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NATURE, MAN, AND HOW MAN SHOULD RELATE TO NATURE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S,
LAO-TZU'S, AND CHUANG-TZU'S VIEWS

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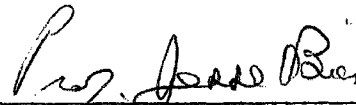
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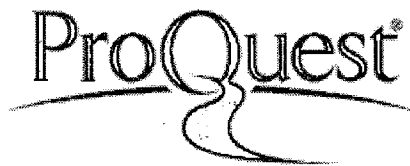


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Nature, Man, and How Man Should Relate to Nature: A Comparative Study of Herman Melville's, Lao-tzu's, and Chuang-tzu's Views (43 pp.)

Director: Dr. Jesse Bier



A comparison of Herman Melville's, Lao-tzu's, and Chuang-tzu's writings reveals similarities despite their temporal and spatial boundaries. Although each acknowledged that nature was a mysterious primal force and accepted man as a limited being entangled in the web of existence, they did not belittle humankind. They agreed that nature--full of beauty yet horror, destructive and benign--inappropriately attracts some men's individual projected hostilities. Too, nature's way is instructive. In order to rid man of pains in life caused by his anxiety and ambition to wrestle and conquer, he should gain self-knowledge in nature and model himself after it. To survive as a human being, man should be himself rather than strive to be what he is not. He should recognize his limitations as a mortal residing in the immortal universe and accept his limitations. Man's significance is not realized in conquering the exterior world but in overcoming his arrogant self.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Having been to sea and primitive islands in the sea, Melville had a close contact with nature and cherished a special feeling for it. "I have long thought that," said Melville, "Polynesia furnished a great deal of rich poetic material that has never been employed hitherto in works of fancy."¹ As a result, many of Melville's books were set in remote places far away from civilization or were about fascinating nonhuman creatures like *Moby Dick*. But for Melville "to employ nature," as Perry Miller put it, "is not to grow in the sun and rain, but to impose a design of the head upon it."² Impose a head, Melville did. In the book *Moby Dick* one reads not only a fascinating sea story, but one also encounters the genius of the author and his insight into nature,³ man, and how man should relate to nature.

According to Melville, nature is a mysterious, indifferent, and powerful force. Full knowledge of it is inaccessible to man. Man is a co-habitant of everything in nature; despite his self-celebrated abilities, he is but a part--only a part--that contributes to the wholeness of the universe. For the well-being of both man and nature, Melville believed that man should deflate his ego, respect nature, and coexist with it instead of wrestling with it.

This insight, which has made its force felt among Melville's readers, is not, however, the mental property of Melville only. It

is shared by many people in the West, as well as by those living in distant places, including Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu of a remote past and alien culture.

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu were Chinese ancient philosophers of the Taoist school. The former was an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). The latter was a disciple of Lao-tzu writing in the fourth century B.C. Their writings, *Tao Te Ching* (known also as *The Classic of Tao and Its Virtue* or *Lao-tzu*) and *The Book of Chuang-tzu*, are central texts of Taoist philosophy, source books that have been a lasting formative influence on Chinese thought.

From a close study of the three, there emerges an amazing resemblance between Melville's, Lao-tzu's, and Chuang-tzu's views on nature, man, and how man should relate to nature. It is not, however, the intention of this study to trace the influence of Oriental thought on Melville. It merely suggests that Melville's insight is shared by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. Chapter 2, therefore, compares Melville's Lao-tzu's, and Chuang-tzu's views on nature. Chapter 3 compares their views on man in regard to nature. Chapter 4 attempts to compare their views on how man should relate to nature. Chapter 5 is a conclusion.

ENDNOTES

¹Perry Miller, "Melville and Transcendentalism," in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 187.

²*Ibid.*

³When speaking of nature, people may take the meaning as ranging from the essential character or constitution of a thing to the entire physical universe with man a part who contributes to the whole of it. Nature also signifies the physical world that is seen set apart from human existence--mountains, rivers, the sky, seas, etc. Nature herein is the latter interpretation.

Chapter 2

NATURE OF NATURE

Throughout the ages, people cutting across the boundaries of countries and cultures have observed the natural world in an attempt, as Joseph Needham put it,

to gain that peace of mind which comes from having formulated a theory or hypothesis, however provincial, about the terrifying manifestations of the natural world surrounding and penetrating the frail structure of human society.¹

Yet, although they have observed the same physical world, they often have arrived at different conclusions, which basically fall into two categories. One is rational: the physical world is seen as nothing more than a collection of plants, animals, seas, plains, etc., which is inferior and often hostile to man. The other is romantic: nature is more of a spiritual entity, a haven for good and man's retreat from the evil of civilization.

Melville, with years of sea experience behind him, could not go along with either extreme. He had a strong doubt about the conviction inherited in both views that nature is an understandable object. Nature, presented in *Moby Dick*, assumed an aspect of a mysterious force beyond human comprehension. The whale, Moby Dick, had an unusual appearance: an "uncommon bulk," "peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead," "deformed lower jaw," and "a pyramidical white hump."² The rest of his body was

streaked and spotted and marbled with the same shrouded hue . . . when seen gliding at high noon through a dark blue sea, leaving a milky-way wake of creamy foam, all sprangled with golden gleaming.³

What was more extraordinary about Moby Dick was his behavior. The whale was reported as being encountered "in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time."⁴ He always managed to escape alive after "repeated, intrepid assaults."⁵

Though grooves of spears should be planted in his flanks, he would still swim away unharmed; or if indeed he should ever be made to spout thick blood, such a sight would be a ghastly deception; for again in unensanguined billows hundreds of leagues away, his unsullied jet would once more be seen.⁶

These descriptions about the appearance and behavior of Moby Dick veiled the whale with enormous mystery and power.

Melville further made his point through Ishmael's meditation on the dazzling whiteness of the whale. The color white is so baffling that it holds different meanings at different times for different people. It is the emblem of innocence, honor, beauty, and purity. It also conveys horror. White strikes awe and fear in some as they gaze across the white wastes of a prairie covered with snow and ice or at the white foaming sea hurled upon a rocky coast by a frightful storm. It also is inspiring, for it might mean supernaturalism. No one can provide a definite meaning.

Despite man's belief in his ability to know and his effort to grasp the unknown, Melville stressed that the full knowledge of nature, symbolized by the whale, was inaccessible. Ishmael said,

For you see no one point precisely; not one distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth, no face; he has none, proper; nothing but that one broad firmament of a forehead, pleated with riddles.⁷

Yet, tormented by the desire to know, time and again Ishmael set out to examine the whale. In Chapters 74, 75, 76, and 79, pages are devoted to the examination of Moby Dick's head only to conclude that

physiology, like every other human science, is but a passing fable. If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I but put the brow before you. Read it if you can.⁸

If Ishmael could not read the Chaldee of the whale's brow, how could he read the mystery of the whole whale?

The mystery of nature and the inaccessibility of it to human rational understanding also characterized Lao-tzu's and Chuang-tzu's views of nature. To take Chuang-tzu's view first in this instance, in his book one sees that he was amazed and fascinated by nature and, thus, presented his readers with a long passage of questions.

Does heaven turn? Does the earth sit still? Do the sun and moon compete for a place to shine? Who masterminds all this? Who pulls all the strings? Who, resting inactive himself, gives the push that makes it go this way? I wonder, is there some mechanism that works it and won't let it stop? I wonder if it just rolls and turns and can't bring itself to a halt. Do the clouds make rain, or does rain make clouds? Who put them up? Who showers them down like this? Who, resting inactive himself, stirs up all this lascivious joy? The winds rise in the north, blowing now west, now east, whirling up to wander on high. Whose breaths and exhalations are they? Who, resting inactive himself, huffs and puffs them about like this?⁹

Chuang-tzu could not give any direct answers to these questions.

Later in the book, though, Chuang-tzu told the reader of his observation about the mysterious quality of nature.

Of their coming there is no trace. In their departure there is no goal. No entrance gate, no dwelling-house, they pass this way and that, as though at the meeting of cross-roads.¹⁰

Limited in time and space as human beings are, their intellect is simply inadequate or useless in probing into that mystery of the flux of things in nature. "Man's intellect, however keen," Chuang-tzu predicted, "face to face with the countless evolution of things, their death and birth, their squareness and roundness, can never reach the root."¹¹

Lao-tzu, however, tried to come up with some answers to those questions that nature put to man. In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu suggested that everything in the universe was brought into existence and governed by a mysterious nonbeing which he called Tao.¹²

The Tao gives birth to it
 The virtue [of the Tao] reared it
 Things [within] endowed it with form,
 Influence [without] brought it to its perfection.¹³

The Tao perceived by Lao-tzu was such an encompassing force that it resided in the biggest and the smallest of things.

The Supreme Tao, how it floods in every direction!
 This way and that, there is no place where it does not go.
 All things look to it for life, and it refuses none of them;
 Yet when its work is accomplished, it possesses nothing.¹⁴

Yet the important characteristic of Tao was not its manifestation but its subtlety.

We look at it and do not see it;
 Its name is The Invisible.
 We listen to it and do not hear it:
 Its name is The Inaudible.
 We touch it and do not find it;
 Its name is The Subtle [formless].
 These three cannot be further inquired into;
 And hence merge into one.
 Going high, it is not bright, and coming down low, it is not dark.
 Infinite and boundless, it cannot be given any name;
 It reverts to nothingness.¹⁵

As a result, at the beginning of *Tao Te Ching*, which ironically was dedicated to describing the indescribable Tao, Lao-tzu told the reader that the subtlety and mystery of nature was not accessible to man's rational or discursive intellect: "The Tao that can be told of/ Is not the constant Tao."¹⁶

Embedded in this view of nature was the belief that no discrete things exist in and of themselves without regard to their changing environment; within this total environment, what are called things are merely inseparable and constantly changing aspects. In that sense, things do not exist. Then what is there to be known? Only Tao is there, according to Taoists, but it does not have impact on the senses from which one conventionally gathers knowledge.

Chuang-tzu said,

The Tao cannot be heard; what is heard is not it. The Tao cannot be seen; what is seen is not it. The Tao cannot be talked about; what is talked about is not it. [Tao is not even really its name;] there is no name that truly corresponds to the Tao.¹⁷

How can we know?

Melville, in presenting the mystery of nature, described its horror and destructiveness. Early in the book one is told that Ishmael already encountered many deaths caused by nature: in a Whaleman's Chapel, which Ishmael attended before he left for sea, one tablet read that a man "was lost overboard," another tablet indicated that five sailors died while they were "towed out of sight by a whale," and still another said that a captain was "killed by a sperm whale."¹⁸ Later, the reader is informed that Moby Dick

reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field. [And the assaults were] not restricted to sprained wrists and ankles, broken limbs, or devouring amputations--but fatal to the last degree of fatality.¹⁹

At the beginning of the book Ishmael was a romantic, full of fascination and illusion about nature. He related that he was "tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote," and loved to "sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts."²⁰ He was especially fascinated by the great whale and confessed that the "portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity."²¹ It was this yearning for wildness and things unknown that impelled him to forsake a civilized life in New York and head for the sea.

What Ishmael later found out about nature was all too appalling. "Consider," he said, "the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began."²² The cannibalism behind the deceptive facade of the beauty of nature was vividly depicted in the passage about the carcass of a whale that was cut loose and left astern.

Beneath the unclouded and mild azure sky, upon the fair face of the pleasant sea, wafted by the joyous breezes [there flowed this carcass of the whale], the water round it torn and splashed by the insatiate sharks and the air above vexed with rapacious flights of screaming fowls, whose beaks are like so many insulting poniards in the whale . . .²³

Ishmael could not help lamenting over the vulturism of the earth that he had unexpectedly discovered.

There's the most doleful and mocking funeral! The sea vultures all in pious mourning, the air-sharks all punctilious in black or speckled. In life but few of them would have helped the whale, I ween, if peradventure he had needed it; but upon the banquet of his funeral they most piously do pounce. Oh, horrible vulturism of earth from which not the mightiest whale is free.²⁴

After all his horrible experience in the sea, including the sinking of the ship on which he hoped to sail to far away places, Ishmael found himself having to cling to anything that might keep him from drowning in the sea and help him return to the place from which he tried to escape.

Although he perceived the disaster that nature brings to man, Melville refused to jump to the conclusion that nature is hostile to man. Moby Dick never purposely chased and hurt until he was chased and threatened. On the third day of the encounter between Pequod and Moby Dick, the latter did not seem to show any intent to attack his chaser, Pequod. "Steadily swimming forward, [the whale seemed] only intent upon pursuing his own straight path in the sea."²⁵ Seeing this, the good-sensed Starbuck said to Ahab, "See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him."²⁶ The whale's action of "suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him [and] reaping away Ahab's leg"²⁷ was not based upon his hostility toward man but was his "blind instinct,"²⁸ or awkwardness," as the physician aboard the Samuel Enderby put it when he tried to dissuade Ahab from his conviction about the hostility and malice of Moby Dick.

Do you know, gentlemen, that the digestive organs of the whale are so inscrutably constructed by Divine Providence, that it is quite impossible for him to completely digest even a man's arm? And he knows it too. So that what you take for the White Whale's malice is only his awkwardness."²⁹

Throughout the book, nature is portrayed by Melville as neutral and unpurposeful in terms of human values and purposes. Since it does not concern itself with the well-being of man, the malevolence or benevolence man sees in nature is a projection of his own feelings.

This view is suggested by the different attitudes adopted by two victims of Moby Dick. Ahab lost a leg to Moby Dick and ever after hated the whale because he believed that Moby Dick took the leg maliciously. Ahab attributed his misfortune to Moby Dick and projected hostility toward the whale.

He tasks me; heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing in it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.³⁰

The second victim, Captain Boomer, who also lost a limb in a confrontation with the whale, did not bear much of a grudge against the creature as Ahab. He willingly accepted his limitation and the strength of Moby Dick. "He's welcome to the arm he has, since I can't help it," Boomer said, and advised Ahab that "Moby Dick is best let alone."³¹

Nature, as viewed by Lao-tzu, registers a quality similar to that seen by Melville--purposeless and indifferent. In Chapter 5 of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu said that nature was "not humane [bu jen], it treats the creature like sacrificial straw-dogs."³² The term *not humane* sounds provocative and extremely negative; but, as Wing-Tsit Chan suggested, it merely was "Lao-tzu's emphatic way of opposing the Confucious doctrine of humanity and righteousness."³³ What the term really means is that nature is impartial, has no favorites, and is not humane in a deliberate or artificial way. Lao-tzu's statement was later clarified by Chuang-tzu in his statement about nature benefitting all without conscious kindness because it destroys without malice.

Ah! My Master, my Master! He trims down the created things and does not account it injustice. He causes all created things to thrive and does not account it kindness. Dating back further

than the remotest antiquity, he does not account himself old. Covering heaven, supporting earth, and fashioning the various forms of things, he does not account himself skilled.³⁴

The hostility or cruelty of nature is not, therefore, the essence of nature but man's projection of his hostility. Man, in striving for things inordinately desired, feels hostility toward anything that happens to pose any difficulty in his endeavor. He looks upon natural phenomena, such as floods, earthquakes, and storms, as nature's hostilities toward man. He resembles the biased Ahab.

In summation, the American and the Chinese are agreed that nature is fundamentally mysterious and unknowable to man, at least in rational and discursive modes. It is, furthermore, indifferent and beyond good and evil, or is both destructive and benign, and inappropriately attracts some men's individual projected hostilities.

ENDNOTES

¹Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. II, *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 63.

²Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent, eds., *Moby Dick* or *The Whale* by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, 1952), miscellaneous phrases. Hereinafter, the citation in this and subsequent chapters is listed as Melville.

³*Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁵*Ibid.*:

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Lin Yu-tang, ed., *The Wisdom of Lao-tzu* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 146.

¹⁰Gerbert A. Giles, ed./tr., *Chuang-tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 213.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹²*Tao* is an important term in Chinese thought. Its significance can be grasped only by seeing its operation in the context. Perhaps *soul* is the best analogy. Since translations often may result in distortion, I prefer to leave it in transliterated form, as many sinologists have done.

¹³Wu Jing-yu, ed., *Tao Te Ching* by Lao-tzu (Gaoxiang: Taizhong Publishing House, 1974), ch. 51. Note: this and all quotations from Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching* are referenced by chapter. The translations are from various sources with some personal modifications according to my understanding of the original text. For the major English sources, please refer to the Bibliography. Hereinafter, all citations in this and subsequent chapters are listed as Lao-tzu.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, ch. 34.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, ch. 14.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, ch. 1.

¹⁷Giles, *op cit.*, p. 213.

¹⁸Melville, *op cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, p. 274.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 561.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 393.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 162.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 439.

³²Lao-tzu, *op cit.*, ch. 5.

³³Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in the Chinese Philosophy*
(Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 142.

³⁴Lin Yu-tang, *op cit.*, p. 66.

Chapter 3

STATUS OF MAN IN REGARD TO NATURE

Until recently the prevailing Western tradition has put man in a special position which separates and distinguishes him from the rest in the universe. According to Christian tradition, man was co-created by God with everything else in the world and in the image of God. Across time, Christian theologians have focused more upon the image of God in man than upon man's co-creation with other beings in the world. This emphasis has resulted in uplifting man above everything else and in the conviction that man is a superior inhabitant and central figure in the universe. In Greek classical thought the conviction that man stands in a special position in regard to other beings in the universe is no less strong.

Melville defied this anthropocentrism and superiority of man. In his vision, man was far less significant than he would like to admit. When this vision was translated into art form in *Moby Dick*, the huge whale became the title character instead of heroic man. To make his point, Melville not only devoted a great number of pages to a description of the whale, but he also often deliberately interrupted the on-going human drama to present factual accounts of the whale from almost every aspect: "biological, sociological, phrenological, paleontological, historical, anatomical, and economical."¹ These cetological passages and chapters used to baffle many readers and

irritate not a few. They were major factors in retarding the reputation of the book because they were considered digressions by the conventional reading public. Yet Wilson O. Clough pointed out, "When Melville wrote Hawthorne that *Moby Dick* was a 'wicked book,' he knew well that such a book could never rest in the conventional pattern."²

Breaking away from the conventions, Melville used cetological passages as an artistic way of rendering his theme. In presenting these passages as and where they are, Melville implied that, besides human beings, there are other creatures in the world that exist, each on their own terms, sharing the same world with man yet totally ignoring man's claim on his superiority. Whether man likes it or not, he is but one of many organisms on the vast stage of the universe and he plays but one part in the on-going drama of existence.

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu did not believe in anthropocentrism either. For them man, like everything else in the universe, was a part--only a part that constitutes the wholeness of the universe. According to the Taoist genesis of things, everything in the world occurred simultaneously. "The universe and I came into being together," said Chuang-tzu. All grew from germs through various stages of life--from small to big, young to old, and return to small and young again.

All things spring from germs. Under many diverse forms these things are ever being reproduced. Round and round, like a wheel, no part of which is more the starting-point than any other.³

Tao has embraced and combined them into unity. Thus Chuang-tzu proclaimed, "I, and everything out there, are one."⁴

Within this unity, this oneness, Taoists see no discrimination of things. That is, they do not acknowledge that the tip of an autumn spikelet is small, a mountain big, and a child who dies in infancy has lived too short a life. Chuang-tzu said that

nothing under the canopy of heaven is greater than the tip of an autumn spikelet. A vast mountain is a small thing. Neither is there any age greater than that of a child cut off in infancy.⁵

Chuang-tzu thereby not only denied any differentiation of things, but he also disposed man as the measure of things. Since all things are one and there is no real difference between them, the difference man sees between himself and other creatures and the superiority he believes in himself does not exist in reality. It is a mere fabrication of his mind.

The view that man is a unique creature also is backed up by the belief that he possesses faculties that have unique quality and distinguish him from others. For example, man has language ability and its power was fully recognized when Mallarme noted that everything in the world exists to eventually culminate in a book.

To Melville, however, language did not always deliver. The etymological account of the word *whale* preceding the narrative proper of the book suggests the inadequacy of language to present a clear idea of the whale. Melville accentuated his point in the introduction to the whaling extracts by reminding the reader that no matter how "authentic" the accounts about the whale and whaling might seem, the reader must not take them for "veritable gospel cetology."⁶ In the chapter, "The Tail," Ishmael deplored his inability to express in words even the tail of the whale.

One of the bottomless profundities the gigantic tail seems spasmodically snatching at the highest heaven. So in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting forth his tormented colossal claw from the flame Baltic of Hell. . . . The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it.⁷

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are especially noted for their distrust of language. "The Tao that can be told is not the constant Tao."⁸ Normally, when one manages to generalize, classify, and formulate an object or an event with words and present it to others in the same manner, one claims that one knows. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu could not, however, go along with this idea. They believed that the generalization, classification, and formulation of experience in words resulted in restriction or even distortion.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the universe perceived by Taoists is one in constant flux: "things are born and die, . . . every end is followed by a new beginning [and the existence of things is] like a galloping horse."⁹ There never is a moment when things are not in a process of change. In the scheme of this ever-changing and on-going universe, everything is *this* and *that* at the same time. No language can correspond to it. What characterizes language is that it is arranged in accordance with the system of mutually exclusive alternatives. When it is said something is *this*, the possibility of it being *that* is excluded. That is why Lao-tzu said, "He who knows does not speak;/ He who speaks does not know."¹⁰

Chuang-tzu's distrust of language was expressed when he tried to explain the indifferenciability of things.

If there was a beginning, then there was a time before that beginning. And a time before the time which was before the time of that beginning. If there was existence, there must have been

nonexistence. And if there was a time when nothing existed, then there must have been a time before that--when even nothing did not exist. Suddenly, when nothing came into existence, could one really say whether it belongs to the category of existence or of nonexistence? Even the very words I have just now uttered--I cannot say whether they have really been uttered or not.¹¹

Besides, what language delivers often is human perception which, according to Melville, is extremely inadequate and relative. Ishmael went to sea to see the world, with a belief in his perceptive capability. He soon realized his inadequacy before the experienced sea-goer, Captain Peleg: "Now then, thou not only wantest to go a whaling, to find out by experience what whaling is, but ye also want to go in order to see the world?" Peleg confirmed Ishmael's intent, then told him, "Well, then just step forward there, and take a peep over the weather bow, and then back to me and tell me what ye see there." Ishmael, as directed, glanced over the weather bow, and perceived in that open ocean that "the prospect was unlimited, but extremely monotonous and forbidding; not the slightest variety I could see." When Peleg asked about what Ishmael had seen, the latter confessed, "Not much, nothing but water."¹²

As to the relativity of human perception, the clue is in Chapter 99, entitled "The Doubloon," where the crew of Pequod all looked at a doubloon and each saw a different thing in it. The proud Ahab made out "three peaks as proud as Lucifer,"¹³ and saw that they represented his will to dominate and succeed in his mission. The religious Starbuck saw in the doubloon three "heaven-abiding peaks that almost seemed the Trinity."¹⁴ For the prosaic Flask, who could not see "what's all this staring been about,"¹⁵ the coin stood only

for so many cigars that he could buy. The point was further stressed in Pip's gibbering, "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look."¹⁶ Although the object (the coin) remained the same, as W. E. Sedgwick suggested, and the process or verb (look) remained the same, yet the one change in the subject of the verb made the whole meaning different.

What compounds the problem is that things often are not what they appear to be. Queequeg seemed vicious to Ishmael in their first encounter, yet later proved to be a most kind and dependable friend. The sea looked calm and beautiful, but "beneath the loveliest tints of azure [was] the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began."¹⁷ So Melville suggested that what one perceived often was "but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without."¹⁸

The inadequacy and relativity of human perception are themes in Lao-tzu's and Chuang-tzu's works. For them, perception was far from enough to grasp the "full feel of things." "What can be seen by seeing is forms and colors," Chuang-tzu said, but "forms and colors are not the adequate means to grasp the full feel of things."¹⁹

When Melville pointed out that different people viewing the same object each might see different things, Chuang-tzu brought to the reader's attention the relativity and subjectivity of human perception in an account of his argument with his friend, Hui-tzu. One day Chuang-tzu and Hui-tzu were taking a leisurely walk along Hao River. They came onto a bridge, when Chuang-tzu observed,

"See how the minnows are darting about! That is the pleasure of fishes."
 "You not being a fish yourself," said Hui-tzu, "how can you possibly know in what consists the pleasure of fishes?" Chuang-tzu retorted, "And you not being I, how can you know that I do not know?" "If I, not being you, cannot know what you know," urged Hui-tzu, "it follows that you, not being a fish, cannot know in what consists the pleasure of fishes." "Let's go back to your original question," said Chuang-tzu. "You asked me how I knew in what consists the pleasure of fishes. Your very question shows that you knew I knew." He went on telling his friend, "I knew it from my own feeling on this bridge."²⁰

Another characteristic of man that has been considered one of his remarkably distinguishing traits from the rest of the creatures in the world is human will. In Melville's *Moby Dick*, however, it registered destruction or, at best, futility. As is seen, one of Ahab's significant qualities was that he had an indomitable will. Ishmael observed that in Ahab's first appearance to the crew, "there was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsunderable wilfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance."²¹ He was determined to be captain of his fate and triumphant over Moby Dick. "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do."²² Wilful, once he set his mind on something, nothing could stop him. To chase his attacker "over all sides of earth till he spots black blood and fins out,"²³ Ahab left his family and ignored his duty to his shipowner and the obligation to his crew. As a father, he could not be moved by the plea of another father to help save his son from the sea.

For Ahab, everything had to make way for his inflexible purpose--to destroy the huge whale. If "envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them," he said, "but first I pass."²⁴ No event or God can deter him. Ahab challenged,

No, ye've knocked me down, and I am up again, . . . Come, Ahab's compliments to ye; come and see if you can swerve me. . . . Swerve me? The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges through the rifle hearts of mountains, under torrents' bed unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way.²⁵

As Ahab came close to his destiny with Moby Dick, he finally realized the wilfulness that long had resided in him.

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much so dare?²⁶

Ahab also recognized what had been sacrificed to accommodate his will. He told Starbuck that he had for forty years "forsaken the peaceful land to make war on the horrors of the deep." But what he had gotten out of it was "the desolation of solitude." Worse yet, to chase Moby Dick, he deserted his newly wedded "young girl-wife," "leaving but one dent in [his] marriage pillow."²⁷ Nevertheless, even in his last moment Ahab was as wilful as he always had been. "Towards thee," Ahab spoke his towering determination, "I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee."²⁸

Nature, however, did not acknowledge human will. Ahab later found that, instead of being captain of his fate, he often was "the fate's lieutenant [acting] under orders."²⁹ The unyielding will of

Ahab did not help him in any way. It took him halfway round the world in his insane pursuit and, finally, to his death.

In the scheme of Lao-tzu's and Chuang-tzu's thought, human will has no place. They believed that everything has its own inner nature, whether heavy or light, wet or dry; man should not interfere. When things can be done, do them; otherwise, don't force anything. Balance in life is lost when will is imposed on others and destruction results when one refuses to stop trying. Lao-tzu spoke a warning to wilful people.

To know harmony is to be in accord with the eternal,
 And to know eternity is called discerning.
 But to improve life upon life is called an ill omen,
 To let go of the emotion through impulse is called assertiveness.
 For things are after reaching their prime;
 That [assertiveness] would be against Tao.
 And he who is against Tao perishes young.³⁰

What is more, Taoists believe that the movement of Tao is cyclic. "It moves away; it reaches its apogee; it comes back."³¹ "To return to one's original state is the universal law."³² Since everything will make a cyclical movement and return to where it starts, Lao-tzu saw even less sense in wilful trying. "Woe to him who wilfully innovates/ While ignorant of the constant [the cyclic movement of the law of the universe]."³³ Lao-tzu therefore preached absence of will--the Void. When man is purified of all desire and will to be what he cannot and do what he is not capable of, he is in harmony with the universe and one with Tao. The virtue of the absence of will which Lao-tzu called the Void is illustrated in the following passage:

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
 But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness
 of the wheel depends.

We turn clay to make a vessel;
 But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness
 of the vessel depends.

.....
 Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize
 the usefulness of what is not.³⁴

Inherent in Melville's, Lao-tzu's, and Chuang-tzu's recognition
 of the inadequacy of language and perception, and futility of will, is
 the acceptance of man as limited and the rejection of viewing man as a
 superior being. From this comes the call for a sensible approach to
 nature, the topic of the next chapter.

ENDNOTES

¹Melville, as noted in Chapter 2 Endnotes, p. 365.

²Wilson O. Clough, *The Necessary Earth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 129.

³Herbert A. Giles, ed./tr., *Chuang-tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 41.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶Melville, *op cit.*, p. XXXIX.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁸Lao-tzu, as noted in Chapter 2 Endnotes, ch. 1.

⁹Giles, *op cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁰Lao-tzu, *op cit.*, ch. 56.

¹¹Giles, *op cit.*, p. 41.

¹²Melville, *op cit.*, p. 72.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 429.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 430.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁹Chuang-tzu, *Chuang-tzu Ji-Shi* (Taipei: Ho Lo, 1974), p. 489.

²⁰Giles, *op cit.*, p. 171.

²¹Melville, *op cit.*, pp. 121-122.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 166.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 166.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 536.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 534.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 565.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Lao-tzu, *op cit.*, ch. 55.

³¹*Ibid.*, ch. 25.

³²*Ibid.*, ch. 16.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, ch. 11.

Chapter 4

NOW MAN SHOULD RELATE TO NATURE

As mentioned earlier, man for years has seen himself as separated and superior among millions of things in the universe. His ego lays claim to the possibility of rational understanding and, therefore, to potentially controlling and dominating his surroundings. Western man has accepted to the letter, as suggested by many historians,¹ the Biblical teaching that God gave man "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."² Consequently, for most of Western history, man has wrestled with nature to assert his supposed dominant position.³

Melville denounced that prevailing view of man's superior position; he saw the deep involvement man has with nature and the dependence from which he cannot free himself no matter how much modern science has promised. This concept of man's involvement and dependence on nature is implied in Melville's description of the benefits whales give to man. The whale has provided man with nourishment, fragrance, and light. For many men the whale's flesh and spermaceti have served as food. The substance emitted from a sick whale's abdomen can be a precious fragrance for human beings. Also, the best candles are made from whale spermaceti and the best lamps are lighted with sperm oil.

"Illumination, not darkness and terror," noted Newton Arvin, "is Moby Dick's great boon to humanity."⁴

Fully realizing this involvement and dependence, as well as the power of nature, Melville advocated that man should respect nature and seek coexistence with it instead of wrestling with it. Melville's position is indicated in that characters who fare well are those who seek balance with and wisdom from nature, and that death takes its toll of those who attempt control and dominance.

Ahab, the embodiment of conventional man who seeks self-significance in fighting against the external world, found satisfaction in controlling and dominating the object. He once was a victim of Moby Dick and lost one of his limbs. Seeing evil in his assaultant, Ahab pitted himself against that assaultant and was determined to kill the whale to prove his power. He had no respect for the mighty whale, only contempt and hate. "Be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal," he swore, "I will wreak that hate upon him."⁵ The mad captain ended up being killed by the whale.

In contrast with Ahab was Ishmael. Although at first he was not radically different from Ahab, he later changed his mind, which eventually saved his life. At the beginning of the voyage, Ishmael also wanted to dominate Moby Dick. He vowed, with the rest of the crew, to find and kill the whale. He admitted that "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine."⁶ Toward the middle of the voyage, however, Ishmael changed. In Chapter 94 Ishmael said, "I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hand and heart of it."⁷

In Chapter 68 Ishmael expressed a wish to live with the whale and model himself after it.

It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among the ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.⁸

While giving Ahab death, Melville rewarded Ishmael with life. In the end of the drama, Ishmael was the only one who survived the terrible wreck. In contrasting the fate of Ahab and Ishmael, Melville warned those who insist on dominating the indomitable and assail the unassailable: the attempt is not only futile but suicidal.

According to the Taoist vision, everything in nature has its own intrinsicity in which man should not interfere, to say nothing of trying to control and dominate by imposing his will. It is natural that

Among the creatures of the world some go in front, some follow;
Some blow hot when others would be blowing cold.
Some are feeling vigorously just when others are worn out.
Some are loading just when others would be tilting out.⁹

In a violent tirade against Confucius' ignorance of the intrinsicity of things and insistence on judging everything according to human values, Chuang-tzu affirmed that "such intrinsicity does exist." He then denounced man's attempt to impose his supposed order on everything and anything that he could lay his hands on. "Things which stick require no glue; things which hold together require no cords." Said Chuang-tzu, "From time immemorial this has always been so, without variation. Why then should [human value] be as it were

glued and corded on."¹⁰ Let nature be itself, heaven and earth would be in harmony. Intervention will prove failure and inevitably bring destruction.

Those [who] would gain what is under heaven by tampering with it--
 I have seen that they do not succeed.
 For that which is under heaven is like a holy vessel, dangerous
 to tamper with it.
 Those who tamper with it, harm it.
 Those who grab it, lose it.¹¹

Speaking of a warning to those who intend to tamper with nature, Chuang-tzu told a story. The emperor of the South Sea, Shu (having form), and the emperor of the North Sea, Hu (having no form), often met with the emperor Hun-tun (chaos, neither quite formed nor yet completely unformed), in the latter's territory. Shu and Hu always were treated generously by Hun-tun during their stays, so they wanted to repay him for his kindness. Since men all have seven orifices for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing, and Hun-tun was the only one who did not have them, Shu and Hu decided to try to create them for Hun-tun. Each day they bore a hole--but on the seventh day Hun-tun died.¹²

Based on the conviction that holy nature cannot be tampered with is the urgent plea that humankind should practice wu-wei, that is, nonaction. "To yield is to preserve [the] whole . . . because the wise man does not contend; no one can contend against him."¹³ Wu-wei is by no means avoiding all physical action but avoiding, using H. Welch's words, "All hostile, aggressive action,"¹⁴ or, quoting H. G. Creel, actions that are "not natural or spontaneous."¹⁵ Because such nonassertive actions require no effort, they do not appear to be actions at all; thence came the term wu-wei. Lao-tzu

and Chuang-tzu urged that man should let things happen in accordance with their own innate laws. Since every action gives rise to a reaction, the sensible thing for man to do in an uncertain world of flux is to avoid any strivings and strainings after that which is beyond reach. Chuang-tzu said,

Those who understand the condition of life do not seek to do what life cannot accomplish. Those who understand the conditions of destiny do not seek for that which is beyond the reach of knowledge.¹⁶

Hence Chuang-tzu's model of the true sage is one who "does nothing, . . . performs nothing, beyond gazing at the universe,"¹⁷ that is, he contemplates.

Wu-wei is difficult to live up to, but it undoubtedly benefits those who stick to it for, as Lao-tzu said in a paradox, "The weak and submissive overcome the hard and strong."¹⁸ This idea is best illustrated by the symbol of water, "which is of all things most yielding and yet can overwhelm [rock] which is of all things most hard."¹⁹

For Melville, as well as Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, the key to a sensible approach to nature is to deflate man's ego--to replace pride with humility. In expounding his point, Melville contrasted two examples of Ahab and Ishmael. The former, a man with enormous pride, called himself "proud as a Greek God."²⁰ Stubb, who knew him well, reported that he never saw him kneel. In the Aeschlean scene, in which he defied the flaming corposants, Ahab affirmed his pride.

I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personifies impersonality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe'er I came;

whensoever I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights.²¹

Another incident that revealed Ahab's fatal pride was the quadrant incident. The quadrant is a helpful tool in sailing, but Ahab resented it. He hated to be dependent on anything except his own will and power. Furthermore, the quadrant reminded him of his limitations in knowledge and power. "Curse thee, thou quadrant!"²² cried Ahab. In a fit of rage he dashed it to the deck and destroyed the guiding tool. He had no doubt about his ability to plot his position and determine his course by methods that he then devised himself. Ahab's pride blinded him in regard to the physical strength and destructive might of Moby Dick and his limitation as a mortal man. This pride set him on a maniacal and suicidal pursuit of the unattainable.

Different from Ahab, Ishmael did not have much ego. Evidence is that, as a sailor on an unusual voyage and survivor of a terrible wreck, he did not tell much about himself. Especially toward the end of the book, where there is much action, he almost phased out until the last chapter. Instead, he told a lot about other whalers and esteemed whaling and the mighty whale a great deal.

Because Ishmael had less ego and pride, he was quick in seeing his limitation and ready to acknowledge it. One of the numerous incidents that illustrate this is in Chapter 86 where, after a study of the tail of the whale, Ishmael willingly admitted, "Dissect him how I may, then I but go skin deep; I know him not and never will."²³

Although he could see "what the White Whale was to Ahab," and knew something of "what, at times, he was to me."²⁴ Ishmael did not claim to be a knower but a humble researcher. He said,

The more I dive into this matter of whaling, and push my researches up to the very spring-head of it, so much the more am I impressed with its great honorableness and antiquity; and especially when I find so many great demi-gods and heroes, prophets of all sorts, who one way or other have shed distinction upon it, I am transported with the reflection that I myself belong, though but subordinately, to so emblazoned a fraternity.²⁵

Ishmael's humility, as opposed to Ahab's fatal pride, is further shown in the chapter entitled "A Squeeze of the Hand." Ahab clung tight to his male aggressiveness and held high his pride as a "free and independent individual" and "self-sustaining and self-assertive Ego,"²⁶ but Ishmael washed his hand and heart of the horrible oath he had pledged earlier to fight against Moby Dick, and enjoyed the tender sentiment of love for his friend, Queequeg. "I perceive," he revealed,

that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, . . .²⁷

Out of Ishmael's humility came a receptive mind. While Ahab could see only one aspect of things, Ishmael managed to see the duality and plurality of them. "Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly," Ishmael confessed, "this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye."²⁸

This humility and receptivity enabled Ishmael to respond to his situation, and adapt and survive. Unlike Ahab, who was fixed on a particular perception and blind to other possibilities, Ishmael was willing to toss away any preconception and embrace a different one that made more sense in a particular situation. This characteristic of Ishmael is seen from the beginning of the book. On a biting cold, dark, dismal night, Ishmael had to find a place to stay. He finally

did, but he had to share a bed with a cannibal, Queequeg. The latter struck him as a terrible looking creature whose face was of "a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares."²⁹ What is more, Queequeg sold human heads in the market. Yet, despite how Queequeg looked and what he did, Ishmael managed to see the best in him and in the situation. "The man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian."³⁰ Ishmael willingly shared his bed with Queequeg, who later became his bosom friend. This adaptability toward the end of the voyage enabled Ishmael to turn Queequeg's coffin into a life buoy that saved him from the disaster.

Fully recognizing the duality of masculine aggressiveness and feminine passivity that reside in each man, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu advocated keeping feminine passivity alive. Lao-tzu said,

Know the male
 But keep to the role of the female
 And be a ravine to the empire.
 If you are a ravine to the empire,
 Then the constant virtue will not desert you
 And you will again return to being a babe.

 Know honour
 But keep to the role of the disgraced
 And be a valley to the empire.
 If you are a valley to the empire,
 Then the constant virtue will be sufficient
 And you will return to being the uncarved block.³¹

In cultivating humility and femininity, men are able to return to their original selves, symbolized in the image of a baby.

The baby looks at things all day without winking; that is because his eyes are not focused on any particular object. He goes without knowing where he is going, and stops without knowing what he is doing. He merges himself with the surroundings and moves along with it.³²

Since the world is undergoing a constant change, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu considered it a moral failing to cling rigidly to a single point of view. To avoid this pitfall, one should "employ his mind as a mirror; it grasps nothing, it refuses nothing. It receives but does not keep."³³ This nongrasping of the mind can only be obtained through humility. The whole point of humility and receptivity, as noted by the Chinese philosopher, Feng Yu-lan, "makes life whole and shuns injury."³⁴

ENDNOTES

¹They are scholars like R. Dubos, Lynn White, etc. The latter, in his influential article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," suggested that Christianity is to blame for the ecologic crisis because it grants man dominion over the earth and, therefore, gives him warrant to abuse it.

²*Bible*. King James Version. Genesis 1:26.

³When saying this, I did not ignore the other Western tradition of *stewardship* in relation to nature, which dates back to the post-Platonic philosophers of the Roman Empire in the third century A.D. Neither did I shun the other Chinese tradition of *despotism*, which has caused severe deforestation since antiquity. I merely leave them untouched in order to focus on the issue upon which I currently am interested.

⁴Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 188.

⁵Melville, as noted in Chapter 2 Endnotes, p. 162.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁹Lao-tzu, as noted in Chapter 2 Endnotes, ch. 29.

¹⁰Herbert A. Giles, ed./tr., *Chuang-tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 94.

¹¹Lao-tzu, ch. 20.

¹²Giles, *op cit.*, p. 93.

¹³Lao-tzu, *op cit.*, ch. 22.

¹⁴Holms Welch, *The Parting of the Way* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 33.

¹⁵Herrlee G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 106.

¹⁶Giles, *op cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁸Lao-tzu, *op cit.*, ch. 78.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Melville, *op cit.*, p. 459.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 500.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 494.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 376.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Arvin, *op cit.*, p. 176.

²⁷Melville, *op cit.*, p. 415.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 372.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

³¹Lao-tzu, *op cit.*

³²Lin Yu-tang, ed., *The Wisdom of Lao-tzu* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 86.

³³Giles, *op cit.*, p. 90.

³⁴Feng Yu-lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1947), p. 65.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

In acknowledging nature as a mysterious primal force and accepting man as a limited being entangled in the huge web of existence, neither Melville nor Lao-tzu nor Chuang-tzu belittled humanity or human life. Their contemplations on nature stemmed from their basic concerns for man and his survival as a human being in a natural context larger than himself. The intent of Melville's sending Ishmael to sea to confront the beauty as well as the horror of nature was to have him come to terms with the nonhuman diversity and scale of it. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu constantly dwelled on nature because they believed that nature's way of existence is similarly instructive. In order to rid man of pains in life caused by his anxiety and ambition to wrestle and conquer, man should gain self-knowledge in nature and model himself after it.

For Melville, as well as for Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, to be human and survive as one, man should be himself. That means that, instead of striving to be what he is not, he should recognize his limitations as a mortal human being residing in the immortal universe and accept those limitations. The significance of man is not realized in conquering the exterior world or demolishing the other but in overcoming his arrogant self--his tendency to be partial and vindictive. Ishmael impressed the reader most by no other quality

than his ability to subdue his rebellious self and accept his limitations. Lao-tzu spoke highly of people who know themselves and who are able to overcome themselves.

He who knows others is clever;
He who knows himself has discernment.
He who overcomes others has force;
He who overcomes himself is strong.¹

As noted earlier, Melville, Lao-tzu, and Chuang-tzu were from different times and places and wrote in totally disparate cultural and historical circumstances. A comparison, however, reveals many similarities in their views on nature, man, and how man should relate to nature. Their fundamental similarity is that despite their temporal and spatial boundaries they viewed the immediate issues from a perspective of cosmic breadth. They therefore managed to shed light not only for their generations but for ours and generations to come. Considering the current ecological crisis brought on by man's growing capacity to alter nature, the views of Melville, Lao-tzu, and Chuant-tzu on nature, man, and how man should relate to nature are not academical but practical and philosophical in the deepest sense.

ENDNOTE

¹Lao-tzu, as noted in Chapter 2 Endnotes, ch. 33.

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