Chapter - One

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy’s life was as uneventful as the lives of his great characters. He was born on June 2, 1840, in a Dorsetshire Cottage at Upper Bockhampton. He came of an old family, one of whose member had been with Nelson at Trafalgar. He was educated at a Dorchester school. Here in 1856 he was apprenticed to an architect who restored old churches. Hardy stayed with him for five years.

In 1861 he went to London and studied architecture under Sir Arthur Bloomfield, rounding off an irregular education by attending evening
classes at King’s College. He won prizes in the following year for architectural theory from the Royal Institute of British Architects. A career as an architect was presently to be cut short by a new influence. He had written verse even before he came to London and now he began to produce many of the Wessex Poems.

In 1867 he left London and settled at Weymouth, where he practiced his profession and began to write his first novel. On the advice of George Meredith, Hardy withdrew the manuscript and directed his attention to producing something with less introspection and more intrigue. As a result, he accepted the conventions of contemporary sensation-novelists and wrote _Disparate Remedies_, a melodramatic and immature work. The critics, however, were focusable, and he was encouraged to produce the idyllic _Under the Greenwood Tree_ in 1872, and a year later, _A Pair of Blue Eyes_, which was the first book to be published under the author’s name and which showed that his art was surely developing, the success of this novel and the encouragement of Miss Emma Gifford, whom Hardy married in 1874, prompted him to turn his back upon architecture and devote himself wholly to writing.

His married life was inaugurated by his first great popular success—“Far from the Madding Crowd”, which was published anonymously as a serial in the Cornhill Magazine. In 1876 he moved to Sturminster Newton, and four years later, after a severe illness, settled near Dorchester, where he built his own
house, Max Gate. With the exception of periodic visits to London and abroad, he remained in Dorset until his death.

Between 1878 and 1894 appeared those works upon which Hardy’s reputation as a novelist justly rests. “The Return of the Native” opens the phase. In this story Hardy first registered a protest against the “happy-ending” school of literature, although the exigencies of its periodical publication forbade him to flout convention entirely. In 1886 The Mayor of Casterbridge was produced, and a year later, The Woodlanders. In 1892 and 1894 he assailed contemporary artistic and moral standards with Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. The outcry against these novels caused him to abandon prose altogether and turn his attention to poetry again, polishing and revising his old verses.

In 1898 Wessex Poems appeared, and Poems of the past and present followed three years later. Between 1904 and 1907, Hardy brought out the ambitious epic-drama, The Dynasts, which is an epitome of his philosophical ideas and which, although “written for mental performance only,” has been produced successfully on the stage. These works were sufficient to establish his reputation as an original and imaginative poet, a claim which he consolidated by a personal and never-failing inspiration to the end.

In 1912 his wife died, and two years later he married Florence Emily Dugdale, who wrote his biography. Increasing honours were conferred upon him Government recognition followed public acclamation, and in 1910 he
was awarded the Order of Merit, and later the Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Literature.

Hardy died on January 11, 1928. His ashes were placed in Westminster Abbey, but his heart was buried at Stanford Church in his native Wessex soil, which, indeed, it had never left.

The more fashionable a philosophy becomes, the more elusive is its definition. So the proponents of existentialism proclaim that, though many attack, few understand them. They insist on the essential optimism of their doctrine that “man makes himself,” for there is always, until death, another chance. Granted, they would say, that, in their wide humanity, they explore the far corners of human life, the horrors and perversions. They expose the can of a fraudulent, strictly bourgeois “human dignity.” But just because of this very humaneness, this very honesty, they are decried as perverts and iconoclasts, as philosophic nihilists and artistic freaks. So, finally, as the word goes around, every treatise that dooms man to destruction, every novel whose characters are mad or bad, every play that depresses without elevating, is labeled “so existential”; and hence existentialism, comes to mean the shocking, the sordid, or the obscene.1

One may well agree with the existentialists that, so loosely used, the word is nearly meaningless—except perhaps for a vague sense that this movement, like others, expresses the collapse in our time of certain formerly cherished conventions—and that existentialists, in fiction as well as in
philosophy, say a number of things that would undoubtedly have brought a blush to the cheek of the young person. But in that sense, after all, anyone, from Freud to James Cain, might with more than justice be called an existentialist.

Nearly as meaningless, is the equally general, though much more serious, use of the word in some philosophic discussion, in which nearly every philosopher since Hegel is shown to be in some sense an existentialist? Again, there is truth in this usage, since existentialism is, in one strand of its development at least a reaction against the speculative idealism of Hegel. But it is, again, only in a very vague and ambiguous sense that nineteenth-century philosophy in general, from Schelling to Nietzsche, can be labeled “existential.” This is, after all, a fairly definite historical movement in philosophy, taking its name from Kierkegaard’s phrase “existential dialectic.” Kierkegaard, it is true, was himself a nineteenth-century philosopher, influenced by Schelling and, more deeply than he would himself have granted, even by the archfiend Hegel. But Kierkegaard was in his own time completely without fame or influence; and to spread the name of his peculiar brand of dialectic over an indefinite number of his predecessors and contemporaries is to spread it very thin.

Moreover, as Sartre and numerous others have repeatedly insisted, there is, in fact, no need for all this vagueness and obscurity, since an extremely simple, literal, and precise definition of existential philosophy is easy to come by and easy to remember. Existentialism is the philosophy which declares as its first principle that existence is prior to essence. It is as easy as that. Of course,
to understand the principle and apply it properly, one must make at least one very important qualification. Taking literary the simple assertion, “Existence is prior to essence.” One might find existentialists in very unexpected quarters. For instance, in the thirteenth-century controversy about proofs of the existence of God, the Augustinians believed in the priority of essence to existence-in the possibility of moving from the idea of God, the intuitive apprehension of his essence, to the assertion of his existence. Their opponents, the Christian Aristotelians, on the contrary, believed in the priority, at least for the genesis of human knowledge, of existence to essence in the necessity of starting with the givens of our sensuous experience and proceeding by induction and abstraction to the ultimate intuitive awareness of essences and eternal truths. Yet, if there is anyone in the whole of Western philosophy who has never been accused of being an existentialist, surely it is St. Thomas!

The necessary qualification to the existentialist principle easily appears, however, if we look at Kierkegaard’s original critique of Hegelian philosophy. The “logic” of Hegel “moves” in its ponderous way from being and essence to actuality and existence-or, rather, from being and essence, through existence, to the higher synthesis of both in Mind or Concept. But for Kierkegaard, as we shall see, the whole notion of starting with “pure being” and of moving from it to existence is absurd. Out of pure logic, pure thought, can come no movement of any sort, for movement implies change, time,
least can pure thought produce the movement of emergence into actuality, into the head, resistant, senseless fact of what is, forever distinct from the conveniently definable nature of what might be. But the existence to which Kierkegaard contrasts this game with essences, the sheer fact that summons him from the dream-world of speculation. Marching with the World-soul through China and India but neglecting, until it shrivels up to nothing, the only soul that should really concern him-his own. It is fact, indeed, that existentialism puts before essence-but a particular human fact. Not the sense-perceptions of a Thomas, generally accessible in their standard character to all our species, not even the more “subjective” but equally uniform impressions of Hume, but just the unique, inexpressible that of any one conscious being’s particular existence-such is the actuality that Kierkegaard and his twentieth-century successors agree in referring to when they declare, as their first principle, the priority of existence over essence.

Taking existentialism, however, in the context of reaction against Hegel and the peculiar “absolute idealism” derived from him, one may, of course, insist that the movement has in this respect no uniqueness, that the pragmatism of James and Dewey, for example, was an equally effective and much less rebellion, There is certainly, in James, a similar turning of the philosopher’s attention from speculative system-building to more pressing human concerns: “The stagnant felicity of the absolute’s own perfection moves me as little as I move it.” There is even, at some points, a distinct likeness
between the pragmatic description of knowledge and the contemporary existentialists. Analysis of human experience. For example, there is the well-known description by Heidegger of the function of the “sign” in our everyday experience. Things in our world occur primarily not as indifferently there. Among the things-at-hand, among the shoes and ships and sealing wax, are a class of things that point, and notably things that point as signs. These signs—for instance, in Heidegger's example, the mechanical hand on German buses that showed the direction that the bus was going to turn—are themselves things-at-hand, things have. Their differentia is that, as signs pointing to other things, they not only serve a particular practical use but reveal something of the relations between things and therefore of the nature of things-at-hand in general. Still, however, things-at-hand, interpreted as useful for something not as merely there. Thus signs are doubly pragmatic. First, they are only one class in a universe of things pragmatically interpreted, things-for-sue. Second, the use which they have is to subserve a pragmatic interpretation of the world: to illuminate the general structure of the world in which we live as itself constituted by things-for-use and our use of or concern with them. Within this class of sign-pragmatic, moreover, symbol, expression, and meaning are themselves only subclasses, listed along with “trace, remains, memorial, document, evidence, appearance.” All this looks very like a variation of James's theme of ideas as railroad tickets from one station to another in our experience.
Even in Sartre, though the describes the pragmatic theory of knowledge as "pure subjective idealism," one can find statements which are, though much more complex and subtle than anything in the Jamesian or Deweyan philosophies, not out of harmony, at any rate, with the general tenor of the pragmatic account of knowing as subordinate to doing. But Sartre’s statement of the intrinsic relation between human ends and the perception of nonhuman, mechanical cause-and-effect patterns is, if not pragmatic, something the pragmatists should have said if they had known what they were at.

Here again materialism gives the revolutionary more than he asks for the revolutionary demand not to be a thing but to govern things. It is true that he has acquired, in work, a correct appreciation of freedom. That which has been mirrored for him by his action on things is far removed from the abstract freedom of thought of the Stoic. It manifests itself in a particular situation into which the worker has been thrown by the chance of his birth and the caprice or interest of his master. It appears in an enterprise which he has not started of his own free will and which he will not finish; it is not distinguishable from his very engagement at the heart of that enterprise. He does not have the pure idea of an autonomy that he does not enjoy, but he knows his power, which is proportionate to his action. What he establishes, in the course of the action itself, is that he goes beyond the present state of the material by a precise project of disposing of it in such and such a way and that, this project being identical with the government of means in view of ends. He, in fact, succeeds in
disposing of it as he wished. If he discovers the relation of cause to effect, it is not submitting to it, but in the very act which goes beyond the present state. Thus the relation of cause to effect is revealed in and by the efficacy of an act which is at once project and realization. Without the illumination which that end provides for the present situation, there would be in that situation neither causal connection nor relation of means to end, or rather there would be an indistinct infinity of means and ends, of effects and causes, just as there would be an undifferentiated infinity of circles, ellipses, triangles, and polygons in geometric space. Thus, in work, determinism does not revel a freedom is so far as it is an abstract law of nature but in so far as a human project carves out and illuminates, in the midst of the infinite interaction of phenomena, a certain partial determinism. The organic unity of the project of the worker is the emergence of an end which at first was not in the universe and which manifests itself by the disposition of means with a view to achieving it; and, at the same time, the lower stratum, which subtends these means and is discovered in its turn by their very disposition, is the relation of cause to effect: like the principle of Archimedes, at once support and content of the technique of shipbuilders. In this sense, one can say that the atom was created by the atomic bomb. Thus freedom is discovered only in the act, is one with the act; it is the foundation of the connections and interactions which constitute the internal structure of the act; it never is enjoyed but is revealed in and by its products. But is exists, on the contrary, for engaging one’s self in present action and constructing a future;
it is that by which there is born a future which permits understanding and changing the present. Thus the worker, in fact, learns his freedom from things, but precisely because the things teach him that he is anything in the world but a thing.

Sartre gives in account of the genesis of philosophic systems not unlike Dewey’s description, for instance, in Reconstruction in Philosophy. Philosophies have in the past, according to both authors, served the function of stabilizing the norms by which the ruling class in a society justifies itself; their pretensions to intellectual objectivity or to universal truth have been, in fact, the pretensions of the privileged to self-perpetuation. Sartre’s language is in the tradition of Marx rather than in the Human line, from which Dewey’s talk of custom, habit, and so on appears to stem; but their accounts of the social origin of what purports to be pure speculation are certainly similar. As against such false hypostatization of ideas or ideals, moreover, both of them would in a sense turn the direction of values from past to future: from a crystallization of what has been to an aspiration toward what needs to be. “What, then, in reality, is a value,” says Sartre, “if not the call of that which is not yet?” True, one might say it is present more than future that Dewey turns to. A more important difference, however, in the two accounts lies not in Dewey’s lesser emphasis on the future but in the kind of future to which each writer wants to shift our attention. To turn values from past to future is for Sartre to turn from the sanctioning of bourgeois privilege to a vision that sees beyond the sectional
interests of the society and hence to revolution. For Dewey that change from what were falsely called “eternal principles” of truth and morals is to a sort of spontaneous growth of progressive democracy. Sartre’s solution implies, as far as I can see, a philosophy of perpetual revolution. Dewey’s, seeing beyond the segments of a past society but remaining faithfully within the present one, provides something like a new dogmatism, less precise in outline but just as dogmatic as those it replaces.

For one thing, pragmatism, with its admiration for science and scientific method, in turning philosophic emphasis from the speculative to the factual, from universal to particular, turns more generally than existentialism to facts as such, to the stream of perceptions, in themselves humanly indifferent, which follow continuously through our consciousness and even, by some accounts, constitute it. Pragmatism in this regard continues, though in a different style, the heritage of Locke and Hume, while existentialism substitutes a new and puzzling concrete givenness for the indifferent outer flow of sense-data that constitutes the material for scientific construction. Therefore, it is different kind of existence whose priority to essence is proclaimed by the two philosophies.

One suddenly finds that, with the elimination of a religious superstition and metaphysical ignorance, new values or even old ones have been spontaneously generated out of the bedrock of fact and more fact. So from habit suddenly comes “intelligent habit”, from impulses grow “integrated” impulses,
from each man’s interest in his own activity here and now comes the glorious
growth of a harmonious society in which all work willingly and sweetly
together for the good of all. And at that point pragmatism itself succumbs to a
delusion at least as grievous as those by which Hegel’s pure speculates deceived
themselves; for mere facts will never to all eternity generate values; nor can
science-psychology as little as nuclear physics-by itself generate either good or
evil. The mechanical interconnections of things but the free acts of men upon
those things create, maintain, and constitute values. It is in the dichotomy
between fact and value, between what merely and irrationally but undeniably is,
and what we aspire to, yet what as undeniably is not in what Ibsen’s Brand calls
“the darkly felt split between things as they are and things as they ought to be,”
that human greatness as well as human failure lies. And it is the perception of
that dichotomy that is the central and significant insight of existential
philosophy.

But it is, for the existentialist, only within the confines of that
reality, unwillingly flung into its world, yet freely making a world of it, that
good and evil, importance and unimportance, can originate. Values are created,
in other words, only by the free act of a human agent who takes this or that to be
good or bad, beautiful or ugly, in the light of his endeavor to give significance
and order to an otherwise meaningless world. No positivistic ethics is, as it
vaunts itself to be, descriptive, not normative; it describes men’s value-
judgement as behavioristic psychology described the paths of rats in mazes.
And, although such descriptions may be detailed and accurate, they have, from an existentialist point of view, little to do with the problems of morality—as little as the positivist’s manipulations of artificial symbol systems have to do with the infinite shades and subtleties of meaning of what are deprecatingly called “natural languages”. But for positivism there are only two necessities mathematical and mechanical; or rather, more strictly speaking, there are only, on one side, the empty necessity of logic and, on the other, the compulsion of chance which establishes, statistically, a kind of pseudo-necessity. Freedom there certainly is not, except as the nonsensical babbling of philosophers. Such an orientation in fact or in existence, then, is as much the contrary of existentialism as is the systematic idealism that they both oppose.

Existentialism does not, and then turns to existence in the sense that if finds human values emergent from mere facts, as pragmatism or positivism try to do. It is a reaction as much against the claims of scientific philosophies as it is against the more high-sounding but no more ambitious systems that preceded them. But in that case one may wonder how existentialism differs from other contemporary movements that claim to redeem a lost humanity by rescuing us from, not through, science. There are, notably, two directions for such revolt against the intellectual and spiritual predominance of the scientific temper. As distinct from the simple naïveté of pragmatist and positivist, what all these writers have to say against our faith, our philosophy, or educe, or our political unwisdom is entirely convincing. But against both sorts
of remedy-the religious and the metaphysical—there are at least two objections in the light of which existentialism appears, at any rate, a plausible alternative.

Faith is not to be had by fiat but only by much more devious and difficult, and certainly unpredictable, ways. And the same holds for metaphysical “knowledge,” which is Blanchard’s brilliant expositions to the contrary notwithstanding—as deeply based on faith as is any supernatural knowledge. The framers of our Constitution conceived, some of them at any rate, that they were founding a government on the eternal troughs of reasons. To us who have lost the Newtonian-Lockean scientific basis for their principles, our belief in those same principles has become an act of faith, not an insight of reason—of faith in reason itself, perhaps—but nevertheless an act by which we believe, not an argument by which we know. The world-views, whether Thomistic or Cartesian, in the light of which these truths could be demonstrated and conveyed like mathematical theorems to docile pupils, are dead and gone; and, however deeply we may believe in the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, we can neither prove its universal truth nor persuade if we could prove.

That is not a specifically existentialist objection. And, of course, for some existentialists, like the Catholic Marcel a return to faith in a Christian God is a possible and even necessary way out of our present moral chaos. What an atheistic existentialist like Sartre asserts, however, of either the religious or the metaphysical solution is that we have here only another endeavour, like the positivistic and as fruitless, to found values not in free human actions but in
objective facts. True, the facts this time are not sense-data but supernatural mysteries or eternal truths of reason. Yet they still are facts, which we discover existing objectively outside ourselves and on which we can rely, in blissful dependence, to guide our actions toward the good and the right. So both these attitudes, equally with materialistic or positivistic theories, exemplify what Sartre calls “the spirit of seriousness”: they seek to escape our ultimate, inexplicable, and terrible responsibility for the values that we live by, by giving them a cosmic rather than a human, a necessary rather that a libertarian, source.

How existentialism fares in its endeavour to save us at once from all these false idols we shall try, in the succeeding chapters, to discover. We shall find in it, I think-in some of its proponents at least-a brilliant statement of the tragic dilemma if not of man, at least of man in our time. And we shall find in it, also, relentless, even extravagant, honesty in the rejection of easy solutions or apparent solutions to that dilemma. Whether such honesty itself, heroically maintained against every intellectual temptation, can in its splendid, self-righteous isolation, of its own force prove the solution of its own problem—that is at first, and perhaps will be to the end, an open question.

In the present study a humble attempt has been made to analyse existential dimensions in the works of Thomas Hardy. Hardy’s philosophy of life as portrayed in his major novels has been examined in detail giving examples and contextual references. On the whole this dissertation presents Hardy’s philosophy and existential tho
References

   p. 01.
2. Ibid, p. 4
3. Ibid, p. 3.
4. Ibid, p. 4