In the Victorian age, the humanist and the scientist still spoke a common language. A logician could read contemporary poetry; a novelist could debate the latest development in evolutionary theory. The increasingly alienated discourses of the twentieth century have created an intellectual climate that mediates against an accurate reflection of the Victorians. Today, the literary critic and the historian of ideas often move in different worlds; the investigator of popular culture may be given short shrift by the more traditional historian of the period; science and literature share little common ground. This study attempts to bridge some of these distances, and to achieve a most Victorian ambition: to make it whole.

The pages that follow will depict a Victorian circle whose members are drawn from a diverse range of intellectual vocations: John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte; George Combe and Robert Chambers; Charles Bray and Harriet Martineau; George Henry Lewes and Herbert Spencer; George Eliot. They number among them respected scholars and inflamed ideologues, novelists and philosophers of science; men of letters, renegade industrialists, and bluestockings. They are not the Bloomsbury group or the Cambridge Platonists; neither a cozy biographical circle of intimate friends nor a united band of sec-
tarian disciples. Yet the biographical interrelationships among them are intricate and important. In some cases they were drawn together by friendship or love; in all cases they were bound by a shared set of beliefs. As their circle takes shape in these pages, it encompasses a vision distinctively Victorian. What ultimately unites these thinkers is a Victorian frame of mind.

George Eliot's heroine Dorothea Brooke finds herself amidst a prototypical Victorian cosmos: "Her world was in a state of convulsive change." Jerome Buckley opened his study of *The Victorian Temper* with the assertion that "the Victorian period achieved little of the stability we have learned to associate with a semi-mythical classical culture. It moved from form to form, and nothing stood. Almost every Victorian thesis produced its own antithesis, as a ceaseless dialectic worked out its designs." Although stability may have eluded the collective sensibility of what John Stuart Mill characterized as an "age of transition," individual Victorians of widely-varied persuasions strove arduously for the third term of that great nineteenth-century dialectic: synthesis. Transition points toward resolution. The "transitional period" of "weak convictions, paralysed intellects, and growing laxity of principle" will terminate in a "renovation . . . in the basis of . . . belief, leading to the evolution of some faith, whether religious or merely human, which they can really believe."

Mill's words are apt: all of these Victorians had faith in evolution, and all of them evolved new faiths—hardly orthodox, yet more than "merely human." Walter Houghton draws attention to the note of Evangelical fervor that can be heard in the new rationalist affirmations of faith: "Though for them the revelation was not religious but scientific, the same note of joy, part relief, part excited hope of discovering a new philosophy of man and the universe, is found among the rationalists." It could be said of the Victorians in this circle that the revelation was both religious and scientific. Intellectually, the men and women in my circle are the heirs of British empiricism, sons and daughters of Francis Bacon and John Locke,
eighteenth-century rationalism and association psychology. Yet they are fascinated by the unknowable, the intuitive, the transcendent. They did not consider the material and the spiritual irredeemably alienated. Although none were orthodox believers (and all were, in varying degrees, denounced as spiritually subversive by their critics), every member of this circle believed, ardently and unwaveringly, in a *via media*. For them, to explore the mechanisms of the human brain or the progressive development of the natural world was not to deny man's moral and spiritual nature. Although their efforts to conciliate science and faith are not always persuasive, they are unerringly sincere.

This intellectual temperament had its roots in romantic precursors of the preceding generation. In his survey of the transition *From Classic to Romantic*, Walter Jackson Bate argued that "nothing is more characteristic of British thought as a whole than its simultaneous confidence, not only in the empirically concrete, but also in an almost intuitional absorption of the experience of concrete phenomena, and in the exclusive working of that intuition through the empirically known." Bate's work provided a lively formulation of an intriguing paradox: the romantic emphasis on feeling and imagination was a product of the mechanistic eighteenth-century psychology of Locke and Hartley. M. H. Abrams elaborated on these truths in *The Mirror and the Lamp*: "[Although] almost all the important romantic theorists commented on the disparity between imagination and scientific perception. . . . It is important to realize . . . that by far the greater number refused to admit that there is any inherent and inescapable conflict between science and poetry. . . . The most common procedure was to regard these, when properly employed, as parallel and complementary ways of seeing." But typically, critics of the Victorian period have failed to recognize the continuity of this romantic sensibility into subsequent decades. Abrams himself belies the subtlety of his previous analysis in his desire for a tidy ending to both the romantic period and to his book: "It was only in the early Victorian period, when all discourse was
explicitly or tacitly thrown into the two exhaustive modes of imaginative and rational, expressive and assertive, that religion fell together with poetry in opposition to science.” In an essay on “Moral Problems and Moral Philosophy in the Victorian Period,” Jerome B. Schneewind defined these two modes in terms of the Utilitarian and Intuitionist schools of thought, and traced their conflict from Bentham’s *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781) to Henry Sidgwick’s *Methods of Ethics* (1874) and F. H. Bradley’s *Ethical Studies* (1876). Schneewind’s essay provided a useful corrective: it revealed that there was a native British intuitionist school in the Victorian period, previously neglected by most historians of ideas. Just as Bate and Abrams revised the stereotype of the emotive, romantic cloud-poet, so Schneewind refined too-exclusive notions of a Gradgrindian Victorian reasoning-machine. But Schneewind’s polarization of these two schools denies the nature of Bate’s characteristically British bedfellows. Similarly, a recent study of the period titles the collision of the utilitarian/rationalist/empiricist and the intuitionist/idealist/mystic an “omnipresent debate,” and concludes that any attempt at synthesis was doomed: “The premises are irreconcilable.”

But even a brief survey of some classic works of the Victorian period reveals persuasive and powerful urges toward the synthesis of opposing tendencies. John Henry Newman might at first seem an unlikely prototype for a Victorian synthesist. Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* chronicles the cardinal’s ill-fated search for a *via media*, in the course of which he was to “receive a shock which was to cast out of [his] imagination all middle courses and compromises forever.” His gradual journey across the slippery ice of church doctrine led him to the shore of dogmatic certitude, from which no return was possible and across which no bridge could be built. “There are two alternatives, the way to Rome and the way to Atheism.” Yet in his preface, Newman begs for “acquittal” from his fellow countrymen, on the charges of misplaced allegiance to mother Rome: “I had rather be an Englishman, (as in fact I am), than
belong to any other race under heaven." Newman's professed Englishness lends significant overtones to his later description of Hurrell Froude: "He had a keen insight into abstract truth; but he was an Englishman to the backbone in his severe adherence to the real and the concrete." Newman himself was given intuitions of the transcendent in abundance. But he must be an English Roman Catholic: "I determined to be guided, not by my imagination, but by my reason. . . . Had it not been for this severe resolve, I should have been a Catholic sooner than I was." Newman thus paradoxically reaches reason-defying dogma by a logically-argued and scrupulously-documented empirical record of that progress toward faith.

In the realm of fiction, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* also articulates thesis and antithesis. The world of "facts and calculations," in which Gradgrindian utilitarian philosophers "weigh and measure any parcel of human nature," stands in desolate alienation from the fantasies and hyperbolic heroics of Sleary's Horse-riding. The materialistic men of fact and the equestrian imaginists quite literally do not speak the same language: Gradgrind's grammiverous quadruped and E. W. B. Childers's "tight-Jeff" and "slack-Jeff" exist in different linguistic universes. Yet the feckless world of Sleary's, in which father deserts child, is hardly a desirable alternative to the rationalist rigidities that entrap the infant soul. Sissy Jupe leaves the circus and comes to live with the Gradgrinds. Her "happy children" will be nurtured with "imaginative graces and delights"—but they must also live "lives of machinery and reality."

The Victorian poet, too, sought synthesis in a world of antinomies. Alfred Tennyson himself insisted that *In Memoriam* incarnated a Victorian sensibility: "'T' is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him." The assertive optimism of the poem's "Prologue" (actually written last), "Believing where we cannot prove," is persistently undercut by the "wild and wandering cries" of the 131 lyrics that follow. Tennyson's affirmations are inextricably intertwined with his deepest doubts.
The contemporary ideas that dominate the poet's reflections are among the central intellectual issues of the Victorian period. Tennyson's religious quest for belief in immortality, prompted by Arthur Hallam's untimely death, seems in direct conflict with the new materialist psychology which would argue that the essence of human nature is not soul, but merely matter:

I trust I have not wasted breath:
   I think we are not wholly brain,
Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,
Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death;

Not only cunning casts in clay:
   Let Science prove we are, and then
What matter Science unto men,
At least to me? I would not stay.

Let him, the wiser man who springs
   Hereafter, up from childhood shape
His action like the greater ape,
But I was born to other things.

[Lyric 120]

The nebular hypothesis claimed that the earth was a product of "seeming-random forms" and "cyclic storms" (Lyric 118, ll. 9, 10) rather than divine fiat. Was man's appearance on the natural scene equally random? Tennyson's nightmares are haunted by "Nature, red in tooth and claw" (Lyric 56, l. 15). But ultimately it is evolution itself, translated into spiritual terms, that may provide the key to man's transcendence of the material:

Arise and fly
   The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

[Lyric 118, ll. 25–28]

Tennyson finds further resolution in poetic form. The abba In Memoriam stanza skilfully brackets and unites the "b's" of doubt with the "a's" of affirmation:
Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die,
And thou has made him: thou art just.
[Prologue, ll. 9–12]

Its elegant order and unerring constancy synthesizes the vast range of Tennyson's contrary ideas and emotions over time and space. The In Memoriam stanza is to Tennyson's poetry what Darwin's theory of natural selection was to nature: a deceptively simple monistic principle that unifies variety yet allows for infinite variation within that fundamental unity.

The Victorian thinkers in the pages to follow address themselves in prose to many of the same contemporary issues as Tennyson: the new materialist psychology; the evolutionary formation of the cosmos, in which man takes his place as a member of the animal kingdom in the great chain of being. Although in many other respects their interests were far-removed from those of Newman, Dickens, and Tennyson, they share—and indeed, epitomize—the Victorian frame of mind that seeks a synthesis of the empirical and the intuitive, head and heart. Newman had Catholic dogma; Dickens, the fantasy-making imagination; Tennyson, poetic form. Like them, the Victorians in my circle seek a monistic principle that will order the universe, yoke the multiplicitous particular with the numinous general.

Although they share many general concerns of the age, I believe that these Victorians can justly be called a "circle." What distinguishes them? They also share a common background and a common set of ideologies. Too often, historians of ideas are content to account for recurrent ideas by invoking a nebulous "in the air." The biographical portions of my study document the direct links by which ideas were transmitted among them. My intellectual history will document that those ideas share a common lineage as well.

In his classic History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Elie Halévy argued that Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism were the seminal forces of the Victorian age.
When Halévy asked, "Was Utilitarianism in 1815 a growing force, Evangelicalism on the verge of decline?" his answer provided him with "the fundamental paradox of English society": "the partial junction and combination of these two forces theoretically so hostile." This paradox became the thesis of his study: "The Methodist revival . . . was after all less unfavorable to the scientific spirit than would appear at first sight"; in fact, "the emotional piety of Evangelical religion and the hunger for experimental knowledge developed at the same time, with the same intensity, and in the same social milieu." Halévy's milieu is precisely that of this Victorian circle: the new industrial cities to the north of London, steeped in nonconformity—the England of provincial philanthropist George Combe, heir to Scotch Presbyterian Calvinism; of Herbert Spencer, offspring of the hosiery towns of the north Midlands, with an ancestry of Methodism and Quaker-Socinian rationalism; of George Eliot, who moved with relative ease from the Evangelical pieties of her girlhood to the Biblical rationalism and scientific enthusiasms of Charles Bray and his Coventry circle in the early 1840s. When they left the provinces for a broader intellectual arena, all carried with them the emotional fervor of that Evangelical heritage, combined with the utilitarian spirit.

Certain ideologies recur like leitmotifs throughout all their work: positivism, phrenology, the pre-Darwinian development hypothesis, necessitarianism, "force." It will be the central task of my study to delineate the common denominators among this panorama of systems. They occur abundantly on a literal level. For example, phrenology provided Auguste Comte with the epitome of his positivist goals: the application of scientific method to the realm of psychology, previously the province of philosophers and theologians. But in larger terms, I am interested in the shape of this Victorian universe, the shared cosmology implicit in positivism, necessitarianism, evolutionary theory.

The shape of my study, like that of the ideologies it investigates, will often of necessity be circular; for many of the ideas
I discuss were held simultaneously rather than discovered sequentially. The linear structure of this book must thus be to some extent an artificial one. The nine Victorians in this circle defy simple categorization. In many ways each of them addresses all of the major themes of the study. They will visit each other's chapters frequently. All were prolific writers; in most cases I limit myself to a representative major text within the historical period during which their common ideas came to fruition.

After introducing Coleridge's *Theory of Life* as a romantic prelude to central Victorian themes, I begin with the foundations, or methodological assumptions, shared by this group, as epitomized in Mill and Comte. I then trace two different applications of this methodology: in natural science (Combe's phrenology and Chambers's evolutionary theory); and in matters of belief, philosophical and religious (Bray's necessitarianism and Martineau's mesmerism). Lewes and Spencer are, as Spencer would have phrased it, the ultimate "synthetic philosophers"; within the distinctive terms of their shared interests, their work draws upon and shapes all of the ideas, explicit and implicit, in preceding chapters. My "Finale" is intended to suggest that the ideologies that animate abstract philosophical debate can be given vivid incarnation in fictional form. This Victorian frame of mind was most fortunate in having George Eliot as its literary genius.

8. Jerome B. Schneewind, "Moral Problems and Moral Philosophy in the Victorian Period," *Victorian Studies*, supplement to vol. 9 (1965), rpt. in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (Chicago, 1971), pp. 185-207. William Whewell and James Martineau are chief among the intuitionists. Significantly, Schneewind presents George Eliot as a Victorian who fails to fit comfortably into either category: "It is in her attempt to work out a satisfactory portrayal of human freedom that George Eliot comes closest to dealing in her novels with the conceptual tension between an Intuitionist attitude toward morality and a determinist attitude toward the universe" (p. 204). Schneewind argues that the synthesis of empiricism and intuitionism came to England via Germany in the 1870s, and that Eliot discovered it in reading Bradley and Sidgwick. My study will demonstrate many earlier, native models for her characteristic blend of intuitionist morality and utilitarian determinism.


MAKING IT WHOLE