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PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS AT HARVARD COLLEGE, 1817–1837

EDGELEY WOODMAN TODD

MUCH has been written about German and Oriental philosophies and their relation to the transcendental thought which developed in New England during the first half of the nineteenth century. No attempt, however, has been made to study the philosophical curriculum of Harvard College between the dates of Emerson's matriculation in 1817 and of Thoreau's graduation in 1837, with a view of suggesting its importance to the beginning of the Transcendental Movement. Yet such an examination of philosophical instruction at Harvard during these years may serve to suggest probable influences upon the formation of Transcendental thought, and also to indicate something of the intellectual milieu out of which Transcendentalism grew.[1]

I

The chief obstacle to a study of the teaching of philosophy at Harvard is the lack of any adequately detailed printed account of the curriculum for the early nineteenth century. This makes necessary an attempt to reconstruct that portion with which we are interested.[2] The best primary source of information, though far from satisfactory, is the series of annual catalogs which Harvard College began to publish in

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1 The scope of this essay prevents any study of the actual influence of the philosophical curriculum upon the writings of Harvard graduates. This influence is discussed in two articles now in preparation, one by Mr. Merrell R. Davis on Emerson, and the other by Mr. Joseph J. Kwiat on Thoreau. The writer acknowledges indebtedness to Professor Leon Howard of Northwestern University for valuable suggestions.

2 Benjamin Rand, "Philosophical Instruction in Harvard University from 1636 to 1900," *The Harvard Graduates Magazine* (Boston, 1928–1929), XXXVII, Numbers 145, 146, and 147, gives a brief outline of the pattern of instruction, but does not attempt to describe in detail any particular section of it.

1819. With certain unfortunate omissions, these indicate the basic pattern of the curriculum during the twenty-year period between 1817 and 1837.[3] The College provided instruction in the following branches of philosophy: (1) intellectual philosophy (*i.e.,* the philosophy of the human mind), (2) moral and political philosophy, (3) religion and natural theology, (4) logic, and (5) natural philosophy.

In intellectual philosophy, irregular use was made of Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* from 1818 on.[4] It first appeared in the catalog for 1820–21, was not mentioned in 1825–26, but reappeared in 1833–34, remaining until 1836–37. A feature of the course was indicated by an announcement printed in the catalog:

> A written analysis required of the student, and a commentary of the instructor, exhibiting the opinions of other philosophers on controverted questions.

This device would be useful in encouraging students to make a comparative study of philosophical points of view and is suggestive for the bearing it may possibly have had upon the weighing of philosophical opinions in the mind of such a student as Emerson.

Between 1820 and 1837, intellectual philosophy was taught also from Dugald Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind,*[5] a work representing the Scottish school of "common sense," of which Thomas Reid was the founder. Scottish intellectual philosophy was represented further by Thomas Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind,* published in four volumes at Edinburgh in 1820; it first

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[3] These catalogs are supplemented for the purposes of this essay by a "Circular Letter relating to Harvard University" (hereinafter, "Circular Letter"), in the *North American Review,* VI (March, 1818), 422 ff., which advertises the courses of instruction for the forthcoming year. This notice establishes the earliest documentation for the use of several of the textbooks here enumerated.

[4] "Circular Letter."

[5] Three volumes: London, 1792; Edinburgh, 1814; London, 1827.

appeared in the curriculum in 1825–26 and remained until 1833, when it was replaced by Locke's *Essay*. In 1827 appeared the same work abridged by a Harvard professor, Levi Hedge.[6] This edition was added to the curriculum by 1830–31 at the latest;[7] that it may have been introduced as early as 1827 is entirely possible, for Hedge in preparing the edition probably had in mind its use at Harvard, and its publication in 1827 would have made this possible by that date.

In moral philosophy, the standard work between 1817 and 1837 was William Paley's *Moral and Political Philosophy*, published in England in 1785. By 1830–31 an additional course called "Moral Philosophy and Natural Theology," was using as a textbook Thomas Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, the second and third books of which bear the titles *Of Ethical and Political Science* and *Natural Theology*.

The religious branch of the philosophical instruction was represented by Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, published in England in 1794, and by Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, London, 1736. Paley's *Evidences*, like his *Moral Philosophy*, was used continuously between 1817 and 1837. Butler's *Analogy* was in use by at least 1818,[8] and it was still being used in 1836–37. These texts were supplemented by the third book, *Natural Theology*, of Hedge's edition of Brown's *Lectures*.

In logic, the textbook for many years was Levi Hedge's *Elements of Logick*,[9] published at Cambridge in 1816 and written while Hedge was professor of this subject. As an elementary textbook, it was considered by the author to be

[6] *A Treatise on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, being the lectures of the late Thomas Brown, M. D. . . . abridged and distributed according to the natural divisions of the subject* (Cambridge, 1827; hereinafter, "Brown, *Treatise*").

[7] The catalog for 1830–1831 contains the first mention of Hedge's edition. Between 1827 and 1830, the courses of instruction are not listed.

[8] "Circular Letter."

[9] A contemporary review of this book appears in the *North American Review*, IV, 78–79 (1817).

"better accommodated to the present improved state of the philosophy of the mind,"[10] and it is reported as his judgment that his students, in learning it, could do no "better than to employ the precise words of the learned author."[11] Hedge's book continued in use as a textbook until 1833, when it was replaced by Whately's *Elements of Logic,* published in London in 1826 and in Boston in 1832, the latter edition probably being the one used at Harvard.

Natural philosophy was taught from William Enfield's *Institutes of Natural Philosophy,*[12] published in London in 1785, which was in use by at least 1817.[13] Because the catalog does not list the courses of instruction for the following year, it is uncertain how long Enfield continued to be used. Natural philosophy was taught, in addition, from William Smellie's *Philosophy of Natural History,* published in two volumes in Edinburgh, 1790–99, which students in 1825–26 could study in place of Stewart and Brown in intellectual philosophy. The catalog for 1830–31 specified the use of an American edition of Smellie published in 1824 and edited by John Ware.

The above-mentioned textbooks were, so far as the catalogs reveal, the source for whatever philosophical instruction was received by Harvard students at this time. Possibly, however, one other book was used during part of 1836 and after. This was John Mason Good's *The Book of Nature,* published

10 *Elements of Logick,* iv.

11 S. A. Eliot, *A History of Cambridge, Mass., 1630–1913* (Cambridge, 1913), 113.

12 Boston editions appeared in 1802, 1820, 1824, and 1832.

13 "Circular Letter." That Enfield was used in 1817 is evident from the fact that its use in 1818 by senior sophisters was a continuation from the junior year.

A letter by Ralph Waldo Emerson to William Emerson, June 20, 1819, indicates that Enfield was used in 1819 by a select group of students: "Mr. [George Barrell] Emerson has told our class to furnish ourselves with Enfield tomorrow when we shall finish Legendre—What think you? Sophomore class such a fine one that they have Enfield put into their hands two terms sooner than other classes. . . ." Ralph L. Rusk, editor, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, 1939), I, 84–85.

in three volumes in London and in two volumes in Boston in 1826, and mentioned by Samuel F. Smith as being "among English studies" which included Smellie, Stewart, and Brown.[14] "All these special studies," he explained, "were omitted by the lower sections of the class"; and, he added, "there was little teaching outside of the books from which we recited,"[15] an item of information suggesting that those enumerated above were supplemented by few, if any, additional texts.

II

The philosophies represented by the textbooks of the Harvard curriculum were all current in the British Isles during the late eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth. It is a significant fact that nowhere in the curriculum is there to be found any trace of the German philosophy identified with Kant and others which gained popularity in England at the turn of the century and which was also to gain acceptance in America. Harvard, at least, was still oblivious to German transcendentalism, repeatedly cited as being important to the genesis of transcendentalism in New England. The philosophy which Harvard did know, however, was not of a uniform nature, in spite of its common geographical origin; for in metaphysics two divergent streams are found: English empiricism systematized by Locke, and the natural realism or "common sense" Scottish philosophy, originating with Thomas Reid.[16] Thus, Harvard students in the formation of their own philosophical outlook were made acquainted

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14 Samuel F. Smith, "Recollections by the Author of 'America,'" *Harvard Graduates Magazine,* II, 6.

15 Smith, "Recollections," II, 165–166.

16 The most comprehensive study of the Scottish school is James McCosh's *The Scottish Philosophy, biographical, expository, critical, from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York, 1875). See also Torgny T. Segerstedt, *The Problem of Knowledge in Scottish Philosophy* (Lund, 1935); and A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *Scottish Philosophy, a comparison of the Scottish and German answers to Hume* (Edinburgh and London, 1885 and later.)

with two opposing tendencies in respect to the problem of knowledge.

Something of the nature of these two tendencies and the differences existing between them is suggested by two quotations. The first is a famous passage from Book II of the *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding,* in which Locke summed up his epistemological position:

> Let us suppose the mind to be . . . like white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? . . . Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from experience; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.[17]

In contrast with Locke's position, Thomas Reid—who, like Kant, had been antagonized by the skepticism which resulted from Hume's carrying the premises of Locke's *Essay* to their ultimate conclusions—postulated the existence of certain "original and natural judgments" which he sometimes spoke of as "intuitions" or "immediate beliefs" and described as being

[17] *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* (New York, 1824), Book II, Chapter I, Section 2. This quotation may be supplemented with another which states Locke's position with regard to intuition: ". . . Sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other; and this, I think, we may call *intuitive* knowledge." Book IV, Chapter II, Section 1. He cites as examples the perception that white is not black, that a circle is not a triangle; and later (Book IV, Chapter IX, Section 3) he states that the knowledge of one's own existence is intuitive. This knowledge he declares to be certain, but he speaks also of the "certainty of true knowledge" being "very short and scanty." He nowhere considers intuition a source of ideas. In all, he says, there are three degrees of knowledge: intuitive, demonstrative (application of reason), and sensitive. Sensation and reflection are alone considered as sources of ideas.

> . . . a part of that furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding. They are the inspiration of the Almighty, no less than our notions of simple apprehensions. They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, when our reasoning faculty would leave us in the dark. They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind;* and what is manifestly contrary to any of those first principles, is what we call absurd. . . . When a man suffers himself to be reasoned out of the principles of common sense, by metaphysical arguments, we may call this *metaphysical lunacy*. . . .[18]

In general it may be said that the two philosophies represented, on the one hand, a denial, and on the other, a moderate affirmation of the existence of innate ideas. The Scottish philosophers, reacting against the outcome of Locke's empiricism in the skepticism of Hume, protested also against the sharp distinction which Locke made between ideas and external objects. Reid and his followers were not to be argued out of the evidence of common sense as to the real existence of outward things. Of course, the dualistic position of Locke had not denied the reality of external objects, and indeed had a definite need for such a belief. But the Scottish philosophers held Locke's system responsible for the skeptical doubts of Hume, and they believed that it must contain a flaw in it somewhere to be able to lead to what Reid called "metaphysical lunacy."

Harvard students, as we have seen, studied Locke's system at first hand from 1818 to 1833, and the system itself is so familiar that it needs no further exposition than that given above. Reid's is less well known, and its place at Harvard is so important as to require a somewhat detailed account of its presentation in the textbooks of Dugald Stewart from 1820 to 1837 and later, and in those of Thomas Brown between 1825 and 1833.

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18 *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (*Works*, New York, 1822), I, 131–132.

According to Stewart, Reid was so successful in refuting the skeptical philosophy that "it is not likely that the controversy will ever be renewed. The rubbish now removed, and the foundation laid, it is time to begin the superstructure."[19] The attempt to begin work on this superstructure was the task that Stewart set before himself.

In describing the mind, as in describing matter, Stewart asserted that its qualities or properties implied the existence of something to which they belonged. This was straight from Reid, as Stewart admitted. While we are not immediately conscious of the existence of the mind, he said, nevertheless the fact that we are conscious of various mental operations implies "... something which feels, thinks, and wills."[20] He added:

> Every man ... is impressed with an irresistible conviction, that all these sensations, thoughts, and volitions, belong to one and the same being; to that being which he calls *himself;* a being which he is led, by the constitution of his nature, to consider as something distinct from his body, and as not liable to be impaired by the loss or mutilation of any of his organs.
>
> From these considerations, it appears, that we have the same evidence for the existence of mind that we have for the existence of body....[21]

Upon the basis of this reasoning, Stewart was led to the necessary conclusion that matter and mind were essentially different, a knowledge of the one being subject to the information of the senses and a knowledge of the latter being subject to only the evidence of consciousness. He asserted, therefore, that "Instead ... of objecting to the scheme of materialism, that its conclusions are false, it would be more accurate to

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19 *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (hereinafter, "Stewart, *Elements*"), I, 12. The edition cited is the seven-volume *Works* (Cambridge, 1829).

20 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 3.

21 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 3.

say, that its aim is unphilosophical."[22] Agreeing, consequently, that knowledge of the material world was dependent upon the information of sensory experience, he would not agree that the study of such knowledge belonged to metaphysics, preferring, instead, to refer it to physics, and insisting that "... its principles should not be blended with those of the former."[23]

It was this very confusion between what is metaphysical and what is physical, Stewart held, that had caused trouble. The study of the philosophy of the mind had been retarded by "inattention to the proper limits of philosophical inquiry," producing as a result a "strange admixture of fact and hypothesis" from the too-ready disposition "to explain intellectual and moral phenomena by the analogy of the material world."[24] While Stewart had no fundamental argument with and distrust of materialism as such, he did object to its irrelevant encroachment upon matters which he believed to be strictly foreign to it.

For a knowledge and account of the phenomenon of perception, Stewart again directed his followers to Reid, promising that there they would find "ample satisfaction."[25] Furthermore, he went along with Reid in opposition to Locke and Hume with respect to the theory of ideas as an explanation of the knowing process.[26] He found Locke's theories to be inadequate as an explanation of the question "Whether all our knowledge may be ultimately traced from our sensations?"[27] In reply, he declared

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22 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 4.

23 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 4–5.

24 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 9–10.

25 See, for example, Stewart, *Elements,* I, 47–48. It seems reasonable, although Reid's works were not specified in the Harvard catalog as textbooks, to suppose that reference to them may have been made at some time during the courses of instruction. At any rate, through Stewart, Harvard students would have been made acquainted with Reid's basic tenets, for Stewart frequently draws upon them.

26 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 69–71.

27 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 73.

That the mind cannot, without the grossest absurdity, be considered in the light of a receptacle which is gradually furnished from without, by materials introduced by the channel of the senses, nor in that of a *tabula rasa,* upon which copies or resemblances of things external are imprinted....[28]

He was convinced from what he saw of the matter "that this doctrine, which refers the origin of all our knowledge to the occasions furnished by sense, must be received with many limitations."[29] The significance of such a criticism is, of course, that besides discrediting Locke's epistemology, it suggests a definite basis for disagreement with him and for the implied conclusion that a more adequate system was needed.

Stewart found in the constitution of the human mind certain "primary truths" which he called "fundamental laws of human belief, or the primary elements of human reason."[30] A conviction of these, he said, was "necessarily implied in all our thoughts and in all our actions."[31] By so describing them, Stewart was referring to the same sort of mental phenomena to which Reid had given the name "common sense." Stewart explained what he meant in the following:

From such propositions as these, *I exist; I am the same person to-day that I was yesterday; the material world has an existence independent of my mind; the general laws of nature will continue in future to operate uniformly as in time past,* no inference can be deduced, any more than from the intuitive truths prefixed to the Elements of Euclid. Abstracted from other *data,* they are perfectly barren in themselves; nor can any possible combination of them help the mind forward, one single step, in its progress.[32]

Thus Stewart represents a continuation of the intuitive

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28 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 73.
29 Stewart, *Elements,* I, 73.
30 *Cf.* Stewart, *Elements,* II, Chapter I.
31 Stewart, *Elements,* II, 18.
32 Stewart, *Elements,* II, 40.

philosophy which was characteristic of the Scottish reaction to Hume. McCosh remarks that "Reid and Stewart nowhere profess to give a full list, or even a rigid classification, of the intuitive convictions of the mind. All they affirm is, that these principles which they have seized for the purpose of meeting the skepticism of Hume, are and must be intuitive.[33]

The philosophy of Thomas Brown, particularly as found in Hedge's abridgment of Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind,* is next in importance to Stewart. Brown's philosophy is described by McCosh as being

> a combination of the Scottish philosophy of Reid and Stewart, and of the analyses of Condillac, Destutt de Tracy, and the higher principles of the sensational school of France, together with views of the association of ideas derived from a prevailing British school. . . . He admits everywhere with them [*i.e.,* Reid and Stewart] the existence of principles of irresistible belief. . . . But acknowledging, as he does, the existence of intuitive principles, he makes no inquiry into their nature and laws and force, or the relation in which they stand to the faculties. In this respect, so far from being an advance on Reid and Stewart, he is rather a retrogression.[34]

Brown's philosophy apparently stood in high regard at Harvard, a fact suggested not only by its use in the Harvard course of study but also by the praise given to it by Hedge in the preface to his own edition of Brown:

> The lectures of Dr. Brown have been received with much favour by the community, and have found admirers in every class of readers. They contain many new and original views of the phenomena of thought, and an improved classification of the various states of mind. He analysed many of its most complicated phenomena, and detected errors which had escaped the notice of other writers on the same subjects. His system of the

33 McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy,* 306.
34 McCosh, 325.

philosophy of the mind has the merit of uncommon simplicity in its elementary principles, and of forcible and various illustration. The same remark may be extended to the statement of his views of Ethical Science, and of Natural Theology. In each of these departments of his work he has manifested an intimate acquaintance with the systems and theories of preceding writers, and an accurate discrimination in pointing out their faults.[35]

By his edition Hedge hoped to extend "the knowledge and usefulness of this valuable work." [36]

Brown followed Reid and Stewart in describing matter as being "extended, and consequently divisible, impenetrable, mobile." [37] Since it is known only through perception, it can be described only in terms of feelings known to the mind. "Whatever knowledge we may acquire of it, therefore, is relative only, and must be relative in all circumstances." [38] As our knowledge of matter is relative, he continues, so is our knowledge of the mind:

If our knowledge of matter be relative only, our knowledge of mind is equally so. . . . Of the *essence* of mind, then, we know nothing but in relation to the states of feelings that form, or have formed, our momentary consciousness. Our knowledge is not absolute but relative.

He also followed the "common sense" school in holding that the "mental phenomena" are "common to all" persons. He did not, however, agree with Reid that consciousness was a separate and distinct "power" of the mind, but rather "the whole series of states of the mind." [39] His assertion of the validity of certain intuitive beliefs included, as the principles of Reid and Stewart had done, the belief in one's identity from a series of immediate circumstances arising in one's thought

35 Brown, *Treatise,* Preface, iii.
36 Brown, *Treatise,* Preface, v.
37 Brown, *Treatise,* 54.
38 Brown, *Treatise,* 55.
39 Brown, *Treatise,* 66.

and which was, therefore, "essential to the very nature of the mind." He believed it to be evident, too, that

> ...all belief...must be either *direct* or *indirect*. It is direct, when a proposition, without regard to any former proposition expressed or understood, is admitted as soon as it is expressed in words, or as soon as it arises silently in the mind....The belief is indirect, when the force of the proposition, to which assent is given, is admitted only in consequence of the previous admission of some former proposition, with which it is felt to be intimately connected....[40]

Such principles of immediate belief were, in Brown's opinion, the basis for all knowledge; without them there could be no belief of any kind. They were the substrata of every conviction; they were as necessary for the skeptic as they were for the most dogmatic and orthodox. Before there could be any reasoning of whatsoever kind, they had to be admitted as "...a necessary part of our intellectual constitution." Furthermore, like Reid, he added to them a kind of supernatural sanction which persisted in men's minds regardless of their outward beliefs:

> These principles of intuitive belief, so necessary for our very existence, and too important, therefore, to be left to the casual discovery of reason, are, as it were, an internal, never-ceasing voice from the Creator and Preserver of our being. The reasonings of men, admitted by some, and denied by others, have over us a feeble power, which resembles the general frailty of man himself. These internal revelations from on high, however, are omnipotent like their Author. It is impossible for us to doubt them, because to disbelieve them would be to deny what our very constitution was formed to admit.[41]

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[40] Brown, *Treatise,* 77–78. Brown's classification of belief at this point bears a strong resemblance to what Locke calls intuitive and demonstrative degrees of knowledge (*Essay,* Book IV, Chapter II).

[41] Brown, *Treatise,* 78–79.

To these principles of belief Brown added the moral feelings, also to be classed among the phenomena of the mind. These immediate emotions of approbation and disapprobation, as he termed them, are developed to a greater extent in his *Ethical and Political Science,* which constitutes the third book of Hedge's edition. To the question, "How do we judge an action right or wrong?" Brown explained that the feeling of moral approbation or disapprobation was

> ... the simple emotion, as that on which alone the moral distinction is founded. The very conceptions of the rectitude, the obligation, the approvableness, are involved in the feeling of the approbation itself. It is impossible for us to have the feeling, and not have them....[42]

He stated that man was so constituted that under certain circumstances it was impossible for him not to have such feelings, and that consequently the notions of virtue, obligation, and merit followed as a matter of course. He admitted, however, that it was "vain to inquire why we feel the obligation to perform certain action" when such inquiries pertained to the mind itself; and then he added:

> Beyond it we may still inquire, and discover what we wish to find, not in our own nature but in the nature of that Supreme Benevolence which formed us.... We know, then, in this sense, why our mind has been so constituted as to have these emotions; and our inquiry leads us, as all inquiries ultimately lead us, to the provident goodness of Him by whom we were made. God, the author of all our enjoyments, has willed us to be moral beings, for he could not will us to be happy, in the noblest sense of that term, without rendering us capable of practising and admiring virtue.[43]

For the moral systems of Hobbes, Mandeville, Paley, and

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[42] Brown, *Treatise,* II, 118.
[43] Brown, *Treatise,* II, 119.

Smith, Brown had little use; nor did he look with favor upon the "moral sense" theory of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. He found fault, particularly, with the latter for their use of the term "moral sense," for it was only metaphorically, he explained, "that the original principle of our nature on which our moral emotions depend, can be called a moral sense." [44]

In his *Natural Theology,* comprising the third book of Hedge's edition of *The Treatise of the Philosophy of the Human Mind,* Brown set out to describe the relations which man, "as a created and dependent but immortal being... bears to that Supreme Being, who is the great source of all existence." [45] He portrayed the Deity in terms of His existence, unity, omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness, and described man's duties to Him. Brown declared that "There is in us an immortal spirit," [46] and he wished generally to refute the arguments of the materialists. In the cultivation of moral excellence and happiness he found man's duty to himself to lie.

Such were the ideas taught to all Harvard students in at least one course, and sometimes by repetition, from 1817 to 1837. To balance them, they had Locke for about three-fifths of the time and for the entire period William Paley's *Moral and Political Philosophy.* Paley's philosophy, of course, was primarily ethical; and in attempting to locate the source for the motivation and guidance of man's ethical conduct, he emphatically denied the validity of supposing that there was any such intuitive principle as an innate moral sense. He asserted

> ... either that there exist no such instincts as compose what is called the moral sense, or that they are not now to be distinguished from prejudices and habits; on which account they cannot be depended upon in moral reasoning; I mean that it is not

44 Brown, *Treatise,* II, 195.
45 Brown, *Treatise,* II, 293.
46 Brown, *Treatise,* II, 327.

a safe way of arguing, to assume certain principles as so many dictates, impulses, and instincts of nature, and then to draw conclusions from these principles, as to the rectitude or wrongness of actions, independent of the tendency of such actions, or of any consideration whatever.... For which reason, I suspect, that a system of morality, built upon instincts, will only find out reasons and excuses for opinions and practices already established....[47]

In place of a system of innate moral principles, Paley substituted a plan which defined virtue as " 'the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness.'... According to which definition," he explained, " ' the good of mankind' is the subject; the 'will of God,' the rule; and 'everlasting happiness,' the motive, of human virtue."[48]

Having stated that the "will of God" was the rule of conduct—which, apart from the declaration of Scripture, was to be discovered by the "light of nature," *i.e.,* "what we can discover of his designs and disposition from his works"[49]— Paley reasoned that the rightness or wrongness of an action depended upon "the tendency of that action to promote or diminish the general happiness."[50] "So then," he advised, "actions are to be estimated by their tendency. Whatever is expedient, is right. It is the utility of any moral rule alone, which constitutes the obligation of it."[51]

This statement of the utilitarian point of view is opposed to the Scottish position; thus Paley is to be considered as belonging to a different trend of thought while at the same time rejecting with Locke the theory of innate ideas as applied to morals. This is borne out further in his *A View of the Evi-*

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47 Paley, *Moral and Political Philosophy,* in his *Works* (Philadelphia, 1841; hereinafter, "Paley, *Moral Philosophy*"), 30.

48 Paley, *Moral Philosophy,* 34.

49 Paley, *Moral Philosophy,* 38.

50 Paley, *Moral Philosophy,* 39.

51 Paley, *Moral Philosophy,* 39.

dences of Christianity, philosophically of lesser importance than his *Moral and Political Philosophy.* That Paley was sympathetic to the psychology of Locke is apparent from his reference to the human mind as being one "which hath acquired all its ideas from sense and experience." [52] Likewise, he argued for an immaterialistic rather than a materialistic concept of the mind, a view arrived at in the following argument:

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact; the individuality of a mind is hardly consistent with the divisibility of an extended substance; or its volition, that is, its power of originating motion, with the inertness which cleaves to every portion of matter which our observation or our experiments can reach. These distinctions lead us to an *immaterial* principle; at least, they do this; they so negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the constitution of a sentient, still more of a rational being, that no argument drawn from these properties, can be of any great weight in opposition to other reasons, when the question respects the changes to which such a nature is capable, or the manner in which these changes are effected.[53]

As in the case of Paley's two works just examined, Bishop Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* was in use at Harvard during the entire period under consideration. Butler's purpose, like Paley's, was not philosophical so much as it was religious; in consequence, his ethical views will be the only part of the book to be examined here. His plan was to examine "what we experience to be the conduct of Nature with respect to intelligent creatures; . . . and let us compare the known constitution and course of things with what is said to be the moral system of Nature . . . and see whether they are not analogous and of a piece." [54] He affirmed the existence

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[52] Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity,* 383.

[53] Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity,* 385.

[54] Butler, *Analogy of Religion,* Introduction, liv. References are to *Works* (New York, 1850). *Cf.* similar views of Emerson in *Nature*: "Every natural process is a version of a moral sentence. The moral law lies at the centre of

of an intuitive moral principle in man, "the moral nature itself, which God has given us." [55] Virtue, he explained, consists of a regard for what is right and reasonable, and consequently, a regard for veracity, justice, and charity; for, he stated, "there is surely no such thing, as a natural regard to falsehood, injustice, cruelty." [56] These pronouncements are in line with Butler's assertion that the world is a moral and benevolent order instituted by God. For him, the government of God is a system of rewards and punishments. He explained:

> Our whole nature leads us to ascribe all moral perfection to God, and to deny all imperfection of him. And this will for ever be a practical proof of his moral character, to such as will consider what a practical proof is; because it is the voice of God speaking in us. And from hence we conclude, that virtue must be the happiness, and vice the misery, of every creature; and that regularity and order and right cannot but prevail finally in a universe under his government.[57]

"The God whom Butler worships," said Leslie Stephen, "is, in fact, the human conscience deified." It is "the oracle implanted in every man's breast." [58]

There remain for discussion several Harvard textbooks which are of only minor interest in comparison with those already considered, but which, nevertheless, deserve some attention. The first of these is Levi Hedge's *Elements of Logick,* useful to the present subject as a reflection of contemporary philosophical opinions as they touch upon logic. It has been seen already with respect to his edition of Brown that Hedge felt some loyalty to the Scottish school. In his *Logick* he wrote

nature and radiates to the circumference. It is the pith and marrow of every substance, every relation, and every process" (Section V, "Discipline").

[55] *Analogy of Religion,* 93.

[56] *Analogy of Religion,* 93.

[57] *Analogy of Religion,* Introduction, liv.

[58] Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,* I, 293-294.

that "the metaphysical writings of Locke, Reid, Stewart, and Brown . . . may be said to comprise in themselves a complete system of intellectual philosophy." [59]

The *Logick* itself is brief and makes frequent references to the Scottish philosophers, as well as to others. In his chapter "Intuitive Evidence," Hedge outlined the general "common sense" point of view, and described five "principal kinds of intuitive evidence," which are "the sources of intuitive belief." These, he explained, are "the evidence of *sense,* of *consciousness,* of *memory,* and of *axioms,* or *general principles.*" [60] If the source for this description of the kinds of intuition is not Scottish, it is, at least, not contradictory to that school of thought.[61]

Another book, of slight philosophical importance, was Enfield's *Institutes of Natural Philosophy.* A textbook of physics and astronomy, it had nothing to do with philosophical speculations, and indicated its position on the first page:

> It is unnecessary here to inquire, whether solidity necessarily supposes impenetrability. Natural Philosophy, being employed in investigating the laws of nature by experiment and observation, and in explaining the phenomena of nature by these laws, has no concern with metaphysical speculations, which are generally little more than unsuccessful efforts to extend the boundaries of human knowledge beyond the reach of the human faculties.

Of more philosophical importance is the successor to Enfield's book, Smellie's *Philosophy of Natural History.* Like Enfield, Smellie was not concerned with abstruse problems of speculative philosophy. His book, however, discussed the problem of instincts and would serve to focus the attention of Harvard students upon the subject of intuitive or innate knowledge from a somewhat different angle. He wrote:

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[59] Hedge, *Elements of Logick,* 170.

[60] *Elements of Logick,* 66.

[61] In instruction in logic there was also Whately's *Elements of Logic,* a discussion of which is omitted here because of lack of pertinence.

> Some [philosophers] have contended that all the actions of animals, of whatever kind, are founded upon experience, observation, and reasoning; whilst others maintain that they are produced by an innate and original principle, which directs and governs the animal without any voluntary exercise of judgment on its own part.
>
> The probability is, that the truth lies between these two opinions.[62]

Elsewhere he acknowledged that although man owed more to reason and less to instinct "than any other animal," he was not entirely devoid of instinct. Most of man's knowledge, Smellie explained, was the result of experience and observation and information imparted by others, and by this knowledge he was guided in his actions.[63] A "pure instinct," he added, was "independent of all instruction and experience" and would "instantaneously produce certain actions when peculiar objects are presented to animals, or when they are influenced by peculiar feelings."[64] Smellie's book would add nothing from a scientific viewpoint to substantiate a belief in a philosophical theory of innate ideas.

Somewhat more interesting for the present purpose is John Mason Good's *Book of Nature,* designed "to take a systematic, but popular, survey of the most interesting features of the general SCIENCE OF NATURE."[65] Good's range of interest and the branches of knowledge covered by him were extensive. Particularly interesting are his views respecting mind and matter.

> That the mind has a DISTINCT NATURE, and is a DISTINCT REALITY from the body; that it is gifted with immortality, endowed with reasoning faculties, and capacified for a state of separate existence after the death of the corporeal frame to which it is at-

62 Smellie, *Philosophy of Natural History,* John Ware, editor (Boston, 1832; hereinafter, "Smellie"), 109.

63 *Cf.* Smellie, 109–110.

64 Smellie, 111.

65 Good, *Book of Nature* (London, 1826; hereinafter, "Good"), I, v.

tached, are in my opinion propositions most clearly deducible from revelation, and in one or two points, adumbrated by a few shadowy glimpses of nature. And that it may be a substance strictly IMMATERIAL and ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT from matter, is both possible and probable; and will hereafter, perhaps, when faith is turned into vision, and conjecture into fact, be found to be the true and genuine doctrine upon the subject. . . .[66]

On the basis of a passage in Locke's *Essay,* Good wrote that until certainty in this doctrine arrived, there was still a possibility for leading man

. . . on the one hand to the proud Brahminical, or Platonic belief, that the essence of the soul is the very essence of the Deity, hereby rendered capable of division, and consequently a part of the Deity himself; or, on the other, to the gloomy regions of modern materialism, and to the cheerless doctrine that it dies and dissolves in one common grave with the body.[67]

When it came to a description of the human understanding and he had to account for the origins of knowledge, Good wholeheartedly declared his preference for Locke, to an exposition of whose system—after a rapid survey of others—he devoted a full chapter.[68] He also gave a chapter[69] to a discussion of the "Hypothesis of Common Sense," and represented the opinions of philosophers ranging on both sides of the question. In the end he concluded that he had "no ambition to soar into the higher rank and the infallible knowledge of an instinctive creature," preferring to content himself

. . . with the humbler character of a rational and intelligent being, still steadily steering by the lowly but sober lamps of a Bacon, a Newton, a Locke, a Butler, a Price, and a Paley, instead of

66 Good, II, 161.
67 Good, II, 162. The passage in Locke is Book IV, Chapter III, Section 6.
68 Good, II, 197–233.
69 Good, II, 260–288.

being captivated by the beautiful and brilliant, but vacillating and illusive, coruscations of these northern lights.[70]

III

The above résumé of philosophical studies at Harvard shows the predominance of Scottish philosophy. That Harvard should be an important center for the dissemination of Scottish thought is in itself not surprising; for Scottish philosophy was, in fact, much in vogue at the time in the eastern universities.[71]

The administrators of Harvard College were compelled for a number of reasons to teach a religious and philosophical orthodoxy. Aside from the important consideration of their own intellectual and religious conscience, buttressed by distrust for skepticism and materialism, they had also to take into account the restricting provisions of certain endowed chairs of philosophy and religion. One of these chairs had been established in February, 1789, by the executors of the will of John Alford, who had died in September, 1761; but not until 1817, when sufficient funds had accumulated, was the first appointment made.

This will made detailed stipulations for philosophical intruction, and determined to a marked degree the course it was to follow. Provision was made for

> . . . a Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity, in the said College for ever, whose principal duty it shall be, by lectures and private instruction, to demonstrate the existence of a Deity or First Cause, to prove and illustrate his essen-

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[70] Good, II, 288. Note, however, that his choice was apparently geographical rather than systematic, for Butler and Price were in some respects philosophically closer to the "northern lights" than to Locke.

[71] "Professing as it did to stand as the champion of religion and morality against scepticism and materialism, it was naturally in better odor in academic circles, and for the time being it had an advantage also in the comparative talents of its defenders." Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *English and American Philosophy Since 1800* (New York, 1922), 2–3.

tial attributes, both natural and moral, to evince and explain his providence and government, together with the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments; also to deduce and enforce the obligations which man is under to his Maker, and the duties which he owes him, resulting from the perfections of the Deity, and from his own rational nature; together with the most important duties of social life, resulting from the several relations which men mutually bear to each other; and likewise the several duties which respect ourselves, found not only in our own interest, but also in the will of God; interspersing the whole with remarks, showing the coincidence between the doctrines of Revelation and the dictates of reason, in these important points; and lastly, notwithstanding this coincidence, to state the absolute necessity and vast utility of a Divine revelation.[72]

The Alford will further stipulated that

The said Professor shall read his lectures on Natural Religion to all the four classes of undergraduates; those on Moral Philosophy, to the two Senior classes; and those on Civil Polity to the Senior class only; provided nevertheless, that the officers of the College, and resident graduates, as likewise such other gentlemen as the Corporation shall permit, shall have a right to attend all or any of the lectures aforementioned.[73]

Not only had the appointed professor to teach according to these stipulations, but he had also to "profess and declare himself to be of the Protestant Reformed Religion, and a member of a Protestant church, and . . . promise to discharge with diligence and fidelity, the sacred trust aforesaid reposed in him. . . ." [74]

Such provisions, it is clear, would have prevented the teaching of an unorthodox philosophical and religious doctrine. Strict adherence to the will in the selection of the

[72] Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University* (Boston, 1860), II, 502.

[73] Quincy, II, 503.

[74] Quincy, II, 504.

Alford Professor and the kind of philosophy which he was to teach would have created at Harvard a condition favoring the acceptance not only of a philosophy whose purpose corresponded to that of the Scottish philosophers, but one actually stressing the merits of the Scottish school—a fact borne out by the continued use of Stewart and Brown.

Aside from this acceptance of the Scottish philosophy in the curriculum, its popularity among the instructors themselves acted in its favor. That Levi Hedge, appointed in January, 1827, to succeed Levi Frisbie as the Alford Professor, thought highly of the Scottish philosophy is evidenced by his edition of Thomas Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind,* discussed above. It will be recalled that Hedge praised Brown in his preface to the work, declaring that it contained much that was original regarding the operations of the mind, that it pointed out errors in the works of earlier writers, that in its views on morals and natural theology there was much to recommend it. Hedge thought it to be especially "suitable for persons who are forming the intellectual and moral habits." Furthermore, in his own book on logic, Hedge made frequent references to the Scottish philosophers and wrote that "the metaphysical writings of Locke, Reid, Stewart, and Brown . . . may be said to comprise in themselves a complete system of intellectual philosophy." [75]

Hedge's predecessor, Levi Frisbie, was also favorably disposed to the Scottish school, as is shown in his address delivered at his inauguration as the first Alford Professor. In this he said:

> If our moral being could be left, as it came from the hands of its Creator, to the simple and wholesome viands of nature, if it breathed only the pure atmosphere of truth, it might perhaps preserve the soundness of health, and the ingenuous suffusions of virtue; but pampered, as it is, with false philosophy and factitious sentiment, the antidote should grow with the poison.

[75] *Elements of Logick,* 170.

There will always be a Hobbes, a Rousseau, or a Godwin; let us then have also our Cudworths, our Butlers, and our Stewarts.[76]

Similarly, the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, Edward Tyrrel Channing, who continued throughout thirty years to teach Harvard students the fine points of logic and writing, showed a similar preference not only for the Scottish moral and intellectual philosophy but also for the Scottish aesthetic. Richard H. Dana wrote of Channing:

Like most men, he passed through his period of metaphysical inquiry, and during that time he made careful study of the different schools, and knew well how the leading minds had treated the great problems of life. The result appears to have been a preference for the philosophy of Reid, from whose style of thought he seemed to receive peculiar satisfaction.[77]

Channing's *Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College* shows evidence of his knowledge and approval of the Scottish school. William Charvat says of Channing that he was "perhaps the most important individual of his time in the disssemination of Scotch aesthetic." [78] Considering, therefore, Channing's long tenure as a teacher at Harvard and the large number of Harvard students, numbering among them both Emerson and Thoreau, who passed under his tutelage, it is reasonable to suppose that his influence upon his students in terms of Scottish philosophy might have been extensive.

Although Scottish philosophy enjoyed marked popularity at Harvard, this fact did not cause the elimination of other

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[76] Quoted by Andrews Norton (*North American Review,* 1818, VI, 226) from Frisbie's "Inaugural Address, Delivered in the Chapel of the University at Cambridge, November 5, 1817." Cudworth held that moral ideas are innate.

Mr. Perry Miller assures me, on the basis of documents which I have not seen, that Frisbie's importance is greater than I can demonstrate here. He suggests particularly the influence of Frisbie upon Ripley.

[77] "Biographical Notice" to Edward T. Channing's *Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College* (Boston, 1856), xvi.

[78] *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810–1835* (Philadelphia, 1936), 33.

philosophical strains. Locke, it was shown earlier, was for many years a staple in the curriculum.[79] Although his *Essay on the Human Understanding* was not in use for some years after the academic year 1824–25, its reappearance in 1833–34, when it replaced Brown, indicates a return to the Lockeian psychology. Just how strong such an opposing influence might have been is uncertain, for Stewart continued to be taught. The partial return to Locke, however, does not discredit the general conclusion regarding the predominance of the Scottish philosophy over the twenty-year period. Supplemented by the moral views of Bishop Butler, it constitutes the most characteristic strain of philosophical thought during this time, and overshadows the philosophy of English empiricism, represented mainly by Locke and Paley.

IV

The importance of Scottish philosophy for Transcendentalism remains to be pointed out. Although it is obviously impossible here to show the extent of this influence, the writer wishes to advance the thesis that the Scottish philosophers suggested to Harvard students the inadequacy of Locke's theory of knowledge, and were of especial importance for their contributions to a theory of morals. The general direction in which the "common sense" philosophers pointed would conceivably encourage the formation of ideas preparatory to later ones more accurately termed transcendental, particularly with respect to moral views. This is not to imply any extensive

[79] But even as early as 1821, Samuel Gilman, writing in the *North American Review*, XII, 396 (April, 1821), expressed some dissatisfaction with Locke in a review of Thomas Brown's *Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect.* He wrote: "Edwards on the Will is still the principal rallying point of our orthodoxy, and Locke is a general classic in our colleges." Then in a footnote he added this significant statement: "Is not a *System of Metaphysics* wanted for our colleges? Something like a history of opinions in that science, with or without the theories of the compiler. Would Locke obtain more than a respectable chapter in such a system? Brunck, Stewart in his Dissertation, and Degerando would furnish copious and valuable assistance in compiling it."

synonymity between Scottish philosophy and New England Transcendentalism, but rather to suggest that the philosophy of Reid, Stewart, and Brown possibly served as a useful transition between Locke and Transcendentalism.

This view seems tenable if Transcendentalism is considered with respect to the theory of knowledge instead of the theory of being. Scottish "common sense" philosophy could be of only limited importance to Transcendentalism in the latter respect, particularly if we think of the movement in terms of idealism as found in Emerson's *Nature* and other essays. On the other hand, its most useful service could be performed in connection with the theory of knowledge—including morals—, and here would seem to lie its particular importance.[80]

The importance of Scottish philosophy is further enhanced when we consider the suggestive fact that the answer given by it to David Hume's skepticism anticipated in part the answer given by Immanuel Kant. Reid and Kant were in agreement on at least one point: the rejection of Hume's skepticism and the theory of knowledge found in Locke.[81] Even though the Scottish philosophy might not have been so profound as the German philosophy, it could be considered as a useful preparatory step toward the acceptance of German ideas.

One other point emerges from the present examination of the Harvard curriculum: it shows conclusively that the influence of German thought upon New England Transcendentalism did not enter by way of the Harvard philosophical studies during the years in question, and that the Scottish philosophy

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[80] However, because Transcendentalism, in spite of its pronounced strain of idealism, is interrupted by occasional loyalties to dualism—as, for example, in *Nature* and later essays of Emerson—it is not possible to eliminate entirely the possibility of influence in connection with the theory of being.

[81] For a discussion of Scottish and German philosophy, see A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *Scottish Philosophy, a Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume* (Edinburgh and London, 1885 and later).

preceded the later influence of German thought by way of Coleridge and Carlyle.

It must be emphasized in conclusion that Scottish philosophy does not tell the whole story of the intellectual background of New England Transcendentalism, any more than Transcendentalism can be said to owe complete allegiance to any single literary or philosophical influence. Much must have been native to it; much was borrowed. But of all the philosophies which eventually found lodgment in the heterogeneous mass of Transcendental thought, or which formed the philosophical background of the Transcendentalists, none has been so much overlooked as the Scottish "common sense" school. The present paper cannot begin to suggest the extent of its importance upon Emerson, Thoreau, or other Transcendental writers, but can only encourage a closer examination of the Harvard philosophical curriculum in terms of its influence upon individual members of the group.