CHOICE: A TREATISE ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

Martin L. Bink

Thesis Director

Daryl B. Adrian
Professor of English

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 1991

Date of graduation
June 1991
FORWARD

When writing a treatise or any literary work, the author is faced with asking, "what is the point of writing this?" This is a teleologic question in the case of the present work. The "point" here is to explain the human condition as a matter of individual choice. This work is indeed my choice of what the human condition is and is reflexive only of my choice.

It is written based on scientific logic even though the problem is humanistic and the "data" is allogorical. The purpose in doing so is to allow a logical base on which to lay my own viewpoint and thoughts. I consider myself a scientist. However, this style allows a literal and free expression of my ideas. I ask then that the reader accept the literary "data" just as readily as one would accept empirical data.

M.L.B.
Man separates himself from other creatures on this Earth by his ability to analyze himself. This analysis asks the question of what it means to be a human. The search for humanity involves finding that one thread that binds the fabric of all human experience. Pulling this thread from the tangle of the skein of human thought involves employing an accurate forcep.

Humans are continually inventing such a tool that can be used for self-analysis. The ancient Greeks and Romans devised systems to explain nature. Pythagoras gave the world mathematical theorems; Euclid discovered the use of geometry; Archimedes introduced the discipline of physics; Thales and Democritus suggested the study of particles as a means to simplify nature for examination. These fundamental tools have been continually revised and rearranged to yield new tools. The emergence of psychology, sociology, economics, etc. as disciplines is an attempt to find the tool for self-definition. Even religion attempts to help man define the human experience.

The present work is also such a tool. A good tool like a good scientific theory must be parsimonious, generalizable, and have a high degree of utility. Herein
such a tool will be suggested, its use demonstrated, and an essay will be made to explain the present human condition.

Humans, as a race of organisms, exist in a symbiosis with the world around them particularly the world they have created. Humans react to the world around them, i.e. humans are effected by the environment. Their actions in turn are involved in the creation of the living environment. This intuitive concept is probably stated best by ecologist Micheal McCloskey in a December 1988 LIFE magazine article:

_Homo Sapiens has appropriated two thirds of the land of the planet, destroying the habitat for millions of species. As this millineum ends, industrialism has damaged the ozone shield for all life and has triggered an epochal change in global climate. We are not immortal; our acts are._ (90)

This commentary on man's power to effect his own world suggests that humans are what they create because only our acts are immortal. The problem in developing the tool then is to relate the human condition to the world that humans have created.

Humans interact with the world internally to make sense of the world. "Make sense" means that the course of human and worldly events have some logical progression or direction. The responsibility for humans to internalize the world around them has been espoused in many different forms. Around 2000 B.C., the ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus wrote, "People are not disturbed by things, but rather by the views they take of those events." Epictetus suggests
that only through internal processing do humans give meaning to the world.

A more scientific explanation for humans' need to internalize the world would be given in modern times by a Darwinian evolutionist, or even by Charles Darwin himself. This view would likely involve the survival of humans as a species. The early humans (most likely Homo Sapiens) that could internally process information from the environment were probably more likely adjust to changes in the environment and therefore were better able to survive and pass genes. After all, according to Darwin, passing genes is the name of the survival game. So perhaps seeking an internal understanding of the world is merely a survival tool for the human animal.

Of course, a theological explanation can also be forwarded to answer the question of internal processing. Again reference is given to LIFE December 1988. This time Tu Wei-Ming, a confucian scholar, states:

We are here because embedded in our own human nature is the secret code for heaven's self realization... It needs our active participation to realize its own truth. We are heaven's partners, indeed cocreators... Since we help to realize itself through our self-discovery and self-understanding in day-to-day living... (93)

In suggesting that humans are heaven's co-creators, Wei-Ming points out that even the existence of the supreme being is defined by internal processing of humans. The "active participation" Wei-Ming speaks of suggests that there must
be an interaction between the individual and the world in order for any internal processing to take place. This interaction is, of course, human experience.

Any person is subject to worldly experience. A person sees events, encounters situations, faces problems, and feels emotion. These experiences are given a direction by the person. Direction manifested in the choices that person makes. Choices which will reveal some information about how the person has internally processed his experience.

Any particular choice one human being makes can be viewed on two levels. The first level is the level of the individual and how the individual has gone about making that particular choice. This is the level at which one can analyze the internal processing of experience. It deals with what the behavioral psychologists would call the "black box," or the function of the mind. The second level is a global level which includes many choices and results in some product that has impact on the outside world and others.

It is by analyzing this product that one begins to forge the tool that will link the human condition to the world that has been created on this planet. However, before the product is analyzed, the process of choice at the individual level must be considered. From this foundation, a more panoramic view can be taken. Choice at the individual level involves "active participation," as Wei-Ming would say, between the individual and the outside
world. From information gathered and internally processed, certain aspects of the situation will become salient. The salient aspects of the situation direct the individual to make some choice in reaction to the situation. The choice can be either a behavior exhibited or an attitude about the situation.

There is empirical scientific evidence that suggests choice may be the product of salience. For the past decade cognitive psychologists have been involved in research based around the "cocktail party paradigm." This model is based on the experience of standing in a room where many people are engaged in many different conversations (much as would be the case if one were attending a cocktail party and were merely listening to all of the conversations taking place). (Greenfield and Sternbach 365) The individual has the choice to pay attention to any of the available words, or entire conversations. The question is, which one will be attended to? Research indicates that words or conversations that involve some personal meaning to the individual will be attended to, e.g. the individual's name, a book the person remembers reading, or a friend's voice. This indicates that the choice of what to attend to auditorially is given direction by the event's salience. (Ibid) Studies also indicate that this is the case with visual attention also. (Ibid 368)

At this point it is safe to assume that salience does indeed direct one's choice, but the next question to be
answered must be, "what directs salience?" Salience is determined by what is important to the individual. Importance is determined by what domain of needs, or drives, is elicited from the situation, i.e. what has motivated the individual to interact with the world. Motivation guides the processing of information by directing the salience of events. The salience is determined by what class of motivation is utilized.

There seem to be three basic themes in human motivation. One theme or class of motivators appears to reflect the human existence as a bio-chemical organism. This theme involves the plethora of motivators associated only with the survival of the individual in the organic sense. This view of human motivation is best exemplified by Darwinian evolution. Darwin and his subsequent followers look at the drive of human behavior in terms of being for the purpose of propagating the individual's genes in the most profitable manner. The idea of gene fitness as the main and possibly only source of motivation for humans likens human existence to a DNA case in which only the assurance of the survival of genetic material is paramount. However, successfully passing one's genes not only involves sexual reproduction, but must also deals with keeping the individual alive. (Alcock, 7-10) In the end, this classification of motivators involves all of the survival needs such as food, shelter, and warmth, as well as the
strategies for successfully passing one's genetic information.

The second classification of motives involves the individual as a member of society. These are more complex motives and center around the influence of human interaction. An individual can be motivated in two directions with respect to society. The first type of influence involves the individual's interacting to enhance the quality of society, i.e. acting altruistic. It pleases the human ego to think that unselfish acts are for the sole purpose of compassion for fellow humans. Indeed, some acts of bravery such as those undertaken every day by firemen, police, paramedics, and other rescue and medical personnel, as well as relief organizations such as Amnesty International, the International Red Cross, and UNECE, are directed at and have only the benefit of others in mind.

However, empirical evidence shows that the range of pro-social behaviors may stem from selfish motivators. Societies probably developed as a means of enhancing one's survival capabilities in the dawn of man's existence. Three men working together had a better chance to kill a bison than one man working alone. Part of the price for this enhanced survival capability was that the members of these societies had to expend some energy for the preservation of the group. This idea of "reciprocal altruism" was espoused by Robert Trivers in 1971. The idea reduces to the element of "repayment." If a person does something to benefit
another, either that person will reciprocate or society will reward the individual. The reward for altruism may also be self-directed. Darley and Latanée (1970) suggested that pro-social behavior may be motivated by cognitive dissonance. That is to say, the individual will strive to resolve situations in which another is in danger because it will lessen the individual's feelings of discord. This is more in keeping with the concept of human compassion, even though the individual is seeking to comfort himself rather than others.

Regardless of whether altruism is a product of charity, reduction of dissonance, or survival, there is significant evidence that suggests that the motive for many behaviors is directed by helping society. On the other hand, society provides humans with motivators that result in the separation of the individual from interactions with others. This refers to the drive of some humans to separate themselves as more successful members of society than others. Societies, or rather human interactions, dictate what is successful or desirable. The domain of such motivators includes not only culture-bound concepts such as fashion and customs but also universal concepts like wealth and power. This is a very broad and abstract division of motivation but can be viewed empirically through the study of "social desirability." Studies done by Walker, Harimanin and Costello in 1980 indicate that an individual's appearance, socio-economic status, and education are rated
by peers as being the most important predictors of task performance, although the task was unrelated to these factors. More physically attractive, higher socio-economic status, and educated people were seen as more able to complete the task. What is more, the "high desirables" were seen as most different from any of the other groups. This drive for humans to attain an elite status among peers causes them to amass wealth, conform to customs, gain status, etc. All of which are behaviors that attribute their motivation to society.

The last class of motivation arises from a human's existence as an individual entity. The foundation for this idea lies in the dogma of Zen-Buddhism which suggests that every single living organism is a mass of energy for the force of nature. No one organism is any more important or less important to the course of nature than any other. What the Zenists did was identify the importance of each individual to the individual. The Existential, Transcendental, and even Romantic schools of thought in the Western world espoused some of the same dogma which lends credence to the individual humanistic division of motivation.

Scientifically speaking, this class of motivation is supported by work first conceptualized by Abraham Maslow. Maslow's "need motivation hierarchy" placed self-actualization at the top of the rank order. That is to say, the intrinsic motivation is important in realization of
an individual's goals. However, L.S. Wrightsman did the most work to apply self-actualization to individual motivation. The result of his work suggested that individuals can be motivated because of personal feelings of satisfaction or intrinsic reinforcement. (510)

Human behavior is the product of the salience of the above motivators or combinations of motivators. A behavior is a choice of salience, and any behavior performed by an individual can be analyzed using such a model. One analogy for the process of individual level choice is that of choosing a pair of socks to wear.

A person opens her lingerie drawer to find a choice of three socks. Each sock represents a different level of choice, organic, social, and humanistic. The first choice is warm wool sock which will provide the highest degree of protection from the environment; this is motivation on the organic level. The second choice is a colorful fashionable sock that matches well with the person's ensemble; this is motivation on the social level. The final choice is a comfortable, old, worn sock that has some sentimental value; this is motivation on the humanistic level. What sock will be chosen? The answer is determined by the motivational salience of the individual at the time and the effect of the outside world.

The situation will demand that one of the three motivators will be utilized. In the case of choosing a pair of socks, the fact that a person wishes to keep her
feet warm on a cold day may invoke organic motivators and the warm wool sock would be chosen. The situation may also call for appropriate appearance. If the individual values this aspect, the social motivators make the colourful sock more salient, and it is the one chosen. Likewise, the individual may see the situation of choosing socks as a personal interest situation and eliminate the other two motivators in favour of what is intrinsically satisfying. That choice is, of course, the old sentimental sock. Regardless of what specific motive is tapped in an individual, the process of choice is the same.

The products of these individual level choices, such as which sock is chosen, can be viewed in terms of global level choice. The concept of global level choice refers to the effect the choices that humans make have on the world around them and, in turn, what effect the world has on making those choices and future choices. The cyclic nature of this process starts with the world around the individual demanding that the individual make choices and providing information to facilitate the choices. Next the individual must make his choice. These first two steps are identical to individual level choice. The same mechanism as individual level choice is employed.

When considering global choice, however, the focus is not on what has directed the choice, but on the product of the choice. The product can be represented as a single choice like that of the sock analogy, or it can be a series
of more complex choices, such as all of the decisions that are involved in building a house. The end product in building a house can only be achieved after determining such things as where to build it, with what material to build it, and how it will be built. These are the decisions an individual or individuals make in order to produce a product that has an effect on the world.

The means of expressing choice can also be categorized. Humans have divided their endeavors on this earth into separate disciplines. The actions of humans (which are products of choice) can be described as pertaining to the disciplines of science, art, literature, religion, politics, economics, etc. These divisions of human thought define the direction that the products of choice will have in effecting the world.

The logic to support how the products of human choice effect the world is rather intuitive, but also is somewhat abstract. Refering again to the remarks made by Micheal McCloskey (see page 2), "We are not immortal; our acts are." If one considers the example Mr. McCloskey cites in his vignette regarding the destruction of the ozone on earth, the immortality of acts becomes more apparent. The use of aerosol sprays has depleted the layer of the atmosphere that protects the surface of the earth from most of the dangerous ultraviolet radiation from the sun. It was the choice of humans for sake of convenience (and ignorance) to develop and use aerosol products. Now that choice has
not only driven many scientists to devote their time to studying the ozone problem but also has changed the climate of the earth forever. It goes without saying that the change in climate does have an effect on the activities of humans on earth.

The result from this sort of logic is that one act physically changes the world which causes others to make certain choices which, in turn, effects the world and causes more choices. The scope and dimension of this circular logic is overwhelming when one considers all the discrete actions one makes in a lifetime. However, by taking advantage of this nature of logic, one can find the tool to define the human condition. For any period in time, one can define a cultural product (science, art, literature, etc.) in terms of global choice. Global choice, in turn, relates the state of interaction of man and his world. The question now becomes what cultural product is to be used?

The tool that will be utilized is literature. Literature is the most logical tool because of its popularity, scope through time, and representitiveness of any period. The literature that will be analyzed is Western literature. This redefinition is necessary in order to parsimoniously develop the theme of the human condition. The literature of Eastern civilizations can also be used, but the results would be the same.

The written word is a medium that has a large number of applications. It can be utilized for the communication
of information, artistic interpretation, or abstract thinking. The written word also enjoys an advantage over oral communication (which is the most basic synapse between thought and expression) in that the written word can be analyzed in its more true form over great span of time. The main property of literature that makes it a useful tool for studying the human condition is its representativeness of the era in which it was written. Perhaps George Bernard Shaw characterized the idea of "representativeness" best with his quote from the preface of SAINT JOAN.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, for most people to think otherwise than in the fashion of their own period." (201)

By using literature to define a period of time, one can see the development of the human condition in a product of human choices.

When oral traditions were first written down by the Semitic tribes of the Middle East, religious tales of God, Adam and Eve, and the the children of man were chosen to show the importance of explaining the unexplainable and to perpetuate the beliefs of the people. The stories themselves portrayed the importance of their choice to believe in God, e.g. the people of Soddom and Gomorrrah being destroyed for their hedonistic ways, the Egyptians being plagued for denying the release of the Jews, Job's persistent faith in the face of adversity. Indeed the choice that humanity was faced with at the time, as the literature reflects, is a choice of dogma. That is to say,
the individual must make a choice whether to believe and in what to believe.

From the dawn of civilization up to the fall of the Roman Empire, humans had to seek definition for their social order for the purpose of making it viable. Social order of the ancient people and indeed their existence on earth was defined in terms of cosmic justice. The direction of choice is how does one justify the ways of God to man?

The Old Testament authors justified God as an omnipotent ruler of the earthly domain. The Exodus Saga tells of the benevolence of God to those who believe and malevolence to those who do not. God's purpose for humans was justified through the lessons taught to the Jews during the wanderings in the Wilderness and were set down in the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament explanation of God's expectations for humans by the authors gives insight into the social order of the time. No justification was needed for God. The way of the believers was the order.

The Greek and Roman thinkers also maintained the idea that social order was a product of some divine desire or plan. However, they tended to justify the Supreme Being (which is, of course, a collection of gods) in terms of man himself. The Greek and Roman tragedies which were the prevalent literary works of this era were produced to support or question social customs in terms of the gods. The fact that the central characters in these works possessed a flaw that was endemic to humans and not to the
gods suggests that the ways of gods need not be justified by man. This idea is developed best by Plato. His dichotic reasoning that he portrayed in his work the Republic indicates that the acts of gods are justified merely by the occasion of man attempting to justify them. (850-854)

The works of the New Testament outline the Covenant that serves to justify God's ways to man. Humans are given the choice to believe in God and enjoy eternal life or not believe and be cast into dark uncertainty. The Covenant is that God will give man a messiah who will test the faithful and save those who believe. The social order and state of humanity that was attributed to the will of God was now justified. Those who suffered on earth could still exist in happiness if they chose to believe. The Beatitudes in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew outline the rewards for man's faith in God and his social order regardless of the individual's state of existence. (5:1-48, 6:1-34, 7:1-27)

The spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire in the third and fourth centuries A.D. indicates that the choice to believe was a popular one. In fact, at the end of the fourth century, Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. The church was now part of most of the Western world. The Empire dissolved in 476 A.D. and even though Christianity was assimilated into the states, no new social order existed. The chaos that ensued after the fall of the Roman
Empire subsided with the prevalence of feudalism as the new social order.

The Ancient World now gave way to the Middle Ages. This long period of human existence brought with it a new system of choices. Humanity was no longer defined as how or what to believe but rather what state of righteousness to choose. Existence became a battle of good and evil, but good and evil had two faces: one secular, the other spiritual.

The first battle of good and evil involved man's struggle against both his physical environment and the strict hierarchichal social order. The feudal system allowed for great power and wealth to be obtained by an individual. These social motivators became the focus of many works of literature of the time. One prevalent style of literature during the Middle Ages was the legend.

Legends told fantastic tales of great human feats, much in the same vane as the Greek epic. Popular themes were conquering heros such as the SONG OF ROLAND and responsibility to social rank as in BEOWULF. These themes supported both the need for the feudal system as well as the underlying structure of the system. The main purpose of feudalism was to bond people together in order to protect them from invasion from other bands. In order to do this efficiently, a person must exchange an obligation to the system as well as a rank in the order.
The SONG OF ROLAND tells of a leader in Charlemagne's military during his quest for an empire. Roland and his brothers-in-arms were bond to chiefs who were, in turn, bond to Charlemagne. (I-VIII) The work recounts many of the quests of the Charlemagne armies and how these armies won victories over the evil pagan tribes. An even more important theme of the SONG OF ROLAND is that of the structure of vassalage. In other words, who was obligated to whom and what characteristics the lord possessed to make him a liege. Epic legends such as ROLAND suggest that social good, i.e. the preservation of one's social order is reinforced by the feudal system. The legends also suggest that rank in the hierarchy of feudalism is a mark of righteousness.

Secular righteousness sometimes clashed with spiritual righteousness during the Middle Ages. People's desire to climb the hierarchy of the feudal system sometimes led to practice of deceit and fraud. In short, society had become corrupt. Both secular and ecumenical politics were influenced by graft and greed. Many people of the time recognized this discrepancy and sought a way to solve the abuse of the social order. One means of confronting such abuse was to invoke the power of spiritual good and evil. Since the dogma was that humans have two lives, one secular and one spiritual, a man could be made to account for actions on earth in his afterlife. The choice of the word actions in the preceding sentence is important because...
regardless of one's position in society and how that position is viewed with respect to righteousness, only the means by which one lives his life is important in the spiritual life. Spiritual good and evil is determined by secular actions and not predisposed by secular position.

The most vivid distinction of secular versus spiritual righteousness is presented in Dante Alighieri's masterpiece DIVINE COMEDY. This trilogy outlines the dominions of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise and depicts the state of these places of final judgement. Dante envisioned these spiritual places as being arranged in a hierarchy in the same manner as secular society, i.e. the more righteous are more rewarded.

The first realm that Dante deals with is the INFERNO or Hell. The circles of Hell as Dante portrays them represent the degree of one's sins on earth. Each progressively more intense level of Hell contains fewer "shades" or souls. This inverted cone structure is the antithesis of the feudal system in that the lesser punished (therefore the more rewarded) shades are more in number than highly punished shades. This arrangement becomes more significant when one considers the corresponding sins with each level of punishment.

The upper level of Hell is represented by those shades that are guilty of sins of dogma and carnal sins. These souls are those that were basically virtuous people on earth but either did not believe in Christ or could not
restrain biological urges. (Wilkie and Hurt 1242-1243)

There were many virtuous people born before Christ and restraint was not always evil. Dante realized that, even though not desirable, these souls were not dangerous.

The lower levels of Hell cater to those souls guilty of malice toward others. Dante saw the fraudulent and violent as the worst class of sin. However, he further defined the degree of malice into classes. The first being malice of those with no special social trust. The second and most severe of all sins is malice of those with special social trust. (Wilkie and Hurt 1242-1243) The circle of the fraudulent of special trust was very elite and represented an interesting commentary on the feudal system. In the feudal system, men of vassalage were obligated to perform duties at the request of their lords in exchange for social privleges. Dante suggested that the lieges also had a responsibility to their vassals and to society not to betray the trust of their position. Since only a few men could obtain high position in the system on earth, and the system had become such that fraud and deceit were almost necessary to elevate oneself, the few that received the most severe eternal punishment were those who betrayed the social trust. The reward in Hell was equal to the reward on earth but in the opposite direction.

Geoffrey Chaucer wrote some years after Dante's death, but he too developed the theme of corruption in the feudal estates. In Chaucer's work CANTERBURY TALES, he
develops the characters (i.e. the teller of each tale) very well as a prologue to each tale. Chaucer criticized graft in society both feudal and ecumenical, and portrayed revealing characterizations of members of society that practiced fraud. One section of society Chaucer saw as particularly vulnerable to graft was that of the pardoners.

A pardoners papal license allowed him to help absolve people of sin. This usually involved a monetary exchange. The pardoners of of CANTERBURY TALES used his office to amass a small fortune and comfortable lifestyle while preaching against such acts of greed. (1518-1519)

Such a man as Chaucer's pardoners would likely receive a severe punishment in Dante's Hell, even though he would be worldly successful and righteous. The pardoners performed the task he was licensed to undertake. He motivated people to repent for their sins and seek redemption from God. He provided such absolution. However, his sin was his hypocrisy. While preaching against greed, he was himself very greedy. In Dante's Hell, he would be subjected to the wearing of leaden mantles, so as to direct his actions. (Wilkie and Hurt 1242-1243)

The dilemma that the pardoners faced was common to most of humanity during the Middle Ages. The choice of secular versus spiritual righteousness was the concern for all those involved in the feudal system. The feudal system offered not only military protection but also the opportunity for a comfortable lifestyle for those in the
position to take advantage of the resources. "Taking advantage of the resources" most often times meant exploiting other people. The exploited could use the promise of God's justice in the afterlife as rationalization for their suffering on earth, while secular comfort motivated others.

Social order changed as individual and majority rights became more valued than feudal status. The Renaissance or re-birth of society produced or was produced by superstition giving way to individual achievement and human centered thinking. Scientific exploration caused humans to re-examine the physical world around them. Copernicus put the sun back at the center of the universe, and maritime explorers found a new world on earth. Martin Luther during the same time period caused humans to re-order the heavens above them with his Protestant movement.

The egocentrism that such revolutions in thinking produced caused humans to ask "where does control of our lives lie?" The state of choice was now humanistic versus ecumenical control for the events of life. It is important to note that it was a question of control of events and focus of intellectual thought and not a question of dogma. Christianity was still very much valued by the Renaissance thinkers. However, there was a movement away from the social based superstitions that had been layered on top of the religion. Indeed, the Protestant movement was centered around returning the meaning of religion to the literal
meaning of the BIBLE. In fact, two of the Renaissance's great authors and humanists were theologians, i.e. Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More.

The role of God in worldly existence did change, however. God did retain responsibility for the nature of man and his creation, but man's earthly existence was now determined by his own free choice. The most notable and noteworthy evidence of this concept is a quote from Pico della Mirandola in his work ORATION ON THE DIGNITY OF MAN. He states as God speaks to man:

I have given you Adam, neither a predetermIned place nor a particular aspect nor any special perogatives in order that you may take and possess these through your own decision and choice. The limitations on the nature of other creatures are contained within my prescribed laws. You shall determine your own nature without my constrait from any barrier, by means of the freedom to whose power I have entrusted you... I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, mortal nor immortal so that, like a free and sovereign artificer, you might mold and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen. (1571)

Mirandola suggests that after creating man, God gave him the will and freedom to determine his own destiny. If free choice is God-given, how can exercising humanistic thought be anything except reverent to Divine Providence. The goal of the Renaissance movement, as the humanists saw it, was to allow each man, whether pope or serf, to have responsibility for interpretation of his life's course.

John Milton very clearly typifies the Renaissance in both style and theme in his classic poem, PARADISE LOST. The subject matter is clearly spiritual, but the approach is
just as clearly humanistic. In this work Milton elaborates on the Biblical story of the casting out of Lucifer and the fall of man. (Book I) Milton very clearly personifies Evil in Lucifer. Milton also shows the fall of man as a conflict among three individuals, Adam and Eve and Lucifer. The fact that the Devil is personified suggests that he can be dealt with by man on earth without direct arbitration from God. This is a salient theme in developing the importance of righteous choice in the face of evil; a theme that Milton would often champion.

Mirandola's concept of God's laisse-faire sovereignty over man is also supported by Milton. Milton refers to this concept as tested virtue. One example of tested virtue in PARADISE LOST is that of Satan luring Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and Eve's subsequent temptation of Adam. (Book III) This event is portrayed as choice of virtue versus knowledge. Adam and Eve choose the path of knowledge. God saw Satan go to earth to tempt humankind, but allowed the choice to be made by humankind without His intervention. Man's state of existence was now his own responsibility.

One last theme that truly typifies Renaissance thinking and that Milton alone due to his own life events can relate is the idea of finding God inside of oneself. Milton was rendered totally blind around the age of forty-four. This caused him to seek reflections of God from the inside rather than from the world. The opening passage
of Book III of PARADISE LOST is widely regarded by scholars not only as a beautiful example of Milton's lyrical style but also a deep commentary on the world within an individual. In this passage Milton praises God according to the inner definition that Milton has found. The idea of an individual's inner definition of the world being paramount is later championed by the Romanticists but is defined and developed in the Renaissance.

Many scholars have considered the Renaissance a period of enlightenment after the superstition-bound Middle Ages. It was in fact a period of choosing to realize the reciprocal impact of man and his physical world. God was still very much alive and very much in focus, but the social order man had been seeking was now a matter of his own choosing. With man's choice however came man's responsibility.

The various subordinate schools of thought within the Renaissance began to conflict and eventually erupt in the 1600's. Social and religious factions were literally at war and the order in society had deteriorated. The challenge for humans was now to find a new social order in the framework of man's justice. At the same time that politics were becoming more and more disorganized, scientific thought began to gain respectibility. Epistemology was being re-established with processes forwarded by such men as Newton and Kepler. In addition, empiricism began to take prominence with techniques developed by Harvey and
Van Leeuwenhoek. Similar types of logical thought began to influence other disciplines of society. Eventually reason and order in the tradition of the ancient Greeks and Romans began to be utilized as a means of coalescing the factions of society into order. The result of this evolution was a period of thought referred to as Neoclassicism.

The freedom of thought and action in the Renaissance resulted in little direction for society. Neoclassicism sought a logical orderly path for men to follow. The increasingly numerous scientific discoveries caused men to rethink many aspects of life. The new social order must account for these changes as well as maintain the freedom of individual thought. The choice now facing humanity was how to assimilate the facts of reason into an orderly society and maintain the individual. The bridge between order and freedom was responsibility.

Because this was a period of political unrest if one was to criticize the ruling faction, it could endanger one's life. As a result, satire became a style popular with many writers as a way to conceal reason-based criticism in their works. One distinguished satirist was Jonathan Swift. Swift wrote an entertaining piece entitled GULLIVER'S TRAVELS in which he satires the ruling monarchy and social practices of England. The story is centered around an adventurous ship's doctor, Lemuel Gulliver. The strange lands that Swift takes Gulliver represent the various political factions of Europe at the time. He satires
English monarchy by representing them as little people with petty ways. (Part I) Gulliver is held captive in all the strange lands he visits, only to be freed after he has reasoned with the rulers and shown them the value of his way of thinking. (Parts I-III) Although few solutions are forwarded by Swift on how to actually solve the problems that he satirizes in GULLIVER'S TRAVELS he does amusingly and saliently point out discrepancies in reason employed by some political factions of the time.

The theme that serves to epitomize what the Neoclassic period was searching for is that of responsibility for one's actions (or choices). The factions that existed in society could be thought of as the result of individual thinking being put into action with no foresight of consequences. In order to give some direction to such thinking the responsibilities for one's choices must be considered. This was the concept that the French philosopher Voltaire nurtured in order to give direction to reason. It is a theme that would later be elaborated on by Karl Marx in his political tenets.

Voltaire's best known work, CANDIDE, presents the shortcomings of not taking responsibilities for one's choices. Candide, the main character of the story, is continually confronted with major life crises in which he fails to take responsibility for choosing a course of action. He believed that no matter what happened "that everything was for the best in this world." (365) Such
fatalistic thinking can be equated to the belief of the monarchial factions of the time trying to preserve the status quo in society because it had worked in the past. However, Candide, like society, was then faced with even further suffering because of his lack of responsibility.

In the end Candide attributed his meager but complacent existence to the beneficence of fate. (429) The satirical nature in which Voltaire wrote CANDIDE suggests that there can be a choice for "the best of possible worlds." (429) This repetitive phrase serves to support the idea that one can make a choice that satisfies the individualistic nature of humans, as well as being socially oriented. Candide failed to make any significant choices of direction for his life, and therefore, was a victim of circumstances. Society had no clear direction for its order (other than nationalization) and thus became neither scientific nor reasonable.

The ideas that Voltaire presents suggests that the state of humanity at the time was reflected in what responsibilities humans were willing to take. Politically humans were ready to take the responsibility of a representative form of government. There was increasing pressure in the European nations to give more power to the respective parliaments. Scientific and logical thought was being based more on empirical evidence instead of dogma. The concept of viewing man as a product of natural law lead in
most part to a new manner of reason and focus of human choice.

The concept that human actions echo natural law meant that man must fit into the ebb and tide of the physical world and not society. In that world man was free to cultivate his free will and emotions. These very tenets were what breathed life into the period of Romanticism. Indeed the ideals of the Romantic period were spawned from the tenets of Neoclassicism, but the Romanticists added emphasis on human emotion as well as reason. This one facet allowed the Romanticists to more completely develop individual choice and free will as a philosophical viewpoint.

Emotion is not necessarily the antithesis of reason however. The idea of individual responsibility that was fostered by the Neoclassical period lended itself to the development of exploring human emotion. In order for one to give direction to one's choice, required one to take responsibility for one's choice. One motivator that would cause the individual to want to take responsibility would be a strong affective reaction to a situation, i.e. the person must become emotional about an event or object or another person. The Romanticists chose to explore the emotions of mankind as a way of explaining the human experience. The way that the Romanticists went about doing this was not by scientific sampling, but rather they explored in detail
their own affective reactions to situations and attempted to
generalize these reactions to all of humanity.

Even though Romantic thought was based around finding
some universals for humanity, the object of their focus
remained on the individual and the importance of free will
and free choice. History and political science curricula of
the present expound the importance of the philosophy of John
Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in establishing the
framework of free choice in the social order. However, the
idea of free choice was not always as explicit as in Locke's
or Rousseau's writings, nor did it always carry social
importance. Much of Romantic writing served to justify the
world to the individual, instead of the individual to the
world.

William Wordsworth epitomized the concept of the world
being a product of an individual's perception in his poem
WE ARE SEVEN. The poem deals with a young girl's impression
of her family structure as she relates it to a passer-by
(who is the narrator of the work). Wordsworth writes:

"Sisters and brothers, little maid,
How many may you be?"
"How many? Seven in all," she said,
And wondering looked at me.

"And were are they? I pray you tell."
She answered,"Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

"Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother." (577-579)
Wordsworth's narrator quickly did the math and asked the "simple child" if her siblings did not number five, since two were dead. The young girl insisted on the number being seven, and the narrator realized that he "'Twas throwing words away..." to argue with her. (559)

The girl justifies the number she reports by divulging her activities with her brother and sister that lie in the church-yard. She mentions that at times she does some of her mending near their graves or eats her supper there on occasion or even sings them a song. To the girl, her dead brother and sister are still as much a part of her family as they were when they were alive. Even though the narrator differs with this view, he must concede to the little girl's perception, because she is so unwaivering. Wordsworth points out that even though the narrator disagrees with the young girl, her perception is just as much reality because it is her individual choice of action.

The "little maid" in WE ARE SEVEN most likely based her perception of her siblings on her emotional tie to both the living as well as the dead brothers and sisters. Indeed, emotions are truly that element of the individual that are genuinely unique. The focus of the Romanticists on emotion most likely developed from the desire to justify the world in terms of individual perceptions. The Romanticists illustrate and expound the idea that there are no unique individual emotions only unique collections of emotions.
The architypical work of this genus of thought is Walt Whitman's SONG OF MYSELF.

At face value, SONG OF MYSELF is a lyrical epic of self-disclosure and praise of nature. The underlying theme as much of Romantic writing was to find a way to understand the world by understanding one's self. Whitman sought not only to understand his physical self but also his emotional self. Whitman writes:

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean, Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest...

I mind how I once lay such a transparent summer morning, How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me, And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to bare-stript heart, And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of earth, And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own, And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own, And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and all the women my sisters and lovers, And that a keelson of the creation is love,...

(1040-1041)

This excerpt from SONG OF MYSELF illustrates how Whitman valued his personal characteristics regardless of what they were. The main thrust of the passage shows how Whitman is illuminated to the knowledge of human experience as a result of an emotional experience. In that moment, Whitman finds the meaning of existence to be the "brotherhood of man" and the support for creation to be an emotion, namely love.
Much of Whitman's exuberant emotions stemmed from the organic physical environment, i.e. nature. The Romantic movement very much valued the beauty of nature and concentrated a great deal of energy into incorporating humanity into nature. The reason for doing so lies in the belief that the laws of nature were just and unwaivering. Therefore the human condition could be separated from the social condition. Or in other words, the individual or even humanity is responsible to natural order rather than social order. This concept was nurtured by a sub-group of the Romanticists called the Transcendentalists.

The leading light in the Transcendental movement was Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's tenets were based on man's obedience of natural law and echoed the ideas of Neoclassicism, i.e. man should be governed by reason not by other men. His works WALDEN and CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE outline what he saw as the order of society. Thoreau believed that all of the resources of the earth were at the disposal of all of humanity and that it was right of all of humanity to secure a peaceful comfortable life through the parsimonious exploitation of the resources and not each other.

The Transcendentalists ideas, however logical, did not become fruitive, because there were (and are) those in society that do not wish to relinquish power. However, the fact that the Transcendentalist and Romanticist movements were viable schools of thought does suggest that the state of humanity from the mid-Eighteenth through the
mid-Nineteenth centuries was one of increasing importance of individual free will and a global concern for the well being of humanity. Even though the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700's tended to de-individuate humanity in exchange for economic prosperity, there was a strong counter current attempting to elevate the value of the individual. The void caused by the discrepancy of thought and action of the times left humanity to question what their true experience was. An attempt to answer this question was presented by the next school of thought, Realism and its offspring Naturalism.

The middle to late 1800's was a very explosive period of time in human development, explosive in the sense that a great many social and cultural advances occurred during this period. The Industrial Revolution caused most of these changes. The products of technology made life a little more comfortable and more of the world accessible. Material wealth became a major concern in society. The economic structure allowed for the emergence of a true middle-class in society. It was this middle-class that became the focus of human thought during this period.

The realists were concerned with portraying middle-class, or every day, life as it actually occurred. On the surface it may appear that the realists were not attempting to analyze the human condition but merely report it. This is not the case. Realism was directly reflective of societal values. Therefore, the fact that the realist
chose to report on the subjects that they did is in itself an analysis and critique of the human condition. Not only does the subject matter of realism provide a clue of the state of humanity at the time, but the emergence of the related schools of thought, namely positivism and naturalism, also gives evidence of the human condition.

These related schools, though not strictly defined as realism, were indeed part of the same genus of thought. Positivism attempted to take a scientific approach to analyzing society. The Positivism writers utilized scientific reasoning and terminology in presenting their ideas. This was the period of time when sociology first began to become a distinct discipline. One of the best known positivist philosophers was Karl Marx. His philosophy of communism as presented in CAPITAL and COMMUNIST MANIFESTO established an analytical solution to certain problems facing the industrial society. His solution involved class revolt to ensure the equable profit of industrialism for the labor-class.

Naturalism on the other hand did not depart as much from the realist approach. However, the naturalists attempted to be more explicit about man's dark animalistic nature. It was during this time that Charles Darwin published THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES. This work outlined the existence of man as a matter of evolutionary fitness and competition. Darwin's concept of environmental determinism became the flag of naturalism. Simply put, environmental
Determinism refers to the idea that humankind's survival and reproductive success is dictated by the physical environment and is the only motivation for human behavior. Humankind was seen as a slave to his environment both natural and social. The famous naturalist Upton Sinclair portrayed man as nothing more than a reactionary animal to the social environment in his "muckraker" novels of the early 1900's.

The main thrust of all of realism, positivism and naturalism was not only to analyze humans in absolute terms but also to provide solutions both explicitly (like Marx and Darwin) and dramatically. The quintessential example of using drama to suggest solutions for living is Henrik Ibsen's work, A DOLL HOUSE. Ibsen uses the classic theme of realism, i.e. portraying middle-class life as it occurs, to present human flaws. The solution is implicit. It comes in the form of what not to do rather than what to do. The almost tragic portrayal of characters suggests to the reader (or in the case of an Ibsen drama, the spectator) a contrary solution to the stories action.

The play, A DOLL HOUSE, itself is "a day in the life" of a stereotypical housewife, Nora, as she reflects on her own life. Nora is presented at first as a passive victim of both her husband (Torvald Helmer) and her father. She is a victim in the sense that she has become "enslaved" in the role of wife and mother by the absence of her own free choice, or as the title implies, Nora is merely a doll for her male keepers. This view echoes the concept of
social/environmental determinism. That is to say, Nora's father's treatment of her as a child predisposed her to remain in a subordinate role as an adult.

The end of the action in the play has Nora fleeing from her husband and family. This action is taken despite the expectations of her by society. On the surface this rebellious action is seen as a movement toward individual realization. What Ibsen is implying, however, is something very different. The decision to leave her family is not an easy nor a desirable one for Nora to make. This adverse condition that Nora is in at the end of the action is a product of her own choosing. She chose early in life to allow the very enslavement against which she is now fighting. Ibsen's solution to Nora's artificial existence is to not allow oneself to perpetuate the pattern of social expectations.

The high degree of contempt in which the realist writers held the human existence indicates the how strong the influence of culture had become on the human condition. Cultural influence outweighed individual choice in directing one's life. Assimilating oneself into the ordered culture of the time was the paramount criterion for evaluating one's existence. The realists suggested that there was a higher force at work than that of material cultural processes. What that force was could not be concretely defined by the realists but was a question that would direct the thinking of the next period of thought.
The twentieth century can be divided into two distinct though related schools of thought. The first dominant before the Second World War and the other after the War. The first period served to bridge the romantic and realist schools into one avenue of consideration. This endeavor was greatly influenced by the emergence of psychology (science of individualistic philosophy) as a distinct discipline. Its beginnings seem to be a solution of the problems presented by the realists while being directed by the individualistic tenets of the romanticists. Humans were viewed as unique entities interacting in society, rather than mere extensions of the environment.

Even though many of the great psychological theorists like Sigmund Freud and William James presented their thoughts in prose, literature of this period was mostly influenced by the philosophy of the existentialists. All of the writers of the early twentieth century (including the psychologists) may not be classified as existentialists, but the prevailing thought of the period can be defined in terms of the themes of existentialism. The existentialists redefined the individual as it pertained to the development of humankind. They dealt with the realists' question about whether man is culture-bound or free by suggesting that the answer lay in the subjective thought of each person, and not in an absolute. Each person, therefore, man was responsible for his own fate.
The existentialists distinguished themselves from other schools of thought by viewing man as an individual entity estranged from God, nature, and even himself. This focal point allowed the existentialists to look at the human condition from a perspective that dismissed superstition and became responsible and directed at helping humankind by changing society. The other truly existential theme is one of seemingly paradoxical dichotomies and irony in existence. It did not matter whether solutions to humanistic problems were positive or negative as long as they were the product of subjective thought. They also believed in the power of non-reason in the human spirit, i.e. the instinctual animalistic side of man. However, their philosophical tenets placed a great deal of importance on humankind's ability to rationalize his existence and think about the world around him.

Humankind's estrangement from himself was best analyzed by Sigmund Freud. Freud integrated the concept of non-reason into his Psychoanalytic theory and presented human thought and action as an inner battle among the many psyches contained in one individual. In Freud's theory the non-reason was called the Id, that part of human unconsciousness that is controlled by primal, instinctual, self-serving thoughts. The antithesis to this part of one's self is the rational, moral Superego. The Superego directed behavior by enforcing learned and instinctual values such as chastity, honesty, and humility.
Controlling the conflict between these two forces of human nature is the Ego, or the I. The Ego, as Freud sees it, was influenced by the mores of society. As a result, the presentation of one's self to the world (the Ego) is the end product of internal conflict and external conflict. What Freud is searching for in his theory is how the manifestation of the conflicts differ from how the person views himself or herself. Any discrepancies in the evaluation of these two factors leads Freud to the supposed cause of a person's mental instabilities. (Marx and Cronan-Hillix 254-260)

This idea, both as a scientific and philosophical position, enlightens the concept of humankind's estrangement from his true self. Not only is humankind estranged from his own person but he also is separated from divine influence. Thus, as Nietzsche concludes, "God is dead," becomes a dominant existential attitude. The writings of Faulkner, Hemingway, Sinclair, and others reflect this attitude by portraying characters asking for the intervention of God, only to find no comfort.

To say that all the existentialists were atheistic would be too stern a condemnation. The absence of God from their philosophy is more a comment on man's shortcomings than a denial. The first century and a half of industrialism had produced machines that could control nature, weapons that could tumble civilizations and destroy the human body in ways unthinkable, and social and political
systems that exploited and demeaned the very people they were designed to protect. The bleak realities of technology had replaced the need for God, according to the existentialists. How could there be a divine providence when children were forced into labour while their fathers were being blown apart in war over some conflict of ideology?

Technology also separated man from nature. Man was not seen as a cog in the natural wheel, rather he was being spawned from and made slave to the machines that defined his existence. Materialism and artificial comfort thus became the definition of status in the twentieth century. Furthermore the technology man had developed was robbing him of the very splendor and wonders of nature. D. H. Lawrence paints a picture of how technology was pushing nature aside in his short story, ODOUR OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS:

Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. At the edge of the ribbed level of sidings squat a low cottage, three steps down from the cinder track. A large bony vine clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof... There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and some ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes. (1839)

Here Lawrence is showing the attempt of nature to reclaim its space as humans exploit a nearby coal mine. The ability for the few chrysanthemums to bring any joy to anyone is overshadowed by the rapid expansion of man's technology.

The estrangement of humans from God, nature, and themselves leaves only nothingness. However life goes on.
Humans continue to search for their being, even in this void. In keeping with the existentialists' affinity for the paradoxical, one could say that the human condition has become the greatest of all nothingness -- a universe. Humans are no longer subjugated to God, nature, reason, society or anything, except to themselves. The course of humanity thus becomes the responsibility of subjective evaluations of each person. The epochs of evolution of man have left us with a vague and paradoxical existence in which many futures can be realized. The existentialists paint a pessimistic portrait of life but give humanity the realization of our responsibility and ability to elevate the state of humanity.

A definition of literature in the second half of the twentieth century would generally be considered difficult. Brian Wilkie and James Hurt write in their compilation and analysis of literature entitled LITERATURE OF THE WESTERN WORLD (volume II):

It is hard to get a clear perspective on the literature of our own century. For one thing we are too close to it; for another, it is still writing itself. ...looking at recent literature sometimes seems less like looking through a lens than peering into a kaleidoscope... One moment we get a fix upon a pattern, the next moment another takes its place. (1507)

Difficulty in defining one's own period is the problem in seeking the answer to the humanistic question. How we see or exist may be very different from how future generations judge us.
Regardless how difficult it may be to define contemporary literature, it is possible to categorize certain themes of literature. These categories owe their genesis to the Existential movement. The first category can be seen as exploring the non-reason or "dark side" of man. The second is how humanity deals with the technological existence it has created. Both of these themes attempt to understand and offer a solution of the discrepancy between (or paradox of) technology and the state of humanity.

The first theme of exploring humankind's dark side is exemplified by the popularity of mystery and suspense prose. Not only are Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Connan-Doyle books exciting to read, but they also appeal to the dark, mysterious part of the psyche. However, the suspense novel has evolved from the classic "who done it" mysteries solved by great detectives such as Miss Jane Marple and Sherlock Holmes to more macabre tales of psychotic villains and their ability to wreak terror and uncertainty into humankind. Stephen King, the master of mystery in the 1970's and 1980's, wrote novels dealing with possessed cars, nightwatchmen gone mad with the complete aloneness of the job, the monster that children fear came to life, and other very abnormal situations placed in normal settings.

The comment on humanity that suspense prose makes is in support of the paradox of existence. Humankind's attempt to deal with the world in a reasonable manner often times is resolved irrationally. Humankind still maintains the power
to be influenced by animalistic impulses and act irrationally. On example of this is the main character in Stephen King's novel, THE SHINING. The character, Jack, seeks a quiet place to take his family, away from the bustle and financial worries of urban life. His new job of a winter caretaker of a summer resort allows him to just that. However, his idealic situation only heighten the instability in his character that leads him to act rather animalistic. He murders the other winter employees then attempts to turn his violence towards his own family only to meet his demise in this irrational quest.

King uses the dark side of humankind's behavior to amplify the idea that we are still responsible to ourselves and that the answers to our existence must be found within our existence and not in a reliance on external circumstances. Humankind has relied on its technology to solve the problems facing it, or a government to improve the quality of life, or society for adverse circumstances, when in fact the answers are contained in our own human choices. The idea that individual human choice is more powerful than any man-made tool in uplifting the human condition is espoused by the one unique genus of literature of the late twentieth century, science fiction.

Although the individual themes of each work of science fiction may vary, all of science fiction is placed in a back-drop of advanced technology. Even thogh the characters of the stories have the benefit of conceivable
but not yet realized technology, the resolutions of the plots usually hinge on an individual utilizing one's own inner characteristics. The impetus of such themes suggests not only the paradox of existence but also the paradox of technology.

Technology can be seen as both the destroyer and savior of state of humanity. It has taken this antagonist/protagonist role not as a fact of its development but as a result of its application. Humankind's scientific endeavors have resulted in the ability to heal diseased bodies of people who fifty years ago would have surely died. The same endeavors allow humans to kill one another with germs that can be undetected in a manner more voracious than imagined fifty years ago. In addition, the "electronic age" allows a wider variety of influences and has closed the distance of communication throughout the world. The result of this technological revolution is that there are wide discrepancies between what humans are capable of doing and what is actually being done to elevate the human condition.

The epitome of science fiction works is one that helps relate man to his technology, makes a statement about the world in which humankind now lives, and shows the triumph of the human spirit and choice over the technological world. That work is Frank Herbert's DUNE. The story tells of a young expatriated duke's attempt to balance the powers of the futuristic universe as he takes control of the desert planet known as Arrakis. Arrakis was
valued as the only source of a geriatric spice that allowed a person to develop prescient abilities. Even though the story takes place far into the future at a distance that earth's sun would not even be a faint glimmer in the sky, DUNE has many implications on life at the end of the twentieth century.

Frank Herbet was first and foremost an environmentalist before he was a science fiction writer; therefore, his books have strong environmental overtones. In DUNE, the ecology of arid lands becomes paramount. The fact that Arrakis is entirely a desert planet shows the importance in maintaining these wastelands here on earth. In the end of the book, the native desert people using the resources the desert has provided are able to defeat an army of "off-worlders" using highly technical weapons. This suggests that we as humans should realize the potential of our resources no matter how barren of life or value they may seem. Herbert's emphasis on conservation and correct exploitation of natural resource is indeed sage advise as the earth begins to be overutilized and abused. In the late 1980's and early 1990's the environment has become an important political and societal issue. The environmental concern Herbert expressed is indeed an important topic to the future of humanity.

Although Herbert's book is a science fiction novel, it deals with technology in a very unique way. Technology is used to simplify daily life and reduce the complexity of
human endeavors. There are no computers or complex weapons. The book eludes to a technological revolt in which resulted in the law that humans "... shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind." (521) The most useful weapon in Herbert's world was a knife because high velocity weapons such as powder guns or lasers were offset by the use of ionic shields or armor. Herbert solves the paradox of technology by limiting its use with respect to human cognative powers and its own ability to be useful.

At present, humans make the technology. It is ours to control. We may decide what to use and what to ignore. We must make decisions that benefit the quality of life on earth. Humans may actively choose to ignore the malevolent applications of atomic or microorganic technology. It is exactly these choices that Herbert and other science fiction writers attempt to make salient in their works. If humans choose to ignore such options, humanity could end in a firey explosion of our own making.

As humanity enters the twenty-first century A.D., we are faced with the choice of application of our technology. We can continue to yield to our "dark side" that is controlled by ignorance and paranoia by devastating the environment and ourselves through the shortsighted application of what we manufacture. On the other hand, the choice can be made to concern ourselves with the environmental and social implications of our actions. The fruition of these choices can be accomplished by the
persis tant reinforcement of beneficial choices. The most important device for this reinforcement in the future will be the electronic media.

Popular culture can be easily communicated into virtually every corner of the world through either radio or television. The trend is indeed toward directing attention and action to environmental and humanistic projects. It is important that popular culture embraces fewer materialistic goals because this indicates that global concern is on the humanistic problems of the time. The problem is keeping such concerns in popular thought.

The next important choice to be made is one not to accept too readily superficial solutions to the problems. The state of humanity is one of responsibility to the discrepancies that technology has allowed. The course of humanity that we must actively choose is one of solving the identified problems. Future generations of literature must be able to explore new facets and conflicts in the human conditions aside from those that the twentieth century has presented.
WORKS CONSULTED


