M. Joad. Because it rules out "purpose" the mechanical view cannot explain the world of values, art, religion, and ethics. "The principle of mechanical causation purports to give a complete account of the present state and condition of a thing in terms of its origins. A thing on this principle is what it is entirely and in every respect because its causes were what they were. It cannot, then, owe any of its characteristics to the operation of teleological causation."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, "the principle of teleological causation does not, as usually stated, make such all-embracing claims, if only because it tends to be allied with theories that maintain the reality of free will." A teleological philosophy recognizes that "insofar as a man's conduct is conceived of as being determined by his conception of a goal or end, mechanical causation is inapplicable."<sup>5</sup>

Why not then, asks Joad, "admit the efficacy of both principles, but

1. Merz, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 393.

2. Pratt, op. cit., p. 62.

3. Complete Writings, V, p. 279. The point will only be mentioned here, as the argument over mechanistic evolution is detailed in Chapter VIII.

4. Op. cit., p. 196.

5. Ibid.

limit the scope of their application?"

Broadly, we should say, Mechanism holds in the world of matter, Teleology in that of spirit. To put the point in another way, we may say that the spheres in which the principle of Mechanism operates are those explored by the natural sciences; the spheres of teleology are those of art, religion and ethics. We might feel tempted to go further and delimit spheres of influence within the boundaries of a single whole, maintaining while the body is mechanically determined, the mind or spirit is teleologically influenced; or again, in a picture, the chemical composition of the paints and colours which they will exhibit when applied to a canvas are, we shall say, explicable in terms of the laws of chemistry and physics, are explicable, that is to say, in terms of the concepts of a world in which Mechanism applies; but the significance of beauty of the picture belongs, we should add, to the world of values, and values influence the mind teleologically.<sup>1</sup>

The answer is that such a view "bifurcates" the universe, and thus is not acceptable to those who view the world as a unity. "If it were true that mechanistic causation ruled in one part of the universe and teleological causation in another, the world would not be a unity, but would be a duality."<sup>2</sup> Whitman insisted that the world was an indissoluble unity; hence any such bifurcation would be out of the question in his philosophy. He could see in man and his history, the laws of Nature, things which could only be explained in terms of a purpose or goal. Being convinced then that the world was a Whole, a Unity, he could logically justify a faith that the Universe was moving toward a goal, although he could not always find proof of the fact. I would not contend that he consciously went through this process of reasoning; I am, rather, answering the charge that his "purpose" was necessarily pure subjectivism, or the result of wishful thinking.

If one grants non-mechanical, purposeful manifestations in Man himself, then from the naturalistic point of view it may be logical to suppose pur-

1. Ibid., pp. 196-197.

2. Ibid., p. 197.

pose also in other parts of the material world. Man, for the naturalist, is not a misfit but is at home in this world--he is a child of Nature. The family resemblance, however, works both ways: if there are things in man not dreamed of in the mechanistic philosophy, then those factors, in some form, must also be in Nature as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

As the poet states his faith in Nature's "scheme" in "A Backward Glance," it is "an implicit belief in the wisdom, health, mystery, beauty of every process, every concrete object, every human or other existence . . . ." While he "cannot understand it or argue it out," he fully believes in "a clue and purpose in Nature, entire and several; and that invisible spiritual results, just as real and definite as the visible, eventuate all concrete life and all materialism, through Time."<sup>2</sup> He not only believed that there was purpose in the world, but made that belief the key point in his thought. As he stated in the Carlyle essay, after indicating that Hegel's philosophy best expressed the purposeful view: "In short (to put it in our own form, or summing up), that thinker or analyzer or overlooker who by an inscrutable

1. As Professor Pratt summarizes this argument, "there is a very real continuity and family likeness between man and his Mother Nature. He is bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh. He characterizes her as much as she characterizes him. With these two thoughts in mind it is hard to turn one's back upon the obvious suggestion that in the great organic whole, which Nature is, purpose also is at work; that in the Cosmos as a whole, as well as in our little lives, purpose is at least one of the dominating influences. It is, at any rate, perfectly consistent with a very real Naturalism to take into serious consideration the hypothesis that the Cosmos as a whole is permeated with immanent purpose . . . ." Op. cit., p. 142.
2. "Then still a purpose enclosing all, and over and beneath all. Ever since what might be call'd thought, or the budding of thought, fairly began in my youthful mind, I had had a desire to attempt some worthy record of that entire faith and acceptance ("to justify the ways of God to man" is Milton's well-known and ambitious phrase) which is the foundation of moral America. I felt it all as positively then in my young days as I do now in my old ones; to formulate a poem whose every thought or fact should directly or indirectly be or connive at an implicit belief in the wisdom, health, mystery, beauty of every process, every concrete object, every human or other existence. . . ." Inclusive, p. 334.

combination of train's vision and natural intuition most fully accepts in perfect faith the moral unity and sanity of the creative scheme, in history, science, and all life and time, present and future, is both the truest cosmical devotee or religious, and the profoundest philosopher."<sup>1</sup>

With the ideas of Historical Unity and Development as integral and basic in his philosophy from the beginning it is no wonder that the poet should have welcomed Hegel with such great enthusiasm. Herz has pointed out that "the faculty of finding out hidden connections, logical, psychological, and historical, thus offering manifold suggestions for the comprehension and interpretation of things and events in their actual and historical 'together,' is the real secret of Hegel's genius; through it he stimulated many thinking minds who, in the manifold and broad regions notably of historical research, approached their subject with the conviction of its unity, of its deeper sense and meaning, and of the existence of governing ideas."<sup>2</sup>

In some of his later prose writings Whitman quotes with approval Hegel's historical thesis of development and with it his other thesis that the Absolute is a process of "creative thought," in other words, Spirit.<sup>3</sup> In earlier chapters we have seen how much the poet actually qualified the doctrine that Spirit is the only "real"; the drift of his writings shows that for him development comes not from a supernatural "creative thought" but from nature itself. Thus, when he outlines Hegel's philosophy of purpose, as he does in the following passage from the Carlyle essay, one must bear in mind its naturalistic setting in his writings as a whole.

According to Hegel the whole earth (an old nucleus-thought, as in the Vedas, and no doubt before, but never hitherto brought so absolutely to the front, fully surcharged with modern scintillation and facts, and made the sole entrance to each and all), with

1. Complete Writings, IV, pp. 321-322.

2. Op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 650-651.

3. "In the two theses, that the Absolute is Spirit and that it is development is to be found, as Kuno Fischer has said, the whole of Hegel's philosophy." Ibid., p. 645.

its infinite variety, the past, the surroundings of to-day, or what may happen in the future, the contrarieties of material with spiritual, and of natural with artificial, are all, to the eye of the ensamblist, but necessary sides and unfoldings, different steps or links, in the endless process of Creative thought, which, amid numberless apparent failures and contradictions, is held together by central and never-broken unity--not contradictions or failures at all, but radiations of one consistent and eternal purpose; the whole mass of everything steadily, unerringly tending and flowing toward the permanent utile and morele, as rivers to oceans.<sup>1</sup>

In considering the question of whether Whitman's philosophy was progressive, one must consider the role of the concept of historical development represented in Hegel. Merz states, "It is the idea of Development, which underlies, as much as that of Freedom, the whole of Hegel's philosophy, and really unfits it in the eyes both of friend and foe to become the support of an immoveable orthodoxy in religious, social, and political questions alike."<sup>2</sup> This was because it substituted the idea of a dynamic society for the old static view. Hegel's particular emphasis is that all nature, including man's history, is a process of dialectical change. He

noted that phenomena are not stable and fixed but are continually in a state of movement, of growth or decay. Phenomena are in a condition of unstable equilibrium; movement results from the disturbance of equilibrium and the creation of a new balance of forces, which is in turn disturbed. "Contradiction," said Hegel, "is the power that moves things." And again: "There is nothing which is not becoming, which is not in an intermediate position between being and not being."<sup>3</sup>

Earlier historians "had seen only a disconnected assortment of phenomena, motivated by the personal whims and ambitions of prominent individuals.

1. Complete Writings, IV, p. 320. The poet cites Hegel's "eternal process of creative thought" again in the "lectures" on the German philosophers (Ibid., IX, pp. 171-172) and in a footnote in "Poetry To-Day in America" (Ibid., V, p. 226). It is important, however, that in none of these passages does he make any issue of Hegel's metaphysical view that Spirit is the Absolute, the only reality.
2. Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 198.
3. Lawson, op. cit., p. 35.

There had been no perspective, no tendency to estimate the forces behind the individual wills; human motives were represented as static . . .<sup>1</sup> Hegel substituted for this unprogressive, static view the idea of history as a continuity, a "changing equilibrium of social forces."<sup>2</sup>

It is a characteristic of the Hegelian philosophy that it could be reactionary or progressive according to which elements were emphasized.<sup>3</sup> Heine (admired by Whitman) hailed it as a revolutionary doctrine; on the other hand Hegel became the official philosopher of the German state.<sup>4</sup> "The

1. Ibid., p. 36.

2. "Many of his historical opinions and conclusions are outmoded today; but the historical research of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been based on the dialectical method. Today the historian is not content with the description of events, the presentation of a sequence of wars, conquests, diplomatic negotiations and political maneuvers. History attempts, with greater or less success, to show the inner continuity, the changing equilibrium of social forces, the ideas and purposes which underlie the historical process." Ibid., pp. 36-37.

Another positive advance was achieved by Idealism, particularly at the hands of Hegel, over the Materialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the destruction of the idea of a system of Absolute and final Truth. Truth lay not in finished dogmatic statements but in long historical development, which mounts from lower to ever higher levels of knowledge, without ever reaching a point at which it can proceed no further. Whitman held as the greatest glory of science that it was forever destroying old dogmas and reaching higher levels of Truth. He celebrated not "Absolutes" but change and transformation in nature.

3. The peculiar dual nature of the Hegelian philosophy also allowed for an all-important shift of emphasis in metaphysics--toward naturalism rather than Absolute Idealism. We have seen that--if we consider his writings as a whole--Whitman made that shift.

4. "Hegel's dual influence continued after his death. The years preceding the revolution of 1848 (in which the vestiges of feudalism were finally destroyed) were years of increasing political tension. Hegel's philosophy furnished the ammunition for both sides of the quarrel. The defenders of conservatism and privilege cited Hegel as authority for their claims. But another group of Hegel's disciples led the fight against the existing state. In 1842, the Reinische Zeitung made a considerable stir as the organ of the so-called "Young Hegelians." One of the editors of this newspaper, who was then twenty-four years old, was Karl Marx." Lawson, op. cit., p. 39.

official side of his philosophy was the metaphysical side, expressing the need for permanence, the desire for the 'absolute idea.' Although he said that contradiction is 'the power that moves things,' Hegel believed that his own age marked the end of contradiction and the realization of the 'absolute idea.'<sup>1</sup> In the logic of his system there is unceasing struggle, and "finality" is impossible. Hegel himself, then, was inconsistent if he assumed that all wisdom culminated in his Encyclopedia, all history in the Prussian bureaucracy of 1820. The "Young Hegelians"---and Whitman also---looked forward to constant change and struggle.<sup>2</sup>

To try to understand Leaves of Grass and leave out the idea of purpose would be to make the mistake Robert Ingersoll did on a certain occasion described by Binns. The attitude of Ingersoll and Whitman "towards questions of religion," he says, "was often antagonistic, and on this occasion, after the speech, Whitman made a sort of rejoinder."

While gratefully acknowledging his friend's appreciation of Leaves of Grass, he pointed out that Ingersoll had stopped short of the main matter, for the book was crammed with allusions to immortality, and was bound together by the idea of purpose, resident in the heart of all and realizing itself in the material universe. He turned to Ingersoll demanding, "Unless there is a definite object for it all, what, in God's name, is it all for?" And Ingersoll, shaking his head, replied, "I can't tell. And if there is a purpose, and if there is a God, what is it all for? I

1. Ibid.

2. See Chapter IX. Although Whitman never explicitly recognizes the split between the "Right" and "Left" Hegelians we might assume that the sources with which he came in contact (many of the "Young (Left) Hegelians" sought refuge in this country in the time of the revolution of 1848) were sympathetic with the progressive interpretation of Hegel. It is interesting that Coetwick (German Literature) recognizes the doctrines of the "extreme" party as "even more revolutionary than the doctrines prevalent in France toward the close of the eighteenth century." Op. cit., p. 272.

We may note here that Arvin in his treatment of Whitman and Hegel tends to underemphasize the progressive side of the Hegelian philosophy and the influence of the "Young Hegelians." Op. cit., pp. 195-196.

can't tell. It looks like nonsense to me, either way."<sup>1</sup>

But if we may take Whitman's word, he is not reading purpose into a physical universe, which in the terms of "science" is "indifferent to human wish and purpose," because he hopes that it is there or simply because his "intuition" tells him all will be for the best. He states often the thought expressed in the passage from the 1855 Preface before cited: "The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be, from what has been and is." It is true, he did have a supreme faith that man was developing toward better things, and in isolated passages his belief in progress may seem to be based upon emotion rather than reason. My point would be, however, that he thought he saw evidence in the past for that belief. Furthermore, that a teleological philosophy is not necessarily supernaturalist.

1. Henry Bryan Binns, A Life of Walt Whitman, pp. 332-333.

The question of Whitman's belief in immortality is too extensive a problem to be undertaken here. It should be noted, however, that it is an inseparable part of his faith in purpose. In his reply to Ingersoll he links the belief in immortality with purpose, and then demands, "unless there is a definite object for it all, what, in God's name, is it all for?" There is a hint that if there is purpose in the world, then existence cannot end in complete annihilation. This idea is stated explicitly in one of his conversations with Traubel. After criticizing Tennyson for expressing "modern ennui--the blue devils that afflict modern civilization," he points out that Tennyson did have "faith," although "not brave, not absolute, not convinced." Then he continues, "the greatest, noblest, farthest-seeing, largest-hoping of modern men do not believe this is an endup--this life a closing." Rather, "with my friend, Mrs. Gilchrist, one of the cutest sanest souls that ever blessed the earth, I am sure, while not formulating anything, . . . that we are, as she puts it, 'going somewhere,' bound for something, following out a purpose, though we may little apprehend its meanings--its inmost suggestions." And a little later, when he was asked if he did not think that, on the contrary, the major proportion of the greatest modern men and women questioned the survival of identity, he replied: "I do not think so: indefinite as all may seem, the faith in identity, in purpose, lasts--must last." Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 163-166.

It is clear Whitman did not consider the belief that the world is "going somewhere" inconsistent with "materialism," "reality and demonstration." As he states in a memorandum "Preparatory to Writing 'Leaves of Grass':

Materialism--(put this section forward . . . reality and demonstration with the opening) . . . that this earth is under a constant process of amelioration--as it always has been--that it, in some manner not perhaps demonstrable in astronomy, expands outward and outward in a larger and larger orbit--that our immortality is located here upon earth,--that we are immortal--that the processes of the refinement and perfection of the earth are in steps, the least part of which involves trillions of years--that in due time the earth beautiful as it is now will be proportionately different from what it was in its earlier gaseous or marine period, uncounted cycles before man and woman grew.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular importance in respect to the naturalistic emphasis of his philosophy is that in most of his expressions of the idea of progress he does not stress the subjective attitude that the world is developing to satisfy man's notion of progress. In his view all values lie in Nature; in other words, progress is part of Nature's law, not man's. As he expressed it in his last days: "As I grow older I am more firmly than ever fixed in my belief that all things tend to good, that no bad is forever bad, that the universe has its own ends to subserve and will subserve them well."<sup>2</sup>

Old and modern learning, "intuitions deep," the sciences, he felt all teach the same lesson:

"The world, the race, the soul--in space and time the universes,  
"All bound as is befitting each--all surely going somewhere."<sup>3</sup>

1. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 150-151.
2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 71. My italics.
3. My science-friend, my noblest woman-friend,  
(Now buried in an English grave--and this a memory-leaf for her dear sake,)  
Ended our talk--"The sum, concluding all we know of old or modern learning, intuitions deep,  
"Of all Geologies--Histories--of all Astronomy--of Evolution, Metaphysics all,

His view is that what is is well and what will be will be well because he "accepts" Nature's laws. That is not to say that everything is perfect, but that everything is developing toward perfection.<sup>1</sup> Nor is this development without setbacks and perhaps long periods of retrogression.

The great idea of humanity is progress--onward! onward! backing and filling--every step contested--sometimes a long interregnum--sometimes a retrogression--but still, by degrees, a sure, resistless progress.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's interpretation of the term "meliorism" throws additional light on his conception of nature's law of progress. In a conversation with Traubel he contrasts his view with George Eliot's. In a word, he felt that the "meliorism" of George Eliot contained an "apology" for the universe, whereas he gloried in a "joyful" world, not denying sorrow but including it in the joy. Traubel explained that "her idea seemed to be that we should do all we can to make this sad world less sad, yours that we should do all we can to make this joyful world more joyful." Whitman replied:

That's probably the whole story in a nutshell, except . . . I don't want people to think my joy does not contain sorrow--does not allow for it and realize its rejuvenating force. With that admission made I stand by your statement. They speak of George Eliot as a 'meliorist'. That would be no sort of a word to express my attitude towards the universe: that word contains an apology--an apology: and an apology is an impertinence. George Eliot was a great, gentle soul, lacking sunlight.<sup>3</sup>

He expresses this same idea in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" as he explains what he means by saying "Amelioration is one of the earth's words":

The earth neither lags nor hastens,  
It has all attributes, growths, effects, latent in itself  
from the jump,

"Is, that we all are onward, onward, speeding slowly, surely  
bettering,

"Life, life an endless march, an endless array, (no halt, but  
it is duly over,)

"The world, the race, the soul--in space and time the universes,

"All bound as is befitting each--all surely going somewhere."

"Going Somewhere," Inclusive, p. 453.

1. See Chapter IX.

2. Complete Writings, IX, p. 139.

3. Traubel, ed. alt., Vol. II, pp. 434-35.

It is not half beautiful only, defects and excrescences show  
just as much as perfections show. . . .

The earth does not argue,  
Is not pathetic, has no arrangements,  
Does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise,  
Makes no discriminations, has no conceivable failures,  
Closes nothing, refuses nothing, shuts none out,  
Of all the powers, objects, states, it notifies, shuts none out.<sup>1</sup>

But this does not mean that ours is an amoral, dead-level world with  
"no lower, no higher, no good, no bad, no better, no worse, no sanity, no  
insanity." To contrast Whitman's view again with crass materialism, in the  
cosmology of that doctrine "life is of profound unimportance":

Among the infinite permutations and combinations through  
which matter has passed, one has supervened in which matter  
has achieved consciousness. This consciousness by matter  
of itself is life. Life, then, is a chance product of  
material forces and substances, evolved under certain con-  
ditions, and doomed to disappear when those conditions no longer  
obtain. As the sterner materialists were fond of saying,  
life is a "mere eddy in the primeval slime."<sup>2</sup>

According to this general conception, reinforced by nineteenth century ge-  
ology and astronomy, spirit is not "a fact of cosmic significance, a sign-  
post pointing in the fundamental character of the universe to something  
friendly and vital which underlay its apparent chaos and deadness. . . ."

On the contrary, "spirit was a chance passenger across a fundamentally  
hostile environment, in which the alien and the brutal conditioned and de-  
termined at every point the mental and the vital." And the universe itself  
is like a gigantic clock. "Some one or something unspecified at some time  
unknown (materialists have often been inclined to pride themselves upon their  
candid admission of inability to account for a first cause) wound the clock  
up; thenceforward, it has proceeded to function automatically through the  
interaction of its parts."<sup>3</sup>

1. Inclusive, p. 187.

2. Joad, op. cit., p. 525.

3. Ibid., pp. 525-526.

Whitman had thought deeply about the problems unanswered by the philosophy of crass materialism. He was aware of the new findings in the field of science and had the highest respect for the scientific approach. Nor did he feel impelled to call upon a supernatural force to account for life and spirit which had to be accounted for in some way. But, having the utmost respect, and love, for Nature and her laws, he could not concede that her highest products, life and spirit, were chance phenomena, the result of a "mere eddy in the primeval slime." They must be part of the scheme. Although at times he may give the impression that he is slipping into the subjectivist view that somehow the universe was created for man's contemplation and to be judged by his subjective ethical standards, his main drift is that Nature is simply fulfilling her own destinies in producing man with his mental and spiritual attributes. Man is the "highest" product of nature.

As the advancing laws of Nature have developed life in the universe, then the highest form of life, man, they progress further to develop the highest thing in man, the soul.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is in "Song of the Open Road" the poet proclaims:

All parts away for the progress of souls,  
All religion, all solid things, arts, governments--all that was  
or is apparent upon this globe or any globe, falls into  
niches and corners before the procession of souls along the  
grand roads of the universe.

Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand  
roads of the universe, all other progress is the needed  
emblem and sustenance.

Forever alive, forever forward,  
Stately, solemn, sad, withdrawn, baffled, mad, turbulent, feeble,  
dissatisfied,  
Desperate, proud, fond, sick, accepted by men, rejected by men,  
They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go,  
But I know that they go toward the best--toward something great.<sup>2</sup>

1. See Chapter VIII.

2. Inclusive, p. 151.

Again, in "Passage to India," after reviewing the "infinite greatness of the past," he turns to the future to indicate that all things have developed "for thy sake O soul."

Passage to India!

Lo, soul, assest thou not God's purpose from the first?  
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,  
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.

A worship new I sing,  
You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours,  
You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours,  
You, not for trade or transportation only,  
But in God's name, and for thy sake O soul.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen in the discussion of Whitman's conception of the soul that he called the soul and its destinies the "real real." The spiritual then is the goal of the future.

The soul, its destinies, the real real,  
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;)  
In these Americas, the soul, its destinies,  
Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!  
By many a throes of heat and cold convuls'd, (by these  
thyself solidifying,)  
Thou mental, moral orb--thou New, indeed new, Spiritual World!  
The Present holds thee not--for such vast growth as thine,  
For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,  
The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.<sup>2</sup>

When we remember that Whitman's "soul" was no supernatural thing, but rather man's highest emotions and intuitions, growing out of and dependent upon the body, these lines seem less idealistic and perhaps less "obscure-entistic." The "new, Spiritual World" is not spiritual in the sense of the supernatural, but is to be an outgrowth of Nature's laws of development and in that sense naturalistic.

1. Ibid., p. 344.

2. "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," Ibid., pp. 383-84.

*Ch. [unclear]  
[unclear]*

## CHAPTER VIII

### EVOLUTION IN NATURE'S "SCHEME"

An inseparable corollary of the "new historical view" detailed in the preceding chapter is the doctrine of evolution.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter, dealing with Whitman's "evolution," is only a continuation of the discussion of his "historical development," but is concerned more particularly with the technical theory of evolution and Whitman's conception of it. He states again and again that the burden of his poems is "to suggest the songs of . . . evolution . . ."<sup>2</sup> In one of his conversations with Treubel

1. The idea of evolution did not, of course, appear suddenly with the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species; rather, that work "was a splendid achievement for humanity at large because the age was ripe for the extension of the historical conception far beyond the boundaries of humanity proper. And . . . the age was thus ripe because by this time scholarship had brought into existence this very conception of history itself in the modern sense of the word." Royce, op. cit., pp. 284-285.

"The world was longing for an historical view of phenomena. The historical interest was already excited to the keenest pitch. Human civilization was already conceived as an evolution. The earth's crust was already known to embody a history whose gaps, still, even at this present moment, very large, were already, in 1859, sufficiently reduced to make probable the notion that a continuous series of physical process, without violent convulsions, had produced the whole succession of geological strata. The old nebular hypothesis of Kant and La Place suggested that the whole growth of our solar system to its present form had been part of the very process that has ended in our own geological history. Only the boundary line between species and species, only the difficulty of conceiving in scientific terms the growth of animal forms without the interference anywhere of special creations, only this, which was, of course, most felt in case of the distinction between man and the animals, remained as an apparently impassable obstacle in the way of the triumph of the historical movement. Darwin's book removed this last great obstacle. In the working of natural selection he found an agency sufficient to explain, in part, if not in the main, the transformation of species." Ibid., p. 286.

2. 1872 Preface, Complete Writings, V, p. 185.

In a late poem he says the "purport" of Leaves of Grass is,

Ch. De Haven ✓  
Preface

he said: "I have felt from the first that my own work must assume the essential truths of evolution, or something like them."<sup>1</sup> And on another occasion, when Harned had said, "The evolutionists are the master-men of the time," Whitman interposed: "So they are: I don't know but you can call this their age. I stand in awe before the men of science: they hold the key to the situation: they are the true discoverers: they are--they, with their utter abandon, honesty."<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's evolution was, of course, purposive. In referring to "Passage to India" he once said: "There's more of me, the essential ultimate me, in that than in any of the poems. There is no philosophy, consistent or inconsistent, in that poem--there Brinton would be right--but the burden of it is evolution--the one thing escaping the other--the unfolding of cosmic purposes."<sup>3</sup> In reference to the adequacy of non-purposive evolution as a complete philosophy, Royce calls this type a doctrine of evolution, pointing out that it "may be, like Darwin's doctrine of natural selection, a purely empirical theory, a generalization from facts with a use of the postulates of science, and nothing more." But, "how nature came by this seemingly ideal character of her processes, such an empirical doctrine need not try to

To open vast realms of space and time,  
Evolution--the cumulative--growths and generations.  
"L. of G.'s Purport," Inclusive, p. 456.  
And in the last poem he wrote, "A Thought of Columbus," he celebrates evolution:  
The mystery of mysteries, the crude and hurried ceaseless flame,  
spontaneous, bearing on itself.  
The bubble, and the huge, round, concrete orb!  
A breath of Deity, as thence the bulging universe unfolding!  
The many issuing cycles from their precedent minute!  
The eras of the soul incepting in an hour,  
Haply the widest, farthest evolutions of the world and man.

Ibid., p. 463.

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 94.
2. Ibid., (p.) 98.
3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 157.

98 *revised*  
p. 98

explain."<sup>1</sup> A philosophy of evolution, however, must face the ultimate question, Has the world a meaning? As a philosophy it "must answer that question in the affirmative; for a philosophy, or at all events an affirmative, a positive philosophy, is . . . an effort to express, and by criticism to establish, the presuppositions of the age which it reflects upon. Now the presumption of an historical age is that there is a history embodied in the known world, and a philosophy of evolution must be an effort to give voice to this presupposition."<sup>2</sup> In defending the part the Idealist and Romantic movements played in restoring purpose and value to the concept of evolution, Professor Royce reminds us that, "In so far as you find mechanism only in the world, you find neither growth nor decay; you find no story at all."<sup>3</sup>

1. Op. cit., pp. 289-290.

2. Ibid., p. 290.

3. "If there is anything true in a philosophy of evolution, then there is something more than mere physical causation, mere mechanism in the world; for how there can be history in the world, no causal explanation, no appeal to mechanism as such, can ever directly express. In so far as you find mechanism only in the world, you find neither growth nor decay; you find no story at all. The return to the outer order in our century has therefore in its presupposition not been a return to the old outer order of the seventeenth century. It has been a return to a world pervaded, as it were, with the spirit of idealism. If there is not merely a group of sciences having a fictitiously historical interest, but a true evolution, then there are ideal interests expressed in this outer order of nature, spiritual passions (to borrow Schelling's romantic expression) frozen into this lava stream of nature's mechanism. Those who have believed that the spirit of the age of evolution removed ideals, removed teleology from the world, have, then, failed to see that the presupposition of our historical age, ever since Rousseau and the romantic period, has been that history is worth studying for its own sake, and that therefore ideals are responsible for nature's mechanism." Ibid., Cf. above, p. 102.

Whitman's evolution, then, because it conceives historical law as purposive, is in Royce's terms a philosophy of evolution, not merely a doctrine. The poet was in full sympathy with the scientific approach and undoubtedly followed the scientific data of evolution,<sup>1</sup> but there is no evidence that he went into the technical theories. He had the evolutionary view from the first, but was always more interested in the philosophical implications than in the scientific details.

On at least two occasions he pointed out the philosophical limitation of what Royce calls "the purely empirical theory" of evolution. In a conversation with Treubel he stated that he assumed that Spencer, Huxley, and Darwin "do not pretend that it gives a why for existence." Treubel answered: "Huxley says it can't be made into a dogma; that it is a working hypothesis, no more." Whitman, in his reply, made the criticism that Darwinian evolution does not explain "beginnings" or "ends."

I think that evolution, considered as you explicate it, is accepted by all who amount to much--for whose opinion we should experience sincere respect. To go further than that is, I should say, looking at it in a very crude style--is altogether unjustified. When it comes to explaining absolute beginnings, ends, I doubt if evolution clears up the mystery any better than the philosophies that have preceded it.<sup>2</sup>

In "Darwinism--(Then Furthermore)" he states the same objection, that Darwin's theory does not solve "the problem of origins, human and other," and thus "cannot be allow'd to dominate every thing else, and will have to take its place as a segment of the circle, the cluster--as but one of many theories . . ."<sup>3</sup> In the course of his discussion, however, he reveals a basic misunderstanding of Darwin's theories in assuming that they teach that men "have come on, originated, develop'd, from monkeys, baboons--. . ."<sup>4</sup>

1. See Chapter II.

2. Treubel, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 94-95.

3. Complete Writings, V, p. 279.

4. Ibid., p. 278.

He also comes dangerously close to the anti-scientific point of view when he says that these theories leave "the divine secrets just as inexplicable and unreachable as before--maybe more so."<sup>1</sup>

Whitman had the highest regard for Darwin, and he had the further insight to see that Darwin was perhaps the most significant influence of the nineteenth century. But he was critical of the mechanical implications of Darwin's theories. This same criticism is, as a matter of fact, a recognized argument against a mechanistic evolution. Professor Marx points out that the title of Darwin's epoch-making book "was not without ambiguity; for in the course of the diffusion and criticism of the ideas contained in it, it has become more and more evident that the process of natural selection could not explain the origin of living matter, but only the origin of separate species, the great differentiation which is continually going on in all natural and mental processes. The genetic view of natural phenomena has become limited to a genealogical record without being able to deal with first beginnings."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Ibid.*, p. 279. He gives full credit to Darwinism, of course, for its "scientific accomplishments," its "counterpoise" to "enfeebling superstitions":

"Of this old theory, evolution, as broch'd anew, trebled, with indeed all-devouring claims, by Darwin, it has so much in it, and is so needed as a counterpoise to yet widely prevailing and unspeakably tenacious, enfeebling superstitions--is fused, by the new man, into such grand, modest, truly scientific accomplishments--that the world of erudition, both moral and physical, cannot but be eventually better'd and broaden'd in its speculations, from the advent of Darwinism." *Ibid.*, p. 278.

2. *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 395. To quote a modern critic of mechanical evolution: "... The chief influence in throwing the Natural Selection theory into the background was the gradual realization that while it doubtless is a true theory so far as it goes, it fails to answer the crucial question concerning the causality at work in evolution. Darwin himself saw this deficiency, but the first to say much about it were not the biologists but the theologians. Darwinism, it came to be realized, gave a partial explanation of the non-survival of the 'unfit,' but told us nothing

It has often been charged that Darwin's theories of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest left no place or need for purpose as a directive agency in biological evolution. Darwin was well aware of the claim that his teaching was fatal to the idea of design in nature, but he did not himself consistently admit its truth.<sup>1</sup> "Huxley, possibly his most powerful ally, denied the charge; and Darwin's son wrote that, 'one of the greatest services rendered by my father to the study of natural history is the revival of Teleology,' his meaning being that Darwin's great work consisted in showing how Nature works--that is, the methods she employs--to reach her goal."<sup>2</sup>

The philosophical struggle around the two sets of assumptions, the mechanical, "dead-level" view and the view that nature's development is purposeful, continues today. The latter concept, variously known as "creative," "originative," "emergent" evolution, is very similar to Whitman's evolutionary philosophy. The "general plan of nature" which presents itself in this hypothesis is to be "likened to a pyramid of tier-like construction":

A process of creative organization led at each stage to the advent of gradients or levels above. Each new level depended

of the arrival of the 'fit.' And this, after all, is the central question. Darwin had propounded it in the title of his great book--The Origin of Species--but had not even attempted to answer. We know why some species and varieties die out, but what is the source of variations?" Pratt, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

1. See Major, op. cit., pp. 114 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 145. Professor Major indicates that "present-day opinion among men of science is that there is no inherent conflict between the mechanical description of biological processes and the teleological view, that the former merely describes the course which Nature follows." He quotes the observation of J. M. Baldwin, in the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology (Vol. II, p. 667) that, "The current definition of teleology, is . . . that of a world theory which does not exclude mechanism, but in some way includes and reinterprets it." Ibid.

*Underscored  
op. cit.*

upon the energies and conditions of the lower level and was adjusted to its wide-spread foundation. Matter, itself, was evolved. Then came the earth with its waters, its salts and fertile earth and, giving it radiant energy, the sun. Then little by little came life reaching upward to more complex forms. The story is a long one, not completely deciphered, for whole chapters are missing in the records. Slowly life lifted to mind, the human mind being the latest and highest to appear. Pre-history gave way to human history and society with its fruit, civilization, began to dominate the surface of the earth. Something of this sort seems to be the unavoidable reading of the facts which science has collected.<sup>1</sup>

To take the mechanical approach that nature is merely in a process of change, not development, would be, in the words of Professor Sellars, to "sweep its evolutionary apex" from nature.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman had absorbed the various findings which were piling up the evidence for evolution, but was interested more in the philosophy of evolution, to use Royce's term, than the doctrine. Not only was his "evolutionism" of the teleological sort, it was also many times egocentric. He often, for example, expresses the sentiment that "All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me." But since he uses himself to represent man it may be said just as legitimately that he is glorying in the fact that evolution in its steady but uneven progress has produced Man. Thus he is speaking for Man when he says in "Song of Myself,"

1. Sellars, op. cit., pp. 363-364.
2. "It would appear that the choice confronting the human mind to-day as knowledge of itself and the universe increases is that between an idealistic and a naturalistic interpretation. In the past, naturalism was regarded as a desperate and disheartening alternative. But, of recent years, naturalism has shown itself to possess possibilities which were unsuspected. This alteration is due to two things at least: the growth of the social sciences including social psychology, and the rise of a naturalistic theory of values. To think of nature in terms of the inorganic sciences only is to sweep its evolutionary apex from nature. And we have tried to show that human values are intrinsic to human living, and that human living is bound up with the kind of a world we are in. In short, naturalism and humanism are seen to be no longer antithetical." Ibid., pp. 474-475.

I find I incorporate gases, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits,  
grains, esculent roots,  
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,  
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,  
But call any thing back again when I desire it.<sup>1</sup>

This idea that man, having evolved from the animal, may see glimpses of himself in other forms of nature is a favorite conception of Whitman's. Again in "Song of Myself," as he gazes at the animals, they "show their relations" to him.

They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly  
in their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,  
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?<sup>2</sup>

He glories in the fact that man is a slowly developed product of nature.

A man's body at auction, . . .  
For it the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without  
one animal or plant,  
For it the revolving cycles truly and steadily roll'd.<sup>3</sup>

The processes of nature have shown that they progress steadily toward higher and higher things and "There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage."

If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their  
surfaces, were this moment reduced back to a pallid float,  
it would not avail in the long run,  
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,  
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.<sup>4</sup>

The new historical view, the idea of development, evolution, are found in Whitman from his first work. The conceptions that have been outlined in previous pages are perhaps no better summed up than in Section forty-four of "Song of Myself":

1. Inclusive, p. 50.
2. Ibid., p. 51.
3. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
4. Ibid., p. 70.

I am an some of things accomplish'd, and I am encloser of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,  
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between  
the steps,  
All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,  
After down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,  
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,  
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon. . . .

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,  
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,  
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,  
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,  
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited  
with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,  
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.<sup>1</sup>

For Whitman man's soul, too, as well as his body, is a product of evolution--"Undeniable growth has establish'd it."<sup>2</sup> The soul "comprehends" and "endows" the earth and its laws, the sky and the stars, is "more evolutionary, vast puzzling, . . . more lasting . . . than they":

Grand is the seen, the light, to me--grand are the sky and stars,  
Grand is the earth, and grand are lasting time and space,  
And grand their laws, so multiform, puzzling, evolutionary;  
But grander far the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing  
all those,  
Lighting the light, the sky and stars, delving the earth,  
sailing the sea.  
(What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul? of  
what amount without thee?)  
More evolutionary, vast, puzzling, O my soul!  
More multiform far--more lasting thou than they.<sup>3</sup>

Man's soul is the highest product of Nature's development, "its evolutionary apex," and is the goal toward which history has been traveling through the centuries.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

2. "A Song of the Rolling Earth," *Inclusive*, p. 190.

3. "Grand is the Seen," *Ibid.*, p. 457.

Yet again, lo! the soul, above all science,  
 For it has history gather'd like husks around the globe,  
 For it the entire star-myriads roll through the sky.

In spiral routes by long detours,  
 (As a much-tacking ship upon the sea,)  
 For it the partial to the permanent flowing,  
 For it the real to the ideal tends.

For it the mystic evolution . . .<sup>1</sup>

The progress of the scheme of things has also reached its highest point in the "New World," in America:

The fields of Nature long prepared and fallow, the silent,  
 cyclic chemistry,  
 The slow and steady ages plodding, the unoccupied surface  
 ripening, the rich ores forming beneath;  
 At last the New arriving, assuming, taking possession,  
 A swarming and busy race settling and organizing everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

But his idea that America is the culmination and peak of the process of evolution has sometimes been misinterpreted. It has been assumed that Whitman, seeing all perfection in the "New World" and all darkness and decay in the Old, took the blindly optimistic view that the processes of Nature had chosen the United States as their highest product. To make the interpretation that Whitman held this naive and rather simple viewpoint, however, is to fail to understand the poems and to do justice to Whitman's philosophy. As he explains in later verses of "Song of the Redwood Tree" America holds the promise of the future only because she will bring the "new society," "proportionate to Nature." He believed that the course of history had developed democracy and that further development of democracy would lead to the higher development of man. America had gone the farthest in recognizing the worth of the common man and he looked to her to continue the development. America is more than this country; the "true America" is "broad humanity."

1. "Song of the Universal," Ibid., p. 192.

2. "Song of the Redwood Tree," Ibid., p. 178.

But more in you than these,<sup>1</sup> lands of the Western shore,  
 (These but the means, the implements, the standing-ground,) I  
 see in you, certain to come, the promises of thousands of  
 years, till now deferr'd,  
 Promis'd to be fulfill'd, our common kind, the race.

The new society at last, proportionate to Nature,  
 In man of you, more than your mountain peaks or stalwart  
 trees imperial,  
 In woman more, far more, than all your gold or vines, or  
 even vital air.

Fresh come, to a new world indeed, yet long prepared,  
 I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal,  
 Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America,  
 heir of the past so grand,  
 To build a grander future.<sup>2</sup>

This "genius of the modern," the next higher development to be looked forward to, he often expresses as he does here: a combination of the "real and ideal." The "beautiful world of new superber birth" that rises to his eyes is the "world of twain in one,/ World of the soul, born by the world of the real alone, led to identity, body, by it alone."<sup>3</sup> As he states this same central concept in "Passage to India," he envisages the time when "the whole earth, this cold impassive voiceless earth, shall be completely justified," when "Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more."<sup>4</sup> The "new society," then, by "history's cycle's forwarded," is to be "proportionate to Nature" in that it will bring the "soul," her product, into closer relationship with her. Chapter I will consider this "new society," Democracy, as the goal of Nature's "creative scheme."

1. "Populous cities, the latest inventions, the steamers on the rivers,  
 the railroads, with many a thrifty farm, with machinery,  
 And wool and wheat and the grape, and diggings of yellow gold."
2. "Song of the Redwood Tree," *Ibid.*, p. 178.
3. "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," *Ibid.*, p. 381.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 346-347.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHITMAN'S OPTIMISM AS A NATURALISTIC CONCEPT

For Whitman, man must have faith in "the scheme of things" and also in "his ability in intellect and spirit to cope and be equal with" the "universes of time, space and materials." Previous chapters have illustrated his faith that the "scheme" is inexorable and is developing toward a good end. As to the seemingly opposite belief, that man is able to "cope with" the world, to have a hand in the directing of history, we have also seen that in the poet's view man is not a machine but a "free soul," the "ruler of life, not a slave." It remains to elaborate this paradox as it relates to his underlying world-view of optimism; and to indicate how his optimism can be defended as naturalistic and progressive.

In dealing with Whitman's optimism one cannot leave out of account his own natural exuberance, the all-loving character of his personality. His very nature was such that he loved and "celebrated" everything in the world about him:

Open mouth of my soul uttering gladness,  
Eyes of my soul seeing perfection,  
Natural life of me faithfully praising things,  
Corroborating forever the triumph of things.<sup>1</sup>

His love for nature and his complete faith in her laws outren, especially in his poetry, a completely logical, scientific view. Far from denying his "unrestricted faith" we may say that it is the most distinguishing feature of the man and his poetry.

1. Inclusive, p. 410.

If the poet's personality were a complete explanation of his views we could accept the position of some critics that his philosophy can be treated as merely the outpourings of a congenital optimist. But a study of Whitman's particular interpretation of the doctrine "What is right" shows that he found rational bases for his optimism. In preceding pages we have contrasted his beliefs with "scientism" to show that he faced an actual dilemma: either nature moves in a fixed and mechanical fashion, with "no higher, no lower, no good, no bad," or she includes in her workings non-mechanical elements, such as purpose, values, spontaneity, free will. It has been argued that he could be justified, on naturalistic grounds, for rejecting the "older naturalism," because it refused to recognize all but mechanical causes, was blind to things we find actually existing in nature. Furthermore, that a crass materialism is in its logic unprogressive, for if everything is mechanically predetermined, struggle for advance is pointless.

Whitman was not entirely successful in resolving the dilemma. At times he proclaims each of the two elements--the doctrine of inexorable law, and that of free will and struggle--separate and apart, as though he were unaware of their contradiction. In his prose, however, we find that he was aware of the conflict, and attempted to reconcile the opposites through the dialectical approach. He never formulated a synthesis completely satisfactory for a modern naturalist; indeed, considering his time and circumstances, we could hardly expect him to. In tracing the poet's treatment of the dilemma in connection with his optimism we may grant his inconsistencies and his too unreserved "hurrahing for the universe"; at the same time we may find in his works the rational, naturalistic bases of his optimism.

In the first place, he considered that science itself enjoins us: "Be ready to say yes whatever happens, whatever don't happen: yes, yes, yes . . . look the universe full in the face--its bad in the face, its good--and say yes to it."<sup>1</sup> He would say that it is unscientific to deplore the past or the present, because everything takes place through the necessary chain of cause and effect: "What has ever happened . . . what happens and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws enclose all . . ."<sup>2</sup> By nature a yes-sayer, Whitman was often too uncritical in his wholesale praise of everything. But back of the yes-saying is also what he considered to be the necessary acceptance of inexorable historical law.

It is a fair interpretation that at least when he is speaking in historical terms, as he habitually does, his statement that "what is is well" means "well" in the sense that it could not be otherwise under the "unshakeable order of the universe." The lines in "To Think of Time" are typical:

What will be will be well, for what is is well,  
To take interest is well, and not to take interest shall be well . . .  
The threads that were spun are gather'd, the weft crosses the warp, the  
    pattern is systematic . . .  
The law of the past cannot be eluded,  
The law of the present and future cannot be eluded . . .<sup>3</sup>

What often appear to be smugly complacent statements of the "rightness" of the world imply not so much the idea of moral "right" as the idea

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 563.
2. Inclusive, pp. 497-498.
3. Ibid., pp. 363-368.

that things could not be otherwise under historical law.<sup>1</sup> The point is well illustrated again in the poem "With Antecedents":

I assert that all past days were what they must have been,  
And that they could no-how have been better than they were,  
And that to-day is what it must be, and that America is,  
And that to-day and America could no-how be better than they are.<sup>2</sup>

This acceptance of the workings of historical law is consonant with naturalism. But, as we have seen, the poet did not accept the mechanical, amoral interpretation of natural law, that Nature is not progressing but is directionless. For him, Nature progresses. The process, not without "impediments" and "delays," moves in a series of "advanced developments." As he states this conception in one of his early notes:

Do not grumble at any fact or condition whatever. What has been has been well, and what is is well, for nothing but such as they could come out of such as underlay them. They also are to underlie what could be built upon nothing better than them. Sure as the geological developments follow each other in steady and beautiful order--sure as the seurian ages terminate in more advanced developments--sure as man was prepared for upon the earth--sure as he makes his resistless progress through time, over all impediments, and coming on with renewed vigor from all retrogrades and delays . . .<sup>3</sup>

Whitman's assurance of the "perfection" of the universe, then, lies not only in his "acceptance" of things but in his belief that Nature's processes are working toward higher and higher ends. He does not see

1. The universe is duly in order, every thing is in its place,  
What has arrived is in its place and what waits shall be  
in its place . . .

"The Sleepers," *ibid.*, p. 361.

All truths wait in all things,

They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,

They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon . . .

"Song of Myself," *ibid.*, p. 49.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

3. *Complete Writings*, IX, pp. 40-41.

"one cause or result lamentable at last in the universe."<sup>1</sup> One of the best known--and most typical--of Whitman's passages is that in "To Think of Time":

Pleasantly and well-suited I walk,  
Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good,  
The whole universe indicates that it is good,  
The past and the present indicate that it is good.

How beautiful and perfect are the animals!  
How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it!  
What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect,  
The vegetables and minerals are all perfect, and the imponderable  
fluids perfect . . .

Just as typically, he adds that all these things are part of the process:

Slowly and surely they have pass'd on to this, and slowly and surely  
they yet pass on.<sup>2</sup>

His "unrestricted faith" in Nature led him, in his poetry, to "commemorate" the evil with the good; and, at times, to specifically deny evil. In "Starting from Paumanok," for example, he states:

Ommes! ommes! let others ignore what they may,  
I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,  
I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is--and I say  
there is in fact no evil,  
(Or if there is I say it is just as important to you, to the land or to me,  
as any thing else.)<sup>3</sup>

Without presenting a thorough analysis of the problem of evil in Whitman it is possible to trace the scientific, historical grounds on which he based his stand. We may grant that in his poetry he "sings unrestricted faith," oftentimes denying that Nature contains any evil.

1. I sing to the last the equalities modern or old,  
I sing the endless finales of things,  
I say Nature continues, glory continues,  
I praise with electric voice,  
For I do not see one imperfection in the universe,  
And I do not see one cause or result lamentable at last in the universe.

Inclusive, p. 411.

2. Ibid., pp. 367-368.

3. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

But let us also understand that, as in the passage last quoted, he habitually uses the word "good" in a dual sense. In his poetry and more especially in his prose works, as we shall see, he recognizes evil as actually existent. In one sense, evil is not "good" because, in contrast with good, it stands in the way of Nature's development toward perfection. In another sense, evil is an inevitable part of the natural process, to good, "as shade to light"; therefore it is "good" in that it is a necessary part of Nature's processes.<sup>1</sup>

In his prose and in his recorded conversations we do not find the same indiscriminate praising of everything as good; it is possible there to follow the reasoning upon which he based his optimism. His conversations with Traubel in his last years show a consistent recognition of "bad" in the world. In the passage previously quoted from Traubel, for example, he maintains that science adjures us: "Look the universe full in the face--its bad in the face, its good--" and say yes to it. He makes clearer in these sources also that his "unrestricted faith" comes not from a blind denial of evil but from a belief in the processes of nature. His expression of this belief in his last days is typical: "As I grow older I am more firmly than ever fixed in my belief that all things tend to good, that no bad is forever bad, that the universe has its own ends to subserve and will subserve them well."<sup>2</sup>

Even in his poetry Whitman does not deny "set-backs" and "retrogressions" in the historical process; he often tends to minimize them, however, because of his "indiscriminate hurrahing." At times, too, he gives the impression that he conceives Nature's processes as moving

1. Complete Writings, IV, p. 320.

2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 71.

forward in a fixed progression:

The earth neither lags nor hastens,  
It has all attributes, growths, effects, latent in itself from the jump .. .<sup>1</sup>

He will say, for example, "There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage," a line which taken by itself might seem to be a denial of set-backs in Nature's progress. But in this same passage, as in his writings taken as a whole, he recognizes the presence of "retrogressions." His point is that in the "long run" Nature is bound to overcome the obstacles:

If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces, were  
this moment reduced to a pallid float, it would not avail  
in the long run,  
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,  
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.<sup>2</sup>

In his writings on social questions, the living conditions of man, the efficacy of his institutions, he consistently recognizes real evils and real set-backs in the progress toward man's well-being. "The great idea of humanity is progress," but with "every step contested--sometimes a long interregnum--sometimes a retrogression--but still, by degrees, a sure, resistless progress."<sup>3</sup> Humanity "goes false, it goes true, to its interests, but in the long run it makes advances."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, he "accepts" certain evils as necessary under historical law.

Poverty is the worst social evil. The lives of many are "constant toil--ever alert to keep the wolf back from the door--no development--no rational pleasure--sleeping in some cramped dirty place--never knowing once in their whole lives real affection, sweetly returned, the joy,

1. Inclusive, p. 187.

2. Ibid., p. 70.

3. Complete Writings, IX, p. 139.

4. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 157.

the life of life . . ."<sup>1</sup> One of his fundamental beliefs is that underlying the whole question of democracy is the "Poverty Question": "the wealth of the civilized world, as contrasted with its poverty."<sup>2</sup> He concludes in Democratic Vistas that "New World democracy" is "so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects."<sup>3</sup>

But the "plutocracy" which causes the suffering belongs "to the system from which we all suffer alike." He goes so far as to say that this suffering could not be avoided, because it is "useless to quarrel with history."<sup>4</sup> He justifies the "acceptance" of the plutocracy on the grounds of historical necessity. As a necessary foundation, democracy requires riches: "men and women with occupations, well-off, owners of houses and acres, and with cash in the bank."<sup>5</sup> Corrupt as is our "money-making" system, he says, "the extreme business energy, and this almost maniacal appetite for wealth prevalent in the United States, are parts of amelioration and progress, indispensably needed to prepare the very results I demand."<sup>6</sup>

But Whitman's "acceptance" of evils does not entail a philosophy of quietism. He calls for revolt against suffering and oppression and bids his readers stand up and assert themselves. This brings us to the other side of the dialectical opposites of deterministic law and man's free will. Both of these logical opposites appear side by side throughout his works. In his poetry, he allows them to stand in contradiction; in his prose, however, he shows himself to be aware of

1. Complete Writings, IX, pp. 138-139.
2. Ibid., V, p. 284.
3. Ibid., p. 63.
4. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 14.
5. Complete Writings, V, p. 83.
6. Ibid.

their logical conflict and seeks a synthesis of the opposites. He accepted the scientific principle that Nature proceeds according to law. But mechanistic science did not allow for another undeniable fact of Nature: that man plays an active part in directing the destinies of the world. Here, as in his treatment of the opposites, idealism and crass materialism, he attempted to make a synthesis. He found his solution, as we traced this problem in Chapter VI,<sup>1</sup> in dialectics. He accepted, in general, the conclusion of Hegel: Freedom is the recognition of necessity. According to this doctrine, the course of history does not move in a straight line toward higher forms. It is a process of struggle in which the forces of progress clash with those of tradition and reaction. Man is "free" to participate actively on either side. "True" freedom, however, lies in recognizing the historical laws of growth and in furthering them.<sup>2</sup>

Although this is a fair summary of Whitman's ultimate stand on the question of freedom and necessity, he never articulated his position in such a complete fashion. He was satisfied here, as in some other questions, to state his position as lying on "the vague line" between two views which are essentially contradictory. In a conversation with Traubel this perplexing problem arose in a discussion as to whether the

1. Pp. 83-84.

2. For Hegel, the doctrine of what is is right means that "everything that exists is a necessary moment in the advance to something further." Randall, op. cit., p. 419. What prevents this historical determinism from being a mere apologetic for the status quo is, to a large extent, the matter of emphasis. By emphasizing the element of tradition the conservatives used Hegel's philosophy to defend outmoded institutions. But Hegelianism also had revolutionary implications. With the emphasis which Whitman, and the "Young Hegelians," gave it--the insistence on continued growth, and the overthrow of traditions which stand in the way of development--the view is a progressive one. Cf. above, pp. 108-109.

suffering caused by the "plutocracy" could have been avoided. His answer was, "No more than the weather: it is as useless to quarrel with history as with the weather: we can prepare for the weather and prepare for history." Then he was asked if history was "automatic." "Not at all," he answered, "it is free in all its basic dynamics: that is, the free human spirit has its part to perform in giving direction to history." The question then posed was whether this statement was not self-contradictory. Walt answered: "I shouldn't wonder: in trying to represent both sides we always run some risk of finishing on the vague line between the two."<sup>1</sup>

On the other side of the "vague line," then, we find that for Whitman man is a "free soul," not destined to be victimized by physical nature, but able to discern her laws and thus to gain mastery over her. He says to "whoever you are":

These immense meadows, these interminable rivers, you are immense  
and interminable as they,  
These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent  
dissolution, you are he or she who is master or mistress over  
them,  
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain,  
passion, dissolution.<sup>2</sup>

But not only is man's will free, and capable, within the limits of her laws, of dominating over Nature. He is also destined to struggle.

In fact, as he announces in "Song of the Open Road," struggle is "provided in the essence of things."<sup>3</sup> His philosophy is not one of

1. Treubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 14.

2. "To You," Inclusive, p. 199.

3. Have the past struggles succeeded?  
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?  
Now understand us well--it is provided in the essence of things that  
from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth  
something to make a greater struggle necessary.

Ibid., p. 152.

laissez faire optimism, but of active, fighting optimism. In another early poem he issues his stirring call to action against "piety and conformity":

Piety and conformity to them that like,  
Peace, obesity, allegiance, to them that like,  
I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations,  
Crying, Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!<sup>1</sup>

He is the poet of "agitation and conflict."<sup>2</sup> Man is "the ruler of life, not a slave."<sup>3</sup>

The poet continues to glory in the free will of man in later poems. In "Song of the Redwood-Tree" (1874) he calls the wills of men "occult deep volitions," "giving not taking law," wills which "really shape and mould the New World, adjusting it to Time and Space."<sup>4</sup> To the very last he continues to preach the gospel of action. The short poem "Life," for example, published in 1888, sees him celebrating "the undiscouraged,

1. "By Blue Ontario's Shore" (1856), *ibid.*, p. 287.

2. Let me have my own way,  
Let others promulge the laws, I will make no account of the laws,  
Let others praise eminent men and hold up peace, I hold up  
agitation and conflict,  
I praise no eminent man, I rebuke to his face the one that was  
thought most worthy.

"Myself and Mine" (1860), *Inclusive*, p. 201.

3. O while I live to be the ruler of life, not a slave,  
To meet life as a powerful conqueror,  
No fumes, no ennui, no more complaints or scornful criticisms,  
To these proud laws of the air, the water and the ground,  
proving my interior soul impregnable,  
And nothing exterior shall ever take command of me.

"A Song of Joys" (1860), *ibid.*, p. 154.

4. You occult deep volitions,  
You average spiritual manhood, purpose of all, pois'd on  
yourself, giving not taking law,  
You womanhood divine, mistress and source of all, whence life  
and love and aught that comes from life and love,  
You unseen moral essence of all the vast materials of America,  
(age upon age working in death the same as life,  
You that, sometimes known, oftener unknown, really shape and  
mould the New World, adjusting it to Time and Space . . .

*Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

resolute, struggling soul of man."<sup>1</sup>

The political implications of Whitman's doctrine of struggle are obvious. Political institutions are not static but are subject to the law of incessant change. "All triumphs and glories are complete in themselves," but all "lead onward." And these "of mine and of the States will in their turn be convuls'd, and serve other parturitions and transitions."<sup>2</sup> "Each age" has "its own growth," and "reforms, fresh views and doctrines" will come "from successions of men and women."<sup>3</sup> He is optimistic because he has faith that the development

1. Ever the undiscouraged, resolute, struggling soul of man;  
(Have former armies fail'd? then we send fresh armies--and  
fresh again;)  
Ever the grappled mystery of all earth's ages old or new;  
Ever the eager eyes, hurrahs, the welcome-clapping hands,  
the loud applause;  
Ever the soul dissatisfied, curious, unconvinced at last;  
Struggling to-day the same--battling the same.  
Ibid., p. 453.
2. How the great cities appear--how the Democratic masses,  
turbulent, wilful, as I love them,  
How the whirl, the contest, the wrestle of evil with good,  
the sounding and resounding, keep on and on,  
How society waits uniform'd, and is for a while between things  
ended and things begun,  
How America is the continent of glories, and of the triumph  
of freedom and of the Democracies, and of the fruits of  
society, and of all that is begun,  
And how the States are complete in themselves--and how all  
triumphs and glories are complete in themselves, to lead  
onward,  
And how these of mine and of the States will in their turn  
be convuls'd, and serve other parturitions and transitions ...  
Ibid., pp. 408-409.
3. I say the word of lands fearing nothing--I will have no other  
land;  
I say discuss all and expose all--I am for every topic openly;  
I say there can be no salvation for These States without  
innovators--without free tongues, and ears willing to hear  
the tongues;  
And I announce as a glory of These States, that they respectfully  
listen to propositions, reforms, fresh views and doctrines,  
from successions of men and women,  
Each age with its own growth.

Ibid., p. 481.

of history will bring true liberty and democracy; but those things must be fought for. Thus, in 1856 in the poem "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," Whitman calls to his "brothers," the French revolutionaries, to keep up their courage, and declares himself "the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over." Yet, "Liberty is to be subserv'd [we may interpret, "in the long run"] whatever occurs."<sup>1</sup>

Another, and distinct, basis of his optimism was the fact that he lived in an era when the country was expanding, and his class, the middle class, was looking ahead to ever-growing opportunity. Newton Arvin states that "the basis of Whitman's strong affirmativeness was in the expectant and energetic life of the class to which he belonged; a class which, in his impressionable years, looked for far more from the future than from the past, which habitually assumed that the course of things was a forward and upward course, and which had no settled fear of movement or change."<sup>2</sup> But it is also true that he felt that the future lay not with any particular class as such but with the common man; and his glorification of struggle toward that end makes him more than a mere proclaimer of complacent middle-class optimism. He tells us:

I put my faith in them--in the crowd of every-day men--in the rise, the supremacy (not the rule) of the superb masses: the men who do things--the workers: they are our hope--they will lead us on if we are led on: not the kid-gloved nobles--the women and the men who dress, who shine, whose life is not love but toilet: I don't see what they can do for us except lead wrong ways--to the devil--yes, lead us into a hole.<sup>3</sup>

Of all the struggles none is more important and none more certain of its goal than that of the "average man," who has already broken "the

1. Ibid., pp. 310-311.

2. Op. cit., p. 255.

3. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 418.

old aristocracies," and still "urges" forward "leaving the masses no rest."<sup>1</sup>

1. "Tears of the Modern," Inclusive, p. 406.

## CHAPTER X

### NATURE AND DEMOCRACY

Whitman's natural "scheme" of things is progressing toward a certain goal: the higher and higher development of the "average" man. As this development can only be achieved through Democracy it, too, is a part of Nature's goal. We will consider in the present chapter his Democracy as an integral part of his naturalistic philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Any attempt to define Whitman's Democracy must start with his insistence on the sacredness of the individual personality. The aim of Nature's process, he states in Democratic Vistas, can be reduced "to the consideration of a single self, a man, a woman . . ." <sup>2</sup> This "something a man is, . . . divine in his own right," is "the key of the most significant doings of our immediately preceding three centuries."<sup>3</sup> The poet never tires of reminding us that the object of "All," of the whole scheme of things, is "The Human Being." The dominant note of "A Backward Glance," for example, is that "In the centre of all, and object of all, stands the Human Being, towards whose heroic and spiritual evolution poems and everything directly or indirectly tend, Old World or New."<sup>4</sup> And "the great pride of man in himself," he states here as elsewhere, is "more or less a motif of nearly all my verses."<sup>5</sup>

1. Nature's social laws are developing men, he states in Democratic Vistas, on the same scale as "the impulses of the elements." Complete Writings, V, p. 97.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 68.

4. Ibid., III, p. 74.

5. Ibid., p. 60.

This emphasis upon the sanctity of the individual is one of the characteristics of the Romantic and Idealistic movements; but Whitman's philosophy is distinguished by the fact that for him it is the common, average man that Nature most treasures. "The working-man and working-woman" were to be in his pages "from first to last." He was to "endow the democratic averages of America" with "the ranges of heroism and loftiness with which Greek and feudal poets endow'd their god-like or lordly born characters."<sup>1</sup> He hopes "for all things from the crowd-- the crowd needs no saviour: the crowd will be its own saviour."<sup>2</sup> He is "not a witness for saviours--exceptional men"; he is "a witness for the average man, the whole."<sup>3</sup>

Not only is the "average" man the "object of all," but in the scheme of Nature it is inevitable that he shall reach full development. It is in the scheme of things that "the least, best dependence is to be upon humanity itself, and its own inherent, normal, full-grown qualities, without any superstitious support whatever." Else "the entire scheme of things is aimless, a cheat, a crash."<sup>4</sup> In other words, Nature, having evolved man in the "divine average," will certainly in the future develop his highest capabilities. Only through Democracy can the "perfect individualism" be achieved, because Democracy alone recognizes the "divine" qualities of man and permits their full development. It is "the purport and aim" of all the past.

1. Ibid., p. 61.

2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 44.

3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 230.

4. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 69.

I was looking a long while for Intentions,  
 For a clew to the history of the past for myself, and for these  
 chants--and now I have found it,  
 It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (then I neither  
 accept nor reject,)  
 It is no more in the legends than in all else,  
 It is in the present--it is this earth to-day,  
 It is in Democracy--(the purport and aim of all the past,)  
 It is the life of one man or one woman to-day--the average man  
 of to-day,<sup>1</sup>

Democracy is "the destin'd conqueror, yet treacherous lip-smiles every-  
 where, And death and infidelity at every step."<sup>2</sup>

Another important side of Whitman's Democracy is that the individual  
 development of Man is impossible without mass development. In this, too,  
 the poet's concept differs from Romantic individualism. Besides glory-  
 fying the individual he insists upon the importance of the "mass," the  
 aggregate, and points out that man can only achieve full development  
 of his individuality through acting with others.<sup>3</sup> As he says in  
Democratic Vistas: "But the mass, or lump character, for imperative  
 reasons, is to be ever carefully weigh'd, borne in mind, and provided  
 for. Only from it, and from its proper regulation and potency, comes  
 the other, comes the chance of individualism."<sup>4</sup> This is a paradox,  
 but Whitman, with his dialectical turn of mind, sees that "the two  
 will merge, and will mutually profit and brace each other, and that  
 from them a greater product, a third, will arise."<sup>5</sup>

Another important characteristic of Whitman's Democracy is that  
 it includes all men, is international. Although he felt that the

1. "I Was Looking a Long While," Inclusive, pp. 324-325.
2. "By Blue Ontario's Shore," ibid., p. 286.
3. See above, p. 81.
4. Complete Writings, V, p. 67.
5. Ibid.

"New World" was far ahead of the Old in democratic development he is never guilty of conceiving democracy in a narrow, nationalistic sense. "No man is a democrat, a true democrat," he states, "who forgets that he is interested in the welfare of the race, who asks only, what is best for America? Instead of, what is best for man--the whole of man?"<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Whitman's Democracy is not merely an intellectual belief but a firm emotional faith. As a matter of fact, as we have seen, Whitman insists that emotion, values, faith, are as real as "materials" and more important. In his own estimate the "very substance" of the Leaves is faith.

What would the Leaves be without faith? An empty vessel:  
faith is the very substance, balance--its one article of assent--  
its one item of assurance.<sup>2</sup>

The greatest poet is he who "sees farthest," who "has the most faith";  
and his great faith is in "the idea of perfect and free individuals."

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,  
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,  
The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots.

Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality,  
They live in the feelings of young men and the best women,  
(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been  
always ready to fall for Liberty.)<sup>3</sup>

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 55.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 372.

3. "By Blue Ontario's Shore" (1856), Inclusive, p. 292.

This unqualified faith in the common man places Whitman's philosophy poles apart from that of Carlyle. He undoubtedly owed some verbal and stylistic debt to Carlyle, as illustrated by Fred Manning Smith (Whitman's Post-Prophet and Carlyle's Hero, "PMLA", Vol. LV, No. 4 (Dec., 1940), pp. 1146-1164); but Smith's conclusion that "an important source of inspiration back of the writing of Leaves of Grass may be found in Heroes and Sartor" is misleading if one is to infer that Carlyle could have "inspired" Whitman's democratic philosophy. The poet was quite conscious of the fact that Carlyle's lack of "faith in humanity" rendered him incapable of understanding the Leaves. As he once told Traubel: "Carlyle could never have understood me--could never have comprehended the Leaves, which are outside

With this outline of the chief characteristics of Whitman's Democracy in mind, we will consider how he justified his belief on naturalistic, empirical grounds. He points out in Democratic Vistas that he does not consider "benevolence" and "charity" a fit reason for belief in the people but that a "scientific estimate" is essential.<sup>1</sup> A part of this scientific basis for his faith he found in his own experience. All his life Whitman had loved to mingle with ordinary people and he knew them well. But of all his experiences his days in the hospitals during the Civil War gave him a unique opportunity to study the "mixtures of men." He found "the same basic traits in them all--in the Northern man, in the Southern man, in the Western man--all of one instinct, one color--addicted to the same vices, ennobled by the same virtues: the dignity, courtesy, open-handedness, radical in all, beautiful in all."<sup>2</sup>

He needed no more proof than the actions of the common man in the "secession war" to prove to him that "popular democracy, whatever its faults and dangers, practically justifies itself beyond the proudest claims and wildest hopes of its enthusiasts." He discovered through

his spiritual latitude and longitude altogether. Carlyle was not an apt student of the modern, of literary rebellion--he was raised, imbedded, in older routines. He did not understand humanity--had no faith in humanity, in fact--more than that, he lacked unction: don't you think that's the word to describe it?--he had no religious faith--I am sure he lacked conviction in the triumph of the good. I do not intend to say Carlyle did not contribute--did not do this and that for which humanity will be eternally richer and grateful. What I am trying to say is that he had no avenue of approach to the people; he lost his way in the jungle; the people were not a beautiful abstraction--they were an ugly fact; he shrank from the people." Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 92.

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 72.

2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 79.

the experiences of the Civil War "how the gist of this fiercest and most resolute of the world's war-like contentions resided exclusively in the unnamed, unknown rank and file; and how the brunt of its labor of death was, to all essential purposes, volunteer'd."<sup>1</sup> Whitman never glorifies war as such,<sup>2</sup> but he saw the Civil War as fought by "the People, of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, insolently attack'd by the secession-slave-power, and its very existence imperil'd."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, important and basic as is the essential goodness of the masses, Whitman finds a further naturalistic, empirical reason for his belief: the natural law of self-preservation demands democracy. As he states in Democratic Vistas he does not rest his conviction simply on the ground that "the People, the masses, even the best of them, are in their latent or exhibited qualities, essentially sensible and good--nor on the ground of their rights." A further ground is that "the democratic formula is the only safe and preservative one for

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 73.
2. In discussing his hospital experiences with Traubel Whitman once summed up his opinion of war as follows: "O God! that whole damned war business is about nine hundred and ninety nine parts diarrhoea to one part glory: the people who like the wars should be compelled to fight the wars: they are hellish business, wars--all wars: Sherman said, War is hell: so it is: any honest man says so--hates war, fighting, blood-letting: I was in the midst of it all--saw war where war is worst--not on the battlefields, no--in the hospitals: there war is worst: there I mixed with it: and now I say, God damn the wars--all wars: God damn every war: God damn 'em! God damn 'em!" Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 295.
3. Complete Writings, V, p. 73.

coming times."<sup>1</sup> Thus, "leaving the rest to the sentimentalists," he presents "freedom as sufficient in its scientific aspect, cold as ice, reasoning, deductive, clear and passionless as crystal."<sup>2</sup>

Democracy is part of the historical law of development, "that of the superior law, in time, gradually supplanting and overwhelming the inferior one":

Democracy too is law, and of the strictest, simplest kind. Many suppose (and often in its own ranks the error) that it means a throwing aside of law, and running riot. But, briefly, it is the superior law, not alone that of physical force, the body, which, adding to, it supersedes with that of the spirit. Law is the unshakeable order of the universe forever; and the law over all, and law of laws, is the law of successions; that of the superior law, in time, gradually supplanting and overwhelming the inferior one.<sup>3</sup>

Democracy is an inevitable historical development. In one passage Whitman goes so far as to doubt "that it owes any serious thanks to noted propagandists or champions, or has been essentially help'd, though often harm'd, by them."

It has been and is carried on by all the moral forces, and by trade, finance, machinery, inter-communications, and, in fact, by all the developments of history, and can no more be stopp'd than the tides, or the earth in its orbit. Doubtless, also, it resides, crude and latent, well down in the hearts of the fair average of the American-born people, mainly in the agricultural regions. But it is not yet, there or anywhere, the fully-receiv'd, the fervid, the absolute faith.<sup>4</sup>

Although in Democratic Vistas and elsewhere the poet makes it clear that real democracy is not "material" but "spiritual," he always

1. Ibid., pp. 78-79. This view that the law of "self-preservation" demands "equality of all rights and persons" is found again in Whitman's "Notes for Lectures on Democracy and 'Adhesiveness,'" Walt Whitman's Workshop, p. 58.
2. Complete Writings, V, p. 79.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 92.

maintains that its necessary basis is material. In this, again, he is true to his belief in science and to his naturalistic philosophy. "Universal ownership of property, general homesteads, general comfort-- a vast, intertwining reticulation of wealth" are the necessary foundation of democracy:

. . . Democracy looks with suspicious ill-satisfied eye upon the very poor, the ignorant, and on those out of business. She asks for men and women with occupations, well-off, owners of houses and acres, and with cash in the bank--and with some cravings for literature, too; and must have them, and hastens to make them.<sup>1</sup>

He also shows his basic grasp of the historical approach by his stand that the capitalistic drive for riches is a necessary step in progress. "All-devouring" business and the "mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarisms" are corrupting influences, but they too are "parts of the amelioration and progress, indispensably needed to prepare the very results I demand."<sup>2</sup>

For Whitman, democracy and science go hand in hand. Democracy is that form of society which is scientifically justifiable, founded upon the facts of nature. Furthermore, the natural laws of development are producing democracy as an inevitable step in progress. But in calling "science twin, in its fields, of Democracy in its"<sup>3</sup> he recognizes

1. Ibid., pp. 82.-83.

2. Ibid., p. 83. "I perceive clearly that the extreme business energy, and this almost maniacal appetite for wealth prevalent in the United States, are parts of amelioration and progress, indispensably needed to prepare the very results I demand. My theory includes riches, and the getting of riches, and the simplest products, power, activity, inventions, movements, etc. Upon them, as upon substrate, I raise the edifice design'd in these Vistas." Ibid.

3. Democratic Vistas, ibid., p. 123.

another connection between the two. As the Beards point out, "political democracy and natural science rose and flourished together. . . . Democracy arrested the attention of idle curiosity and demanded that the man of microscope and test tube come into the street to invent, relieve, and serve. Science, on the other hand, helped to determine the course of democratic development."<sup>1</sup> Whitman was aware that science would enable mankind to wipe out starvation and disease, that it had made possible the raising of the standard of living for all the people. In a discussion with Traubel of the Malthusian doctrine, for example, he spoke of its "horrible falsity," and went on, "The earth crowded? It was 'absurd' on the face of it. . . . Overpopulation? . . . a pure confession of incapacity to explain social sores." When Traubel expressed his faith that finally science would find ways to vitalize what we now regard as waste land Whitman said: "You must be right: it will be confirmed: I too have often thought that." And finally he summed up, "No social theories complaining of overpopulation are to me tenable: whatever the reason for poverty may be, it's not that."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps enough of Whitman's analysis of democracy has already been reviewed to throw doubt on the pronouncement of Newton Arvin that from the point of view of reasoned doctrine Whitman was "a political illiterate."<sup>3</sup> Arvin's point is that the poet arrived at his political philosophy largely through his feelings and intuitions. "The idealists had assured him, and he was prone by nature to believe it, that with social as with ethical and metaphysical questions it was unnecessary to subject oneself to any

1. Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, The Rise of American Civilization, Vol. I, p. 737.
2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 173-174.
3. Arvin, op. cit., p. 240.

difficult discipline of study and analysis; that here, too, one could safely rely upon feeling and intuition."<sup>1</sup> Such a conclusion might be drawn if one looked only at Whitman's emphasis on his "faith" in democracy and his emotional sympathy with the masses. But we have seen that he also had thought deeply about the problem and marshaled his experiences to back up his conclusions. Furthermore, he had looked at the question from the scientific view of the development of history. And to intimate, as does Arvin, that his study of political democracy was limited to "his early reading in Paine and Jefferson" is to do Whitman an obvious injustice. For one thing, his emphasis upon the "working man" was hardly that of Jefferson. And in such essays as "The Tramp and Strike Question" he shows a grasp of the new problems brought by an industrial society never imagined by Jefferson.

Whitman's belief in democracy is not based upon an idealized view of the common man. In fact, in the historical view, as he points out, the "goodness" or "badness" of the individual is not relevant; the course of history simply happens to be developing toward more democracy. But history does not move toward its goal without "set-backs" and "retrogressions."<sup>2</sup> Whitman had some very definite ideas as to the defects of the political democracy of the time and the general direction, at least, of necessary changes to perfect it.

No extensive quotations are needed to prove that Whitman was not blind to these defects. He was not fatuously optimistic here any more than in his views of other aspects of the world. In Democratic Vistas

1. Ibid.

2. See Chapter IX.

he concludes that "New World democracy" is, "so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand, religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results."<sup>1</sup> The "business classes" are depraved and the government is "saturated with corruption":

The depravity of the business classes in our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business (this all-devouring modern word, business), the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field.<sup>2</sup>

He is optimistic about the present because it is a necessary step toward the great future development of democracy. But as to the actual life of the common man in the present he recognizes that for many it is like that of "so many young men, full of the stuff to make the noblest heroes of the earth. . . ." They pass their lives, "year after year, and so till death," in

constant toil--ever alert to keep the wolf back from the door--no development--no rational pleasure--sleeping in some cramped dirty place--never knowing once in their whole lives real affection, sweetly returned, the joy, the life of life--always kept down, unaware of religion--no habitual rendezvous except the bar-room--unaware of any amusements except these preposterous and painful screenings from the pulpits.<sup>3</sup>

It is not the fault of the masses that they do not seem to possess the noble qualities that Whitman sees in them; they have not been given

1. Complete Writings, V, p. 63.

2. Ibid., pp. 62-63.

3. Ibid., IX, pp. 138-139.

a chance to develop themselves. He was always quick to resent what he considered slander of the masses. On one occasion when a group was discussing social problems and the European masses were spoken of in "severely disrespectful terms" Whitman bristled, saying: "I will not believe it, . . . Give them a chance--give them a chance--they will be as good as the rest. All that man needs to be good is the chance. History has so far been busy--institutions, rulers, have been busy--denying him that chance."<sup>1</sup> In another such conversation he was asked if he had ever had any experiences to shake his faith in humanity. He answered: "Never! Never! I trust humanity: its instincts are in the main right: it goes false, it goes true, to its interests, but in the long run it makes advances." Again, the reason "humanity falls down every now and then" is that it is not free; and "when we get a real democracy, as we will by and bye, this humanity will have its chance--give a fuller report of itself."<sup>2</sup>

The chief political problem as he saw it was not "the abstract question of democracy" but the "Poverty Question," that is, "the wealth of the civilized world, as contrasted with its poverty":

Beneath the whole political world, what most presses and perplexes to-day, sending vestest results affecting the future, is not the abstract question of democracy, but of social and economic organization, the treatment of working-people by employers, and all that goes along with it--not only the wages-payment part, but a certain spirit and principle, to vivify anew these relations; all the questions of progress, strength, tariffs, finance, etc., really evolving themselves more or less directly out of the Poverty Question ("the Science of Wealth," and a dozen other names are given it, but I prefer the severe one just used).<sup>3</sup>

1. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 157.

3. "The Tramp and Strike Questions," Complete Writings, V, p. 284.

In this same "undeliver'd" lecture he analyzes the American Revolution and the French Revolution as "strikes," stemming from this basic economic problem:

The American Revolution of 1776 was simply a great strike, successful for its immediate object--but whether a real success judged by the scale of the centuries, and the long-striking balance of time, yet remains to be settled. The French Revolution was absolutely a strike, and a very terrible and relentless one, against ages of bad pay, unjust division of wealth-products, and the hogish monopoly of a few, rolling in superfluity, against the vast bulk of the work-people, living in squalor.<sup>1</sup>

As to the efficacy of the political parties in dealing with the "poverty question," both "the Republican party positively, the Democratic party negatively," are alike "apologists of the plutocracy." He "cares less for politics and more for the people," and sees that "the real work of democracy is done underneath its politics." He is not "scornful" of the plutocracy, because they too belong "to the system from which we all suffer alike." And, true to his historical view, he feels that this suffering could not be avoided because it is "useless to quarrel with history." He is "not looking to politics to renovate politics" but to historical forces: "--the great moral, spiritual forces--and these stick to their work, through thick and thin, through the mire and the mirage, until the proper time, and then assume control."<sup>2</sup>

It would not do to say that Whitman had a well-thought-out political program, but he had at least certain touchstones which were consistent with his democratic philosophy. As he points out in a conversation with Traubel the "labor question" was not "up" in his early career as it was later. But he adds, some day that question will have to be solved--"then

1. Ibid., p. 285.

2. Traubel, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

somebody will have to look out--especially the bodies with big fortunes wrung from the sweat and blood of the poor."<sup>1</sup> As he confessed to Traubel, a socialist, he could not follow him in all his "intricate involvements, theories," but he was with him in all he aimed for. To lead him on Traubel had asked him, "Suppose the millionaires were abolished--that millionairism became impossible, would you feel unhappy over it?" Whitman's answer was: "What? me? God no! Ain't that my program?" And when Traubel accused him of being a bit reactionary he "fairly yelled" at him:

To hell with your reaction! to hell with it! I may be dodging your doctrines: I'm not dodging your purpose: I am with you all in what you aim for: solidarity, the supremacy of the people: all the people in possession of what belongs to all the people but has been stolen from them: I'm with you in that: but I can't follow you in all the intricate involvements, theories, through which you pursue your fierce agitations.<sup>2</sup>

If Whitman had no particular program he seems never to have deviated in his writings from the view that the aim should be "solidarity, the supremacy of the people." In Democratic Vistas, when he comes to the "political section of Democracy" he declares that few people, "even in these republican States, . . . fully comprehend the aptness of that phrase, 'THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE,' which we inherit from the lips of Abraham Lincoln . . . ." The scope of this formula "includes both the totality and all minutiae of the lesson."<sup>3</sup> To Whitman Lincoln's statement would be enough to test any particular political program for its fitness to carry forward the development toward democracy and progress.

1. Ibid., p. 193.

2. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 481.

3. Complete Writings, V, pp. 71-72.

To sum up, democracy is desirable because that system alone allows the highest development of the individual man, and it is inevitable because Nature, not being chaotic or meaningless, tends toward the highest development of her products. As man's "soul" is the higher step in his development Whitman is most interested in democracy in connection with its development of the spirit. A sound material, economic basis is necessary; but material gains are nothing if they do not further the ultimate "spiritual" goal. The important question is: "Is there a great moral and religious civilization--the only justification of a great material one?"<sup>1</sup>

Democracy can only be complete when it includes what Whitman calls variously in his work "the living principle," the "idea," the "religious element." As he states it, rather indefinitely, in one place in Democratic Vistas:

For, I say, the true nationality of the States, the genuine union, when we come to a moral crisis, is, and is to be, after all, neither the written law, nor (as is generally supposed), either self-interest, or common pecuniary or material objects--but the fervid and tremendous IDEA, melting everything else with resistless heat, and solving all lesser and definite distinctions in vast, indefinite, spiritual, emotional power.<sup>2</sup>

What this "IDEA," this "vast, indefinite, spiritual, emotional power" is he makes clear in the latter parts of Democratic Vistas. It is the "religious element," which is "at the core of democracy." It is only achieved by the individual merging himself with "the divine, vast, general law," the law of Nature. That law is developing toward a solidarity, a brotherhood of all individuals. The individual soul is

1. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 65.

2. Ibid., V, pp. 59-60.

is only one half of the development; it is only complete when joined with the other half, the human race:

The common ambition strains for elevations, to become some privileged exclusive. The master sees greatness and health in being part of the mass; nothing will do as well as common ground. Would you have in yourself the divine, vast, general law? Then merge yourself in it.

And, topping democracy, this most alluring record, that it alone can bind, and ever seeks to bind, all nations, all men, of however various and distant lands, into a brotherhood, a family. It is the old, yet ever-modern dream of earth, out of her eldest and her youngest, her fond philosophers and poets. Not that half only, individualism, which isolates. There is another half, which is adhesiveness or love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades and fraternizing all. Both are to be vitalized by religion (sole worthiest elevator of man or State), breathing into the proud, material tissues, the breath of life. For I say at the core of democracy, finally is the religious element. All the religions, old and new, are there. Nor may the scheme step forth, clothed in resplendent beauty and command, till these, bearing the best, the latest fruit, the spiritual, shall fully appear.<sup>1</sup>

The true poet is demanded to enunciate the "living principle," to "lead them who plan with decision and science, Lead the present with friendly hand toward the future."

To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account,  
That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle,  
as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants.<sup>2</sup>

The democracy of the future, then, will bring about this "living principle," will be in itself a "religion." It will away the ages "with a breadth and rectitude tallying Nature's own."

It (democracy) too must be adorn'd, credited with its results--then, when it, with imperial power, through amplest time, has dominated mankind--has been the source and test of all the moral, esthetic, social, political, and religious expressions and institutes of the civilized world--has begotten them in spirit, and in form, and has carried them to its own unprecedented heights--has had (it is possible), monasties and ascetics, more numerous, more devout than the monks and priests of all

1. Ibid., p. 80.

2. "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Inclusive, p. 291.

previous creeds--has sway'd the ages with a breadth and rectitude tallying Nature's own--has fashion'd, systematized, and triumphantly finish'd and carried out, in its own interest, and with unparallel'd success, a new earth and a new man.<sup>1</sup>

1. Democratic Vistas, Complete Writings, V, p. 93.

## CHAPTER XI

### SUMMARY

Whitman's position in respect to science and the materialist philosophy is a matter of controversy. A general charge against him is that he is an Indian-giver: that he proclaims science and materialism "first and last" in importance; but that almost in the same breath he says, "Science is not my dwelling." It is true that he often makes statements which are flatly contradictory, not bothering to explain how they may be reconciled. If one interprets his works as a whole, however, one finds that in this particular contradiction, as in others, he has attempted to work out a synthesis between contradictory points of view.

Whitman's synthesis of "materialism" and "idealism," basic in his thought, we have termed a legitimate form of philosophic naturalism. His is not the "older naturalism," which was synonymous with crass materialism, "linked its fortunes with extreme mechanicalism," and "saw no place or function for human intelligence." It is a naturalism which includes man with his values and his free will as an active participant in the natural "scheme." The themes Whitman emphasizes in addition to science and materialism are "man's idea of his own position in the universes of time, space and materials, his faith in the scheme of things, . . . his clue to the relations between himself and the outside world, his ability in intellect and spirit at any rate to cope and be equal with them, and with Time and Space." The main essentials of these "greatest themes" are ruled out by the "older naturalism"; that subjective man is a part of Nature and is a force in the determination of the destinies of the world; and that the

laws of nature are not purposeless but are moving toward a goal.

Our definition of "naturalism" has allowed for a synthesis of the "older naturalism" and idealism. It holds that man, with his free will and his subjective values, must be included in Nature; yet maintains the source of these values to be in Nature itself--not in some source above Nature, the Supernatural. As the empirical, scientific point of view is the sine qua non of any naturalistic philosophy we have given the evidence of Whitman's loyalty to science. But according to the "older" naturalism nature, including man, had to be accounted for in the deterministic laws of the physical sciences. We have seen that Whitman, along with many modern "naturalistic" philosophers, insists that man, a product of nature, has an active part in nature's scheme. As to purpose in nature, the old La Placean science maintained that ours is a mathematical universe with no possibility of purpose or spontaneity. Because "scientism" did not allow for growth, development, progress in Nature, Whitman refused to accept it. He believed firmly that Nature operates according to laws, but saw evidence that those laws were not mechanical but were moving in progressive stages toward the goal of man's higher development.

An essential of any naturalistic philosophy is "an earnest and courageous desire to find out and face the truth, no matter what it may be." This spirit of inquiry, of revolt against superstition, dogma, tradition, is behind everything Whitman wrote. The corollary of this principle is that in searching for the truth the naturalistic thinker must follow unequivocally the findings of science. Whitman not only states many times his loyalty to this view, but in his works as well as in his notes and clippings he shows an understanding of the scientific

thought of his century. The chief of the novel scientific ideas which in the nineteenth century were changing man's view of his world were the principle of the indestructibility of matter, the atomic theory, the law of the conservation of energy, and evolution. All of these Whitman understood and incorporated in his philosophy; and the most revolutionary of them, evolution, is his most constant theme.

But because the poet, along with his hurrah for science, pointed out that "scientism" was "not enough" for a complete philosophy, he has been accused of renegacy from naturalism. This "scientism," or, as we have termed it, the "older naturalism," was, as a matter of fact, insufficient as a philosophy. By picturing the world, including man, as a mechanism it failed to explain the emotions, ideals, values, which man actually finds in himself. Also, this mechanical view was a static one, failing to explain how new and more complicated forms develop in Nature's evolutionary processes.

It has been illustrated that this protest against "scientism," in the field of philosophy, was behind the whole Idealist reaction beginning with Kant. Whitman's "Sunday evening lectures" and other writings show that he had an intelligent grasp of the respective positions of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel in regard to the shortcomings of mechanism. That philosophy, because it could not explain man's subjective values and emotions, failed to answer the all-important question of "man's idea of his own position in the universes of time, space and materials." Of the "illustrious four" it was Hegel who led Whitman to what he considered the most satisfactory explanation. Whitman's answer to the question of man's relation to nature he arrived at through Hegel's dialectical approach. Man and nature, for Whitman, are actively interrelated. Man neither

completely "makes" the world, as in the purely Idealist philosophy; nor is he completely "made" by mechanical forces of heredity and environment, as in the philosophy of "scientism." Rather, man and nature interact and actively change each other.

To say that man is not a will-less, helpless product of material forces is not necessarily to deny that he is a product of nature. As a matter of fact, to establish Whitman's philosophy as naturalistic this thesis has shown that in his thought man's "soul" and "all his attributes, animal, intellectual, moral" are a part of the all-inclusive "Nature." It is not denied that at times the poet speaks of the "soul" in a way that apparently leaves him open to the charge that he drifts into supernaturalism. The answer we have given to this charge is that his writings as a whole make it clear that for him the "immaterial" part of man, his "spirit," or "soul," arises from material nature in her evolutionary development.

To complete the outline of Whitman's naturalism we have traced how he included as products of Nature not only man's body and soul, but also his institutions and "all the movements of history and civilization."

To return to the relation between man and the objective world, Whitman looks at them as parts of one indissoluble whole--the "ensemble" of Nature. We have contrasted this view with that of mechanical "scientism," which in Whitehead's words, "bifurcates the universe." Mechanistic science forces a "bifurcation between mind and body, life and matter, spirit and nature." Whitman, like Goethe, would not accept this bifurcation. He demanded a monistic philosophy in which the mechanical and non-mechanical would be combined into a Unity. To maintain this unity among seeming "opposites" Whitman adopted Hegel's dialectical approach.

In his conception of the laws of Nature's development Whitman again departed from "scientism." According to that view ours is a "dead-level," purposeless universe. In his thought, as in that of certain modern naturalist philosophers, the universe is not purposeless but is developing toward higher and higher levels; nature itself is purposeful in the sense that it contains its own goal toward which its laws propel it. I have not attempted to prove that Whitman studied through the whole vexing philosophical question of mechanism versus purpose in all its implications. In fact it may be admitted that a great part of his belief in a progressive world stemmed from a firm faith that Nature's laws, having evolved man, would guarantee that his progress would continue. I have, however, defended his belief in purposeful natural laws against the charge that such a belief can have no place in a naturalistic philosophy.

Whitman's concept of the "scheme" of Nature included a good grasp of the historical approach, an approach that J. T. Merz has called "the greatest step taken in modern times" within the natural as well as the social sciences: the viewing of "objects of nature, not in isolation, but in their surroundings, and the processes of nature not independently but in their sequence in time." As Whitman stated the creed: "The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be, from what has been and is." The acceptance and understanding of historical law is fundamental to a naturalistic philosophy; and the evidence shows that Whitman adhered to this view consistently, applying it not only to the evolution of the material cosmos but also to the growth of human institutions.

This complete acceptance of historical law--"What has ever happened . . . what happens and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws enclose all"--is also fundamental to Whitman's optimism. But his stand

that "what is is well" implies not so much the idea that what is is morally "right" as the idea that things could not be otherwise under historical law. As Burroughs pointed out, this is also the view of "absolute, uncompromising science." It is fundamental to naturalism. Whitman, of course, went further. He did not accept a "scientism" which holds that nature is amoral and purposeless. For him the world is "good" because it is working toward a progressive goal. Evil is a necessary element in Nature's processes, and is therefore "good" in the sense that it is a necessary part of those processes.

Along with his acceptance of historical law we find that Whitman also believes in the freedom of the will. Here again are two "opposites" which he had perforce to reconcile, as does anyone who believes in scientific law and at the same time in man's ability, within limits, to make his own decisions and to be a factor in directing the destinies of the world. These "opposites" are present in the poet's thought from the first. He solved the paradox somewhat as Hegel did--and as did Melville in the chapter on the "Wat Makers" in Moby Dick. The will is free, but it is strictly limited in its operations by historical law. True freedom is to understand this law and conform to it. But also, revolt is possible against those elements--such as tradition and dogma--which run counter to the progressive direction of history. Thus it is possible for Whitman to "accept" historical law and at the same time be the poet of revolt and struggle.

The main goal of Nature's law, the scheme of things, is the higher development of man. Though there will be many "set-backs" and "retrogressions," progress toward this goal is inexorable. Concretely, the goal itself and at the same time the instrument for achieving it is

Democracy--which for Whitman is also a Religion. Democracy is necessary because it alone allows the highest development of the individual man; it is inevitable because Nature, not being chaotic and purposeless, moves toward the highest development of her products.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arvin, Newton, Whitman, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1938.
- Bezalgette, Leon, Walt Whitman, New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920.
- Beach, Joseph Warren, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1936.
- "Reason and Nature in Wordsworth," Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. I, No. 3 (June, 1940), pp. 335-351.
- Beard, Charles A. and Mary R., The Rise of American Civilization, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1936.
- Binns, Henry Bryan, A Life of Walt Whitman, London, Methuen & Company, 1905.
- Boatright, Mody C., "Whitman and Hegel," Texas University Studies in English, No. 9 (1929), pp. 134-150.
- Brandes, George, Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature, 6 Vols., New York, The Macmillan Company, 1905.
- Bucke, Richard Maurice, Cosmic Consciousness, Philadelphia, Innes & Sons, 1905.
- Walt Whitman, Philadelphia, David McKay, 1883.
- Burroughs, John, Whitman, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1896.
- Cambridge History of American Literature, 4 Vols., New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931.
- Carpenter, Edward, Days with Walt Whitman, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1924.
- Clark, H. R., "Emerson and Science," Philological Quarterly, Vol. X (July, 1931), pp. 225-260.
- Cooke, Alice Lovelace, "Whitman's Background in the Industrial Movements of his Time," University of Texas Studies in English, No. 15 (1935), pp. 76-91.
- "Whitman's Indebtedness to the Scientific Thought of his Day," University of Texas Studies in English, No. 14 (1934), pp. 89-115.
- Dampier, Sir William, A History of Science, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1936.

De Selincourt, Basil, Walt Whitman, London, M. Secker, 1914.

Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, ed. James Mark Baldwin, 3 Vols., New York, The Macmillan Company, 1925.

Dowden, Edward, Studies in Literature, London, C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878.

Ellis, Havelock, The New Spirit, 3d ed., New York, The Walter Scott Publishing Company, 1892.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, Complete Works, 12 Vols., ed. Edward W. Emerson, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903.

Fiske, John, Edward Livingston Youmans, New York, D. Appleton & Company, 1894.

Forster, Norman, American Criticism, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928.

Nature in American Literature, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1925.

"Whitman as a Poet of Nature," PMLA, Vol. XXXI (1916), pp. 756-758.

Fulghum, W. B., Jr., "Whitman's Debt to Joseph Gostwick," American Literature, Vol. XII (Jan., 1941), pp. 491-496.

Gay, William, Walt Whitman, His Relation to Science and Philosophy, Melbourne, Australia, Mason, Firth & M'Cutcheon, 1895.

Gohdes, Clarence L. F., "Whitman and Emerson," Sevens Review, Vol. 37 (Jan., 1929), pp. 79-93.

Gost(w)ick, Joseph, German Literature, Philadelphia, 1854.

and Robert Harrison, Outlines of German Literature, London, Williams and Norgate, 1873.

Gould, Elizabeth Porter, Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman, Philadelphia, David McKay, 1900.

Harned, Thomas B., ed., The Letters of Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman, New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918.

Hodge, Frederic H., ed., Prose Writers of Germany, Philadelphia, Porter & Costes, 1870.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, The Logic of Hegel, transl. W. Wallace, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1892.

The Philosophy of History, New York, Willey Book Co., 1900.

Selections, ed. J. Loewenberg, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.

- Hicks, Grenville, The Great Tradition, New York, International Publishers, 1935.
- Hobhouse, L. T., Development and Purpose, London, Macmillan and Company, 1927.
- Holloway, Emory, Whitman, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.
- Howard, Leon, "For a Critique of Whitman's Transcendentalism," Modern Language Notes, Vol. XLVII (Feb., 1932), pp. 79-85.
- Hungerford, Edward, "Walt Whitman and His Chart of Bumps," American Literature, Vol. II (Jan., 1931), pp. 350-384.
- Joad, C. E. M., Guide to Philosophy, New York, Random House, 1935.
- Kennedy, William Sloane, Reminiscences of Walt Whitman, London, Alexander Gardner, 1896.
- Lawson, John Howard, Theory and Technique of Playwriting, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936.
- Leves, G. H., A Biographical History of Philosophy, 2 Vols., London, Charles Knight and Co., 1845.
- Major, David R., An Introduction to Philosophy, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935.
- Marcuse, Herbert, Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory, New York, Oxford University Press, 1941.
- Matthiessen, Francis Otto, American Renaissance, New York, Oxford University Press, 1941.
- Merz, J. T., A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century, 4 Vols., London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1912.
- Moore, John B., "The Master of Whitman," Studies in Philology, Vol. XIII (Jan., 1926), pp. 77-89.
- Morgan, Bayard Q., A Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation, 1481-1927, 2d ed., Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1938.
- Morgan, C. Lloyd, Emergent Evolution, New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1923.
- Myers, H. A., "Whitman's Conception of the Spiritual Democracy," American Literature, Vol. VI (Nov., 1934), pp. 239-253.
- "Whitman's Consistency," American Literature, Vol. VIII (Nov., 1936), pp. 245-257.
- Paine, Gregory, "The Literary Relations of Whitman and Carlyle with Especial Reference to Their Contrasting Views on Democracy," Studies in Philology, Vol. XXVI (July, 1939), pp. 550-563.

- Farrington, Vernon Louis, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930.
- Pratt, James Bissett, Naturalism, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1939.
- Pressley, Ruth Peyton, The Indebtedness of Whitman to Emerson, Unpublished Thesis, University of Texas, 1930.
- Randall, John Herman, Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind, New York Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926.
- Riethmuller, Richard, "Walt Whitman and the Germans," German American Annals, New Series, Vol. IV (1906), pp. 3-15; 35-49; 78-92.
- Rily, Woodbridge, American Thought, New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1923.
- Ritchie, David G., Darwin and Hegel, New York, Macmillan & Company, 1893.
- Royce, Josiah, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1892.
- Sellers, Roy Wood, Critical Realism, New York, Rand McNally and Company, 1916.
- Evolutionary Naturalism, Chicago, Open Court Publishing Company, 1922.
- The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1926.
- Shephard, Esther, Walt Whitman's Pose, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938.
- Sixby, George L., "'Chanting the Square Deific'- A Study in Whitman's Religion," American Literature, Vol. IX (1937-38), pp. 171-195.
- Smith, Bernard, Forces in American Criticism, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939.
- Symonds, John Addington, Walt Whitman, New York, E. P. Dutton & Company, 1893.
- Townsend, Harvey Gates, Philosophical Ideas in the United States, New York, American Book Company, 1934.
- Traubel, Horace L., Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, ed. In Re Walt Whitman, Philadelphia, David McKay, 1893.
- With Walt Whitman in Camden, 3 Vols., Vols. I and II, New York, D. Appleton & Company, 1908; Vol. III, New York, Mitchell Kennerley, 1914.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, Nature and Life, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Science and the Modern World, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1927.

Whitman, Walt, The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman, 10 Vols., ed. Richard M. Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, Horace L. Traubel, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902.

The Gathering of the Forces, 2 Vols., ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920.

I Sit and Look Out, ed. Emory Holloway and Vernolien Schwarz, New York, Columbia University Press, 1932.

Leaves of Grass, Inclusive Edition, ed. Emory Holloway, New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927.

New York Dissected, ed. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adamsri, New York, Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Inc., 1936.

The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, 2 Vols., ed. Emory Holloway, Garden City, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921.

Walt Whitman's Workshop, ed. Clifton Joseph Furness, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1928.