WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

AND

TRANSCENDENTALISM

BY

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TO

MY MOTHER AND FATHER
PREFACE

As I sit here and compose this final addition to my paper, I am amazed by what I have learned in the course of its production. Not only have I learned much about a man whose importance for human thought I believe profound, but I have learned much about myself. Such is the nature of historical study of the great thinkers of the past.

My work on Channing, however, has barely begun. He has given me a vantage point on the intellectual history of the Western world, and I see expansion within that as limited only by time and energy. The fascination I find in history stems from my love of interpreting old (but not in any sense lesser) facts in terms of new. In fact, I believe this is the only way man’s understanding of history progresses. Most people can only learn from history if it is presented in the terms that they use today. Channing needs to be understood in such terms. It is a crime that his influence should die because of outmoded syntax, nomenclature, and interpretation.

A number of interesting and important questions have arisen that, in my readings, have not been sufficiently addressed by historians of intellectual thought. Much of the problem, I believe, arises from the tendency of historians to see science only in its historical context. Especially in
the relations between neurochemistry and intellectual output, I see much needed work. Perhaps I speak of philosophy rather than history here, but another area I see needing attention is the validity of creating abstract systems to link historical figures by that vague process called "influence." More emphasis needs to be placed on exactly when, how, and why a person was influenced by another. Admittedly, this is a tall order, but difficulty does not negate duty. In summary, I hope I'm not being brash (or just plain dumb) in saying that historians must look at the past, live in the present, and look to the future.

On the specific topic of this paper, what is presented in these pages falls far short of what needs be said. Work needs to be done on characterizing Channing's specific relation and influence to each individual transcendentalist. Comparing him to abstract definitions of transcendentalism seems less valuable. Also--and this is true for Emerson and some of the other transcendentalists as well--how did Channing justify immersion in fairly abstract search for the meaning of life and God at the expense of human, personal relations? Perhaps that is not a fair question, however, for we all must give up other things to be good at some things.

The trials and tribulations involved in producing a fairly large work of this nature are great; and I could have never finished this paper alone. My greatest thanks go to
Professor Winton U. Solberg here at the University of Illinois; he understood that in the long run, the greatest help he could give me was to let me proceed haltingly and (sometimes) painfully alone—learning all along the way great lessons. When things bogged, however, he was instantly available and ready with advice and encouragement. I have worked harder for no one else at this university. Also, Dr. Mary Lee Spence, my undergraduate history advisor here at the university also showed great interest in my progress on this paper and hence was a great motivation. Mrs. Peggy Mills, my incredibly flexible and accurate typist, deserves special mention. Without her understanding and expertise, this paper would still be a scrawl on notebook paper. Finally, my girlfriend Sandy Bussey was pivotal in the successful completion of this work. Without her support and encouragement, I would have never made it. Thanks, also, to those I didn't mention, but who helped in some way nonetheless. They know who they are.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

On October 2, 1842, in Bennington, Vermont, William Ellery Channing mumbled, "I have received many messages from the spirit," and breathed his last. With him probably went the possibility of ever establishing beyond doubt his relationship to the transcendentalism which had arisen with Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature only six years earlier. Who was this intense, pious Unitarian minister, this semi-invalid who accomplished more in one lifetime than many could in two? What was his importance for American history in particular, and for human thought in general? More importantly for this paper, what was his relationship to a movement that he so profoundly influenced and whose tone he undeniably helped set? Finally, was William Ellery Channing a transcendentalist?

The problem is multifaceted and complex, and repels simplistic analysis. Most attempts to attack the problem have been negligent in one way or another. Before these difficulties are discussed, however, a little incursion into what others, including Channing himself, have said about his
transcendentalism will be enlightening and will exemplify many of the inherent problems in past approaches.

Beginning with Channing's contemporaries sets the limits of the debate right away, for even Channing's closest friends and acquaintances could not determine his exact thought. Often, a contemporary would assert Channing's transcendentalism in one breath and deny it in the next. Emerson wrote in his journal in 1837 a statement that denied that Channing's thought had broadened:

    Men are continually separating and not nearing by acquaintance. Once Dr. Channing filled our sky. Now we become so conscious of his limits and of the difficulty attending any effort to show him our point of view that we doubt if it will be worthwhile. Best amputate.¹

This quote, seeming to state Emerson's view so forcefully, was lessened in impact by his statement a few years later to Elizabeth Peabody that "in our wantonness we often flout Dr. Channing, and say he is getting old; but as soon as he is ill we remember he is our Bishop, and we have not done with him yet."²

Another transcendentalist, George Ripley, indirectly commented on Channing's position when he said that he regarded as Channing's crowning glory that he could look so generously on a movement that was, perhaps, "a reform of his reform."³ Ripley deferentially described himself as "a child of Channing."⁴
Theodore Parker, a transcendentalist in command of twenty-one languages, described Channing as the head of the transcendentalist wing of Unitarianism during the furor raised by Emerson's "Divinity School Address." "It is quite evident that there are now two parties among the Unitarians; one is for progress, the other says, 'Our strength is to stand still.' Dr. Channing is the real head of the first party."  

Elizabeth Peabody, a close friend of Channing's and his tireless amanuensis, perhaps knew him more intimately than anyone else. She made many statements about Channing which indirectly asserted that he was a transcendentalist. Peabody tells us, for example, that Channing introduced her to Carlyle from whom she first learned the word "transcendent." Also, when Carlyle's writings and Emerson's lectures began to quicken thinking in Boston, she was thrilled that "at last Dr. Channing's spiritual philosophy had begun to pervade society."  

Peabody also told Channing in the last years of his life that a Lieutenant Green had said of Channing's sermon "Likeness to God" that "the whole transcendental movement" was wrapped up in one of its paragraphs. A final example occurred late in Channing's life, a period in which he was often sick and rapidly growing deaf. Peabody tells us that Channing's daughter often borrowed and read to Channing manuscripts of Emerson's sermons that Channing had missed;
Peabody "never heard him express anything but pleasure and essential agreement with them." 8

Among Channing's more conservative Unitarian contemporaries, opinions differed from the mixed reviews of the transcendentalists. Andrews Norton, Ezra Stiles Gannet, and Charles Upham all expressed unequivocal fears or convictions that Channing was a transcendentalist. Gannet, appointed as Channing's Associate Pastor at the Federal Street Church in 1824, felt that Channing often based his sermons on the un- sound philosophy of those young "heretics." 9 He wrote in his diary in 1828:

Dr. Channing preached a sermon of uncommon power, but of doubtful utility, in defense and illustration of the doctrine that the glory of Christianity consists, not in anything peculiar to itself, but in what it has in common with the teachings of reason and nature, its most important truths,—namely, the being and unity of God, human immortality, and the presence of the Divine Spirit, —being only clearer declarations of what had been whispered by these other teachers... The discourse was powerful and bold; but without more qualifications than Dr. Channing introduced, I doubt if it was not suited to do more harm than good. 10

Andrews Norton, the "Unitarian Pope," in a letter to Channing in 1840 importuned him not to lend his support to the transcendentalists:

I have regretted that your views respecting the transcendentalism that has been making its way among us as they were expressed to me in conversation some time since and have been otherwise indicated should be no different from my own. You have evidently not
regarded as I have done, either its characters, relation
relations, or tendencies; and the party that has
distinguished itself by the vague doctrines and
loose declamation which may be summed up under
that name, has publicly and privately sought to
shelter itself under your high reputation by
claiming you as its head. I beg you earnestly
to give attention to the existing state of things
under a sense of the good or evil which your mode
of acting and teaching may occasion.11

Norton had probably come to this decision through his own ob-
servations and by such comments as the 1839 letter from the
Rev. Charles Upham, in which he told Norton that he feared
that "Dr. Channing favors the new views."12

Thus, direct statements by Channing's contemporaries
about his position in regard to transcendentalism are incon-
cclusive. His orthodox Unitarian brethren apparently con-
sidered him a transcendentalist, or at least tending strongly
in that direction. His "heretic" brethren, on the other hand,
were more mixed in opinion; they believed that Channing had
taken some strong steps toward the "new views" and had been
a living impetus to the movement, but that she had drawn back
from their more radical assertions. Only Elizabeth Peabody
claimed that Channing was a full-fledged transcendentalist.

The inconclusiveness of the evidence from direct state-
ments by Channing's contemporaries about his transcendentalism
leads us to turn to the opinions of historians and scholars
who have directly discussed Channing's relation to the move-
ment. Early biographers of Channing and historians of
transcendentalism, such as O. B. Prothimngh, Charles T. Brooks, and William Henry Channing adamantly asserted in general that Channing was definitely not a transcendentalist. They labelled him a "transition figure," and described him as a very liberal and very unique Unitarian, and as a precursor of transcendentalism. As Prothimh noted, despite the splendid things that Channing said about human dignity, the divine nature of the soul, and the efficacy of moral intuition, these would "scarcely justify the ascription to him of sympathy with philosophical idealism...The first principles of transcendental philosophy had not been distinctly accepted, even if they were distinctly apprehended."\(^{13}\)

Between John W. Chadwick's biography in 1903 and Robert Leet Patterson's *The Philosophy of William Ellery Channing* in 1952, Channing was largely ignored by historians, a victim of that strange, whimsical law that determines which historical figures are ignored and which are studied. One exception to this general period of apathy towards Channing was Arthur L. Ledu's "Channing and Transcendentalism," published in 1939 in *American Literature*. This article was and has remained a distinct aberration because of its assertion that Channing was, without doubt, not a transcendentalist—that he totally rejected the "new views."

With the appearance of David P. Mendell's *William Ellery Channing: An Intellectual Portrait* in 1960, the spell
on Channing was broken. Since then, at least five full-length books and a number of scholarly articles on the man have appeared. As a figure of historical interest, Channing has been resurrected. The trend of recent scholarship has not followed Ladu, but the emphasis on him as a transitional figure between Unitarian rationalism and transcendental romanticism has remained. Coupled with that emphasis, also, is the assertion, that Channing is an outright transcendentalist.

Among these recent scholars of the subject, everyone has an opinion but few are precise in their language. Charles F. Richardson, for example, calls Channing a "direct intellectual precursor of the Transcendentalists." Vernon L. Parrington describes him as a "forerunner of transcendental individualism." Harold C. Goddard excludes Channing from his list of transcendentalists, then, paradoxically, says later that Channing was really the "first of the transcendentalists." 14 Elizabeth Flower states:

Channing was not a Transcendentalist, yet his statements of his own doctrine could often be given a Transcendentalist interpretation; and Emerson, Alcott, and the other young dissidents of the late twenties and early thirties did so interpret them. Accordingly, these young men idolized Channing and thought of him as their leader, when in fact he was nothing of the kind. 15

Henry D. Gray believes that Channing was not a transcendentalist, but that he broke the ground for the movement. 16
Conrad Wright states that "Despite Channing's impatience with the tendency of Unitarianism to settle down into a new orthodoxy...his theological allegiance remained with the old school." Arthur L. Brown tells us that "he was no transcendentalist. Nor would he ever become one." Clarence L. F. Gohdes calls Channing a transcendentalist in the same league with Emerson, Alcott, Brownson, Parker, Ripley, et al. Edgell tells us that Channing's "fundamental bias was Transcendental," and that this bias "pushed him into an overt statement in 1828." In light of these opinions, Channing's position in relation to the movement remains fuzzy. Those who consider him a transition figure are universally vague in defining exactly what is meant by that term. Channing often hangs suspended--linked securely to neither movement, called a "bridge," but really a mobile. Channing appears to span the whole gap between liberal Unitarianism and transcendentalism, which throws little light on his true position in that spectrum. Those who consider Channing an outright transcendentalist fail to give solid reasoning in defense of that position and more importantly do not adequately resolve the important paradoxes in his thought that seem to make him now a transcendentalist and now a Unitarian. A major problem in all of these attempts is the failure to adequately delineate a useful definition of transcendentalism to which Channing can be compared, a problem that will be discussed shortly.
Turning to Channing himself, now, we see that he usually expresses a cautious optimism about the tendencies of the transcendentalists. He seems to like their spirit and desire for truth, but is frightened by their excesses. His general attitude is one of reserved open-mindedness. He won't jump on the bandwagon, nor will he be left behind, an attitude he held his whole life when approaching possible new sources of truth. We know, at least, that Channing was not looking at the transcendentalists with the jaundiced eye of a Norton, from whom Channing declared, "he differed radically in philosophy." Channing sensed a latent well-spring of spirituality and power in the gush of transcendental sentiment, yet hesitated to immerse himself.

In 1839, for example, in a letter to Lucy Aiken, an intellectual he had met while traveling in Britain, Channing expressed mixed emotions:

We have some signs among us of a "transcendental" school, as it is called...They have some great truths at bottom, but of course wanting the modification which always comes from looking over the whole ground and seeing what is due other truths...I see aspirations after something better, not always wise--how can it be?--but a presage of good, whether near or distant.

At other times, however, this cautious optimism turned toward an openly negative or positive direction. In a letter to Peabody in 1840, for example, Channing opined:
I see and feel the harm done by this crude speculation... In its opinions generally I see nothing to give me hope. I am somewhat disappointed that this new movement is to do so little for the spiritual regeneration of society.  

But two years later he declared: "I like much the Transcendental tendencies of our family," referring in this instance, of course, to the Unitarian "family."  

Thus, Channing's own statements directly on the topic at hand are of no help. They are as inconclusive as the evidence drawn from the direct statements of his contemporaries and from scholarly opinion in general. On more specific transcendental tenets, however, Channing's statements tended toward the negative pole. In a letter to James Martineau in 1841, for example, Channing wrote:  

They [the transcendentalists] are anxious to defend the soul's immediate connection with God. They fear lest Christ be made a barrier between the soul and the Supreme, and are in danger of substituting private inspiration for Christianity. Should they go this far, my hopes for them will cease wholly.  

More support can be found in a letter to Peabody in 1841 concerning Theodore Parker's "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity." Channing says:  

I grieved that he did not give some clear, direct expression of his belief in the Christian miracles. His silence under such circumstances makes me fear that he does not believe them. I see not how the rejection of these can be separated from the rejection of Jesus Christ... There is not a trace of time
when he existed in men's minds without them....
Without miracles the historical Christ is gone....
Reduce Christianity to a set of abstract ideas,
ever it from its teacher, and it ceases to be
'the power of God unto salvation.'

The last two quotes were used as evidence in the argument made by Ladu in 1939. Looking at these quotes, one is struck by their force and clarity and their seeming direct denials that Channing favors transcendentalism, precisely the conclusion drawn by Ladu. One is tempted to nod assent, reach for further indirect evidence and corroborate Ladu's conclusion.

But there is a thorn in this argument: how to reconcile Ladu's conclusion with Channing's very transcendental-sounding utterances in his sermon "Likeness to God," his posthumous publication "The Perfect Life," and his unfinished "Treatise on Man." The implications of the statements contained in these writings are simply too transcendental, almost painfully so when compared with Ladu's conclusion. One quote from Channing exemplifies the problem:

Wisdom is omnipresent. The greatest truths meet us at every turn. Jesus came to reveal the Father. But is God, the infinite and universal Father, made known only by a single voice, heard ages ago on the banks of the Jordan, or by the sea of Tiberias? Is it an unknown tongue that the heavens and earth forever utter. Is Nature's page a blank? Does the human soul report nothing of its Creator? Does conscience announce no authority higher than its own? Does reason discern no trace of the Intelligence, that it cannot comprehend, and yet of which it is itself a ray? Does the heart find in the circuits of creation no friend worthy of trust and love?
One point must be made in regard to the dichotomy between Channing's transcendental-sounding utterances and those supporting Ladu's conclusion: to ignore Channing's transcendental-sounding statements as Ladu does is problematic. As strong as the evidence that Ladu draws on is, the evidence of Channing's transcendental-sounding quotes sometimes seems stronger. As we shall see, as he got older, Channing's sermons sounded increasingly transcendental. The problem must be faced squarely, and two possible avenues of inquiry come to mind.

Perhaps Channing is not concerned with consistency, and follows Emerson's dictum that consistency of thought is only for little minds. Edgell calls upon this "explanatory" tool often, and Patterson sometimes indirectly asserts the same. Such a notion, however, can immediately be dismissed; the story of Channing's life is his agonizing over what is truth. He strives always for unity and consistency of thought, many times losing a night's sleep when he can't fit a new fact or idea into his own world-view.

A second possibility is to take the transcendental-sounding statements for what they are worth on the surface level, i.e., as expressions of transcendental bliss, mind awash in the effulgence of union with the Over-Soul. Edgell has done this, but the problem with simply looking at the language on this romantic, poetic level is that one may gloss over
intrinsic and contradictory assumptions producing this type of language, looking only at effects may mask underlying causes; assumptions or modes of thinking producing an Emersonian poetic burst may differ radically from those producing a Channingesque poetic emanation. The problem is one of the source of poetic inspiration, or, more formally, of epistemology.

Before proceeding with defining and resolving the discrepancies and dichotomies in Channing's thought, a discussion of problems inherent in comparing that thought with that of the transcendentalists is necessary, for it is at this basic level where most attempts to discuss the thesis of this paper fail. At first glance, the task seems fairly straightforward. One must merely decide what transcendentalism is and then compare that system to what Channing thought. Such a mode of attack is, of course, a basic approach. The problem arises not in the comparison per se, but in the intrinsic nature of what is being compared.

Inherent problems in both Channing's thought and transcendentalism preclude simple, universal definitions and characterizations of the two sides, and thus preclude one-to-one comparisons without considerable definitional clarification and qualification. The problem is simply that few agree on exactly what attributes are subsumed under the term "transcendentalism" except in a broad, abstract sense,
and few understand Channing except in a disjointed, particular sense. Make no mistake. The onus of blame falls not necessarily on the scholars involved; rather, the difficulties are largely inherent in transcendentalism and in Channing themselves. More importantly, one realizes that the historical problem of deciding whether William Ellery Channing is a transcendentalist or not is as much of a problem of definition as of rational comparison. If everyone is using a different definition of transcendentalism with which to compare Channing, then no wonder opinions vary!

The basic problem is the incredible scope and breadth of individual systems, ideas, and Weltanschauungen to which the term "transcendental" has been applied. Transcendentalism has been used to encompass such a vast multitude of differing philosophies and ideas, that the term has become severely wanting in definitional power, and hence almost meaningless. The term consumes all who had even the slightest relation to the movement, and consequently reveals nothing. Wright, for example, describes transcendentalism as "a stream of tendency, rather than a standardized body of thought."28 Dirks says that, "It was hardly a movement; it never became a philosophical system. It was, instead, a 'faith,' an 'enthusiasm,' or a 'ferment.' Its central figures were seldom completely agreed."29

A few examples will illustrate the diversity of opinion as to who may, or may not, be included
under the banner of transcendentalism. Describing Theodore Parker, for example, Schneider states that Parker was a transcendentalist "only to a very limited degree." Dirks claims that Parker stood near, but not within, New England transcendentalism, and Gohdes described Parker as "the chief Transcendentalist" after Emerson withdrew from the controversy over the miracles question. Most historians would definitely consider Parker a transcendentalist. Thus, disputes exist over the standing of even those who are generally considered the transcendentalists of New England.

Moving on to an analysis of the problem of definition, Smith describes in a broad sense one of the major difficulties common among those defining transcendentalism. Namely, is the term to be applied to those who hold the philosophical doctrines, usually conceived to be Emerson's doctrines, of transcendentalism, or does the term include all those who lived during the heyday of the "new school" and who may have tended to, been influenced by, or embraced slightly, some of the doctrines of transcendentalism? More succinctly, is the term "transcendentalism" a historical descriptive or a philosophical definitive? Goddard, for example, in Studies of New England Transcendentalism uses the term in the broadest sense when he explains that he will not limit himself to any definition of transcendentalism, but will, instead define the transcendentalists as those whom "common consent has selected"
as members of this movement. Incredibly, Goddard excludes Thoreau from his scheme. 32

The problem is not whether one meaning of the term is "better"—both meanings are useful—rather, the problem arises when the term is allowed to fluctuate between the two meanings when used as a decision criterion. The point is very significant in Channing's case because the greatest portion of his life occurred before the transcendental anno mirabilis, which, in effect, because of accident of birth, proscribes the use of the historical definition of the term to describe Channing. Now, assume for the moment that Channing did not adhere to all the doctrines of Emerson, but did adhere to some doctrines of Emerson's "disciples," who have fallen under the rubric of transcendentalism because of their nearness to the movement. Should Channing then be called a transcendentalist? Few historians have considered this a problem.

Another aspect of the problem of an overly wide usage of the term "transcendentalism" is the problem of defining the philosophical doctrines of transcendentalism itself. To put this idea another way, does American transcendentalism really mean Emersonian transcendentalism? Certainly Emerson's Nature is usually considered the best expression of American transcendentalism, but how many other transcendentalists embraced Emerson's abstract, impersonal God and his tendencies toward pantheism and mysticism? Certainly, some significant
transcendentalists did not. Historians seem to conclude that Emerson's nature was the best expression, yet maintain that Emerson really was not representative of the movement. This is an important problem when dealing with Channing, for to whose "brand" of transcendentalism are we to compare him? Emerson probably conceived of God as an abstract set of moral principles, whereas Parker and most of the other transcendentalists, even Alcott, thought of God in personal terms; Channing's God was also personal. What are we to conclude? Certainly, for example, we can't simply assert that Channing was not a transcendentalist just because he did not conceive of an impersonal deity like Emerson.

And even if we decide to ignore the other transcendentalists as inferior manifestations of Emerson, no problem is really solved. As James Joseph Mennan, William R. Hutchison, and Henry David Gray tell us, the least of Emerson's worries was consistency in thought. His perpetual openness to new truth and his mystical temperament meant that something he believed today would not necessarily be part of his cognitive repertoire at some future date. How then, one asks, can we compare Channing's thought to a state of flux, to a system of thought that, while not random, was at best vicissitudinous?

Maybe we can ignore the specifics of what Emerson thought and concentrate on his spirit of inquiry, his open-mindedness, his receptivity to new truth. A number of scholars have chosen this route, the best example being Edgell.
Channing is deemed a transcendentalist not because he came to the exact conclusions that Emerson did, but because he had Emerson's free spirit, a hint of his poetic genius, and a profound openness and piety.

In fact, a disturbing pattern appears in judgments on Channing's transcendentalism. Those who pronounce Channing a transcendentalist usually do so on the basis of poetic criteria used by Edgell. Those who declare Channing outside the transcendental camp compare specific tenets of his philosophy to those of Emerson. Something is amiss; the results should be the same.

Amidst these general speculations lie two general tasks that must be accomplished to effect a logically consistent solution to the problem of this paper which rises above the failure of past approaches:

1. The specific manifestation of New England transcendentalism to which Channing is to be compared must be elucidated.

2. Some general explanatory structure must be devised that gives logical consistency to Channing's Unitarian-sounding and transcendental-sounding sermons, thus determining if they arise from the same epistemological assumption. Logically following from this assertion is the idea that a mistake is made in drawing evidence from only one side of Channing's sermons.

Only the first task will be undertaken now because the second task comprises a good part of the rest of the paper.
The best way to approach a big problem often involves making a number of fairly rigid and actually non-truthful assumptions that "define away" major portions of the problem, leaving one the ability to concentrate on one specific aspect of the grand problem. As we have seen, transcendentalism is an incredibly broad phenomenon. Each transcendentalist thought differently. To attempt to compare Channing to transcendentalism as a whole really requires that his thought be compared to the thought of such figures as Emerson, Thoreau, Brownson, Ripley, and Parker. Since such a task could fill several volumes, to attempt it in this thesis is clearly impossible. Consequently, this paper will test the possible transcendentalism of William Ellery Channing on the basis of the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson, simply because Emerson's thought is most commonly described as the generic thought of New England transcendentalism. The reader must realize that showing that Channing was not an Emersonian transcendentalist (as this paper will show) does not mean that Channing was not a transcendentalist on the whole. In fact, much evidence implies that were this paper to compare Channing's thought to that of Theodore Parker, the opposite conclusion would prevail.

In a sense the implication of the above is that to ask if William Ellery Channing is a transcendentalist is really a rather useless question. We must ask, rather, where Channing's thought fell on the spectrum between Unitarianism
and Emersonian transcendentalism, a question that really should be applied to all of the men and women who are typically referred to as New England transcendentalists.

The problem of this paper has now been narrowed and we may begin with more specific arguments. The next task is to construct an argument that will explain why his thought contains such a strong duality between Unitarianism and transcendentalism, or, as we shall see, between rationalism and mysticism. Channing cannot, in final judgment, be called a transcendentalist because the fundamental assumptions underlying his thought were different from those of the transcendentalists. William Ellery Channing walked to the edge of New England transcendentalism, looked into the valley below, and withdrew. In the meantime, however, a number of young Unitarians following closely behind overran their intellectual forerunner and plunged into the depths— or as they would have said—rose to the heights, of New England transcendentalism. The question is, what stopped Channing?
CHAPTER II

CHANNING'S SYNTHESIS OF MYSTICISM AND RATIONALISM

The only attempt to define Channing's thought as a system derived from a common theme is found in Robert Laet Patterson's *The Philosophy of William Ellery Channing*. Patterson has recognized that the fundamental difficulty in defining Channing lies in his paradoxical union of mysticism and Lockeian rationalism. To create order in a system of thought heeding the calls both of mysticism and rationalism, Patterson postulates the principle of *essential sameness*. This principle, is the "intellectual justification of the mystical interest which so largely dominated his thinking, and became ever more manifest until its close."¹

Patterson defines the concept in his discussion of Channing's conception of God. The principle of *essential sameness* describes the result of a comparison of man's and God's nature. Basically, man and God differ in degree not in kind. The human being is a creature with characteristics and attributes that are essentially the same as God's, God's attributes, Channing says, differ from man's only "in degree, in purity, and in extent of operation."²

The importance of this explanatory principle for the discussion of Channing's transcendentalism is that the concept
itself eliminates the possibility of defining Channing as transcendentalist. For the transcendentalists, man is divine because God is within. For Channing, according to Patterson, man is divine because God has given him a nature essentially the same as His own. Man is like not of God. Thus, in Patterson's scheme, man turns inward to find God through a study of his own individual nature. Man understands himself, and then, to know God, merely extends his own attributes to infinity. In contrast the transcendentalists turn inward to study God directly.

Nor is the transcendental Reason allowable in Patterson's scheme. For the transcendentalist Reason is infallible precisely because of the quality that Patterson's principle denies is possible in Channing, i.e., that God is immanent. If Channing's parallel to the transcendental Reason depends only on the ultimate authority of his own, merely God-like nature, then infallibility vanishes. Channing's judgments would be essentially the same as God's judgments—but not perfect like His.

Patterson's arguments in favor of his formulation are persuasive. Many of Channing's beliefs and ideas are more clearly understood, and do fit nicely into the larger scheme. Niggling anomalies appear, however, that the principle of essential sameness cannot easily explain. Most important is the discrepancy between the explanatory power of the doctrine in
different periods of Channing's life. Specifically, the doctrine of essential sameness adeptly explains Channing's earlier and more rational Christian thought, but encounters difficulty when called upon to explain his later thought.

Perhaps Patterson is biased by his own theism and desire to see Channing as "one of the outstanding figures in the history of Christian thought." Whatever the case, he describes Channing's earlier, more rational and Christian thought as "remarkably well integrated," and his later more transcendental thought as a collection of peripheral "loose ends" which were never tied together." Consequently, Patterson's concept of essential sameness denies that the whole last decade of Channing's thought had any consistency or relation to the whole. As far as Patterson is concerned, Channing's intellectual growth was arrested a decade before his death. Patterson's method is to assume that all of Channing's thought can be explained by one concept. Thus, Patterson tries to reconcile two opposing types of thinking represented by Channing's near pantheism and mysticism in "The Perfect Life" and his rational proofs of Christianity in "Unitarian Christianity."

His tool, however, is simply not powerful enough to bring these two starkly different ways of thinking under a common heading. Thus, Patterson resorts to intricate argument and speculative hair-splitting to show that Channing's
transcendentalism is amenable to explanation by the doctrine of essential sameness. Even this use of complex argument to fit the data into a supposedly simplifying scheme fails, however, and Patterson is reduced to pronouncing Channing's "philosophy of nature inadequate, [and] his vacillation between dualism and idealism regrettable." Patterson honestly believes that if Channing had lived to complete his unfinished Treatise on Man "his entire system would in all likelihood have become as tightly integrated as his philosophy of religion." This speculative lament is clearly false, for the fragmentary Treatise on Man, among all of Channing's written works, contains by far Channing's most transcendental-sounding quotes and, at the same time, the severest strictures against this intellectual viewpoint.

The problem with Patterson's explanatory device is its failure to take into account Channing the living person. The principle of essential sameness is a theory composed solely upon the intellectual character of Channing's works. It does not include important insights drawn from Channing's personal history and temperament. To develop a theory that will unify and explain all of Channing's thought, we must look at Channing the man, not merely the Channing expressed in the written word. A number of personal characteristics and general tendencies in Channing's life and thought point the way.

The goal now is to develop an explanatory argument that can unify Channing's thought. Patterson is not mistaken
when he says that the fundamental problem involved is the reconciliation of Channing's thoroughgoing rationalism and mysticism. That these were the fundamental boundaries, emphases, or directions of his thought there can be no doubt; many scholars have noted the preponderance of these two seemingly mutually exclusive ways of thinking.

Brooks said that there was "much truth" in the assertion that Channing was both a mystic and a rationalist. Channing, he believed, "grew more rather than less a Mystic," but "At the same time the importance of the practical as well as rational elements of religion never took a lower place, but rather a higher, in his growing thought."\(^7\) Brooks' assertion is supported by Channing's love in college and at Richmond of William Law, the seeker of mystical perfection, and Joseph Butler, the rationalist.\(^8\) Also, Patterson tells us that "there can be no doubt at all that he was a thorough and confirmed mystic from boyhood to death."\(^9\)

Many of Channing's sermons contained statements that showed that he believed he had achieved at times a mystical union with God:

There is, too, a piety which swells into a transport too vast for utterance, and into an immeasurable joy. I am speaking indeed of what is uncommon, but still of realities.\(^\)\(^10\)

Channing's rationalism, on the other hand, was always an important part of his thinking. His Unitarianism itself
attested to that fact. Much of his thinking about Christiani-
ity—the nature of Jesus, the necessity of miracles, and the
truth of revelation—came straight from Locke. Christianity,
Channing declared to be a perfectly "rational religion" and
if that were not so he would "be ashamed to profess it." 11
In his 1932 sermon "Christianity a Rational Religion," Channing
repeatedly emphasized that not only was Christianity a
rational religion, but that man was an eminently rational
being:

We must never forget that our rational nature
is the greatest gift of God. For this we owe him
our chief gratitude. It is a greater gift than
any outward aid or benefaction, and no doctrine
which degrades it can come from its Author. 12

The fact that man's nature was rational preceded and
necessitated the fact that Christianity be rational:

I glory in Christianity because it enlarges,
invigorates, exalts my rational nature. If I could
not be a Christian without ceasing to be rational,
I should not hesitate in my choice...I can conceive
no sacrilege greater than to prostrate or renounce
the highest faculty which we have derived from God. 13

Now, what was the relative importance of these two
modes of thinking in Channing's mind? The answers to the fol-
lowing questions allow us to formulate answers for the lar-
ger question of this paper: did one or the other tendency
predominate? If not, how did Channing get two such opposing
tendencies to lie side by side? The answers to these questions
are found within a Kuhnian framework which takes into ac-
count the relations between Channing's health and the de-
cisions and pattern of his life.

In the history of the philosophy of science, Thomas
Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* is, if you
will, a paradigmatic revolution. Kuhn's new way of looking
at the dynamics of scientific advance is directed specifica-
ly to the hard sciences and casually to the social sciences.
His greatest contribution to human thought, however, may be
the light that he throws on the ability of the individual to
withstand and adapt to psychological, paradigmatic revolution.
Actually, Kuhn's insight is an old one among the great in-
tellectual theorists of the mind in Western culture, but the
application to science has "legitimized" the concept.

A personal psychological paradigm is simply another
name for one's *Weltanschauung*—one's personal way of look-
ing at the world. A paradigm determines the questions one
asks about the nature of things, and what phenomena one con-
siders important amongst the infinite variety of existence.
A paradigm also sets the criteria upon which one judges the
truth or falsity of certain propositions.

Kuhn's insight is that once one is confined in the
defining walls of a paradigm, to move totally to a new
paradigm is a tremendously difficult, trying, and essential-
ly unachievable process. Once one has structured reality in
one set of terms, the shift to a totally new set of cognitive
schema is difficult, because one tends to think of the new
concepts in terms of the old, and often the new concepts are
inexplicable in terms of the old. An excellent example is
the impossibility of explaining the Einsteinian Universe in
terms of the Newtonian Universe. Newton's laws simply do
not contain the bases of comparison or concepts necessary
for understanding Einstein's theories.

In this paper the assumption is that Unitarianism
and transcendentalism are different paradigms; two distinct
and mutually exclusive ways of looking at the world. The
fundamental difference is that of epistemology. The Uni-
tarian draws on Locke the sensualist and materialist. The
transcendentalist is an intuitionist. Also, the Unitarian
places God in a position fairly remote from human affairs.
For the transcendentalist, God lives and breathes within.
According to Kuhn, what logically follows from the delineations
above is that a man who was deeply immersed in the Unitarian
paradigm would have trouble moving to transcendentalism. He
would not be able to grasp the full import and subtlety of
transcendentalism. The fact that most of the transcenden-
talists were formerly young Unitarian ministers supports this
idea. The goal is now to show that Channing's thoughts can
be explained within the model described above, that is, that
Channing's relation to Christianity is explicable within
a paradigmatic scheme. He was too deeply immersed
in that religion to have ever successfully moved to transcendentalism, even if he had so desired.

The notion that a person’s belief system, his personality paradigm, is composed of rather solidified modes of thinking has an interesting application to Christianity. The doctrines and spirit of Christianity, for most people, are conceived in rather rigid terms as “rules to follow” or specific things that “one must believe.” Thus, Christianity presents a ready-made, pre-formed mode of looking at the world, a secure mechanism for interpreting and making sensible the vagaries of dealing with reality and one’s own mind. Conversion to Christianity is often accompanied and preceded by intense emotion. Often the conversion follows a long period of “spiritual trial” or intense unhappiness. A conversion, in a very strong sense, is an immersion into, or an acceptance of, a new paradigm.

The science of neurophysiology has shown the strong relation between disorders of affect such as depression, mania, and schizophrenia and biochemical imbalances in neural tissue. Patients of affective disorders often complain of uncontrollable thoughts or thought patterns that seem to rise from nowhere to torment them. Research has shown that limbic discharges may be responsible for these uncontrollable feelings.

Man knows so little about the function of the brain that speculation is difficult, but the following ideas are
not out of line with current research and consensus in brain physiology and cognitive psychology. The best (but extreme) example of these notions can be found in the traditional religious revival in which participants are instantaneously converted to a new way of thinking, a new paradigm, a new set of cognitive schema. These conversions are usually consummated, as mentioned, in the presence of strong emotion. Afterwards, participants claim that they are free from worry, free from unhappiness, free from whatever was bad in their lives before they were converted. Why? The answer is that they now have a legitimated channel of thinking that structures their world and makes things explicable and understandable. A person steps from relativism to certainty. They, in effect, have a ready made schema that can automatically decide the truth-value or moral import of important questions and situations in their lives. No longer must time be spent agonizing over what is right or wrong. One already automatically knows. Reality is simplified. Decisions can proceed deductively from fixed truths instead of the more difficult inductive method used by young children in the interpretation of their world. Perceived reality becomes fixed not relative.

In this developing schema, mysticism and rationalism are poles apart. Mysticism is a belief in the efficacy of the imagination, a belief that truth can be approached by taking in all experience and all thought; by catching the
essence of each thought or fact one approaches God or the
factor of unity. Mysticism is deduced from no principles.
The phenomena is random and different from conscious prob-
lem solving. Nothing is to be denied as a possible road to
truth. Any insight, no matter how far from common thinking,
common-sense, or logic could contain the key, the secret to
the nature of things. The mystical world view is an open-
ness to all experience, all input, whether internal or external.

Rationalism, conceived in relation to the notions
above, is a different phenomena entirely. Hard, conscious,
empirical thought is necessary. Logic, linear thinking, and
organization prevail. The imagination is usually considered
a faculty further from, not closer to, reality. Imagination
is a source of new ideas, but truth has no special privilege
there. Rationalism reduces the "blooming confusion" of
reality, to use James' phrase, by insisting that conclusive
proof in terms of material reality be presented to ascertain
the truth-value of any question. A concept conjured by the
mind is not true unless proven empirically.

With these ideas in mind we turn to Channing, a man
living at a time when no viable intellectual principle ex-
isted to unify the two opposing tendencies described above.
That unification would not come for another half century.
In relation to these two modes of thinking Emerson and Locke
are representative, and Channing is somewhere in between.
In a sense, Emerson and Locke solved the problem of intuition vs. rationalism by ignoring the other factor and asserting that there really was no problem. Locke said trust materiality, and Emerson said trust (in effect) the conjurings of the mind. Channing, however—and this is important—probably did not know which mode of apprehending things to trust and thus vacillated between the two his whole life.

Channing's tendency toward mysticism predominated in clamor for expression; the rational faculty served for Channing as a way of curbing the excesses of that clamor. The story of Channing's life is the story of his attempts to rationalize his mysticism, yet still leave a route for that mysticism to eventually flower. He felt and believed that the imaginings and emotions had validity and were the pious and ultimate road to God, but because of his experiences at Richmond he had come to see that the mystical faculty could not be trusted.

The reason, then, that the question of Channing's transcendentalism has been unanswerable in the past is because it is unanswerable—Channing himself never answered the question. Although he didn't perceive the question in the terms this paper uses, he never resolved the fundamentally inherent question: are the flights of fancy of the mystical faculty on great and glorious subjects the real way to approach God?
Channing was a transcendentalist by nature and a rational Unitarian by force of will. When he realized in Richmond that continued development of his mystical insights and directives would prove fatal to him, Channing sought for ways to strongly control, but not totally limit, his mystical tendency. He found his boundary in a rational Christianity, specifically in a rational interpretation of the New Testament. Only the New Testament could allow Channing to have both a somewhat fixed portion of belief and the ability to pursue truth wherever the path ultimately took him. The results for Channing were life-saving. The result for religious thought was a wholly new interpretation of Christianity, an interpretation that blossomed into New England transcendentalism.

One central aspect of Channing's life that has been virtually ignored by scholars is the state of his health. This is bewildering in light of the clear and central shifts in emphasis and form of Channing's thought that took place in the context of debilitating periods of sickness. After his stay at Richmond, Channing was a physical invalid for the rest of his life, and one is constantly astounded when reading his letters and biographies how often and long Channing is seriously ill. He is often confined to his bed for weeks and sometimes months at a time! His health is always a factor in major decisions and as Rice says of Channing's health in 1830,
"It was clear that the physical debility which had troubled Channing for years was to be permanent."

No psychological studies have attempted to determine the nature of Channing's ill health; his illnesses are usually merely mentioned and then receive no further treatment. A viable possibility, however, is that Channing's illnesses were primarily psychological. He clearly suffered from some affective disorder—possibly depression, but more likely manic-depression. (One wonders how Channing's thought would have differed if he had received lithium treatment, the modern and strikingly effective treatment for the mood swings of manic-depression.)

A few examples to support this diagnosis will suffice. In a letter written while in Richmond Channing described his emotional state:

"Not long ago, I was an eagle. I had built my nest among the stars, and I soared in regions of unclouded ether. But I fell from heaven, and the spirit which once animated me has fled. I have lost every energy of soul, and the only relic... is a sickly imagination, a fevered sensibility. I cannot study. I sit down with Goldsmith or Rogers in my hand, and shed tears—at what? At fictitious mystery; at tales of imaginary love."[5]

And in another letter:

"Sometimes joy gives me wings, or else, absorbed in melancholy, I drag one foot heavily after the other for whole hours together."[6]
Statements like these and general descriptions of Channing's behavior during his life indicate that a statement he made late in life carries much truth: "My whole life has been a struggle with my feelings." 

Research in the last decade on neurotransmitters and chemical imbalances in the brain and their relation to mental disorders have an interesting application here. There is a growing consensus in the medical literature that depression, schizophrenia, and a host of other mental illnesses once considered to be due to childhood experience or sexual repression are really the result of a chemical imbalance in neural tissue.

Transcendent or mystical experiences, essentially extreme affective disorders, can in fact, be self-induced. Mystics have altered brain chemistry by physical hardship to produce the mystical experience for centuries. Fasting, isolation, and sensory and sleep deprivation have all been used.

Are we to explain Channing's life and thought as a series of biochemical events, then? Of course not, but in this context Channing's almost constant illness and pervasive depression can probably be interpreted with these neurochemical findings in mind. The whole question is especially interesting because if a biochemical imbalance was producing excessive neural discharge in the limbic system, Channing's thought could be interpreted as an attempt by him to use his powerful rational faculties to construct some form of ordered,
comprehensive explanatory scheme in which these ungovernable affective discharges could come comfortably to rest.

Channing's thought, in effect, may simply be a rational explanation or description of the limbic system—the anatomical seat of human emotion. The fact that Channing's world view expressed in many ways mankind's profoundest hopes for peace, universal brotherhood, and spiritual transcendence may be an indication that these concepts are innate in the mind. Perhaps Christianity in its essence, its true form, is a system that is intrinsic to the very structure or function of the primordial limbic mind. The thought is provoking.

The important common factor in these speculations is that Channing had difficulty in controlling his involuntary emotional discharges, discharges that mingled in Channing's mind, external reality with the confusion in his brain. Still, at first, Channing had a faith in the intellectual and emotional products of these severe swings of mood; he cultivated them while in college. Later, at Richmond, after he had nearly destroyed himself, Channing drew back from his faith in the ability of these mystical flights to bring him closer to God. This faith was always the most basic tendency of his thought, but he rationally decided not to follow his impulses, because these impulses were leading him only to death. When Channing decided his impulses could not
be wholly trusted, he made a decision that forever placed him outside the transcendental camp, but, as mentioned, this decision went against the grain of his natural tendency to trust himself; this tendency, thus, sought expression and was the cause of the transcendental tone of so many of his recorded statements. In support of this argument, let us turn to Channing's experiences in college and as a tutor in Richmond; these experiences set the general character of the relationship between his mysticism and rationalism.

The first period was Channing's college days at Harvard. His manic-depressive nature was involving him in rather severe mood swings. He described those days years later:

I can remember the days when I gloried in the moments of rapture, when I loved to shroud myself in the gloom of melancholy...We used to encourage... rapture and depressions of spirit...18

As these passages indicate, Channing's emotional experiences were intense. His mind was a searching one that had left the boundaries of any dogma to find something else. Eventually Christianity, as interpreted by Locke, would be the restraining force on Channing's flights of fancy, but in the meantime, he had nothing. The result was a mystical illumination in his junior year in 1795.

Channing had been reading Hutchison's Inquiry in his favorite spot under some willow trees when he came upon
Hutcheson's doctrine of an innate moral sense and the theory of disinterested benevolence. Channing's description, in the first sentence, power of this illumination indicated the traditional desire of the mystic to transcend the primitive vessel of the body in its search for God:

I longed to die, and felt as if heaven alone could give room for the exercise of such emotions; but when I found I must live, I cast about to do something worthy of these great thoughts....I considered that they were the powers which ruled the world, and that, if they would bestow their favor on the right course only, and never be diverted by caprice, all would be fitly arranged, and triumph was sure.

In this experience Channing had a:

view of the dignity of human nature....[of the] glory of the Divine disinterestedness, the privilege of existing in a universe of progressive order and beauty, the possibilities of spiritual destiny, the sublimity of devotedness to the will of Infinite Love, penetrated his soul.19

The important factor of this illumination was its coupling with Hutcheson's doctrine of innatism. Hutcheson had given form and content to a Channingesque mystical experience; he had planted in Channing's mind a primal belief in innatism, a seed that would sprout when he read Price and gradually mature as he came in contact with the British Romantics and French Eclectics. In a way Channing's experience represented a "conversion" to innatism. The modern reader is astounded that Channing was but fifteen years old at the time of this experience.
Despite outward success in college and the profundity of his mystical experience, Channing continued to be depressed. He had never expressly considered divinity as a career until his senior year, before that favoring law and medicine. But the tendency of his mind finally drove him to divinity, the profession for which he was made, and "the only profession which could make [him] happy." Channing hoped that the study of divinity would calm what he called his "fervence of temperament," a mild way of describing his abnormal mental state. At this time Channing resolved never "to be possessed" but under all circumstances to "possess his own soul in peace." "

This decision for divinity, one must keep in mind, was not expressly a decision for Christianity; that would come later. Channing still had a powerful belief in innatism. He had narrowed his interest and thus narrowed the reality with which his disturbed mind had to contend. By doing this Channing had taken one step away from the extreme form of mysticism; still his mind clamored for knowledge from many sources, and in Richmond he followed a plan that filled his mind but destroyed his physical health.

Upon graduation, Channing had been invited to tutor the children of David Meade Randolph in Richmond, Virginia. His teaching duties were not taxing and Channing sought to improve his mind, will, and character by intensive reading,
monastic seclusion, physical denial (he forced himself to 
sleep on the bare floor without blankets in cold weather),
and fasting—all traditional techniques of self-induced 
mysticism. He had plenty of money but refused to replace his 
threadbare clothing, a condition he used to rationalize his 
flight from all forms of social contact.

The result of these privations was a severely dis-
ordered concept of reality. For hours on end Channing was 
lost in contemplation of what could be. Brooks dubiously 
calls Channing's actions "heroic treatment" of himself, but 
admits that "he fell into a morbid, sentimental enthusiasm 
[that] wore away his body and his mind."22 The evidence in-
dicates that in this period Channing was undergoing a period 
of paradigmatic relativism. Anything he thought, he believed 
could be true. His world view was the mystical one and he 
sought truth from every source. Channing was at a critical, 
adolescent age and his social ostracism provided him with no 
help in forming a rational and non-mystical view of the 
world.

Channing was living an aparadigmatic existence, but 
he soon realized how much harm was being done to his health. 
In letters to relatives and friends he expressed a desire to 
give up the revery he knew was destroying him. His intellec-
tual relativism had brought him to the brink of despair and 
he searched desperately for a way out. Years later Channing 
described this period:
Do anything....rather than give yourself up to reverie. I can speak on this point from experience. At one period in my life I was a dreamer, castle-builder. Visions of the distant and future took the place of present duty and activity. I spent hours in reverie.23

Thus, Channing experienced the great spiritual trial of his life. But how did he escape this morbid mystical tendency? The answer is that he "latched onto" a paradigm; the paradigm, of course, was Locke's interpretation of Christianity. Channing again narrowed the reality he would concern himself with and took a step that would allow him to hold some fundamental assumptions (those of Christianity) as fixed, and thus allow the psychologically easier deductive route to truth to develop in his thought. Thus, here in Richmond Channing underwent what Edgell describes as an "orthodox conversion" to Christianity. He adopted the Christian paradigm:24

I believe that I never experienced that change of heart which is necessary to constitute a Christian till within a few months past. The worlding would laugh at me; he would call conversion a farce. But the man who has felt the influences of the Holy Spirit can oppose fact and experience to empty declaration and contemptuous sneers.25

One of the key things Channing realized in this second mystical experience was that moral contemplation without moral action was reprehensible. One could not just sit around and think about God and moral things. Rather, one must strive for truth through real-world action. The imaginative and intuitive mind is necessary but not sufficient to gain true
knowledge of God. One approached God not by pure thought, but by a combination of moral thought and moral action.\(^{26}\)

Thus, by accepting Christianity, Channing had defined his world by using principles that were very much a product of his experience and locality. The principles he adopted were not "out of time, [and] out of space" as Emerson believed his own were.\(^{27}\) Christianity was a historical phenomena of Western culture mainly, and Channing had accepted that road alone to truth; he had decided against mysticism, and once having made that decision he could never return to the relativistic open-mindedness required of the transcendentalists.

Thus, Channing curbed his mysticism with rational Christianity. But the relative positions in regard to one another of the two tendencies changed throughout his life. After his conversion, Channing applied himself to studious inquiry into the Bible. He immersed himself in the faith. The result was that for the next two decades, Channing could be considered a fairly orthodox Unitarian. His sermons bear out this statement. Channing stresses the rational and logical proofs of Christianity. His Christianity is Lockean and he repeatedly hails Locke as a representative Unitarian. The best evidence, however, is the fact that Channing's famous "Baltimore Sermon" in 1819, called "Unitarian Christianity," was and has been considered the best rendition of orthodox Unitarian beliefs in that period. Most of Channing's
rationalism was directed to building arguments against the
dogmas of Calvinism. In this period one finds the strongest
evidence for asserting that Channing was not a transcendentalist. Statements from these first two decades of Channing's
ministry often flatly contradict statements made after 1820.
Many scholars making this comparison hastily assert that the
earlier evidence should prevail because it came first. This
is a mistake because, although this approach backs the answer
to the problem given in this paper, it is not logically justifiable because Channing's thought took a strong turn after 1821.

The simple fact is Channing's mystical tendency could
not be quelled forever. Again, Channing's health precipitated
the change in direction of his thinking. From 1820 to 1821,
Channing was emotionally and physically ill for an entire
year. He was inactive for most of that time. In the sum-
mer of 1821, he travelled in the mountains of New Hampshire
and Vermont and established a friendship with the mountains
"more intimate than I have formed with any part of nature." In the meantime, Channing had found and come to love the
poetry of Wordsworth, who had such great effect on the trans-
cendentalists. Thinking of Wordsworth, Channing spoke of the new direction in poetry:

Men want and demand a more thrilling note, a poetry
which pierces beneath the exterior of life to the depths of the soul, and which lays open its mysterious workings, borrowing from the whole outward creation fresh images and correspondences with which to illuminate the secrets of the world within us.
Neither his heightened relationship with nature, nor his exciting discovery of Wordsworth did much for Channing's health; he remained very sickly. Consequently in 1822 he received permission from his congregation to travel to Europe.

Channing's European trip had a profound influence on the direction of his thought. William Henry Channing called that year a transition period in Channing's life. Channing was enthralled with the natural beauty of the continent and with the personalities and thoughts of Carlyle and Wordsworth, whose acquaintances he made. Whatever the exact cause, Channing came back to New England a changed man. Shelton Smith describes the situation effectively:

Was it a breaking away from the stiff, decorous atmosphere of patrician Boston? Was it the horizon-expanding, ego-nourishing experience of matching minds with Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, Aikin, and the others? Was it months in Italy's sensuous cities, or weeks among the liberating Alps? As a recorder of his experiences, Channing is no help at all. Yet, from the time he set foot again on native soil, he was an expanded man.

The intellectual result of this European tour was that Channing's mystical tendencies were given a strong shove to the surface; and surface they did. Although still highly rational, Channing's later sermons progressively decreased emphasis on the Christian revelation as the route to truth. Man's ability to receive truth from the natural world
received more stress. Channing went far enough in this direction to cause Patterson to remark that the line between revealed religion and natural religion had become rather thin for Channing.

One reason explaining the events after 1820 in Channing's life is his growing realization that Unitarianism was too rational, too unemotional, and too confining. In 1820 he wrote:

I have before told you how much I think Unitarianism has suffered from union with a heart-withering philosophy. I will now add, that it has suffered also from a too exclusive application of its advocates to biblical criticism and theological controversy, in other words, from a too partial culture of the mind. I fear that we must look to other schools for the thoughts which thrill us, which touch the most inward springs, and disclose to us the depths of our own souls.\textsuperscript{33}

He also deprecated the use of a "Unitarian orthodoxy" based on rational reasoning alone, because it failed to "strike the living springs in the soul."\textsuperscript{34} He believed that without a "heart-stirring energy" Unitarianism would never regenerate the world.\textsuperscript{35}

Arising from these realizations was the new emphasis in Channing's thought on the soul as the most efficacious route to God. Channing was increasingly turning inward to find religious truth; the mysticism of his college and Richmond days had returned. Evidence used by scholars to assert that Channing was a transcendentalist is drawn largely
later statements that emphasized the inward route of the soul.

A few examples describe the intensity and suggestive (of transcendentalism) nature of Channing's thought in this later period of his life:

The grand ideas [and] all God's attributes come from within, from the action of our spiritual nature...Our ideas of design and skill, of a determining cause, of an end of purpose, are derived from consciousness, from our own souls. Thus the soul is the spring of the knowledge of God.36

And from Channing's 1828 "Likeness to God":

Thus, God's infinity has its image in the soul; and through the soul, much more than through the universe, we arrive at this conception of the Deity.37

Religion itself, Channing stated:

...recognizes and adores God as a being whom we know through our own souls; who has made man in his own image; who is the perfection of our own spiritual nature.38

Clearly, Channing's mysticism and general tendency toward belief in innatism and internal over external proof had begun to dominate his thinking. But did Channing fully become a transcendentalist? The ultimate proof of this question comes in the next chapter when we test Channing on the transcendental doctrine of immanence. In the context of this chapter, however, the answer is clearly "no."
Although Channing was turning increasingly to self-reliance on his own instincts and intuitions, he would never have full confidence in what the mystical insights of his mind told him. He had learned long ago in Richmond that his imagination could lead him astray. Channing had conceived for too long the religious experience and the nature of God within the boundaries of the paradigm of Christianity. His mysticism was, in effect, channeled within a rather logical form of Christianity that required rational proof of its doctrines.

Channing was willing to admit that some of his intuitive and emotional thoughts were enlightening and added to his comprehension of truth, but proof in some form was required before unconditional assent was given. Channing never lost his belief in the words of Jesus with which he headed his famous "Baltimore Sermon": "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

A statement Channing made on his deathbed when he called for those around him to talk to him of plain things so he could get his mind off the fantastic visions running through his mind, describes the basic argument of this chapter: the necessity for Channing of distinguishing between imaginings and reality in the search for religious truth.

I feel more deeply everyday the close personal relations which the Heavenly Father sustains to every spirit, and the strong bond of a common spiritual nature between all human beings. But we must
beware of over-excited feeling, or vague sentiment, of mingling our theoretical views or our favorite imaginations with the truth. We need to feel the reality...the REALITY of a spiritual life.

Thus, we have seen that Channing's "synthesis" of mysticism and rationalism was not a synthesis at all, but rather an intellectual balancing act of opposing poles of tendency. The fulcrum changed positions along the line between these two poles throughout his life, but the mere fact that any fulcrum existed insured that Channing could never be a transcendentalist. Thus, the psychological model for Channing's thought has now been presented. Let us now turn to more formal proofs of Channing's lack of adherence to transcendentalism.
CHAPTER THREE
IMMANENCE

The overriding goal of the transcendentalists was to return to religion a living, breathing spirit, a sense of God's closeness and importance in the commonality of life. The Unitarian God was distant, spectatorial, and seemed only a historical reality. Such a God, the transcendentalists believed, might as well been dead. The result of these facts was the affirmation by the transcendentalists that God was not transcendent but immanent. Thus, the fundamental doctrine of transcendentalism was that God was immanent in Nature and man. The material reality, be it human or inanimate, that perceived and was perceived, was a mere shell behind which the power of the Over-Soul resided.

The intrinsic relationship of immanence to transcendentalism is clearly seen when surveying the major tenets of the "new views"; almost all are logical derivatives of the doctrine of immanence. No other single factor unifies the various manifestations of transcendentalism as well as this doctrine. A look at some of the logic found in going from the general belief in immanence to more specific doctrines of transcendentalism is enlightening.

Two basic areas are subsumed under the notion of immanence: Nature and man. Nature in this paper is of secondary
importance, yet important enough to warrant a closer look. The importance of this principle with respect to Nature is the fact that matter became for the transcendentalists not merely the everyday reality with which man must contend; rather matter became the teacher, the exemplifier of the driving Spirit immanent in matter. Matter was not merely the harmonious interaction of physical forms describable by various laws of mass and vector relations. Matter, rather, was a teacher of moral law. It existed in its present form because God determined that form to be the best for teaching man about Spirit.

For most of the transcendentalists, however, immanence in Nature took a back seat to immanence in the soul of man. Because God was within, God could be directly reached if one knew how. And if God could be directly accessed, one, in effect, achieved a transhistorical existence. One touched the eternal laws true in any time and place. Thus, intuition was infallible because it need not concern itself with bothersome things like empirical validation and rational proof. Because reason was, in essence, God, historical revelation was conceived as a primitive and indirect route to truth. The various Unitarian "proofs" of Christianity were not so much attacked as ignored; they were simply irrelevant to the true religion of the soul. The emphasis on miracles vanished and Jesus lost the title of Messiah and became simply the
greatest moral teacher in history; historical Christianity in general was dealt a severe blow.

Another set of derivatives from the doctrine of God within emphasized the creative potential of self-reliance. Literature and art, creativity dormant in America for so long, could be resurrected. One became creative by following the impulses from within. Education was also altered in concept. The transcendentalists emphasized not harsh, rote learning of facts, but the idea of education as an unfolding or releasing of that which existed within. Alcott is the best example of this Socratic approach. Finally, social reform was perceived as a subset of individual moral regeneration; societal improvement proceeded causally from individual rebirth in the name of God. The difference from traditional Christianity in this case was more that of emphasis than direction.

Looking at these examples, if one were placed in a hypothetical situation in which one was allowed but a single question to ask a man to determine his relation to transcendentalism, the best question would be: "Is God immanent?" Thus, the most rigid form of proof of Channing's relation to the new views requires that we ask this question of him.

Unfortunately evidence from Channing's published sermons and writings does not address the question directly. Thus, questions that logically follow from the doctrine must
serve the purpose. To prove that Channing did not believe
that God was immanent we will demonstrate the veracity of
the following points:

1. Channing did not believe that Nature was an
emanation of Spirit.

2. Channing's repudiation of the hypostatic
union theory of Christ was a repudiation
of the transcendental view of man in
general.

3. Channing, because of a fundamental assumption
about the role of history and Christian
revelation in human religious progress, never
rejected a miraculously proven historical
Christianity.

4. Because of some specific beliefs concerning
the divine nature of man, the personality of
God, and the heavenly family of minds, et al.,
Channing repudiated Emerson's idea of ab-
sorption into the Over-Soul.

5. Channing's route to truth was based on the
doctrine of essential sameness.

We will see that, although Channing revoluted against
the remote, spectatorial God of the orthodox Unitarians, he
did not, like Emerson, wrench that God from the sky and im-
plant him in man and Nature. Let us now turn to the first
topic on the agenda: Channing and Nature.

As Boller asserts, the most obvious sign of being a
transcendentalist was a belief that the natural world was a
projection and symbol of the Universal Spirit.¹ Nature was
an expression, an emanation, a flowing-forth of the Divine,
and a number of interesting interrelationships existed
between God, material reality, and man. Nature and Spirit, Emerson believed, were two poles between which man was placed. Man possessed qualities of both poles; he was both Spirit and physical being. This composition was paralleled by Emerson's epistemology; Reason comprehended Spirit and the Understanding comprehended the facts of the material world.2

In a sense man was the vessel through which the material aspect of Nature attempted to return to the encompassing Spirit. From man's point of view, however, Nature served as a means of bringing to union the individual soul and the Over-Soul. Because each natural fact was a symbol of some hidden spiritual fact or moral truth, man could learn about his own soul by studying the correspondential relation between material fact and spiritual fact, i.e., by studying, in effect, the soul of Nature. Man's Understanding perceived an empirical, natural fact and passed that sensual perception to the Reason, which then perceived the intrinsic, hidden moral truth.3 Natural facts and material creation, in general, formed an intricate, organic language through which God spoke to his creatures. Nature illustrated and made clear to the human mind its innate Platonic, pre-experiential ideas. Nature was an intermediate between man's Reason (his "part and parcel" of the Over-Soul, i.e., his soul) and God. Of course, man's soul and God were one, except in man's clouded conception.
All his life Channing had a special relationship with Nature. As a boy he spent many an enthralled hour on the beach wondering at the incredible power and beauty of the crashing surf. He always felt more peaceful in Nature than among the crowded hoard of the street. Peabody indicated this feeling Channing had for Nature when she described his summers in Newport:

Dr. Channing seemed all the time to be holding a religious festival of the most joyous character in companionship with the birds and flowers, the clouds and stars, the sunsets and sunrises, the oceans and landscapes....

The question is, did Channing conceive of Nature as divine, and were there specific truths to be garnered correspondentially? Or was his relationship with Nature a simple emphasis on sentimental and emotional awe? At times Channing sounded as if he, indeed, favored the former view. In his "Likeness to God" sermon in 1828, for example, he wrote:

In proportion as we approach and resemble the mind of God, we are brought into harmony with the creation; for in that proportion we possess the principles from which the universe sprung; we carry within ourselves the perfections of which its beauty, magnificence, order, benevolent adaptations, and boundless purposes are the results and manifestations. God unfolds himself in his works to a kindred mind.

Furthermore, creation was a "birth and shining forth of the Divine Mind," a work through which His Spirit breathed. He
rejoiced in "How much of God may be seen in the structure of a single leaf."\textsuperscript{7} The universe itself was a "revelation of an omnipotent mind," and God delighted to "diffuse himself everywhere."\textsuperscript{8}

These quotations have a definite transcendental ring; they arise, however, from different intellectual assumptions. Channing is not speaking about reading specific moral truths from specific natural facts. His strong rational streak dominated, and when he spoke about learning from Nature, he meant learning about the laws that describe the precision, order, and unity of the universe à la Newton. When Channing said that the lifeless unconscious masses of Nature were created to instruct intelligent beings, he was speaking in a very rational, empirical sense.

Thus, Channing did not accept the fluxional, organic, ever-changing and upward-striving world of the transcendentalists. The truth of this statement is validated by Channing's lifelong assertion that the Christian miracles were an essential proof of that religion. Man could not develop his highest faculties simply by observing Nature. Nature could only hint at some of the deeper spiritual laws. The concept of immortality Channing used as an example of a spiritual fact to whose truth Nature could only lend hope:

And as to the doctrine of Immortality, the order of the natural world had little tendency to teach...with clearness and energy.\textsuperscript{9}
The miracles of Jesus were needed to prove that immortality was a spiritual reality. Nature was fixed and describable by mechanical laws; only a radical alteration of the regular order could stun man to spiritual apprehension:

A fixed order of nature, though a proof of the One God to reflecting and enlarged understandings, has yet a tendency to hide Him from men in general... As the human mind is constituted, what is regular and of constant occurrence excites it feebly...

Further proof that Channing's transcendental-sounding relationship with Nature was really sentimental and emotional is found in the fact that Channing always insisted that "Divine wisdom is not shut up within any book." Nature was always secondary not only to revelation but to the human soul as a source of a religious truth. God's infinity was imaged in the soul. Remember that "God has a nobler work than the outward Creation, even the spirit within yourselves."

Unlike the transcendentalists, Channing could never unequivocally assert that Nature was divine or ideal; the idea was interesting, even noble, but without proof the assertion could not be safely assented to. As late as 1835, seven years before his death, Channing wrote to Lucy Aikin that he had just begun to think that there might be "more wisdom in these affections (that we felt in nature) than in much which passes for philosophy." He did not believe this wholeheartedly;
the idea might be true. In his posthumous "Treatise on Man," Channing expressly denied the doctrine of immanence. He wrote:

According to these views, matter which seems to some the only reality vanishes, and nothing is left us in the outward world but the infinitely diversified agency of the creator. Matter and God become one...But I attach no importance to speculations of this character. The essences of things are hidden from us in darkness yet impenetrable. Of matter we know nothing beyond a few relations. 14

Clearly, Channing's views of Nature, contrary to what many have said, were not akin to those of the transcendentalists. The Lockeanism he had grown up with, and the wide range of deistic authors that he had read while at Richmond and in college, still held a powerful sway over his mind. Channing's ideas about the relations between Nature and religious truth were very much like those of the deists and, in fact, he had been accused of being a deist more than once in his career. As in so many other areas of life, Channing was willing to speculate about the Nature of things, but truth was not to be achieved without proof.

Channing was not a deist, however, because he believed in the importance of revelation in bringing man to God. Revelation came first; the products of analysis of the natural world used by the deists merely confirmed what was already known to be true. The transcendental qualities of his statements about Nature sprang from Channing's own
sentimental nature and his emotional feelings when in that milieu. Nature led him to God not because a moral truth lay under every rock, but because its incredible intricacy, beauty, and harmony reminded him of his closely held, and closely felt, heavenly Father, a personal being he increasingly felt he had direct access to through his soul. Channing reverenced Nature because he felt peaceful and relaxed there. Nature invoked in him calm and noble emotions.

In 1839, three years before his death, Channing wrote to Aikin a passage that described the character of his relationship with Nature:

I almost wonder at myself when I think of the pleasures which the dawn gives me, after having witnessed it so many years. This blessed light of heaven, how clear it is to me! And this earth which I have trodden so long, with what affection I look at it! I have but a moment ago cast my eyes over the lawn in front of my house, and the sight of it gemmed with dew, and heightened by its brilliancy the shadow of the trees which fall on it, awakened emotions perhaps more vivid than I experienced in youth.15

Channing's essentially mystical nature undoubtedly pushed him to rather exalted views of Nature. As shown, however, he did not consider that Nature divine in the transcendent sense. God had constructed Nature in accordance with grand principles of regularity and precision, but specific, practical moral truths were not to be found. God was above, not behind, Nature. He was not immanent.
But immanence in Nature was secondary to immanence in man for the transcendentalists. Could Channing have denied Nature's divinity yet supported that notion in man? The answer, we shall see, is ultimately "no." Channing believed man had a divine nature, but he used the word "divine" in a sense different from the transcendentalists. The key was his doctrine of essential sameness, mentioned earlier, which we will examine in greater detail later. For now, let us turn to Channing's conception of Jesus.

If man's soul was "part and parcel" of the Over-Soul, then man, for the transcendentalists, possessed a dual nature. He was in effect part corporeal and part divine. Man was a union of God and man. This rigid dualism in transcendentalism was a central fact and manifested itself in their dualistic epistemological stance; the Understanding dealt with man the material body, and the Reason with man the divinity.

The transcendentalists never, however, specifically described the nature of this divine-man union. The only description of the nature of this union was indirectly found in their idea of correspondence, whereby the Reason and Understanding worked together toward the goal of releasing man's soul to the Over-Soul.

Whatever the exact nature of the union between God and man within the human being, the transcendental notion is applicable to the traditional Calvinistic conception of
Christ as a combination of God and man bound together by the mystery of the hypostatic union, because the transcendental conception of all men is, in a sense, a return to this idea. Furthermore, the doctrine of the incarnation, in which God became man, is also applicable in conjunction with the hypostatic union and transcendental God-man union.

In this context the goal is to compare Channing's conception of the essential nature and character of Jesus to the transcendental conception of man in general. The comparison is based on the fact that the transcendentalists thought all men were potentially equivalent to Christ in moral power, character, love of God, and the ability to perform miracles. 16

Christ, Emerson believed, had been the only man in the history of the world who had ever realized the full spiritual dignity of man. 17 Jesus had overcome the Understanding's tendency to cloud and distort the power and clearness of the intuitive Reason. Jesus, by opening himself to the call of Reason, had participated directly in the Godhead. He had been a corporeal man on earth who, in a special sense, was at the same time God because he had experienced immersion in the Over-Soul. Emerson described the essential idea of the potential Christ in each man in his journal in 1832:

The truth of truth consists in this, that it is self-evident, self-subsistent...You must be humble because Christ says 'Be humble.' 'But why must I
obey Christ?" "Because God sent him?" 'But how
do I know God sent him?" 'Because your own heart
teaches the same thing he taught.' 'Why then
shall I not go to my heart at first?' 18

With these ideas in mind, let us now look at the evidence to
support the assertion that because Channing rejected the possi-
bility of a union of God and man in Jesus, he rejected a
similar union in man in general.

One fundamental aspect of thought pervading Channing's
religious conceptions is his theory of personality. He be-
lieved that God, Jesus, and the individual man each had a
distinct, internally consistent, and unified personality.
The original impetus to Channing's robust personalism was
his intense revulsion against the Calvinistic doctrine of the
Trinity. Channing believed that doctrine to be not only
unscriptural but irrational. Most important, however, was
Channing's belief that the Trinitarian view of God, by
spreading devotion among what, in effect, were "three Gods,"
failed to emphasize that there was only "one being, one mind,
one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom unde-
rived and infinite perfection and dominion belong." 19 Belief in
the Trinity was really just pagan polytheism. The result was a
destruction of pious worship of the One.

Not only did the non-personalistic Trinitarian con-
ception divert worship from its proper end, but it also made
that proper end unintelligible. Trinitarianism was so
irrational that it made clear conceptions of God impossible.
These inherent contradictions were impossible because God was an "infinitely wise" teacher, and such a teacher would teach men not by filling "them with apparent contradictions... [nor] filling them with sceptical distrust of their own powers," but rather by "bringing down truth to [man's] apprehension...[and] showing its loveliness and harmony."^20

Directly from his complaints against the doctrine of the Trinity stemmed Channing's complaints against any belief in the dual nature of Christ. Channing expressly denied the transcendental notion that any kind of union of God and man in the same being was possible. His declaration is worth quoting in extenso:

We complain of the doctrine of the Trinity, that, not being satisfied with making God three beings, it makes Jesus Christ two beings, and thus introduces infinite confusion into our conception of his character...According to this doctrine, Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one conscious, intelligent principle, whom we can understand, consists of two souls, two minds; the one divine, the other human; the one weak, the other almighty; the one ignorant, the other omniscient. Now we maintain that this is to make Christ two beings. To denominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose him made up of two minds, infinitely different from each other, is to abuse and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these minds in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its own perceptions. They have, in fact, no common properties...The doctrine that one and the same person should have two consciousnesses, two wills, two souls, infinitely different from each other, this we think an enormous tax on human credulity.^21
With the notion of Christ's dualistic nature dispelled, Channing stated his conception: "We believe, then, that Christ is one mind, one being, and, I add, a being distinct from the one God." 22

Thus, Channing repudiated the mystery of the hypostatic union. 23 Christ could not approach God within because God was not within. Christ was a man who had developed, through moral effort and intense struggle, the perfection to which all human beings could and must aspire. The savior of the human race was a member of the human race. Christ's humanity turned perfect was the basis of hope for all men.

One apparent contradiction now arises: If Channing did not believe that Jesus was part God, and the transcendentalists did, why, in Channing's scheme, was the position and importance of Jesus exalted far above mankind, and in the transcendental scheme, Jesus' stature and role greatly diminished? How could a Jesus that was, in part, God be less important than a Jesus that was just a perfect human?

The answer is not to be found in a direct comparison of the two conceptions of Christ, but rather in a comparison of the differing conceptions of man's nature. The fairly obviously conclusion is that the transcendental conception of Christ was lower only in comparison to their exalted conception of man. Christ was less important relative to man because all men were potential Christs. Channing did
exalt man's position in creation, but because neither
Christ nor men were part of God, Christ must be raised far
above man because he had achieved human perfection. Christ
had achieved perfect development of what Channing conceived
to be the universal divine principle in all men—that they
were God-like. Man had a nature "kindred" to God's,
and Christ had perfected that nature. 24

In Christology, however, Channing was not Humani-
tarian but Arian. Christ was not simply a man; he had
existed before coming into the world. 25 Lest one think this
fact lessens the argument above, consider Channing's view on
the doctrine of incarnation; he denied it. The doctrine re-
inded him "or the mythology of the rudest pagans," and
Patterson described Channing's argument against the doctrine
of incarnation as "the most powerful which has ever been
delivered." 26

Channing's denial is logically consistent with his
denial that Jesus was part man and part God, and his Arianism,
therefore, is a further argument against the transcendental
belief that all men were potential Christs. He believed that,
"Jesus Christ existed before he came into the world...he was
known, esteemed, beloved, revered in the family of heaven."
This notion that Christ was more than a human being was for-
eign to transcendentalism, and they would have revolted
against the idea. As Frothingham wrote, "The writer of such
words was certainly not a Transcendentalist in philosophy." 27
The notion that the transcendental and Channingesque conceptions of the importance and stature of Jesus were relative to their conceptions of the status and spiritual level of mankind, brings us to the second major area of comparison useful in determining Channing's belief or disbelief in immanence: historical Christianity. Miller explains that, although the miracles question was one of the main points of contention in the series of transcendental-Unitarian debates after 1838, a more fundamental contention was the differing conceptions of the nature of man of the two parties.  

The transcendentalists had come to believe that man's soul, though hidden and unfolded, was part of God. The Unitarians, on the other hand, although rejecting the Calvinistic dogma that man's basic nature was completely fallen and horribly corrupt, still believed that man's nature was not totally good. More importantly, if one put forth the hypothesis that God, and religion in general, could be found by direct access to the divine soul, then the Unitarians must reject this notion a priori, whereas the transcendentalists could at least "test" its validity. The practical result of turning inward for the transcendentalists was that they no longer needed to turn to revelation to initially apprehend, develop, and confirm religious truths. Why bother with revelation when one could speak directly with the revealer?

The Unitarians never rejected revelation. Miraculously confirmed revelation, in fact, was their sole route to
religious knowledge. They followed Locke in using the New Testament as an empirical piece of evidence to which rational methods of proving truth could be applied. A statement by Norton exemplified the orthodox attitude toward intuitive awareness of the truths contained in the Bible: "There can be no intuition, no direct perception of the truth of Christianity, no metaphysical certainty."  

What, however, was Channing's position? Was revelation the only route to God? We know he was far from Norton's position. Channing emphasized not only revelation, but Nature and the soul, as teachers of the Divine Nature and will:

Wisdom is omnipresent. Everywhere it comes to meet us. It shines in the sun. It radiates the heavens. It whispers through all sounds of Nature. It beams resplendent from the characters of good and wise men, and more brightly still in our own souls. Our teachers are thus all around and within, above and beneath.  

The quotation sounds as if it could have come directly from Emerson, and Channing made many statements with the same character and tone. Channing seems to have relegated revelation to a very minor role. What are we to conclude?

The answer requires deeper analysis. Channing did increasingly emphasize the importance of receiving truth from Nature and especially the soul. Never did he, however, in a broad sense, place revelation below Nature and the soul.
Revelation held a special place in his thought, a place that proscribes calling him a transcendentalist on the point of his increasing emphasis on Nature and soul. His position on this matter evolved from completely different conceptions of history, the importance of miracles, and the role of Jesus in man's search for God. In sum, historical Christianity was as important to Channing as it was unimportant to Emerson.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in 1838 set the limits of debate between the two opposing tendencies of Unitarianism that had been schismatizing for a number of years. After playing the role of the pivotal schismatic in 1838, Emerson quietly withdrew from the furor he had raised, leaving Ripley and Parker to defend the transcendental polemics. Norton and Ware defended the Unitarian camp; Channing remained interested but aloof.

Emerson's fundamental assertion claimed that since each man was part of the Godhead, he could receive spiritual truth directly. Unfortunately, he said, no one seemed to realize this simple fact, and consequently revelation was seen as something that had occurred long ago and had never been heard from again:

[The] moral Nature, that Law of laws, whose revelations introduces greatness,—yea, God himself, into the open soul, is not explored as the fountain of the established teaching in society. Men have come to speak of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead.
This belief that revelation was only of ancient origin, Emerson felt, was not conducive to true spirituality, to a living sense of God in the world. Nor was one's dependence on something elucidated two-thousand years ago a secure basis for belief for religion in general. Thus, Emerson castigated the Unitarians on their Lockeian basis for belief in revelation: Christ's miracles. "To aim to convert a man by miracles," Emerson said, was a "profanation of the soul." Such a conversion was a conversion of the Understanding only, a conversion based on outward evidence and consequently not truly felt. In holding the conception of miracles and their relation to religion that they did, the Unitarians missed Christ's true message. Emerson poetically described the situation:

He [Christ] spoke of miracles; for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shinn's, as the character ascends. But the word Miracles, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.

The implications of Emerson's address were threefold: First, on the broadest level, he implied that history and historical Christianity and its revelation were totally unnecessary. Man had direct access to divine law. Secondly, on a lower level, Emerson implied that if one did accept Christian revelation as a pure expression of truth, to base
belief on Christ's miracles was primitive and failed to give one the full meaning of the revelation. One must compare revelation to one's innate conception of moral perfection to see and feel that Christianity was of divine origin. Finally, in a point that Ripley had stated in 1836, and that Parker would restate in 1841, Emerson implied that Christianity and Jesus were distinct. They did not necessarily go together. Christianity would be true even if Christ had never lived—again, because one could compare Christianity's doctrines to one's own soul. All of these ideas, Channing rejected. Beginning with the meaning of history, let us examine each question separately.

Emerson's declarations against historical Christianity resulted from a deep and pervasive trans-historicism in his thought, a trans-historicism that was inherent in Protestantism itself. According to A. Robert Caponigri, the purpose of the Reformation had been to restore the true historical Christian spirit to the ossified Roman Church. Since history is irreversible, however, the reformers were forced to recourse to some ahistorical principle in their attempt to rekindle the original Christian spirit. The search for that ahistorical principle began with the principle of private judgment.

The principle of private judgment was an important aspect of Channing's thought. He repeatedly emphasized that
man must, in the last analysis, depend on his own mind. Emerson also believed one must ultimately rely on one's own mind, but his reason for believing this was quite different from Channing's. Channing's private judgment was historical. Emerson's self-reliance was a reliance on what he believed was the trans-historical principle of infallible intuition.

Thus, in his search for true religion, Emerson caused the human mind to look not backward or forward in history, but above history. In fact, the term "transcendentalism" described not the transcendental conception of God, but their conception of how to find God, i.e., in the realm of spiritual laws that are "out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance." Intuition, then, was orientated to a trans-historical object, and was itself, according to Caponigri, a trans-historical mode of operation. Man found morality not by looking from man to man, but by looking up. Moral life had no historical dimension. Any intervening historical mediator, like Christianity, simply got in the way and hid man from his true destiny. Thus, Emerson did not look to history for validation of the soul's insights. He sought the mystical union with the trans-historical divine, a union whose fundamental precepts were so inimical to any kind of authority, creed, or doctrine.

To Channing these ideas were sheer bunk. His sermons continually stressed the importance of "looking over the whole
ground," which definitely meant looking over the past.
In "Evidences of Christianity," Channing explained that, be-
cause of the very nature of things, the past was inextri-
cably linked with the present:

We may and must know much of the past; for
the present has grown out of the past,—is its
legacy, fruit, representative, and is deeply im-
pressed with it. Events do not expire at the
moment of their occurrence.40

The importance of this linkage of past and present in human
life was clear. The past educated men for a better future.
When Channing made the following statement, he was far from
Emerson's trans-historicism:

[We] derive from it [the past] our most im-
portant knowledge. Former times are our chief
instructors. Our political as well as religious
institutions, our laws, customs, modes of think-
ing, arts of life, have come down from earlier ages,
and most of them are unintelligible without a
light borrowed from history.41

For Channing, then, ignorance of the past meant a foolish
refusal to partake in the past efforts of other souls struggling
to make sense of themselves, the world, and God. Irreverence
of the past was simply a tremendously narrow way of thinking.42

Histori a Christianity as revelation directly from
God was particularly important for Channing. Revelation, as
a mediator between man and God, far from preventing man from
coming closer to God as Emerson believed, was the necessary
first step in approaching Him. Channing held a fairly
traditional view of the role of revelation. Unlike the transcendentalists who felt God in the soul and thus knew He existed, Channing talked often about faith—faith in the Biblical doctrines. One could be sure only through faith. Eventually, we have seen, Channing would emphasize the soul as the best way to understand God and truth. But without revelation one would never be conscious of this power within. Christianity was sent from heaven to call forth and exalt human nature. God had given man a nature kindred to His own and His goal for men was for them to develop to perfection that god-like soul. Christianity declared "God's connection with the human soul," a soul framed in God's image that man might "approach him in his highest attributes."

Christianity furnished "the means to remove the films which gather over the inward eye and prevent us from seeing the revelations of Nature" and the soul. "Jesus Christ came, not only to give us his peculiar teaching, but to introduce us to the imperishable lessons which God forever furnishes in our own and all human experience, and in the laws and movements of the universe."

One important thing to note is that, for Channing, Christianity did not put forth any specific creed or dogma which a man must believe to be a Christian. Christ gave man a method and an insight into man's own soul. Channing declared that, "Christianity is a temper and a spirit rather than a
...doctrine, it is the life of God in the soul of man." Christianity freed man's mind from dogma and human formulations and gave man the unfettered ability to search for truth wherever it was to be found. Channing said:

[Christianity allows me] to escape the narrow walk of a particular church, and to live under the open sky, in the broad light, looking far and wide, seeing with my own eyes, hearing with my own ears, and following truth meekly but resolutely, however arduous or solitary be the path in which she leads.

One point must be emphasized now: none of this freedom of mind and development of the soul could occur without contact with Christianity. Nature alone was insufficient. Man, without help, was not aware of his god-like soul. One could not see the connections between Nature, the soul and God by direct intuition as Emerson claimed. The starting point was Christianity, and Channing emphasized this fact repeatedly:

In saying that the great truths of religion are shining all about and within us, I am not questioning the worth of the Christian revelation. The Christian religion concentrates the truth diffused through the universe, and pours it upon the mind with solar lustre...We cannot find language to express the worth of the illumination given through Jesus Christ.

Channing needed, at first, "a more direct, immediate, explicit testimony to the purpose of God" than Nature and the soul, "and such a witness [was] Christianity." The vast importance of the moral nature of man had justified and demanded
God's direct intervention through revelation; and He had obliged.\textsuperscript{53}

Not only did revelation introduce man to the method of approaching God, but it also imparted to man specific knowledge he would not otherwise have. The best example of this idea is found in Channing's statements about immortality. Here the dividing line between natural and revealed religion—sometimes a thin one for Channing—was wide. Without revelation, man might hope for immortality, but he could never be sure his spirit would live on. As "to the doctrine of immortality," Channing declared, "the order of the natural world had little tendency to teach this, at least with clearness and energy."\textsuperscript{54} But God had another way to teach man so that he must not "wander in doubt as to the life to come," and that way was miraculous revelations. "Miracles," Channing believed, "are the appropriate, and would seem to be the only, mode of placing beyond doubt man's future and immortal being."\textsuperscript{55}

Clearly, Channing believed history and historical Christianity to be important. He did not believe that the transcendental correspondentional Reason, or direct intuitions of the soul could, in the first instance, introduce man to true religion. But what did Channing think of the importance of miracles as proofs of Christianity, an importance Emerson downgraded? Also, did he separate Jesus from his teachings? Would revelation have been just as true had Christ never lived?
On these questions, Channing clearly differed from the transcendentalists. To address the former first, we can say that Channing never deprecated the importance of the New Testament miracles in leading to belief. He had declared in 1821 that "Christianity is not only confirmed by miracles, but is in itself, in its very essence, a miraculous religion." Later in life, as he found evidence for the divine nature of Christianity in other sources, Channing declared that he needed "miracles less now than formerly", but he added, "could I have got where I am, had not miracles entered in the past history of the world?" Further evidence for Channing's high regard for miracles is found in his reaction to Theodore Parker's "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" in 1841. "The great idea of the discourse--the immutableness of Christian truth," Channing "[responded] to entirely." He failed, however, to concur with Parker's views on the importance of the Christian miracles. In a letter to Lucy Aikin in 1841, he wrote:

I grieved that he did not give some clear, direct expression of his belief in the Christian miracles. His silence...makes me fear he does not believe them. I see not how the rejection of these can be separated from the rejection of Jesus Christ. Without them he becomes a mere fable....

The forceful statement above brings us to the second question: did Channing believe that the truths of Christianity were based on Christ's personal authority? An affirmative
answer to this question would signal that Channing did not believe that the Christian truths were all inherent in man's nature, or accessible through intuition as Parker, Ripley, and Emerson believed. And this is exactly the case. Channing protested against every attempt to sunder the Christian revelation from its revealer. Not only were "the precepts but the great doctrines bound up with Jesus," but they could not "be truly understood without him." Jesus had a "peculiar" connection with his religion and "there was no such thing as a Christianity without Christ." In the same letter to Aiken about Parker's "Transient and Permanent in Christianity" cited earlier, Channing declared his views most clearly:

Reduce Christianity to a set of abstract ideas, sever it from its teacher, and it ceases to be "the power of God unto salvation ...what I want is not the naked idea but the existence, the realization of perfection."

In a conversation with Peabody, Channing told her that he believed Christ's authority was personal, because for him moral authority implied personal authority. His most unambiguous statement about the moral authority of Christ, however, was made a year before his death in 1841. He wrote:

As to Christ's authority, there is a sense in which I think it important and reliance on it most natural and reasonable. I never met a superior mind without some degree of reliance on it. From such a mind as Christ's, I am sure I can hear
nothing but truth... If in the course of...
[studying Christ's words]... I meet anything
which seems inconsistent with any known truth
... I feel I have not reached his meaning. I
wait for further light.\textsuperscript{62}

This final passage illustrates an important point:
unlike the transcendentalists who relied on their own minds,
Channing's reliance was on the mind of Christ. When a ques-
tion between Channing's and Christ's conclusions arose,
Channing considered himself mistaken and waited "for further
light." No transcendentalist, especially Emerson, would
have emphasized, as Channing said, "the clear, bright distinc-
tive between Jesus Christ and ourselves."\textsuperscript{63}

To summarize this section on revelation, let us say
that Channing never went as far as his radical contemporaries
in emphasizing the garnering of truth from Nature and the
soul. Channing never stepped out of the Christian paradigm.
The reason is simple: he did not believe he had access to
any intuitive, transcendent, transhistorical principle. God
was not within. Certainly, he believed that the pure spirit
of historical Christianity was clouded by man-made creeds
and interpretations, but, for Channing the solution to that
problem was an impartial, rational study of the New Testament,
not reference to a transhistorical divine Reason.

Although Christianity formed the foundation of
Channing's thought, there is no doubt that in the 1820s,
Channing increasingly emphasized the soul as the most effective
route to God and truth. He was to find some importance in approaching God through Nature, but his final stance maintained that, "God is not to be found in Nature, but in our souls." As his thinking matured, Channing lay greater and greater emphasis on individual illumination. "Christians," he believed, had "yet to learn that inspiration and miracles and outward dignities are nothing compared with the soul." Most Christians had perceived God as a Being incomprehensively and inconceivably above human beings, a perception Channing viewed as a disastrous error.

Not only did Channing believe that man could learn about God through the soul, but also that man could commune directly with God in the mystical sense. As Patterson asserts, Channing had come to believe that man had univocal knowledge of God; man could not only know that God is, but also what He is. The notion that Channing believed himself to be, at times, mystically communing with God is easily supported. In his 1828 "Likeness to God," Channing described a type of experience that was unmistakably mystical:

To a man who is growing in the likeness of God, faith begins even here to change into vision. He carries within himself a proof of a Deity, which can only be understood by experience. He more than believes, he feels the Divine presence; and gradually rises to an intercourse with his Maker, to which it is not irreverent to apply the name of friendship and intimacy.
Clearly, Channing had turned inward! But, as the question of this chapter asks, to what? Was Channing turning inward to a soul that was his parcel of the encompassing Over-Soul, or was he turning to something else? We have already seen evidence on the topics of Nature, Jesus, and revelation that support a negative answer to this question. Arguments to follow will bolster this conclusion.

Before making specific counter-assertions against the conception of immanence in Channing's thought based on the character of his mystical communion with God, let us describe the character of Emerson's communion with--rather, absorption into--the Over-Soul.

Stemming directly from a belief in the immanent Divine, Emerson's mystical emphasis on Reason was an attempt to receive spiritual truth in direct and unadulterated form by immersion in the Over-Soul. The union was not simply a surface-to-surface fusion, but rather a three-dimensional cross-flow during which the portion of the Over-Soul in the individual returned to the all-pervading Divine Ambience.

To illustrate, imagine a tiny, water-filled ball suspended in the depths of the ocean. The ball originates from, and is maintained by, the ambient and enclosed water. Imagine, also, that the ball is composed of a material that somehow allows the water inside to remain in contact with the ocean outside, yet, by adding something to the water within, a process which paradoxically maintains the sphere's existence,
prevents this communication. Finally, assuming that the ball cherishes its humble spherical existence, imagine that the ball's goal is to gradually remove its contribution to the enclosed water, thereby dissolving its spherical hardness, allowing the reunion of the water within, with the all-encompassing ambience without.

Three important ideas in Emerson's thought are illustrated in this example. The first idea, we have already encountered frequently. This is the idea that the human soul is really a section or portion of Emerson's conception of God. This conception of God is the second idea: Emerson's God was a supra-personal Deity. Unlike the personal, theistic conception, Emerson conceived of God as a force, an impersonal creative energy that had no locus and was, in fact, omnipresent. God was immanent—not transcendent. The third idea illustrated above and inherent in Emerson's thought constitutes a central contradiction in his views.

This contradiction arises from the logical relationship between Emerson's emphasis on the self-reliant individual and the destruction of that individuality when immersed in the Over-Soul. Emerson's affirmed pantheism and his belief in the freedom and integrity of the individual simply are mutually exclusive. If one believes in the validity of the logical and rational modes of thinking, then undifferentiated immersion in the Over-Soul in conjunction with an emphasis on
individuality are not defensible positions within the same scheme of thought.

Here, in fact, was the point where Emerson's rational, philosophical justifications of his beliefs reached an impasse. When Emerson came to this point in the argument, he spoke of the futility of trying to use primitive verbal expression to explain a problem so sublime. The end result of this contradiction was its denial of any individual free will. Emerson would have denied this assertion, but determinism must follow any system in which an individual's best route to understanding the nature of things required his total submission to a greater will.

Now, how far along these lines did Channing's thought proceed? The answer is "very little." For one thing, he explicitly denounced such pantheism and "oriental mysticism." He especially disliked any system of philosophy or religion in which the individual counted nothing. Eastern philosophy was guilty of this charge and the result was human "submission to despotic power which has characterized the Eastern world." Channing made clear how far he felt the Oriental mysticism was from his conception of Christianity:

[Oriental philosophy] was visionary and mystical, and placed happiness in an intuition or immediate perception of God, which was to be gained by contemplation and ecstasies, by emaciation of the body, and desertion of the world. I need not tell you how infinitely removed was the practical, benevolent spirit of Christianity from this ruinous sanctity and profitless enthusiasm.
If the individual counted nothing and had no conscious free will, then man acted "only in show." Without free will, man had no moral connection with God because, in Channing's scheme, man approached God by moral effort. Thus, if the Divinity was exalted to such an extent that man was robbed of dignity, religion was subverted just as profoundly as when God was stripped of his perfection. In his "Introductory Remarks" to *Works*, Channing made a statement about pantheism that directly showed his lack of respect for Emerson's absorption into the Over-Soul:

Man, a bubble, arising out of the ocean of the universal soul, and fated soon to vanish in it again, [has] plainly no destiny to accomplish [anything] which could fill him with hope or rouse him to effort.  

Channing's dislike of Emerson's type of mystical union seems based on one principle idea: pantheism denied man a free will, and thus a motive to strive upward. And striving for ever higher moral improvement was fundamental for Channing. But what intellectual construct can explain a way of thinking that includes the idea of mystical union, learning best from the soul, continual upward striving, and free moral will? The answer is to be found in Patterson's doctrine of essential sameness. This doctrine, says Patterson, "constituted the theoretical expression of Channing's communion with God." The basic idea of essential sameness is this: Channing believed that God had given man a nature just like His own. This
nature contained all God's nature but was far less developed.

Men and God were not different qualitatively but quantitatively. Channing wrote:

The idea of God, sublime and awful as it is, is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity... God is another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection and extended to all possible truth...

Because man had a nature "kindred" to God's nature, man learned about God by studying himself. If a man believed something was moral and good, then God believed that also; thus, man knew something about God. Thus, for Channing, turning into the soul was indirectly turning inward to God. As man turned inward and learned more about his own nature, he came closer to understanding God. Man, then, should continually strive to improve his soul because that brought him closer to God. Thus, man needed the free will to make the moral decisions necessary for that improvement. Finally, as man's soul was purified, he came closer and closer to understanding and communing with God through spiritual understanding and kinship.

All of this was very different from the transcendental reasons for turning inward. Yet, the practical results were similar, simply because the souls, to which Channing and Emerson turned, were similar. But they were not the same. This is the ultimate reason why Channing has been so often
falsely called a transcendentalist. The practical effects of turning inward to a soul that was like God's were very similar to turning toward a soul that was God.

This point explains why Channing grew more transcendental-sounding as time went along. He had spent fifty years developing, purifying, and contemplating his moral nature and soul, much more so than the average human being. Thus, he must have felt that he was coming closer and closer to understanding God. His mysticism was operating within the rational Christian confines Channing had imposed on it, but the impetus upward, the impetus to greet God, was still powerful.

Channing's notion of immortality supports these assertions, and depreciates any Emersonian idea of instantaneous mystical consumption of all that is knowable. Man, Channing believed, would strive upward forever. Unlike Emerson, to Channing, personal immortality was a closely held belief. Man would live on in heaven as an individual; heaven, in fact, was nothing but a continuation of this world in which man would be rewarded with greater intellectual, moral, and sensuous powers. There would be no dissociation in the Over-Soul. Because man would only approach God, he could never be God, for God was a "creative and uncreated" intelligence. Man was forever a creature, but a creature who could improve forever.
Essential sameness and Channing's strong personalism in regard to spiritual beings went hand in hand. As described earlier, Channing believed that God, man, and all other created intelligences had a unified, cohesive, and similar personality. He used the idea of "all minds are of one family" often.\(^75\) No spiritual being was separated by too great a distance from another. Channing called it "the greatest of truths" that "all souls are one in Nature, approach one another, and have grounds and bonds of communion with one another." From God to archangels to angels to Jesus to man, minds had "the same views, the same motives, the same general ends."\(^76\)

Since all minds were of one family and all strove upward through individual moral effort, individual personalities and wills were required. There was no determinism in Channing's thought. Man as a person chose or chose not to strive upward.

Clearly, the doctrine of essential sameness prohibits naming Channing an Emersonian transcendentalist. Other evidence has also been given to show that the only immanence Channing believed in was the immanence of a "kindred nature" to God. And if Channing did not believe in an immanent Diety, then Nature supplied no correspondences, and, most importantly, intuition was not infallible. Consequently, on the objective bases described in this chapter, William Ellery Channing was far from transcendentalism.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The following section undertakes to place the concluding statements of this paper within a framework of distinctly American historical developments. Unitarianism, Channing, and Transcendentalism did not rise separately or in a vacuum. They all had a common intellectual heritage. Channing, we have seen, was not a transcendentalist in fundamental precepts. Yet, many of his beliefs and statements were very close to transcendental tenets. Looking at Channing and the transcendentalists in the broad stream of American history throws more light on the topic of this paper.

The broadest framework on which the question of the paper rests is Channing's solution to the conflict between rationalism and mysticism. Between the first generation of Puritans, William Ellery Channing's brand of Unitarianism, and Channing's transcendental heirs, the attempts to solve the conflict took not the form of attempts at unification but of one-sided emphases on the warring polarities. Religious enthusiasm and Christian rationalism held sway. Channing attempted to bring these polarities together, to combine reason with piety. His reason was directed to the destruction of Calvinist dogma; his piety to a search for a living God in the
soul. The result was a unique synthesis that flowered in a
certain wing of transcendentalism.

Two tendencies were latent in the faith of the men who founded the Plymouth Colony in 1607. O. B. Frothingham, in the first historical account of transcendentalism, describes that dual Nature of Puritanism that was to split into two streams of thought, one stream proceeding linearly and inexorably to its culmination in Unitarianism, and the other stream first in the absurdities of religious revivalism and finally as transcendentalism:

The orthodox theology, in spite of its arbitrary character and its fixed type of supernaturalism, exercised its professors severely in speculative questions, and furnished occasions for discernment and criticism which made reason all but supreme over faith. This theology too had its spiritual side—nay, it was essentially spiritual. Its root ran back to Platonism, and its flower was a mysticism which, on the intellectual side, bordered closely on Transcendentalism.1

Clearly, one side of Puritanism stressed order, social conformity, adherence to law and the sober intellect; the other side, however, could scarcely contain a piety, a religious passion and a sense of direct inward communication with God.

Thus, the Puritans had the seed of intuition in their thought. Before the Fall, Adam had had the power of an immediate, intuitive understanding of Nature and the law. Afterwards, however, man's nature became so corrupt and depraved, that the ability to know God, the law, and moral distinctions
was almost totally lost. Man still possessed the seed of intuitive awareness, but God's merciful gift of revelation now became the only real source of knowledge of Him. As Miller explains, this pietistic seed was a strong undercurrent of emotion and longing that, if unchecked, could flower into pantheism or mysticism.²

The Puritans, however, were not intuitionists. Man was depraved, his judgments colored, and that was that. The Puritans followed the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit, adopting Calvin's solution to the major danger inherent in the Reformation—that the appeal to the spirit within would cross the line between revelation and illusion and step from faith into fanaticism. The Spirit which bore witness in the soul, said Calvin, had not the ability to promulgate a new gospel, for Christ's gospel as taught in the Book was final. Rather, the witness of the Spirit authenticated Christ's teaching and convinced the soul of the divine origin, character, and meaning of the gospel.³ The line tread here was thin and when Edwards attempted to reinterpret Calvinism in a Lockean framework, the distinction broke down and Puritanism dissolved into its two components.

If the Puritans stood near but not in intuitionism, they held the same position in relation to pantheism. God had created the universe and had His hand in the workings of its most minute part. God was in and of everything, and He even altered natural events depending on the behavior of men.⁴
However, though created and sustained by God, the universe was not God Himself. Man could study the phenomena of Nature and learn of God, as Cotton Mather and the early Puritan scientists had done, but man could not simply surrender the ego to Nature and circulate and become immersed in the Infinite Being. The line was thin here also, as the Puritans were aware, and again, Edwards would be instrumental in dissolving this distinction.

By 1700 the Enlightenment was beginning to shake the foundations of Calvinism. The bold and determined men riding the crest of the wave of empiricism and rationalism had one fundamental conviction at heart: to question. The Enlightenment turned its critical, analytic, and to some, demonic eye to the study of Christianity, the universe, and man.

Assumptions that had stood for centuries were scrutinized by the cold, hard techniques of scientific empiricism. Any assertion that failed the test was to be discarded as so much dogma; any assertion that failed the criteria of empirical testability was to be relegated to the misty realm of doubt. Science alone, as Meyer discriminatively points out, did not cause men to doubt; it merely provided doubt with a method.

Science was especially adept at explaining the natural order of things. Scientific theories gradually became better and better at predicting and understanding natural events
without reference to observable human behavior or providential meaning. The sphere of providence in the natural world was gradually narrowed. The non-pantheistic, but ever-present, living, and intimately close God of Puritanism was forced to a remote and spectatorial position in the heavens. Further pushed by Locke's insistence that the human mind could have no contact with God, this trend culminated in a Unitarianism whose cold rationality the transcendentalists would one day reject.

Jonathan Edwards was not unaware of these effects of scientific rationalism upon Calvinism. Edwards was not a polemicist against science in general, however. He had entered Yale College at age thirteen in 1716 and had gradually become convinced of the veracity of the thought of Newton and Locke. He became a rationalist as far as his Puritanism would allow. Not only did Edwards accept the truth in both science and religion; he also saw the fundamental conflict between the two. To Edwards, "It was not because Newtonian science denied religion that it was dangerous; it was because it rendered religion unnecessary." As time passed and Edwards became a prominent preacher, he felt compelled to reply to the growing scientific rationalism toward which Chauncy and Harvard were tending in religious matters. His goal became the reconstruction of Calvinism on the basis of Newton and Locke—to show that the new science supported the old religion.
The solution for Edwards was to bring God from his remote heavenly position back into man's life. He emphasized the pietistic, mystical, and pantheistic elements inherent in Puritanism. God, said Edwards, did not merely create the universe and then retire to his throne to watch the expanding panorama. God created the world, rather, "by a diffusion Himself into time and space." God alone was substance, and all else was derived from Him.  

Thus, Edwards did not deny that Newton's laws described the universe. They did; but they were not the universe itself. The universe could be described mechanically but was not mechanical.  As with Berkeley and Johnson, Edwards was able to combine the regularity of the Newtonian universe with the sense of Divine immanence in the Calvinist world only by idealizing matter. The world had become, in effect, an idea in the mind of God.  

One qualification must be made at this point. Edwards would have utterly denied that pantheism and mysticism were inherent in his thought. He was conscious of the need to retain the idea of God's transcendence above material reality. He knew that if the substance of man and Nature were diffused in God, then man was divine and must merely heed callings of the Over-Soul. This contradicted orthodox theology which taught that man was evil and Nature and God distinct. Thus, Edwards forced into his system every available argument against equating God with Nature or the inward experience with
direct communion. Thus, Edwards bounded the throbbing spirit
he had injected into Calvinism with arguments that pushed
Calvinist theology to its limits. 14

To make God immanent again, however, was only a pre-
liminary step. Scripture was God's main communication with
man, but another route was necessary. Edward's special em-
phasis on the doctrine of typology satisfied this need. This
doctrine resembled Emerson's doctrine of correspondence. As
Edwards described it:

It is very fit and becoming to God, who is infin-
ity wise, so to order things that there should be
a voice of His in His works, instructing those that
behold them and painting forth and shewing (sic) divine
mysteries and things more immediately appertaining
to Himself and His spiritual kingdom. The works of
God are but a kind of voice or language of God to
instruct beings in things pertaining to Himself.15

The doctrine of typology explained natural phenomena
that were scientifically inexplicable. Most importantly, how-
ever, as Flower says, typology allowed communication with God:

[The] doctrine of typology was designed to re-
store that direct and immediate intercourse between
God and man which had existed when God spoke to man
through the whirlwind and the lightning bolt. Only
by interpreting nature as God's word and by finding
in its very order and regularity a divine message
could the universe be kept redolent with spiri-
tual life.16

Clearly, Jonathan Edwards, a man of rationalism and
mysticism, had a powerful effect on New England religion.
Edwards' was a great intellect, and his life and thought can
be understood as a struggle to maintain a balance between emotion and logic and between piety and intellect. Edwards was a religious mystic with a systematic and logical mind. His synthesis of "head" and "heart" was a noble effort and had some influence on Channing through Samuel Hopkins.

Of course, Edwards' attempt to enclose essentially pantheistic and mystical doctrines in the rationally creaky system of Calvinism could not last. His doctrine of supernatural knowledge and illumination was misconstrued. Edwards did not believe that direct illumination was an awareness of new truths, for that would be creating new scripture. Illumination, for Edwards in the typical Calvinist sense, merely made plain the truth of Scriptural doctrine. Unfortunately, his followers did not always adhere to his warnings and, thus, his ideas and sermons helped spawn the Great Awakening, a movement which Edwards essentially applauded but whose excesses he denounced. The Great Awakening was the end of the long-shaky Puritan synthesis, and to that great ferment and its aftermath we now turn.

The Great Awakening was a rather noisy expression of Puritan piety untrammeled by logical or rational restraints. The upheaval was a reaction to the effects of Enlightenment thinking which had begun to force Puritanism into a rational mold. For many years, the declining number of conversions in New England had been apparent; the faith seemed to be dying. In response, Edwards and others had developed the jeremiad to
frighten people into the acceptance of God. The jeremiad, however, succeeded only in laying the groundwork for the excess emotionalism of "preachers" like George Whitefield and James Davenport. By 1745 every colony in America had been swept by the sirocco of religious fervor, an orgy of writhing, screaming bodies and frothing confessions.

The effect on New England religion was simply devastating. The Puritan synthesis exploded into its component parts. Three great parties precipitated: the New Lights, who followed Edwards and Hopkins in interpreting the Enlightenment in terms of Calvinism; the Old Lights, who still vainly resisted the whole Enlightenment; and the Rationalists who had begun to interpret Calvinism in terms of the Enlightenment, and were thereby starting down the road to Arminianism. Each group felt that its beliefs preserved, if not the letter, at least the spirit of the original Puritan "saints."

The fundamental difference between the supernatural rationalists and the orthodox New and Old Lights was not the acceptance of Enlightenment thinking per se, but conceptions of the nature of man. To the orthodox he was still a corrupt, sickly being, with no hope save through God's gift of grace. To the Rationalists, however, the Puritan covenant theology had begun to mean that all men--not just the elect--had an equal opportunity to receive God's grace, depending on the character of the life they led. The Rationalists had, in
orthodox eyes, committed the sin of accepting the Covenant of Works that Adam had with God before the Fall. 18

For the next sixty years, the rise and consolidation of the supernatural rationalists was quiet but inexorable. Between 1745 and 1805, various thinkers laid the foundation of Unitarianism and formulated many of its essential doctrines that would be so succinctly expounded in Channing's open declarations in his famous "Baltimore Sermon" in 1819. The Congregational system was instrumental in fostering the relatively smooth advance of the liberals. Under the system of independent churches, doctrine within a given church could be easily altered without changing the original church covenant or applying to superior authority. 19 By 1805, when Henry Ware, a liberal, was appointed Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard, and orthodox Calvinists like Jedediah Morse began calling for an elimination of pulpit exchange, the liberals were firmly entrenched in New England. 20

Before the narrowness of orthodox exclusionism had fallen on liberal shoulders, however, the Arminians had achieved much of their goal of rationalizing Calvinism. Assuming a fairly benevolent God and at least the tendency toward good in man, they had used Lockean rationality and Scottish moral theory as the basis for testing Calvinist dogma. Though they would not go as far as the Deists, theirs was a tendency towards Natural Religion. 21 Revealed Religion, they felt, could present doctrines above reason but not contrary to
reason. The claims of any particular religion to be of divine revelation were to be judged solely by historical evidence and logical analysis.\textsuperscript{22}

Most of the Unitarian doctrines, as mentioned, were fully developed by 1805. The liberals stressed the right of private judgment, efficacy of reason, and the essential goodness of man. They had begun to have confidence in the moral human being.\textsuperscript{23} Calvinism had begun to look like an abomination, a monstrous mish-mash of human creeds, essentially subversive to true religion. Innate depravity, predestination, infinite atonement, compulsive grace, and the doctrine of the Trinity, were all sundered from Christianity by the blade of rationalism. In all of this ambient rationalism and polemicism, a tiny, frail man of barely five feet observed, listened, and learned, and began his career as a minister. Than man, of course, was William Ellery Channing.

A brief retrospect and prospect are now necessary to place things in perspective. The aspect of Puritanism amenable to rationalism, as we have seen, verged from orthodoxy after the Great Awakening. From there, the rational tendency of Puritanism proceeded linearly within the confines of the supernatural rationalism of Arminianism and culminated in Unitarianism. The influences and precursors are direct, clear, and obvious.

But what of the other side of Puritanism—the side of intense piety and personal apprehension of God—the side
Edwards so desperately tried to fit into a Calvinism already under rational fire? No linear, historical progression of Puritan piety and tendencies toward mysticism and pantheism is apparent. Yet, to insist that the pantheism and mysticism of transcendentalism did not, in part, rise from Puritan influence is certainly wrong. What is the problem?

The answer is probably to be found in the nature of rationality and piety. Rationality, unless applied to metaphysical questions, is distinctly a concept describing dealings with physical concepts—thus, Locke's sensationalism. Piety, or the mystical experience, on the other hand, is essentially a personal, private experience, an inward phenomena, a feeling unrelated to material forms.

Making the distinction solves the problem. The rational aspect of Puritanism could be transferred materially in creedal statement, logical proof, and stated beliefs. Piety, however, could only really be transferred, if at all, by personal influence. A mystical illumination or profound feeling of God's living presence is hard to describe with a creed or any kind of written word for that matter.

Thus, Puritan piety, best expressed in Edwards in the late 1730s, was communicated by him to his parishioners. Unfortunately, most of them misunderstood, and revivalism degenerated, consequently exhausting Puritan piety in excessive emotionalism. Still, however, a place remained in the framework of Puritanism that survived rational attacks, and was in
a sense, immune to them. But this place in the framework was dormant and only the right man could exploit the latent power within, for the rational emphasis dominated.

Since Puritan piety was not capable of being materially passed along, nor of being passed along in the abstract, the pietistic expansion in New England depended on the temperament of the individual. And if Jonathan Edwards filled Puritanism with the throbbing spirit of his own mystical temperament, William Ellery Channing was to fill the culmination of supernatural rationalism known as Unitarianism, with his essentially mystical temperament. In the context of a religion perceiving itself to be fighting for its life against the influx of Enlightenment thought, this Edwardean emotional infusion produced the recklessness of the Great Awakening. In the context of a coldly rational Unitarianism, this Channingesque emotional and pious infusion, in part, produced transcendentalism.

Channing, we have seen, did not himself become a part of the movement he spawned. The parallel of Edwards is interesting, for although Edwards is usually considered to be the impetus to the Great Awakening, his thought certainly contained personal strictures against the form many of the revivals took. Edwards agreed with the core of the Great Awakening, but not the extreme fringe. Channing followed the same pattern. He agreed with the central openminded tendency of transcendentalism, but not with the extreme manifestation
of that movement as represented by Emerson. Calvinism prevented Edwards from becoming a ranting lunatic; rationalism prevented Channing from immersing himself in the encompassing Over-Soul.

One final aspect of Unitarianism especially germane to a discussion of Channing's relation to transcendentalism must be elucidated: This is the Scottish moral sense. The moral sense was a slight retreat from pure Lockeanism. Locke had denied the possibility of any Platonic innatism in the human mind, and consequently had destroyed any basis for the idea of the Protestant conscience in the Lockean mind. A new basis for conscience had to be found within Lockean epistemology, and the moral sense of the Scottish Realists filled that function admirably.

Specifically, the moral sense allowed Unitarians to have all the good points of the traditional Protestant conscience while circumventing all of its faults. The moral sense was an effective innate moral guide, yet not a source of religious principles or truths. The moral sense could perceive moral distinctions, but would never lead to antinomianism. Thus, the Unitarians were safe—so they thought—from any wild claims of intuitive knowledge of religious truths or God. The transcendentalist, however, would soon show them how unsafe they were.

The usual picture drawn of the relation between transcendentalism and Unitarianism in the transcendental annus
mirabilis portrays the transcendental divergence as essentially negative and reactionary in character. That picture is accurate—but only as far as it goes—for transcendentalism was not only a reaction to, but also a result of, Unitarianism. As Goddard points out, because rationalism forces the individual to depend solely on himself, "The rational spirit is the logical predecessor of the transcendental spirit." 25

Unitarianism had, in effect, cleared the debris of Calvinist dogma from the Puritan religion. What remained, and what the Unitarians had not exploited, was the bare, quivering spirit and soul of Puritanism. 26 Unitarianism, as the rational culmination of a moribund Calvinism, was only half of the Puritan tradition. Only an epistemological assumption prevented the other half from exploding into American life, and when that epistemological assumption was declared obsolete, the explosion rocked New England and the cry of "infidels" rang from conservative pulpits.

Unitarianism also set many of the precedents for the transcendental philosophy. The Unitarian emphasis on free-thought and open inquiry was prime. Also, the lack of any Unitarian creed, which allowed speculation within Protestant theology, could only be followed by speculation outside of the traditional boundaries of that system. 27 Finally, the Unitarian emphasis on man's essential goodness allowed the new ecstacies to experience the mystical joy of God in soul
and Nature without the groveling prostration before an un-
knowable God that Edwards' beliefs had forced him to.\textsuperscript{28}

Thus, Unitarianism was as much a stepping-stone to
the new infidelity as a barrier to be smashed. But if struc-
tural elements of Unitarianism were important in precipitat-
ing the new movement, another factor in Unitarianism was
probably even more important, and that was the thought and
life of William Ellery Channing.

That Channing directly and momentously influenced \textit{all}
of the major transcendentalists is unquestionable. Channing
was the Unitarian parallel to Jonathan Edwards. As Gray says,
"It was Channing's mission, more than any other man, to pre-
pare the New England of Jonathan Edwards to become the New
England of Emerson."\textsuperscript{29} Channing's influence was the influence
of personal contact. His most powerful influence was through
the pulpit. His sermons were preached with such moving elo-
quence and piety that his listeners felt they were in the
presence of a man communing directly with his God.

Channing's pivotal influence is stressed again and
again in the literature. According to his first biographer,
nephew William Henry Channing, Channing's sermons as a whole
were unique in New England:

\begin{quote}
In sentiment and style these sermons are origi-
nal, in the sense that they were not derived from
the atmosphere of the surrounding community or from
the leading minds with which Mr. Channing held in-
tercourse. Indeed, there was little resembling
them in the preachin' at that time prevalent in
Boston or New England.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}
Goddard described Channing’s link with the Unitarians and their cold rationality as tenuous at best. In fact, Channing was a distinct break from that cold tendency:

If Channing was a Unitarian, he was of an entirely new type; and with him—if we are to give him that name—the continuity of Unitarian development seems almost broken. Indeed, the more one studies his character and beliefs in relation to his time, the more one must feel he was scarcely a Unitarian at all, but rather the first of the transcendentalists. He had precisely what the Unitarians of his day had not—enthusiasm, a deeply spiritual character, and a liking for philosophy...all those distinctive doctrines which gave his preaching uniqueness and significance in his own day and which give him historical importance now, flowered from the transcendental elements in his beliefs.31

Thus, Channing’s influence was not so much in his philosophical or theological doctrines, but rather in his emotional, intense, pious reverence for the Supreme Being and the divinity in man. He was acutely conscious of the cold character of Boston Unitarianism, and he sought to breathe into that dry system of rational "negative" a living, trembling spirit.

Not only did Channing breathe religious fervor into Unitarianism; he was also unparalleled as the creator of a climate in Boston that was open to new ideas and truths. In fact, the story of Channing’s life is largely the story of his open spirit. Channing was instrumental in blazing the trail that the British Romantics and French Eclectics would later traverse into the minds of young Unitarians. Clarke explains that:
It was Channing who...did the most to let in new ideas, by the personal influence of his receptivity to new ideas, by his acceptance of Price, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and by his undogmatic spirituality.\textsuperscript{32}

Channing spoke with a poetic tone that appealed to the largeness, elevation and profoundness of the incipient Romanticism in the country. As mentioned earlier, Channing's influence on the likes of Emerson, Alcott, Parker, Peabody, Ripley, and Brownson was tremendous. In them, the seed he planted matured and blossomed.

Emerson, for example, became a virtual disciple of Channing and traveled into Boston almost every weekend because "Dr. Channing was preaching sublime sermons every Sunday morning in Federal St...."\textsuperscript{33} That these trips were worth the effort, Emerson enthusiastically affirmed; "We could not then spare a single word he uttered in public, not so much as the reading a lesson in Scripture or a hymn...."\textsuperscript{34} Even more conclusive, Emerson probably first came across the idea of divine immanence in Channing's "Likeness to God" sermon in 1828, in which Channing said that "God becomes a real being to us in proportion as His own nature is unfolded within us."\textsuperscript{35}

Emerson was not the only future transcendentalist to be heavily influenced by Channing. Although in time Alcott was to have misgivings, his first impressions of Channing fairly glowed. The first time he heard Channing speak, he wrote in his journal that he had received "an introductory
course to immortality." As his experience with Channing grew, Alcott added, "His mind is a remarkable one. It soars high. It leaves the region of material vision and seeks affinity with the objects and essences of spiritual forms." 35

Channing also had a telling influence on the unpredictable Orestes Brownson. In 1828, Brownson was just emerging from the infidelity phase of his tumultuous religious career when a friend read to him Channing’s “Likeness to God.” As Arthur Brown says, “Channing’s affirmation of the potential divinity in man, which Brownson later called the most remarkable utterance” since the Sermon on the Mount, “cured Brownson’s doubts and converted him to Unitarianism...” 36

Channing had a similar effect on Ripley, Parker, and especially, Peabody, and as all of these transcendentalists pledged their spiritual allegiance to him, Channing never withdrew his fundamental support for their basic aim. They all thought very much alike, realized this, and never forgot that fact—even when their conclusions on specific issues differed. Channing, however, was the initiator, and although the transcendentalists went far beyond what Channing considered safe ground, they never forgot their spiritual precursor. Without doubt, had Channing never lived, transcendentalism would certainly have taken a much different form in New England in the late 1830s.
Like Edwards, however, Channing believed the transcendentalists had gone too far. He despaired that they had drifted so far from the stream of historical Christianity. Their diffidence toward the historical miracles, their de-emphasis of Christ's role, and their dependence on infallible intuition—which he feared was simply an "ego-theism"—he never understood. He had been instrumental in bringing about the transcendental revolt, yet he grew back. Why?

Channing's secure paradigmatic basis in historical Christianity allowed him to see the dangers of relativism and antinomianism in religious thinking. He had had his own experiences with a disordered, relativistic mode of cognition while in Richmond. Channing simply realized that self-subservience to one's mystico-emotional impulses was dangerous not only to oneself, but society and true religion as well. He saw much nobleness in transcendentalism, but he saw the danger too.

Unfortunately, Channing's personal synthesis of reason and emotion did not last. The problem lay in the fact that his solution to the problem of the "head" and the "heart" was intimately tied up with his own personality and constitution. His specific synthesis suited him and him alone. He realized that each tendency must constrain the other. And as Edward's mysticism had been constrained by the ancient doctrines of Calvinism, Channing's mysticism was constrained by his rationalism expressed as Unitarianism. He may have
realized that Edwards' followers had ignored the constraints on direct apprehension imposed by Edwards on himself, and desired not to have a repetition of any such phenomena. As we have seen, Channing knew the dangers and quite possibly wanted to insure that he didn't start a little revival of his own. In a sense, however, he failed, for it would not be going too far to assert that transcendentalism in America was, in part, Channing's "revival."
NOTES

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8Peabody, p. 366.

9Rice, p. 198.

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28 Wright, Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing-Emerson-Parker, p. 35.

29 Dirks, pp. 16-17.

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32 Dirks, p. 11.

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3 Patterson, From Forward.
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32 Mendelsohn, p. 191.

33 Barbour, p. 169.

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36 Patterson, p. 100.


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10 Channing, Works (1884), p. 197.


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16 Flower, p. 425.

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33Wright, Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing-Emerson-Parker, p. 100.

34Wright, Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing-Emerson-Parker, p. 99.

35Wright, Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing-Emerson-Parker, p. 97.


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53. Patterson, p. 198.


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76 Channing, Works (1888), p. 313.

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5 Miller, "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," p. 597.


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