CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF DESTINY AND GEORGE ELIOT'S COMMITMENT TO DETERMINISM.

An understanding of George Eliot's early impressions and scholarly cognition would be lacking in substance unless it is supplemented by a companion study of the background in which her creative imagination strove to present its humanistic ideas in the dramatic context of character and plot. It is worth recapitulating that George Eliot's mental life was characterized by an intense self-consciousness that kept her acutely awake to the development of her own reflective and perceptive faculties. A general view of the nineteenth century milieu would, therefore, help in the comprehension of her emotional and intellectual position at the time of writing novels and consequently make an invaluable contribution to the study of George Eliot's concept of Destiny.

The age of George Eliot extends from 1819 to 1880. Important for its leading sociological features, the period is no less remarkable for the literary transition that was evident in the academic pursuits of the era. The old order of Romanticism, its creative force debased into a spirit of vulgarised Epicureanism and frivolty, yielded
place to a consistent and rationalised approach towards life. The reign of Queen Victoria, which is historically conspicuous for its affluent and halcyon days, unprecedented commercial prosperity and scientific discoveries, witnessed, ironically, an equally unprecedented disintegration and uncertainty of moral thinking. The strong pillars of traditional belief in the supernatural — the origin and end of mankind, the Day of Judgement and man's accountability for his actions — were all shaken to their very foundation. A persistent quest for stability and balance, therefore, becomes the hall-mark of the century.

As the belief in God weakened, owing chiefly to the progress of scientific knowledge, commercialism and the popularization by Huxley of the intensely pessimistic theory of evolution, the prominent brains of the period exerted themselves rigorously to lend a helping hand to the bewildered masses. It was precisely this desire to sublimate the irrational which described the focal points of the philosophies enunciated by Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. Comte's Positivism and the Utilitarian - Empirical School of Mill and Spencer, both aimed at the emendation of the social organism.

1. Contrary to the Darwinian theory of evolution which anticipated a better future, Huxley held that man's in-born animalism cannot be suppressed or modified. He prophesied that the animal instincts would eventually gain the upper hand and drag mankind backward. — author.
Dethroning the God of Bible, they set out to install in His place the God of Humanity, which drew his strength from their consequently formulated sciences of sociology. While utilitarianism saw the individual as a unit of its social ethics and in consequence, entitled to the greatest freedom consistently with the freedom of others, Positivism denied the validity of all metaphysical speculations stressing at the same time, the presence of a regular law in nature. It, therefore, aimed at emancipating society from the shackles of the confounding traditions and social conventions.

Similar strains are detectable in the literary output of the age which is, more or less, obsessed with the complexity of the situation. George Eliot's interest in philosophy in general, which succeeded her infatuation with the philosophy of religion led her to focus her attention upon questions which occupied the intellectuals of the age. Her novels were written basically for the moral sustenance they could offer to a society shorn of its traditional beliefs. George Eliot's mission, like theirs, was directed at finding a new and natural ethics to replace the moral code which had been associated with the ancestral faith. Her works are, therefore, infused with a desire to stress man's spiritual essence and to enlighten his moral right to assert himself. This mental emancipation, she believed, would quell the paralyzing forces of pessimism and thereby enable him to become the true master of his Destiny. Destiny, not in the general sense of the word implying a
mysterious power — uncompromising, ruthless, and impene-
trable to understanding, the irreversible fatality of the
absurdity of life, toying at leisure with the lives of
human beings — but in the philosophical and ethical
context denoting the ultimate goal which becomes the
guiding principle of humanity.

Questions regarding the Destiny of man, a problem
of perennial interest and importance, have possessed the
minds of all eminent interpreters of life. The goal of
life is held, ever since the old classical period, as a
state of tranquility where the harmony of the soul is
obtained by an innate combination of reflection and reason.
Plato, who saw Reason as the highest good for man, declared
that the goal can be attained only after man has met evil
and, by the choice of his own reasoning, overcome it.
Plato's man is thus free to choose and act without cons-
traint. Aristotle also denied the existence of any unconquer-
able determinant and advocated the primacy of knowledge
and reasoning as a sure means to self-realization. The
stoics approach the problem from a different angle as their
faith, that everything has its source in the will of God,
finds it difficult to conceive of evil without some good.
To them man's will is determined, yet it is left to him to
become a slave to his passions or, in a rare case, to rise
to moral magnanimity. The Greek tragedy, therefore, depicts
passionate creatures who suffer mainly because they are
helpless before their fiery temperaments.
The early Christian thinkers were also faced with the dilemma of explaining the presence of evil in a world created by the Absolute, Perfect and Almighty God. St. Augustine's belief in the predestination of man in a state of sin had a deep effect on scholasticism. The dominance of the church from the ninth century to the onset of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century prescribed contemplation as the sole means for inviting the grace of God. It was only with the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance that man began to search for truth, and soon discovered the almost mathematical laws of cause and effect which controlled the universe. The individual was no longer an agent of his own salvation or damnation, but was an integral part of the larger whole which depended greatly on the consequences of his actions. It, therefore, became imperative that each individual should strive for the inner harmony which is the only true happiness.

The celebrated German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, in one of his *Lectures on Ethics* observes that "the ultimate Destiny of the human race is the greatest moral perfection, provided that it is achieved through human freedom, whereby alone man is capable of the greatest happiness". A similar idea was echoed in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, the renowned Catholic luminary of

the thirteenth century. A close disciple of Aristotle, he believed that since God has created the entire universe fundamentally with the purpose of revealing His goodness, each of his creations strives towards an established end, viz., the revelation of the divine goodness through a realisation of its true being. St. Thomas further points out that whereas irrational beings are determined by natural or sensuous impulses, the human being, despite his versatility and rationality, is no less determined. Yet his ability to apply reason, to differentiate between good and evil and to choose according to his own inclinations are features which distinguish him from other creatures. Thus while lower beings move inadvertently towards their goal, the human being, by exercising his free-will is able to dominate his own actions.

The Destiny of man, according to St. Aquinas is to achieve self-realisation, that is, absolute satisfaction, beatitude or happiness. However, the form wherein this objective is realised and the means by which it is fulfilled depends upon the choice of the individual. For instance, a person who desires riches as his consummate good may seek to achieve his end through iniquitous measures. The subsequent accumulation of wealth which gives him a feeling of fulfilment and his \textit{opus operandi}, unquestionably perverse, are of his own choosing. He would therefore be deemed fully responsible for the\textit{sequentia} perturbations.
This assertion inevitably leads to a discussion of one of the most intriguing conundrums in the field of ethical philosophy, that is, the extent of man's responsibility for his actions. Viewed either theologically, with reference to the Omnipotence and Omniscience of the Almighty God, or scientifically, in the light of the intra-causal nature of the universe, the question remains, on the whole, elusive. It would be worthwhile, at the outset, to clarify the terms which are to be employed.

The much debated problem regarded popularly as that of Determinism and Free-will, can be traced, in English literature, right back to the age of Geoffrey Chaucer. For instance, Chaucer's *Troylus and Criseyde* is a tragedy, strongly deterministic in tone, the entire action of which is presided over by an intricate and unavoidable destiny. Basing his ideas on the philosophical conception of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, the poet has attempted a somewhat mechanical and rigid exposition of his notions with reference to the manifestations of Destiny, in relation to providence, chance and human free-will. Troilus' well-known soliloquy relating God's foreknowledge to man's free-will, more or less, paraphrases Boethius's arguments to Lady Philosophy by drawing upon the two schools of thinkers: those that believe that the prescience of God leaves no room for human choice and those who

---

3. The term is used here as well as later in what has already been classified as the 'general sense', which is almost synonymous to fate. 'Destiny' with a capital D would denote the ethical classification. --- author.
feel that by dint of his reasoning capacity, man is able to guide his own actions. They take their stand on the argument that the Omniscience of God foresees all events because they are to happen and not because he is the cause of their occurrence.

This philosophical approach of Chaucer is decidedly far in advance of the medieval idea which repeatedly expressed itself in Greek literature. The entire conception of Greek tragedy is based on the fatalistic doctrine that nothing which the individual can do in any way affects the fate to which he is destined. The Greeks believed that the individual could, by no means, avoid the portion of misfortune allotted to him either by gods together or by Zeus alone. Accordingly, it was the 'moira' of Achilles to die immediately after causing the death of Hector as it was the 'moira' of Oedipus to kill his own father and marry his own mother.

Thus, the central idea of Fatalism, "the philosophic doctrine of the futility of human struggles against destiny" is very familiar to Greek thought in its denial of the preventive efficacy of the human being. Fatalism may be described loosely as synonymous with predestination, involving a similar degradation of the moral character of God and making the qualities of divine justice and divine love meaningless. Predestination, too, leaves no scope for individual effort, for whether the individual believes

himself to be the elect or the non-elect, it is bound to become indifferent and apathetic. Likewise, this theory leaves little room for hope concerning the improvement of one's Destiny.

Fatalism, as defined in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is that "attitude of mind which accepts whatever happens as having been bound or decreed to happen". The concept is further explained by the distinction that "whereas determinism can be represented as compatible with moral responsibility, fatalism, properly understood, would reduce practical ethics to nothing but the advice that we should resign ourselves indifferentily to the course of events". It would, however, be useful to point out that while fatalism accounts for the various events of an individual's life on earth, predestination applies "to the eternal destiny of man".

The exact degree of man's responsibility for his actions has been the subject of much controversy in the sphere of philosophy. Derived from the Latin origin *determinare*, the expression 'Determinism' etymologically means 'to fix', 'to settle' or 'to prescribe'. It is "the name given to the theory that all events, even moral choices are completely determined by previously existing causes". The doctrine "professes that those parts of

6. Ibid.
the universe already laid down, absolutely appoint and decree what other parts shall be. The future has no ambiguous possibilities hidden in its womb: the part we call the present is compatible with only one totality. Any other future complement than the one fixed from eternity is impossible. The whole is in each and every part, and welds it with the rest into an absolute unity, an iron block, in which there can be no equivocation or shadow of turning".9

This 'iron-block' view of M. Timur however, holds good only for the class of philosophers William James categorises as hard determinists who "did not shrink from such words as fatality, bondage of the will, necessitation and the like".10 The sole illustration that James offers for this hypothesis is that of the famous lines of Omar Khayyam:

With earth's first clay they did the last man knead
And there of the last harvest sowed the seed.
And the first morning of creation wrote
What the last dawn of reckoning shall read.

Nevertheless, the stanza which gives a perfect rendering of the hard deterministic attitude towards life is the one quoted by Prof. Paul Edwards in his valuable essay, "Hard and Soft Determinism":

'Tis all a checker-board of nights and days,
Where destiny with men for pieces plays;
Thither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back to the closet lays.11

Specifically an ethical problem, the concept of determinism basically centres on the issue of man's ability to realize good and avoid evil. The two main influences governing and moulding the thoughts and acts of the individual have been marked as hereditary nature and environmental nurture. Since both these factors, obviously not of the subjects' own choosing, are responsible for his psychic legacy, the hard determinists absolve their agents of all temperamental lapses and mistakes.

Opposed to hard determinism which is, on the whole, identical with necessitarianism and the old fatalistic beliefs is the type classified by William James as soft determinism. Criticising the hard determinists' denial of the causal efficacy of human desires and efforts, the soft determinist "abhors harsh words, and repudiating fatality, necessity, and even predetermination, says that its real name is freedom". The defining of the concept was precisely what David Hume and John Stuart Mill set out to do in their distinguished discussions on liberty. Basing their arguments primarily on the meanings of the terms 'freedom' and 'necessity' they rejected the entire problem of incompatibility as being purely verbal in character involving only connotative confusions. It was with this school of thought that George Eliot instinctively identified herself. Disapproving of the hard determinists'
practice of vindicating persons indiscriminately George

Eliot firmly refutes any distinction between the

concepts of determinism and free-will. The 'free-action'
in no way seeks to establish that it was uncaused. It
merely suggests that it was performed without coercion or
constraint.

The cardinal point developed by Hume is the thesis
that "causation is essentially constant succession, that
there is no necessary connection between causes and their
effects. Causes, therefore, do not compel the occurrence of
their effects: they only precede them." Similar ideas have
been advanced by J.S. Mill in the System of Logic:

human actions ..., are never (except in some cases
of mania) ruled by any one motive with such abso-
lute sway, that there is no room for the influence
of any other. The causes, therefore, on which action
depends, are never uncontrollable; and any given
effect is only necessary provided that the causes
tending to produce it are not controlled. Expressing the same view is George Eliot's argument voiced
by Mr. Irwine in reply to Arthur Donnithorne's objection in

Adam Bede:

"Well, but one may be betrayed into doing things by
a combination of circumstances, which one might
never have done otherwise".

"Why, yes, a man can't very well steal a bank-note
unless the bank-note lies within convenient reach;
but he won't make us think him an honest man because
he begins to howl at the bank-note for falling in
his way". 14

The tragic situations in which George Eliot's characters find themselves owe nothing to fatalism or irrational pre-determination; they always proceed in the wake of the protagonists' inability to control their passions.

This line of reasoning is skilfully elucidated by Prof. C.A. Campbell in his inaugural address, "In Defence of Free will" in which he maintains that the agents' formed character determines "the felt balance of desires in the situation of moral temptation. But all that amounts to is that formed character prescribes the nature of the situation within which the act of moral decision takes place. It does not in the least follow that it has any influence whatsoever in determining the act of decision itself... the decision as to whether we shall exert effort or take the easy course of following the bent of our desiring nature: take, that is to say, the course which, in virtue of the determining influence of our character as so far formed, we feel to be in the line of least resistance". 15

Having indomitable faith in the power of the 'will' the soft determinists persist in believing that in spite of hereditary propensities and environmental circumstances man is "able to act contrary to the felt balance of mere desire and to achieve the higher end despite the fact that it continues to be in the line of greater resistance relatively to our desiring nature". 16

It is this belief in the potentiality of the human will that motivates John Stuart Mill in his *System of Logic*, to declare that "We are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us". The same conviction is expressed in George Eliot's letter to Mrs. Ponsonby (Dec. 10, 1874):

The progress of the world — can certainly never come at all save by the modified action of the individual beings who compose the world; and that we can say to ourselves with effect, "There is an order of considerations which I will keep myself continually in mind of, so that they may continually be the prompters of certain feelings and actions", seems to me as undeniable as that we can resolve to study the Semitic languages and apply to an Oriental scholar to give us daily lessons. (GEL VI, 99)

This power of moral discrimination, or Dijudikation, defends man's moral dignity and significance by giving due importance to his liberty of action and of thought and by rejecting the idea that his efforts and his volitions are merely the sport of an inexorable and conscious mechanism ingrained in the nature of the universe.

Although a staunch Calvinist in her early years, George Eliot's mature viewpoint is based on a vision of man's power rather than upon a conviction of his sinfulness. She saw man as combining moral, psychological and physiological principles which could be apprehended and analysed.

18. "Kant thinks it important to distinguish the theoretical from the practical elements in moral action, to separate the intellectual activity of judgment through which we determine what action ought to be done from the practical activity of the will which determines the performance of the action. To this activity of moral judgment he gives the name Dijudikation which has been translated by discrimination". *Lectures on Ethics*, Introduction by Louis Infield (Methuen & Co., London, 1930) p. XIII.
Her faith in the future of mankind owed much to her acquaintance with Charles Bray. The "fundamental doctrine" of The Philosophy of Necessity, "that mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena", \(^1\) was the first to introduce her to the "law of consequences" as applied to the mind. It confirmed her notion of meliorism that mind is continually developing and striving towards perfection.

The 'meliorist' thinking of which George Eliot considered herself to be the pioneer, \(^2\) nourished itself on the belief that, at every stage of social history, there exists a wide scope for further improvement and enrichment of the human being. According to Maxim Gorky:

> Life progresses towards perfection guided by the ideal, by that which does not yet exist but which we believe it is possible to achieve. \(^3\)

It is the same conviction in the future, that inspired George Eliot to give a call to fight for a better life and to struggle for even greater excellence by a new vision of unsealed heights.

Of all the intellectual figures of the nineteenth century, it was Auguste Comte who appears to have had the greatest impact on George Eliot's thinking. Comte prescribed an evaluation of the developing and ever-changing face of society which is brought about due to the fluctuation

---

1. GEL II, 403.
2. "I don't know that I ever heard anybody use the word 'meliorist' except myself". GEL VI, 333.
in ideas and institutions. He explains the nature of social dynamics as fundamentally subject to the laws of continuity in which every progressive step is indispensably sequential to the preceding social state. He further stresses the urgency of discovering these laws by accentuating the part played by heredity and environment in determining the personality of an individual.

As an artist George Eliot had set herself to investigate the objective precondition of human consciousness in order to explain what lay at the root of, and conditioned the movement of, different human aspirations. Her study of the influence of environment and circumstances on man included the objective factors that determine the life not only of an individual but of the entire society. Thereby she gradually came to concentrate on man's inner world, looking on life and history as the theatre in which people's passions and ideas are realized, determining, by their fortuitous play and flux, the flux of life.

George Eliot was in absolute conformity with the Comtean principle which gives succinct expression to the natural laws present in the ideological phenomena from time immemorial. She studied the effects of social environment on man's spiritual and moral world. Consequently, she focussed her attention on portraying the psychology of her characters as subject to the iron laws of society. The sense of continuity and the "conception of European Society
as incarnate history which she admired in Riehl's works is a prominent feature of her novels, as the "vital connexion with the past" is the recurring theme of her fiction. Whether the panorama presented revolves round the small town of Milby or the provincial town of Middlemarch, the claims of society, as determinant of human Destiny, remain equally powerful. Prof. Levine's commendable analysis of George Eliot's conception of a determined universe clearly indicates the extent of intellectual harmony that existed between Comte and our philosophical novelist:

George Eliot saw a deterministic universe as a marvellously complex unit in which all parts are intricately related to each other, where nothing is really isolable, and where past and future are both implicit in the present. Nothing in such a universe is explicable without reference to the time and place in which it occurs or exists. This suggested that one can never make a clear-cut break with the society in which one has been brought up, with one's friends and relations, with one's past. Any such break diminishes a man's wholeness and is the result of his failure to recognise his ultimate dependence on others, their claims on him, and the consequent need for human solidarity. For George Eliot, every man's life is at the center of a vast and complex web of causes, a good many of which exert pressure on him from the outside and come into direct conflict with his own desires and motives.
When 'every man's life is at the center of a vast and complex web of causes' it is logical that there could be no main hero as the ideological and spiritual centre of a work. The need to relate everything to a central figure is linked with a perception of the world centred on the individual. The hero, however, sheds much of his weightiness when society itself or a large agglomeration composed of various individual Destinies becomes the focal point. Hence, from the Scenes of Clerical Life to Daniel Deronda there is a remarkable galaxy of heroic deeds but no heroic characters.

She gives full recognition to the penetrating effects of environment and its role in producing a moral sense in the individual along with the instituting of a general criterion for right and wrong. Central to her point of view is a synoptic concept of reality as a network of vigorously inter-related parts. Only by conceiving the world as an organised entity can man look upon himself as a responsible being required to channelise his dynamic powers towards socially beneficial designs. This democratic notion of the universe is fully borne out by her conception of historical laws. Her works are pervaded with the idea of development, the belief in the incessant movement of life, constantly in the making, continuously changing. History being linear in time, events take place according to a set pattern governed by causes and their antecedents. The changes in social forms that occur throughout history are, therefore, not fortuitous but inevitable.
In accordance with an insistence on the causal and determined nature of events or historical phenomena, George Eliot fully realized the fact that events and human actions are far more inter-dependent than meets the eye. Her conviction of the inevitability of a change in the existing social relations and the ceaseless advance of human history towards emancipation, forms the basis of her conception of meliorism and Destiny which, apparently, is illustrative of Darwin's theory of evolution. The continuity of this universal process has like effects on man and society:

--- young natures --- in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths. And we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unit which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? (TMF, 303)

An inalienable confidence in the power of man's intrinsic moral essence led George Eliot to totally reject the dictum that the individual is "in the elemental ages' chart, the meanest insect on the obscurest leaf". She argued that "In natural science --- there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of human life". (TMF, 303). As every event has its causal antecedent, however trivial or inconspicuous, it is the presumably

faceless individuals and their 'nameless unremembered acts' that decide the Destiny of nations. 25

This deterministic belief, manifest in her fiction, reveals itself in her denunciation of the element of chance. Not that she denies the event itself but she believes that where on the surface accident holds sway, there too it is actually governed by inner hidden laws which only need to be discovered. George Eliot makes every effort to highlight the correlation between the evidently negligible emotion or action and the consequent hazardous complexities. Her characters are always censured for their random, unregarded steps. Her thematic pattern is woven around individuals who never bother to calculate the aftermath of their self-gratification. Their vision is limited to the immediate result which, for a short while, corresponds to the one intended. It is only when consequences, quite different from those that were contemplated, assert themselves, that they realize the full brunt of their folly. Pelham aptly observes:

A dark shadow with monitory finger at its lips haunts her pages. In its presence we are shudderingly aware of the immense responsibilities that flow from our most unregarded actions, as if some vast world-conscience were bearing in upon our defenseless lives, and we grew conscious of "the inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character". 26

25. "...the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs". MP., 896.

It is, therefore, imperative for every individual to be scrupulously conscientious in his actions if he wants to avoid causing woe and distress to himself as well as to others. George Eliot's letters, the most authentic spokesman of her views, are outweighed with her sermons on goodness, morality and harmonious living.

Heaven help us! said the old religions—the new one from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another. (G&L II, 82)

She emphatically recommends—

a closer examination of your feelings, should you find that you had lost all sense of quality in actions—all possibility of admiration that yearns to imitate—all keen sense of what is cruel and injurious—all belief that your conduct (and therefore the conduct of others) can have any difference of effect on the well-being of those immediately about you (and therefore on those afar off), whether you carelessly follow your selfish moods or encourage that vision of others' needs, which is the source of justice, tenderness, sympathy in the fullest sense?

(G&L VI, 98)

This is practicable only through a deliberate cognizance of, and commitment to, the concept of determinism; the realization of the "undeviating law" which alone can "give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible":

The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations, not by means of Greek and Hebrew, but by that inexorable law of consequences, whose evidence is confirmed instead of weakened as the ages advance; and human duty is compressed in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching.... every past phase of human development is part of that education of the race in which we are sharing; every mistake, every absurdity into which our human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit. A correct
generalization gives significance to the smallest
details....27

George Eliot's letter of November 25, 1853, deserves
special notice for her quotation from Comte that serves to
illuminate her standpoint which advocates one's sense of
duty and malice-free resignation as the sole panacea for
human suffering. Comte's words - "Notre vrai destinee, Se
compose de resignation et d' activite" (Our true destiny
is composed of resignation and activity) express the
essence of her humanistic philosophy. The approach is
further generalized in the letter to Mrs. Ponsonby in which
she observes:

With regard to the pains and limitations of one's
personal lot, I suppose there is not a single man,
or woman, who has not more or less need of that
stoical resignation which is often a hidden heroism,
or who, in considering his or her past history, is
not aware that it has been cruelly affected by the
ignorant or selfish action of some fellow-being in
a more or less close relation to life. And to my
mind, there can be no stronger motive, than this
perception, to an energetic effort that the lives
nearest to us shall not suffer in a like manner
from us. (GEL VI, 99)

This faith in the 'energetic effort' whereby man can channe-
larize his actions is analogous to John Stuart Mill's ideas
on self-conscious and deliberative choice. Like him she saw
man as an agent in his Destiny, capable, through Will, of
coming to terms with his nature and acting contrary to his
egoistic dictates. She totally concurred with Mill's view
that "though our character is formed by circumstances....
what is really inspiring and ennobling in the doctrine
of free-will is the conviction that we have real power over

the formation of our character; and that our will, by influencing some of our circumstances, can modify our future habits or capacities of willing.  

The same conviction, 'that we have real power over the formation of our character', helps George Eliot to resolve the problem of determinism and moral responsibility:

As to the necessary combination through which life is manifested, and which seem to present themselves to you as a hideous fatalism, which ought logically to petrify your volition, -- have they, in fact, any such influence on your ordinary course of action in the primary affairs of your existence as a human, social, domestic creature? And if they don't hinder you from taking measures for a bath, without which you know that you cannot secure the delicate cleanliness which is your second nature, why should they hinder you from a line of resolve in a higher strain of duty to your ideal, both for yourself and others? (GEL VI, 98)

This lack of 'resolve in a higher strain of duty invariably accounts for the quagmire of tragic situations in which her dramatic personae find themselves. Unlike the characters of Franz Kafka or Thomas Hardy, who are portrayed as mere play-things of unknown forces, at the mercy of the cruel whims of fate, George Eliot conceived man as capable of throwing off the chains of fate in order to assert his will. She boldly denounces "the art which leaves the soul in despair (and) is leasing to the soul;" which, "instead of widening the mind to a fuller and fuller response to all the elements of our existence, isolates it in a moral stupidity." Critically suspicious of the "crudity" of writers whose "exposition strangles us on results that seem to stultify the most

29. *Creed* III, p. 56.
ardent, massive experience of mankind and hem up the best
part of our feelings in stagnation"[31] the motivating force
behind all her novels is the need "to strengthen the good
and mitigate the evil".[32]

The inspiring principle which alone gives me courage
to write is that of so presenting our human life as
to help my readers in getting a clearer conception
and a more active admiration of those vital elements
which bind men together and give a higher worthiness
to their existence. (GEL IV, 472)

The tragedies of Shakespeare are essentially built round
characters of a mixed fabric in which the good qualities
generally outnumber the weaker traits of the hero; yet the
predominance of the latter in a moment of crucial decision
provides the ground for the cataclysmic tragedy which eventually overthrows him. Shakespeare's plays reflect his
conception of a moral order which, when disturbed by an
individual's inability to resolve the inner conflict between passion and duty results in unforeseen devastation.
The greatness of the dramatist rests primarily on the fact
that, despite his use of the element of chance and the depiction of the supernatural agencies, the total impression left on the reader is far from pessimistic. The truth of the
dictum Character is Destiny leaves one with the feeling of the superiority of the human being in his ability to exercise control by a joint concentration of Reason and will-power.

"The importance of individual deeds" and the "all
sufficiency of the soul's passions in determining sympa-

31. GEL VI, 120.
32. GEL VI, 259.
thetic action", are marked by George Eliot as the "two convic-
tions or sentiments which so conspicuously pervade it (The
Spanish Gypsy) that they may be said to be its very warp on
which the whole action is woven".33 The statement is equally
applicable to her entire fictional themes. In Adam Bede she
laments at the "terrible coercion in our deeds which may
first turn the honest man into a deceiver and then reconcile
him to the change".34 She repeatedly warns her readers
against the "dreadful vitality of deeds" which "live and act
apart from our own will ..... children may be strangled, but
deeds never".35 The aftermath being implacable, it becomes
essential to apply the reins of will power to the unbridled
freedom of personal interests.

Extreme circumspection of all actions becomes all the
more imperative as the sequel does not remain confined to
the malefactor or the small circle of the near and dear.
George Eliot was aware of this complexity of ties between
man and his social environment and saw that the slightest
deviation from the social code sets the relentless forces
of society into action, which expedite the undoing of the
protagonist. It is this notion of man as subservient to,
and placed peremptorily within, the iron framework of social
laws which finds expression in the epigraph of Middle
March, Book I Ch. IV :

33. See 'Notes on the Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in General'
in Gress III pp. 31-37.
34. AB. 295.
35. Rom., 159.
1st Gent. Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves.

2nd Gent. Ay, truly; but I think it is the world that brings the iron.

Deeds do not necessarily issue from the recklessness or negligence of her characters. Very often they are the outcome of the 'part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions .... The collision between hereditary entailed Nemesis and the peculiar individual lot, awakening our sympathy of the particular man or woman whom the Nemesis is shown to grasp with terrific force'.

The plight of such characters who are unable to enforce their moral will attracts George Eliot as she wishes to stimulate her readers' "love, pity, constituting sympathy, and generous joy".

She could not help discerning the negative aspects of human nature — like egoism, callousness and narrow-mindedness — yet, a meliorist to the marrow, she believed that by consistent and steady efforts of the Will, these imperfections could be overcome and put right. However, it is the weak-willed, helpless to counteract their determinants that occupy the place nearest her heart:

I think it would be possible that men should differ speculatively as much as they do now, and yet be of one mind in the desire to avoid giving unnecessary pain, in the desire to do an honest part towards the general well-being .... Pity and fairness — two little words which, carried out, would embrace the utmost delicacies of moral life — seem to me not to rest on an unverifiable hypothesis but on facts quite as irreversible as the perception that a pyramid will not stand on its apex. (GRL VI, 407)

36. Gross III, 32-34.
The purpose of George Eliot's art lies not in criticism or ridicule. She is the "aesthetic teacher" who aims at "the rousing of the nobler emotions" enabling one "to feel keenly for one's fellow beings", by "amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot". Her ethical philosophy boldly denounces "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 relations to it (that universe) as human beings".

An aspect of George Eliot's Comtean spirit is revealed in her emphasis on observation and reflection coupled with a compassionate understanding of human psychology as requisite norms of her moral code. George Eliot wholly accepted the Positivist motto, "Agir par affection, et sentir pour agir" as it tallied exactly with her belief in the predominance of the emotive over the intellectual. Accordingly, her novels, while illustrating that 'affection is the broadest basis of good in life' bespeak the supremacy of emotion and feeling. In Book V of Middlemarch, she has categorically stated that "Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion". This primacy of the affective function in man, distinguished by Feuerbach as well, is upheld by George Eliot throughout her literary career. Moreover,

38. GEL VII, 44.
40. GEL V, 31.
the concepts *live for others* and *altruism*, the moral code and basic principle of the Positivist ethics accentuating the need of benevolence, and Feuerbach's emphasis on the need of sympathy, correspond exactly with George Eliot's description of true morality as being inherent in the "extension and intensification of our sympathetic nature".41

According to the records offered by Cross, "She was cheered by the hope and by the belief in the gradual improvement of the mass, for in her view each individual must find the better part of happiness in helping another. She often thought it wisest not to raise too ambitious an ideal, especially for young people, but to impress on ordinary natures the immense possibilities of making a small home circle brighter and better. Few are born to do the great work of the world, but all are born to this. And to the nature capable of the larger effort, the field of usefulness will constantly widen".42 The mainspring of this awareness lies embedded in the family where 'parental affection', in the guise of innumerable renunciations, acts as a powerful influence on the future moral values of the individual. A healthy family unit, therefore, becomes the initial link between egoism and altruism:

---

42. Cross III, 347.
Not for one moment would one willingly lose sight of the truth that the relation of the sexes and the primary ties of kinship are the deepest roots of human well-being, but to make them by themselves the equivalent of morality is verbally to cut off the channels of feeling through which they are the feeders of that well-being. They are the original fountains of a sensibility to the claims of others which is the bond of societies.

The ameliorative influence of family life gradually leads the individual beyond the small domestic circle to embrace friends; and then awakening his consciousness towards the immediate social circle, helps him on to virtually identify himself with the entire human world. The individual begins to realise that his interests correspond to those of society and that his relationship with others is not antagonistic but, on the contrary, of increasing accord and closeness. This spiritual-cum-intellectual advancement towards a higher level of social awareness helps to evolve an attitude not only towards society but also towards the historical prospect and values, the ethical and moral principles of human behaviour and the duty of the man who rejects the traditional demands made upon him by society. The crystallisation of this outlook which necessarily entails development and enrichment of inherent moral qualities finally transcends the bounds of


44. "Through my union and fellowship with the men and women I have seen, I feel a like, though a fainter, sympathy with those I have not seen; and I am able to live in imagination with the generations to come, that their good is not alien to me, and is a stimulus to me to labour for ends which may not benefit myself, but will benefit them". Thomas Pinney (ed.) Essays of George Eliot, pp. 573-74.
fellowship and merges each one of us with the whole of humanity.

This idea, explicated in her essay on the poet Young\textsuperscript{45} is expressed repeatedly in her letters:

The getting older brings some new satisfactions, and among these I find the growth of a maternal feeling towards both men and women who are much younger than myself. In this way the roots of affection may continue to spread as long as one's mind lasts. An affection sprouting from the perpetuity of relations is the main strength and the main regulation of life". (\textit{GEL} V, 5)

Egoism, translated into feelings of "Love, pity, constituting sympathy, and generous joy with regard to the lot of our fellowmen" underlines the "all sufficiency of the souls' passions in determining sympathetic action".\textsuperscript{46} This ability to look at the good of life a little apart from our own particular sorrow and to be "better able to imagine and to feel the pains of those who differ —— in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures",\textsuperscript{47} is achieved invariably after some painfully shocking experience has activated the will towards an ungrudging service of the co-sharers of life. George Eliot's novels repeatedly draw upon the relevance of sorrow to the human life by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45} "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 others, who would suffer the same pain if I was unjust or dishonest towards them —— The fact is I do not love myself alone —— I have a tender love for my wife, and children, and friends, and through that love I sympathise with like affections in other men". — T. Pinney (ed.) \textit{Essays of George Eliot}, p. 373.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Casse III}, pp. 35-37.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{GEL} III, 111
\end{flushright}
illustrating the subsequent broadening of the egoist's vision towards a sympathetic understanding of the fellowmen. The greatest bane of the self-centred individual, according to George Eliot, is "the privation of ardent sympathy — the finding one's heart dry up, so that one has to act by rule without the tide of love to carry one". (GEL VII, 210).

Genuine moral behaviour, in her view, is that which springs from the "immediate prompting of innate power --- and not from laboured obedience to a --- rule; and the presence of --- innate prompting is directly opposed to the perpetual consciousness of a rule. The action of faculty is imperious, and excludes the reflection why it should act --- in proportion as morality is emotional --- it will exhibit itself in direct sympathetic feeling and action, and not as the recognition of a rule. Love does not say, 'I ought to love' --- it loves. Pity does not say 'It is right to be pitiful' --- it pities. Justice does not say, 'I am bound to be just' --- it feels justly". 48

Since it is the individual's unconstrained freewill that asserts itself in his conscious choice between good and evil, George Eliot envisions Destiny as fundamentally contained in a person's own decision reached without the compelling pressure of external circumstances. Having arrived at the conclusion, she added another dimension to the determining forces of the human consciousness by illustrating the

consuming power of money and its putrefying effects on human nature. Silas Marner's estrangement from society is related directly to his passion for hoarding: "The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his loom and the repetition of his web". The experiences of Hetty Sorrel, Tito Melema, Rosamond Vincy, Nicholas Bulstrode and Gwendolen Harleth demonstrate the futility of the economic situations which effectively undermine their ethical values.

Apart from 'the heroic, Promethean effort' required for overcoming, and relinquishing, personal desires for wider and nobler causes, the individual, in order to achieve this ideal state of perfection, has to have "his heart strings bound round the weak and erring so that he must share not only the outward consequences of their error but also their inward suffering". The mental and moral education of Adam Bede, his conversion to that "new awe and new pity" which form the essential and fundamental ground of George Eliot's religion of humanity, is the most illuminating explication of her beliefs. It is only through this process, which George Eliot describes as 'a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state', that one can hope to aspire to the serene sublimity of the soul wherein lies the real worth of a human being. It is this state of perfect happiness,

49. M. 148.
50. Crisis III, 36.
51. ME. 197.
52. ME. 402.
which transcribed into words, defines the true nature of George Eliot's concept of Destiny.

To sum up, George Eliot's concept of Destiny was neither a utopian vision of man's happiness nor a Shavian hope for a superman: it was the logical outcome of her consummate understanding of all the prominent, contemporary schools of philosophy, viz., the Utilitarian - Empirical school, Evolutionary-Naturalist school and the schools interested in religious philosophy, for instance, that of Comte's Positivism. Cogently aware of the universe as an integrated organism wherein each individual was subject to the forces of heredity, environment and the social code to which she added the pressure of the economic conditions, her philosophical presumptions have a direct bearing on her ethical views which are significantly free of all metaphysical enigmas. "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., the exaltation of the human)." 53

Hence even the most intricately labyrinthine obligations and responsibilities are seen in the context of human experience, for in the decision of the being lies the key to right action which, in the historical perspective, contributes to the social and ethical development. Writing to

53. [Ref. VI, 98.}
Charles Bray in 1857, George Eliot had remarked: "My own experience and development deepen everyday my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathise with individual suffering and individual joy." Thus by placing the altruistic impulses of love and sympathy beside the sense of duty and responsibility, and limiting the ultimate action to the will of man, George Eliot endorses her view of a deterministic universe governed by the undeviating laws of cause and effect as compatible with her faith in the attainment of a moral perfection and her "calm confidence in its intrinsic power to secure its own high destiny, — that of universal empire".

54. Gross I, 357. See also George Eliot's letter to John Sibree: "Creation is the superadded life of the intellect: sympathy, all-embracing love, the superadded moral life. These given more and more abundantly, I feel that all the demons, which are but my own egotism moping and moving and gibbering, would vanish away .... Evil, even sorrows, are they not all negations? Thus matter is in a perpetual state of decomposition .... superadd the principle of life, and the tendency to decomposition is overcome. Add to this consciousness, and there is a power of self-amelioration. The passions and senses decompose, so to speak. The intellect by its analytic power restrains the fury with which they rush to their own destruction; the moral nature purifies, beautifies, and at length transmutes them". Gross I, 155.

55. Gross I, 79. For further evidence, see Appendix.