

Walt Whitman & Hegel

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Though a significant amount of work has been done on the relationship between Whitman and Hegel, most scholarship has, until quite recently, contained itself to source studies or interpretations of Whitman's poetry that frequently rely upon very general structures, such as triads, that cannot be conclusively shown to originate in Hegel's influence, and thereby fall into the trap recognized by William James in his essay "Hegel and His Method": "once catch well the knack of this scheme of thought [Hegelianism] and you are lucky if you ever get away from it. It is all you can see" (Diggins 166). An example of this problem is a 1951 piece on Whitman and Hegel by Alfred Marks; in this essay Marks claims that Whitman's poetry shows a significant and direct influence by Hegel because this poetry makes frequent use of the terms "'fusing,' 'blending,' 'uniting'" and so on—that every instance of this is an instance of the Hegelian dialectic (98). Conversely, there are critics who deny any influence, such as Olive Parsons, who argues that Whitman didn't properly understand the dialectic or, if he did, his use of it in "Chanting the Square Deific" is heretical (1090).

Further, many essays presume that Whitman was either a poor reader of the Hegel available to him or that he had read texts that were not available; a case in point is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which, though discussed in English, did not appear in an English translation until after Whitman's death (Lindberg 245). In answer to critics who claim that Whitman was unwilling or incapable of understanding Hegel, I would like to point to the unsigned "Walt Whitman and His Critics" published in the London *Leader and Saturday Analyst* in 1860 in which the author berates those who had

[. . .] treated the new author as one self-educated, yet in the rough, unpolished, and owing nothing to instruction. Fudge! The authority for so treating the author was derived from himself, who thus described, in one of his poems, his person, character, and name, having omitted the last from his title-page: "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a Kosmos, Disorderly, fleshly, and sensual,"— and in various other passages confessed to all the vices, as well as the virtues of man. All this, with intentional wrong-headedness, was attributed by the sapient reviewers to the individual writer, and not to the subjective-hero supposed to be writing. Notwithstanding the word 'Kosmos,' the writer was taken to be an ignorant man. (Price)

I don't presume to say that use of the word 'Kosmos' is an indicator of the ability to interpret Hegel's philosophy, but I propose that it is useful to read Whitman with and against Hegel, especially since the majority of material on Hegel available to Whitman treated Hegel's historical and political philosophy. Though it is always problematic to look for solutions to poetry in any body of critical theory or philosophy, I believe the interests of both poet and philosopher converge upon ideology, upon similar concerns about the role of the individual in the emergent nation state. I would then like to present a reading of how Whitman uses Hegel's philosophy against the conservative positions of Carlyle.

Before progressing to consider what relationship Whitman's prose has with his reading in Hegel, it would be wise to examine closely the two sources known to have been consulted by Whitman—if not as a *proof*, at least as a measure of the knowledge available to Whitman. *German Literature* by Joseph Gostwick¹ gives the briefest of sketches of Hegel's philosophy, though consideration of Hegel does occupy four of the seven pages in the section dealing with 18th and 19th century German philosophy (Kant, Fichte, and Schelling are allotted one paragraph each). This emphasis on Hegel as the pinnacle of German Idealism is echoed in "Sunday Evening Lectures" and "Carlyle from American Points of View" in both of which Whitman allows that Hegel is the ultimate answer to the problems addressed by Kant, Fichte, and Schelling; this is indicative of Hegel's domination over Western European philosophy during Whitman's time. In other words, Whitman's emphasis on the importance of Hegel is not idiosyncratic—and thus not a proof of a special influence—but a shared assumption of his day. Claims that do not take this into account can easily be exaggerated. Gostwick presents Hegel's philosophy as follows:

The heavens and the earth, and all things within their compass, all the events of history, the facts of the present, and the developments of the future, must be (according to Hegel's doctrine) only so many steps in one eternal process of creative thought. The leading principle of this process is found in the development of a series of oppositions which are at once produced and resolved by reason. Truth is represented as consisting in the just "relation" of objects to each other. Unity pervading apparent opposition, and variety, is the mark of truth in all systems, both natural and intellectual. (269)

This unity "builds up nations, and maintains the order of the moral as of the physical world" (269). Following this terse description of the Hegelian dialectic, Gostwick moves on to illustrate its functioning in politics and nation-formation. He depicts the Hegelian Absolute Spirit as the engine driving a progressive teleology that will iron out all errors in time, "a progressive enunciation of truth through a series of imperfect interpreters" whose "true tendency is toward the dominion of just thoughts or principles" (270). And the Hegelian *Aufhebung*—or supercession, the tendency to "overcome dialectically"—is the engine driving the political progression toward the perfect: "improvement in society should preserve all that was good in the preceding condition" (270). Gostwick chooses to accentuate the positive, ignoring the element of negation in the *Aufhebung* that is frequently the most emphasized aspect in current literary theory. Because of this, treatments of the relationship between Hegel and Whitman that rely heavily upon negation may err by over-emphasizing its importance to Whitman and the "Hegel" that Whitman knew. Gostwick continues to outline the Hegelian theories of the membership of the individual in the State, the only true source of freedom; the "vulgar notion of freedom implies only a release from constraint" (270).

Fredric Hedge's *Prose Writer's of Germany* provides a twelve-page treatment of Hegel; eleven pages are taken by a translation of Hegel's "Introduction to the Philosophy of History" and a one-page, semi-facetious essay on whether philosophy is more or less abstract than everyday language. The remaining page is an introduction most likely written by another author (Eleanor 385). The introduction characterizes Hegel

¹Gostwick's name is frequently cited as Gostick, as it was incorrectly spelled in the 1854 edition.

as “the last of the four great German philosophers,” a phrase/sentiment echoing Gostwick and echoed several times in Whitman (446). Hedge notes that, though “theological and philosophical controversies of the day rage around it,” Hegel’s philosophy is the “most comprehensive and analytic of pantheistic schemes” (446). Leaving aside for a moment the question of what exactly an analytic pantheism might be, Hedge provides a capsule definition of what we now accept as the Hegelian dialectic:

There is one *Absolute Substance* pervading all things. That Substance is *Spirit*. This Spirit is endued with the power of development; it produces from itself the opposing powers and forces of the universe. All that we have to do is to stand by and see the process going on. The process is at first the evolution of antagonistic forces; then a mediation between them. All proceeds by triplicates; there is the positive, then the negative, then the mediation between them, which produces a higher unity. This again is but the starting point for a new series. And so the process goes on, from stage to stage, until the Absolute Spirit has passed through all the stadia of its evolutions, and is exhibited in its highest form in the Hegelian system of philosophy. (446)

Hedge’s depiction allows more conflict between the “opposing powers”; there is antagonism and negation, but this is again linked to a evolutionary progressivism and an always productive mediation of conflict. This link was one that Whitman welcomed and saw as a corrective—to “counterpoise [. . .] the tenets of the evolutionists”—to the excessively materialist implications of Darwinian evolutionary theory by the insertion of the “Absolute Spirit” into the political-historical equation. In the translated “Introduction to the Philosophy of History,” Hegel makes it very clear that what sets his historico-political theories apart is the material application of the Absolute Spirit to the history of man: “reason is the substance of all things, as well as the infinite power by which they are moved” (450). There is no question that this Spirit is abstract or merely theoretical; Hegel baldly claims that “reason is not so impotent that it can produce only an ideal, a something which ever should be and never is” (450). It is this Absolute Spirit that serves as the pawl which insures that gears of history can only move forward, following the “rational and necessary course of the spirit which moves in the world” (450).

Hegel’s philosophical history—as presented in the “Introduction to the Philosophy of History”—is “a speculative treatment of history,” a “thoughtful consideration” that attempts to reconcile individual freedom and agency with the “rational and necessary course of the spirit which moves in the world” (450). He reasons that moral laws, norms, are expressions of the Absolute Spirit: “moral laws are not accidental, but are reason itself” (453). Further, the state is the natural expression of these laws: “When these moral laws or ethical principles [. . .] are really carried out and maintained, then we have the *State*” (453). We infer the State from moral law. Unfortunately, moral law was first inferred from “consideration of the history of the world itself” (450). Since the history of the world deals with the doings of states—and, of late, nations—there is a certain amount of circularity in Hegel’s argument.

In exploring the freedom of the individual in the State, Hegel discusses two types which boil down to the master and the slave. The first is, not surprisingly, a slave, and the second is the “world-historical individual” or the great man in history whose “private purposes contain the substance of that which is the will of the spirit of the world” (453). It is difficult to see where the appeal in this for Whitman would lie; after all, he enlists Hegel in service of attacking Carlyle’s anti-democratic/republican thinking. Hegel contrasts the citizen of the modern nation state—who has the potential to be a world-historical individual—with the citizens of the Greek city-state whose freedom was arbitrary and dependent upon the labor of slaves; therefore, “their freedom itself was partly only a an accidental and perishable flower, and partly a hard servitude of the human and humane” (452). Hegel states that, under the influence of Christianity, Germans first realized that the nature of man is freedom, and that though “slavery did not at once come to an

end,” the problem of slavery will eventually be resolved, as the “history of the world is the progress in the consciousness of freedom” (452).

Whitman engages in his most extensive direct discussion of Hegel in the unpublished “Sunday Evening Lectures.” The text as it appears in the *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* is, according to the headnote there, taken from a text prepared from “a series of fragments”; it discusses Fichte, Schelling, Kant, and (primarily) Hegel. The philosophy of Hegel that Whitman gives us here is quite optimistic and is presented, as in Gostwick, as the culmination of the work of Fichte, Schelling, and Kant; this philosophy is aimed to “solve the vast problem of universal harmony, ensemble, the idea of the all,” which does not seem terribly far-removed from Hegel’s intent as expressed by Hedge and Gostwick (2010).

In this manuscript, Whitman concludes that Hegel “most fully and definitely illustrates Democracy by carrying it into the highest regions” and that he encloses the work of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling “like a nest of boxes” (2017, 2016). The second conclusion is very much in keeping with Hedge and Gostwick’s summaries, but the first is a departure of Whitman’s own—one emblematic of his use of Hegel. Whitman planned to present to his audience a Hegel that demonstrated that the material world—the “whole concrete show of things, the world, man himself, either individually or Aggregated in History”—rests on a unifying “spiritual, invisible basis” that is the “real substance, the only immutable one” (2010). This theoretical solution must have been of great relief to the poet who had written in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* “A word of the faith that never balks [. . .] A word of reality . . . materialism first and last imbueing [sic]” (49).

But Whitman immediately backs off on the strength of his claim, qualifies it, and says: “Religion and morals [. . .] are not palpably affected [. . .] Nor does the Hegelian system, strictly speaking, explain the universe, either in the aggregate or in detail” (2010). Though this seems to cut the legs out from under Hegelianism as any sort of totalizing solution, Whitman is redirecting the purpose of Hegel’s philosophy:

“the ambition for universal knowledge is a vain ambition [. . .] But it seems to me that the thought of universality [. . .] is not only the grand antedating background and appropriate entrance to the study of any science but to the fit understanding of the position of one’s self in Nature, to the performance of life’s duties, to the appreciation and application of sane standards to politics and to the judgement upon and construction of works in any department of art, and that by its realization is provided a basis for religion and theology that can satisfy the modern.” (2016-17)

That is, Hegelianism is useful. It is, as Whitman said of the material facts in 1855, not his dwelling, but the means of entry to his dwelling (49).

And the use to which Whitman puts Hegelianism is a bit of a misprision, if taking Hegelianism to its inevitable humanist conclusion fits Bloom’s definition. Whitman replaces the central position of the Absolute Spirit in Hegel’s system with the “human soul” (2011). In the often-quoted “Only Hegel is fit for America” passage, Whitman praises Hegel, as above, for bringing “the study of life here and the thought of hereafter [. . .] an expansion and clearness of sense before unknown” (2011). That is, for uniting the material and spiritual: “body and mind are one; an inexplicable paradox, yet no truth truer” (2011). The twist arrives in the statement “the human soul stands at the center, and all the universes minister to it, and serve it and revolve around it” (2011). It is the human soul that is the opposite number here, not Hegel’s Absolute Spirit. Something like the Absolute Spirit arrives in the lecture as that which informs the individual soul almost as an afterthought; in the closing paragraphs of the notes, Whitman warily says that it only remains to be considered “whether there is not probably also something in the Soul [. . .] which being itself adjusted to the inherent and immutable laws of things [. . .] does not afford a clue to unchangeable standards and tests [and] by its own laws, repel the inconsistent, and gravitate forever toward the absolute, the supernatural, the eternal truth” (2017-18). Whitman is willing to accept Hegel’s conclusions about the spiritual basis of

humankind and society, but he seems more reluctant to accept the specifics of Hegel's method of "penetrating beneath the shows and materials of the objective world" (2012).

Rather than displacing the human soul with Hegel's Absolute Spirit, Whitman bends Hegel's philosophy a little further to allow more room for humanity and its bodies. This bending is most apparent in his notion of ensemble or "universal harmony [. . .] the idea of the all" (2010). This "all" or ensemble is "that something above" or "enclosing" that inspires "prayer and worship," yet—as "the all" it also contains the material realm (2011). Ensemble is substantial as well as spiritual; it is the materially spiritual: "body and mind are one; an inexplicable paradox, yet no truth truer" (2011). For Whitman, Hegel's philosophy reveals the "world of materials" "as a face in a mirror" (2011).

Finally, it is important to note that Whitman demonstrates a fairly good understanding of the functioning of a simplified version of Hegel's dialectic. Whitman claims that the consideration of "the dark problem of evil, forming half of the infinite scheme" is necessary, "directly or indirectly," to "any profound consideration of Democracy" (2012). And he finds an adequate response to the problem of evil in the optimistic version of the dialectic presented in Hedge. Whitman defines Hegel's "curious, triplicate process" as a mediation between the "Positive" and the "Negative" that is the result of the "eternal impetus of development" of the "only absolute substance which is SPIRIT" (2012). This closely echoes the introductory passage in Hedge, and is close in spirit to the picture of the functioning of the *Aufhebung* provided in the translation of the "Introduction to the *Philosophy of History*."

The most extensive *published* discussion of Hegel by Whitman occurs in his "Carlyle from American Points of View" in *Specimen Days*. In this essay Whitman attacks Carlyle for his biliousness and tries to offset his "dark fortune-telling of humanity and politics" with Hegel's more optimistic outlook (914). This essay contains two of Whitman's most-frequently quoted statements about Hegel. The first—"though neither of my great authorities during their lives consider'd the United States worthy of serious mention [. . . .]"—establishes Carlyle and Hegel as of equal value to American democracy (914). Whitman advances Hegel's "formulas" as an "essential and crowning justification of New World democracy"; whereas Carlyle's "reactionary doctrines" serve a negative, but useful, purpose by illuminating "dangerous spots and liabilities" in American democracy (914, 922).

Whitman begins his attack on Carlyle by summarizing the details of his life that have gripped the American public, notably among them is dyspepsia (914). He further characterizes Carlyle as a "confirmed hypochondriac" who had none of the "stomachic phlegm" of Kant, the "Konigsburg sage" (915). The rhetoric of his argument in "Carlyle from American Points of View" consistently relies upon somatic metaphors to critique philosophical systems. Whitman contrasts the "vacuity of his [Carlyle's] pale cast of thought" to the "cheering realities and activity of our people and country" and suggests that if Carlyle had not had to live amidst the "parturition agony and qualms of the old order, amid crowded circulations of ghastly morbidity" of Europe he might have been "recuperated by the cheering realities and activity of our people and country" that was giving birth to a new life by the openness of space and opportunity, "our limitless air and eligibilities" (915).

Coming from the poet who wrote "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" in which the speaking persona unaccountably soon becomes sickened and tired by the proofs and figures of astronomy and leaves to find solace in the experience of walking under the stars and from the poet who in his later years writes poems bemoaning his bowel troubles, this may not be remarkable—except as it applies to the notion of ensemble; the philosophy or attitudes of Carlyle are not only environmentally determined, they are linked specifically to the body in space, in its surroundings. Though this rhetoric echoes Hegel's claim that a people are possessed by the soil, mountains, air, and waters of their State, "even as the state also possesses them"—I certainly do not mean to claim influence here—rather, Whitman is making a specific material

connection between the ideas of the Self (in this case, Carlyle) and the body of the Self in space (Carlyle in crowded, old-fashioned Europe). That is, Whitman is dealing with a specific, individual self, rather than the entire citizenry of a nation, and he carefully ties spiritual and mental states to the body's experience of its physical surroundings; this difference is subtle, and Whitman will—later, in *Democratic Vistas*—attempt to work with a national character in aggregate.

As Whitman's definition of the ensemble Self unfolds, it begins to sound remarkably similar to the process of development of the self-consciousness as described in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. In the place of awareness of the Other as a defining aspect of the self, Whitman offers "a soul-sight of that divine clue and unseen thread" which holds all events together—that is, a "wondrous something" that exists "apart from mere intellect" in the "whole being, including physique," of every "superior human identity" or human "considered as ensemble" (918). It is this soul-sight or thread that is "the fusing explanation or tie" the "relation between the (radical, democratic) Me, the human identity of understanding, emotions, spirit, &c., on the one side, of and with the (conservative) Not Me, the whole of the material objective universe and laws, with what is behind them in time and space on the other side" (919). Whitman links this idea of a "fusing explanation" to "Schelling's answer" that the morality that is "conscious and formulated" in humankind exists in "an unconscious state, or in perceptible analogies" in "concrete Nature" (919). Hegel, who he says offers "the last best word" on this matter, merely fills in "certain serious gaps," a reduction that he likely gleaned from the glosses in Hedge or Gostwick (919-20).

This displacement of emphasis from an ephemeral Absolute Spirit to a sort of animistic materialism allows Whitman to mount his final attack on Carlyle and his pessimistic views (still in the form of advancing Hegel over him) and, by extension, theoretical systems in general. Expanding upon his definition of Hegel's system as a "process of Creative thought" based in Nature that is "unerringly tending and flowing toward the permanent *utile* and *morale*, as rivers to oceans," Whitman is able to declare that "as life is the whole law and incessant effort of the visible universe, and death only the other or invisible side of the same" and that "vice and disease, with all their perturbations, are but transient" (920). So, although evil is a part of the whole, it is a part doomed to be subsumed into a more perfect, presumably less evil, form in the passage of time. But Whitman is not simple-mindedly optimistic, saying that though "great evil [is] certainly doomed to failure," that failure only comes "after causing great suffering" (921). As he closes his consideration, Whitman returns to bodily metaphors, saying that the contributions of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Darwin—snubbing Carlyle—are necessary to the "erudition of America's future" (922). He adds, however, that in them

there seems to be, nay certainly is, something lacking—something cold, a failure to satisfy the deepest emotions of the soul—a want of living glow, fondness, warmth, which the old exaltè s and poets supply, and which the keenest modern philosophers so far do not. (922)

That is, all theory, including Hegel, is cold—like a corpse or revenant—but that some theory, Carlyle's, is sickly and bilious.

Whitman's recourses to Hegel are less frequent in *Democratic Vistas* than in "Carlyle from American Points of View," but he returns to Hegel's theories and similar ideas of unification as a possible means to bless American democracy with greater health and as means to answer the question he self-consciously poses in a note to the "lump character" passage:

Must not the virtue of modern Individualism [. . .] perhaps keep down entirely, in America, the like of the ancient virtue of Patriotism, the fervid and absorbing love of general country? I have no doubt myself that the two will merge, and will mutually profit and brace each other, and that from them a great product, a third, will arise. (965)

This is the same question that Hegel frames in response to Rousseau's assertion that "man is free by nature [. . .] and that the society, the State, [. . .] must restrict this natural freedom" (Hedge 453). Though the philosophies of their antagonists differ, both Whitman and Hegel are engaged in anxious defenses of their political/theoretical—ideological—systems and both respond by characterizing the arguments of their attackers as, in Hegel's words, "misty figments which a theorising [sic] spirit generates" or, in Whitman's case, as figments generated by physical and spiritual indigestion (453).

Aside from the similarity of the rhetoric of their arguments, there are also familiar echoes of Hegel lingering in the logic of passages in which Whitman advocates "completeness in separatism":

This idea of perfect individualism it is indeed that deepest tinges and gives character to the idea of the aggregate. For it is mainly or altogether to serve independent separatism that we favor a strong generalization, consolidation. As it is to give the best vitality and freedom to the rights of the States, (every bit as important as the right of nationality, the union,) that we insist on the identity of the Union at all hazards. (966)

Though the Civil War is obviously one source for his concern about Union, Whitman is also using that conflict/problem as a metaphor for postwar ills, attempting to link its importance to what he sees as the more foundational problem of the individual in the State. The eventual solution of which will be a greater merger of the individual into the State, a merging that preserves characteristics of the individual identity and that is voluntary. Passages such as the following seem to be clearly derived from Hegel's belief that the State is the expression of underlying Spirit:

Law, considered as freedom determining itself, is the objectivity of spirit: hence that alone is true volition, the will in the truth of it, which obeys law, for it then obeys only itself; it is then with itself and free; this is the freedom in the State for which the citizen is active, and which fills his soul. In that the State, the fatherland, constitutes a community of existence, in that the subjective will of man become subject to the laws, the opposition between freedom and necessity vanishes. (Hedge 455)

Thus, for Hegel, law is freedom because true freedom, true expression of human potential consists in subordinating the "subjective will" to the dictates of the Absolute Spirit as they are represented in the moral/ethical system of laws of the fatherland; the "limitation of those impulses, desires, and passions, which belong only to single individuals as such" is not a restriction of freedom, but conformity to this higher moral law (454). Or as Whitman puts it:

man, properly train'd in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and series of laws, unto himself, surrounding and providing for, not only his own personal control, but all his relations to other individuals, and to the State. (966)

This rhetoric of assimilation can be frightening, especially when one reads passages that celebrate American expansionism—"Long ere the second centennial arrives, there will be some forty to fifty great States, among them Canada and Cuba. [. . .] Can there be any doubt who the leader ought to be?"—or passages that advocate a science of "healthy average personalism," a "democratic ethnology of the future" designed to "supply through the States a copious race of superb American men and women" (1005, 987, 985). However, Whitman's desired leadership is not just the United States, but a United States that follows the dictates of the "mightiest original non-subordinated SOUL," a Soul whose "other name in these Vistas is LITERATURE" (1005). That is, to an extent, Whitman is proposing an empire ruled by a *Weltliteratur*, a world literature. The mouthpiece, "embouchure," or exponent of this literature will be a class of "orbic bards," individuals like Emerson's Poet, a person that Whitman at one time thought he might be. It is these orbic bards that will become the "sweet democratic despots of the west" and dominate or destroy the outmoded ideas of the Old World, ideas of former world-historical individuals like Christ, Dante, Shakespeare, Kant, and even Hegel

(997). That is, the role of the orbic bard is to sublimate the “powerful and resplendent ones” of the “feudal and old” and create a new poetry that is “bold, modern, and all-surrounding and kosmical” (998, 1003).

Whitman, in proposing the orbic bards, as “national expressers, comprehending and effusing for the men and women of these States, what is universal, native, common to all,” wants to avoid the “sad unity of a common subjection” as possessed by the city-states of ancient Greece (959). This desire to avoid forced subjection and the example Whitman chooses are identical to the passage in Hegel in which Hegel describes the role of the Christian religion in bringing freedom to Germany, a freedom that was very unlike the slavery-based culture of the Greek city-states, which only “knew that *some* are free” and “had the continuance of their fair freedom bound thereby” (452). For Whitman, too, Christianity brings a solution, though it is a partial one:

What Christ appear'd for in the moral-spiritual field for human-kind, namely, that in respect to the absolute soul, there is in the possession of such by each single individual, something so transcendent, so incapable of gradations, (like life,) that, to that extent, it places all beings on a common level. (971)

Christianity equalizes humanity, as all humans participate in its transcendence, possess a un-quantifiable and non-hierarchical soul or portion of the “absolute soul.”

This statement is very much like Hegel's use of the Absolute Spirit, but though the “core of democracy [. . .] is the religious element,” Whitman again offers materialism and science as a corrective to “the fossil theology of the mythic-materialistic, superstitious, untaught and credulous, fable-loving, primitive ages of humanity” (1000). In a note to a passage proposing “the lord, the sun, the last ideal” as superior to religious fervor, moral conscientiousness, and emotional love, Whitman declares that “abstract religion [. . .] is easily led astray [. . .] and is capable of devouring remorseless, like fire and flame” (1007). This anxiety is telling; Whitman is reluctant to accept any transcendent force that compromises individual agency, whether it be forced subjection (slavery), the intoxication of religious fervor, or the overwhelming ascendancy of a “last ideal.” He proposes that “scientific facts, deductions, are divine too” in that they “prevent fanaticism” and that “Nature, true Nature, and the true idea of Nature, must furnish the pervading atmosphere” to the poems of the orbic bards (1007, 1008). And by true Nature and its true idea(l), he means “the whole orb, with its geologic history, the kosmos”—the world as presented by objective science (1009).

Again, Whitman accepts the unification of material and spiritual, but tries to evade the totalizing implications of containment and control in the means by which Hegel accomplishes his union: the Absolute Spirit. Whitman tries to maintain the individual and bodily, returning at the conclusion of *Democratic Vistas* to the “bloodless vein, the nerveless arm” of Carlyle (1017). Perhaps if he had been more rigorous, more of a philosopher, Whitman would have denied himself the pleasure of these contradictions, but, containing multitudes, he remained a poet.

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