Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Concept of Skepticism and His Doctrine of the Infinitude of the Private Man

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON: HIS CONCEPT OF SKEPTICISM AND HIS DOCTRINE OF THE INFINITUDE OF THE PRIVATE MAN

by

Donal Francis Mahoney

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

June 1962
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes to analyze Ralph Waldo Emerson's concept of skepticism and his doctrine of the infinitude of the private man in terms of what each is in itself and how each relates to the other. Initially, the nature of Emerson's skepticism will be studied. Then, in the light of this analysis, the infinitude doctrine will be examined. A conclusion as to their relationship will be offered. A summary of the argument will follow.

The investigation of Emerson's concept of skepticism and his infinitude doctrine has brought the writer to grapple with the following materials: the major essays in which Emerson has dealt with the problem—in the main, "Circles," "Experience," "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," and "Fate"; the corresponding Journals and, in some cases, portions of the Journals which do not correspond in time but do in subject matter, i.e., a note upon a subject pertinent to skepticism that is delivered in later years purely as an
afterthought but is in itself illuminating; and, lastly, the appropriate scholarship written in the area.

As to the history, the truth and falsity, of the problem presented, no exact comment can be made as no history of the precise nature of the problem has been located. A study of Emerson's skepticism—not, however, of his infinitude theory—is Charles Lowell Young's *Emerson's Montaigne* (New York, 1941). A study that approaches Emerson's doctrine of the infinitude of the private man is J. O. McCormick's "Emerson's Theory of Human Greatness," *New England Quarterly*, XXVI (September, 1953), 291-314. Neither study deals essentially with the subject matter of this paper.

Charles Lowell Young's *Emerson's Montaigne* is in the main a biographical study of the life and principles of a man who in depth contributed to Emerson's concept of skepticism. Chapter-wise, Young deals with Montaigne separately as man, writer, moralist, and skeptic. He devotes an additional chapter to "Emerson's Acquaintance with Montaigne." This study will differ from Young's in that it shall be concerned primarily with Emerson's notion of skepticism and shall be concerned with Montaigne's concept only insofar as it sieves through Emerson.
Where McCormick's study differs from the immediate one is in its devotion to an enumeration and discussion of those persons in history Emerson thought notably superior and in its detailed examination of many of the roots in history of Emerson's concept of greatness. The immediate study is not historical. It is expository. It explains one portion of Emerson's philosophical belief. It alludes to history only when, in the mind of this writer, an explanation of the historical root of an idea that Emerson had serves to illuminate the idea itself.

Since there can be located no single, unified, detailed exposition of either Emerson's concept of skepticism or of his doctrine of the infinitude of the private man, and since there can be located no study of the relationship this writer finds to exist between these two areas of thought, the purpose of this paper is to explain these areas of thought and to point out the relationship that exists between them.
CHAPTER II
SKEPTICISM: "CIRCLES" AND "EXPERIENCE"

Of Ralph Waldo Emerson's major essays, there are four which, in the main, are detailed presentations of that author's concept of skepticism. They are "Circles," "Experience," "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," and "Fate." Each essay offers an aspect or aspects of Emerson's skeptical thought; and each, while a unit in itself, intertwines with and supplements the skepticism of the other.

The function of "Circles" in the text of Emersonian skepticism is that of a prologue; for, in claiming that "permanence is but a word of degrees," the essay posits in introduction a basic principle that ribs that body of skeptical thought which its trio of companions embellishes and develops.


2Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in Ibid., p. 168. Emerson adds: "Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts."
One cannot deny that the "essay shows signs that Emerson at the time of writing was appreciably unsettled." He was, however, more than unsettled: he was, or was coming to be, preoccupied with the negative import of the flux in nature that he, in prior moments of indefatigable optimism, would have found easy to ignore. "Circles," then, is the voice of this growing unrest:

"Circles" is single among Emersonian essays—single in its daring. Brief passages in other essays dare as much, but nowhere else is the animating principle of a discourse so venturesous. . . . The "flux" has been much dwelt upon, but one doubts if the realization of the plasticity of the universe (in distinction from the mere slipperiness of the personal life) has ever elsewhere reached the point attended in "Circles."

The lack of permanence that Emerson sees in "Circles" is resident in no specific area of life. Everything in existence flits and meanders. "Nature ever flows; stands

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4 Oscar W. Firkins, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1915), p. 188.
never still. Motion or change is her mode of existence."\(^5\)
Nothing--nature, man, nor knowledge--is stable. Nature has "no fixtures":\(^6\) the universe always eddies in a vortex.
Man is without brim; he never fills with knowledge. New thought at every moment enters existence;\(^7\) yet to be born, ultimate knowledge will never be conceived: "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. There is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us."\(^8\) Everything in life--nature, man, knowledge--both enjoys and endures a spinning existence; and to this spinning existence the wise man rivets his

\(^5\)Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, eds. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston, 1909-1914), V, 494.

\(^6\)Emerson, "Circles," p. 169.

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 171. "The last chamber, the last closet, he must feel was never opened; there is always a residuum unknown, unanalyzable. That is, every man believes that he has a greater possibility."

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 170.
attention. 9

As an essay, "Circles" does more for the body of Emersonian skepticism than serve as a mere introduction. Not only does it contain the soil in which Emerson's skepticism begins to take root, but the essay also, in what is necessarily microcosmic fashion, deals with the nature of the skepticism itself. For in "Circles" Emerson first assays a problem that he will consider in more complete terms at a later time: namely, the true tone of a valid skepticism. In doing so, he gives the reader one view of what he believes the real, the actual skeptic must be: 10

And thus, 0 circular philosopher, I hear some reader exclaim, you have arrived at a fine

9 Emerson, Journals, X, 238. As late as 1868, Emerson, still fascinated by the circles of nature's existence and the obligation of man to them, said, "Our little circles absorb and occupy us as fully as the heavens; we can minimize as infinitely as maximize, and the only way out of it is (to use a country phrase) to kick the pail over, and accept the horizon instead of the pail, with celestial attractions and influences, instead of worms and mud pies." (Ibid.)

10 Emerson, "Circles," p. 176.
Pyrrhonism, at an equivalence and indifference of all actions, and would fain teach us that if we are true, forsooth, our crimes may be lively stones out of which we shall construct the temple of the true God. . . . But lest I should mislead any when I have my own head and obey my own whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any things as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.

Here, Emerson, with a "fresh consciousness of impermanence in his own thought," immediately disallows his critics the negative possibility of equating his concept of the skeptic with their interpretation of it as the scoffer. Emerson wants very much to establish the legitimacy of his skeptic; and this accomplishment, as shall be seen, he achieves to a greater degree in "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic." In "Circles," however, Emerson quite seriously informs his audience that

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11 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 94. Of Emerson's state of mind at this time, Whicher observes: "Numerous indications in [some of his most interesting essays] and in his journals, betray his disturbed awareness that the pattern of his first convictions is undergoing an unforeseen modification, and that the various truths he has come to recognize are in radical and permanent conflict with each other." (Ibid.)
the skeptic is not, by necessity, a pessimist. Nor, by the same token, Emerson asserts, is the skeptic necessarily an optimist. For Emerson, the skeptic in essence is an experimenter, an unsettler: one who waits, watches, and sees. And at this time, Emerson is ardently convinced of the validity of his position.

If in "Circles" Emerson has, so to speak, prepared the reader with an introduction for the scope of the skeptical thought that is in the remaining three essays yet to evolve, he has in the second of them, "Experience," delineated the character of man, the individual, who will come to grips with this skepticism, and has itemized the many problems he will face in the thick of his traffic with it. For it is in "Experience" that Emerson asserts that man knows "that the world [he converses] with in the

12 Frederick Ives Carpenter, Emerson Handbook (New York, 1953), p. 62. On the literary aspects of "Experience," Carpenter states: "Although 'Experience' seems to have been written spontaneously and at white heat, its structure is carefully planned and its development clear and logical." (Ibid.)
city and in the farms, is not the world [he] thinks;"¹³ that the theory of life has no actual twin in its practice; and that man must forever be faced with cosmetics and not reality.

In "Experience" Emerson discusses and explains the Lords of Life. Of the extent of their contribution to his skeptical mood, it has been noted that "now he finds that the self on which he would rely is governed by an incongruous set of conditions which he can neither reconcile nor control."¹⁴

Emerson believed that each Lord was an active agent in each man's life. Each Lord manifested itself in an individual's life in a variety of ways, and each appeared to no two men in exactly the same fashion. This condition,

¹³Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston, 1957), p. 273. On this difference in his mind between the world as it is and as he thinks it, Emerson adds: "One day I shall know the value and law of this discrepancy. But I have not found that much was gained by manipural attempts to realize the world of thought. Many eager persons successively make an experiment in this way, and make themselves ridiculous." (Ibid.)

¹⁴Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 111.
Emerson divined, caused each man to interpret life in his unique manner; and, as such, it denied all possibility of any universally homogenous interpretation.

Emerson first explains, then lists, the Lords of Life. He claims that he can give them no specific order as they are but a "fragment of me" and "I am but a fragment": 15

"Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness,—these are threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way."

Emerson clarifies his idea of the Subjectiveness 16 of each man through his personal assertion of each man's individuality, which, he believes, is displayed in two distinct areas: namely, man in his relation to nature and

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16 Emerson, Journals, X, 468. In his Journals, some twenty years after he first discussed Subjectiveness, Emerson turned to it once again: "Dangerously great, immoral even in its violence of power. The man sees as he is." (Ibid.)
man in his relation to man. The substance of the former idea is that each man first tints the universe with the hue of his subjective existence; that he then interprets the composite result; and that his personal interpretation is, by its very nature, markedly different from whatever other interpretation a separate individual might offer.\textsuperscript{17}

To explain to his reader the latter idea—man in his relation to man—Emerson speaks metaphorically. He refers to the individual man as a globe; and, for illustrative purposes, asks the reader to imagine two globes juxtaposed:\textsuperscript{18}

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 appetite the parts not in union acquire.

\textsuperscript{17}Emerson, "Experience," p. 271. "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." (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 270.
One man's actual knowledge, then, of any other man is as minute and transient as the globes which kiss at a point and rotate away.

In further explanation of the Subjectiveness of each man, Emerson offers his concept of sin. As it appears in "Experience," the concept is more detailed than the remark he made in his Journal: "Sin is when a man trifles with himself, and is untrue to his own constitution." 19

Sin in the sinner, Emerson claims, differs when it is viewed, first, by the sinner himself and, second, by an observer of the sinner. 20 For the sinner, his act is merely an "experiment." For the observer of the sinner, however, the act remains the traditional evil it has always been. Why this discrepancy exists, Emerson explains, is due to the point of view in each man. The sinner views sin from the intellect and, therefore, considers it a

19 Emerson, Journals, IX, 20.

20 Emerson, "Experience," p. 270. "We believe in ourselves as we do not believe in others. We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others is experiment for us." (Ibid.)
mere "diminution, or less"; whereas, the observer of the sinner views the other man's sin from the conscience and, as a result, finds it "bad." It is, however, quite possible that either point of view might exist in either the sinner or the observer. The saint when he sins does not view his sin from the intellect. Rather, he views it from the conscience and, as can be expected, feels sad. Emerson feels that sin viewed from "the conscience, and not the intellect results in a confusion of thought;" and feels that this "confusion" provides an additional barrier between individual men and that the Subjectiveness of each individual is thereby increased. 21 One explanation links this matter with Emerson's status as a mystic: 22

Mysticism denies the reality of "evil" in the conventional sense, and Emerson's interpretation was fundamentally that of the mystic. Of course neither mysticism nor Emerson denies the reality of what men call "evil" or the reality of the feelings of pain and sorrow which accompany the phenomenon of "evil" in

21 Ibid., p. 271.

22 Carpenter, pp. 143-44. Carpenter speaks of Emerson's personal attachment to the idea: "Emerson, himself, like all mystics, had lived through many long years of pain and tragedy and developed his philosophy as a result . . . ." (Ibid.)
individual human experience. But both deny the justice of calling these "evil." They interpret "evil" from the point of view of God or of humanity as a whole, rather than from the point of view of the individual man suffering what he imagines to be evil: the pain or death of the individual man of a nation may rather contribute to the development of humanity or of the life process as a whole. The obvious fact that it is difficult for an individual to look upon his own pain and death with godlike equanimity explains the unpopularity of the mystical interpretation of evil, but in no way invalidates it.

For Emerson, then, the problem of sin plays no small part in the relations of men. It is a barrier, a definite barrier, and does not admit of facile collapse: "For Emerson—as the haunting overtones of 'Experience' intimate—it is a problem which can be optimistically resolved only after the most desperate of inward struggles and only after attaining a serenity almost stripped of emotion." 23

Surface, another of the Lords of Life, Emerson views in two ways. He sees in it both evil and good. It is evil in that through Surface no penetration to Reality, a fellow

Lord, can be realized. Not even grief, a major emotion, can emasculate Surface: "The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into reality, for the contact with which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers... I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature."  

But if Surface shoulders man away from reality and, as a result, hinders man's grasp of life, it nevertheless possesses, in Emerson's eyes, an element of positive worth:  

I compared notes with one of my friends who expects everything of the universe and is disappointed when anything is less than the best, and I found that I begin at the other

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24 Emerson, "Experience," p. 256. Emerson speaks of the grief he felt at the loss of his son: "Grief too will make us idealists. In the death of my son, nor more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate—no more, I cannot get it nearer to me." (Ibid.)

25 Ibid., pp. 262-263. Emerson adds: "I accept the danger and jangle of contrary tendencies. I find my account in sots and bores also. They give a reality to the circumjacent picture which such a vanishing meteorous appearance can ill spare." (Ibid.)
extreme, expecting nothing, and am always
full of thanks for the moderate goods. . . .
If we will take the good we find, asking no
questions, we shall have heaping measures.
The great gifts are not got by analysis.
Everything good is on the highway.

Like its peer Surface, Illusion, another of the Lords,
has the power to block man from Reality: "Color is illusion,
you say; but how know I that the rock and the mountain are
more real than its hue and gleam."26

Illusion first hindered man when he came to realize
that he existed. This knowledge, claims Emerson, caused
man's fall. For when man learned that he existed, he began
immediately to distrust the knowledge disclosed by his
intellect and by his senses.27 No longer did man know
with certitude that the objects of his environment actually

26 Emerson, Journals, IX, 264.

27 Emerson, "Experience," p. 269. On the fall of man
and his distrust of the senses: "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." (Ibid.)
existed. He began to believe that all things were "subjective phenomena" and mere "shadows":

The first illusion that is put upon us in the world is the amusing miscellany of colors, forms, and properties. Our education is through surfaces and particulars. Nature masks under ostentations sub-divisions and manifold particulars the poverty of her elements, and the rigid economy of her rules. And, as infants are preoccupied wholly with surface differences, so multitudes of adults remain in the infant or animal estate, and never see or know more.

That Emerson, then, found Illusions vexatious cannot be denied. His Journals, as well as his more popular essays, attest to that. But as to the exact extent of his disturbance with them, there is some doubt: "This endless sequence of illusions, if it did not leave Emerson quite undisturbed, did not move him so deeply as perhaps it ought to have done. He found the secret of this illusory energy of nature in necessity, the necessity for 'a succession of moods or objects.'" No matter, though, the exact degree of effect

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28Emerson, Journals, X, 123.

29Charles Lowell Young, Emerson's Montaigne (New York, 1941), p. 35.
Illusion had upon Emerson; its existence certainly aided the temporary reign that skepticism enjoyed.

Temperament, another Lord of Life, should not be explained only in itself; for, when it is explained as one portion of the complex of experience to which all of the Lords contribute, it serves to illumine their interrelations: "what is experience? . . . It is a series of illusions, governed much by temperament, as to their character in each individual, and if deceptive, yet educative. It is a movement through moments and surfaces, wherefore it is wisdom to make the most of every moment, to accept the condition temporarily existing and to live always with respect to the present." 30

Temperament in itself, however, no less than Illusion, decreases the tenability of certitude and increases the

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30 George Edward Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York, 1926), pp. 133-134. Ralph L. Rusk calls attention to Emerson's method in this respect: "What has been too much ignored is that his most characteristic ideas were deeply rooted in experience and were the fruits of the empirical method, which, as he believed, he never wholly abandoned." "Emerson and the Stream of Experience," English Journal, XLII (April, 1953), 181-187.
legitimacy of skepticism. It is especially vicious in its dealing with man insofar as it greets him from the guise of other persons. Strangers or friends provide no actual exception. Temperament can manifest itself in anyone. "There is an optical illusion about every person we meet. In truth they are all creatures of a given temperament, which will appear in a given character, whose boundaries they will never pass; but we look at them, they seem alive, and we presume there is impulse in them." 31

Similar in effect to other Lords, Temperament clouds the intellect and attempts to brake all progress toward Reality: "'T is a great misfortune of certain temperaments that they are by their own force or too much determination, thrown out of all sympathy, and are therefore, inconvertible. . . . Arguments appeal to bystanders, to a

31Emerson, "Experience," p. 258. Emerson evidences his disgust with youth in this matter: "We see young men who owe us a new world, so readily and lavishly they promise, but they never acquit the debt; they die young and dodge the account; or if they live they lose themselves in the crowd." (Ibid.)
world of bystanders, masses of opposing fact, all is wasted; 't is only oil to flame, only mountains of confirmation to their insanity." Nevertheless, Emerson maintains that if it is used correctly, and if the faculty of the reason (the exact nature of which will be later discussed) is used to capacity, the intellect can and should, in no small measure, debilitate the prowess of the Temperament. The last of the Lords, Succession and Surprise, like Surface, are at once impedimentary and advantageous. They act as impediments in that they encourage the activity of

32 Emerson, Journals, IX, 222.

33 A.J. Kloeckner, "Intellect and the Moral Sentiment in Emerson's Opinions on the Meaner Kinds of Men," American Literature, XXX (November, 1958), 322-338. Kloeckner points out that in the essay "Experience" Emerson believed that the temperament was vulnerable to the faculty of the reason; he further asserts that Emerson lost this idea as time progressed.

34 Emerson, Journals, V, 83. Emerson on the subject of Succession: "Succession, division, parts, particles--this is the condition, this the tragedy of man. All things cohere and unite. Man studies the parts, strives to tear the part from its connexion, to magnify it, and make it a whole. He sides with the part against other parts; and fights for parts, fights for lies, and his whole mind becomes an inflamed part, an amputated member, a wound, an offence." (Ibid.)
Illusion; and they serve as advantages when, through their efforts, Illusion is made slightly more palatable than if Succession and Surprise did not exist.

Succession parades marching Illusions before the mind of man; yet it stifles the additional evil of ennui:\textsuperscript{35}

The secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. \ldots This onward trick of nature is too strong for us; \ldots When at night I look at the moon and stars, I seem stationary, and they to hurry. Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation, and sanity of mind in variety or facility of association. We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is quickly odious.

Surprise, like Succession, serves to promote variety by allowing the chance occurrence to upset the accepted order of knowledge that exists in, and often stultifies, man's world. "Chemistry, astronomy, surprise all the time, and the appointed way of man from infancy to omniscience is through an infinite series of pleasant surprises."\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35}Emerson, "Experience," p. 259.

\textsuperscript{36}Emerson, \textit{Journals}, IV, 123.
Surprise, too, causes man to formulate a new order of knowledge that will prevail as acceptable until the next Surprise occurs. Stagnant design is, as a result, appreciably avoided: "How easily, if fate would suffer it, we might keep forever these beautiful limits, and adjust ourselves, once for all, to the perfect calculations of the kingdom of known cause and effect. . . . But ah! presently comes a day, or it is only a half hour, with its angel whispering,—which discomfits the conclusions of nations and years. . . . Life is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping if it were not." \(^{37}\)

The Lords of Life listed and their prowess explained, Emerson, at the end of "Experience," registers a plea for an interpretation of life that, in addition to harboring the accepted beliefs of society, will quarter the skepticisms

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\(^{37}\) Emerson, "Experience," p. 265. On Surprise, Emerson adds: "Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive. Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such; and the chemical and ethereal agents are undulatory and alternate; and the mind goes antagonizing on, and never prospers but by fits. We thrive by casual ties [chance occurrences]. Our chief experiences have been casual." (Ibid.)
Emerson holds:

In liberated moments we know that a new picture of life and duty is already possible; the elements already exist in many minds around you of a doctrine of life which shall transcend any written record we have. The new statement will comprise the skepticisms as well as the faiths of society and out of unbelieves a creed shall be formed. For skepticisms are not gratuitous or lawless, but are limitations of the affirmative statement, and the new philosophy must take them in and make affirmations outside of them, just as much as it must include the oldest beliefs.

Skepticism, then, at this juncture of his life, remains for Emerson a very necessary and very valid concept. It does not, however, remain so for long, as the essay "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic" reveals.

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Ibid., pp. 268-269. Emerson notes his general concept of faith at this point. He speaks of it in terms of accepting the moral sentiment: the important thing is not so much what one believes concerning the "immortality of the soul," but that one has experienced the "universal impulse to believe." (Ibid.)
CHAPTER III

SKEPTICISM: "MONTAIGNE; OR, THE SKEPTIC" AND "FATE"

The tone of Emersonian skepticism, as it is developed in "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," is, perhaps, best summarized by two statements from the author's Journals. It should be remembered that the essay itself was written "in the latter half of 1845"; and that the first of these statements was recorded in August of 1845, the latter some nine years later—in May of 1854—when, supposedly, Emerson's skepticism had

1 Mark Van Doren capsulized the relationship of Emerson to Montaigne: Emerson "loved Montaigne for that aspect of his skepticism which made him not so much a believer in nothing as a believer in all things—an insatiable seeker after life in each of its innumerable things . . . Montaigne gave Emerson a significant idealism." "Emerson, Ralph Waldo," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, VI (New York, 1931), 135.

2 Whicher, Selections from Emerson, p. 493. Whicher points out that "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," written late in the year 1845, was first read in Boston on January 1, 1846. It was given as part of a course that Emerson was teaching. Preparation for the essay, Whicher maintains, Emerson got from his reading of Cotton's translation of Montaigne. He stresses, however, that the doubts expressed in the essay are Emerson's own and not merely a recording of Montaigne's. (Ibid.)
spent itself. The first: "We expose our skepticism out of probity. Well, we meet, then, on the ground of probity, not of skepticism." The second: "We affirm and affirm, but neither you nor I know the value of what we say." The import here, then, is that Emerson believed that he met his environment with integrity and did with it what he could, never knowing the actual significance of his actions. This, then, is the skeptical tone of his mind.

In "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic" Emerson's accomplishment is threefold. Initially he characterizes the kinds of men who exist and cites their preoccupations. Secondly, he bears witness to the emergence of the skeptic from the ranks of men. And thirdly, he constructs and, after much deliberation, destroys through invocation of the moral sentiment,

3 Emerson, Journals, VIII, 83.

4 Ibid., p. 466.

5 Young, p. 26. "It is likely enough, or more than likely, that Montaigne had served Emerson in defining the skeptical habit of mind or in forming his own notion of that. But it is his own notion, less complete than Montaigne's, which he sets forth... the doubts and negations are not Montaigne's. They are those, rather, which Emerson had gathered from his own thought or experience, and wished to dispose of, assigning them to the skeptical type of mind." (Ibid.)
the pavilion of thought upon which the skeptic stands. With this debunking, Emerson's flirtation with skepticism ceases, and he returns revitalized to his concept of God within man, his belief in the infinitude of the private man.

How Emerson in the first place became entangled with the skepticism he eventually denounces in the Montaigne essay is a process subject to some conjecture. One interpretation would have us believe that Emerson's curtsy to skepticism resulted from his wanting "to learn from the skeptics, the rationalists, and the scientists a common sense basis for moral truth." Another view, however, appears to be more valid:

Just as Emerson had personified his revolutionary ambitions in the hero-type of the scholar, so now he puts his doubts of the scholar's faith into the mouth of the skeptic. By thus creating a fictitious "alter ego" to whom to attribute his more dangerous thoughts, Emerson could relieve himself of respons-

6Spiller, p. 362.

7Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 113. Whicher defines Emerson's skepticism as "a more than half-serious experiment in a metaphysics of empiricism prompted by a bankruptcy of transcendentalism." (Ibid., p. 114)
ibility for them and yet at the same time give them expression. The doubts of the skeptic remain his own, however, detached; his skepticism is his most considered summary of his transcendentalism. The name he gave it shows his continued faith; yet his concern with it equally reveals the adjustment to fact that his faith was undergoing.

The fact, then, that Emerson, if only for a transient moment, was gripped by an honest skepticism is undeniable. It is interesting to note his workings with it.

When in the grip of his skepticism, Emerson maintained that the majority of men reside in either of two categories. Man was either a genius or a man of mere talent. If he was a genius, Emerson, at times, referred to him as an abstractionist; if he was a man of mere talent, he was otherwise known as a materialist. Emerson often used varied

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8Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston, 1957), p. 284. Emerson offers this distinction: "Each man is born with a predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature. . . . One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant with facts and surfaces, cities and persons, and the bringing certain things to pass; --the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius."
terms for the same subject interchangeably. 9

Of the nature of the genius, 10 Emerson speaks frequently in his Journals. As early as 1824, the author records:
"Profound knowledge is good but profound genius is better, because . . . in the end, when both have arrived at the same amount of knowledge, the latter is much the richest [sic]. They have not only a certain sum of intelligence to get, but a great expedition to perform." 11 Again, as late as 1872, 12


10 Ibid., p. 296. On Emerson's concept of genius: "... he [Emerson] offers a definition of genius in very fine lettering. . . . genius is trueness of sight; . . . is the man who can describe simply and with proper words the phenomena of nature."

11 Emerson, Journals, I, 312. McCormick (p. 298) adds that false genius is possessed by the individual the public calls genius; that true genius is not made so by man, but by God; and that "all true genius is moral and humble."

12 Emerson, Journals, X, 467. No exact date is given, but the possible year span here is 1862-1872.
Emerson speaks in this way about the same subject: "Genius delights in statements which are themselves true, which attack and wound any who oppose them."\(^{13}\)

The genius, then, is the man of thought. He is the individual who assails the Lords of Surface and Illusion, pierces them, and comes to grips with the ideas of things. He is a man glued to the Infinite, the Absolute, the Real:\(^{14}\)

The genius is a genius by the first look he casts on any object. . . . In powerful moments, his thought has dissolved the works of art and nature into their causes, so that the works appear heavy and faulty. He has a conception of beauty which the sculptor cannot embody. Picture, statue, temple, railroad, steam engine, existed first in an artist's mind, without flaw, mistake, or friction, which impair the executed models. . . . It is not strange that these men, remembering what they have seen and hoped of ideas, should affirm disdainfully the superiority of ideas.

\(^{13}\)Ibid.

\(^{14}\)Emerson, "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," pp. 284-285. Emerson adds: "Having at some time seen that the happy soul will carry all the arts in power, they say, Why cumber ourselves with superfluous realizations? And like dreaming beggars they assume to speak and act as if these values were already substantiated." (Ibid.)
Not only, however, is the genius the man of thought. He is also allied to the unified nature of God in such way as to warrant prematurely some mention of his kinship with—in some cases his identity with—the individual who is a practitioner of infinitude. In this respect, it has been noted that Emerson believed that "greatness of mind is to be evaluated in direct proportion to the strength of the idea of the Deity in the mind."\(^{15}\) Emerson corroborates this idea in a letter to Thomas Carlyle: "Genius is but a large infusion of Deity, and so brings a prerogative all its own."\(^{16}\) He continues in this correspondence to cite the genius as the voice of the mind which speaks in the present and in the actions of the future.\(^{17}\) Later, however, the link between the practitioner of infinitude and the

\(^{15}\) McCormick, p. 293.

\(^{16}\) Charles Eliot Norton, The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, II (Boston, 1883), 336.

\(^{17}\) Ibid. Emerson continues: "It [Genius] has a right and duty to affront and amaze men by carrying out its perceptions defiantly, knowing well that time and fate will verify and explain what time and fate have through them said."
activator of the reason, the genius is most cases, shall be examined. Initially, the man of mere talent, or the materialist, must be examined.

As the genius is concerned with the Infinite, the Absolute, and the Real, the man of mere talent, his opposite, enjoys dalliance with only the Finite, the Relative, and the Apparent. This materialist finds both Surface and Illusion amiable associates, and he deems worthless the occupation of the genius: 18

The men of toil and trade and luxury,—the animal world, including the animal in the philosopher and poet . . . and the practical world . . . weigh heavily on the other side. The trade in our street believes in no metaphysical causes . . . but sticks to cotton, sugar, wool, and salt. To the men of this world . . . the man of ideas appears out of his reason. They alone have reason . . . the inconvenience of this thinking is that it runs into indifferentism and then into disgust.

Emerson speaks in his Journals on at least three separate occasions of the nature of the primary tool of the

18 Emerson, "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," pp. 285-286. In the Journals Emerson notes that even the man of talent has his inferiors: "Talent without character is friskiness." (Journals, V, 419)
materialist, namely talent. On the first occasion, he considers talent in itself: "The talent sucks the substance of the man. How often we repeat the disappointment of inferring general ability from conspicuous particular ability . . . . Blessed are those who have no talent."¹⁹

On the second and third occasions, Emerson contrasts talent with genius; the latter, as might be expected, is thought superior: "The difference between talent and genius is, that talent says things which he has never heard but once, and genius things which he has never heard."²⁰

"Genius is power; Talent is applicability. A human body, an animal, is an applicability; the Life, the Soul is genius."²¹

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¹⁹Ibid., VIII, 95.

²⁰Ibid., VI, 370-371. On the same point McCormick offers further contrast. He notes, in addition to its moral cast, the alliance of genius with the Divine; he denounces any such possibility with Talent, finding it merely "intellectual good health." Talent, he believes, can only glimpse the patterns of life that the genius consumes. (P. 301)

²¹Emerson, Journals, VI, 371.
Still held by the tenets of skepticism, Emerson tests both the man of genius and the man of mere talent. He finds each of them guilty of false doctrine; each an extremist; and each the proponent of a rootless position. With regard to the man of mere talent, the materialist, this decision comes as no surprise. With regard to the genius, the decision seems incongruous only when one forgets the skeptical mood Emerson was in at this time. Once his skepticism ebbs, Emerson returns to revere the genius as the individual who most often exercises his right of infinitude. Nevertheless, the incongruity of his attitude at this period in his life has been noted: "More interesting, however, is his rejection of the materialist's opposite number, the abstractionist. Emerson here takes a common sense view of the transcendentalist, the reformer, and men of faith generally."\(^{22}\)

From out of the skeptical confusion generated by the existence of the genius and the materialist, Emerson's

\(^{22}\) Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, p. 113.
skeptic emerges. He is neither a man of genius nor a man of talent, though he may well possess, in moderation, traits of either individual. He is pruned of excess and stands as the median of these two extremes. "The abstractionist and the materialist thus mutually exasperate each other, and the scoffer expressing the worst of materialism, there arises a third party to occupy the middle ground between these two, the skeptic namely. He finds both wrong by being in extremes. ... He sees the one-sidedness of these men of the street. ... Neither will he be betrayed to a book and wrapped in a gown. The studious class are their own victims; they are thin and pale, their feet are cold."  

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23 Emerson, "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," p. 286. Emerson manifests his alienation from the abstractionists: "If you come near them and see what conceits they entertain, --they are abstractionists, and spend their days and nights in dreaming some dream; in expecting the homage of society to some precious scheme, built on a truth, but destitute of proportion in its presentiment, ... of all energy of will in the schemer to embody and vitalize it." (Ibid., p. 287)

24 Ibid., p. 286. Emerson inveighs against the abstractionist and the materialist: "You are both in extremes ... You that will have all solid, and a world of pig-lead, deceive yourselves grossly. You believe yourselves rooted and grounded on adamant; and yet, if we uncover the last facts of our knowledge, you are spinning like bubbles in a river ... You are bottomed and capped and wrapped in a gown." (Ibid., p. 287)
What Emerson believed at this time was that the skeptic knew what the genius denied, what the man of talent ignored: that man "cannot see." He believed that the skeptic rightly realized that his philosophical ability was not unlimited. And it must be stated here that had Emerson held this belief forever, had he been for the greater portion of his life a skeptic rather than a believer and an optimist, his theory of the infinitude of the private man would never have been formulated. Nevertheless, Emerson was a skeptic for only a short period of time, during which he praised the skeptic for seeing that "conflicting evidences" exist and for realizing rightfully that these conflicting evidences invalidate any adherence to a particular creed: "I neither affirm nor deny. I stand here to try the case . . . Why fancy that you have all the truth in your keeping? There is much to say on all

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
sides."\textsuperscript{27}

Emerson adamantly maintained that the skeptic was not the iconoclast. The skeptic did not, as many would have it, shed for sheer pleasure the dogmas of any one creed. The true skeptic did not flit from church to church crying "Liar!" Nor did he seek with probing fingers a side wound in all religion. What the skeptic did, Emerson asserted, was consider. "This then is the right ground of the skeptic, unbelief, not at all of universal denying, nor of universal doubting; least of all of scoffing and profligate jeering at all that is stable and good. . . . He is the considerer. . . . Everything that is excellent in mankind, he will see and judge."\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid. . . Emerson continues: "If there is not ground for a candid thinker to make up his mind, yea or nay,—why not suspend judgment? I weary of these dogmatizers. I tire of these hacks of routine, who deny the dogmas . . . . I am here to consider . . . to consider how it is. I will try to keep the balance true. . . . Why think to shut up all things in your narrow coop, when we know there are not one or two only, but ten, twenty, a thousand things, and unlike?" (\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, pp. 287-288)

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 289. Emerson elaborates on his philosophy of skepticism. He notes that it must be both pliable and strict; pliable enough to fit man, and having fit him, strict enough to remain with him "as a shell must dictate the architecture of a house founded on the sea." (\textsuperscript{Ibid.})
The true skeptic, Emerson believed, would remove himself, like Addison and Steele, from the traffic of society; would acquire lodging in the distance; and would, from this point of vantage, observe what actually is and what actually is not. "Not less clearly Emerson saw, and let his reader see, the distinguishing mark of skepticism: the suspended judgment, signifying that truth for the skeptic is still to seek."\(^{29}\)

There can be little doubt that Emerson has established, despite an imminent denial of the same, a solid existence for the position of the skeptic. For, by his rather exact and defined defense of the considerer in society, he makes exceedingly difficult to accept the sudden dismissal of the skeptic through an invocation of a principle: that principle which is the synthesis of current that rides between

\(^{29}\)Young, p. 20. Young cites Emerson's failure to include in his concept a basic tenet of skepticism: "But there is a third element in the skeptical attitude to life of which Emerson seems scarcely to have been aware . . . the alleged repose of mind, or complete tranquility, which follows suspension of judgment . . . ." (Ibid., pp. 20-21)
the faculties of the reason and the moral sentiment, which is actualized when the faculty of the reason unites with God, will be analyzed later in detail.

How Emerson justified his destruction of his concept of skepticism is the subject of varied opinion. One interpretation suggests that "Emerson had reservations about the philosophy of experience which he ascribed to the skeptic, for the skeptic is of course the traditional enemy of faith. Skepticism was a half-truth; it ignored the facts on which faith was founded." Another critic asserts that "there was not a fibre of scepticism in his whole constitution." Should this last opinion be the truth of the matter, it makes nearly impossible any acceptable explanation for the

30 Spiller, I, 361. Spiller explains Emerson's conflict with skepticism in terms of a battle. He believes that the "tone of penitential self-accusation" which grew in Emerson in his early years was decimated ultimately by the "native optimism of his character." As a result of the trial, Spiller believes Emerson's affirmation was strengthened.

31 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 112.

32 Woodberry, p. 107. Woodberry's argument holds that "Emerson was dominated above his will by a faith so pure, so absolute, so unquestioning that he could hardly divide it from his consciousness of being."
sincerity the essays on skepticism evince. Emerson wrote too convincingly at that time in his life to be divorced personally and completely from the philosophy he then preached.

One other explanation appears to be based on the most valid reasoning. It has as its core the idea that, though initially gripped in the skeptical vise, Emerson was eventually able to writhe free: "Yet Emerson was quite incapable, none the less, of maintaining the sceptical attitude to life as anything permanent or final; or even of entertaining a doubt except in regard to particulars. Faiths might go, but never faith. He was too inveterately affirmative, in his habit of mind, ever to come to rest in a sceptical suspension of judgments, or to find any peace in the sceptic's peace."\(^33\)

It is possible, then, to accept Emerson's resignation from the role of skeptic if one is willing to believe that the skepticism explained and advocated in the essays

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\(^{33}\)Young, p. 18.
"Circles," "Experience," "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," and "Fate" is but a momentary lapse in what is otherwise an all-pervasive and continuous concept of Emersonian belief. Emerson's invocation of the moral sentiment would not lead one to believe otherwise:34

The final solution in which skepticism is lost, is in the moral sentiment, which never forfeits its supremacy. All moods may be safely tried and their weight allowed to all objections; the moral sentiment as easily outweighs them all, as any one... I play with a miscellany of facts, and take those superficial views which we call skepticism; but I know that they will presently appear to me in that order which makes skepticism impossible. A man of thought must feel the thought that is parent of the universe; that the masses of nature do undulate and flow.

Over against Emerson's words, critical opinion exists that cannot accept as valid what it deems to be nothing more than the author's flippant rejection of skepticism:

34Emerson, "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," p. 300. In the Journals Emerson speaks in like manner: "Of the strange skepticism of the intellect. It will not speak to the intellectual on the platform of ethics, and that out of a true integrity. It has strange experience. It knows that it is a debtor to sin and degradation. Certainly let it do homage in silence to the Soul. But in speech I think it should bravely, as it certainly will with the Intellectual, own the Actual. That is sublime--to abandon one's self, against all experience, to the Absolute and Good." (VII, 296)
"The refutation is brief. Too brief. Emerson took his stand on 'the moral sentiment,' as he liked to call it: and he simply held it against all the powers of negation or of doubt. . . . It disposes of skepticism in far too summary a fashion."\(^{35}\)

The concept of the faculty of the moral sentiment, then, is all important in Emerson's skepticism; and, as shall be seen, it has no less importance in the author's theory of the infinitude of the private man. As stated earlier, the faculty of the moral sentiment is simply the faculty of the reason, actualized; the faculty of the reason actualized is simply the union of that faculty with the Deity. This union of the reason and the Deity, as Emerson meant it, is not easy to conceptualize; one might say, however, that the reason consumes the willing Deity, which in turn permeates the consumer for that period of time that the reason remains actualized. The nature of this process

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\(^{35}\)Young, p. 36. Young maintains that Emerson's refutation of skepticism "leaves, or seems to leave, the doubts which Emerson had so honestly recognized as not without reason just where it found them."
will be considered in the chapter on infinitude. What will be considered here is the product of the realized reason, the moral sentiment itself, which at once atrophies Emerson's skepticism and invigorates his infinitude theory. A simplified version of its definition stresses its importance: "Emerson came to describe the faculty whereby man might come to explore the realm of the spirit as the 'moral sentiment,' and most of his value judgments on men and experience depend ultimately upon the presence or absence of this faculty. It is the capacity of human nature to discover the moral law by means of intuition." 

The moral sentiment, however, is more than the perception of the moral law by intuition. True, the reason, as Emerson would have it, intuits, rather than systematically

36 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 14. Whicher notes that the roots of the concept of the moral sentiment are lodged in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson; that the moral sentiment was used against the thought of Hobbes; and that Emerson became aware of the moral sentiment through his reading in college of Dugald Stewart, the Scottish realist.

37 Spiller, p. 370.
approaches the moral law; but the moral sentiment does more than this, for it is "the voice of God in the soul."\(^{38}\) Emerson states that he is "enlarged by the access of a great sentiment, of virtuous impulse"; that this sentiment is "the direct income of God."\(^{39}\) How this direct income affects him; how it comes when the reason is taut; and how it leaves when the reason is flabby has this explanation: "By this 'union,' the Over-Soul not only fills but is the individual soul, just as the ocean tide fills and floods for a time the shallow brook flowing into it, and becomes one with it, and then retreats again, leaving the 'brook,' the individual

\(^{38}\) Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 14. Whicher notes that "This benevolent notion meant to Emerson . . . that conscience was not to be explained naturally." Conscience was the microphone of God; through it he spoke his law; and man, if he were true to his nature, followed it without hesitation. (Ibid.)

\(^{39}\) Emerson, Journals, V, 248. Carpenter adds that Emerson's conscience had Puritan roots and that Emerson transformed it into the faculty of the moral sentiment. He then regarded it as productive of an "axiom of all human conduct and psychology." (Carpenter, p. 199) Whicher writes: "God was revealed in his own soul by the best of all possible evidence, the direct experience of his own consciousness." (Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 33)
mind, with only a 'far-off memory.'"\(^{40}\)

How and why the moral sentiment departs once it is possessed will be considered in the discussion of the reason, but it is well to note here that the "moral sentiment could certainly inspire, but to conquer and prevail took more than ecstasy." For "to be a doer demands the knack, or character, or magnetism or whatever personal force it is that gives one man ascendancy over another."\(^{41}\)

As Emerson explains, "Whenever the moral sentiment is affirmed, it must be with dazzling courage. As long as it is cowardly insinuated, as with the wish to show that


\(^{41}\)Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 66. Perhaps more than the personal force of an individual, his "virtue of obedience" to the dictates of the moral sentiment guarantees his success. C.E. Jorgenson, "Emerson's Paradise under the Shadow of Swords," Philological Quarterly, II (July, 1932), 274-292.
it is just what the Church receives today it is not imparted and cannot be owned." 42

The moral sentiment has likewise been cited as the term which Emerson used most frequently "to describe man's relationship to the central fact of spiritual law." 43 In this instance the moral sentiment is the "traditional weapon" Emerson used to oppose "the spiritually limiting effect of rationalism and empiricism." 44 To some it appears that Emerson used this weapon legitimately in his expulsion of skepticism. 45 For others, however, doubts remain: "Yet

42 Emerson, Journals, X, 102. "By lowly listening, omniscience is for me. By faithful receiving, omnipotence is for me. But the way of the soul into its heaven is not to man, but from man." (Ibid., V, 273)

43 Kloeckner, p. 323. George A. Gordon offers an interpretation of the relationship: "The Emerson doctrine of man is as hard to define as the Emersonian doctrine of God, but if we say that God is the soul of the universe and that man is the soul that answers to it ... we shall not be far astray." "Emerson as a Religious Influence," Atlantic Monthly, XCI (May, 1903), 585.

44 Kloeckner, p. 323.

45 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 14. Emerson confirms Whicher's contention: "See how many cities of refuge we have. Skepticism, and again Skepticism? Well, let abyss open under abyss, they are all contained and bottomed at last, and I have only to endure. I am here to be worked upon!" (Journals, VII, 82)
in the moral sentiment as he conceived it, there is the same sense of contact with an ultimate reality as in other forms of mystical experience; and the same sense of making the contact directly, the same sense of immediacy. To the skeptic, however, all mysticism will seem to be, more than likely, only one more illusion." 46

The effect of Emerson's snub of skepticism is two-fold. If the essays devoted to skepticism are considered in isolation, Emerson's flight to the moral sentiment is incongruous. If they are considered, as they should be, as but one portion of the Emersonian body of thought, and as an unorthodox portion as well, Emerson's abrupt change of loyalty from skepticism to the moral sentiment will be easily understood. Emerson could not remain the considerer. He had to return to his faith, the great belief in the

46 Young, pp. 38-39. In addition, Kloeckner points out that "It is doubtful whether the moral sentiment as conceived and celebrated by Emerson was by itself sufficient to insure participation by all men in the good life . . . ." (Kloeckner, p. 328) Now, if this is the case, Young's argument—that the moral sentiment is incapable of slaying skepticism—takes on weight.
Spirit of unity, the belief in the moral sentiment.

In the essay "Fate"47 Emerson further debunks the skepticism he once, for a period of time, cherished and held. He again states that his refutation of the skeptical attitude results from his belief in the moral sentiment or in what he sometimes terms the Beautiful Necessity,48 the Oneness of all. Prior to the reiteration, however, he discusses the nature of Fate. Essential to Emerson's

47Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston, 1957), p. 330. This essay has been termed Emerson's "most complete expression of . . . discriminating optimism." "Fate" states the beliefs of "the pessimist in the strongest terms." It lists the forces of nature which assail man, the laws of nature that cannot be brought under supervision, and the inevitable tragedies that often occur. Nevertheless, the "good man confronts the evil Fate" and wins. Samuel McChord Crothers, Ralph Waldo Emerson: How to Know Him (Indianapolis, 1921), p. 24.

48Emerson, "Fate," p. 351. In the Journals, Emerson speaks of the Beautiful Necessity (the moral sentiment) and says that "any single fact considered by itself confounds, misleads us. Let it lie awhile. It will find its place, by and by, in God's chain." (V, 79)
The concept of Fate is the idea of limitation. "No picture of life can have any veracity that does not admit the odious facts . . . . The element running through entire nature, which we popularly call Fate, is known to us as limitation. Whatever limits us we call Fate." Whatever stands in strong opposition to, and far beyond the reach of the will is termed Fate. Emerson advises that man must accept, but not without protest, "a great deal as Fate." He suggests that "we are examples of Fate";

49 Norton, II, 217: In a letter to Carlyle, Emerson wrote: "I scribble always a little . . . . I did within a year ago or eighteen months write a chapter on Fate, which . . . I hope to send you in fair print . . . . Comfort yourself . . . . you will survive the reading, and will be a sure proof that the nut is not cracked."

50 Emerson, "Fate," p. 338.

51 It is of some interest to note one observation made upon Fate: "One of the happiest and most illuminating of Emerson's definitions is this: 'Fate is the limitation of power.'" Rudolph Schottlaender, "Two Dionysians: Emerson and Nietzsche," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIX (July, 1940), 338. It would appear that Fate uncontrolled would be something less than happy, though admittedly "illuminating."

52 Emerson, Journals, VII, 553. Soon afterward, Emerson remarked: "Fate, Fate. Well, settle this then; the nobility of the sentiment is in resisting that or in accepting it." (Ibid., p. 559)
that we "toss up a pebble and it falls"; that even "the soaring of" our "mind and the magnanimity" we "indulge will fall." 53

The nature of the limitation imposed by Fate is a unique one. For it includes and permits the existence of the freedom of the will within its bounds: "To hazard the contradiction,—freedom is necessary. If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate, and say, Fate is all; then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man." 54 But the freedom is a strange one, when one considers "the power of Fate, the dynastic oppression of Submind": 55

53 Ibid., VIII, 239. Here Emerson intimates his eventual victory over Fate: "But cannot we ride the horse which now throws us?" (Ibid.)

54 Emerson, "Fate," p. 340. In the Journals, Emerson elaborates on the apparent contradiction in the co-existence of freedom and Fate: "Our doctrine must begin with the necessary and eternal, and discriminate Fate from the necessary. There is no limitation about the eternal. Thought, will, is co-eternal with the world. And as soon as intellect is awakened in man it shares so far of the eternity,—is of the maker, not of the made." (IX, 216)

55 Ibid., VIII, 406.
"Underlying all is the 'power of Fate, the dynastic oppression of Submind.' He [Emerson] now accepts the plain fact that most souls belong to the world of fate, or animal good. Their fixed determinations are the very means by which high nature works. Free souls are rare, and even in them inheres an old inertia which punishes, as it were, any fit of geniality."56 Certainly Emerson believes that free souls are rare; but, nevertheless, he believes that they are.57 Their numbers consist of those individuals who, through the union of the reason and the Deity, exercise and maintain the faculty of the moral sentiment.

56 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 155. Prior to the statement noted, Whicher says that Emerson's notion of freedom resulted from his "early submission to necessity," which caused him to yearn for liberty with a ferocity that was "all the more intense for his underlying sense of its impossibility." What Whicher believes is that Emerson's later extravagant optimism emerged from this "longing for freedom" and "the eventual realization of it." (Ibid., p. 13)

57 Emerson, Journals, VIII, 311. Emerson speaks on the subject of free and pent souls: "Souls with a certain quantity of light are in excess, and irrevocably belong to the moral class. . . . Souls with less light, it is chemically impossible that these be moral . . . these belong to the world of Fate." (Ibid.)
To determine the manner in which the freedom of the will and Fate coexist is no difficult project. Their coexistence prevails once freedom of the will becomes a fact in a man; for man, from that moment knows the nature of Fate and has, thereby, ample defense against its assault. The entire process is but one other channel through which man achieves infinitude. "Reality rules destiny. They may well fear Fate who have any infirmity of habit and aim. But he who rests on what is, and what he is, has a destiny above destiny, and can make mouths at fortune." 58

Man achieves freedom of the will by activating the "Power" 59 of the will, whose efforts can bring Fate to

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58 Ibid., IX, 199.

59 Emerson, "Fate," p. 339. G.E. Jorgenson asserts that Fate is "left a word" or defeated by the "conformity" to Fate of the will (p. 284). Perhaps; but it would seem that the will would conform not to Fate itself, but to the law of the Deity which Fate obscures. The "power" of the will slays Fate; then conformity to the good occurs. Philip Lovelace Nicoloff concurs: "...Emerson held that mere insight into the 'scientific' law and its utility was not enough. Man must also give his assent to the law. The law must become his will just as it was the will of the universal intellect." Emerson on Race and History (New York, 1961), pp. 98-99.
its knees: "Thus we trace Fate in matter, mind, and morals. . . . It is everywhere bound or limitation. But Fate has its lord; limitation its limits. . . . For though Fate is immense, so is Power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits Power, Power attends and antagonizes Fate. . . . Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members . . . but a stupendous antagonism."60

Power of the will comes into existence as a by-product of the process of evolution whereby the faculty of the reason promotes itself to the faculty of the moral sentiment. Once the faculty of the moral sentiment evolves, the limitations otherwise imposed by Fate weaken; and, as a result, man prepares for a realization of his infinitude. Thought, the energy the reason gives off in this transformation, illustrates the new dominance: "Thought is identical, the oceanic one, which flows hither and thither, and sees that all are its offspring: it coins itself indifferently into house or inhabitant, into plants, or man, or fish, or oak

60 Emerson, "Fate," p. 339.
or grain of sand. All are re-convertible into it. Every atom is saturated with it, and will celebrate in its destiny the same laws." 61

Fate, then, as a result of the assault by the power of the will, no longer harasses Emerson with limitation. Rather, it begins to unfold to him a greater knowledge of his personal powers: "The breath of the will which blew through the universe eternally in the direction of the right and necessary was now his will also, and before it he moved irresistibly, fated to succeed. No longer driven by appetite against the 'burning wall' of Fate, he went forward to perform what he now knew to be an absolute good. He acted knowingly as an instrument of the divinity." 62 As an instrument of the divinity, Emerson, "from identifying his real self with the divine

61 Emerson, Journals, VIII, 563. Earlier, in the Journals also, Emerson said that "Thought is nothing but the circulations made luminous. There is no solitary flower, and no solitary thought." (Ibid., p. 397)

62 Nicoloff, p. 214. Nicoloff believes that skepticism never had an actual hold on Emerson, but that with the hands of Fate it "stole what few good hours it could." As noted previously, Nicoloff believes Emerson capable of pushing Fate aside in his search for the Deity. (Ibid.)
Self within him and dismissing the rest as outer shell, temporary and apparent, ... came to recognize that his real self was the whole contradictory nature, divine potentiality and mortal limits together."

This function, then, of the faculty of the moral sentiment as a pivotal point in the interaction between the concept of skepticism and the theory of the infinitude of the private man becomes increasingly evident when various interpretations of the infinitude theory are brought under consideration. Similarly, a deeper impression of the nature of the moral sentiment itself occurs when its source, the faculty of the reason, is considered at length. Both examinations shall now begin.

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63 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 103. On the same point Woodberry notes that "The soul knows itself as an effect of which the cause is God." He asserts that Emerson believed that, in this instance, cause and effect were "consubstantial." Moreover, he defines Emerson's concept of the soul as "a particular form of divine energy." (P. 109)
CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INFINITUDE OF THE PRIVATE MAN

It is no easy task to determine with certitude the exact meaning and purpose Emerson had when he, in his Journals, made the following statements: "In all my lectures, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man";\(^1\) and "I affirm the divinity of man."\(^2\) The latter statement, at first glance, might seem self-explanatory; but close scrutiny of the author's work dismisses immediately any such possibility. Of the

\(^1\)Emerson, Journals, V, 380. Any doubt that Emerson was not serious when uttering this statement should be eradicated when the statements which follow it are read: "This the people accept readily enough, and even with loud commendation, as long as I call the lecture Art, or Politics, or Literature, or the Household; but the moment I call it Religion, they are shocked, though it may be only the application of the same truth which they receive everywhere else, to a new class of facts." (Ibid., pp. 380-381)

\(^2\)Ibid., VIII, 87. Again, Emerson writes, "Who shall define to me an Individual? I behold with awe and delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being imbedded in it; as a plant in the earth so I grow in God. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, I am God . . . ." (Ibid., IV, 247) Emerson has made, directly and indirectly, the same claim in other instances.
difficulty of the doctrine, the following has been noted:

"It is a difficult doctrine, more nearly Christian than pagan, but strictly neither one nor the other . . . . It is a moment in that life which is at once human and divine. The infinitude of the private man is a doctrine which makes, or tends to make, the entire experience of life a religious . . . experience." ³

The case for Emerson's status as a mystic is the topic of much debate. The opinions proffered on the plausibility of such classification are as many as the definitions offered for the term itself. ⁴ One who believes that Emerson is a

³Young, p. 180.

⁴Carpenter, pp. 113-114. In situating Emerson within its scope, Carpenter first sections mysticism into three areas. The first area consists of those who deal in the occult for the sake of the occult, i.e., the magicians or the mediums. In this sense, mysticism is "a term of reproach." The second area includes those who claim themselves evidence of "the doctrine that God or the ultimate nature of reality . . . may be experienced or known in an immediate apprehension or insight, differing from all ordinary sensation or ratiocination." Individuals who experience this kind of mysticism evince "ecstasy" in the supernatural. Carpenter claims that "Emerson did not describe the experience he had as radically different, or supernatural, nor claim personally to have attained it in its pure supernatural form." For this reason, Carpenter says, Emerson has often been denied "the title of 'mystic.'" The last area of mysticism, however, is Emerson's. Here reside those who hold that "any type of theory asserting the possibility of attaining
mystic speaks in reference to the infinitude theory and says that "This idea of unity or identity results directly from the mystical experience of ecstasy, in which the individual escapes the limits of his own individuality to feel himself part of the whole."\textsuperscript{5} That such ecstasy would have to occur in anyone who experienced Emersonian infinitude seems proper to assume: "The doctrine of the infinitude of the private man was the point of agitation in his thought, the flame under the pot, because it irresistibly suggested that the power newly disclosed within his soul might, now that it was at last recognized, be made to flood his whole being . . . ."\textsuperscript{6}

knowledge or power through faith or spiritual insight" is mysticism. "By this general definition," says Carpenter, "Emerson was clearly a mystic." In the present writer's opinion, however, Emerson's essays and Journals offer ample evidence of Emerson's residence in the second area as well as the third.

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 21. Carpenter notes that the soul, in "identifying itself with God . . . achieves that feeling of beatitude or unity which is the goal and reward of all mystics." (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{6}Whicher, Freedom and Fate, pp. 46-47. On the same point McCormick remarks that "Emerson's theory of human greatness plagued him all his life." This doctrine, McCormick asserts, was the essence of Emerson's optimism. (P. 291)
From study there emerge three, if not more, possible interpretations of Emerson's theory of the infinitude of the private man. The first would hold, simply, that man as an individual is in himself God. The second would suggest that man as an individual is in himself, as is each other man, one portion of a God Whom all men make manifest. The third would contend that man as an individual is in himself potentially God, that he becomes truly God when he has nurtured and developed into actuality the God-potential that is, by his very nature, his. Each of the arguments wears a garment of evidence; the fabric of the last, however, is of a finer, more intricate weave.

Evidence in Emerson's work for the initial argument—that man as an individual is in himself God—follows a distinct pattern as does the criticism that agrees with it: "The rock on which he . . . based his life was the knowledge that the soul of man does not merely, as had long been taught, contain a spark or drop or breath or
voice of God; it is God."\textsuperscript{7} Emerson, in his own words, seems to agree: "Excite the soul, and the weather and the town and your condition in the world all disappear; the world itself loses its solidity, nothing remains but the soul and the Divine Presence in which it lives.\textsuperscript{8} His assertion involves the idea that the individual is a resident in Divinity and, more importantly, that each man ultimately is the Divinity in which he resides. On the same issue he speaks again: "... that is one fact then; that in certain moments I have known that I existed directly from God, and am, as it were, his organ, and in my ultimate conscience am He."\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7}Whicher, \textit{Freedom and Fate}, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{8}Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston, 1957), p. 99. It might be noted that in this address Emerson spoke of the historical aspect of the infinitude doctrine. He attacked historical Christianity as the shackles of religion. (Carpenter, p. 56) What he urged the Harvard graduates to do was to seek the new revelation—the essence of their own natures.

\textsuperscript{9}Emerson, \textit{Journals}, IV, 249. George Gordon notes Emerson's method of exciting the soul: "Man is called upon to speak face to face with God, to allow the Divine Soul to awaken the dormant faculties within him, to educate his whole being in science, in duty, and in worship." (P. 585) Woodberry describes the intuitive nature of the activity: "The function of the soul with regard to this divine influx is to receive, ... to give unimpeded way to the currents which stream through it." (P. 111)
On each of these occasions, however, Emerson qualifies both the concept of the residence of man in Divinity and the idea of the simple existence of man as God. In the first instance, "Excite the soul" and in the second, "in certain moments"--these conditions, Emerson says, must first be satisfied before man is God. As such, the qualifying trios of words do not enhance the first argument.

The second argument--that man as an individual is one portion of a God whom all men make manifest--also has in Emerson's work apparent evidence of its authenticity: "Like a bird which alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough, is the Power which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one."\(^{10}\)

No one man, then, according to this idea, is, or contains entirely in himself, God, because "there is no adaptation or universal applicability in men, but each

\(^{10}\) Emerson, "Experience," p. 261.
has his special talent, and the mastery of successful men consists in . . . keeping themselves where and when that turn shall be oftenest to be practiced."\textsuperscript{11} The men who are popularly great, not essentially great, are what they are precisely because they choose to join wills with, or open themselves to, not the Divine Spirit as they should but, rather, to other men who offer them the dubious reward of a transient feeling of greatness.\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless, some maintain that "the soul is identical in all men," that "its essence is divine."\textsuperscript{13} Others follow the same route to its

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 260. The reader should not think that Emerson in this instance uses the term talent in the derogatory sense of the man of mere talent. The context from which this sentence was extracted has these thoughts in close conjunction: "A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors. . . . Of course it needs the whole society to give the symmetry we seek." (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{12}McCormick, p. 308. "The greatest man is not man at all for he merges his human will in the Divine and becomes the image of God." (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{13}Woodberry, p. 112. Earlier Woodberry observed that "the soul's knowledge of God, however, is not self-knowledge." He states that such knowledge of the Deity "is rather unfolded to human apprehension separately and diversely as knowledge of that energy, not ourselves, which has self-existence for its chief trait and is operant in and upon the soul, but above it." (Ibid., p. 110) How all of this relates to a soul whose "essence is divine" (Ibid., p. 112) is difficult, this writer would imagine, to establish.
farthest extreme: pantheism. "This pervading soul of the universe hallows the world, hallows humanity, fills nature with beauty, fills society with radiant meaning, and overwhelms all finite forms, natural and human, with infinite life, light, significance, beauty, and joy."\textsuperscript{14}

Additional support for this second argument emanates from Emerson's idea of the effect of compensation\textsuperscript{15} upon the "double consciousness" of man:\textsuperscript{16}

One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition,... to the old knots of Fate, freedom, and foreknowledge exists: the profounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his

\textsuperscript{14}Gordon, p. 585. On Emerson's attitude toward pantheism, Whitcher remarks that "he is faced with a choice between two varieties of pantheism." These are "pancosmism, the identification of God with the totality of things" and "acosmism, the denial of the reality of anything except God." Ultimately, Whitcher says, Emerson "in great part ... avoided either one." (Freedom and Fate, p. 31)

\textsuperscript{15}Woodberry, p. 129. "Emerson's name for this indifferency in circumstances is the law of compensation ... . The divergence, the separation, the opposition, are only apparent; life is an integration of the two elements, and the law of compensation lies in the necessity of the integration. Man cannot have a part, but must take the whole ... the sweet [and] the bitter." (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{16}Emerson, "Fate," p. 351.
private and his public nature . . . To offset the drag of temperament and race, which pulls down, learn this lesson, namely, that by the cunning co-presence of two elements, which is throughout nature, whatever lames or paralyzes you draws in with it the divinity, in some form, to repay.

Man, therefore, according to the second argument, would be, in Emerson's eyes, other than pure Divinity. He would be more than a voice for the thoughts of a separate God. He would be, in effect, "human"; and, as such, he would be subject to frailty, compensation for which he could gain through a comprehension and realization of the Divine portion of his dual nature. As has been noted, "For a few years . . . compensation played an indispensable part in furthering Emerson's emancipation from scepticism and self-distrust; the assertion of a law of compensation is the first major offensive action in his private battle with Fate." 17

17 Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 37. Whicher opines that "The notion of an automatic moral compensation, nevertheless, is without question the most unacceptable of Emerson's truths, and a major cause of his present decline of reputation." (Ibid.)
As stated previously, neither of these initial arguments adequately explains Emerson’s statement on the infinitude of the private man. It is the third argument, if any, that brings light: Emerson believed that man was potentially God; that he became God when he employed to capacity those personal powers of his nature that were geared to the fruition of each man’s God-potential.

The significance of Emerson’s concept of Nature in

Lauter points out why it is difficult to pin down Emerson’s concept of Nature: "... I think we may say that in each use of 'Nature' ... Emerson means something complex, something of which we cannot know the full import until we have studied many occurrences. For while the orbed meaning subsists in Emerson’s mind at all times, only one or another arc is likely to appear clearly to us in any given instance." P. Lauter, "Truth and Nature: Emerson’s Use of Two Complex Words," English Literary History, XXVII (March, 1960), 70. Another note on the ambiguity of Emerson's "Nature" is made by Carpenter. He states that in the essay Emerson sought "to express a new philosophy of life all at once, and it is not surprising that he failed." The essay itself, Carpenter says, "challenged attention if it evaded definition." (P. 52) If Lauter and Carpenter found ambiguities in "Nature," Thomas Carlyle did not. Emerson mailed him a copy of the essay, and Carlyle replied: "Your little azure-colored 'Nature' gave me true satisfaction. I read it, and then lent it about to all my acquaintance that had a sense for such things. ... You say it is the first chapter of something greater. I call it rather the Foundation and Ground plan [sic] on which you may build whatsoever of great and true has been given you to build." (Norton, I, 112)
relation to the theory of the infinitude of the private man is not easily pinpointed. Even in isolation, the Emersonian concept of Nature as depicted in "Nature" guarantees no facile explanation. Nevertheless, its value has not been underestimated: "The primary assumption of this essay is that man, when regarded individually or generically, is the starting point of all philosophical speculation. His functions, his relations, and his destiny are its only concerns. . . . Whatever truth lies beyond or outside man can be reached only through him and by him." ¹⁹

In the majority of his moments, Emerson viewed Nature as a positive good; in the minority—namely, in his dalliance with skepticism—he found Nature inimical. It is easier, in reference to the infinitude theory, to explain the former rather than the latter view, though both can be explained. Ultimately, however, it must be remembered that no matter the strength of Emerson's outlook at a given moment, the following always, in one way or another, prevailed: "Nature

¹⁹Spiller, p. 369.
is two-headed. Invoked, or uninvoked, God will be there."

When Emerson viewed Nature as a positive good, he held that its physical properties—the wooded area, the solitude afforded therein; the flower, the resident beauty—that these properties formed a "projection of God," an "exposition of the Divine Mind." He believed that "benefit is the end of nature"; that "air, water, sun and moon, stone, plant, animal, man, devil, disease, poison, war,

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20 Emerson, Journals, V, 238. J.W. Beach attacks Emerson for invariably viewing "Nature all too blandly through the eyes of the 'mind,' reading it in the light of 'innate ideas' and all hoary preconceptions of 'idealism.'" He berates Emerson for not admitting that his mind may have "something to learn from Nature, from the world which it finds given to it from without." "Emerson and Evolution," University of Toronto Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 474-97.

21 Ibid. Spiller notes the distinction Emerson made between the man and Nature and how the latter relates to Divinity. He does so in terms of Emerson's Me and the Not Me: "The Me is consciousness, or that part of man which partakes of divinity, the Not Me is the objective of consciousness, that with which the Me is in relation. But Nature, or the Not Me, also partakes of divinity. ... Its reality lies in its being 'a projection of God in the unconscious.'" (I, 369)

22 Ibid. Spiller notes the distinction Emerson made between the man and Nature and how the latter relates to Divinity. He does so in terms of Emerson's Me and the Not Me: "The Me is consciousness, or that part of man which partakes of divinity, the Not Me is the objective of consciousness, that with which the Me is in relation. But Nature, or the Not Me, also partakes of divinity. ... Its reality lies in its being 'a projection of God in the unconscious.'" (I, 369)

23 Emerson, Journals, V, 28.
vice"—that these "all serve." He believed, in essence, that nature served man in all respects: "Really the soul is near things, because it is the center of the universe, so that astronomy and Nature and Theology date from where the observer stands. There is no quality in Nature's vast magazines he cannot touch; no truth in science he cannot see; no act in will he cannot verify,—there is where he stands." 

Emerson believed that "the relation of the soul to Nature parallel to its relation to God, in that there identity between the two and also operation of one upon the other [and that] the function of nature to unfold the soul [which it accomplished] by virtue of the

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24 Ibid. Again Emerson, in the Journals, makes evident his amazement at the multiplicity of existence and, what he implies in this instance but ultimately recants, its indecipherability. "Just as man is conscious of the law of vegetable and animal nature, so he is aware of an Intellect which overhangs his consciousness like a sky; of degree above degree; and heaven within heaven. Number is lost in it. Millions of observers could not suffice to write its first law." (VIII, 567)

25 Ibid., V, 28.

26 Ibid., VIII, 22.
perfect correspondence of Nature to the soul." When in this mood, Emerson held that God and Nature were merely two aspects of a single spirit, and that at times this single spirit was difficult to discern, as Nature was "in continual flux."

That Emerson did not always consider Nature a magnificent cornucopia has already been seen in the discussion on skepticism. When he believed Nature to be other than omni-beneficial, he found that it sealed man in an envelope of distractions, and that these distractions tended to

27Woodberry, p. 113. Emerson adds, "But it is the Life, it is the incoming of God by which that Individual exists. . . . When that Divine Life shall have more richly entered and shed itself abroad in him, he will no longer plead for Life, he will live." (Journals, V, 497)

28Trent, p. 348. In addition, Spiller notes the transcendental "idealistic view of the universe as an embodiment of a single cosmic psyche, now manifesting itself as man, now as nature, and achieving through the interaction of the two in history its own secret intent. . . ." Man, in this instance, would be but a fragment of the world psyche. (I, 350)

29Emerson, Journals, V, 377. How Emerson became immune to the unpredictable flux of Nature he notes in his Journals when he states that the "detached fact is ugly. Replace it in its series of cause and effect and it is beautiful. Putrefaction is loathsome; but putrefaction seen as a step in the circle of Nature, pleases." (Ibid., p. 54)
obstruct any advance man might make toward a realization of his Divinity. In his skeptical period, Emerson dubbed this role of Nature as oppressor "Fate" and discussed it at great length, as we have seen, in an essay by the same name.

For man to realize his quest, i.e., a knowledge of his divinity or infinitude, he had to learn, Emerson believed, the nature and structure of the hierarchy of his powers and had to accede to its plan by convincing his faculty of the understanding that its province was not one of interference with the functions of the faculty of the reason. The reason had its prerogatives, and the understanding had to subordinate itself to them. Emerson had this idea of rank in mind when he states that "Heaven is the exercise of the faculties . . . ." 30 There is no question that for Emerson this exercise would constitute heaven, but the exercise would have to be a proper one geared to the plan the faculties, by their very nature, dictate.

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30 Ibid., VIII, 571.
Prior to any intimate discussion of Emerson's concept of the reason and the understanding, and the function of each in man's quest to realize his infinitude, it would seem proper to give some mention to (though it is not in the province of this paper to discuss at great length) the historical sources—the people and the thoughts—that fed Emerson's mind with regard to each faculty. It is, of course, no great revelation to state that the individuals cited as influential in Emerson's personal idea of the reason and the understanding were influential also in the formation of other of Emerson's beliefs and tenets.

In what is admittedly an oversimplification, it may be asserted that the roots of Emerson's concept of the faculties of the reason and the understanding were hooked in the soil of German Romanticism; that their stems, prior to their flowering in Emerson's mind, were bent somewhat in the wind of English Romanticism. In short, German thought passed through English minds before halting in Emerson. The roots themselves, mostly German and always Nordic, are: Kant, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Fichte, Schelling, Schiller, Schiller.

31Trent, I, 332. McCormick observes that after 1836 Emerson's appraisal of Goethe was generally positive. Emerson "recognizes the pervasiveness of Goethe's influence and he can write in 1837 that Goethe has affected all recent works
Leibniz, Hegel, Richter, Swedenborg, and Spinoza. The English Romantics of influence, in the main, are: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle, with the latter two the most influential. Other influences, from a variety of genius, because no young man can read Goethe 'without finding that his own compositions are immediately modified by his new knowledge.' (Pp. 296-297)

32 Rene Wellek, "Emerson and German Philosophy," New England Quarterly, XVI (1943), 54. "The Transcendentalists were merely looking for corroboration of their faith. They found it in Germany, but ultimately they did not need this confirmation. Their faith was deeply rooted in their minds and their own spiritual ancestry." (Ibid., p. 62)


34 Clarence Hotson, "Emerson and the Swedenborgians," Studies in Philology, XXVII (July, 1930), 545. Hotson observes that Emerson made at least sixty allusions in his Journals, correspondence, and published works to Swedenborg and his disciples. (Ibid.) Van Doren cites Swedenborg as the source of Emerson's metaphysical approach to nature; of his difficulty with the connection between the mind of man and the phenomena of nature; and of man's position at the center of nature. (P. 135)

35 Wellek, p. 53.

36 Trent, I, 332. Edwin Mead adds that Emerson, in 1833, the year after his resignation from the ministry, visited Carlyle, whom he had been reading for five years. (P. 164)
of areas, have also been noted, and there is every likelihood that many of these bear the same relationship to German thought as they bear to Emersonian doctrine.

Emerson, then, for the most part, used the English Romantics as filters for Germanic thought. Coleridge is primary in this regard, especially as to the distinction between the reason and the understanding, and shall be later discussed. Wordsworth and Carlyle, though not as influential with regard to the concepts of the reason and understanding, were nevertheless of influence on Emerson and helped bring to fruition many of his ideas. A helpful comparison of the thought of Wordsworth and Emerson perhaps capsulizes their similarity and difference in these statements: "For each of them, God ... penetrates

37 McCormick, p. 301. McCormick includes "Gerando's collection of pre-Platonic philosophers; the neo-Platonics; a moral theism from Thales and Anaximander; a statement of the unreliability of the senses from Xenophanes; concept of unity from Pythagoras; of unity in the midst of diversity from Heraclitus." (Ibid.) F.I. Carpenter, in turn, asserts that "perhaps the most important and certainly the most unusual influence on Emerson ... was the literature and philosophy of the ancient East." (Pp. 110-111)

and interpenetrates nature, an Essence everpresent. Emerson, from the first, adds that this soul is not simply ever present—it is already within us, as well.”

Carlyle was an important influence in several ways. He interpreted for Emerson, though to a lesser degree than did Coleridge, the ideas of Kant. He held, as did Emerson in his period of skepticism, a fluctuating concept of God, fluctuating, that is, between the concepts of a

39 Ibid., p. 191.

40 Carpenter, p. 224. Carpenter comments that Emerson "adopted the transcendental terminology of Coleridge and Kant to describe as 'reason' what was essentially 'conscience' guided by religious intuition." (Ibid., p. 198) Rene Wellek adds that "Emerson thought of Kant as the originator of intuitionism, but was mainly interested in his philosophy." (P. 46) A.J. Kloeckner, in turn, points out that Emerson, throughout his work, no matter his love of intuition, many times said that he "could not unequivocally rely on intuitions or first thoughts." (P. 327)

41 Henry E.J. Bevan, "The Religion and Philosophy of Thomas Carlyle," Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, XXVI (1905), 223. As difficult as it is to systematize Emerson's thought, Carlyle's is no less a challenge: "It has been said that you cannot reduce Carlyle to a system, and that is true. His teaching is usually antithetical. At one moment he argues violently for black, at another for white, and he leaves you to reconcile the two positions as best you may." (Ibid., p. 212) Bevan could easily have been speaking of Emerson in this instance.
personal and an impersonal Being. More importantly, Carlyle brought Emerson to Goethe, as Coleridge brought Emerson to Kant; and he urged, and was successful in bringing Emerson to a perusal of some fifty-five volumes of Goethe's work.42

Finally, in 1838, Emerson collected, wrote an introduction to, and had published in America the essays of Carlyle, who, in turn, prefaced and had published in England Emerson's first volume of essays.43

Despite the general acceptance of the idea that Emerson's Germanic influence sieved through English minds, the possibility of his obtaining the same at its origin, in some cases, has been noted. Emerson owned a copy of an 1838 translation of the Critique of Pure Reason, in the Francis Haywood translation, which is "still preserved in his library at Concord [and] shows pencil markings" that

42 Mead, p. 224.

43 Ibid., pp. 181-185. Edwin Mead believes that "the editing of 'Sartor Resartus' and Carlyle's Essays may be regarded as the beginning of Emerson's own literary career." (Ibid., p. 184) Carpenter notes the unique friendship between the two. They bickered about a number of things but were steadfast friends. Whereas Carlyle gave Emerson inspiration, Emerson supplied two of Carlyle's greatest needs: admiration and faith. Their friendship, strangely, thrived on the air of disagreement. (Pp. 25-27)
Emerson is believed to have put there. Nevertheless, it is believed that Emerson "learned from Coleridge Kant's distinction of Reason from Understanding" and that Emerson's concept of the same is really "Kant . . . as misunderstood by Coleridge." What Emerson has done to the Coleridgean distillation of Kant is little better: "Emerson grows particularly reckless when echoing Coleridge's distinction between understanding and reason, which he handles with a looseness going far beyond anything possible to Coleridge. He has been much impressed with Coleridge's derivation of understanding from the mere senses, which makes it unreliable and inferior."

44 Wellek, pp. 44-45.

45 Ibid., p. 47. Robert Spiller advises that Emerson "in his own early thinking . . . did not clearly distinguish between the logical and the intuitive roads to truth." He says that Emerson owed to Coleridge this distinction but that "it was not to become clear to him until his spirit had been melted and forged." (I, 362)

46 Joseph W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry (New York, 1936), p. 329. Beach asserts that while Emerson "sometimes misses the metaphysical implications" of the thoughts he derives from Coleridge, he reaches the same practical result as Coleridge—"a spiritual anthropomorphism in the interpretation of scientific data, a disposition not so much to be guided by the facts in building up theories, as to read a human (and religious) meaning into the facts." (Ibid., p. 326)
Other Kantian concepts that Emerson received in vitiated form were "the Kantian proofs of immortality, the existence of God, . . . the freedom of the will . . . and the subjectivity of time and space."\(^47\) Many of these he doubtless received from his reading of Coleridge: "He was reading Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and *Friend* in 1829—a year before discovering Carlyle—and for the next seven years Coleridge remained perhaps the most important single influence on his literary life."\(^48\)

That Coleridge influenced Emerson, then, in the Kantian concepts of the reason and the understanding is certain, even though the precise extent of such influence is impossible to ascertain. For "There can be little doubt that Coleridge introduced Emerson to the terms 'reason' and 'understanding' as he used them in the technical senses . . . and that Coleridge fixed the distinction

\(^47\) Wellek, p. 47.

\(^48\) Carpenter, pp. 223-224.
between them in his mind."\(^{49}\) It is, therefore, important to understand the nature of thought in this area that Coleridge gave Emerson, since the latter's concept of the reason and the understanding bears so heavily upon his theory of the infinitude of the private man.

Coleridge believed that the faculty of the reason existed only in man; that the understanding existed both in man and in animals (in which case the understanding was termed "instinct"); that reason, by its nature, was superior to understanding; and that for it to function properly, the reason had first to come to a realization of its immense powers.\(^{50}\) Once such powers were realized, the reason became

\(^{49}\)N.R. Davis, "Emerson's 'Reason' and the Scottish Philosophers," New England Quarterly, XVII (June, 1944), 211-212. Robert Spiller adds on the distinction: "Similarly the distinction found in Coleridge and Emerson alike, between the Reason and the Understanding . . . could express and justify the Transcendentalists desire to retain both the mysticism of the past and the empiricism of the present, and to assign each a sphere in experience proper to its character." (P. 350) F.T. Thompson adds that after "having established the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason, Emerson proceeds to show first the function of the Understanding in the discipline of the mind, and second the function of the Reason in the moral realm." "Emerson's Indebtedness to Coleridge," Studies in Philology, XXIII (January, 1926), 68.

\(^{50}\)Charles Richard Sanders, Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement (Durham, N.C., 1942), p. 35.
the operative means by which man came to study spiritual truth; with such powers unrealized, any efforts by the reason in this area proved futile. Whether, however, the reason ever became operative by this act of faith in itself had no bearing on the presence or absence of the faculty itself in every man.\textsuperscript{51} It always existed in man, whether in a state of activated certainty or complete passivity.

The understanding, as a faculty in man, Coleridge thought impaired as its utility was debilitated by its inability to discern spiritual truth: the understanding could detect only material evidence and could not, as could the reason, deal perceptively with spiritual truth. The understanding, however, was not a completely inutile faculty; it supplemented the reason in its work which, to be accomplished, required the cooperation of all of the faculties of man.\textsuperscript{52}

The reason itself Coleridge believed to be of two

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid..

types: the speculative reason and the practical reason. The goal of speculative reason was abstract truth; the goal of practical reason was the moral truth and will of man. While not oblivious to the value of the speculative reason, Coleridge found the practical reason to be of more worth to man in that it provided him with a mean of guidance according to which he might, rightfully, determine the course of his life.

In summary, it may be said that Coleridge held to be true three basic tenets of belief regarding the faculty of the reason: that the reason revealed to man the Highest Truth, God; that it revealed to him a knowledge of the basic unity in God of all proximate truths; and that it provided man with the ability to realize the importance Ultimate Truth must have upon the application and direction of his life. This faculty of the reason existed in every man, supplemented in its work by the more mundane

54 Sanders, p. 47.
55 Ibid., p. 48.
The faculty of the understanding.

An apparent paradox that is common to both Coleridge and Emerson in their individual concepts of the reason and the understanding is the nature they ascribe to each. The faculty of the reason, for them, has not the characteristics ordinarily predicated of it. And neither has the faculty of the understanding. Coleridge and Emerson both believe that the reason is an intuitive faculty and the understanding a logical one. The ordinary conceptions of these faculties, of course, is just the reverse.

Knowledge sweeps easily, like a tot on a waxed slide, into the properly conditioned reason; it resists the understanding and, as with the stray crumb and the assiduous ant, must be dragged away by the faculty which seeks it. Davis provides a crystallized comparison of the two faculties:

56 Spiller, p. 354. Spiller continues: "The third assumption . . . is that intuition and imagination offer a surer road to truth than abstract logic or scientific method. It is a corollary to their belief that nature is organic, and corresponds to the technical distinction between the reason as intuition and the understanding as logical analysis." (Ibid.)
The reason is here represented as a faculty of the mind that functions by revealing or perceiving intuitively and not by a syllogistic or logical process of reasoning. It is eternal or farsighted, and gives to man his 'first thoughts' of youth, his love of the beautiful and the good . . . . The understanding, on the other hand, is a faculty of the mind that functions by comparing, contriving, adding, and arguing. It is temporal and near-sighted, denies the assertions of reason, and gives to man rules of custom and self-interest for the care of the body and animal life . . . .

Emerson's version of the distinction provided by Coleridge between the reason and the understanding is similar to the distinction itself in a number of ways. Each argues that "the Understanding belongs to the mass" and that "it is the faculty which . . . arranges phenomena." Each believes that, in the active sense, which is, for Emerson, its existence as the faculty of the moral sentiment, "the Reason is possessed only by a few" and that it "is necessary

57 Davis, pp. 210-211. In the sermon "The Genuine Man," Emerson contended that "there is this supreme universal reason in your mind which is not yours or mine or any man's, but it is the spirit of God in us all." A.C. McGiffert, ed., Young Emerson Speaks (New York, 1938), p. 186.

58 McCormick, p. 299.
for the intuition of the ultimate ends." 59 Emerson, in his Journals, elaborates: "The City delights the Understanding. It is made up of finities: short, sharp mathematical lines, all calculable. It is full of varieties, of successions, of contrivances. The Country, on the contrary, offers an unbroken horizon . . . of vast uniform plains, of distant mountains . . . the objects of the road are few . . . the eye is invited ever to the horizon and the clouds . . . . It is the school of the Reason." 60

Coleridge did not believe—and Emerson agreed with him—that the faculty of the understanding was devoid of value. Coleridge stressed the true function of the understanding: its ability to serve the reason in subordination,

59 Ibid. In the Journals, Emerson typifies his concept of the function of the reason when he contrasts it with the understanding: "Reason, on the other hand, contents himself with animating a clod of clay somewhere for a moment, and through a word withering all these [obstructions erected by the understanding] to old day cobwebs." (V, 13)

60 Ibid., pp. 310-311. On the reason, Whicher adds, "The great emancipating privilege of contemplation was the sight of God through Reason, or better, the union with God, since the mind's 'vision' is not like the vision of the eye, but is union with the things known." Freedom and Fate, p. 132.
to complete, in this sense, the prowess of the reason. Emerson saw as the understanding’s basic achievement its ability to help man acquire an appreciation of the singular beauty of an individual object. More than this, however, the understanding could not accomplish. It could not, as could the reason, unite the individual manifestations of nature. But this is not to say that the understanding would always remain within the limits prescribed by its nature; Emerson comments on this in his Journals: "The Understanding, the usurping understanding, the lieutenant of Reason, his hired man,—the moment the Master is gone, steps into his place; the usher commands, sets himself to finish what He was doing, but instantly proceeds with his own dwarf architecture, and thoroughly cheats us, until presently for a moment Reason returns, and the slave obeys, and his work shrinks into tatters and cobwebs." 61

61 Emerson, Journals, IV, 73. A.J. Kloeckner would caution one to avoid the idea that "because a man's reason can lead a man to the right, all he says is right." (P. 326) Oscar Firkins disagrees: "Man errs, but the Reason is infallible. Man sins, but the Reason finds sin merely negative. Man dies, but the Reason is deathless. To senses nature is absolute; to the Reason it is provisional." (P. 320)
Emerson believed that only the activated reason, the faculty of the moral sentiment, could perceive God in the unity of existence and could allow Him to enter and permeate man. For if man attempted such perception with the understanding alone, he labored futilely with but "half his force." 62 Due precisely to such misguided endeavors, Emerson believed "the world" lacked "unity" and was "broken and in heaps." 63 The problem was that "Understanding possesses the world." 64

The activated reason, it has been noted, stands in the Emersonian system as the singularly effective foe of Fate, whose constrictive nature, for a time, nourished Emerson's transient skepticism, and which, in so doing, constructed Nature's best barrier against man's realiz-

63 Ibid.  
zation of his infinitude. The jurisdiction of the moral sentiment in this area is more deeply impressed when Emerson's metaphor for the process the reason undergoes in its transfer to the moral sentiment is considered. In it, Emerson pictures Fate as a hoop whose axle is man. The moral sentiment, the stretched faculty of the reason, is the gathering of spokes that, from the axle to the hoop, secure Fate to man in what is for him a knowledge-gaining relationship. Via the spokes, man traces each inch of the hoop's arc.65

The function of the activated reason in the realm of man's quest for infinitude is illumined through comparison to its previously discussed function in the realm of skepticism. Fate, whether considered as the friend of skepticism or the foe of infinitude, remains the same:

65Emerson, "Pate," p. 351. Whicher comments on Emerson's personal problem with Fate: "To take the leap into greatness he had to overcome two radical difficulties: the inconsecutiveness of his own moods, the impossibility of persevering the moments in which he felt his unity with the power within him; and the necessity of dealing with an outside world that remained obdurately independent of his will." Freedom and Fate, p. 60.
"Whatever limits us we call Fate... The limitations refine as the soul purifies, but the ring of necessity is always perched at the top... The limitation is impassable by any insight of man. In its last and loftiest ascensions, ... freedom of the will is one of its obedient members." 66

As with Emerson’s skepticism, the mastery of Fate over the infinitude of the individual man is eliminated by the power of the will. As the faculty of the reason prepares for the reception of the Deity through its evolution into the faculty of the moral sentiment, the power of the will, the natural child of this evolution, accosts and emasculates Fate. Therefore, since Fate’s ability to block man from infinitude resides in its existence as “unpenetrated causes”; 67 and since the combined assault of both the power of the will—which in preparation for the reception of the Deity clears away obstacles—and the faculty of the reason—which functions


67 Ibid., p. 344.
now as the moral sentiment, the faculty through which the
Deity arrives—Fate, as in the case of Emerson's skepticism, 
loses its efficacy. Emerson describes the process: "The
world,—this shadow of the soul, or other me,—lies wide
around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my
thoughts and made me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly
into this resounding tumult. . . . I pierce its order; I
dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of
my expanding life."68

Once the faculty of the reason, acting as the moral
sentiment, receives its flood of Divinity, infinitude occurs
in that particular individual who has exercised his particu-
lar segment of the universal faculty of the reason. What
further happens to the nature of that faculty Emerson points
out. After infinitude is achieved, "Reason is not to be
distinguished from divine Essence"; for "to call Reason 'ours'

68Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," Selections
from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston, 1957),
p. 70. A.J. Kroeckner is of the opinion that Emerson excepted
no one from this process: "... although some men will not
reflect on their condition, there are none who cannot reflect
and who would consequently be excluded de facto from partici-
pation in the better life. . . ." (P. 325) Gordon agrees
that "The deepest craving of the spirit of man is for an Infin-
ite Being capable of communion with man . . . ." (P. 581)
or 'human' seems an impertinence, so absolute and confined it is." He repeats this idea in the sermon "Pray Without Ceasing" when he says: "Did you not know that the knowledge of God is perfect and immense . . . that your Reason is God." 70

When, then, in the summer of 1832 Emerson chose personally to defrock himself of the ministry, 71 he did not so much deny the divinity of Christ as recommend and commend the Savior for wisely exploiting the tools of His and every

69 Emerson, Journals, III, 235. Woodberry notes the attitude Emerson wished man to have toward the search of the reason for the Deity: "Thus the wisdom of life when summed lies in a complete and enthusiastic surrender to God alone, such that every thought and act shall give free course to the divine, streaming into the soul and energizing there under the control of the Over-will." (P. 126)

70 McGiffert, p. 4.

71 Van Doren, p. 134. His rupture with the ministry resulted from his loss of faith in the Lord's Supper and the Divinity of Christ (Ibid.). "Emerson's act of renunciation [denying the Lord's Supper] was not only important as determining the nature of his career, but significant also of the transition of New England from theological dogmatism to romantic liberty." (Trent, I, 363) Spiller writes: "His rebellion, when it finally came, was two-fold: against the last vestiges of ecclesiastical authority over the spiritual life of the individual, and against eighteenth century rationalism which had killed spirituality, he thought, when it
man's nature which might, and did in His case, procure for the practitioner infinitude. As Emerson remarked later in his Journals, "The history of Jesus is only the history of every man written large. The names he bestows on Jesus belong to himself,--Mediator, Redeemer, Savior." That Emerson actually believed in each man's potential infinitude is, therefore, undeniable. All that man need do to realize it was exert his independence and his faculties: "The thinker looks for God in the direction of the consciousness, the churchman out of it. If you ask the former for his definition of God, he would answer, 'my possibility'; for his definition of Man, 'my actuality.'"  

denied revelation. The first pointed to a final schism in which each man becomes his own church; the second sought to provide the rules for a new and personal orthodoxy. In the end self-reliance was sanctioned by submission to the 'Beautiful Necessity.'" (I, 363)

72 Emerson, Journals, V, 478.

73 Ibid., VI, 441.
CHAPTER V
SUMMATION

As we have seen, the problem here is to establish that Emerson employed essentially identical tools—the faculty of the reason, in its evolutionary form as the faculty of the moral sentiment—in his transient advocacy of the legitimacy of a skeptical philosophy and in his ineffaceable adherence to the doctrine of the infinitude of the private man. Both the concept of skepticism and the infinitude doctrine are analyzed in themselves and in their mutual relations.

Of the Emersonian work consulted, the essays "Circles," "Experience," "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," and "Fate," as well as the author's Journals are noted as the appropriately primary ore from which this paper is refined. Attention is also called to other of Emerson's works and to the pertinent scholarship in the field.

There is little critical work available which relates directly to the exact problem of this paper. Two works of scholarship, C.L. Young's Emerson's Montaigne and J.O.
McCormick's "Emerson's Theory of Human Greatness," are substantially different from but, admittedly, valuable to the immediate endeavor.

"Circles" is the prologue of Emersonian skepticism; it relates the author's philosophical unsettlement and tells of his belief in the impermanence of any credo of stabilized reality in either the physical or spiritual universe. The essay offers an initial characterization of the skeptic as neither the scoffer, pessimist, nor optimist, but as the considerer, the experimenter, and the unsettler.

"Experience" delineates the nature of the individual man who will have to grapple with the chasm of divergence that exists between the actual world and its ideal counterpart. It also presents the Lords of Life: Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, and Subjectiveness. Each Lord of Life functions as an agent that is, in a variety of ways, active in every man's life. The composite effect these Lords have on each man is unique in that each man formulates a different interpretation as a result of his conflict with the world.
The Lord Subjectiveness affects man both in his relations with other men and in his relations with Nature. In its contact with Nature, man's Subjectiveness first creates what it is later to interpret. Similarly, it affects the regretfully minimal knowledge one man has of another. Emerson's concept of sin adds to his idea of Subjectiveness. The sinner views sin from the intellect; the observer of the sinner views sin from the conscience. The former finds sin privation; the latter, evil. The sin viewed from the conscience, Emerson holds, causes confusion of thought; resultant is an increase in the Subjectiveness of the individual involved.

The Lord Illusion repels man from reality; it causes him to distrust, suspect, the intelligence offered by his intellect and senses. As a result, only a subjective perception of apparent existence can be made. The Lord Temperament closely corresponds to Lord Illusion in that it causes both strangers and friends of man to present themselves to him as other than they are. It matures, in effect, the cumulus intellect which can do no more than reject reality the few times it contacts it.
The remaining Lords, Surface, Succession, and Surprise, have dual significance. Essentially they, like the others, confuse man, but, unlike the others, they create their chaos in a more palatable fashion.

With the Lords of Life enumerated, Emerson requests that the body of skeptical thought be incorporated into recognized creeds and that it be granted the status of acceptance. Skepticism, at this time, is doubtless a part of Emerson's thought.

In the Journal entries which complement "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," Emerson reaffirms his inability to estimate the value of any specific perception. In the essay itself, he accomplishes three things: he lists the kinds of men in existence; he extracts the skeptic from their midst; and he constructs, later to destroy via the moral sentiment, the skeptic's validity in society.

Most men, Emerson believes, are either geniuses or men of mere talent, or, vicariously, abstractionists or materialists. The genius, or abstractionist, is a man of thought, the man ecstatically in love with the Infinite, the Absolute, and the Real. Save in Emerson's skeptical period, the
genius is the practitioner of infinitude; he permits his faculty of the reason to evolve into the faculty of the moral sentiment. The man of mere talent, the materialist, on the other hand, is enamored of the Finite, the Relative, or the Apparent. His talent is mere "applicability" without originality; it is immeasurably less than genius, though its evincen would not have one think so.

Emerson, in his skeptical period, believes that both the genius and the man of mere talent are extremists. From the mean towers the skeptic. He has not the exaggeration of either side. He admits that man is limited in his ability to reach God through philosophical journeys. He knows that conflicting evidences prohibit any chance of universal truth in any one creed. He neither affirms nor denies.

The true skeptic, however, is not an iconoclast. He does not with bravado strip respectability from creeds. Rather, he orbits society and observes from the distance what in society actually is and what actually is not. He holds the "suspended judgment."

Emerson creates a very stable foundation for the skeptic in society,—a foundation that crumbles in the path of
the moral sentiment, which is the faculty of the reason, extended to its capacity, in union with the Deity. Emerson's abrupt resignation from the position of skeptic is acceptable if one realizes that his romance with disbelief is merely an evanescent flirtation in a life of exquisite fidelity. To say, however, that he at no time gave any serious consideration to skepticism as a legitimate philosophy is to mock the sincerity of the skeptical essays.

As we have asserted, the faculty of the moral sentiment is the faculty of the reason actualized. The reason actualizes when it achieves unity with the Deity; for it institutes, at the precise moment of unity, infinitude in the achiever. Notably, the actualized reason not only nourishes infinitude, but eviscerates skepticism as well. To sustain the actualization of the reason, the realizer must actively recognize and encourage the new life the moral sentiment imparts.

The essay "Fate" interes dead skepticism. The moral sentiment, its slayer, aids in its burial. Fate is limitation. Left to prosper, it clenches man in a vise. Nevertheless, it cannot within its bounds deny existence to its
major opponent, the freedom of the will. This freedom, however, is possessed and exercised by only a few souls. Over most souls Fate reigns.

Once the will frees itself in man, the corresponding intellect grasps the nature of Fate. This knowledge debilitates Fate's constrictive control, and free will and Fate truly co-exist as the former hacks at and pommels the foundation of the latter. Freedom of the will is achieved by the power of the will, an energy which owes its tributary existence to the evolutionary growth of the faculty of the reason. The power of the will decimates Fate and the Deity pours into man through the faculty of the moral sentiment.

The functions of the faculty of the moral sentiment, then, are the connective tissues between Emerson's concept of skepticism and his doctrine of the infinitude of the private man. One of its functions, as we have seen, employs a by-product of its creation, the power of the will, to eliminate an impressive foe, Fate, in order that unity with the Deity, its goal, might be reached.

In what sense Emerson thought man God as a result of his union with the Deity is open to three possible inter-
pretations. Either man as an individual is in himself at all times God; or each man as an individual is one portion of a God Whom all comprise; or, lastly, as this paper contends, each man is potentially God, his realization of this potential dependent upon his willingness to achieve it, to endure the necessary work to achieve it.

Emerson's hedging qualifications of his statements on the first two interpretations dismiss, in effect, their tenability and argue, as a result, the validity of the third possibility—that man is potentially God.

Emerson's concept of nature in relation to man's infinitude is ambiguous in the sense that his estimate of nature is, as it was in his conflict with skepticism, at once beneficial and destructive. For the most part, he believes that nature is beneficial and that from it man, its core, gathers God.

That man's approach to God might be difficult, might be braked by a conflict with obstructions erected by nature itself, is the major reason for Emerson's negative interpretation of nature, which peaks in his skeptical period. Circumscripitive distractions—in a word, Fate,—molest man in his
quest for infinitude. To eradicate distractions, man must, as he does in his victory over skepticism, realize his nature, know, as a result, himself in addition to the functions of his faculties.

The function of the faculty of the understanding in man's search for infinitude is one of subordination to the faculty of the reason. The understanding remains in the background and complements, makes whole, the reason as it evolves into the faculty of the moral sentiment.

The roots of Emerson's concepts of the reason and the understanding are lodged in German Romanticism. They come to the American Transcendentalist through his personal acquaintance with, and reading of, the English Romantics. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle introduce him to Kant, Goethe, Swedenborg, and Spinoza, among numerous others.

From Wordsworth Emerson no doubt receives influence in his belief in the interpenetration of God in nature. Through Carlyle, he meets all of Goethe and some of Kant, and is exposed to the vacillating concept of the Deity--personal or impersonal--that sturdily grew in Emerson's skeptical period.
Despite Emerson's ownership of a pencil-scrawled translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Coleridge, critics agree, brings Emerson to grips with the German Romantic's concepts of the reason and the understanding. Coleridge gives Emerson his personal corruptions of the Kantian ideas; and Emerson proceeds further to corrupt them, or, rather, to mould them to his own use. In any event, he leans heavily on Coleridge's analysis of their natures.

On various points on the faculty of the reason, Emerson and Coleridge, in the general sense, agree. They both believe that the faculty of the reason reveals God to man; reveals the unity of all proximate truths in God; and reveals the nature of the conduct that corresponds correctly to the God known. Similarly, they both hold that the reason is an intuitive, the understanding a systematically logical faculty. The latter functions in all men, the former in a few.

Emerson personally stresses that only the faculty of the reason actualized—the faculty of the moral sentiment—has the ability to see God in the unity of existence and that only it can allow God to pour through and permeate man who, in thankful anticipation, realizes infinitude. And as
his bout with skepticism assures, the death of Fate must be a fact before this infinitude can be realized. Its expiration in the infinitude assertion occurs no more easily than it did in the dismissal of skepticism. Again the power of the will, which activates during the birth of the moral sentiment, disarms Fate and prepares for the onrush of Deity. The moral sentiment—the reason signally taut—accepts the Deity, knows its infinitude, and celebrates its achievement of Emerson's definition of God—"my possibility."
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Donal Francis Mahoney has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Date: 5/29/62
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