I, Roland Francis Lee, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, October 26, 1919. I received my secondary school education in the public schools of the city of Lakewood, Ohio. My undergraduate training was obtained at Baldwin-Wallace College, from which I received the degree Bachelor of Arts in 1942. From The Ohio State University, I received the degree Master of Arts in 1947. While in residence at The Ohio State University, I was employed as Graduate Assistant during the years 1946-47, 1948-50. In 1950, I received an appointment as Instructor in The Ohio State University, where I specialized in the Department of English. I held this position for two years while completing the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.


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this merit: Emerson never violated the sanctity of another person's soul. And that is no mean praise. It is not easy to convey faith without some trace of bigotry creeping in, nor to talk of the spirit in a spiritual way, nor to convey the ethical sense of right and wrong in a liberating manner. Above all, it is not easy to do these things with a humility which observes the integrity of the other person, which realizes that it is precisely that integrity or inwardness which is the original fact in any religion worth the name. It is easy to talk of the dignity of man, but how many observe it? or write of human dignity, but how many writers show by the form and spirit of their writing that they really respect the integrity of the reader? Emerson observed that integrity as few writers on kindred subjects have done. In that perhaps lies his lasting worth.

THE END
shortcutting, no borrowing, without a destruction of that very integrity which it is a question of bringing into being. And upon this one word integrity, perhaps, Emerson stands or falls. He insisted that each individual be himself, and the existentialists have echoed him in insisting that being oneself is a task which no man will finish in a month or a year or even a lifetime. It seems to me that Kierkegaard has unknowingly given us a description of what Emerson was trying to do which would be difficult to match in the volumes of Emerson commentary. Kierkegaard would have recognized in "Self-Reliance" the deep reverence for individual human dignity.

To stop a man on the street and stand still while talking to him, is not so difficult as to say something to a passer-by in passing, without standing still and without delaying the other, without attempting to persuade him to go the same way, but giving him instead an impulse to go precisely his own way. Such is the relation between one existing individual and another, when the communication concerns the truth as existential inwardness. 17

And that, I think, was Emerson's intention. He gave every man an impetus away, away from the second-hand, away from the hypocritical; he gave every man an impetus toward that truth which was "true for him." When Matthew Arnold characterized him as the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit, Arnold might have added

17Ibid., p. 247.
Nor can there be any conversion to "Emersonism," for the phrase involves a contradiction in terms. Emerson, as Kierkegaard says of Lessing, has prevented discipleship, and one is inclined to wonder how there could be so much loose talk of "Emersonian" and "Emersonism" once this point had been perceived. Perhaps it has not been seen with the clarity it deserves. While the Sage of Concord has an insidious and undeniable charm, while the astute psychologist knows that the best way to get people to follow you is to tell them to be off, it is highly improbable that there can be any such beast as an Emersonian. In his "Fable for Critics" Lowell probably came nearer the truth when he wittily remarked that Emerson left his hearers "converts to they know not what." From an existential point of view though, one wonders if converting people to they know not what does not involve considerably more than appears at first thought. Perhaps Emerson converted them to themselves.

Far from seeking disciples, Emerson was trying, I suggest, to drive his readers inward in order that they might tap for themselves what Marcel calls certain mysterious sources which lie completely beyond any rationalizing, and which seem to have so largely dried up for the modern world. And the God-given integrity of each soul requires that each find his own way. There is no
It seems to me that one might look far before finding a more exact rendering of the spirit of "Self-Reliance," and of the rest of Emerson's moral and religious work as well. The latter realized that the inwardness in each is precisely the road which leads them away from one another, though paradoxically producing at the same time the possibility of real communion. Emerson was trying to reawaken the basic individualism of the religious life, the how of the personal appropriation. To do so, he continually thrust his reader away, so wary was he of infringing upon what he regarded as the sanctity of the individual personality. Yvor Winters suggests that "Self-Reliance" is an invitation to license with a resultant degradation of human dignity; but, if the existentialists are consulted, it becomes an invitation to the deepest human nature to realize itself, with the integrity (as well as the intelligence) of the other person guarded against all violation by "busy intermeddling of third parties" or "excess of amiable stupidity." But it must be read as well as written in faith, and Emerson gave his readers credit for enough intelligence and enough integrity to do just that. He respected them.
man, not "to" man. Says Kierkegaard,

Really to communicate such a conviction would require both art and self-control: self-control to understand inwardly that the God-relationship of the individual man is the thing of prime importance, and that the busy intermeddling of third parties constitutes lack of inwardness, and an excess of amiable stupidity; art enough to vary inexhaustibly the doubly reflected form of the communication, just as the inwardness itself is inexhaustible.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 72.

Thus the ethical and religious teacher will beware of that greatest of all dangers—having disciples. Both Emerson and Kierkegaard—again, the two arch-individualists—explicitly warn against it. Discipleship constitutes a false relationship between man and man, regardless of how true objectively the doctrines in question may be. The purity of an original relationship to God must be maintained. In this respect, Kierkegaard finds Socrates to be the great model, because he so consistently pushed his followers away by his irony, by his dearth of results. He put them upon their own resources, which is to say, he respected their dignity as individual human beings. He put first facts first.

Socrates was an ethical teacher, but he took cognizance of the non-existence of any direct relationship between teacher and pupil, because the truth is inwardness, because this inwardness in each is precisely the road which leads them away
is no objective truth, but the truth consists in personal appropriation.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{13}Kierkegaard. \textit{Postscript.} p. 71.
\end{quote}

Such an attempt could never consist of expressing concepts merely, for that course would give the reader—and the writer—the illusion that he actually knows something or other. He would forget what it means to be ignorant and hence what it means to have faith. Says Kierkegaard, in addition,

> When I understood this, it also became clear to me that if I desired to communicate anything on this point, it would first of all be necessary to give my exposition an indirect form. For if inwardness is the truth, results are only rubbish with which we should not trouble each other. The communication of results is an unnatural form of intercourse between man and man, in so far as every man is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation, which the communication of a result tends to prevent.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., pp. 216-217.
\end{quote}

Kierkegaard goes on to say that the man of faith will therefore observe one cardinal fact, namely, that each individual has a sacred integrity of his own which must not be violated by a dogmatic conveying of results or by well-meant efforts to convert; each person must find his own God-relationship and no one else can find it for him. He takes, as Emerson says, the way "from"
which cannot be abstractly imparted, which needs the combinations and complexity of social action to paint it out, as many emotions in the soul of Handel and Mozart are thousand-voiced and utterly incapable of being told in a simpler air on a lute, but must ride on the mingling whirlwinds and rivers and storms of sound of the great orchestra of organ, pipe, sackbut, dulcimer, and all kinds of music. As the musician avails himself of the concert, so the philosopher avails himself of the drama, the epic, the novel, and becomes a poet; for these complex forms allow of the utterance of his knowledge of life by indirections as well as in the didactic way, and can therefore express the fluxional quantities and values which the thesis or dissertation could never give.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\)Ibid., Vol. V, p. 189.

And that last statement should make the writer of any dissertation soberly consider what he is doing.

If we call upon Kierkegaard to explicate Emerson more fully upon this matter of communicating the how of faith, of expressing inwardness in all its passion and intensity, we shall find him castigating those who think that the conveying of results (i.e., a body of concepts, as a philosophical system or any intellectual schemata) is the object of the highest communication. He contemptuously refers to results as "paragraph material," and insists that the writer who best expresses inwardness will have few intellectual results. He says of his own problem,

Suppose that someone wished to communicate the following conviction: Truth is inwardness; there
apples off a tree, without any thanks.\footnote{Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 307.}

The conveying of thoughts or concepts merely, is the most barren and bereaving of processes. It impoverishes the listener who knows not what to do with these pretty toys. The ideal speaker or writer will not so much convey ideas except as instruments—as he will set the mind of his listener in action so that the latter can move under his own steam. Truth, as Kierkegaard says, consists of a dynamic personal appropriation. Not he is great who gives me ideas, but he "who gives me to myself." And very few can do that. The man of faith will convey this reviving flame not so much by what he says as by how he says it; indeed, he does not say it at all; it says itself through him.

Emerson's dissatisfaction with the conveying of mere abstractions strikes a jarring note when one considers that the usual estimate of him is that of a writer who dealt in nothing but abstractions. The whole matter deserves reconsideration, but I must be content here with quoting a paragraph which expresses Emerson's intention, be his practice what it may. Nothing can be clearer than that he did not intend to be a purveyor of concepts.

The philosopher has a good deal of knowledge
communication between people.

To further express this faith, Emerson seems to have avoided the communication of concepts as an end in themselves. There are no results; there is little that can be pinned down and codified in an intellectual scheme; this fact has been a source of great distress to scholars, and has evoked some acrid comments about vagueness, emptiness and general superficiality. It is therefore doubly interesting to note Kierkegaard declaring that precisely this absence of intellectual results will characterize the writer who is trying to convey inwardness. It is pertinent too to recall Kierkegaard's statement (cf. page 1) that the persistent, the well-nigh invincible error of intellectualism is to think that existing consists of "getting to know something about this or that."

Following Kierkegaard's lead, I think it highly doubtful that Emerson ever intended his listeners or hearers to go away burdened with concepts. To load a groaning mortal down with ideas is a strange way of liberating his soul. Emerson, like Kierkegaard, seems to have looked askance at these men of many concepts:

We do not love the man who gives us thoughts in conversation. We do not love that act? Why? Does it violate our thinking? Does it accuse our unthinking? We like the company of him whose manners or unconscious talk set our own minds in action, and we take occasions of rich opinions from him, as we take
into how he should live. In the same vein, he clearly felt that the traditional Christian terms had become so lacking in inwardness that he resolved to break altogether with words that had become barren. Hence his search for a means of expression where the "word is one with the thing." Hence too his continual insistence upon freshness or spontaneity of expression. As he records in the Journals,

I told Alcott that every one of my expressions concerning "God," or the "soul," etc., is entitled to attention as testimony, because it is independent, not calculated, not part of any system, but spontaneous, and the nearest word I could find to the thing. 10


From an existential point of view, possibly the highest compliment we can pay Emerson is to say that as philosopher and theologian he had neither system nor terminology. Far from looking upon the absence of these high attributes as a defect, we must enquire if it is not precisely the absence of them which constitutes his strength. For the general trend of existentialist thinking, in Kierkegaard especially, seems to imply that that is the way to communicate matters pertaining to faith. Objective discourse is communication between minds, but what everyone seeks—and finds in literature, for example—is
and recalcitrant, permitted. . . To-morrow the way will be clear, in the very direction of the breath which had carried life to the point where it had to stop. Let once the summons of the hero come, we shall not all follow it, but we shall all feel that we ought to, and we shall see the path before us, which will become a highway if we pass along it. At the same time, for each and every philosophy the mystery of the supreme obligation will be a mystery no longer: a journey had been begun, it had had to be interrupted; by setting out once more we are merely willing again what we had willed at the start. It is always the stop which requires explanation, and not the movement.

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Emerson too did not think the movement required explanation.

To express the dynamic nature of faith—which, as Kierkegaard says, can never be conveyed directly, least of all by abstract philosophy—Emerson tended to dispense with all terminology, with a few obvious exceptions. He apparently felt that the use of a terminology has something self-defeating in it, a "closing" tendency, that it results in what Berdyaev calls the "objectification of concepts." On this score he is perhaps a more thorough existentialist than the three who bear the name. He had no desire to elaborate concepts consistent with one another; that was too easily anticipated and might have little or no relation to a human being who wanted insight.
break up the congealed, the petrified modes of the religion of his day. He was trying to set the sluggish blood flowing again. He was trying to reanimate his society, not by new doctrines, but by a rekindling of that primordial element which men, despairing of naming it aright, have called spirit. And the spirit never stands still; it always energizes.

Henri Bergson, in his book The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, distinguishes between static religion and dynamic religion, which correspond to the closed and open societies. The mystic, says Bergson, is the man who goes directly to the original source; the mystic pierces through the incrustations of myth and custom and encourages all men to do likewise; he sets men on the march again, breaking up their closed societies and static religions by his vision and actual realization of a new life. Such, I believe, was Emerson's purpose, for mystic and seer he undoubtedly was. Says Bergson in a passage which seems to hit precisely the spirit of Emerson's intention:

Let a mystic genius but appear, he will draw after him a humanity already vastly grown in body, and whose soul he has transfigured. He will yearn to make of it a new species, or rather deliver it from the necessity of being a species; for every species means a collective halt, and complete existence is mobility in individuality. The great breath of life which swept our planet had carried organization as far along as nature, alike docile
but even more he desired the fiery faith of Calvinism, and his task was the rigorous one of being tolerant in doctrine without losing that passionate inwardness which puts life in any doctrine. It was not an easy task, and it put him in a highly vulnerable position. The Unitarians attacked him as an ungrateful rebel; the Calvinists denounced him as sheer heretic, though they were probably secretly pleased at being offered so perfect a specimen of Unitarianism's logical outcome; materialists of all shades dismissed him as a dreamer. He was, so to speak, under attack from both Right and Left, a position which, unless I am greatly mistaken, he still occupies today.

The contention that Emerson was fundamentally a man of faith, a man who sought in a literary way to revive religious sentiment, is reinforced by the conclusions of Perry Miller. He declares,

> Which is to imply something that I hope these massed quotations will make clear, namely, that the Transcendental movement is most accurately to be defined as a religious demonstration. The real drive in the souls of the participants was a hunger of the spirit for values which Unitarianism had concluded were no longer estimable. . . the literature becomes, even in its more fatuous reaches, a protest of the human spirit against emotional starvation.8

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doctrine, but the absence of faith. One doctrine might do if only that were held earnestly in the right way, but when disbelief has become a "mark of probity" (which it probably still is), then the religious instinct has been subverted, and no dinning of doctrines or proving of conclusions or howls of heresy will ever supply the missing faith. Not particular beliefs, but the universal impulse to believe, the affirmative attitude, is the core of Emerson's religion, and one must be impressed by how like he is to Kierkegaard in decrying the superficial intellectualism which analyzes the prayer and psalm of its forefathers. Given that pristine faith, he is confident that particular beliefs will take care of themselves. The correct how, as Kierkegaard might put it, will give the correct what. One might almost say that this sentence from "Experience" expresses Emerson's religiosity in its most compressed form:

So in accepting the leading of the sentiments, it is not what we believe concerning the immortality of the soul or the like, but the universal impulse to believe, that is the material circumstance and is the principal fact in the history of the globe.7


In his emphasis upon faith, upon the inward appropriation of truth, Emerson is completely in accord with existentialism. He preferred the doctrines of Unitarianism,
which Calvinism, despite all its narrowness, had possessed. The Unitarian had a keen mind and excellent doctrine, but—he had no faith. The Calvinist did have faith, albeit savoring too much of brimstone. It would be difficult to find a more searching analysis, not merely of 19th century Unitarianism, but of "enlightened" religion in any age than Emerson presents here.

Luther would cut his hands off sooner than write theses against the pope if he suspected that he was bringing on with all his might the pale negations of Boston Unitarianism. I will not now go into the metaphysics of that reaction by which in history a period of belief is followed by an age of criticism, in which wit takes the place of faith in the leading spirits, and an excessive respect for forms out of which the heart has departed becomes more obvious in the least religious minds. I will not now explore the causes of the result, but the fact must be conceded as of frequent recurrence, and never more evident than in our American church. To a self-denying, ardent church, delighting in rites and ordinances, has succeeded a cold, intellectual race, who analyze the prayer and psalm of their forefathers, and the more intellectual reject every yoke of authority and custom with a petulance unprecedented. It is a sort of mark of probity and sincerity to declare how little you believe, while the mass of the community indolently follow the old forms with childish scrupulosity, and we have punctuality for faith, and good taste for character.®


This is a damning indictment—one that would have delighted Kierkegaard by the unerring way it hits the spirit of the thing—and it requires no great perception to see that what Emerson despises is not the absence of
first. . . Now is there any third step which Germany has made of like importance and renown? It needs no encyclopaedia of volumes to tell. I want not the metaphysics, but only the literature of them. . .


"Not the metaphysics, but only the literature of them"—should we make a substitution and say, not the what but the way in which this metaphysic may permeate and enrich human life, not the abstraction, but the concrete embodiment? Of this sentence Rene Wellek says,

This saying seems to sum up Emerson's attitude, not only to Hegel but to all German philosophy.

Wellek suggests that the real attraction of German idealism for the Transcendentalists lay in its enmity to 18th century British empiricism and to the tradition of skepticism and materialism in general. But there can be little doubt that German idealism distinctly lacked what Kierkegaard called inwardness.

Turning to Unitarianism, we find that Emerson retained much of Unitarian doctrine, but entertained more contempt for the new church than for the older Calvinism. And the reason is not far to seek. Unitarianism had lost that spirit, that vital inwardness, that religious how,
earnestness, the spirith with which one actually lives his beliefs, these things are largely alien to German idealism. He wanted to "humanize this logic," and he made what is possibly one of the keenest criticisms of intellectualism ever delivered when he wrote,

All abstract philosophy is easily anticipated—-it is so structural, or necessitated by the mould of the human mind.\(^3\)

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\(^3\)Emerson. *Journals*. Vol. VIII, p. 69.

Metaphysics might afford a field for intellectual cleverness, but it had very, very little to do with wisdom.

It is indeed curious that so much should be made of Emerson's German idealism when his references to it are sometimes quite caustic or indifferent in nature. He used three words from German idealism, Reason, Understanding, and Transcendental; two or perhaps all three he could easily have gotten from somewhere else, and he used all three in decidedly non-Kantian ways. Of the school of Hegel we find him saying—-thinking perhaps of the St. Louis Hegelians with whom he was thrown in rather bored contact,

Dreary are the names and numbers of volumes of Hegel and the Hegelians,--to me, who only want to know at the shortest the few steps, the two steps, or the one taken. I know what step Berkeley took, and recognize the same in the Hindoo books. Hegel took a second, and said, that there are two elements, something and nothing, and that the two are indispensable at every subsequent step, as well as at the
discourse—it is a fact of immense importance when one examines some of the estimates which have been made of Emerson. They seem so frequently to be all what and no how. They have lost themselves in searching for sources and influences or in misapplying logic to a sphere where, so the existentialists say, logic has no relevance whatsoever. Above all, there has been a pronounced tendency to reduce Emerson to a watered-down version of German idealism combined with Unitarianism. If this is all there is to Emerson, then he cannot last very long.

But we may doubt the completeness of such judgments. Indeed, we may even doubt the accuracy of them. On the level of doctrine alone, it is probable that Emerson took far more from Plotinus and Plato than he ever took from the Germans.

If, in addition, we turn to the how of the matter, it would not perhaps be too bold a proposition to say that Emerson in his way represented as distinct a reaction to abstract idealism as did Kierkegaard. His typically existential indifference to system which was "the gnat grasping the world," his supreme unconcern toward "proofs" whose ingenious devisers did not yet understand "that the thing affirmed must affirm itself," his depreciation of positivistic knowledge which he held "cheap," above all, his intense concern with the sincerity, the passion, the
holds that pagan religiousness must precede Christian religiousness. Marcel is equally as explicit in warning that the opposite of atheistic existentialism is not necessarily Christian existentialism. He feels that Christians had better not be in too great a hurry to reach Christianity, but learn—or relearn—to the full what natural religion means. He says to objectors:

I would answer: it is quite possible that the existence of the fundamental Christian data may be necessary in fact to enable the mind to conceive some of the notions which I have attempted to analyse; but these notions cannot be said to depend on the data of Christianity, and they do not presuppose it.¹

³Marcel. The Philosophy of Existence. p. 29.

Again he declares:

Sartre has himself admitted that there is a Christian version of existentialism which is not to be confused with his own; though, for my part, I think it is insufficient and even incorrect to stress its Christian character, because I believe that many people are liable to adhere to it who do not regard themselves as Christians.²

²Ibid., p. 67.

Thus, Emerson is not a Christian so far as doctrine goes, but he may well be a kind of existentialist because of his emphasis upon the how of religious appropriation.

While this how admittedly constitutes a very elusive element—one which, as Kierkegaard says, defies all direct
together with the promptings of Angst, stems from a
dissatisfaction with doctrines qua doctrines and an in-
tense longing to realize a truth that is synonymous with
living. The great choice of the existentialists and Emerson
derives its validity not from what is chosen, but how
it is chosen. The problem of evil is not a matter of
solving an intellectual puzzle, but of relating oneself
to concrete evils in a true way. The point of "Compen-
sation" is not so much the problem of whether a system of
compensations does exist, as it is of relating oneself
truly to the principle of compensation itself. Other
examples might be adduced, but the heart of the matter,
I believe, is clear. The one element which does most to
make Emerson a blood brother of the Christian existential-
ists is the primacy of that mysterious yet real thing we
call the how or the spirit of belief.

Nor does one have to be an out and out Christian or
an atheist in order to qualify as an existentialist. The
modern existentialists themselves think that the custom-
ary division of existentialism into theistic and atheistic,
or Christian and atheistic, is grossly oversimplified.
The pagans of old had religions which, while far from being
Christian, enabled their sincere adherents to achieve
existential truth. In this connection, Kierkegaard ap-
parently considers Socrates the first existentialist, and
Chapter VII. The Primacy of the Religious How

The foregoing considerations have indicated clearly that a veritable chasm separates Emerson from the Christian existentialists on matters of Christian doctrine. But lest we should lose sight of what is peculiarly and distinctively existential, it must be remembered that the what of the belief is subordinate to the how of the belief. As Kierkegaard says, philosophers and theologians argue the objective truth of doctrines, the what; rarely do they consider the fact that an individual must relate himself truly to the truest doctrine if the latter is to have any real significance in his life. The indifferent Christian, the fanatical, the hypocritical, etc., may all have the true doctrine, but this intellectual advantage has not been converted into an inwardness that results in a revivified personality; in other words, so far as practical or existential truth is concerned, they wind up with exactly nothing. Truth pertains to how one believes and how one lives. Truth is a dynamic Way, not a doctrine.

The primacy of this way, this how, has run like a single theme through all the preceding chapters. It is the principal point of this dissertation and underlies everything else. What I have called anti-intellectualism,
various other explanations have been forthcoming. Of Emerson's position there can be no doubt; he was not in the least vague on this point; everyone, even man on gibbets and in brothels, is on his way back to the Good and the True, for the most generous sentiment is always the truest. Emerson disliked intensely "this eastern monarchy of a Christianity, which indolence and fear have built." Apparently he thought that exclusiveness and fear went hand in hand. For him, either all men were saved, or there was no God. Even the dear old Devil might finally "take a thought and mend."
of well-doing and daring, and he had little use for any kind of exclusiveness based on theology.

The problem which Emerson's position brings up is one which has concerned many Christians—and many non-Christians—namely, whether Christianity is a religion of exclusiveness. The previously quoted passage from Reidar Thomte, for instance, explicitly excludes from salvation those who do not bring themselves to a sense of sin. Obviously this qualification alone will exclude quite a few: what happens to them is not quite clear in any of the existentialists. For example, the adjective "divine" has been applied to Plato and "blessed" to Spinoza, yet neither of these men can be considered saved in the Christian sense. Their virtues are, in Emerson's words, nothing but "splendid sins" unless they wear the Christian name.

In the previous chapter we remarked Emerson's harshness in conceiving of individual souls as being lost in the Over-Soul, but in all fairness it should be pointed out that Christianity is equally hard if it excludes from salvation all those who do not qualify as Christians—or even if it excludes the veriest sinners. It is simply a question of where the callousness is applied, in this world or in the next. A consideration of this kind seems to have called Universalism into being, and so deeply have thoughtful Christians been distressed by the problem that
end all requir ing of wonders, are profane.18


That is Emerson's position, that morality is the summit of religion, that ethics is the sovereign concern, and that the moral sentiment is the Divine in man.

It follows of course that he did not consider Christianity to be the truth, as do our existentialists; rather, it was one more partial—though the greatest—expression of the one religion. And here we encounter his third objection, the exclusiveness of Christianity. Like William Blake he holds that all religions are one, being different manifestations of the same truth, which all have local peculiarities and exaggerations. Of Christianity he says,

Christianity... in its purified and primitive state, makes one with the moral code. They cast mutual light and honour on each other. The doctrine of immortality, the grand revelation of Christianity, illuminates and ennobles the existence of man.19

19 Emerson. Journals. Vol. II, p. 120.

There is for him no separating the Christian Revelation from the revelations of other religions, the Hindu or Stoic, nor even from the private revelations vouchsafed to each individual by the moral sentiment. He declared that there is and has been only one religion, the religion
than those who insist on the God of Revelation. And this is a capital point.

Let me suggest that the Son of God, if he listens from on high to the feeble efforts of his mortal ministers, may more approve the piety which finds the original foundation of his Father's law complete and competent, than that which adds awkward abutments to the work of Omniscience from the second dispensation. 17


What Emerson's refusal comes to at last is the assertion that ethics is the highest manifestation of religion, that, properly seen, ethics is religion. We might observe, in addition, that for Emerson ethics had a much deeper signification than either the orthodox preacher or the sociologist usually gives it. This seems to have been one of the few subjects which could rouse him to some anger, and we find him several times lashing out at those who sneer at a religion of "mere morality." It was in his eyes equivalent to saying "poor God."

If we might characterize Christian religiosity as "other-worldly," we might equally call Emerson's, with its emphasis upon ethics, "this-worldly." Indeed, he says so in his reply to the objecting missionary.

I answer: Other world! there is no other world. God is one and omnipresent; here or nowhere is the whole fact. The one miracle which God works everywhere is in Nature, and imparting himself to the mind. When we ask simply, 'What is true in thought? what is just in action?' it is the yielding of the private heart to the Divine mind, and all personal preferences,
of the 18th century; he seems to have retained a certain deistic taste for intelligibility. I think he might have held disputes on the paradoxical religiousness in much the same light as he regarded the differences between Unitarianism and Trinitarianism.

Will the disputes upon the Nature of God, upon Trinitarianism and Unitarianism, never yield to a purer pursuit and to practical inquiry? It is possible, for all we know to the contrary, that God may exist in a threefold Unity; but if it were so, since it is inconceivable to us, he would never have revealed to us such an existence which we cannot describe or comprehend. Infinite Wisdom established the foundations of knowledge in the mind, so that twice two could never make anything else than four. As soon as this can be otherwise, our faith is loosened and science abolished. Three may be one, and one three. 15


With the same uncompromising rationalism he says,

I conceive that the Creator addresses his messages to the minds of his children, and will not mock them by acting upon their moral character by means of motives which are wild and unintelligible to them. 16


The Christian might say that passages such as these simply show Emerson's lack of understanding, but it is not my business here to argue the two; it is sufficient to show the ground of his discontent.

Emerson goes on to express his view that those who hold by the God of Nature are closer to Christ's spirit.
emphasis which made of him a "wart and a wen." The Christian Fall did not inspire, and the Christian sense of sin showed God "out" of him—which latter is exactly the case as Kierkegaard puts it. Emerson's God was immanent.

That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great stoical doctrine, Obey thyself. That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen. There is no longer a necessary reason for my being. Already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creep over me, and I shall dease forever.13


Emerson's second major break is his refusal of the dogmas of the Incarnation, the Redemption, and Revelation. Here again Unitarianism may have influenced him. To him these dogmas implied the same Manichaeism, or at least a faulty workmanship on God's part. He declares,

But that the administration of eternity is fickle; that the God of Revelation hath seen cause to repent and botch up the ordinances of the God of Nature—I hold it not irreverent, but impious in us to assume.14


It is clear that in the very deepest sense he was a Rationalist, and that he refused to set aside Reason in order that the Paradox might bestow itself. It may be surprising to say it, but Emerson remained in many ways a true child
"It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man." \(^{11}\) This Fall constitutes a statement of condition, as does the Christian, but again the sense of sin is lacking. "Exist" in this passage means literally coming into self-consciousness, a self-consciousness which separates the soul from its Divine source, disrupting the original unity and harmony. It implies what is explicitly stated by Plotinus:

What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the Father, God, and though members of the Divine and entirely of that world to ignore at once both themselves and It?

The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into birth, in the desire for self-ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion; thus they were hurried down the wrong path, and drifting further and further, came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine. \(^{12}\)


This is indeed the Fall Emerson speaks of, but he, like Plotinus, turns away from that sin which would seem to be an inevitable part of any Fall. Perhaps he felt it an unprofitable matter; perhaps he disliked the usual form of the Christian dogma; certainly he disliked the Christian
pure malignity can exist. Even in little anecdotes he delights in bringing the point out.

Dr. Hedge tells us that the Indian asked John Eliot, "Why God did not kill the devil?" One would like to know what was Eliot's answer.9

We may doubt if Eliot found an answer, for the simple savage with the profundity of simple minds hit the point of the matter immediately. Kierkegaard's answer is in its way consistent: that evil or sin can be entertained only as a paradox to thought. God is omnipotent and sin is a reality, yet God is not responsible for it. Thus we have Emerson saying of Swedenborg, who, as the one Christian among the Representative Men, is of particular interest here:

Swedenborgianism is one of the many forms of Manichaemism. It denies the omnipotence of God or pure spirit.10

Swedenborg was oppressed by a sense of sin, but Emerson, like Socrates, held that a man does not willingly choose the evil, or choose to be in ignorance by refusing to understand.

These considerations bring us to the question of how much of a Fall Emerson's man sustained, for a Fall he has.
depravity of man and (so far as he considered abstract
questions important) with its insistence upon the Unity
rather than the Trinity of God. By and large, his work
shows an amazing consistency in these denials.

It was earlier remarked that Emerson considered the
intrusion of any elements outside of God's plan to be
Manichaeism, and this, I think, is his basic objection
to the orthodox dogma of sin. From a purely historical
point of view it is interesting to note that Manichaeism
--the belief in a struggle between two warring powers, a
God of good and a God of evil--was once the most serious
rival of the Christian Church, and that St. Augustine him­
self was an adherent for some years before his conversion
to Christianity. Apparently Emerson felt that a great
deal of Manichaeism had crept into the Christian Church,
even while the latter firmly denounced it as heresy. And
the totally evil will, the will which is sinful at heart,
seemed to him to posit another power outside of God--
which is exactly what some religions do posit.

This is scarcely a new problem. It has been the prob­
lem of theology for hundreds of years, the great insoluble
of how omnipotent goodness can remain omnipotent if it al­
allows of a rival power (the evil will) or remain good if it
takes the responsibility for it. In Emerson's Journals
one can see him again and again rejecting the idea that
there can be salvation only in and through Christ, or through a "hidden Christ" for those who have never heard of Him and even for some who have rejected Him. In their acceptance of the fundamental Christian dogmas, all three writers are alike, though there may be differences of emphasis, sometimes stemming from the differences in sects.

On his objections to traditional Christian theology Emerson expressed himself fully and clearly. Moreover, his criticisms have been made the subject of a scholarly article. I shall limit myself here to what seems to be the nub of his disagreement, centering as it does around three main points of doctrine: sin, the paradox of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, and the exclusive character of Christianity.

On the question of sin, there can be no doubt that Unitarianism had softened the harshness of Calvinism to such a degree that Emerson found it not at all difficult to cast off whatever lingering vestiges of sin remained. Critical as he was of the pallid intellectualism of Unitarianism, he agreed with its denial of the natural
category when they approach it too exclusively through the traditional and imperfect contrast between faith and reason, I may perhaps be pardoned a word of comment. . . .

The paradoxical is rooted in an entirely different antithesis, namely, that between God and man, between God's understanding of what human life ought to be, and man's. It makes its appearance only when the individual has become ethically mature, when he has been developed ethically and religiously to the point where there can be some question of his submitting himself to the divine in order to be radically transformed by the discipline of the relationship. In this conflict the individual's strength consists in his weakness, his victory in his defeat. The human, all-too-human understanding of life which he thus comes to renounce is no abstract intellectual function, but a concrete consciousness involving intellect, feeling and will. In other words, it is his reason as the expression for what he initially is, in contradistinction to what he strives in faith to become. Hence there exists indeed no paradox for faith in its perfection, but for the human individual who is in process of becoming the paradoxical cannot be avoided without arbitrarily limiting the spiritual process. Kierkegaard's insistence upon the paradoxical is a consequence of his deep-seated predilection for apprehending the spiritual life in process, and hence ethically, rather than aesthetically, in a foreshortened perspective, or altogether in static terms. 7


Marcel, whose writings seem more applied to the preliminary problem of reminding Christians that Pagan religiousness had great merit, does not dwell on the absurd or the Absolute Paradox, as Kierkegaard does. However, the "Mysteries" of the Catholic Church seem to serve somewhat the same purpose. Berdyaev, of course, stresses the paradoxical nature of Christianity, and declares too that
Thus, Emerson's religiosity would have been, for Kierkegaard, the Pagan religiosity, which while excellent in its way is not really a God-relationship.

Finally, it is the paradoxical, the absurd character of Christianity that Kierkegaard, like Pascal, stresses, and it is highly significant that it is this absurd quality that Emerson refuses. Christian faith involves an acceptance of the absurd. It has that in it which outrages reason (in practically every sense in which the word has ever been used), not merely as it is incomprehensible, but as it seems to go counter to the essence of rationality itself. Thus, the idea of God entering into time as an historical figure is an absurdity, as is the idea of redemption and revelation to a selected few. These things must be believed against understanding, must be appropriated as determinants of living, not as doctrines to be argued. A "leap" of faith is required. Far from arguing the matter, Kierkegaard retains Christian dogmatics in an honored place.

Of this concept or category of the absurd in Kierkegaard, Swenson says,

The various determinants of faith are by Kierkegaard concentrated in the single category of the absurd, since the movement of faith seems paradoxical to the ordinary consciousness from which faith emerges. The paradoxical is Kierkegaard's careful and precise development of a thought which the Greeks dimly shadowed forth as the divine madness (Plato's Phaedrus). Since even thoughtful readers may misunderstand this
That is to say, when all confidence in thyself or in human support, and also in God as an immediate apprehension, when every probability is excluded, when it is dark as in the dark night—it is in fact death that we are describing—then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith. This strength is stronger than the whole world, it possesses the powers of eternity, it is the Spirit's gift from God, it is thy victory over the world, in which thou dost more than conquer.5


How completely alien is this to the Emerson who admired strength for its own sake—even in thieves and pirates—whose affirmative bias did not lead him through the valley of the shadow and for whom much of Christian dogma was a "theologic cramp." Kierkegaard would have smacked too much of Emerson's Calvinist forbears.

How wide the divergence is may be seen from the following quotation, which might be considered as addressed exactly to Emerson's position. Says Kierkegaard,

Let the reader remember that a direct God-relationship is aesthetic and is really not a God-relationship, any more than a direct relationship to the absolute relationship, because the discrimination of the absolute has not been accomplished. In the religious sphere the positive is recognizable by the negative. The most exuberant sense of well-being in the delight of immanence, which exults in joy over God and the whole of existence, is a very lovable thing but not edifying and not essentially a God-relationship.6

It must be believed. Comprehension is coterminous with man's relation to the human, but faith is man's relation to the divine. How then does Christianity explain this incomprehensible? Quite consistently, in an equally incomprehensible way, by means of the fact that it is revealed. 4

Berdyaev tends to share Kierkegaard's position, but Marcel is very careful to retain what he calls the "intelligible background." As a Roman Catholic, he accepts revelation as beyond reason, but he seems to retain what Catholic theology calls "right reason," a human faculty which, when purified, does not clash with revelation.

Enough has already been cited to show how radically different Emerson's tenets are from these positions, but more remains. So emphatically does Kierkegaard insist that Christian faith is of a peculiarly distinctive kind, that he rejects much of what is commonly called faith—including Emerson's.

For we men are not so precise in the use of words, we often speak of faith when in the strictest Christian sense it is not faith. In every man, with differences due to natural endowment, a stronger or weaker spontaneity (immediacy) is inborn. The stronger, the more vitally powerful it is, the longer it can hold out against opposition. And this power of resistance, this vital confidence in oneself, in the world, in mankind, and (among other things) in God, we call faith. But this is not using the word in a strictly Christian sense. Faith is against understanding, faith is on the other side of death. And when thou didst die, or didst die to thyself, to the world, thou didst at the same time die to all immediacy in thyself, and also to thine understanding.
brought it into existence.

Precisely the concept by which Christianity distinguishes itself qualitatively and most decisively from paganism is the concept of sin, the doctrine of sin; and therefore Christianity also assumes quite consistently that neither paganism nor the natural man knows what sin is; yea, it assumes that there must be a revelation from God to make manifest what sin is. . .

What determinant is it then that Socrates lacks in determining what sin is? It is will, defiant will. The Greek intellectualism was too happy, too naive, too aesthetic, too ironical, too witty. . .to be able to get it sinfully into its head that a person knowingly could fail to do the good, or knowingly, with knowledge of what was right, do what was wrong. The Greek spirit proposes an intellectual categorical imperative.


Kierkegaard goes on to point out that the paradoxical character of Christian doctrine prevents its ever being understood. It is outside of understanding; it is, says Kierkegaard, repeating St. Paul, a stumbling block to the Jews and "foolishness" to the Greeks.

Socrates explains that he who does not do the right has not understood it; but Christianity goes a little further back and says, it is because he will not understand it, and this in turn is because he does not will the right. And in the next place, describing what properly is defiance, it teaches that a man does wrong although he understands what is right, or forbears to do right, although he understands what is right; in short, the Christian doctrine of sin is pure impertinence against man, accusation upon accusation; it is the charge which the Deity as prosecutor takes the liberty of lodging against man.

But can anyone comprehend this Christian doctrine? By no means—this too is Christian, and so is an offense.
fallen condition, which requires a rebirth of the whole personality; this rebirth the person cannot accomplish of himself, for he is completely separated from God. The intervention of God as Man is required, Jesus Christ as redeemer and pattern.

The consciousness of sin presumes some kind of fall or original sin which man incurs simply by the fact of being born. Sin is paradoxical in that a man could scarcely be held accountable for his own birth, yet, according to Kierkegaard—and most Christian theology—it is precisely his existence that constitutes his sin. The more fully he realizes this fact, the more deeply religious his life becomes. On this matter of the Fall of Man, each of the existentialists seems to be influenced by the particular sect he belongs to. Thus, Kierkegaard, as a Lutheran, considers the Fall a deep one, though he does not go to the Calvinist length of total depravity. Marcel, as a Roman Catholic, takes a middle position and does not share Kierkegaard's somewhat morbid emphasis on sin. For Berdyaev the Fall is perhaps lightest of all, since he adopts the view of the Orthodox Church.

According to Kierkegaard, it is sin that marks the decisive difference between paganism and Christianity. For the pagan, sin literally did not exist; Socrates had his "ignorance," but he did not have sin; Christianity
After the Pagan religiousness has been established, Kierkegaard—who has a deep respect for it and insists that it must come first—sees the consciousness of sin and the dread of guilt as being the essential characteristics of Hebraic-Christian thought.

Precisely by this fact—its dread of guilt—Judaism is further advanced than Hellenism, and in this one can perceive the sympathetic factor in the relation of dread to guilt, which Judaism would not relinquish at any price for the sake of acquiring the lighter expressions of Hellenism: fate, luck, misfortune.

1Kierkegaard. The Concept of Dread. p. 93.

Speaking of sin as the differentiating factor in Kierkegaard's Religion B, Reidar Thomte says,

Religion A is universal. It knows the whole race as saved. Religion B is particularistic. The eternal happiness of each individual depends upon his relationship to a historical fact which requires time to be made known, and everyone who does not bind himself to this condition is eo ipso excluded.

Sin-consciousness, as distinguished from the guilt-consciousness of religion A, represents the breach with immanence, for by coming into being the individual has become another. Sin as such is not placed within immanence. From eternity the individual is not a sinner, but when the individual who is planned on the scale of eternity comes into the world, he becomes a sinner, and is thereby excluded from every communication with the eternal by means of immanence. Sin therefore is not a dogma or a doctrine, but the new existence medium.


Sin, in short, is a statement of condition, of a guilty,
Chapter VI. The God of Nature and the God of Revelation

At a certain point Emerson breaks sharply with the Christian existentialists on doctrinal questions. In fact, he can scarcely be called a Christian. In contrasting Emerson with the existentialists, I can think of no more illuminating essay than Matthew Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism," for just as the existentialists are Hebraic, so Emerson seems to be Greek. Arnold, like Kierkegaard, finds the essential difference to lie in the Hebraic concept of sin, which the Greeks did not have, being, as Arnold says, "very much at home in Zion." Emerson certainly preserved the Hebraic strictness of conscience which Arnold praised, but everything indicates that he too was at least moderately comfortable in Zion and on no account inclined to regard sin too seriously.

All in all, Emerson seems to embody what Kierkegaard calls the Pagan religiousness. The Danish writer, who had a categorical bent, sees the stages of life as the aesthetic or hedonistic stage, the ethical stage, and after the ethical two kinds of religious existence: the first he calls Religion A (Pagan) as exemplified possibly by Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics; the second is Religion B (Christian), the paradoxical religiousness.
but in the light of two such calamities, the worst be­reavements any man can suffer, one wonders if the tendency toward impersonality and coldness might not have received an added impetus. One might, like the hero of Conrad's *Victory* protect himself thereby from loss. This is nothing but a baseless conjecture, but his deathbed words are significant as the possible utterance of a man whose human ties come back poignantly.

With great difficulty Emerson tried to communicate something to Lidian, apparently a farewell. He seemed to remember his first son. "Oh that beautiful boy," he exclaimed.50

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And many lines in "Threnody" are too heartfelt to be feigned.

He lost something with his son.

The eager fate which carried thee
Took the largest part of me:
For this losing is true dying;
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning.
O child of paradise,
Boy who made dear his father's home,
In whose deep eyes
Men read the welfare of the times to come,
I am too much bereft.51

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And on that more human note it seems fitting to close.
But perhaps we have made too much of Emerson's coldness, his solitariness, his sometimes irritating self-sufficingness. He was capable of more than a belief in the survival of the fittest, though there can be no doubt that in organic evolution he found one more confirmation of his beliefs. It would be fairer to close on the opposite note, particularly since there are facts in his biography which suggest more human feeling than he is usually given credit for. One relation which needs more investigation is his love for his first wife, Ellen Tucker. That Ellen could inspire him to write love poetry voluminously while Lydia Jackson could not get a love letter from him is a significant fact. The continuous mention of Ellen in the journals, the naming of his daughter, the curious adding of the "n" to Lydia's name, all suggest a degree of passion surprising in the cold Yankee.49

49 The linguistic explanation of Emerson's preference for "Lidian" (cf. Dykema, K. W. "Why Did Lydia Jackson Become Lidian Emerson?" Amer. Speech, XVII (Dec., 1942), pp. 285-286.), to prevent the intrusive r between "Lydia" and "Emerson," does not preclude a psychological explanation.

doubtedly he felt something for Ellen which he never experienced again, and one may idly wonder if his view of communion might have been different had Ellen lived.

The other fact is the death of his first son. It is well known that he "grieved that he could not grieve,"
work, nor adopt another's facts. It is a main lesson of wisdom to know your own from another's. I have learned that I cannot dispose of other people's facts; but I possess such a key to my own as persuades me, against all their denials, that they also have a key to theirs. A sympathetic person is placed in the dilemma of a swimmer among drowning men, who all catch at him, and if he give so much as a leg or a finger they will drown him. They wish to be saved from the mischiefs of their vices, but not from their vices. Charity would be wasted on this poor waiting on the symptoms. A wise and hardy physician will say, Come out of that, as the first condition of advice.47


And there is some point in refusing sympathy here; on the psychological level alone the reader will recognize how excellently this thought echoes modern findings. Emerson, like the existentialists, sees in the life of truth, however barren, a transcending of Angst. Indeed he says it in "The Preacher" in existentialist terms:

The lessons of the moral sentiment are, once for all, an emancipation from that anxiety which takes the joy out of all life. It teaches a great peace. It comes itself from the highest place.48


And finally, he continually thrusts the reader away from him, saying in effect, "Go your own way. Do not take what I say seriously. Each must find his own truth in his own way." It is passages such as this which make one believe that Emerson has a permanently valid place.
James' term "tough-minded" in this connection. For this is the truth—as Emerson has experienced it—and whether it is the truth is for him less important than that he should abide by his experience and perception, deviating not one jot from the fact. It would have been so easy to soften the harsh outlines, to underplay the unpleasant, to let a false sentimentalism "pule and whine," but he did not. He announced the fact as he saw it, thus laying claim to that primary truthfulness which underlies all particular truths and pierces through the veil of illusion. Unpleasant as it may seem, the truth, he held, would at last vindicate itself, and though his report might be different from that of the existentialists, he is clearly like them in insisting that the spirit of truth is primary.

So we find him in the midst of these sad separating facts going back to his original anchors, faith, self-trust, the strictest honesty. We find him too, refusing sympathy to those who wish to be argued out of their doubts and assured that everything is all right. He will not refuse the unpalatable findings of the biologist, the physicist, or the chemist.

And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks. That need makes in morals the capital virtue of self-trust. We must hold hard to this poverty, however scandalous, and by more vigorous self-recoveries, after the sallies of action, possess our axis more firmly. The life of truth is cold and so far mournful; but it is not the slave of tears, contritions and perturbations. It does not attempt another's
the impersonal.

Never can love make consciousness and ascription equal in force. There will be the same gulf between every me and thee as between the original and the picture. The universe is the bride of the soul. All private sympathy is partial. Two human beings are like globes, which can touch only in a point, and whilst they remain in contact all other points of each of the spheres are inert; their turn must also come, and the longer a particular union lasts the more energy of appetency the parts not in union acquire.45


Even more illuminating is a statement of conditions in his own household.

Most of the persons whom I see in my own house I see across a gulf. I cannot go to them nor they come to me. Nothing can exceed the frigidity and labor of my speech with such. You might turn a yoke of oxen between every pair of words; and the behavior is as awkward and proud.46


It might have been experiences of this sort which caused him to declare rather bitterly that one ought to treat people "as though they were real. Perhaps they are."

It seems then that the communion of the existentialists has more warmth, more compassion, more humanity; Emerson has more skepticism and less compassion; he scarcely deserves the title of optimist at this point, for he presents one of the bleakest optimism that ever chilled a tender heart, and one is forcibly reminded of William
of all in Emerson is that this arch-individualist should lose his uniqueness in the impersonal, the pantheistic God. For if pantheism is unfriendly to egotism and thereby liberates true personality, it is equally unfriendly to personality as the unique, the individual, the unrepeatable, which latter the existentialists stress again and again. Pantheism seemingly has its price, namely, that if it destroys egotism, it also destroys other Egos, so that one winds up communing not with people but with the impersonal. The following passage indicates that Emerson saw what he was losing, but it is from the early journals and not at all representative of his later position.

'T is not in man to thank the philosopher that merges his selfish in the social nature. 'T was a foolish vanity in the Stoic to talk in this wise. It suggested or else grew out of that primeval dogma of the Mundane Soul. No man loves it; the meanest loses more than he gains by parting with his identity to make an integral atom of the Whole. Nor perhaps need we dread anything. If any one feeling is positive, it is personal accountability. I know that I exist, but the age and the Universe are alike abstractions of my own mind, and have no pretensions to the same definitive certainty. 44


For Emerson there is at last an unbridgeable gap between persons. One needs only to read "Experience" or "Illusions" to see how deeply he held this view and how exactly it complemented the belief that all sympathy should be universal, i.e., a union of the personal in
is a rare one. Say what they will of society, the men of
individualism are solitary.

But the necessity of solitude is deeper than we have said, and is organic. I have seen many a phi-
losopher whose world is large enough for only one person. He affects to be a good companion; but we are still surprising his secret, that he means and needs to impose his system on all the rest. The de-
termination of each is from all the others, like that of each tree up into free space. 'T is no wonder, when each has his whole head, our societies should be so small. Like President Tyler, our party falls from us every day, and we must ride in a sulky at last. Dear heart! take it sadly home to thee,—there is no cooperation. We begin with friendships, and all our youth is a reconnoitring and recruiting of the holy fraternity they shall combine for the salvation of men. But so the remoter stars seem a nebula of united light, yet there is no group which a telescope will not resolve; and the dearest friends are separated by impassable gulfs. The cooperation is involuntary, and is put upon us by the Genius of Life, who reserves this as a part of his prerogative. 'T is fine for us to talk; we sit and muse and are serene and complete; but the moment we meet with anybody, each becomes a fraction.43


These are sad words; one might think that man became whole in society, but for Emerson each becomes a fraction. One wonders, if Emerson had pushed his individualism even fur-
ther, would he have come full circle back into society? The trouble may arise, not from too much individualism but from too little. I suspect that this would have been Emerson's diagnosis.

But, speaking of individualism, the strangest paradox
entirely accounted for on the basis of the difference between the 19th and the 20th centuries.

It is a commonplace that Emerson struck many people as being cold and that he recognized the fact of his coldness himself. In the essay "Love" he says,

I have been told that in some public discourses of mine my reverence for the intellect has made me unjustly cold to the personal relations. But now I almost shrink at the remembrance of such disparaging words. For persons are love's world, and the coldest philosopher cannot recount the debt of the young soul wandering here in nature to the power of love, without being tempted to unsay, as treasonable to nature, aught derogatory to the social instincts. For though the celestial rapture falling out of heaven seizes only upon those of tender age, and although a beauty overpowering all analysis or comparison and putting us quite beside ourselves we can seldom see after thirty years, yet the remembrance of these visions outlasts all other remembrances, and is a wreath of flowers on the oldest brows. But here is a strange fact;...42


And off he goes, not on love, but on the nature of remembrance like another Proust.

In all his writing the bias is away from others, and one somehow has the feeling that without this bias his native strength would be lost. It may be that at last there is no opposition between individualism and communion, and certainly Emerson declares—as do the others—that real communion can exist only between real individuals, decisive personalities as Kierkegaard calls them, but the combination
takes place; he is you and you are he; then is a teaching, and by no unfriendly chance or bad company can he ever quite lose the benefit. But your propositions run out of one ear as they ran in at the other.  


There can be little doubt that Emerson conceived of true communion essentially as the existentialists conceive it, but it is equally certain that he fails of the degree to which Berdyaev and Marcel carry it. As far as he went (to put it smugly) he was solid, but the feeling of real warmth, of what one might call the reality of human affection is not often there. His communion is a bit too cold and academic. Like Kierkegaard he was a lone man, though temperamentally so unlike otherwise. Like Kierkegaard too he is a man of faith preeminently, and one may idly wonder if his compensation is not at work here, if the powerful apprehension of and expression of individual faith does not usually attenuate the feeling for communion. It is perhaps significant that both Kierkegaard and Emerson are the two arch-individualists and also the most powerful writers qua writers of the four. Beside them, both Berdyaev and Marcel seem lacking in expressive fire-power, but at the same time a little more human, a little more humane. Neither Emerson's Ego nor Kierkegaard's has a social origin, and I do not think this fact can be
ordinary education often labors to silence and obstruct. The mind is one, and the best minds, who love truth for its own sake, think much less of property in truth. They accept it thankfully everywhere, and do not label or stamp it with any man's name, for it is theirs long beforehand, and from eternity. The learned and the studious of thought have no monopoly of wisdom. Their violence of direction in some degree disqualifies them to think truly. [Italics mine] We owe many valuable observations to people who are not very acute or profound, and who say the thing without effort which we want and have long been hunting in vain. The action of the soul is oftener in that which is felt and left unsaid than in that which is said in any conversation. It broods over every society, and they unconsciously seek for it in each other. We know better than we do. We do not yet possess ourselves, and we know at the same time that we are much more. I feel the same truth how often in my trivial conversation with my neighbors, that somewhat higher in each of us overlooks this by-play, and Jove nods to Jove from behind each of us. 

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Highly significant is the fact that Emerson conceives of communion (and true communication) as something quite transcending words, a decidedly existential position. Like Kierkegaard, he says that no teaching, for example, can take place until both master and pupil share the same condition; both partake of something greater than either. Communion is between souls, not, as a superficial intellectualism would have it, between minds.

The same reality pervades all teaching. The man may teach by doing, and not otherwise. If he can communicate himself he can teach, but not by words. He teaches who gives, and he learns who receives. There is no teaching until the pupil is brought into the same state or principle in which you are; a transfusion
in which he describes how a mythical pundit spoke to him in a dream.

He also said, that the doctrine of Pantheism or the Omnipresence of God would avail to abolish the respect of circumstance, or the treating of all things after the laws of time and place, and would accustom men to a profounder insight. Thus Hospitality, he said, was an external fact. . . the pure in heart, having nothing to hide, are the most hospitable, or keep always open house.39


What is significant here, aside from the obvious instrumentalism, is the almost involuntary association of pantheism with hospitality or communion. Pantheism tends to unite people, to make for a world of subjects.

Oddly enough, or perhaps not so oddly, some of the most striking observations on communion occur in "The Over-Soul." "Men descend to meet," says Emerson, and the following passage suggests how essential it is that they must ascend or break through to commune.

One mode of the divine teaching is the incarnation of the spirit in a form,--in forms, like my own. . . But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all. Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God. And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. . . There is a certain wisdom of humanity which is common to the greatest men with the lowest, and which our
vantage point of pantheism, the merit which Emerson saw in the latter—as concept—becomes even clearer. For pantheism destroys egotism and paves the way for conceiving communion as the existentialists conceive it, as union through and in God; the fact that pantheism tends equally to destroy the uniqueness of personality we must also bear in mind for later attention. But we are now in a better position to understand why Emerson, instead of speaking of my soul, should speak always of the soul and declare moreover that there is one soul common to all men. However vague or pantheistic this may be, it clearly leaves no room for egotism, and one is forced to see in Emerson an instrumentalism of ideas which uses concepts. It is true that Emerson is a pantheist, in theory, but far more important is the fact that he uses pantheism to convey the transcending of egotism; we must distinguish between pantheism as a statement of the objective nature of things and pantheism used to put one in the proper spiritual attitude. It is the familiar distinction between the what and the how.

Thus, pantheism was for Emerson not only a means of transcending the Ego by seeing God in Nature, but a means of understanding communion between people as union in God. Pantheism, for him, was friendlier to the inclination of the spirit. There is a curious passage in the journals
While I am not denying that Emerson is a pantheist, it seems to me that these considerations add a whole new dimension to the problem of theism vs. pantheism. The latter is a problem for thought, and, thanks to the existentialists, that fact alone is enough to arouse our suspicions; quarrels between rival metaphysical or theological views are usually not existential problems and the continual danger attending the discussion of existential problems is to transfer them to the realm of the intellectual.

How utterly inconceivable Emerson held the Over-Soul to be can be seen in this passage, which has, incidentally, all the earmarks of the so-called negative theology.

The sovereignty of this nature whereof we speak is made known by its independency of those limitations which circumscribe us on every hand. The soul circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes time and space. The influence of the senses has in most men overpowered the mind to that degree that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul. The spirit sports with time,--

"Can crowd eternity into an hour,
Or stretch an hour to eternity."38


In the light of what is inconceivable, it seems rather pointless to argue conceptions.

If now we approach the fact of communion from the
Well, scholarship demands that we compare thoughts, but we might remember Emerson's warning that we are struck blind in the comparing. Conceptually speaking, the difference between a pantheistic God and a theistic God is simply that one will fit in a four-foot box called Nature and the other is a person outside of the box. Neither of these conceptions—being spatialized—arouses much reverence, and the essential fact, after all, about God is that one should reverence Him. I suggest in this connection that Emerson was an excellent existentialist in declaring that it is far more important to entertain the right attitude toward God than to hold the right conception of Him. Kierkegaard himself declares in the Postscript that the savage who prays truly to an idol is more in the truth than the Christian who prays irreverently to the true God. The essential thing, for Emerson and, I believe, for the existentialists, is to get rid of all spatial representations, and if one analyzes what is meant by theism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, etc., he will find that he cannot possibly think them except in spatial terms. Possibly the highest reverence contents itself with saying that God is inconceivable.
Even if we agree in general with what I have just said, it is true that, if thought works along these lines, it may be in danger of arriving finally at a de-personalized conception of being; it might look in the end uncommonly like a more or less disguised pantheism. We shall see more clearly as we proceed why there can be no foundation for this fear if we look at it from the point of view I have taken up. But it is well to reject once and for all and in the strongest terms, the idea that in order to avoid pantheism it is necessary to cling to the idea of a human person as rigidly circumscribed as possible. Here again is one of those pictorial representations, which are not only falsifications; they tend to a crude materialism. We have opposed them on countless occasions, and we shall probably again have occasion to point out the truth, which is that if we start from this sort of notion, which is that of ego-centric commonsense, God cannot be thought of in any real way; or at least He can be thought of only as an idol and not as a spirit.


This is a significant passage, for, quite obviously, Marcel is stating exactly the objection Emerson had to most forms of theism. For Emerson, God could not be thought of in any real way, and the student of his work must be struck by how often he says that to conceive God as a person is the rankest impiety. God is the uncontainable.

Never compare. God is our name for the last generalization to which we can arrive, and, of course, its sense differs today and tomorrow. But never compare your generalization with your neighbor's. Speak now, and let him hear you and go his way. Tomorrow, or next year, let him speak, and answer thou not. So shall you both speak truth and be of one mind; but insist on comparing your two thoughts; or insist on hearing in order of battle, and instantly you are struck with blindness, and will grope and stagger.
more certain immortality becomes, not as the promise of continued duration but as the concomitant of that eternity which lies outside of time.

Of immortality, the soul when well employed is incurious. It is so well, that it is sure it will be well. It asks no questions of the Supreme Power. The son of Antiochus asked his father when he would join battle. "Does thou fear," replied the king, "that thou only in all the army wilt not hear the trumpet?" 'T is a higher thing to confide that if it is best we should live, we shall live,--'t is higher to have this conviction than to have the lease of indefinite centuries and millenniums and æons. Higher than the question of our duration is the question of our deserving. Immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in future must be a great soul now. It is a doctrine too great to rest on any legend, that is, on any man's experience but our own. It must be proved, if at all, from our own activity and designs, which imply an interminable future for their play. 35


To put it in existential terms, it is not the quantitative duration which is the question, but the qualitative eternity manifested by the moral sentiment.

It is, I believe, in the light of this imprisoning egotism that we must approach Emerson's pantheism and his sense of communion. Earlier it was remarked how Marcel looked upon the words my being and my soul as being highly suspicious terms from a spiritual point of view. They smack of selfness, and Marcel makes so determined an effort to avoid the egotism in them that he offers this apology:
man is a lover of truth. There is no pure lie, no pure malignity in nature. The entertainment of the proposition of depravity is the last profligacy and profanation. There is no scepticism, no atheism but that. Could it be received into common belief, suicide would unpeople the planet. It has had a name to live in some dogmatic theology, but each man's innocence and his real liking of his neighbor have kept it a dead letter.34

34Ibid., p. 278.

No wonder Hawthorne and Melville disliked him. An unresolvable opposition reigns here. For Hawthorne—himself much closer to the Christian existentialists in this respect—piety almost demands sin and depravity. For Emerson piety demands that absolute depravity be impossible. Whichever view one may hold on the matter, he cannot but see a new profundity in Plato when the latter has Socrates continually ask that apparently easiest of questions: "Does a man knowingly choose the evil?" The Christian existentialists say yes; Emerson, being a Greek, says no.

But, regardless of its origin or its connection with depravity, how is this egotism, this selfness, to be transcended? Not by any doctrine of immortality separated from its spiritual affinities, Emerson thinks. In its proper state the soul does not give way to a "low curiosity" or bargain for its private benefit. Paradoxically, the more it rises to this plane of true personality, the
of future retributions, for selfishness is its own hell.

As every man at heart wishes the best and not inferior society, wishes to be convicted of his error and to come to himself,—so he wishes that the same healing should not stop in his thought, but should penetrate his will or active power. The selfish man suffers more from his selfishness than he from whom that selfishness withholds some important benefit. What he most wishes is to be lifted to some higher platform, that he may see beyond his present fear the transalpine good, so that his fear, his coldness, his custom may be broken up like fragments of ice, melted and carried away in the great stream of good will.33


Like the Greek that he essentially was, Emerson does not think that a man willingly shuts himself off from truth. The demonic man of the existentialists, the man who is "sick" and prefers sickness, who does evil for the sake of evil, in short, man depraved and sinful, does not exist for Emerson; he sides with Socrates and Plato in holding wickedness to be ignorance. For an age whose tastes run to Dostoevsky, Melville, Kafka, and Kierkegaard, with their predominant blackness of background, this view must indeed seem a blindness to "the vision of evil." Nevertheless, it is integral to Emerson, and he held it with a consistency which has rarely been remarked. There is no completely evil man, no man in whom evil does not derive all its power from a perversion of good.

Nothing shall warp me from the belief that every
"No man was permitted to call Goethe brother:" here is Emerson at his epigrammatic best. We must note too that the egotist hides himself; he does not reveal his nature; basically, egotism is a lack of that simple honesty which underlies "Self-Reliance." We are inclined to wonder how many writers and philosophers come under this most incisive of criticisms, namely that they hide themselves.

It is characteristic of Emerson that he did not exclude himself from the vice; indeed, who could? Speaking of the theory and the practice of humility, he says,

"The creature is subject to vanity." There is none almost who has not this misleading egotism. The efficient men are efficient by means of this Flanders horse... They all gravitate to cities... Jesus was grand where he stood, and let Rome and London dance after Nazareth. But the thinkers or litterateurs of humility are not humble. Thus Alcott, Thoreau, and I know the use and superiority of it, but I cannot praise our practice.31


Of his own group of elevated spirits he relates this not so elevated story.

We had a story one day of a meeting of the Atlantic Club, when the copies of the new number of the Atlantic being brought in, every one rose eagerly to get a copy, and then each sat down, and read his own article.32

32Ibid., p. 243.

The selfishness which imprisons man in his ego Emerson sees to be its own retribution; for him there is no need
consistent.

This goitre of egotism is so frequent among notable persons that we must infer some strong necessity in nature which it subserves; such as we see in the sexual attraction. The preservation of the species was a point of such necessity that nature has secured it at all hazards by immensely overloading the passion, at the risk of perpetual crime and disorder. So egotism has its root in the cardinal necessity by which each individual persists to be what he is.29


For Emerson existence is God's work and must bear his mark even in its worst manifestations.

For Emerson egotism is the God-given individuality gone astray, taken airs to itself and forgetful of its source; for him individualism is sin only when the person conceives that he is something of himself, forgets that humility and dependence upon God by which true personality arises. This is his principal stricture of Goethe, much as he admired the German writer.

But also that other vicious subjectiveness, that vice of the time, infected him also... This subtle element of egotism in Goethe certainly does not seem to deform his compositions, but to lower the moral influence of the man. He differs from all the great in the total want of frankness. Who saw Milton, who saw Shakspeare, saw them do their best, and utter their whole heart manlike among their brethren. No man was permitted to call Goethe brother. He hid himself, and worked always to astonish, which is egotism, and therefore little.30

primary separating fact; Berdyaev and Marcel both see the transcending of egotism as the basic step in achieving communion. We might enquire then what part egotism plays in Emerson's thought, an enquiry made doubly interesting by the fact that "Self-Reliance" is sometimes construed as the rankest egotism.

Now egotism—or, if we put it in theological terms, pride—is an indubitable fact, so much so, that one sometimes wonders how certain schools of psychology could in the face of it deny the existence of a "self." Self fairly shrieks itself out of all our actions and words, and it must require a rare degree of abstraction to be able to deny it. The question arises, for a mind like Emerson's, why does egotism exist? That is, what is its place in God's plan? If I understand Christian Existentialism correctly, it has no place in God's plan, but constitutes a part of that original sin which brought man into existence; in short, man sins because he exists or exists because in some unfathomable fashion he has sinned, presumably prior to existence. Existence and its concomitant egotism cannot be separated from sin.

There are a few faint echoes of this thought in Emerson, and certainly egotism is for him the cardinal sin, but he differs from the existentialists in that egotism does have a place in God's plan. He is eminently
is not a matter of disputing propositions, but of a living belief which employs all the powers of the person; only after he has lived it does he grasp it.

Little need be said on Emerson's dislike of that kind of communion and fellowship which rests on objectification. He had no feeling for the togetherness which springs from communal enterprises, custom, or slogans of brotherhood. He felt sympathetic to the Fourier Socialists, but in addition to the fact that he felt that Fourier had left "life" out of his calculations, Emerson would certainly have made a sorry kind of Socialist. Thoreau carried this bias to such an extreme that Emerson characterized him as being in his own person a "walking refutation" of Socialism.

It would be unfair to accuse Emerson of lacking any sense of communion at all, particularly when one thinks of the countless wise and subtle observations on human relations scattered through the essays. Nor can the love and veneration he inspired in so many of his friends be lightly discounted. It must have had some real foundation.

Possibly the best way to get at Emerson's concept of communion is to approach it through that original sin of egotism which the existentialists make so much of. Kierkegaard declares that egotism is the cause of Angst, the
others is consecrated and inwardly dedicated; it is protected against suicide and despair, which are interrelated and alike, because it knows that it is not its own, and that the most legitimate use it can make of its freedom is precisely to recognise that it does not belong to itself; this recognition is the starting point of its activity and creativeness. 27

27 Marcel. The Philosophy of Existence. p. 28.

The inseparable link between the basic ethical choice, the affirmation of life as a gift, and the communion between brothers who have a common Father is apparent here. Marcel calls it a recognition of a kind of "depth of reality" which the nihilist will never make.

It is rather important to ask ourselves how, or rather where, we are going to take our stand when we are faced with such a refusal to recognise life as a gift and therefore to acknowledge the metaphysical reality of sonship. It is pretty clear, at least, that we cannot simply condemn such refusals as infringing certain rules of morality, which we assert to be self-evident and beyond discussion; if we are to protest against this kind of nihilism, it can only be in the name of a sort of depth of reality which the nihilism refuses to recognise and, as it were, blots from view; it was just this very depth, in fact, that I was trying to make manifest in my essay Homo Viator. This deep reality, that nihilism ignores, has to make this same act of recognition and acknowledgement whose central importance for our thesis I have so often underlined. 28


Quite evidently Marcel is appealing to experience here, never to logic; the deep reality in the soul must answer to another reality and thereby make itself manifest. It
impossible to separate communion from the ethical choice, creativeness, and fidelity. One would do better to use Emerson's term and speak of spiritual affinities.

Personne—engagement—communauté—réalité: il y a la une sorte de chaîne de notions qui ne se laissent pas à proprement parler déduire les unes des autres—rien d'ailleurs de plus fallacieux que la croyance à la valeur de la déduction—mais qui se laissent saisir dans leur unité par un acte de l'esprit qu'il conviendrait de désigner non par le terme galvaudé d'intuition, mais par celui trop peu usité au contraire de synidèse, l'acte par lequel un ensemble est maintenu sous le regard de l'esprit.25

25 Marcel. Homo Viator. p. 27.

Only in love is mystery revealed, the mystery of self as well as of other.

Mais en fin de compte de telles précisions sont fallacieuses; quiconque a aimé sait bien que ce qu'il a aimé dans l'autre ne se laisse pas réduire à des qualités désignables—et précisément, ce mystère qui est moi-même, c'est ce qui en moi n'est révélé qu'à l'amour.26

26 Ibid., p. 182.

Like Berdyaev, Marcel finds the essential meaning and realization of intersubjectivity or communion to lie in the recognition of a common Father from whom all gifts, including life itself, flow. The attitude behind communion is religious, however little brought into consciousness.

Here at last can be brought together the various motifs and thematic elements which I have had to bring out one by one. In contrast to the captive soul we have described, the soul which is at the disposal of
come in time to possess the possessor.

La charité comme présence, comme disponibilité absolue. Jamais le lien avec la pauvreté ne m'était apparu aussi clairement. Posséder c'est presque inévitablement être possédé. 23


According to Marcel's distinction between the realm of being and the realm of having, charity lies in the former while the lust for possessions lies in the latter. The objectified consciousness, overcome by the categories of space and time, the world of "things," sees in charity only the dismal prospect of impoverishment and concludes that charity is all well and good for those who can afford it. But the truth, for Marcel, is paradoxical; charity enriches, is the work of a rich personality or a personality which has tapped the source of all benefit and knows that its proper function is to sow benefit.

...nous sommes donc ici dans un ordre où les catégories valables dans le monde des choses cessent complètement d'être applicables; catégories, il faut le voir, rigoureusement liées à la notion même d'objet. 24

24 Ibid., p. 99.

Marcel insists that the essential mystery behind communion or intersubjectivity, which is his later term, prevents any rationalization of the phenomenon. It is something which is lived, or "seized" by the spirit, and it is
person who is transparent or revealed. The former is concerned about himself, but in the wrong way. His concern stems from desire, the pleasure-pain principle, and desire is never directed toward moral integrity as such or toward salvation rightly apprehended.

Il faudrait montrer maintenant que l'objet du désir n'est jamais l'intégrité comme telle, que c'est toujours un mode du jouir, de même que l'objet de la crainte est un mode du pâtir. Mais le salut est sans doute au delà de cette opposition.  

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Concern therefore indicates something different from desire; it does not care about the Ego, but goes beyond it toward a transfiguring reality so that at its most authentic it may appear to be complete unconcern as the "Take no thought of what ye shall eat." Marcel says,

This shows that to be occupied with oneself is not so much to be occupied with a particular object as to be occupied in a particular manner. It must be noted that the contrary of this state is not a state of emptiness or indifference. The real contrast is rather between the being who is opaque and the being who is transparent.  

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When disponibilité reaches its maximum, it becomes charity, allowing of an almost infinite range of degree. The personality is then freed, revealed, realized. The opposite pole is the miserly clinging to possessions which
encumbered with himself. He cannot quite break through the husk of ego, he cannot transcend. He conceives that the trouble can be remedied by a greater self-concern, by securing advantages, by getting more things, but the valid movement is to cast aside the self.

L'être disponible s'oppose à celui qui est occupé ou encombré de lui-même. Il est au contraire tendu hors du soi, tout prêt à se consacrer à une cause qui le dépasse, mais qu'en même temps il fait sienne.19

19Ibid., p. 31.

By this movement the personality is revealed, a word one encounters frequently in all four writers; the language of paradox seems highly appropriate at this point, for the person may be said to discover himself in proportion as he loses himself; from the human point of view the person seems to create himself, but, religiously, he finds himself or receives himself from God. On this point an amazing likeness runs through all these writers so that we have Kierkegaard saying,

His self is, as it were, outside of him, and it has to be acquired, and repentance is his love for this self, because he chooses it absolutely out of the hand of the eternal God.20


The person who is not available is, in Marcel's language, opaque to himself and to others in contrast to the
is, the person to whom other people are objects (as for Sartre, who, Marcel declares, has no sense of communion on any possible level) might almost be said to disbelieve in the existence of the other person as person. He has no faith.

Nous pourrions dire encore, et du même point de vue, que je m'affirme comme personne dans la mesure où je crois réellement à l'existence des autres et où cette croyance tend à informer ma conduite. Qu'est-ce ici que croire? C'est réaliser ou encore affirmer cette existence en elle-même, et non pas seulement dans ces incidences par rapport à moi.18

18 Marcel. Homo Viator. p. 27.

There is visible here the underlying Emersonian position that the inner world is reflected in the outer; it is only insofar as one becomes himself (as essence or being) that the existence of others takes on reality, dignity, worth. But Marcel very wisely thinks it better to reverse the emphasis and say that only insofar as one really believes (and belief here must be a determinant of conduct) in the existence of others is his own existence revealed to him. A perfect compensation reigns here, so that one can understand why Emerson should say that all love is mathematically just. One finds the meaning of his own personality in other people.

Of the person who is incapable of disponibilité, Marcel says in most suggestive terms that he is occupied with or
my soul; instead, he speaks always of the soul or being. Is it possible that this was his way, not so much of preaching pantheism, as of avoiding the least shadow of egotism? We shall consider the problem later.

To introduce his thought (which he manages with the artistry of a Bergson) Marcel makes use of the term disponibilité best translated into English as availability—though still not exactly. In the meeting of two people the relationship may vary from complete availability to complete unavailability. Thus, if I seek help from someone, he may indicate—regardless of his words or deeds—by every subtle nuance of expression and tone that he is not really with me; he is unavailable, and this surely is a common experience. Another person, though he may do nothing for me in word or deed, may indicate just as certainly that he is available, that he understands in sympathy. Marcel puts it this way:

It will perhaps make it clearer if I say that the person who is at my disposal is the one who is capable of being with me with the whole of himself when I am in need; while the one who is not at my disposal seems merely to offer me a temporary loan raised on his resources. For the one I am a presence; for the other I am an object.17


It is by developing these two attitudes, familiar enough to everyone, to their extremes that Marcel tries to convey what true communion is like. The objectified person, that
Any opposition of love of man to love of God indicates for Berdyaev a faulty approach; the two become one in the spiritual life.

Gabriel Marcel, whose distinction between my being and my life underlies his thought, agrees with Berdyaev in thinking that the Ego has a social origin. Rather than starting with a consciousness of self, therefore, as do Kierkegaard and Emerson, he starts with the consciousness of others. In this way, he tries to avoid the egotism which lies in wait. He considers it unfortunate that we even have to use the terms my being or my soul at all, so susceptible are they to pejoration.

There is a sense in which it is literally true to say that the more exclusively it is I who exist, the less do I exist; and conversely, the more I free myself from the prison of ego-centrism, the more do I exist. It follows that it would be philosophically absurd to say that my being may be reached through my existence. To the ear of a metaphysician or of a man of spirituality, the words my being always have a suspicious sound. . .there is a danger of their [my being and my soul] degenerating into a sort of self-worship which has nothing in common with a religion worthy or the name; in fact, it is an extremely dangerous perversion of religion.16


This statement and Marcel's accompanying remarks on his apparent leaning toward pantheism will prove highly important in examining Emerson's thought. It is sufficient to remark here that Emerson never uses the terms my being or
Now we pass from the world of phantasms and non-being to the world of love, i.e. to the world of reality. Real love is always for the concrete and the individual. It is impossible to love the abstract and the general. Love always sees the loved one in God and in eternity through radiating its own gracious power. Love is creative life and an inexhaustible source of light, warmth and energy. The true purpose and meaning of love is not to help our neighbours, do good works, cultivate virtues which elevate the soul, or attain perfection, but to reach the union of souls, fellowship and brotherhood. Love is a two-term relation and presupposes the meeting of two, their communion and unity, and the formation of a third—fellowship and brotherhood.13

It can be clearly seen that Berdyaev's communion tends irresistibly toward the idea of union in a third—God. Love for one's fellowmen is essentially love for God, so that there can be no valid separation of the two; love for "the least of these" is love for God and love in God.

The meeting of one person with another always finds its fulfilment in a third. Two become a unity not through duality but through trinity in which they achieve their common entity.14

Berdyaev also retains a place for love of abstract values as being a dim presentiment of love for concrete realities.

Love of ideas and values, of truth, goodness and beauty, is merely the unconscious and imperfect expression of the love for God and the divine. One ought to love God more than man, and the love for God ought to give us strength to love man.15


inner life of their own.11

11Ibid., p. 84.

The fruition of communion lies in love, for Berdyaev, both the love that descends (compassion or caritas) and the love that ascends (eros).

There is another type of love—the love that descends, the love that gives and does not ask, love which is compassion and sympathy, caritas. Caritative love seeks nothing for itself. It gives of its abundance to another. Erotic love is union with another in God. Caritative love is union with another in the absence of God, in the darkness of the world. It is impossible to love everyone unless we use the word in the sense of caritas. Love is choice. You cannot compel yourself to love. But caritas, lovingkindness, compassion, are possible towards all men and are not linked with choice. While eros-love demands reciprocity, caritas-love does not demand it, and therein lie its riches and its power. And real eros-love includes caritas-love, compassionate love. The erotic love which knows no compassion and charity acquires a demonic character and torments man.12


It is of course the compassionate love which these writers chiefly stress, though not at all to the exclusion of erotic love; the former does not lessen the latter, but rather, strengthens it. Charity, the greatest of all virtues, represents for Berdyaev a height which Greek religious philosophy never quite reached and which only Christianity puts in its merited place. For in the world of charity or love reality finds its fulfillment; when the Ego is lost in compassion, the personality breaks through.
to grasp the symbolic character of Nature, but Berdyaev's emphasis is upon Spirit as it is manifested in other people. He explicitly warns against the temptation for man to identify himself in a kind of vague romanticism with Nature.

The romantic Ego, when confronted with a growing sense of human isolation, had sought to identify itself with the cosmos.9


Considering the likeness of their thought, it seems unlikely that he would have considered Emerson's symbolism merely the efforts of another "romantic Ego." But his bias is clearly social, as Emerson's was not.

Berdyaev holds that the person realizes true personality only in communion with other personalities.

When confronted with an object, the Ego remains solitary and self-sufficient; but in the presence of another Ego, which is also a Thou, it emerges from its solitude in an endeavour to achieve communion. The intuition of another Ego's spiritual life is equivalent to communion with it.10

10Ibid., p. 81.

Nor is this communion reserved only for human relationships. It may and does extend to the animal world.

It is an error to think that communion can only be a human relationship, that it is the attribute solely of human friendship. It is common to the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, which all enjoy an
itself it tends to emerge from its seclusion and to unite with the Other Self, with other Egos, with the Thou, with its fellowmen, with the divine world.  

Berdyaev believes that the Ego is social in its origin, that instead of Emerson's division of Nature and the Soul, the I-E and the NOT ME in Nature, we should begin with the Ego and other Ego's. Emerson attempted to transcend this division by taking Nature as the symbol of Soul, by a spiritual communion with the natural world—excluding the people in it, but his emphasis was on Nature and his bias a solitary one. It is interesting to note that Berdyaev also believes that Nature is to be apprehended as symbol, though he does not dwell on the subject. Take, for example, this statement:

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imperative to think as a man, which latter course throws man into his valid perspective.

Thus, the reality of a world of subjects is not, as the intellectual might think, the reality of a philosophical concept which mirrors reality; it is quite literally reality itself. One may know it only by entering into it, or, in Emerson's words, "so to be is the sole inlet of so to know." It is experience, not thought, fact, not theory, and only experience can be the judge.

In emerging from its seclusion, the Ego tends to realize itself in proportion as it transcends its own selfish limitations, that is, as it realizes more intensely its bond with other people; the dignity of others is the proclamation of dignity of self; where one is missing, the other will equally be missing. On this account then, true communion does not involve looking upon oneself as an instrument for social "doing good," and Thoreau had some justice in his remark that doing good was a profession which was overcrowded. Neither oneself nor another person can be solely an instrument for any temporal aim. Berdyaev declares:

To realise itself, the Ego must fulfil two conditions: firstly, it must never be merely an objective or social instrument; and secondly, it must always endeavour to transcend itself. In the process of transcending
love, when that pules and whines. 4


The existentialists too want the truth first. They want a communion which springs from within, consisting of a consciousness freed from ulterior motive and prompted by sympathy and love. They see all genuinely human relationship as a kind of "breaking through" to a plane where people are seen as human beings worthy of respect, as ends in themselves—not in abstract thought, but in concrete fact. There is no separating theory and practice here; where the practice does not exist, the theory has no life.

True communion, as the existentialists see it, consists of a continuous emergence of the ego into the real or subjective world, the noumenon, to use Kant's term. Thereby a world of subjects arises. To view other people as things merely, is to live in a shadowland akin to that depicted by Plato in the legend of the Cave in the Republic. It is a dehumanized, a devitalized world that the latter view presents, and this grotesqueness seems, in the existentialist opinion, to be reinforced by the prevailing hyper-intellectuality of modern thought; the thinking has been separated from the man and his living instead of being a function of that living. Thinkers think about man, thus making him an object, instead of remembering the far greater
cannot produce—the real article itself. And one might infer from Marcel's thought that there exists today a hypocrisy of social action as nauseating in its way as the religious hypocrisy it prides itself on having left behind.

The brotherhood that comes from within starts with honesty—and does not strain its own capacity. Communion among men is an excellent ideal, but if it is to have any inwardness there must be integrity there first. Why pretend to a love or compassion one does not feel? Why not be content with stating the truth and trust that thereby the real love may arise? It is this kind of inwardness that the existentialists desire in their communion, and it is this kind of integrity which Emerson set himself to expressing with an artistry which is difficult to match. This is the spirit behind those harsh lines,

I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways. If malice and vanity wear the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass? If an angry bigot assumes this bountiful cause of Abolition, and comes to me with his last news from Barbadoes, why should I not say to him, 'Go love thy infant; love thy wood-chopper; be good-natured and modest; have that grace; and never varnish your hard, uncharitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles off. Thy love afar is spite at home.' Rough and graceless would be such greeting, but truth is handsomer than the affectation of love. Your goodness must have some edge to it,—else it is none. The doctrine of hatred must be preached, as the counteraction of the doctrine of
more collectivised world that we are now living in, the idea of any real community becomes more and more inconceivable. Gustave Thibon, to whom I referred just now in connection with Nietzsche, had very good grounds indeed for saying that the two processes of atomization and collectivization, far from excluding each other as a superficial logic might be led to suppose, go hand in hand, and are two essentially inseparable aspects of the same process of devitalization.

To put it in quite general terms, and in simpler language than Thibon's, I would say that we are living in a world in which the preposition 'with'—and I might also mention Whitehead's noun, 'togetherness'—seems more and more to be losing its meaning;...3


Morality by slogan, brotherhood by decree, excellent terms indeed. A pity they do not represent anything. Marcel feels that they do not strike any vital chord. They lack inwardness. If there are no men who in their hearts do not feel that they are brothers, then no amount of cajolery, legislation, or coercion will ever produce that missing brotherhood. Like Emerson, Marcel believes that brotherhood starts with one brother, then perhaps two, then ten, and so on. The bond must come from within, not forged weakly from without by some conditioning technique or by legislation. The latter may achieve a hypocritical veneer of communion; it may produce "social consciences," though individual consciences do not seem to change much. It may produce all the forms, all the tokens, all the enlightened, fashionable mouthings; one thing it
possibility of creating true brotherhood by means of conditioning men or collectivising society. Communion may be brought about by manipulation. To these methods of achieving communion, the existentialists are unalterably opposed, as was Emerson. Men cannot achieve communion through outward means. Says Marcel, speaking specifically of family morality,

La multiplication des mots d'ordre, des slogans familiaux dans les discours officiels et dans la presse ne doit pas nous faire illusion. Rien là qui permette de croire à une conversion effective des intelligences et des cœurs: ce n'est certainement pas par des moyens d'essence publicitaire qu'on parviendra à atteindre le vouloir le plus foncier, le plus secret des individus.²


Of modern French education Marcel is very skeptical. He suspects that in the last analysis its results will be found to be "nothing."

In an even stronger vein, Marcel says that one of the great modern illusions is the belief that collectivising society will produce a sense of brotherhood. The truth is that in the collectivised society, people are farther apart than ever; at its worst, the inhabitants of such a society live in a perpetual atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and hate.

The truth of the matter is that, by a strange paradox and one which will not cease to exercise us during the course of these lectures, in the more and
The doctor who regards his patient as a specimen, the employer who regards the employee as another machine, the bureaucrat who sacrifices people to the state, the greedy calculator (in everyone) who sees in the new acquaintance nothing but a means to some end: these examples we might extend indefinitely and with infinite nuances of feeling. To objectified man, other people do not "exist" in the richest sense of the word. One thinks in this connection of the great novelists, Dickens particularly, with his genius for reaffirming the essential humanity which man's inhumanity outrages.

The Christian existentialists have tried to re-awaken the sense of a fundamental humanity in which every person qua person is felt to possess worth and dignity; he is to be known as subject rather than as object; Emerson, of course, in his time, preached Immanuel Kant's dictum, that every person is to be treated as an end in himself, never as a means. He warned that while the senses would make "things" of all persons, "If you leave out their heart, you shall lose your own."¹


The existentialists call attention to the fact that reliance upon technology—itslf an objectifying force—has curiously enough given rise to a strong belief in the
Chapter V. Communion

The existentialist term "objectification" perhaps becomes clearest when it is used as the opposite of communion, for the existentialists understand by the term the making of other people into "objects"—in the most literal sense. We have already noted their belief that modern man has received a great impetus toward objectification from the spread of technological thinking, but obviously the phenomenon is not new though the word is. A world of objectification is a world of estrangement, in which all sense of brothergood is dulled or lost; and in this sense, as Berdyaev declares, each person makes his own world. He may shut himself up in his own constricted ego like Emerson's Cain, who in all of God's resplendent creation "hears only the sound of his own footsteps;" or, he may break through to the level of love and communion.

Objectification covers a wide range of application. To look upon a human being as an object may be humorous, it may be grotesque, or it may be tragic; in any case, say the existentialists, the attitude strikes our deepest instincts as being fundamentally wrong. A person considered as object is a means to some end, never an end in himself.
I am not annoyed by receiving this or that superabundantly. I say to the Genius, if he will pardon the proverb, In for a mill, in for a million. When I receive a new gift, I do not macerate my body to make the account square, for if I should die I could not make the account square. The benefit overran the merit the first day, and has overrun the merit ever since. The merit itself, so-called, I reckon part of the receiving. 49

What Marcel calls the fundamental generosity underlying the creative life, the desire to create, to give, to dedicate oneself, is coexistent in all these writers with a sense of receiving. They do not extol their gift because they know it was never really theirs to give; they are simply passing on what God has given them. Only he can give much who is filled with the consciousness of having received much. The wise man, says Emerson, gives his good away as fast as he receives it; he beware of too much good staying in the hand. An interplay or dialectic exists between God and man, so that the creative life is a continual progress and not a station. Truth, as Emerson remarks, never is, but always is a-being. And what seems to animate this kind of life, to be its very pith and marrow, is the awareness, however dim, however unarticulated, of having received everything. This sense of indebtedness is a religious sentiment, and it makes very little difference toward what conception of God it is directed. On the conception of God Emerson said little; on the sentiment one should entertain toward God he said much; he is existential rather than intellectual, and no sentiment finds such continual expression from him as this realization of having received everything. Only the grateful man can create.

All I know is reception; I am and I have; but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not. I worship with wonder the great Fortune. My reception has been so large, that
terminology—and we cannot too often insist upon this point—,
would probably state the dualism as the conflict of
Understanding and Reason, affirming as he did that there
was no doctrine of the Reason which could bear to be trans­
lated into the language of the Understanding. I almost
suspect that the most significant point one can make about
his use of the terms Understanding and Reason is that he
used them loosely, poetically, suggestively; in short, he
used the terms precisely as a professional philosopher
would not.47 This suspicion gains credence by Emerson's

47The exclusively Kantian derivation of these terms,
via Coleridge, is doubtful. Merrell R. Davis in "Emerson's
'Reason' and the Scottish Philosophers," NEQ, XVII, No. 2
(June, 1944), pp. 209-228, suggests that he found the terms
in Stewart and Reid before he read Coleridge. What is sig­
nificant here is his highly individualistic use of the words.
He was far from following Kant's precise use, and it may be
doubted that Emerson ever intended his "Reason" to be the
object of philosophical analysis and introspection. His
suspection of dissectors and analysts was too deep-seated.

I look upon every sect as a Claude Lorraine glass
through which I see the same sun and the same world
and in the same relative places as through my own
eyes, but one makes them small, another large; one,
green; another, blue; another, pink. I suppose that
an Orthodox preacher's cry, "The natural man is an
enemy of God," only translates the philosopher's that
"The instinct of the Understanding is to contradict
the Reason"; so Luther's Law and Gospel (also St.
Paul's); Swedenborg's love of self and love of the
Lord; William Penn's World and Spirit; the Court of
Honor's Gentleman and Knave. The dualism is ever
present, though variously denominated.48

There is no tax on the good of virtue, for that is the incoming of God himself, or absolute existence, without any comparative.

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I might add that Emerson's language is strikingly similar to Marcel's, who also speaks of a mysterious, uncircumscribable "presence" whose virtue is an incitement to create. On this plane there is no compensation; the self or ego is transcended by the energy with which it gives itself to the task of creating. On this plane the soul is free, qualitatively free.

It would not, I believe, be pushing matters too far to state that Emerson was trying to convey the sense of what Berdyaev calls a "new structure of consciousness," in which creativeness is seen as the end and meaning of life. The dualism is in all these writers, though they may call it by different names; it is not a dualism of ideas, of metaphysics, but a dualism of consciousness, of attitude or of spirit. Kierkegaard, using the Biblical terms, says that the natural man must be subdued to the spiritual man; Berdyaev says that subjectivization must triumph over objectivization so that personality may emerge; Marcel says that man must transcend the realm of Having to the realm of Being. Emerson, wary as he was of
properly exists. He creates himself.

The most important paragraphs in "Compensation" deal with precisely this transcending of the plane of compensation. They are couched in abstract language, but there can be no mistaking Emerson's meaning: the best of life is not to be found at a kind of heavenly bargain-counter, but in the abrogation of the very consciousness enslaved to the idea of debit and credit, reward and punishment, gain and loss. There is a "letting go" of the self.

There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit, its own nature. The soul is not a compensation, but a life. The soul is. Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same. Nothing, Falsehood, may indeed stand as the great Night or shade on which as a background the living universe paints itself forth, but no fact is begotten by it; it cannot work, for it is not. It cannot work any good; it cannot work any harm. It is harm inasmuch as it is worse not to be than to be.

...There is no penalty to virtue; no penalty to wisdom; they are proper additions of being. In a virtuous action I properly am; I plant into deserts conquered from Chaos and Nothing and see the darkness receding on the limits of the horizon. There can be no excess to love, none to knowledge, none to beauty, when these attributes are considered in the purest sense. The soul refuses limits, and always affirms an Optimism, never a Pessimism.

His life is a progress, and not a station. His instinct is trust. Our instinct uses "more" and "less" in application to man, of the presence of the soul, and not of its absence; the brave man is greater than the coward; the true, the benevolent, the wise, is
does not expect any compensation beyond the life, the liv­
ing itself. Creativeness is not a means to something else, but is itself the end. A generous man does not give in order to get; as Kierkegaard puts it, the idea is intent to realize itself in him; he is moved by a fundamental richness, a moral sentiment, as Emerson says, and finds the end in the creative action. This is to say that the creative or virtuous life lies completely above compensa­
tion; it is a whole, not a half seeking its counterpart; it is absolute, not relative. Its life is "for itself," as Emerson says. And Gabriel Marcel, writing on the re­
lationship of giving and receiving, insists upon the im­
possibility of reducing the compensation involved to a
logic which can be applied only to the world of "things."

Clearly the plane of compensation has been transcended here; the soul itself swallows up compensation, ends, and means into an absolute existence. In the creative life the person
return for the least effort, to put up a dollar's worth of goodness in order to receive a dollar's worth of pleasure, to expiate three pleasant vices by doling out three repugnant acts of charity. Virtue or creativeness for its own sake this morality does not know. Says Emerson,

Virtues are, in the popular estimate, rather the exception than the rule. There is the man and his virtues. Men do what is called a good action, as some piece of courage or charity, much as they would pay a fine in expiation of daily non-appearance on parade. Their works are done as an apology or extenuation of their living in the world, as invalids and the insane pay a high board. Their virtues are penances. I do not wish to expiate, but to live.44

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Is there no possibility of the man and his virtues being one, indeed, of his being unconscious of them? Emerson—and the existentialists—hope that the human race can do a little better than dole out its virtues as penances; it often has done better, and perhaps on this score life is ahead of theology. If behind the gift there is no possibility of generosity and behind the act of mercy no possibility of mercy, if this so-called virtue comes so churlishly and unnaturally, then the existentialists deal in illusions when they talk of bringing men back to a sense of inwardness—and Emerson too, for that is almost certainly what he was trying to do.

In the creative life, a person does not look for and
reduces Euthyphro’s definition of piety to the declaration that it is “an art which gods and men have of doing business with one another.”

Euthyphro feels dimly that there is something wrong with the definition, but he is helpless to change it. Similarly, Mrs. Clennam in Dickens’ Little Dorrit keeps a “heavenly account-book” in which she records her celestial status day by day, and though at the final reckoning the Almighty would doubtless be found heavily in her debt, one somehow carries away the feeling that Mrs. Clennam has missed the point of what ethics is all about.

Berdyaev aptly calls this kind of morality the “heavenly utilitarianism” and shows its striking likeness to the grossest materialism.

The heavenly utilitarianism, so strongly marked in theology, chronologically precedes the earthly, but logically the heavenly utilitarianism is a reflection of the earthly. Utilitarian morality is built on the pattern of the heavenly utilitarianism, which regards good works and love of one’s neighbour as a means for the salvation of the soul and the attainment of the bliss of paradise.

What marks this grudging, legalistic morality is the complete absence of any creative spirit, any largeness of sentiment. It knows but one virtue: to get the biggest
It should be obvious that Emerson here is hitting, not merely at the doctrine of future worlds, but at the very structure of consciousness which is ruled by the idea of compensation. He is disgusted by the notion that virtue is a means to an end, something one pays out in order to be repaid later—in this world or in the next. He senses the falsity behind these reluctant saints—the lack of inwardness, as Kierkegaard might say. To them the virtuous is the secretly odious and sinning is the real attraction, so that they must undergo the ordeal of watching the bold sinner reap the delights which are forbidden to them. Far better were they honest rogues like Falstaff or frankly enquired, "Why be an angel before your time?"

Yet it requires no great insight to perceive that from cleric to psychologist the notion of the ethical often does not go beyond this concept of a set of rules designed to stifle one's natural appetites, and, considering the unbeautiful aspect of this view, one can easily understand why so many should flee to ethical relativism, where, if there is no longer guidance, there is at least no longer frustration.

Emerson is not alone in satirizing this morality of debit and credit, of "You sin now and I'll sin later." Its essential cheapness has always made it fair game for the satirist. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, for instance, Socrates
explicitness, Berdyaev implicitly.

That "Compensation" presents a different picture if read in the light of the creative life is the hypothesis I should like to develop. This consideration leads to the conclusion that the existence or non-existence of a system of compensations is not the point of the essay. But let us consider Emerson's excellent beginning, a beginning which he unfortunately did not follow up as well.

Ever since I was a boy I have wished to write a discourse on Compensation; for it seemed to me when very young that on this subject life was ahead of theology and the people knew more than the preachers taught. . .

I was lately confirmed in these desires by hearing a sermon at church. The preacher, a man esteemed, for his orthodoxy, unfolded in the ordinary manner the doctrine of the Last Judgment. He assumed that judgment is not executed in this world; that the wicked are successful; that the good are miserable; and then urged from reason and from Scripture a compensation to be made to both parties in the next life. . .

Yet what was the import of this teaching? What did the preacher mean by saying that the good are miserable in the present life? Was it that houses and lands, offices, wine, horses, dress, luxury, are had by unprincipled men, whilst the saints are poor and despised; and that a compensation is to be made to these last hereafter, by giving them the like gratifications another day,—bank-stock and doubloons, venison and champagne? This must be the compensation intended; for what else? Is it that they are to have leave to pray and praise? to love and serve men? Why, that they can do now. The legitimate inference the disciple would draw was,—'We are to have such a good time as the sinners have now;'--or, to push it to its extreme import,—'You sin now, we shall sin by and by; we would sin now, if we could; not being successful we expect our revenge to-morrow.'

readers as absurd. Furthermore, criticizing Emerson on his own grounds, we might point out that propounding an outward compensation degrades the spiritual life into that very materialism Emerson so detested. Kierkegaard, who had no use for "outwardness" of any kind, might almost have been thinking of "Compensation" when he wrote the following lines:

...outward victory proves nothing at all ethically, for ethically question is raised only about the inward; outward punishment is of little significance, and the ethical, so far from requiring with aesthetic fussiness the visibility of punishment, says proudly, "I shall punish sure enough, i.e. inwardly; and it is simply immoral to rate outward punishment as of any account in comparison with inward."40


How nicely the phrase "aesthetic fussiness" seems to apply. It does look as though Emerson were taking on to a certain degree the role of God's apologist.

But in spite of these weaknesses, the third person viewpoint, the objective hypothesis of a system in Nature, the consistency at all costs, the absurdity and materialism of an outward compensation, in spite of all these things, the essay may have something important to say. Emerson may have been trying to express a sense of the creative life which the existentialists advocate, and it is significant that the existentialists too retain the doctrine of inward compensation, Kierkegaard and Marcel with reasonable
much from the head, and it must not be thought that stu­pidity is thereby being elevated into a virtue, but, from an existential viewpoint, Emerson in "Compensation" was given to too much glimpsing into the mechanism of Nature. (All three existentialists may be accused of the same tendency, but the point is irrelevant here.) He knows too much. He has taken too much pains to superimpose compensa­tion upon Nature—exactly as the intellectualist fits things into his system—rather than allow the principle to emerge of its own volition. When Bronson Alcott said that Emerson always left Nature in the same order in which he found it, he might have excepted "Compensation." Some urge to intellectual consistency prompted Emerson to tie up all the loose ends of the cosmos. In point of fact, he is too consistent, and the criticism applies to the rest of his work as well. But consistency is a dubious virtue; it is the virtue of a thinker, not of Man thinking; honesty is better. Certainly Emerson at his best did not try to satisfy this "hobgoblin of little minds;" nor do the existentialists; Berdyaev bluntly says that his thought is filled with inconsistencies.

It seems to have been consistency which induced Emerson to add a system of outward compensations to his inward comp­ensation. Nothing was gained and much was lost, for the assertion that the biter is always visibly bit strikes most
compass, their eyes appraising, their hands grasping, their every move calculated to bring in its penny's worth of return. Yet it is curious that the man who hated calculators should have written an essay which on very superficial reading seems designed to put calculation on a cosmic basis. "Compensation" may or may not be a bad essay, but I think the title does not convey the most important element in the essay, the absolute rather than compensatory nature of the creative life.

No other essay of Emerson's has enjoyed so much sheer derision as "Compensation" has. Undoubtedly it deserves much of this criticism, for it suffers from serious weaknesses. In the first place, it is written largely in the third person, as by some spectator who perceives Nature's system; it is no accident, I believe, and this point is basic to the problem of communication, that Emerson at his best writes in the first person—that is to say, like a human being rather than a thinking machine. "Self-Reliance" and "Experience" are from the heart, but "Compensation" is too much from the head. It states propositions rather than sentiments, and hence enables the critic to leap with glee upon that most unexistential of elements, an objective hypothesis to be proved or disproved. And the hypothesis of a system of compensations is very easily attacked.

It may seem strange to chide a writer for writing too
perhaps best sums up how deeply he felt the need of a creative attitude toward evil.

Another dogma, growing out this pernicious theological limitation, is his Inferno. Swedenborg has devils. Evil, according to old philosophers, is good in the making. That pure malignity can exist is the extreme proposition of unbelief. It is not to be entertained by a rational agent; it is atheism; it is the last profanation. Euripides rightly said,—

"Goodness and being in the gods are one; He who imputes ill to them makes them none."

To what a painful perversion had Gothic theology arrived, that Swedenborg admitted no conversion for evil spirits! But the divine effort is never relaxed; the carrion in the sun will convert itself to grass and flowers; and man, though in brothels, or jails, or on gibbets, is on his way to all that is good and true. Burns, with the wild humor of his apostrophe to poor "auld Nickie Ben,"

"O wad ye tak a thought, and mend!"

has the advantage of the vindictive theologian. Every thing is superficial and perishes but love and truth only. The largest is always the truest sentiment, . . . 39

39 Emerson. "Swedenborg; Or, the Mystic." Works. Vol. IV, pp. 138-139.

And that last sentence best expresses creativeness: the largest is always the truest sentiment.

. . . . . . . . . .

"Nature," says Emerson, "hates calculators." She despises those souls who are never moved by natural impulse, but creep up and down the world with footrule and
This forgiving spirit, Emerson deserted only once, when he decided that the monster of slavery could be slain only by the sword. He seems to have finally been carried away by the tide. One of the most interesting facts that


Prof. Rusk brings out in his biography is that this move of Emerson's—practically his one saving grace to the modern reformer—seems, after the Civil War, to have curtailed his creative powers and was followed by decided disillusionment. Says Rusk,

For him, an idealist, the war had been a disease in his own system as well as in the body politic. He found it hard to get the poison of hate out of his blood. At the end of the conflict he could not refrain from writing down privately a list of the atrocities he charged against the South. His thinking did not thrive so well as before. He no longer enjoyed a sphere of almost limitless intellectual liberty. For him the idea of liberty had become too much constricted in the symbol of the manumitted slave. It was hard even for so puissant a liberal as Emerson to free himself from the narrowing boundaries of his postwar world.


His basic position was that hate was useless, that evil is overcome only by love and forgiveness, a forgiveness which knows no exceptions and which is at one with the creative spirit. A passage from his essay on Swedenborg
himself. From this point of view, there is wisdom in Emerson's definition of evil as non-being. It may be that he was primarily presenting a spiritual attitude toward evil, that he was suggesting, not one more barren abstraction, but a way of coping with evil. For how can one possibly destroy evil considered as non-being? It cannot be taken by a frontal assault, though it lures many an attacker to his own destruction. Non-being is overcome only by an influx of Being, by the introduction of order into chaos, that is, by the creation of the good. This constitutes the affirmative attitude. Forgiveness and love constitute the apogee of the creative attitude toward evil. The latter is not to be destroyed, but transmuted. Says Berdyaev,

One must behave with humanity and kindliness even to the devil. There is a dialectic of one's behaviour to the enemy and to evil. You begin by fighting in the name of good against the enemy, against the evil, but you end by being yourself permeated with evil.\footnote{35}{Berdyaev. \textit{The Divine and the Human.} pp. 88-89.}

In a more humorous vein, but perhaps even more tolerant, Emerson speaks in "Experience" of rising in the morning to find the "dear old spiritual world and even the dear old devil not far off."\footnote{36}{Emerson. "Experience." \textit{Works.} Vol. III, p. 62.}
of egotism. The passion of hate does not let out on some broad vista of love and justice; it flies in ever narrowing circles, constricting its horizon to the point of that nothingness or evil it serves while thinking to destroy. It is this demonic quality which ends in Ahab's "worship of defiance," and it stays with him.

The ruling passion is strong in Ahab's death. Pride and pride-engendered hate. Pride in his gallant ship, pride or a proud despair in a lonely death ending a lonely life, pride in the consciousness that his "topmost greatness" lay in his "topmost grief." Hate in the final thrust: "From hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear!"


How telling a fact too it is that Ahab in his pride conceives of evil as a positive force, not a negation; it is a brutal, inscrutable malice that lies behind the wall, and he, the Reformer of reformers, is to destroy it. Ahab has a living devil principally because Ahab is himself considerable of a devil, and the world gives him back his image point for point.

Emerson's position is the diametrical opposite of Ahab's. Emerson insisted that the man who tries to destroy nothingness is dealing with chimeras; he destroys only
sick, selfish men and women, such as we know them to be. But the believer not only beholds his heaven to be possible, but already to begin to exist,—not by the men or materials the statesman uses, but by men transfigured and raised above themselves by the power of principles. To principles something else is possible that transcends all the power of expediencies.32


He suggests that the evil will be overcome in another way, a creative way in which the means are themselves the end, in which there are no "instrumentalities."

In another way the right will be vindicated. In the midst of abuses, in the heart of cities, in the aisles of false churches, alike in one place and in another,—wherever, namely, a just and heroic soul finds itself, there it will do what is next at hand, and by the new quality of character it shall put forth it shall abrogate that old condition, law, or school in which it stands, before the law of its own mind.33


From a broader point of view, Emerson's stricture of evil means applies not only to overcoming social evil, but also to overcoming all moral evil. For him, as for the existentialists, the creative life is opposed above all to a psychology of hate and pride, whose most insidious form is the pretense that it wishes to produce good by destroying evil—as if one could destroy without destruction, or produce love out of hate, or manufacture altruism out
hope for man unless their program be adopted?

The reformer who is truly moved by his cause, says Emerson, will not rely on the trumperies of shallow, conniving, or evil means to gain his end. If his means are not themselves creative, then he will forego the end. His basic means are a trust that an absolute Right exists and that men will respond to this Right if it be shown them. If there is no love of right in them, then there is no hope in any institution.

The power which is at once spring and regulator in all efforts of reform is the conviction that there is an infinite worthiness in man, which will appear at the call of worth, and that all particular reforms are the removing of some impediment.

The Americans have many virtues, but they have not Faith and Hope. I know no two words whose meaning is more lost sight of. We use these words as if they were as obsolete as Selah and Amen. And yet they have the broadest meaning, and the most cogent application to Boston in this year. The Americans have little faith. They rely on the power of a dollar; they are deaf to a sentiment. They think you may talk the north wind down as easily as raise society; and no class more faithless than the scholars or intellectual men. Now if I talk with a sincere wise man, and my friend, with a poet, with a conscientious youth who is still under the dominion of his own wild thoughts, and not yet harnessed in the team of society to drag with us all in the ruts of custom, I see at once how paltry is all this generation of unbelievers, and what one brave man, what one great thought executed might effect. I see that the reason of the distrust of the practical man in all theory, is his inability to perceive the means whereby we work. Look, he says, at the tools with which this world of yours is to be built. As we cannot make a planet, with atmosphere, rivers, and forests, by means of the best carpenters' or engineers' tools, with chemist's laboratory and smith's forge to boot,—so neither can we ever construct that heavenly society you prate of out of foolish,
he is more interested in hating the rich and in castigating dissenters than in loving the poor. Nor would much be required to make him hate the poor; they need only disagree with him. When he gets into absolute power, he sees no evil in whipping them into conformity, so that he holds forth the dismal prospect of a society in which half of the members stand guard over the other half, and we are left uncertain as to who is to compose the citizenry of the state. He is fascinated, as Berdyaev says, by the myth of "the good of the State," and, at his fanatical worst, will sacrifice individual lives to this dubious goal. For, and I believe this is Emerson's point and Berdyaev's too, it is a strange lover of the human race who pours all his energies into hating individual members of it.

Lacking in varying degrees as he does the leavening of sweetness and light, the reformer oppresses us by the disparity between the ideals and the man. We feel that the things he says may be true, but he is not the man to say them. The reform we need badly; would God we could spare the reformer. It was apparently Emerson's view that, in the long run, what good can be expected from those who are ruled by hate, who believe that the end justifies the means, who treat dissenters as mortal enemies—babbling tolerance all the while—and who see no
with most ardor what are called the greatest benefits of mankind, are narrow, self-pleasing, conceited men, and affect us as the insane do. They bite us, and we run mad also. I think the work of the reformer as innocent as other work that is done around him; but when I have seen it near, I do not like it better. It is done in the same way, it is done profanely, not piously; by management, by tactics and clamor. It is a buzz in the ear.30


Many a reformer perishes in his removal of rubbish; and that makes the offensiveness of the class. They are partial; they are not equal to the work they pretend. They lose their way; in the assault on the kingdom of darkness they expend all their energy on some accidental evil, and lose their sanity and power of benefit. It is of little moment that one or two or twenty errors of our social system be corrected, but of much that the man be in his senses.31


One is inclined to wonder if there is any essential difference on this point between the reformer of Emerson's day and the modern reformer. Perhaps his criticism is still relevant. Certainly one thing is clear: many of our reformers, to use the language of both Emerson and Berdiaev, do not draw their spirit from the right source. They are more intent upon destroying evil than upon creating good. Talk as they may, their good will is suspect. The reformer who professedly loves the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed, too frequently makes it plain that
The obstacle the philanthropic movements meet is in the invincible depravity of the virtuous classes. The excellent women who have made an asylum for young offenders, boys of 10 to 18 years, and who wish, after putting them through their school, to put them out to board in good farmers' or mechanics' families, find the boys do well enough, but the farmer and the farmer's wife, and the mechanic's wife, behave brutally. What then? One thinks of Luttrell's speech about the soldiers fraternizing with the mob, "Egad, it's awkward when the extinguisher catches fire." 29


And that last dry remark seems to get at the root of the trouble.

Even more sinister is the tendency of the reformer, to be overcome by his means, like the dyer's hand, to be "subdued to that it works in." To start well is easy; to finish in the same altruistic spirit and lofty aim with which one started is rare indeed. The reformer begins by hating the sin; he ends by hating the sinner. Often, there is little to choose between him and the sinner. It was this unregenerate character of the reformer which seems to have disgusted Emerson most when asked to participate in some movement.

The Reforms have their high origin in an ideal justice, but they do not retain the purity of an idea. They are quickly organized in some low, inadequate form, and present no more poetic image to the mind than the evil tradition which they reprobated. They mix the fire of the moral sentiment with personal and party heats, with measureless exaggerations, and the blindness that prefers some darling measure to justice and truth. Those who are urging
strongest when most private and alone. The young men who have been vexing society for these last years with regenerative methods seem to have made this mistake; they all exaggerated some special means, and all failed to see that the Reform of Reforms must be accomplished without means.28


Emerson is saying precisely what Berdyaev says. Means and ends cannot be separated, so that, in the last analysis, there are no means to be used and then discarded; the means themselves must be creative.

It seems to have been a clear perception of the evil possibilities in man which made Emerson so skeptical of reforms which, while emphasizing special means, made no provision for the reforming of those people who were to administer the matter. In the Journals one can see this rather cynical vein increasing as Emerson grows older. He seems to have had a very sure grasp of the fundamental weakness in human nature, not the weakness of a few people, but the weakness in all people. The ardent reformer, on the other hand, has a decided tendency to divide people into the sheep and the goats, the good and the bad, and he is continually being shocked by the revelation that there is a bit of nastiness in everybody. Emerson humorously calls this weakness the "invincible depravity of the virtuous."
probably both—it hits at the very basis of the modern
reliance on organization. Of what use is it to organize
rascals, or to pass laws to secure honest government if
there are no honest men there in the first place? The
trouble, as Emerson saw it, lies in man, and the remedy
must begin there.

Like Berdyaev, Emerson declares that those who seek
a better society do not trust their own goals enough.
They do not think that good is essentially stronger than
evil by its very nature. Hence, their exaggeration of
some special means, usually superficial, often evil. As
he says of the reforms he desired but did not support by
the prescribed means,

These reforms are our contemporaries; they are
ourselves; our own light, and sight, and conscience;
they only name the relation which subsists between
us and the vicious institutions which they go to
rectify. They are the simplest statements of man
in these matters; the plain right and wrong. I can­
not choose but allow and honor them. The impulse is
good, and the theory; the practice is less beautiful.
The Reformers affirm the inward life, but they do not
trust it, but use outward and vulgar means. They do
not rely on precisely that strength which wins me to
their cause; not on love, not on a principle, but on
men, on multitudes, on circumstances, on money, on
party; that is, on fear, on wrath, and pride. The
love which lifted men to the sight of these better
ends was the true and best distinction of this time,
the disposition to trust a principle more than a
material force. I think that the soul of reform;
the conviction that not sensualism, not slavery, not
war, not imprisonment, not even government, are need­
ed,—but in lieu of them all, reliance on the senti­
ment of man, which will work best the more it is
trusted; not reliance on numbers, but, contrariwise,
distrust of numbers and the feeling that then are we
Berdyaev's—and Marcel's, insofar as the latter has expressed himself on the subject.

He questioned first of all the reliance on numbers and associations. This constituted an appeal to superficial means.

If partiality was one fault of the movement party, the other defect was their reliance on Association. Doubts such as those I have intimated drove many good persons to agitate the questions of social reform. But the revolt against the spirit of commerce, the spirit of aristocracy, and the inveterate abuses of cities, did not appear possible to individuals; and to do battle against numbers they armed themselves with numbers, and against concert they relied on new concert. . .

. . .to such, concert appears the sole specific of strength. I have failed, and you have failed, but perhaps together we shall not fail. Our housekeeping is not satisfactory to us, but perhaps a phalanx, a community, might be. Many of us have differed in opinion, and we could find no man who could make the truth plain, but possibly a college, or an ecclesiastical council, might. . .But concert is neither better nor worse, neither more nor less potent, than individual force. All the men in the world cannot make a statue walk and speak, cannot make a drop of blood, or a blade of grass, any more than one man can. But let there be one man, let there be truth in two men, in ten men, then is concert for the first time possible; because the force which moves the world is a new quality, and can never be furnished by adding whatever quantities of a different kind. What is the use of the concert of the false and the disunited? There can be no concert in two, where there is no concert in one.27


Whether this sentiment be considered an idealistic hypothesis or an example of shrewd common sense—and it is
separation of means and ends. Man tries to make a disjunction where none is possible, and, as Emerson declares in "Compensation,"

This dividing and detaching is steadily counteracted. Up to this day it must be owned that no projector has had the smallest success. The parted water reunites behind our hand.\textsuperscript{25}


In the spiritual life, says Berdyaev, ends and means are one.

Only the qualitative attainments of the spiritual life lead to the affirmation of truth and to victory over falsity. This is precisely because in the spiritual realm there are no "ends" for the sake of which one may and ought to lie, and no "means" for the sake of which one might forget about "ends" and turn falsity into a virtue.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26}Berdyaev. \textit{The Destiny of Man}. p. 165.

If the reformer draws his spirit from the right source, he will not, like the Grand Inquisitor, espouse a "practical" method which may in the long run turn out to be as evil as it is superficial. Only creative means can bring about creative ends.

It seems advisable to quote Emerson at some length on this matter, for his objections to the reformers who thronged the New England of his day seem to the socially-minded modern not merely incomprehensible, but inexcusable. His objections, I believe, stem from the same source as
paraphrasing him on this point, we might observe that, from all the noise and confusion, it is clear that there is naivete somewhere; now it only remains to decide who is naive.

If we now turn to Emerson's views on how evil should be dealt with—the most practical problem of all—Berdyaev seems to articulate Emerson's position most clearly. For Berdyaev, evil cannot be destroyed by a direct attack, that is, the man who is oriented to destruction, however good his initial motive, becomes himself the agent of evil. Far from creating, he succeeds only in destroying. Berdyaev, whose many writings on social reform show that he is far from indifferent to the problem, does not think that lasting reform can come about by the means popularly envisioned. A society of true communion or sobornost cannot be insured by outward means. It must come from within the individuals. Outward reform is too superficial, for one thing, too prone to become evil, for another. The means overcome the ends. People lack faith in the power of that good they so desire to see triumph. As Berdyaev says,

People do not believe that the good may be preserved and established without the aid of falsehood. The good is the end and lies are the means.24


According to Berdyaev, the error consists of the false
delegated to an individual or to a select few to bring about the desired improvement. When one reads the accounts of the European intellectuals who embraced Communism and were later disillusioned by the venality and ruthlessness of the leaders, one is inclined to wonder how they could ever have been so innocent in the first place. It is enough to make one distrust the intelligence of intellectuals as a class—and I have been at some pains to show that both Emerson and Kierkegaard unquestionably had that distrust. Such a delegation of power requires for its guardian a person or persons of angelic character, superior to the temptations of wealth, superior in particular to the love of power; even the veriest layman knows by simple experience that such guardians are hard to come by. The reformer who is indifferent to, even contemptuous of, the democratic procedure derived from long, bitter experience, and who so trustingly would confide his fate to the whim of an entrenched tyrant, be the latter's title what it may, seems in his person to illustrate the somber truth that we do not learn from history. It has remained for the sophisticated 20th Century, so learned in economic theory, so informed in psychology, so clever at dialectics, to display a fundamental innocence in regard to human nature which previous ages can scarcely match. Emerson has sometimes been thought naive in regard to evil, but
in its most insidious forms. Consider, for example, the following passage on slavery.

I may here express a general remark, which the history of slavery seems to justify, that it is not founded solely on the avarice of the planter. We sometimes say, the planter does not want slaves, he only wants the immunities and the luxuries which the slaves yield him; give him money, give him a machine that will yield him as much money as the slaves, and he will thankfully let them go. He has no love of slavery, he wants luxury, and he will pay even this price of crime and danger for it. But I think experience does not warrant this favorable distinction, but shows the existence, beside the covetousness, of a bitterer element, the love of power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in his absolute control. . . . The planter is the spoiled child of his unnatural habits, and has contracted in his indolent and luxurious climate the need of excitement by irritating and tormenting his slave. 23


The love of power—we may wonder if Emerson has not put his finger upon the mainspring of all tyranny, not greed alone, nor advantage alone, but the pure love of power, beside which the other appetites dwindle into insignificance. This is an evil which may disrupt any system.

On the other hand, it is rather curious how many modern reformers have remained completely blind to the possible consequences of the unbridled love of power. Spying greed and corruption in capitalism—which Emerson also saw—they have hastily concluded that the remedy lies in a change of systems, with complete power frequently being
carried the matter further than the reformer usually carries it.

In the same vein he warns against an attack upon evil unsupported by the total regeneration of the reformer himself. His "reform from within" seems to spring fully as much from hard-headed common sense as from idealism.

It is handsomer to remain in the establishment better than the establishment, and conduct that in the best manner, than to make a sally against evil by some single improvement, without supporting it by a total regeneration. Do not be so vain of your one objection. Do you think there is only one? Alas! my good friend, there is no part of society or of life better than any other part. All our things are right and wrong together. The wave of evil washes all our institutions alike. Do you complain of our Marriage? Our marriage is no worse than our education, our diet, our trade, our social customs. Do you complain of the laws of Property? It is a pedantry to give such importance to them. Can we not play the game of life with these counters, as well as with those? in the institution of property, as well as out of it? Let into it the new and renewing principle of love, and property will be universality. . . . No man deserves to be heard against property. Only love, only an Idea, is against property as we hold it.22


Emerson seems to have insisted upon a kind of depth of evil, an evil ingrained in man—not in a few selected wicked specimens, but in all men. This innate perversity he saw capable of corrupting the most excellently planned institutions; the institutions could never be better than the men who composed them. This evil in man he saw clearly
These are scarcely the reflections of a man who does not see evil. He sees it only too well and sees equally through the superficiality of those who put all their trust in "programs." To pick out just one insight here, it would seem that Emerson knew what the principle of "conspicuous consumption" was, long before Thorstein Veblen coined the phrase.

But Emerson held that trade was no worse than other aspects of the culture. No man could escape the evil.

But by coming out of trade you have not cleared yourself. The trail of the serpent reaches into all the lucrative professions and practices of man. Each has its own wrongs. Each finds a tender and very intelligent conscience a disqualification for success. Each requires of the practitioner a certain shutting of the eyes, a certain dapperness and compliance, an acceptance of customs, a sequestration from the sentiments of generosity and love, a compromise of private opinion and lofty integrity. Nay, the evil custom reaches into the whole institution of property, until our laws which establish and protect it seem not to be the issue of love and reason, but of selfishness. . . . Of course, whilst another man has no land, my title to mine, your title to yours, is at once vitiated. Inextricable seem to be the twinings and tendrils of this evil, and we all involve ourselves in it the deeper by forming connections, by wives and children, by benefits and debts.21

21Ibid., pp. 233-234.
the borders) of fraud. The employments of commerce are not intrinsically unfit for a man, or less gen-
ial to his faculties; but these are now in their gen-
eral course so vitiated by derelictions and abuses at which all connive, that it requires more vigor and resources than can be expected of every young man, to right himself in them; he is lost in them; he cannot move hand or foot in them. Has he genius and virtue? the less does he find them fit for him to grow in, and if he would thrive in them, he must sacrifice all the brilliant dreams of boyhood and youth as dreams; he must forget the prayers of his childhood and must take on him the harness of routine and obsequiousness. If not so minded, nothing is left him but to begin the world anew, as he does who puts the spade into the ground for food. We are all implicated of course in this charge; it is only necessary to ask a few questions as to the progress of the articles of commerce from the fields where they grew, to our houses, to become aware that we eat and drink and wear perjury and fraud in a hun-
dred commodities. . . . The abolitionist has shown us our dreadful debt to the southern negro. In the island of Cuba, in addition to the ordinary abomina-
tions of slavery, it appears only men are bought for the plantations, and one dies in ten every year, of these miserable bachelors, to yield us sugar. I leave for those who have the knowledge the part of sifting the oaths of our custom-houses; I will not inquire into the oppression of the sailors; I will not pry into the usages of our retail trade. I con-
tent myself with the fact that the general system of our trade (apart from the blacker traits, which, I hope, are exceptions denounced and unshared by all reputable men) is a system of selfishness; . . . It is not that which a man delights to unlock to a noble friend; which he meditates on with joy and self-approval in his hour of love and aspiration; but rather what he then puts out of sight, only showing the brilliant result, and atoning for the manner of acquiring, by the manner of expending it. I do not charge the merchant or the manufacturer. The sins of our trade belong to no class, to no in-
dividual. One plucks, one distributes, one eats. Every body partakes, every body confesses,—with cap and knee volunteers his confession, yet none feels himself accountable. He did not create the abuse; he cannot alter it. What is he? an obscure private person who must get his bread. That is the vice,—that no one feels himself called to act for
might well quote an entire essay on this point rather than
the few selections here offered. He was after all a Yankee,
a shrewd, perceptive Yankee at that, and though the Yankee
has been accused of many things, he has never yet been in­
dicted for a naive blindness to the shortcomings of man­
kind or to the general imperfection of the world. Emerson
once declared that there was a crack in everything God had
made, and usually he saw the flaw. He knew that he was
not taking the pain out of a toothache by denying the meta­
physically positive reality of evil; it still hurt and hurt
plenty. But there has been an unfortunate disposition to
interpret his denial of evil as a positive force on such
a simple-minded basis that Emerson emerges as a kind of
good-natured moron who perceived only with great diffi­
culty and straining that slavery was an evil institution.
The point to be made, I believe, is that Emerson saw more
evil, not less, and that he saw the root of it to lie, not
in institutions or organizations or customs, but in man
himself.

Consider, for example, the following stricture of com­
merce, a stricture which the careful reader will note can
be applied to capitalism or socialism equally. Emerson
was not debating economic systems; he was appraising what
man in his present state will do to any system.

The ways of trade are grown selfish to the borders
of theft, and supple to the borders (if not beyond
could he ever cope with it abstractly. "Life," says Emerson, "is not dialectics," and intellect cannot supersede action. The only question everyone is forced to ask about evil is this: "Where is the evil and what do I do about it?"

It seems almost inevitable that this kind of question should center around social reform, the overwhelming concern of the 20th Century. In modern times the sense—if not always the perception—of evil has been especially acute. Perhaps the possibility of world catastrophe has intensified this sense to a degree which the more placid 19th Century did not know, but, whatever the causes, the fact seems certain. Coincident with this vision of evil has arisen the desire to eradicate the evil by means of social reform. So many wrongs exist to be righted. Indeed the creative spirit seems sometimes manifest in the multitudinous movements for reform: the sluggish passivity is whipped into activity; a degree of passionate belief is aroused; and even a kind of secular optimism arises. To the modern reformer, Emerson seems to be the man who neither saw the evil nor did anything about it—with the exception of slavery.

One can state categorically, I think, on the basis of his writings that Emerson had an exceptionally clear perception of the evils visible in experience—and one
One of the attempts to solve the problem of evil, and to reconcile it with the possibility of theodicy, amounts to this, that evil is present only in the parts, whereas in the whole there is only good. It was thus that St Augustine thought, and Leibnitz, and indeed in the last resort, most forms of theodicy adopt the same position, for they admit that God uses evil for the purposes of good. But that sort of doctrine is based upon the denial of the unconditional significance of all personality, and it is a characteristic rather of ancient moral philosophy than of Christian. It means the prevalence of the aesthetic point of view over the ethical.19

19 Berdyaev. The Divine and the Human. p. 86.

We are not concerned here with debating a proposition of this kind. Emerson may be right or he may be wrong, but one thing at least is certain: he presents the coldest, bleakest, most ruthless optimism ever fashioned by a gentle soul. In being willing to sacrifice the unique, unrepeatable personality, he displays a hardness which the existentialists, prizing as they do the individual soul, would recoil from. One is inclined to wonder where all this talk of blandness, softness, and sentimentality originated.

But if we leave the theoretical aspects of evil and probe more deeply into the existential or practical side of the matter, then Emerson's treatment of the problem has far more meaning. After all, no man ever saw evil in the abstract; he saw it only in the concrete. Nor
at a few good products. What happens to the wastage Emerson does not say; perhaps they go back into Nature's raw materials and the artificer tries again.

Nature makes fifty poor melons for one that is good, and shakes down a tree full of gnarled, wormy, unripe crabs, before you can find a dozen dessert apples; and she scatters nations of naked Indians and nations of clothed Christians, with two or three good heads among them. Nature works very hard, and only hits the white once in a million throws. In mankind she is contented if she yields one master in a century. . . The mass are animal, in pupilage, and near chimpanzee. But the units whereof this mass is composed, are neuters, every one of which may be grown to a queen-bee. The rule is, we are used as brute atoms until we think: then we use all the rest. Nature turns all malfeasance to good. Nature provided for real needs. No sane man at last distrusts himself. His existence is a perfect answer to all sentimental cavils. If he is, he is wanted, and has the precise properties that are required. That we are here, is proof we ought to be here.18

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This is optimism, to be sure, but it might have delighted Charles Darwin. It is optimism which holds very close to facts, and is not bothered by sentimental speculations about what happens to those who fall by the wayside. In short, one does not find an abundance of Christian charity here. Emerson's either/or is very simple: either you win through or you perish, and Nature doesn't particularly care which. The good of the whole, not the part, is the primary object. Berdyaev thinks that such a position is basically pagan, though often met with in Christian
But Nature is no sentimentalist,—does not cosset or pamper us. We must see that the world is rough and surly, and will not mind drowning a man or a woman, but swallows your ship like a grain of dust. The cold, inconsiderate of persons, tingles your blood, benumbs your feet, freezes a man like an apple. The diseases, the elements, fortune, gravity, lightning, respect no persons. The way of Providence is a little rude. The habit of snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda,—these are in the system, and our habits are like theirs. You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughter-house is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity, expensive races,—race living at the expense of race. The planet is liable to shocks from comets, perturbations from planets, rendings from earthquake and volcano, alterations of climate, progressions of equinoxes... The scurvy at sea, the sword of the climate in the west of Africa, at Cayenne, at Panama, at New Orleans, cut off men like a massacre. Our western prairie shakes with fever and ague... Without uncovering what does not concern us, or counting how many species of parasites hang on a bombyx, or groping after intestinal parasites or infusory biters, or the obscurities of alternate generation,—the forms of the shark, the labrus, the jaw of the sea-wolf paved with crushing teeth, the weapons of the grampus, and other warriors hidden in the sea, are hints of ferocity in the interiors of nature. Let us not deny it up and down. Providence has a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end, and it is of no use to try to white-wash its huge, mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student in divinity.17


And indeed this kind of Providence is a little rude. Many of us would like to be spared a Providence of this sort—bland and soft though it be. Still less do we care for a Providence which sacrifices millions in order to arrive
evil we experience can be only good in the making. Any tendency toward making evil autonomous he denounced as Manichaeism, and the perception of such a tendency seems to have been one of his principal objections to orthodox Christian sects. (Indeed, an entire paper deserves to be written on Emerson's view of Manichaeism in historical Christianity.) His consistency here may be admirable, for he was determined not to eat his cake and have it too, but the explanation has a glib, rationalistic ring, in Emerson or in the host of predecessors who have said the same thing. For who, after all, can explain evil? Berdyaev and Marcel perhaps strike a profounder note by simply saying that evil is a mystery.

The point is that any explanation of evil is likely to prove very cold comfort, and Emerson's explanation is unusually chilling. He carried its implications out ruthlessly, with the result that though evil may be tending to the good of the whole, the hapless individual is crushed in the machinery—unless he proves exceptionally strong. A great deal has been made in this connection of Emerson's optimism; it has been labeled bland, soft, or sentimental, but one need only read such essays as "Fate" or "The Method of Nature" to doubt judgments of this sort. In one respect he was a thorough-going evolutionist. He says, for example of Nature—not viewed symbolically:
What may be called non-being may have an existential significance; nonentity has great existential significance, although it would be untrue to say that it exists.  

Kierkegaard implicitly shares the position, I believe. Marcel, with his insistence upon a "will to negation" offers a striking illustration of an attempt to translate this abstraction into concrete, existential terms.

Emerson's explanation of evil seems to follow the traditional Christian pattern. Adopting the terminology of Aristotle, we may say that evil had as its efficient cause the Fall of Man, while its final or teleological cause is the eventual production of good. Many thinkers have been discomfited by the problem of how a just God can allow evil—Emerson among them. The early Manichaean sects explained the fact by positing two powers, a God of light or good, and a Power of darkness or evil, of independent origin. The Christian sects, wary of limiting God's power by so forthright a dualism, have settled the question in various ways, usually with a subordinate evil power which God permits but is not responsible for. Emerson, with uncompromising consistency, declared that there was no dualism in this sphere, no evil metaphysical power; if God exists, then everything must come from Him, and the
objective existence, but no subjective.15

By objective existence Emerson means simply that the thief has a desire to steal and really does steal, but so far as the thief's essence goes, there is no evil essence there, precisely because evil is the absence of essence; it has no subjective existence. The thief, essentially viewed, is less of a man, and that less constitutes the metaphysical evil. The evil is very definitely present in experience; Emerson is not denying that the thief steals or the tyrant grinds his people down or that these things are evil; these things are facts. What he does deny is the presence of any metaphysical evil principle which exists in its own right; he denies the existence of an Ahriman or a Satan. Metaphysically, Satan is non-being. Metaphysically, God is the only existence.

This is far from being an original position with Emerson, though he seems to have been one of the most consistent exponents of it. The history of religious and philosophical thought records many who have shared it, St. Thomas Aquinas and Spinoza, for instance. Of the existentialists, Berdyaev explicitly shares it. He says,

It can be asserted and with good grounds, that evil has no positive existence and that it can only allure by what it filches from good. But none the less evil not only exists but it prevails in the world.
and explanation of evil are purely matters of theory and abstraction, that is, they may have little or no effect upon living; they are not existential. On the other hand, both the perception of evil and the method one uses to cope with it are existential. It makes a great deal of difference if one can see evil in the concrete, for both insight and experience are required to perceive the subtle way in which the evil is intertwined with good. Similarly, how one chooses to deal with the evils he actually encounters in experience is an important fact, probably the most important of all. Here we arrive at a difference which makes a difference. It should be stated in advance that in the creative life, as both Emerson and the existentialists advocate it, evil becomes, not an intellectual puzzle for clever people to speculate about, but a force which must be met in the concrete, and, so to speak, transmuted rather than annihilated.

If we deal with the purely theoretical aspects of the matter first, it appears to have been Emerson's conception of evil as "non-being" which has led to the notion that he denied the evils we see around us and in us every day. As he says of sin,

Sin, seen from the thought, is a diminution, or less; seen from the conscience or will, it is pravity or bad. The intellect names it shade, absence of light, and no essence. The conscience must feel it as essence, essential evil. This it is not; it has an
them, who see a black star always riding through the light and colored clouds in the sky overhead; waves of light pass over and hide it for a moment, but the black star keeps fast in the zenith. But power dwells with cheerfulness; hope puts us in a working mood, whilst despair is no muse, and untunes the active powers. A man should make life and nature happier to us, or he had better never been born.\textsuperscript{14}


Emerson today has to contend with a black star which monopolizes the heavens, but in the existential doctrine of creativeness we can see some indication of what he was driving at.

\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots

A second major result of applying the existential doctrine of creativeness to Emerson is that his treatment of the problem of evil does not seem altogether the vapid word-playing it has so often been considered. The modern world is keenly aware of evil, almost evilly aware of it, and any writer who does not give the Devil his due is summarily dismissed. It has been so with Emerson, who is said to lack "the vision of evil."

For convenience, we may divide the problem of evil into four aspects: the conception of evil; the explanation of evil; the perception of evil; the active attitude one should take toward evil. It is apparent that the conception
And, indeed, in modern times, the ark has been found empty. But the news has not been suppressed; to judge by the way it is trumpeted about, there must be something pleasing about it, and one is strongly reminded of Marcel's diagnosis of the "will that God should not exist." Truth remains a value, but the enlightened know that the truth is basically disenchanted.

It is the judgment of the existentialists that the growing dependence upon techniques, the encroachment of deterministic thinking, the spread of passivity and the attenuation of the power to believe—all marking the diametrical opposite of creativeness—have resulted in a pessimism more deeply-rooted than that which springs from calamity. This hopelessness springs from man. Against it the existentialists pit the creative instinct which lies submerged in the depths of personality; it is and must be optimistic; indeed, Marcel has evolved what he calls a "metaphysic of hope." In this light, Emerson's optimism becomes, not merely more comprehensible, but inevitable.

It is an old commendation of right behavior, "Aliis laetus, sapiens sibi," which our English proverb translates, "Be merry and wise." I know how easy it is to men of the world to look grave and sneer at your sanguine youth and its glittering dreams. But I find the gayest castles in the air that were ever piled, far better for comfort and for use than the dungeons in the air that are daily dug and caverned out by grumbling, discontented people. I know those miserable fellows, and I hate
"Experience," "Illusions," "Considerations by the Way,"
"Montaigne, Or, the Skeptic," these and others have a some­what more warm-blooded and intimate flavor. We are assured by them that Emerson too was a mortal.

But, in the larger view, these considerations throw Emerson's optimism into a new light and reveal a profounder base for it than it has usually gotten credit for. The seeds of optimism, of course, are in all these writers, however dark the existentialist picture may appear at times. Anyone who adopts Truth as a value in itself, as something to be reverenced rather than used, makes at the same time the unsaid assumption that the truth is ultimately some­thing good; there seems little point in revering a truth which has at last nothing worth revering about it. I sus­pect—but cannot prove—that this is what Emerson means by those rather obscure lines in "Montaigne" on the "levity of intellect."

The first dangerous symptom I report is, the levity of intellect; as if it were fatal to earnestness to know much. Knowledge is the knowing that we can not know. The dull pray; the geniuses are light mockers. How respectable is earnestness on every platform! but intellect kills it. Nay, San Carlo, my subtle and admirable friend, one of the most penetrating of men, finds that all direct ascension, even of lofty piety, leads to this ghastly insight and sends back the vo­tary orphaned. My astonishing San Carlo thought the lawgivers and saints infected. They found the ark empty; saw, and would not tell; and tried to choke off their approaching followers, by saying, 'Action, action, my dear fellows, is for you!'

Emerson, on the other hand, was a once-born man, and one wonders if he ever quite gave the difficulty its due; even the most sympathetic students go away baffled as to just how he managed it. To call it superficiality smacks of envy; to call it the result of heredity and environment is unfortunately only an easy method of explaining it away; but such unmitigated believingness has a distinctly irritating effect on contemporary spirits. It may not be exactly a crime to be born believing, but it is at least a bit on the uncivil side.

On the other hand, if one considers the impulse or the will to believe an integral part of the creative life, as all these writers do, then it becomes more understandable why Emerson should avoid so rigorously the negative stance. His duty, as he said, was to affirm, and he had no use for writers who did not affirm; they might better have kept their mouths closed, for, in his eyes, they did nothing but deject and perplex mankind. Apparently he felt that the spirit of belief could be conveyed only in a believing way. Fallen man had to relearn the natural attitude before he could do much with particular beliefs.

Whether Emerson took the wiser course in choosing this via affirmativa is a debatable matter. Many readers feel that he is at his best in those essays in which he expressed the doubts and the skepticisms so strongly.
It is for us to believe in the rule, not in the exception. The noble are thus known from the ignoble. So in accepting the leading of the sentiments, it is not what we believe concerning the immortality of the soul or the like, but the universal impulse to believe, that is the material circumstance and is the principal fact in the history of the globe. Shall we describe this cause as that which works directly?\textsuperscript{12}


The universal impulse to believe, the affirmation which precedes all rationalizing, this quality Emerson had in plenty; for him, believing was the root of the creative life. But belief is a sustenance largely denied the modern soul; the natural attitude is unbelief, the natural proclivity denial. Nothing seems more difficult to the modern mind than to acquire faith; we are born into an atmosphere of suspicion. As for Emerson's impulse to believe—that is beyond comprehension.

It is, one suspects, this painfulness of believing which provides the existentialists with their main appeal and their increasing strength. They know how hard it is for the modern world to believe. They are twice-born men speaking to a world which has all but despaired of its second birth. Marcel and Berdiaev are moderns, and Kierkegaard, though a man of the 19th Century, echoes the difficulties of the 20th Century with equal if not more power. They know the struggle, the doubt, the nihilistic tendency.
to the common discourse of their company. . . Others there are to whom the heaven is brass, and it shuts down to the surface of the earth. It is a question of temperament, or of more or less immersion in nature. The last class must needs have a reflex or parasite faith; not a sight of realities, but an instinctive reliance on the seers and believers of realities. 11


Thus, it seems that to an age in which unbelief has become almost a principle, in which even the believers are slightly sheepish about confessing conviction—except in matters of politics—Emerson could not be anything but distasteful. He literally goes against the grain; his tremendous affirmative bias grates, not against rival beliefs, but against an inclination to disbelieve as deeply negative as his own tendency was positive. A passage such as the following, for example, seems sheer nonsense to the modern mind, and the clash, I suggest, is not between one theory and another theory, but between the creative impulse to believe and the impulse to deny. In a clash so basic, disputes about particular theories have a somewhat irrelevant ring.

Our life seems not present so much as prospective; not for the affairs on which it is wasted, but as a hint of this vast-flowing vigor. Most of life seems to be mere advertisement of faculty; information is given us not to sell ourselves cheap; that we are very great. So, in particulars, our greatness is always in a tendency or direction, not in an action.
mainspring is the will that God should not be.\footnote{Marcel. The Mystery of Being. Vol. II, p. 176.}

Obviously the statement can be expanded to cover other beliefs as well.

What is significant here, I believe, is that the creative spirit is completely lost in a nihilism which makes a fetish of unbelief. For, and this matter is of capital importance in Emerson and the Christian existentialists, it is the nature of the creative personality to believe, and, says Emerson, "we only believe as deep as we live."\footnote{Emerson. "Beauty." Works. Vol. VI, p. 283.}

To the soul immersed in nature, to use Emerson's term, or, to use the existentialist term, involved deeply in life, belief is the most natural thing in the world. The same affirmation underlies both creating and believing, and the nihilism which finds belief odious does so principally because creativeness no longer has for it any essential meaning. In his unfallen state man is a natural believer and creator, declares Emerson, not a scoffer or an incredulous skeptic waiting to be convinced. He is "disposed to believe."

Belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; unbelief, in denying them. Some minds are incapable of skepticism. The doubts they profess to entertain are rather a civility or accommodation
somehow makes the whole theoretical aspect of the matter ridiculous. He can act the truth he cannot put into words.

The existentialists assert that a kind of blighting nihilism linked to technology (and technology rests upon determinism) has settled down over the modern soul like a miasma. It might be unfair to call this nihilism another result of technique-ridden thinking, but the two are, in their view, certainly connected, for the gloomy enlightenment of the latter drags in its tortuous wake, not merely a suspicious distrust of principles formerly held as absolute, but often a downright dislike of them. What seems frequently to emerge is not a calm, objective disbelief, but what one might call an anti-belief made into a principle of its own. It is as though the whole personality were negatively oriented, were nihilistic, as the existentialists say. This disposition does not disbelieve on the shallow basis of arguments or proofs; the argument is already in its constitution. It makes swift work of all particular beliefs, because it has already dealt with the greater enemy: the tendency to believe. In what must be considered a profound comment on the modern mind as well as a statement affording great insight into Emerson's thought, Gabriel Marcel says,

The history of modern philosophy, as I said before, seems to supply abundant illustrations of the progressive replacement of atheism, in the grammatically private sense of the word, by an anti-theism whose
made of determinism. For is it possible that after all its magnificent work, the creative power should somehow have mislaid itself? In a precisely similar vein, Berdiaev says,

If man is only the product of his natural and social environment, if he is entirely moulded by society, it is incomprehensible where the power to create comes from, which permits him to master natural and social forces and to create something entirely new. The lower cannot create the higher unless it contains within itself what is potentially higher.8


Rightly apprehended, techniques with their determinism form the *instrument* of creativeness.

It seems clear then that Emerson suggests the same answer to determinism and its concomitant passivity that the existentialists do—creativeness. He suggests that each person answer by action, not by theory. There is after all something very convincing about action and something very tenuous about theory. When a lowering determinism constricts the horizon, when it denies the possibility of any new or spontaneous creation, when its proponents take particular delight, as sometimes seems, in blasting every fledgling hope that invigorates life—all in the name of weaning man away from his childish illusions—, then one unanswerable recourse remains to the individual: he can create. His creative action
or the heart, lover of absolute good, intervenes for our succor, and at one whisper of these high powers we awake from ineffectual struggles with this nightmare. We hurl it into its own hell, and cannot again contract ourselves to so base a state.?


One wonders if "impudent knowingness" is not abroad today in a far more virulent form than Emerson knew it; apparently the existentialists think so. But one must, I think, be struck by the overall mastery of the problem displayed in this passage, by the perception of the twin dangers attending determinism: the formation of a superior "knowing" class who eventually constitute the masters, and the growth of a hopeless passivity which paralyzes the vital powers. To use the common idiom, these tendencies take the "spirit" out of people.

How put that spirit back? Not by more techniques, say all these writers, but by a rebirth in each individual of the creative spirit, for, declares Emerson, the creative spirit is primary, not secondary; it is the aboriginal maker—even of techniques; it is its own evidence by virtue of the fact of creating. It is always there, for "it is impossible that the creative power should exclude itself." This last statement, a combination of common sense and inspiration, may be one of the keenest, as it is certainly one of the most humorous, criticisms ever
who has so assiduously devoted himself to kicking every foundation out from under it. When he denied the pristine creativeness, he gave the tyrant his cue.

That Emerson was keenly aware of the dangers of deterministic thinking in its numerous ramifications seems evident from the following passage, in which "temperament" is roughly equivalent to determinism.

On the platform of physics we cannot resist the contracting influences of so-called science. Temperament puts all divinity to rout. I know the mental proclivity of physicians. I hear the chuckle of the phrenologists. Theoretic kidnappers and slave-drivers, they esteem each man the victim of another, who winds him round his finger by knowing the law of his being; and, by such cheap signboards as the color of his beard or the slope of his occiput, reads the inventory of his fortunes and character. The grossest ignorance does not disgust like this impudent knowingness. The physicians say they are not materialists; but they are:—Spirit is matter reduced to an extreme thinness: O so thin!—But the definition of spiritual should be, that which is its own evidence. What notions do they attach to love? what to religion? One would not willingly pronounce these words in their hearing, and give them the occasion to profane them.

...''But, sir, medical history; the report to the Institute; the proven facts!''—I distrust the facts and the inferences. Temperament is the veto or limitation-power in the constitution, very justly applied to restrain an opposite excess in the constitution, but absurdly offered as a bar to original equity. When virtue is in presence, all subordinate powers sleep. On its own level, or in view of nature, temperament is final. I see not, if one be once caught in this trap of so-called sciences, any escape for the man from the links of the chain of physical necessity. Given such an embryo, such a history must follow. On this platform one lives in a sty of sensuality, and would soon come to suicide. But it is impossible that the creative power should exclude itself. Into every intelligence there is a door which is never closed, through which the creator passes. The intellect, seeker of absolute truth,
view, proceeding fatefully in the opposite direction. The technicians have largely overlooked the deeper implications of their position. However sincere or altruistic their motives, they are led by their denial of human creativeness, by their inevitable division of society into the makers and the made, the technician and the material, the active and the passive, into one logical position—a psychology of master and slave, to put it in its most brutal terms. In the modern totalitarian societies or in George Orwell's 1984 we behold simply the fulfilment of the possibilities latent in a technology which denies dignity or creativeness to man. In these manufactured robots of the state, devoid of humanity, devoid even of identity as individual human beings, the melancholy triumph of technique appears.

Though the democratic intellectual may express shocked horror at these monster states, the existentialists declare that the tendencies often already exist in his own thought. He has invited the catastrophe by his dogmatic denial of absolute values, by his faith in the power of techniques to produce character, most of all, perhaps, by his immense condescension toward the unthinking masses who must be indoctrinated, guided, and molded into conformity like so many animals. His belief in treating man as another "thing" to be manipulated has undone the very values he prizes most. He need not bewail the loss of a sense of human dignity
many political leaders, intellectuals, educators and social technicians to regard their human material as plastic matter to be molded at will. It has been found so easy to make "things" that a transfer has been effected to the notion of making people. Man becomes quite literally an object. Personality can be made by the right techniques; behavior perhaps can be controlled; ideal states can be made out of not so ideal people by men whose character embodies still less of the ideal. Now the existentialists do not deny the immense power of conditioning, nor do they churlishly decry the benefits of techniques, but they do deplore this almost explicit denial of any creative power in the individuals who comprise the "masses." Like Emerson, they want to break the masses up, to waken individuals to a sense of their God-given creativeness. In short, they have faith in man. Says Berdyaev,  

We must create in our soulless and chaotic world more intense and more profound centres of spirituality. The inertia of political parties, which are necessarily directed towards external activities, is really terrifying and we cannot expect, we must not expect, salvation and renaissance from them.  

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Far from creating more profound personalities, the devotees of social techniques are, in the existentialist
...—yet it is wholesome to man to look not at Fate, but the other way: the practical view is the other. His sound relation to these facts is to use and command, not to cringe to them. "Look not on Nature, for her name is fatal," said the oracle. The too much contemplation of these limits induces meanness. They who talk much of destiny, their birth-star, etc., are in a lower dangerous plane, and invite the evils they fear.5


These may be words meant particularly for the modern ear. We might consider soberly if the "wholesome" and "practical" view be not the creative view; we have been contemplating limits for a long time now, and seem to have reaped from it only hopelessness and passivity. One need only translate "destiny" and "birth-star" into "heredity" and "environment" to get the modern equivalent, for superstition does not consist of preferring astrology to science, but of entertaining a superstitious trust in either astrology or science. We like better those active souls who fly in the face of fate—scientific or astrological. One is minded of the physics professor who calculated down to the last inch the maximum distance a golfball could be driven, whereupon his son stepped out and drove a ball twenty yards farther. The son, it seems, had something of the right spirit in him. He was creative.

The existentialists trace an even more sinister development of deterministic thinking in the tendency of
an increasing determinism tends to obliterate the creative power. We might consider first the disturbing dependence upon techniques—a dependence which ranges from the petulant to the pathetic. Science has indeed produced miracles, and the existentialists hope it produces more, but what of the poor mortal who becomes so dependent upon it? The more benefit he receives, the less effort he has to expend, the more the creative powers flag. Some slight imagination is required to read a novel, but the very nadir of passivity seems to have been reached in television, technical triumph though it is. Curiously enough, as Gabriel Marcel remarks, as the techniques for enjoyment increase, enjoyment itself seems to decrease, and the existentialists imply clearly that passivity is at the root of this discontent.

This passive dependence may be directed towards many things by "objectified" man, but it is not the things themselves or the natural forces or the techniques which are at fault; it is man who is at fault; he has reversed the order of Nature so that "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Man creative should be in the saddle, and I suggest that for Emerson, as for the existentialists, the great enemy is passivity, that the one thing of value in the world is "the active soul." Even in "Fate," where he concedes so much to determinism, he still says,
Now obviously the mere fact that one holds by the concept of determinism will not produce a passive personality, any more than a concept of creativeness will produce a creative personality: the determinist in theory may be creative in fact, while the proponent of creativeness may well embody the passivity he attacks. So little effect do abstract ideas have on conduct that it is probably nearer the truth to say that the attitude produces the conception. But, some connection there is, for determinism assumes passivity, helplessness, on the part of the hapless creature. The existentialist statement of this connection comes down to this: in a world where deterministic thinking—as exemplified by scientific techniques of all kinds—has held sway for some one hundred years or more, man comes more and more to consider himself helpless, to rely on techniques (which somebody else has invented) for things he could and should do for himself, to become passive; in short, he loses sight of the fact that he is primarily a creator, the creator even of techniques. The existentialists hold that wherever so much determinism hangs in the air, some of it is bound to be inhaled, and in the long run it comes out—passivity.

No doubt so sweeping a generalization requires some backing, and we must therefore consider more minutely how
The phenomenon of passivity, for the existentialists, is intimately bound up with the theory of determinism. The relationship is a rather subtle one, for it is essentially the interrelationship of an attitude and an idea—always difficult things to connect, but once seen, it renders far more point to the existentialist distaste for determinism. It is not determinism, but determinism linked to passivity, which comes under attack; the existentialists, as the reader has probably already noted, are more interested in the practical than in the theoretical aspect of abstract ideas such as determinism. Their metaphysics, like Emerson's, are to "the end of use," and it is only insofar as determinism as a theory has perceivable effects that they are concerned with it.
... and a person who is really alive in this way has, quite apart from any tangible achievements of his, something essentially creative about him... It should be added that in placing creativity at the basis of ethics, we at the same time transcend that sort of ethical individualism for which the individual tends to be thought of as something self-contained, a monad... 2

2Ibid., Vol. I, p. 139.

In the same manner Berdyaev finds in the inner fact of creativeness a transcendence of self, a breakthrough.

All creative work, all knowledge, all act, the making of all that is new, is impossible without some self-limitation and a transcending of one's lower nature. Only the man who places the object of his creation above himself and who prefers truth to self is capable of creating anything in life. That is a spiritual axiom. 3


Given this primary impulse to create, one can understand more easily why all these writers display such aversion to codified ethics.

In its struggle to achieve creativeness, the personality must first shake off the passivity which is so strongly linked to Angst. Passivity indeed seems almost to be the cardinal sin for Berdyaev and Marcel, and, considered as a whole, what are Emerson's writings but one vast incitement to activity? Marcel explicitly contrasts the creative fullness of life with the passive state in which the
Emerson's "affirmative class," who "monopolize the homage of mankind." Says Gabriel Marcel, in elucidating his conception of creativeness,

There can be production without creation, and there can be creation without any identifiable object remaining to bear witness to the creation. I think that we must all, in the course of our lives, have known beings who were essentially creators; by the radiance of charity and love shining from their being, they add a positive contribution to the invisible framework which gives the human adventure the only meaning which can justify it. . . .1


Thus it is not the outward manifestations of creativeness which concern these writers; it is the inner drive, the impulse which moves one to live creatively. This creative urge, as has been earlier remarked, is the inseparable concomitant of the ethical choice which, so to speak, calls it into being. Seen from within, the ethical life is a continual bestowing of benefit, a sharing of a fundamental richness which increases as it is shared. Far from being a wayward egotism, it is actually a transcension of individualism conceived monadically. It is a fullness of life which may be safely trusted, as Emerson says, so long as it be faithfully imparted, that is, so long as the person creates. Gabriel Marcel, who has been at considerable pains to guard against unbridled individualism, puts it thus:
notion of the artist as a person apart from other men, the special repository of the creative instinct. The existentialists and Emerson, on the other hand, do not exclude anyone from the creative life; they assert that creativeness pertains to the nature of man as man, and the possession of unusual talents does not set a man above his fellows in any essential respect. Everyone may create.

To live creatively, it is not necessary to produce a series of objets d'art; in fact, it is not necessary to produce anything tangible at all. The manifestations of creativeness are not always visible to the eye. The most truly creative person, in the existentialist sense, is frequently the one who leaves not a single created object behind him, but whose character exudes a bracing and mellowing influence upon those around him, and whose memory remains among his survivors as an invigorating force. His life is creative. He may not paint great pictures or write profound books; he may not be overflowing with ideas or be remarkable for wit—though all these things are creative. But the power of the total personality may work in the tone and texture of the entire life rather than merely in one channelized activity; the creative power makes itself felt without words; it is felt in the tone of the voice, the glance of the eye, in the refusal to dwell on the negative, in the positive orientation. Such people constitute
Chapter IV. The Creative Life

It is perhaps by their concept of the creative life that the Christian existentialists place Emerson's thought most strikingly in a new perspective. He too was trying to arouse the creative spirit, and this largely overlooked element in Emerson has been given new and forceful expression by the existentialists, who think that the awareness of the creative nature of man is being effaced from the modern consciousness by virtue of an overwhelming faith in scientific techniques. That is to say, the modern intellectual temper is attuned to a determinism in which there is no place for creativeness, in which creativeness becomes just one more illusion. It may be that this deterministic bias in modern thinking renders Emerson unpalatable today, and certainly it is precisely this determinism, with its faith in techniques and its "objectified" consciousness, that the existentialists are attacking.

Too frequently, when the word creativeness is mentioned, one thinks immediately and exclusively of the artist, as the one mortal to whom this magical power is imparted. Nor can it be denied that this is an impression which the artist himself is often only too willing to foster by various subtle means, so that the gaping admirer carries away the vague
knowing of one thing better and better. He might well have said with Kierkegaard,

Do not check your soul's flight, do not grieve the better promptings within you, do not dull your spirit with half wishes and half thoughts, ask yourself, and continue to ask until you find the answer; for one may have known a thing many times and acknowledged it, one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it, and yet it is only by the deep inward movements, only by the indescribable emotions of the heart, that for the first time you are convinced that what you have known belongs to you, that no power can take it from you; for only the truth which edifies is truth for you.27

As many critics have pointed out, he may not have sensed the demonic nature in all its potentiality, may not have seen how evil evil can really be. The temptation at this point is to call him innocent, though the judgment should be tempered by a consideration of the hard-headed, even cynical shrewdness with which he appraised men and affairs. But a deficient sense of evil can scarcely hinder a man from knowing how good good can really be. It does not need to explore every subterranean byway in order to find the highway. Montaigne remarks that there are a hundred ways of missing the mark, but only one way to hit it. Should we say then that Emerson concentrated on hitting it, and was not interested in the misses save as they corrected his aim? He ignored the byways; he was suspicious of both heights and depths, preferring a steady tone to his life; he did not want to need "diet and bleeding." And there is a tremendous point to this whole affirmative bias; that point is faith, an affirmation beyond words which the latter can suggest only as a shadow suggests substance. On this score we may say that he expresses the meaning of honesty, of creativeness, of the faith or inwardness which underlies all, with a depth that is not easy to match, and which many readings do not exhaust. He speaks the wisdom of Kierkegaard and Socrates, that wisdom is not the knowing of many things, but the
its reputation, and the credit of truth and honesty is as safe; nor have I any fear that a skeptical bias can be given by leaning hard on the sides of fate, of practical power, or of trade, which the doctrine of Faith cannot down-weigh. The strength of that principle is not measured in ounces and pounds; it tyrannizes at the centre of nature. We may well give skepticism as much line as we can. The spirit will return and fill us. It drives the drivers. It counterbalances any accumulations of power:--


That, I think, is faith. He has no illusion that he knows the truth, has this "terrific re-agent" safely under lock and key. Truth is dynamic. He is concerned about being on the side of truth, wherever that lies, just as it is said of Lincoln that, when he was asked during the Civil War if he thought God was on his side, he replied that he did not know, that he was more concerned to learn if he was on God's side.

It seems clear then that Emerson has unmistakably existential elements in his ethical thought. He has, too, unmistakable differences. His choice is not anguished; he seems at times to have been effortlessly impelled to it. But he does choose; he does insist that one must live the truth before he can know it. We might say that he knew what Angst and despair were, but not with the fullness the existentialists do. He was not, as he frankly says, a "born sufferer," and he would not pretend to be one. Nor does his choice bring him to the Christian sense of sin.
explain to the doubtful why evil exists; if God exists, He will doubtless make His own apology by and by. In the meantime, only honesty.

It is well known how much Emerson was inclined to skepticism, and those who find it difficult to reconcile with his intuition and his faith may see in the existentialist dialectic of faith and skepticism some answer. They are almost different aspects of the same thing, a deep integrity which acknowledges in existence that truth it cannot hope to conceive in thought. The following passage, taken from the essay "Worship," illustrates how integrally faith was bound up with skepticism for Emerson, how in the fashionable modern term they form a "tension."

I have no infirmity of faith; no belief that it is of much importance what I or any man may say: I am sure that a certain truth will be said through me, though I should be dumb, or though I should try to say the reverse. Nor do I fear skepticism for any good soul. A just thinker will allow full swing to his skepticism. I dip my pen in the blackest ink, because I am not afraid of falling into my inkpot. I have no sympathy with a poor man I knew, who, when suicides abounded, told me he dared not look at his razor. We are of different opinions at different hours, but we always may be said to be at heart on the side of truth.

I see not why we should give ourselves such sanctified airs. If the Divine Providence has hid from men neither disease nor deformity nor corrupt society, but has stated itself out in passions, in war, in trade, in the love of power and pleasure, in hunger and need, in tyrannies, literatures and arts,—let us not be so nice that we cannot write these facts down coarsely as they stand, or doubt but there is a counter-statement as ponderous, which we can arrive at, and which, being put, will make all square. The solar system has no anxiety about
nothing that Emerson says,

I think that philosophy is still rude and elementary. It will one day be taught by poets. The poet is in the natural attitude; he is believing; the philosopher, after some struggle, having only reasons for believing. 25


A clever man disputes about philosophies; a wise man goes one better and weighs philosophy.

Clearly, Emerson thought, why need the man of faith burden himself down with all these particular beliefs? Common folk know it for what it is, pedantry or fanaticism, so that it is the trademark of the intellectual that each one comes bearing his particular hobby-horse of a theory— including his existentialism or his transcendentalism. It is a strange kind of faith that binds us down and makes us poorer than before. Would it not be better for each to come simply as a human being, knowing his ignorance, and willing to set all these theories out blinking in the light of day, trusting that if there is anything good or true in them it will make itself manifest to those who honestly will one thing? Faith does not clutch at doctrines and guard them as a cat does her kittens. For if faith is honesty in living, then skepticism is honesty in thinking and represents perhaps the integrity of the intellect. Faith is in no hurry to play God's apologist and
remains unsaid; probably cannot be said; for all that we say is the far-off remembering of the intuition. That thought by what I can now nearest approach to say it, is this. When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name;—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience. You take the way from man, not to man.24


We might say too that for Emerson, as for Kierkegaard, an honest skepticism is the correlative of faith. For all conceptual thought is hypothetical and only fanatics hold otherwise. Whoever says that he knows is deluding himself—though not others, except insofar as they too delude themselves. He means that he wishes he knew, and his preoccupation with doctrine is a compensation for his lack of faith; faith may produce doctrines, but doctrines will never produce faith, and that tendency to cling to creeds—whether religious, philosophical, or political—is so rooted in us that it seems impossible to get rid of what Emerson called this "disease of the intellect." For faith precedes all doctrines and belief precedes all particular beliefs; from an existentialist point of view, we are not so much in danger of losing beliefs as we are of losing the disposition to believe. The prover of beliefs has already lost his faith—if he ever had any, and it is not for
I had expressed myself a bit in opposition to the exaggerated respect for intellectual gifts which is so characteristic of our age, I had insisted that what really matters is something quite different, an inwardness of the entire being for which language possesses no other expression but faith.  


Could we not say the same of Emerson? May not the dangerous "Self-Reliance" be really a communication of faith, which the sectarian translates into works, which the intellectual translates into concepts, which the sociologist or legislator translates into anarchy? For, all make the transition from existential to intellectual, from subject to object, from Reason to Understanding. It may, on the contrary, be an existential communication, and the complete absence of objective support may express its faith. It may be, not an attempt to multiply concepts or prove their validity, but an effort to "deepen"—in Marcel's term—a single concept by suggesting its power to illuminate the concrete facts of living experience. It may be an attempt to convey that admittedly vague but certainly real thing we call "insight." There is no doubt that it is at least an effort to convey a sense of faith and a sense of the "Trustee" behind this faith, an "aboriginal Self" which is the ground of all particular selves. And the sign of that faith is its aloneness.

And now at last the highest truth on this subject
transaction on the basis of a calculation, an advantageous speculation in the market instead of an absolute venture.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{quotation}
\end{quotation}

Kierkegaard and Emerson both say to their readers, Take it or leave it, but do not waste the day arguing about it, for that only signifies that you have not understood it. Do not seek a security which betrays you; it may be what you think you want, but it does not answer to your deepest need.

Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{quotation}
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There may not be many concepts in Emerson, but one sometimes feels that he had caught the spirit of what living is all about.

We might say then that as Kierkegaard and the existentialists are preeminently men of \textit{faith} over \textit{works}, so too, Emerson in a quiet, calm way, without the heroics or the agonizing, was trying to bring his age back to a sense of what it means to have faith, to venture, to choose. Kierkegaard described his own task thus.
are heard as well as spoken in faith. There is no
danger in them to him who is really in earnest to
know the truth, but like everything else, may be a
mere hypocrize's cloak to such as seek offence, or
to such as talk for talk's sake. 20

20 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 337.

His answer is Kierkegaard's answer: be in earnest and
above all, have faith.

By now, it should be clear that to demand these ob­
jective guarantees or safeguards (though most of us will)
is for Emerson and the existentialists tantamount to a
declaration of non-faith. The courageous dare; the timid
seek assurances; as Emerson insists, "God will not have
his work made manifest by cowards." We might hark back
to Kierkegaard with his insistence upon getting rid of
proofs, assurances, and all the public pawnbrokers who
want security on their investment. Says Kierkegaard of
this faith which requires assurances,

How fortunate that I am not a serious man, an assev­
erating philosopher or a guaranteeing clergyman, for
then I, too, might be moved to attempt a demonstra­
tion. Fortunately my frivolity excuses me; and in
my capacity as a frivolous man I venture to have the
opinion that anyone who resolves to strive for an
eternal happiness on the ground of his faith in the
assurances of the philosophers and the guarantees
of the clergy, will nevertheless not really strive
for it, and that what will prevent him is precisely
this confidence of his in the philosophers and the
clergy; though the clergyman believes, to be sure,
that it is lack of confidence. Such confidence
merely inspires him with a desire to follow, to
associate himself with others, to make a business
manifestation of the ethical choice as presented by these writers, he may find it in this fact: the person creates or lives creatively. This tree, like any other, may be known by its fruits. The intuitions of a Hitler would be for them not intuitions at all, but pathological phenomena, and the sign of their falsity is their destructiveness. So too of Emerson's "bold sensualist" who uses the doctrine to rationalize his actions; if it be objected that this doctrine is dangerous in the wrong hands, it should be obvious that any doctrine is dangerous in the wrong hands, and that if everything which has been done in the name of Christ be laid to his account, then Christianity has much to answer for. For the false man perverts the truest doctrine, which fact indicates that the truth must first be in the man before any of it can be realized in the doctrine; as the existentialists say, truth is inwardness. The degree to which Emerson wrestled with this problem can be seen only in the Journals, in the countless exhortations and regrets at not having a little more faith. The following illustrates his sense of the danger and his interpretation of the answer.

Lean without fear on your own tastes. Is there danger in the doctrine as if it permitted self-indulgence? Fool! Every man hath his own conscience as well as his own genius, and if he is faithful to himself he will yield that law implicit obedience. All these doctrines in the proposition, Thou art sufficient unto thyself (Ne te quasiveris extra) are perfectly harmless, on the supposition that they...
here, a bow there, and then one goes his way; there is no point to this trained dog existence; if a dog could do it better, why do we need a man?

The existentialists have tried, as Berdyaev says, to break up the petrified modes of existence in our time, to liberate us from the pinfolds of a deterministic consciousness which is as strong within the churches as outside of them. Weighing their thought carefully, we might inquire if Emerson was not trying to do the same thing, if he was not a liberator of a rare sort, one who had a sense of the creative spirit which it is given few men to share. We might reconsider the judgment which sees in "Self-Reliance" nothing but an invitation to license; possibly it does not all lie on the surface, neatly catalogued, and with plenty of helps for the unwary. The impious ring of the "Devil's child" may proceed from a deeper faith than the shocked devotee knows. For some have faith and some have not, and we need better guides than sects to tell them apart. We might bring up anew the question of atheism and say with Emerson,

It is plain from all the noise that there is atheism somewhere: the only question is now, which is the atheist?19


So then, if one seeks some kind of objective
condemn in the scientist. It is, as Marcel and Berdyaev so excellently say, not techniques and sciences and scientists which are at fault, but the mind which has allowed itself to be disoriented by technique. It denies the subjective in order to hold by the objective. In Emerson's terminology, it abandons the Reason to cling to the Understanding. Its most precious hope is to reduce living to some sort of science, to set codes of conduct as a church, to arrive at a dehumanized robot as the Marxists or the Nazis, to fix on patterns for making human beings as the educator or the sociologist. But is there nothing human there to begin with? Is there nothing in man or his source to be trusted? If not, then we are licked before we start; if there is, then why not trust it a little more, instead of betraying like the Grand Inquisitor, by every word and deed, that there is really nothing to have faith in at all? This is the kind of faith I believe Emerson was getting at, and clearly a venture of faith is required in his ethical choice.

Certainly it was Emerson's conviction that living is not a science but an art, and that if anyone catches to some degree the trick of it, he never gets it from anyone else or even from himself in the deepest sense of the word. If man is a creator, can he not be trusted? The science of legalistic ethics turns life into a formality, a nod
following could be approximated many times in his work.

The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;—cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.18


Today there is much disapproval on the part of churchmen and humane liberals of an encroachment of "scientism" into our lives. But they do wrong to denounce the scientist, who, when he is true to the cause of truth, knows better than to apply his methods in fields where they will not work. It has rarely occurred to the denouncers that they themselves, every time they say, "Let us hold by this," or "Let us make rules or codes for this thing so that it may hold good forever," are denying the creative consciousness and asserting the deterministic mode of life they
merely does the faithful man create, but he creates after his own law and by so doing breathes life into the old ones. He cannot possibly live creatively by harking to somebody else's rules or principles, any more than, as Emerson says, Shakespeare could have learned how to write from a teacher. The creative is the primary, not the derivative element, and the old, outmoded word inspiration comes back into respect with the existentialists. The creative is the new, the unforeseeable, the startling, the enricher of life, but it always remains the mysterious because it has its roots in a source man cannot plumb. It may laugh at rules and scorn principles, even its own, secure in the conviction that when faced with a moral problem it can produce a new principle to deal with the fact, nay, produce a principle out of the fact, much as a genius makes masterpieces out of the material other people contempt. If the man is sincere and earnest, then the new principle is soon seen to be not so new after all, but a new application of a very old and very respectable principle, and new life is infused into the Ten Commandments because someone had the courage to deny them, had nerve enough to let go his old angels and welcome the new ones he but half understood.

Such, it seems to me, is part of that creative spirit which underlies everything Emerson wrote, but which perhaps is best expressed in "The American Scholar."
and whoever does not find it, to however slight degree, in his daily life may rest assured that it does not lie in the thinking of pious thoughts or the analysis of big words. Berdyaev too declares that every creative effort entails a transcension, a willingness by the person to subordinate himself, to forego, to give, even in the supreme case to give up his life. And this is the final mark of fidelity, of self-reliance, of integrity; it results in a transcension of self inseparable from the creative drive which actually constitutes the transcension. It results in realities, not a futile heaping on of more concepts.

Unfortunately, some critical estimates of "Self-Reliance" have neglected to put it in the whole context of Emerson's ethical thought, and the creative aspect has therefore been submerged. Creativity, for the existentialists, is to be taken in its widest possible sense; thus, Dickens' Mark Tapley was a creative soul because he was always looking for adversity in order to remain cheerful in the midst of it, and anyone with such an abounding good humor and vitality could well afford to loaf occasionally; he carried his genius with him.

The creative pertains to the essence of man and is linked indissolubly with that suspicion of consistency which so distinguishes both Emerson and Marcel. Not
will not say, though in the journals he does declare, "The doctrine of immortality, the grand revelation of Christianity, illuminates and ennobles the existence of man." 16

16 Emerson. *Journals.* Vol. II, p. 120.

And the Christian immortality is certainly a personal one. One wonders if he did not steer clear of dogmatizing on immortality—not merely because he hated dogmatism—but because he feared to evoke reactions which he considered the polar opposite of "spiritual."

For both Emerson and the existentialists the ethical choice includes a sloughing off of the ego, the temporal self. In a very expressive use of the English word "exist," Marcel puts it thus.

There is a sense in which it is literally true to say that the more exclusively it is I who exist, the less do I exist; and conversely, the more I free myself from the prison of ego-centricism, the more do I exist. 17


The self is forgotten in the enthusiasm with which it gives itself to its task. That is to say, it transcends itself by abandoning itself, just as when we say of a person who lives for his work that he "loses" himself in it. In short, transcendence does not consist of journeying into a mental stratosphere where the bustling pleasures of life sound far off and faintly. It is to be found in living itself
existentialist position that though man's philosophical systems are things of "shreds and tatters," a perfect system exists for God, and that it makes very little difference if man sees it or not. Therefore, in "Self-Reliance" he is in for faith. In "Montaigne" he is in for skepticism. In "Fate" he is in for fate. How to reconcile these warring elements? "By obeying each thought frankly, by harping, or, if you will, pounding on each string, we learn at last its power."\footnote{Emerson. "Fate." \textit{Works.} Vol. VI, p. 4.} His object is not to reconcile things which do not wish to be reconciled, but to be honest about each. And that very honesty, bleak as it is, brings him back to the primacy of ethics and to faith. It encompasses the doubt.

It is not too clear from his work whether Emerson's ethical choice—and "Self-Reliance" seems to be one sustained effort to express the decisiveness of the choice and the faith underlying it—is also made on the ground of immortality. He speaks contemptuously of the haggling for a personal immortality as being the fall of man. But, if we consider his complete work, then immortality seems to be assumed; this world, as he specifically says, is our place of education, and immortality is inferred from our design. Whether it is a personal immortality or not he
Too little has been made of the fact that Emerson did experience struggle, disappointment, and fruitless days. Significant entries occur in the journals, but even the essays give decided hints of what might be called the more "human" side of Emerson, the doubts, the weaknesses which reassure the reader that he is dealing with a mortal like himself. "Experience,"—which seems to me his masterpiece—"Illusions," "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," these essays present a different Emerson from that popularly conceived; there is no bland optimism here, but rather the record of a man who gave the existentialist Angst a strikingly literary rather than philosophical expression. In spite of all his faith he could sadly say that in an entire lifetime each person knows only a few really sane hours; the rest of the time he is blind.

And, considering only these three essays, what enormous concessions Emerson made. Very few such born believers have ever thrown themselves so completely into the opposite camp. But it was characteristic of Emerson that he did not hesitate to do what always seems treason to the believer, namely, to express the doubt more forcefully than the doubter himself can manage. Whatever viewpoint he took, he tried to take it completely: it was an all or nothing proposition. With the reconciliation of opposites he did not bother. He seems to have shared the
thing to Emerson that "decisiveness" means to the existentialists. The choice once made, however low in tone, stick to it. Do not compromise with it. It is this kind of decisiveness which speaks out of "Self-Reliance," the unsaid proposition being that it does not matter so much how lofty a moral tone you have set as that you should hold fast by whatever you have chosen. And Emerson did have some struggles. We find him saying,

It will not do to indulge myself. Philosopher or Christian, whatever faith you teach, live by it. Who opposes me, who shuts up my mouth, who hinders the flow of my exhortation? Myself, only myself. Cannot I conform myself to my principles? Set the principles as low, as loose as you please, set the tune not one note higher than the true pitch, but after settling what they shall be, stick to them.14


This is decisiveness. It may not be particularly Christian, but it is undeniably sincere, and that, if I understand the existentialists correctly, is what counts. And if one does not see any particular point in this ethical choosing, he can still say, "Why be an angel before your time?" which statement, if it lacks loftiness of aspiration, has at least so complete an honesty about it that it compels admiration. Emerson did not especially want angels; he did want individuals who would be themselves; given that much, he shared Kierkegaard's faith that the rest would go well. But the decisiveness had to be there.
the nothing of death.\textsuperscript{12}

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\textsuperscript{12}Emerson. "Illusions." \textit{Works.} Vol. VI, p. 322.
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There may not be much Christian charity here, but there is plenty of old Calvinist discipline and very little patience with weakness.

It is, I believe, this rigorous discipline which underlies the "relaxation" of "Spiritual Laws," and possibly one so disciplined might safely be trusted to let the Divine express itself through him. The disciplined will is for Emerson the "natural" will, which fact accounts for the following unexistential statement.

The lesson is forcibly taught by these observations that our life might be much easier and simpler than we make it; that the world might be a happier place than it is; that there is no need of struggles, convulsions, and despairs, of the wringing of the hands and the gnashing of the teeth; that we misconceive our own evils. We interfere with the optimism of nature; for whenever we get this vantage-ground of the past, or of a wiser mind in the present, we are able to discern that we are begirt with laws which execute themselves.\textsuperscript{13}

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Thus, the natural man is good—if he has taken the trouble to be naturally disciplined, disciplined not so much in any particular code as in whatever principles he may have. Discipline is part of the nature of things.

It would seem that discipline means somewhat the same
things which executes itself and whose laws are never successfully violated: they are merely illustrated. These spiritual laws apparently are found only in proportion as they are followed, the discipline thus preceding the perception as well as following it.

On this matter of discipline there is a curious hardness in Emerson. Never one to stipulate particular principles or rules to be followed, he is adamant in insisting that one follow completely whatever principles he has taken to heart. For those who do not he has only contempt. I suspect, therefore, that much of the struggle which the existentialists stress—and perhaps, as they think, the modern world has to rediscover, in its search for quick and easy ways, what it means to struggle—much of this struggle is taken for granted by the scion of generations of ministers. Perhaps his discipline was bred in his very bone. It is difficult to account for his contempt for the undisciplined on any other ground. Grumbling Crump and his devils are for Emerson evidence of the absence of discipline.

The visions of good men are good; it is the undisciplined will that is whipped with bad thoughts and bad fortunes. When we break the laws, we lose our hold on the central reality. Like sick men in hospitals, we change only from bed to bed, from one folly to another; and it cannot signify much what becomes of such castaways, wailing, stupid, comatose creatures, lifted from bed to bed, from the nothing of life to
However, there is grave danger of oversimplifying what is clearly a complicated matter. Kierkegaard and Berdyaev do not hold with taking airs upon one's attainments or denying the graceful soul to whom these things come naturally; they simply do not find that it comes so naturally to them—and they have a point there. If we must agree with Emerson that the less a man thinks or knows about his virtues the better we like him, we must also agree that the critical choices of life are for most people matters of real struggle. Emerson seems almost to have reached the stage of what the psychologists would call complete sublimation, where conflict disappears. He is almost describing man before the Fall, where conscious-ness is so completely integrated that the mundane self, the ego, disappears, where all difference between Mine and Thine is lost.

But this absence of struggle in Emerson must be qualified by a consideration of one element which underlies his thought and was certainly embodied in his life: that element is discipline. Rather than emphasize it, he seems to take it for granted—as a 19th Century New Englander might. But it is there. In the first Nature one of the great lessons of Nature is the discipline of the intellect and the will; spiritual as well as physical laws exist, and they must be obeyed as perceived; there is an order of
of their writers to look misery in the face until even misery backs down. Certainly in Emerson's case we must take into account an English and Yankee tradition which considers it extremely poor taste to cry about one's troubles or to pour out one's soul on sympathetic shoulders. I do not think these considerations really "explain" anything, however, and am almost tempted to fall back on an inspired term and call Emerson a "once-born" man. For Kierkegaard's declaration that the man who suffers the most excruciating Angst has the greatest potential spirituality, Emerson would probably have had no liking. How little essential sympathy he had with the doctrine of struggle and suffering may be seen by the following.

In like manner our moral nature is vitiated by any interference of our will. People represent virtue as a struggle, and take to themselves great airs upon their attainments, and the question is everywhere vexed when a noble nature is commended, whether the man is not better who strives with temptation. But there is no merit in the matter. Either God is there or he is not there. We love characters in proportion as they are impulsive and spontaneous. The less a man thinks or knows about his virtues the better we like him. Timoleon's victories are the best victories, which ran and flowed like Homer's verses, Plutarch said. When we see a soul whose acts are all regal, graceful and pleasant as roses, we must thank God that such things can be and are, and not turn sourly on the angel and say "Crump is a better man with his grunting resistance to all his native devils."

We receive the distinct impression that the great choice has already been made.

Though in all these writers the sincerity or integrity of the choice is a common denominator, Marcel and Emerson seem to part from Kierkegaard and Berdyaev in that the former indulge in much less agonizing. Kierkegaard declared that it was his intention to make Christianity difficult again, since Christianity had become so easy a matter that one went to Heaven by railroad train—like Hawthorne's fortunates. He succeeded, so much so, that for him there is practically no movement of the spirit which is not performed at the height of tension. Indeed he defines the ethical life as struggle and victory. Berdyaev too sees a constant struggle or tension between the higher and the lower, a spiritual victory being won only at the price of agony.

This tortured consciousness one cannot find in the man who asserted that "no man ever stated his griefs as lightly as he might." Perhaps national characteristics do enter into the matter here, the general gloom which overhangs not a few Scandinavian writers, the voracious appetite for suffering in the Russians which enables some
into "Spiritual Laws" with scarcely a break in context.

A presence is a reality; it is a kind of influx; it depends upon us to be permeable to this influx, but not, to tell the truth, to call it forth. Creative fidelity consists in maintaining ourselves actively in a permeable state; and there is a mysterious interchange between this free act and the gift granted in response to it.9


Perhaps Marcel's "maintaining ourselves actively" throws some light on why Emerson's statement of the movement has such a deceptively easy sound, why the following quotation is sometimes mistaken for an invitation to go to sleep.

A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would show us that a higher law than that of our will regulates events; that our painful labors are unnecessary and fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. Belief and love,—a believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care.. . .We need only obey. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word. Why need you choose so painfully your place and occupation and associates and modes of action and of entertainment? Certainly there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of balance and willful election. For you there is a reality, a fit place and congenial duties. Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right and a perfect contentment. . . .

I say, do not choose; but that is a figure of speech by which I would distinguish what is commonly called choice among men, and which is partial act, the choice of the hands, of the eyes, of the appetites,
Perhaps the most striking statement of this totality is Kierkegaard's when he declares that "Purity of heart is to will one thing," for "Only the Good is one thing in its essence and the same in each of its expressions." Now this statement seems on first consideration to say everything and on second consideration to say nothing—which is generally the way of statements where the reader has to supply his meaning out of his own experience. But the totality indicated by "one thing" deserves attention.

Now I believe that this same totality or integrity of choice is expressed by Emerson in a different way in "Spiritual Laws." One wills one thing by—not willing; one chooses himself in his eternal validity by—not choosing. One comes to the point of what I think Kierkegaard means by "resignation," an abdication of the ego. One might almost say that in his faith Emerson's man lets his course be chosen for him, by means of subordinating his lower powers. He gets himself out of the way so that whatever power produced him may have a chance to act through him; in a word, he becomes receptive or, in Marcel's term, "available." It is rather amazing to find Gabriel Marcel expressing this same receptivity in words which could fit
of "That's business," or "Everybody does it," or "I had to," Emerson had absolutely no use. To the sociologist who speaks of the deterministic force of the social ethos, he would have replied, "Are there no individuals in this culture?"

We must hold a man amenable to reason for the choice of his daily craft or profession. It is not an excuse any longer for his deeds that they are the custom of his trade. What business has he with an evil trade? Has he not a calling in his character?"  

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It is well to recall that we are not dealing with a series of steps leading to the ethical life or a collection of isolated phenomena; for Emerson and the existentialists, choice, responsibility, integrity, sincerity, duty and freedom are elements, which, when reflective thought considers them, take on a separateness which they may not in the least have when one experiences them in living. Marcel suggests that there prevails among these elements a kind of spiritual organon, so that if one is impressed by a deeper meaning in any one of them, he will find to his amazement that he has also contracted for the lot. It is as though Emerson's mysterious "affinities" were at work, as though some principle put all in each and each in all. It is as though these things were only facets of some central nameless totality which animated all of them.
Planetary influence is a little old-fashioned today, but we have that which is even better, because scientific—heredity, environment, conditioning. All praises to that greater tolerance and sympathy which a better understanding of another human being's condition produces; certainly the existentialists want more of it and not less; but there is one person to whom this determinism should not be applied: myself. So far as a living responsibility goes, all these planetary or genetic influences add up to only one word—*excuse*. When I plead as extenuation of my deeds my wretched childhood and villainous conditioning, it may all be true, every word of it; only one thing makes it false, namely, *the fact that I say it*. Someone else may excuse me, but not myself.

To show how far-reaching are the implications of existentialist thought—and of Emerson's—we might point out that modern educational theory seems, all in all, to have abetted this "behavior of excuse," as Emmanuel Mounier calls it, to have so lost itself in deterministic thinking that it is now engaged in the paradoxical effort to produce responsible people by first telling them in every conceivable way—that they are not responsible. In "Experience" Emerson pointed out the danger of deterministic thinking—and the modern existentialists confirm his foresight. For the pitiful business of whining and excusing,
prove it to someone else is achieving a remarkable feat indeed. But responsibility in living is a completely mysterious fact which one asserts only in his practice, not his theory, though theory and practice so often split that one is tempted to throw all theory down the drain; the intellectual proponent of free-will is frequently the most irresponsible of persons, while the proponent of determinism can sometimes be the most truly responsible person in the state.

Responsibility for Emerson is something one chooses, almost creates. If one feels that it is somehow a part of his proper being, then he will take it though every proof in the book points otherwise. Logic is forgotten. He will agree with Edmund when the latter gives what is probably the finest expression of the spirit of responsibility to be found in literature.

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit of our own behaviour,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail, and my nativity was under Ursae Major: so that it follows I am rough and lecherous.—Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.

(King Lear, I, ii)
statement that if a man chooses earnestly enough, he will be sure to choose the right. The same sentiment underlies all of Emerson's ethical thought.

Every sincere man is right, or, to make him right, only needs a little larger dose of his own personality. Excellent in his own way by means of not apprehending the gift of another. When he speaks out of another's mind, we detect it. He can't make any paint stick but his own. No man passes for that with another which he passes for with himself. The respect and the censure of his brother are alike injurious and irrelevant. We see ourselves; we lack organs to see others, and only squint at them.6

Thoreau, in his perverse fashion, was uttering the same thought when he declared that he would like to see all men be as far apart as possible.

Just as it is the sincerity of this choice which produces duty, so it is equally the sincerity which produces responsibility. Only a supreme indifference to life as it is lived could induce one to try proving man's free-will in the face of that determinism which every consistent intellectualism winds up with. Intellectually, the effort to conceive of free-will—and hence presumably responsibility—stalls itself on the proposition that there exists in man a kind of uncaused cause, or perhaps an effect which has no cause; but in view of the way our minds work, anyone who says he can conceive this phenomenon clearly and

It does not need to pump your brains and force thought to think rightly. Oh no, the ingenious person is warped by his ingenuity and mis-sees.\(^4\)


From the existential point of view then, duty is simply the expression in action of that primary integrity which the person chooses. Duty is inward, not outward, and cannot be reduced to formulas or codes. Such a position may sound anarchistic, but Kierkegaard would have considered Emerson excellently oriented when the latter wrote this passage:

The populace think that your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism; and the bold sensualist will use the name of philosophy to gild his crimes. But the law of consciousness abides. There are two confessional, in one or the other of which we must be shriven. You may fulfil your round of duties by clearing yourself in the \textit{direct}, or in the \textit{reflex} way. Consider whether you have satisfied your relations to father, mother, cousin, neighbor, town, cat and dog—whether any of these can upbraid you. But I may also neglect this reflex standard and absolve me to myself. I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can discharge its debts it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day.\(^5\)


And that last may be no idle challenge.

We might hark back here to Kierkegaard's curious
Behind this passage lies a decisive honesty which risks everything on the proposition that honesty somehow pertains to the nature of things, that God plays no tricks on those who play none themselves. But honesty is a simple and childish virtue, allowing as a concept very little inducement to intellectual gymnastics or earth-shaking conclusions. Everybody knows what honesty is, only—perhaps nobody knows it well enough. Thus we find Gabriel Marcel at the present time undertaking a Socratic investigation into the phenomenon of fidelity in all its simplicity. Perhaps honesty as well as the allied fidelity, is not as simple as is commonly thought, or perhaps, as all these writers hold, the simple is precisely the thing which baffles the most ingenious efforts to understand. It may be that the separation of honesty as a concept from honesty as a concrete phenomenon in living represents the perpetual error of intellectualism—the transferring of the existential to the intellectual, of the concrete to the abstract. Simplicity of character may be granted insight which is denied mere intellectual brilliance, denied almost because of that intelligence. The intellectual gets in his own way; the simple person lies parallel to Nature.
It is this choosing of integrity which one finds chiefly in "Self-Reliance," "Spiritual Laws," and the magnificent essay on "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic." When the existentialists say that choosing oneself brings the choice between good and evil into existence, or that fidelity to oneself is the ground of all ethics, they are restating that same position of Emerson's when he says, "I look upon the simple and childish virtues of veracity and honesty as the root of all that is sublime in character."  

But his strongest expression of integrity is in the following passage, which, being literary overstatement, has too often been criticized for its letter rather than for its spirit.

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, "What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?" my friend suggested, --"But these impulses may be from below, not from above." I replied, "They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this: the only right is what is after my constitution; the only
it. He has come to the point of preferring that which is, of seeking a "perpetual substitution of being for seeming." He has tried being everything else—like Kierkegaard's hero in Either/Or; now he will try being himself. And it is no easy job, as the existentialists explicitly say.

Such, it seems to me, is what Emerson's declaration comes to in part, the taking of a decisive stand which admits of an almost indefinite deepening. It is a stand calculated to answer by the most drastic means the existentialist question, "What is my business here?" It is an effort to probe reality by becoming real. It is a choosing of good and evil in a sense that transcends the legalistic codes of a society or a church; it is an effort to find that level of life at which good and evil begin to mean something more than a dogmatic injunction or a conditioned reflex or a means to respectability. It is an effort to get the "whole and genuine" quality of the thing in its integrity—if it has any integrity.

It appears then that Emerson, like the existentialists, finds in this primary choice an emergence of that integrity by which good and evil take on their valid significance. Then, the ethical life begins. This is to say that integrity or honesty is not a virtue, but the bone and sinew of all virtues, the inwardness which makes them what they are.
suspects though that he is saying it in the concrete terms which a common man may understand and take to heart, and which an intellectual may despise because there is so little to take to head. Emerson has deepened the abstraction and shown it in concrete instances.

Emerson's man has ignored the momentary gleams which bid him stand and see what is expected of him. He has ignored the inner promptings which are not really his at all. He has fled abroad. He has looked elsewhere. Surely the truth is to be had from someone else, from some wise church, some cleric, some educator, some scientist, one who knows? But he has found out that they do not know, or if they do, they cannot speak his language. He has learned the rueful wisdom of Omar, has heard great argument about it and about, but ever he comes out by that same door where in he went. He has tried books, but books do not speak unless spoken to, and one must bring the thing he hopes to find in them. He has learned that the integrity which separates each from each is a wise barrier which cannot be surmounted, that the common is a falsehood and the individual is the true. He has learned that the secret of life cannot be imparted from one to another, that, in Lao-Tse's words, he who knows does not tell, while he who tells does not know. He has learned that the truth can be had on only one condition—living
Chapter III. The Ethical Choice: Emerson

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none. This sculpture in the memory is not without preestablished harmony. The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.¹


If Emerson is not expressing, in this his central work, that mysterious movement of the soul by which a person "chooses himself in his eternal validity" or enters into a "pact" with life or chooses "personality," then he is certainly saying something remarkably close to it. One
so integrally are they bound together; the person casts himself loose from external help and advance calculations, and, almost in the gambler's sense, takes a chance. He chooses an objective uncertainty, and hopes to vindicate his faith by his living.
attitude is thus the balancing element of Marcel's faith, and it is apparently not until what he calls the Fires of Revelation, the Christian Revelation, are reached that this tendency to skepticism is suspended. The doubt is swallowed up in the faith.

... ... ... ... ... ...

Briefly summarized, the chief aspects of the existentialist ethic come to this. A primary act of will—which may call for continual repeating—is made whereby the person chooses himself in his eternal validity or takes a stand upon eternal principles. The choice is a choice for eternity; it presumes faith in immortality. The choice must be decisive, earnest, something which is carried out in living. Responsibility and duty emerge as elements which arise from this choice, elements which the person, so to speak, creates. The manifestation of this choice is creativeness in the largest sense of the word; a participation in eternal being means to share in the creative urge. Behind this choice is assumed an intellectual framework of two realms of being, or more properly, two determinants of consciousness, which comes to saying that man must transcend his present state in order to reach his true being. A venture of faith must be made in the choosing; it seems almost impossible to separate faith from this choice,
which the philosopher can never stand in the relationship of an onlooker to a picture. The philosopher, so to speak, must first chart his course by his own living. Experience is primary.

This leads me to believe that the development of my thought was largely an explicitation. It all seems to me to have happened as though I only gradually succeeded in treating as material for thought what had been an immediate experience, an experience less realised than assumed, rather like the blind groping in an uncharted cave; it is only later that the prospector can understand and retrace the way travelled in this first period of discovery. Moreover, I am convinced that I can be creative as a philosopher only for so long as my experience still contains unexploited and unchartered zones.


Marcel finally calls attention to the need of what might be called the critical attitude. He makes a clear distinction however between the critical spirit and the purely negative spirit which has committed itself to unbelief. There may be such a thing as pure negativism or nihilism just as there may be a too great impressionability, symptomatic of intellectual deficiency; both of these tendencies, so common today, Marcel sees as leading to a dogmatism which the best minds of the 19th century never asserted. The valid intellectual attitude he declares is the ability to comprehend an idea fully and sympathetically without necessarily subscribing to it, but this distinction he fears is almost lost today. The intellectually critical
Obviously, the activation of the belief, so to speak, will generate a certain assurance—if it is sincere—but this assurance cannot be proved or demonstrated, nor can it very well exist before the choice.

But it is abundantly clear that the assurance which we have just presupposed, is by no means a conviction; it goes beyond what has strictly speaking been given to me, it is a jump, a bet—and, like all bets, it can be lost.46

46Ibid., p. 79.

So completely does the living take precedence over the intellectual formulation of the faith that Marcel sees the final certainty as being a characteristic of the personality rather than of the doctrine. Using his distinction between the realm of being and the realm of having, he speaks of living with "a certainty which I am, rather than with a certainty which I have."47 Apparently, this kind of certainty, as for Kierkegaard, is produced and maintained only by action. It is not static, but dynamic. Indeed, the formulation of the thought seems, to Marcel, to have come afterward, as if the degree of insight were the fruit of the living. And the formulation may change. Speaking of the objective detachment of the pure spectator, Marcel says that his own thought was that the investigation had to be pursued within reality itself, to
Like Kierkegaard and Berdiaev, Marcel also sees the decisive choice as being made on the basis of faith in immortality; it is literally a choice for eternity.

We must, in short, state as categorically as possible, even though we shock some semi-agnostics whose reflection is faulty or who often have not reached the depths of human experience, that it is on the ground of immortality that the decisive metaphysical choice must be made.44

Immortality, the existence of God, these are the concomitant elements without which the ethical choice becomes meaningless; the deeper the choice, the more these elements are assimilated as parts of faith.

The objective validity of the choice can never be validated by thought. Therefore, in Marcel, we find the same insistence upon the leap, the wager, or the chance which the individual takes. The test of the choice is how fully it absorbs and transforms the powers of the individual—a pragmatic test.

From this point of view one might say that the strongest belief, or more exactly the most living belief, is that which absorbs most fully all the powers of your being.45
have already said about reflection and its power of fostering such modulations. But, of course, this term, modulation, or modality, or mood—any of these words might be suitable in English—itself needs to be made precise. We are not dealing with what one might call predicable modulations, that is to say of modes of being which are definitely different from each other, but which can be predicated, at different times or in different circumstances, of one and the same subject, or, in the vocabulary of an older philosophy, of one and the same substance.42


It almost seems to me as if the lazy man's way had its merits here, and that one might find the double aspect of the self less confusing if he didn't try to conceive it at all, but took it as poetic metaphor, letting his imagination have its freedom and asking the question which I believe Emerson always asked of theories: not "How clear is this theory?" but "How much of life does this theory make clear to me?" There is a world of difference, practical difference, between the two. In the one the man may be ridden by his theory; in the other he uses his theory. Notwithstanding Marcel's careful philosophical distinctions, I believe that this attitude is basically faithful to his thought, for he himself says of his distinction between my being and my life:

...ou'il n'y a de salut et pour l'intelligence et pour l'âme qu'à condition de distinguer entre mon être et ma vie; que cette distinction peut être par quelques côtés mystérieuse, mais que ce mystère
Thus, if the critic finds something amazing about Marcel's realm of being, if he is startled by the notion that there should be a mode of consciousness which Marcel rationalizes as being a participation in being, then he ought to be equally startled by the truly astounding fact that there is consciousness at all. In his haste to prove that an elm is an oak, he loses sight of the fact that both are trees.41

41The reader who desires a really philosophical treat­ment of this mystery--I shall not call it a problem--should refer to Marcel's The Mystery of Being, where the careful qualifications and analyses of terms were aimed at an au­dience of professional philosophers.

It is obvious from the insistence upon two realms that there are in man two kinds of self, or two selves, or two modalities of the same self, which view has already been seen in Kierkegaard and Berdyaev. But Marcel points out that we must remember that the categories of the phys­ical world do not apply here to what must always remain a mystery. We must be wary of conceiving it as a kind of met­aphysical schizophrenia, though the conflict between the two modalities may be intense, as in Berdyaev.

We are not in the physical world, and cannot say, 'There is this self, there is that self', as we might say, 'There is an apple, there is an orange'. I would prefer to call our two selves, which are not really two selves, or our two levels of the self--which have not, however, the sharp measurable gap between them that the notion of a level physically implies--differ­ent modulations of existence; let us remember what we
to him. But if in the course of time a bond of affection springs up whereby the dog will risk his life to save mine or I will endanger my own to save his, then the structure of consciousness is altered. When I begin to look upon the dog as in some sense my equal, as deserving of the same consideration I give myself, as being a being who feels joy and sorrow, who bleeds when cut and is thankful when helped, then we are in the kingdom of being. The dog has in a sense become me, or, in Marcel's words, I participate in a world of subjects for which I can give no rational explanation. It does no good to explain this bond as a projection of my ego or a satisfactory sublimation—valid as this explanation may be for the production of psychological techniques—for the explanation does not in this case explain the existence of the phenomenon. This comes down to saying that Marcel's distinction between being and having is essentially meaningless to anyone who lacks a sense of mystery, for the latter person is sure that the thing can be "explained." As Emerson says,

It is so wonderful to our neurologists that a man can see without his eyes, that it does not occur to them that it is just as wonderful that he should see with them; and that is ever the difference between the wise and the unwise: the latter wonders at what is unusual, the wise man wonders at the usual.40

the body not as an object but as a subject.39

In short, the best that reflective thought can do is to run its concepts through a Socratic dialectic to a reductio ad absurdum by which mystery may appear—if it is not immediately or intuitively obvious. Reflection must recognize that it is dealing with an order of things where it does not feel at ease, where its concepts must be taken metaphorically as suggestions and not things in themselves, where feeling and intuition regain their validity as primary "givens," an order of things where people really live their lives. Reflection must never lose touch with experience as given.

Marcel gives as an example of having, the case of possessing a dog, and I should like to develop it a bit as a concrete illustration of the difference between the world of objects, of having, and the world of subjects, of being. If I buy a dog I possess him in the most worldly sense. He is obedient to me, he depends upon me for his food, and looks to me for his orders. I may use him for herding sheep or guarding the house or doing tricks or any other purpose. The relationship is one of command and obey, of master and slave. This is the world of having, in which the dog is an object to me and I am an object
possession because it has not the complete dependence of a possession; on the contrary, I am considerably dependent upon it, so much so, that if we are separated by death I cannot even imagine how I can continue to be. Nor can I consider my body as a kind of instrument for the effectuating of my will, for my body is mine properly only when there is no separation, when I am my body. Nor can I be reduced to or identified with my body, as materialism does, for then the very consciousness by which I can, if I wish, consider my body something else is denied. From this point of view, the existentialist criticism of materialism is that the latter has become so naively objective that it is willing to overlook a primary fact of experience. Marcel goes on to describe the proper viewpoint of the relation as being this.

But let us walk warily at this point. There is a way of conceiving the identity of myself and my body which comes down to mere materialism, and materialism of a coarse and incoherent sort. There would be no point in asserting my identity with the body that other people can see and touch, and which for myself is something other than myself, in so far as I put it on the same level as any other body whatsoever, that is, at the level of the body as an object. The proper position to take up seems, on the contrary, to be this: I am my body in so far as I succeed in recognizing that this body of mine cannot, in the last analysis, be brought down to the level of being this object, an object, a something or other. It is at this point that we have to bring in the idea of
Fidelity, in short, takes us out of the realm of the purely human and into a realm where the concepts of human thought—linked inextricably to the physical world and the notion of object—seem no longer relevant. These two realms, or more properly, modes of human consciousness, Marcel designates as the world of being and the world of having, one the world of subjects, the other the world of objects. It will be seen how closely this approximates Berdyaev's distinction between subj ectification and objectification.

This distinction between être et avoir is not a distinction which can be grasped by pure thought in abstracto. One does not use examples simply to illustrate it; rather, it can be sensed only within the examples themselves, that is, it lies in the facts of experience as one lives them, though what Marcel calls a "secondary reflection" may afterwards aid in its articulation.

In the first place, Marcel declares that all having or possessing is a function of my body which I look upon as an object I possess. But if I analyze the relation between me and my body, this relation manifests itself as a mystery, not a problem. I cannot consider my body as a
initial nihilistic bias underlies all his thought so that he arrives at what Marcel calls the "negative enlightenment."37

The element, however, which really indicates to Marcel the validity of fidelity is its creativity. Fidelity is indeed one thing, but from a higher point of view it would be wiser to say that it is one aspect of a single thing which has other aspects, chief among them creativeness. Fidelity is not passive; it is a constant production of benefit, a creativeness which in its "fundamental generosity" knows that in giving itself it receives itself, or, better, as Marcel says, that giving is a kind of receiving.

C'est parce que la fidélité est créatrice qu'elle transcende infiniment, comme la liberté elle-même, les limites du prescriptible. Créatrice, lorsqu'elle est authentique, elle l'est au fond de toute manière, car elle possède le mystérieux pouvoir de renouveler non seulement celui qui la pratique, mais encore son objet, quelque indigne qu'il ait pu être d'elle à l'origine, comme si elle avait une chance—il n'y a rien ici de fatal assurément—de le rendre à la longue perméable au souffle qui anime l'âme intérieurement consacrée. C'est par là que la fidélité révèle sa vraie nature qui est d'être un témoignage, une attestation; c'est par là aussi qu'une éthique qui la prend pour centre est irrésistiblement conduite à se suspendre au plus qu'humain, à une volonté d'inconditionnalité qui est en nous l'exigence et la
Here we have, not selfishness, but selflessness, and Marcel asserts that fidelity absolutely demands a transcendence of the ego. It is meaningless on any other level.

It is pertinent to add at this point that Marcel undertook a detailed rebuttal of Sartre's attack upon "good faith," the latter being another expression for sincerity. When one considers the whole subjective basis of Christian existentialism, the validity of good faith or sincerity or fidelity is obviously the place to attack, and Sartre with his usual keen perception did just that. Marcel, who has a high regard for Sartre as a thinker, offered a refutation which is really implicit in the foregoing paragraphs, namely, that in order to accuse anyone of bad faith, one must have, however dimly, some presentiment of what good faith is. One can imagine good faith without any reference to bad faith, except as a possibility. But one cannot imagine bad faith without reference to good faith as the necessary ground for his thought. In its barest logical terms, the affirmative does not need the negative, but the negative must have the affirmative. (This reasoning is central to Henri Bergson's discussion of the concepts of being and nothing in Creative Evolution.) One can almost see the two schools of existentialism dividing right here. Marcel chooses being, good faith and all that it implies. Sartre chooses nothingness as the ground of his thought and this
If he has not already arrived at, that antinomianism which has frightened so many away from Emerson. While this ruthless rejection of external principles is in Kierkegaard and Berdyaev, Marcel's expression of it comes a good deal closer to Emerson's own.

But there is always danger of misunderstanding fidelity to oneself. It does not mean an egotistic self-assertion, a baying at the moon by a lonely wolf. The truth is quite opposite; it would be better to speak of self-effacement. Whoever would assert, for instance, that choosing himself, being faithful to himself, would mean being unfaithful to his friends, is, in the words of the younger Holmes, thinking words and not things. It would be more accurate to say that he does not know what he means by fidelity, just as we have many people today who babble tolerance in a manner that shrieks intolerance. Fidelity is one thing, not two things. Indeed, Marcel says that it may be better to think of fidelity as always fidelity to someone else. In this way the self is not misconstrued as an ego lost in its own wanderings and rationalizing its own vices.

Il n'y a donc en réalité aucune raison valable de penser que la fidélité à soi-même soit plus intelligible que la fidélité à autrui et présente par rapport à elle une véritable priorité. C'est bien plutôt l'inverse qui est vrai: je suis sans doute moins immédiatement présent à moi-même que ne l'est celui auquel j'ai donné ma foi. 36

36Ibid., p. 182.
thing; he is, in the popular phrase, at one with himself.

In a passage amazingly reminiscent of the sections in "Self-Reliance" on conformity and consistency, Gabriel Marcel puts it thus.

. . . ; si j'admets sans discussion qu'être fidèle à moi-même signifie être fidèle à certains principes que j'ai adoptés une fois pour toutes, je risque d'introduire dans ma vie un élément aussi étranger, disons même aussi destructeur que l'artiste qui se copie lui-même. Ces principes, si j'étais absolument sincère, je devrais m'astreindre à les soumettre à un examen fréquemment renouvelé, et me demander périodiquement s'ils répondent toujours à ce que je pense et à ce que je crois. Comment ne pas juger suspect la paresse naturelle qui m'incite à placer ces principes au-dessus de toute discussion? Je m'épargne par là l'épreuve toujours pénible de la remise en question. Il peut fort bien arriver que ces principes ou ces opinions finissent par recouvrir, par étouffer ma réalité propre: dès lors comment resterai-je fidèle à moi-même? Je ne suis plus là, je n'existe plus. En vérité c'est une machine qui a pris ma place. Au surplus, le jeu de la vie sociale contribue à favoriser cette substitution de l'automatique au personnel. Je suis connu, je suis classé comme professant telle opinion, par là je m'assure une certaine place sur l'échiquier social; mais en me déjugeant, je serai regardé comme inconsistent, on ne me prendra plus au sérieux. Or, je tiens à ce qu'on attache de la valeur à ce que je dis, je veux que mes opinions aient du poids. Et c'est ainsi que la société, dont toute une part de moi-même est complice, tend à me détourn er de procéder à cette révision intérieure à laquelle je me jugerais tenu de procéder si je ne m'arrangeais pas pour perdre contact avec moi-même. Il va de soi d'ailleurs que l'esprit de contradiction, qui me pousse parfois à défier l'opinion des autres et à la déconcerter délibérément, ne vaut pas mieux que ce mediocre conformisme. 35


It seems to me that here Marcel is coming pretty close to,
Choosing fidelity then carries with it a perpetual bidding of farewell to the past in a firm but friendly manner. However, it is equally certain that fidelity to oneself cannot be fidelity to an abstract principle unless we call that principle truth itself. Fidelity to the eternal cannot be reduced to finite principles or codes. The same fidelity which produced the principle reserves the right to annul it or supplant it. A man comes before his principles, and the persistent error of legalistic morality is to put the cart before the horse. In the existential view, legalistic morality lacks faith in that unfathomable source from which all principles spring. It wishes to play safe and stand guard over the spoons—a completely valid viewpoint for a legislator or a sociologist, but not for a man of religion. While it is an excellent thing to be able to formulate one's principles and to convey them, it might almost be said in this connection that when a man is most faithful to himself, he is completely unconscious of any specific principle which his acts embody. Whenever I formulate a principle, there is the principle and me; too often we are complete strangers unwillingly joined by some compulsive yoke; I stand, in Kierkegaard's words, in an outward relation to duty. But when complete fidelity is present, then the man and his principles are the same
the past as past is—not to be faithful. The artist must, to use Emerson's simile, give up his old angels so that new ones may come in. He must choose, as it were, between time and eternity, for fidelity carries with it the notion of an eternal correlative. The expression of this faithfulness to the eternal is the continual production of the new, the surprising.

Il apparaît donc dans ce cas privilégié qu'être fidèle à moi-même, c'est répondre à un certain appel intérieur qui m'enjoint de ne pas m'hypnotiser sur ce que j'ai fait, mais au contraire de m'en dégager, c'est-à-dire de continuer à vivre, par conséquent de me renouveler. . . . Ceci revient à dire que la fidélité, en pareil cas, est difficile à apprécier du dehors.34

34Ibid., p. 179.

This line of thought has considerable significance today, when the artist, if he has not bound himself to his past, seems often bent on a quest of the new, the different, for its own sake. Unfortunately, this quest too frequently ends in the banal or the unintelligible. What Marcel's position comes to is that the artist aims at the wrong thing in choosing either the old or the new, that any artistic expression which is sincerely bent on conveying the truth as the artist sees it cannot fail to bear the stamp of a certain originality, however faint. The artist acquires originality—precisely because he did not look for it, but subordinated himself to a higher value. It is as
To say that he is faithful to his friends is insufficient, for wherein does this fidelity behind all particular fidelities consist, insofar as we are able to make it articulate to ourselves? It would seem that the master key of all fidelities is nothing else than fidelity to oneself or to some ungraspable principle within oneself which never explains, but simply says.

Ne convient-il pas dès lors de reconnaître que la seule fidélité véritable est fidélité envers soi-même, et que c'est seulement à travers elle que je puis déployer ce qu'on regarde inexactement comme la fidélité envers autrui? En d'autres termes, je mettrais mon point d'honneur à accomplir certains actes qui intéressent une autre personne, mais en dernière analyse, c'est entre moi et moi-même que le seul lien véritable serait noué. 33

33Ibid., p. 178.

To illustrate the principle of fidelity, Marcel chooses the example of an artist. This example has two advantages: first, artistic integrity is one of the few integrities which can still command a respectable attention; second, the artist's fidelity must by its very nature be to himself and to no one else. The artist, as Marcel says, can betray himself. He can become fascinated by what he has done already, become his own imitator, and rewrite the same book twenty times over under different titles. By so doing he destroys that perpetual renewal, that perpetual abandoning of the old which fidelity enjoins. To be faithful to
means, whose superficial intellectualism has helped de­
prive it of its ethical "guts," an ethical revival can come only by the reinstatement in each person of a living fidelity.

Aussi est-il indispensable, pour qui voudra procéder aujourd'hui à l'im immense travail de reconstruction morale qui s'impose, de s'attacher à rétablir ces mêmes valeurs à la place qui leur appartient--au cœur même d'une vie humaine non plus dénaturée, aliénée ou prostituée, mais vécue dans la plénitude de sa signification. De fait, l'éthique qui s'ébauche aujourd'hui un peu partout, et surtout bien entendu à travers les mouvements de jeunesse, ne saurait être qu'une éthique de la fidélité.32

32Ibid., p. 173.

It is essential to realize that fidelity or faithfulness can be recognized only from the inside, as is true of all essentially existential positions; it can be objectified into a concept only at the price of killing it.

In his treatment of fidelity Marcel first distin­
guishes between obedience, which may in many cases be mere­ly demanded or exacted, and fidelity, which must always be merited. One cannot be forced into fidelity as he can in­
to obedience. Rather, fidelity implies some inner response which one makes freely, some reply to a call which, mys­
terious as it may be, has yet the quality of an absolute or as near to an absolute as a human being is likely to get. But the matter becomes more puzzling when one en­
quires what it is that the faithful person is faithful to.
Tu te sens à l'étroit. Tu rêves d'évasion. Mais prends garde aux mirages. Pour t'évader, ne cours pas, ne te fuis pas: creuse plutôt cette place étroite qui t'est donnée: tu y trouveras Dieu et tout. Dieu ne flotte pas sur ton horizon, il dort dans ton épaisseur. La vanité court, l'amour creuse. Si tu fuis hors de toi-même, ta prison courra avec toi et se retrécira au vent de ta course: si tu t'enfonces en toi-même, elle s'évasera en paradis. 31

31Ibid., p. 35.

In this connection man seems to be the only animal who can take a stand toward existence. Indeed he is the only one who is forced to; that is the price he pays for his consciousness; the animal, as Henri Bergson suggests, has little or no sense of his individuality, his "separateness;" he is at one with his world. Man, on the other hand, is separated precisely by his consciousness, so that the latter constitutes both his power and his helplessness, his rise and his fall, his dignity and his shame. He cannot return to the life of the dreaming spirit. He must take his stand and attempt to draw thereby on that mysterious power from which he has separated himself.

To express the subjective how of this choice, Marcel describes it as being a fidélité, a faithfulness within the person, which has as its outward manifestation "creativity." Thus his term fidélité créatrice. Marcel declares that in a world given over to the outwardness of techniques, in a world which has forgotten what inwardness
specifically Christian one. Marcel, like Kierkegaard, is resolved not to reach the Christian categories too quickly. Like the latter writer, he thinks that the superficial Christian of today, as well as his naturalistic brother, had both better rediscover what it means to be a religious pagan.

The great choice for Marcel then includes first of all hope as an invigorating force and secondly the taking of a stand whereby the individual refuses to flee, but plants himself, in Emerson's words, "solidly on his instincts," determined to answer the question at first hand --by living it. Marcel quotes a passage from Gustave Thibon which catches so excellently the spirit of the thing that it deserves to be reproduced.
before the choice; this element is hope, the Christian hope. Marcel sees it as a force which breaks up the fixating qualities of despair as the spring sun thaws out the ice-jam on a frozen river. Against the freezing, destroying will to negation he pits first of all hope.

Hope is not a kind of listless waiting; it underpins action or it runs before it, but it becomes degraded and lost once the action is spent. Hope seems to me, as it were, the prolongation into the unknown of an activity which is central—that is to say, rooted in being. Hence it has affinities, not with desire, but with the will. The will implies the same refusal to calculate possibilities, or at any rate it suspends this calculation. Could not hope therefore be defined as the will when it is made to bear on what does not depend on itself?28


Going further, Marcel envisages the master choice as the formation of a "pact," an affirmative movement or venture which man in his freedom can make or refuse to make.

Il semble qu'il faille poser l'existence d'un pacte, j'irai jusqu'à dire d'un lien nuptial, entre l'homme et la vie; ce lien, il est au pouvoir de l'homme de le dénouer; mais dans la mesure où il dénonce ce pacte, il tend à perdre la notion de son existence.29


Just as for Kierkegaard and Berdyaev the truly ethical inevitably contains some degree of the religious in it, so for Marcel too, the pact which man may make with life involves a religious attitude, but not necessarily a
insolvency." The despair of oneself is an absolute betrayal in which the destructive, the nihilistic will is unleashed. Marcel apologizes for dwelling on these subjects thus:

If I have stressed despair, betrayal and suicide, it is because these are the most manifest expressions of the will to negation as applied to being.26

(Those who have noticed how closely the existentialist thought seems to parallel some fundamental concepts of modern psychology, as exemplified by this "flight," will perceive here another instance of its vitality.) Angst then poses this problem to the individual: he can run away—in an infinite variety of ways—or he can stand his ground and find out what is required of him.

À l'origine de la distraction, de la volonté de distraction à tout prix, il y a une fuite; mais devant quoi? Ce ne peut-être que devant soi-même. Le moi est sans doute placé devant ce dilemme: s'accomplir ou s'enfuir. Là où il ne s'accomplit pas, il ne peut que s'éprouver lui-même comme un vide béant, insupportable, et dont il lui faut se protéger à tout prix.27

The individual is brought to the point where he must make a choice, the aspect and the intensity of that choice perhaps differing among different individuals. But Marcel sees another element entering in, almost a kind of choosing
he never forgets what he claims empiricism always forgets, that in order to have experience you need somebody who experiences. Therefore also, the elements he suggests as comprising the ethical life should not be taken as separated, either in essence or in sequence. Rather, there is a kind of togetherness about them—and one may see here why Berdyaev declares that gestalt psychology is most congenial to existentialism—a togetherness which analysis easily forgets and which language cannot convey because it is forced to deal with each element separately. Speaking of an overemphasis on courage, for example, Marcel says:

L'illusion paraît consister ici à accorder une valeur intrinsèque au courage, ou dans d'autre cas, à la sincérité, alors que le courage ou la sincérité, conditions essentielles de la valeur, ne deviennent valeurs authentiques qu'en s'articulant avec d'autres valeurs constituées. Grave est la tentative de désorboner le courage ou la sincérité, c'est-a-dire de les détacher artificiellement d'un certain organon spirituel, au sein duquel l'un et l'autre exercent leur fonction propre.25


At the origin of the existential Angst Marcel notes what he calls a flight, a fleeing from oneself, a desire to escape which gives rise to the innumerable quests for distraction and opiate. This flight constitutes the most completely negative of attitudes, and in its most intense form becomes despair, not a despairing of this or that goal, but a despair of reality as a whole, "é statement of complete
The fact that the noumenal events break through and enter the phenomenal world. The meta-historical breaks through and enters the historical world. There is no absolute breach between these two spheres. But when meta-history enters into history, not only is it revealed in history, but it is also adapted to the limitations of historical time and historical place. Light shines in the darkness. 24

24 Ibid., p. 16.

Quite clearly the same venture of faith underlies Berdyaev's thought as much as it does Kierkegaard's. Faith knows no assurances; in that fact lies both its repugnance to the "natural" man and its ability to strike some responsive chord. Nor is it an intellectual venture. It is the willingness to stake everything upon the eternal validity of personality; it is a venture in living.

In suggesting what constitutes the ethical life, Gabriel Marcel is of particular interest because his thought is so like Emerson's. It is paradoxical that of the three writers the Roman Catholic should sound most like Emerson, but anyone who reads in Homo Viator the essay entitled "Obéissance et Fidélité" cannot but be struck by the constant echoes of "Self-Reliance" and "Spiritual Laws."

As an analyst Marcel is unique in that he continually stresses the necessity of not destroying the wholeness of experience, of not fragmenting the organic and spiritual unity which actually constitutes the experience. Therefore,
world, for within it a struggle of polar opposite principles is going on. But this dualism is not final. The last word, the word as yet unspoken, belongs to God and to divine Truth, it lies beyond human optimism and pessimism; and this is our final faith. This overcomes the tragedy born of freedom which has been the path of man and of the world included in him. To that world beyond, no dualism, no division into paradise and hell, which smacks too much of here and now, can be transferred.22


The basis of Berdyaev's choice, as of Kierkegaard's, is a faith in immortality. The present world is meaningless and must come to an end before the victory of spirit is complete. For the individual, too, death is not the end of life, but the beginning of authentic life.

The meaning of the world is spiritual. When it is said that life and the world have no meaning, the existence of meaning at a higher level than life and the world is thereby acknowledged, that is to say judgment is passed upon the meaninglessness of world life from the point of view of spirit.23

23Ibid., p. 129.

For Berdyaev Christian revelation is the confirmation and symbolization of his faith. The birth of Christ was the entrance of God into history, which phenomenon Kierkegaard calls the "absolute paradox."

Christianity is the revelation of God in history, not in nature. . . . Only spiritual revelation exists, revelation in the Spirit, whereas historical revelation is the symbolization in the phenomenal historical world of events which take place in the noumenal historical world. But the whole mystery lies in the
his reverence for truth prevents him from debasing it into a means. Berdyaev has a repugnance for the systems of ethics which put the source of morality in society, whether in the absolute or the relative sense. He considers these systems convenient falsehoods, perpetrated by society on its members.

Society cannot be the supreme value and the final end of human life. Even if it were possible to prove that the distinction between good and evil had a social origin, this would throw no light on the nature of moral valuation. The object of philosophical ethics is to know not the origin and development of ideas about good and evil as such. What matters to it is the ontological nature of good and evil, and not man's ideas about them. The modern mind is so demoralized by the historical and the psychological methods of approaching the subject that it finds it difficult to distinguish the problem of the good as such from that of human ideas about the good, beginning with the Hottentot morality and ending with Kant and Comte.21

21Ibid., p. 20.

In other words, if a person is concerned about the Good, it makes precious little difference to him what other cultures have thought about the good or where they derived their ideas. He is not trying to explain the good; he is not looking for more concepts; he wants the thing itself—that is, if he is a human being and not merely a thinker.

But the tragic dualism in man is not final; it will be abrogated by God, but man must share in the struggle whereby the spiritual triumphs.

Not pantheism but dualism is true for our phenomenal
falsehood which is regarded as an expression of wickedness, but falsehood which is morally sanctioned as good. People do not believe that the good may be preserved and established without the aid of falsehood. The good is the end, the lies are the means.  

19Ibid., p. 160.

Though Berdyaev in other places seems to think that evil and sin are positive forces, he insists, when dealing with ontological truthfulness, that evil is negation, non-being.

Love of truth is the fundamental ontological virtue, the first of virtues. Above all, be truthful to God, to yourself and to other people. This is the beginning of the moral life, i.e. of discrimination between moral realities and of living among realities and not among fictions. The devil is a liar and the father of lies, he is the falsification of reality and his kingdom is the kingdom of falsity. It is therefore essential to build up an ethic of ontological truthfulness, to seek in everything for what is primary, first-hand, original, i.e. to seek for the source of life and power. Evil is evil solely because it is falsehood, untruth, non-being.  

20Ibid., p. 166.

A primary choice for truthfulness seems to be implied here, and we may note again that it is this reverence for truth which sets existentialism distinctly apart from pragmatism—though both stress the incorporation of truth into living. One might put the difference in this fashion: for the pragmatist a principle is true because it works; for the existentialist a principle works because it is true, and
truth. The atheist realizes that God cannot be that bad.
For the positive theology which has so intimate a familiari-
ity with God's purposes Berdyaev has no use. It results
in the anthropomorphistic God.

It is precisely the traditional theology that leads
good men, inspired by moral motives, to atheism... In His omniscience, ascribed to Him by positive the-
ology, God foresaw from all eternity the fatal conse-
quences of freedom with which He endowed man. He
foresaw the evil and suffering of the world which
has been called into being by His will and is wholly
in His power; He foresaw everything, down to the per-
dition and everlasting torments of many. And yet He
consented to create man and the world under those
terrible conditions. This is the profound moral
source of atheism. 18


Like Kierkegaard, Berdyaev finds the source of the
moral life in a fundamental truthfulness or earnestness
which holds truth to be an absolute value. Truth is not
an attribute of propositions, but spiritual inwardness of
the whole personality. There can be no other starting
place; a preference for truth on the intellectual level
alone is rather comical if it does not enter into the per-
son's life as a determinant of action; he cannot love truth
very much who is at no great pains to embody it as he sees
it. Hypocrisy or falsehood becomes the prime source of
immorality.

Ethics has not paid sufficient attention to the
monstrously big part played by falsehood in man's
moral spiritual life. What is meant here is not the
When man thinks of himself, he seems to be an object; when he acts creatively (which may include creative thinking), he denies his thought and becomes a subject.

This Divine side of his nature man finds within himself, not outside, and because of this fact he is forced back upon that same individualism we have noted in Kierkegaard. Only by his own effort can he find the self which is deeper than self, can the truth of his nature become transparent to him.

The transcendent reaches man not from without but from within, out of the depths. God is more deeply within me than I am myself. That was already said by St. Augustine. I must transcend to my very self. The deep may be concealed in man, and this deep requires a breakthrough, a transcending. Through the transcending the mysterious becomes clear, and this is revelation.

From this fact it also follows that no one can objectify the ethical life or prescribe rules for it. Indeed so distasteful does Berdyaev find the "legalistic morality" of most established churches that he asserts that the atheism which rebels against the common doctrine of free-will and ethical prescriptions has in itself a more profound moral
hostility, of law. While the other world is the world of spirituality, of freedom, love, kinship.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 254.

In short, one chooses to live his life in ethical categories.

The mystery of ethical creativeness cannot be conceptualized, and each learns it only for himself. It entails a continual transcendence of the ego, as when one lives for his work or for his family, etc. The life of the spirit is not "knowing something or other," but a change in the quality of the knower, a change in personality, which is as mysterious to the person as it is incommunicable to anyone else. Only by living it does he know it, and the question of objective validity simply demonstrates that the questioner has not seen the point.

But spiritual reality has another genesis—a non-objective reality imparted by God. Who is subject. My inner spiritual reality is not an object. I cannot be an object in relation to myself. The subject is not a substance, a naturalistic category, but an act. . . Spirit is, as it were, a Divine breath, penetrating human existence and endowing it with the highest dignity, with the highest quality of existence, with an inner independence and unity. An objective interpretation of spiritual reality raises the question: Do my spiritual states and experiences correspond to any authentic reality or are they merely subjective states? But this is a fundamentally false presentation of the problem, one based on the supposition that the subject should reflect some sort of object. Actually, spiritual states do not correspond to anything, they simply are; they are the prime reality, they are more existential than anything
from his inner self, from others and from God.

This slavery of subject to object must be overcome so that the natural world is subdued to spirit. And it is the choosing of freedom, of creativeness which brings man back to his true self; in proportion as he does so, other people take on the aspect of other selves, of thou's rather than of things to be used for one's convenience. Man's own dignity emerges as he recognizes the dignity of others. Nature again becomes a living thing, symbolic of spirit (in practically the Emersonian sense), rather than a blind concatenation of forces. Berdyaev urges the creation of a new structure of consciousness, a creative consciousness. Man must realize that he is a creator, a personality who creates his duty and his responsibility; he must rid himself of what might be called the deterministic consciousness, which is something quite different from a concept of determinism and which the growth of scientific techniques seems to have abetted.

Human consciousness is subject to a variety of illusions in understanding the relation between this world in which man feels himself to be in a state of servitude, and the other world in which he awaits his liberation. Man is the point of intersection of two worlds. One of the illusions consists in interpreting the difference between the two worlds as a difference of substance. In actual fact it is a difference in mode of existence. Man passes from slavery to freedom, from a state of disintegration to a condition of completeness, from impersonality to personality, from passivity to creativeness, that is to say he passes over to spirituality. This world is the world of objectivization, of determinism, of alienation, of
potentially spirit. Man vacillates between two poles, the tendency to authentic personality being "subjectivization," the tendency to enslavement being "objectivization."

He is a being who is polarized in the highest degree, God-like and beast-like, exalted and base, free and enslaved, apt both for rising and for falling, capable of great love and sacrifice, capable also of great cruelty and unlimited egoism. Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche recognized the tragic principle in man and the inconsistency of his nature with peculiar distinctness. Before that Pascal had expressed better than anyone this two-sidedness of man.14


This dualism Berdyaev labels in different ways, spirit vs. nature, freedom vs. slavery, but his most common terms are subjectivization and objectivization. The latter denotes man's inherent tendency to enslavement, an enslavement which he often prefers. There may be enslavement to nature, to society, to the state, to art, to the erotic, even to God; man may enter into a false or objectivized relation to these things, as when the Nazi degrades himself and others into a means for the expansion of the state. Man's natural perversity leads him to abdicate freedom and creativeness, in fact, to fear the untried venture which they suggest. He prefers a safe slavery. He comes to look upon himself and others as objects, as "things," the result and the toy of natural, economic, social and psychological causes. Man becomes estranged—a word Berdyaev later used
realities is possible, gifts and vocations connected with them, and the already created world from which man can borrow his materials. Man is not the source of his gifts and his genius. He has received them from God and therefore feels that he is in God's hands and is an instrument of God's work in the world.  


By his doctrine of creativeness Berdyaev does not mean that every man must be an artist or a genius—though there is implicit in his thought and explicit in Kierkegaard's thought the idea of every man's having a "calling," much in the Emersonian sense. The individual may be an artist, but the emphasis is upon the inner spiritual fact of creativeness and not upon the external manifestation of it. Quantitatively speaking, one man may accomplish ten times what another accomplishes, but qualitatively or ethically speaking, if both create to their utmost, the accomplishment is the same.

In the transition to the creative life Berdyaev sees a struggle between the two aspects of man's nature, the spiritual and the natural. Man has a dual nature; he is torn by the promptings of spirit—the true subjectiveness—and the enslaving tendencies of the natural man. Man is a paradox in the world, and his uniqueness lies not in his physical ability or his intellectual brilliance but simply in the fact that he is a person, a person who is
negative views, that is, what the ethical life is not.

There is nowhere evident in Berdyaev the decisiveness or earnestness of choice that emerges so powerfully in Kierkegaard. Nor does his biography reveal any of those crises which Kierkegaard experienced. He fell under a succession of influences, Marx, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Dostoievskey, but his thought underwent gradual transitions. Oddly enough, Kierkegaard was not one of these influences, but came as a kind of confirming voice.

Neither Kierkegaard, whom I did not read until late in life and whose morbid exaltation of sin is profoundly uncongenial to me, nor Heidegger, nor even Jaspers, had any particular influence on my thought.12

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The mark of the ethical for Berdyaev is the creative, creative in the most comprehensive sense of the word. In the creative act personality is restored to its integrity. A breakthrough into authentic being is made. Here again we can see the existential emphasis upon the activity of the will. Man becomes authentically himself by creating. But—as for Kierkegaard—man is not the source of his own creating.

Creativeness is a complex fact. It presupposes, first, man's primary, meonic, uncreated freedom; secondly, the gifts bestowed upon man the creator by God the Creator, and, thirdly, the world as the field for his activity. Thus three elements are involved in human creativeness: the element of freedom, owing to which alone creation of new and hitherto non-existent
that action must spring from insight. One must live the truth before he can understand it. Indeed, understanding is not the real object at all; living truly is the object; the truth must be embodied in action and sustained in action, for it is not a set of ideas, but an essence to be realized, a task. Here again we see the primacy of the existentialist how; it is not so important to have hold of the right principles as it is to sincerely try living whatever principles one does have. Thereby, the better principle arises. Truth is thus dynamic; it may wax and wane depending upon the individual's action; it has no existence apart from action, and Kierkegaard declares,

... that truth exists for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action.11


Having dealt briefly with the problem of choice in Kierkegaard, I should like to turn to Nicolas Berdyaev, who also considered himself an existential thinker, though he preferred the title of "personalist," in which name itself one may see the individualism that runs through existential thinking. Many of Kierkegaard's positions he shares and these I shall treat very briefly. Let it be said in advance that he shares practically all of Kierkegaard's
is the existential dialectic, a tension of opposites which produces, not an objective certitude but a subjective certitude. Where there is no venture, there is no faith.

An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual. . . . The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.  


Chaning-Pearce suggests that there can be no separating these two subjective forces.

Faith and doubt are thus linked in this humanly indis-soluble dialectic. For Kierkegaard as for Emerson, "a saint is a sceptic once in every twenty-four hours."  


But what gives this choice its eventual certitude is the completeness with which it is lived. It is a decision to live in the manner which the individual perceives to be most nearly ideal. One might object that some primary insight is assumed here, and doubtless it is; Kierkegaard's man, unlike Sartre's, does not have to fashion his personality out of nothing, because he has faith that a human nature exists. But the usual intellectualist emphasis is reversed. Kierkegaard stresses the idea that insight springs from action more than he does the obvious fact
soul, but Kierkegaard's point seems to be that this position receives its fullest expression in Christian thought.

The individualism which underlies Kierkegaard's thought throws each person back upon his solitary strength or weakness. There is no group effort here, no group morality, no external help. The individual is alone; he cannot look to others for help; they may be looking to him. Creeds and codes have nothing to do with a choice of this sort. The essence of it lies in its subjective quality, its pathos, its decisiveness, its earnestness, precisely the elements which each must learn for himself. The lessons of history or biography are of no help, for, as Kierkegaard says, each person must tread the whole weary way for himself, must in a sense relive human history in his own person until he catches up with himself. There are no helps and no short cuts.

Clearly this entire position calls for a venture of faith which is entirely conscious of the ambiguity of its position. It may all be an illusion, there may be nothing to answer to the faith. It is like Pascal's "wager," which possesses no objective assurance. The claims of skepticism are acknowledged, even admitted to be a correlate of faith, so that a profound and sincere skepticism --one which is capable of being skeptical of skepticism-- is the reverse side of a profound and sincere faith. This
So far this ethical choice of Kierkegaard's is not specifically Christian; he declares that up to a point there may be a pagan religiousness whose chief differentiating mark from Christianity is the absence of a sense of sin or complete separation from God. But Kierkegaard is a Christian and his choice inevitably becomes a distinctly Christian choice. The marks of the Christian choice are a sense of sin, guilt and repentance. Kierkegaard says,

I cannot often enough repeat the proposition, however simple it may be in itself, that choosing oneself is identical with repenting oneself. 8

8Ibid., p. 208.

It must also be emphasized that the choice is made on the basis of eternal validity, the chooser affirming his faith in the immortality of the soul—his faith, that is, not his knowledge, for the whole movement is a kind of "leap" or venture which offers no assurances beforehand. The chooser chooses his eternal self or the kind of self which deserves to be immortal; he does not choose finitely or relatively, but absolutely and for eternity. It may be objected that this latter characteristic, the choosing of personality on the basis of immortality, is not restricted to Christianity, that Socrates and Plato, for instance, also believed in the eternal validity of the individual
If you will understand me aright, I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. Therefore, even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by reason of the energy with which he chose, that he had chosen the wrong. For the choice being made with the whole inwardness of his personality, his nature is purified and he himself brought into immediate relation to the eternal Power whose omnipresence interpenetrates the whole of existence. This transfiguration, this higher consecration, is never attained by that man who chooses merely aesthetically.⁶


So emphatically does he insist upon the earnestness, the integrity of this choice, that he goes on to say,

What is it, then, that I distinguish in my either/or? Is it good and evil? No, I would only bring you up to the point where the choice between the evil and the good acquires significance for you. Everything hinges upon this. As soon as one can get a man to stand at the crossways in such a position that there is no recourse but to choose, he will choose the right.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 142.

That is to say, if one is sincere and whole-souled in his choice, the validity of his personality becomes manifest. If he chooses even the wrong rightly enough, he will discover the wrong and thereby the right. But choose he must; if he delays too long, the time comes when he can no longer choose.
grudgingly accepting duty or freely creating it, between being the pensioner of life, howling for gifts and miserly of himself, or being a doer and a creator, then he will know what Kierkegaard means by decisiveness.

It might be added that when one faces a choice of this kind, ethical relativism is of very little help. The existentialists criticize, not so much the truth of ethical relativism, as its relevance. Relativism does not choose anything, finding apparently that all choices are equally right—or wrong. Swenson sums up Kierkegaard's objections thus.

The ethical relativist either occupies the irrelevant standpoint of a disinterested observer, in which case he cannot see the issue, or he is bankrupt of ethical enthusiasm. Without the passion of subjectivity there are nowhere any decisive distinctions in life. But when the individual has once chosen to exist in ethical categories, the distinction between good and evil comes into being for him in all its absoluteness, being essentially the distinction between realizing and failing to realize his own deeper self.5

5Swenson. Something About Kierkegaard. p. 120.

From Kierkegaard's point of view, it is better almost to choose the worse than to choose nothing at all, contenting oneself with speculation and disputation. Choosing the worse at least has some life to it, for vigor lies in choice, in the exercise of the will rather than of the intellect merely. And here we come to the second and inseparable quality of the choice, its passionate earnestness.

Kierkegaard says of this earnestness,
himself and yet would endeavor to realize it.\footnote{Kierkegaard. \textit{Either/Or}. Vol. II, p. 213.}

So far a very rough sketch of the results of the ethical choice has been given. It now remains to consider the quality or inwardness of the choice, for in that feature lies the existentialist truth. The how of the choice, the element which objective thought can never deal with, determines the realization of it, in fact, is the realization. This investigation can be pursued only within the sphere of subjective experience itself, of life as it is lived, not as it is thought.

The first quality of the choice is its decisiveness. There comes a time, says Kierkegaard, when reflection must come to an end and the will must take over. For reflection paralyzes the decisiveness which gives existence its tang. The aesthetician in \textit{Either/Or} reflects on his condition and chooses particular things to distract him—which is equivalent to not choosing at all; the ethicist chooses himself, after which he needs no more distraction. It is only by recourse to experience that one may get an inkling of what Kierkegaard means here, and that probably is as he would have preferred it. If, therefore, one ever comes to the point where he feels that he must make an absolute decision about his attitude, that he must choose between
subjectivity. Thus, the truth is in the man, not in the concept or the deed; nor is Kierkegaard's view far removed from common usage, for people often instinctively use the word "true" in this manner.

But the speech of daily life enshrines another, and no less important, usage, whereby truth or falsehood comes to be attached to realities: a true man, a true statesman, a false friend, a false diamond.

That this subjective truth or inwardness cannot be conceptualized goes without saying, but one may by recourse to his own experience sense what Kierkegaard means. If ever he has thought, "That person has character," or "That man has truth in him," then he is hitting on Kierkegaard's meaning.

So then the person who has chosen himself has truth in him and does not need to look outside himself for his duty. The latter course is a grudging slavery.

For duty is not an imposition but something which is incumbent. When duty is viewed thus it is a sign that the individual is in himself correctly oriented. For him, therefore, duty will not split up into a congeries of particular definitions, for that is always an indication that he stands in an outward relation to it. He has clad himself in duty, for him it is the expression of his inmost nature. . .When the ethical is rightly viewed it makes the individual infinitely secure in himself, when it is not rightly viewed it makes the individual insecure, and I cannot imagine a more unhappy and agonizing existence than that of a man who manages to put duty outside.
primary choice is made that freedom begins, the freedom which can then choose good or evil. Up to that time the individual is bound or subject to determinism. Responsibility thus is not something one argues about; one chooses it freely by virtue of the initial choice. No attempt is made to prove that man is responsible. Quite simply Kierkegaard implies that responsibility pertains to man's nature. From this primary choice, too, stem all particular manifestations of duty.

Kierkegaard shies away from any cataloguing of duties or responsibilities. They degenerate into mere form and outwardness, which a man performs, as Emerson says, much as a dog tends a spit. There is no outward duty and no abstract duty to which all must conform; there is only my duty and only I can tell what it is, nor do I know until I have chosen myself in my eternal validity. To put duty outside of oneself either in the form of an abstract imperative or a list of specific injunctions is to be falsely related to duty—**even if the duties so enjoined are objectively valid**. Here the difference between objective and subjective truth appears at its sharpest: it is not enough—indeed it means nothing—merely to go through the right motions of duty; as a theologian would say, works are nothing without faith; what is requisite is that I act from the right motive, have the right inwardness or
then will a human being take a stand. In short, man must choose.

Kierkegaard makes it plain that what one chooses by this primary ethical choice cannot really be communicated, and he therefore gives three expressions for it, though all refer to the same thing. They are as follows: to choose despair; to choose oneself in his eternal validity; to choose freedom.

But what is it I choose? Is it this thing or that? No, for I choose absolutely, and the absolute-ness of my choice is expressed precisely by the fact that I have not chosen to choose this or that. I choose the absolute. And what is the absolute? It is myself in my eternal validity.


It must be emphasized that for Kierkegaard, as for Emerson, "self" has a double meaning; there is the mundane self and there is the eternal self which may transfigure the mundane. The choice, far from being an assertion of personal idiosyncrasies, is actually a breakthrough into the eternal, so that it constitutes a clear subordination of the temporal self to the eternally valid self. It is a renunciation by the individual of his private preferences in order that the absolute, grounded in God, may manifest itself through him. By this choice the true personality is revealed.

According to Kierkegaard, it is only after this
nature of things.

In the first volume of *Either/Or* Kierkegaard presents various aspects of the life lived in despair, meaningless, pointless, empty, enlivened only by diabolically clever methods of distraction which the protagonist knows will prove at last fruitless. This kind of life Kierkegaard calls the "aesthetic" life, the life devoted to pleasure and feeling. The hero lives in his "immediacy," that is, he has no goals which partake of the eternal and transcend his dyspeptic ego. His *Angst* makes him feel that his life is a joke, an absurdity as Jean-Paul Sartre puts it. This so-called aesthetic stage is one of three general stages into which Kierkegaard categorizes human life, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. This chapter is concerned with only the first two stages.

In Kierkegaard there does not appear to be any gradual transition from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere. Rather, hating as he did any form of gradualness, of little by little, of mediating opposites, he presents the change as a leap which man takes when faced with a crisis in his life. The very title *Either/Or* suggests his impatience with all mediation—in which, of course, he was aiming primarily at Hegel. Man must be brought to the crossroads, and it is *Angst* which brings him there. The sense of urgency, of suffering, of crisis must be there, for only
Chapter II. The Ethical Choice: The Existentialists

We have seen that the motivation behind Christian existentialism is a very real and very passionate one. The existentialist is moved by Angst. He wishes to realize existence in its fullness. And he sets about the matter somewhat as Thoreau did, by living his way into the problem.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.1

1Thoreau. Walden. pp. 81-82.

Though the existentialist might have a much different report to make, he too wishes to find out whether life is mean or sublime, and to know it by experience. He seeks that truth which is true for him, which is grounded in the
prattle of social mores and social ethics; if that is all there is to our ways of life, then we must feel with honest Jack Falstaff, "I'll none o' it." But the yearning and the mystery remain. We would forego much, perhaps all, if one ray of illumination would show us how we should live, what our business is here. Here is no theoretical problem, but the most concrete and practical problem: how should I live and what should I live by? This longing everyone may share—intellectual or not—and perhaps everyone does. In one of his finest and simplest utterances Kierkegaard puts it:

What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.80


It was to this spiritual need, I suggest, that Emerson addressed himself, not to the formulation of intellectual systems.
As painfully to pore upon a book
   To seek the light of truth; while truth the while
Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look:
   Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{78}Shakespeare, William. \textit{Love's Labour's Lost}. I, i, 72-77.

Why offer knowledge when the trouble lies in the heart? These dim yearnings will never be satisfied by knowing things. What boots all this knowledge if the same old sinner is to do the knowing? The trouble is more basic and the remedy must be equally so; it must shake the heart. The human being who is moved by \textit{Angst} is not trying to collect truths; he is looking for Truth. Says Marcel of truth-gatherers,

\textit{Il existe à cet égard une analogie remarquable entre les vérités particulières et les choses. La chose est là, prête à être constatée par quiconque, la vérité particulière se donne aussi comme offerte à qui voudra la reconnaître et la proclamer. Là est à n'en pas douter l'origine d'une certaine illusion scientifique. Nous sommes exposés à amasser, à collectionner les vérités particulières, comme on collectionne des cailloux ou des coquillages.}\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79}Marcel. \textit{Homo Viator}. p. 195.

\textit{Angst} poses no theoretical problem and whoever so conceives it \textit{eo ipso} misunderstands it. \textit{Angst} is personal. It is the longing to find a way of life that answers to our deepest instinct, a way without compromise and firm-rooted in whatever reality sustains us. Away with this
our explanations do everything except explain—in the profoundest sense of the word. Our knowledge is pseudoknowledge and we the dupes of it. We can understand the overtone of bitterness in Emerson's

People disparage knowing and the intellectual life, and urge doing. I am very content with knowing, if only I could know. That is an august entertainment, and would suffice me a great while. To know a little would be worth the expense of this world.??


It might indeed—if only we could know.

We have those who are overflowing with explanation and information as much as any Sophist in Greece. Perhaps never before have so many known so much about so little. Here is one who says we are simply a combination of atoms and proves it irrefutably. Here is another who says we are spirit and proves that irrefutably. Along comes a third to declare that we are basically a sex drive, and a fourth to bid us obey the commandments. Knowledge in plenty and confusion in plenty, but what shall we make of it? Well, one thing at least seems probable: we should hold our knowledge and our theories with a kind of goodhumored lightness much as a bon vivant holds his drink, for it has that in it which is fatal to light, an ignorance more abysmal than ignorance. We must feel with Biron:

Why, all delights are vain; but that most vain
Which, with pain purchas'd, doth inherit pain:
On this subject Kierkegaard somewhat testily remarks,

But there are certain things it is difficult to get into certain persons' heads, and among them the passionate definition of the incomprehensible.\(^{75}\)

\(^{75}\)Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript.*

p. 500.

Not merely the definition of the incomprehensible, it must be noted, but the passionate definition of the incomprehensible, out of which the sentiment of wonder develops. There is no such thing as a purely intellectual wonder when confronting the mystery of existence, for wonder is a movement of the whole personality, a passion. This sentiment is primary in Emerson.

You are really interested in your thought. You have meditated in silent wonder on your existence in this world. You have perceived in the first fact of your conscious life here a miracle so astounding,—a miracle comprehending all the universe of miracles to which your intelligent life gives you access,—as to exhaust wonder, and leave you no need of hunting here or there for any particular exhibitions of power.\(^{76}\)


In the face of encompassing mystery our knowledge looks ridiculous, a tiny heap of hard won scrapings in the midst of the giant riddle. We may build that heap up to infinity and yet what will it ever tell us that we really want to know? What silly hope is this of an increment of wisdom from age to age? For, to tell the truth,
that wonder is not in good taste? Problem-solving has come into fashion, and it would be a rare institution which included in its curriculum a course devoted to the demonstration of ignorance and the promotion of wonder. Nevertheless, the mystery remains, and every addition to knowledge should serve to intensify it. The more one learns about how the body grows, the more he should wonder why it grows, for that is the miracle. If one can see no miracle here, then let him rest assured that he has no taste for existentialism—or for Emerson.

Most of us pay lip-service to the Socratic ignorance and the resultant humility, but most, if we were completely honest, would confess that when we get right down to it there are quite a few things we think we know. Certainly when one considers our constant and tiresome disputations --of which this paper is undoubtedly one--there is very little evidence of a sense of ignorance or wonder. Everyone talks as one who knows--like James Thurber's mystical cat. As for humility--that is something which Uriah Heep had. To Kierkegaard must go at least the credit of being one of the few thinkers who took Socrates and his humility seriously. There is a possibility that when Socrates said that he knew only that he knew nothing, he meant essentially, precisely that. How refreshing to find for a change a man who does not know.
empiricism always takes experience for granted, whereas the amazing thing is that there should be experience at all. Most religions, even primitive ones, are perceptive on this point, and therefore always propound a Book of Genesis, showing that if they do not have the solution, they at least see the problem. It does no good to denounce this as a silly question; it is a real question, perhaps the question.

To Be is the unsolved, unsolvable wonder. To Be, in its two connections of inward and outward, the mind and Nature. The wonder subsists, and age, though of eternity, could not approach a solution.74


As a problem there is only one thing wrong with it: it is a mystery. And this mystery envelopes us and our knowledge; we ourselves are a part of it.

Even Aristotle, the most academic of the Greeks, declared that philosophy began in wonder, and Plato too, for the Greeks never lost sight of the wonder of existence. Nowadays, it is a question what thinkers begin with—but it is certainly not wonder; they are too educated for that. The simple awe of the savage has more profundity in it, for wonder is not a product of education. Indeed much education appears primarily aimed at throttling whatever stray remnants have stubbornly persisted. Should we say
within the existential sphere, whereby man takes up a cognitive attitude towards something, whereas his attitude ought to be that something.  

The hunger of Angst can least of all be stayed by an addition to knowledge.

In the first place, we can never really know. Over and behind all our knowledge hangs the veil of mystery from which all things spring and from which Angst springs. Mystery is our element, and the first step should be to recognize it as such; nor can this point be too often repeated, for unless it is thoroughly made, everything else the existentialists say is meaningless.

If there is one human faculty which seems to have progressively withered away in proportion as our technical knowledge increases, it is the faculty of wonder. Perhaps this is not remarkable, for when man has solved difficult problems in medicine or physics or chemistry and added thereby immeasurably to his store of knowledge, it is easy for him to imagine an infinite progress and quickly arrive at the conclusion that there are no mysteries—simply unsolved problems. Now this overhasty conclusion springs from a failure to perceive that there is one major problem about existence which defies solution, namely, why does it exist at all? As Marcel says,
Falls? . . .

Metaphysics is dangerous as a single pursuit. We should feel more confidence in the same results from the mouth of a man of the world. The inward analysis must be corrected by rough experience. Metaphysics must be perpetually reinforced by life; must be the observations of a working man on working men; must be biography,—the record of some law whose working was surprised by the observer in natural action. . . But this watching of the mind, in season and out of season, to see the mechanics of the thing, is a little of the detective. The analytic process is cold and bereaving and, shall I say it? somewhat mean, as spying. There is something surgical in metaphysics as we treat it. Were not an ode a better form? The poet sees wholes and avoids analysis; the metaphysician, dealing as it were with the mathematics of the mind, puts himself out of the way of the inspiration; loses that which is the miracle and creates the worship.


Kierkegaard remarks that the philosopher who builds a system—and any consistent elaboration of concepts is a system—is like the man who constructs a great mansion and then goes to live in the doghouse, for he is still outside of the fact.

"To acquire knowledge," this phrase embodies in itself the crowning illusion to which the existentialists are opposed. They are saturated with agnosticism in the most literal sense of the word. Knowing things is not existing. As Berdyaev says of man's tendency to "objectify" reality as an object of thought:

I regard as 'object' not the subject-matter of knowledge but that which marks a certain relationship
makes no essential contact with our lives except when a stray insight happens to rouse the heart, to convey "existence."

It becomes clearer then why Kierkegaard could say that thinkers had forgotten what it means to exist. Their inquiries lack relevance to the Angst in man's heart. They have forgotten that the impulse which makes people go to the great works of literature is a hunger for something that will speak to their condition. They too frequently assume that wisdom consists in the manipulation of concepts. But the great mass of mankind seem to be in solid agreement with Kierkegaard on this point, for it must be confessed that most of us are not hot upon the trail of philosophic truth, and would not know what to do with it if we found it. Now this phenomenon has two explanations: either we are not concerned with truth as such, which in varying degrees is doubtless the case, or we feel in some dim fashion that Truth does not lie in this direction. The latter expresses the existentialist view, a view which, I repeat, lies curiously close to what we call common sense. Of what avail is this philosophic toy of thought if it cannot permeate and change the quality of living?

I confess to a little distrust of that completeness of system which metaphysicians are apt to affect. 'Tis the gnat grasping the world. All these exhaustive theories appear indeed a false and vain attempt to introvert and analyze the Primal Thought. That is upstream and what a stream! Can you swim up Niagara
In view of the controversy going on about Kierkegaard's concept of existence, it seems pertinent to observe that for Kierkegaard existence was precisely the thing one could not have a concept of.

Existence, like movement, is a difficult category to deal with; for if I think it, I abrogate it, and then I do not think it. It might therefore seem to be the proper thing to say that there is something which cannot be thought, namely, existence. But the difficulty persists, in that existence itself combines thinking with existing, in so far as the thinker exists. 70

70 Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript.* p. 274.

All thought is rooted in the principle of immanence and for this reason,

Speculative philosophy discounts existence; in its eyes the fact of existing amounts to having existed (the past), existence is a transitory factor resolved into the pure being of the eternal. Speculative philosophy as the abstract can never be contemporary with existence as existing but can only see it in retrospect. This explains why speculative philosophy prudently holds itself aloof from ethics, and why it becomes ridiculous when it makes a trial at it. 71

71 Ibid., p. 506.

In short, as plain people might say, thinking about living is not living. It is only by a false mediation that thought pretends to bridge the gap between itself and existence. It is this which makes the essential irrelevance of philosophical system or indeed of any philosophical enquiry whose aim is to convey merely intellectual concepts. The thought
to interpret, to explain, to render cognizable this fleeting existence. In short, it aims to think existence in terms of concepts, and its energies are bent on solving problems which impede this effort. It is doubtless from this point of view that Marjorie Grene criticizes Kierkegaard on the grounds that he did not solve a single one of the great problems of philosophy. But it should be obvious to anyone who knows Kierkegaard's motivation, that, whatever he was trying to do, he was not trying to solve the problems of philosophy or to pretend that he had. He was not seeking an interpretation of existence, but a fuller existence itself, the living reality. He did not want reflection, but reflection which permeated his living. He did not want to solve intellectual puzzles; the paradox prevented that; the most that reflection could do was to lead one to the point where thought broke down and faith began. Solving the problems of philosophy is no remedy for Angst. One might as well try to stay his hunger by reading about dietetics. Thought and existence are two different spheres, and the error of intellectualism lies in thinking that existing consists "in getting to know something about this or that." But the whole criticism strikingly illustrates how dangerously easy it is for even the keenest mind to transfer the existential to the intellectual.
of the Danish Church, Berdyaev was a Russian Orthodox Catholic and Marcel is a Roman Catholic. They are not against organized religion as such, but they hate the faith which relies on outwardness, credulity and numbers. Their principal objection to the church as institution is that so often it does not speak to man's heart. Nevertheless, even at its worst, religion does recognize that man has a heart, which, they think, is more than can be said of some proponents of adaptation.

Of all the answers to dread the philosophical system was Kierkegaard's particular bête noir—perhaps because he himself was so strongly drawn to it in his youth. His particular aversion, of course, was the reigning Hegelianism. Oliver Wendell Holmes once characterized Emerson as an "iconoclast without a hammer," and adapting this statement, we may say that Kierkegaard is an icoclast with a hammer, for he is not content until he has pulverized the enemy. Today, attacking philosophical system is like flogging a dead horse, but what Jean Wahl calls Kierkegaard's battle against all philosophy is hugely alive—and frequently missed. Kierkegaard underestimated the power of a misunderstanding to "take the explanatory effort to itself in a new misunderstanding."

Philosophy, in its usual sense, aims at the elaboration of concepts more or less consistent, which are intended
with dogma is not so much that he finds it false as that he finds it meaningless. It is something outside of him which has no relevance. Curiously enough, the more he tries to prove the objective truth of these doctrines, the more meaningless they become to him, so that by the time he has established to his satisfaction their undoubted verity, they are also quite dead. For all the difference they make in the quality of his daily life, he might as well believe in the existence of elves; in fact, the latter might serve him better. It was against this comfortable, dull, objectivized Christianity that Kierkegaard delivered some of his most savage attacks. For the born Christian Christianity was too often all doctrines and outwardness, or, as Emerson said of Unitarianism, a pallid intellectualism which lacked the faith of its narrower forebear, Calvinism. For Kierkegaard, as for Emerson,

It is of no use to preach to me from without. I can do that too easily myself. Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others. In that is the miracle.69


On the other hand, it must be remembered that for the Christian existentialists dogma does contain truth if it be appropriated inwardly by the whole personality. It is a question of how you believe it. Kierkegaard was a member
and a craven egoism, then it is worth meditating on. But this, each one must decide for himself, for only he knows the quality life has for him. In this respect we are as solitary as so many islands.

From the foregoing the existentialist objection to the panacea of adjustment becomes clear. To prescribe adjustment is to declare that the problem does not exist. It is patronizingly to treat man as a confused animal who needs straightening out by a superior technical knowledge. By this means man is assured that for him there is no nobility and no baseness, that reverence has no proper object, in fact, no real right to exist. Emptiness again closes in. Such a course is like that of the priest in Madame Bovary, who, when Emma came to him in her emotional distress, recommended a change of diet. In the existentialist view no change of diet, no increase in adaptation, excellent as that may be, can cope with Angst, for the latter expresses man's need to come to terms with existence as a whole.

While institutional religion proposes to satisfy this dread, it cannot do so merely by propounding dogma and doctrine. Credulity is not faith. Doctrine may and does degenerate into so many objective propositions which the person accepts in much the same way he accepts the fact that the earth is round; the worst difficulty one encounters
anti-intellectualism which is so difficult to convey in objective writing.

Doubtless the first remedy for Angst would be better adaptation, a prescription which, in effect, denies the validity or existence of so-called spiritual yearnings and ascribes them to psychological and sociological maladjustment. The temptation at this point is to debate the objective validity of the subjective phenomenon—to put it in the jargon, which after all has its uses—but obviously we are dealing with something which is by definition unprovable. To believe or disbelieve in the reality of spiritual yearning is to make a primary act of faith for or against the reality of something called spirit, which, if it exists, can be apprehended by us only as a quality of living. And upon this matter of quality the whole thing really hinges: it depends upon the quality of the dread whether the person thinks these promptings come from above or below, and that quality is precisely the thing that no person can communicate to another. All subjectivity is necessarily secret. If it be merely one more selfish desire, if it higgle for a private salvation, if it be a self-centered anxiety, or a complex refusal to face reality, then these things must not be dignified by the name of spiritual. But if it seem to be none of these, if it seem to be a longing directed away from a cheap selfishness
that he wants something, but does not know what it is he
wants, then he may be thinking in existentialist terms.
For this need is obscure and its fulfillment unknown;
therein lies the tragedy. As Gabriel Marcel declares,

For reasons which I shall develop later, I suspect
that the characteristic of this need is that it can
never be wholly clear to itself. 68


Whoever tries with great zeal to make it clear as a con-
ception of thought misses the point of the matter com-
pletely.

Now though the phenomenon of dread may differ in form
and intensity from one writer to another, it is sufficiently
homogeneous in all to indicate what things will not satisfy
it. One can "by indirections find directions out." This
matter is of the highest importance in understanding exist-
entialism, for from the nature of the primary motivation
stem many of the existentialist objections to traditional
philosophy; these objections are rich in suggestions as to
why Emerson had so little use for the system and logic and
conceptual arrangement of traditional philosophy. The
motivation once sensed, the objections arise naturally and
with a kind of immediate visibility. It is the advantage
of subjective writing that, once established in the view-
point of the "existing individual," one can easily see the
more upon the world of objects. It is not difficult to equate this objectification of Berdyaev's with the despair of Kierkegaard and Marcel, but Berdyaev goes a step further in asserting that man sometimes actually prefers this slavery in despair. Like the hero in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground he knows that he is "sick," but he wants it that way. He rushes to put on his own chains; he prefers a false security to freedom, which latter entails constant danger. Like so many Russian writers, Berdyaev sees man as a study in perversity, two-sided, angelic and demonic, capable of supreme sacrifice and capable also of embracing the evil—just because it is evil.

This sketch of the existentialist Angst, will at least serve to convey some sense of what motivates these men. It is not a philosopher's desire to watch the wheels go round, nor a dilettante's idle curiosity, nor a desire for social reform, but a hunger of the whole personality for a new quality of life. For man the essence of this quality is the fact that it is unknown. If he knew what it was, he would have it.

I can know that truth is divine and helpful; but how it shall help me I can have no guess, for so to be is the sole inlet of so to know.67

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When a person feels, Babbit-like, that something is lacking,
I have never doubted the existence of God, even and perhaps least of all when I denied him. Man has not succeeded in killing God. But I have often been conscious of God's absence from the world, of the world's and man's forsakenness by God. Indeed, this forsakenness by God of human societies and civilization is the basic experience of the age in which it has been my lot to live—an age of the triumph of blind and relentless fate.65


On the positive side he speaks of spiritual yearning.

Man is a being who experiences not only fear and anguish but also yearning. Yearning lies nearer to anguish than to fear, but it has its own quality. Yearning is certainly not what is experienced in passing through danger; it has certainly no connection with anxiety, and indeed it lessens anxiety. Yearning is directed upwards and is a mark of man's higher nature. Man has to submit to abandonment, loneliness, and the strangeness of the world.66


In Berdyaev's view man's denial of the promptings of Angst results in his enslavement to the world of things, a process which he calls "estrangement" or "objectification." Man comes to be regarded as a thing. He is the worked upon rather than the worker; he is the product rather than the producer, the passive rather than the active; he is given over to the "wholly natural," and despairs in the midst of the triumph of his techniques. There may be enslavement to nature, to society, to money, to sex, even to God. Faith wanes as man relies more and
grown apiece with it. The more light we gain, the less satisfied we are—which inclines the skeptical to wonder if it be light at all, if this faith in techniques is not just one more form of quiet desperation—sometimes not so quiet. Man is putting his trust in the wrong place, and as a result he finds himself more and more unable to "control his controls," as Marcel puts it, more and more at the mercy of a strange, problematical world rather than master of it. Marcel would agree with Kierkegaard that intellectualism eats away faith,

...that in one direction truth increases in extent, in mass, partly also in abstract clarity, whereas certitude steadily decreases.63


Nicolas Berdyaev accords to Angst nowhere near the analysis that Kierkegaard gives it. He takes Angst at its negative signification, while distinguishing it from both fear and everyday anxiety, both of which are mundane in character.

Anguish, on the other hand, is experienced, not in the face of empirical danger, but in confronting the mystery of being and non-being, when face to face with the transcendent abyss, in the face of the unknown.64

64Berdyaev. Slavery and Freedom. p. 52.

He felt it as the foresakenness of man by God.
The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

Trenchant words indeed! If anyone feels they hit home, then he knows what Kierkegaard is getting at. This despair is unsaid; only in the emptiness and the frenzy of the pursuits does it reveal itself: the greedy, the sensual, the ambitious, have all despaired of something better and betaken themselves with furious industry to the pursuit of the second best.

So far as the other existentialists go, they are more subdued in tone. Marcel places his emphasis upon emptiness, ennui—which he calls France's metaphysical malady—and uselessness, elements which in their most aggravated form lead to despair and even suicide. What he calls the "ontological need," the need for man's spirit to realize itself, seems to him to lose itself in despair the more it places a pathetic reliance in "techniques," in the evolving of intellectual controls. Marcel sees a profound connection between the idolatry of scientific techniques and the bewildered pessimism which seems to have
hope can never quite be quenched. It manifests itself in moments. This hope Emerson uses as his starting point in "The Over-Soul."

There is a difference between one and another hour of life in their authority and subsequent effect. Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences. For this reason the argument which is always forthcoming to silence those who conceive extraordinary hopes of man, namely the appeal to experience, is for ever invalid and vain. We give up the past to the objector, and yet we hope. He must explain this hope. We grant that human life is mean, but how did we find out that it was mean? What is the ground of this uneasiness of ours; of this old discontent? What is the universal sense of want and ignorance, but the fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim?


The very existence of Angst is the suggestion of something better. By what standard did we arrive at the verdict of meanness?

In Kierkegaard's view, no person escapes dread in some form or other, to some degree or other. If he denies it, or is not conscious of it, it is only because he has despaired of himself and seeks to lose himself in the concerns of the world. He has given up. This kind of despair then is not an idea or a belief, but a way of living—with innumerable variants to it. Possibly the finest expression of it comes from Emerson's friend Thoreau:
anxiety and pathological morbidity seems obvious, and neither Berdyaev nor Marcel carries it to the length which Kierkegaard does. Nonetheless, to such violent degrees does Kierkegaard's Angst go, and I have no desire to water it down for agreeable consumption. Chaning-Pearce says of this almost masochistic emphasis on suffering:

This stress upon suffering is evidently attributable in some degree, first, to his own abnormal sensitivity and, second, to his violent reaction from the cushioned and complacent Christianity which, in his own crisis, had been found wanting. A synthetic view of the whole of his writings suggests that, to some extent, he was deliberately stressing this feature of Christianity as a 'corrective.'

It is true that Kierkegaard despised complacency, but no one can read him without feeling that his suffering was not all "reaction;" it was deep, it was intense, it was basic. Make no mistake about it, when Kierkegaard talks about dread, there is plenty of dread there.

Universalizing the concept of dread, Kierkegaard makes it a reality in every human life and, paradoxically, the quality which indicates to man his own dignity. Dread is the hunger of the spirit seeking to realize itself. The torment is coexistent with a sense of "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." The
For Kierkegaard Angst is the consequence of Original Sin, the fall by which man separated himself from God. By it also man may arrive at what was for Kierkegaard a vital stage, the consciousness of sin.

So then dread signifies two things: the dread in which the individual posits sin by the qualitative leap; and the dread which entered in along with sin, and which for this reason comes also into the world quantitatively every time an individual posits sin.58

Allied as it is with sin and salvation, Kierkegaard's Angst must always be thought of in connection with its spiritual affinities.

Although the negative element may be primary for him, Kierkegaard does insist upon the dual nature of dread: It is both attraction and repulsion. It is a presentiment of possibility (the heaviest of categories for Kierkegaard), of freedom, and the prospect terrifies while it entices. The person feels that something better is possible, but at the same time he fears this possibility.

In dread there is the egoistic infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a definite choice, but alarms and fascinates with its sweet anxiety.59

That dread carried far enough may have elements of neurotic
dread as it has been variously translated.

Although we have spoken so far of hunger or yearning, the reverse side of the matter has constantly kept pace. To yearn for something is to fear or flee from its opposite. I either seek a full life or I dread an empty one, or possibly both together. This negative motivation is highly important, as some existentialists place far more emphasis upon it than upon the positive side. Angst has thus a dual nature, an attraction and a repulsion.

As befits a master psychologist, the strongest, most articulate and most terrifying expression of Angst, or dread as the Revd. Mr. Lowrie translates it, is to be found in Kierkegaard. The elements which have been mentioned form part of Kierkegaard's dread, implicitly or explicitly, but in a highly intensified form. This perhaps is the key to his dread—its intensity. He does not, like Berdyaev, write about intensity; he writes with intensity. It reaches at times heights of frenzy, of vertigo, in which the negative element of dread is clearly predominant, that is, he desires deliverance from something, or in Christian terms, desires to be saved. His is a voice echoing the passionate need of St. Augustine and Pascal, the need of a man whom God has deserted in the world. Because of its close connection with the idea of salvation, this negative motivation is worth remembering.
pathology or, what is almost as bad, a distracted and insistent need for company with whom the most superficial of relations is established. How many people are there who cannot bear to be alone with themselves? As for the precarious position that is our lot, that does not even bear thinking upon. Nonetheless, there come times when everyone must face the fact that his tenure upon earth is an uncertain one and that the next wind which blows may take him with it. There is no security here and that is the only certain fact. Now one need not muse upon this fact so long as to stare it out of countenance—something which many thinkers, including some existentialists, have done—but quietly and firmly he must be aware of it, else his existence has an ostrich-like quality.

When all of these gropings and disquietudes are considered together, it becomes obvious that they are only so many facets of one central, nameless thing, and that the list is by no means exhaustive. Furthermore, they may all exist together, reinforcing rather than negating each other. Obviously they can have no essential meaning to anyone unless he has felt them in his own life, that is, unless he has somehow been oppressed by the meanness, the emptiness, the meaninglessness of his life.

This is the *Angst* of the existentialists, the anguish or
In a somewhat similar vein Emerson characterizes his age.

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness;—

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

It is so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary class as a mere announcement of the fact that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers, and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim.

But Emerson's optimism was at least a trifle premature, for, over a hundred years later, it looks as though we had outseen God and nature, and not merely drunk truth dry but found it highly unpalatable. If anything, we are more critical, more negative.

To complement these unsatisfied and possibly unsatisfiable yearnings, there is the keen sense of our aloneness and instability. Each one comes into the world alone—and resisting, at that—goes out alone—again willy-nilly—and lives most of his life alone, for after all, how often can it be said that we are really with a person in the deepest sense of the word? At its worst this aloneness passes into
But, politics aside, we can scarcely be accused of an exuberance of belief. The doubt plagues us. Even our dissipation is timid and skeptical, burdened with half measures and second thoughts. We can understand Stevenson's grudging admiration for that friend of his youth who "went to seed with magnificent abandon." The fiery Nietzsche can almost convince one that evil is good if it be thorough enough. But we will not believe until we are assured in advance of the thing's goodness. We demand proofs and assurances; we wish to know, so that we stand on the water's edge like a diver who will not take the plunge until absolutely certain that it is safe. We think that faith is the second fact. Quite possibly, it is the first, and the more we reflect the further away we get from that pristine affirmativeness which asks no guarantees. Thought is not faith and propositions are not living. Kierkegaard humorously complained that his age had stifled all passion by its overly reflective bias.

Nowadays not even a suicide kills himself in desperation. Before taking the step he deliberates so long and so carefully that he literally chokes with thought. It is even questionable whether he ought to be called a suicide, since it is really thought which takes his life. He does not die with deliberation but from deliberation. 56

as the works of genius and religion. "A man," said Oliver Cromwell, "never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going." 54

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The real lure of modern political ideologies or reforms seems to lie in this fact, that they supply a goal to which, in the absence of religious faith, the individual can give himself. They supply purpose and meaning to purposeless lives. They answer, particularly among intellectuals, to the deepest kind of need. They allow the follower to serve.

Il est manifeste, en effet, que toute vie est un service, ce qui ne signifie pas, bien entendu, qu'elle ait à se dépenser pour un individu désignable, mais seulement qu'il est de son essence d'être consacrée à (à Dieu, ou bien à une valeur supérieure telle que la connaissance, ou l'art, etc., ou bien à une fin sociale délibérément choisie). Servir, en ce deuxième sens, c'est se mettre au service de. Et ici l'accent doit être mis sur le petit mot se, sur le pronom réfléchi. Vivre, au sens plein du mot, c'est non pas exister ou subsister, se borner à exister ou à subsister, mais disposer de soi, se donner. 55

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The only enthusiasms in good taste today are political. One is safe there. The long list of books by disillusioned ex-Communists testifies to the need of a lay religion among intellectuals. Nor will any ideological warfare with Communism ever get very far until it understands that the reason lies in the heart, not the head.
With as great a disgust of the apathy of his age, Kierkegaard exclaims, "Let others complain that the age is wicked; my complaint is that it is wretched; for it lacks passion."53

Instead of being exalted by enthusiasm, we scoff at belief, calculate probabilities, try to insure our investment in advance and multiply our dangers by the very act of guarding against them. A timorous prudence, whose watchword is security, rules our activities.

If only we could want something really worth the wanting, throw our hearts into a goal which demanded every ounce of resource we could muster, then we feel that we might wake up and brush the sleep from our eyes. Everyone practices prudence, but nobody likes it very well. We say, "Well, one must live," and our eager excuses testify to our secret disgust. We long for the time when we can abandon ourselves to some floodtide and cast this penny-wisdom off. We feel that there are potentialities which have never been tapped, are formless and nameless, and can be known only by a complete abandonment of self.

The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory and to do something without knowing how or why; in short to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment. The great moments of history are the facilities of performance through the strength of ideas,
"I never met a man who was fully awake," says Thoreau with his cryptic genius for coming plump upon the fact. And if we were truthful, we would admit that it is rarely we feel any passion strongly and simply. How base and trivial are most of them! How two-faced, as modern psychology shows. They have no wings. They are for the most part poor negative things, directed against something. We call a flimsy venom a passion. Let the word itself arise and it immediately has an unpleasant significance. Is there no such thing as a passion for something?

The passion that sweeps one up we no longer know, and today enthusiasm slinks about like an outcast in a world which it itself created. Today, many things are believed, but none are believed in. It is a rash man who dares have the courage of enthusiasm, for he will be looked upon as ridiculous. This blight of disbelieving is contagious. It smiles patronizingly, pokes fun at the zealot and seems bent upon making everybody as miserable as itself. As a class, enthusiasts usually deserve the skepticism they receive, but what a pity that the stigma should be transferred to enthusiasm. For the need is there. What is a man good for without enthusiasm? and what is enthusiasm but this daring of ruin for its object?"

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Empty-hearted and sleepy-eyed we look for something to rouse us. Could we infuse a little of passion into this dust, we might succeed in living instead of merely existing. There seems to be a dearth of fire in the heavens, so stingy is our portion, so easily fanned out.

Did our birth fall in some fit of indigence and frugality in nature, that she was so sparing of her fire and so liberal of her earth that it appears to us that we lack the affirmative principle, and though we have health and reason, yet we have no superfluity of spirit for new creation? We have enough to live and bring the year about, but not an ounce to impart or to invest. Ah that our Genius were a little more of a genius! We are like millers on the lower levels of a stream, when the factories above them have exhausted the water. We too fancy that the upper people must have raised their dams.

Life must have passion or it is like so much sleep. Whatever moves us receives our attention. The idiom of language—which Emerson says is always wise—expresses its sense of that fact by the saying, "That has no meaning to me." And Berdyaev says,

That is above all a Christian truth. The whole appreciative aspect of knowledge is affective, for it expresses the 'reasons of the heart.' Criteria of value have an important place in philosophical knowledge. Since there is no way of apprehending Meaning without a criterion of value, its apprehension is primarily based on the knowledge of the heart.
If one hungers for a more vital reality, it seems rather obvious that nothing will satisfy him except the thing itself. Talk is useless. As Emerson declares,

They [personal revelations] are solutions of the soul's own questions. They do not answer the questions which the understanding asks. The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after.49


No more can the meaning which is missing in life be supplied by semantics, which, with all its excellences, seems capable of delivering every kind of meaning except the one that a human being is interested in, the one that cannot be defined. What a cruel mockery is this, when an earnest supplicant asks for Meaning, to supply him with a catalogue of meanings, to beat him down—as can very easily be done—with "Define me your terms," or "What do you mean by that?" If he could define his terms or knew precisely what he was after, he wouldn't be asking. It is no idle quibbling when Plato points out in the Meno that if one inquires about that which he knows, then he has no need to inquire; on the other hand, if he does not know that which he is inquiring about, then he cannot even begin to inquire. Vagueness clouds this longing; its essence is its indefinability, so that one knows what he lacks and yet he does not know.
that mad quest which seeks to lose itself in distraction, 
to flee from itself.

To drift, to flounder, to lie inert without a spark, 
that is the epitome of meaninglessness. In such a person 
the tide of nothingness comes more and more to engulf the 
personality, so that in Kierkegaard's words he eventually 
outlives himself and might properly be buried long before 
his physical demise—the latter being a mere formality.

Ici, le désœuvrement confine au désespoir, le désespoir n'est autre chose que le désœuvrement parvenu à la conscience la plus aiguë de soi, ou encore, pour user d'un mot quelque peu barbare, le désengagement, la désertion d'une conscience qui ne fait plus corps avec le réel.  


Reality indeed seems to be lost and all meaning with it. 
What can philosophy do for this poor mortal? He yearns 
for food, and philosophy, prating much of "reality," pre­
sents him with--delightful repast--one more barren concept 
to chew on. For philosophy makes the eternal mistake of 
confusing reality with thinking about reality. Kierkegaard 
remarks,

What the philosophers say about Reality is often 
as disappointing as a sign you see in a shop window, 
which reads: Pressing Done Here. If you brought 
your clothes to be pressed, you would be fooled; for 
the sign is only for sale.  

Even stronger is the cry of the sufferer in *Either/Or*.

How terrible tedium is—terribly tedious; I know no stronger expression, none truer, for only the like is known by the like. If only there were some higher, stronger expression, then there would be at least a movement. I lie stretched out, inactive; the only thing I see is emptiness, the only thing I move about in is emptiness. I do not even suffer pain. The vulture constantly devoured Prometheus' liver; the poison constantly dripped down on Loki; that was at least an interruption, even though a monotonous one. Even pain has lost its refreshment for me. If I were offered all the glories of the world, or all its pain, the one would move me as little as the other, I would not turn over on the other side either to obtain them or to escape them. I die the death. Is there anything that could divert me? Aye, if I might behold a constancy that could withstand every trial, an enthusiasm that endured everything, a faith that could remove mountains, a thought that could unite the finite and the infinite. But my soul's poisonous doubt is all-consuming. My soul is like the dead sea, over which no bird can fly; when it has flown midway, then it sinks down to death and destruction.45


And from an earlier writer—often called existential—comes an echo of this same cry.

**Weariness.**—Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. There will immediately arise from the depth of his heart weariness, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, vexation, despair.46


Yet is the stillness of ennui simply the twin brother of
fill up our lives with; a few would do, if only those few were whole and sound. But that wholeness and soundness is precisely what we cannot find, and we strive to compensate for this weak and sicklied quality by a distracted quest for quantity—as though more of the same were any help. It is a question which is the sadder spectacle, the man who does not get what he wants, or the man who gets it and then finds out its worthlessness.

The frenzied pursuit of more things seems to go apace with, even to be prompted by that sense of nothingness which we call ennui or tedium or boredom. Like Hamlet's, our thoughts can take the savor out of anything.

But we must pay for being too intellectual as they call it. People are not as light-hearted for it. I think men never loved life less. I question if care and doubt ever wrote their names so legibly on the faces of any population. This Ennui, for which we Saxons had no name, this word of France has got a terrific significance. It shortens life, and bereaves the day of its light. Old age begins in the nursery, and before the young American is put into jacket and trowsers, he says, "I want something which I never saw before;" and "I wish I was not I." I have seen the same gloom on the brow even of those adventurers from the intellectual class who had dived deepest and with most success into active life. I have seen the authentic sign of anxiety and perplexity on the greatest forehead of the State. The canker worms have crawled to the topmost bough of the wild elm, and swing down from that. Is there less oxygen in the atmosphere? What has checked in this age the animal spirits which gave to our forefathers their bounding pulse? 44

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does not exaggerate his experiences? One must enlarge a bit here, deal in superlatives there, and by convincing others perhaps convince himself. We sometimes feel that nothing is ever quite as good or quite as bad as we say it is, and that a mutual conspiracy exists to conceal this odious fact. Some enterprising scholar should enquire if the tragic vision of life be not the vision of its pettiness. The hero of Thomas Mann's "Disillusionment" lives his life in anticipation of the event which will lift him into a greater reality, but each incident crumbles at the touch, and he is left knowing that even when he dies he will say, "Is this all there is to it?"

Conjoined with this meanness is a sense of emptiness or void in which we live and which is in us. We abide in a kind of nothingness, and our essence almost seems to be imperfection. The mark of the creature is upon us. We want something which we do not have and wish to be something which we are not, so that the very existence of desire is an intrusion of nothingness. The cup invites filling, but indeed it seems to have no bottom to it, and the more we pour, the emptier it gets. Our lives lack pith and matter, so much so that most people recoil at the thought of presenting their autobiography—there is so pitifully little there, an emptiness not so much of quantity as of quality. We do not need many things to
meaningless. 


Most people consider their lives meaner than they will admit. Too often existence has for us as individuals a quality of triviality which disenchant our days. We feel that someone else's is better.

Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel and hangs on every other sail in the horizon. Our life looks trivial, and we shun to record it. Men seem to have learned of the horizon the art of perpetual retreating and reference. "Yonder uplands are rich pasturage, and my neighbor has fertile meadow, but my field," says the querulous farmer, "only holds the world together." I quote another man's saying; unluckily that other withdraws himself in the same way, and quotes me. 43


Indeed, the worst judgment we can pronounce upon life is not that it is terrible—there is at least something sublime about the supremely terrible, as a great tragedy will show—but quite simply that it is banal. It creeps in its petty pace from day to day. The impulse to dramatize, within or without the theatre, seems to imply that human life has a petty quality in itself and must needs be transfigured to receive a respectable attention. Who
We might produce the answers if only we could find someone who knew the questions. We would gladly begin the thought if only we knew where to begin, for some tyrannous desire for unity makes its claim felt. Is there no sense to this sequence of events, no vital core? It seems that the dissatisfaction people often feel with their lives is not so much that they are calamitous or wicked, as that they are indistinct. We cannot see any outline; nothing seems to cohere, but all is lumped together like the contents of a beggar's knapsack, no clear form emerging. The individual facts of life do not fit end to end in the architectonic we think they should have. It seems inevitable that people should set a heavy premium on the honors of an orderly career, providing as it does a symmetry and distinctness that our patchwork existence conspicuously lacks: or on some creed or social philosophy which introduces the notion that we know where we are going. Like Philip in Of Human Bondage most people would prefer some sort of pattern to emerge, and few are satisfied with the stoical acceptance of life's meaninglessness that Philip achieved. We lack a unity that is vital, not formal, inward, not outward. As the hero of Kierkegaard's Either/Or cries, "My life is absolutely
night or the mist dissolves in air. Life will not stand still long enough for us to get hold of it. We do not have it; it has us. Our wisdom should be coexistent with our living, but while we form our precepts and marshal our arguments, life has already flitted on, leaving us brooding over empty concepts. Today's wisdom is tomorrow's foolishness. Nor can we hark back to any beginning in time, for the truth of the matter is that first we live and afterwards we think about it. One day we wake up in the midst of life and ask, "What am I doing here?" not knowing how we came, nor why, as one who emerges from a long sleep into new surroundings. Beginning indeed! Shall we find the beginning of that which we are already in? It was too late after the first day.

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which according to the old belief stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again.

If any of us knew what we were doing, or where we are going, then when we think we best know! 41

speak perhaps in the first person, to attempt by imaginative rendering to share the motivation and sentiment which animate these writers. Taking a hint from Kierkegaard, one might observe that there is after all only one way to convey passion, and that is **passionately**, so that the thing presented is embodied artistically in the form. One may sense thereby the spirit from which all the letters spring. No doubt dangers exist in this course, but the reader can, I believe, with the aid of what has already been presented and will be presented, easily compensate for any exaggerations. It should also be mentioned that in regard to the adoption of the subjective viewpoint Emerson is perhaps more existential in his practice than are the existentialists themselves. This point I hope to illustrate, by using selections from his work to express the existentialist motivation.

If you were to ask an existentialist where he begins his thought, he might reply in all sincerity that he is still looking for the beginning, with which judgment a good many people would find themselves in solid agreement. With Aristotle he may say that the beginning is more than half of the whole, but where to start, how to commence? As well look for the point where the day glides over into
it could not be otherwise, but so long as one bears the paradox in mind, he need not go astray. As a new expression of an old sentiment, existentialism is addressed specifically to the modern world by men who know the problems of the modern spirit and the overwhelmingly intellectual bias of its thought. These facts perhaps account for its powerful and increasing impact. 

- ii -

So far I have presented an objective account of some primary existentialist positions, with selections from Emerson to illustrate how easily his anti-intellectualism, articulated by him only as the difference between Reason and Understanding, accords with theirs. But there is a depressing absence in this account of the element which really brings existentialism alive—namely, passion. Let the intellectual position be what it may, it remains nothing but a kind of curious skeleton unless passion breathes life into it. In a way, existentialism—authentic existentialism of the Kierkegaardian sort—defeats all efforts to talk about it objectively. If the words have no fire in them, they are meaningless. They fall flat.

There remains therefore only one thing to do: to adopt the subjective viewpoint in all its intensity, to
humanity; for his exclusiveness he suffers a fitting re-
tribution. He does not realize that the bell also tolls
for him.

Summing up, it appears that existentialism is nothing
wholly new. Indeed it would be suspect if so. Nor is the
name perhaps important. Kierkegaard did not call himself
an existentialist; he considered himself a "Christian
thinker." But rarely has the suspicion of intellect, of
thought as such, received the explicit intellectual formu-
lation which the existentialists have given it, a formu-
lation which called the word "existential" into being as
the opposite of intellectual. Professor Swenson thinks
that in this respect Kierkegaard has achieved a veritable
Copernican revolution in thought:

In my opinion, Kierkegaard was the first critic of
intellectualism who burned his philosophical bridges
behind him, and thereby liberated himself from the
trammels of the intellectualist application or mis-
use of logic in the world of life and reality. Cer-
tainly not the first to discover the category in
question, or the first to use it, he was nevertheless
the first, as far as I am aware, to give it a clear
and dialectical formulation.40


Certainly Emerson, though he is permeated by the same
spirit, never made such a formulation. For this reason
the existentialists are invaluable for supplying the
architectonic. Their formulation as such is intellectual;
spite of the overwhelming intellectuality of its writers and the fact that they have addressed themselves to intellectuals, existentialism marks a return to what might be called the natural viewpoint, a course which Emerson would certainly have extolled.

A further corollary—particularly significant today—is that for the existentialists intellectual differences between men are superficial differences, that the possession of more brain-power does not set one off from his fellows in any more fundamental respect than does the possession of more brawn. Their humility and humanity at this point is indeed refreshing, and augurs a breaking down of artificial barriers. All men are essentially alike.

The task of the subjective thinker is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses in existence whatever is essentially human. To rely on a differential trait in this connection is a misunderstanding, for to have a little more brain and the like is insignificant. 39


To the arrogance of intellectuals as comprising a class apart from and superior to ordinary men, the existentialists, like Emerson, are unalterably opposed. To shut out other men from an essential humanity is for them a sign that the intellectual has deprived himself of his own
cognitive, intellectual, rationalistic, those who oppose what they consider its failures will deliberately set themselves to exposing the weaknesses of cognition, of rationalism, of intellectualism in general. Their bias therefore may to some degree be explained by the audience aimed at.

Philosophically, one might orient himself to existentialism by reference to such writers as Plato, Kant and Bergson, who have shared the suspicion of intellect. Indeed, Marjorie Grene in *Dreadful Freedom* says that the phenomenon of existentialism suggests that a revival in philosophy usually signifies going back to Plato. William James' pragmatism constitutes a clear revolt against intellectualism, but one must observe that the pragmatic conception of truth as something *useful* is diametrically opposed to the existentialist reverence for truth as a value in itself.

Possibly the most important orientation to make in regard to existentialism is to perceive that its return to the subjective viewpoint of the whole man, in which green means simply green and sincerity means just that, marks in a very real sense a return to the viewpoint of *common sense*. The intellectual returns to the viewpoint of his unlettered brother. He tries to be objectively objective, which effort may involve the realization that there are some things one cannot be objective about. In
voluntarism. A guiding principle is always present, but it is a principle beyond man's intellect; the intellect can only rationalize it or crystallize it in concepts; this principle is the sense of the whole personality grounded in the Divine, a sense which the intellect cannot possibly justify because it must always assume it.

There is no doubt that much of the existentialist bias may be explained—though not explained away—on the ground of reaction. Kierkegaard's arch-foe was of course the "system" of Hegel, but a reader can easily discern in the dialectic, the categories, and the terrific intellectuality of the man an inheritance from Hegel which never left him. Jean Wahl holds that Kierkegaard revolted against certain aspects of both romanticism and Hegelianism.

La pensée de Kierkegaard s'explique en partie par les mouvements contre lesquels il est entré en lutte et qui ont en même temps contribué à la former. Ces mouvements, ce sont le hégélianisme et le romantisme (1). Déjà, en étudiant le stade esthétique, nous avons vu comment il lutte contre le romantisme en se servant du hégélianisme; maintenant, nous allons voir comment il lutte contre le hégélianisme en se servant de certains concepts romantiques transformés, approfondis peut-être encore au contact de sa foi (2).


However, romanticism has little strength today, and it is to the other element that the existentialists address themselves. When the temper of a time becomes so thoroughly
the reason of Coleridge and Emerson, and reason as used in modern writing. In common experience, how many men of strictest reason seem never to have learned Moliere's art of being "reasonably reasonable"? Logic may be one thing, but reasonableness is something else, something sensed or intuited. In Emerson's eyes Reason is this primary instinct of the whole personality. While the existentialists doubt the power—or better, the relevance—of man's reasoning powers as we know them, they share a deep faith in the ultimate reasonableness or rationality of the universe. Kierkegaard, for example, speaks of a rational order or system existing for God, while Marcel posits what he calls an "intelligible background." They refer to something which is the rationale of reason, a higher reason which is not an organ in man; rather, man, so to speak, is in it. In this connection, it is curious that the proponents of intellect so frequently wind up with a blind, irrational universe; man is rational, but the universe is not. For the existentialists and Emerson on the other hand, the creation rings true, but man is at fault; his intellect is not adequate, and the highest reasonableness is to recognize that fact.

This distinction should serve to separate existentialism from other forms of what might be called "anti-intellectualism." They do not exalt emotionalism or
bias is not negative, but completely positive. They are for personality and equally for the intellect—as a function of personality. For them, as for Emerson,

All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect or the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie,—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed.37


Few writers have had as little patience with stupidity as Kierkegaard had, and few have made a more intensive use of dialectic. Dialectic, in his eyes, was the pathway to finding one's ignorance. What the existentialist effort really represents is an attempt to put intellect in its proper place secondary to the whole man. They are trying to regain a perspective which they feel has been so widely lost. Nor is their effort a kind of secular humanism: they insist that the whole man has his source in a supernatural order; his faith implies it however little he may bother to rationalize it.

Neither must it be thought that the existentialists indulge in a retreat from reason, as has been suggested by some critics. Reason is after all a most elusive term. Historically, one need cite only the difference between
undermines all theories, may appear to contain in it some­what self-defeating. Unquestionably the existentialists are thinkers and unquestionably they have theories. Yet, as Berdyaev says, "Thought must inevitably be expressed, but it is also true that expressed thought is in a certain sense falsehood."36


The existentialists acutely realize the paradox and have been led thereby into an examination of the whole problem of communication, a problem which is considered in practi­cally everything Emerson ever wrote. But they cannot re­solve the paradox and frankly admit it. One might add, however, for their benefit that in the realm of values the only alternative to propounding what appears to be a theory is to keep silent altogether. Theoretical truth may not be existential truth, but all one can do is to propound that fact as a theory since the medium of commu­nication is language. Objective language can communicate only thought; art is required to communicate existence. It would seem that Emerson too was searching for a form of "existential communication."

It would be completely false to assume from what has been said that the existentialists are against intellect in the sense of entertaining an animus towards it. Their
such becomes far less important, yet the very nature of communication requires that one express what seems to be a theory. Emerson is often considered a pure theorist, but it has frequently been overlooked how lightly and genially he took all theories, even his own, how often he wrote that the wisest people probably kept silent. His aversion to dogmatizing, of which more will be said later, was carried to the degree that he could even poke fun at himself. Consider how seriously he took the majestic name of Transcendentalism itself.

You must know I am reckoned here a Transcendentalist, and what that beast is, all persons in Providence have a great appetite to know: So I am carried duly about from house to house, and all the young persons ask me, when the Lecture is coming upon the Great Subject? In vain I disclaim all knowledge of that sect of Lidian's,—it is still expected I shall break out with the New Light in the next discourse. I have read here my essay on the Age, the one on Home, one on Love, & one on Politics,—These seem all to be regarded as mere screens & subterfuges while this dread Transcendentalism is still kept back. They have various definitions of the word current here. One man, of whom I have been told, in good earnest defined it as 'Operations on the Teeth'; A young man named Rodman, answered an inquiry by saying "It was a nickname which those who stayed behind, gave to those who went ahead."35

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No theorist could deal with his heart's delight so frivolously.

This thought which attacks thought, this theory which
on which as you cruelly hint any position of mine stands. For I do not know, I confess, what arguments mean in reference to any expression of a thought. I delight in telling what I think but if you ask me how I dare say so or why it is so I am the most helpless of mortal men; I see not even that either of these questions admit of an answer.33


Even if one holds a true theory of man, the uselessness of theory is illustrated by the fact that the individual may not embody his theory; he may well be a hypocrite. The individual may not "exist in his thought," to use Kierkegaard's peculiar phrase. Existentially speaking, it is not so much what one believes that matters; it's how he believes it. The only real belief is one which is synonymous with the life. True theories do not make true men; on the contrary, it is far more likely that true men make true theories. So often there is the man and his theory. Rarely do they merge so completely that he does not even need to state his theory. "But if a man do not speak from within the veil, where the word is one with that it tells of, let him lowly confess it."34


Thus, a tremendous paradox lies at the root of existential thought—and at the root of Emerson's. Theory as
more light upon life.\textsuperscript{31}


Obviously, an appeal to experience in this comprehensive sense would be very like an appeal to intuition, to immediate recognition, and I suggest that Emerson's intuitionism becomes much more understandable if taken as based on this existentialist depth of experience. One can argue theories, but he cannot very well argue experience.

The ridiculing of "proof" with its whole apparatus of deduction, analysis, semantics, etc., is summed up by Kierkegaard in this caustic sentence; speaking of objective certainty, he says,

\begin{quote}
This type of certainty has something in common with that independence, which in independence of the world needs the world as witness to its independence, to feel sure that it really is independent.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32}Kierkegaard. \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}. p. 71.

From this point of view, any criticism or argument sounds rather foolish, and the existentialists may explain why Emerson could write thus to Henry Ware, Jr., after the famous Divinity School Address:

\begin{quote}
I could not give account of myself if challenged I could not possibly give you one of the "arguments"
in fact, not in theory. Thereby, we may have true men rather than true theories, for if the truth of man's nature be not its own warrant, what else can possibly go bond for it? The intellect with its theories and proofs cannot, because it is only a part of that nature.

These considerations bring us to what I think is a fact of central importance, namely, that the existentialist appeal is basically to experience, not the abstracted experience of the empirical philosopher, but concrete experience in its living wholeness. The existentialists ultimately appeal to what people have felt and lived, believing apparently that if one does not start with facts, he will never end with them. More precisely, their appeal is to the depth of experience. Berdyaev, for example, says that a valid empiricism does not presume to set limits to experience, while Marcel, who is very explicit on the matter, asserts that the atheist continually tends to obscure this depth of experience. Marcel would like to be known as "the philosopher of the concrete." Of his own method he says,

...for my method of advance does invariably consist, as the reader will have noticed already, in working my way up from life to thought and then down from thought to life again, so that I may try to throw
truth, the existentialists speak of it as being "subjectivity" or "inwardness," terms roughly equivalent, I believe, to Emerson's word "character." When man possesses truth, it reveals itself as character, that is, the degree to which he embodies those qualities which really pertain to human nature; how far Sartre has strayed from authentic existentialism is shown by his denial of a human nature as essence. From an existential standpoint, however much intellectual truth may be disputed—which is endlessly—the truth of character is perceived instantly by a kind of total perception or intuition; our reverence signifies our insight.

Though the existentialists have theories of man's true nature, they do not attempt to prove such theories by logic. Logic, for them, seems to be more what it was for Emerson, the "unfolding of the intuition." To demand an objective proof of man's nature betrays a failure to distinguish between the perpetually hypothetical nature of thought and the completely factual nature of existence. Kierkegaard boldly suggests that in the existential realm, the realm of values, we should get rid of the mass of "public pawnbrokers and guarantors" who wish to play safe by being sure of their money in advance; one should set sail without assurances, much as Emerson suggests in "Self-Reliance." Thereby, the truth of man's nature is validated
It is highly significant that the existentialists too have denied that faith is intellectual credulity. Kierkegaard declares that the persistent error of intellectualism is to take faith out of the realm of the existential where it properly belongs.

The realm of faith is thus not a class for numskulls in the sphere of the intellectual, or an asylum for the feeble-minded. Faith constitutes a sphere all by itself, and every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual.  

For example, to be sincere—if sincerity be granted as a phenomenon—is to have faith in the sincerity of the universe, to assert existentially—not intellectually—that sincerity somehow pertains to the nature of things. In Marcel's words, such qualities as these are ontological, not illusory. This is a venture of the heart which cannot be justified in thought, but may be validated in living. It lies outside of proof or disproof.

To signify this more than intellectual nature of
can show it to him. The fundamental integrity may express itself in many different ways and still remain the same, but no one can appropriate someone else's integrity. He may have only his own. Thus, the existentialists have taken a stand for individualism and individual dignity in a manner surprisingly reminiscent of Emerson's self-reliance. They have arrived at his paradoxical position of saying that the way to truth may seem different to each and yet be basically the same. But of this individualism, more later.

It is quite clear that underlying this entire position is a fundamental act of faith, an act which is completely different from choosing intellectual credulity in propositions. The latter is a partial and frequently meaningless act, according to the existentialists. Faith, on the other hand, throbs with life, being a total act of the personality by which it affirms its own validity and the essential solvency of the unknown power which produced and sustains it. It is not something one thinks, but something one lives. And this faith, as for Emerson, is religious.

Religion in the mind is not credulity, and in the practice is not form. It is a life. It is the order and soundness of a man. It is not something else to be got, to be added, but is a new life of those faculties you have. It is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be
A competent judge of such matters has said that it was rare to see anyone write humbly about humility, doubtfully about doubt, &c. ... But still rarer than such a presentation which is the thing presented, still rarer is it than [sic] a man's understanding of a thing is his action, that the fact of his understanding what ought to be done is expressed by—oh, noble simplicity—his doing it.


Truth is an existential value; as a purely intellectual value it has no essential relation to the whole personality. In common speech, it does not mean anything to the person, however much semantic meaning it may be shown to possess. One cannot value truth very highly if he is at no great pains to embody it as he perceives it; he must live it. One chooses to realize in fact, not in theory, an unknown human nature which reveals itself only to an attitude of complete integrity, complete sincerity. Of this nature we have perhaps only hints and stray insights, but the existentialists declare that we are not completely in the dark. Like Emerson, they think that the total nature of man makes its claims felt in each individual if he defers in all earnestness to a guidance which he cannot hope to comprehend.

Since the quest for truth is so intensely subjective, it follows that each individual is thrown back upon his own resources. The way must be his way, and no one else
Given their bias, the existentialists do not then define truth in intellectual terms or subject the concept to a semantic analysis. Their deliberate vagueness in defining it stems from a very real fear of reducing its qualitative, its reverential nature to a quantitative concept. One might imagine, as Kierkegaard warns, that he is receiving knowledge and become deluded into thinking he knows. From their point of view, the essential fact is whether one really prefers truth and obeys it when he finds it. The man who reverences truth for its own sake, not for any use he may put it to, seeks truth in a true manner. And no position is more peculiarly existential than this: that the mode of the approach must embody the end aimed at. And the mode, the way, is the truth. "Ici, par conséquent, le comment de la recherche nous donne le but de la recherche." 27


When reverence for truth exists, the totality of personality has to some degree been restored.

But the total approach does not stop with a preference for truth as an absolute value; it involves the exercise of the will, a continual choosing of truth in action by the whole personality; it demands living truly insofar as one's lights allow.
ence is thereby lost.

I say the effect is withering; for, this examination resulting in the constant detection of errors, the flattered understanding assumes to judge all things, and to anticipate the same victories. In the activity of the understanding, the sentiments sleep. The understanding presumes in things above its sphere, and, because it has exposed errors in a church, concludes that a church is an error; because it has found absurdities to which the sentiment of veneration is attached, sneers at veneration; so that analysis has run to seed in unbelief. There is no faith left. We laugh and hiss, pleased with our power in making heaven and earth a howling wilderness.

Unlovely, nay, frightful, is the solitude of the soul which is without God in the world. . . To see men pursuing in faith their varied action, warm-hearted, providing for their children, loving their friends, performing their promises,—what are they to this chill, houseless, fatherless, aimless Cain, the man who hears only the sound of his own footsteps in God's resplendent creation? To him, it is no creation; to him, these fair creatures are hapless spectres: he knows not what to make of it. To him, heaven and earth have lost their beauty. How gloomy is the day, and upon yonder shining pond what melancholy light! I cannot keep the sun in heaven, if you take away the purpose that animates him. The ball, indeed, is there, but his power to cheer, to illuminate the heart as well as the atmosphere, is gone forever. It is a lamp-wick for meanest uses. The words, great, venerable, have lost their meaning; every thought loses all its depth and has become mere surface.26


How excellently this expresses the existentialist objection. Emerson recognized in his day an intellectualism of the "second zone," and the habits it was apt to beget. The Understanding could kill the sentiments most expressive of an essential humanity.
has lost something very vital and very real in disavowing the subjective experience of reverence, of piety.

This sentiment they are trying to restore.

Clearly this attitude involves a complete break with the intellectual approach, which would never accept reverence as a primary fact; it would insist upon analyzing and validating the sentiment. It would, so to speak, insist upon finding out whether man has a right to feel reverence, a highly subjective phenomenon. This task it can obviously never accomplish, and the existentialists, who have harsh things to say about thinkers who try to settle the objective validity of subjective phenomena, make no bones about taking reverence at its face value. For them, as for Emerson, the sentiment of reverence means that somewhere there exists something worth revering. Speaking of the triumphs of intellectual criticism in detecting error and superstition in the established churches, Emerson goes on to point out how completely the sentiment of rever-
itself first of all in an attitude toward truth. The usual intellectual attitude toward truth is that it consists of a body of knowledge to be used. For the existentialists on the other hand, truth, or better Truth, is not the used but the user. "I always thought and I continue to think, that truth does not serve anybody or anything; they serve it."\(^{23}\) It is a value in itself, an essence—possibly unknowable—which is to be reverenced for its own sake. Whereas the intellect has a curiosity about truth, the whole man entertains a reverence for it, a sense of piety. He may well forego a seemingly idle curiosity. Marcel expresses this attitude by his term, "the spirit of truth."


Je préférerais pour mon compte parler ici de l'esprit de vérité. Quoi qu'on en dise parfois en un langage beaucoup trop imprécis, ce n'est pas contre la vérité, mais contre l'esprit de vérité que nous sommes tous continuellement exposés à pécher. L'esprit de vérité peut d'ailleurs habiter totalement un être qui, au cours de son existence, n'a eu l'occasion ou la possibilité de reconnaître qu'un tout petit nombre de vérités particulières, et pour qui ces vérités ne se sont même jamais formulées en des termes qui permettent de les transmettre ou a fortiori de les enseigner.\(^{24}\)


A reverence for truth is fundamentally a kind of piety, and the existentialists hold that the intellectualist temper
must be remembered that paradox lies at the basis of existential thought; paradox cannot be resolved, though it might seem at times a convenient way of escaping difficulties. But, more to the point, it is equally obvious that to speak of a total approach is the objective, the intellectual way of putting it and constitutes only a metaphorical expression. Subjectively viewed, this total approach manifests itself as a way, a how qualitatively different from the purely intellectual approach, which, whether, it be rationalist, empiricist, pragmatist or positivist, still speaks only the quantitative language of intellect. As quality, the difference is experienced; it cannot be simply thought. A transition is made from the sphere of thought or concepts to the sphere of existence or attitudes. Kierkegaard expresses it in what one suspects is a deliberately tantalizing fashion.

Suppose a man wished to communicate the conviction that it is not the truth but the way which is the truth, i.e. that the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation, and hence that there is no result.*2

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Thus truth does not consist of coming to know this or that; rather it is a becoming, a transition. It is, in Emerson's words, "an untaught sally of the spirit."

The how of the total subjective approach manifests
The dehumanization of man—the splitting off of the intellect from the whole personality—is perhaps best illustrated by the experiments performed in the name of science upon the inmates of concentration camps. The cold objectivity of the experimenters, their intense curiosity, their willingness to add by this means to the store of knowledge, these characteristics receive by general consent the appellation of inhuman. Yet, from an existential standpoint, what could intellect do to restore that missing humanity? They did not lack intelligence. They lacked something else, some intangible yet real quality pertaining to the whole man, something which, far from being ruled by intelligence, is itself the ruler. They would represent for the existentialists—by a purely subjective judgment—the dehumanized man at his modern worst, intelligent, learned, methodical, objective, perhaps aesthetically inclined, but completely alienated from himself.

The restoration of the complete man can be accomplished only by an individual effort which is equally total. The paradox which is involved here is obvious: a total approach already assumes the restoration of the total man. But it
of it is implicit in his thought. This might be an empty world.

Not in nature but in man is all the beauty and worth he sees. The world is very empty, and is indebted to this gilding, exalting soul for all its pride. "Earth fills her lap with splendors" not her own.20


But man has mistaken the intellect for the whole personality, and has denied that primary subjective experience which constitutes value. It could not be otherwise, for, since the objective intellect carefully abstracts from the matter all subjective qualities before it starts, it would be very strange if it should succeed in rediscovering what it had been at such great pains to exclude in the first place. In the field of values one starts with values subjectively experienced or he cannot start at all; he does not abstract from them or destroy them by analysis; he takes them in their completeness, thus being more empirical, more concrete, than the empiricists—who always take the observer, the subject, for granted. Marcel expresses the completeness of the subjective approach—and the impossibility of any other—in this way:

Au fond, la méthode est toujours la même: c'est l'approfondissement d'une certain situation métaphysique fondamentale dont il ne suffit pas de dire qu'elle est mienne, car elle consiste essentiellement
to recognise.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18}Marcel. \textit{Philosophy of Existence}. p. 3.

It is man who confers quality upon existence. He is a microcosm who bestows life upon the creation in proportion as he answers to it. This basic Emersonian tenet Berdyaev echoes.

The understanding of human personality as a microcosm is set in antithesis to the organic-hierarchical interpretation of him, which transforms man into a subordinate part of a whole, into a common, a universal. But personality is not a part of the universe, the universe is a part of personality, it is its quality. Such is the paradox of personalism. One must not think of personality as a substance, that would be a naturalistic idea of personality. Personality cannot be recognized as an object, as one of the objects in a line with other objects in the world, like a part of the world. That is the way in which the anthropological sciences, biology, psychology, or sociology would regard man. In that way man is looked at partially: but there is in that case no mystery of man, as personality, as an existential centre of the world. Personality is recognized only as a subject, in infinite subjectivity, in which is hidden the secret of existence.\textsuperscript{19}


The existentialists, who make much of this alienation, say that man has produced it himself; the dehumanized world he perceives results from his dehumanizing himself. I doubt if Emerson had the acute sense of a "broken world" which the modern existentialists have, but the possibility
world of hypothesis.

En premier lieu le point de vue existentiel sur la réalité ne me semble pouvoir être que celui d'une personnalité incarnée; dans la mesure où nous pouvons imaginer un entendement pur, il n'y a pas pour un tel entendement possibilité de considérer les choses comme existantes ou non-existantes. 17


Objective thought, in the existentialist view, drains quality out of its considerations because quality is an embarrassment it cannot cope with; in order to deal with it, the intellect must reduce it to the quantitative terms in which it thinks. Thus, an intellectually viewed world, a world of function and technology, is a partial world, devoid of all quality, much less value. It has organisms instead of people, knowledge instead of faith. It is a dehumanized world in which man does not feel at home. (One of the most rationalistic of existentialists, Heidegger, makes this *Unheimlichkeit* a central and undeniable fact.) To everything his heart demands, his head says no. Marcel calls it, after one of his plays, a "broken world."

Life in a world centred on function is liable to despair because in reality this world is empty, it rings hollow; and if it resists this temptation it is only to the extent that there come into play from within it and in its favour certain hidden forces which are beyond its power to conceive or
could hardly say that one view is truer than the other, but one might say that the qualitative view is reality as it is lived. Green as quality is a concrete, immediately experienced fact, while green as quantity is an abstract, unperceivable theory which must be checked against results; indeed its purpose is to obtain results. Now no one would dream of denying the primary qualitativity of green, but the existentialists assert that in the case of such intangible, subjective qualities as faith, justice and charity, the objective intellect often does proceed to explain them away on a quantitative basis; justice, objectively viewed, becomes simply the customs of various societies—the hungering after justice may be an illusion, or at least an illusory hunger. Whereas objective thought—if it is consistent—will then proceed to deny all universal values, the existentialists maintain that his process illustrates nothing more than the basic inadequacy of thought when it is out of its element. Says Kierkegaard,

\[
\text{It is not denied that objective thought has validity; but in connection with all thinking where subjectivity must be accentuated, it is a misunderstanding.}^{16}
\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 85.}\]

Gabriel Marcel declares that the purely objective thinker thinks himself quite out of existence into a quantitative
speak in terms of dynamics, as libido, conflict, repression, etc. Otherwise it could not even begin, for, wherever one seeks to evolve a technique, he must reduce his material to quantitative terms. Modern technology, which Berdyaev and Marcel see as a demoralizing force, is completely quantitative and remorselessly anti-qualitative.

Now the existentialists do not question any more than did Emerson the validity of what science has found; what they do question is the validity of transferring that viewpoint to the sphere of human values, to the questions of what man lives by. In Emerson's terminology, the understanding is not to be trusted in the realm of Reason. He was wary of the calculating faculty, much as Kierkegaard says of Socrates, "His merit was precisely to shun this way, where the quantitative siren song enchants the mind and deceives the existing individual."¹⁵

¹⁵Kierkegaard. _Concluding Unscientific Postscript_. p. 189.

A single example may suffice to illustrate how the quantitative interpretation of intellect may override the qualitative facts of experience. (Those who recognize the overtones of Henri Bergson can see why he is sometimes considered an existentialist.) The color green as interpreted intellectually by physics is reduced to a quantitative phenomenon, numerically expressed. One
history and literature, and to summon all facts and parties before its tribunal. And in this sense the age is subjective.

But, in all ages, and now more, the narrow-minded have no interest in anything but in its relation to their personality. And this habit of intellectual selfishness has acquired in our day the fine name of subjectiveness.14

Berdyaev and Marcel also realize the danger, and point out that the opposite of objective is not necessarily the biased and idiosyncratic.

According to the existentialists, the purely objective, intellectual view of the world and of man, since it is a partial view, results in a deformed, stunted, barren and basically false picture. This barrenness arises from the intellect's tendency to reduce everything to matters of quantity, which it can think conceptually, as opposed to quality, which can only be perceived or experienced. Intellectualism's prime error is to assume that it can think certain things which can, in reality, only be experienced. An unbridgeable gap yawns between reflective thought and experience, which gap thought attempts to bridge by reducing experience to quantitative terms. The physical sciences, for example, reduce everything primarily to quantitative terms, mass, velocity, density, etc. Even psychology as an objective science is forced to
shaken, elated, disillusioned and infused with hope. Who will deny that suffering, joy, conflict, ecstacy are sources of knowledge? Reality is, in fact, closed to those who pretend to know in a state of indifference, disinterestedness and neutrality, for they suppress the evidence of the very reality which they attempt to know.12


It should be pointed out that the existentialists are fully aware of the ambiguity of "subjective," and have warned against being misunderstood. Commenting on the criticisms of his subjectivity, Kierkegaard says,

It is easy to see what this guidance [those who criticize subjectivity] understands by being a subject of a sort. It understands by it quite rightly the accidental, the angular, the selfish, the eccentric, and so forth, all of which every human being can have enough of. Nor does Christianity deny that such things should be gotten rid of; it has never been a friend of loutishness.13


Emerson, who I believe is a subjective thinker in the existentialist sense, was likewise bothered—though not very much—by the criticisms of wayward subjectivism hurled at self-reliance.

There is a pernicious ambiguity in the use of the term subjective. We say, in accordance with the general view I have stated, that the single soul feels its right to be no longer confounded with numbers, but itself to sit in judgment on
is a misunderstanding in the realm of values where the whole personality is concerned. Value as such automatically implies interest and commitment; otherwise it is not value; Marcel declares in *Homo Viator* that value cannot be reduced to an abstract formulation for intellectual convenience.\(^\text{11}\) The existentialists would assert, for instance, that no one ever reads poetry objectively—except unwilling students; given that attitude, one would never read poetry at all, for poetry is intensely subjective both in its production and its appreciation. Objectivity in values—except perhaps in the sense of fairmindedness—is an illusion, as well as a begetter of illusions. The whole personality embraces concern, feeling, commitment as parts of itself, but the objective viewpoint of intellect, the part presuming to be the whole, begins by abstracting them and ends by explaining them away. In his last book Berdyaev gives an expressive account of what is meant by the subjective viewpoint.


Despite the established and venerable tradition of confining philosophy to logic and epistemology, I was never able to conform my mind to such a limitation or to see any possibility of true philosophical knowledge along those lines. On the contrary, knowledge appeared to me as creative understanding, involving a movement of the spirit, a direction of will, a sensitivity, a search for meaning, a being
As a second result of man's immersion in existence, the existentialists hold that he cannot remain a disinterested, objective spectator—except in the illusory realm of abstract thought. It is this unfortunate condition which Kierkegaard called "absentmindedness." When man stops thinking and resumes his living, he becomes concerned about life and its values, and he ought to be so concerned. The existentialists question even the possibility of being objective in the realm of values, thereby finding themselves in agreement with modern psychology.

As Professor Karl Heim has said of Kierkegaard's type of thought, 'a proposition or truth is said to be existential when I cannot apprehend or assent to it from the standpoint of a mere spectator but only on the ground of my total existence.'


Much more do the existentialists question the advisability of remaining objective. The view of the whole person is the subjective view, an intensely interested view, as opposed to the objective or spectator's view. The objective thinker deliberately eliminates all elements except the intellectual: his ideal is to be disinterested, unemotional, uncommitted. The existentialists say that while this is an excellent attitude in the sciences, it
his ignorance. He does not confuse "knowing things" with self-knowledge, for the latter is an attribute of personality, not of intellect. He sets little store by conceptual results.

It is forgotten that existence makes the understanding of the simplest truth for the common man in existential transparency very difficult and very strenuous. With the assistance of a result, peopleingly credit themselves with everything (I have heard people, stupid enough to run their heads against a stone, say that it is impossible to remain at the standpoint of the Socratic ignorance), and finally they wind up, like all windbags, with having done the impossible.9

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By his humility man may feel himself abased, but by it also he may reestablish an original and healthy relationship to that unknown power which produced him. By throwing off the tyranny of the arrogant intellect, he may set the condition for personality to reassert the pristine wholeness which is its right and nature. Then he has a chance to learn something. He may find himself again. Nor can his nature be known in advance; only a presumptuous intellectuality pretends to know the nature of man, to set limits to that nature; man can know himself only as he becomes himself. And humility, says Emerson, is the avenue to that truth.
be a rather hopeless and puzzling kind of position, but it is basic to existentialism.

The systematic Idea i.e., the Hegelian system is the identity of subject and object, the unity of thought and being. Existence, on the other hand, is their separation. It does not by any means follow that existence is thoughtless; but it has brought about, and brings about, a separation between subject and object, thought and being.


This amounts to saying that existence itself is a kind of fallen state wherein man, by virtue of his higher powers, is separated from his true self. It finds a curious echo in Emerson’s “Experience.”

It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments. We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors.


As opposed to those who trust in man’s intellect to solve all problems and who point to our immense and constantly increasing store of knowledge, the existentialists urge a return to the ignorance of Socrates. In the Socratic sense, the properly humble man recognizes clearly
In the existentialist view, since man is himself involved in the mystery of existence, he is placed thereby in a paradoxical situation. He becomes part of the mystery. He wakes up in the middle of it, nor can he remove himself by strenuous attempts to explain by means of thought either himself or that which produced him. His involvement leads all thought on the matter to end in paradox; thought, for example, cannot explain itself because it continually presupposes something unthinkable. Epistemology is halted before it begins. As Marcel declares, "Knowledge is contingent on a participation in being for which no epistemology can account because it continually presupposes it." The existentialists are highly dubious about all such "explanation," since those who explain rarely perceive that the instrument of explanation, thought itself, cannot be explained. When it attempts to deal with subjective existence, thought encounters something it cannot handle—precisely because that existence produced it. Our faculties are somewhat disjointed—because we find ourselves in existence. This may seem to
in the least and the greatest everywhere.  

Berdyaev too finds in primitive wonder the basis of existential thought.

Kierkegaard's thought is not fundamentally new; it is very simple, and is motivated by the sense of anguish to which the personal drama of his life gave rise. His tragic experience led him to emphasize the existential character of the knowing subject, the initial fact of man's immersion in the mystery of existence.

There can be no argument about the existence of mystery as a fact; one either sees it or he does not see it, and the existentialists hold that an increasing intellectuality may and often does go apace with an increasing dullness of perception. A mystery becomes another "problem" to be solved in time, which view signifies merely that the mystery has not even been perceived; wonder comes to be regarded as childishness; faith is thought to be a credulous belief in propositions. Speaking of a world whose trust is placed in techniques, scientific or social, Gabriel Marcel says,

In such a world the ontological need, the need of being, is exhausted in exact proportion to the breaking up of personality on the one hand and, on the other, to the triumph of the category of the 'purely natural' and the consequent atrophy of the faculty.
sovereign whole of which intellect is only a part; the viewpoint of intellect is partial, its approach is partial, its results are partial, and consequently the completeness it pretends to is sheer illusion. The existentialists seem to consider faith in intellect the great modern superstition, just as Emerson decried the tendency to trust the meddling, calculating "understanding." For them the total man can be restored only by an equally total approach.

The total man recognizes first of all the fact of the mystery of existence. Here is the great fact that shatters every venture of thought. For the total man, the existing rather than merely thinking man, the sense of wonder does not decrease with knowledge as though it were a childish naiveté which information dispels; rather, it increases with knowledge; the mystery grows greater as new facts are gained and new techniques invented, so that he who knows most realizes most fully his ignorance. All our knowledge, be it ever so expanded, is only a heap of gleanings contained within an encompassing mystery. Kierkegaard thought this sense of wonder capable of becoming a kind of religious experience.

If the passion of wonder defines itself, its highest expression is that God is the inexplicable whole of existence, as sensed by the imagination
Personality should be the leader and intellect the follower. But man has allowed his intellect to usurp and tyrannize over those functions reserved for the whole personality. He is divided from himself and must be restored to his integrity. To be sure, other parts may likewise usurp the function of the whole, as the possessive instinct, sex, etc., but what chiefly distinguishes existentialism is its suspicion of intellect. Man has taken to intellectualizing everything—including things which cannot be intellectualized. He has taken to analyzing, to proving, to refuting, to explaining, in short, to running everything through the millstones of conceptual thought, even that reality which lies back of and produced thought in the first place, even the values which pertain to the whole man. He has almost lost touch with the primal personality. So successful has intellect been in its proper function of evolving techniques in the sciences that it has presumed to explain the world of values, moral, religious, aesthetic, in the same terms it employs on physical nature, the inevitable result being that values tend more and more to disappear or to be regarded merely as necessary illusions. Intellect has become dominant.

The existentialists attack this tendency at its outset by questioning the right or the ability of intellect so to explain or so to dictate. For them personality comprises a
writers themselves have expressed misgivings about using the name. Berdyaev includes even Karl Jaspers in this stricture, though Jaspers occupies a middle position.

For Kierkegaard, philosophy is itself existence rather than an interpretation of existence; whereas, for Heidegger and Jaspers, who are concerned with a particular philosophical tradition, philosophy is synonymous with interpretation. Their aim, especially Heidegger's, is to elaborate philosophical categories on an existential basis, to make categories of human anxiety or the fear of death. . . The elaboration of concepts is an objective process leading inevitably to a hypostasis of the intellectual categories themselves.²


Although existentialism may approach mysticism, its starting point is not in the least esoteric; it is in fact so obvious and familiar, so basically simple that one may be tempted to read into it more difficulty than really is there. Later we shall have occasion to notice how closely allied it is to what we call the notions of "common sense."

What underlies this distinction between existential and intellectual is the proposition that human personality in its totality is prior to and superior to intellect, which latter should serve in a subordinate function, just as the eyes and the hands serve the whole body. There is, in matters of values, discernment by the personality which the intellect can never do more than articulate or ration-
doubtless also forgotten what it means to exist as human beings; this must therefore be set forth. But above all it must not be done in a dogmatizing manner, for then the misunderstanding would instantly take the explanatory effort to itself in a new misunderstanding, as if existing consisted in getting to know something about this or that. If communicated in the form of knowledge, the recipient is led to adopt the misunderstanding that it is knowledge he is to receive, and then we are again in the sphere of knowledge. Only one who has some conception of the enduring capacity of a misunderstanding to assimilate even the most strenuous effort of explanation and still remain the same misunderstanding, will be able to appreciate the difficulties of an authorship where every word must be watched, and every sentence pass through the process of a double reflection.¹


My thesis is that this primary opposition of existential to intellectual, to conceptual knowledge or thought, lies at the very heart of existentialism, both in its inception and in its authentic development. This opposition Kierkegaard, Berdyaev and Marcel all share in common, and every peculiarly existential position will be found to contain it, implicitly or explicitly. Furthermore, it would seem that the philosophies of Heidegger and Sartre, which have latterly monopolized the name, are alien to this distinction, that they have allowed the intellectual elements to crowd the existential out of the picture. Critics agree that the underlying rationalism of Heidegger and Sartre makes them doubtful existentialists, while the two
EMERSON AND CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM

Chapter I. The Search for Truth

In view of the great confusion surrounding the term existentialism today, it seems advisable to go back to the original coining of the word in order to fix some fairly precise meaning to it. Though a strong impression obtains that existentialism represents an abstruse and recondite philosophy or philosophies, the word "existential" in its first use by Kierkegaard was actually opposed to "logical," and by extension to "intellectual" as such. Existential was used not so much in the sense of a logical opposite as in the sense of a name for a different, more comprehensive sphere of human apprehension, an apprehension which was experience itself in all its transiency, its passion, its mystery. In one of the clearest statements of his intention Kierkegaard puts the matter thus:

My principal thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we had forgotten what it means to exist, and what inwardness signifies, and that the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity was explicable on that ground. I now resolved to go back as far as possible, in order not to reach the religious mode of existence too soon, to say nothing of the specifically Christian mode of religious existence, in order not to leave difficulties unexplored behind me. If men had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, they had
A few limitations of the scope of this dissertation remain to be pointed out. First, whenever the words "existentialism," "existentialist," or "existential" are used, they refer only to the three Christian existentialists, Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, and Marcel. The words do not apply to the more widely popularized philosophies of Sartre, Heidegger, and other so-called atheistic existentialists. The cumbersome nature of the terms renders this shortening advisable.

Second, I have made no attempt to place existentialism in its historical perspective. This study is made upon the basis of a comparison of ideas, and the development of those ideas has necessarily been subordinated. Unfortunate omissions, of course, result. Henri Bergson, for example, who is referred to in several places, is a commanding figure in this whole line of thought. I should have liked to accord his genius the fullness of treatment it deserves, but the addition of another writer would have doubled the complications.

Third, I have not separated Emerson from the existentialists in the first chapter. So similar is their fundamental approach and motivation that separation did not appear to be warranted. Indeed, the point is perhaps more adequately made by not separating them. No confusion, I think, will result.
Paradox, the entry of God into the world as Jesus Christ. He has neither the sense of guilt nor the sense of sin to the existentialist degree. He steadfastly denies the possibility of an evil will, and on these matters his contemporaries Hawthorne and Melville are far more like the existentialists. He had no sense of evil as pure malevolence. Last, he does not place the value on individual personality which the existentialists do; he was apparently willing to let it be swallowed up in the impersonal—a paradoxical position for so insistent an individualist. One could scarcely go so far as to call him an existentialist.

I have not treated all of Emerson's basic positions in this dissertation. The role of Nature, the principle of balance or polarity, the organic principle, skepticism, these elements have not received the fullness of treatment they deserve. But, those which I have considered seem to me equally basic, centering as they do around what might be called the core of his writing. All in all, the comparison seems to confirm Perry Miller's contention that New England Transcendentalism was basically a religious manifestation, and that the old Calvinist spirit, if not the doctrine, was speaking in "Self-Reliance." It spoke in a more subdued tone, but for the "pale negations" of Unitarianism it had no use. Emerson was trying to kindle a new fire, a new "inwardness."
to be truly himself in the sight of God. Truth, say the existentialists, is inwardness; it is a quality of the individual's personality and deeds, not an attribute of propositions. It is dynamic, not static. Indeed, so much do they stress the subjectivity of truth that we find Kierkegaard declaring that how one believes is essentially more important than what one believes. The inwardness, the orientation of personality is what counts. Clearly, this position is a tremendous affirmation of individualism.

A corollary of this primacy of the how over the what, of the spirit over the letter, is that the whole problem of communication has to be reexamined. This the existentialists do, and their efforts place Emerson's disavowal of a terminology and his effort to make the word "one with the thing" in a new light. The existentialists seem to unite in suggesting, implicitly or explicitly, that real communication is achieved through art rather than through the objective discourse of science or of semantic analysis.

On certain fundamental issues Emerson breaks with the existentialists. For example, he does not stress paradox as being at the very heart of man's position in the world; he sometimes implies it and there are certainly paradoxes in his thought—which the existentialists may explicate—but paradox as a central concept he does not have. Still less does he accept what Kierkegaard calls the Absolute
come under attack by the proponents of what Berdyaev calls "legalistic ethics"; fidelity sounds to them too much like an invitation to anarchy.

The creative life which the existentialists prescribe is also to be found in Emerson, though perhaps not so explicitly. The true life is a life of creating rather than of getting; things must be subdued to man rather than man to things. Indeed, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind," is an existentialism in miniature. The creative life is truth lived rather than truth merely thought.

In the sphere of communion, Emerson stresses the same sense of brotherhood which the existentialists declare has been largely lost today. His individualism reduces the intensity of that sense, but it is there. And for him also the sense of brotherhood is inseparable from the sense of sonship, that is, an awareness of God as the ground of all communion. Furthermore, there is evident the sense of self-abnegation, of renunciation, of complete abandon to the Divine Will.

These considerations bring us to what is perhaps the chief existential element in Emerson: his individualism, which has been so often attacked and which the existentialists go so far toward justifying. The latter have reaffirmed the basic individualism of the religious life, the true Christian, in Kierkegaard's words, being he who dares
these elements is the consistent and unswerving anti-intellectualism displayed both by the existentialists and by Emerson. The term should not be misunderstood, for obviously all of these people are intellectuals in the finest sense of the term. Their suspicion of intellectualizing is rather to be interpreted as an affirmation of the whole personality, the living man of whom intellect is only a subordinate part. The negative approach of the existentialists, i.e., their attack upon intellectualism, throws the whole matter of Emerson's "intuitionism" into a new perspective.

The motivation behind the existentialists seems to be very similar to Emerson's. He, too, appears to have had some sense of Angst, and he has given the sentiment very concrete expression without isolating and naming it.

The primacy of the will likewise appears to be emphasized by Emerson. "Self-Reliance," for example, can easily be considered an attempt to express the same sort of decisiveness that the existentialists stress in their ethical choice. Furthermore, Emerson was preaching an ethic of "fidelity" long before Marcel used the term. Emerson, like the existentialists, suggests a kind of absolute ethical choice which must be faithfully maintained, and which renders particular codes of ethics unnecessary. This decisive fidelity to the higher self is likely to
another. Such is the case with Emerson and the Christian existentialists.

A close consideration of Emerson's work seems to indicate that there are unmistakably existential elements in his thought. By no means would I call him an existentialist in a strict sense, but certain startling likenesses exist. These similarities must qualify our estimate of the influence of German Idealism on Emerson, for though he used the terminology of German Idealism—when he used terminology at all—there is evidence that he had as little liking for the abstraction and the system-building of the Germans as the existentialists have. The latter have stated their objections to traditional idealism very forcefully, and I am inclined to believe that Emerson had very much the same objections; successfully or not, he, like Gabriel Marcel, was trying to be a "philosopher of the concrete."

The comparison is further justified by the fact that existentialism, theistic or atheistic, is coming to be the most dynamic force in modern thought. It seems to speak to the modern spirit and is therefore particularly valuable as a means of evaluating Emerson in modern terms. It can be used to make Emerson's thought more available.

It remains to deal briefly with some of the chief existential elements to be found in Emerson. The first of
Foreword

It may appear strange that this dissertation should compare Ralph Waldo Emerson with three writers whom he never knew, either by their writing or their repute, and whose backgrounds differ so widely from that of the 19th Century New Englander. Søren Kierkegaard, the titular father of all forms of existentialism, was Emerson's contemporary, but Emerson apparently knew nothing of the Dane, whose works remained in comparative obscurity until the end of the century. Nicolas Berdyaev was a Russian aristocrat who, though sympathizing with the revolution, was forced to flee the Communist regime and lived most of his remaining years in France. Gabriel Marcel, still living, is a French Roman Catholic and a playwright of distinction. All three writers are emphatically Christian existentialists, as distinguished from the atheistic existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger.

But there is justification for comparing Emerson with this group of writers. Ideas do indeed have histories and undergo modifications according to the particular social milieu, but, considered in themselves, they need have no chronology; it is in fact all the more striking to find similarities of thought between writers who have had no known influence on each other, writers who seem to have developed their likenesses in complete independence of one
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R. F. L.
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