

**Matthew Arnold's Religious Reconstruction.  
Seeing "the object as in itself it really is"?**

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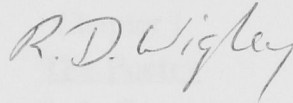
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## Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated  
this thesis is my own work.



R.D. Wigley  
February 1991

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## Introduction

Fret not yourself to make my poems square in all their parts, but like what you can ... The true reason why parts suit you while others do not is that my poems are fragments - i.e. that I am fragments ...<sup>1</sup>

The subject of this thesis is Matthew Arnold's attempt to reconstruct Christianity out of what he saw as the ruins of its past historic manifestations. "The central fact" of Arnold's experience, as Douglas Bush has said, "was the loss of traditional Christian faith".<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, hinting at the wider background against which Arnold attempted his reconstruction, said of Arnold's poem "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" that it voiced "a moment of historic doubt, recorded by its most representative mind".<sup>3</sup> These two statements taken together indicate that Arnold is particularly important in any question of faith and doubt in the nineteenth century. The great religious controversies of the middle of that century (the questions raised by Darwin's Origin of Species and the related furore over the question of the Bible's infallibility) reached their height at the same time as Arnold reached intellectual maturity. The fact that Arnold's "doubt" is so "representative" is because he was caught in the middle of the antagonists. As the son of the deeply religious and conscientious Dr Arnold, Matthew was raised with the view that religion was necessary for both the personal and collective good. Equally, however, he inherited his father's liberality in religious matters (Dr Arnold being opposed to dogmatism and coercion in religion)<sup>4</sup> and because of this he felt it necessary to find a solid intellectual basis for Christianity - however much this might upset certain Christian believers.

The type of "solid intellectual basis" that Arnold feels he needs is one of the primary questions with which this thesis deals. The above letter to his sister is an indication that, at least at the age of twenty-seven, Arnold himself was lacking in solidity. The fact that he is "fragments" suggests that he might have had some difficulty in coming to terms with "the loss of traditional Christian faith" and in finding a

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to "K" (Arnold's sister Jane), c. July 1849, Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold ed. A. Whitridge (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1923) p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Arnold - A Survey of his Poetry and Prose (MacMillan, London, 1971) p. xv.

<sup>3</sup>A Choice of Kipling's Verse (Faber and Faber, London, 1941) p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>For a description of Dr Arnold's religious ideas see, for example, The Liberal Anglican Idea of History - Duncan Forbes (Cambridge University Press, 1952).

satisfactory basis for a religious reconstruction. Yet the truth is that his fragmented nature and his loss of Christian faith are two sides of the same coin. He had to attempt his religious reconstruction because he was fragmented. The point is that Arnold is well aware of the problems that Christianity faces in the nineteenth century but he is aware also that its difficulties are a facet of a problem that is much more fundamental. As I shall show during the thesis Arnold clearly believes that he is living in an age in which certainty of any sort has become problematic. In the Preface to his 1853 collection of poems, Arnold writes of "Empedocles on Etna" that it represents a man in whom "the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves". If the "central fact" of Arnold's experience is the loss of traditional Christian faith, then this modern realisation of "the dialogue of the mind with itself" is the central underlying cause of that fact.

As I shall show in Chapter One, Arnold's poetry is full of this realisation. The majority of the poems are arguments, dialogues between either Arnold's mind or Arnold and another protagonist. These poems see Arnold thinking aloud, setting opposing interpretations or philosophies of life against each other in order to come to some definite answer on the "modern problems" that the poet faces. That these problems are the subject of his poetry is clear from an 1865 critical essay of Arnold's:

The end and aim of all literature, if one considers it attentively, is, in truth, nothing but [a criticism of life].<sup>5</sup>

Arnold's belief that nothing less than life itself is under study shows that the very basis of existence needs definition. Just why this is necessary can be seen from an early poem, "In Utrumque Paratus"<sup>6</sup> where Arnold ends with the proclamation that "I ... but seem". This is a graphic illustration of the fundamental problem that faces all thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - that is, the definition of reality itself.

The subject of epistemological interpretations in what is called the post-Enlightenment era has been widely studied.<sup>7</sup> The starting point for what Arnold identifies as "modern problems" is generally accepted to be the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century with the establishment of the empirical method of observation. The key figure in coming to an understanding of what effect the scientific revolution had on man's pursuit of knowledge is John Locke. His An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)<sup>8</sup> is, as A.D. Nuttall says, "the cornerstone of English empiricism".<sup>9</sup> Locke makes it clear that, under the empiricist method, we have no direct knowledge of external reality. All we have is an image on the retina which we interpret on the basis of our experience of the world. The problem is that, as Nuttall points out, "the whole

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<sup>5</sup>From "Joubert" in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold 11 vols. - R.H. Super (ed.) (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1960-77) vol. 3, p. 209. (Hereafter referred to as CPW).

<sup>6</sup>For a fuller examination of this poem see below, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>One of the best of these studies from our point of view is A Common Sky - Philosophy and the Literary Imagination - A.D. Nuttall (Chatto and Windus, Sussex University Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup>ed. J.W. Yolton, 2 vols. (Everyman, London, 1961).

<sup>9</sup>Nuttall p. 15.

range of knowledge is private to the knower".<sup>10</sup> The extreme result of this can be seen in the philosophy of solipsism which suggests that external reality may not exist at all. For the purpose of this thesis the less extreme, but still far-reaching, conclusions of the eighteenth century philosopher David Hume are more important. Hume suggested<sup>11</sup> that the conclusions to be drawn from the empiricist theory of knowledge were that all our actions were based on inference. Every decision, from the simplest upward, had to be made on the assumption that the evidence before our eyes is true. Hume used this picture of the breakdown of objective certainty to question religious phenomena which, as he makes clear in the essay "Of Miracles",<sup>12</sup> have no basis at all for existence apart from the "evidence" of the arbitrary claims of religious people.

As I said earlier the problem facing Christianity or spirituality of any kind, underlined here by Hume, is really just one facet of the larger problem brought into view by the scientific ascription of reality. This can be shown, as Nuttall says, by the word "substance". After the sixteenth century, substance (literally "underlying reality") has come to mean that which is material.<sup>13</sup> If the underlying reality is the material, then what place is there for the spiritual?

This is the background against which Arnold attempts to reconstruct Christianity. The fact that he is aware of the problems facing him is clear, I think, from the phrase that I have used in my thesis title. The true purpose of criticism, says Arnold, is to see the "object as in itself it really is".<sup>14</sup> The phrase has some echoes of Kant and his inability to know things "in themselves". Only in the post-Enlightenment era would one come across such a marked attempt to pin down the object of reality.

In Chapter One I show Arnold attempting to answer this problem in his poetry. The religious problem is made explicit by Arnold in a letter to his friend A.H. Clough in which Arnold discourses on the need for a new poetry that will provide the spiritual direction that recent poetry has lacked. "Poetry", he says, must become a "complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did" and include "religion with poetry".<sup>15</sup> This is one of Arnold's most enduring beliefs. It illustrates the fact that Arnold sees himself as in some sense post-Christian - that traditional religion is no longer adequate to fulfil spiritual needs. The fact that he goes to a pre-Christian age is interesting. It indicates that the more recent poetry has been afflicted by the inability to see its way in religious matters, has been unable to provide a "rule for life". Arnold's letters are full of this criticism of the heritage of the Romantic poets. As I shall show his criticism can be summed

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid..

<sup>11</sup>In A Treatise of Human Nature - (Everyman, London, 1911).

<sup>12</sup>In Essays: moral, political and literary (Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>13</sup>Op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>From Arnold's 1861 essay, "On Translating Homer".

<sup>15</sup>See below, p. 15.

up as aimed at the Romantics' inability to find an objective vision (the "magister vitae"). Arnold's unhappiness with the "dialogue of the mind with itself" and his distaste for Romanticism are, in fact, closely connected. He is stating the fact that the Romantics' taste for subjective visions does not provide the objective certainty which he lacks following the disappearance of traditional religious faith. His attempt to come to terms with this fact is the subject of Chapter One.

Chapter One shows that, however much he may wish not to, Arnold is in fact firmly entrenched in the Romantic tradition. His parents' love of Romantic poetry, his godfather John Keble's indoctrination of Matthew with Wordsworth's poetry and Arnold's personal acquaintance with Wordsworth all ensure that Arnold is unable to escape the Romantic estimate of life. This creates a conflict within Arnold between a desire to escape from the Romantics' subjective visions and an inbuilt inability to do so. His own poetry illustrates this conflict. As I shall argue, the majority of his poetry suffers from an explicit denial of Romantic poetical philosophy in the desire to achieve objectivity and comprehension. My argument is that this is merely Arnold's inevitably failed attempt to escape from the Romantics' (implicit) realisation that such a denial of subjectivity is impossible in the post-Enlightenment era. I use, in particular, S.T. Coleridge's statements on this question as a critique of Arnold's position, arguing that Coleridge saw well enough the modern epistemological problems and that his attempt to include religion with poetry is a far more successful solution than Arnold's own.

Arnold's failure to forge his new poetry can be seen by his conscious decision to attempt a criticism of life that is more obviously practical. Chapter Two sees Arnold approaching the same problems as were approached in his poetry, only this time he attempts to pin down "the object as in itself it really is" via prose criticism. In contradiction to those critics who claim that Arnold's move from poetry to prose indicates a coming to terms with his spiritual problems I argue that the truth is quite otherwise. The change is in fact owing to Arnold's perception that he has been unable to conquer the epistemological problems I have underlined. His search for objectivity has been unsuccessful. This paves the way for the same search to be undertaken in the field of prose criticism. As I show during the chapter, Arnold takes on the theories of J.G. von Herder and the German historicists in order to come to terms with the loss of traditional Christian faith. He finds therein the humanist argument that humanity is engaged in a process of steadily progressive development, at the end of which man's capacity for social, artistic and religious development will have reached its zenith. The idea has the advantage for Arnold of appearing to provide some objective certainty in an otherwise uncertain world.

During this time we also see Arnold reading Locke and Spinoza and embracing what we may call a broadly "rationalist" view of life. The effect of this on his religious views is clear from Arnold's two essays on Spinoza - his first critical attempt to come to terms with the religious phenomenon. His rationalist solution is, however, no solution for Arnold. As I argue Arnold has a temperamental need for

"something more" in religion than Spinoza's determinism. Throughout his criticism Arnold identifies "emotion" as a need that demands satisfaction. The significance of this for my thesis is that "emotion" is a particularly intangible property on the empiricist model. Arnold's need of it, however, brings us to Chapter Three. Arnold's return to Christianity is, as I see it, a need to find some place in his scheme for emotion.

Chapter Three charts the same struggle that was identified in Chapter One - Arnold's personal need to allow for spiritual knowledge against his intellectual inability to allow for the truth of such knowledge in the post-Enlightenment era. This struggle is centred most specifically on Arnold's idea of Christianity. Arnold attempts to reconstruct Christianity on the empiricist model. That which is verifiable, for Arnold, is true. The characteristic outcome of this method is a God whose property is merely an underlying tendency (making for morality) in humanity and a Jesus who is the moral exemplum *par excellence*. As I argue this is entirely at odds with the tenets of the Christian religion and the "evidence" of the Bible. Arnold's reconstruction is inadequate because he is attempting to force together two utterly opposed world views. As in Chapter One I use Coleridge's observations on the Bible and Christianity, this time in order to deny the conclusions of such critics as James C. Livingston who claims that Arnold's approach should be the normative one for Christianity today.<sup>16</sup> In contradiction to this idea I suggest that for Arnold himself such a reconstruction proved inadequate. His attempt to pin down the object that is truly certain collapses on the empiricist model. I conclude by arguing that Arnold himself sees the collapse of his system in that he realises that Christianity on the historicist model lacks the authority of the traditional model of history as controlled by God. The complete relativity of a universe without God raises the spectre of a collapse towards chaos rather than the historicists' desired scenario of a coming to perfection through inevitable progress.

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<sup>16</sup>In *Matthew Arnold and Christianity* (University of South Carolina Press, 1986).



## Chapter 1

### The Poetry

#### 1.1. Early Currents

Harold Bloom's comment that Arnold was "a Romantic poet who did not wish to be one"<sup>1</sup> seems to me to sum up Arnold's career in poetry. His poems are "fragments" owing to, as I hope to show, contradictory impulses that run below the surface of each piece of work. Whilst on the one hand he was in a direct line of descent from the English Romantics and much of his poetry shows their influence, there is another side of Arnold which revolts against their solutions to life and to their thoughts about life. The first part of this thesis will examine the early influences that inform these two sides of Arnold.

The important question of Arnold's motives for becoming a poet has, until recently, been answerable only by conjecture. If Lionel Trilling's Matthew Arnold,<sup>2</sup> the standard text on Arnold's life and work, has an obvious weakness, it is that the author had few autobiographical materials with which to work. Park Honan's valuable Life is the first biographical work on Arnold to make use of the notebooks and private correspondence made available in the last few decades. Honan's psychological method presents a portrait of a young Matthew Arnold very much influenced by his upbringing. Arnold is seen almost in Freudian terms as the eldest son repelled by the father's stern intensity towards the mother's protective haven. Honan believes that many of Arnold's later poetic themes arose from Mrs Arnold's early influence. Inclined to "tragic imaginings", she made her son "a master of pathos":

Minor themes in her journals of the 1830s, such as time's evanescence, the poignancy of the past, and the inconsequence of the world's routine hubbub, swell into major ones in his own poetry.<sup>3</sup>

If this tended to drive Arnold into himself - and Arnold's poetry is consistently self-questioning - then it is clear that a similar tendency in Romantic poetry (the example par excellence here is Wordsworth's autobiographical Prelude) inevitably harmonised with Arnold's juvenile thought. There was no shortage of possibilities for Arnold to come into contact with such influences as is clear from the fact that Matthew saw

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Bloom (ed.) - Matthew Arnold (Chelsea House, New York, 1987) p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Columbia University Press, New York (2nd. ed., 1949.)

<sup>3</sup>Matthew Arnold - A Life (Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1981) pp. 7 & 32.

much of John Keble in his youth.<sup>4</sup> More significantly still, the Arnold family holiday home, at Fox How in Ambleside, was close by the Wordsworths. The two families were often in contact and there was much conversation between Arnold and the old poet.<sup>5</sup> Although his admiration for Wordsworth fell far short of hero-worship,<sup>6</sup> the influence on Arnold of such a grand figurehead of England's immediate past was immense and lasting:

He is one of the best and deepest spiritual influences of our century

Arnold told Ernest Fontanes in 1879.<sup>7</sup>

Conversations with Wordsworth no doubt gave Arnold a thorough and vivid knowledge of England's immediate poetic heritage. Certainly his first published poem, "Alaric at Rome", written before his eighteenth birthday, shows a strong Byronic influence.<sup>8</sup> It also, however, contains much that, retrospectively, we can see as distinctively Arnoldian. It was deemed to be original and powerful enough to gain the Rugby School poetry prize for 1840 by a unanimous vote. Such affirmation was, no doubt, extremely important for a young man struggling in the shadow of his father. It was probably this success that determined Arnold's early poetical vocation.

"Alaric at Rome" is notable for showing so early the tone of reflective melancholy that is the main characteristic of Arnold's poetry. Arnold seems to have fallen prey to (and to a great extent furthered) what we might call a post-Romantic malaise. The subject-matter, of course, favours the tone of despair, with its concentration on the overthrow of once-glorious Rome by the Goths. But Arnold's handling of this favourite post-Renaissance topos has none of the calm, studious melancholy of a Claude painting, or the heroic despair of his original Byronic model. Arnold's observer in Rome is not an impassioned Romantic activist; he is a muted, passive commentator, coming across in tone like a fin de siècle pessimist:

Alas! far other thoughts might well be ours  
And dash our holiest raptures while we gaze:  
Energies wasted, unimproved hours,  
The saddening visions of departed days:  
And while they rise here might we stand alone,  
And mingle with thy ruins somewhat of our own. (199-204)

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<sup>4</sup>Keble's book of devotional poems The Christian Year (published in 1827) is deeply influenced by Wordsworthian themes and imagery. Park Honan mentions that the infant Matthew "learned to "repeat" Keble's lyrics in exchange for his mother's ardent attention...". (Honan, p. 12.)

<sup>5</sup>See Honan, chap. 2.

<sup>6</sup>John Peters argues that the contrast between Wordsworth's early poetry and the man Arnold knew must have been painful and disillusioning for Arnold. By the 1840s, Peters claims, Wordsworth had become a misdirected idealist who had withdrawn from the world, not because he was holding fast to something precious and true but because he was "atavistic". (Matthew Arnold - The Heroes of his Poetry, (1973 Ph.D. thesis for University of Wisconsin), [University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan] pp. 43-46.) Certainly Wordsworth, with his appeals for authoritarianism in all walks of life as a cure to Europe's ills, would have been un congenial to an Arnold under the thrall of his father's authority.

<sup>7</sup>Arnold to Fontanes, on sending him a copy of a selection of Wordsworth's poetry to which Arnold had written the preface. (Related in Notes to "Wordsworth" essay [CPW 9:336-340]).

<sup>8</sup>Arnold admitted as much to Edmund Gosse in 1888 - "You will see that I had been very much reading Childe Harold". Quoted in Matthew Arnold: The Complete Poems - ed. K. & M. Allott (Longman, London, 1979) p. 3. (Hereafter referred to as CP).

A tone not entirely Arnold's own is detectable here. We have already noted Mrs Arnold's probable influence on her son's imagination. Dr Arnold, however, also seems to speak through lines such as "Energies wasted, unimproved hours". The combination of a stern, inward-looking morality and a pathetic musing on time's evanescence shows Arnold to be very much the child of his parents.

Another theme of Dr Arnold's own work is, however, taken a step further by Matthew. Dr Arnold's sense of history was cyclical. He saw parallels in the states of past and future civilisations:

Thus the largest part of that history which we commonly call ancient is practically modern, as it describes society in a state analogous to that in which it now is ...<sup>9</sup>

Herein Matthew found authority for seeing the fall of Roman civilisation as a possible foreshadowing of the dissolution of his present European civilisation:

Perchance that solemn sight might quench the fire  
Even of that ardent spirit; hopes and fears  
Might well be mingling at that murmured sigh,  
Whispering from all around, "All earthly things must die". (177-180)

Arnold's descriptive epithets all have this distinctive note of portentous fore-knowledge - "glorious ruins" (l. 45), "solemn grave" (l. 49), "eloquent silence" (l. 67), "mournful loveliness" (l. 104). Over all history Rome gazes "with sad prophetic eye" (l. 24). It is an attitude of fatalism that will occur over and over in Arnold's poetry.

Distinctively Arnoldian, too, is the narrator's appeal to nature as an aid to understanding the human drama. Lines 97-102 see a pause in the action of Alaric's conquest of Rome in order to interpolate a Romantic nature simile:

Hast thou not marked on a wild autumn day  
When the wind slumbereth in a sudden lull,  
What deathlike stillness o'er the landscape lay,  
How calmly sad, how sadly beautiful;  
How each bright tint of tree, and flower, and heath  
Were mingling with the sere and withered hues of death?

The likening of the destruction of the glorious city to the autumnal death of a landscape has a self-conscious force that brings to notice the fact that Arnold, not Alaric, is the "prime mover" of the poem. Here the poem becomes a vehicle for Arnold's juvenile thoughts on the relationship between man and nature; thoughts, notably, of the disorder contained within beauty.

An understanding of Arnold's attitude to nature is important if we are to compare Arnold's and Coleridge's poetical philosophy. As we shall see later, Coleridge sought above all for unity between man and his (supposedly) external world. Now it may indeed be said that the stanza quoted above indicates such a unity. Man's condition is mirrored in the natural scene where the foreshadowing of death is contained within the beauty of the natural forms. Later in the poem, however, such a unity has disappeared. Lines 193-198 speak of Alaric's extraordinary burial in the bed of a river:

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<sup>9</sup> *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (B. Fellowes, London, 1845) pp. 108-9. From "The Social Progress of States" (1830).

One little year; that restless soul shall rest,  
 That frame of vigour shall be crumbling clay,  
 And tranquilly, above that troubled breast,  
 The sunny waters hold their joyous way:  
 And gently shall the murmuring ripples flow,  
 Nor wake the weary soul that slumbers on below.

Here, nature's relationship to man is sharply dichotomous. Man in death is "troubled" and "weary" whereas nature is tranquil and "joyous". In the passage quoted before, nature takes part in Arnold's perceived sadness of death. Here she becomes something apart. It is possible, in this poem, to put such inconsistency down to youthful thoughtlessness, but in reality the confusion points to more than this. What we see in "Alaric" is, in fact, an early example of Arnold's struggle with Romanticism. The "double movement" we have observed here in Arnold's attitude to nature - the wish for a Wordsworthian identification of man with nature combined with a sense that man is in reality isolated - is a tendency that we shall see again in Arnold's poetry.

## 1.2. Coleridge's Poetical Philosophy

Arnold spent most of the 1840s in Oxford; as an undergraduate and, from 1845, as a Fellow, of Oriel College. His reading list for the fellowship examination is interesting for the high profile given to the debate between idealist and rationalist philosophy. Included were Kant's Critique, Mill's Logic and Plato's Republic and Phaedrus, together with works of Augustine, Descartes and Berkeley.<sup>10</sup> It is particularly interesting to find Arnold reading Kant. A similar reading of Kant during his undergraduate years, led Coleridge towards a profound change in his epistemological theories. A prolonged discussion of Coleridge's position as it evolved will be instructive for the light it sheds - in the shape of parallels and divergences - on Arnold's own later development as a poet.

In the light of my prime concern with Arnold's religious work, the comparison with Coleridge is useful for throwing into relief that "central fact of Arnold's experience". It was, in fact, the central fact of the experience of both men that religious concerns and poetry were inextricably intertwined. For Arnold, however, the relationship between the two in the 1840s was an uneasy one. Although intellectually, as Honan says, Arnold had given up his belief in the Resurrection and Atonement by 1844,<sup>11</sup> a turbulent poem from that year, "Stagirius", indicates that, emotionally, a gap had been left:

From doubt, where all is double;  
 Where wise men are not strong,  
 Where comfort turns to trouble,  
 Where just men suffer wrong;  
 Where sorrow treads on joy,  
 Where sweet things soonest cloy,  
 Where faiths are built on dust,  
 Where love is half mistrust,

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<sup>10</sup>See Honan, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

Hungry, and barren, and sharp as the sea -  
Oh! set us free. (30-48)

"Stagirius" is a passionate search for a deity not "built on dust". The description of the soul uncertain about its true goal and hence in turmoil gives way to a plea, at the end of the poem, for unity:

O where thy voice doth come  
Let all doubts be dumb,  
Let all worlds be mild,  
All strifes be reconciled,  
All pains beguiled! (52-56)

There is, notably, no suggestion in the poem of how the latter stage can be reached, only that it is absolutely necessary for Arnold's well-being that it is.

"Stagirius" shows that, at the time of reading Kant, Arnold felt a sense of loss and a desire for recovery. His early poetry is undertaken as a form of enquiry. Coleridge, too, came to Kant in a spirit of enquiry, albeit a more positive one than Arnold's. Coleridge's enquiry took the form of rebellion against the empiricist orthodoxy prevalent at the time and an aspiration towards Truth by alternative methods. This had always been a tendency in Coleridge's character. Thus in the decade of the 1790s, prior to reading Kant, we find Coleridge becoming a political agitator for the republican cause, attempting to initiate an agrarian commune in America, and, in 1798, planning to enter the Unitarian ministry. If there was one controlling factor in determining Coleridge's life, thought and poetry it was the idea that there was an all-encapsulating Truth about life that could be known. In the last years of his life we find Coleridge obsessed by his Opus Maximum, a projected work that would embody his philosophical system, one designed to unite all previous systems in sifting the fragments of truth from each.

Coleridge too, then, came to read German idealist philosophy in a spirit of dissatisfaction. An uncompromising logician, his dissatisfaction can be traced to a feeling that the epistemological theories then current failed to square with his own experiences. He came to believe this particularly in his acquaintance with Wordsworth, whose poetry "found him" in a way that others' did not.<sup>12</sup> In Biographia Literaria he describes how the poetry of Wordsworth introduced him to new possibilities of perception. He was struck by

the union of deep feeling with profound thought: the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops.<sup>13</sup>

There is a marked Platonic tone to this description of his new way of seeing the world. Whilst Wordsworth is observing just the same objects Coleridge has always observed, there has been constructed around them an "ideal world" which, though always there, had been lost to sight by a sterility of perception, a lack of "imaginative faculty".

<sup>12</sup>The expression is from Coleridge's later description of the Bible in Aids to Reflection - ed. T. Fenby (Grant, Edinburgh, 1905) p. 272: "In short, whatever finds me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit".

<sup>13</sup>Biographia Literaria - ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1907) vol. 1, chap. iv., p. 59.

Coleridge took these ideas a step further in his reading of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. He found in Kant the argument that all percipient acts require an act of faith. As J.H. Muirhead puts it, the very existence of an objective world of fact depended on a "natural metaphysic of the mind" postulating "necessary connections between the dispersed elements of sensory experience".<sup>14</sup> Where he departed from Kant was in denying Kant's view that the only knowledge we can have is of the phenomenal world (Kant's "Understanding"). Though for Kant there was a "real" world (that of the moral sphere), we could only know vague regulative principles which had "no validity as a revelation of the real or noumenal world".<sup>15</sup> Coleridge undermined such a view by arguing that Kant's belief in the truth of the phenomenal world was of just the same kind as his Reason (or "knowledge of the real world"). Following Plato, Coleridge maintained that we can know the noumenal world by using a higher form of the same creative faculty that we employ in all perception. As Coleridge understood, the vital difference was that

while the emphasis in Kant was upon the conceptions of the understanding, into which the ideas of the reason entered only as regulative principles bereft of any substantiating power, in Plato the ideas were the underlying basis of the whole structure of knowledge, being not merely constitutive, but "productive".<sup>16</sup>

Coleridge's reading of philosophy served to confirm already nascent ideas as to the nature of religious language. He saw that certain sorts of language implied adherence to something beyond the merely phenomenal world. Most specifically he found this in the use of symbolic language. In The Statesman's Manual Coleridge writes of his experience of reading the scriptural histories. He describes them as being "the living educts of the Imagination", that "reconciling and mediating power", which, through the "senses" and organized by the "Reason", gives birth to symbols. A symbol, therefore, is "above all" the "translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the reality it renders intelligible."<sup>17</sup> Coleridge is here starting from his own Platonist/Christian convictions and, finding them affirmed in Scripture, analysing in what way the redactors put their convictions across. He sees in the writers' use of symbol their successful attempt to explain noumenal experience and their conviction of universal truths. Symbol thus has the power, for Coleridge, to create meaning, to point beyond the temporal moment. In it the particular and universal meet, the individual brings into being the belief that he is part of a larger purpose.

Coleridge is insistent on the fact that the writer or spectator "brings into being" this state of consciousness. As he had seen, any act of perception involves an act of creating meaning out of raw sense data. For Coleridge the natural corollary of this is to see ourselves as partaking in the divine act of

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<sup>14</sup>Coleridge as Philosopher (Allen and Unwin, London, 1930) p. 90. I will be relying fairly extensively on Muirhead's exhaustively detailed work for information on the relationship of Kant's philosophy to that of Coleridge.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>17</sup>The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge - ed. W.G.T. Shedd, 7 vols. (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1884) vol. 1, pp. 436-437. Coleridge notably does not find such fertile use of the Imagination in the years following Locke, Hume, Berkeley et al.:

The histories and political economy of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the product of an unenlivened and generalising understanding.

creation.<sup>18</sup> What he termed Wordsworth's "imaginative faculty" in the remembrance of his early struggling towards understanding, now becomes defined as the "Imagination". The Imagination is not to be seen merely as a systematizer of impressions, reproducing in the mind what is seen on the retina. In its highest form the Imagination allows us to partake in the boundless nature of noumenal reality.

As Muirhead says, Coleridge is at bottom taking his inspiration from the old distinctions between natura naturata and natura naturans - that is Nature as a dead mechanism and Nature as a creative force "essentially related to the soul of man".<sup>19</sup> To use our Imagination is on one level, then, simply to put us into a right relationship with God, to see ourselves as part of his whole creative scheme. On a higher level, however, (and this is where symbolic and poetic language comes in) Coleridge places the poets and the artistic faculty. With help, according to Muirhead, from Schelling, he postulates a higher "Secondary Imagination", that faculty which allows the artist to embody in his art the divine working. In thus defining the artistic process Coleridge is able to satisfy himself as to what is happening in his own and Wordsworth's poetry and the symbolic and metaphorical language of the Bible. "Art", to quote Schelling, "effects the impossible by resolving an infinite contradiction in a finite product" - a result it achieves through the power of the "productive intuition" we call "Imagination".<sup>20</sup> Art and poetic language thus have the ability to encapsulate the very essence of what it is to be human. In a particular "finite" work of art we can glimpse the "infinite contradiction" that we are both individual and yet part of a greater whole, both divinely creative and yet part ourselves of Creation.

Coleridge is here attempting to come to terms with the tensions and ambiguities of human existence. His enquiry into the workings of the artistic process is undertaken in order to try to understand the "infinite contradiction" that in art and poetry one can seemingly partake in the eternally creative glory of God whilst simultaneously one remains a human being subject to the same laws as the rest of nature. We can now see, then, that Coleridge's poetic enquiry is a fundamentally religious one in that it is an attempt at synthesis, an attempt to unite the polarities of existence, to bring order out of seeming chaos. As Muirhead underlines, the Imagination must bring discordant qualities into balance or harmony in order to reveal the truth that is implicit there, to "unite sameness with difference".<sup>21</sup>

We should now be able to see fully the power of symbolism for Coleridge. A symbol encapsulates in its very being the religious process, the eternal and particular meeting whilst for ever remaining distinct.

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<sup>18</sup>For example, from a letter to Thomas Poole (23rd March, 1801) berating mechanistic philosophy:

If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's Image, and that, too, in the sublimest sense, the Image of the Creator, there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.

(Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge - ed. E.L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1956-71) vol. 2, no. 709.)

<sup>19</sup>Muirhead, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup>Werke, vol. 3, p. 349. Quoted in Muirhead, p. 202.

<sup>21</sup>Muirhead, p. 210.

Thus, as Stephen Prickett underlines in Romanticism and Religion, art is vitally important as a tool in any explanation of religion:

The symbolism of art makes us grasp "presentationally" the eternal truths of human nature through the particularity of an individual situation.<sup>22</sup>

This was Coleridge's most important contribution to Romantic poetic theory, a contribution of which Arnold would surely have been aware. Whilst it does not solve the ambiguity of existence or the question of the status of art as an explanation of existence, it is nevertheless one of the most thought-provoking responses to that disjunction in human thought that we have suggested is the crucial existential problem handed down by such philosophers as Locke and Hume. It is this same problem, as we have seen and will continue to see, that afflicts Arnold. His efforts to come to terms with it and his use, if any of the Coleridgean "solution" will be examined in the next section.

### 1.3. The Poems of Arnold's 1849 Collection

It was never likely that Arnold would follow Coleridge's precise course. His reading of German philosophy has to be seen in the light of familial attitudes and notions in the areas of epistemology and religion. Idealist philosophy had to contend with the strongly imbibed common-sense morality of Arnold's father, a peculiarly English combination of Lockeian philosophy and the wisdom of the Anglican divines. Notably this led to a battle in Arnold between opposing philosophical systems. Although the sonnet "Written in Butler's Sermons", was probably composed before his reading of Kant, it serves to indicate the way in which Arnold's thought was moving:

Affections, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,  
Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control -  
So men, unravelling God's harmonious whole,  
Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours. (1-4)

Arnold vigorously denies the possibility of explaining human nature as if it were a matter only of a number of inter-connecting chemical reactions. He goes on to assert that man has "one nature" which "queen-like, sits alone, / Centred in a majestic unity". At this time in his life he sees Bishop Butler's attempts at theology (attempts which, notably, were later on to provide much of the inspiration behind Literature and Dogma) as an unnecessary schematising of man's God-given unity.

The idea that he has a "real" self buried somewhere deep within his apparent self is one of Arnold's most enduring beliefs, and a constant theme of his poetry. It is a complex matter, owing its existence to a number of different sources. At the time of the above-mentioned poem it has probably been suggested primarily by Arnold's reading of Classical philosophy, although the influence of Goethe - the modern mind most important to Arnold - is also likely. The pure aspiration after Truth of a philosopher such as Plato no doubt offered great comfort for a poet who, as we saw in "Stagirius", was finding trouble in defining his

<sup>22</sup>Romanticism and Religion - The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church (Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 30.



self and his goal in life. If Arnold saw himself as in some sense "post-Christian", then a return to the wisdom of an intellectually similar time was a comforting bulwark on which to rest. Goethe he saw as the modern face of Classicism's underlying principle - the "wide and luminous view".<sup>23</sup> He was able to suggest to Arnold that, even in his own sickly times, one might fix on certain ideals and follow them; that somewhere the Truth might still be found.<sup>24</sup>

The extraordinary poem "In Utrumque Paratus", probably written in 1846, sees Arnold experimenting with idealist philosophy. The first two stanzas follow the ideas of Plotinus in seeing the goal of the soul as one of re-ascent to the original fount of purity from which creation sprang. The remainder of the poem describes such a journey, but utters a plaintive warning to any who see themselves greater than "the wild unfathered mass" who have known "no birth / In divine seats". Arnold ultimately discounts himself as an idealist, for, having reached the "solemn peaks" where his soul might be re-united with the "One all-pure", he looks down to see the natural "brother-world" only to make the self-effacing utterance:

Yet doth thine inmost soul with yearning teem.  
- Oh, what a spasm shakes the dreamer's heart!  
"I, too, but seem." (40-42)

This indicates the parameters within which Arnold's thought is moving. In the 1840s he seems to hover between the possibility of finding Ideals to which he might commit himself, or of giving in to a mechanist philosophy in which the self is unknowable.

Interestingly enough, Arnold had been reading the Biographia Literaria in 1846.<sup>25</sup> Whilst he may have been aware of the claims Coleridge was making for poetry, however, Arnold's debt to Romanticism seems to have been on the level of tone and imagery (as in the hints of Byron and Wordsworth in "Alaric at Rome") rather than in an adherence to the Romantics' thoughts on poetry. In fact Arnold's whole desire seems to have been to look beyond Romanticism. Many of the letters of the 1840s to his "confessor", Clough, convey his ideas about the true role of poetry and his feelings that the English Romantics had failed to realise it:

What a brute you were to tell me to read Keats' Letters ...

What harm he has done in English poetry. As Browning is a man with a moderate gift passionately desiring movement and fulness, and obtaining but a confused multitudinousness, so Keats with a very high gift, is yet also consumed by this desire: and cannot produce the truly living and moving, as his conscience keeps telling him. They will not be patient neither understand that they must begin with an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness: ...

... But what perplexity Keats Tennyson et id genus omne must occasion to young writers of the sort: yes and those d--d Elizabethan poets generally. Those who cannot read G[ree]k sh[ou]ld read nothing but Milton

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<sup>23</sup>From "Stanzas In Memory of the Author of "Obermann"" (ll. 79-80).

<sup>24</sup>The fact that Arnold saw Goethe in the light of Classical wisdom is clear from a letter sent by J.C. Shairp to A.H. Clough, 24 July 1849: "I don't think he (Goethe) will ever be an oracle for me, though Matt says "he saw life steadily and saw it whole"". (Quoted in CP, p. 139.) Arnold had originally applied the phrase to Sophocles in the 1848 sonnet "To a Friend".

<sup>25</sup>Allott suggests that Coleridge's work is the probable source of the imagery in ll. 15-21 of "In Utrumque Paratus". (Ibid., p. 45.)

and parts of Wordsworth: the state should see to it.<sup>26</sup>

A somewhat later letter conveys a similar reproach:

More and more I feel that the diff. btw. a mature and a youthful age of the world compels the poetry of the former to use gr. plainness of speech as compared with that of the latter: and that Keats & Shelley were on a false track when they set themselves to reproduce the exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity, of the Elizabethan poets. Yet critics cannot get to learn this, because the Elizabethan poets are our greatest, and our canons of poetry are founded on their works. They still think that the object of poetry is to produce exquisite bits and images - such as Shelley's clouds shepherded by the slow unwilling wind, and Keats passim: whereas modern poetry can only subsist by its contents: by becoming a complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did: by including, as theirs did, religion with poetry, instead of existing as poetry only, and leaving religious wants to be supplied by the Christian religion, as a power existing independent of the poetical power. But the language, style, and general proceedings of a poetry which has such an immense task to perform, must be very plain, direct and severe: and it must not lose itself in parts & episodes & ornamental work, but must press forwards to the whole.<sup>27</sup>

These letters give us representative ideas on two of Arnold's most enduring beliefs - that the modern age presents new problems for the poet and that Keats, Shelley and the Romantic poets generally neither perceived the need for a new approach nor provided one. Arnold's thesis is that the modern poet has to adopt a new manifesto in order to deal with the larger range of thoughts and feelings now current. This belief in a cumulative idea of history is underlined in another letter to Clough:

... had Shakespeare and Milton lived in the atmosphere of modern feeling, had they had the multitude of new thoughts and feelings to deal with a modern has, I think it likely the style of each would have been far less curious and exquisite... The poet's matter being the hitherto experience of the world, and his own, increases with every century.<sup>28</sup>

Arnold's remedy for the modern poet confused by such "multitudinousness" becomes the distinctive basis of his philosophy. At the heart of one's multipartite vision, one needs a ruling Idea. The making of the word "idea" into a proper noun indicates its abstract nature for Arnold. It indicates less a set of fixed principles and more an unfocussed cri de coeur - a resolve that some regulative principle for life, and thus for poetry as a criticism of life, must be found.

The end of the letter from 1852 indicates why there is a need for such a prevailing Idea. His call for poetry to become "a complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did" sees Arnold taking the position we saw in "Stagirius" a step further. It is clear that Arnold now sees European civilisation as moving unremittingly to a new stage of unbelief in religious matters. Poetry's role is to suggest, by means of content and style, new rules by which to live.

On one level Arnold is looking back fondly to a civilisation - Greece in the age of Pericles - which he perceives to have been more cultured and open to culture than any other. His hope is the unlikely scenario of a return to the days when a people (supposedly) lived by the plays of Sophocles. Arnold's invocation of the poetry of the ancients betrays, however, a more personal need. His answer is his effort to lay to rest the

<sup>26</sup>Letter to Clough, after Sept. 1849. (LC, pp. 96-97.)

<sup>27</sup>Letter to Clough from Milford Boys School, Oct. 28, 1852. (Ibid., p. 124.)

<sup>28</sup>London, Tuesday [Dec. 1847 or early 1848]. (Ibid., p. 65.)

"raging falsetto" of "Stagirius".<sup>29</sup> Whilst his prescription for poetry is outwardly addressed to other poets, to critics and to Clough, it is primarily Arnold addressing himself on the necessity of finding a clear, unobstructed rule of life. It is his realisation that he is being pulled apart by rival philosophical systems:

For me you may often hear my sinews cracking under the effort to unite matter ...

he tells Clough in 1847/8.<sup>30</sup> And again:

The spectacle of a writer striving evidently to get breast to breast with reality is always full of instruction and very invigorating - and here I always feel you have the advantage of me: "much may be seen, tho: nothing can be solved" - weighs upon me in writing.<sup>31</sup>

Arnold's feeling that reality escapes him leads him to exalt those poets who have shown evidence of a cool objectivity, who have seemed to him to be self-possessed and in touch with that unity at the heart of themselves which we saw posited in "Written in Butler's Sermons". Thus one early sonnet, from 1844, treats Shakespeare as the objective poet par excellence. "Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure," he is likened to "the loftiest hill" at which we gaze in awe in the attempt to encapsulate it within our vision. The attempt is doomed to failure - "Shakspeare, Shakspeare, you are as obscure as life is:" Arnold tells Clough in 1847.<sup>32</sup> Yet the sonnet, as Park Honan says, "is a tribute to Arnold's best hope for himself",<sup>33</sup> a hope that he may be able to find the same cool detachment he perceives in Shakespeare.

According to Arnold this is, as we have seen, a detachment notably not present in Keats, Shelley, Tennyson "et id genus omne". In concentrating on "exquisite bits and images" rather than "the whole" such poets have failed to perceive the changing needs of poetry, failed to see that "dawdling" with the "painted shell" of the universe is not likely to help anyone to live in it.<sup>34</sup>

Arnold's letters give us his generalised view on the Romantics - that their poetry is inadequate to fill the spiritual gap left by the decline of Christianity. According to the 1852 letter quoted, the "contents" of Romantic poetry existed as "poetry only" and left "religious wants" to be supplied "independent of the poetical power" - a startling suggestion when we think of the claims Coleridge was making for the type of poetry he was creating.

To see more clearly what Arnold is saying we must look further at his poetry. The substance of "The New Sirens" (1846-7) is the debate in the author's mind between leading a life of sensuous pleasure or one dedicated to the laborious pursuit of knowledge. The New Sirens are a symbol of Arnold's awakening to the possibilities of a religion of pleasure. "Come", the Sirens say,

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<sup>29</sup>From a letter to F.J. Palgrave in 1869, speaking of "Stagirius" and another early poem, "The Voice" - "the falsetto rages too furiously". (Quoted in CP, p. 36.)

<sup>30</sup>LC, p. 65.

<sup>31</sup>London, July 20, [1848]. (Ibid., p. 86.)

<sup>32</sup>[London, shortly after Dec. 6, 1847.] (Ibid., p. 63.)

<sup>33</sup>Honan, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup>From the letter to Clough, [shortly after Dec. 6, 1847]: "Yet to solve the Universe as you try to do is as irritating as Tennyson's dawdling with its painted shell is fatiguing to me to witness...." (LC, p. 63.)

"the soul is fainting  
 Till she search and learn her own,  
 And the wisdom of man's painting  
 Leaves her riddle half unknown."  
 "Come," you say, "the brain is seeking,  
 While the sovran heart is dead;  
 Yet this gleaned, when Gods were speaking,  
 Rarer secrets than the toiling head." (73-80)

In the poem Arnold rejects the proffered allure of the Sirens - the philosophy that "only, what we feel, we know". Arnold's "argument" to the poem, in a letter to Clough, explains why:

I ... ask myself whether this alternation of ennui and excitement is worth much? Whether it is in truth a very desirable life?

And, were this alternation of ennui and excitement the best discoverable existence, yet it cannot last: time will destroy it: the time will come, when the elasticity of the spirits will be worn out, and nothing left but weariness.<sup>35</sup>

At one level this is obviously a personal rejection of youthful excess. There is, however, a larger thesis afoot. The broad question of the efficacy of Romantic ideas as a rule for life is posed from the beginning. The protagonist is a poet, formerly following his art whilst clutching "awful laurels" (l. 31), but now wondering if the "frail forms" (l. 43) of the New Sirens might not be "more enduring / Than the charms Ulysses bore" (ll. 43-44). Perhaps the vociferous claims of the new poets of romantic love are greater and safer than that allure of intellectual love which proved fatal to Homer's sailors? The promise certainly appears to be rewarding. The nightly revels in the "humming festal room" (a suggestion, perhaps, of mystical beliefs and practices) culminate in a glorious dawn in which divine communion is suggested:

And immortal forms, to meet you,  
 Down the statued alleys came,  
 And through golden horns, to greet you,  
 Blew such music as a God may frame. (101-104)

The poet is charmed for a time. Later in the poem, however, he admits that "Long we wandered with you, feeding / Our rapt souls on your replies," but (and here we are reminded of Arnold's sub-title to the poem "A Palinode") now he is beginning to question the Siren's message. In the light of "the sombre day" (l. 116) (a figure for the ever-seeking brain "that must be fed" (l. 130)) the Sirens are forced to think instead of relying simply on their senses. The result is that they droop and dwindle. The poet decides that such a philosophy can not, finally, be entertained:

Can men worship the wan features,  
 The sunk eyes, the wailing tone,  
 Of unsphered, discrowned creatures,  
 Souls as little godlike as their own? (247-250)

That Arnold's decision contains a turning away from Romanticism is clear from the reasons the poet gives for not, finally, committing himself to the New Sirens. A hint of Arnold's dissatisfaction with the Romantics' common inspiration from Nature is clear:

And if the dawning

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<sup>35</sup>March 1849. (Ibid., p. 106.)

Into daylight never grew,...  
 Or the day were sooner done,  
 Or, perhaps, if hope were stronger,  
 No weak nursling of an earthly sun... (105-6, 110-112)

Arnold here suggests that the seeming divinity of the glorious dawn is only, as he re-iterates later, a "vain ovation" for "mimic raptures" won "From some transient earthly sun",<sup>36</sup> one's excitement at which soon fades when subjected to any deep thinking. The Sirens' claim to supply all one's spiritual needs is met with similar disbelief:

Once, like us, you took your station  
 Watchers for a purer fire;  
 But you drooped in expectation,  
 And you wearied in desire.  
 When the first rose flush was steeping  
 All the frore peak's awful crown,  
 Shepherds say, they found you sleeping  
 In some windless valley, further down. (139-146)

If Arnold saw himself, in "In Utrumque Paratus", as unworthy to be proclaiming the Truth on the solemn peaks, then the Romantic philosophy is too weak even to aspire after Truth. In this powerful image Arnold anticipates the letter to Clough about the failure of recent poetry to combine "religious wants" with poetry. The Sirens, like Jesus' disciples following their spiritual source, are discovered asleep, in abandonment of their pretentious vows.

Arnold takes his thesis further in the title poem to his 1849 collection of poems, "The Strayed Reveller". The "Reveller" is an impressionable young Romantic who, straying into the environs of the goddess Circe's palace, is prevailed upon by Circe to surfeit himself on her intoxicating wine. Ulysses joins the company, eager to hear news of humanity, and the Youth tells of all he has heard that day. He has, he tells Ulysses, been in the company of Silenus, "the satyr companion and instructor of the youthful Dionysus"<sup>37</sup> who, when drunk, shows great powers of comprehension. Silenus has imparted two visions of the world to the Youth - that of the "Gods" and that of the "wise bards". "The Gods are happy" (l. 130) as, detached from humanity, they view their playthings as a picturesque harmony. The wise bards, though seeing the same things are, however, made to feel the suffering as well as the beauty:

They feel the biting spears  
 Of the grim Lapithae, and Theseus, drive,  
 Drive crashing through their bones; (227-229)

The Gods exact a price of the artist for his creative gift - "To become what we sing" (l. 234).

There has been some divergence in critical opinion as to the meaning of "The Strayed Reveller". Lionel Trilling, for example, sees it as a typical Arnoldian theme - "Arnold's celebration of the painful glories of

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<sup>36</sup>Paraphrase of ll. 152-154.

<sup>37</sup>Note in CP, p. 78.

man's bondage to the emotions",<sup>38</sup> a celebration, in fact, of one of Romanticism's central tenets. Allott, meanwhile, decides that it is contradictory to the majority of Arnold's poems:

...clearly in one mood at least before 1849 poetic volatility powerfully attracted him.

Drawing attention to the Youth's enthusiastic utterances at the beginning,

Faster, faster,  
O Circe, Goddess,  
Let the wild, thronging train,  
The bright procession  
Of eddying forms,  
Sweep through my soul! (1-6)

Allott claims that "the movement of the whole stanza suggests a Shelleyan allegiance..."<sup>39</sup> Whilst I would agree with the results of such conclusions I differ, however, on the estimation of Arnold's motives. I would agree with Leon Gottfried's estimation in his Matthew Arnold and the Romantics<sup>40</sup> that the Reveller is "strayed" in more senses than one. Although he hears both the visions of Silenus, he is attracted only by the superficial overview of the Gods:

But I, Ulysses,  
Sitting on the warm steps,  
Looking over the valley,  
All day long, have seen,  
Without pain, without labour,  
Sometimes a wild-haired Maenad -  
Sometimes a Faun with torches -  
And sometimes, for a moment,  
Passing through the dark stems  
Flowing-robed, the beloved,  
The desired, the divine,  
Beloved Iacchus. (270-280)

This is, in effect, the same claim as that of the New Sirens - the simple, carefree delighting in pleasure with the suggestion of a glimpse of the divine as the reward for one's discipleship. Arnold is not showing such "poetic volatility" allegiance. The Youth is, after all, not in control of himself. "Drunk with superficial beauty and variety," to quote Gottfried, Arnold likens him to those Romantic poets who are "prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness". At the end of the poem, despite his being offered the profound poetical vision of the wise bards, he is as astray as he was at the beginning, calling for more wine in his satisfaction with sensuousness.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that Arnold is on the side of the wise bards. What is not clear, however, is who the wise bards are meant to represent. Trilling feels that they stand for Arnold's brief celebration of the Romantic temperament. Such a reading, however, directly contradicts Arnold's accusation that the Romantics played with "exquisite bits and images" rather than pressing "forwards to the whole". The wise bards are notable,

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<sup>38</sup>Trilling, p. 100.

<sup>39</sup>CP, pp. 67-68.

<sup>40</sup>University of Nebraska Press, 1963.

<sup>41</sup>Gottfried, pp. 124-125.

on the contrary, for their comprehensive vision. Such a factor leads Warren D. Anderson to posit Sophocles and Apollonius as the wise bards and, further, to see the poem as the typical Arnoldian opposition of Classical ideal and Romantic sensuousness and multitudinousness.<sup>42</sup>

It is here that I come back to Trilling's conclusion. I do think Arnold is celebrating "the painful glories of man's bondage to the strength of the emotions", but I agree with Anderson in finding that celebration centred on the Classical poets, not the Romantics. What is happening is, in fact, an unconscious displacement on Arnold's part. "The Strayed Reveller" is a celebration of the painful joys of poetic creation (a thoroughly Romantic poetical idea) in the guise of an admiration for the Classical "wide and luminous view". Arnold is, in effect, applauding Classicism for showing Romantic characteristics.

The confusion lies, I think, in Arnold's desire for "the whole". We saw in discussing the "Shakespeare" sonnet, Arnold's personal desire for cool detachment in the face of the world's "multitudinousness". We know, too, from "Stagirius" and the 1852 letter to Clough that he saw this "wholeness" as something to be found only in religion. Now that Christianity was failing he needed to find that religious sense of the essential unity of matter, the religious fulness of purpose, in poetry. Arnold's knowledge of the lives of Romanticism's central protagonists makes him doubtful as to the efficacy of the central tenets of Romantic poetry for enabling one to follow a ruling Idea of life.<sup>43</sup> Thus his claim that Romantic poetry did not address religious wants, did not provide for this wholeness of purpose. The New Sirens and the Strayed Reveller are the results of Arnold's perception of Romanticism's failings - characters who become "prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness" and who, failing to follow the ruling Idea, will eventually wear out the "elasticity" of their spirits.

So Arnold seeks for his cool detached vision in the likes of Sophocles and Apollonius but, remarkably enough, portrays them as in possession of what Coleridge would call "The Imagination". Arnold's "wise bards", in "becoming what they sing", are showing that semi-divine creative faculty which Coleridge saw as the essence of the poetic office. Their uncomfortable vision is the powerful one of a reconciliation of "discordant qualities"; knowledge of both the beauty of the divine vision and the agonies of human existence. They emerge from the sublimities of their vision much like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner does after his - "sadder but wiser".

If this is all true, it would suggest that Arnold is, as we suggested at the beginning of this chapter, showing Romantic characteristics in spite of himself. The desire for "the whole" leads him to find it in a place he thinks he is rejecting. It is clear however, from the remaining poetry, letters and official poetic

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1965) pp. 24-31.

<sup>43</sup> In addition to Arnold's probable opinion of Wordsworth at this time (see note no. 6, p. 3) we find him dismissing Coleridge and Shelley in a late essay in the following terms. Coleridge was a "poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium" whilst Shelley was a "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain". (From "Byron", the preface to the Poetry of Byron (1881). CPW 9:237.)

pronouncements, that Arnold is not aware of his additions to the Romantic heritage. The poem that ends the first volume and is presumably meant to sum up the whole, is his most unremittingly anti-Romantic piece of all. "Resignation" is the first of a number of notable poems, each of which serves to sum up and define a particular stage of Arnold's poetical philosophy. In "Resignation", Arnold makes what he believes are firm definitions of the man/nature relationship and the role of the poet. In his resulting re-definitions of the nature of reality, he attempts to substitute his own unified system of beliefs for the fragmented vision of earlier poems.

Many of Arnold's early poems are arguments. Such pieces as "In Harmony with Nature (To a Preacher)", "The World and the Quietist (To Critias)" and "To a Republican Friend, 1848" set up debates between the author and the person addressed. "Resignation" is another such argument, addressed "To Fausta", Matthew's elder sister, Jane Arnold.<sup>44</sup>

Like "The New Sirens", "Resignation" might equally have the sub-title "A Palinode", as the poem is a deliberate retraction of ideas the poet might once have entertained or even partly believed. The full title of the poem sets up the tone of recantation with its suggestion that Arnold is resigning from a position still held by his impetuous sister. The substance of the poem further emphasises the idea of re-definition of the self, since it is about re-visiting a place and events which the memory had marked out as a previous self-definition.

Leon Gottfried sees "Resignation" as Arnold's deliberate attempt to re-define the Wordsworthian poetic philosophy of "Tintern Abbey".<sup>45</sup> The address to the passionate sister and the poet's own past certainly suggest this. So, too, does the setting, since this is the English Lake country, containing all the associations that Arnold knew would be readily in the minds of his readers. However, as always with Arnold's larger theses, behind the denial of Romanticism is the catalyst of the personal desire for integrity. "Resignation" is Arnold's attempt to close the debate going on in his own mind about the nature of nature, a debate that we noticed was certainly unfinished at the time of writing "Alaric at Rome".

The main action of the poem is a repeat of a walk made ten years earlier by Dr Arnold and the Arnold children. Matthew recalls his youthful reactions to the original walk, evoking remembrances of an almost Wordsworthian sublimity:

And now, in front, behold outspread  
Those upper regions we must tread!  
Mild hollows, and clear heathy swells,  
The cheerful silence of the fells. (64-67)

The description of the close of that day sums up the young Arnold's sense of Wordsworthian empathy with

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<sup>44</sup>According to Trilling, the name suggests "a female Faust" who "desires poignant experience to relieve the dullness of her life". (p. 79.)

<sup>45</sup>Gottfried, pp. 219-223.



nature. The headlong rush of the recollection thus far pauses, in order to give an effect akin to one of Wordsworth's "spots of time":

But, Fausta, I remember well,  
That as the balmy darkness fell  
We bathed our hands with speechless glee,  
That night, in the wide-glimmering sea. (82-85)

On this walk, however, a new tone is introduced. Mature reflection has taken the place of "speechless glee":

Here sit we, and again unroll,  
Though slowly, the familiar whole. (94-95)

We soon find, though, that Arnold's sister is still in possession of her youthful disposition towards nature:

Still this wild brook, the rushes cool,  
The sailing foam, the shining pool!  
These are not changed; and we, you say,  
Are scarce more changed, in truth, than they. (104-107)

The effect of the deliberately awkward punctuation of the last two lines is to deny the certainty of what has gone before, to set up the antithesis in attitudes that is the substance of "Resignation". Arnold, it is clear, diverges strongly from the opinion of "Fausta" that this walk can be described in the same manner as the one a decade earlier. He adverts to the gipsies "whom we met below" (l. 108) as the true natural inheritors of what Fausta sees as "scenery". Unmoved by any Romantic sense of spiritual "oneness" with nature their pattern of life is one of subsistence:

- they rubbed through yesterday  
In their hereditary way,  
And they will rub through, if they can,  
To-morrow on the self-same plan,  
Till death arrive to supersede,  
For them, vicissitude and need. (138-143)

Having described what life is like for the common lot, Arnold contrasts the expectations of the gipsies with those of the Wordsworthian poet. There is a marked line of descent from Wordsworth's description of the poet as a man "endowed with a more lively sensibility",<sup>46</sup> to Arnold's definition of the poet as one

to whose mighty heart  
Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart, (144-145)

but a rebuke of the author of "The Prelude" is surely intended in the following couplet, where Arnold's poet

Subdues that energy to scan  
Not his own course, but that of man. (146-147)

Moreover Arnold's poet seeks not for communion with his fellows, but rather for detachment:

Beautiful eyes meet his - and he  
Bears to admire uncravingly; (160-161)

Arnold's poet identifies with nature, but such an identification is the opposite of "the love of nature leading

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<sup>46</sup>From the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1800).

to the love of man" of "The Prelude". His contemplation of nature leads him to decide that the universal order is one of "peace" not "joy", a "placid and continuous whole" (ll. 192 & 190). For Arnold's poet, the comprehension of nature leads to his resigning from the love of man.

Fausta, though, is not convinced. She listens, but retains a "wandering smile" (l. 199), still, it seems, in possession of Romantic beliefs. Her reply is that, compared to the gipsies who "feel not, though they move and see" (l. 205), the poet is able to feel more deeply and is, at will, able to breathe "immortal air" (l. 207). In what may be a reference to Coleridge's claims for the "Secondary Imagination", Fausta's poet shows that ability to partake in his art in the divine process of creation.

In a passage that foreshadows "Dover Beach" Arnold retorts that the world "outlasts" such feelings as aversion, love, interest and hope, implying that nature is indifferent to whatever the poet might choose to think about her. Arnold implores his sister to become reconciled to a philosophy of life that is very close to fatalism:

Blame thou not, therefore, him who dares  
Judge vain beforehand human cares;...  
Who needs not love and power, to know,  
Love transient, power an unreal show;  
Who treads at ease life's uncheered ways - (231-232, 235-237)

It is only those who resign themselves to a mechanistic universe who are able to "conquer fate" (l. 248); only then, in other words, can one overcome the Romantic urges within us.

The poem's conclusion sees Arnold deliberately cutting short all further conjecture by asserting the one thing we can know with certainty:

Enough, we live!... (261)

If we can sense anything about nature it is that the hills, rocks and sky "seem to bear rather than rejoice" (l. 270). Any attempt to see oneself as somehow apart from this order - and this is Arnold's final acerbic injunction against the Romantics - is doing a disservice to those who have given up all pretensions:

Not milder is the general lot  
Because our spirits have forgot,  
In action's dizzying eddy whirled,  
The something that infects the world. (275-279)

It seems from this poem that in the years since "Alaric at Rome"<sup>47</sup> Arnold has decided to solve the question of man's relationship to Nature in favour of a stoic fatalism. Man appears to have none of the communion with nature that Wordsworth asserts in "The Prelude" and that we have seen Coleridge postulating in his theory of the Imagination in Biographia Literaria. "Resignation" sees Arnold denying (or ignoring) Coleridgean and Wordsworthian ideas of poetic creativity and consequently becoming lost in the isolation that follows from accepting the mechanistic world view. For many of Arnold's family and friends

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<sup>47</sup>"Alaric" was written by May, 1840. "Resignation" was composed between the years 1843 and 1848.

this was no "solution" at all. His antagonist in the poem, Jane, wrote to their brother Tom saying that common men would "sink" unless they found "some mighty helper":

surely language which tells them of a dumb unalterable order of the universe... will seem too unreal and too hopeless.<sup>48</sup>

Sceptical, too, of the reality of Arnold's vision is J.C. Shairp who wrote to Clough about their mutual friend:

I do not feel that great background of fatalism or call it what you will which is behind all his thoughts. But he thinks he sees his way.

and, similarly, in another letter,

Anything that so takes the life from out things must be false... Mat, as I told him, disowns man's natural feelings, and they will disown his poetry. If there's nothing else in the world but blank dejections, its not worth while setting them to music.<sup>49</sup>

It is true that Arnold disowns "man's feelings", though he would substitute "Romantic" for Shairp's "natural". What he is doing in "Resignation" is deliberately recanting ideas he has held - and even held in the same volume of poetry. The poets as "wise bards" who "become what they sing" in "The Strayed Reveller" are here denied their philosophy of "Romantic empathy and identification" in favour of a philosophy of "Olympian ("Classical") detachment".<sup>50</sup>

The sermon on detachment in "Resignation" is apparently written for the larger benefit of poetry. Of direct relevance here is Arnold's letter to Clough of February, 1849:

The trying to go into and to the bottom of an object instead of grouping objects is as fatal to the sensuousness of poetry as the mere painting, (for, in Poetry this is not grouping) is to its airy and rapidly moving life.

"Not deep the Poet sees, but wide": think of this as you gaze from the Cumner Hill toward Cirencester and Cheltenham.<sup>51</sup>

The invocation of the line from "Resignation" indicates that Arnold saw his poem as pointing the way forward for other poets. Foreshadowed here is his insistence on the need for poets of an "Idea of the world", and echoes of his admiration for the detached, objective vision of Shakespeare. When we think, however, that such ideas produced the widely differing messages of "The Strayed Reveller" and "Resignation" we may begin to question the stridency of the latter's call for stoic detachment. Perhaps it may be that Arnold "protesteth too much"?

If we are to take Jane Arnold's side in seeing the philosophy of "Resignation" as "too unreal and too hopeless" then the best place to go for support may well be Arnold himself. There is evidence from his letters that the demolition of Romantic beliefs was undertaken with more than one eye on Clough:

- I have been at Oxford the last two days and hearing Sellar and the rest of that clique who know neither life

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<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Honan, p. 177.

<sup>49</sup>LC, p. 104.

<sup>50</sup>William A. Madden - Matthew Arnold - A Study of the Aesthetic Temperament in Victorian England (Indiana University Press, 1967) p. 127. We can find the reason for such a pronounced change in Arnold's reading lists and letters. His reading of Spinoza, Epictetus, Senancour's "Obermann" and Goethe are all apparent from the poem, especially in the prevailing spirit of Stoicism.

<sup>51</sup>LC, p. 99.

nor themselves rave about your poem gave me a strong almost bitter feeling with respect to them, the age, the poem, even you. Yes I said to myself something tells me I can, if need be, at last dispense with them all, even with him: better that, than be sucked for an hour even into the Time Stream in which they and he plunge and bellow. I ... took up Obermann, and refuged myself with him in his forest against your Zeit Geist.<sup>52</sup>

This letter, written soon after the completion of "Resignation", suggests that there might be more behind the philosophy of the poem than a considered appraisal of Romantic and Stoic ideas on the nature of reality. The language of "taking refuge" suggests that Arnold might, in fact, be escaping from complex and conflicting ideas about poetry and life. Whilst the intention might have been to create a poem that explores ideas, the final effect is quite to the contrary. Arnold's resignation is in fact a resignation from creativity of any sort owing to a destructive withdrawal into himself.

For the true empiricist, of course, the acceptance of the individual's isolation is at least an honest realisation. Significantly, however, Arnold was not satisfied with such a conclusion. Towards the end of the next year Arnold was hinting to Clough that such a philosophy led only to a poetic void as well as being an unsatisfactory "magister vitae":

With me it is curious at present: I am getting to feel more independent and unaffected as to all intellectual and poetical performance the impatience at being faussé in which drove me some time since so strongly into myself, and more snuffing after a moral atmosphere to respire in than ever before in my life.<sup>53</sup>

In admitting he was driven into himself by what amounts to impatience with the intractable problems of writing poetry, Arnold himself denies the force and the truth of "Resignation".

The question as to how he can avoid this isolation and, in particular, how he can write poetry that avoids the conclusions of "Resignation", seems to receive an equivocal answer. In the light of our concerns with Arnold's solution to the question of religion and spirituality this letter seems to me to indicate the reaching of a threshold in Arnold's life. Primarily the letter is an admission of guilt. He admits to Clough that he has been withdrawn from his friends. The solution to this particular problem is a search for "a moral atmosphere". This is significant because for the first time Arnold is linking morality with life and literature. On the other hand we have to ask the question "is literature really of importance to Arnold here"? The letter seems, in fact, to be saying that a moral atmosphere is needed in order to escape from intellectual and poetical performance. For a poet whose poems appear to have been written in order to find solutions for life, such a conclusion seems to be hinting at a termination of poetical performance. Perhaps the Romantic poet in Arnold saw, however, the possibility of another way out of isolation. Perhaps in another mood he may have admitted to himself that Wordsworth's "sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused",<sup>54</sup> might resonate more with his nature than his own " ... something that infects the world". This would certainly have been the wish of J.A. Froude, one of Arnold's poetical mentors, who wrote to Clough after The Strayed Reveller volume's appearance:

I admire Matt - to a very great extent. Only I don't see what business he has to parade his calmness and

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<sup>52</sup>London, [Nov. 15, 22 or 29] 1848. (Ibid., p. 95.) Arnold was writing against Clough's successful poem "The Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich".

<sup>53</sup>Thun, Sept. 23, [1849]. (Ibid., p. 110.)

<sup>54</sup>"Tintern Abbey", ll. 95-96.

lecture us on resignation when he has never known what a storm is, and doesn't know what he has to resign himself to - I think he only knows the shady side of nature out of books - still ... There are some things like the Forsaken Merman that sound right out from the heart.<sup>55</sup>

D.G. James' polemical Matthew Arnold and the Decline of English Romanticism sees Arnold's poetry as a failure owing to its "fluctuating, picturesque dismay". It could only have grown if he had committed himself to one particular cause: what James calls "the Extreme". Arnold, he says, should have tapped the "spiritual sources of Romanticism", going on to develop the high Romanticism of the earlier generation of English writers.<sup>56</sup> From what we know of Arnold's contemporaries, many of them had the same opinion. "The Forsaken Merman" that Froude saw "right out from the heart" is both the most original and the most Romantically influenced poem in The Strayed Reveller volume. It was also the most generally admired poem of the collection.

"The Forsaken Merman" finds Arnold's idealist side uppermost, realising the power of myth to symbolise the possibilities of a harmonious existence. In this poem, Arnold finds a positive harmony set in nature and standing in opposition to the confusion of human life - a profound change from the imposition of the nihilistic order onto nature in "Resignation".

"The Forsaken Merman" was originally a Danish ballad, which may account for Arnold's creation of a free-flowing incantation. His sense of rhythm is often poor in other poems, but here the chief characteristic of the Merman's natural habitat is beautifully captured in the musical ebb and flow of the rhythm. The combination of the vision of untroubled calm enjoyed by all the sea creatures, as well as the sentiments necessarily called forth by the story, put us strongly on the side of the Merman and indignant at the collective sin of humanity that can set itself against the natural order. This opposition is played on throughout the poem, with life in the town busily unaware of anything outside itself. When Margaret is called to the church she moves from the "kind sea-caves" (l. 61) with their ceilings of "amber" and pavements of "pearl" (ll. 118-119) to a "little grey church" where "Loud prays the priest; shut stands the door" (l. 82). In opposition to the descriptions of the mysterious deep, the faithless Margaret's life in the town is portrayed in terms of busy superficiality:

She sits at her wheel in the humming town,  
Singing most joyfully.  
Hark what she sings: "O joy, O joy,  
For the humming street, and the child with its toy!" (87-90)

In contrast the descriptions of marine life are slower, longer and richer, the repetition of words and rhythm suggesting a realm of contented co-existence:

Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,  
Where the winds are all asleep;  
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,

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<sup>55</sup>March 6, 1849. (LC, p. 127.)

<sup>56</sup>(Oxford University Press, 1961) pp. 26-27.

Where the salt weed sways in the stream,  
 Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,  
 Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;  
 Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,  
 Dry their mail and bask in the brine; (35-42)

Although one can not say for certain, it seems possible, with Arnold's knowledge of Coleridge's poetry, that Arnold's inspiration for the "sea-snakes" came from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner". Whether it is conscious or not, the above description does have contained within it the Mariner's joyful acceptance of his kinship with the natural order. It is as if the original revelation of the Mariner is here being quietly confirmed by Arnold.

"The Forsaken Merman" is a significant admission by Arnold. In content it builds on what D.G. James calls "the spiritual sources of Romanticism" in the suggestion that humanity is poorer for denying the truths of existence set within nature. It builds too on the inheritance of Romanticism in its balladic, mesmeric form - a form so at odds with the majority of The Strayed Reveller collection. The overall effect of the poem is remarkable in that it fulfils none of the prescriptions we have seen Arnold making for poetry. There are no "sinews cracking" here because there is no effort to "unite matter". There is no desperate attempt to find a prevailing Idea, no poet imposing his "objective" vision on the poem and no desire, above all, to write poetry by which one can live. Instead, we have suggestions, intimations and hopes. "The Forsaken Merman" is a remarkable postscript to Arnold's first volume of poetry. Put together with the unconscious allegiance to Romanticism in "The Strayed Reveller" we can see a radical disjunction in Arnold's system of beliefs as portrayed in his poetry at this time which undermines the prevailing message of the 1849 collection as well as putting large question-marks against Arnold's self-appointed role as a reformer of poetry.<sup>57</sup>

The 1849 set of poems sees Arnold wavering between an allegiance to the Romantic, and particularly Wordsworthian, tradition in which he was raised and a new poetry that nevertheless rests heavily on the past and particularly the Classical tradition. Each of the poems is an attempt to come to terms with the epistemological vacuum left by the disappearance of traditional Christian faith, to find a philosophy that will overcome the isolation of the self that inevitably follows from the observations of philosophers and scientists such as Hume and Newton. The radical opposition of such poems as "The Forsaken Merman" and "Resignation" - their tone, imagery and content - suggests that Arnold is by no means sure in which direction he should go.

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<sup>57</sup>From a letter to "K", probably of 1849, speaking of the reception of his volume: "At Oxford particularly many complain that the subjects treated do not interest them. But as I feel rather as a reformer in poetical matters, I am glad of this opposition." (Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold p. 15).

#### 1.4. Poems: 1852 and Later

The second volume of poems (1852) sees Arnold uncompromising towards those, like J.A. Froude, who found more pleasure (and honesty) in "The Forsaken Merman" than in "Resignation". Froude's doubts as to the reality of Arnold's experience as poeticised in "Resignation" can not, however, be repeated as a critique for the majority of the poems in the new volume. The title to Park Honan's chapter on this part of Arnold's life - "The Intensity of Love 1848-1849"<sup>58</sup> describes perfectly the main impulse behind the poetry of Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems.

Honan offers new insights into what was previously considered to be a brief but intense passion for a stranger. Arnold, holidaying in Switzerland, wrote to Clough that he was planning to linger at the Hotel Bellevue in Thun "for the sake of the blue eyes of one of its inmates".<sup>59</sup> Following thorough research, Honan maintains that this woman was well known to Arnold, she apparently being his holidaying neighbour at Ambleside, Mary Claude. That she was an old friend from family holidays in the Lake District certainly fits Arnold's diffident character. For a man who seems to have found most women uncongenial the idea of Arnold impetuously abandoning plans in order to steal glances at women not known to him becomes absurd.<sup>60</sup> The point is an important one actually, because it sheds a new and very bright light on the poems of the 1852 collection, as well as qualifying further the comments on "Resignation" and adding to our understanding of Arnold's consequent poetical direction.

Mary Claude, Honan tells us, was Arnold's "ally in the Clougho-Matthean set from 1847 to 1849. While he admired her authors he wrote his most successful poetry;"<sup>61</sup> Mary Claude wrote in the style of the continental version of England's Romanticism - the "Sentimental School" - that of Senancour, Chateaubriand, Richter and Foscolo. She it was who probably introduced Arnold to Senancour's "Obermann" - who, as we shall see, was a profound influence on his poetry during this period.

What was previously not known about the meeting at Thun was that it never occurred. Mary Claude left early from Geneva for home. On his return to Oxford, Arnold was apparently ridiculed by his friends for his being jilted. The immediate result was the letter we have seen in relation to "Resignation" about Arnold's "refuging himself with Obermann in his forest".

All this is significant because it demonstrates further the personal impulses behind what might be taken as definitive philosophical pronouncements in the poems. If it casts further doubts on the validity of

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<sup>58</sup>Honan, pp. 144-167.

<sup>59</sup>29 Sept., 1848. (LC, p. 91.)

<sup>60</sup>In the same letter from Thun, Arnold writes the following: "More particularly is this my feeling with regard to (I hate the word) women. We know beforehand all they can teach us: yet we are obliged to learn it directly from them."

<sup>61</sup>Honan, p. 158.

"Resignation" as a rule for life, it also colours our vision of the other poems written around this time. Arnold returned to Thun the following year, in September 1849, but during this holiday the relationship between him and Mary was finally extinguished. The entire drama is recounted in the poems "Meeting", "Parting", "Isolation. To Marguerite", "To Marguerite - Continued", and "A Farewell".<sup>62</sup>

Unsurprisingly we find most of these poems attempting to deal with the problem of feeling. Arnold is already suspicious of "feeling" as a source of motivation - such is the very clear message of "The New Sirens". However, as we saw in the same poem he is well aware of the strength of the emotions, even as he denies their efficacy as a rule of life. It is clear, for example, that the main legacy of Romanticism, as perceived by Arnold, is "feeling":

Others will strengthen us to bear -  
But who, ah! who, will make us feel? (66-67)

he wrote in the "Memorial Verses" for the death of Wordsworth.

In the "Marguerite" poems we can see this simultaneous movement of the desire and fear accompanying abandonment to the emotions. A typical example is "Meeting" where the opening describes Arnold's return to Thun in the style of a conventional love lyric:

Again I see my bliss at hand,  
The town, the lake are here;  
My Marguerite smiles upon the strand,  
Unaltered with the year. (1-4)

Love is not to come to fruition, however, as the poem portentously continues:

Again I spring to make my choice;  
Again in tones of ire  
I hear a God's tremendous voice:  
"Be counselled, and retire." (9-12)

"Parting" has a similar message:

Forgive me! Forgive me!  
Ah, Marguerite, fain  
Would these arms reach to clasp thee!  
But see! 'tis in vain. (59-62)

Throughout the "Marguerite" series the lover seems to have an intimation of his ultimate failure, as if, like his own Gipsy Child, he has "foreknown the vanity of hope".<sup>63</sup> The remarkable thing, however, is the universalisation of these feelings. The idea that there is some cosmic decision against his love leads him, pessimistically, to conclude that universal isolation is inevitable:

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,  
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,  
We mortal millions live alone. ("To Marguerite - Continued", l. 1-4.)

<sup>62</sup>The titles are those in CP and are not necessarily the original 1852 titles. "Marguerite" is Arnold's pseudonym for Mary Claude.

<sup>63</sup>"To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-shore" (c. 1843-44) l. 39.



Whilst not wishing to deny the intensity of Arnold's love for Mary Claude, one wonders whether the poet is really writing poems about specific occasions or whether he is not rather dramatising beyond the reality of the situation. Such large claims about the true nature of human communication do not, on the face of it, seem to be a direct consequence of fading amorous hopes for Mary Claude. Leon Gottfried's similar suspicion leads him to treat Arnold's "Marguerite" poems with severity. There is, he says, "a quality of posturing self-dramatisation, of shrillness and of insensitivity" in the poems. Of Arnold's sense of negative destiny he ironically comments: "This meddling deity takes so personal an interest in Matthew Arnold's love affairs..."<sup>64</sup> Such criticism has some truth, but its sarcastic force is obviously more successful when aimed at the hypothesis of Arnold's dalliance with a blue-eyed stranger. From what we know of Mary Claude, the whole question becomes more complex.

What happens in the love poems is, I think, Arnold's familiar technique of displacement; the purgation of internal conflicts by universalising those conflicts or destroying them in the supposedly objective actions of Arnold's poetic protagonists. In the "Shakespeare" sonnet this took the form of exalting Shakespeare for supposedly displaying the detachment from the world Arnold himself was seeking. In "The Strayed Reveller", Arnold was able to deny the prevailing poetic spirit of the age by projecting Romantic ideas on to a Classical model. In "Resignation" he was, as we now see, able to overcome disappointment in love and further repel the Romantic side of his nature by attacking Romanticism under the guise of a reformation of poetic philosophy on Stoic lines. The "Marguerite" poems are an extended series of attempts to lay "feeling" or strong emotion to rest. Whilst the catalyst for writing the poems might be a disappointment in love, the philosophy of the series comes to embrace much more. When Leon Gottfried calls "Isolation. To Marguerite" "embarrassing"<sup>65</sup> he is pointing out graphically an obvious problem with the love poems - that they can not contain the weighty conclusions they are forced to bear. The idea of the impossibility of meaningful human interaction is simply not justified by the fact of a failed love affair. Once again, in fact, Arnold is using poetry in order to discredit a philosophy of poetry (and therefore, by Arnold's own theory, a philosophy of life). It is a generally accepted psychoanalytical principle that a person who continually and vociferously denies something to himself is in reality attracted to whatever he is attacking. So it is here with Arnold. Awakened to the possibilities of being led by feelings through his love for Mary Claude, he tentatively embraced, as Honan says, "her authors", the Sentimental School, believing, at the same time, that this was dangerous territory. When the personal attempt to find fulfilment by emotions failed, Arnold then used the medium of poetry to destroy, with, I suspect, some relief, that type of poetry which celebrated "feeling" as a type of knowledge. Thus in "To Marguerite - Continued" he invokes motifs of the Sentimental School - nightingales and moonlit nights - only to deny their worth as symbols of inter-human communication. All they do, instead, is flatter to deceive. His conclusion in that

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<sup>64</sup>Gottfried, p. 160.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

poem, that our isolation is total is, as in the case of "Resignation", another attempt to overcome a divisive philosophy of life.

"Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann" (November 1849) is, like "Resignation", another of Arnold's self-definitions. It is a public summary of his flirtation with, and despatch of, the recent poetical incarnation and a statement of his future development. The poem enables Arnold to pay his poetical debt to Senancour while at the same time claiming that the march of time makes it impossible to embrace his philosophy of life. In the process of this valediction to the Sentimental School Arnold further re-defines his past by officially denying any future involvement with two other previous heroes - Wordsworth and Goethe.

The poem begins by admitting the force of Senancour's portrait of Obermann. Visiting the Alpine country in which Obermann took refuge from the world, Arnold associates the severity of the surroundings with the person whose desire to maintain integrity forces him to abandon the confusion of humanity's "hopeless tangle" (l. 83). It is an option to which Arnold is greatly attracted, the austerity of Obermann's search for Truth resonating with that Idealist side of Arnold which we saw aspiring after unity with the "One all-pure" in "In Utrumque Paratus". Only two others, Arnold muses, have managed in these times "to see their way" (l. 48) like Obermann. But these, although also attractive to Arnold, one cannot follow. Wordsworth, though still maintaining his special virtue of "sweet calm" (l. 79), has done so only by averting his eyes "From half of human fate" (l. 54). Goethe meanwhile, the possessor of the "wide / And luminous view" (ll. 79-80), was raised "in a tranquil world" (l. 67). We, "brought forth and reared in hours / Of change, alarm, surprise" (ll. 69-70) can not hope to emulate him.

Arnold muses further on Obermann's philosophy. In doing so he admits his fragmented self:

Ah! two desires toss about  
The poet's feverish blood.  
One drives him to the world without,  
And one to solitude. (93-96)

Obermann tries to tempt Arnold to his life of solitude with a message similar to that of "Resignation":

He only lives with the world's life,  
Who hath renounced his own. (103-104)

This time, however, Arnold waves away the proffered delights of self-absorption:

Away the dreams that but deceive  
And thou, sad guide, adieu!  
I go, fate drives me; but I leave  
Half of my life with you. (129-132)

Arnold's official reason for denying the possibility of resignation is that he "must" live in the world owing to the wiles of Destiny:

We, in some unknown Power's employ,  
Move on a rigorous line; (133-134)

but the letter to Clough about being "driven into himself" indicates that it is because he is aware of the

damage done to himself and his friendships by the message and tone of "Resignation". His admitting to Clough that he is "snuffing after a moral atmosphere to respire in" is, as we have suggested, an apology for his damaging self-interest.

"Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann" is, then, an attempt to clear up misunderstandings within Arnold and between Arnold and his friends. His "adieu" is not only to Obermann. It is a more considered farewell to Mary Claude, another, more rational, attempt to bury Romanticism and a report to the world at large as to his intention to remodel his poetry and himself. In admitting his attraction to that which he is renouncing Arnold is, at least in this poem, able to find something like psychological wholeness.

The problem of a poet in search of a poetic identity still remained, however. Even if the clear-headed reasoning of the "Stanzas" did make for psychological health, the idea of a poet leaving half of his poetic self behind is startling. The search for the "buried self" is, in fact, the catalyst behind all of Arnold's remaining major poems.

The search for a self by which to live and write poetry leads Arnold in a number of conflicting directions, none more contrary than in the two major poems of the 1852 and 1853 collections, "Empedocles on Etna" and "Sohrab and Rustum". "Empedocles on Etna" is Arnold's epic dramatisation of the problems faced by poets in the modern day. The Preface to the 1853 poems claims that Arnold "intended to delineate the feelings of one of the last Greek religious philosophers" come upon an age in which differing ideas had begun to prevail.<sup>66</sup> As he goes on to say, however, there has entered into Empedocles' situation "much that we are accustomed to consider as exclusively modern", namely "the dialogue of the mind with itself". From what we know of Arnold's inheritance of his father's cyclical idea of history, it is quite clear that Empedocles is a poet and philosopher in Arnold's position, working through Arnold's own problems.

The three characters of the poem bring together a number of familiar Arnoldian themes as well as presenting for the first time ideas which will provide much future pre-occupation. The vast majority of "Empedocles on Etna" is taken up by the central character's monologue on his life, philosophy and times. Previously feted as a healer and sage by the Sicilian people, he now lives under banishment and with the knowledge of the rejection of his Stoic philosophy by the Sophists. Pausanias, Empedocles' companion on the poem's journey (the ascent of Etna), is, as a physician, eager to discover the secret of Empedocles' miraculous powers of healing. The third character, Callicles, is an impressionable young harp-player who interjects from time to time in the hope of charming Empedocles back to good spirits.

Empedocles' reply to Pausanias is not what the physician expected. Denying the idea of magic or

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<sup>66</sup>From the reproduction of the Preface in CP, pp. 652-671.

miracle, Empedocles delivers a characteristically Arnoldian sermon on "reading thy own breast aright" (Act I, Sc. ii, l. 142) in order to see one's way through the present troubles. The message's mixture of Stoicism and the Book of Common Prayer (as in "We do not what we ought, / What we ought not, we do," (I, ii, 237-238)) is supposed to enable Pausanias to "bravelier front his life" (II, i, 9) by divesting him of extravagant hopes and teaching him to be satisfied with the simple joys that are left.

There is a suggestion of Arnold's future as a self-styled religious educator in the exchange between Empedocles and Pausanias. Empedocles' declamation in the first part of the poem pin-points a number of problems to be overcome by those wishing to live honestly as well as fully. It is clear however, that, underlying the specific fears and difficulties, the all-embracing question is "how to live in a world devoid of any religious meaning". Empedocles' advice to "Sink in thyself!" (I, ii, 146) is all that is left after trust in God (or, for Empedocles, "Gods") has been removed on the grounds of "not proven". Although Empedocles' message is to be modified in Arnold's future religious writings, Pausanias' role scarcely changes. His credulous desire to understand the magic powers behind Empedocles' acts of healing makes him a prototype of the general public whose readiness to believe in supernatural occurrences Arnold desires so much to change.

The difference between this poem and the future religious writings is that, at this stage, the Stoic message of Arnold's intellect is not the only, or even the pre-eminent, factor in his life. We saw in "Resignation" Arnold attempting to deny conflict within himself by denigrating the worth of feeling and the poetry that takes feeling into account. The second half of "Empedocles", however, states Arnold's predicament in full. Whilst he does not wish to deny the efficacy of the rule of life he has given to Pausanias, Empedocles himself cannot fulfil the injunction to be self-sufficient, to be true to his "only true, deep-buried" self (II, i, 371),

For something has impaired thy spirit's strength,  
And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy.  
Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself - (II, i, 21-23)

The "something" is later identified as the tyranny of thought. Empedocles recalls a time when

.... we received the shock of mighty thoughts  
On simple minds with a pure natural joy; (II, i, 242-243)

Now, however, he has lost his "balance", having become a slave to thought "and dead to every natural joy" (II, i, 248-249).

In an important passage later on, Arnold admits the evasive nature of previous incarnations of his philosophy of life, before laying bare his true "bounded" self:

And who can say: I have been always free,  
Lived ever in the light of my own soul? -  
I cannot; I have lived in wrath and gloom,  
Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,  
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light,

But I have not grown easy in these bonds -  
 But I have not denied what bonds these were. (II, i, 392-398)

The passage can be taken as a confession of previous concealments of the truth, whilst the last line gives us Arnold's state of mind in this poem - one of hopeless division.

That it is not a state in which one can live comfortably is clear from the suicide of Empedocles. That it was too close to the truth of Arnold himself is clear from his withdrawal of the poem from the next volume, only a year later. The official reason for the omission, given in the 1853 Preface, is that the portrait of Empedocles is one of prolonged suffering which finds "no vent in action". Therefore, although the representation might have been accurate, it is also painful and, as such, it does not fulfil the rule that art must provide enjoyment. The argument is interesting because whereas Arnold had, previous to this passage, invoked the critical wisdom of Aristotle, Hesiod and Schiller in support of his use of the form of tragedy, the remainder is entirely his own thesis. What it suggests is that Arnold quickly came to see "Empedocles" as too subjective a portrait for public exhibition and the chief character's suicide as too suggestive a solution (albeit for him a symbolic one) to his own difficulties. If we look more closely at Empedocles' dialogue with himself in Act II, we see that the result of his honest admitting of failure is a resolve to cast aside his vocation as a poet-philosopher:

And lie thou there,  
 My laurel bough!  
 Scornful Apollo's ensign, lie thou there!  
 Though thou hast been my shade in the world's heat -  
 Though I have loved thee, lived in honouring thee -  
 Yet lie thou there,  
 My laurel bough!  
 I am weary of thee. (II, i, 191-198)

Arnold's emphatic rejection of a future of poetic creation looks both back to and forwards from the conclusion reached in the "Obermann" poem. Once again he admits the divided self but here he denies the psychological solution as of any lasting significance. For a poet to create he must be unified and true to his buried self.

Although "Empedocles on Etna" states the problem, it sees no resolution. The tyranny of thought is seen as inevitable for a man come upon an uncongenial time. That this is Arnold's own belief is clear from a letter to Clough written at this time about the volume:

But woe upon me if I analysed not my situation: and Werter [,] René [,] and such like [,] none of them analyse the modern situation in its true blankness and barrenness, and unpoetrylessness.<sup>67</sup>

However, the analysis of civilisation's failure to be true to its collective self which is seen as deceit in religious matters in Act I (via the example of Pausanias), can not, finally, act as an explanation for Empedocles' own malaise. General analysis turns to personal prognosis in Act II. What Empedocles is suffering from is the inability to feel. He lacks "fulness of life" because he has lost the "power of feeling"

<sup>67</sup>December 14, 1852. (LC, pp. 125-126.)

(II, i, 258). The result, notably, of feeling life to the full, is "joy", a word repeated a number of times by Empedocles in his longing for the sensation. The associations with Wordsworth are, I think, quite clear. "The shock of mighty thoughts" received by "simple minds with a pure natural joy" are analysed as the communion of the mind with "outward things" (II, i, 241):

The sports of the country-people,  
A flute-note from the woods,  
Sunset over the sea; (II, i, 251-253)

So clearly does this fulfil the philosophy of the Lyrical Ballads about poetic subjects and the work of the "imagination" to bring about "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that, unconsciously or not, it is clear that Arnold is hankering after the half of his poetic self left behind with the "Obermann" poem.

The acceptance of the necessity for Arnold of at least part of the Coleridgean/Wordsworthian poetical philosophy is clear from two letters to Clough, one more general and the other particularly revealing. The letter of February 12, 1853, repeats the analysis of "Empedocles":

yes - congestion of the brain is what we suffer from - I always feel it and say it - and cry for air like my own Empedocles.<sup>68</sup>

This letter diagnoses the problem but, like the first part of "Empedocles", shirks personal responsibility in the claim that it is a general quandary. The second, however, mournfully admits some culpability:

I feel immensely - more and more clearly - what I want - what I have (I believe) lost and choked by my treatment of myself and the studies to which I have addicted myself. But what ought I to have done in preference to what I have done? there is the question.<sup>69</sup>

Arnold admits at least one reason - a mixture of unconscious and wilful neglect - for the loss of his ability to feel. Nevertheless, the inclusion of that heartfelt cry - "what ought I to have done" shows that Arnold still sees himself as a victim of the modern age. There has been no essential change in the eight years since the writing of "Stagirius". Arnold's addiction to his studies is simply a way of escaping from the conclusions he drew early on in his life - that his is the first age that lacks divine direction.

Whilst such conclusions could only spell the end of poetic creation and the end of finding any solution for life Arnold could not, of course, rest with them. The third character in "Empedocles on Etna", Callicles the harp-player, points to Arnold's future poetic direction. His dramatic function is to provide relief (in the form of song) from the incessantly despondent thoughts of Empedocles. However his unquenchable optimism and his harmonising function (his thoughts both open and close the poem) suggest further that he, like Empedocles, is the embodiment of a philosophy. His introduction to the forest scene that opens "Empedocles" is a description of wide-eyed wonder and almost artless enthusiasm in its listing of the pleasures awaiting one at every glance. His function as opposition to Empedocles is clearly established:

What mortal could be sick or sorry here? (I, i, 20)

Although Callicles is a lover of nature he is, however, not so much a Romantic as a naturalist. It is Callicles who severely chides Pausanias over the doctor's belief in miracles:

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

Bah! Thou a doctor! Thou art superstitious.  
Simple Pausanias, ... (I, i, 133-134)

Similarly rational is his refusal to see Empedocles' dilemma as in any way inevitable. There is no cosmic plot against Empedocles, simply

.... some root of suffering in himself,  
Some secret and unfollowed vein of woe,  
Which makes the time look black and sad to him. (I, i, 151-153)

His suggested cure is one of natural healing:

.... lead him through the lovely mountain-paths, (I, i, 156)

Callicles' songs are a mixture of delighted naturalistic description and the recital of Greek myths. Interspersed between Empedocles' anguished speeches, the songs are more, however, than simply light relief. The myths provide comment on the speeches of Empedocles and, in doing so, suggest that Callicles' philosophy may be an antidote to Empedocles' suicidal musings. The most obvious example is the myth of Apollo and Marsyas which precedes the decision of Empedocles to cast aside his role as a poet. The "triumph" of Apollo's "sweet persuasive lyre" (II, i, 126) whose music has the power to blow away "the clouds which wrap the soul" (II, i, 124) over the flute-playing faun Marsyas, is as the triumph of the musician Callicles over the poet Empedocles. Callicles' "The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere" (II, i, 37) is too painful a truth for a poet who realises his comparative inability to create harmonious art. It is this fact - the failure of the poet - which leads Empedocles to leap into Etna's crater.

The implications for Arnold's poetry are obvious. If "Empedocles" states the problem - the paralysis of the creative faculty - and the letter to Clough sees as almost irreversible the results of his mistreatment of himself, then the harmonious vision of Callicles recommends itself with its potential for overcoming conflict. At the end of the poem Callicles anticipates the 1853 Preface by, in effect, expurgating Empedocles' vision:

Not here, O Apollo!  
Are haunts meet for thee. (II, i, 421-422)

The subjects for poetry are henceforth to be "moon-silvered inlets", shepherds "soft lulled by the rills" and pigeons roosting "deep in the rocks" (II, i, 425, 433-4, 431-2). Poetry under the influence of Apollo has the power to harmonise all things:

The day in his hotness,  
The strife with the palm;  
The night in her silence,  
The stars in their calm. (II, i, 465-468)

Callicles' prescription for poetry enabled Arnold to take pleasure in artistic creation for almost the first time. Letters to Clough and his mother in 1853 see him pronouncing as his "best work ever" the major poem of the 1853 collection, "Sohrab and Rustum". The only parallel with "Empedocles" is that "Sohrab and Rustum" is a dramatic epic. The handling of his sources on this occasion is, however, entirely

different. Whereas the characters of "Empedocles" are so clearly representations of certain sides of Arnold, in "Sohrab and Rustum" the poet seeks to remove himself from identity with characters and action. This, as explained in the 1853 Preface, is a deliberate attempt to prove critics wrong who claim that the proper aim of modern poetry is to produce "A true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history".<sup>70</sup> Arnold's riposte sums up much of his past agonising over the problems of poetic creation in the modern age as well as providing the foundations for many of the critical dicta in his future prose writings. In particular it places the formal seal on the thoughts in the 1852 letter to Clough about poetry's need to be a complete magister vitae as was, supposedly, the poetry of the ancients. Thus he repeats his criticism of Keats as the producer of "happy expressions" who is unable to delineate the object of his poems. English literary history is seen as defective since the time of Shakespeare, whose great genius allowed him to create satisfying wholes even whilst possessing a "wonderful gift of expression". Unfortunately those poets following him have been seduced by the "exquisite bits and images" and have lost sight of the larger object. In modern times the great mischief has been a concentration on the poet's subjective expression rather than a seeking after great poetical actions.

All this confusion is to be overcome, as we saw in the 1852 letter, by immersion in the poetry of the ancients. By fixing his attention on "excellent models" the poet may

reproduce ... something of their excellence ... if he cannot be taught to produce what is excellent independently.

This formal explanation enables Arnold to sacrifice "Empedocles on Etna" as a mistake and substitute "Sohrab and Rustum" in its place as a tragedy which, following the prescription of Callicles, can provide enjoyment through its distanced objectivity.

Thus in "Sohrab and Rustum" we are placed firmly in an heroic, mythic past. In both subject and style Arnold fulfils his new poetic criteria by handling a Persian myth in a Greek manner. In his desire to find a tragedy of universal rather than personal significance, Arnold chooses the story of the death of a young hero (Sohrab) at the hands of his unwitting father (Rustum). The oriental subject has the benefit for the poet of removing the story far from his own experiences, an effect heightened for the reader by its reproduction in the form of Homeric narrative, replete with numerous Homeric similes.

Arnold's attempt to overcome Romantic subjectivity has not generally met with critical acclaim. The greatest objection is that the removal of the subject from the poet's experience leads to a disastrous reduction in the vital empathy between poet and reader. As Park Honan says:

His objective view of art kept him from seizing the "inward being" of any man, even from writing with full lyric freedom.<sup>71</sup>

In a similar vein, Douglas Bush claims that Arnold's withdrawal from the modern world has an artificial effect, heightened by the Homeric similes:

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<sup>70</sup>From the reproduction of the Preface in CP, pp. 662-663. The phrase was taken by Arnold from an essay that appeared in the *North British Review* xix (Aug. 1853) 338, entitled "Theories of Poetry and a New Poet".

<sup>71</sup>Honan, p. 285.



each one comes in as a conscious tour de force and gives us a shock of unreality from which it is not easy to recover.

Conscious re-creation, as Bush says, is never as effective as the original it tries to re-create.<sup>72</sup>

Other critics have claimed, furthermore, that the poem fails even in the poet's attempt to produce an objective action. Lionel Trilling claims "at least a shadowy personal significance" in the death of the son at the hands of the father, likening it to a psychical death of the failed Matthew at the hands of Thomas Arnold.<sup>73</sup> Warren Anderson, meanwhile, sees the desired Classical unity being gradually consumed by an Arnoldian unifying force -

the sense of hopeless unequal struggle that is Matthew Arnold's cri de coeur.<sup>74</sup>

It is certainly true that the tragedy has a very Arnoldian ring. Brought about not through "excellent human actions" but via cruel mischance, the story is handled in a tone of pathetic fatalism that is typically Arnoldian. The vision, for example, of Rostand's horse caking the sand with "the big warm tears" from his "dark, compassionate eyes" (ll. 735-736) would fit more happily in a satire on, rather than a homage to, Classical epic poetry. D.G. James, dismissing "Sohrab and Rostand" as having "a donnish air", refers to Arnold's Classical manner as "only another escape".<sup>75</sup> The 1853 Preface and the poem for which it seeks to argue certainly do seem to be exercises designed to "unite matter" without the "sinews cracking" as they did in recording the painful truth of "Empedocles". Arnold admits as much at the end of the Preface, where the bravado of the earlier part with its confident explanations and assertions, dissolves into wounded pleas for lenience:

I am far indeed from making any claim for myself, that I possess this discipline ... But I say, that in the sincere endeavour to learn and practice, ... I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing, among the ancients. They, at any rate, knew what they wanted in Art, and we do not. It is this uncertainty which is disheartening, and not hostile criticism ...

D.G. James interestingly finds Arnold's concern for the Classical

in a perverse way, only a symptom or manifestation of the Romantic spirit ... a symbol for the inviolable thing, the other, the unattainable, the transcendent.<sup>76</sup>

He is suggesting, in fact, that, once again by displacement, Arnold is finding the spiritually synthesised vision in entirely the wrong place. That the poet was more pleased with "Sohrab and Rostand" than anything he had yet created, would seem to indicate that he had truly found his buried self and attained his unifying "Idea" of the world in the example of the ancients. However, compared with Arnold's best hope for himself, whose possibility he could picture but not grasp, such academic poetry is really only a desperate "second best":

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<sup>72</sup>Bush, p. 68.

<sup>73</sup>Trilling, pp. 134-135.

<sup>74</sup>Anderson, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup>James, pp. 61 & 26.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Moderate tasks and moderate leisure,  
 Quiet living, strict-kept measure  
 Both in suffering and in pleasure -  
 'Tis for this thy nature yearns ...

And (the world's so madly jangled,  
 Human things so fast entangled)  
 Nature's wish must now be strangled  
 For that best which she discerns.

So it must be!<sup>77</sup>

The emphasis on "must" is a plea to Arnold's true buried self, his "fugitive delicate sense",<sup>78</sup> the half of his poetic self abandoned with the "Obermann" poem, to refrain from rebellion against the decision of the intellect.

The opposition of "Empedocles on Etna" and "Sohrab and Rustum" is really the most significant point to be noted in discussion of the 1852 and 1853 volumes. What the two poems suggest is that Arnold has got no further than in 1849 in coping with the problem of man's isolation from nature (including human nature). "Empedocles" is brutally honest - what the poet-philosopher is lacking is the ability to feel joy. The problem is man's isolation - "the dialogue of the mind with itself" - which Arnold correctly analyses as the modern situation. Arnold's complaint that this situation makes poetic creation impossible (owing to its "unpoetrylessness") is important in our comparison of Arnold's "solution" to that of Coleridge. Coleridge's contemplation of Wordsworth's poetry led him to an assertion that the mind was not a passive "looker-on" on an "external world" but a partaker in creation itself. It is notable that Arnold seeks the joy that Wordsworth feels and indicates that his inability to find it leads to a lack of creativity. Whilst he diagnoses, as Coleridge does, the situation, he, unlike Coleridge, can not find such a dynamic answer. Instead he confirms his isolation with a poem, "Sohrab and Rustum", that merely escapes from the modern situation in its return to a bygone age.

### 1.5. The Triumph of the "Fugitive Delicate Sense"

The 1853 Preface has more than a suggestion of the mistaken solution of "Resignation" behind it. The sacrifice of "Empedocles" in the name of "enjoyment" rather than truth, links it with the letter to Clough of 1849 in which Arnold urges his friend to "group objects" rather than go "into and to the bottom of an object". The poet is to find his ruling Idea by seeing "wide", not "deep". Arnold goes on to say that Clough's poems are "not natural":

... - but consider whether you attain the beautiful, and whether your product gives PLEASURE not excites curiosity and reflexion ...<sup>79</sup>

In this remarkable passage we see English poetic philosophy turned completely on its head. The

<sup>77</sup>From "The Second Best" (c. 1850-1851), ll. 1-4, 9-13.

<sup>78</sup>From the Yale MS.: "We have a fugitive delicate sense thro': wch we know all things... but this delicate sense is not in our power..." The Yale Manuscript - ed. S.O.A. Ullmann (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1989) p. 178.

<sup>79</sup>LC, pp. 98-99.

Romantics' desire to penetrate to the depths of every subject by following a message set within nature is now claimed by Arnold to be "not natural".

In another interesting part of the Preface we see Arnold claiming that the detached, objective poetic view can only be achieved through serenity of mind. This state is, notably, to be gained by fixing the attention on "some noble action of a heroic time", the poet thereby "banishing from his mind all feelings of contradiction, and irritation and impatience". This is akin to saying that the modern mind - the subject, according to Arnold, of modern poetry - is inevitably in a state of paralysis, the plaything of contradictory currents of thought. The contemplation of a noble action (such as is portrayed in "Sohrab and Rustum") is recommended as a means for clearing away all the doubts and confusions of the modern age - be they religious, social or political. This is to be the very basis of Arnold's prose argumentation.

There are a number of doubts that need to be raised about Arnold's rejection of "contradiction" in poetry. Is it really desirable, for example, for a poet to achieve serenity of mind by simply ignoring the multitude of subjective voices suggesting alternative truths? The Arnoldian synthesis - the prevailing Idea - is surely weaker for not taking into account the discordant experience of others. It is certainly quite at odds with the Coleridgean reconciliation of "opposite or discordant qualities" - a poetic of creative tension that allows for the possibility of acquiring new and different kinds of knowledge. We may suspect, in any case, that Arnold's making the objective view the "natural" one and his banishment of contradiction are facets of the same personal desire - to deny the conclusions of his own subjective poetic that growth in any direction is impossible.

The vast majority of Arnold's poetry, both before and after the writing of the Preface, rests uncomfortably in a state of confusion. As an antidote to such a poem as "Empedocles on Etna", then, the call for a more detached objectivity would seem to be important for a poet seeking to find a rule for life in poetry. "Empedocles" may state the case of a decline in religious faith but it does not include the positive spiritual direction Arnold hopes poetry will provide. Is ranging over the periphery of objects, however, really going to provide spiritual direction either? Even leaving aside the evidence of "Sohrab and Rustum" that, at least for Arnold, the creation of such a form of poetry seems impossible, it is arguable that "not deep the poet sees, but wide" is an entirely false prescription. If, as on the Coleridgean model, the ground of true knowledge is to be found in the activity of the Imagination, then the organisation and systematisation of information - Arnold's grouping of objects - is not part of the poetic office at all. The knowledge of comprehension is, according to Coleridge, the realm of the Reason. As D.G. James says, "The life of poetry consists in vision, not in comprehension". With support from Keats' "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts", and Wordsworth's "fallings from us, vanishings; Blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised", James claims that poetry's true role is not one of philosophy and speculation. Instead it points us towards a world we cannot finally enter. Poetry brings us to the brink and leaves us there - "its

true end lies outside itself" - it is initiation only.<sup>80</sup> Arnold's alternative of "comprehension" is a devaluing of the spiritual possibilities to be found in poetic creation. Ironically enough, Arnold's attempt to "include religion with poetry" has the unexpected effect of excluding it.

The fascination of Arnold is that part of the poet in him knows all this. "Dover Beach" and "The Scholar-Gipsy", both believed to be amongst Arnold's most suggestive and successful works, build on and conclude the philosophic ideas and poetic forms of such poems as "The Forsaken Merman" and (despite himself) "The Strayed Reveller". Whilst taking their inspiration from nature, they provide a "criticism of life" not at all in accord with the "natural" philosophy of the 1853 Preface.

Douglas Bush calls "Dover Beach" Arnold's "most perfect work of art" because of its simplicity, its clear crystallisation of a particular Arnoldian theme, handled here without the "usual discursive analysis".<sup>81</sup> The theme of the decline of religious faith, so central to the poet's perception of his lack of well-being, manages to attain to that "subjective objectivity" which characterises the best poetry, that potent communication by which one person manages to encapsulate a wider truth and thus overcome isolation. Arnold achieves it here through a terse economy of language within an unhindering poetic form - free, irregularly rhymed verse - and the use of strongly evocative natural imagery to illustrate his central idea.

"Dover Beach" is a moment of super-clear perception, Arnold's version of a Wordsworthian spot of time. The opening puts across the poet's state of heightened awareness by enticing the reader into the poet's company and vision. The highly pictorial nature of the poem is achieved through the appeal to sight, smell, feeling and sound, and is given further depth and colour in a subtle appeal to the intuitive (or Arnold's "fugitive, delicate") sense:

The sea is calm to-night.  
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
 Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
 Gleams and is gone, the cliffs of England stand,  
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air! (1-6)

The liberal use of punctuation allows time for the senses to digest fully the information offered. Single syllable words, meanwhile, suggest quite as much the silence they break as an invitation to dwell on the words themselves. The underlying tone of "something left unsaid" prepares us for the moment of revelation to come. What does come is typically Arnoldian in tone, but powerfully expressive. Its air of finality is quite unlike Arnold's usual doubtful wavering between contradictory ideas and, consequently, carries more conviction. The image of the "Sea of Faith"

Retreating to the breath  
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

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<sup>80</sup>James, pp. 42-46.

<sup>81</sup>Bush, p. 40.

And naked shingles of the world. (26-28)

at last achieves for Arnold that detached objectivity for which he is seeking, summing up in such stark tones the widely-felt pessimism of mid-nineteenth century agnostics.

Having made the wider observation, Arnold's personal response is equally direct and, strangely enough, certain in its uncertainty:

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night. (29-37)

Arnold's usual intellectual wavering between options tends to lead, by Arnold's own admission in the 1853 Preface, to a paralysis in activity. It seems almost paradoxical then, that such a lucid statement of muddy doubt should spur Arnold to action. For him it is a turn to the certain call of his emotions and a turn away from the possibility of knowing anything through the intellect. But he has left room for dissension. Somehow, in the depths of his struggle between faith and despair, he has transcended his rational attempts to understand it all and created one of those rare moments of profound heightened insight. The fact that the world "seems" to lie before him still leaves room for dissent, so that, while Arnold's suggestion is disharmonious for himself, he has created that special arena for debate, that tension between opposites, which poetry, at its best, can offer. Whatever the decision he has made, the world, which he himself has described with such dream-like wonder, still calls forth the poetic impulse. Furthermore, Arnold's conviction that love is in some way "true", leads one at least to question the poem's broader thesis. It may be in spite of the prevailing Arnoldian philosophy of life and poetry, but here Arnold has built on Romanticism in order to, in D.G. James' phraseology, "take us to the brink and leave us there". Like the great Romantic poets, Arnold takes deep stock of his natural surroundings before asking his question, but he manages to combine this with his Classical heritage (the final Thucydidean image of the night-battle) in order to create, in Warren Anderson's words, the "universal modern symbol".<sup>82</sup> As Leon Gottfried says, it is the "deep honesty" with which Arnold expresses the conflicting messages of Romanticism and rationalism that makes such a poem as "Dover Beach" his "best" and most representative work:

It was in this work, and not in his academic efforts to achieve classical serenity, that his poems truly represent, as in 1869 he said they did, "the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century".<sup>83</sup>

Arnold manages a somewhat similar blend in "The Scholar-Gipsy" where he combines a pastoral form with a "criticism of life" that again draws heavily on the philosophical insights of Romanticism.

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<sup>82</sup>Anderson, p. 71.

<sup>83</sup>Gottfried, p. 209.

One of Arnold's late religious essays, "A Psychological Parallel" (1876), explores the attempt, by the seventeenth century "Cambridge Platonists", to revive a spiritualist and Platonic philosophy. "By this attempted revival", Arnold claims, "they could not and cannot live". It is interesting, then, that the story of the Scholar-Gipsy should come from a book by one of the group, Joseph Glanvill, and interesting, too, that Arnold should draw on the book, The Vanity of Dogmatizing, in order to encapsulate in the Scholar-Gipsy a true criticism of life in opposition to modern attempts.

The portrait of the Scholar-Gipsy then, has its basis in the seventeenth century but, as Park Honan has stressed, it also draws on German Romanticism, and in particular Goethe and Herder's "expressivist anthropology". Herder's On the Origin of Language (1772) was one of the fore-runners of Coleridge's theory of language. Herder it is who first claims that man is a creator, not an imitator, in his use of language. Goethe, as Honan says, stresses a "purification" (Läuterung) that words effect, and sees the poet as a deific agent of nature. For him it is primarily the artist who is able to challenge the false ideals of the age. Arnold's Scholar-Gipsy takes on the theories of Herder and Goethe to become a symbol of the poet, seeking, through his artistry, for self-possession.<sup>84</sup>

The Scholar-Gipsy, however, becomes a much greater and much more mysterious figure than merely a poet in search of his self. The effect of Arnold's use of Theocritan pastoral (carrying with it hints of Milton's harangue against religious deceit and self-deceit in "Lycidas") is to give the quest, and the criticism of modern life, a much broader base than it might otherwise have had. In appealing to the support of a long poetic tradition, the quest and the criticism are ranged alongside our knowledge of that tradition and, in consequence, gain in significance. The Arnoldian pastoral is to be seen as the latest in a succession of poems whose aim is to sum up the spiritual crisis of an age and plead for the restoration of spiritual health. The Scholar-Gipsy himself thus takes on the nature of a symbol for every person's aspiration after existential fullness.

It is precisely because the Scholar-Gipsy is such a richly significant symbol that he is portrayed as mysterious and elusive, to be glimpsed only by those prepared to follow their "fugitive delicate sense". The first stanza establishes the arcane, but vital, nature of the quest. Arnold makes a strident appeal to his "shepherd"<sup>85</sup> to "Go",

No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed, (3)

and "again begin the quest!" (l. 10). The quest is, notably, to take place beyond the knowledge of most people:

... when the fields are still,  
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest. (6-7)

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<sup>84</sup>See Honan, pp. 273-275.

<sup>85</sup>Allot states (CP, p. 357) that the "shepherd" is Clough, but it is surely a quite general appeal and includes the poet himself.

After the general introduction, Arnold sets the pastoral scene and sets himself for meditation on Glanvill's book. Rather as in "Dover Beach" our senses are asked to respond to the utmost to the description of the natural surroundings which, so fully and lovingly observed, are obviously the fruit of long and happy acquaintance by Arnold. It is clear that the dwelling on nature is not just pastoral convention. The "live murmur" (l. 20) of the summer's day and the rich landscape are the natural equivalent of what Arnold is seeking - fulness of being. It is the super-abundant energy of nature - he has to retreat to his nook in order to "bower him" from "the August sun" (l. 29) - that spurs Arnold to read "the oft-read tale" (l. 32) of the Scholar-Gipsy once again.

The parallel between the Gipsy and Arnold here is obvious. Like the Gipsy, Arnold is seeking something other than intellectual fulfilment in the Cumnor Hills. He is, in fact, treading the same path as the Gipsy, who,

... tired of knocking at preferment's door,  
 One summer-morn forsook  
 His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore, (35-37)

The practical reason given by Glanvill for the Scholar's leaving Oxford is poverty, but Arnold chooses rather to emphasise the enticement offered by the gipsies' knowledge. That the Scholar leaves on a "summer-morn" suggests that Oxford - the place of intellectual fulness - is no equal to the intuitive truth to be learned from those living close to nature.

The nature of the gipsies' knowledge is interesting. Glanvill's original states that the gipsies "could do wonders by the power of the imagination, their fancy binding that of others".<sup>86</sup> Whilst there is no reason to suppose that he equates Glanvill's with Coleridge's "Imagination", the word is still extremely suggestive for Arnold. In "The Scholar-Gipsy" Arnold records the meeting between the Gipsy and two of his Oxford friends, paraphrasing Glanvill's original up to the point of giving the Gipsy's decision to impart to the world ""the secret of their art, / When fully learned" (ll. 48-49). Here, however, Arnold makes him add

But it needs heaven-sent moments for this skill." (50)

The departure is significant. Allott, recording that the first (1853) version of the poem had "happy" for "heaven-sent", states that "On either reading the moments are those of poetic inspiration".<sup>87</sup> Whilst this might be part of the answer, the phrase "heaven-sent moments" has, I believe, a much broader significance. For a poet who claimed so often that the only knowledge we can have is that of our own inner selves (and that is difficult enough to attain), the suggestion of the possibility of knowledge acquired from without is an extraordinary admission. Whilst the "skill" itself is not specified it is, I think, the type of knowledge that is important.

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<sup>86</sup>From Arnold's own note to the poem.

<sup>87</sup>CP, p. 359.

The type of this knowledge is expanded upon in the next set of stanzas which deal with the Scholar-Gipsy's wanderings in the Oxfordshire countryside. The most notable feature of the Gipsy is his flying of the world's ways in order to keep himself open to the possibility of receiving the knowledge of the "imagination". He is described in terms something akin to a nineteenth century Saint Francis; - although the philosophical wanderer Rousseau and the idea of the "noble savage" are also possible primogenitors. Wearing "outlandish garb" over his "figure spare" (l. 98) and having "dark vague eyes" and a "soft abstracted air" (l. 99) he wanders in all weathers, knowing that only by immersing himself in the natural order can he become truly one with himself. The time for the medieval St. Francis has departed, however. This modern wanderer after truth is "pensive and tongue-tied" (l. 54).

That this is Arnold's own personal pre-requisite for the finding of spiritual health is clear from the poet's recognition of moments in which he has shared something of the Gipsy's experience. He dwells lovingly on the remembrances of past days in which, he imagines, the Gipsy may have been partaking:

... I myself seem half to know thy looks,  
And put the shepherds, wanderer! on thy trace; ...

... in my boat I lie  
Moored to the cool bank in the summer-heats,  
'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills,  
And watch the warm, green-muffled Cumner Hills,  
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats. (62-63, 66-70)

But, on the same pattern as the workings of his own "fugitive delicate sense", it is only a half recognition of the Gipsy. "Heaven-sent moments" are rare in Arnold's times.

When the Gipsy is seen - and these are reported, not direct, sightings - it is only in "retired" (l. 71), quiet places, as far away as possible from the world's "routine hubbub". To emphasise the opposition of the Gipsy to the world's ways he is sighted by people who make no attempt to blend (as the Gipsy does) into the natural surroundings. Thus he is seen by "Oxford riders blithe, / Returning home on summer-nights", who meet the Gipsy punting "in a pensive dream" (72-73, 77) or by "Maidens, who from the distant hamlets come / To dance around the Fyfield elm in May" (82-83). Notably he has no commerce with the world in the form of speech. Instead he gives the maidens flowers, symbols of a communication much deeper than the typical dialogue of May Day courting rituals.

Like St. Francis, the Scholar-Gipsy holds no alarm for the creatures of the countryside. Thus

The blackbird, picking food,  
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all;  
So often has he known thee past him stray,  
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a withered spray,  
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall. (116-120)

The final couplet here has provoked much critical discussion. A.E. Dyson, for example, claims that this is the point where Arnold dissociates himself from the Gipsy whose dream belongs to a pre-scientific age Arnold knew was impossible to re-enter. Because the spark never actually falls, Dyson believes that



Arnold sees the Scholar-Gipsy's life as an impossible dream.<sup>88</sup> Now on this reading the poem would have to be seen in terms of fairy-tale rather than myth, which would, in the eyes of many people, be a devaluation. Dyson is suggesting, in fact, that Arnold sees no possibility of finding psychological wholeness in following the Gipsy's example. E.K. Brown, for one, disagrees:

As books are the instrument of the intellect, natural objects are for him the instruments of intuition ... When he fades from our sight, the gipsy is still without a valid intuition; but he is still governing his life on the assumption that only so may such an intuition be attained; and unless it is attained, one has nothing fit for trust.

What is more, even the discipline required of the Gipsy in his quest has led to the sort of psychological unity for which Arnold is seeking:

The gipsy has had a precious incidental reward: he has become a disinterested being, in an eminent degree characterized by repose, dignity and inward clearness.<sup>89</sup>

The final stanza before the Gipsy's "fading from our sight" provides us with Arnold's only sighting:

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,  
Have I not passed thee on the wooden bridge,  
Wrapped in thy cloak and battling with the snow,  
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
And thou hast climbed the hill,  
And gained the white brow of the Cumner range;  
Turned once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,  
The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall -  
Then sought thy straw in some sequestered grange. (121-130)

In a similar movement to the symbolic mountain ascent after Truth in "In Utrumque Paratus" the Scholar's quest involves strictness and severity and a clear rejection of the more comfortable compromise (the feasting intellectuals in Christ-Church).

By lonely pureness to the all-pure fount  
(Only by this thou canst) the coloured dream  
Of life remount!

as Arnold had written in the earlier poem. It is significant that it is in this description of the Gipsy that Arnold himself partakes. In emphasising his knowledge of the pain as well as the joy of the Gipsy's quest, Arnold half-identifies with him, even if he knows that he is still unable to go beyond the "causeway chill" in his search.

The sceptical, realist part of Arnold now asserts itself with a start:

But what - I dream! (131)

The pastoral is abandoned for a critique of modern life. Arnold gloomily decides, for a few lines, that the Gipsy is long-since dead. But then, with a strident cry, the idealist Arnold proclaims the continued existence of the Scholar-Gipsy:

- No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours! (141)

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<sup>88</sup>See *Critics on Matthew Arnold* - ed. Jacqueline E.M. Latham (Allen & Unwin, London, 1973) pp. 52-60.

<sup>89</sup>*Matthew Arnold - A Study in Conflict* (University of Chicago, 1948) pp. 45-46.

It is only, the poet decides, we, who, like the protagonist of "The New Sirens", have worn out our life with "repeated shocks" (l. 144) which "numb the elastic powers" (l. 146). Arnold re-affirms the conclusion of "The New Sirens" but here claims that there is an alternative - the example of the Gipsy, who

... hadst one aim, one business, one desire; (152)

and is thus "exempt from age" (l. 158). Arnold, in comparison, "half-lives a hundred different lives" (l. 169) and, whilst he similarly awaits the "spark from heaven", he knows that it is not likely to fall for those who are "Light half-believers" of "casual creeds" (l. 172) and, consequently, "never deeply felt, nor clearly willed" (l. 173).

Even the best of his age is deemed inadequate. Those who would live by the intellect - and one thinks of Arnold's letter to Clough about his own addiction to studies - can only tell us about

... misery's birth and growth and signs,  
And how the dying spark of hope was fed, (187-188)

The rest of us, meanwhile,

... waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear;  
With close-lipped patience for our only friend, (193-194)

Arnold here sums up the philosophy of "Resignation" but now, set alongside the possibilities of hope engendered by the Scholar-Gipsy, he proclaims that patience is "sad" and

.... too near neighbour to despair - (195)

The horror of his own picture leads Arnold to plead with the Gipsy to fly all contact with the modern world, lest his

... glad perennial youth would fade,  
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours. (229-230)

As in the denial of "close-lipped patience" in "Resignation", Arnold's final plea to the Gipsy contains another reversal of the earlier poem's philosophy. He tells the Gipsy to

... fly our paths ...  
For strong the infection of our mental strife, (221-222)

thus denying the claim in "Resignation" that the glory of life is taken away by the "something that infects the world". Here the infection is man-made.

At the end of the poem, Arnold leaves the Gipsy untainted, predicting that he will be forever

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,  
Still clutching the inviolable shade, (211-212)

Thus he affirms the continued existence of the embodiment of hope that is the Scholar-Gipsy and, in doing so, suggests that, even in the corrupt modern world, one might still cultivate the spiritual life to the point where the spark from heaven might fall to the greater glory of mankind.

The final extended image of the poem has long been a subject of critical debate. Arnold represents the flight of the Gipsy from modernity with an image from Herodotus of a "grave Tyrian trader" (l. 232) who,

spying an intruding "Grecian coaster ... / Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine" (ll. 237-238), indignantly sails off in the opposite direction in search of the more congenial company of the shy and honourable Iberian "traffickers" (l. 249). E.K. Brown claims "at the least a general relevance to the character of the gipsy in the elaborate simile" whilst G. Saintsbury states the opposite, that no "ingenuity can work out the parallel" between the Gipsy and the Tyrian.<sup>90</sup> Certainly the need for such an elaborate piece of artifice seems doubtful in a poem whose central opposition - that of the Scholar-Gipsy's way of life compared with modern ways of life - is so clearly and deeply drawn. Arnold, no doubt looking for a grand summary to his poem was, I think, forced into such elaboration simply because the Scholar-Gipsy stands for so much that is important to the poet. I believe, however, that the simile does not succeed in summing-up the Gipsy. The effect is, instead, rather like that of the Homeric similes on the form of "Sohrab and Rustum" - an artificial construction that causes us to suspend our belief through its incompatibility with the rest of the poem. The failure, however, itself carries much significance. We may suppose that Arnold turned to Herodotus as a related Classical adjunct to the tone of Theocritan pastoral in the poem. In theory such an idea would be reasonable enough. In practice, however, Arnold has misjudged the effect that his conscious archaism has on the rest of the poem. The truth is that Arnold has not merely created a memento mori in "The Scholar-Gipsy". His use of the pastoral is not regressive, suggesting a golden age about which we can dream but which we can have no possibility of entering. In the figure of the Scholar-Gipsy Arnold has created a potent combination of the "expressivist anthropology" of Herder and Goethe and the English Romantics' philosophy of "inspirational" knowledge.<sup>91</sup> The Oxfordshire countryside, the immersion in which is a pre-requisite to the Gipsy's finding any knowledge, is therefore not symbolic of a lost Arcadia, or even the Roman campagna. It contains, in fact, Arnold's most original answer to the question of "how to live". As Douglas Bush says, such pastoral "escapism"

is not necessarily weak evasion, it may be, like the pastoral tradition as a whole, an integral element in the criticism of life.<sup>92</sup>

Thus the scholarly Classical treatment in the final simile jars rather than blends with what is undoubtedly the modern, not antique, pastoral of the rest of the poem.

The simile has, in the end, an entirely unanticipated effect, providing comment not on the Scholar-Gipsy but on Arnold. The action of the Tyrian to escape the tyranny of the Greeks does indeed have a parallel - that of the "Arnoldian Romantic" pastoral idyll attempting to escape from the imposition of an academic Classical model. Whilst Arnold does force the academic model onto the unwilling Romantic, it is undeniable that the "indignant" (l. 243) poet from another, gentler, land and literary form overcomes such

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<sup>90</sup>Brown - *Revue anglo-américaine* xii (1934-35) pp. 224-5 and Saintsbury - *Matthew Arnold* (Russel and Russel, New York, 1967) p. 42.

<sup>91</sup>The "spark from heaven" has its primary source, Allot believes, in Arnold's "recollection of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles at Pentecost" (p. 362). Coleridge saw all creative perception in the same way - "In short, whatever finds me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit". (See note no. 12, p. 10.) Even if Arnold was making no direct reference to the English Romantics, this is the philosophy to which the Scholar-Gipsy adheres.

<sup>92</sup>Bush, p. 73.

an imposition and remains, at the end, aloof in the "quiet places" of the earlier part of the poem. It is not, despite its position, the final simile that remains in the mind.

We are left, then, with a modern pastoral criticism of life which, like "Dover Beach", embodies a dialectical tension and fulfils D.G. James' wish for Arnold to develop further the insights of the previous generation of English poets. The Gipsy's "one aim" is placed alongside modernity's many sided vision (our "hundred different lives") and consequent frittering away of aim and purpose. The choice is not simple - "The Scholar-Gipsy" remains a shadowy set of hints and suggestions rather than a well defined model for instant happiness; but while for Arnold the dominant mood may be one of melancholy he knows, too, that the spark from heaven can only come to those who desire to attain to the sort of hope embodied in the Gipsy. And what should be good news for Arnold is the fact that he does "seem half to know" the Gipsy's "looks".

The reality of Arnold's knowledge of the symbolic Scholar-Gipsy's person and therefore aspirations is clear from a letter of May 1857 to his brother, Tom Arnold:

You alone of my brothers are associated with that life at Oxford, the freest and most delightful part, perhaps, of my life, when with you and Clough and Walrond I shook off all the bonds and formalities of the place, and enjoyed the spring of life and that unforgotten Oxfordshire and Berkshire country. Do you remember a poem of mine called "The Scholar Gipsy"? It was meant to fix the remembrance of those delightful wanderings of ours in the Cumner Hills ...<sup>93</sup>

This is a richly significant letter and not least because its description of the poem as an embodiment of delight, freedom and enjoyment emphasises that the prime purpose of "The Scholar-Gipsy" is to attain to beauty and give pleasure - effects which, we remember, were to be achieved in a far different manner according to the 1853 Preface. It is not, however, the final word. The overwhelming evidence is that it is in spite of himself (as we have seen before in "The Strayed Reveller" and "The Forsaken Merman") that Arnold manages to attain in his poetry to what D.G. James calls "vision". A letter to Clough of November 1853, shows that, even soon after the completion of the poem, Arnold is emphasising once more "comprehension" over "vision", the practical over the hopeful:

I am glad you like the Gipsy Scholar - but what does it do for you? Homer animates - Shakespeare animates - in its poor way I think Sohrab and Rustum animates - the Gipsy Scholar at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

The complaining millions of men  
Darken in labour and in pain -

What they want is something to animate and ennoble them - not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams - I believe a feeling of this kind is the basis of my nature - and of my poetics.<sup>94</sup>

Arnold proclaims his poetics to be practical, and the simile of the Tyrian trader now becomes clearer. For the Arnold bound by the principles of the 1853 Preface, the Classical imposition does serve his purpose. It sums up the poem as an artificial escape from unpleasant reality. His later classification of the poem as an "elegy" indicates how Arnold was able to regard "The Scholar-Gipsy" as a pretty lament for a lost age

<sup>93</sup>Quoted in CP, p. 356.

<sup>94</sup>LC, p. 146

("pleasing melancholy") whilst distancing himself from too close an involvement with its message. Again, as with the "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann", Arnold is able temporarily to become a psychological whole by releasing his "fugitive delicate sense" for a purely limited time.

That he does not finally commit himself to the furthering of his intuitive, spiritual self is evidence of Arnold's recognition that his phrase, the "criticism of life", is one more applicable to the practical field of prose writing than to that of poetry. The phrase itself occurs late in Arnold's work.<sup>95</sup> Whilst he applies it there to poetry, however, his own poetic fount has long run dry. We may suggest, then, that from about the time Arnold was entering into hard and serious work as a school-inspector (1851 onwards), he came to perceive his private work as more and more an adjunct to his practical job of improving society. That "The Scholar-Gipsy" (1853) is one of his last major poetic achievements suggests that Arnold's belief in poetry as being in itself a criticism of life was gradually eroded over the years. In fact, the triumph of the "fugitive delicate sense" is short-lived. It is finally the "modern situation" in its "unpoetrylessness" which conquers and Arnold, understanding this, makes a virtue of necessity by, in effect, denying the philosophical conclusions of England's recent poetic tradition and divesting poetry of any claim it might have to offer "inspirational" knowledge:

I am more and more convinced that the world tends to become more comfortable for the mass, and more uncomfortable for those of any natural gift or distinction - and it is perhaps well that it should be so - for hitherto the gifted have astonished and delighted the world, but not trained or inspired or in any real way changed it - and the world might do worse than to dismiss too high pretensions, and settle down on what it can see and handle and appreciate.<sup>96</sup>

In his remaining poetry Arnold largely re-iterates the themes of the divided and the buried self. Owing, however, to the implication, in the above letter, that psychological and spiritual wholeness is not to be found by working in areas such as the writing of poetry, the themes are coldly stated, with no attempt made at resolution. As Michael Thorpe says of Arnold's elegy for his lost youth and Marguerite, "The Terrace at Berne" (1863):

Cold now is the romance, cold the inspiration; the great Arnoldian themes now seem perfunctorily recapitulated;<sup>97</sup>

There are also the escapes from his renegade Scholar-Gipsy persona - grand schemes like his attempt at Greek tragedy "Merope" which seeks, ironically enough, to produce the "lofty sense of the mastery of the human spirit over its own stormiest agitations".<sup>98</sup> The effect, as Thorpe observes, is of a "dead imitation, devoid of ... living "affinity" between the past and the present ..." Arnold commits the crime of suppressing his true poetic impulse in the interests of a restrictive theory".<sup>99</sup> Then there is the equally evasive "Thyrsis" which attempts to re-produce the tone and message of hope of "The Scholar-Gipsy" whilst admitting that such a hope is unattainable:

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<sup>95</sup>In the "Wordsworth" essay of 1879.

<sup>96</sup>June 7, 1852. (LC, pp. 122-123.)

<sup>97</sup>Thorpe, p. 37.

<sup>98</sup>From the Preface to "Merope" (1858).

<sup>99</sup>Thorpe, pp. 64 & 66.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here, (31)

he says of the Cumnor Hills. And, as a result,

Ah me! this many a year  
My pipe is lost ... (36-37)

But this time around Arnold is able to rationalise away his loss:

Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart  
Into the world and wave of men depart; (38-39)

Arnold invokes the symbol of a tree beloved of Clough and himself which, even on this re-visit two decades later stands still and stands, supposedly, to assert the continued possibility of receiving the spark from heaven:

*Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.  
Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,  
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.* (238-240)

Whilst the Scholar still searches, however, Arnold is still only visiting and will depart for the world following the poem's end. Whilst "Thyrsis" does attain to a "pleasing melancholy" in its elegiac beauty, there is none of the dialectical tension between possibilities that we saw in "The Scholar-Gipsy". The final effect is of the earlier pastoral recapitulated with diminished idealism.

Arnold's last major poem, "Obermann Once More", is a farewell to poetry, marking a new stage in Arnold's work - that of a total commitment to critical prose writing. In many ways it is his first personally satisfactory answer to the need, as he told Clough more than a decade earlier, to include religion with poetry, to find some way of coping with the nineteenth century crisis of faith. That he bids farewell for good to the creative half of his poetic self uneasily abandoned at the end of the last "Obermann" poem, indicates that "Obermann Once More" is not itself a fulfilment of that earlier wish - its dominantly prosaic content and pedestrian rhythm are far from Arnold's best poetry - but it does have the incidental effect of marking out religious prose as Arnold's major future concern. Thus the poem is, for the most part, a r sum  of Arnold's present intellectual position on Christianity and the history of civilisation. The poet hears Obermann telling him to

... .. help attain:  
*One common wave of thought and joy  
Lifting mankind again!* (322-324)

This is essential given the picture of modern religious belief painted by Obermann. Proclaiming startlingly the death of the resurrected Christ owing to man's dead creeds, dead rites and dead social order, Obermann's direction for the future summarises completely Arnold's forthcoming religious argumentation:

*"Unduped of fancy, henceforth man  
Must labour! - must resign  
His all too human creeds, and scan  
Simply the way divine!"* (185-188)<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup>The stanza was, significantly, italicised in 1885.

If Arnold was inclined to regret the passing of personal salvation through the writing of inspired poetry, then Obermann conveniently dismisses the objection:

And who can be alone elate,  
While the world lies forlorn? (247-248)

The dream of universal human happiness is not for Obermann to help bring to fruition. For him "It was not yet the appointed hour" (l. 253). But Obermann appoints his one-time disciple Arnold to the task of helping to "tell / Hope to a world new-made!" (ll. 311-312).

The way is open, then, for the major pre-occupation of Arnold's life - the loss of Christian faith - to be approached through the medium of prose rather than of poetry. The practical side of Arnold might put this down to the force of his own personal circumstances, or an uneasy perception that journalism was now a more useful medium for communicating his message to large numbers of people. But the side of him which hoped for a glorious transformation of the world through the ideals fostered in such poems as "The Scholar-Gipsy" remained, colouring his prose and, occasionally, making disquieting admissions:

Though the Muse be gone away,  
Though she move not earth today,  
Souls, erewhile who caught her word,  
Ah! still harp on what they heard.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>The "Persistence of Poetry" quatrain, printed as the prefatory poem to Arnold's last collection of poems, *New Poems*, in 1867.

## Chapter 2

### Prose Criticisms of Life (The 1850s and 1860s)

At the end of our discussion of his poetry we have reached the conclusion that Arnold is very much back where he started. The abandonment of his attempt to find spiritual wholeness in poetry comes through his failure to fulfil his own injunction to include "religion with poetry". Whilst we have put this failure down to a misunderstanding by Arnold as to what is the true role of poetry, Arnold himself simply decides that it is the age itself that has overcome the ability of anyone to write poetry. This attitude only reinforces, however, the situation of hopelessness that we saw being proclaimed by Arnold in "Stagirius". He is still faced by the loss of spiritual meaning and hence a purpose and direction in life and he is still faced with a divided self (what we might call the "present" and "buried" selves). He is no nearer to finding solutions to those epistemological problems that lie behind his feelings of isolation and of his inability to feel. Whilst he has rejected Coleridge's attempts to deal with the same problems he still, however, attempts to overcome them. Whilst writing poetry is more or less abandoned in his search for something to fulfil religious needs, Arnold's criticism of life continues unabated. Beginning in the 1850s and 1860s Arnold starts to deal directly with the religious question itself rather than approaching it obliquely via the means of melancholy subjective visions. The poem "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" indicates the way in which Arnold's thought is moving during the 1850s and 60s.

I behold  
The House, the Brotherhood austere!  
- And what am I, that I am here?<sup>1</sup>

Arnold visited the Carthusian monastery, the Grande Chartreuse, on his honeymoon in September 1851. The poem, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse", was first published in Fraser's Magazine in 1855, appearing again, with significant changes, in Arnold's 1867 collection of poems. The differences between the two versions are revealing in that they state, quite unequivocally, large changes in Arnold's personal vision of Christianity and hence in his sense of vocation during the 1850s and 1860s. In fact the firm decisions reached in "Obermann Once More" can be seen as a direct result of the deliberations being worked over between the two versions of the "Stanzas".

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<sup>1</sup>"Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse", ll. 64-66.



The first version of the "Stanzas" has a movement very similar to that of the "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann". Both use the method of defining the self in relation to a place of pilgrimage. In the "Obermann" poem the evocation of his pilgrimage to the isolation of Senancour's Alpine country enables Arnold to admit the importance to him of the idea of withdrawal from society whilst at the same time laying the vision to rest in the realisation that, for him, such isolation is ultimately damaging. As we saw in considering the poem, however, Arnold remains spiritually hungry with his idealist "buried self" still yearning for communion with the other, active side of his nature, driven "to the world without".

Unsurprisingly then, the "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" finds Arnold's neglected half attempting to exact revenge for its dismissal. Once more we find a pilgrimage to a place of spiritual importance - "the Carthusians' world-famed home" (l. 30). This journey, however, seems to have no clearly defined motive:

- And what am I, that I am here? (66)

Allott suggests that it might have been a stop-off on the poets' "Grand Tour".<sup>2</sup> But Arnold's enquiry seems to be double-edged - is he there as a tourist or because he is drawn (against his will) to what is celebrated there? The 1855 version of the poem is deeply equivocal. An internal dialogue is set up between Arnold's present self and the self moulded by the "masters" of his "mind" (l.73); the intellectual, primarily Stoic, teachers of his past. Lest they should fear Arnold's defection to a creed of Pausanian credulity he assures his "rigorous teachers" (l. 67) that

I come not here to be your foe!  
I seek these anchorites, not in ruth,  
To curse and to deny your truth;

Not as their friend, or child, I speak!  
But as, on some far northern strand,  
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek  
In pity and mournful awe might stand  
Before some fallen Runic stone -  
For both were faiths, and both are gone. (76-84)

Whilst assuring his conscience Arnold has to admit, however, that he feels a deep affinity with the monks:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born,  
With nowhere yet to rest my head,  
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn. (85-88)

In these four lines Arnold sums up and re-states the negative conclusions of "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann", "Resignation" and "Empedocles on Etna". With a desperate plea for psychological (and the suggestion of primal) wholeness Arnold admits the need for escape:

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,  
Ye solemn seats of holy pain!  
Invest me, steep me, fold me round,  
Till I possess my soul again;  
Till free my thoughts before me roll,  
Not chafed by hourly false control! (91-96)

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<sup>2</sup>"Arnold's interest in the Grande Chartreuse may have been stimulated by Wordsworth's account in "The Prelude" (1850) vi 416-88 of his visit to the monastery in 1790." (CP, p. 303.)

As David DeLaura says, this is the main concern of the "Stanzas" - the impotence to which his withdrawn Stoicism has reduced him.<sup>3</sup> Whilst their faith may be "dead", the monks have more affinity for Arnold in their aspiration after spiritual wholeness than Arnold's own "rigorous teachers". The 1855 version has Arnold recounting his loss of traditional faith with some bitterness:

For rigorous teachers seized my youth,  
And prun'd its faith, and quench'd its fire,  
Showed me the pale cold star of Truth,  
There bade me gaze, and there aspire. (67-70)

But Arnold really aspires after the wholistic view of the medieval world:

We are like children reared in shade  
Beneath some old-world abbey wall,  
Forgotten in a forest-glade,  
And secret from the eyes of all. (169-172)

At the end of the poem the poet asks to be left alone "Fenced ... in this cloistral round" (l. 205).

The 1855 "Stanzas" represents the lowest point in Arnold's search for self-unity. Significantly, from the point of view of this thesis, it is centred on the loss of traditional Christian faith - there are loud echoes of "Stagirius" in this poem. The belief, in "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann", in the reality of the poet's divided self is here re-defined in terms akin to the theme of "Empedocles" - the division of thought and feeling. But here the problem which really governs those poems is made more explicit - how can Arnold live to the full when he feels the truth "Of reverie, of shade, of prayer" (l. 206) and yet has to deny the old ways under instruction from the "pale cold star of Truth" brought into view by the Zeitgeist?

By 1867 Arnold has found an answer to all this - the answer, as we have seen, of the dominant side of his post-1853 Preface philosophy - the practical necessity of doing something. The 1867 version of the "Stanzas" finds a unity of a sort for Arnold by coming to the same conclusion as "Obermann Once More". What is important in poetry is the stressing of comprehension over vision; and the same is now true for Arnold's religious position. Whilst the regret for the passing medieval world-view remains, it has been transmuted, for the now socially minded Arnold, into a matter of purely nostalgic interest. Arnold rejects the monks' idealism just as surely as he rejects the dreams of the Scholar-Gipsy. His decision, in "Obermann Once More", to concentrate in his religious didacticism on what can be known:

"Unduped of fancy, henceforth man  
Must labour! - must resign  
His all too human creeds, and scan  
Simply the way divine!" (185-188)

allows him to dismiss the visions of the Carthusians as impractical for future religious needs. Thus in the 1867 "Stanzas" we find Arnold distancing himself from the austere idealism of the monks in worldly compromise. The bitterness against his "rigorous teachers" has gone. Instead of "pruning" the faith of his youth and "quenching" its fire, Arnold now claims that they "purged its faith, and trimmed its fire" and

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<sup>3</sup>D.J. DeLaura - Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England (University of Texas Press, 1969) pp. 20-21.

showed him the "high, white" rather than "pale cold" star of Truth. Where before Arnold had asked the worldly activists to leave him in the "forest" of the monks' "cloistral round", he now changes dramatically the whole tone of the poem, pronouncing an ironic final judgment on their way of life:

- Pass, banners, pass, and bugles, cease,  
And leave our desert to its peace! (209-210)

Arnold would not, I believe, have seen this as a diminution of his idealism. It is rather a decision to search for it in another place. We can find the clue to this change of emphasis in the letter to Clough already quoted:

I am glad you like the Gipsy Scholar - but what does it do for you? ...

You certainly do not seem to me sufficiently to desire and earnestly strive towards - assured knowledge - activity - happiness. You are too content to fluctuate - to be ever learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth. This is why, with you, I feel it necessary to stiffen myself - and hold fast my rudder.

My poems, however, viewed absolutely, are certainly little or nothing.<sup>4</sup>

Arnold often appears to use Clough as his alter ego, in order to criticise the side of himself which identifies with his friend. Here his criticism of Clough is really an impatience with his own idealist poetic side, the side that leaves the activist impotent by appealing so strongly to the Gipsy within him. The "pleasing melancholy" that the Scholar-Gipsy awakes is that of any enquirer after truth who is content to wander and to fluctuate in his desire to accept nothing but perfection. At the time of this letter (1853) it is the same melancholy as that awakened by contemplation of the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse.

As we have seen before, however, Arnold only names a problem to his confessor in order to dismiss it. Here he is able to displace onto Clough his own propensity to "never come to the knowledge of the truth" in questioning any truth which does not produce "assured knowledge - activity - happiness". In dismissing his poems as "little or nothing" when viewed absolutely, Arnold is saying two things. On a simple level he is claiming that they are, when viewed as a whole, of little interest. He is also saying, however, that in the search for absolute knowledge they are of little or no help. This absolute knowledge is not the partial glimpse of the Scholar-Gipsy or the dreadful doubt of the poet in "Dover Beach", or even the hankering after something lost of the Carthusians. It is rather that knowledge that "animates" and "ennobles" and brings happiness by following the prescription of the 1853 Preface. It is, in fact, a knowledge simply not available to a poet, like himself, so inclined to melancholy subjective visions on the Romantic model. Absolute knowledge must be sought in another way.

The 1867 version of "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" finds Arnold fulfilling his own dictum of writing poetry by which to live. In giving up on what he sees as impossible ideals, Arnold accepts unequivocally the Stoicism of his "masters of the mind". But it is not the disabling Stoicism of 1855.

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<sup>4</sup>Coleby, Nov. 30th (1853). (LC, p. 146.)

Instead it is the rational, mediative approach of a faith "purged" of impossibilities and "trimmed" in order to burn more brightly. Arnold now sees his task as one of attempting to help a new society to birth rather than accepting for ever his hopeless wandering between the old and new worlds.

Together with his school inspectorship, there was one other major change in circumstances during the 1850s which helped Arnold towards this assessment of his future role. On 5th May 1857 Arnold was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. This was as much a recognition of the Arnold family's services to education as a display of admiration towards Matthew's poetical achievements. As a representative of something begun by his father it must have given Arnold a relieved sense of having found a public niche somewhere and must have thereby diminished any sense of impotence felt in his failure as a poet. Certainly, as a critic talking about poetry he was able to pursue actively the role he had hopefully cast for himself in his first volume of poems - that of the poetical "reformer".

As well as mitigating substantially Arnold's personal despair at failing to produce an "adequate" type of poetry, it must also have caused him to retain his hopes for poetry to be in some way a criticism of life. Although he might have been unable to produce such a "criticism" himself, he must have felt that this was more than compensated for by being given a position that held the possibility, potentially, of influencing people in a far greater way. Having been given the specific task of judging England's poetic past and helping to determine its future, Arnold therefore accepted the role with relish and a high sense of honour. His literary criticism, which begins in 1857 with his inaugural Oxford lecture, "On the Modern Element in Literature", betrays a sense of priestly vocation. Arnold is given the chance, by his public recognition, to act as the godfather to a new literary sensibility. Thus is accounted for Arnold's prose style which, in marked contrast to the introspective self-questioning of his poetry, has a self-confident mark about it; the mark of the teacher rather than that of the questioner.

The gap between the uncertain, contradictory probings of Arnold the poet and the fluid, witty and persuasive outpourings of Arnold the critic has generally produced a curious effect on Arnold's own critics. The majority have tended to concentrate on either the poetry or the criticism, as if there was no connection between the two. Of those that have taken Arnold as a whole, fewer still have sought to make any explicit connection between Arnold the poet and Arnold the religious controversialist - possibly because the latter preoccupation has been seen as an historical curiosity. Yet the remarkable feature about Arnold is his consistency. The catalyst, or shaping spirit, behind his prose writings is very similar to that which governs his poetry. Thus an assertion such as that of Douglas Bush that Arnold turned to literary criticism because the main reason for his writing poetry - his "spiritual malaise" - had dissolved,<sup>5</sup> is quite simply wrong. The difference in style, supposed by some critics to reflect a change of interest or heart, merely reflects a

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<sup>5</sup>Bush, p. 85.

tailoring of emphasis. It is the audience that has changed, not Arnold's interests. In fact, if Arnold's poems could be said to be arguments, as we have seen from the letters, with Clough, then the prose can be seen as an attempt to transport the same mode of argumentation onto a larger stage. Clough's death in 1861 and his own failure to come to a satisfactory self-definition through poetry both help Arnold towards the new exercise of self-definition through prose. The tools have changed but the task remains the same.

To return to Douglas Bush's suggestion that Arnold's "spiritual malaise" had gone, I would suggest that the truth is quite the contrary. Arnold's rejection of the Scholar-Gipsy is rather the most potent sign that the spiritual malaise has conquered. What Arnold does lose in the 1850s is his faith in the ability of any individual to spiritually transcend the age. This is an entirely intellectual decision showing a distrust of any knowledge that might take intuition into account. As Park Honan says, Arnold deliberately turned against subjective feeling from 1853-7. He failed to continue as a poet owing to a "revolt against intuition" and a "belief in a more rational outlook"<sup>6</sup> The prose version of Arnold is therefore weighted heavily in favour of a clinical, rational and supposedly more objective outlook.

The picture we are given of the monks in the "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" provides us with an accurate portrait of the state of Arnold's mind at this time. In his identification with the monks' temperament but his rejection of their way of life we see Arnold's desire for an age where people are united in a common faith. At the same time, however, he perceives that it is no longer possible to hold fast to a solution which relies so heavily on intuitive knowledge. Arnold's outburst in a letter to Clough that these are "damned times" owing to "the height to which knowledge is come" is his perception that the basis for knowledge of any sort is in question.<sup>7</sup>

"On the Modern Element in Literature" is, then, the first of his critical attempts to lay to rest the spectre of complete relativity. That Arnold realises himself that he is undertaking such an attempt is clear from the original purpose behind the essay. It was supposed to be the first in a series of lectures on the subject of what constitutes "modernity" in literature. This clearly, I think, connects it with such comments as that in the 1853 Preface about the "modern problems" of the character of Empedocles. Interestingly enough, however, the series was discontinued owing to a self-confessed "insufficient" knowledge. The short

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<sup>6</sup>Honan p. 279. This is not to say that all poetry is by necessity unable to encompass a more or less objective vision. It is simply that Arnold is attempting to overcome the "dialogue of the mind with itself" which he perceives to have been the hallmark of Romantic poetry. In his frustration at his own tendency to write such poetry he deliberately turns against any manifestation of Post-Enlightenment subjectivity.

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My dearest Clough these are damned times - everything is against one - the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical enervation ... and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties.

Sept. 23rd 1849. (LC, p. 111.) I take "intuitive" knowledge to be, to quote Coleridge, "a direct and immediate beholding or presentation of an object to the mind through the senses or the imagination". (*Biographia Literaria*, vol. 2, p. 230). Coleridge's suggestion that the intuitive is a particular apprehension of the "imagination" implies that such knowledge can involve a mystical rapport with the numinous. This is the sense in which I am using the word "intuitive" when I say that the monks' faith rests on "intuitive knowledge".

preface to the published essay<sup>8</sup> also begs forgiveness for an "imperfection" of style - that of the "doctor rather than the explorer". The confession should, I think, be taken at face value. Arnold's first foray into critical prose is of particular importance in any attempt to discover continuity in Arnold's work. His dissatisfaction here stems from his realisation that the impasse reached in his poetry is leaving its mark on his criticism - work which, by its nature and according to his position, should display a surer authority. As it is the lecture pretends to such an authority, but it is the authority of the frightened despot rather than the enlightened ruler. As Wordsworth's grandson William complained, on writing to Crabb Robinson a few weeks after the lecture:

... he seems to lust after a system of his own: and systems are not made in a day: ...<sup>9</sup>

As its title suggests, "On the Modern Element in Literature" is based on a realisation about the reality of historical change. At this stage in his career Arnold is reviewing his life against the broad ebbs and flows of history in order to find "guidance" (as he says in the 1853 Preface) for life in the modern age. Arnold's solution to his own spiritual malaise - the soul in isolation in a universe without God - is to look for support from human history. Having rejected the medieval solution of history controlled by God, Arnold looks for guidance anthropologically - by interpreting human history as an expression of the spirit of man. This is the "expressivist anthropology" which we first saw informing the portrait of the Scholar-Gipsy. There, however, the philosophy collapsed into the English Romantic model of poet as prophet inspired by God. In this essay the inspiration for the man of literature is more obviously humanist in expression.

Wordsworth the younger's complaint that Arnold seems to "lust after a system" is a criticism that might be repeated by many a twentieth century student of literature. It is quite clear, from the very beginning of the lecture, that Arnold's concern is not to examine literature in a reductive manner - this lecture is not merely about modern style, language or modes of expression. It is instead a treatment of literature as an expression of nothing less than "the truth about life". Arnold's concern is spiritual. By the end of the third paragraph we are told that there are two types of "deliverance" demanded of the human race and that "in the enjoyment of both united consists man's true freedom". "Moral deliverance" is demanded of all ages and all individuals whilst "intellectual deliverance" is "the peculiar demand of those ages which are called modern". By the end of his introduction to the subject Arnold has proclaimed that "it is to the poetical literature of an age that we must ... look for the most perfect, the most adequate interpretation of that age". Arnold's concern in this lecture is to make a comparative survey of past epochs and their bodies of literature in order to seek guidance for the future from past "modern" ages.

Arnold's historicism and anthropological concerns are immediately apparent. We saw how, in "Alaric at Rome", the poet briefly touches on his father's cyclical view of history. In "On the Modern Element in

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<sup>8</sup>The preface was appended to the lecture on its first publication as an essay in MacMillan's Magazine in 1868.

<sup>9</sup>Quotation from CPW 1:225.

Literature" we find Arnold using the idea as the basis of his argument. Ruth apRoberts' useful book, Arnold and God,<sup>10</sup> shows how important such ideas became for Arnold in his attempts to interpret his own age. As she says, the new theory of historicism, first articulated by the Italian philosopher Gianbattista Vico, was "standard historical teaching at Matthew Arnold's Rugby".<sup>11</sup> In "Alaric at Rome" Arnold appropriated the cyclical paradigm for a fatalistic end - to suggest that England was in a state analogous to the failing Roman Empire. Now Arnold decides on the more optimistic parallel of ancient Greece. The change probably reflects Arnold's developing knowledge of, and adherence to, the ideas of J.G. von Herder. Herder's Ideas Towards the Philosophy of History of Mankind (the Ideen)<sup>12</sup> was first read by Arnold from 1867-9, but, as apRoberts says, he knew of Herder through Carlyle much earlier. Herder gives a developmental twist to Vico's original ideas by suggesting that, although there are parallels within history, the general movement is one of "progress", a progress that is seen in anthropological terms through man's capacity for language, society and religion. The importance of this for Arnold is that it provides an alternative humanist gospel onto which his own disenfranchised spirituality can cling. Herder talks of a "chain of development" through which the human spirit develops although individuals pass away, whilst in the individual himself a state of perfection can be aimed for - Bildung - "the willed harmonious development in the individual of all aspects of the human - as distinct from animal - potential..."<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note the last part of that definition of Bildung. The idea of a constantly evolving human potential as an escape from animality has a strong appeal to those wishing to deny the conclusions of the Newtonian reductionist world view. It is useful, too, as an alternative to transcendental philosophy. Herder's Metakritik of 1799 is a deliberate refutation of Kant's Critique, denouncing Kant's work as abstract and unreal, a "linguistic monstrosity, an unparalleled word jugglery". The Metakritik seeks for a scientific, verifiable basis for knowledge; it attempts to bring all the sciences of man and his environment into an integrated whole.<sup>14</sup> The religious implications of this are complex. Whilst Herder himself was a Christian - religion being a specific area of man's Humanität - others who followed him felt the need for a rejection of the traditional models. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, which had a great impact on Arnold, treats Herder's idea of Bildung as, according to apRoberts, "a sort of secular salvation".<sup>15</sup> Goethe, seeing the truly spiritual expression of mankind as manifested through his use of language, displaces the traditional mantle of "Creator" from God onto man.

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<sup>10</sup>University of California Press, Berkely, L.A., 1983.

<sup>11</sup>pp. 62-63.

<sup>12</sup>First published 1784-91.

<sup>13</sup>apRoberts, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>The comparison between Herder and Kant is discussed in Isaiah Berlin's Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (London: Hogarth Press, 1976). (Quoted by apRoberts, p. 41.)

<sup>15</sup>apRoberts, p. 47.

It is important to have some understanding of what we may call the "historicist gospel" in relation to Coleridge's attempts to retain the traditional models of God and his creation. It seems to me that the assumptions behind the historicists' theory of human progress do not sufficiently take into account the problems Coleridge saw being created by empiricism. We explored in the last chapter Coleridge's "tensional" theory of language - his view of language as the expression of man's ambiguous relationship with God and the universe. From what we have discovered in this chapter we can now see Coleridge's ideas in historical perspective. In 1801 we find Coleridge denouncing the Newtonian world view in a letter to his friend Thomas Poole. Most particularly he attacks the idea of the mind as "a lazy looker-on on an external universe".<sup>16</sup> What Coleridge is reacting against is that division of man from his surroundings we have already observed. The dominant empiricist philosophy had solidified such a division by assuming that the constitution of "reality" was an objective world of facts as observed through man's sense data. Correspondingly, empiricist philosophers of language such as Horne Tooke and the Lockean, David Hartley, came to see the history of language as a process of gradual desynonymisation in which man came to understand more fully the universe around him. Words, which had previously described reality as man interacting with his surroundings,<sup>17</sup> were now seen as evolving into purer forms as befits the new knowledge of man: words now denote things. As Coleridge came to see, this is a false clarity which leads to a lack of balance between the individual mind and the world "out there". The "lazy looker-on" does not participate in the world outside, he simply views it as a kaleidoscope of images. Meanwhile, his assumption that his objectifying of reality somehow "solidifies" reality breaks down on closer inspection. The observer is left observing only his own senses and any "meaning" in the world is lost through the resulting isolation. What Coleridge sees and reacts against in the empiricist philosophy is, in effect, the evacuation of God. As the description of reality becomes progressively more internalised, so the idea of meaning retreats. The loss of balance between reader and text leads, interestingly enough, right back to pre-Creation chaos.

The study of the process of desynonymisation leads Coleridge to different conclusions. He refuses to see changes in language in terms of a monolithic development in man's understanding of the universe. Rather he observes the constant change and flux as a corollary of our changing relationship with nature and God. As Stephen Prickett says in Words and the Word, Coleridge came to see words as related not so much to things as to "changes in human consciousness itself".<sup>18</sup> Such a view denies that language evolves into a "purer" form or becomes somehow "better" at describing reality. What it does do is hold those changes in consciousness in tension. Coleridge allows for the possibility of further creation in human consciousness - and thus further changes in language - by retaining the dualistic idea of the logos as both within and outside nature.

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<sup>16</sup>Letters, vol. 2, no. 709.

<sup>17</sup>For example, "wind" as both a physical entity and as an expression of the Spirit of God.

<sup>18</sup>Words and "The Word" - Language, poetics and biblical interpretation (Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 147.



If we relate this back to Coleridge's theory of the Imagination we can see how the change in consciousness - the progressive internalisation of man's experience - affects Coleridge's aesthetics. The Imagination is, in fact, needed to bridge the gap between God and man. In its origins the word "nature" included man, and the whole was understood as the workings of God. With the internalisation of God's revelation, our experience becomes more mysterious and more ambiguous. With the idea of the "Imagination" Coleridge tries to understand man's new relationship with God. God is both inside man - hence man's semi-divine creative ability - and yet outside him. Thus is created the modern human condition we explored in Chapter One. As Stephen Prickett observes, Coleridge's sense of human perception rests in ambiguity:

[Coleridge's] semi-mystical Platonic vision that could make him write confidently of the time when "the other great Bible of God, the Book of Nature, shall become transparent to us, when we regard the forms of matter as words, as symbols, valuable only as being the expression, an unrolled but yet a glorious fragment of the Supreme Being" (*Philosophical Lectures* - ed. K.Coburn (Routledge, 1949) p. 367) is incomplete without the counter-intuition: "We understand nature just as if, at a distance, we looked at the image of a person in a looking-glass, plainly and fervently discoursing, yet what he uttered we could decipher only by the motion of his lips or by his mien." (*Anima Poetae* - ed. E.H.Coleridge (1895) p. 232.)<sup>19</sup>

Coleridge's attitude allows for the possibility of knowledge from without as well as within. His belief that the theories of empiricist philosophy are inadequate to describe the whole of experience leads him to an interesting semantic usage in his description of reality. Whereas the empiricist vainly asserts a world of facts independent of the observer, Coleridge balances the discordant qualities of internal and external observation with his assertion of the existence of "facts of the mind". As Stephen Prickett points out, this is being true to the original root meaning of the word "fact" (from the Latin *factum*), which meant "a thing done or performed". A fact was something participated in - the product was made by human agency. By Arnold's time "fact" has come to mean what is scientifically observable; it has lost that human creative potential - man has become a "lazy looker-on".<sup>20</sup>

It should be no surprise then, when looking back at Arnold's poetic pronouncements, to see his confusion over these differing world views at the root of his feelings of isolation. With such a poem as "The Scholar-Gipsy" we find an almost Coleridgean balancing of discordant qualities - the internal spiritual journey of the Gipsy coupled with an attitude of expectation towards the possibility of knowledge breaking in from without (the "spark from heaven"). Alternatively, we find Arnold searching for a self which has been "buried" by the general change in human consciousness from external and participatory to internal and isolated.

With this general feeling of isolation in mind we can now understand better the new epistemological theories of Herder and Goethe and their appeal for Arnold. The perception that God can no longer be understood in terms of participation in man's external surroundings leads Herder to suggest that God is

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 148

<sup>20</sup>See Prickett, pp. 192-93.

concomitant with purely human development. The Romantics' idea of man's felt unity with "Nature" is thus rejected, as Herder's idea of Humanität states that "man, and only man, is organised, biologically, with a capacity for reason, for art, for language - and for religion".<sup>21</sup> People such as Goethe, Carlyle and, following them, Arnold, are consequently led to expect a future Kingdom of God on human developmental lines. Man will have escaped from his sense of isolation when he has become fully human. Thus we find Arnold marking a passage, (on his first reading of the Ideen from 1867-9), on man failing to reach the "pure image of man that lies in him" and, written on the inside front cover, we find a new optimistic resolution to change this state of affairs in himself, in order "to be able to arrive at a firm view concerning the course of human life".<sup>22</sup>

The suggestion of ways in which man is to develop is, of course, Arnold's task. By the mid 1860s he is producing subtle comparative studies in literature, education and religion on the Herderian historicist model, shifting the fragments of "truth" from the past and moulding them together with his own insights to form broad prescriptive models on mankind's future development. "On the Modern Element in Literature" is, however, far from subtle. What we see is Arnold's attempt, and failure, to escape from the conclusions of human history and the conclusions of his own poetry. Whilst we find Arnold embracing the theory of historicism, we also see him shying away from some of its implications.

Arnold's unhappiness with historicism can be illustrated by juxtaposing the 1857 lecture with a letter from 1852, a letter which uses a significant simile in order to describe his state of mind:

... I am sure however that in the air of the present times il nous manquẽ d'aliment, & that we deteriorate in spite of our struggles - like a gifted Roman falling on the uninigorating atmosphere of the decline of the Empire. Still nothing can absolve us from the duty of doing all we can to keep alive our courage and activity.<sup>23</sup>

This is, of course, an echo of the fatalism of "Alaric at Rome", but we find a different use of history in "On the Modern Element in Literature".

Arnold's search for spiritual nourishment from the past leads him to a comparative survey of the literatures of ancient Greece, the Elizabethan age and the late Roman Empire. All these ages are deemed "modern" because, in a conscious echo of the historicists we have discussed, they were ages of "advanced civilisation". They therefore have instruction for the inevitable development of Arnold's own age.

It is no surprise to find that Arnold comes out in favour of ancient Greece as the best model for future development. As Ruth apRoberts says, students at Rugby were taught to think of Periclean Greece as the supreme example of human civilisation. Moreover, it corresponded well to the social situation of modern Europe. The heroic age which passed into the first major modern experiment in democracy (Greece in the

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<sup>21</sup>See apRoberts, p. 54.

<sup>22</sup>Quotation from apRoberts, p. 44. Original source for quotation was unavailable.

<sup>23</sup>Edgbaston, June 7th, 1852. (LC, pp. 122-123.)

fifth century B.C.) had particular significance for those observing the parallel movement from aristocracy to democracy in nineteenth century Europe.<sup>24</sup> And yet Arnold's analysis is surely uncritical. Not only is his field of study impossibly large, but his critical method of drawing general conclusions from the works of single "representatives" of each age raises all sorts of questions. In the comparison of Periclean Greece and Elizabethan England the latter age is found wanting. In Greece the people do not wear arms, dress simply but elegantly and have tolerance for others' opinions. Sixteenth century England is the opposite. And what of the historians of each age? Sir Walter Raleigh sums up the Elizabethan age in his "wholly obsolete and unfamiliar language" and his lack of control over the "facts" of the time. Thucydides, in comparison, speaks as the "thoughtful philosophic man of our own days":

He represents, at its best indeed, but he represents, the general intelligence of his age and nation; of a nation the meanest citizens of which could follow with comprehension the profoundly thoughtful speeches of Pericles.

The faults with such an analysis are manifold. How can Arnold know, for example, the thoughts of Athens' "meanest citizens" and how, anyway, can one man's testimony sum up an age? Arnold's comparison of historians is equally suspect; it is not, in fact, a true comparison at all. Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World is compared with Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War and Raleigh's is castigated for its speculative opinions on the physical characteristics of the universe. Raleigh has not a "rational appreciation and control of his facts". Remarkably enough, Arnold does not seem to have realised that the subject matter of the two historians is entirely different.

The literary critical judgments in this essay are on much the same lines as those in the 1853 Preface. The poets of Periclean Greece - Pindar, Aeschylus and Sophocles - are praised for being as "interesting" and "adequate" as the age itself. There is also a new note, however. Arnold compares the disappearance of the work of Menander with the survival of that of the comic, Aristophanes and asks "to what is this to be attributed?" The answer springs from Arnold's new optimistic view of history. Menander has "perished" because the age in which he lived saw Greece in decline. His work had to be sacrificed because in his poetry was "the seed of death" and it was thus at odds with the ongoing developmental pattern of human history:

The human race has the strongest, the most invincible tendency to live, to develop itself. It retains, it clings to what fosters its life, what fosters its development, to the literature which exhibits it in its vigour, it rejects, it abandons what does not foster its development.

Given this belief it is strange, then, that Arnold should dwell for so long, when he comes to study Roman poetry, on Lucretius. Lucretius, he says, is a "great poet" and, moreover, as "modern" as Thucydides. His modernity is, however, marked out by his exhibition of a "feeling" of "ennui" and "depression" which is a characteristic "stamped on ... many of the representative works of modern times". After some time Arnold dismisses Lucretius as inadequate to describe his age because he is not "in sympathy" with it; he is "overstrained, gloom-weighted, morbid".

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<sup>24</sup>See apRoberts, pp. 62-3.

One wonders why Lucretius has not "perished" like Menander? The developmental theory seems to collapse here, so Arnold unceremoniously bundles Lucretius out of the way in the same way as he later rejects Senancour in "Obermann Once More". Lucretius was not "in sympathy" with the "energy" of the Roman life of his day because he "withdraws himself" in an attempt "to learn the nature of things". He attempts to "rivet his eyes on the elementary reality" of the world. He finds it "terrifying and alluring; and to deliver himself from it he has to keep perpetually repeating his formula of disenchantment and annihilation". Arnold rejects him because he is "morbid" - "and he who is morbid is no adequate interpreter of his age".

There is clearly a two-fold movement in "On the Modern Element in Literature". Arnold's wish in searching history is to find that fixity which he sought, and failed to find, in writing his own poetry. His broad, comparative method is his attempt to overcome the isolationist conclusions of his poetic self. Not deep the true poet sees, but wide. Arnold ranges over as broad a field as possible in the hope that true comprehension of "how to live" will come through objectively studying the poetry of other ages. He understands, through his reading of Herder, that the history of the human spirit is one of gradual advancement; his hope is that it will be the nobility of Greece's heroic age that will prevail. This is the optimistic estimate behind the word "modern" in the essay's title. The other movement is, however, pessimistic. Arnold simultaneously feels the objective vision sliding away into subjectivity under the laws of complete relativity that is the inevitable conclusion of the observation of the "facts" of human history. Where is the justification for believing that Greece will prevail? Why should it not be the "gifted Roman falling on the uninvigorating atmosphere of the decline of the Empire" who is the real parallel with the future? Arnold's portrait of Lucretius resembles the self-character sketches in "Resignation" and "Empedocles on Etna". Furthermore, the animation with which he describes Lucretius' "modern" complaint of "disenchantment and annihilation" seems to suggest that Arnold fears the pessimistic outcome more than he hopes for the return of the golden age.

The reason why Arnold cannot comfortably embrace the developmental historicist theory is implicit in the essay itself. Without actually realising it, Arnold pin-points the problematic implications inherent in the empiricist world-view - the epistemological basis on which the theory of historicism rests. In his search for fixity of purpose and solidity of vision Arnold asks for "deliverance" (from the lack of such fixity and solidity) in two ways - in the "moral" and "intellectual" spheres. The division is significant. "Moral deliverance" is taken to be a demand that is absolute and enduring. "Intellectual deliverance" is specifically "modern" however, and it is a deliverance that a poet such as Lucretius (and Arnold himself) lacks. The demand for such a deliverance exists

... because the present age exhibits to the individual man who contemplates it the spectacle of a vast multitude of facts awaiting and inviting his comprehension.

This deliverance begins

... when our mind begins to enter into possession of the general ideas which are the law of this vast multitude of facts. It is perfect when we have acquired that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us; ...

The demand is essentially the same as that enunciated in the 1853 Preface where the contemplation of noble actions from a heroic time is recommended as a means of banishing all feelings of contradiction, impatience and irritation. The problem we discussed then is equally present here - a "law" that governs all perception and that leads to a state of "harmonious acquiescence" might easily mean an ordering of reality that does not allow for the possibility of disconfirmation and growth. This is certainly the case in "On the Modern Element in Literature" where the "objective" view leads to obviously subjective and sometimes very questionable opinions as to what is "adequate". What is apparent, anyway, is that Arnold's wish for "comprehension" is impossible. In his division of "what can be known" into two types - moral and intellectual- Arnold has fallen prey to the empiricist perception that knowledge is separable from the knower. His obvious discomfort in speaking of the "vast multitude of facts" awaiting comprehension stems from the reality that these "facts" are, quite simply, unknowable. By empiricist epistemological definition he has no connection with them.

That knowledge of the moral sphere is taken for granted as a pre-requisite to being human shows that such knowledge is, for Arnold, intuitive and universally available. This is an interesting twist in his otherwise conventionally empiricist theory of knowledge. His dismissal of Lucretius is, in fact, a moral judgment - an absolutism in the face of the tyranny of facts which does not seem to be justified by his simultaneous embrace of the relativity of historicism. What it shows is that Arnold recognises the limitations of the Newtonian world view - as René Wellek says:

Arnold genuinely desires to escape his own historicism and that of his time with its danger of falling into a complete relativism of values.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, however, he is unable to rest in that state of uncomfortable, but creative, tension we saw being embraced by Coleridge. Where Coleridge attempts to balance his moral awareness ("I am") and the world of things ("it is"), thereby forging a unity out of discordant qualities, Arnold, in this essay at least, unsatisfactorily imposes a unity by erring on one side of the dialectic - the moral. In doing so he satisfies neither himself nor the historicists.

His uncertainty over types of knowledge is a recurring theme in Arnold's prose criticism. The relative failure to pin down, in "On the Modern Element in Literature", what might be "true" in history does not, however, in any way shake his resolve to continue with "the sincere endeavour to learn and practice"<sup>26</sup> from the past. By the time he publishes the 1857 lecture, over ten years later, he has finely honed his method and he can pass off his early attempt as one that is suggestive in its principles even if it is defective in some of its material. By the time we come to Arnold's next published work on literature, his 1861 "On Translating Homer" Arnold has apparently reduced the scope of his aims. His judgments are more nearly literary. The personal prescriptive note has gone owing to his simpler aim - "to give practical advice to a

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<sup>25</sup>A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950 - Volume 4 - The Later Nineteenth Century (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1965) p. 159.

<sup>26</sup>From the 1853 Preface.

translator" - and with its removal comes a more objective appreciation of the critic's role. Thus we find

Arnold advising a translator

not to try "to rear on the basis of the Iliad, a poem that shall affect our countrymen as the original may be conceived to have affected its natural hearers"; and for this simple reason, that we cannot possibly tell how the Iliad "affected its natural" hearers.

Whilst the book is, for the most part, uncontroversial, there is, however, one point at which the Arnoldian manifesto makes its appearance. We may recognise certain resonances from the letters to Clough in the following pronouncement on the "great blemish of [modern] English literature":

English literature ... regarded ... as a living intellectual instrument ... ranks after the literatures of France and Germany. Of these two literatures, as of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort; the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, - theology, philosophy, history, art, science, - to see the object as in itself it really is.

As in "On the Modern Element in Literature" Arnold embraces European historicism at the expense of what he sees as the defect of "eccentricity" and "arbitrariness" in English literature. Once again we have the assertion that there is a particular branch of knowledge - the intellectual - which requires for its acquisition a peculiarly modern endeavour - a "critical effort". Once again we have the implication that such an "effort" will lead to a complete understanding of what it is to be human. But once again we have the absolutist desire for complete objectivity (seeing objects as they really are) simultaneously allied with an obviously subjective opinion as to what these "objects" should be. Arnold is no further, in this essay, in coming to a satisfactory resolution of the epistemological problem.

Arnold's first major collection of criticism was published in 1865. Essays in Criticism continues the European theme as Arnold ranges comparatively across the field of European literature in searching for his "law" of human life. The essays as a whole are confident and purposeful, drawing from all areas of human endeavour in testimony to his will to believe, following people such as Herder and Humboldt, that the human spirit connects all branches of knowledge. Thus we find Arnold delving into the lives of poets and statesmen, becoming involved in theological disputes and, once more, interpreting history. Perhaps the best way to approach the essays is to look at the philosophy that underlies them all, since it is a solidifying of his philosophical opinions and a consequent reduction in his "spiritual malaise" that leads to Arnold's prolific spate of writing.

It is the two essays on Spinoza that are the clue to the whole collection. Arnold's first recorded mention of Spinoza is in a letter to Clough of 1850 in which he tells his friend that he has been reading the philosopher "with profit". Arnold goes on to say the following:

I go to read Locke on the Conduct of the Understanding: my respect for the reason as the rock of refuge to this poor exaggerated surexcited humanity increases & increases.<sup>27</sup>

Both before and after the time of this letter Arnold uses Spinoza in conjunction with Stoics such as Epictetus to posit an order of the universe based on reason rather than on intuitive knowledge. Whilst there

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<sup>27</sup>Rugby, October 23rd. (LC, p. 116.)

was, in the 1850s, enough doubt remaining to enable Arnold to write poems such as "Dover Beach" and "The Scholar-Gypsy", Spinoza's rationalism has become much more ingrained in Arnold's thought by the time of the Essays in Criticism. As I suggested before, however, the change from the fluctuating ideas that inform the poems of the '50s to the confident "certainty" behind the prose of the '60s does not indicate a consequent settlement of the debate. Arnold's increased reliance on Spinoza during the '60s stems from a wish to convince himself and his audience that he can find "intellectual deliverance". Spinoza's philosophy fits very happily into the gospel of people such as Herder because, while he stresses the immanence of God in all things, Spinoza also claims that everything exists independently. He is thus at odds with Coleridgean philosophy, since man has no semi-divine creative status and therefore no "Imagination" on the Coleridgean model. Spinoza is useful for Arnold because his philosophy gives Arnold a rationale for faith. Arnold's discomfort with the idea of a transcendental God is catered for - there is no problem with miraculous breaks in nature- whilst his belief in the indwelling spirit of God in man (on the Herderian model) is sanctioned by Spinoza's claim that God is "co-existent with the universe" and "concerned for all things".<sup>28</sup>

This particular type of religious debate is not undertaken in order to satisfy a personal spiritual hunger. The descriptions of such a need in "Stagirius" and "The Scholar-Gypsy" are - for the moment - the last words on that topic. Arnold undertakes prose writing in order to pin down objects and it is the object of religion as a manifestation of the human spirit amongst other manifestations that he undertakes to define in the Spinoza essays. Thus his thinking on the subject of religion here is quite as comparative and "objective" as it is in studying any other area of human endeavour. It is not religion as the "truth about life" in any absolute sense that interests Arnold in the '60s.

A letter of 1863 to his mother describes Arnold's object in writing about Spinoza. Whilst, he says, Spinoza's doctrines are not his, he does wish to "modify" opinion about the philosopher:

... what the English public cannot understand is that a man is a just and fruitful object of contemplation much more by virtue of what spirit he is of than by virtue of what system of doctrine he elaborates.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, although he is obviously in agreement with many of Spinoza's ideas on the proper interpretation of Scripture, it is not finally the philosophy as a set of propositions which interests Arnold. As he says in the essay "Spinoza and the Bible":

A philosopher's real power over mankind resides not in his metaphysical formulas, but in the spirit and tendencies which have led him to adopt those formulas.

Whilst Arnold cites a number of examples - such as his dismissal of miracles and his speaking of the inaccuracies of Scripture - wherein he believes Spinoza's criticism of the Bible is useful, he cites an equal number where the philosopher, to Arnold's mind, errs. This is not because Arnold is formulating his own theology - that is not an interest at this time. In fact in this essay Arnold makes it clear that theology is not about intellectual ideas at all:

<sup>28</sup>Honan, p. 322. Honan describes fully the importance of Spinoza to Arnold in chapter 14, pp. 312-337.

<sup>29</sup>January 7th, 1863. Quotation from CPW 3:446.

Theology demands perfect obedience, philosophy perfect knowledge: ...

The fundamentals of faith are

... the belief that God is, that he is a reward of them that seek him, and that the proof of seeking him is a good life.

This is unquestionable to Arnold - it is in the area of that "moral deliverance" that is an absolute demand for all ages. Spinoza's usefulness for Arnold is rather in his critical spirit - that shaping force behind history which leads to mankind's general advancement. Spinoza's appeal is in his attitude towards the Bible and religion - a specifically modern attitude in which the Bible is treated largely metaphorically and religion is taken as a self-evident (because, supposedly, empirically provable) need.

I said earlier that the Spinoza essays reveal a reduction in Arnold's "spiritual malaise" and lead to an increased tone of self-confidence in his other critical writings. Arnold's assent to a religious system based on Spinoza is, however, to use Newman's terms, notional rather than real. If we take "notional" to mean a merely intellectual assent to a proposition then such a term describes well Arnold's position. Spinoza is an agent of "intellectual deliverance" - an ally in Arnold's search for a properly "critical" view of human life.

Such an estimate of Arnold's religious interests at this time is confirmed by the "Spinoza and the Bible" essay itself - Spinoza's main appeal for Christians is, as Arnold repeats a number of times, his "power of edification". "Unction", he admits, is absent from Spinoza's writings, but unction is not the quality which Arnold wishes to champion. In fact Arnold almost replaces unction with edification as the peculiar quality he believes to be bestowed by God.

Quite as telling a guide to Arnold's religious position at this time is provided by a number of the companion Essays in Criticism. If Spinoza's religion aids Arnold's intellectual deliverance, then that of Marcus Aurelius provides a focal point for Arnold's need of "moral deliverance". Arnold's comparativism is again in evidence in "Marcus Aurelius" (1863); he calls the second century Roman Emperor a "truly modern striver". Meanwhile his thoughts and moral axioms Arnold wishes to be as popular as the great Christian bible of morality, the Imitation.

For all that the "Marcus Aurelius" essay appears to be an unexceptional exposition of the other side of the Arnoldian dialectic there is detectable a different note to that which governs the Spinoza essays - a note more personal and more revealing. Early on we find an interesting assertion:

The paramount virtue of religion is, that it has lighted up morality; that it has supplied the emotion and inspiration needful for carrying the sage along the narrow way perfectly, for carrying the ordinary man along it at all.

Arnold goes on to say that this "emotion" is manifested with most splendour in the Christian religion and that the greatness of Marcus Aurelius is that his emotion "suffuses" his morality to such an extent that he approximates to that special character inherent in Christian morality. Not that it finally does:

... the emotion of Marcus Aurelius does not quite light up his morality - it has not power to melt the clouds of effort and austerity quite away, ...

Two things need to be said about this. Firstly there has entered into Arnold's two-fold definition of true



humanity a third term. "Moral deliverance" can not be attained merely by studying the maxims of Epictetus; for such advice to become real rather than notional one must be emotionally transformed. "Emotional deliverance", although not named as such by Arnold, is quite as important as intellectual and moral deliverance. The other point is that Arnold finds this expression to be an exclusively Christian quality. This need not in itself be remarkable. In this essay Arnold quotes a number of sayings of Jesus and it may well be that these are of great inspiration to any age. The point is, though, that Arnold is writing not about Christianity, but about a second century persecutor of Christianity. Furthermore it is remarkable that, although this is an essay in which Arnold is seeking to recommend Marcus Aurelius as something of a spiritual guide, he is admitting equally that the Roman is missing that vital element which would make him whole.

The last two paragraphs of the essay provide a clue to Arnold's purpose. In the penultimate paragraph Arnold recommends Marcus Aurelius from the point of view of the historicist critic:

... he remaining the especial friend and comforter of all clear-headed and scrupulous, yet pure-hearted and upward striving men, in those ages most especially that walk by sight, not by faith, but yet have no open vision.

He is thus a vital guide for "modern" man - for all those who live in an age where irrational "faith" has been replaced by clear-headed reason ("sight"). It might be expected that this would be the conclusion, but it is as if Arnold suddenly remembers that Marcus Aurelius' "vision" is not enough:

Yet no, it is not for what he thus gives them that such souls love him most! it is rather because of the emotion which lends to his voice so touching an accent, it is because he too yearns as they do for something unattained by him.

**He knows not the Sermon on the Mount and therefore**

We see him wise, just, self-governed, tender, thankful, blameless; yet, with all this, agitated, stretching out his arms for something beyond,- ...

Arnold's affinity for Marcus Aurelius rests, I think, in his uneasy perception that second century Rome and nineteenth century Europe are parallel ages. The personal note which we saw informing Arnold's portrait of Lucretius in "On the Modern Element in Literature" is present again in his study of Marcus Aurelius. The "clouds of effort and austerity" of Marcus Aurelius sound remarkably similar to the "overstrained morbidity" of Lucretius and both figures are seen by Arnold to be not "in sympathy" with the spirit of the age. Lucretius is deemed "modern" but is "inadequate" owing to his morbid subjectivity. Marcus Aurelius is "modern" but is finally in despair for that "something" which he lacks. And Arnold himself? He finds Marcus Aurelius "touching" because he, too, lives in an age of "sight" rather than "faith". Christianity is, if we remember the conclusion of "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse", as remote for Arnold as it was for Marcus Aurelius. Yet "emotion" - that which touches notional morality into religious deliverance (one might perhaps say into worship) - is the special preserve of the age of faith. Unattainable for Marcus Aurelius, one suspects that it is unattainable, too, for Arnold.

"Marcus Aurelius" is an important essay because it makes clear how artificial is Arnold's division of "intellectual" and "moral" deliverance - especially when it is applied to religion. In Arnold's comparative

religious scheme Spinoza supplies a largely intellectual deliverance and Marcus Aurelius a moral one. It is clear, however, that Marcus Aurelius' is quite as intellectual a deliverance as that of Spinoza. His morality is again a system of assent to a series of propositions. Religion, for Arnold, seems to be about something else - something that he lacks. When we talk about the reduction in Arnold's spiritual malaise, therefore, we are talking about an apparent rather than a real reduction. Even with knowledge of Spinoza and Marcus Aurelius, Arnold lacks an "open vision".

Arnold's use of the words "vision" and "sight" are remarkably suggestive. In his assertion that the modern age is one in which people walk by sight, not by faith, he is describing the philosophy of empiricism perfectly. It is the objects that one sees that the empiricist claims are demonstrable "facts". But what of this lack of vision? When we remember D.G.James' assertion that Romantic poetry is about "vision" rather than comprehension and we think further of Arnold's own admission on Wordsworth's death that he was suddenly bereft of a guide who could teach him how to feel ("... who, ah! who, will make us feel?") one is inclined to see Arnold, quite unwittingly, pin-pointing the problem with the philosophy he is attempting to follow. Remarkably enough, the "Marcus Aurelius" essay, which begins as an objective attempt to recommend a morality based on "thought" alone, ends up by admitting that a morality so circumscribed is lacking in a quality only attainable by religious faith. "Emotional deliverance" seems to demand the presence of a "fugitive delicate sense".

"Marcus Aurelius" is a typical example of what Arnold has been attempting in his criticism of the 1850s and 60s. Underlying all is the attempt to come to terms with modernity and, although his method has changed - his criticism is in the form of prose rather than poetry - the truth is that the problems remain the same as they did when they were announced in "Stagirius". Arnold's attempt to find a spiritual basis for life in his embrace of the "gospel" of historicism and the rationalism of Spinoza is remarkably similar to his attempt, in his poetry, to find the objective and comprehensive view. Both attempts eschew the uncomfortable partial knowledge that Coleridge realises is the human spiritual lot. Both attempt to find a rational ruling Idea which will provide an adequate basis for man's religious yearnings. As we see with the "Marcus Aurelius" essay, however, such an Idea leaves out of the equation the "feeling" or "emotion" that is part of religious faith. Whilst we see Arnold's need for such a "deliverance" we have also seen, however, his inability to find it owing to, as we have discovered, the loss of the traditional model of faith. Without the "knowledge" that is available in faith Arnold's attempt to criticise life in the 50s and 60s seems as incomplete as did the same attempt in his poetry. We shall see the effect of all this on his mature religious writings in the final chapter.

## Chapter 3

### The Mature Religious Writings

#### 3.1. St. Paul and Protestantism

By the time we come to Arnold's mature religious writings we can recognise a clear change in tone from the distanced objectivity of the Spinoza essays. This change can be related above all to deaths in the family. During 1868 Arnold's youngest and eldest sons died, the infant Basil in January and sixteen year-old Thomas in November. These events obviously focussed Arnold's mind on to religious questions in a new way. As we can see from the following letter to his sister the "notional assent" of the Arnold of the 1860s has been replaced by a more urgent and personal assessment of religion:

And so this loss comes to me just after my forty-fifth birthday, with so much other "suffering in the flesh", the departure of youth, cares of many kinds, an almost painful anxiety about public matters - to remind me that the time past of our life may suffice us! - words which have haunted me for the last year or two, and that "we should no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." However different the interpretation we put on much of the facts and history of Christianity, we may unite in the bond of this call, which is true for all of us, and for me above all, how full of meaning and warning.<sup>1</sup>

The last line of this letter no doubt refers to the fact that Arnold had known for some time that his father's heart defect was hereditary.<sup>2</sup> This, accompanied by the knowledge of the deaths of some of his dearest friends, Clough included, in the 1860s, appears to have substantially affected his attitude to life during that decade. The deaths in his family were the necessary events needed to make this burgeoning attitude prevail. From the mid-1860s onwards the Note Books become gradually more filled with quotations from and comments upon the Bible, Thomas à Kempis and Bishop Wilson. In terms of the effect on Arnold's writing there is a distinct change from the rather abstract handling of religious matters in the 1860s to the more objective and critical commentator of St. Paul and Protestantism. Arnold has, quite simply, become personally involved in the religious debate.

Another reason for Arnold's attitudinal change is also bound up with his family. It seems likely that such meditations as the above on the frailty and impermanence of life caused Arnold to dwell increasingly on his place in the family heritage. Early on in Arnold's life this heritage had caused him some discomfort.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Jane from Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888 - ed. G.W.E. Russell, 2 vols. (MacMillan & Co., London, 1895) vol. 1, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup>Arnold was thus informed in 1847 or 1848. See Honan, p. 122.

According to Park Honan Arnold's reputation at Oxford as a dandy and poseur can best be seen as an attempt at liberation from his father's rigorous Christian morality.<sup>3</sup> If this is true then it is equally likely that, on the Freudian model, the superego exacted its revenge. Even leaving aside Lionel Trilling's perhaps fanciful theory that "Sohrab and Rustum" is about Thomas Arnold's psychical revenge on his son the evidence points strongly to a need in Matthew to satisfy the moral conscience implanted in him by his father.

The best set of evidence is the letters written to his mother. The central purpose of these seems to be to console his mother for the early loss of her husband by, to some extent, taking Dr Arnold's place. Thus we find Matthew continually commenting about his father's life - about his irreproachability as a father and as a schoolmaster, his public successes and his hopes and intentions for the future. It seems to me that this over-deference to his father's memory can best be explained as a need for reconciliation. Certainly it is not just for his mother's benefit that Arnold writes so admiringly about his father.

Certain of the poems suggest this paternal influence. "Obermann Once More", in the poet's desire to be at the vanguard of history, can be seen as Arnold consciously taking on his father's authoritative role in the "new" religious age (the "world's new hour"). "Rugby Chapel", similarly, finds Arnold drawing strength from the memory of his father's ability to

... move through the ranks, recall  
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,  
Praise, re-inspire the brave! (198-200)

Girded by his father's strength Arnold feels able to continue his "march"

On, to the bound of the waste,  
On, to the city of God. (207-208)

"Rugby Chapel" points, in fact, to the larger Arnoldian thesis that we saw in the dismissal of "The Scholar-Gipsy". In the letter to Clough<sup>4</sup> Arnold's reference to the "complaining millions of men" who "darken in labour and pain" is made in order to support his decision to abandon what he sees as the subjective type of knowledge for which the Gipsy seeks. Salvation must, as we saw in "Obermann Once More" ("And who can be alone elate, / While the world lies forlorn") be universally accessible. "Rugby Chapel" repeats this message with the added inference that the way of salvation is to be on Dr Arnold's lines:

But thou would'st not alone  
Be saved, my father! alone  
Conquer and come to thy goal,  
Leaving the rest in the wild. (124-127)

The vision of his father as the "faithful shepherd" coming "Bringing thy sheep in thy hand" is surely a model to which Arnold aspires.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., chapter one.

<sup>4</sup>See above, p.49.

Thus Arnold begins, in St. Paul and Protestantism, a serious reconstruction of Christianity. The twin foci of the work are the wish that Dissenters might be included within the Church and the correct interpretation of Scripture. It is Arnold's concern that all constraints to the full comprehension of all sects within the Church should be removed. In order for this to happen he recognises that the most vital need is for a consistent theology. The search for such a common basis is at the heart of St. Paul and Protestantism and consequently we find Arnold grappling seriously for the first time with Biblical exegesis and questions of theology.

In many ways the pursuit of these concerns is a direct continuation of his father's opinions and work. Thomas Arnold wished for a "Broad Church" which would influence the Dissenters for the better by including them.<sup>5</sup> Dr Arnold felt that such a cause could be advanced by a better understanding of Scripture. Adopting the "Reason - Understanding" formula in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Arnold saw biblical scholarship as allowable in the realm of the "Understanding", although faith in a supernatural deity was directly instinctive and unquestionable (intuited by the "Reason"). Thus is accounted for Dr Arnold's seemingly contradictory position as both a zealous evangelical and a liberal theologian.<sup>6</sup>

The parallels between father and son are very striking indeed. Matthew was, however, unable to adhere to his father's traditional reliance on a transcendent deity. As a result for Matthew the same problems lead to significantly different solutions.

Arnold's primary objective in the first part of St. Paul and Protestantism is to further the removal of Protestantism's "schemes of doctrine, Calvinistic or Arminian" and their materialistic ideas on election and justification. Armed with Edouard Reuss's Histoire de la Théologie Chrétienne au Siècle Apostolique which he had read in the summer preceding the first article's appearance, Arnold wishes to give a "true criticism of this great and misunderstood author" (St. Paul). Essentially Arnold wishes to put right the excesses of the Reformation and provide the future Church with the proper development it was denied. As he says in the Preface of 1887, Christianity must do without both the "Dissidence of Dissent" and "mankind's familiar fancies of miracle, blood, bargain and appeasement". The suggestion is that the Church has become lost in its split between materialistic Protestantism and the Catholic Church's "machinery of ... mythology".<sup>7</sup> Arnold is to go back to the Bible itself in order to underline the true grounds for modern belief.

The 1887 Preface sums up Arnold's own view of the reasons behind his choosing St. Paul as the flag

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<sup>5</sup>See Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement; Studies in S.T.Coleridge, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, J.C.Hare, Thomas Carlyle, and F.D.Maurice - C.R.Sanders (Duke University Press, North Carolina, 1942) and Forbes - Op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>See apRoberts, pp. 61-2.

<sup>7</sup>From "A "Friend of God"" - Review of J.R.Morell's translation of Tauler's Following of Christ. Published in Nineteenth Century, April 1887. CPW 11:180-187.

bearer of his new theology. According to Arnold, St. Paul showed a "prodigy of religious insight" by which he disengaged "the figure and influence of Jesus" from "mankind's familiar fancies of miracle, blood, bargain and appeasement". The implication is that Arnold is going to use Paul to further his own post-Enlightenment view of Christianity - an exercise which is obviously open to abuse in terms of maintaining the original message of Paul. Nevertheless when we come to the essay proper Arnold makes an early attempt to defuse such worries:

... what St. Paul, a man so separated from us by time, race, training and circumstances, really thought, we cannot make sure of knowing exactly. All we can do is to get near it, reading him with ... critical tact ... reading him, also, without preconceived theories to which we want to make his thought fit themselves.

Such a disclaimer is genuine enough and, when Arnold compares the language of Romans with the "market-place" language of Calvinism and the "licence of affirmation about God and his proceedings, in which the religious world indulge", it is clear that Arnold's criticism of the latter is valid. Such critical tact appears to fail, however, when Arnold comes to the character of Paul and the purpose of his writings. The crux comes when Arnold claims that Puritanism has adopted a false view of St. Paul "by an unintelligent adherence to him and a blind adoption of his words, instead of being a true child to him". A distinction is set up in Paul's writing between what is "figure" and in the "sphere of feeling" and what is "thesis and intellectual reasoning". Puritanism, Arnold asserts, confounds the two sides of Paul, making what is primary in Paul into that which is secondary and vice versa. To be a "true child" to St. Paul is obviously to have a right construction as to what Arnold deems to be "primary" in Paul's epistles. That is to say that the primary sayings are more true than the secondary. Arnold makes it clear what is "true" for him in Paul:

We mean, so far as truth is concerned, a greater or lesser agreement with facts which can be verified ...

We have come here to the one central factor underlying all of Arnold's religious prose - the need for the claims of modern science to be allowed for in any question of religion and faith:

The scientific sense in man never asserted its claims so strongly; the propensity of religion to neglect those claims, and the peril and loss to it from neglecting them, never were so manifest.

At the time of writing St. Paul and Protestantism Arnold felt a need, justifiable as theologians would now agree, to invoke the scientific sense in order to explode the idea of a God who is so obviously an anthropomorphic projection. Thus Arnold rails against Calvinism's talk of God "just as if he were a man in the next street", a "sort of magnified and non-natural man, who proceeds in the fashion laid down in the Calvinistic thesis". The invocation of the scientific sense in connection with a materialistic conception of the old pre-Christian myth of the three-storey universe is of course appropriate. When Arnold comes, however, to interpret St. Paul's character and thought it is a little like using a sledgehammer to pick a lock. Early on in the work Arnold tells us that Paul's is a "simple religion of the heart". This no doubt accounts for Paul's words of "figure" and "feeling". Now in discussing language about God, Arnold claims that the scientific sense does not deny "the rights of the poetic sense" to use "figured and imaginative language". However, the question as to whether such language is true when discussing facts which can be verified seems to receive an equivocal answer with the following:

Neither is it that the scientific sense in us refuses to admit willingly and reverently the name of God, as a point in which the religious and the scientific sense may meet, as the least inadequate name for that universal order which the intellect feels after as a law and the heart feels after as a benefit.

This is a direct admission of that post-Enlightenment division between thought and feeling that we have been tracing in Arnold's work. The division between science (the realm of the intellect) and religion (the claims of the "heart") parallels the division that we saw being suggested in "Marcus Aurelius". There we saw Arnold outlining the need for "intellectual" and "moral" deliverance whilst still stretching out his arms for "something beyond" - that something that we called "emotional deliverance". I believe that Arnold comes up against the same problem in St. Paul and Protestantism and that his inability to come to terms with it does great damage to his exegesis and his theology.

It is quite clear in this work that Arnold is using St. Paul as a champion of Arnold's own, very nineteenth century, solutions to the epistemological problem. Paralleling the early distinction he sets up between "figure" and "feeling" and "thesis and intellectual reasoning", Arnold draws a distinction between two sides of Paul's thought - his ability to "Orientalise" as against his tendency to "Judaise". This enables Arnold to turn Paul into a sophisticated man of letters who, owing to the misfortunes of time and race, is prone to lapses in critical tact. Thus for an example of Paul's Orientalising Arnold takes Romans 9:32 - "God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all" (Arnold's emphasis) to mean that Paul is describing the inevitable outcome of unbelief "by a vivid and striking figure" rather than that Paul was (as is clear from the argument of Romans) utilising a predestinarian theology for his own ends.<sup>8</sup> Arnold states that when Paul Orientalises

... the fault is not with him if he is misunderstood, but with the prosaic and unintelligent Western readers who have not enough tact for style to comprehend his mode of expression.

He thus makes of Paul a master rhetorician. As an example of Paul's Judaising Arnold takes the tenth chapter of Romans. This, which Arnold says is written to make the point that "faith comes by hearing" is taken to be an example of Paul's tendency to "use the Jewish Scriptures in a Jew's arbitrary and uncritical fashion, as if they had a talismanic character". This, Arnold claims, is an "interruption to the argument" and a "fault of style" as well as a "fault of reasoning". He claims that the argument "would stand much clearer" without its "scaffolding of Bible-quotation".

Clearly Arnold's reconstruction of Pauline Christianity has become so far removed from the Apostle's original purpose as to have taken on the form of something quite unchristian. The problem is that Arnold is firmly entrenched in a world-view that Paul would not recognise. He says of Paul that he

uses within the sphere of religious emotion expressions which, in this sphere, have an eloquence and a propriety, but which are not to be taken out of it and made into formal scientific propositions.

In this way Arnold turns Paul into a divided personality like himself. The slightly dismissive attitude towards religious utterance shown in Arnold's use of the word "emotion" suggests that Paul, like Arnold himself, is faced with a Cartesian dualism which makes his "Orientalising" not true in itself. "Within the

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<sup>8</sup>In Romans 11 Paul appears to be telling the Roman Jewish Christians that God has turned his back on the Jews so that they might be saved via the salvation of the Gentiles (11:11-12) for the greater "riches" of the world. His purpose is to unite the Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome, a purpose that involves explaining to the Jews the reason for God's rejection of the idea of exclusively Jewish salvation.

sphere of religious emotion" means that such language is beautiful and useful but it is not actually true compared to "facts which can be verified". If we come back to Arnold's admission that the word "God" can be used "as the least inadequate name for that universal order which the intellect feels after as a law and the heart feels after as a benefit" then we may draw the conclusion that a law can be true or false whereas a benefit is merely a measure of greater or less emotional residue. Arnold accepts Paul's God as long as he is a God of the intellect.

All of this is extremely ironic when we consider the real purpose of Paul in Romans. Theologically speaking the antithesis at the heart of the letter is that between law and grace, the argument being that God is a God of grace and that his mercy is not attainable by good works in the context of the Jewish Law. It is remarkable that Arnold seems to be looking for his God in quite the contrary direction.

In a sense, of course, Paul is not "making theology" at all. As Gunther Bornkamm says in connection with the central question of the Epistle to the Romans - that is, "justification":

For modern man the primary question overshadowing all others is whether there is a God at all. Justification seems stale, out of date, no longer "with it". It seems tied to a view of the world which we no longer share. True Paul never discusses the existence of God, but he would repudiate the suggestion that it is a question of world view. Paul's teaching about the law and justification by faith alone transcends the kind of questions raised by modern man and the way he thinks.<sup>9</sup>

For Paul the whole question of righteousness and justification only makes sense in the context of the cosmic plan of redemption. His "theology" presupposes that God has already acted in history in the Christ event and has thereby established a new covenant of faithfulness to which we must respond if we are to gain salvation. When Arnold effectively dismisses expressions within the sphere of "religious emotion" in Paul he is throwing out Paul's entire message since those expressions are usually assertions of God's grace in guaranteeing our salvation.

Arnold seems to come somewhere near the truth in the second part of St. Paul and Protestantism when he asserts that "the great central matter" of Paul's thought is "the righteousness of God, the non-fulfilment of it by man, the fulfilment of it by Christ". Furthermore he states that, in contradiction to the use of the Christ event by Protestant and Catholic dogmatists, Paul's starting-point in connection with Jesus is "as the clue to righteousness, not as the clue to transcendental ontology". Paul was concerned with the directly practical, not the "sphere of abstract speculation". This, as we have said, is quite true. Paul is not writing theological treatises for the university lecture-hall. God's action in Christ does not need to be described in terms of subtle theory. Nevertheless when we come to the grounds for Paul's belief in Jesus as "the clue to righteousness" we begin to see the utter polarity in thought between Arnold and Paul. According to Arnold, the "sum and substance" of the "total impression" made by Jesus on Paul is of his being "without sin". This conviction, Arnold asserts, gradually dawned on Paul through contemplation. By studying Christ, Paul "got to know himself clearly" and thus he transformed his own "narrow conception of

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<sup>9</sup>The New Testament - A Guide to its Writings (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1973) pp. 84-85.



righteousness". Thus Paul's conversion rests on "facts of experience and assert[s] nothing which science cannot verify". Taking Philippians 3:12 ("Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own") Arnold says of Paul that he has been "apprehended" by Christ for

the righteousness of God; a sense of conformity with the divine moral order, the will of God, a sense of harmony with this order, of acceptance with God.

Now, as far as Arnold is concerned, God is "that stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being". He says in St. Paul and Protestantism that this is as far as science will go in allowing for the idea of God. This is a completely humanistic statement since it deals only with man's aspirations. Although it purports to be cosmic ("all things"), the fact that to fulfil one's being amounts to "a sense of conformity with the divine moral order" actually leaves untouched the question of the divine aspirations for and of the rest of creation. The whole of that vital strand in Pauline thought in which he asserts that the entire creation "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19) is put aside, presumably, as an example of "Judaising". Yet this example, small as it may seem, indicates how far away is Arnold from grasping the real convictions behind Paul's writing. The whole point is that Paul starts with belief in God as creator and redeemer and seeks to understand man's place within this scheme. Arnold, on the contrary, starts with himself and attempts to describe what, within the limits of empirical observation, can truly be known. Since, as we have observed, empiricist epistemology actually leaves everything in doubt, Arnold's theology is inevitably imprecise, obscure, contradictory and finally, as theology (talk about God rather than man) inadequate.

For Paul the idea of righteousness or justification is simultaneous with the conviction that God has acted in Christ and that salvation is assured if one accepts this belief unreservedly. Hence

... if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.<sup>10</sup>

Thus his conversion can not be described in terms of a dawning "sense of conformity with the divine moral order". For Paul it was, we may assume with confidence, a sudden revelation of the unreserved grace of God. It was a release from the constant round of sinning and making recompense that was the practice of the Jewish Law. Essentially it meant a new understanding of God - a sense that God is universal and cosmic in both nature and purpose.

For Paul justification is not something attainable by man in isolation, as it is in Arnold, from a transcendent God. Righteousness is actually the overwhelming attribute of God - it is never something that man himself can possess. As Wayne A. Meeks says, it is the "righteousness of God" that is the central argument of Romans.<sup>11</sup> This can be summed up by Romans 3:26: "it was to prove at the present time that

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<sup>10</sup>Romans 10:9-10.

<sup>11</sup>Wayne A. Meeks (ed.) - The Writings of St. Paul - A Norton Critical Edition (W.W.Norton & Co., New York, 1972) p. 74.

he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus". For Paul it is God's action towards man that is the central point of his whole experience. Righteousness is not something that man can actually attain to himself.<sup>12</sup>

Arnold's attempt to resurrect Paul as a nineteenth century empiricist has the effect of turning around this essential relationship between God and man. According to his thesis that a "scientific criticism" of Paul's theology must lead to a division between that which is primary and that which is secondary, Arnold marks off Romans chapter four as an example of "secondary" importance, an example of Paul's Judaizing. He says that the Apostle rests his doctrine of justification by faith upon the case of Abraham "by the thesis that Abraham in old age believed God's promise that his seed should yet be as the stars for multitude, and that this was counted to him for righteousness". Arnold concludes that the "sanction thus apparently given to the idea that faith is a mere belief, or opinion of the mind, has put thousands of Paul's readers on a false track". The words "mere belief" here are astonishing, because this "mere belief" is the very basis of Pauline theology. What Paul does in Romans is to contrast Abraham's profound faith that the promise of God will be fulfilled with that of Moses in the context of the law. Despite his and his wife's oldness and barrenness, Abraham believes that God will overcome such barriers in the promise that he will become "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5, Romans 4:17). Paul uses Abraham as a prototype of Christian faith. In the context of the God who has raised Jesus from the dead the old reliance on the Law and on man's fulfilment of it has been removed by the God to whom all things are possible. The original promise to Abraham ("go forth, multiply and be fruitful") has become transmuted into the new promise of life in Christ. As Jurgen Moltmann says, however, this new promise is only available to those who, like Abraham, submit themselves to dependence on the power of God. Taking Paul's statement in Galatians 3:18 ("If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise") Moltmann explains that "if the promise of God is bound to the law, then the promise is invalidated: it then depends no longer on the powers of the God who has promised, but on the power of the man who obeys". As Moltmann says, the whole contrast for Paul between righteousness and law is that between dependence on the power of God in contrast to man's self-sufficiency.<sup>13</sup> For Arnold, on the contrary, righteousness has once again become something like that of the Law. Righteousness is seen as a tendency to which we must aspire.

Arnold's personal insistence that righteousness is all leads him to deny Paul's real message that this only made sense in the context of the death, resurrection and eschatological future of Christ. Thus Arnold attempts to trace a spiritualising tendency in Paul - an attempt, in his "later theology", to "find a moral side and significance for all the processes, however mystical, of the religious life". The important side of Paul's

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<sup>12</sup>As Wayne Meeks says, Paul utilises the cognate relationship between the Greek words *dikaiois* ("righteous") and *dikaionta* ("justifies") to explain his understanding of God's righteousness as both an inherent quality of God and God's characteristic action towards man: "The verb is drawn from the field of law, where it may mean "to pass sentence," but also "to acquit," "to declare righteous". For Paul it clearly means this and more: "to put into a right relationship" with God." (Ibid., p. 74, n. 6.)

<sup>13</sup>Jurgen Moltmann - Theology of Hope (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1967) p. 145.

belief in resurrection, for example, is that faith in Christ means a rising "with him to that harmonious conformity with the real and eternal order". The idea of a spiritualising tendency has been exploded by modern theology. As a result of doubts in the chronology and authorship of the epistles attributed, in the Bible, to Paul, the idea of theological development in Paul's "work" no longer has currency.<sup>14</sup> Further, as Morna Hooker says,

In the course of his mission and in his letters the apostle to the Gentiles developed his distinctive understanding of the Christian message in many different ways ... Thus his epistles offer a broad spectrum of theological thought which refuses to be fitted into a neat and tidy system.<sup>15</sup>

This is indicative of the realisation that the different epistles were written to fulfil different needs. The letters to the Corinthian Christians, for example, are concerned with that particular group's tendency towards gnosticism. Paul's wish to counter this tendency leads to an entirely different message from that given in Romans. According to F.C.Baur, one of Arnold's protagonists in 1875's God and the Bible, the purpose of Romans was "to do away with the last remaining portions of the Jewish exclusiveness by taking up and representing it as the mere introduction to the Christian universalism which extended to all nations".<sup>16</sup> Thus, although there is some truth in Arnold's claim that there is, in Romans, a diminution in the importance of the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, this is not an example of Paul's increasing spiritualisation. In fact, Paul's purpose is to seek to remove the Jewish belief in their exclusivity. Whilst his own belief in Jesus as the Messiah remains as strong as ever, he is concentrating, in this message, on the universalisation of this Messiahship.

Arnold's belief in Paul's purpose leads him to a theory that nothing in Paul's theology is so important to the Apostle as the character of Jesus. According to Arnold "the Jesus of the Bible follows the universal moral order and the will of God". This, he says, is the "scientific result" of "any criticism of the Gospel-history" and, furthermore, "this is the result which pre-eminently occupies Paul". Paul's conversion from a Jew "struggling" in the "stream of duty" owed itself to a "wonder-working power of attachment" which he identified through Jesus and appropriated. To this "new and potent influence Paul gave the name of faith". Faith, claims Arnold, is "holding fast to an unseen power of goodness" and Paul, he maintains, added to this his own "through identification with Christ".

At this point, remarkably enough, Arnold seems to come close to what Christianity claims about Christ. Faith certainly is holding fast to something unseen and the figure of Christ is vital to the working out of what that "unseen" is and what He/She/It purposes. Yet the truth is that Paul and Arnold are really worlds apart. The difference can be seen in the word "identification". Paul's sense of faith, says Arnold, is that of

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<sup>14</sup>Reuss's inaccurate chronology of the epistles (all attributed to Paul) was accepted by Arnold and used as the basis for his theory of a development in Paul's thought. Arnold jotted down the chronology in his pocket diary for September 1st, 1869, at the time he was writing the second part of St. Paul and Protestantism. See CPW 6:42.

<sup>15</sup>Hooker, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup>Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ vol. 1 (1873) p. 322. Quoted by F.Watson - Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach (Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 11.

"identification with Christ through the emotion of attachment to him". Arnold really sees Jesus as the moral exemplum par excellence who inspires waves of emotion when we consider his character. Thus the surpassing religious grandeur of Paul's conception of faith is that it seizes a real salutary emotional force of incalculable magnitude and reinforces moral effort with it.

Jesus becomes, in fact, the most perfect human being, whilst identification means seeing this perfection in Christ's character and hankering after it ourselves.

The "emotional force of incalculable magnitude" is interesting. Arnold is describing here, successfully I think, the results of contemplation of a religious object. He describes it earlier, too, in St. Paul and Protestantism, where he seems to be talking about the overwhelming joy which comes from contemplating the fulness of the love of God. In Paul, he says, the rational and moral world is combined with "the necessary, mystical and divine world, of influence, sympathy and emotion". The combination "produces results transcending all our expectations and calculations". In seeking to explain this sense further, Arnold turns to analogy. He compares the power to that we feel in being in love. He concludes that this is why being in love is so popular with the human race - because it is "irresistable" and "delightful". Arnold touches here on the method used by Rudolf Otto in his "scientific" attempt to describe the category of the holy, or "numinous".<sup>17</sup> For Otto the "numinous" is the unique original "feeling-response" common to religions. It was originally devoid of ethical meaning and completely non-rational. The same is true, he asserts, of the category of beauty. Both states are "perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other" - therefore they can not be strictly defined, only evoked or awakened in another person. Since we are necessarily limited in our description of such indefinables, the best method is that of using "illustrative substitute[s]" for "intellectual concept[s]", whilst knowing that they are merely illustrative.<sup>18</sup> If we look more closely at Arnold's sense of a "necessary, mystical and divine world, of influence, sympathy and emotion", we may say that it accords closely with Otto's description of the "element of fascination" in our apprehension of the numinous.<sup>19</sup> This is the "desire for communion with the numen" expressed by a "feeling of longing fascination". This element has ideas on the rational side to describe it - love, mercy, pity and comfort - but these do not exhaust "the profound wonderfulness and rapture" in the beatific experience of deity. "Grace" is the best word of all to describe this sense of an objective attraction, but, Otto warns, it describes not only "gracious intent" but also "something more". At its highest point of stress, Otto concludes, the fascinating becomes the "overabounding", the "exuberant", as in the great experiences of grace, conversion and second birth

in which the religious experience appears in its pure intrinsic nature and in heightened activity, so as to be more clearly grasped than in the less typical form of piety instilled by education.

There is an unutterableness in such experience, Otto says, as has been vouched for by the autobiographical accounts of the converted from St. Paul onwards.

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<sup>17</sup>The Idea of the Holy (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1950).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-19.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-40.

It is the "something more" described by Otto in his account of the experience of grace that Arnold so clearly lacks. The "something more" he misses is the objective correlative on which to centre his feelings of "influence, sympathy and emotion". Where Otto describes the "numinous" as a "feeling-response", Arnold can only claim a feeling as the residue left after the objective correlative (God) has been exploded by empiricism. It is remarkable that Arnold himself, in our identification of him with Marcus Aurelius, agreed that he was left, despite intellectual and moral deliverance, "agitated, stretching out his arms for something beyond ...". Whilst he claimed there that Marcus Aurelius was missing the emotional deliverance of the person of Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount, it is clear that there is no real difference between Arnold (who does know the person of Jesus) and Marcus Aurelius (who did not). Both, as we said before, live in an age in which people walk by sight not by faith.

Thus we come back to Paul. Undoubtedly it is the Christ who is the centre of Paul's theology. But this is not because Jesus so perfectly follows "the universal moral order". Paul, in fact, has no interest in the character of Jesus<sup>20</sup> - his whole concern with Jesus is as the (universal) Messiah. His interest in ethics is incidental and only as they bear relation to the redemptive scheme. Arnold's anthropocentric interest can lead him to conclude only that Jesus is an extraordinarily inspirational figure. His wish, however, for the "salutary emotional force of incalculable magnitude" to be "real", to actually mean something objective, causes him continual difficulties. What, he asks, is the difference between Jesus and Socrates? The answer is that a "penetrating enthusiasm of love, sympathy, pity, adoration, reinforcing the inspiration of reason and duty, does not belong to Socrates". Whilst such an approach might personally be held in the context of Arnold's post-Enlightenment world view, the question has to be put as to whether this is really the basis for the resurrection in Christianity that Arnold was seeking. What really is the difference between Jesus and Socrates? Or, to put the question in a twentieth century light, why should people follow Jesus rather than Ghandi or Mother Theresa or some equally inspiring figure? Arnold's decision to accept the wisdom of the age and negate the idea of a God who stands over against his creation strikes at the very heart of Christian belief. Faith in a "salutary emotional force" is hardly an adequate basis for acceptance of the Bible or any of the rest of the Christian tradition.

Arnold's religious reconstruction in St. Paul and Protestantism is largely deficient in its attempt to resurrect Christianity on a "true" reading of the Bible. That which is true is merely that which can be scientifically verified - a test of truth that is utterly at variance with the basis on which the Bible rests. Owing once again to an inability to systematise emotion as anything other than a residual feeling that accompanies correct intellectual decision-making, Arnold is left, as he was in his poetry and criticism, with a division between thought and feeling that is fatal to his theology.

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<sup>20</sup>It hardly needs saying that the "evidence" of the character of Jesus - the four Gospels of Arnold's Authorised Bible - was not available to Paul.

## 3.2. Arnold's Religious Prose - 1873-1888

### 3.2.1. Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible

The epistemological presuppositions that inform St. Paul and Protestantism also lie behind the remainder of Arnold's religious prose. There is a difference in the handling of his ideas, however, evidence for which can be found in the relative interest which the later works, particularly Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible, have held for Arnold's critics. As R.H. Super has observed:

There has been very little modern scholarship upon St. Paul and Protestantism, which has been rather lost sight of in the shadow of Literature and Dogma.<sup>21</sup>

I believe this myopia in Arnold's critics to be far from accidental. A good example is Ruth apRoberts who begins by dismissing St. Paul and Protestantism as something inchoate, unsubtle and not a little self-righteous:

Arnold rather high-handedly cancels certain aspects of Paul for the convenience of his argument. At times we can hear a tone of Thomas Arnold in the Chapel, taking advantage of a captive audience: if Paul's language "is to be turned into positive language, then it is the language into which we have translated it that translates it truly." I am right, in short.<sup>22</sup>

apRoberts calls Arnold "overingenious" in his desire to rehabilitate Paul. Having concluded thus, however, apRoberts adds that the most interesting aspect of St. Paul and Protestantism is that of Arnold "drawing close to a theory of the centrality of figure or metaphor in matters of religion". apRoberts implies, therefore, that the central ideas of the book are unimportant to criticism of Arnold since they show his relatively immature handling of theology. What is important for the critic is the embryonic appearance of Arnold's mature method discernible within the uneven theological argument of his formative work. This is, I believe, poor critical practice on apRoberts' part. In passing off Arnold's handling of Paul as an inadequate first attempt at theology she has failed to perceive the larger underlying reasons behind Arnold's shortcomings in St. Paul and Protestantism. The truth is that the problems are not simply overcome in his later religious prose. The presuppositions that inform his theology in St. Paul and Protestantism are quite as present in his later work. What is different is the way Arnold has tried, in a subtle and sophisticated way, to find an answer to the divisions in his epistemology. Those critics, apRoberts included, who concentrate exclusively on Literature and Dogma do so, I believe, primarily because they share Arnold's post-Enlightenment world view and they accept the solutions offered therein.<sup>23</sup> To such critics St. Paul and Protestantism has the (unintended, of course, on Arnold's part) disadvantage of fundamentally calling in to question any attempt at marriage between such opposed world views as those of Arnold and the early Christians. Literature and Dogma, on the other hand, hides these oppositions rather more successfully.

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<sup>21</sup>CPW 6:421.

<sup>22</sup>apRoberts, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup>A reading of any of the more devoted Arnoldians will reveal the extraordinarily crusading nature of their criticism. See, for example, any of the work of A.O.J. Cockshut, Basil Willey, James C. Livingston and apRoberts.

Ruth apRoberts is correct in discerning that St. Paul and Protestantism sees Arnold approaching to a "theory of the centrality of figure or metaphor" in religious matters. His tentative definition of God as a "stream of tendency" - made with a view to combatting the gross materialism of the God of the Protestant sects - is an early foreshadowing of the central purpose and method of Literature and Dogma. Arnold himself summarised his major work thus:

to people disposed to throw the Bible aside Literature and Dogma sought to restore the use of it by two considerations: one, that the Bible requires for its basis nothing but what they can verify; the other that the language of the Bible is not scientific, but literary.

Arnold's primary consideration here is, as ever, a social one. He recognises that "the masses" are losing the Bible, the results of which are much to be feared owing to the "all-importance" the Bible carries in matters of conduct. His concern, therefore, is to show that what he perceives to be the main reason for this mass rejection - the "discredit befalling miracles and the supernatural" - is, in fact, no reason for foregoing the Bible. The language of the Bible is, he avers, not scientific. It should not, therefore, be rejected as "bad science". It is literary and fluid and should be treated as such. Following true criticism by the agents of culture the Bible can once again be used by the masses.

The impulses behind these efforts came from events that followed after the publication of St. Paul and Protestantism. Whilst, as we shall see, the former work's concerns are continued in Literature and Dogma, these events led to the attempted handling of much larger questions than we saw being approached in St. Paul and Protestantism. First, Arnold the educator was made aware of the prominence of the question of religious education in the parliamentary debate over W.E.Forster's 1870 education bill. The question as to how much and what sort of religious education should be included in the syllabi of the new state Board schools led to a debate over the place of the Bible in school curricula. One of the figures in the debate was Arnold's friend T.H.Huxley. Huxley was a champion of the natural sciences and a confirmed agnostic.<sup>24</sup> His part in the debate was to attempt to further the cause of agnosticism by questioning the idea of any sectarian religious instruction. In addition to Roman Catholic and Protestant bodies

there was a third party growing up and daily increasing in significance, which has nothing to do with either, but which has its own religion and morality that rests in no way whatever on the foundation of the other two.

The particular foundation that this third party eschewed was the Bible. It was reported in The Times of Huxley that

if these islands had no religion at all, it would not enter into his mind to introduce the religious idea by the agency of the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

This challenge must have been felt as a rebuff to Arnold's programme, begun in St. Paul and Protestantism, of re-establishing Christianity on the basis of a correctly interpreted Bible. Inheriting as he did his father's strong liberal Anglican adherence to the Bible as indispensable to both private and public education, Arnold would have felt the life and aims of his father and the whole liberal Anglican tradition to be at

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<sup>24</sup>For a good portrait of Huxley, see A.O.J. Cockshut - The Unbelievers; English Agnostic Thought 1840-1890 (Collins, London, 1964).

<sup>25</sup>The Times (London), February 23rd, 1871. Quoted by William Blackburn - "The Background of Arnold's Literature and Dogma", Modern Philology November, 1945: p. 133.

stake. Arnold's position was precarious, however. Huxley's opposition to the Bible owed its existence to a perception that the onward march of science had rendered the Bible anachronistic - that morality was taught falsely if it was based on the sanction of miracles and a supernatural God. The problem for Arnold was that St. Paul and Protestantism had been dedicated (minus the rejection of the Bible) to this very thesis. The dilemma can be illustrated by a letter from Huxley to Arnold after the publication of St. Paul and Protestantism. Huxley wrote that he had found "many good things": "One of the best is what you say ... about science conquering the materialism of popular religion."<sup>26</sup> Arnold's reaction to such praise must have been guarded - particularly so when considering Huxley's position in the Forster education bill debate. It no doubt led him to conceive of Literature and Dogma as essentially a defence of the Bible, a defence to be based on the true literary value of its contents.

Arnold's resolve to be the "honest broker" between religion and science was further strengthened by an ominous event at the heartland of culture itself - Oxford. The inauguration of Keble College in June 1870 gave the chancellor of the university, Lord Salisbury, the occasion to deliver a speech which determined, for Arnold, the central issue of Literature and Dogma. A college dedicated to the name of Keble gave Salisbury the chance to further the interests of the Anglo-Catholic party at Oxford. Pledging the college to a religion "thoroughly Catholic", Salisbury proclaimed the hope that

there shall be no more within these walls the idea of severing religion and dogma than there is an idea of severing the daylight from the sun.<sup>27</sup>

Arnold's idea of "catholic" was precisely the opposite to Salisbury's; that much he had made clear in St. Paul and Protestantism. Dogma of any sort, be it "Catholic", Protestant or Comtist Positivist, was divisive and furthermore, in the case of the Church, based on the false premises of "miracle, blood, bargain and appeasement". Arnold makes his reactions clear in a letter to his mother four days after the ceremony. Salisbury, he says, is a "dangerous man" who, alongside his need for dogma, proclaims that the future course of Oxford studies should be along scientific rather than literary lines:

Religion he knows, and physical science he knows, but the immense work between the two, which is for literature to accomplish, he knows nothing of, and all his speeches at Oxford pointed this way. On the one hand, he was full of the great future for physical science, and begging the University to make up her mind to it, and to resign much of her literary studies; on the other hand, he was full, almost defiantly full, of counsels and resolves for retaining and upholding the old ecclesiastical and dogmatic form of religion. From a juxtaposition of this kind nothing but shocks and collisions can come.<sup>28</sup>

Arnold is determined to be a "healing and reconciling influence" - which leads him to a solution typical of the former Professor of Poetry resolved to exert an influence on both Oxford studies and the culture of the nation. Arnold determines to save the future of religion (and hence the right conduct of England) by undermining the dogmatic basis of Christianity and re-constituting it on the basis of its broadly literary appeal.

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<sup>26</sup>Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley - ed. Leonard Huxley, 2 vols. (London, 1900) vol. 1, p. 329.

<sup>27</sup>Guardian, June 29th, 1870. Quoted by Blackburn, p. 131.

<sup>28</sup>June 25th, 1870. Letters 2: 35.



Arnold took his task of educating the "masses" on this basis seriously. In the Preface to the First Edition (1873) he makes it clear at the beginning that he is concerned for the future of the working classes. He quotes from a pamphlet sent to him by William Steward, a Bedford worker, who claims that "the speculations of the day" are working on the mind of the people in such a way as to lead them to reject the infallibility of the Bible as a priestly imposition. This is relayed by Arnold for the benefit of both the imposers and those imposed upon. To both parties he wishes to point out that the truth of Christianity does not rest on a belief in the necessity of miraculous divine intervention or a system of metaphysical speculation based on it. Arnold insists on the "natural truth" of Christianity. This is not to say of course that Arnold accepts "natural religion" on the Paley "watch-maker principle". Such distinctions as those between "natural" and "revealed" religion are, he asserts, false, arising from the metaphysicians' unhappy speculations. As he says in Literature and Dogma: "that in us which is really natural, is, in truth, revealed." Arnold is attempting to find a true ground for unity by asserting that the "religious experience" is clearly verifiable and universally available. The structure of what he calls aberglaube (literally, "extra-belief"), that surrounds this natural truth, is no longer necessary or desirable in the new scientific age.

Arnold is trying to give voice here to the Zeitgeist's new basis for Christianity. He perceives that certain post-Enlightenment reconstructions have proved inadequate. Whether or not he had read Hume on miracles his reading of Kant (if no one else) would have led him to reject such half-way house reconstructions as deism. If the advent of Isaac Newton had dealt the death-knell to miracle as a providential suspension of the laws of nature, the deists still felt able to proclaim the existence of the infinitely perfect Creator who could be adduced from the perfection of the flawless machine that was his creation. In his poem "In Harmony with Nature: To a Preacher" (first published 1849) Arnold seems to be echoing Hume's criticism of deism that the existence of pain in nature is antithetical to the idea of a perfect creation:

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,  
And in that more lie all his hopes of good.  
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;  
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore ... (5-8)

Arnold recognises the fact that the Time-Spirit has created immense problems for a dogmatic theology based on such theories as those held by the deists. His solution is thus to reject the entire programme of "theology as speculative science" and reconstruct it, instead, on the grounds of "theology as experience".

This is where Arnold comes back to the importance of language. When he says that "the language of the Bible is not scientific, but literary", Arnold is being both negative and positive. Firstly he is trying to refute the argument that the mythological basis of the Bible should be taken as scientific fact. This is his demolition of "theology as speculative science". On the other hand he is saying that the language of the Bible can and must be taken as conveying, with more force than in other literature, the truth about life.

This is where Ruth apRoberts, with her thesis that Arnold is approaching to a "theory of the centrality of

figure or metaphor", is approximating towards the truth. Whether it is truly a theory or whether it is only a fortunate tendency is, however, a question that apRoberts does not raise but one that is vital to an understanding and evaluation of Arnold's religious reconstruction. Does his "theory" of language in the Bible really convey the truth about life for Arnold? And is it adequate as the new basis for Christianity and the education of the race? These are the questions that have to be raised concerning Literature and Dogma.

From the beginning of Literature and Dogma it would appear that the second question at least must be answered in the negative. The fact is that Arnold's approach to language in the Bible is, as it was in St. Paul and Protestantism, extremely questionable. Arnold's primary contention is that the Bible, as literature, should be immune from metaphysical or fundamentalist dogmatism. We may call this his "broadening programme". Unfortunately, however, this attack on dogmatism is not maintained owing to a concurrent programme which says that literature can only express truth if that truth is verifiable. Since, according to Arnold, the only religious truth is conduct then it is easy to see that Arnold will end up by instituting his own dogmatism. This "reductive programme" is the dominant one in his religious prose and it must raise substantial doubts as to whether any religious reconstruction so circumscribed could or should be recommended as a new basis for Christianity.

Thus Arnold begins in Literature and Dogma where he ended in St. Paul and Protestantism - with the point that language about God is approximate, fluid and "literary", rather than scientific and precise. The word "God" is "a term thrown out ... at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness, a literary term, in short". This fundamental premiss is always the starting-point for Arnold's talk about God-language, and it contains within it the very important post-Enlightenment realisation that language about God is always also language about man. The simple truth as Arnold iterates and reiterates, is that any talk of God has to be undertaken within the parameters of man's experience of God. This enables Arnold to suggest two different but related conceptions. First he denigrates "metaphysics" or any esoteric or sectarian "knowledge" that is used to justify belief in God. Following on from this he also implies that, given the relativity of any and all language, talk about God or religion is not exclusive to Christianity or the Bible. To illustrate the second point he gives various examples of religious utterance in literature. Whilst he begins with examples from the Gospels, he then proceeds to give a more daring example from Sophocles, commenting that it "is from Sophocles, but it is as much religion as any of the things which we have quoted as religion". Ruth apRoberts uses these examples to lend weight to her belief that Arnold is coming to a complex and subtle understanding of what religious expression means. Her basic premiss is that religious language is metaphorical as opposed to literal, that "metaphor is of the essence in the religious mode": since, clearly, we are dealing in religious language with what she calls "heuristic" fictions, rather than concepts. In this particular language-game

the pretense or approximation of metaphor carries more meaning than the literal ... metaphor ... differs in intensity from the scientific mode to such an enormous extent that it is not a difference in degree but in kind.

In Literature and Dogma, apRoberts claims, Arnold broaches "the phenomenology of metaphor" and thus

"demonstrates what he has claimed to be the relevance of literary criticism in matters of religion".<sup>29</sup>

The modern understanding of metaphor as the essential mode of communication in religious matters is a vitally important issue in present-day theology and we shall examine it in more detail later. For the present it is necessary to evaluate apRoberts' contention that Arnold "anticipates" the modern literary critical approach to theology, that he "recognizes the great thundering arrogance of dogma and the terrible constriction of the literal".<sup>30</sup> apRoberts' thesis is based in the first place on those phrases that Arnold uses in demonstrating the meaning of the word "religion". Now I would agree with apRoberts that Arnold, in utilising this technique, is appealing properly to experience and therefore to language as the expression of that experience; further, he implies that religion (being, as apRoberts would say, a heuristic fiction itself) is capable of stretching its meaning rather than being tied to a narrow or dogmatic definition. Thus, in his experimental way, he admits at first that it is possible to have a very wide definition of "religion":

... some people, indeed, are for calling all high thought and feeling by the name of religion; according to that saying of Goethe: "He who has art and science, has also religion".

The citing of Goethe, one of Arnold's favourite authors, is an indication that Arnold himself would wish to admit such a definition, especially when he adds, rather condescendingly I feel, that we must not use it at present as "men have not yet got to that stage". At present, he says, we should "limit ourselves in the use of the word religion as mankind do". Thus far apRoberts' contention that Arnold is in possession of an understanding of religious language would seem to be supported by the text. However as I have suggested I do not believe that this is the dominant reading of Literature and Dogma. The fact is that, despite Arnold's aforementioned implicit support of Goethe, the real meaning of religion for Arnold is that severely circumscribed one we have observed before - that definition that we have described as his "reductive programme". Arnold's message here, as in "Marcus Aurelius", is that "the true meaning of religion is thus, not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion". Given that Arnold says this before he talks about Goethe, such a statement as this that follows the Goethe quotation becomes quite ambiguous:

When mankind speak of religion, they have before their mind an activity engaged, not with the whole of life, but with that three-fourths of life which is conduct.

Now it is Arnold himself who has made this computation that conduct is "three-fourths of human life" and, indeed, he suggests further that the only doubt about this "is whether we ought not to make the range of conduct wider still, and to say it is four-fifths of human life, or five-sixths". It is, therefore, Arnold, not "mankind", who speaks in the above statement about "religion". Whilst it seems, then, that he has been leaving himself a quarter of life (the "high thought and feeling" of "art and science") to be integrated into the religious experience when mankind is ready for that stage, I would question the possibility of any such future inclusion in Arnold's religious scheme.

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<sup>29</sup>apRoberts, pp. 194 & 217. apRoberts takes "metaphor to overlap with symbol, and to subsume simile and metaphor proper, and synecdoche and metonymy". (Note, p. 216.)

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

This all becomes clearer when we look at the examples that Arnold chooses to illustrate the idea of religion. What he does is to set up pairs of comparative quotations. The first part of the pair, he claims, illustrates morality whilst the second is an example of religion. One such pair is the following:

"We all want to live honestly, but can not," says the Greek maxim-maker. That is morality. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" says St. Paul. That is religion.

Or, to give another example:

"Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty," is morality. But: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work," is religion.

This is all a reply to the objection Arnold anticipates that, according to his scheme, there is "no difference between what is ethical, or morality, and religion". Despite his attempt to refute this, however, the objection can still, I believe, be sustained. From a Biblical critical point of view, there is indeed a difference. In the first example above, St. Paul's cry is a rhetorical outburst made in the context of the complete certainty that the new covenant of grace has brought an end to the round of sin and repentance experienced under the Law. This faith of St. Paul is indeed religion. In the second quotation, from the Fourth Gospel, Jesus (or the author of the Gospel) is replying to the prosaic request of the disciples that he should eat. As always with Jesus, he turns the literal into the symbolic. His nourishment is to work for the realisation of the Kingdom of God:

Do you not say, "there are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. (John 4:35.)

The difference between this and the completely literalistic saying from the book of Proverbs which accompanies it is clearly that between a sophisticated religious belief and a purely moral injunction. Thus

Ruth apRoberts concludes:

Any of us in the least degree used to literary analysis will recognize in the morality column the more-or-less literal mode and in the religion column the metaphorical ... He invites us to test on our psyches the effects of group A as compared to the effects of group B. And I think we are obliged to recognize the emotive power of B, in the latinate sense of emoveo, having the power to dislodge, to move, to change men; ...<sup>31</sup>

Given apRoberts' belief in the power of metaphor to express religious truth, this paragraph can be taken to mean that Arnold's examples of religious language carry more meaning than the literal, that they differ "in intensity from the scientific mode to such an enormous extent that it is not a difference in degree but in kind".

Now this is rather given the lie to by Arnold himself. Arnold's claim is that metaphysical propositions are different in kind from moral or religious ones. "They differ in kind from what is religious, while what is ethical agrees in kind with it" [the religious]. "But is there therefore", Arnold asks, "no difference between what is ethical, or morality, and religion? There is a difference, a difference of degree." So Arnold himself admits that religious language is the same as ethical. But what of this difference of degree? It seems to me that to call the difference in the pairs given above one of degree is for Arnold to misunderstand entirely what is being said by his "religious" spokesmen. To put it clearly, the statements or proclamations from the New Testament are not simply "morality touched by emotion". They are examples

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

of language that is without meaning if the context in which they are uttered is withdrawn. They presuppose certain religious propositions that can not be reduced to mere moral schema. When apRoberts says that the metaphorical (religious) mode differs in kind from the scientific mode, she is analysing correctly the phenomenon of religious language. It is not, however true of Arnold's "religion". The quotation from Sophocles that Arnold claims is "as much religious as any of the things we have quoted as religious" is literal rather than metaphorical, morality rather than religion. Once again here, we come up against the fact that the only certain knowledge for Arnold is knowledge of morality or conduct. The other quarter, fifth or sixth of human life, the emotional residue, is not "true" in itself. The result is the equation of St. Paul, Christ and Sophocles which is far from being, as apRoberts suggests, a broadening of the religious idea in the name of literary criticism. It is, rather, a collapse of religious language and religious faith into "mere morality".

This is all a primary example of the major fault we have underlined with respect to Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible. Even leaving aside the question, for now, as to whether this religious programme really conveys the truth about life for Arnold, it must certainly be clear that attempts by such critics as apRoberts to rehabilitate Arnold's scheme are, as she said of Arnold's handling of St. Paul, "overingenious".

### 3.2.2. Arnold and God

As an illustration of the conflict brought about in his religious reconstruction by the concurrent programme that we have identified we shall examine more closely a major problematic area - Arnold's speculation about God. Arnold has considerable difficulty with the concept of God owing to his desire to tread a delicate path between the demands of the scientists and the Biblical and dogmatic fundamentalists. In order to thwart the latter group he insists that language about God is poetic, not scientific. In order to please the friends of science he searches constantly for a scientifically verifiable description of God. Meanwhile Arnold's own religious needs and the needs of Christianity continually upset the whole scheme.

In the first chapter of Literature and Dogma Arnold attempts to find a description for God that is not mere anthropomorphic projectionism but which is, nevertheless, scientifically acceptable. In order to frustrate false contemporary notions about God he determines to search for origins, to find the one fundamental ground for belief in God. Here we immediately encounter the first problem, however. Arnold describes God as a "not ourselves" which "is in us and in the world around us". It has "almost everywhere", Arnold believes, "struck the minds of men as they awoke to consciousness, and has inspired them with awe". Arnold, happily enough at this point, displays an understanding of how this sense of otherness could only be expressed in connection with objects outside man: "everyone knows how the mighty natural objects which most took their regard became the objects to which this awe addressed itself". Furthermore he shows a fine sense of the whole gamut of responses that this acknowledgement of a God or gods has called forth:

Everyone knows of what differences of operation men's dealing with this power has in different places and times shown itself capable; how here they have been moved by the not ourselves to a cruel terror, here to a timid religiosity, there again to a play of imagination; almost always, however, connecting with it, by some string or other, conduct.

This sentence could be taken as an objective examination, in the manner of Rudolf Otto, of man's experience of the holy; in which case the last part, the connection of the sense of the divine with man's conduct, would be no more than a description of man's sense of responsibility (as in the neutral sense of how man conducts himself) in the face of an overseer. This is not, however, Arnold's point. Arnold's sense of conduct is not descriptive, it is prescriptive. That is to say that the idea of the holy can not truthfully be expressed in terms of man's many and varied responses of awe, imagination or terror in the face of the not ourselves. The idea of God is, for Arnold, only true in connection with man's sense of righteousness and conduct. Thus while such a statement as the following may be true on the surface - "we are not writing a history of religion; we are only tracing its effect on the language of the men from whom we get the Bible" - it also displays a wilful neglect of those other impulses to religion which Arnold has touched upon. Arnold's disclaimer here - that those other impulses are not to be examined further in the context of this present book - actually amounts to a claim that such impulses were of relative unimportance to the "men from whom we get the Bible". Further, having made this assumption, he then uses his notion of Israel's concept of God to deny the possibility of any other sort of knowledge about God. Arnold's argument here is, in fact, a petitio principii - it sets out to prove a conclusion that has already been taken for granted. Armed with the belief that religion is purely a system that makes for good conduct, Arnold sets out to prove that this was also the concern of Israel. What follows is some questionable criticism as to the origins of Old Testament faith.

Arnold's basic contention is that Israel had a peculiar understanding, not common to other nations, of right conduct. She came to understand her God as "a power which makes for righteousness". In order to show that Israel's belief was the great religious intuition common to all times and thus the correct intuition for the present, Arnold attempts to deny the idea of Israel having any other sort of belief about God:

There are, indeed, many aspects of the not ourselves; but Israel regarded one aspect of it only, that by which it makes for righteousness.

Israel was not, Arnold correctly asserts, a nation of metaphysicians who came to God by "abstruse reasoning":

Israel, at this stage when The Eternal was revealed to him, inferred nothing, reasoned out nothing; he felt and experienced.

Now there is no doubt that this is the case, if Arnold is talking only about a Hebrew version of St. Thomas Aquinas. However, he is actually making the much broader assumption that "feeling and experience" can have no cognitive content other than a post-Enlightenment acceptance of the universality of a tendency to right conduct. The evidence in the Old Testament suggests that things are otherwise. In his understanding of Israel's God Arnold is attempting to show how overwhelmingly true is the idea of the universal moral order as the basis of religion. To assert this, however, he has to turn the evidence his way. Thus he makes the idea of God as the giver of righteousness prior to the idea of God as creator: "That is the notion at the

bottom of the Hebrew's praise of a creator." Israel, therefore, miraculously foreshadows Arnold's own idea of God:

Wisdom and understanding mean, for Israel, the love of order, of righteousness. Righteousness, order, conduct, is for Israel at once the source of all man's happiness and at the same time the very essence of The Eternal. The great work of The Eternal is the foundation of this order in man, the implanting in mankind of his own love of righteousness, his own spirit, his own wisdom and understanding; and it is only as a farther and rational working of this energy that Israel conceives the establishment of order in the world, or creation.

That this is Israel speaking, rather than Arnold, is extremely questionable, especially when Arnold supports his thesis with quotations from the Books of Job and Proverbs. This is questionable exegesis. Both books are examples of what scholarship has termed "wisdom literature", composed in a sophisticated and literary way at a time far distant from texts, such as Genesis, that deal with God as creator. As has been shown in the work of J. Pritchard, creation myths are common to all, including Semitic, religions. The Genesis creation myth, whilst composed in its Biblical form around the ninth century B.C., is a conglomerate of a number of oral traditions, all testifying to the fact that the question of origins and purpose is the primary impulse to religion, rather than a recognition of Arnold's Old Testament trinity of "spirit ... wisdom and understanding".<sup>32</sup>

It is to be admitted that "righteousness" comes to be the vital concern in Hebrew religion. This concept of righteousness, however, is not arrived at by observing scientifically the laws of human nature. One does not have to read far into the history of Israel in the Pentateuch to observe that "righteousness" is far from universally available. The God of this time is a national God, the God of "armies" (Psalm 24) who is jealous for Israel. Only in the prophetic literature, first and most notably in Amos, does God speak out against Israel<sup>33</sup> and his concerns become something more than narrowly nationalistic.

The problem is not simply that Arnold's exegesis is wrong; it is that he has ignored much of the evidence through following a falsely reductionist theory about the origins of belief in God. Furthermore, this reductionism actually clashes very seriously with his attempt to resurrect the Bible on the grounds of literature. This can be illustrated by quotations which summarise Arnold's contrary programmes:

There is truth of science and truth of religion: truth of science does not become truth of religion until it is made to harmonise with it.

Religion must be built on ideas about which there is no puzzle.<sup>34</sup>

The second principle is antagonistic to the first, as we can see in Arnold's thoughts on God in Literature and Dogma. First, Arnold recognises that God can only be spoken of in poetic, rather than scientifically precise, terms. The language of "figure and feeling" he says, rather than that of science and literal fact, is best employed with respect to God. The "language of science", he asserts, "will be below what we feel to

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<sup>32</sup>See particularly The Ancient Near East (Princeton University Press, 1958).

<sup>33</sup>In Amos chapters 1 - 2 Amos unexpectedly prophesies against Israel (2:6) having formerly condemned other nations as might have been expected. This is one of the remarkable turning points in Old Testament literature - the point where the prophets start to proclaim the universality of God's judgment.

<sup>34</sup>The first quotation is from Arnold's 1863 essay "Dr Stanley's Lectures on the Jewish Church" in Essays in Criticism. The second is from the 1877 opening essay to Last Essays on Church and Religion, "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist".

be the truth". Having said this, however, Arnold then goes on to search for the scientific core of truth: "what was the scientific basis of fact for this consciousness?" His answer is his favourite "stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being". Whilst he admits that this is "less proper" than Psalm 117's "Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat", he claims that his own definition at least has the benefit of being "scientific".

Interestingly enough there was a contemporary objection to this. A writer in the Spectator of July, 1871 asked the following:

Why [is the "scientific" definition Mr. Arnold has proposed] less adequate, unless those poetic words, which go beyond science in Mr. Arnold's opinion, go beyond it in the direction of filling up with more truth than error the suggestions and implications of science! Yet, if this be so, the suggestions and implications which lead the mind to use personal analogies are truer than those which lead it away from those analogies.<sup>35</sup>

This is precisely to the point. If language of figure and feeling is the correct mode in which to describe man's apprehension of God, then why search for a "true" scientific definition at all? Arnold himself felt it necessary to reply to his antagonist in a footnote in the first edition of Literature and Dogma:

It has been urged that if the personifying mode of expression is more proper, it must, also, be more scientifically exact. But surely it will upon reflexion appear that this is by no means so. Wordsworth calls the earth "the mighty mother of mankind," and the geographers call her "an oblate spheroid;" Wordsworth's expression is more proper and adequate to convey what men feel about the earth, but it is not therefore the more scientifically exact.

Disatisfied with Arnold's explanation the same reviewer replied in the February, 1873 number of the Spectator that Arnold's defence was "a pure evasion of the point".<sup>36</sup> This is a judgment with which I concur. Arnold's reply rests on the assumption that the argument is simply about categorisation. As in the 1863 quotation above, Arnold is defending his belief that there is truth of science and truth of religion. The geographers' statement is true for science and therefore it is quite adequate. The reviewer, however, might well have retorted that "truth of science does not become truth of religion until it is made to harmonise with it". The point is that Arnold is implicitly making a statement of value - about which description of the world is more true for him. The metaphorical mode of description (Wordsworth's or the Psalmist's) is weaker in its "truth value" than the scientific definition. Arnold continually fails in his work to rest content finally with what he would call the "poetic" description of the world. The fact is that the Psalmist's paean to God needs no scientific alternative - to appropriate Ruth apRoberts' words, by this metaphor "something is said - or made - that could not be said or made otherwise".<sup>37</sup> The use of the verb "to make" here is important. It suggests that the words are themselves constitutive of the reality to which they refer. They have "truth value" in themselves. It is this that Arnold can not always grasp.

The most sustained recent defence of Arnold's religious position - James C. Livingston's Matthew Arnold and Christianity - admits of some fault in Arnold's handling of the question of God. In talking

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<sup>35</sup>July 8th, 1871 (XLIV, 827). Quotation from CPW 6, note on p. 473. This was after the first appearance of the articles in the Cornhill that later made up the first chapter of Literature and Dogma.

<sup>36</sup>February 22nd, 1873. Quoted in CPW, *ibid.*.

<sup>37</sup>apRoberts, p. 218.



about Arnold's use of "concrete" language to describe God and our relations with God, Livingston acknowledges that

he consistently reveals a crucial theological blind side in his persistent failure to appreciate the central role that the concrete language of personal relations plays in the biblical vision of man's encounter with God.

In relation to the question of language about God, Livingston makes a similar admission two chapters later. Arnold was unwise, he says,

in failing to recognise the significance of and to bring out more fully the crucial fact that Christians could rightfully ascribe to God attributes which it only made sense to speak of as belonging to personal agents.

Later still, when touching on the use of myth in the Christian scheme, Livingston, stating that Arnold rejected the Old Testament myths and the myth of Christ's struggle with the devil as "no longer serviceable", admits that "Arnold's critical tact fails him".<sup>38</sup> Despite all these provisos, however, Livingston still claims success for Arnold's programme:

It is quite wrong to assert that Arnold the hermeneut undercuts Arnold the guardian of poetic truth. As Nathan Scott observes, "On the contrary, so paramount is the role that [Arnold] accords the poetic imagination in the religious enterprise that it may, indeed, be said to be for him the very means of transcendence, the vital agent whereby men first "hail" the numinous, the *mysterium tremendum*, the not ourselves".<sup>39</sup>

This conclusion of Scott's (and Livingston in agreement with him) is extremely questionable. Livingston is saying that Arnold's failures are incidental to the overall success of his scheme, that the "crucial", unwise and tactless falling short in his use of religious language has no lasting detrimental effect on his attempt to preserve Christianity. Two things are wrong with this assessment. First it suggests that Arnold has an idea of the Christian God which he does not, in fact, hold. Secondly and by extension Livingston believes (I am convinced wrongly) that Arnold makes a successful attempt to incarnate this God by his use of the "poetic imagination".

Nathan Scott's equation of Arnold's "not ourselves" with Rudolf Otto's "*mysterium tremendum*" seems to me, again, to be questionable. As I have sought to show, the evidence points to the fact that Arnold's God is an anthropomorphic projection, a tendency towards right conduct that he believes is deducible from human affairs and is applicable only to human affairs. Indeed Arnold conclusively admits this himself in God and the Bible, where he says that the "not ourselves that makes for righteousness" is not God: "For this is really a law of nature, collected from experience, just as much as the law of gravitation is." This throws further into question Arnold's personal commitment to the "quarter", "fifth" or "sixth" of religion that is not to do with conduct. Perhaps it is some such unease that makes Livingston apologise for Arnold in the following way:

If Arnold were writing a history of religions and not an essay on the Bible, he might well have traced out the multifarious ways in which men have represented the power which to them transcends "the limits of their narrow selves, and by which they lived and moved and had their being."<sup>40</sup>

This, I feel, is rather uncritical. One should surely concentrate on the evidence that there is, rather than that

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<sup>38</sup>Livingston, pp. 90, 157 and 165.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 137. Nathan Scott's work is entitled "Arnold's Vision of Transcendence - the *Vis Poetica*", from the July, 1979 edition of The Journal of Religion.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

which might have been. The fact is that Arnold does not write about God in this way because he does not hold ideas of God's transcendence. Consequently neither does Arnold use language about God as a "means of transcendence". In God and the Bible Arnold replies to criticisms of his views of personal language about God by defending his reductionist approach still further. He indulges, he says, in "a long philological disquisition" in order to show that words "make men their sport". To illustrate the basic truth that all abstract terms arise out of the concrete Arnold shows that "being" and "existence" can be reduced to mere sensuous words such as "breathing", "growing" and "standing". This is in common with the dominant eighteenth and nineteenth century empiricist understanding of philology exemplified by Horne Tooke's etymological programme of reducing all ideas to the root nouns from which they sprang.<sup>41</sup> As Stephen Prickett observes in Words and the Word

Tooke's ... etymological "proofs" were to dominate sections of English philology for almost fifty years, and to earn the approval of such men as Noah Webster, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Mill, Hazlitt, and Archbishop Trench ...<sup>42</sup>

Arnold uses such a "science" because it is a method of reducing complex and sometimes intangible ideas to that which is really verifiable. Thus he seeks to demolish metaphysics by saying that "God is" can be reduced to "God breathes" and that we are therefore indulging "in gross creature-worship".

This is not a failure of critical tact hiding Arnold's alleged commitment to a transcendent God. The whole empiricist philological programme is based on the premiss that that which is concrete possesses more descriptive power than its later figurative version. Although Arnold is using it here to deny the results of some of the more florid imaginations of the metaphysicians, his very acceptance of the method shows a lack of understanding as to the power of language to evolve in the attempt to reach more subtle explanations of things.

### 3.2.3. Arnold and the Christian Mythos

The contrary tendencies that we have been investigating - the "broadening" and "reductive" programmes - actually come to cancel each other out in Literature and Dogma. Arnold begins with the thesis that language about God is fluid and literary. Then he attempts to find the scientifically verifiable ground for talk about God. As a result the literary or poetic language that is "of the essence" (to use apRoberts' words) in religion is left to refer to an emotional residue that has no cognitive content. Hence the whole mythological and metaphorical basis on which the Bible and Christianity is built is, to quote Livingston, "no longer serviceable". Thus we see the whole of the Christian mythos being described by Arnold as an accretion - as Aberglaube. Whilst this accretion has been useful because it has attracted "emotion to the ideas of conduct and morality" it must not be taken as an end in itself. Arnold decides that Aberglaube - although a development from the supposedly original ground of consciousness about God - must be pruned out in the new scientific age:

<sup>41</sup>See John Home Tooke - The Diversions of Purley, 2 vols. (1798-1805), reprinted Menston, Scolar Press, London 1968.

<sup>42</sup>Prickett, pp. 135-136.

Extra-belief, that which we hope, augur, imagine, is the poetry of life, and has the rights of poetry. But it is not science; and yet it tends always to imagine itself science, to substitute itself for science ...

And so we must lose as a part of religion "that which we hope, augur" and "imagine". This is a strange outcome for religion which, according to many other thinkers, appears to have had its origins in what mankind hoped for, augured and imagined. As numerous twentieth century studies have suggested,<sup>43</sup> the myths which Arnold is so anxious to discard appear to be the very constituent elements of religion itself. As Mircea Eliade maintains, a myth is something by which the religious person lives: "The more religious man is, the more paradigmatic models does he possess to guide his attitudes and actions." The myth is therefore constitutive of reality itself, since, according to religious thought, reality is that which is sacred. Thus "the myth reveals absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work". The role of the myth is "to "fix" the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities" - it actually creates the sacred itself and provides the "meaning" which the religious person seeks:

It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in the myths, that establishes the world as a reality.<sup>44</sup>

To conclude, myths have an indispensable function in religion. Their presence in the history of religions suggests that the religious impulse is to an explanation of the "how?" and the "why?" of existence, a question of origins and purpose. In giving an answer to these questions they are indeed an end in themselves: "they are determinative for man and his existence, and adumbrate the conditions under which man lives."<sup>45</sup> To remove myth from religion is to remove the sacred as an explanation of reality.

There is one obvious way in which the notion of myth can be abused and it is this which Arnold has, on the face of it, uppermost in his mind in his religious reconstruction. This is the literalistic handling of myth, by which profound mystery is reduced, to quote Arnold, to "mere machinery". In one of his latest essays, "A "Friend of God"",<sup>46</sup> Arnold seeks to recommend mysticism (following his reading of the work of Tauler, a Reformation mystic) as an antidote to the Salvation Army who, at that time, were "trifling" with religion "via the old mythological means". Arnold believes that the time of the Salvation Army is coming to an end:

The immense, the epoch-making change of our own day is that a stage in our intellectual development is now declaring itself when mythology, whether moral or immoral, as a basis for religion is no longer receivable, is no longer an aid to religion but an obstacle.

This attack on mythology can be seen as part of Arnold's long-running campaign against all forms of religious fundamentalism. It has the same basis, in essence, as his argument against the Puritans twenty years earlier. He is seeking, justifiably enough, to discredit those "religious" people who attempt to coerce

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<sup>43</sup>For example, Otto's Idea of the Holy, any of Mircea Eliade's work, and particularly The Sacred and Profane - The Nature of Religion (Harcourt, Bruce and World Inc., New York, 1959). Also Myths in the Old Testament - Benedict Otzen, Hans Gottlieb, Knud Jeppesen, (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1980.)

<sup>44</sup>Eliade, p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>Otzen, Gottlieb and Jeppesen, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup>Published in the Nineteenth Century, April 1887.

others into belief via literalistic interpretations of Judgment and Grace. Arnold's proffered alternative of mysticism should be explored a little more closely, however. He recommends the mystics because they rest religion "on natural truth rather than mythology". "Let me be candid", he says: "I love the mystics", though in their "golden single sentences" rather than in the whole conduct and argument of their work. Arnold's grounds for supporting mysticism are, I feel, rather suspect. The overall picture one gains from reading "A "Friend of God"" is that Arnold is using the mystics purely to discredit the fundamentalism of the Salvation Army. His own empiricist viewpoint is, meanwhile, continually playing down the real grounds of belief on which mysticism rests. Thus, following a particularly mystical passage about identification with Christ's actions, (and it should be remembered that mystery can not be defined conceptually or prosaically) Arnold comments in a manner which reveals his lack of commitment to the mystic world view:

The reader will recognise the strain of homage which from age to age successive generations of mystics have ever loved to uplift to "the eternal word". I will not say it is entirely satisfying, but at least it is always refreshing, consoling and ennobling.

Arnold concludes the essay by saying that the reader will find "plenty in this strain to give him refreshment". There will, however, be found even more than this:

... isolated sentences fitted to abide in the memory, to be a possession for the mind and soul; to form the character. "Sin killeth nature, but nature is abhorrent of death; therefore sin is against nature, therefore sinners can never have a joy".

This really betrays Arnold's intention in the essay - to extract moral syllogisms in a way that reduces Tauler's mystical adhesion to the religious life to something like the asceticism of the majority of Thomas a Kempis's Imitation of Christ. This rather throws into relief Arnold's declaration against mythology, in that we realise it is not simply the fundamentalist understanding of myth that Arnold is rejecting. His object is much more wide-ranging than simply an attack on the Salvation Army. Once again Arnold is implying that the only religious language allowable is the "scientifically verifiable" language of morality or conduct. Any language that refers, as Tauler's does, to a mystical communion with the Godhead, is rejected by Arnold as unverifiable. Moral advice is once again the only true, because scientifically verifiable, religious object.

James C. Livingston tries to see Arnold's handling of myth in a different light. Arnold, he says, would have agreed with the twentieth century critic Paul Ricoeur that one must go beyond a literal understanding of myth. As Ricoeur says, "the dissolution of the myth as explanation is the necessary way to the restoration of the myth as symbol".<sup>47</sup> By "myth as explanation" Ricoeur means precisely the same thing as Arnold does in his critique of the Salvation Army. If myth is reduced to fairy-tale and the faithful are told that religion rests upon acceptance of these fairy-tales, then there will come the time, as Arnold says in a number of places, when they will reject them as wanting "intellectual seriousness". The latter part of the sentence, the idea of the "restoration of the myth as symbol", is most important; particularly since

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<sup>47</sup>The Symbolism of Evil (New York, 1967) p. 350.

Livingston is applying this explanation of myth to Arnold's own method. Remarkably enough, Arnold can himself directly answer the question as to whether he restores myth as symbol. In his 1885 essay "A Comment on Christmas"<sup>48</sup> Arnold explores the legend of the Incarnation.<sup>49</sup> The fact, he says, is the birth of Jesus. Isaiah's prophecy and the miracle of the incarnate God are purely legend. "Yet even the legend and miracle investing the fact", he says, "have, moreover, their virtue of symbol". "Symbol", continues Arnold, "is a dangerous word". People use it, he says, in order to give credit to something that is unhistorical, as if the narrator of the Gospel meant his description of the Incarnation to be symbolic. "They save it, however, at the expense of truth." Nevertheless, Arnold continues, "a thing may have important value as symbol, although its utterer never told or meant it symbolically". Thus far, Arnold's criticism is good. The hermeneutical procedure is designed to come to the truth of what the original really means, not to give an alternative explanation that has no root whatsoever in the original text. But what does Arnold mean by symbol? If we explore further, we can see that Arnold's idea of symbol is very much conditioned: the symbol's virtue

will depend on these two things further: the worth of the idea to which it does homage, and the extent to which its recipients have succeeded in penetrating through the form of the legend to this idea.

The "worth of the idea" is a very ambiguous phrase, but Arnold makes his evaluative procedure somewhat clearer with his assumption that the Incarnation is about "Christ's birth of a Virgin". The question then becomes one of "the innate worth of the idea of pureness".

At this point, interestingly enough from the point of view of this thesis, Arnold looks for support from S.T. Coleridge. He notes the appearance of a recent book by H.D. Traill on Coleridge wherein Traill talks about

the great Coleridgean position "that Christianity, rightly understood, is identical with the highest philosophy, and that, apart from all questions of historical evidence, the essential doctrines of Christianity are necessary and eternal truths of reason - truths which man, by the vouchsafed light of nature and without aid from documents or tradition, may always and everywhere discover for himself".

Of this Arnold proclaims that

it is true: it is deeply important; and by virtue of it Coleridge takes rank, so far as English thought is concerned, as an initiator and founder. The "great Coleridgean position" that apart from all question of the evidence for miracles and of the historical quality of the gospel narratives, the essential matters of Christianity are necessary and eternal facts of nature or truths of reason, is henceforth the key to the whole defence of Christianity. When a Christian virtue is presented to us as obligatory, the first thing, therefore, to be asked, is whether the need of it is a fact of nature.

This is a remarkable example of words, to quote Arnold, making "men their sport", here because the critic who appropriates them does so without a proper knowledge of his source. There may be some wilful misunderstanding in Arnold's expurgation of Traill's point that Coleridge's Christianity must be "identical with the highest philosophy". Nevertheless it is quite clear that Arnold believes he has found a true ally in

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<sup>48</sup>Published in The Contemporary Review, April 1885.

<sup>49</sup>Arnold designates the Incarnation as "legend". Legend, as Otzen, Gottlieb and Jeppesen say, is "usually historically and geographically localised" (op. cit. p. 7) compared to myth, which "takes place" outside space and time. Both legend and myth, however, have in common the search for meaning and purpose. Despite their different forms they are both fictive games expressive of a deeply felt and widely attested truth.

Coleridge for his own brand of experiential Christianity. Arnold's translation of the "great Coleridgean position" says that "facts of nature" are scientifically verifiable qualities of nature and that "truths of reason" are the conclusions reached following logical analysis of the scientific evidence. Thus Arnold concludes that Coleridge instituted the novel view of Christianity of which he (Arnold) is the heir: that even if we remove unverifiable miraculous evidence and even if we are faced with the confusions arising from conflicting Biblical witnesses, nevertheless Christianity is a clearly verifiable fact of nature. The fact that Arnold chooses to think of the Incarnation as a symbol doing homage to the idea of purity shows that "facts of nature" can actually be reduced to "facts of human conduct". The end result of all this is that symbol is true only if it is symbolic of morality.

Coleridge's actual ideas are, of course, far different. Coleridge, in fact, has vastly differing beliefs as to what can be "experiential". As we have already seen,<sup>50</sup> Coleridge appropriates Kant's "Reason" as a faculty of perception by which we can know the real or noumenal world. For Coleridge "facts of nature" are a product of the interaction between the perception of the world governed by the senses and the "reconciling and mediating power" of the Imagination. A symbol is the result in human language of the "imaginative fact" proclaiming itself. Whilst Coleridge would say that this "imaginative fact" can genuinely be experienced, Arnold would not. For Coleridge, the Scriptures and the "Book of Nature" are themselves a sort of "living metaphor", untainted by the empiricist world view. They are alive with a noumenal reality that Arnold would not accept. Whereas a symbol, for Arnold, can not be real in itself (it can only refer to something else, something empirically verifiable) for Coleridge a symbol is itself constitutive and productive of the reality to which it refers - it "always partakes of the reality it renders intelligible". The problem with Arnold's use of Coleridge is that he does not understand Coleridge's starting point for his enquiries. Coleridge already accepts the truth of Platonist/Christian ideas about the universe. Thus his phenomenology is a working out of an already accepted theological world view. This is why he can believe that Christianity is commensurate with "the highest philosophy". It is within these parameters that he undertakes to find out what is being said in the Scriptures and what one can thereby infer from one's own perception of reality.

Arnold's rather mischievous addition to Traill's description of Coleridge (Coleridge's supposed belief that for Christianity to be understood it is necessary to remove the reliance on miracles) is, in fact, far from the truth. In the Notebooks we see Coleridge approaching the problem of miracle in much the same way as he approaches symbolic language - that is, he regards miracles as explicative of the nature of reality; he believes that they have something to say about man's experience of the universe. This is the absolute opposite of Arnold's reductive method. Where Arnold seeks to reduce human language to its root to find its supposedly true and untainted objective reality, Coleridge's fascination is with what Arnold would call

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<sup>50</sup>See above, pp. 10-13.

the "accretion" itself. This is not to say that Coleridge credulously accepts every development as more true than the root from which it sprang. As he shows with respect to miracle, his is still a critical method:

What has hitherto been wanting and which if God grant me life, and the power of his grace I hope to supply is a Canon of Credibility a priori - a Code of Principles determining what Evidences are possible, what reasonable, and what desirable, as means to the assumed end - and in this Code I hope to set forth every possible sense in which the term, Miracle, can be used - and not least to make men have a distinct knowledge of their own meaning and belief - which I am persuaded not one in a thousand does at present.<sup>51</sup>

This brings home the point that Coleridge's method is as experiential as Arnold's. What differs is not their relative levels of credulity but their criteria of experientiality. For Coleridge everything is related to the power of the Imagination to encapsulate spiritual truths. Whilst such marvels as the raising of Lazarus are clearly doubtful in both authenticity and purpose,<sup>52</sup> the phenomenon of the gift of tongues on Pentecost is explicative of the perceived reality of the Holy Spirit. As in his evaluation of symbolic language, the presented phenomenon is an end in itself:

And first let it be understood that the solution of the Phaenomena, and their true character, are not the points in question. Let them be effects or results of the Imagination ...<sup>53</sup>

Questions of scientific authenticity - the very starting point for Arnold - do not apply in the attestation of such spiritual experiences: "May there not be a hidden contradiction in the Demand or Expectation, that a Miracle should be wholly objective?"<sup>54</sup> Instead of fruitlessly searching for objective standards by which to measure reality - and we saw that this search marred both Arnold's poetry and criticism - Coleridge accepts the fragmented and partial nature of our perception of the universe and actually makes of it a virtue. In effect he is saying that the attestation of miracle is no less than we might expect from mankind's recorded experience of life. As Stephen Prickett says, for Coleridge "religious belief involves living in a universe implicit with hidden meaning".<sup>55</sup> In this respect, miracle and symbol are both essential in themselves as explanation of the religious perception of life.

To go back to Livingston's assertion that Arnold restores the "myth as symbol", we can now see that the appropriation of Ricoeur's quotation as an explanation of the Arnoldian religious critical method is quite wrong. Arnold's bald rallying cry in the 1883 Preface to Literature and Dogma that miracles do not happen lacks the sophistication of both Ricoeur and the authority Arnold himself chooses as a critical ally, Coleridge. Arnold's method is more iconoclastic than either of these two critics. On his model Christianity may shed itself of those people who credulously accept everything in the Bible, including its mythology, as an indispensable basis for belief. On the other hand it would also dangerously undercut what is left of the Christian religion after the "myth as explanation" has been removed.

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<sup>51</sup>Notebook no. 39 (B.M. Ms. 47,534) p. 49. Quoted in Prickett - Romanticism and Religion, pp. 52-53. I have had to rely here on Professor Prickett's research, the quotations from Coleridge's notebooks here reproduced being as yet unpublished in any other form.

<sup>52</sup>The raising of Lazarus appears only in John's Gospel and thus has no support for authenticity from the synoptic Gospels. It is quite clearly a foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection. In Note Book no. 37 (B.M. Ms. 47,532) p. 6 (quoted in Prickett, p. 52) Coleridge implies that this and other similar miracles are not in themselves necessary constituents of faith:

Surely Common Sense might shew these Metaphysicians that the man who believes in [such miracles would] sustain no increase of Faith in the Supernatural character of our Saviour's Acts of Power and Mercy, tho' he had persuaded himself to believe all the additional wonders narrated in the Gospel of Nicodemus. - The opposite of Faith and its worst enemy is Credulity.

<sup>53</sup>No. 38 (B.M. Ms. 47,533) p. 4. (Quoted in Prickett, p. 53.)

<sup>54</sup>No. 39 (B.M. Ms. 47,534) p. 10. (Quoted in Prickett, p. 53.)

<sup>55</sup>Romanticism and Religion p.53.

### 3.2.4. Arnold and Jesus

In order finally to settle the question as to the success of the Arnoldian religious reconstruction we shall examine more briefly Arnold's handling of the figure of Jesus. Given the virtual disappearance of God from the Arnoldian scheme, the question of the character and status of Jesus carries a great deal of significance in our search for the "transcendence" that Livingston claims to find in Arnold's religious belief and work.

The question obviously carries a great deal of significance, too, for Arnold. In fact the figure of Jesus is all-important in the Arnoldian scheme. Whilst Literature and Dogma begins with discussion of God, God and the Bible concludes with a call to understand the "figure and influence of Jesus". This is indicative of the transformation in the religious focal point that Arnold is seeking to bring about. The very importance of Jesus for Arnold the nineteenth century empiricist is his perceived solidity; his verifiability. In Arnold's wish to base religion on the truly "experiential" there could be no better spokesman than the Jesus of the Gospels in his supposed recognition of the universal moral order and the future kingdom based on its principles.

The problem is, of course, the assumed verifiability of the man Jesus. It is interesting that Arnold spends much of God and the Bible seeking to refute what he sees as the dangerously iconoclastic criticism of the theologians of Tübingen university. Early on in God and the Bible Arnold quotes David Friedrich Strauss, perhaps the most controversial of the nineteenth century proponents of German "Higher Criticism". Then, in chapters four and five, Arnold refers directly and at length to F.C.Baur, the then leader of the Tübingen school. He criticises the German critics for having pet theories that are unable to stand upon reflection owing to their being based on "absurd inferences". The Tübingen critics, Arnold proclaims, lack "sound judgment and common sense" and have insufficient data and tact. His position here foreshadows the essentially defensive role that Arnold explicitly casts for himself ten years later in a "A Comment on Christmas":

I feel myself really in sympathy with the religious world far more than with its assailants - even with the religious world as it is at present.<sup>56</sup>

This is something of a change from the attitude of the self-confident provocateur of his earlier criticism and it is, I believe, an unconscious acknowledgement that the foundation on which he has built his religious reconstruction is crumbling. It is difficult to tell how much Arnold consciously believed this, but one can, I think, detect at least the beginnings of the note of a man under siege in his long and vigorous attack on the German critics in God and the Bible. There is something rather desperate in his critical appeal to national characteristics:

Sooner or later, however, these theories will have to confront the practical English sense of evidence, the plain judgment as to what is proved matter of fact and what is not ... All theories, the old and the new, will have to stand the ordeal of the Englishman's strong and strict sense for fact. We are much mistaken if it does

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<sup>56</sup>Arnold to the editor of the Contemporary Review on payment for "A Comment on Christmas". Cited in CPW 10:530.



not turn out that this ordeal makes great havoc among the vigorous and rigorous theories of German criticism concerning the Bible documents.

Arnold's challenge arises directly from a consideration of Baur's position on the fourth Gospel. It is the opinion of Baur that the Gospel attributed to John is not the direct history that it claims to be; that it is intended as an anti-Jewish conception of Christianity; that it has a dogmatic design and is profoundly calculated art of a Gnostic sort. "No sayings of Jesus are authentic which are recorded in the Fourth Gospel only", Arnold quotes Baur as saying. Arnold undertakes to disprove this by employing the Englishman's innate sense of what is fact and what is not.

Arnold's method in finding the original sayings or logia of Jesus is extremely questionable. As he had done with the Gospels in Literature and Dogma, he divides the sayings of Jesus from those of, in this instance, "John", under the assumption that those of Jesus are "over the head of his reporter". Whilst this may work on some occasions it does not on others. In the matter, for example, of the spiritualisation of the Resurrection in the fourth Gospel, Baur's interpretation - that "John" wrote this - causes Arnold some difficulty. Arnold wishes to attribute all spiritualising ideas to Jesus in contradistinction to the materialising ideas of his reporters. Baur is, in fact, much more likely to be correct. There is no evidence in the Old Testament that the Jews had ideas of a division between spirit and body. Thus the "internalised resurrection" appears to have arisen from Greek thought and can be attributed to "John" rather than Jesus. Somewhat later Arnold quotes "Paul" quoting Jesus in Acts on the belief that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Arnold suggests that it must be an original saying of Jesus because Paul's manner is so different. Paul, therefore, did not invent the saying. Again, this creates problems. The third Gospel writer, "Luke", is the writer of Acts. He therefore invented to some extent the sayings of Paul. Thus we have the supposed words of Paul quoting the supposed words of Jesus, words which, furthermore, are not found in the Gospels.

The problem is not, as we said before in connection with myth, that Arnold's exegesis is incorrect. It is that he has the most subjective and arbitrary critical principles in decisions pertaining to the character of Jesus. "Where the logia are suited to the character of Jesus, they come from Jesus" is his basic principle. This is a decision based entirely on the character of Jesus that he has drawn for himself. This Jesus is an abstraction, an inevitable result of removing the Absolute from God onto Jesus. Thus Jesus himself, in effect, becomes the power that makes for righteousness. Jesus, says Arnold, brought the Jews back to an understanding of the emotional power of righteousness. What had become social and national in character (righteousness) had now to become inward and personal. Jesus brought them back to that "abiding Power not of man's causing which makes for righteousness" that they had at one time had. Jesus, continues Arnold, had a "method" and a "secret". His method was a "great unceasing inward movement of attention and verification" in matters of conduct. To keep the commandments of God was to be inwardly pure - "to have the heart and thoughts in order as to certain matters". This method is allied to the secret by which it is

performed. His is a character of "mildness and sweetness". The "renouncement" and "inward appraisal" which Christ calls upon us to make is performed, in him, in a tone of "sweet reasonableness" and "exquisite, mild, winning felicity".

One can perhaps blame Arnold for not seeing that sweetness and mildness are hardly the terms to use in connection with the Jesus who drove the money-changers from the Temple, or who argued with the Scribes and Pharisees or, finally, went to an agonising death on the cross. It would be uncritical, however, to charge Arnold for not seeing the developments ahead in Christology. Certainly opinions about the character and status of Jesus have undergone profound changes in the century following Arnold. The century that began with Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer proclaiming that the original Jesus was no longer available to modern day Christianity has reached the position where leading theologians such as Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenburg have recovered that original message as, in their opinion, essential to Christian faith.<sup>57</sup> One can, however, censure a critic such as Livingston who, having knowledge of the fundamental changes in Christology (he admits that the moral interpretation of Christianity is now "out of favour")<sup>58</sup> persists in presenting the basic thrust of Arnold's argument as normative for Christianity. Whilst Livingston recognises that there is a central issue at stake in the question of what religious language is saying about religious experience (he has an entire chapter devoted to the "Status of Religious Language and Experience") it is clear that the critic simply accepts Arnold's fundamental premiss that religion is all about human conduct. Thus while Livingston makes the claim that religious language was not only useful for Arnold but "true" and that for Arnold such language

is not only a more adequate mode of expression, it is grounded in and refers to objects of our common human experience; it is referential and cognitive as well as evocative. It gives us knowledge of crucial aspects of human existence in the world ...<sup>59</sup>

the "knowledge" here given is, however, purely that of the (supposedly) empirically verifiable moral order. According to Arnold (and Livingston agrees here) the proof of the truth of this meaning of religion is readily available to human experience. "How", Arnold asks in Literature and Dogma, "are we to verify ... [the] ... "not ourselves"?" The answer Arnold gives is "by experience" - "as you verify that fire burns". It is no surprise that Arnold limits his religious experience in this analogy to what is empirically verifiable. As I hope I have shown, however, this interpretation of religious experience is limited by Arnold's

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<sup>57</sup>In his pioneer work on Jesus' eschatology Weiss claimed that Jesus' entire message could be reducible to his belief in an imminent judgmental end of the world. As opposed to then recent liberal ideas of Jesus as the proclaimer of a this-worldly moral order Weiss countered:

The Kingdom of God is [in Jesus' view] a radically superworldly entity which stands in diametric opposition to this world. The dogmatic religious-ethical application of this idea in more recent theology, an application which has completely stripped away the original eschatological-apocalyptic meaning of the idea, is unjustified.

(From Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God - English translation by Richard Hyde Hiery and David Larrimore Holland (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1971) (First German ed., 1892) p. 114.) As Moltmann suggests (Theology of Hope p. 38) this turns Jesus into "an apocalyptic fanatic". Pannenburg completely reverses this by saying that the eschatological message - that the future is in God's hands - is integral to Christianity: "This resounding motif of Jesus' message - the imminent Kingdom of God - must be recovered as a key to the whole of Christian theology." (Wolfhart Pannenburg - Theology and the Kingdom of God (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1969) p. 53.)

<sup>58</sup>Livingston, p. 138.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

"historical conditioning". His position is certainly not adequate as a description of religious experience as a whole and neither is it adequate for the present age in which scientific positivism has been shown to be much less secure in its "truth value" than was previously thought.

Ruth apRoberts' suggestions about the nature of religious language and experience certainly point in the right direction. As with Livingston, however, she is guilty of projecting onto Arnold an advanced understanding of the problem which he did not, in fact, have. The truth is that if we can appropriate for religious language as a whole what Arnold says about symbol in "A Comment on Christmas", such language is only important if the idea to which it does homage has "worth". The limitations of Arnold's conception of "worth" can be illustrated by a specific and important example - his attitude to Jesus' parables as explicative of the Kingdom of God. For Arnold, seeking to institute the moral absolute as the foundation stone of his scheme, the parables are secondary in importance to what he calls the "direct teaching" of Jesus:

Instructive and beautiful as the parables are, however, they have not the importance of the direct teaching of Jesus. But in his direct teaching we are on the surest ground in single sentences, which have their ineffaceable stamp.<sup>60</sup>

The immediately interesting thing here is that Arnold has been asking how we can be sure that we have the original words of Jesus in the Gospels. He shows a good critical sense in realising that stories such as the parables are likely to have been less embellished or invented than other parts of Jesus' message. Then, however, he changes tack. The "surest ground" becomes something other than the "clearest evidence". Instead it becomes an indication of the worth for Arnold of the particular part of the Gospel. The "single sentences", which are, in effect, what Arnold perceives as moral maxims, or rules of conduct, are only unforgettable because they fit Arnold's conception of the character of Jesus. Whilst this throws some doubt on to the authenticity of these pieces of moral advice (a question that Arnold does not consider) it also begs the question as to what the parables (which Arnold admits are the only truly recoverable part of Jesus' message) are about in terms of purpose and importance. "Instructive and beautiful" is really a dismissal through lack of knowledge on Arnold's part. If they had really been instructive he would have pursued them further. As for their supposedly "beautiful" nature, it is quite clear that such a word is totally inadequate to describe their contents. The truth is that, owing to his preconceptions about the character of Jesus and the nature of religion generally, Arnold is dismissing the parables as anachronisms that obscure the "true" message of Jesus.

I said earlier<sup>61</sup> that the modern understanding of metaphor as the essential mode of communication in religious matters was a vitally important issue in present-day theology. This recognition is, as we shall see, particularly important for an understanding of the parables whilst, in turn, the parables are vitally important for a true understanding of Jesus. It will therefore be necessary to review briefly this Christological issue in order to put Arnold's criticism of Jesus in its proper light.

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<sup>60</sup>Literature and Dogma chapter six.

<sup>61</sup>See above, p.88.

Scholars are agreed nowadays that the parables are the single most important source for an understanding of Jesus' message. "We are standing right before Jesus when reading his parables", the respected exegete Joachim Jeremias believes.<sup>62</sup> The importance of the parables in our discussion of religious language is that they are, as Eta Linnemann has observed, not primarily conveyors of information (as Arnold supposes them to be) at all. A parable is a "language event" by which the speaker tries to induce a profound change in the person addressed.<sup>63</sup> C.H.Dodd observes further that a parable is, at its simplest,

a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.<sup>64</sup>

This suggests further that the parables are, in a subtle sense, arguments. As Eta Linnemann points out, the parables of Jesus usually address situations in which the antagonists hold polar positions. The speaker of such a parable, by making the opponent regard the situation from an entirely different viewpoint, can give a wholly new understanding, building bridges across chasms of opposition that could never be crossed by what she calls "controversy dialogue".<sup>65</sup> The resulting decision, which the parable compels, may well concern not just superficial matters of opinion, but matters of profound existential orientation.<sup>66</sup>

This latter observation is important. It is clear from the synoptic Gospels that the majority of the parables speak of the coming of the Kingdom of God; indeed, the preaching of the Kingdom is the very centre of Jesus' message:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel". (Mark 1:14-15.)

Set at the very beginning of what scholars recognise to be the earliest Gospel, we have here a good indication of the dominant message of Christ. One of the most important questions to be addressed here is whether the kingdom spoken of is to be realised here and now, or whether it will be a future coming in the manner of Jewish apocalypse. No agreement has been reached amongst theologians as it is clear from the evidence in the Gospels that Jesus' own words are equivocal. The parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (Matt. 24:45-51, Lk. 12:44-46) or that of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-12) can be seen, for example, as Jesus' exhortation to watch for a future apocalyptic event - "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour". On the other hand, in many of his actions and sayings Jesus seems to be proclaiming that the kingdom is already here. Following the casting out of a demon from a dumb man, Jesus daringly proclaims: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Lk. 11:20)

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<sup>62</sup>Rediscovering the Parables (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1966) p. 10.

<sup>63</sup>Parables of Jesus, Introduction and Exposition (S.P.C.K., London, 1966) p. 30.

<sup>64</sup>The Parables of the Kingdom (Nisbet, London, 1935) p. 16.

<sup>65</sup>Linnemann, p. 21f.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

A number of American literary critics<sup>67</sup> have taken these latter "parabolic actions" or sayings as evidence that the theologians' approach needs a profound re-orientation. Where theology has been looking for the kingdom of God as a fact to be described as already here or to be expected in the future, literary critics point out that all of Jesus' parables, actions and sayings have a proclamatory nature. The word "if" in the above saying from Luke indicates that Jesus is not conveying information at all, he is proclaiming the inbreaking of the kingdom itself for whoever is willing to receive it. This demands in the listener the "profound existential orientation" suggested by Linnemann, in that Jesus' words never finally conceptualise the kingdom as a present or future state of affairs. What they do is instead challenge the hearer to accept the reality of both God's presence in the world and the reality of his plan of salvation. Jesus calls, in fact, for a radical approach to reality. In one sense it is obvious that the kingdom was not yet there. None of the apocalyptic happenings had occurred, the course of history continued, Palestine was still under Roman domination. To believe that God's reign was beginning was absurd. And yet Jesus proclaims the reality of the kingdom of God. That this proclamation is not a description of an empirically verifiable nature is clear from some of the extraordinary proverbial sayings of Jesus: "leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Lk. 9:60); "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39). If the kingdom was fact, there would be no need for these radical demands! In his proverbial sayings Jesus demands the combination of an attitude of faith towards the certainty of the future coming of the kingdom and an inbreaking of the kingdom in the present for anyone who has ears to hear.

This ties in with our earlier observations on the nature of metaphor, symbol and myth. In one sense, metaphor juxtaposes descriptions of reality that are radically discontinuous. They do not exist together in the present. Yet their coming together actually creates a new meaning. As apRoberts' says, "no one believes his love is a red rose, or really very like a red rose".<sup>68</sup> In describing the experience, however, the user of the metaphor suggests that it is only by such a paradox that his goal of embodying the reality he feels is there can be brought about. It should be clear now, why, as apRoberts says, metaphor must be "of the essence in the religious mode", since religion is obviously beset by the problem of attesting to realities that seem to be contradicted by appearances. As on the Coleridgean model it is only the "Imagination", that faculty that does not rely on the empirically verifiable observation of the senses but on intuition and inference, that can grasp "real" reality. By necessity it can only do this by the indirect means of metaphor, symbol and image.

Given this truth about religious language it is best to see the kingdom of God as symbol. On this reading Jesus' parables can be seen as extended metaphors, language-games which seek to bring about a new reality by compelling imaginative adherence in the listener. This is not the giving of specific ideas or

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<sup>67</sup>Such as Robert W. Funk, Dan Otto Via and John Dominic Crossan. See Norman Perrin - Jesus and the Kingdom of God (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1976).

<sup>68</sup>apRoberts, p. 216.

orders. As Amos Wilder says, we have gone beyond the idea of Jesus as a teacher who imparts moral rules for life:

Jesus' speech had the character not of instruction and ideas but of compelling imagination, of spell, of mythical shock and transformation.<sup>69</sup>

The extended metaphors express an attitude of faith, they do not demand a particular conceptual state of mind. This leaves the essential ambiguity of existence still open. The kingdom, then, remains a symbol because, as Norman Perrin says, its meaning can not be exhausted or fully expressed by any one referent.<sup>70</sup> By evoking the myth of God's powerful intervention, as Jesus' language of the kingdom does, the symbol points beyond itself to the ineffable mystery of the ultimate salvation that is the message at the very heart of the Christian faith.

It should be clear now that Arnold's reconstruction of Christianity is inadequate. Both his historical understanding of the roots of Judaism and his understanding of the personal role of Jesus are seriously flawed owing to his preconceptions as to the nature of religion generally. Given what we have discovered about the nature of Jesus' proclamation, the words of Arnold on the "religious consciousness of humanity", that it has produced in Christianity not ideas but imaginations, "and it is ideas, not imaginations which endure", must be seen to be radically opposed to the insights that have been developed by the majority of theologians and literary critics over the last century in the fields of Biblical exegesis and the nature of religious experience.

Throughout his work, in fact, we can see the same problems arising in each area - in his poetry, criticism and theology. As with his poetry, where the search for a ruling Idea and an objective vision caused him to fail to tap, to quote D.G. James, the "spiritual sources of Romanticism", so his theology, in resting on "ideas", fails to understand the real impulses behind Christianity and religion. As I have argued throughout my analysis the Coleridgean model of knowledge attained via the Imagination is a much more successful post-Enlightenment epistemology than is Arnold's attempt to fit poetry and religion into the empiricist scheme of reality. As a final assessment of Arnold's religious reconstruction I will appropriate James' phrase in his estimation of Arnold's poetry. His attempt to find a place for religion in his critical scheme is a failure owing to his "fluctuating, picturesque dismay" when faced with questions of spirituality.

### 3.2.5. Conclusion

And what of Arnold himself? We asked earlier the question of the adequacy or otherwise of Arnold's view of religious language (and therefore, religion) for himself. Does he believe, finally, that he has encapsulated, in his criticism, the religious object "as in itself it really is"?

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<sup>69</sup>See Perrin, p. 129.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

We said earlier that the change in tone in the writing of the religious works of the 1870s was a reflection of Arnold's personal need to "atone" for his sons' deaths and to fulfil the religious role his father had cast for him. Whilst this is certainly true there is, nevertheless, a parallel critical principle, running alongside this, that demands expression. In the Conclusion to Literature and Dogma, despite all that has been said previously about religion as morality, Arnold turns to what he calls "the other quarter" of life - art and science. The conception of God as righteousness meets, he says, only three-quarters of us:

For the total man, therefore, the truer conception of God is as "the Eternal Power, not ourselves, by which all things fulfil the law of their being;" by which, therefore we fulfil the law of our being so far as our being is aesthetic and intellective, as well as so far as it is moral.

Art and science, he says, have been misemployed by religion in the past, giving us "doggerel hymns" and "metaphysical speculations". Yet "as man makes progress" and our knowledge of art and science increases, these will become "stringent like rules of conduct and will invite the same sort of language in dealing with them". But for our time "the God of the Bible" is "the Eternal who makes for righteousness".

There could not be a clearer statement than this of Arnold's need to satisfy the demand within him that he pursue the manifesto of the German historicists to its end. Despite the undoubted element of personal seriousness and sincerity that has entered into his religious work, Arnold looks forward to a time when religion will be superseded by a humanist New Jerusalem. That the God that Arnold looks forward to proclaiming will be as scientifically verifiable as ever is evidenced by the fact that perfection in the knowledge of art and science "will invite the same sort of language" in dealing with them as "rules of conduct" do at present.

All this points to an inescapable conclusion - that on this model of progressive human development there is actually no need for religion. Arnold here underlines a problem with the entire liberal theological movement of the nineteenth century. The reason that theologians such as Karl Rahner (1904-84) saw a need to revive the roots of Christian tradition - as Moltmann says, by "stressing the meaning of the mystical dimension of the depths of Christian faith"<sup>71</sup> - was their perception that the Christian religion had been made redundant by the liberal theologians' attempts to compromise with post-Enlightenment norms of belief. Arnold is typical amongst nineteenth century religious apologists in his attempt to resurrect the Bible as the one thing that is really sure in religion. For Arnold this is particularly pressing as he sees it as a sort of midwife to his vision - a vital provider of the rules of conduct that will one day govern all human life. Where Arnold is unusually bold amongst Victorian religious apologists is in his implications that religion as he knows it will pass away.

Whilst this should confound any critical attempt such as Livingston's to recommend Arnold's religious reconstruction as a future blueprint for Christianity, it is also a questionable solution for Arnold himself. The personal need for religion, bred into his temperament by his father and furthered, in its aesthetic side,

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<sup>71</sup>Theology Today (SCM Press Ltd., 1988) p. 75.

by his affinity for poetry, does not actually wish to see Christianity pass away. This is the main impulse behind his frequent paeans to Catholic worship - such as in the conclusion to God and the Bible, where he claims that, just like Catholic architecture, Catholic worship must survive and prevail "because it is the worship which, in a sphere where poetry is permissible and natural, unites the most of the elements of poetry". The proviso here, however, underlines Arnold's problem. Arnold the apprehender of aesthetic realities can, finally, never prevail in the face of Arnold the intellectual progressivist. The division in Arnold between thought and feeling remains to the end. The problem for the latter incarnation of Arnold is that, under the law of complete relativity that continually dogs the empiricist, the future carries with it the unwelcome spectre of complete chaos. If even the Bible, as the one thing sure, is to pass away along with the rest of religion, then the question of authority rears its head. What authority is there for believing in the ultimate progression of human history? In a universe without God the optimism of Arnold the historical progressivist seems unfounded.

One comes back, in the end, to D.G. James' cry of "what might have been" had Arnold committed himself to "the Extreme" and the "spiritual sources of Romanticism". Sadly, Arnold the poet who wished for an "immense future" for poetry, was unable to rest with the merely provisional knowledge of reality that poetic language provides and at which religious worship is aimed. Poetry's answer to the question of existence (according to James, Keats' "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts") was the solution which Arnold the creator of the Scholar-Gipsy needed to embrace. His actual solution - historical progressivism in the name of what he perceives to be the "facts" of history - ends up, finally, by becoming less of a defence against the threat of anarchy than he supposed. Perhaps this can best be summed up by Arnold himself. Following God and the Bible's defence of the position he had marked out for himself in Literature and Dogma, Arnold turned to a subject that tested all his assumptions. In March, 1877, the Nineteenth Century ran an article by Arnold on Lord Falkland, the seventeenth century statesman who became a martyr to righteousness with his determination to hold fast to principle above political expediency. As John P. Farrell suggests in a perceptive article on the essay, the parallels between Falkland and Arnold are striking.<sup>72</sup> Falkland, says Arnold, was a hero because he "had rank, accomplishment, sweet temper, exquisite courtesy, liberality, magnanimity, superb courage, melancholy, misfortune, early death". "The ordering of this list", Farrell comments, "is revealing: it begins in the seventeenth century and it ends in the nineteenth century". Farrell's conclusion is that Arnold is casting a role for himself, the role of the tragic hero. As Arnold says, Falkland has "the charm" for the "imagination",

... of one who is and must be, in spite of the choicest gifts and graces, unfortunate, - of a man in the grasp of fatality ... He is surely and visibly touched by the finger of doom. And he knows it himself.

I think that Farrell is correct in his thesis. During the course of the essay Arnold rages bitterly against the small questions made great of the 1870s - of "simpletons" ranged against "savages" in religious questions of ritualism, disestablishment and the Burials Bill. Falkland's problems are paralleled by Arnold's own:

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<sup>72</sup>In Matthew Arnold - A Collection of Critical Essays - D.J. DeLaura (ed.) (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1973) pp. 99-118.



He and his friends, by their heroic and hopeless stand against the inadequate ideals dominant in their time, kept open their communications with the future, lived with the future. Their battle is ours too; ...

But perhaps the faith in inevitable progress is unfounded?:

To our English race, with its insularity, its profound faith in action, its contempt for dreamers and failers, inadequate ideas in life, manners, government, thought, religion, will always be a source of danger.

Arnold's conclusion itself seems to question the whole artificial ordering of reality undertaken in order to give intellectual solidity to life:

Slowly, very slowly, his ideal of lucidity of mind and largeness of temper conquers; but it conquers. In the end it will prevail; only we must have patience. The day will come when this nation shall be renewed by it. But, O lime-trees of Tew, and quiet Oxfordshire field-banks where the first violets are even now raising their heads! - how often, ere that day arrive for Englishmen, shall your renewal be seen!

Perhaps the Scholar-Gipsy himself is treading the field-banks of Falkland's estate at Tew. It is certainly an appropriate concluding epitaph to Arnold's work that his doubts over the inevitability of man's historical progress are answered by that other side of Arnold that finds salvation in poetry. One is left with the ironic vision of Arnold returning to the haunts of his Scholar-Gipsy:

Rapt, twirling in [his] hand a withered spray,  
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

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