CHAPTER I

HARDY'S PERCEPTION OF THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT
Hardy's vision of the world as manifest in a series of his novels culminating in *Jude the Obscure* seemed hopelessly dark, and his views on morality profoundly disturbing both to the lay-readers of his fiction and learned critics of literature. He was, consequently, variously described as an atheist, a heretic, a determinist, a pessimist, and called such other epithets usually regarded as abusive. He was castigated for doing what he did as well as for not doing what he never attempted to do. His naturalistic metaphysics which is, in fact, the beginning of his melioristic ethics, has been mistaken for the conclusion of his thought, and his unique position as a thinker has eluded the grasp of his critics so far. The basic question, therefore, which we have to ask ourselves and answer is whether or how far Hardy was a philosopher before we attempt to study his philosophy as it issues from his novels.

Hardy cannot be regarded as a philosopher in the traditional academic sense of the term. He never attempted in the manner of Hegel or Herbert Spencer a complete and coherent system of philosophy seeking to comprehend the totality of existence as conditioned by causal laws within time and space, or subscribe to any such system worked out by others. He did not delight in the inquisitive game of inferences regarding the ultimate stuff of phenomenal reality.
He wondered why people read more metaphysics in his novels than was really there. Hardy wrote in his General Preface to the Novels and Poems:

"Positive views on the Whence and Wherefore of things have never been advanced by this pen as a consistent philosophy. Nor is it likely, indeed, that imaginative writings extending over more than forty years would exhibit a coherent scientific theory of the universe even if it had been attempted - of that universe concerning which Spencer owns to the "paralizing thought" that possibly there exists no comprehension of it anywhere. But such objectless consistency never has been attempted, and the sentiments in the following pages have been stated truly to be mere impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments."

He writes, again, in his diary on 31 December, 1901:

"After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given him by his surroundings."

It is obvious that he asks everyone here to work out, not an elaborate system of metaphysics, but simple philosophy of life and action. His distrust in the theoretical enterprise of abstract reasoning is patent again when he writes:
"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."

It cannot, of course, be denied that Hardy was deeply interested in philosophy, and that the chief currents of the contemporary thought had influenced and shaped his mind considerably. But he had sworn no allegiance to any one particular system, and had none of his own to offer. It is a mistake to treat him as a philosopher in the traditional sense and then to complain that he is crude and inconsistent.

Yet Hardy can be regarded as a philosopher in the recent existential sense of the term. Instead of trying to resolve the mind-matter dichotomy of existence as we experience it into some abstract harmony of thought in the manner of Hegelian Idealists and Darwinian Naturalists, he boldly recognized the absurd confrontation between the aspirations of the human consciousness and the universe indifferent to them. His thought is spun under the spur of anguished concern for man alienated in his only homeland which is the earth. We can look upon him as a philosopher in the sense Dr. Everett W. Knight looks upon Gide, Malraux, Saint-Exupery and Sartre as philosophers in Literature Considered as Philosophy. All these in their own ways tried not to propound a metaphysical system but attempted to chalk out a
path to right and responsible living, and to give meaning to life's transitory character in the context of its earthly career itself. They all heavily depended on the human freedom of will, little and limited though it is, in creating a new kind of optimism from the ruins of customary faith and morals. Their ideas find expression not in well-reasoned treatises, but in fiction, drama, and poetry. They are essentially literary artists who have, by their passionate message of revolt and reconstruction, compelled their recognition as philosophers from the academic circles unwilling to recognize them as such.

Epistemologically, Hardy may loosely be described as an agnostic. It is obvious in the passages quoted earlier and may clearly be seen in the thought pattern that issues from the study of his novels. But he often sounds even sceptical as when he maintains that "nothing is as it appears." The ultimates of things had ceased to bother him. He never tried to go behind the concrete apparent to the abstract real and wander thus beyond the limits of comprehension possible for our power of knowing. He accepted only the self-evident as truth.

One such truth which Hardy accepted was the non-existence of God. He wrote:

"January 29 (1890), I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality, of course - the only true meaning of the word."
His novels clearly reveal his disbelief to a careful reader. many of his critics, however, think that he was rather a heretic who believed in a malevolent Deity rejoicing in human suffering than a sincere atheist who believed in no God at all. Edmund Gosse, for example, takes it for granted that Hardy was a heretic, and wonders:

"What has Providence done to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his creator?"  

Mrs. Oliphant writes similarly in criticism of Hardy:

"Mr. Hardy's indignant anti-religion becomes occasionally very droll, if not amusing. Against whom is he so angry? Against 'the divinities', who are so immoral - who punish the vices of the fathers on the children? Against God? - who does not ask us whether we wish to be created; who gives us but one chance etc. But then if there is no God? Why, in that case, should Mr. Hardy be angry? We know one man of fine mind whom we have always described as being angry with God for not existing. Is this perhaps Mr. Hardy's case? But then he ought not to put the blame of the evils which do exist upon this imaginary Being who does not."

Such assumption that Hardy is a heretic and the criticism based upon it are the result of critics' usual tendency to take up stray remarks, either Hardy's own or those of his characters, and to interpret them as the statement of his philosophical position. It is a mistake to isolate the words from the proper context, ignore their connotative significance, and take their
literal meaning too seriously. Hardy's blasphemous pronouncements should be considered in the light of the authorial mood of the moment and in the context of the character, circumstances and situation. A novel is not a systematic treatise where statements must follow one another in logical sequence, and it must not be approached or evaluated as a philosophy simple and pure. The total impression of Tess - or any of his mature novels - on us, as we shall analyse in the chapters to follow, is that he sees the evils of existence and holds only man as responsible for them. There is no justification for the assumption that Hardy believed in God despite his disbelief and put the blame of evils that exist on a Being who does not.

Yet Hardy has appeared a heretic because (1) some of his characters conceived anthropomorphically a Godhead qualitatively different from that of Christianity and substituted revolt against for prayer to Him; (2) he himself in his authorial comments satirically lashed out at the God of traditional faith with a view to vexing pious believers in Him, (3) asserted his disbelief emphatically often in the interrogative form, and (4) frequently exercised "willing suspension of disbelief" to imagine a Deity somewhat after the Hellenic notion for the purposes of tragedy in his fiction. It is necessary to deal with each one of these points in some detail.

The characters who complain against the Fate and sound
heretic represent themselves, not their author. Their utterances are to be judged in the light of their temperament and trying situation. Sue, for example, says in *Jude the Obscure*:

"We must conform!......All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God."

But Jude immediately sets her straight by observing:

"It is only against man and senseless circumstance."

She admits:

"True!....... What have I been thinking of! I am getting as superstitious as a savage!.... But whoever or whatever our foe may be, I am cowed into submission. I have no more fighting strength left; no more enterprise. I am beaten, beaten!"

It is as natural for the beaten and grief-stricken like Sue when all her children were dead, to fix the blame for their misery on an Evil Controller of the World, as it is for the fortunate ones like Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* to read a kindly purpose in a crass accident when Fitzpiers, her husband was saved from the fatal jaws of a man-trap and to exclaim:

"O Edred, there has been an Eye watching us to-night, and we should be thankful indeed!" But Hardy, as is patent in the passages from *Jude* quoted above, regarded such a tendency as a
temperamental weakness. Only his weaker characters exhibit it. His courageous characters such as Clym, Oak, Elizabeth-Jane, Marty South, Ethelberta, stand unshaken like stoics through all their tribulations and struggles, accept without complaint all the chance changes of life and see no God good or evil anywhere. They represent Hardy's constructive philosophy of life in the midst of natural world to be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Hardy, then, directed satire in his authorial comments not so much against God as against the irrational and cowardly belief in Him. Andrew Lang wrote in criticism of what he presumed to be Hardy's heretic faith in Tess of the D'Urbervilles: "If there is a God, who can seriously think of him as a malicious fiend?"

Hardy, on the contrary, would put it thus: if there is a God, who can seriously think of him as anything but a malicious fiend? The Pagan notion of cruel and jealous gods was more reasonable than the Christian concept of a benevolent Godhead in view of man's misery during his short span of life governed by mischance and destined to terminate in death. If the world-order as we experience it is not amoral, it might possibly be immoral, but there is no evidence to believe that it is a moral-order in any accepted religious sense of the term. Hardy wrote in response to Mr. Courtney's critical article on his writings:
"As to his winding up about a God of Mercy, etc. — if I wished to make a smart retort, which I really should hate doing, I might say that the Good-God theory having, after some thousands of years of trial produced the present infamous and disgraceful state of Europe — that most Christian continent; — a theory of a Goodless-and-Badless God (as in The Dynasts) might perhaps be given a trial with advantage."

He has made, in fact, a smarter retort to the believers like Mr. Courtney in his novels by introducing there a 'Goodless' but not 'Badless' God as an alternative to the God of Mercy if belief in a Super-mundane agency were at all necessary and could not altogether be given up as superfluous to the pains and problems of practical life. But the philosopher in Hardy rejects every notion of God, Pagan or Christian, good or evil or neutral, as born of superstition, and affirms absolute atheism. His notorious remark — "Justice was done, and the President of Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." is a satire, not a simple statement, against the traditional faith in God, not against the imaginary being himself. Hardy seems to be saying that the Deity, if real and omnipotent, must have sported with the life of pure and innocent Tess for sadistic delight, since otherwise He could have saved her and made her happy. As a statement this remark might contradict Hardy's atheistic position. As a satire it does not.
Sometimes Hardy makes emphatic assertions of his disbelief in question form. For example, he speaks of the Durbeyfield family in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*:

"All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship — entirely dependent on the judgment 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 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 breezy and pure, gets his authority for speaking of 'Nature's holy plan.' 14

Again, commenting on Alec stooping with lustful intentions over sleeping Tess, Hardy writes:

"But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked." 15

In the first of these passages Hardy states that the poet quoted has no authority for speaking of 'Nature's holy plan' in view of the helpless human misery as seen in the Durbeyfield household; in the second, that there is nowhere the
Providence of Tess's simple faith who could intervene in time to save her from seduction. In both these he used interrogative form to make the affirmations more emphatic. The sense of outrage and irony is manifest in both the passages.

Hardy, then, in spite of atheism, used his poet's prerogative denied to philosophers, to suspend willingly the disbelief in the realm of his creative literature, and "to exclaim illogically against the gods, singular or plural" as in the Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, in order to make the tragic conflict meaningful and the narrative more moving. This does not mean that Hardy - or Euripides or Shakespeare for that matter - believed in the actual existence of any such gods. He wrote in reply to an unknown critic who assumed that "Hardy postulates an all-powerful being endowed with the baser human passions":

"As I need hardly inform any thinking reader, I do not hold, and never have held, the ludicrous opinions here assumed to be mine - which are really, or approximately, those of the primitive believer in his man-shaped tribal god. And in seeking to ascertain how any exponent of English literature could have supposed that I held them I find that the writer of the estimate has harked back to a passage in a novel of mine, printed many years ago, in which forces opposed to the heroine were allegorized as a personality (a method not unusual in imaginative prose or poetry) by the use of a well-known trope, explained in that venerable work, Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, as
"one in which life, perception, activity, design, passion, or any property of sentient beings, is attributed to things inanimate."

"Under this species of criticism if an author were to say "Aeolus maliciously tugged at her garments, and tore her hair in his wrath", the sapient critic would no doubt announce that author's evil creed to be that the wind is "a powerful being endowed with the baser human passions", etc. etc."

Thus Hardy's poetic faith and figurative impersonations do not contradict his authentic atheism.

Hardy's uncompromising atheism is expressed in his small but significant poem *Han* written before he had started writing novels. He finds there human existence accidental and superfluous in the Godless scheme of things. Even a 'vengeful god', if there were one, would suffice to give tragic dignity to man and meaning to his struggle. But unfortunately there is none to revolt against in the Promethean pride, and man is left absolutely alone and unwanted. Hardy writes:

"......How arrives it joy lies slain.  
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?  
- Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,  
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan....  
These purblind Boomsters had as readily strown  
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain."

Hardy maintains consistently the same position in his novels too.

G. K. Chesterton is right when he observes:
"The whole case for Hardy is that he had the sincerity and simplicity of the village atheist — that is, that he valued atheism as a truth and not a triumph."20

But aggressive atheism sounds like a heresy. It is so in the case of Hardy.

It is, however, wrong to assume that Hardy's quest for God which concluded in the realization of His absence, was that of a rationalist. Mr. Ferry Keisel is not right when he observes:

"Before Hardy began writing fiction, he had experienced a loss of religious faith and corresponding conversion to rationalism that was characteristic of not a few young men of the time."21

Hardy's quest was emotional and truly religious. As Clive Holland puts it, "All his life, undoubtedly, Hardy was much troubled by questionings of the existence of good and evil, and how it should be that evil was permitted by a Deity, who could presumably have so easily checked the evil, and in doing so provided poor humanity with a much happier and better world in which to live."22 All that happened in his case was that the rational backing to religious faith was withdrawn leaving the longing for God intense as ever, as in the case of Nietzsche too, but objectless, forlorn and futile. Reason mocked at what his heart obstinately crave and cried for. The
mystical urge remained, but the metaphysic of a dogma that could support it crumbled. The loss of faith meant for Hardy also the loss of inward peace till he managed to resolve the emotional disturbance into a novel kind of serenity to be discussed in the next chapter.

The rationalist quest for God was purely ontological and intellectual. Hardy's great contemporaries like Herbert Spencer and T. H. Huxley who conducted the quest scientifically enough, did not experience the anguish and disturbance which Hardy felt at finding God nowhere in the universe. They regarded the inquisitive game of reasoning as interesting in itself. The conclusions it led to and the knowledge they gained did not disturb them emotionally. George Wonderlovo, the narrator hero in Tono Bungay represents H. G. Wells, the author of the novel and his rationalist atheism, when he declares triumphantly that God does not exist and goes to sleep peacefully: "I slept not only through that night, but all my nights since then... That declaration was an epoch in my spiritual life."23 Hardy was clearly not such a rationalist. He never desired merely knowledge of the reality which rationalists regarded as an ultimate end of their inquiry. He wanted to know if the reality was positively responsive to his spiritual longings, and finding it otherwise preferred the darkness of despair to the illusory light of any wishful faith or philosophy.
There was, then, the vulgar and so called rationalism of the educated in his times who, incapable of thinking independently for themselves, recited like parrot the opinions received from the philosophers in fashion, and felt free from God's punitive power to act as they pleased and to prove the right of the might. Such a moral nihilism which to the vulgar mind seems to be the corollary of atheism, is illustrated in Alec's behaviour in Tess of the D'Urbervilles in his relapse into lascivious ways after brief conversion to Christianity. Hardy evidently does not approve of it. The absence of God, he felt, entailed not permissive licence, but freedom and responsibility of man in building up the ethics of gratuitous self-abnegation which is to be discussed in the Fourth Chapter of this thesis. Hardy cannot be regarded as a rationalist even in such vulgar sense of the term.

Rationalism in the epistemological sense of the term means Hegelian faith that 'the real is rational', that man's reason is capable of knowing all that exists and is to be known. Hardy did not share such faith. That was why he never attempted or upheld a 'scientific theory of the universe' seeking to comprehend the totality of the scheme of things in its immediate and ultimate, empirical and essential nature. He humbly declined to Mr. Joseph McCabe's proposal to include his name in a Biographical Dictionary of Modern Rationalists. Mrs. F. E. Hardy wrote for Hardy:
"He says he thinks he is rather an irrationalist than a rationalist, on account of his inconsistencies. He has, in fact, declared as much in prefaces to some of his poems, where he explains his views as being mere impressions that frequently change. Moreover, he thinks he could show that no man is a rationalist, and that human actions are not ruled by reason at all in the last resort."24

Yet he did not blind himself to the light of reason in favour of a convenient belief against what the impressions indubitably revealed to be true. Though he abandoned the quest for the ultimates, his recognition of the actual was bold, lucid and rational. That is the case of existentialists as well. The existential phenomenology is content with the definition of concrete phenomena and the description of their interrelation, hates the rationalist love for the abstract and the faith in the possibility of complete knowledge.

There is no substance in another charge that Hardy was a determinist. Logic, however, both in theology and science, cannot avoid the conclusion that free-will is an illusion. If God is omniscient, the events of every moment in all time to come already exist in his knowledge and cannot be altered. Even Dr. Johnson had to admit reluctantly in his discussion with Boswell that God's prescience was incompatible with human freedom:

"JOHNSON. "If I am well acquainted with a man, I can judge with great probability how he will act in any case, without his being restrained"
by my judging. God may have this probability increased to certainty." BOSWELL. "When it is increased to certainty, freedom ceases, because that cannot be certain at the time; but if it is certain at the time, it is a contradiction in terms to maintain that there can be afterwards any contingency dependent upon the exercise of will or anything else." JOHNSON. "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it." 25

The scientific thought contends on the other hand that the human will cannot be independent of the causal chain of events in which each one of them is determined by the antecedents. The freedom of will which becomes the cause of certain actions cannot be itself uncaused though it may illusorily seem to be so. Dr. Albert Einstein, the greatest of scientists in our century, thus maintains:

"I do not at all believe in human freedom in the philosophical sense. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. Schopenhauer's saying, 'A man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants', has been a very real inspiration to me since my youth;....." 26

But determinism, religious or scientific, though logically thus irrefutable, explains away rather than accounts for our immediate experience of the human freedom. Hardy trusts this experience subscribes to no theory which seeks to confute it, and regards the freedom of will, little and limited though it is, as truth and no illusion. That is why man in Hardy's world
seems to be a spiritual entity so long as he lives, not a puppet in the hands of soulless destiny. The critics to whom this appears to be an inconsistency in view of his naturalistic world-view do not realize that this is no fallacy if deliberately introduced, as in the atheistic existentialism, to signify the irreconcilable discord of existence between the human consciousness and the world of Nature.

Hardy is yet described as a determinist because the force of circumstances in his novels proves very often stronger than men and women struggling against it. Irving Howe, for example, writes:

"Hardy meant to depict the universe in terms of a mechanistic determinism, but so strong was the resistance created toward the new theories by his heritage of Christian feeling, that he fell back at times into a kind of gnosticism, a view of life as predetermined by bad intentions without a discernible figure or force actively intending, or at least a view of life as predetermined by bad luck."27

Realizing that it is rather difficult to describe Hardy exactly as either a crude fatalist or a determinist in the mechanistic sense, Howe makes him a curious blend of the two, ignoring conveniently Hardy's own cry that he upheld no sort of such theory. Hardy's declared position is 'meliorism' "actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces - unconscious or other -
that have "the balancing of the clouds", happen to be in equili-
rium, which may or may not be often."28 That is exactly
the impression conveyed by his fiction. The struggle of the
characters in it against the circumstances resulting in defeat
and death or victory and joy, would not have been possible if
Hardy did not regard man as an agent free enough to struggle
thus. The characters themselves, as we shall see in the chapters
succeeding the present one, are the authors of their ruin. There
is no inevitability of their suffering or disintegration. Nature
is involved in their tragedies only by way of its blind in-
difference.

Determinism, moreover, even if Hardy believed in it,
leads to the undoing of itself by making the freedom of will —
or whatever we feel, think, desire and do — as the inevitable
outcome of the antecedents, and so the inescapable destiny of
man. It does not assert, if it is true to itself, that man
ought or ought not to hope and act, but that man cannot help
hoping and acting if he is hoping and acting or losing hope and
lying dull in despair if he has actually lost hope. It merely
states that whatever is done or has come to pass in the mind
of man or the world outside him, was destined to happen. It
explains the causation of actions. But it cannot enjoin any
particular action or inaction, for the injunction "presumes
the freedom of man to do accordingly or otherwise. It cannot
even enjoin that whenever whatever is enjoined should not be enjoined, for the act of having enjoined or the idea of enjoining anything was also predetermined. The theory of determinism thus evaporates by its own extreme logic, and leaves the life of man practically free as ever. Thus human freedom is not incompatible with the theory of determinism even if Hardy believed in it though he never did.

Herbert Spencer, C. Lloyd Morgan, Samuel Alexander and a host of other thinkers read variously a kind of progressive spiritual unfoldment in Darwin's discovery of life as evolution from amoeba to man which replaced the biblical concept of life as the divine creation. It was an idealistic form of mechanistic determinism which envisages a superhumanity happier than the human race at present, rid of all the evils, social and natural, we now suffer from, in a shining future ages away from us. Bertrand Russell writes in criticism of this philosophical trend:

"A process which led from amoeba to man appeared to the philosophers to be obviously a progress—though whether amoeba would agree with this opinion is not known. Hence, the cycle of changes which science had shown to be the probable history of the past was welcomed as revealing a law of development towards good in the universe—an evolution or unfolding of an idea slowly embodying itself in the actual. But such a view, though it might satisfy Spencer and those whom we may call Hegelian evolutionists, could not be accepted as adequate by the more whole-hearted votaries of change."
Hardy cannot be regarded as any kind of progressive evolutionist. He considered the emergence of human consciousness as an accidental evolutionary change, not as a regular development ahead of animal sentience. Sue in *Jude the Obscure* echoes her author's views when she thought "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."30

Yet Hardy's sympathetic critics, in their anxiety to defend him against the charge of pessimism, have ascribed to him a faint evolutionary hope. They have heavily depended for this purpose on *The Dynasts*, his epic drama, which, as they see it, ends on a hopeful note — with a question:

"Nay: shall not Its (of the Immanent Will, the First Cause) blindness break?  
Yea, must not Its heart awake,  
Promptly tending  
To its mending  
In a genial germinating purpose, and for  
Loving-kindness' sake?"31

and with an answer:

"But a stirring thrills the air  
Like sounds of joyance there  
That the rages  
Of the ages  
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered  
from the darts that were,  
Consciousness the Will informing, till It  
fashions all things fair."32
Samuel Hynes observes of this:

"This final burst of "evolutionary meliorism" has seemed to some critics a contradiction of Hardy's pessimism, and a flaw in the poem as a whole, which should not be taken seriously. Nevertheless, there the speech is, and in position which prevents our ignoring it; we must take it seriously if we take any of the poem seriously."35

But such critics, it seems, fail to understand that the conclusion of this epic-drama is not intended to voice a solemn prophecy. Hardy was not a happy dreamer, and never allowed irrational hopes to cloud his clear perception of the world as it is and as it moves aimlessly in the stream of time. To quote F. B. Pinion: "The conclusion of The Dynasts expresses therefore not a conviction but simply a cry from the heart of the human race which lives in hope. Hardy could see little cause for such hope when he wrote The Dynasts, and still less a few years afterwards at the outbreak of the First World War."34

Hardy, in The Dynasts, is a poet writing in epic strain and sweep, and it is the chorus of supernatural machinery that reflects wishfully over the possible shape of future after the drama of blood and butchery is over. They do not represent Hardy. Even the concept of a divinity somewhat akin to Schopenhauer's Will is introduced here to fulfill the epic requirement of a Power above Nature and unseen to us, not in order to propound a new faith. It is wrong to derive logical arguments from the artistic symphony of imagination, impressions and
emotions in a poem.

There is a passage of authorial comment in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* which manifests a line of thought not dissimilar to one found in *The Dynasts*. Hardy angrily complains against the universe when Tess meets Alec for the first time at a fatal moment which leads to her subsequent molestation, suffering and death:

"In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour of loving. Nature does not often say 'See!' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing; or reply 'Here!' to a body's cry of 'There?' till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game. We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing strange destinies."35

The passage appears at first impression to be expressing, though faintly, a philosophical hope of the progressivist kind. But a little careful and closer examination will prove it to be no more than an incoherent expression of emotional disturbance.
At the beginning of it, Hardy calls the scheme of existence "the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things." Logically this amounts to his admission of a predetermined plan of a happy universe, which, though ill-executed so far, is still steadily on its way to correct and complete execution. Or it should mean that he presumes the being of a Deity akin to J. S. Mill's notion, benevolent enough to work out a good plan of existence but powerless to execute it in reality. But then Hardy says "we may wonder" whether at the summit of evolutionary progress our ills will be cured and a happy human race will walk the earth. It is obviously a fallacious form of ratiocination in which what seems to be an assertive conclusion precedes subjunctive premises. The confusion is further enhanced when we remind ourselves that Hardy believed in no God, good or bad or neutral, who could conceive plans and give them material shape. The First Cause of his concept is only a poetic image of blind Nature working "automatically like a somnambulist"36, the "viewless, voiceless Turner of the Wheel"37. But we are relieved to find that the whole confused line of thinking in the passage quoted above is contradicted and cancelled when Hardy maintains in the same breath: ".....but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible." What is left is the mood that overwhelms him, and it is only this mood of anguished concern for the fate of man, which establishes
coherence between his contradictory statements. Such passages have no assertive value, and their full meaning is conveyed by the compelling force of emotion. Neither *The Dynasts*, nor the hint in *Tess* at the vision unfolded in the epic-drama, shows Hardy as any kind of progressive evolutionist.

What interests Hardy is the human situation here and now on earth. He criticises the progressivist philosophical trend which consoles the man in misery today by a promise of perfect happiness to an ideal generation yet to appear in an age indefinitely remote in future, when he wrote in his letter printed in *The Academy and Literature*, May 17, 1902, concerning a review of Maeterlinck's *Apology for Nature*:

"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 slight, can be atoned for by her future generosity, 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?"

Hardy's speculation about 'future', whenever he attempted one, was cautious and credible. He has prophesied, as we shall consider in due detail in the next chapter, both the existential anguish of the enlightened humanity and its eventual resolution when new emotions are developed in man.
to harmonise happily with the new vision of the world. But he never wishfully imagined a world harmonious with the inborn urges of man towards which the existence as we experience it, is moving in time in the process of evolution.

Hardy's description of Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* in whom Hardy sees "the typical countenance of the future" is significant:

"He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here."40

"As for his look, it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray."41

Hardy describes Clym as a future man, also as a modern man whose age "is to be measured by the intensity of his history," in short an ideal man of his notion "with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things." He is, moreover, the real man, the mortal "deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase," though it is only in bright natures like his that the fettered god appears conspicuously
godly. This is not a determinist concept of science that degrades man into nothing and rejects consciousness as an illusion, or the idealistic evolutionist notion of a perfect man destined to appear on earth in due course of time. It is the existential recognition of man as a free and responsible agent irreducible to matter, as long as he lives, in a world which is lifeless and blind.

In the world deserted by God Hardy finds man alone and in exile. In the vast background of Nature shorn of all metaphysical meaning and silent to human hopes, man has to live his lonely life threatened by complete nihilism. That is the human predicament. Victims of circumstances no less than the victims of their own self-created miseries, Hardy’s characters struggle weakly under the empty Wessex sky, hope and pray, clinch fists and curse, fight and fall or stand invincible stoics content with whatever chance brings. Hardy’s perception of the predicament of mankind is expressed in his novels in a number of symbolic scenes and situations which his art has contrived spontaneously. David Cecil is right when he observed: "Consciously chosen symbols are generally dreadfully unconvincing. Most likely he was hardly aware, when he conceived them, of the deeper implication of these scenes."
Hardy views the bubble of man's precarious being in juxtaposition with the stretch of time, endless and without beginning, in a symbolic situation in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. It occurs when Henry Knight is hanging by "the last outlying knot of starved herbage" from a vertical height of "the Cliff without a Name," looking at a fossilized creature's eyes "dead and turned to stone" in the rock, with the deep sea of death waiting below to engulf him when he falls. In the darkening twilight of the evening he sees in a vision the scowling phantoms of the forms of life forsaken in the aimless onrush of evolution, travels "in less than half a minute" up to the hazy horizon of past, and becomes aware of the transient character of life.

"Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously. Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying for defence and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears, rose from the rock, like the phantoms before the doomed Macbeth. They lived in hollows, woods, and mud huts – perhaps in caves of the neighbouring rocks. Behind them stood an earlier band. No man was there. Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous size, the megatherium, and the myledon – all, for the moment, in juxtaposition. Further back, and overlapped by these, were perched huge-billed birds and swinish creatures as large as horses. Still more shadowy were the sinister crocodilian outlines – alligators and other uncouth shapes, culminating in the colossal lizard, the iguanodon. Folded behind were dragon forms and
clouds of flying reptiles: still underneath were fishy beings of lower development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things."48

It is obvious that Knight in this situation stands for man aware of his place in time. Hardy's vision, however, does not end with this perception, or with bewildered passibility or despair in response. The pangs of painful situation are countered by the solace of human love symbolized here by Elfride who at once steps in to save and sweeten his short existence.

Hardy considers man's place in the spatial universe in Two on a Tower. He writes in the preface to it:

"This slightly-built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater of them as men."49

The human world of hopes and fears is superfluous to the impersonal universe with enormous balls of fire whirling and floating in the infinite emptiness. Awareness of this superfluity implies to the average man absolute pessimism. It amounts to extinguishing the lights that have illuminated our existence and sinking in the darkness of nihilism. An ill-meaning universe is endurable. But it is very difficult to put up with an unmeaning universe which science has revealed to our view. The
following conversation in Two on a Tower between Viviette Constantine and Swithin St. Cleeve is important:

"She looked around over the magnificent sketch of sky that their high position unfolded. 'Oh, thousands, hundreds of thousands,' she said absently. 'No. There are only about three thousand. Now how many do you think are brought within sight by help of a powerful telescope?' 'I won't guess.' 'Twenty millions. So that, whatever the stars were made for, they were not made to please our eyes. It is just the same in everything; nothing is made for man.' 'Is it that notion which makes you so sad for your age?' she asked, with almost maternal solicitude. 'I think astronomy is a bad study for you. It makes you feel human insignificance too plainly.' "

Awareness of the unmeaning universe and the insignificance of life does not dishearten the strong and courageous of men. But such men are always few. That is why the basis of Hardy's meliorism, though philosophically quite sound, was unacceptable to his contemporaries. Swithin is right when he tells Viviette:

"Then if, on the other hand, you are restless and anxious about the future, study astronomy at once. Your troubles will be reduced amazingly. But your study will reduce them in a singular way, by reducing the importance of everything. So that the science is still terrible, even as a panacea. It is quite impossible to think at all adequately of the sky - of what the sky substantially is, without feeling it as a juxtaposed nightmare. It is better - far better - for men to forget the universe than to bear it clearly in mind."
There is a significant dialogue in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* between Tess and her little brother Abraham. They are travelling in a cart by night to take beehives to the market. Abraham "with upturned face made observations on the stars, whose cold pulses were beating amid the black hollows above, in serene dissociation from these two wisps of human life." "Black hollows" dissociated from "two wisps of human life," is a poignant expression which makes Hardy's awareness of the absurd clear to us. The boy asked if the stars were the worlds and Tess replied in the affirmation. The dialogue continued and the boy asked further:

"'All like ours?'
'I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like apples on our stubbard-trees. Most of them splendid and sound - a few blighted.'
'Which do we live on - a splendid one or a blighted one?'
'A blighted one.'
'Tis very unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there were so many more of 'em.'
'Yes.'
'Is it like that really, Tess?' said Abraham, turning to her much impressed, on reconsideration of this rare information. 'How would it have been if we had pitched on a sound one?'
'Well, father wouldn't have coughed and crept about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go his journey; and mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished.' "53

Virginia Woolf reads in this conversation the direct intrusion of Hardy, "the mournful thinker", under the mask of Tess, and feels that instead of recording the impression of life, here
he is advancing an argument on it.54 But it is not correct. A little examination of the drift of the dialogue shows that it is not, and is not intended to be a coherent argument. It merely expresses Hardy's obsessive awareness of the human predicament amid the immensity of the non-human cosmos. The word 'sound' or 'splendid' stands for two meanings here — one in the beginning, the other at the end. Self-luminous stars of rounded fire like sun are sound and splendid. Planets like earth where life has evolved are blighted. In scientific sense of the word apparently there is little difference between a blighted apple and our earth. Larvas in an apple feed upon its kernel. Human and other insects crowd and creep about on earth and feed upon its yield.

But when it comes to the description of the blighted planets, the sense changes. The blighted planet is one where there is fundamental absurdity between human need and Nature irresponsible to it, where life's longing for happiness is thwarted by crass material accidents, where innocence is deflowered by villany and goodness comes to grief, where the rigid order of Nature is only chaos and disorder from the moral point of view. Splendid planet is one where harmony prevails between the urges of man and Nature responsive to them, where instead of a "general drama of pain" a story of happiness is enacted. On a splendid planet Tess's father
"wouldn't have coughed and creeped about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go his journey; and mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished."

A little later on the same journey the cart of Tess and her brother meets with an accident, and Prince, the horse, is killed. Her father's only means of earning livelihood is gone. Tess exclaims in sorrow and despair:

"'Why, I danced and laughed only yesterday.'
She went on to herself. 'To think that I was such a fool!'
"'Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it? Tess?" murmured Abraham through tears."

Such is the state of affairs on a blighted star. Sound of splendid star becomes a concept of an ideal world of happiness. Mrs. Woolf is not justified in calling this passage a jarring and irksome argument of philosophy in an otherwise artistic novel. Considered as a logical argument, we have seen, it violates the fundamental 'law of thought' associating two different meanings to the same word. Nor is it meant to be an argument. There is no reason to believe that Hardy has tried to argue here and committed a logical fallacy unknowingly. Such thoughts are natural in an intelligent girl like Tess "who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress"56, and who was brought up amid hardships in a household headed by a drunkard. Her words are
quite in keeping with her own temper and with the general vision of life unfolded in the whole novel. They express Hardy's perturbation no less than Tess's.

The Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* involves manifold symbolism. It is to be discussed elaborately in the next chapter. It must suffice here to note that the heath, in the main, is a symbol of the entire natural world of Hardy's view, dead to the urges of human heart, and yet the only habitation of man. Furze-cutters and clowns steeped in ignorance, beautiful Eustacia, comely Thomasin, lascivious Wildeve, Diggory Venn unselfishly devoted to his love, stoical Clym etc. live in the general background of this vast barren waste enacting their brief drama of joy and sorrow.

We can quote on almost endlessly from Hardy's novels the authorial comments, dialogues and situations to elucidate his clear and painful perception of the human predicament. It had so profoundly disturbed Hardy's critics and contemporaries, that they failed to realize that what they imagined to be the negative conclusion of his philosophy was, in fact, the positive beginning of it, "that comment on where the world stands is very much the reverse of needless in these disordered years of our prematurely afflicted century: that amendment and not madness lies that way." It rarely dawned on them that
Pessimism is inescapable if to see clearly is to be pessimistic. But the situation has changed in our own age. Most of the sensitive thinkers of the twentieth century have been feeling what only a few like Hardy had felt some fifty years earlier, and we hear today the existential cries of anguish raised from every corner of the world. Philosophers have now almost unanimously accepted the nihilist metaphysics just similar to that of Hardy although they differ from him and from one another in their ethical approaches to life. Bertrand Russell, for example, writes in perturbed vein in his well-known lyrical essay *A Free Man's Worship*:

"That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

"How, in such an alien and inhuman world, can so powerless a creature as Man preserve his aspirations untarnished? A strange mystery it is that Nature, omnipotent but blind, in the
revolutions of her secular hurrying through the abysses of space, has brought forth at last a child, subject still to her power, but gifted with sight, with knowledge of good and evil, with the capacity of judging all the work of his unthinking Mother. In spite of Death, the mark and seal of the parental control, Ian is yet free, during his brief years, to examine, to criticise, to know, and in imagination to create. To him alone, in the world with which he is acquainted, this freedom belongs; and in this lies his superiority to the resistless forces that control his outward life."

"... The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need - of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves."59

All this is not different from Hardy's vision. Only despair must be the foundation of our reasonable hopes. Science tells us all that we wish to know of Nature, and also that in the realm of relativity absolute knowledge is impossible. The days of metaphysical adventure in philosophy are, therefore, over. The recent existential trends in philosophy are chiefly ethical.
They do not ask what the ultimate stuff of the world is, but how to live life best within the corporeal limitation of our being, and co-exist happily. To quote Rev. Reynold Borzaga: "The plea of the contemporary philosophers is simple: Do not give us perfect formulas for understanding reality. Let us live our lives. Let us try to find the solution to living by living."60

Hardy has realized about a century ago that the world was never made for man, that the whole of the universe is gratuitous and irrational, and that all forms of life are equally superfluous to its aimless mutations and movements. That is why he accepted "the view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations."61 He writes:

"That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation."62

That is why his characters find life to be "a cause of depression a good many have to put up with."63 Yet both he and his representative characters do not sink in, but stand on despair, and lift the burden of responsibility on their shoulders to realize for themselves the stoical serenity of soul that comes from brave and wise resignation, and to achieve in the humanitarian spirit the happiness and welfare of many people.
In some of these characteristics of his thought as we shall consider in the chapters of this thesis to follow, if "existentialism is a trend, not a school"\textsuperscript{64}, Hardy has shared it and shown.

The first instinctive reaction of a man obsessed with "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power"\textsuperscript{65} is to commit suicide and put an end to "this hobble of being alive"\textsuperscript{66}. Hardy was prophetic in painting Father Time in \textit{Jude the Obscure} as a child obsessed with the morbid death-wish, as a representative of the generations which were soon to follow Hardy. Father Time kills his brethren and commits suicide to deliver them and himself from the pain of life, and to relieve his parents of their burden. Jude says:

"It was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us - the 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. \textit{He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live.} He is an advanced man, the doctor:"\textsuperscript{67}

Hardy's prophecy is confirmed and justified when we read the literature of the generations succeeding his own. Larry, the disillusioned nihilist in Eugene O'Neill's \textit{The Iceman Cometh}, expresses again and again his wish for death, and quotes the lines of Heine in his support:
"Lo, sleep is good; better is death; in sooth, 
The best of all were never to be born."68

That, in fact, seems to be the message of the play as Larry at the end is made a "real convert to death"69, and it is suggested that he commits suicide.

In Ionesco's play The Chairs also the Old Man of 95 delivers the message of suicide to the gathered audience of invisible guests, not by the word of mouth but by action as he throws himself into the sea.70 In Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot Astrogen and Vladimir, the symbolic representatives of humanity, talk of committing suicide while waiting tediously for nothing, though they do not do it for want of courage.71

The suicide cases have actually increased in number in the feverish Western societies, and the wish not to live has now become a serious obsession with thinkers, writers and artists. Ignazio Silone observes:

"Suicide among writers in various countries during the past thirty years has reached an unparalleled figure. It seems to me that however much they may differ outwardly, the majority of these episodes have a common source: what Nietzsche called the nihilism of modern times...... Whenever I happen to consider the sense of bewilderment, tedium and disgust characteristic of our age, my mind turns not to the books of Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre but to the suicides of Essenin, Mayakovsky, Ernst Toller, Kurt Tucholsky, Stefan Zweig, Klaus Mann, Drieu La Rochelle, F.O. Matthiessen, Cesare Pavese, and other lesser known figures. That a flock of terrifying ghosts they seem, when one names them all together! Persecution, exile, isolation,
poverty, illness, abnormality - one or the other of these external reasons has been suggested in each case to explain how a man of talent could have sought such a desperate end. But the last writings of these men before death, or their last confidences to their friends, are invariably a confession of anguish or despair at the effort and the futility of living.\textsuperscript{72}

Albert Camus begins his well-known philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* with the problem of suicide and manifests a vision of life not dissimilar to that of Father Time:

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest - whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories - comes afterwards."\textsuperscript{73}

The whole essay is a search for reasons to live, since the old values are uprooted, and the absurd is uncovered to our view. Camus builds up on the recognition of the absurd a new philosophy of life. Hardy has done the same thing, less systematically, as we shall see in the Fourth Chapter of this thesis, but more solidly. Camus was fortunate enough to have lived in our times, and therefore whereas Hardy was condemned as a pessimist, Camus was applauded by the world and honoured with the Nobel-Prize for voicing with clarity and eloquence what is oft felt confusedly by the sensitive everywhere. A prophet is sure to be misunderstood in his own age and country. Hardy
was not an exception to it. But today we are at a safe distance of about a century from the period of angry reception of his novels by the Victorian public. We can see, therefore, without bias that Hardy's painful perception of the human situation is "the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also"74. His philosophy of life is truly melioristic, founded firmly as it is on what Russell has called in the passages quoted earlier "unyielding despair". There is nothing negative about his thought if courage and lucidity are not negative characteristics.