

COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF
GEORGE ELIOT AND THOMAS HARDY

By

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The first step in the estimate of an artist's philosophy is to ascertain what the artist himself conceived as his mission, and whether he considered that he was impregnating his art with any philosophy of life worthy of acceptance. An admission by an artist of a telic aim should give the inquirer a suggestion as to how to prosecute his investigation. But the converse is manifestly not true: that the denial of a telic aim indicates the absence of a philosophy worth searching for. Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy have left us in letters and notes, and buried in their imaginative writings, hints as to what each considered the aim of his work beyond the giving of pleasure to readers. Both felt that vital truths could be presented to a large audience more effectively through the imagination than directly through the faculty of reason. Yet each disclaimed the responsibility of organizing his ideas into a complete system. Neither artist, in fact, seems to have thought that the influence on society of any subtly ratiocinated system of philosophy could be very great. So, like some greater moral artists, they have presented scattered truths for others to codify.

That George Eliot regarded art as a legitimate pulpit she stated in a review published in 1856:

When Hornung paints a group of chimney-sweepers,-- more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness,

than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations. Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.¹

Of her own office as a literary artist she wrote in a letter July 18, 1878:

My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher--the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge. It is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings; another to say, "This step, and this alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities."²

Yet in spite of this limiting of her "function", George Eliot did, especially in her later novels and in The Spanish Gypsy and certain other poems, indulge in a great deal of abstract philosophizing--so much as to mar the artistry of, for example, Romola. This novel is, in fact, so didactic that it seems to depart from the inductive method that George Eliot set for herself, and to follow the deductive plan, with characters and incidents cut to fit a previously determined moral. This program indicates a vast change in practice from her ideal of twenty years earlier, as expressed in a letter to her friend Sara Hennell:

I feel every day a great disinclination for theories and arguments about the origin of things in the presence of all this mystery and beauty and pain and ugliness that floods one with conflicting emotions.³

1. "Natural History of German Life," Essays, 161.

2. To Mrs. Peter Taylor. Cross III, 330.

3. To Miss Sara Hennell, June 8, 1857. Cross I, 461.

This letter may have expressed a mood of weariness rather than a habitual attitude, for in her journal she wrote on January 28, 1859:

I owe him [Spencer] a debt of gratitude.....The stimulus of his intellect, especially during our long walks, roused my energy once more and revived my dormant love of science. His intense theorising tendency was contagious, and it was only the stimulus of a theory which could then have induced me to work.⁴

Some have seen in this growing tendency to philosophize a result of her growing interest in the scientific writings of her husband, George H. Lewes. But the most probable explanation seems to be that George Eliot was oppressed with the necessity of bringing some sort of cosmic order out of the chaos of sufferings, wonderings, doubts, despairs. She had the instinct to manage, to arrange, to clarify, so insistently present that she became a less accurate reporter in becoming a propagandist editor. In this she is quite different--one might say much less convincing--than Thomas Hardy. To the end of showing a satisfactory philosophy of life she bent every effort and consecrated every talent. Yet, unlike Thomas Hardy, she never brought her philosophy to even the semblance of a system. In a letter to Frederic Harrison she wrote:

But the fact is, I shrink from decided "deliverances" on momentous subjects from the dread of coming to swear by my own "deliverances", and sinking into an insistent echo of myself. That is a horrible destiny--and one cannot help seeing that many of the most powerful men fall into it.⁵

4. Cross II, 76.

5. "To Frederic Harrison," January 15, 1870. Cross III, 10

The fact that George Eliot's philosophy is never brought to a well rounded close does not indicate a lack of mental acumen or of moral courage. Rather it shows the agnosticism inherent in any Positivist philosophy until the "unknowable" shall have been greatly reduced. For in spite of the deductive tendency mentioned in Romola, George Eliot remained a positivist as regards the great concepts of God, immortality, destiny, and the like.* She could have been voicing her own increasing inability to reach conclusions satisfying to her judgment when she wrote in connection with the doubts assailing Savonarola:

To the common run of mankind it has always seemed a proof of mental vigor to find moral questions easy, and judge conduct according to concise alternatives. And nothing was likely to seem plainer than that a man who at one time declared that God would not leave him without the guarantee of a miracle, and yet drew back when it was proposed to test his declaration, had said what he did not believe. 6

She seemed oppressed by the multitudinous aspects of truth demanding to be learned. Throughout her life she was an indefatigable student of science and of philosophy, but always she saw ahead new fields to be investigated before she could reach satisfaction. She readily fell in with the investigative spirit of Nineteenth Century thought, which she pictured in Daniel

* Positivism: A system of philosophy elaborated by the Frenchman Auguste Comte (1798-1857), on the basis of the doctrine that man's knowledge is confined exclusively to phenomena, and that even this knowledge is relative and not absolute. It, therefore, rejects all attempts at metaphysics or speculative philosophy, whether as to natural causes or First Cause, and as to substances, physical or mental, human or divine. New Standard Dictionary

Deronda:

While Mordecai was waiting on the bridge for the fulfilment of his visions, another man was convinced that he had the mathematical key of the universe which would supercede Newton, and regarded all known physicists as conspiring to stifle his discovery and keep the universe locked; another, that he had the metaphysical key, with just that hairs-bredth of difference from the old wards which would make it fit exactly. ⁷

Throughout her works George Eliot dropped so many bits of advice and uttered so many oracles that Mr. James was right in stating George Eliot's

....general attitude with regard to the novel, which, for her, was not primarily a picture of life, capable of deriving a high value from its form, but a moralized fable, the last word of a philosophy endeavoring to teach by example. ⁸

Like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy denied that he had any consistent philosophy of life. Yet whereas Eliot disclaimed in rather uncertain terms that hers was a complete system of wisdom, Hardy asserted that what was called his philosophy was

... only a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show. ⁹

It is this "confused heap of impressions" that will be searched for its ideas of worth. That Hardy considered the individual ideas in this "heap" as of value is certain, and also that he considered his imaginative mode of presentation best. In his journal he wrote on October 17, 1896, while smarting from criticism of

⁷ Daniel Deronda II, 116.

⁸ James, Henry: Partial Portraits, 50

⁹ Letter written to someone about December, 1920, obviously referring to correspondence with Mr. Noyes. Later Years, 219.

Jude the Obscure:

Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystalized opinions--hard as a rock--which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel-- which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries-- will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing....If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone. 10

Elsewhere in his journal he recorded:

April 19 (1885). The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things. 11

In October, 1917, he wrote:

I hold that the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not convictions. Wordsworth in his later writings fell into the error of recording the latter. So also did Tennyson, and so do many other poets when they grow old. Absit omen! 12

Some readers fresh from The Dynasts would not hold that Hardy has refrained from recording convictions. A few years later, in 1922, when Hardy was preparing to issue Late Lyrics and Earlier, he wrote an Apology which defends himself as a "thinker," and sets forth in some detail his later theory of his mission as artist. Yet here he pretended to no finished system:

10 Later Years, 57.

11 Early Life, 223

12 later years, 178

While I am quite aware that a thinker is not expected, and, indeed is scarcely allowed, now more than heretofore, to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempt to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible--it must be obvious to open intelligence that, without denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of "obstinate questionings" and "bland misgiving" tends to a paralysed intellectual stalemate. Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells. An what is today, in allusion to the present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only such "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also. 13

The responsibility of the prose novelist in the shaping of the thoughts of the public was heavy on Thomas Hardy in the period of Tess and Jude. He was suffering under the sting of sharp criticism that his philosophy was useless if not positively dangerous. Yet he refused to suppress or gloss his testimony. Instead he suggested that the fault might lie with the readers rather than with the philosophy:

It is unfortunately quite possible to read the most elevating works of imagination in our own ow any language, and, by fixing the regard on the wrong side of the subject, to gather not a grain of wisdom from them, nay, sometimes positive harm. What author has not had his experience of such readers?--the mentally and morally warped ones of both sexes, who will where practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions. Truly has it been observed that 'the eye sees that which it brings with it the means of seeing.' 14

13 Collected Poems, 526

14 "Profitable Reading of Fiction'." Forum, march, 1888.

An entry in his journal for the same year implies genuineness of purpose:

October 7. The besetting sin of modern literature is its insincerity. Half its utterances are qualified, even contradicted, by an aside, and this particularly in morals and religion. When dogma has to be balanced on its feet by such lair-splitting as the late Mr. M. Arnold's it must be in a very bad way. ¹⁵

Two years later he published a more specific defence of his loaded writing:

... The crash of broken commandments is as necessary an accompaniment of a tragedy as the noise of drum and cymbals to a triumphal march. ¹⁶

He defended his treatment of sex--a treatment that many Victorians and others have considered indelicate--by insisting that

... Nothing in such literature should for a moment exhibit lax views of that purity of life upon which the well-being of society depends; but the position of man and woman in nature, and the position of beliefs in the minds of man and woman--things which everybody is thinking but nobody is saying--might be taken up and treated frankly. ¹⁷

Though Hardy's defense of his right to publish his philosophy through imaginative writings grew more vigorous, the philosophy itself did not change greatly, but was throughout deliberate, well-thought, and consistent. It was suggested in the "Crass Casualty" of "Hap." written in 1866, and appeared without essential change in content, though with somewhat expanded reaches throughout his

¹⁵ Early Life, 281

¹⁶ "Candour in English Fiction," New Review. Jan. 1890.

¹⁷ Ibid.

stories and poems to The Dynasts, completed in 1907, and the later poems. Throughout his long career he was a constant searcher for truth, and the bits of wisdom, colored by mood and circumstance, together form a more coherent whole than he foresaw when he wrote:

Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as are forced upon us by chance and change. ¹⁸

18 Preface to Poems of the Past and Present, August, 1901. Collected Poems, 75.

CHAPTER II

POSITIVISTIC BASIS FOR THE PHILOSOPHIES OF
GEORGE ELIOT AND THOMAS HARDY

Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy were reared in orthodox Christian surroundings. As a child and young woman George Eliot was unusually devout. When she was eighteen years old she wrote:

... Oh that we could live only for eternity! that we could realize its nearness.

... It would not cost me any regrets if the only music heard in our land were that of strict worship.¹

At about the same time (1839) she wrote a devotional poem, later published in the Christian Observer. The refrain of the poem, Farewell, reflects the mood of its inspiration, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle." II Peter 1.14. ²

Hardy was at one time destined for the church. When he was sixteen and an apprentice in an architect's office, he became greatly exercised over the question of baptism. He feared that his own baptism in infancy according to English Church custom was not efficacious. Both Eliot and Hardy saw life with a high idealism. Both were by nature studious, investigative, critical--characteristics not inharmonious with religious devotion. And both were endowed with more than usual perceptiveness and insight. But the processes by which they arrived at their philosophies, very similar in many major points, differed

1 Letters to Miss Lewis (her teacher) Aug. 18 and Nov. 6, 1838. Cross I, 4,44.

2 Cross I, 57

widely.

The method by which George Eliot attained her philosophy of Positivism is well known. Here it is my purpose merely to mention some of the significant points as a basis for a further development of her theories of God, religion, fate, immortality. In 1841, two years after writing the letters mentioned above, George Eliot moved with her father to Coventry. The extensive reading that she had previously done in philosophy--Kant, Locke, besides the ancients--formed a ground for friendship with the Bray circle. This consisted of Charles Bray and his wife, and the latter's brother and sister, Charles and Sara Hennell. Charles Bray had previously published his Philosophy of Necessity, the essential feature of which is an identification of God and necessity. In this he holds that the supreme will or consciousness which has at some previous time created the universe has now regularized itself into automatically functioning natural law. God, and therefore his objectification in the visible universe, are mind, either conscious or unconscious. In this he agrees with Hardy, except that he does not show the total mind in process of emerging into awareness. The necessity of explaining evil (pain), which prompts Hardy's thesis of the Emergent Will, also stimulates Bray. He answers the immemorial question of Whence comes evil? by an appeal to the supernatural creator. Since God, or necessity,

has created all things, He must be the author of pain. But He has not created it through any pleasure of evil, "but because it is requisite to the greater good pursued." Evil is the "invariable accompaniment of that error which is consequent upon the necessary limitation of the powers of knowing."³ It is always present where there is ability to enjoy. Bray devotes chapters to a justification of the existence of evil. It is necessary, he says, as a protection for the system upon which happiness depends and as a stimulus to action. George Eliot accepted Bray's necessitarian God as superior to her old concept, but the limiting of God absolutely to law--even the law of His own regularity--did not suit her. It inhibited too much the present power of the Great Initiator to initiate new action or to alter existing forces. Some years later, after she had become acquainted with Spencer and had already been joined with Lewes for three years, she wrote to Charles Bray this criticism of his book:

... In the fundamental doctrine of your book (The Philosophy of Necessity) --that mind presents itself under the same conditions of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex)--I think you know that I agree. And every one who knows what science means, must also agree with you that there can be no social science without the admission of that doctrine. I dislike extremely a passage in which you appear to consider the disregard of individuals as a lofty condition of the mind. My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy. ... I could more readily turn Christian, and worship Jesus

3 Bray, Charles: The Philosophy of Necessity, vol I.

again, than embrace a Theism which professes to explain the proceedings of God. But I don't feel at all wise in these matters. I have a few strong impressions which serve me for my own support and guidance, but do not in the least qualify me to speak as a theorist. ⁴

Charles Hennell had also published three years previously An Inquiry concerning the Origin of Christianity. This book shows the falsity of the objective basis of the Christian Faith. It rejects the supernatural, the miraculous, elements in the Christian Religion, and treats it as a natural, organic outgrowth of Judaism in contact with Western philosophy. The various events of the Gospels it subjects to a rational criticism. The man Jesus it presents in much the same light as does George Moore's Brook Kerith. But it does seek to retain the moral and aesthetic values commonly seen in Christianity. Nor does it reject theism. The central thesis is that since Christianity has become an integral part of European civilization, incorporated in its mores, it must be real:

And how canst be otherwise than real to us, this belief that has nourished the souls of us all, and seems to have moulded actually anew their internal constitution, as well as stored them up with its infinite variety of eternal interests and associations? ⁵

To Hardy, Hennell's doctrine would have seemed a scholastic compromise. He would have pointed out that "real to us", while sufficient as the basis of a system of morals, is not satisfactory as the basis for a theism. He would have called the Inquiry an effort to endow a system postulated

4 Letter to Charles Bray, Nov. 15, 1857. Cross I, 472.

5 Hennell, Charles: An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity.

on reason with the properties inherent in an established religion. But George Eliot's devout nature demanded some support in her doubts, and this system served her. She read the Inquiry in 1841, evidently with great interest, for she often mentioned it in her letters, and in 1852 she wrote an analysis of it for the Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's publications. It seems to have marked an epoch in her life--the definite break with orthodoxy. In commenting on Hennell's book she wrote to Miss Lewis:

... But my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error. ⁶

Her enthusiastic acceptance of Hennell's views may have been more ready because, as she says in another letter:

I think the "Inquiry" furnishes the utmost that can be done toward obtaining a real view of the life and character of Jesus, by rejecting as little as possible from the Gospel

A year later Charles Hennell induced her to translate Strauss' Leben Jesu. Sara Hennell, the third member of the circle, was also a free-thinking writer, who afterwards published Thoughts in Aid to Faith.

These three thinkers believed in a Christianity as an ethical and spiritual system, based largely on the teachings of Jesus. All three held the Positivistic idea that man can have no real knowledge whatever except that furnished him through his senses. Yet all three developed theories not strictly Positivistic. George Eliot spent much time with them, and their influence on the young searcher can hardly be exaggerated. They aided in the

6 Letter to Miss Lewis, Nov. 13, 1841. Cross I, 103.

7. Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, Sept. 16, 1847. Cross I, 163

usually very painful operation of removing the ingrafted supports of traditional religion. At the same time they helped her to an endurable conception of life. Her devotion to truth was sincere, but her reasoning can hardly have been so purely inductive as it would have been if her loss of faith had not been so promptly compensated with a new absorbing purpose--her new religion.

What would have been the effect on George Eliot if she had not come under the influence of these friends is, of course, impossible to say. For her happiness and sanity it was well to replace rejected theses at once with others relatively more tenable. Yet her devotion to objective truth cannot fail to have been hurt by this early subjection to a new system demanding defense. It was natural for her, as it is for every one similarly placed, to grasp eagerly for a supporting belief to bring order into the chaos of her shattered orthodoxy. In proportion as she found a new belief she saddled herself with a vested interest. If her theory was correct, she accomplished more constructively than if she had remained more disinterested--weighing all phenomena with impartiality. If wrong, she became the less accurate scientific observer. Hardy did not come to any organized theory comparable to Eliot's until he reached that of the Emergent Will, when he was in his fifties. He undoubtedly remained a better

observer than he would have been if he had undertaken to defend a doctrine--however in accord with Positivistic demonstration. That his books would have been different, probably happier, is certain. That he would have done more good for the world depends on what philosophy he might have embraced and what its degree of truth. In 1842 Eliot wrote:

... For my part I wish to be among the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from usurped domination! ... Meanwhile, although I cannot rank among my principles of action a fear of vengeance eternal, gratitude for predestined salvation, or a revelation of future glories as a reward, I fully participate in the belief that the only heaven here, or hereafter, is to be found in conformity with the will of the Supreme; a continual aiming at the attainment of the perfect ideal, the true logos that dwells in the bosom of one Father.⁸

This devotion to truth caused eventually a break with her father, which was only partially mended by Eliot's agreement to outward conformity, including attendance at church. This compromise for the sake of her father is consistent with her practice of toleration through life and the kindly attitude of her writings toward all earnest religion. While she felt herself a crusader to "set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free," and while she believed herself emancipated from supernaturalism, she yet had naïve faith that somehow truth must triumph over error. This is a supernaturalism that is usually pardoned because of its pleas-

⁸ Letter to Mrs. Pears, Friday Evening, February, 1842. Cross I, 106.

ing optimism and because of its laissez faire. It is in line with her desire to hold spiritually to all that seemed best in tradition. A letter of this period states her position:

... I can rejoice in all the joys of humanity,--in all that serves to elevate and purify feeling and action; nor will I quarrel with the million who, I am persuaded, are with me in intention, though our dialects differ. Of course I must desire the ultimate downfall of error, for no error is innocuous; but this assuredly will occur without my proselytising aid, and the best proof of a real love of the truth--that freshest stamp of divinity--is a calm confidence in its intrinsic power to secure its own high destiny,--that of universal empire.⁹

During her life at Coventry George Eliot read exhaustively from Comte, Mills, Darwin, Locke, Spencer, and others. G. E. Cooke points out that through this reading she effected the reconciliation between Kant and Locke which she had so much desired in younger years.¹⁰ Another writer of importance in framing George Eliot's philosophy is Feuerbach, whose Essence of Christianity she translated after leaving Coventry for London in 1851. She had, however, through her reading of Hennell and Comte, already reached much the same conclusion as Feuerbach--that the objective basis of Christianity is false, that religion exists in the consciousness independent of any basis in objective reality.

The last, and probably the greatest, influence on her thinking was that of the great Positivist, George Henry

9 Letter to Mrs. Pears. Cross I, 105.

10 Cooke, G. E., George Eliot, 219

Lewes, her husband from 1854 till his death in 1878. Lewes' monumental work, A Biographical History of Philosophy, published in 1845, is built, as he says, by an impartial sceptic who holds that all systems of philosophy are equally futile, that they never have had any certainty nor ever will have. Yet he treats them respectfully as, altogether, the parent of positive science. For philosophy, he holds, was essential to give stimulus to the investigator. He draws parallels to astrology and alchemy, which respectively furnished incentive for astronomy and chemistry. Lewes follows Comte in holding to the three stages of thought through which all knowledge successively passes. First is the supernatural or fictitious, in which the mind asks for causes; it is marked by animism and by gods that need to be propitiated; it reaches its highest stage in monotheism. Second is the metaphysical or abstract, a transitional modification of the first stage; here the mind is concerned with abstract forces; it finds its highest development in the recognition of a general force termed Nature. Third is the positive or scientific, in which

... mind, convinced of the futility of all inquiry into causes and essences, applies itself to the observation and classification of laws which regulate effects; that is to say, the invariable relations of succession and similitude which all things bear to each other. The highest condition of this stage would be, to be able to represent all phenomena as the various particulars of one general view. ¹¹.

11 Lewes, G. H.: Biographical History of Philosophy, 656.

Lewes holds with Comte that the third stage of thought, the only stage in which knowledge is capable of progressive development, is now possible, and indeed imperative. The human mind is now ready to give its attention solely to the phenomena themselves, without interposing supernatural or metaphysical considerations.

... The search after essences and causes was renounced. The pretention to absolute knowledge was set aside. The discovery of laws became the great object of mankind. ¹²

Man, then, can know only the relative, not the absolute. Man must trust the results of his own experience because it is impossible for him to transcend them. It is vain for him to strive toward creative reason except on the basis of verified experience--laws. But Lewes does not hold, any more than does Comte, that the discovery of inviolable laws is an end in itself. These discovered laws are to be used as bases for further deductive hypotheses. The difference, then, according to Lewes, between philosophy and positive science is basically one of method. "Philosophy is deductive a priori." That is, it builds upon hypotheses whose truth may not be established. It proceeds from a priori axioms--axioms taken up without having undergone the "laborious but indispensable process of previous verification." Thus there may be a fallacy in either premise. Mathematics he holds as the ideal example of philosophy a priori, for it is readily

12 Ibid, 648

demonstrable. Of course Lewes wrote before the time of Einstein. "Positive science is deductive a posteriori." It begins by first ascertaining whether the axiom from which it is to deduce conclusions is indisputable; it experimentalizes; it puts nature to the test of "interrogation." After much observation it attains, by inductive process, to the certainty of law, and from this law certain deductions are drawn. It proceeds, then, not from an assumption but from a fact.¹³

A further doctrine of Lewes the scientist is that man's ideas are the necessary concomitants of his organism and of his environment. Man has no inherent ideas, but the interpretation of the data furnished him through the senses is conditioned by his heredity--a part of the history of the race:

Modern philosophy staked its pretensions on the one question: Have we any ideas independent of experience?...
The answer always ends in a negative.¹⁴

Lewes carries his biological theory further in considering man as not simply an assemblage of organs, but also as an organ in a collective organism--the race. From his individual organs man derives his sensations, judgments, and primary impulses. From the collective organism he derives his more complex concepts. This would give basis, if further basis were needed, for Eliot's treatment of heredity and tradition in her stories and poems. However,

¹³ Lewes, G. H.: Biographical History, Introduction.

¹⁴ Ibid, 664.

before meeting Lewes, George Eliot had read Darwin and knew Spencer as a friend. She already believed in the survival of every fit and positive form of life in the better forms that succeed it. She already saw a future in which the moral and spiritual offspring would rise higher than its progenitors--a melioristic theory reached at a much younger age than Hardy could have formed any synthesis.

Such then are the men and books that had the greatest influence on the developing mind of George Eliot. Scott says that religion was to Spencer, Strauss, Comte, Hennell, Feuerbach, Lewes--her studies and companions--

but a plaything of the race--the sentimental outcropping of race infancy--built up of fears, ancestral and sun worship. ¹⁵

This assertion may be somewhat justified if one restricts religion to its frequent connotation as a system built on objective phenomena. Yet it is difficult to group Strauss, Comte, Hennell, and Feuerbach in any generalization on religion. All these men, together with Bray, Locke, and others, conditioned George Eliot's emergent religion. They supplied the Positivistic base which she expressed in heredity, evolution, and tradition. This base, plus feeling, is her religion.

The process by which Thomas Hardy arrived at his Positivism was considerably different from that of George Eliot, and his philosophy was much slower in emerging. The several reasons for this difference in development must be noted if one is to understand the different form his philosophy was to take. Only one or two of these,

15 Scott, William T.: Chesterton and Other Essays, 273.

however, need more than passing comment.

First, for several reasons, though chiefly because he was a boy and not a girl, his serious reading during his late teens was principally Latin and Greek--Virgil, New Testament, Homer, Sophocles. He thus had relatively less Christian philosophy, and a relatively greater basis of Classic thought on which to build.

Second, at sixteen he was articled to an architect. For the next several years his reading could be pursued only early in the morning or at night. His work kept his mind from synthesizing the material he was gathering, but it did not keep him from gathering data, especially from the life around him. During the same period of life George Eliot was reading extensively in modern philosophy and theology. The most purposive reading that he did before he was twenty was probably his search of the Greek New Testament and whatever treatises he could lay hands on to find arguments for infant baptism. That he found very slender basis for this practice of the Church encouraged him to question other accepted dogmas. 16

Third, at the usual time of settling life thought, Hardy was not thrown among friends who had already considered religion and life inductively, and who could aid him in building major premises. Instead, as his orthodox theories crashed around him he was left without

protection from the hard facts that life presented on all sides. That he had no such friends as the Brays and Hennells caused him to look more keenly into actuality, to observe life more keenly in the effort to find the key to phenomena. His study of the classics, while of some aid, did not give the support that doctrines enforced by a friendly presence could afford. Advice from the clergy he soon found of no service.

Fourth, Hardy's mind, while precocious, had an elasticity that kept it unusually open to new opinions. This was a concomitant of that immaturity which, at twenty

... was greater than is common for his years, and it may be mentioned here that a clue to much of his character and action through-out his life, is afforded by his lateness of development in virility, while mentally precocious. He himself said humorously in later times that he was a child till he was sixteen, a youth till he was five-and-twenty, and a young man till he was nearly fifty. Whether this was intrinsic, or owed anything to his having lived in a remote spot in early life, is an open question. ¹⁷

Hardy remained relatively agnostic all his life, and at no time seemed settled in any belief except that suffering demands pity and relief. This did not, of course, prevent his tentative proposal of a philosophy of merliorism.

Fifth, and inevitable, was the hereditary organization of his mind. Whereas Eliot belonged to a family of intense religious convictions,--several of them, especially Dinah Morris, were Evangelical preachers and exhorters,--Hardy's family seems to have taken little active interest in

17 Early Life, 42

religion beyond regular attendance and worship and the furnishing of music. They were an intelligent family, who had for centuries furnished many leaders in local activities.

Sixth, and conditioned by the fifth, was his affection by the fatalism of the West Country. This environment of fatalism early accustomed his mind to see and note the sinister in life. 18

Seventh, a corollary of the fifth and sixth, is very important to an understanding of Hardy's philosophy. Yet it seems to have been overlooked by his biographers as a major influence in the formation of his general philosophy. It is a bent of his mind that made him unusually tender towards suffering--that of birds and beasts no less than that of men.

George Eliot, while admitting man's place in the evolutionary process, seems to consider man as an entity in the affairs of the universe so far removed from his brute connections as to live under a different dispensation. Possibly Eliot's infrequent mention of suffering in beasts is due to the influence of Bray's doctrine of Evil (pain) mentioned earlier in this chapter. Certainly the fact that she treats human suffering as frequently telic is reminiscent of Bray's doctrine. Hardy's view

of creation is more inclusive. Evolution is a more vital fact. Thus the number of data on which he must build his premises was greatly increased. He did not report this hypersensitiveness in letters or notes until in late years, long after it had worked its effect on his life and art. In fact, Hardy was little given to reporting his introspections. This tenderness, sometimes verging on animism, sees all creation, even inanimate, the helpless sport of an unkind fate--a very real force, almost anthropomorphic, to the Wessex dweller. Here will be treated only pity towards dumb life, from which Hardy drew parallels of pity towards the almost equally dumb (inarticulate) peasant. It is this instinctive pity rather than any concept of pain in general that gave Hardy pause.

Hardy has denied that *Jude the Obscure* is intended to be autobiographical. Yet the idea persists that at least the boy Jude somewhat presents a picture of Hardy's feelings. The first bit of advice Jude received was

Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can. ¹⁹

His first job, scaring the rooks from the farmer's corn, he lost because through pity he let the birds eat. When punishment came, the child Jude perceived

... the flaw in the terrestrial scheme, by which what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener.²⁰

19 Jude, 5.

20 Jude, 11.

We may believe that the average boy would recognize the folly of letting conduct be governed by pity, that he would see that philosophizing on the unfairness of nature brought only pain to himself. But

... Though Farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of young birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them and the nest in the original place the next morning. He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again. He carefully picked his way on tiptoe among the earthworms without killing a single one. ²¹

As Jude pondered the ordering of the world, he concluded that

Growing up brought responsibilities. ... Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. ²²

The man Jude did not get over the humane "weakness" in his character. Whether Jude is in any sense Hardy or not, the horrible details of the pig-killing could only have been told by one who had witnessed such a scene with eyes of pity, and with a mind not at ease as to its justice. ²³

At the same time that he weighed the undeserved sufferings of dumb life, Hardy attacked inhumanity in man. The two were inseparable. When grieved over the

21 Jude, 12

22 Jude, 14

23 Jude, 71

inhumanly wounded pheasants, Tess recalled that she had been told when a girl that hunters, rough and brutal as they seemed when pointing their guns with

... a bloodthirsty light in their eyes ... were, in fact, quite civil persons, save during certain weeks of autumn and winter, when, like the inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, they ran amuck, and made it their purpose to destroy life, ... conduct at once so unmannerly and so unchivalrous towards their weaker fellows in Nature's teeming family. ²⁴

As she put the yet living birds out of their torture by breaking their necks with her trembling hands,

... She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in nature. ²⁵

Hardy has not left us any notable records of the cruelty of animals to each other, probably because such cases are too common, and because nothing can be done about it.

Man is the offender. The wagtail let the bull, the stallion, and the mongrel pass without fear, but

A perfect gentleman then neared;
The wagtail, in a winking,
With terror rose and disappeared;
The baby fell a-thinking. ²⁶

One of the most poignant of the humanitarian poems is of the song bird

Blinded ere yet a-wing
By the red-hot needle.
...
Resenting not such wrong,
Thy grievous pain forgot,
Eternal dark thy lot,
Groping thy whole life long,
After that stab of fire;
Enjailed in pitiless wire;
Resenting not such wrong! ²⁷

24 Tess, 318

25 Tess, 318

26 "Wagtail and baby", Collected Poems, 278

27 "The Blinded Bird" Collected Poems, 418

Other examples might be sighted to show the kinship Hardy felt with the dumb creation. One of his last poems, "Compassion", is an ode in celebration of the Centenary of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It is dated January 22, 1924. ²⁸

In his letters and notebooks Hardy left several testimonies of his sensitiveness to the sufferings of animals. These latter references are mostly from rather late in life. One of these, a letter to the Rev. S. Whittel Key, is reminiscent of "A Modest Proposal:"

I am not sufficiently acquainted with the many varieties of sport to pronounce which is, quantitatively, the most cruel. I can only say generally that the prevalence of those sports which consist in the pleasure of watching a fellow-creature, weaker or less favored than ourselves, in its struggles, by Nature's poor resources only, to escape the death-agony we mean to inflict by the treacherous contrivances of science, seems one of the many convincing proofs that we have not yet emerged from barbarism.

In the present state of affairs there would appear to be no logical reason why the smaller children, say, of overcrowded families, should not be used for sporting purposes. Darwin has revealed that there would be no difference in principle; moreover, these children would often escape lives intrinsically less happy than those of wild birds and other animals. ²⁹

The most significant pronouncements are contained in two letters written in 1909 and 1910. Both show that the pity of his early life had now become rationalized:

The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the center of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively. Therefore the practice of vivisection, which might have been defended while the belief ruled that men and animals are essentially different,

28 "Compassion." Collected Poems, 791

29 Later years, 106.

has been left by that discovery without any logical argument in its favor. And if the practice, to the extent merely of inflicting slight discomfort now and then, be defended (as I sometimes hold it may) on grounds of it being good policy for animals as well as men, it is nevertheless in strictness a wrong, and stands precisely in the same category as would stand its practice on men themselves. 30

To the Secretary of the Humanitarian League --

Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species, is ethical; that it logically involves a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a necessity of rightness the application of what has been called "The Golden Rule" beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. While man was deemed to be a creation apart from all other creatures, a secondary or tertiary morality was considered good enough towards the "inferior" races; but no person who reasons nowadays can escape the trying conclusion that this is not maintainable. And though I myself do not at present see how the principle of equal justice all around is to be carried out in its entirety, I recognize that the League is grappling with the question. 31

Finally, in his will Hardy left money to two societies whose object was to lessen the sufferings of animals on the way from the farms to the slaughter centers. 32

A man that had so abiding a feeling of kinship to the "inferior races" could never frame a philosophy not based in considerable part on data respecting their position in the world. It was in part the necessity for ratiocinating this material that made Hardy slower than was Eliot in reaching a major premise. This lengthened time gave opportunity for more extended observation of

30 Later Years, 138.

31 Later Years, 141

32 Later Years, 250

phenomena to be used in making his induction. That the phenomena recorded are mostly of the pessimistic sort may be due to the peculiar selectivity of Hardy's perception. Or it may be due to the fact that phenomena are not pleasant when viewed impartially and without an artificial distortion to make them more pleasing. Hardy himself seemed to change his mind somewhat on this matter during his life.

Of the writings and thinkers that influenced Hardy's early authorship, we know much less than in the case of George Eliot. Before writing Far From the Madding Crowd, his fourth novel, he read Comte's Positive Philosophy. That he was influenced by it is certain from the following comment by Mrs. Hardy:

The Spectator ... hazarded a guess that it might be from the pen of George Eliot ... However, he conjectured, as a possible reason for the flattering guess, that he had latterly been reading Comte's Positive Philosophy, and writings of that school, some of whose expressions had thus passed into his vocabulary, expressions which were also common to George Eliot. ³²

Some years later the death of George Eliot again set him thinking about Positivism. At this time he writes:

If Comte had introduced Christ among the worthies of his calendar it would have made Positivism tolerable to thousands who, from position, family connection, or early education, now decry what in their heart of hearts they hold to contain the germs of a true system. It would have enabled them to modulate gently into the new religion by deceiving themselves with the sophistry that they still continued one-quarter Christians, or one-eighth, or one-twentieth, as the case might be: This is

a matter of policy, without which no religion succeeds in making way. ³³

An entry made in his journal on July 19, 1883, gives Hardy's justification for his particular kind of outspoken Positivism:

In future I am not going to praise things because the accumulated remarks of ages say they are great and good, if those accumulated remarks are not based on observation. And I am not going to condemn things because a pile of accepted views ranked together from tradition, and acquired by instillation, say antecedently that they were bad.³⁴

This is the principle upon which Hardy had long been writing, and this entry does not, of course, mark an epoch in his thought. It simply shows that his Positivism was to be outspoken, whereas Eliot's was softened by a kindly tolerance and outward conformity. In spite of her basic Positivism Eliot seemed to believe that somehow truth would triumph without her feeble aid. Her devotion to truth became conditioned by feelings of duty and expediency and religion. Hardy remained untrammelled for a longer period, and never got far from the agnosticism requisite for the keen observer. This agnosticism is reflected in a letter written when he was sixty:

My own interest lies largely in non-rationalistic subjects, since non-rationality seems, so far as one can perceive, to be the principle of the Universe. By which I do not mean foolishness, but rather a principle for which there is no exact name, lying at the indifference point between rationality and irrationality. ³⁵

34 Early Life, 210

35 Later years, 90

Excellent testimony that he had not yet ceased to gather data and that he had not yet begun to bend the data furnished by his senses to the support of any intellectual vested interest. In spite of charges of its cruelty, Hardy's method of representing life is the kindlier is spirit, for it is the method of complete, fearless diagnosis. Real kindness demands that the man of vision tell the whole truth as he sees it. That he finds life to be without value, or worse, can not excuse the artist for deceiving its victims. Hardy's method is also much more in accord with whatever dignity and worth man may have, for it treats man as able to hear the truth and to form his own conclusions--a prerogative granted by few literary artists and by no religious propagandists.

Re'sume: George Eliot's Positivism was reached at a relatively early age. She was assisted in the formation of her major premises by learned friends and by wide reading in philosophy. The objectivity of her readings and recordings of phenomena may very conceivably have been distorted by her early adoption of a satisfying philosophy and by her outward acquiescence in what to her was error. Thomas Hardy was rather late in coming to any philosophy of life. The principal reason for this retardation was his humanitarian feeling, which greatly multiplied the data for him to weigh before reaching any satisfactory

solution to the incongruities of the world. This very lateness made his testimony more trustworthy than it otherwise would have been. His Positivism was outspoken, unhampered by any mistaken kindness that would soften, conceal, or gloss his testimony. Both Eliot and Hardy held that a priori philosophies are limited by the faculties of the human mind; that only through Positive Science can progress be made.

CHAPTER III

THE IMMANENT WILL

In an early scene of Goethe's Faust the learned man sits in his study, attempting to render into German the Greek logos of John 1.1. After successively discarding Wort, Sinn, and Kraft, he fixes on That¹ as best translating the idea implied in logos. In the English Bible logos is translated word. To the layman not concerned with the theological second person of the Trinity, it means the prime cause, the first reason, the unconditioned. This idea Thomas Hardy attempts to translate from his consciousness into defining terms in many of his stories and poems. The most commonly chosen name is Immanent Will, borrowed from Arthur Schopenhauer. Hardy also employs many other names, especially in the Dynasts, to define more narrowly the concept. He further attempts to make his idea understandable through describing the consciousness and activities of the Will.

Definition: A survey of the various terms applied to the Immanent Will in the Dynasts gives a fairly accurate understanding of Hardy's conception of the present status of the Will. This description by nomenclature contains no fewer than forty-four suggestive names. Among these are the Immanent Will, used often: Voiceless Turner of the Wheel; Prime Mover; the Mode (Being as its attribute); the

1 The primary English meanings of these words are word, sense, strength, and deed.

Cause; the Prime; High Influence; All-inhering Power; the Unconscious Cause; Great Unshaken; Great Necessitator; World Soul; Eternal Urger; Unweeting Mind; Fate; Force; Purposive, Unmotived, Dominant Think; Rapt Determinator; the Back of Things; the Immanent Unrecking; the Unknowable; the Great Foresightless; the Loveless, Hateless; the Absolute; It; the Along; the Immanent Shaper. Some of these names are also employed in various poems and stories.

The many terms employed to identify the Will are not in themselves a satisfactory definition, however suggestive of attributes they may be to the imagination. They are partially successful in establishing the connotations of the term Will. They are the only definition Hardy attempted. That Will is not in itself a perfect term, although possibly the best to be found, Hardy admits in a letter to Mr. Edward Wright:

I quite agree with you in holding that the word 'Will' does not perfectly fit the idea to be conveyed-- a vague thrusting or urging internal force in no pre-determined direction. But it has become accepted in philosophy for want of a better, and is hardly likely to be supplanted by another, unless a highly appropriate one could be found, which I doubt. The word that you suggest--Impulse--seems to me to imply a driving power behind it; also a spasmodic movement unlike that of, say, the tendency of an ape to become a man and other such processes. ²

In another letter he admits that the term is not altogether satisfactory, but adds that

in the lack of another word to express precisely what is meant, a secondary sense has gradually arisen,

² Later Years, 124.

that of effort exercised in a reflex or unconscious manner. Another word would have been better if one could have had it, though 'power' would not do, as power can be suspended or withheld, and the forces of Nature cannot.³

Failing to give us a satisfactory definition of the Will, Hardy has furnished us with abundant data of the character and activities of the Immanent Will.

Character of the Immanent Will: In developing a concept from the narrative and descriptive paraphrases that Hardy has left, the reader must remember that the poet has used imaginative terms not accurately translatable into prose ideas. He must also remember that this material covers a long period of years and inevitably a wide range of moods in the author as well as some changes of belief. Since Hardy is an artist as well as a philosopher, one may expect him in the enthusiasm of creation to hazard some opinions that at other times he would repudiate. Yet a careful canvassing shows not only his fanciful imaginings but also quite plainly his more sober judgment.

To the artist the Will does not always appear as of the same grade of consciousness. Or one might say that in some passages the Will is described in more anthropomorphic terms than in others. Three such degrees of consciousness are fairly distinguishable, besides a

3 To Dr. Edward Clodd, March 22, 1904. Later Years, 105

fourth, which is postulated as a future "meloir" possibility.

1. Sometimes the Will is merely a "sublime fermenting-vat." This is the evolutionary Will, ever becoming, in a state of endless flux. This is the Nature that drives her victims, not purposively, but because It must ever work. It is the Crass Casualty of "Hap," although in this short poem the evolutionary character is not evident. In any case Will so conceived is non-sentient of good or evil, and therefore is not to be blamed, for "guilt does not lie in willing, but in willing with knowledge!"⁴ This amorphous conception of the Will is hinted as the Will to Enjoy in an entry in Hardy's notebook dated July 16, 1888:

Thought of the determination to enjoy. We see it in all nature, from the leaf on the tree to the titled lady at the ball. ... It is achieved, of a sort, under superhuman difficulties. Like pent-up water it will find a chink of possibility somewhere. Even the most oppressed of men and animals find it, so that out of a thousand there is hardly one who has not a sun of some sort for his soul.⁵

Again he calls it the

... "appetite for joy", which stimulates all creation; that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed.⁶

Occasionally, not often, the seeming malevolence of a certain spot, as Egdon Heath, seems thus amorphous.

4 Schopenhauer, Arthur: The World as Will and Idea, 204

5. Early Life, 279

6 Fess, 216.

Usually the spirit of a place is more personal.

2. Most often the Will is a stupid, blind urger, who
 works unconsciously, as heretofore,
 Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
 Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
 Seem in themselves its single listless aim,
 And not their circumstance. ⁷

This "Immanent Doer that doth not know" is sometimes conceived as having grown tired of his partly finished toy, and as having dozed in his reasoning and perceptive faculties while yet willing in a mechanistic fashing. Usually It has not yet completely emerged into consciousness, but works in a state of calm nescience, giving no warnings and answering no questions. It has no sense of good or ill, of pain or pleasure. It is supremely indifferent to Its creatures, mutely musing over their fates. It is without any sustained aim. Yet It is ceaselessly striving toward It knows not what. That countless midges are tortured or destroyed is immaterial to a non-sentient being. The fact that their feelings and desires are intense cannot concern It. It can not pay heed to man's motives any more than to Its own. The evils that man commits because driven by this Will are not morally chargeable to It, for it is nescient and irresponsible. That the sins so committed are not wholly chargeable to man is another matter, one on which Hardy

7 Dynasts, 1.

differs considerably from George Eliot, as will appear later. An unexplained reference in Hardy's journal gives very doubtful help on this point, because of the confused use of the verb to sin. Elsewhere Hardy uses sin to mean conscious evil doing. Here the term seems to mean to err. Hardy's doctrine of Free Will, as explained later in this chapter, would not allow the usual meaning of sin to be used here. The Italics are mine.

December 10 (1888) . . . He, she, had blundered; but not as the Prime Cause had blundered. He, she, had sinned; but not as the Prime Cause had sinned. He, she, was ashamed and sorry; but not as the Prime Cause would be ashamed and sorry if it knew.⁸

When the Spirit of the Years shows to the Spirit of the Pities the mad massacre at Waterloo, the Pities asks why the Will prompts "so senseless-shaped a doing!" The Years exonerates the unrecking misdoer with

I have told thee that It works unwittingly,
As one possessed, not judging.⁹

Again through the Spirit of the Years we learn that
... the Will heaves through Space, and moulds the ^{(times,}
With mortals for Its fingers! We shall see
Again men's passions, virtues, visions, crimes,
Obey resistlessly
The purposive, unmotived, dominant Thing
Which sways in brooding dark their wayfaring!

Such a doctrine of an irresponsible manipulator is exceedingly repugnant to the mind that wishes to bring order out of chaos-- to establish responsibility. Yet

8 Early Life, 282.

9 Dynasts, 517

10 Ibid, 191.

Hardy shows it as the usual concomitant of disillusionment.

The concept of the development of the Will from the first to the second degree of consciousness, from "sublime fermenting-vat" to "blind urger," is shown in a paragraph from Jude the Obscure:

Vague and quaint imaginings had haunted Sue, in the days when her intellect scintillated like a star, that the world resembled a stanza or melody composed in a dream; it was wonderfully excellent to the half aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full waking; that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. But affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous; and those ideas were now exchanged for a sense of Jude and herself fleeing from a persecutor. 11

But whither to flee?

Sometimes the Will, while yet mainly nescient, seems to approach the third grade, that of sentience. In the following passage the Will is a great Denier, possibly sentient:

Then another silence, till she was seized with another uncontrollable fit of grief. "There is something external to us which says, 'You shan't!' First it said, 'You sha'n't learn!' Then it said, 'You sha'n't labor!' Now it says, 'You sha'n't love!'"

He tried to soothe her by saying, "That's bitter of you, darling."

"But it's true!" 12

11. Jude, 407.

12 Ibid, 401.

This theory of a Will either wholly or partially nescient is utterly iconoclastic--as far as the poles from the comfortable dualism of the Victorian Age, and of our own. For such a Will is neither good nor evil, but powerful, arbitrary, unpredictable. Critics, especially those theologically inclined, have bitterly condemned this view as robbing man of all dignity and making him a mere puppet in the hands of a blind power.¹³ In answer I would make two observations. First, the inherent dignity of man as conceived by anyone who pretends to more than the most material philosophy is not conditioned by the treatment he is accorded from without. In other words, a man driven by fate is not less worthy than he would be if fate were not present. Second, it has never been satisfactorily proved that truth is in any way dependent upon advantage to man, or that the universe is constituted for man's benefit. This will be treated further in the section of Religion.

3. Often, especially in the later poems, Hardy postulates a Will sufficiently sentient to be at least partially capable of pleasure, pain, malice, but not quite omnipotent. To the degree in which the Will is both sentient and potent, It may be held morally responsible. A very high degree of sentience is indicated in a fragment in Hardy's notebook, dated May 29, 1922. No poem or story pictures the Will so far emerged

13 Whitfield, T. H.: Thomas Hardy.

from the unconscious:

Poem -- I -- First Cause, omniscient, not omnipotent -- limitations, difficulties, etc., from being only able to work by Law (His only failing is lack of foresight).¹⁴

Hardy's intent was obviously to write a poem from the point of view of I, the Will, which would somewhat exonerate the Will from moral guilt for its evident blunders in ordering the universe. But is not this merely placing the responsibility one step further back? Hardy does not postulate what may be the nature of this government behind the Will. Possibly the conditioning is meant to be inherent in the nature of the Will itself, although that does not quite tally with the earlier conception of the Will as conditioned not by any external, but only by its own nescience and aimlessness. A conditioning outside the Will would not agree with Hardy's doctrine of Monism, on which he bases his theory of Free Will. A somewhat similar idea is recorded by William Archer in reporting a conversation with Mr. Hardy:

Mr. Hardy: ... Do you know Hartmann's philosophy of the Unconscious? It suggested to me what seems almost like a workable theory of the great problem of the origin of evil -- though this, of course, is not Hartmann's own theory -- namely, that there may be a consciousness, infinitely far off, at the other end of the chain of phenomena, always striving to express itself, and always baffled and blundering, just as the spirits seem to be. 15

14 Later Years, 226

15 Archer, Wm.: Real Conversations, 45.

But these two references seem to present fanciful hypotheses rather than typical indictments of a sentient Will. They ascribe to the Will a more anthropomorphic mind than appears in Hardy's most convincing writing. There, in so far as the Great Causer has at all emerged into awareness, It is somewhat imbecilic. It is different from the Immanent Unrecking, but for practical purposes it is not much better. To the intellect this view of an imbecilic Cause is certainly less satisfying than that of the nescient Urger or that of the omniscient, limited Cause. In his apostrophe to the portrait of the woman about to be hanged, it is certainly not a sane Cause that Hardy refrains from chiding:

Would that your Causer, ere knoll your knell
 For this riot of passion, might deign to tell
 Why, since It made you
 Sound in the germ,
 It sent a worm
 To madden Its handiwork, when It might well
 Not have assayed you,

Not have implanted, to your deep rue,
 The Clytaemnestra spirit in you,
 And with purblind vision
 Sowed a tare
 In a fi3ld so fair,
 An a thing of symmetry, seemly to view,
 Brought to derision! 16

Here the spirit is not one of rebuke to the mad Cause, but rather of compassion toward the soul made to suffer for the arbitrary sport of a Setebos. Instead of ordering Its universe as a sane governor would, the Cause proceeds with its

16 "On the Portrait of a Woman About to be Hanged," Collected Poems, 747.

... unconscious planning,
 Like a potter raptly panning!
 Chorus
 And then, Love and Light its aim --
 Good Its glory, Bad Its blame?
 Nay; to alter evermore
 Things from what they were before. 17

Many of Hardy's poems and stories are recitals of the inane pranks of this partly sentient Will, occasionally for poetic purposes objectified as plural, as the "Purblind Doomsters" of "Hap!" The only merit of this Will is a sense of irony. The classic example of their hideous sport is found in the ending of Tess:

"Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess. And the D'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. 18

Cases of monstrous irony may be found in almost any story in A Group of Noble Dames and Life's Little Ironies.

Small wonder that the moon says of life

O, I think of it, often think of it
 As a show
 God ought surely to shut up soon, 19
 As I go.

But the show does not shut.

More intolerable to Hardy than that man should be made sport of is the idea that his affliction serves no end, not even the amusement of moronic Immortals. There is bitterness in hearing It report to the inquiring poet:

17 Dynasts, 517.

18 Tess, 457.

19 "To the Moon," Collected Poems, 411.

Well, my forethoughtless modes to you
 May seem a shameless thing,
 But -- I'd no meaning, that I knew
 In crowning Death as King! 20

Instead of smiling "at this collapse of Austria's
 men-at-arms, so drolly done", the Great Unshaken remains
 "impassible as glacial snow." 21

Again the poet complains:

If but some vengeful god would call to me
 From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
 Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
 That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting:

Then could I bear it, clench myself, and die,
 Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
 Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
 Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

22

But not so.

Since, then, man's ills are the result of the
 purposelessness, or at best listlessness, of the Prime
 Mover, what, if any, is the remedy? Hardy's favorite one
 is that the Unconscious shall at last wake into com-
 plete sentience. This idea, the basis of his distinctive
 doctrine of Meliorism Hardy claimed as his own. On
 February 2, 1908, He adds this postscript to a letter to
 Dr. Clodd:

The idea of the Unconscious Will becoming conscious
 with flux of time, is also new, I think, whatever it
 may be worth. At any rate I have never met with it
 anywhere. F. H. 23

Seven years later he repeated the claim in a letter to

20 "An Inquiry." Collected Poems, 725.

21 Dynasts, 76.

22 "Hap" Collected Poems, 7.

23 Later Years, 276. See also letter to Mr. Edw. Wright,
 later in this chapter.

Dr. Saleeby:

The assumption of unconsciousness in the driving force is, of course, not new. But I think the view of the unconscious force as gradually becoming conscious: i.e., that consciousness is creeping further and further back towards the origin of force, had never (so far as I know) been advanced before The Dynasts appeared. But being only a mere impressionist I must not pretend to be a philosopher in a letter and ask you to believe me.²⁴

Among Poems of the Past and Present, published in 1911, two definitely postulate this future coming into consciousness of the Prime Causer. "The Sleep-Worker" is a query as to the result of such an awakening:

When wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see --
As one who, held in trance, has laboured long
By vacant rote and prepossession strong --
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly;

...

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame, 25
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?

"God-Forgotten" in the same collection is an ironic fantasy, imagining a truly moral god who says,

Thou shouldst have learnt that Not to Mend
For Me could mean but Not to Know. 26

That man's condition may be ameliorated by the coming awakening into awareness of the Will is suggested in the Dynasts:

Chorus of the Pities
Yet It may wake and understand
Ere earth unshape, know all things, and
With knowledge use a painless hand,
A painless hand! 27

24 Later Years, 70.

25 "The Sleep-Worker", Collected Poems, 110.

26 "God-Forgotten", Collected Poems, 113.

27 Dynasts, 322.

One of Hardy's late poems, "Xenophanes, the Monist of Colophon," suggests that this Great Dumb, vainly queried by Xenophanes twenty-five hundred years ago, still snores in its sleep:

Some day I may tell,
When I've broken My spell.

But that will be long hence,

... when you're forgotten,
And old cults are rotten, 28
And bulky codes shotten.

Hardy suggests that through an inadvertence man has preceded the Will into consciousness. That is, a part of the Cosmos has attained consciousness and is become sentient man. Just why this particular part of the Cosmos is become conscious, is not answered. Nor is reason given for believing that no other part of the Cosmos is emerged from unconsciousness. This does not at all deny Hardy's general doctrine of Monism. The Cosmos is becoming conscious -- emerging from nescience -- with undeserved pain to the part already sentient. Man, as the part of the Cosmos already emerged into sentience, is imagined as leading the Will to clearer consciousness, and therefore to a finer sense of morality. God, when rebuked by man for flagrant cruelty, answers:

The thought (of cruelty) is new to me.
 Forsooth, though I men's master be,
 Theirs is the teaching mind! 29

We see man's intelligence as

... but an unreckoned incident
 Of the all-urging Will, raptly magnipotent. 30

This "unreckoned incident" is fancifully described as
 the coming of a germ of Consciousness

... on an aërolite
 Aions ago
 From some far globe, where no distress
 Had means to mar supreme delight. 31

The conclusion suggested in this poem, however, is
 not that greater awareness of the Will shall relieve
 distress, but that

... Maybe now
 Normal unawareness awaits rebirth. 32

Whichever form Meliorism may take is not important in
 this connection. A more essential thesis is that the Will,
 which now knows neither good nor evil, but whose mani-
 festations work mischief for mankind because they are
 unordered, will become good if once consciousness is
 established. No other thesis could be consistent with
 Hardy's belief in the essential goodness of man as a
 phenomenon of the Cosmos, enlightened by sentience. In
 preceding the Will into consciousness, man has also
 attained a higher morality than that of the semi-conscious
 Will. Then man may hope that if the rest of the Cosmos --
 the Will that now thwarts man -- becomes aware, it also

29 "God's Education," Collected Poems, 261.

30 Dynasts, 137.

31 "The Aërolite," Collected Poems, 736.

32 Ibid

will become good. We should be

...thankful yet

Time's finger should have stretched to show
No aimful author's was the blow

That swept us prone,
But the Immanent Doer's That doth not know,

Which in some age unguessed of us
May lift Its blinding incubus,

And see, and own: 33
"It grieves me I did thus and thus!"

One of Hardy's very late poems, "A Philosophical Fantasy," published in the Fortnightly Review, January, 1927, contains this stanza of hope of meliorism:

Aye, to human tribes nor kindness
Nor love I've given, but mindlessness,
Which state, though far from ending,
May nevertheless be mending.

34

There yet remains the problem of reconciling the Immanent Will with the individual free will that is essential to morality as conceived by Mr. Hardy. Hardy has been accused of pronouncing false "the inner world revealed by consciousness -- the world of feeling, value, and purpose;" and delusive "our distinctive traits, such as conscience or remorse, implying as they do responsibility on our part." 35 If this is the message that Hardy gives the world, we can surely not rejoice in it as one likely to elevate mankind. And we can somewhat understand why protagonists of

33 "The Blow." Collected Poems, 449.

34 Later Years, 253.

35 Shafer, Robert: Christianity and Naturalism, 265, 248.

various sorts of orthodoxy should attack Hardy as a subverter of youth. Yet it is not the part of scholarship to denounce a doctrine on the ground of its being opposed to one's preconceived notion of teleology. The progress of the world has been too much retarded by the well meant suppression of disturbing doctrines -- a suppression that does not appear to have made happier the mankind for whose benefit it was practiced. Rather the seeker after truth should demonstrate the falsity of the doctrine before denouncing it. And he should make certain that the artist has promulgated the objectionable doctrine before censuring him.

In his own mind Hardy was clear as to the reconciliation of the driving, external Will and individual free will. He believed that man has a modicum of inherent will by virtue of his being a minute part of the total Great Will, which is for the most part unconscious. Man, as a relatively emerged bit of the Cosmos, can distinguish between good and evil. And, as a partly free agent, he can often choose the good. In proportion as he can both see the right and do his wish, he is morally responsible -- not to anything outside himself, but to his own enlightened soul. But to the degree in which he is unenlightened or is bound or manipulated as one of Earth's jackaclocks,³⁶ he is to be pitied.

36 Dynasts, 6.

He is sometimes made to perform evils that he hates even while he does them. In such a case the sin -- if sin there be -- cannot be charged to him, for he is only the hand of an unweeeting compulsion. This gloomy futility of the man either unenlightened or impotent or both is the most novel feature of Hardy's art, and so has been allowed to obscure the element of free will that is just as evident. There is, then, a seeming dualism in the soul. Men can make free choices between good and evil up to a certain point. Beyond this point he can sometimes see the good and desire it, but cannot execute his wish. That is, he is conditioned by a mightier than he in the form of destiny, fate, environment, heredity, or some element external to his individual will. Almost any novel will serve to illustrate this seeming dualism in a theoretic monism. For instance, Jude has an unusual degree of enlightenment. He can see ideal goods and he is able to make many ideal choices. That is, his enlightened will is largely free. But the point that Hardy impresses on the reader is that Jude is not free in all things, that his choice is sometimes forced by the outer Will-- here his passion for women and for liquor. This does not mean that he is otherwise free. His body and his activities -- the objective Jude -- are often the sport of an external compulsion. But his volition is mainly

free, and good, except for these two passions. Another writer might have pictured a Jude whose every impulse was governed by arbitrary destiny. The fate of Jude might then have been deplorable or beatific; it could not have been tragic. Some writers -- for example, George Eliot -- might have shown us a Jude with a much greater degree of autonomy. Instances of wills not entirely free are to be found in all the greater novels.

Another type of reconciliation to be made is this: The individual will, ordinarily capable of making right choices, is forced to choose between two apparent goods. But accurate choice is difficult to make because the enlightenment is not perfect. This problem is common enough in real life. Hardy gives it a sympathetic treatment in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions."³⁷ A reprobate father has fallen into a weir and is calling for help. His two clerical sons stand at a little distance. Two goods appear: to rescue the father, or to insure their sister's happiness and their own success by allowing his worthless life to expire. The question of what they should do is too difficult, too subtle to be at once decided. And the time allowed by fate for the choice is very short. As we read the story at leisure we assure ourselves that we should have rescued the father. The two sons recognize later their error in allowing the father to perish. But what Hardy would

37 Life's Little Ironies, 44.

tell us here is that man is not always sufficiently out of the dark to see what choice he should make, even when he wishes to choose the best. In this case our condemnation must give way before pity. Such a situation is even more intolerable than the one in which moral choice is denied through inborn passions or limiting environment. The spirit of tragedy, which must involve freedom of will, is for the moment displaced by one of paralysis, which in turn becomes the bitterest irony when the good, chosen only passively, turns to dust and ashes.

Hardy has been accused of writing stories in which the individual free will is entirely displaced by the outside Will. This accusation may mean either of two things. First, that the individual, though able to form choices, is impotent to execute his wishes, that he is the unwilling sport of Circumstance. Second, that the Immanent Will so dominates the individual free will that it can make no conscious choices, that it is utterly passive and without desire except as that desire is dictated from without. Hardy undoubtedly does present some catastrophes of the first sort in the shorter poems. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, such outside compulsion is wrongly taken by some as a denial of human worth. It is rightly only a denial of man's ability

to objectify his worth. Of the second sort, the utter dominance of the individual will from without, I can find no examples in Hardy. Such a dominance is what zealots seek in religious ecstasy -- a subordination to the will of some deity. That Hardy has created any character whose will is completely under outside control, either good or evil, seems an exaggeration. The nearest approach is probably in the case of young Dare in A Laodicean. Hardy's own testimony in a letter to Dr. Saleeby is apropos:

The nature of determination embraced in the theory is that of a collective will; so that there is a proportion of the total will in each part of the whole, and each part has therefore, in strictness, some freedom, which would, in fact, be operative as such whenever the remaining great mass of will in the universe should happen to be in equilibrium.

However, as the work is intended to be a poetic drama and not a philosophic treatise I did not feel bound to develop this. 38

His reconciliation of the Unconscious Will with the free will is also contained in a letter to Mr. Edward Wright, partly quoted previously:

In a dramatic epic -- which I may perhaps assume The Dynasts to be -- some philosophy of life was necessary, and I went on using that which I had denoted in my previous volumes of verse (and to some extent prose) as being a generalized form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt, myself included. That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely -- at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in a fraction of the whole (i.e. so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the mass; and there being no Will outside the mass -- that is, the Universe -- the whole Will becomes conscious thereby: and ultimately,

it is to be hoped, sympathetic.

I believe, too, that the Prime Cause, this Will, has never before been called 'It' in any poetical literature, English or foreign.

This theory, too, seems to me to settle the question of Free-will v. Necessity. The will of a man is, according to it, neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them. ³⁹

Resume: The Will as conceived by Hardy is immanent, autonomous, indestructible. So far he agrees with Schopenhauer. Typically the Will is unconscious and aimless. In so far as the Will is or may become conscious, it ceases to be aimless. In this Hardy differs from Schopenhauer, whose Will is always unconscious and aimless. It is on this latter proposition that Hardy bases one of his two theories of Meliorism -- the one principally held in his later years and evidently the dearer to him. It is that relief will come when and if the unconscious part of the Cosmos follows man into consciousness. Hardy's Will is not, as in Schopenhauer, malignant, but is supremely indifferent to man. In essence It is rather good than evil. Thus, as the Will may become enlightened there need be no conversion of Its nature. So far as the present result to man is concerned, there is little difference

39 Ibid, 124.

whether the Will is malignant or indifferent. Man, as well as the rest of creation, is crushed by the operation of a potent Will without governance. So, as in Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, as well as in the pessimistic philosophies of the Orient, pain is the normal, positive state; pleasure is the negation of pain -- an interlude in the prevailing order. The doctrine is one of a monism at present flawed through the inadvertent enlightening of a part. The unenlightened mass works through "Mindless minions" that

In mechanized enchantment sway and show
 A Will that wills above the will of each,
 Yet but the will of all conjunctively;
 A fabric of excitement, web of rage,
 That permeates as one stuff the weltering whole. 40

Till the Melior shall come man had best

Be mute, and let spin on
 This whirlwind of the Will! 41

40 Dynasts, 344.

41 Ibid, 496.

CHAPTER IV

FATE CHARACTER NEMESIS

Fate - Character in Eliot

"Character is destiny," said Novalis. This rather cryptic pronouncement Eliot quotes in the Mill on the Floss and uses as a thesis for many of her developments. She modifies its sense, however, in two directions. First, she uses is in a causative sense, meaning that character determines, conditions, becomes destiny. She would hardly reverse the phrase and say, "Destiny is character," as Hardy sometimes does. Second, in common with Hardy, although not to the same extent, she treats character as only the partitive condition of destiny. Like Hardy she shows a converse: that destiny beyond the individual's control partitively determines the character. The extent and direction of the interaction of character and destiny give a clue to the comparative hopefulness of the philosophies of Eliot and Hardy. It is as we might suspect. Both show that our destinies are, unfortunately, only partly subject to our volitions-- Hardy less than Eliot. Both show that our characters are in part shaped, directly or indirectly, by forces wholly beyond our control -- Hardy much more than Eliot.

In a short moral essay on Maggie Tulliver's fate, George Eliot indicates how circumstance may occasion action that will in turn affect character:

For the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. "Character", says Novalis, in one of the questionable aphorisms -- "character is destiny." But not the whole of our destiny. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have a great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle had died an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity, notwithstanding many soliloquies, and some moody sarcasms towards the fair daughter of Polonius, to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law. ¹

This circumstance outside the self, which forces man's acts, Eliot never shows, as Hardy occasionally does, as deceiving the individual will. For instance, in a few cases Hardy indicates that the Immanent Will not only forces man against his inner promptings to do acts which would constitute sins if prompted by the individual free will, but also deceives the free will itself so that it wills to do what it ordinarily would not. It is as if the free will were non-existent. (See chapter on Immanent Will.) George Eliot does not go to this length. Always there is a modicum of free will that may make choice, even though sometimes feeble. Again, in Hardy *Destiny* is sometimes blamed for giving man a will not quite free or not enlightened enough to make right choices. Eliot is not quite so clear as is Hardy in her theory of the influence of this external Will on the individual free will, but she seems to hold, as does the Church, that every man is endowed with a free will strong enough to

¹ Mill on the Floss, 427

make right choices in any situation. Yet she is much influenced by Bray's Necessitarianism -- that the end product of the life is the absolute result of the heredity as affected by the environment. She must have seen that this doctrine if carried to its ultimate conclusion would destroy all moral responsibility. As specific a statement as she makes of this placing of responsibility on one's nature, for which one can hardly be to blame, is the Rev. Mr. Irwin's defense of Arthur Donithorne.:

Ah, but the mood lies in his nature, my boy, just as much as his reflection did, and more. A man can never do anything at variance with his own nature. He carries within him the germ of his most exceptional action; and if we wise people make eminent fools of ourselves on any particular occasion, we must endure the legitimate conclusion that we carry a few grains of folly to our ounce of wisdom.²

That Eliot does not develop this irrefutable doctrine further, as does Hardy in his poems and stories of futility, may mean that Eliot does not consider this thesis of benefit to mankind. As appears elsewhere, she does temper her scientific doctrine to the "shorn lamb." She does not deny her faith; neither does she always exploit it. In a modified form this admission is found in her description of the character of Tito Malema. Yet in this case there seems not to be the purpose to extenuate the wrong doing. Tito is the one fully developed character

² Adam Bede, 177.

that George Eliot appears to have created with insufficient moral viability. True, she did give him many advantages of instruction and of companionship, and she laid on him an obligation of gratitude that would have restrained most men, even seaklings. If she created him deductively, if she endowed him with insufficient safeguards to meet his crises, if she made him a man of straw to be burned for the edification of her readers, she did him a wrong, and she was not true to her inductive art. In an early passage we read that

... His mind was destitute of that dread which has been erroneously decried as if it were nothing higher than a man's animal care for his own skin: that awe of the Divine Nemesis which was felt by religious pagans, and, though it took a more positive form under Christianity, is still felt by the mass of mankind simply as a vague fear of anything which is called wrongdoing. Such terror of the unseen is so far above mere sensual cowardice that it will annihilate that cowardice; it is the initial recognition of a moral law restraining desire, and checks the hard bold scrutiny of imperfect thought into obligations which can never be proved to have any sanctity in the absence of feeling. "It is good", sing the old Eumenides, in AEschylus, "that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom -- good that men should carry a threatening shadow in their hearts under the full sunshine; else, how should they learn to revere the right?" That guardianship may become needless; but only when all outward law has become needless -- only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force. ³

In the case of Arthur Donnithorne, salvation was to come through his "nature" as modified by circumstance. In the case of Tito, as appears later in this chapter, destruction was to come from the same sources.

³ Romola I, 125

Again, without being very clear as to the responsibility for our deeds, Eliot states that these deeds, which become a part of our immediate environment as soon as they are objectified into action, in turn affect their source. Thus Arthur Donnithorne's ingenuous character is made deceitful through the fancied necessity for concealment:

Arthur was in the wretched position of an open, generous man, who had committed an error which makes deception seem a necessity. The native impulse to give truth in return for truth, to meet truth with frank confession, must be suppressed, and duty was become a question of tactics. His deed was reacting upon him -- was already governing him tyrannously, and forcing him into a course that jarred with his habitual feelings.⁴

Eliot gives further moralizing comment on the effect on Arthur's soul of his deception:

Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the particular combination of outward with inward facts, which constitutes a man's critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character. There is a terrible coercion in our deeds which may first turn the honest man into a deceiver, and then reconcile him to the change; for this reason -- that the second wrong presents itself to him in the guise of the only practicable right. The action which before commission has been seen with that blended common-sense and fresh untarnished feeling which is the healthy eye of the soul, is looked at afterwards with the lens of apologetic ingenuity, through which all things that men call beautiful and ugly are seen to be made up of textures very much alike. Europe adjusts itself to a fait accompli, and so does an individual character, -- until the placid adjustment is disturbed by a conclusive retribution.⁵

The moral that George Eliot would point in this essay is plain enough. No one would dispute that it is salutary to mankind. But she does not make clear the

4 Adam Bede, 317.

5 Ibid., 324.

original responsibility for those deeds that determine us.

The literary artist who takes pains to show character-- not merely the objective outcome of life -- as affected by externals usually allows his creature to be corrupted or at least reduced to conformity, very seldom to be exalted. In great art the reader is not ordinarily made aware that there is a force outside the character that is moulding more than his "fortune" unless that force is sinister. This is practically always true in Hardy. In Eliot there is usually, not always, a conflict between inherent nobility and perverting circumstance. Sometimes, as in Daniel Deronda, Silas Marner, and Spanish Gypsy, Fate intervenes as a constructive force. Daniel is made more sensitive, more kindly, by his suspicion of the bar sinister:

The sense of an entailed disadvantage -- the deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe, makes a restlessly active spiritual yeast, and easily turns a self-centered, unloving nature into an Ishmaelite. But in the rarer sort, who presently see their own frustrated claim as one among the myriad, the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender. ⁶

Such cases are probably quite as common in life as are the more sinister. But in life, as in literature, there must be the "rarer sort" upon which circumstance may work. In the case of Silas Marner we are led to believe that his salvation could never have been effected except through

⁶ Daniel Deronda, 180.

the intervention of chance in the person of Eppie. Eliot does not subtilize as to whether his sin would have been on his own head if that chance had not come. A more striking example of the interaction of inborn tendency and of circumstance to form character, which in turn becomes fate, is in the case of Fedelma. At a time when Destiny seems to have been kind to the Zincola maiden in having raised her to become the bride of Don Silva, Destiny, in the person of her father, comes to call her to salvation. The call from luxury, love, the consolation of religion, to a life of hardship and disappointment, far from her lover and outside God's sight, is partly contained in these two speeches of Zarca's:

No, not a slave; but you were born to reign.
 'Tis a compulsion of a higher sort,
 Whose fetters are the net invisible
 That holds all life together. Royal deeds
 May make long destinies for multitudes,
 And you are called to do them. You belong
 Not to the petty round of circumstance
 That makes a woman's lot, but to your tribe,
 Who trust in me and in my blood with trust
 That men call blind; but it is only blind
 As unyeaned reason is, that growing stirs
 Within the womb of superstition.

...
 Well, then, unmake yourself from a Zincola,--
 Unmake yourself from being child of mine!
 Take holy water, cross your dark skin white;
 Round your proud eyes to foolish kitten looks;
 Walk mincingly, and smirk, and twitch your robe:
 Unmake yourself,-- doff all the eagle plumes
 And be a parrot, chained to a ring that slips ⁷
 Upon a Spaniard's thumb.

7 Spanish Gypsy, 132.

The inborn nobility, which but for this one call
would probably have atrophied, answers:

Father, I choose! I will not take a heaven
Haunted by shrieks of far-off misery.
This deed and I have ripened with the hours;
It is a part of me,-- a wakened thought
That, rising like a giant, masters me,
And grows into a doom. 8

At a later time the father indicates the degree of
Fedelma's salvation by showing the emptiness and un-
worthiness of the life she escaped:

... The worst of misery
Is when a nature framed for noblest things
Condemns itself in youth to petty joys,
And, sore athirst for air, breathes scanty life
Gasping from out the shallows. You are saved
From such poor doubleness. The life we choose
Breathes high, and sees a full-arched firmament.
Our deeds shall speak like rock-hewn messages,
Teaching great purpose to the distant time, 9

In all this Eliot shows Fedelma's free will making the
right choice. But how much of Fedelma's salvation can
be accounted to her? The destiny that redeemed Fedelma
was the undoing of the weaker Don Silva. A strength of
character sufficient for an ordinary don's life could
not withstand the unusual strain imposed upon it. The
responsibility for his contemplated breach of faith he
rather unheroically shifts from his own shoulders:

... I will sin,
If sin I must, to win my life again.
The fault lie with those powers who have embroiled
The world in hopeless conflict, where all truth
Fights manacled with falsehood, and all good
Makes but one palpitating life with evil. 10

8 Ibid, 135.

9 Ibid, 209.

10 Ibid, 158.

That he ultimately regains some degree of esteem in our eyes is less attributable to himself than to the constancy of Fedelma. In Theophrastus Such Eliot suggests that among men not of the "rarer sort" outside circumstance in the form of heredity, tradition, environment, must be depended upon to produce whatever changes are effected in the character. Such sluggish souls rarely experience self-prompted impulses toward any high ideal:

The truth is that, the primitive wants of nature once tolerably satisfied, the majority of mankind, even in a civilized life full of solicitations, are with difficulty aroused to the distinct conception of an object toward which they will direct their actions with careful adaptation; and it is yet rarer to find one who can persist in the systematic pursuit of such an end. Few lives are shaped, few characters formed, by the contemplation of definite consequences seen from a distance, and made the goal of continuous effort or the beacon of a constantly avoided danger. Such control by foresight, such vivid picturing and practical logic, are the distinction of exceptionally strong natures; but society is chiefly made up of human beings whose daily acts are all performed either in unreflecting obedience to custom and routine, or from immediate promptings of thought or feeling to execute an immediate purpose. ¹¹

In a headnote to a chapter of Daniel Deronda, George Eliot again shows the creation of character in part independently of volition:

We please our fancies with ideal webs
Of innovation, but our life meanwhile
Is in the loom, where busy passion plies
The shuttle to and fro, and gives our deeds
The accustomed pattern. ¹²

The other side of the shield appears in the assurance that Deronda gives Gwendolyn that our salvation is in our

¹¹ "A Too Deferential Man", Theophrastus Such, Essays, 306.

¹² Daniel Deronda I, 243.

own hands:

No evil dooms us hopelessly except the evil we love, and desire to continue in, and make no effort to escape from. You have made efforts -- you will go on making them. ¹³

This is comforting, perhaps, but it does not solve the problem of responsibility for the desire. The converse of this same thought is expressed by Hardy:

But much as he wished to be an exemplar in these things, he could not get on. It was quite impossible, he found, to ask to be delivered from temptation when your heart's desire was to be tempted unto seventy times seven. ¹⁴

The divergent tones of these two passages are illustrative of Eliot's and Hardy's contrasting approaches to the problem of responsibility for character. Hardy does not predicate so assuredly an unhampered volition. One can less suspect the reliability of his reportings of phenomena when one notes how free they are from any attempt to inculcate "right thinking."

Nemesis in Eliot

A specialized application of "Character is Destiny" is found in George Eliot's doctrine of Nemesis.

"'Tis Law as steadfast as the throne of Zeus --
15

Our days are heritors of days gone by."

Her idealism shows itself in the emphasis which she constantly lays on the Eumenides as spiritual forces effecting their punishment not alone in objectives, but

13 Ibid., II, 314.

14 Jude, 112.

15 Aeschylus, Agamemnon. Felix Holt, 471.

more especially in character degeneration. Inevitably sin brings its reward. Never in Eliot is there the suggestion, rather common in Hardy, that evil either may or may not entail a physical punishment, and that a spiritual punishment is not inevitable, but is conditioned on the soul's innate sensitivity. In Eliot the soul is always sensitive until it has become numb through wrong doing. The process by which the soul dies to virtue is subtle, and the temptation is often insidious. But Eliot always puts the initiative to error in the individual.

The form that Nemesis usually takes in Eliot is a benumbing of the faculty for distinguishing good and evil, which gradually develops into a paralysis of the conscience. Eliot then shows the victim of his own evil acts sinking deeper and deeper into sin, with a progressively less acute conscience to sting him to a saving effort. With Eliot it is not an objective punishment for sin, although that comes too, that is most to be feared. It is the subtle anaesthetization, hardly noticed at first, that in time either destroys the fine sense of values or inhibits any impulse to choose the better. Eliot shows both. If the mind is not wise enough to struggle against this deadening result of initial wrong doing, or if some powerful outside influence does not save it, the end is destruction. The most striking, though possibly not most convincing, illustration of

the process by which deeds so affect the soul that they lead to its complete degeneration is Tito Malema. The beginning of the downfall of this unfortunate man came in his willing to believe that his benefactor was beyond his aid. I believe he is dead expressed his wish rather than his conviction. On the basis of that wish he determined to put his money to interest rather than risk it on a probably vain search for his father:

When, the next morning, Tito put this determination into act he had chosen his color in the game, and had given an inevitable bent to his wishes. He had made it impossible that he should not from henceforth desire it to be the truth that his father was dead; impossible that he should not be tempted to baseness rather than that the precise facts of his conduct should not remain forever concealed.

Under every guilty secret there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes, whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires -- the enlistment of our self-interest on the side of falsity; as, on the other hand, the purifying influence of public confession springs from the fact, that by it the hope in lies is forever swept away, and the soul recovers the noble attitude of simplicity.

Besides, in this first distinct colloquy with himself the ideas which had previously been scattered and interrupted had now concentrated themselves; the little rills of selfishness had united and made a channel, so that they could never again meet with the same resistance.¹⁶

It is true that Tito did not have the protection of "that awe of the Divine Nemesis", an unreasoned fear of the results of evil doing. Yet Eliot does not excuse Tito for his sin, as Hardy might have done on the ground that Tito did not have this moral defense. She chooses

16 Romola I, 108.

rather to let him assume full moral responsibility for the progressive denials of his father:

He had sold himself to evil, but at present life seemed so nearly the same to him that he was not conscious of the bond. ¹⁷

Each successive downward step made the next more inevitable. Each evil volition when objectified into an act became an entity in the host of evils that beset him. Or, to change the figure, each deed became a child to be sponsored, supported, defended:

But our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never: they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness; and that dreadful vitality of deeds was pressing hard on Tito for the first time. ¹⁸

The climax in the downfall of Tito is the point at which his perception of evil became dimmed:

It was that change that comes from the final departure of moral youthfulness -- from the distinct self-conscious adoption of a part in life. The lines of the face were as soft as ever, the eyes as pellucid; but something was gone -- something as indefinable as the changes in the morning twilight. ¹⁹

Nemesis was now laying hold of the soul of Tito Malema. When his father, a prisoner and in rags, confronted him on the street, he denied him before he had time to collect his thoughts:

He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation. ²⁰

17 Ibid, 126.

18 Ibid, 174.

19 Ibid, 228.

20 Ibid, 233.

When fear had brought him to his senses he experienced

... that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character.

21.

The possibility of a return to rectitude was not yet past. But nothing short of a miracle could now change the direction of Tito's volitions. George Eliot does not show any moral struggle such as we commonly find as a prelude to the final renunciation of the good. Instead, there is only a selfish dread of disgrace:

There was still one resource open to Tito. He might have turned back, sought Baldassarre again, confessed everything to him -- to Romola -- to all the world. But he never thought of that. The repentance which cuts off all moorings to evil, demands something more than selfish fear. 22

Yet one so endowed and circumstanced as Tito could not return. The web that he had begun to spin about himself

... had gone on spinning itself in spite of him, like a growth over which he had no power. 23

The final Nemesis leaves us not much grieved. We feel that Tito's soul is dead, that there is now no longer any salvation for him that the incident of physical death alone is required to give a sense of completeness. It may be doubted whether George Eliot is quite fair to Tito in subjecting him to such tests without endowing him with greater moral stamina. If the odds were too great for him if his free will was too much subjected

21. Ibid., 235.

22. Ibid., 236.

23. Ibid., 316.

to destiny in the form of heredity and circumstance, then the Nemesis becomes, in the last analysis, an almost inevitable working out of destiny, and Tito is only the maltreated victim, given merely the show of self-determination. In this case the responsibility must be borne by Destiny. This is an altogether possible reading of the matter presented by Eliot, and the case is not untrue to life. Hardy's Dare in A Laodicean is a man with a very slight chance, if any, of living a good life. That George Eliot does not intend Tito to be a moral puppet is evidenced by the care with which she prepares his moral downfall. An evil foil for Romola and Savonarola could have been created much more easily. The final judgment must rest with each reader.

While George Eliot creates no other character in whom Nemesis wreaks so complete an immolation, she does present data from other lives in which the moral struggle is more evident, and the tragic value correspondingly enhanced. The Nemesis that overtakes Savonarola is particularly tragic, for it is not the result of singleness of evil purpose. Savonarola's became, rather,

... a consciousness in which irrevocable errors and lapses from veracity were so entwined with noble purposes and sincere beliefs, in which self-justifying expediency was so inwoven with the tissue of a great work which the whole being seemed as unable to abandon as the body was unable to abandon glowing and trembling before the objects of hope and fear, that it was perhaps

impossible, whatever course might be adopted, for the conscience to find perfect repose. 24

Eliot holds that whatever the final outcome of life may be, no struggle against evil ever fails utterly, for just as each sin poisons the soul, so each struggle against sin develops an inward resistance. It was only through years of resistance to evil ideas that Maggie developed sufficient strength to save her from the final consummation of sin. As she woke on the river with ^{Stephen} Philip she reviewed the events of the previous day -- events that might well have become the objective ancestry of a progressively more calloused sensitivity:

She had said she would rather die than fall into that temptation. She felt it now -- now that the conquest of such a fall had come before the outward act was completed. There was at least this fruit from all her years of striving after the highest and best -- that her soul, though betrayed, beguiled, ensnared, could never deliberately consent to a choice of the lower. An a choice of what? Oh, God -- not a choice of joy, but of conscious cruelty and hardness; for could she ever cease to see before her Lucy and Philip, with their murdered trusts and hopes? 25

The anguish at the thought of leaving Philip was bitter; That at the thought of the pain she must give him was even more poignant:

... But surmounting everything was the horror of her own possible failure, the dread lest her conscience should be benumbed again, and not rise to energy till it was too late. 26

24 Romola II, 148.

25 Mill on the Floss, 504. *

26 Ibid, 505.

* Note: In the case of Tess the long struggles against wrong did not bring strength for victory.

... to snatch ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain could have time to shut upon her; that was what love counselled; and in almost a terror of ecstasy Tess confusedly divined that, despite her many months of lonely self-chastisement, wrestlings, communings, schemes to lead a future of austere isolation, love's counsel would prevail. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 201.

For a soul so delicately constituted as Maggie's or Savonarola's, effective Nemesis, or threat of Nemesis, lies in the loss of

... the capacity for ruth, compunction, or any unselfish regret -- which we may come to long for as one in slow death longs to feel lacerations, rather than be conscious of a widening margin where consciousness once was. 27

But for more gross natures some pointing hand seems requisite to make the soul fully conscious of the Nemesis that is upon it. This may be accomplished in various ways, probably most effectively through the opinion of others. This is true in the case of Arthur Donnithorne:

He (Adam) stood like an immovable obstacle against which no pressure could avail; an embodiment of what Arthur most shrank from believing in -- the irrevocableness of his own wrong-doing. The words of scorn, the refusal to shake hands, the mastery asserted over him in their last conversation in the Hermitage -- above all, the sense of having been knocked down, to which a man does not very well reconcile himself, even under the most heroic circumstances -- pressed on him with a galling pain which was stronger than compunction. Arthur would so gladly have persuaded himself that he had done no harm! And if no one had told him the contrary, he could have persuaded himself so much better. Nemesis can seldom forge a sword for herself out of our consciences -- out of the suffering we feel in the suffering we may have caused: there is rarely metal enough there to make an effective weapon. Our moral sense learns the manners of good society, and smiles when others smile; but when some rude person gives rough names to our actions, she is apt to take part against us. 28.

27 Daniel Deronda II, 357.

28 Adam Bede, 322.

Fate -- Character in Hardy

"Character is Fate." said Novalis.²⁹ Hardy, as does Eliot, uses this aphorism as the thesis of many of his stories and poems. And, like Eliot, he modifies considerably the sense of the verb is. In Hardy character conditions fate to a somewhat less degree than in Eliot. Fate exists as a more independent entity which executes a blind will on the individual without being so much affected by the character as expressed in volitions. Conversely, the character is even more affected by fate in Hardy than in Eliot. This may be because of Eliot's deductive purpose to show the independence of the soul to circumstance. Or it may be the result of a greater accuracy of reporting, because of less purposive synthesis, in Hardy. When stripped of editorial comment the phenomena presented by Eliot and Hardy are in many phases parallel. That is, they show a mutual interaction of character and fate. But the synthesis that the reader makes of Hardy's data is quite different from that which Eliot helps him to construct. In Eliot there is always a modicum of free will left to the individual. At least he believes himself free to make his own choices. He realizes, it is true, that he is conditioned by tradition, heredity, circumstance. But these seem to affect the end-product of his will -- not his will itself. He retains the precious

29 Mayor of Casterbridge, 137.

illusion of autonomy. Neither does Hardy deny all autonomy to the soul, but in his greatest works he often shows this autonomy as partial -- conditioned not alone in the execution but to a great extent in the volition itself. Usually the mind does not feel itself to be hampered in its wishings, but sometimes it plainly perceives that the ego is being manipulated from without. It is then as if the victim were given the eyes of the author and saw for himself that his freedom was restricted, or perhaps only a figment. This idea of consciously being played does not appear in Eliot.

Among the characters that have this sense of a constricted freedom is Wildeve, who said:

However, the curse of inflammability is upon me, and I must live under it, and take any snub from a woman. It has brought me down from engineering to inkeeping: What lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn. 30

Jude saw and measured the bars that held him. He recognized that his struggle was not alone with outside circumstance, but more especially with an indwelling fate, a sort of personification of his passions. The feeling he had was what must have inspired ancient writers to their conception of possession by demons. He felt himself urged by an objective force, a not ego, for whose compulsions he ought not in strictness be held responsible, although he could not expect a third

person to make such distinction between his self and a force that expressed its will through that self. His life was a constant internal warfare between the noble self and its ignoble genie. In proportion as Jude recognized in himself such foreign dictation, his own power of resistance was weakened. Yet most modern writers, including George Eliot, would not have seen Jude's struggle as so very different from that which might go on in any soul. The point to be noted is Hardy's atavistic endowment of the passions with personality, and Jude's recognition of that personality.

A more clearly developed example, but not so great art, is that of Jocelyn Pierston. The mind of this artist was subject to rebirths within it, or rather to successive emergences into activity, of an Idea of the Unattainable Well-Beloved. Pierston recognized that this Idea was really wholly in his own mind, although it objectified itself in successive women, especially the three Avices, grandmother, mother, and daughter. So imperious was this dictator of his consciousness that it drove him quite against his judgment and even against anything that could be called desire. At forty he was being impelled toward the second Avice:

Behind the mere pretty island girl (to the world) is, in my eye, the Idea, in Platonic phraseology -- the essence and epitome of all that is desirable in this existence I am under a doom, Somers. Yes, I

am under a doom. To have been always following a phantom whom I saw in woman after woman while she was at a distance, but vanishing always on close approach, was bad enough; but now the terrible thing is that the phantom does not vanish, but stays to tantalize me even when I am near enough to see what it is! That girl holds me, though my eyes are open, and though I see that I am a fool! ³¹

Twenty years later it was the same, except that by then he saw himself more objectively and recognized more clearly the nature of his malady:

... He now felt that his old trouble, his doom -- his curse, indeed, he had sometimes called it -- was come back again. His divinity was not yet propitiated for that original sin against her image in the person of Avice the First; and now, at the age of one-and-sixty, he was urged on and on like the Jew Ahasuerus -- or, in the phrase of the islanders themselves, like a blind ram. ³²

The curse is finally exorcised by a fever which also destroys his artistic sense. So long as the possession persisted, Pierston was helpless against its decrees. ³³

The Dynasts shows various characters, notably Napoleon, driven by some force within. But in the Dynasts Hardy shows even less of individual responsibility than in the novels. Jude, Pierston, Wildeve assumed a major liability for the deeds prompted by

31 Well-Beloved, 171.

32 Ibid, 240

33 Note: The idea to which Hardy gave artistic expression by animating it in the fashion of Wessex was later developed by Proust: Peu de personnes comprennent le caractere purement subjectif du phenomene qu'est l'amour, et la sorte de creation que c'est d'une personne supplementaire, distincte de celle qui porte le meme nom dans le monde, et dont la plupart des elements sont tires de nous-memes. Ombre, i. 40.

Le desire s'eleve, se satisfait, disparaît -- et c'est tout. Ainsi, la jeune fille qu'on epouse n'est pas celle dont on est tombe amoureux. Ombre, ii. 158, 159. Later Years, 248.

Their passions objectified. Napoleon much more than they disclaimed personal responsibility and laid any blame upon the indwelling genie. He recognized himself as a tool of an Immanent Will:

Napoleon (gravely, to Josephine)

... Know you, my Fair
That I -- ay, I -- in this deserve your pity.--
Some force within me, baffling mine intent,
Harries me onward, whether I will or no.
My star, my star is what's to blame -- not I.
It is unswervable!

...
Spirit of the Years

He spoke thus at the Bridge of Lodi. Strange,
He's of the few in Europe who discern
The working of the Will.

Spirit of the Pities

If that be so,
Better for Europe lacked he such discerning! 34

And again, after the retreat from Moscow:

Napoleon

...
I had no wish to fight, nor Alexander,
But circumstance impaled us each on each;
The Genius who outshapes my destinies
Did all the rest! 35

In no novel of Eliot's is there a hint of this personification of the forces within. Nor do these examples mean that Hardy in any sense believes in demon-possession. He is recording the feelings of distracted souls that in the search for the cause of their distresses project an

34 Dynasts, 179.

35 Ibid, 363.

anthropomorphic control within themselves. It is significant that to the degree in which the soul feels itself manipulated and acquiesces in the manipulation, it ceases to be affected in character except by the volition to acquiesce. In other words, the spiritual constitution of the tool is not affected by what it is made to do; it is affected only as it ceases to struggle against fate. Napoleon is not shown to us as a developing character, but as a driven one. Napoleon recognized that:

... Yet, 'tis true, I have ever known
That such a Will I passively obeyed! 36

This submission he did not find inconsistent with his early vaunting ambition:

To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche
In human fame. 37

For even that ambition was inspired. Could Napoleon have meant to deny this control in his final epigram?

Great men are meteors that consume themselves 38
To light the earth. This is my burnt-out hour.

A closer parallel to Eliot's philosophy of the mutual interaction of character and fate is found in those characters that are warped by circumstance without realizing that they are changed in moral fiber. In case of change in character coincident with great external stress, Eliot usually makes plain the major part played by the soul itself. Her mind revolts at

36 Ibid., 519.

37 Ibid., 520.

38 Ibid., 520.

the thought that man may have but an infinitesimal part in his own salvation or damnation. The case of Father Time would be hardly less repellent to her than that of a conscious possession by a genie.

The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died. ³⁹

The most zealous apologist for a divine plan could hardly hold that the child had a fighting chance. As his father said in trying to explain to Sue:

It was his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us -- boys of a sort unknown in the last generation -- the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live. ⁴⁰

This is the most extreme example that Hardy presents of the terrible unfairness of life. Because of its very monstrousness it loses in tragic effectiveness. Nevertheless it must be considered among the data he offers.

The most common, and at the same time the most convincing instances of fate projected into character are those in which Nature in her more sinister aspects misshapes the developing personality. Eustacia Vye under

39 Jude the Obscure, 400.

40 Ibid., 400.

less adverse circumstances would never have become the rebel against life. She

... was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. 41

Fate had not endowed her with an adaptable character. Yet if it had placed her in almost any surroundings but Egdon Heath, she would have cast herself into some part that she could play acceptably. On the Heath she struggled against her destiny, unable to see herself objectively as the sport of circumstance, unable to resign herself to the ordained. So hers is not a melodrama of a soul deceived into making evil choice or of a soul forced to misdoing against its will. It is a tragedy of a soul so acted upon by fate that its very fiber is corrupted until it brings about its own destruction. This is not so very far from Eliot's thesis, although Eliot would have preserved more the figment of free will, and she would have shown more plainly a culpability in Eustacia. Hardy does not moralize. He does not place on Eustacia the sin for an imperfectly constituted character further warped by an uncommonly perverse environment. His method is induction. The reader may deduct moral responsibility if he dare. Such also is the case in the Woodlanders, and A Pair of Blue Eyes, and somewhat in Jude the Obscure.

41. Return of the Native, 77.

Nemesis in Hardy

The ideal example in Hardy of "Character is Fate" is to be found in The Mayor of Casterbridge, which also typifies Hardy's concept of Nemesis. Michael Henchard was born with the seeds of his final immolation already in his soul -- seeds that required no particular set of circumstances for their development. His own stubborn pride and ungovernable temper were a force that could prove victorious over his many admirable qualities in almost any environment. His long and valiant struggle against the evil within him -- a struggle that began the morning after he sold his wife -- did not develop, as in the case of Maggie Tulliver, a moral resilience. Rather the evil itself seemed to gain in its resilience by being long suppressed. After nearly twenty years of upright, respected living, he was crossed by difficulties with Farfrae. Then his

... tones showed that, though under a long reign of self-control he had become Mayor and churchwarden and what not, there was still the same unruly volcanic stuff beneath the rind of Michael⁴² Henchard as when he had sold his wife at Weydon Fair.

The Furies pursued him without respite, making sport of any feeble effort his will might make to save him. Finally, discredited and broken he went forth as a laborer:

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied five-an-twenty

42 Mayor of Casterbridge, 134.

years before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his sould in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum -- which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu -- with the departure of zest for doing -- stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him. ⁴³

The tragic close of the story is not heart-breaking so much for the suffering, physical and mental, that was inflicted on Henchard, as for the feeling that all this suffering was uselesor worse; that he was most bitter in death. It is as if the soul of Henchard had been saddled with a genius which did not drive him to destruction as the demons drove the swine into the sea, but, which is more tragic, warped and dulled the soul till it became its own Nemesis. That Michael Henchard's destiny would probably have evolved in much the same fashion in other surroundings does not affect it as an illustration of the interaction of character and fate to produce a final Nemesis. Henchard's character is so much affected by fate that Hardy does not pronounce condemnation.

Hardy often shows Nemesis as dependent on what seems a minor decision. The whole course of the Woodlanders was changed by the petulant refusal of Mrs. Charmond generously to grant an extention on Giles Winterborne's leasehold. Nemesis was brought upon her and suffering upon many others. It is not quite accurate to say in this case that character is fate.

For the fate resulting was out of all proportion to its inception in character. It is rather that an incidental mood in character conspired with Fate to bring catastrophe. The part that character as such played was only sufficient to give a bitter irony to the outcome. George Eliot lets Nemesis depend on Arthur Donnithorne's blameworthy failure to tell of his relation with Hetty. But Eliot is careful to give both Arthur and Hetty opportunities to tell -- at least enough to establish moral culpability. The tragedy does not, then, seem the ironical consequence of an error but the rigorous retribution for a sin. In *Tito Maletta*, *Bulstrode*, *Grandcourt*, the moral guilt is even more fully established. Hardy is less careful to constitute guilt. Life's Little Ironies is a series of condensed stories, each of which illustrates a Nemesis occasioned by Fate set in motion by an incommensurate error. Since Hardy's purpose is not to edify, he is free to present the most disillusioning data. An interesting comment on this disparity between cause and effect he left in his notebook:

History is rather a stream than a tree. There is nothing organic in its shape, nothing systematic in its development. It flows on like a thunderstorm-rill by a road side; now a straw turns it this way, now a tiny barrier of sand that. The offhand decision of some commonplace mind high in office at a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years. Consider the evenings at Lord Carnarvon's, and the intensely average conversation on politics held there by average men who two or three weeks later were members of the Cabinet. A row of shopkeepers in Oxford Street taken just as they came would conduct the affairs of the nation as ably as these.

Thus, judging by bulk of effect, it becomes impossible to estimate the intrinsic value of ideas, acts, material

things: we are forced to appraise them by the curves of their career. There were more beautiful women in Greece than Helen; but what of them? 44

After reading Hardy one has no comforting sense of fairness in the government of the world: that one is responsible for one's own character, that destiny is what one makes it, and that Nemesis is a just and law-abiding paymaster. But one does feel that there has been no purposive amelioration of unpleasant phenomena.

CHAPTER V

PAIN PITY PESSIMISM MELIORISM

Pain - Pity

In the chapter on the Positivism of Thomas Hardy, his sensitivity to suffering, especially that of animals, is suggested as a factor in delaying the formation of his philosophy. More important still, his sensitivity to all suffering is a major factor in the development of that attitude toward life which has caused him to be called a pessimist. The problem of pain is one of the first to which Hardy gives his attention. His approach is radically different from that of an apologist for any divine scheme. Through observation of phenomena he has come to see pain not as a beneficent provision for man's welfare, but as the result of imperfection in the ordering of the universe. None of the commonly accepted theories by which man has through the ages sought to make inescapable pain less intolerable is acceptable to Hardy's intellectual honesty. Hardy does not find that suffering has resulted in man's ennoblement. He does not find consolation in pain the punishment for sins that in the future may be avoided, Nor does he think that pain will be abundantly compensated for in a future life. He sometimes advises a sort of stoicism, not as an organized philosophy, but as a mute submission to the inevitable bad. He satirises the doubtful integrity of those who simply deny the

existence of pain or who employ a priest to deny it for them:

"Better!" said the parson, in the strenuously sanguine tones of a man who got his living by discovering a bright side in things where it was not very perceptible to other people. ¹

None of these more or less deductive theories of the amelioration of suffering accord with Hardy's agnostic spirit. He approaches the matter from the scientific viewpoint, and sees that pain is a real phenomenon and inescapable except through the numbing of the senses.

Hardy, like Schopenhauer, observes that the more highly developed forms of life suffer more acutely than those less developed, and that the person of greatest endowments endures the most exquisite pain. As the individual consciousness approaches distinctness of perception, as it emerges further from the Unconscious, its susceptibility to pain is proportionately increased. The soul whose awareness approaches genius suffers most of all. Such is the case with Jude, Clym Yeobright, and Tess. An entry in Hardy's notebook gives such an observation:

April 7 (1889). A woeful fact -- that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how. ²

¹ Two on a Tower, 22.

² Early Life, 285.

The same idea is incorporated in Hardy's comment on the excruciating agony suffered by Bathsheba when she unscrewed the lid of the unfortunate Fanny's coffin and discovered her husband's perfidy:

Capacity for intense feeling is proportionate to the general intensity of the nature, and perhaps in all Fanny's sufferings, much greater relatively to her strength, there never was a time when she suffered in an absolute sense what Bathsheba suffered now. ³

A highly organized person, like Marty South or Grace Melbury,

... who combined modern nerves with primitive emotions ... was doomed by such coexistence to be numbered among the distressed, and to take her scourgings to their exquisite extremity. ⁴

Hardy believes that duller sorts suffer only proportionately to their less acute sensibilities. Since, then, pain is conditioned in intensity by the degree of consciousness of the sufferer, no objective standards can be set up for its measurement.

... It is not the thing, but the sensitiveness to the thing, which is the true measure of its pain. Perhaps what seems so bad to you falls lightly on her mind. ⁵

Fifteen years later he wrote in his journal:

February 26 (1889). In time one might get to regard every object, and every action, as composed, not of this or that material, this or that movement, but of the qualities pleasure and pain in varying proportions. ⁶

The most complete statement Hardy makes on the subject of pain is a letter published in The Academy and Literature,

³ Far From the Madding Crowd, 351.

⁴ Woodlanders, 294.

⁵ Hand of Ethelberta, 380.

⁶ Early Life, 285.

May 17, 1902. This is an answer to a review of Maeterlinck's apology for Nature (The Buried Temple).

Sir, In your review of M. Maeterlinck's book you quote with seeming approval his vindication of Nature's ways, which is (as I understand it) to the effect that, though she does not appear to be just from our point of view, she may practice a scheme of morality unknown to us, in which she is just. Now, admit but the bare possibility of such a hidden morality, and she would go out of court without the slightest stain on her character, so certain should we feel that indifference to morality was beneath her greatness.

Far be it from my wish to distrust any comforting fantasy, if it can be barely tenable. But alas, no profound reflection can be needed to detect the sophistry in M. Maeterlinck's argument, and to see that the original difficulty recognized by thinkers like Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Haeckel, etc., and by most of the persons called pessimists, remains unsurmounted.

Pain has been, and pain is: no new sort of morals in Nature can remove pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who are its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof. And no injustice, however ample, so long as we consider Nature to be, or to stand for, unlimited power. The exoneration of an omnipotent Mother by her retrospective justice becomes an absurdity when we ask, what made the foregone injustice necessary to her Omnipotence?

So you cannot, I fear, save her good name except by assuming one of two things: That she is blind and not a judge of her actions, or that she is an automaton, and unable to control them: in either of which assumptions, though you have the chivalrous satisfaction of screening one of her sex, you only throw responsibility a stage further back.

But the story is not new. It is true, nevertheless, that, as Mr. Maeterlinck contends, to dwell too long amid such reflections does no good, and that to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, as Nietzsche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity.⁷

Is, then, pain of no value? Cannot this plentiful and inescapable suffering be turned to some account? Yes, a little. But in no sense commensurate to its cost. For the sufferer Hardy sees very little virtue in

7 Later Years, 97.

pain. This is evidenced by the futile sort of suffering conceived as of refining or exalting potency, the artist would have shown triumph over suffering rather than dumb submission or useless revolt. One looks in vain for the ecstatic suffering of the martyr, so common in George Eliot. The repeated chastisements of fortune may reduce the victim to a conformity where conformity seems the remedy for the torture. Or, more often, it may induce a dumb resignation where the suffering seems to be inflicted without apparent reason. The sufferer himself seems no more noble or magnanimous. His only gain is in the ability to endure more pain. This Hardy holds to be not of intrinsic worth, as does Eliot, but rather only an accomplishment rendered necessary by the mismanagement of the universe. Hardy would consider a case of smallpox too high a price to pay for future immunity -- especially if the immunity did not protect.

There is another and much more worthy gain to be got from suffering. Unfortunately, however, it does not accrue to the sufferer but to the observer. Early in 1890 Hardy wrote in his journal:

Altruism, or the Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your Neighbor as Yourself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame.⁸

It is notable that Hardy never writes of the refining, exalting effect of pity on the pitier. To him the only

8 Early Life, 294.

good of pity is utilitarian,--that is, it may serve to lessen the total bulk of pain to be endured. Given a race with no pain and so no need for pity, Hardy would never wish pain to enter in order that pity might enoble the heart of the beholder. Unawareness rather than sensitivity is the ideal he expresses. In a passage from the Dynasts he suggests that a better scheme than the present one of sufferers pitied would be a universe of rhobots:

Spirit of the Pities

But out of tune the Mode and meritless
That quickens sense in shapes whom, thou hast said,
Necessitation sways! A life there was
Among these self-same frail ones -- Sophocles--
Who visioned it too clearly, even the while
He dubbed the Will "the gods". Truly said he,
"Such gross injustice to their own creation
Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,
And for themselves with shame."-- Things mechanized
By coils and pivots set to foreframed codes
Would, in a thorough-sphered melodic rule,
And governance of sweet consistency,
Be cessed no pain, whose burnings would abide
With That Which holds responsibility,
Or inexist. ⁹

Yet one doubts whether Hardy's reticence on the subject of pity as an asset is to be taken as meaning that he does not at all value it for its own sake -- that is, for its value to the one exercising pity. Sympathy was a major factor in his own life, and the principal emotion he arouses in his readers. Yet he has given no direct testimony on this subject. Pity as a means of alleviating

⁹ Dynasts, 99.

suffering must, of course, be considered as a very poor substitute for the absence of pain itself. So, if compassion does not benefit the one feeling it, it is at best only a fractional compensation for the suffering occasioning it.

While pity itself may not be a distinct gain to the one experiencing it, the failure to feel pity in the presence of distress is an evil. In 1887 he wrote in his journal:

May 29. Instance of a wrong (i.e. selfish) philosophy in poetry:

Thrice happy he who on the sunless side
Of a romantic mountain
Sits coolly calm; while all the world without,
Unsatisfied and sick, tosses at noon. 10

Without straining meanings one can see that Hardy is revolted at the blind inductive optimism that seems to find even more than compensating good in pain -- a divine plan for enriching the life of the sufferer or of his associates. Three significant doctrines are implicit in Hardy's reportings of spiritual and physical suffering: first, the more man has read divine purpose into pain, the less concerned he has been in its alleviation; second, the total pain in the world would have been lessened had man not looked to a future life to right the outrages of this; third, the likeliest way to bring relief is to expose pain, not as conceived by theological apologists

10 Thomson, James: "Summer," The Seasons, Line 458-464. Early Life, 262.

but as it presents itself in all its grimness.

... if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full
look at the Worst. ll

Pessimism

The almost universal indictment against Hardy is that he is a pessimist. Most often the critic making the charge would appear to mean that Hardy's philosophy is unpleasant, that it does not harmonize with the critic's own notions of the government of the universe, that whether true or false such findings as Hardy presents are not salutary, and that it is expedient to discredit the bringer of offensive news rather than to hear and weigh his message. A critic voicing such views should not be taken seriously, for he is not sincere in his position, and is probably ill informed. A second critic is sincere in his charge. He holds that Hardy, whether unconsciously through a distortion of his mental optics, or purposely in order to defend preconceived theses, selects phenomena of a sinister sort rather than reporting life disinterestedly as it presents itself to him, -- in other words, that he is not inductive in his art, but deductive. This charge cannot be absolutely refuted, of course, for the most unbiased observer will see most clearly what corresponds to his own ideas. Yet that Hardy's readings of life are more reliable than most,

ll "In Tenebris," Collected Poems, 154.

that they are not purposely distorted, the data in the chapter on Hardy's Positivism will show. A third critic does not deny the author's sincerity or his accuracy in the reporting of phenomena. On the basis of these findings he reads pessimism into the author's philosophy. It is to show that Hardy is not a consistent pessimist that the following data are presented, together with Hardy's own comments on the charge.

Pessimism in its accurate metaphysical sense is a

... doctrine that everything in nature is ordered for, or tends to, the worst, or that the world is essentially evil. 12

The term is loosely applied to any philosophy that does not express the glowing optimism of

God's in his heaven --
All's right with the world! 13

One must note, too, that pessimism is much more a matter of mood than is, for example, the belief in personal immortality. It is so very subjective that without shifting his opinions on many phases of life, an author may change from pessimist to optimist and back again. And in his zeal for objective truth he may record impressions that brand him a pessimist -- that are indeed pessimistic -- even though in the large his outlook is hopeful. Such is the case with Thomas Hardy, whose pessimism is due, not to any personal ill fortune but to a heightened sensitivity to the sufferings of others

12 Webster's New International Dictionary.

13 Browning, Robert: Pippa Passes.

(including animals) and an enthusiasm for the good and the beautiful. So endowed, he cannot help being oppressed by the disparity between the almost limitless capacity for enjoyment and the much restricted means for satisfying the legitimate demands on life. To a letter written to a friend who had reviewed Jude the Obscure, Hardy adds this postscript:

P.S. One thing I did not answer. The 'grimy' features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead. ... It is, in fact, to be discovered in everybody's life, though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's. 14

might one say that Hardy is optimistic as to humanity's capacity for aspiring and enduring, but pessimistic as to the objective results of his efforts?

Injustice, especially the gratuitous insult of being born, lies at the base of much of Hardy's pessimism. Unlike Wordsworth, he does not find Nature's plan holy, but an irrational travesty on justice, sending children into lives of inescapable misery, such as await the Durbeyfield household:

All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship -- entirely dependent on the judgement of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them -- six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved

14 Later Years, 41.

in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. Some people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is sweet and pure, gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan". 15

The tragedy in Tess' life was in great measure due to her vain effort to correct the injury inflicted by an unkind fate:

.. to be their Providence; for to Tess, as to some few millions of others, there was ghastly satire in the poet's lines:

Not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come.
To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify, and at best could only palliate. 16

In some respects parallel to the plight of the Durbeyfield children is that of the young Chickerels, who were

... bright little minds ready for a training, which without money and influence she could never give them. 17

But it is not alone the children whom Fate has placed among the lowly that Hardy pities. All life holds enough of disappointment and hardship so that Hardy feels compassion for the child to be born. 18

Hardy sees the element of chance as unfriendly to man, not because it is inherently malignant, but because it moves powerfully and in unpredictable directions. The failure of Clym to admit his mother and her consequent pitiful death are attributed to chance. A more patent

15 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 21.

16 Ibid, 410.

17 Hand of Ethelberta, 207.

18 "The Masked Face," "The Unborn", etc., Collected Poems, 490, 268.

instance of the unhappy interference of chance in the affairs of men is the failure of Angel Claire to get Tess' letter. Much has been said and written to prove Eustacia Bye's undoing was the result of errors within her control -- errors for which she might reasonably be held responsible. Critics have felt that to prove Eustacia's ego, as ideally distinct from her heredity, and environment, culpable, would somehow exonerate the world order of blame and prove Hardy at least not a pessimist. Hardy's position here, as elsewhere, is that the benevolence or malevolence of the non-ego -- environment, heredity, destiny -- must be determined for the individual by his own outlook. Subtilizings do not help the soul that feels itself overwhelmed by an unkind providence. Hardy undoubtedly expresses a pessimistic outlook on life when he lets Eustacia lament her lot:

'... How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! ... I do not deserve my lot!' she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. 'O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to heaven at all!' 19

No matter how righteous theoretically the governance of the universe may be proved to be, it is bad in so far as it allows such despair. Hardy himself in his earlier years does not philosophize much about metaphysical

causes, remedies, and such. He is plainly pessimistic regarding the tyranny of the non-ego. The man who tries to discover a workable way of life is no more successful than Gabriel Oakes' sheep dog:

George's son had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day -- another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion, and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise. ²⁰

In the fall of 1882 he writes in his journal:

Since I discovered, several years ago, that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled myself very little about theories. ... Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of pure mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day. ²¹

And three years later:

December 21 (1885). The Hypocrisy of things. Nature is an arch-dissembler. A child is deceived completely; the older members of society more or less according to their penetration; though even they seldom get to realize that nothing is as it appears. ²²

Not all the pessimism evident in Hardy's earlier years is a reflection of an unkind destiny, except as that destiny manifests itself in the frailty of man himself. While Hardy has a high appreciation of the inherent capacity of many men to aspire and to endure, he has not the Victorian faith in human perfectibility. He sees man as not much improved after years or generations of experience and indoctrination. The strivings

²⁰ Far From The Madding Crowd, 42.

²¹ Early Life, 201.

²² Ibid, 231.

and sufferings of man, the labors of his prophets and seers have largely been in vain. The fires of tribulation have blistered his soul, but not refined it. A tragic instance of the vanity of endeavor is that of Michael Henchard, who after twenty years of effort gave up the struggle against drink:

'Because in twelve days I shall be released from my oath.'

'What oath?'

'The oath to drink no spirituous liquid. In twelve days it will be twenty years since I swore it, and then I mean to enjoy myself, please God!' ²³

The pathos lies not so much in Henchard's poverty and its attendant suffering as in his lack of self-mastery. That his twenty years of resistance have failed to refine him, that his stubborn heredity has proved too much for his will so that at last he must go down in defeat, are thoughts that lie close to pessimism. Hardy early loses faith in the potency of creeds to elevate man, but since he sees all creeds as man-made, the fault lies, of course, with man. Jude's efforts toward the better life were nullified by the emptiness of the doctrines offered him as well as by his own limitations. In the midst of his troubles, Jude said:

... I am in a chaos of principles -- groping in the dark -- acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago, when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best.

... I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine -- if, indeed, they ever discover it -- at least, in our time. 'For who knoweth what is good for man in this life? -- and who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?' 24

While the crowds in the street shouted Hurrahs, Jude died bewildered, embittered, whispering slowly, his lips scarcely moving:

"Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, 'There is a man child conceived.'" ... "Let that day be darkness; let not God..." "Why died I not from the womb? ... I should have slept: then had I been at rest!" ... "... Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?" 25

In the stupidity with which man clings to the outworn supernaturalism of Christianity, with its anthropomorphic god, Hardy reads the incapacity of mankind for advancement. In "A Plaint to Man," Hardy admits a possible need in the infancy of the race for

... a mercy seat
Somewhere above the bloomy aisles
Of this wilful world. 26

But man should no longer outrage his intelligence by clinging to this god that must

... dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay. 27

In rejecting the supernatural Hardy does not, however, discount man's need for something to take its place.

The following is from a letter of June 10, 1901:

24 Jude the Obscure, 388.

25 Ibid, 482.

26 "A Plaint to Man," Collected Poems, 306.

27 Later Years, 90.

I do not think that there will by any permanent revival of the old transcendental ideals; but I think there may gradually be developed an Idealism of Fancy; that is, an idealism in which fancy is no longer tricked out and made to masquerade as belief, but is frankly and honestly accepted as an imaginative solace in the lack of any substantial solace to be found in life. 27

Sometimes Hardy's pessimism takes the form of a querulous pointing of man's follies and inconsistencies. He is the cynic in this reverie in church:

... When the congregation rises there is a rustling of silks like that of the Devils' wings in Paradise Lost. Every woman then, even if she had forgotten it before, has a single thought to the folds of her clothes. They pray in the litany as if under enchantment. Their real life is spinning on beneath this apparent one of calm, like the District Railway-trains underground just by -- throbbing, rushing, hot, concerned with next week, last week. ... Could these true scenes in which this congregation is living be brought into church bodily with the personages, there would be a churchful of jostling phantasmagorias crowded like a heap of soap bubbles, infinitely intersecting, but each seeing only his own. 28

More cynical is the speech he puts into the mouth of Napoleon:

Ay! Not content to stand on their own strength,
They try to hire the enginry of Heaven.
I am no theologian, but I laugh
That men can be so grossly logicless,
When war, defensive or aggressive either,
Is in its essence Pagan, and opposed
To the whole gist of Christianity! 29

The foregoing examples have all been taken from the earlier part of Hardy's life. Until about 1890 he presented data that showed a far from hopeful outlook for man as an inherently good creature the sport of an irrational destiny. Yet he seldom wrote of pessimism as such. Then followed the period of the Dynasts, when he seemed on the whole more sanguine, as will appear later. But when the

27 Later Years, 90
28 Early Life, 276.
29 The Dynasts, 342.

Great War brought a general disillusionment, Hardy seemed to lose much of this faith in the amelioration of man's condition -- a faith that he seems never fully to have recovered. Of course these divisions are only proximate, for, as stated above, Pessimism is largely a matter of immediate mood. Doubts intrude into the brightest periods, if such there are, and Hardy never wholly loses faith in man's worth. In the truest sense, it is only in so far as Hardy doubts the nobility of human nature, its capacity for enlightenment, that he can be called a pessimist. So long as man is the victim of an irrational Will, or even of his own errors caused by his development, there is hope. Even though man is much persecuted from without, the integrity of his soul remains a matter of satisfaction. True despair must center on the incurable depravity of man himself. This sort of pessimism Hardy does not exhibit in his earlier writings, and only infrequently in his later.

The shock of the War completely shattered the hope which he had expressed in the "Sick Battle God," published in 1901:

In days when men found joy in war,
 A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;
 The peoples pledged him heart and hand,
 From Israel's land to isles afar.

But new light spread. That god's gold nimb
 And blazon have waned dimmer and more dim;
 Even his flushed form begins to fade,
 Till but a shade is left of him.

That modern meditation broke
 His spell, that penmen's pleadings dealt a stroke,
 Say some; and some that crimes too dire
 Did much to mire his crimson cloak.

Yes, seeds of crescent sympathy
 Were sown by those more excellent than he,
 Long known, though long contemned till then --
 The gods of men in amity.

...

He rarely gladdens champions now;
 They do and dare, but tensely -- pale of brow;
 And would they fain uplift the arm
 Of that weak form they know not how.

Yet wars arise, though zest grows cold;
 Wherefore, at times, as if in ancient mould
 He looms, bepatched with paint and lath;
 But never hath he seemed the old!

Let men rejoice, let men deplore,
 The lurid Deity of heretofore
 Succumbs to one of saner nod;
 The Battle-god is god no more. 29

But even before the outbreak of the war, Hardy must have felt, as did very many leaders in Europe, that war was imminent. The prophetic "Channel Firing," published in April, 1914, four months before the outbreak of the War, shows that he was even then apprehensive for the safety of Europe. The pessimism of this poem is not so much directed against an outward fate as against man's failure to ameliorate his own condition. God tells the startled ghosts that:

Just as before you went below;
 The world is as it used to be. 30

In commenting on the effect of the war on her husband, Mrs. Hardy says that:

- 29 "The Sick Battle-god," Collected Poems, 88.
 30 "Channel Firing," Collected Poems, 287.

... the war destroyed all Hardy's belief in the gradual ennoblement of man, a belief he had held for many years, as is shown by poems like "The Sick Battle-God," and others. He said he would probably not have ended The Dynasts as he did end it if he could have foreseen what was going to happen within a few years.

Moreover, the war gave the coup de grace to any conception he may have nourished of a fundamental ultimate Wisdom at the back of things. With his views on necessitation, or at most a very limited free will, events seemed to show him that a fancy he had often held and expressed, that the never-ending push of the Universe was an unpurposeful and irresponsible groping in the direction of the least resistance, might possibly be the real truth. 31

In September, 1918, Hardy answered a letter painting the monstrosities to be expected in any future war. He said:

If it be all true that the letter prophesies, I do not think a world in which such fiendishness is possible to be worth the saving. Better let Western "civilization" perish, and the black and yellow races have a chance.

However, as a meliorist (not a pessimist as they say) I think better of the world. 32

Distrust of the perfectability of man is evident in the preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier, published in February, 1922:

... when belief in witches of Endor is displacing the Darwinian theory and "the truth that shall make you free," men's minds appear, as above noted, to be moving backwards rather than on.

... But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it pour mieux sauter, drawing back for a spring. I repeat that I forlornly hope so, notwithstanding the supercilious regard of hope by Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and other philosophers down to Einstein who have my respect. 33

It is only during the latter years of his life that

31 Later Years, 165.

32 Later years, 190.

Hardy says much of Pessimism as such -- years when he admits that:

... The Scheme of Things is, indeed, incomprehensible; and there I suppose we must leave it -- perhaps for the best. Knowledge might be terrible. 34

One does not need to go deeply into his thought to see why Hardy always repudiates the charge of pessimism commonly directed against him. Yet it is rather the popular connotation of the term that he resents: a false, morbid, misanthropic desire to see wrong triumph. Hardy's own attitude has none of this ill will towards man. His is rather the pessimism of the prophet of truth in contemplation of inevitable woe. His philosophy he sees as the only impartial, unafraid estimate of man's unhappy state. He sees the same injustice towards himself in the term pessimist (as popularly applied) as the surgeon might feel in announcing a malignant disease. So in the excerpts following it will be seen that he sometimes denies and sometimes accepts the title of pessimist. He is convinced that the only possible hope of saving the human race lies in a clearer recognition of the evils of existence and an acceptance by man himself of responsibility for their correction. It is to shake man from his mental and spiritual lethargy, to show him that a considerable part of his ills lie with himself and can be cured only by himself, that Hardy mercifully exposes

34 Letter to Alfred Noyes, December, 1920, Later Years, 218.

the worst in life. His purpose is to enforce a feeling that much injustice is needless. An entry in his notebook on January 16, 1918, gives the creed of a sensitive humanitarian, not of a gloomy cynic:

As to pessimism. My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint -- in this case human ills -- and ascertain the cause; then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimist is: Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms.

So, since he considers his position the one of intellectual honesty, he resents what seems an unfair attack on his motives.

One of the first references he makes to pessimism, so-called, occurs in his journal of 1902:

January 1. A Pessimist's apology. Pessimism (or rather what is call such) is, in brief, playing the sure game. You cannot lose at it; you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed. Having reckoned what to do in the worst possible circumstances, when better arise, as they may, life becomes child's play. 36

In Real Conversations William Archer reports a discussion with Thomas Hardy on the subject of pessimism. Mr. Archer vouches that he has faithfully reproduced the thought of Mr. Hardy, although possibly not the exact words. The conversation is undated, but took place at Max Gate about

W. A. And the pessimist holds, I take it, that the principle of evil is the stronger.

Mr. Hardy. No, I should not put it precisely in that way. For instancy, people call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that "not to

35 Later Years, 183.

36 Later Years, 91.

have been born is best," then I do not reject the designation. I never could understand why the word "pessimism" should be such a red rag to many worthy people; and I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere. I do not see that we are likely to improve the world by asseverating, however loudly, that black is white, or at least that black is but a necessary contrast and foil, without which white would be white no longer. That is mere juggling with a metaphor. But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs, and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against "man's inhumanity to man" -- to woman -- and to the lower animals? (By the way, my opposition to "sports" is a point on which I am rather in conflict with my neighbors hereabouts.) Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good. 37

An acknowledgement of a birthday letter from Mrs. Arthur Henniker shows a decided doubt as to the spiritual progress of the race:

Max Gate, 5 June, 1919.

Sincere thanks for your good wishes, my dear friend, which I echo back towards you. I should care more for my birthdays if at each succeeding one I could see any sign of real improvement in the world -- as at one time I fondly hoped there was; but I fear that what appears much more evident is that it is getting worse and worse. All development is of a material and scientific kind -- and scarcely any addition to our knowledge is applied to objects philanthropic and ameliorative. I almost think that people were less pitiless towards their fellow-creatures -- human and animal -- under the Roman Empire than they are now; so why does not Christianity throw up the sponge and say, I am beaten, and let another religion take its place? 38

A year later among some "Birthday Notes" appear two paragraphs that show that his faith in man has not yet been restored. The pessimism is now more than a mood, if

37 Archer, Wm.: Real Conversations, 46.

38 Later Years, 19.

pure mood it ever was. It is thoroughly rationalized into a philosophy of life -- not malevolence but almost hopeless benevolence:

Nature's indifference to the advance of her species along what we are accustomed to call civilized lines makes the late war of no importance to her, except as a sort of geological fault in her continuity.

Though my life, like the lives of my contemporaries, covers a period of more material advance in the world than any of the same length can have done in other centuries, I do not find that real civilization has advanced equally. People are not more human, so far as I can see, than they were in the year of my birth. Disinterested kindness is less. The spontaneous goodwill that used to characterize manual workers seems to have departed. One day of late a railway-porter said to a feeble old lady, a friend of ours, "See to your luggage yourself." Human nature had not sunk so low as that in 1840. 39

On December 29, 1926, he writes in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Granville-Barker that Napoleon

... threw back human altruism scores, perhaps hundreds of years. 40

The apologist for Hardy will look in vain through the writings of his last years for an assurance that the dark veil was removed and that Hardy died in the confidence that all was finally on the way to perfection. Such is not the case, for the veil did not lift. Or if one agree with Hardy that eventual salvation for the race is not assured, one will recognize that Hardy saw clearly to the end. In August of his last year (1928) he wrote to the critic J. B. Priestley, apropos of Mr. Priestley's criticism of Meredith's Essay on Comedy:

39 Ibid, 212.

40 Ibid, 252.

... Meredith was, ... I always felt, in the direct succession of Congreve and the artificial comedians of the Restoration, and in getting his brilliancy we must put up with the fact that he would not, or could not -- at any rate did not -- when aiming to represent the "Comic Spirit," let himself discover the tragedy that always underlies Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough. 41

This echoes what he wrote in 1876.

"All is vanity," said the Preacher. But if all were only vanity, who would mind? Alas, it is too often worse than vanity; agony, darkness, death also.

A man would never laugh were he not to forget his situation, or were he not one who never has learnt it. After risibility from comedy, how often does the thoughtful mind reproach itself for forgetting the truth? Laughter always means blindness -- either from defect, choice, or accident. 42

At the close of his life he had not greatly changed his mind from his belief as expressed above and in his journal, of October 15, 1888:

If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy; and, on the contrary, if you blind yourself to the deeper issues of a tragedy you see a farce. 43

Mrs. Hardy records that the last thing read to her husband on the evening of his death was a quatrain from the

Rubaiyat:

Oh, Thou, who man of baser Earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd -- Man's forgiveness give -- and take! 44

Meliorism

As antitode for the wretched condition into which man has been thrown by no fault of his own but by the

41 Ibid, 257.

42 Early Life, 148.

43 Ibid, 282.

44 Later Years, 266.

compulsion of birth, Hardy offers various solutions. None are, however, so much in accord with conventional thought as are those of Eliot. These may be grouped as follows: first, voluntary cessation of existence; second, resignation to the inevitable; third, evolution of the race into a more tolerable concord with the external universe; fourth, rebirth of "Unawareness"; fifth, emergence of the Will into more complete consciousness. These are the ultimate solutions. For immediate amelioration of man's lot, Hardy offers much the same suggestions as does Eliot -- greater compassion toward all creatures, acceptance of duty, development of a spirit of brotherhood. Hardy is convinced that whatever may be the ultimate fate of the human race its present condition is unnecessarily aggravated by abuses that lie within the power of man to correct. This is a commonplace to even the sketchy reader of his work.

The theory of von Hartmann's that man can best find the way out of his dilemma through suicide -- not active, personal suicide, but a passive ending of oneself through failure to procreate is one that Hardy develops in many poems and stories. The direction the idea takes in Hardy is what is termed race suicide, the refusal to be a party to the extention of race suffering. If, as Hardy is convinced, the ills of life outweigh its values, if existence

is a mockery and a curse, it would be better not to have been born. Obviously man cannot undo the error of his own birth. But he can refrain from inflicting a like injustice on another. Jude the Obscure is at bottom an exposition of this doctrine. It was this reluctance to force sufferers into the world will-nilly even more than the unusual sensitiveness of her nature that resulted in Sue's reluctance to marry and reproduce. As she and Jude came into the church to be married, they found another couple already at the altar. The necessary delay before their own ceremony could be performed gave them opportunity to weigh more carefully the responsibilities of wedlock. Sue realized that she could not enter matrimony with her eyes opened to all its meaning to her and Jude and to those who might follow. She said to Jude:

... Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all. In fifty, aye, twenty years, the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now, as

"Shapes like our own selves hideously multiplied," and will be afraid to reproduce them. ⁴⁵

In the atrocious slaying of Sue's babies by the pathetic little "Father Time," -- and his own suicide, Hardy has shown us an objectification of the "coming universal wish not to live." ⁴⁶

A considerable part of Tess of the D'Urbervilles is an exposition of the tyranny of being born. The case of

45 Jude the Obscure, 339.

46 Ibid, 400.

the Durbeyfield children has already been cited. Probably the most striking instance, the one in which Hardy's large humanitarianism is most apparent, is a conversation between Angel Clare and Tess during their estrangement. In explaining the impossibility of their continued union, Angel pictured to Tess a Nemesis in the form of children blighted by the knowledge of their mother's early transgression:

"...Don't think of me or of yourself, my feelings or your feelings. That's not all the difficulty; it lies in another consideration -- one bearing upon the future of other people than ourselves. Think of years to come, and children born to us, and this past matter getting known -- for it must get known. ... Well, think of these wretches of our flesh and blood growing up under doubts which they will gradually get to feel the full force of with their expanding years. What an awakening for them! ..."

... She had truly never thought so far as that, and his lucid picture of possible offspring who would scorn her was one that brought deadly conviction to an honest heart which was humanitarian to its center. Sheer experience had already taught her, that, in some circumstances, there was one thing better than to lead a good life, and that was to be saved from leading any life whatever. Like all who had been provisioned by suffering, she could, in the words of M. Sully-Prudhomme, hear a penal sentence in the fiat, "You shall be born."

Yet such is the vulpine slyness of Dame Nature, that, till now, Tess had been hoodwinked by her love for Claire into forgetting it might result in vitalizations that would inflict upon others what she had bewailed as a misfortune to herself. 47

In several of his poems Hardy has suggested the same salvation for the race through cessation of existence. Mad Judy, whom Hardy thinks not so mad after all, illustrates this philosophy:

47 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 276.

When the hamlet hailed a birth
 Judy used to cry:
 When she heard our christening mirth
 She would kneel and sigh.
 She was crazed, we knew, and we
 Humored her infirmity.

When the daughters and the sons
 Gathered them to wed,
 And we like-intending ones
 Danced till dawn was red,
 She would rock and mutter, "More
 Comers to this tony shore!"

When old Headman Death laid hands
 On a babe or twain,
 She would feast, and buy her brands
 Sing her songs again.
 What she liked we let her do, 48
 Judy was insane, we knew.

An epigram that Hardy adapted from the French flippantly states a thought which is really a serious one:

I'm Smith of Stoke, aged sixty-odd,
 I've lived without a dame
 From youth-time on; and would to God 49
 My dad had done the same.

This doctrine of suicide is commonly associated with Pessimism. In Hardy it is the product of his extreme sensitiveness to suffering as influenced by the philosophy of Pessimism propounded by von Hartmann and others. Yet suicide is itself a form of amelioration, for it implies that the contemplated state of nothingness is better than the present one of being. Hardy's humanitarianism would never countenance the infliction of suffering on one's friends through taking one's own life. But the

48 "Mad Judy," Collected Poems, 138.

49 "Epitaph on a Pessimist," Collected Poems, 771.

passive suicide of the race he seriously suggests as a conceivable ultimate escape, especially for those of the race furthest emerged into consciousness -- those most sensitive to the woes of life. For

Better than waking is to sleep! 50

The second form of meliorism that Hardy suggested is resignation to the inevitable, renunciation of the hardly attainable. It is offered as a partial antidote against the

... intolerable antilogy
Of making figments feel! 51

Yet in Hardy this doctrine never reaches a lofty development. There is never the selfless renunciation of desire which one finds in Romola or Middlemarch. Tess' sacrifice of herself, no less heroic than that of Romola or of Dorothea, was nevertheless not a voluntary seeking to give her life for those who had no claim upon her. Nowhere in Hardy does non-resistance approach the sublimity of

Thou hast not half that power to do me harm
As I have to be hurt. 52

There is rather the capitulation to the inevitable -- a rebellious impotence. He does not subscribe, as does Eliot, to the doctrine of Goethe's quoted and developed by Carlyle, that

50 Dynasts, 302.

51 Dynasts, 77.

52 Shakespeare, Wm.: Othello V.ii.

... It is only with Renunciation (Entsagen) that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin. ... There is in man a Higher than Love of Happiness: he can do without Happiness, and instead thereof find Blessedness! 53

Unlike Eliot and Carlyle, Hardy is a sensitive hedonist. To him resignation is not a renunciation of the right to happiness. The right still remains even though the effort toward attainment may be foregone. He would repudiate the renunciation preached by Carlyle:

Foolish soul! What Act of Legislation was there that thou shouldst be Happy? A little while ago thou hadst no right to be at all. What if thou wert born and predestined not to be Happy, but to be Unhappy! Art thou nothing other than a Vulture, then, that flies through the Universe seeking after somewhat to eat; and shrieking dolefully because carrion enough is not given thee? Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe. 54

man has that right, says Hardy, by virtue of his being born without his desire or consent, and of his being furnished with the appetite for happiness. But since man is impotent to enforce his just claim on destiny, he will, on the whole, get on better if he accepts whatever is given him without contention. Protest is futile; resistance is worse.

An interesting bit of indirection, a seeming resignation of what is the prime aim of the hedonist, is found in Hardy's journal:

January 5, (1888). Be rather curious than anxious about your own career; for whatever result may accrue to its intellectual and social value, it will make little

53 Carlyle, Thomas: "The Everlasting Yea." Sartor Resartus.

54 Ibid.

difference to your personal well-being. A naturalist's interests in the hatching of a queer egg or germ is the utmost introspective consideration you should allow yourself. ⁵⁵

A similar sort of saving indifference to what life may bring is shown in a conversation between Ethelberta Petherwin and Christopher Julian. Here the thought is that happiness is a by-product not to be sought for itself. What Hardy really means is that happiness is so uncertain of attainment that man had best not center too much attention on it, or be too much disappointed in failing to secure it:

Ethelberta: Let me be. Life is a battle, they say; but it is only so in the sense that a game of chess is a battle -- there is no seriousness in it; it may be put an end to at any inconvenient moment by owning yourself beaten, with a careless "Ha-ha!" and sweeping your pieces into the box. Experimentally, I care to succeed in society; but at the bottom of my heart, I don't care.

Julian: For that very reason you are likely to do it. My idea is, make ambition your business and indifference your relaxation, and you will fail; but make indifference your business and ambition your relaxation, and you will succeed. So impish are the ways of the gods. ⁵⁶

Years later Hardy writes in his journal a paragraph that shows almost this same conception of the untrustworthiness of life:

May 1, (1902) Life is what we make it as Whist is what we make it; but not as Chess is what we make it; which ranks higher as a purely intellectual game than either Whist or Life. ⁵⁷

In the great tragedies the resignation is that of chained despair before an unrighteous but powerful fate. It is a bending before blind necessity, an acquiescence

55 Early Life, 267.

56 Hand of Ethelberta, 140.

57 Later Years, 96.

not willingly initiated but yet preferable to vain resistance. In the case of the peasant it becomes a dumb acceptance. In the Return of the Native Eustacia, who cannot learn to bend before fate, is broken. Clym better adapts himself to the inevitable, not because he sees the prevailing order as right, but because disillusionment of spirit has convinced him that life at best offers little to her victims -- not enough to struggle for.

Yeobright placed his hand upon her arm. "Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away?" 58

Such is the resignation that Hardy holds forth as a possible alleviation for man's lot. It is a far cry from the lofty, mystical renunciation of religious asceticism. It is equally removed from the idealism of Eliot, in which the renunciation although not undertaken for its own sake, becomes none the less a means of grace, purifying and ennobling the character. In Hardy it is only a make-shift, a poor substitute for the better objective conditions that man is powerless to effect. It never elevates the soul to a beatific state of merging with the godhead -- to a state beyond temptation from the life that

has been renounced. There is too little of the voluntary in the renunciation for it to be accounted a virtue per se. If it makes less intolerable the inflicted misery of life, it fulfills its utilitarian purpose.

The third means by which Hardy fancies that a melioration may come is through an evolution of the human race into a more supportable relationship with its environment. Just what this evolution may be Hardy does not specify clearly. In fact, he suggests several possible adjustments that may be made. These are not all harmonious, and, except for the theory of progressive enlightenment, they are probably little more than fancies. Hardy finds man fettered by social restraints, superstitions, outworn religions, barbarous laws -- man-inflicted injustices which man will discard on emerging further into rationality. One of these, the English marriage laws, Hardy denounces as the

... gratuitous cause of at least half the misery of the community. ⁵⁹

It is partly against oppressive marriage and divorce laws that Jude the Obscure is directed. In it Sue looks forward to a saner age.

... When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say! ⁶⁰

Much more widely dispersed is Hardy's complaint against

59 "Laws the Cause of Misery," Hearst's Magazine, June, 1912.

60 Jude the Obscure, 254.

man's shackling himself with outgrown religious ritual and superstition. He sees a good omen of man's deliverance in the general rejection by scientific thinkers of constraining, irrational faith in a man-made deity.

"God's Funeral" shows a mingled note of pity for the unhappy dazedness of those who see the god dead and of hope that a new, clearer light may dawn to take the place of the anthropomorphic concept. But disillusionment brings an immediate lessening of satisfaction in life.

Hardy quotes the mourners for the dead god:

How sweet it was in years far hied
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!

And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?...

Then he applies his enlightened imagination to find a compensation for the loss of the god:

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, on my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
"See you upon the horizon that small light -- 61
Swelling somewhat?" Each mourner shook his head.

Only through disillusionment, a burying of the dead god, can a new hope arise. Yet none but the seer can behold the new hope. To the mourner of the shattered faith there is

no bright gleam. His lot it is to bury the dead, not to rejoice in the birth of the new god.

Highly idealistic is the thought in "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds," published in Human Shows three years before Hardy's death. It and "There seemed a Strangeness" from the same collection stand out in contrast to the pessimism of most of his late poems. They show a hope that out of the welter of tried and discarded faiths a purer spirituality may be born. The poet imagines himself sitting among the fungus-grown sepulchres of the dead creeds, readings the epitaphs of "deceased Catholicons:"

When in a breath-while, lo, their spectres rose
Like wakened winds that autumn summons up:--
"Out of us cometh and heir, that shall disclose
New promises!" cried they. "And the caustic cup

We ignorantly upheld to men, be filled
With draughts more pure than those we ever distilled,
That shall make tolerable to sentient seers
The melancholy marching of the years." 62

"There Seemed a Strangeness" also borrows an "otherworldly" voice which announces that the Supreme, who has long fogged men in ignorance, is about to uncloud their veiw. A new dispensation awaits,

"And they shall see what is, ere long,
Not through a glass, but face to face;
And Right shall disestablish Wrong:
The Great Adjustment is taking place." 63

Hardy does not, however, believe that this improvement in belief will take place through any inherent capacity of

62 "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds," Collected Poems, 689.

63 "There Seemed A Strangeness," Collected Poems, 690.

truth to prevail. In July, 1925, he wrote in his notebook:

"Truth is what will work," said William James (Larpers). A worse corruption of language was never perpetrated. 64
That man must be his own salvation -- if salvation there is to be -- is always Hardy's doctrine. In "The Lacking Sense" Hardy imagines Nature groping blindly, wounding her children unwittingly, needing guidance from her creatures. He counsels man to

Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no note of
malediction;
Not long on thee will press the hand that hurts the
lives it loves;
And while she plods dead-reckoning on, in darkness
of affliction,
Assist her where thy creaturely dependence can or may,
For thou art of her clay. 65

Hardy looked forward to a time when the church would so modify its liturgy and creed as not to exclude the millions of thinkers who could not subscribe to its present sanctities. He hoped to see the English Church liberalize and rationalize its worship so as to admit men and women who no longer believed in the supernatural. But in his late years the fulfillment of that hope seemed projected far into the future, for he saw the clergy becoming more narrow and dogmatical, and a belief in mysticism increasing. Some notes from his journal of January, 1907, throw light on his conception of the function of religion. They also show that the various churches of England have fallen far

64 Later Years, 242.

65 "The Lacking Sense," Collected Poems, 107.

short of that conception:

An ephemeral article which might be written: "The Hard Case of the Would-be-Religious. By Sinceritas."

Synopsis. Many millions of the most thoughtful people in England are prevented entering any church or chapel from year's end to year's end.

The days of creeds are as dead and done with as the days of Pterodactyls.

Required: services at which there are no affirmations and no supplications.

Rationalists err as far in one direction as Revelationists or Mystics in the other; as far as in the direction of logicity as their opponents away from it.

Religious, religion, is to be used in the article in its modern sense entirely, as being expressive of nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word -- ceremony, or ritual -- having perished, or nearly.

We enter church, and we have to say, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep," when what we want to say is, "Why are we made to err and stray like lost sheep?" Then we have to sing, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," when what we want to sing is, "O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify! Till it can, let us magnify good works, and develop all means of easing mortals' progress through a world not worthy of them."

Still, being present, we say the established words full of the historic sentiment only, mentally adding, "How happy our ancestors were in repeating in all sincerity these articles of faith!" But we perceive that none of the congregation recognizes that we repeat the words from an antiquarian interest in them, and in a historic sense, and solely in order to keep a church of some sort afoot -- a thing indispensable; so that we are pretending what is not true: that we are believers. This must not be; we must leave. And if we do, we reluctantly go to the door, and creep out as it creaks complainingly behind us.

Christianity nowadays as expounded by Christian apologists has an entirely different meaning from that which it bore when I was a boy. If I understand, it now limits itself to the religion of emotional morality and altruism that was taught by Jesus Christ, or nearly so limits itself. But this teaching does not appertain especially to Christianity: other moral religions within whose sphere the name of Christ has never been heard, teach the same thing! Perhaps this is a mere question of terminology, and does not much matter. That the dogmatic superstitions read every Sunday are merely a commemorative recitation of old articles of faith held by our grand-

fathers, may not much matter either, as long as this is well understood. Still, it would be more honest to make these points clearer, by recasting the liturgy, for their real meaning is often misapprehended. But there seems to be no sign of such a clearing up, and I fear that, since the "Apology" (in Late Lyrics), in which I expressed as much some years ago, no advance whatever has been shown; rather, indeed, a childish back-current towards a belief in magic rites. ⁶⁶

Sometimes, though not often, Hardy states his assurance that people were happier when the race was younger. Yet he nowhere recommends a return to nature. He recognizes that the loss in creature happiness has been compensated for by increased intellectual satisfaction. At least, having attained to the light of disillusionment, man does not wish the peaceful illusion of the blind. So his evolutionary adjustment does not include retrogression. In 1888 he wrote of the peasants of Wessex:

... Indeed, it is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed. ⁶⁷

So far three ideas of meliorism have been treated, cessation of existence, resignation to the inevitable, and evolution of man into a more adaptation to his environment. In all these the initiation lies with man; he is responsible for his own salvation. Two further hypotheses remain: that of the submerging of man into unawareness, and that of an emergence of the Will into consciousness -- both dependent primarily not on man

66 Later Years, 121.

67 "The Aerolite," Collected Poems, 737.

but on the Immanent Will. Of these two, the former is only a phantasy. It occurs in "The Aerolite," in which the ills of man are ascribed to a germ of consciousness that escaped to this world through an error. While the seers pondered how to rid the world of this curse, or to limit its registerings to good,

I left them pondering. This was how
 (Or so I dreamed) was waked on earth
 The mortal man
 Begot of sentience. Maybe now
 Normal unawareness waits rebirth. 68

Hardy's distinctive theory of meliorism is that of an emergence of the Immanent Will from nescience or semi-sentience into fuller awareness. Since this is wholly an activity of the Will, it is treated in the chapter on the Immanent Will.

CHAPTER VI

IMMORTALITY

Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy make careful distinction between two types of immortality: that of the individual consciousness in a personal life beyond the grave as taught by orthodox Christianity, and that of influence persisting only in the lives of others. The first both reject unqualifiedly. The latter they accept and frequently allude to as a hope that adds dignity and worth to human life.

The rejection of personal immortality has brought George Eliot into disfavor with a considerable number of readers, especially protagonists of Christianity, who have failed to see in this rejection of a second life a heightened altruism, a greater devotion to the task of alleviating the ills of the present life. That her avowal of the finality of this life has not hurt her with more readers may be attributed to the fact that she boldly expresses her belief only in her essays and in her letters and conversations -- never in poems or fiction. The reason for this unfortunate inconsistency would seem to be the same as that which prompted her to outward conformity, including attendance at church. In her private thinking she was a fearless searcher for the truth. Yet she hesitated to destroy the happiness which

others might find in traditional faith in the supernatural. Writing to one who passionately clung to such a hope, she said:

I have no controversy with the faith that cries out and clings from the depths of man's needs. I only long, if it were possible to me, to help in satisfying the need of those who want a reason for living in the absence of what has been called consolatory belief. ¹

Yet her inconsistency here is less easily understood than in the case of church attendance and worship, for to the mature George Eliot the conventional belief in immortality is not merely unscientific and contrary to experience; it is pernicious to mankind in that it dulls the feelings of compassion, discourages a fearless search for truth, and lowers the dignity and worth of this life. In a review of Lecky's History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, she writes:

Indeed, wherever the tremendous alternative of everlasting torments is believed in, -- believed in so that it becomes a motive determining the life, -- not only persecution, but every other form of severity and gloom, is the legitimate consequence. ²

She finds that the belief in personal immortality not only encourages vicious practices, but fails in the one service that it is best calculated to render -- that of maintaining morality. In a criticism of the poet Arthur Young she offers this opinion:

May, to us it is conceivable that in some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality -- that

1 Letter quoted by G. E. Cooke: George Eliot, 228.

2 "The Influence of Rationalism," Essays, 153.

we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones and to our many suffering fellow-men -- lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence. And surely it ought to be a welcome fact, if the thought of mortality, as well as of immortality, be favorable to virtue. Do writers of sermons and religious novels prefer that men should be vicious in order that there may be a more evident political and social necessity for printed sermons and clerical fictions?

Later in the same review, while showing that a higher morality is independent of considerations of future reward or punishment, or of other theological dicta, she says:

... To us it is a matter of unmixed rejoicing that this latter necessary of healthful life (morality) is independent of theological ink, and that its evolution is ensured in the interaction of human souls, as certainly as the evolution of science or of art, with which, indeed, it is but a twin ray, melting into them with undefinable limits.⁴

Her indignation is aroused at the slander against the unbeliever which she reads in these lines from Young's

Night Thoughts:

As in the dying parent dies the child,
Virtue with Immortality expires.
Who tells me he denies his soul immortal,
Whate'er his boast, has told me he's a knave.
His duty 'tis to love himself alone;
Nor care though mankind perish, if he smiles.⁵

In her reply to this unwarranted and unjust pronouncement, Eliot gives her most complete statement of the failure of the belief in immortality to make men more merciful or more just:

3 "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness," Essays, 31.

4 Ibid, 52.

5 Young, Edward: Night Thoughts, Vol. I, Night 7, p.200. Essays, 49.

We can imagine the man who "denies his soul immortal," replying: "It is quite possible that you would be a knave, and love yourself alone, if it were not for your belief in immortality; but you are not to force upon me what would result from your own utter want of moral emotion. I am just and honest, not because I expect to live in another world, but because, having felt the pain of injustice and dishonesty towards myself, I have a fellow-feeling with other men, who would suffer the same pain if I were unjust or dishonest towards them. Why should I give my neighbor short weight in this world, because there is not another world in which I should have nothing to weigh out to him? I am honest, because I don't like to inflict evil on others in this life, not because I'm afraid of evil to myself in another. The fact is, I do not love myself alone, whatever logical necessity there may be for that in your mind. ... It is a pang to me to witness the sufferings of a fellow-being, and I feel his suffering the more acutely because he is mortal. -- because his life is so short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness and not misery. Through my union and fellowship with men and women I have seen, I feel a like, though a fainter, sympathy with those I have not seen; and I am able so to live in imagination with the generations to come, that their good is not alien to me, and is a stimulus to me to labor for ends which may not benefit myself, but will benefit them. ... And I should say that, if you feel no motive to common morality, but your fear of a criminal bar in heaven, you are decidedly a man for the police on earth to keep their eye upon, since it is matter of world-old experience that fear of distant consequences is a very insufficient barrier against the rush of immediate desire. Fear of consequences is only one form of egoism, which will hardly stand against half-a-dozen other forms of egoism bearing down upon it." ⁶

The final indictment of the faith in immortality is most characteristic of George Eliot's thought. It is an attack upon the commercialism of this system of deferred rewards and penalties through which the Church has largely encouraged morality. She holds that morality practiced in order to gain reward or to avoid punishment is not morality at all but an investment. While it may gain the approval of men, it really denies the highest attribute of man -- his ability to choose the good without

6 "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness," Essays, 49.

reference to his own selfish ends. In opposition to the theory that the belief in immortality is a principal source of virtue, she maintains that:

... so far as moral action is dependent on that belief, so far the emotion which prompts it is not truly moral,-- is still in the stage of egoism, and has not yet attained the higher development of sympathy. In proportion as a man would care less for the rights and welfare of his fellow if he did not believe in a future life, in that proportion is he wanting in the genuine feelings of justice and benevolence; as the musician who would care less to play a sonata of Beethoven finely in solitude than in public, where he was to be paid for it, is wanting in genuine enthusiasm for music. ⁷

She denounces bitterly:

... that impiety towards the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown. ⁸

George Eliot is not dispirited by her belief in the finality of earthly life. In it she sees a challenge to help humanity make the best of the few years allotted to it. Her only dissatisfaction is the one frequently expressed, especially in her later years, of the shortness of life. "I could be interested in everything, if I only had time." Duty, the keynote of her religion, becomes to her the more insistent as she realizes that there will be no second opportunity afforded for correcting the errors and omissions of this life. The poet and essayist Frederic W. M. Myers reports a conversation in which Eliot assumes the role of prophet:

7 Ibid., 50.

8 Ibid., 62.

I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May: and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men, -- the words God, Immortality, Duty, -- pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law. I listened, and night fell: her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a sibyl's in the gloom: it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates. And when we stood at length and parted amid that columnar circuit of the forest-trees, beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be gazing, like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty halls, -- on a sanctuary with no presence to hallow it, and heaven left lonely of a God.

In her imaginative writings George Eliot treats with respect the beliefs that her characters hold in a future life. But his tolerance is rather an indication of her delicacy toward the religious convictions of her readers than of any belief of her own in the supernatural. In her poems and stories she gives frequent hints of the pathos of finality, as:

Oh the anguish of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know! 10

Yet she nowhere says anything that could lead the reader to think: since this life is short, and since there is none to follow, why improve it? She perhaps feels it expedient not to emphasize a doctrine that has not yet been

9 Myers, Frederic W. H.: "George Eliot," Century Magazine, Nov. 1881.

10 "Amos Barton," Scenes of Clerical Life, 77.

proved beneficial to man, even though she herself feels that it was both true and salutary. This dualism is further treated in the section on religion.

But George Eliot does believe in an immortality based on the teachings of Charles Bray -- that we live hereafter only in the life of the race. ¹¹ The most beautiful expressions of this enlightened faith are in the poem inspired by these words of Cicero's:

Longum illud tempus, quum non ero, magis me movet,
quam hoc exiguum. (That long time, when I shall not be,
more moves me than this present short time.) ¹²

Oh may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.

So to live is heaven:
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing as beauteous order that controls
With growing sway the growing life of man.

...
That better self shall live till human Time
Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky
Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb
Unread forever.

This is life to come. ¹³

This immortality of influence is predicated in:

... He has no tomb.
He dwells not with you dead, but lives as law. ¹⁴

Sometimes she approaches the mystical in her poetic treatment of this impersonal sort of immortality, as in:

¹¹ Bray, Charles: The Philosophy of Necessity.

¹² Cicero, ad Atticum, xii. 18.

¹³ "Oh May I Join the Choir Invisible," Poems, 441.

¹⁴ "Death of Moses," Poems, 437.

Spirits seem buried and their epitaph
 is writ in Latin by severest pens,
 Yet still they flit above the trodden grave
 And find new bodies, animating them
 In quaint and ghostly way with antique souls. 15

Usually her expression of immortality is of the mild sort
 as in "Janet's Repentance:"

But there is another memorial of Edgar Tryan, which
 bears a fuller record: it is Janet Dempster, rescued
 from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and
 now looking back on years of purity and helpful labor. The
 man who has left such a memorial behind him must have
 been one whose heart beat with true compassion, and whose
 lips were moved by fervent faith. 16

It will be noted that none of these readings of the
 immortality of influence deny the personal life beyond
 the grave, and readers do not, of course, find the two
 ideas inharmonious. In no case does Eliot express that
 unhappy outlook frequently voiced by Hardy that our immor-
 tality is conditioned by our being kept in mind as person-
 alities,-- that we cease to exist as influences as soon
 as our lives are no longer remembered as such. This
 doctrine Eliot would call both egoistic and untrue. For
 the soul after death, non-sentient because non-existent,
 could not be affected by being forgotten. And the influ-
 ence of the soul, its true immortality, would not necessar-
 ily cease when the person ceased to be remembered by name.
 Nor does Eliot suggest that other more hopeless second
 death, when even influence shall have faded to naught.
 This idea of Hardy's she would reject as contrary to

15 "Spanish Gypsy." Poems, 30.

16 "Janet's Repentance," Scenes of Clerical Life, 397.

the law of conservation.

Eliot recognizes the insistent demand that man makes for a future life. She admits that:

Our impulses, our spiritual activities, no more adjust themselves to the idea of their future nullity, than the beating of our heart, or the irritability of our muscles. ¹⁷

Yet in spite of this almost organic demand, she refuses to postulate any eternity more supernatural than the poetic assertion that our souls, as objectified in our words and deeds, live on as forces for good or evil in the lives of others. Here she tacitly accepts Comte's Positivist Religion of Humanity.

The problem of personal immortality is more insistently present to Thomas Hardy than to George Eliot. Whereas Eliot accepts the finality of this life as an inevitable fact not altogether repellent, Hardy never ceases to berate the Cause for endowing man with a vain longing that can never be satisfied.. Sometimes Hardy imaginatively complains that man, by necessity mortal, should have been allowed to evolve so far into sentience as to picture and desire an immortality forever denied him. Not that Hardy considers eternal life a boon. He is not so well pleased with this life that he would have existence long protracted. He lets the yew tree in the cemetery speak of the peaceful dead beneath it:

17 "The Lifted Veil," Essays, 456.

If the living could but hear
 What is heard by my roots as they creep
 Round the restful flock, and the things said there
 No one would weep.

"Now set among the wise,"
 They say: "Enlarged in scope,
 That no God trumpet us to rise
 We truly hope." 18

But the worthlessness of a postulated eternal life in no wise excuses the Cause from His sin -- one of many -- in permitting man a longing that can never be gratified, and that serves no demonstrable good. The indictment is not, then, that man must remain mortal, but that he should have been permitted to wake sufficiently from the Unconscious to desire eternal life. Since he can find no provision made whereby man may attain to immortality, Hardy refuses to appear to sanction the deception. As a matter of intellectual honesty he would not have man deluded by a false hope of the unattainable. The pathos of this unsatisfiable desire he presents in the final parting of Tess and Angel Claire:

"...Tell me now, Angel, do you think we shall meet again after we are dead? I want to know."

He kissed her to avoid a reply at such a time.

"O Angel -- I fear that means no!" said she, with a suppressed sob. "And I wanted so to see you again -- so much, so much! What -- not even you and I, Angel, who love each other so well?"

Like a greater than himself, to the critical question at the critical time he did not answer; and they were again silent. 19

18 "While Drawing in a Churchyard," Collected Poems, 504.

19 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 453.

This tragedy of parting with no hope of reunion is also expressed in his poems.

That man would be better off without such an unfounded belief in immortality, Hardy is quite certain. He reports that

... Once upon a time Angel had been so unlucky as to say to his father, in a moment of irritation, that it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and not Palestine. ²⁰

Hardy's super-sensitive humanitarianism makes him see the belief in immortality as a cruelty against the sufferer -- a belief far in advance socially of that expressed by George Eliot. Hardy finds true kindness to inhere in absolute integrity rather than in avoiding the issue or in conscious deception of the victim. To shield man from unpleasant truth he considers a denial of man's dignity and courage. He also holds that the belief in immortality, instead of adding meaning to earthly life, really lessens its seriousness and worth by shifting to the remote future the goal of endeavor. In this, and in the belief that the hope of immortality makes for greater inhumanity, Hardy agrees with George Eliot. His thought is expressed in the feeling of Angel Claire toward Tess:

Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life -- a life

20 Ibid, 178.

which to herself, who endured or enjoyed it, possessed as great a dimension as the life of the mightiest to himself. Upon her sensations the whole world depended to Tess; through her existence all her fellow-creatures existed, to her. The universe itself only came into being for Tess on the particular day in the particular year in which she was born.

This consciousness upon which he had intruded was the single opportunity of existence ever vouchsafed to Tess by an unsympathetic First Cause -- her all; her every and only chance. How then should he look upon her as of less consequence than himself? ²¹

The divergent attitudes of Hardy and Eliot towards the reader is significant. Eliot, while she does not actually postulate an immortality in her imaginative writings, really says nothing to encourage the inquiring reader to revise his views. Hardy, on the other hand, refuses to conciliate his reader by seeming to countenance an immortality that his reason cannot accept. Nor does Hardy refrain, as does Eliot, from proclaiming his disbelief through his stories and poems. Rather he courageously, if bitterly, pronounces his opinions on this and other theological matters.

Just as Hardy is more obsessed with the horror vacui than is George Eliot and shrinks more sensitively from a final nothingness, so he speaks more frequently of the "immortality of influence" than does she. Possibly in this case immortality is not the scientific term to be used, although Hardy always employs it whether he means

21 Ibid., 174.

a relative persistence in the consciousness of loved ones or absolute immortality in the sense of a never dying echo. A note of rather gloomy hope is present in this contemplation of death:

By briefest meeting something sure is won;
 It will have been:
 Now God nor Demon can undo the done,
 Unseen the seen.
 Make muted music be as unbegun,
 Though things terrene
 Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

 So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
 From times remote
 Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
 Supply one note,
 Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
 Somewhere aloft
 Amid the spheres, a part of sick Life's antidote.²²

More bitter is the mood in "His Immortality." Here he shows immortality as conditioned by the remembrance of the living:

I saw a dead man's finer part
 Shining within each faithful heart
 Of those bereft. Then said I: "This must be
 His Immortality."

 ...
 Lastly I ask -- now old and chill --
 If aught of him remain unperished still;
 And find, in me alone, a feeble spark.
 Dying amid the dark. 23

Similar is the thought in "Her Immortality:"

But grows my grief. When I surcease,
 Through whom alone lives she,
 Her spirit ends its living lease,
 Never again to be! 24

22 "To meet, or Otherwise," Collected Poems, 292.

23 "His Immortality," Collected Poems, 130.

24 "Her Immortality," Collected Poems, 50.

A yet deeper pathos he wrote into his notebook ten years after his sister's death:

December 23 (1925). Mary's birthday. She came into the world .. and went out again .. and the world is just the same ... not a ripple on the surface left. 25

This statement is not, of course, true to his belief that the immortality of influence is coexistent with the memory of those surviving. It shows, rather, a gloomy foreboding as to the ultimate "to-be-forgottenness."

Another phase of the immortality of influence is shown in various stories and poems of heredity. The most sustained expression is in the novel The Well-Beloved, in which Jocelyn Pierston is enamored of three successive incarnations of his beloved Avice Caro -- grandmother, mother, daughter. Elsewhere a biological immortality is postulated in the family face, which lives on,

Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

...
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die. 26

A third aspect of the subject appears in a poem dated New Year's Eve, 1922. In this the Absolute explains that:

Your "Now" is just a gleam, a glide
Across your gazing sense:
With me, "Past," "Future," ever abide:
They come not, go not, whence
They are never hence.

25 Later Years, 245.

26 "Heredity," Collected Poems, 407.

Later the Absolute reveals to the poet:

The vista called the Past,
Wherein were seen, as fair as when
They seemed they could not last,
Small things and vast.

But the future remains veiled, for:

'Twould harrow you to see undraped
The scenes in ripe array
That wait your globe -- all worked and shaped:
And I'll not, as I say,
Bare them today.

Like a poetic rendering of Kant's Critique of the Pure Reason, the Absolute concludes:

In fine, Time is a mock, -- yea, such! --
As he might well confess:
Yet hath he been believed in much,
Though lately, under stress
Of science, less.

And hence, of her you asked about
At your first speaking: she
Hath, I assure you, not passed out
Of continuity,
But is in me.

So thus doth Being's length transcend
Time's ancient regal claim
To see all lengths begin and end.
"The Fourth Dimension" fame
Bruits as its name. 27

Likewise in "So, Time,"

The sound philosopher
Now sets him to aver
You are nought
But a thought
Without reality. 28

27 "The Absolute Explains," Collected Poems, 720.

28 "So, Time," Collected Poems, 723.

Such assurance of immortality by virtue of philosophising over the non-reality of time as a concept is not satisfying to the man craving eternal life. Hardy will not do violence to his conscience by suggesting a comfort that he is convinced is vain. Nor will he refrain, as does Eliot, from pronouncing truths that he knows to be harmful to his reputation. In reply to a criticism of the Dynasts which appeared in the London Times, he wrote:

I suppose I have handicapped myself by expressing, both in this drama and previous verse philosophies and feelings as yet not well established or formally adopted into the general teaching; and by thus over-stepping the standard boundary set up for the thought of the age by the proctors of opinion, I have thrown back my chance of acceptance in poetry by many years. The very fact of my having tried to spread over art the latest illumination of the time has darkened counsel in respect of me.

What the reviewer really asserts is, not "This is an untrue and inartistic view of life," but "This is not the view of life that we people who thrive on conventions can permit to be painted." 29

A last phase of immortality, that of the evil initiated or permitted by the First Cause, is suggestive of Hardy's theory of the Immanent Will. In "By the Earth's Corpse" the Lord is questioned by inquiring Time:

O Lord, why grivest Thou?--
 Since life has ceased to be
 . . .
 And humankind, and fowl, and fur
 Are gone eternally,
 All is the same to Thee as ere
 They knew mortality.

To this the Lord replies:

Written indelibly
 On my eternal mind
 Are all the wrongs endured
 By Earth's poor patient kind,
 Which my too oft unconscious hand
 Let enter undesigned.
 No god can cancel deeds foredone,
 Or thy old coils unwind!

As when, in Noë's days,
 I whelmed the plains with sea,
 So at this last, when flesh
 And herb but fossils be,
 And, all extinct, their piteous dust
 Revolves obliviously,
 That I made Earth, and life, and man.
 It still repenteth me! 30

Small consolation for the seeker after eternity!

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION

The early life of George Eliot was one of deeply emotional religion -- a life in which the renunciation of so-called worldly concerns figured largely. In another chapter are set forth the steps whereby her absorbing Christianity gave way to the Positivism which was to dominate her intellectual life, and which was one of the bases of her religion. Here will be discussed the principal tenets of that religion, and the media through which Eliot felt that religion could best serve humanity.

A singular fact in the development of George Eliot's thought is that the disillusionment through which she passed in discovering the weakness of the historical basis of Christianity was not succeeded by either bitterness or indifference. Through her whole life she kept the enthusiasm of her early religious experience, intensified rather than diminished by the failure of historical support. By a sort of reincarnation, the life principles that for orthodox religionists reside in the traditions of Christianity were reborn for Eliot in the virtues themselves.

In place of the divine fiats of Scripture and tradition, Eliot found justice, love, reverence, and renunciation as themselves authorities for the governance

of conduct. Thus, although she rejected for herself all ecclesiastical doctrine and dogma, she remained profoundly religious throughout her life. Nor did she, like Hardy, seek to weaken the faith of her readers in a theology that she found no longer tenable. Hardy's integrity demanded intellectual honesty in his dealings with his readers. Eliot believed that high aspiration, faith, hope, charity are virtues of greater worth, at least to most men, than enlightenment with its frequent attendant dissatisfaction with life. Her position she writes to Madame Bodichon:

Pray don't ever ask me again not to rob a man of his religious belief, as if you thought my mind tended to such robbery. I have too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with no-faith, to have any negative propagandism in me. In fact, I have very little sympathy with Freethinkers as a class, and have lost all interest in mere antagonism to religious doctrines. I care only to know, if possible, the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning till now. ¹

An interesting commentary on Eliot's opinion of mere negation of worship is the following from a description of the thought of certain colliers:

... and in some of the ale-house corners the drink was flavored by a dingy kind of infidelity, something like rinsings of Tom Paine in ditchwater. ²

Ample justification for the religious life Eliot finds in the emotional demands of human nature, without the necessity of any factual revelation whatever:

1 Letter to Madame Bodichon, Nov. 26, 1862. Cross II, 343.

2 "Amos Barton," Scenes of Clerical Life, 23.

The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence.³

Eliot seems to feel that average humanity must have some outside authority to bolster a will liable to weakness. Man must look up to something outside himself, and, failing a god, he will consecrate for himself an ikon, as did the Children of Israel in the wilderness. This innate requirement of man Eliot perhaps illustrates best in the case of Silas Marner, who enshrines his hoarded guineas in the place of the god who has deserted him, and who later consecrates Eppie as his deity. That this outside power is itself only a figment of the mind does not invalidate its efficacy. So long as the worshiper does not see that his idol is of clay, he receives the whole subjective value of worship. The disillusioned, who is convinced that the source of his inflowing inspiration is merely a projection of his own consciousness and coexistent with it, may also satisfy his appetency to worship, even though he feel that the object of his veneration is only as divine as he is himself. The following comment, spoken in somewhat idfferent connection, shows her views on this subject of edification through conscious illusion:

... Well, well, the illusions that began for us when we were less acquainted with evil have not lost their value when we discern them to be illusions. They feed the ideal better; and in living them still, we strengthen the precious habit of living something not visibly, tangibly existent,⁴ but a spiritual product of our visible, tangible selves.

3 "Janet's Repentance", Scenes of Clerical Life, 300.

4 "Looking Backward," Theophrastus Such, Essays, 278.

Eliot seems able to divorce the idea of spiritual beauty from that of intellectual truth. While she declares that God is inconceivable and immortality unthinkable, she nevertheless holds that the aesthetic values to be got from religion are so precious that they should be secured to the race even at the sacrifice of a certain intellectual frankness. In a letter to J. W. Cross, whom she later wedded, she writes:

All the great religions of the world, historically considered, are rightly the objects of deep reverence and sympathy -- they are the record of spiritual struggles, which are the types of our own. This is to me pre-eminently true of Hebrewism and Christianity, on which my own youth was nourished. And in this sense I have no antagonism toward any religious belief, but a strong outflow of sympathy. Every community met to worship the highest Good (which is understood to be expressed by God) carries me along in its main current; and if there were not reasons against my following such an inclination, I should go to church or chapel, constantly, for the sake of the delightful emotions of fellowship which come over me in religious assemblies -- the very nature of such assemblies being a binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience, and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse. And with regard to other people, it seems to me that those who have no definite conviction which constitutes a protesting faith, may often more beneficially cherish the good within them and be better members of society by a conformity, based on the recognized good in the public belief, than by a non-conformity which has nothing but negatives to utter. Not, of course, if the conformity would be accompanied by a consciousness of hypocrisy. That is a question for the individual conscience to settle. ⁵

In the emotional need for religious exercise Eliot agrees with Hardy. But Hardy is less tolerant of what

⁵ Letter of J. W. Cross, Oct. 20, 1873. Cross III, 215.

would seem to him a lack of integrity. While he would not deny folk the practice of those religious rites that have won a place in the life of the nation, he would have it understood by all that the rites are performed only for their antiquarian and reminiscent value -- not at all for any potency in themselves. In his stories and especially in his poems he is outspoken against the keeping up of a mummery unless it is plainly recognized as such. Eliot's attitude toward worship is more positive than Hardy's. She would have man reap what benefit he can from religion, if possible forgetting for the time its slender basis in fact. Hardy's attitude is first of all negative. He would have man consciously and constantly deny the supernatural, and treat his worship as symbolical, not of outside reality but of immanent aspiration toward the good. Thus he falls somewhat of the devotional attitude.⁶ He is resentful that no hypothesis of God can be found that will satisfy his reason. While admitting the present necessity of emotional idealism, he never ceases to berate whatever holds responsibility for letting man develop to this pass in a world so devoid of resources for either intellectual or emotional satisfactions. He would have man freed from all illusion as a prerequisite to any honest religion. The contrast of his position and Eliot's on this point appears in an

6 See chapters on the Immanent Will and Pessimism.

excerpt from his journal:

May 9 (1881). After infinite trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so that they may not be interdestructive I come to the following:

General Principles. Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have overdone so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.

If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse! ⁷

Eliot also differs widely from Hardy in her conception of the moral quality of the Prime Source, which, she is convinced, is more nearly perfect in idealism than is man. Hardy, on the other hand, considers the Will non-moral in itself but inimical to man's good through its blindness. Although neither identifies this external power with any conception of a god concerned with man's petty affairs, and responsive to man's wishes, Eliot's endowment of it with goodness makes her sanction of worship seem more aesthetically consistent than does Hardy's. She believes that man may legitimately expect an inflow of inspiration as from Emerson's Oversoul, even though the object of worship be only a projection of the worshiper's imagination, or a bit of matter endowed with spirit by the worshiper. Hardy says: Let man perform

7 Early Life, 192.

his worship for his own sake, constantly remembering that its only value is reflex; that if there is an outer being it is probably non-sentient and non-moral, at least not benevolent toward man. Hardy is intellectually consistent, although he seems not quite aesthetically consistent in projecting worship towards a being which cannot be conceived as worthy of reverence. Eliot says: Let man forget that his worship does not transcend his own consciousness. For there must be an outer being which is worthy of reverence, though it is impossible for man to come to an adequate conception of it. Eliot explains somewhat this attitude toward the Infinite in a letter to Miss Hennell, in which she recognizes the instinct to worship, but does not hold that this instinct is a proof that the worship accomplishes anything objectively:

... You observe in your note that some persons say the unsatisfied longing we feel in ourselves for something better than the greatest perfection to be found on earth is a proof that the true object of our desires lies beyond it. Assuredly, this earth is not the home of the spirit -- it will rest only in the bosom of the Infinite. But the non-satisfaction of the affections and intellect being inseparable from the unspeakable advantage of such a mind as that of man in connection with his corporal condition and terrene destiny, forms not at present an argument with me for the realisation of particular desires. ⁸

George Eliot's conception of the goodness of the universe she expresses in another letter to Miss Hennell:

⁸ Letter to Miss Hennell, Nov. 3, 1842. Cross I, 116.

... There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase, "Too good to be true." The highest inspiration of the purest, noblest human soul, is the nearest expression of the truth. ... Shall we poor earthworms have sublimer thoughts than that universe, of which we are poor chips -- mere effluvia of mind -- shall we have sublimer thoughts than that universe can furnish out into reality? ⁹

This idea of an outside perfection to which the human mind can aspire is common in Eliot's fiction. The philosophy spoken by Mrs. Winthrop to Silas Marner has many points of similarity to Eliot's own:

... it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got -- for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me; and if anything looks hard to me, it's because there's things I don't know on; and for the matter o'that, there may be plenty o'things I don't know on, for it's little as I know -- that it is. ... And all as we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner - to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o'good and rights, we may be sure as there's a good and a rights bigger nor what we can know -- I feel it i' my own inside as it must be so. And if you could but ha' gone on trustening, Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow-creatars and been so lone. ¹⁰

Gwendolyn found this outside Source through the help of Daniel Deronda. Maggie Tulliver in her "Valley of Humiliation" found that her old dream worlds would no longer satisfy her needs.

She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life: ... she wanted some key that would enable her to understand, and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart. ¹¹

She found the needed support in the truth preached to her by Thomas à Kempis. She discovered a new secret

⁹ Ibid, 194.

¹⁰ Silas Marner, 363.

¹¹ Mill on the Loss, 304.

of life:

... It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires -- of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole. ... She had not perceived -- how could she until she had lived longer? -- the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. She knew nothing of doctrines and systems -- of mysticism or quietism; but this voice out of the far-off middle ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message. 12

Having asserted man's innate need of religion, and having justified the existence of religion on the basis of that need, Eliot goes much further than does Hardy in defining her religion and in formulating its tenets. Briefly her religion is one of service to mankind and of development of the self through emotion, tradition, pain renunciation. It is a denial of injustice, hypocrisy, intolerance, commercialism, "save-your-own soulism". Duty, service, aspiration, renunciation are shibboleths of that religion.

To Eliot the recognition of duty is that which most distinguishes man from the brute creation. In "Janet's Repentance" she calls this idea of duty

... that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the

moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life. ¹³

The demands of duty become more absolute as man advances in the evolutionary process, and as certain other concepts that formerly actuated him -- god, immortality, fear, and the like -- become less operative. But duty must have an object. In Eliot the all-important object is not the glorification of God, or the betterment or salvation of the self, but the aiding of suffering and erring humanity. It is an exaltation of brotherhood:

I began to feel for other people's wants and sorrows a little more than I used to do. Heaven help us! said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another. ¹⁴

Throughout her imaginative writings and essays and in many of her letters, Eliot emphasizes the imperative nature of this duty of brotherhood. A letter to Mrs. H. B. Stowe shows this idea of duty grounded on pity:

I believe that religion, too, has to be modified-- "developed", according to the dominant phrase -- and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly-known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. I do not find my temple in Pantheism, which, whatever might be its value speculatively, could not yield a practical religion, since it is an attempt to look at the universe from the outside of our relation to it (that universe) as human beings. As healthy, sane human beings, we must love and hate, -- love what is good for mankind, hate what is evil for mankind. ¹⁵

13 "Janet's Repentance," Scenes of Clerical Life, 299.

14 Letter to the Brays, Jan. 1853. Cross I, 302.

15 Letter to Mrs. H. B. Stowe, May 8, 1869. Cross III, 86.

In a long letter to the Hon. Mrs. Ponsonby she rebukes her correspondent for feeling no pity for man, now that she believes him mortal and miserable. Eliot insists that this knowledge is the greater reason for trying to improve man's present state. Part of the letter follows:

My books have for their main bearing a conclusion the opposite of that in which your studies seem to have painfully imprisoned you -- a conclusion without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life -- namely, that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man; and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e., an exaltation of the human).¹⁶

As Romola is fleeing from the unhappiness in Florence, she is met by Duty in the person of Savonarola. He challenges her to a beatitude more precious than escape:

You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice: it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience. I say again, man cannot choose his duties. You may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth; and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty -- bitter herbs, and no bread with them.¹⁷

Romola's acceptance of the duty of the Cross imposed upon her is in the spirit of disillusioned devotion:

... If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the

16 Letter to the Hon. Mrs. Ponsonby, Dec. 10, 1874.

 Cross III, 245.

17 Romola I, 373.

fainting; while the light visits my eyes they shall seek the forsaken. ¹⁸

Eliot's whole enthusiasm is directed towards this unselfish service to man. Religion she measures only by its human quotient. Rites and creeds are judged only by whether or not they alleviate man's sufferings and elevate him above sin and degradation. Thus it is not the Evangelical teaching of Mr. Trj an or Dinah Morris, or the High Church doctrine of Mr. Irwine that enkindles Eliot's enthusiasm. It is their love of humanity, altogether independent of creed or of Christianity. She lets Adam Bede voice a homely religion which in many points seems not unlike her own:

May, Seth, lad; I'm not for laughing at no man's religion. Let 'em follow their consciences, that's all. Only I think it 'ud be better if their consciences' 'ud let 'em stay quiet i' the church -- there's a deal to be learnt there. And there's such a thing as being over-spiritual; we must have something besides Gospel i' this world. ... I know a man must have the love o' God in his soul, and the Bible's God's word. But what does the Bible say? Why, it says as God put his speerit into the workman as built the tabernacle, to make him do all the carved work and things as wanted a nice hand. And this is my way o' looking at it: there's the speerit o' God in all things and all times -- week-day as well as Sunday-- and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics. And God helps us with our head-pieces and our hands as well as with our souls; and if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours -- builds a oven for's wife to save her from going to the bake-house, or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two potatoes grow instead o' one, he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning. ¹⁹

18 Ibid., II, 188.

19 Adam Bede, 7.

Eliot has no sympathy for the religion that must go to the past for its inspiration or that seeks its justification in the future of this world or another. A religion must justify itself through service to present humanity, not through promise of a distant millennium. Here she is in perfect accord with Hardy. In one of the essays of Theophrastus Such she writes:

... Wide-reaching motives, blest and glorious as they are, and of the highest sacramental virtue, have their dangers, like all else that touches the mixed life of the earth. They are arch-angels with awful brow and flaming sword, summoning and encouraging us to do the right and the divinely heroic, and we feel a beneficent tremor in their presence; but to learn what it is they thus summon us to do, we have to consider the mortals we are elbowing, who are of our own stature and our own appetites. ... On the whole, and in the vast majority of instances, the action by which we can do the best for future ages is of the sort which has a certain beneficence and grace for contemporaries. 20

"Worldliness and Other-Worldliness" is a denunciation of thus shifting the center of religious thought from the immediate needs of humanity to a future world.

"Evangelical Teaching" opposes the doctrine that all things should be evaluated according to their service to the glory of God. She finds that glory to God, as popularly conceived, does not have as its correlary kindness to man. Nor does it imply a moral exaltation of the worshiper.

But next to that hatred of the enemies of God which is the principle of persecution, there perhaps has

20 "The Watch-dog of Knowledge," Theophrastus Such, Essays, 323.

been no perversion more obstructive of true moral development than this substitution of a reference to the glory of God for the direct promptings of the sympathetic feelings. Benevolence and justice are strong only in proportion as they are directly and inevitably called into activity by their proper objects: pity is strong only because we are strongly impressed by suffering; and only in proportion as it is compassion that speaks through the eyes when we soothe, and moves the arm when we succor, is a deed strictly benevolent. If the soothing or the succor be given because another being wishes or approves it, the deed ceases to be one of benevolence, and becomes one of deference, of obedience, of self-interest, or vanity. ²¹

These latter motive may inspire the doing of some acts beneficial to mankind, but their commercialism prevents the doer from receiving the highest approbation. So Eliot chooses as her only criterion direct human values -- especially those involved in self-forgetting service. The stanza opening "The Lifted Veil" is a fitting invocation for such a faith:

Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns
 To energy of human fellowship;
 No powers beyond the growing heritage
 That makes completer manhood. ²²

Zarca pronounces to Fedalma this creed of duty, begotten of common brotherhood:

Oh, it is a faith
 Taught by no priest, but by their beating hearts.
 Faith to each other: the fidelity
 Of fellow-wanderers in a desert place
 Who share the same dire thirst, and therefore share
 The scanty water: the fidelity
 Of men whose pulses leap with kindred fire,
 Who in the flash of eyes, the clasp of hands,
 The speech that even in lying tells the truth
 Of heritage inevitable as past deeds,
 Nay, in the silent bodily presence feel
 Thy mystic stirring of a common life
 Which makes the many one: fidelity
 To that deep consecrating oath our sponsor fate

²¹ "Evangelical Teaching," Essays, 136.

²² "The Lifted Veil," Essays, 426.

Made through our infant breath when we were born,
 The fellow-heirs of that small island, life,
 Where we must dig and sow and reap with brothers.
 Fear thou that oath, my daughter, -- nay, not fear,
 But love it; for the sanctity of oaths
 Lies not in lightning that avenges them,
 But in the injury wrought by broken bonds
 And in the garnered good of human trust.
 And you have sworn, -- even with your infant breath
 You too were pledged. ... ²³

This idea of duty governs the whole direction of Eliot's religion. She accepts the debt that is laid on her by the fact of her having received life. But whereas the orthodox Christian conceives the debt as due a heavenly Father and payable in part, at least, in praise and psæan, Eliot finds no god outside humanity to whom to pay any debt. But she does not default the debt. Rather she finds herself debtor to humanity. The bond is in no wise invalidated by being owed to mankind. Daniel Deronda and Middlemarch are notable developments of the idea of a debt owed by the enlightened to those in comparative darkness.

Eliot often gives this duty a tragic significance by suggesting that if the debtor fail of his obligation, not God himself can right the wrong. So

... If Dorothea, after her night's anguish, had not taken that walk to Rosamond -- why, she perhaps would have been a woman who gained a higher character for discretion, but it would certainly not have been as well for those three who were on one hearth in Lydgate's house at half-past seven that evening. ²⁴

23 The Spanish Gypsy, 124.

24 Middlemarch II, 392.

Stradivarius is made to voice a like sense of responsibility:

... my work is mine,
 And, heresy or not, if my hand slacken
 I should rob God -- since He is fullest good --
 Leaving a blank instead of violins,
 I say, not God Himself can make man's best
 Without best men to help Him. 25

This debt of brotherhood is a constantly growing obligation. It is modified by the countless interlocking human relationships in which each being is involved. Near the end of her career Maggie acknowledges this debt, which she had early recognized intellectually, that nothing is good for her that is bad for others -- that the past has made ties for her so that she is no longer free to act as she chooses. In resisting the passionate yearnings of her own heart and the pleadings of Stephen Guest, she says:

... You feel, as I do, that the real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds. Else all pledges might be broken, when there was no outward penalty. There would be no such thing as faithfulness.

...
 Oh, it is difficult -- life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling;--but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that have made others dependent on us -- and would cut them in two. ...many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly -- that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. 26

25 "Stradivarius," Poems, 401.

26 The Mill on the Floss, 479.

Later, when Stephen and Maggie are on the water together, it is this sense of obligation incurred towards others that gives Maggie strength to resist Stephen's eloquence. She says:

... There are memories, and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me; they would never quit me for long: they would come back and be pain to me -- repentance.

... We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us -- for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. ²⁷

Eliot recognizes, of course, that not all these debts are created by the debtor. Many are inherited; others are forced upon him by the sins and errors of those about him and by the normal interaction of human beings.

Eliot does not give this idea of brotherhood the complete development it has received from later writers, notably Joseph Conrad in the *Wigger of the Narcissus*. Hers is not a doctrine of the "solidarity of mankind," where every deed has a reflex influence on the doer as a part of the whole. Yet the difference seems to be largely one of metaphor and of terminology. The corner stone of her religion is duty to mankind, prompted by sympathy for error and suffering. Usually, however, she

maintains the individuality of the sympathizer; his suffering is not by virtue of a postulated identification of himself and of the primary sufferer as parts of an indivisible whole. Yet Dorothea, after a night of self-examination, realizes that she is not merely a benevolent onlooker or even a director of the affairs of mankind, but that

... She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. 28

Hardy comes very near the concept of an organic unity of mankind in the *Dynasts*, where on various occasions the scene assumes a preternatural transparency and discloses the Will as a brain whose tissues are composed of men. 29 This fancy of mankind as one organism was in Hardy's mind when he wrote these notes, evidently intended to be used in a future novel:

March 4 (1886). Novel-writing as an art cannot go backward. Having reached the analytic stage it must transcend it by going further in the same direction. Why not be rendering as visible essences, spectres, etc. the abstract thoughts of the analytic school?

The human race to be shown as one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one point is shaken, like a spider's web if touched. Abstract realism to be in the form of Spirits, Spectral figures, etc.

The Realities to be the true realities of life, hitherto called abstractions. The old material realities to be placed behind the former, as shadowy accessories. 30

28 Middlemarch II, 378.

29 Dynasts, 36, 113, and elsewhere.

30 Early Life, 232.

If the first tenet of Eliot's religion is service to others, the second is the development of one's own soul. Yet the culture of the soul is never an end in itself. It is always a most valuable by-product of courses undertaken for other ends judged worthy in themselves. To her readers she holds forth the Christian virtues of renunciation and high aspiration, together with worship, which she considers necessary to the good life.

Throughout Eliot's fiction unselfish renunciation is insisted upon as the sine qua non of moral excellence. It is this which exalts Fedalma and makes her worthy of her high destiny when she gives up the life of a Spanish lady to save her father's zincalas:

... I will bear
The heavy trust of my inheritance.
See, 'twas my people's life that throbbed in me;
An unknown need stirred darkly in my soul,
An made me restless even in my bliss.
Oh, all my bliss was in our love; but now
I may not taste it: some deep energy
Compels me to choose hunger. ³¹

more poignant still is Fedalma's refusal to let Silva abandon his religion and station to follow her. This ability to make the higher sacrifice is the one noble quality lacking in Silva's character. Yet his acquiescence in the decision of Fedalma that they must part rehabilitates him somewhat in our eyes, and he leaves

31 Spanish Gypsy, 225.

us also a hero. For Eliot does not hold that renunciation must be sought for its own sake to be of moral worth. So sought it would lose its ennobling value and become merely a commercial venture.

In Eliot renunciation is accompanied by the voluntary undertaking of the harder, nobler life indicated for us by circumstance. It never becomes mere passivity. For renunciation is not the end in itself, but the prerequisite to purposeful endeavor. Maggie voices a philosophy which, if she could have followed it, would have saved her much misery:

I've been a great deal happier ... since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn't have my own will. Our life is determined for us -- and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do. ³²

The theme of Middlemarch is the acceptance of a heroic self-abnegation and the courageous shouldering of a burden. That the burden is not worth the bearing does not invalidate the effort as a means of ennobling Dorothea's character. Eliot questions the rationality of such vain sacrifice, but she does not discount the spirituality of one who could entertain such idealism:

... it always seemed to me that the use I should like to make of my life would be to hope some one who did great works, so that his burthen might be lighter. ³³

32 Mill on the Floss, 320.

33 Middlemarch I, 378.

Such vain sacrifice as this of Dorothea's Eliot dis-
countenances in the discussion of "Bouddha giving himself
to the famished tigress to save her and her little ones
from starving." 34

In a previous chapter mention is made of Hardy's
doctrine of resignation. There it is stated that Hardy
advocates the voluntary renunciation of what cannot be
acquired or retained with certainty. But Hardy's pur-
pose is not the refining of character through trial, of
the rendering of the person capable of greater service.
It is merely the avoidance of bootless striving and
eventual disappointment. Thus resignation seems often
to be only an anaesthetic to relieve the symptoms of
the irremediable disease of being. A contrary opinion
is voiced by Philip Wakem, who seems to speak here for
Eliot:

... Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation
is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed --
that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is
not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in
ignorance--to shut up all the avenues by which the life
of your fellow-men might become known to you. I am not
resigned: I am not sure that life is long enough to
learn that lesson. You are not resigned: you are only
trying to stupefy yourself. 35

Eliot shows renunciation as more than an avoidance of
greater unhappiness; it is a direct means of grace.
While she never causes her characters to court privation

34 Daniel Deronda II, 72.

35 Mill on the Floss. 348.

as a zealot might, or to do purposeful penance, she constantly recognizes the soul-purifying efficacy of renunciation. Her belief in renunciation, service, duty, is as positive as that in God and immortality is negative.

As a Positivist she evaluates the changes she has seen wrought in lives through the voluntary giving up of things desired. She acclaims unselfish deeds as their own reward, as not in need of any outward recognition. Hardy is too much a Hedonist to sanction such a system of worldly unfairness. So he demands a poetic justice. He lets Jude speak bitterly of his failure to achieve a recognized success:

... But I don't admit that my failure proved my view to be a wrong one, or that my success would have made it a right one; though that's how we appraise such attempts nowadays -- I mean, not by their essential soundness, but by their accidental outcomes. ³⁶

We see Marty South made heroic by her noble unselflessness, but we are not made to feel that her nobility is its own reward. We are made to resent the objective unfairness she suffers. In Felix Holt we also resent unfairness, but we rejoice more in the edification of character that we see. The difference is partly in point of view. Hardy is the onlooker demanding visible justice. Eliot identifies herself more with the sufferer

and attempts to utilize the injustice as a means of inner grace. Yet this does not mean that Hardy's is the less sympathetic heart. He is possibly more militant in demanding rectification of wrongs. Eliot's is a more immediately practical critique. She sees lives miserable and degraded through their own faults and those of others. While she cannot hold out the hope of ideal justice, she does declare that lives may be made more blessed through service and self-sacrifice than through an insistence on their rights. Hers is much like Goethe's doctrine of Entsagen, developed by Carlyle in Sartor Resartus.³⁷

Eliot has a strong contempt for all commercialism in religion, especially "save-your-own-soul-ism", frequently a correlary to renunciation as taught by the Christian Church. She urges renunciation, not that one may purge the dross from one's soul as a condition of union with the Infinite, but that one may the better serve humanity. Renunciation undertaken for a selfish ulterior purpose is not complete renunciation, but a commercial engagement. The soul undertaking it is less free from self interest, less fit for spiritual union with the highest than the one that loses itself in living for others, even though it may have no theological theories whatever. Her concept of virtue is

³⁷ Quoted above in Chapter V.

wholly apart from any consideration of wages. In fact, virtue ceases to be virtue when its object is external advantage. The most patent exposition of this idea is in the struggle of Banker Bulstrode to reconcile a sensitive conscience with a paternalistic attitude towards God's earthly kingdom.

... It was a principle with Mr. Bulstrode to gain as much power as possible, that he might use it for the glory of God. He went through a great deal of spiritual conflict and inward argument in order to adjust his motives, and make clear to himself what God's glory required. 38

Through much compromising with his troublesome conscience and many justifications of his questionable dealings, Bulstrode develops his egoism until peril that threatens him seems a direct visitation from the Lord. He argues in his prayers that he is merely acting as the Lord's steward, that he has sought nothing for his own gratification:

... Those misdeeds even when committed -- had they not been half sanctified by the singleness of his desire to devote himself and all he possessed to the furtherance of the divine scheme? 39

Bulstrode is not a coarse hypocrite, such as might affect a belief merely to gull the world. He is of the self-deceived. His desires have been stronger than his beliefs, so that he has gradually explained the gratification of those desires into a satisfactory agreement with his cherished creed. Now the carefully ratiocinated arrangement is

38 Middlemarch I, 161.

39 Middlemarch II, 104.

in imminent danger of collapse. So with Nemesis upon him, he attempts bribery of the unreasonable Omnipotent:

He had long poured out his utterances of repentance. But today a repentance had come which was of a bitterer flavor, and a threatening Providence urged him to a kind of propitiation which was not simply a doctrinal transaction. The divine tribunal had changed its aspect for him; self-prostration was no longer enough, and he must bring restitution in his hand. It was really before his God that Bulstrode was about to attempt such restitution as seemed possible. ... Night and day, while the resurgent threatening past was making a conscience within him, he was thinking by what means he could recover peace and trust -- by what sacrifice he could stay the rod. His belief in these moments of dread was, that if he spontaneously did something right, God would save him from the consequences of wrong-doing. For religion can only change when the emotions which fill it are changed; and the religion of personal fear remains nearly at the level of the savage. ⁴⁰

Bulstrode never ceases his attempts to corrupt the Almighty. He cannot comprehend that Omniscience must know not only what is spoken in prayer and what is consciously held as the thought sponsored by the will, but also the half-submerged desire felt to be unworthy of acknowledgement. His prayers for this reason lack singleness of purpose. They have no efficacy in calming his terrors. They are distracted by apology and cross-purpose:

... If it should turn out that he was freed from all danger of disgrace -- if he could breathe in perfect liberty -- his life should be more consecrated than it had ever been before. He mentally lifted up this vow as if it would urge the result he longed for -- he tried to believe in the potency of that prayerful resolution -- its potency to determine death. He knew that he ought to

40 Ibid 11, 202.

say, "Thy will be done;" and he said it often. But the intense desire remained that the will of God might be the death of that hated man. 41

Again Eliot gives a vivid picture of the futility of urging the ideal right in the same breath as self interest when she has Matthew Jermyn ask Mrs. Fransome to reveal to her son his true parentage. To Mrs. Fransome's refusal George Eliot adds this comment:

... Men do not become penitent and learn to abhor themselves by having their backs cut open with the lash; rather, they learn to abhor the lash. ... A man who had stolen the pyx, and got frightened when justice was at his heels, might feel the sort of penitence which would induce him to run back in the dark and lay the pyx where the sexton might find it: but if in doing so he whispered to the Blessed Virgin that he was moved by considering the sacredness of all property, and the peculiar sacredness of the pyx, it is not to be believed that she would like him the better for it. Indeed, one often seems to see why the saints should prefer candles to words, 42 especially from penitents whose skin is in danger.

Yet Eliot is tolerant in the main of the unenlightened who hold fast to the rewards promised in the Beatitudes. She does not expect folk to be entirely free from the idea of compensation. Such are Mr. Tryan's flock at Milby:

... Whatever might be the weaknesses of the ladies who pruned the luxuriance of their lace and ribbons, cut out garments for the poor, distributed tracts, quoted Scripture, and defined the true Gospel, they had learned this -- that there was a divine work to be done in life, a rule of goodness higher than the opinion of their neighbors; and if the notion of a heaven in reserve for

41 Ibid., II, 283.

42 Felix Holt, 413.

themselves was a little too prominent, yet the theory of fitness for that heaven consisted in purity of heart, in Christ-like compassion, in the subduing of selfish desires. They might give the name of piety to much that was only puritanic egoism; they might call many things sin that were not sin; but they had at least the feeling that sin was to be avoided and resisted, and color-blindness, which may mistake drab for scarlet, is better than total blindness, which sees no distinction of color at all. ⁴³

Mr. Gilfil's sermons at Shepperton amounted

... indeed, to little more than an expansion of the concise thesis, that those who do wrong will find it the worse for them, and those who do well will find it the better for them: the nature of wrong-doing being exposed in special sermons against lying backbiting, anger, slothfulness, and the like; and well-doing being interpreted as honesty, truthfulness, charity, industry, and other common virtues, lying quite on the surface of life, and having very little to do with deep spiritual doctrine. Mrs. Patten understood that if she turned out ill-crushed cheeses, a just retribution awaited her; though, I fear, she made no particular application of the sermon on backbiting. ⁴⁴

Thus, though their motives may not be altogether altruistic, folk may lead better lives than without instruction.

Co-ordinate with the renunciation of selfish ambition in the culture of character, Eliot places moral integrity and high aspiration; for they all frequently coexist in the same personal nobility.

Moral integrity, the antithesis of commercialism, Eliot finds embodied in science. It is the

⁴³ "Janet's Repentance," Scenes of Clerical Life, 299.

⁴⁴ "Mr. Gilfil's Love-story," Scenes of Clerical Life, 92.

creed of the Positivist, superior to all propaganda. Physician Lydgate speaks her opinion of the sincerity of science:

... Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma. Dogma gives a charter to mistakes, but the very breath of science is a contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive. ⁴⁵

An intense study of moral integrity is the not altogether successful struggle of Savonarola to exalt high idealism in Florence through means that he recognizes as questionable. When, near the end of his career, he is brought to the extreme of executing political enemies, he justifies his action to the more simple Romola on the grounds of a divine expediency:

Be thankful, my daughter, if your own soul has been spared perplexity; and judge not those to whom a harder lot has been given. You see one ground of action in this matter. I see many. I have to choose that which will further the work entrusted to me. The end I seek is one to which minor respects must be sacrificed. The death of five men -- were they less guilty than these -- is a light matter weighed against the withstanding of the vicious tyrannies which stifle the life of Italy, and foster the corruption of the Church; a light matter weighed against the furthering of God's kingdom upon earth, the end for which I live and am willing myself to die.

... The cause of my party is the cause of God's kingdom. ⁴⁶

45 Middlemarch II, 327.

46 Romola II, 116.

This seems far from the singleness of criterion of the Christian ideal. But his integrity has not, as in the case of Bulstrode, been prostituted to a selfish commercialism. It has been sacrificed to his concept of the greater glory of God. Eliot does not sanction the jesuitical ethics to which he commits himself, but she does rehabilitate him as a hero and a martyr, humble and without cupidity, even for the martyr's crown:

There is no jot of worthy evidence that from the time of his imprisonment to the supreme moment, Savonarola thought or spoke of himself as a martyr. The idea of martyrdom had been to him a passion dividing the dream of the future with the triumph of beholding his work achieved. And now, in place of both, had come a resignation which he called by no glorifying name.

But therefore he may the more fitly be called a martyr by his fellow-men to all time. For power rose against him not because of his sins, but because of his greatness -- not because he sought to deceive the world, but because he sought to make it noble. And through that greatness of his he endured a double agony: not only the reviling, and the torture, and the death-throe, but the agony of sinking from the vision of glorious achievement into that deep shadow where he could only say, "I count as nothing: darkness encompasses me: yet the light I saw was the true light." 47

The highest integrity is spoken by *Redalma*:

You may divide the universe with God,
Keeping your will unbent, and hold a world
Where he is not supreme. 48

47 Savonarola II, 202.

48 Spanish Gypsy. Poems. 145.

An honesty supported by the will, which cannot be corrupted even by loyalty to Deity, is Eliot's ideal.

High aspiration in Eliot never takes the form of secluded asceticism. Just as renunciation works a regeneration in the individual but is not undertaken for its own sake, so the vision of the seer always has its social objective. In fact, Eliot does not indicate that spiritual exaltation is possible except when the heart is inspired by a desire to serve, or at least by benevolent thoughts towards man. That the seer himself is exalted is not the prime consideration, although his life is necessarily hallowed beyond that of those served.

... the earth yields nothing more Divine
 Than high prophetic vision -- than the Seer
 Who fasting from man's meaner joy beholds
 The pathos of beauteous order, and constructs
 A fairer type, to shame our low content. ⁴⁹

The "Legend of Jubal" relates the coming of death into a happy world. Till then none in Cain's city but Cain himself knew of death. So, not aware that an end could come to life, the people thrived in un-
 aspiring idleness. But the accidental slaying of a boy brought a new dispensation:

49 "A Minor Prophet," Poems, 389.

And a new spirit from that hour came o'er
 The race of Cain: soft idlesse was no more,
 But even sunshine had a heart of care,
 Smiling with hidden dread --

Now glad Content by clutching Haste was torn,
 And Work grew eager, and Device was born.
 It seemed the light was never loved before.
 Now each man said, "'I will go and come no more."

Thus to Cain's race death was tear-watered seed
 Of various life and action-shaping need.
 But chief the sons of Lamech felt the stings
 Of new ambitions, and the force that springs
 In passion beating on the shores of fate. 50

From this hard discovery of mortality sprang not only sorrow and ambition and dissention, but also pity and service and spiritual striving. From this latter were born the arts, preeminently music, as blessings to man. Stripped of direct utilitarian ends, this exaltation of spirit appears most nobly in a letter written near the end of George Eliot's life:

I try to delight in the sunshine that will be when I shall never see it any more. And I think it is possible for this sort of impersonal life to attain great intensity, -- possible for us to gain much more independence, than is usually believed, of the small bundle of facts that make our own personality. 51

A religion of duty, service, renunciation, lofty aspiration and the like is not calculated to win wide popularity among mankind. For the elect few who, like George Eliot, are by inheritance and

50 "The Legend of Jubal," Poems, 285.

51 Letter to the Hon. Mrs. Robert Lytton, 8th July, 1870. Cross III, 116.

training fitted for the religious life, these appeals may be sufficient. But Eliot realizes that man lives by emotion, habit, tradition much more than by intellectual promptings unenforced by the feeling. So the vital element in her religion is feeling as manifested in mysticism, tradition, emotion.

Both Eliot and Hardy are much interested in mysticism, and both introduce the supernatural into their poems and stories. Yet neither seems quite convinced of the existence of supernatural forces. They are frankly agnostic but curious. Hardy is querulous that the human intellect cannot come by any explanation of seemingly authenticated manifestations of supernatural powers. Eliot is more resigned to ignorance. Her attitude here seems to be consistent with that towards other inexplicable phenomena, as suffering. She would induce man, if possible, to derive some benefit from what is altogether beyond his control. If he cannot gain direct good from the mystical, he may be able to ennoble his heart through contemplation of what seems to be the supernatural. She makes no attempt to explain by natural laws the strange insight by which

Mordecai reads Daniel Deronda's fitness to be his successor.⁵² Nor does she explain away Adam Bede's strange visitation on the night of his father's death.⁵³ Her sympathy for sincere belief in the supernatural is evident in her treatment of the devout faith of Dino in his mission and visions:

... For the Divine love had sought me, and penetrated me, and created a great need in me. ... I felt that there was a life of perfect love and purity for the soul; in which there would be no uneasy hunger after pleasure, no tormenting questions, no fear of suffering. Before I knew the history of the saints, I had a foreshadowing of their ecstasy. For the same truth had penetrated even into pagan philosophy: that it is a bliss within the reach of man to die to mortal needs, and live in the life of God as the Unseen Perfectness. ... It came over me in visions when my mind fell away weary from the vain words which record the passions of dead men: it came over me after I had been tempted into sin and had turned away with loathing from the scent of the emptied cup. And in visions I saw the meaning of the Crucifix.

...
 ... For I have had that vision thrice. And through all the years since first the Divine voice called me, while I was yet in the world, I have been taught and guided by visions. For in the painful linking together of our waking thoughts we can never be sure that we have not mingled our own error with the light we have prayed for; but in visions and dreams we are passive, and our souls are as an instrument in the Divine hand.⁵⁴

Often the mystic does not have the qualities of the supernatural. It is a state somewhat analogous

52 Daniel Deronda

53 Adam Bede, Book I, chap. iv.

54 Romola I. 167.

to catalepsy. Of Savonarola's mystic religion she says:

... In moments of ecstatic contemplation, doubtless, the sense of self melted in the sense of the Unspeakable, and in that part of his experience lay the elements of genuine self-abasement; but in the presence of his fellow-men for whom he was to act, pre-eminence seemed a necessary condition of his life. ⁵⁵

To the ecstatic states of Fra Salvestro she gives a rational meaning, at the same time indicating that the explanation of seeming mysteries by psychic laws does not invalidate the mysteries for the purposes of religion:

... Fra Salvestro had a peculiar liability to visions, dependent apparently on a constitution given to somnambulism. Savonarola believed in the supernatural character of these visions, while Fra Salvestro himself had originally resisted such an interpretation of them, and had even rebuked Savonarola for his prophetic preaching: another proof, if one were wanted, that the relative greatness of men is not to be gauged by their tendency to disbelieve the superstitions of their age. ⁵⁶

Eliot recognizes the organic demand of man for the mysterious, the occult. This she finds as biologically insistent as the need for something to worship and for immortality. But she cannot postulate any critique of the mystic. She holds that man can know nothing beyond what is revealed

55 Romola II, 201.

56 Romola I, 385.

to him through his senses. So the effort to frame a supernatural world deductively must be in vain. To her the mystic is merely the subject of interesting speculation. Yet she recognizes that to some it has vital religious significance. In "The Lifted Veil," a study of preternatural vision, she shows the tragedy that would attend the ability to read clearly the occult:

... No matter how empty the adytum, so that the veil be thick enough. So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life, that if the whole future were laid bare to us beyond to-day, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between; we should pant after the uncertainties of our one morning and our one afternoon. ⁵⁷

Hardy's treatment of the mysterious is that of an agnostic who would like to be convinced. He seems to regard the supernatural phenomena he presents in his stories and notes as intellectual curiosities. They must, as the tricks of a magician, be explicable by natural law. Hardy enjoys them as riddles defying his reason. He is very painstaking in presenting the details of any inexplicable occurrence as if challenging the reader to unravel the mystery. Thus, even when used as an essential element in an emotional

57 "The Lifted Veil." Essays, 456.

element in an emotional story, the mystic itself does not appeal to the reader's emotion but to his intellect. The emotion is stirred, rather, by the struggle of the victim against a fate that assumes a baffling guise. In "The Withered Arm" Hardy weaves an intellectual mystery whose details are supplied and attested by not less than four persons. But the supernatural does not carry its own emotional appeal as it does in Eliot. The reader is induced to puzzle his wits for a solution whether or not his heart is touched by the spiritual struggles of Rhoda. In itself the supernatural engages the intellect, although as a manifestation of a hostile fate it enters the emotional construction of the story as its great obstacle. The mystery of the withered arm is never solved, and the story closes on the intellectual plane:

... Here, sometimes, those who knew her experiences would stand and observe her, and wonder what sombre thoughts were beating inside that impassive, wrinkled brow, to the rhythm of the alternating milk-streams. 58

Since he always sees the mystic as something demanding solution, Hardy never uses it as of blessed emotional significance, as does Eliot. To do so he would have to be resigned to the supernatural, or at

least be able, as is Eliot, to acquiesce gracefully to the inevitably unsolvable, and make the best of it. Hardy remains mentally more militant, more investigative. Throughout his life Hardy retains a keen interest in reported happenings of a psychic nature. A most intimate instance, reported by Mrs. Hardy, is the unaccountable behavior of Hardy's dog Wessex:

About nine o'clock on the evening of April 18 (1925), Mr. Watkins called at Max Gate. ... The dog, as was his wont, rushed into the hall and greeted his friend with vociferous barks. Suddenly these gave way to a piteous whine, and the change was so startling that Wessex's mistress went to see what had happened.

Nothing however seemed amiss, and the dog returned into the room where Hardy was sitting and where he was joined by Mr. Watkins. But even here Wessex seemed ill at ease, and from time to time went to the visitor and touched his coat solicitously with his paw, which he always withdrew giving a sharp cry of distress.

Mr. Watkins left a little after ten o'clock, apparently in very good spirits. Early the next morning there came a telephone message from his son to say that the father, Hardy's guest of the night before, had died quite suddenly about an hour after his return to the hotel from Max Gate. As a rule the dog barked furiously when he heard the telephone ring, but on this occasion he remained silent, his nose between his paws.

Hardy makes use of a similar incident in Desperate

Remedies:⁶⁰ Scattered throughout his journals are

reportings of mysterious happenings which Hardy seems

59 Later Years, 241.

60 Desperate Remedies, 103.

intellectually to doubt as manifestations of a supernatural, but which he plainly wishes he could believe.

In Real Conversations William Archer testifies to Hardy's eager interest in the mystic:

Mr. Hardy: Well, now, in this matter my position is just the reverse of yours. I am most anxious to believe in what, roughly speaking, we may call the supernatural -- but I find no evidence for it! People accuse me of scepticism, materialism, and so forth: but, if the accusation is just at all, it is quite against my will. For instance, I seriously assure you that I would give ten years of my life -- well, perhaps that offer is rather beyond my means -- but when I was a younger man, I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost -- an authentic, indisputable spectre.

...

My mother believed that she once saw an apparition, etc. 61

One of the most profound effects of Eliot's study of evolution seems to be her conviction that each social institution, just as each organism, is the product of a long series of developments. She does not believe that a new order can come into being by a special creation. It must be built on the accumulated traditions of past ages. This belief keeps her from being so iconoclastic as is Hardy, and at the same time causes her to countenance moderate views that seem inconsistent with her professed agnosticism. In a letter of 1880 she writes:

61 Archer, Wm., Real Conversations, 37.

Remember, dear, that the reason why societies change slowly is, because individual men and women cannot have their natures changed by doctrine and can only be wrought on by little and little. 62

She somewhat defends her position of tolerance of irrational traditions as being the only tenable one in the nineteenth century:

... As a necessary preliminary to a purely rational society, you must obtain purely rational men, free from the sweet and bitter prejudices of hereditary affection and antipathy; which is as easy as to get running streams without springs, or the leafy shade of the forest without the secular growth of trunk and branch. 63

She accepts traditional forms of worship, not as does Hardy for their antiquarian interest only, or because nothing better is at hand to keep some sort of church in operation, but because they seem to her to be parts of the foundation of modern society and to embrace the accumulated wisdom and aspiration of the race. Many of the observances have been proved through long generations to be conducive to the highest ethical and emotional development. She cites, for example, kneeling in prayer:

Slowly Romola fell to her knees, and in the very act a tremor came over her; in the renunciation of her proud erectness, her mental attitude seemed changed, and she found herself in a new state of passiveness. 64

62 Letter to Elma Stuart, Dec. 11, 1880.

63 "The Natural History of German Life," Essays, 180.

64 Romola I, 170.

Eliot does not answer the psychological question of whether kneeling gets its virtue through long association with humility, or whether there is something biologically conducive to meekness in the physical attitude of kneeling. She simply accepts the institution of kneeling as tending towards the desirable renunciation. Nor does the fact that she can conceive of nothing absolute to which to kneel affect the efficacy of the kneeling. For the essential purpose is not to glorify another being, but to edify man. Likewise for all the symbolisms of religion Eliot has reverence. To her they are the crystalization of the highest idealism and the most disinterested heroisms of the race. They are the imagery that has been hallowed through the loftiest aspirations of mankind. They are the net result, too, of former reasonings and experiments, and have become the guide of the race as an organism, just as habit, when once learned through feeling or through reason, becomes the mentor for the individual. The mutual guidance of man by tradition and reason Eliot describes in a speech of the Jew Sheperdo:

... I abide

By that wise spirit of listening reverence
Which marks the boldest doctors of our race.

For truth, to us, is like a living child
 Born of two parents: if the parents part
 And will divide the child, how shall it live?
 Or, I will rather say: Two angels guide
 The path of man, both aged and yet young,
 As angels are, ripening through endless years.
 On one he leans: some call her Memory,
 And some, Tradition: and her voice is sweet,
 With deep mysterious accords: the other,
 Floating above, holds down a lamp which streams
 A light divine and searching on the earth,
 Compelling eyes and footsteps. Memory yields,
 Yet clings with loving check, and shines anew
 Reflecting all the rays of that bright lamp
 Our angel Reason holds. We had not walked
 But for Tradition; we walk evermore
 To higher paths, by brightening Reason's lamp. 65

Elsewhere she pictures poetically the present hope
 of man as the culmination of all the past, just as
 the hope of the future will incorporate the best from
 the present:

The faith that life on earth is being shaped
 To glorious ends, that order, justice, love,
 Mean man's completeness, mean effect as sure
 As roundness in the dew-drop -- that great faith
 Is but the rushing and expanding stream
 Of thought, of feeling, fed by all the past.
 Our finest hope is finest memory. 66

In a review of Lecky's History of Rationalism in
 Europe she defends the role of tradition:

Our sentiments may be called organized tra-
 ditions; and a large part of our actions gather all
 their justification, all their attraction and aroma,
 from the memory of the life lived, of the actions
 done, before we were born. In the absence of any
 profound research into psychological functions or into

65 The Spanish Gypsy, 171.

66 "A Minor Prophet," Poems, 389.

the mysteries of inheritance, in the absence of any profound comprehensive view of man's historical development and the dependence of one age on another, a mind at all rich in sensibilities must always have had an indefinite uneasiness in an undistinguishing attack on the coercive influence of tradition. 67

A letter to Madame Bodichon gives us more intimate knowledge of Eliot's conception of what should be the attitude of the enlightened mind towards religious tradition:

... As for the forms and ceremonies, I feel no regret that any should turn to them for comfort if they can find comfort in them; sympathetically I enjoy them myself. But I have faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Church has presented; and those who have strength to wait and endure are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls -- their intellect as well as their emotions -- do not embrace with entire reverence. The "highest calling and election" is to do without opium, and live through all your pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance. 68

Tradition in worship, then, like belief in immortality and other orthodox concepts, Eliot values for its poetic and utilitarian virtues. For the non-rationalizing mind tradition must be the criterion. For the seer, tradition has a different significance. It is respected as the mother of the best in life. But it is also subject to improvement by the best intelligence of the race, and its dictates must always be subject to the veto of the enlightened intellect:

67 "The Influence of Rationalism," Essays, 121.

68 Letter to Madam Bodichon, Dec. 26, 1860 Cross II, 283.

There is not a more pernicious fallacy afloat in common parlance than the wide distinction made between intellect and morality. Amiable impulses without intellect man may have in common with dogs and horses; but morality, which is specifically human, is dependent on the regulation of feeling by intellect. All human beings who can be said to be in any degree moral have their impulses guided, not indeed always by their own intellect, but by the intellect of human beings who have gone before them, and created traditions and associations which have taken the rank of laws.⁶⁹

Finally, Eliot places a much higher value on religious tradition than does Hardy, who would hold Eliot's position not quite intellectually honest in himself, and who would not be convinced that what tradition can conserve is altogether worth conserving.

In Eliot's philosophy the true life of an organism is the life of feeling. This idea is in line with her concept of evolution. She sees the intellectual faculty in man as a late development, an outgrowth, an ordering of the emotions. It has been made necessary only because of the greater complexity of the higher organism and the conflicts incident to interaction of different organisms. Though the intellect has come to be a guide and moderator of man's emotional life, the emotions still remain the basic part of his nature. Often they

69 "Evangelical Teaching," Essays, 112.

are to be trusted rather than the more lately developed intellect, for only through the emotions can one enter sympathetically into the life of one's fellow-men and understand their hopes and fears. In other words, it is not intellectual knowledge of the objective needs of the world that gives motive power to service, that inspires the feelings of duty and of self sacrifice. It is the subjective feeling for the sufferings of others. We see the conflict between the spirit and the letter, between beauty and truth. Eliot expresses the contrast in the defense she has Maggie make against her righteous but unimaginative brother:

... But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them. If you were in fault ever -- if you had done anything very wrong, I should not want punishment to be heaped on you. ... You have no pity: you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. ... You are nothing but a Pharisee. 70

So her purpose in writing is not to combat unscientific beliefs or to encourage rationalistic thought in her readers. It seems to make but little difference what people think if only their feelings are right, for it is the feelings that produce the all important service

to humanity. She declares that

... it is possible, thank Heaven! to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings. ⁷¹

Eliot lets Adam Bede speak this critique of feeling as the incentive of good deeds:

But I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young un, as religion's omethin else besides notions. It isn't notions, sets people doing the right thing-- it's feelings. ⁷²

Elsewhere is quoted Eliot's dictum that to her the idea of God is inconceivable. ⁷³ Yet she advocates the holding to the concept of God, not, as does Hardy, for its historical and poetic value alone, but as a "conscious illusion" for the ennoblement of man's sentiments:

The idea of God is really moral in its influence-- it really cherishes all that is best and loveliest in man -- only when God is contemplated as sympathizing with the pure elements of human feeling, as possessing infinitely all those attributes which we recognize to be moral in humanity. In this light, the idea of God and the sense of His presence intensify all noble feeling, and encourage all noble efforts, on the same principle that human sympathy is found a source of strength: The brave man feels braver when he knows that another stout heart is beating time with his; the devoted woman who is wearing out her years in patient effort to alleviate suffering or save vice from the last stages of degradation, finds aid in the pressure of a friendly hand which tells her that there is one who understands her deeds, and in her place would do the like. The idea of a God who not only sympathizes with all we feel and endure for our fellow-men, but who will pour new life into our too languid love, and give

71 Adam Bede, 38

72 Ibid, 186.

73 Myers, Frederic W. H.: "George Eliot," Century Magazine, Nov. 1881. Quoted in Chap. VI.

firmness to our vacillating purpose, is an extension and a multiplication of the effects produced by human sympathy; and it has been intensified for the better spirits who have been under the influence of orthodox Christianity by the contemplation of Jesus as "God manifest in the flesh." 74

From this it is apparent that the concept of God is not one of literal truth. Rather, He is an objectification of loftiest and most unselfish feeling. Her purpose as the sponsor of such a god is that this god may so appeal to the sensibilities of man as to purge him of much of his selfishness and inspire him with more idealistic sympathy. Her creed as a writer she gives in a letter to Charles Bray:

... I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls: and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is, that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures. 75

This glorification of the ennobling feeling, seemingly, at the expense of insistence on scientific accuracy, is easily accounted for from the manner of Eliot's conversion to Positivism. A letter of that period shows her as already committed to two standards -- the intellectual one of scientific truth

74 "Evangelical Teaching," Essays, 136.

75 Letter to Charles Bray, 5th July, 1859. Cross II, 118.

for her private thinking, and the emotional one of spiritual truth, love, service, for her life of feeling and for others. In commenting on the religious experiences of a certain Miss D. she says:

When the soul is just liberated from the wretched giants' bed of dogmas on which it has been racked and stretched ever since it began to think, there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope. . . . We believe that we shall soon obtain something positive which will not only more than compensate us for what we have renounced, but will be so well worth offering to others, that we may venture to proselytise as fast as our zeal for truth may prompt us. But a year or two of reflection, and the experience of our own miserable weakness, which will ill afford to part even with the crutch of superstition, must, I think, effect a change. Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds. Agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union. We find that the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body, and that we cannot in the majority of cases wrench them away without destroying vitality. We begin to find that with individuals, as with nations, the only safe revolution is one arising out of the wants which their own progress has generated. It is the quackery of infidelity, to suppose that it has a nostrum for all mankind.⁷⁶

Of the two standards, the intellectual and the emotional, she held the latter to be paramount.

Again the intellect is considered as ancillary to emotional well being. It is not justified in itself, but only as it serves the affections, which have given rise to it:

76 Letter to Sara Hennell, Oct. 19, 1843. Cross I, 122.

After all has been said that can be said about the widening influence of ideas, it remains true that they would hardly be such strong agents unless they were taken in a solvent of feeling. The great world-struggle of developing thought is continually foreshadowed in the struggle of the affections, seeking a justification for love and hope. 77

Her advice to thinking man is that he keep emotion and sentiment intact and operative even in the face of reflection that threatens to reduce life to barren law. To this end she justifies, as Hardy would not, the entertaining of conscious illusion:

... Our sweet illusions are half of them conscious illusions, like effects of color that we know to be made up of tinsel, broken glass, and rags, 78

77 *Romola* II, 67.

78 "The Lifted Veil." Essays, 457.

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