This project aims at deriving the divergent trends of thought manifest desultorily in the novels of Thomas Hardy and harmonizing them into a regular philosophy as far as possible. He was, in spite of his preoccupation with ideas, a creative artist, a poet-novelist, not a systematic philosopher who consciously used literature as the vehicle to carry his thought. An artist does not always have the intellectual awareness of what he intuitively sees and spontaneously shows. He leaves to the discerning critics the task of formulating his vision into clear concepts and coherent argument. When Dr. S. Radhakrishnan requested Rabindranath Tagore to write an introduction to his book entitled Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, the latter humbly declined and wrote back:

"It is difficult for me to write an introduction to your book, for I do not know what my duties are in writing it. For about my philosophy I am like M. Jourdain who had been talking prose all his life without knowing it. It may tickle my vanity to be told that my writings carry dissolved in their stream pure gold of philosophical speculation and that gold bricks can be made by washing its sands and melting the precious fragments - but yet it is for the readers to find it out and it would be perilous responsibility on my part to give assurance to seekers and stand guarantee for its realisation. If a doctor
writes a scientific paper on some disease which I harbour in my constitution it would be ludicrously presumptuous on my part to vouch for its truth, for only sufferings are for me and their pathology is for the doctor."

Hardy admitted as much when he wrote in the Postscript to the Preface to Jude the Obscure: "And no doubt there can be more in a book than the author consciously puts there, which will help either to its profit or to its disadvantage as the case may be." He never had claims on philosophy. Still if we observe some sort of philosophy issuing from the complex pattern of his artistic creation, it is for us to gather and systematise it with critical sympathy and detachment. The "precious fragments" lying strewn through the pages of his novels, have to be carefully sifted, collected, melted and crystallised into the "pure gold of philosophical speculation".

Hardy, as David Cecil observes, "sees human beings less as individuals than as representatives of a species, and in relation to the ultimate conditioning forces of their existence. His subject is not men, but man. His theme is mankind's predicament in the universe." Hardy is traditionally described as a pessimist because he finds Man thus in a strange existential predicament, grappling with grim situations and often dying in
despair. But the fact is that instead of sinking in despair Hardy makes it a spring-board of action. He is probably the first English novelist who has grasped the absurdity of existence on metaphysical and social levels. He has anticipated the existentialists in reading with boldness, exceptional among his Victorian contemporaries, the tragedy of Man alienated in the world and isolated emotionally in the midst of his apathetic fellows. It is therefore thought proper in this thesis to use certain existential technical terms such as: 'lucidity', 'anguish', 'engagement', 'absurd', etc., in discussing Hardy's philosophy. But instead of perpetuating the confrontation between the cries of man and the silence of the universe by vain revolt as the absurdists do, Hardy evolves a concept of ethical harmony which neutralises the metaphysical absurd. It is our hopes and demands from the universe which create the absurd. Hardy considers it silly cowardice to expect anything from the dead universe, pleads for the extinction of all our attitudes to it and asks us to cultivate a neutral frame of mind which will happily coincide with the neutral natural phenomena. This constitutes a state of harmony between man and Nature. The realisation of it brings inward peace which is not very difficult from the stoical 'apathy', the Buddhist tranquillity or the Geeta-concept of even-mindedness in the face of the indifferent play of fate.
which spells pain as accidentally as pleasure and seems now
to frown and now to favour according to the erroneous reading
of our wishes. The discipline that leads towards the esta­
blishment of harmony is described as metaphysical ethics in
this thesis. On the social level Hardy remains a compassion­
ate humanist, and his secular ethics has its roots not in a
belief, not in an ontology congenial to human hopes and
aspirations, but in real human need.

Irving Howe writes:

"As a thinker, Hardy could do no more than
restate in his own idiom the assumptions
dominating the advanced circles of his
times."4

This opinion is shared by many. But it seems baseless and
perfunctory to me. Hardy's philosophy is of a kind expressi­
ble in literature alone, and it is not only highly original,
but also fully prophetic of the drift of thought and shift of
emphasis from universe to life, from metaphysics to ethics,
in the years that followed. To think that it is merely a
restatement of the ideas and opinions current in his times is
to miss its essential uniqueness. I have tried to bring it
out by comparison and contrast, whenever necessary, with some
thinkers, ancient and modern, who have also pondered over the
predicament of man in the world without meaning and arrived
at similar conclusions.
The purpose of this thesis is to systematise Hardy's thought as it issues from his novels, not to consider how it gradually developed and what influences had contributed to its making. All biographical interest is therefore held irrelevant and excluded here.

All the trends of his thought are manifest in every one of his philosophically important novels though one or two of them may appear predominant in it. The study of these novels is attempted in this thesis trendwise, not in chronological sequence. The novels which seem to be little more than plain narrative are omitted from the study.

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