Romanticism acknowledged a trinity of God, Nature and Man in the cosmic scheme. Modern Scientific determinism has uprooted faith in an unperceived divinity. To an agnostic of the transition, the visual seems to be more real than the unseen celestial spirit. Two forces, natural and human, are the main components of the universal design. These two prime factors are viewed differently according to individual faith and experience, as unified manifestation of one common force, or two different entities engaged in constant encounters. This is the basic premise of Hardy's monistic inclination and Frost's dualistic outlook.

Hardy's is a monist, a follower of the philosophy of unity. The universe is taken as a unified whole. He reckons an insentient cosmic force of which man is but a helpless segment of the whole, a mere puppet in the artistry of the scheme. 'Part is mine of the general Will'. ('He Wonders About Himself' CPH, p.510).

In the cosmic design, he perceives, time and space are but parts of one vast, elaborate system. As is well-known, Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy influenced Hardy.
A particular passage in Schopenhauer's *The World As Will and Idea* significantly attracted and impressed T. Hardy.

As the magic lantern shows many different pictures, which are all made visible by one and the same light, so in all the multifarious phenomena which fill the world together or throng after each other as events, only one will manifests itself, of which everything is the visibility, the objectivity, and which remains unmoved in the midst of this changes, it alone is the thing-in itself; all objects are manifestations, or to speak the language of Kant phenomena.

Hardy's final choice of an apt term to denote nature is 'the Immanent Will', a mindless power, all-pervading and omnipotent. Man is an inconsequential part of a supreme power predestined by the fatalism of Will. In his Journal entry of April 1890, Hardy writes, that "mankind ... possibly will be viewed as members of one corporal frame".

Thus do the mindless minions of the spell
In mechanized enchantment sway and show
A Will that wills above the will of each
Yet but the will of conjunctively,
A fabric of excitement web of rage
That permeates as one stuff the wailing whole.

(*The Dynasts* I, 1, 5, p. 567)

To Hardy, the whole natural world is bound by a strong organic unity. The universe taken as a whole, all the world and space rolled into one mass, presents as 'The Universe of unity! Like Spinoza, Hegel, Crabbe
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and Shelley, Hardy believes in the view of life as one of unity. It may be a distributive unity, which does not totally obliterate the idiosyncrasies of the integral parts. Man is part of the natural world and every act intricately woven into the web of the Immanent will - Ernest Brennake has effectively traced Hardy's Monism to Schopenhauer and says,

"Hardy's World view is also idealistic Monism, is evidenced, by the frequency with which the epithet, "Immanent" is applied to the will ...... Hardy usually employs..... the term "Immanent" because he is primarily interested in excluding every conception of an exterior force essentially different from the universe, and out side of It." 2

Hardy instinctively regards man as a part of the universal system, differing in no fundamental tendencies from the celestial stars, terrestrial animals and plants. In the poem "The High-School Lawn" (CPH, p. 812), there is a descriptive passage in which a group of children clad in bright coloured clothes dance on the green lawn like flowers strewn on a green carpet. The lawn, the children and the bright colour are shown as a single homogenous grouping suggestive of unity.

Sleeves of chrome hue;
Fluffed frills of white,
Dark bordered light;
Such shimmerings through
Trees of emerald green are eyed.

("The High-School Lawn" 11 4-8, CPH, p. 812).
In a letter Hardy says, 'The discovery of the law of evolution which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole of conscious, collectively.' In this instance Hardy has sought symbols consistent with his monistic philosophy.

The Will or the Cosmic Design assumes superiority over intelligence. A total subordination to the Will is seen in the poem "Near Lanivet" (CPH, p. 436) "Pedigree" (CPH, p. 460) and "Honey Moon Time At an Inn" (CPH, p. 514-16) in all these poems, the mood, tone, setting and the components of the poems are synchronized and are integrated segments of an essential whole. 'The evanescence of human life, its withered countenance and its unalterable end are symbolized in the waning Moon-image and in the opacity of the shiftless vision of a dolphin's eye.

The uncurtained panes of my window-square let in the watery light
Of the moon in its old age;
And green-rhumed clouds were hurrying past
Where mute and cold it globed
Like a drifting dolphin's eye seen through a lapping wave.

("The Pedigree" ll 4-7, CPH, pp. 460-61)
Hardy's monistic philosophy visualises nature as omnipotent, arbitrary and autonomous. Its governing laws are necessity and determinism. "Neither chance, nor purpose governs the universe, but necessity." Hardy holds the existence as a lawful but purposeless process, everything moving on an inevitable course towards an end. "The Immanent, that urgeth all, Rules what may or may not befall!" (The Dynasts, I, II, 5, p. 87). Men cannot swerve the 'impulsion by incognizance of the Will'. Nature is perceived as an unconscious power wielding absolute superiority over intelligence. To Hardy she is intransigent, dispassionate, a mechanical force with neither intelligence nor conscious power. In "The Last Chrysanthemum" (CPH, p. 149) an untimely bloom and beauty is wasted in the cold sapless winter. The season of sunshine and warmth are over. The flower remains shivering in turbulent tempests. The poet remarks through the flower lost in a trance of "dreaming willessness", "Yet it is but one mask of many worn. / By the Great Face behind".

In Hardy's view, nature is aimless as she is unconscious. Therefore a pessimistic outlook is most appropriate. Nature's callousness leaves a trail of
"thwarted purposing", unfulfilled dreams 'where her creations groan'. The pain and misery that human beings feel are not inflicted by some vengeful deity, they are the consequences of a groping nature. Hardy cannot see any conscious intelligence at the helm, the injustice of uncompensated pain destroys hope and faith in nature's holy plan. Hardy notes in a pessimistic tone, "Too fragrant was life's early bloom,/ Too tart the fruit it brought" ("Shut Out That Moon" CPH, p. 216). Nature in its aimless ramble strews 'blisses about man's pilgrimage as pain" ("Hap" CPH, p.4). It is a passive, unaggressive indifference. There is no open fury or hostility. The supreme power is an 'unmaliced unimpassioned, nescient Will!' (The Dynasts, II, VI, 5, p. 424). Such indifference does not provoke retaliation in the sufferer. Man is a luckless, chanceless, tragic victim.

The theme of death or denial of life is another salient feature of Hardy's monistic pessimism. The constant conflicts between the fine potentialities of man and the indifference of an unconscious universe gradually annihilates life's ebb, leaving only a conviction of an unvariable end.
It says that life would signify
A thwarted purposing;
That we come to live, and are called to die.
Yes, that's the thing
In fall, in spring,
That Yell'ham says:—
'Life offers—to deny!'  

("Yell'ham Wood's Story," ll 8-14, CPH, p. 298)

Hardy is acutely aware of the universality of change and waste. Universal decay and ruin are envisaged in several poems. He is constantly preoccupied with the theme of evanescence as the principle manifestation of change.


Death - the great obliterator of earthly woes and injustice of life is projected as one of the alternatives for resolving the unsupportable burden of existence.
The transitoriness of existence on an alien universe calls for an early release. Man is a helpless victim in the mechanically motivated universe. The purposeless design of things is unconcerned with petulant complaints of man-kind. Birth is followed by inglorious youth, and infirm old age. In a world without providence conditions in nature frustrate all human endeavors. Nature's blind gropings foresees the meek and strong, gentle and the powerful of her creations alike,

Black is night's cope;
But death will not appal
One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope.

("In Tenebris" I 11 21-24, CPH, p. 167)

Monists are generally determinists and often pessimists. They could view the passing scene only as an immense tragedy. Like pantheism, which it resembles in the essential doctrine of unity, monism nourishes a fatalistic mood, "her primal doom pursues her, faultful, fatal is she ever", ("The Lacking Sense" CPH, pp.116-3). Hardy tries to explain his pessimism in "Shut Out That Moon" (CPH, p. 216), "Autumn in King's Hintock Park" (CPH, p. 215), and "In Tenebris" III (CPH, p. 169)
I had learnt that the world was a welter of futile doing ("In Tenebris", CPH, p. 169).\footnote{6}

Frost perceived dichotomy in the scheme of things. The enigmatic nature and humanity stood on either side of the well-chosen middle-path of the poet. The multiple facets of nature led him to consider the doctrines of a philosophy which acknowledged pluralism. Where Hardy perceives a unity in the design, Frost finds a separateness. Man and nature, inner and outer, are found distinct, isolated and disunited. As he says, 'There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed' ("There Are Roughly Zones", PRF, p. 305).

The barrier which Frost visualises between the natural and the human is maintained continuously. Nature will not let man mingle with her completely, the oneness and unity the romantics celebrated is cleared irrevocably. Man adds to this eternal barrier other limitations, conditioned by science and technology. But man is not intimidated by barriers,
he accepts them as a form of cosmic law. Realizing, understanding and finally accepting, man continues his existence on the other side of nature. "Mending Wall" (PRF, p. 33), "The Most of It", (PRF, p. 338) "Two Look at Two", (PRF, p. 229) "The Demiurge's Laugh" (PRF, p. 24) "An Old Man's Winternight" (PRF, p. 108) "Once By Pacific" (PRF, p. 250) "Come In" (PRF, p. 334) "Wood-Pile" (PRF, p. 101), and a number of other poems deal with the theme of existence of a barrier between man and nature, thereby insisting on their separateness,

When they were halted by a tumbled wall
With barbed-wire binding. They stood facing this,
Spend what onward impulse they still had
In one last look the way they must not go,

('Two Look At Two' 11 7 - 10, PRF, pp. 229-30).

The barriers are varied and in their diversity. Man finds the kaleidoscopic moods of nature, hostile, mocking, indifferent and responsive. (The various types of barriers have been discussed in Chapter VI - Human Situation.)

The two entities, man and nature generally remain separate. However, a constant interaction between them goes on. Such interactions are as varied as the barriers they cross, and the intensity of the interaction is also
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a variant. The enigmatic nature lets man into her secrets in the most unexpected moments, thereby establishing her supremacy unquestioned. Various degrees of interaction, each unique in a particular way, are seen in poems such as "Two Look at Two" (*PRF*, pp. 229 - 30) "Tree At My Window" (*PRF*, pp. 251-52).

Often the presence of trees in Frost, signifies the self's, uncertain moment of panic the loss of rational powers, and the momentary hypnotic effect. An absolute silence exists as nature in the deep dark wood's beauty mesmerise the poet to forget "his promises" to mortal life. A passing moment of fascination holds him at the edge of the line separating him from the dark forces of nature ("Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening", *PRF*, p. 224). Nature is persistent in enticing man into her deep dark recesses. Thus a thrush music of a twilight hour, lures the poet in "Come In" (*PRF*, p. 334). Each time nature, succeeds in bringing the poet to the threshold. But the keen-eyed poet holds back. In "Two Look At Two", a rare occasion of warm reciprocation is extended, and the disparate forces meet in harmony,
Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from,
"This must be all", It was all. Still they stood,
At great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlocked-for favour
Had made them certain earth returned their love.

("Two Look At Two" 11 38 - 42, PEP, pp. 229-30).

Nature mocks man's feeble efforts to cross the barriers in a bid to conquer nature. The limitless traits in man defies her laws. Man is prevented from reaching the ultimate cosmic truth. Man is relentless in his quest, though his repeated failures try to discourage him, and subdue his spirit. He views the unknown fact as the abode of his misery, and his seeking is an attempt to find, a lasting solution to all earthly woes. Nature teases him, she bestows a momentary glimpse as in "For Once, Then Something" (PEP, p. 225), 'Once when trying with chin against a well-curb./ I discerned, as I thought beyond the picture'. But it vanishes, as it appeared suddenly. 'Blotted and blurred'. In "The Demiurge's Laugh", nature mockingly lets man realize the impassable barriers and the completeness of her seclusion.

A sleepy sound, but mocking half,
As of one who utterly couldn't care
The Demon arose from his wallow laugh,
Brushing the dirt from his eye as he went;
And well I knew what the Demon meant.

("The Demiurge's Laugh" 11 8-12, PEP, pp. 24-25).
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In a similar defiant mood, the cow in "The Cow in Apple Time" crosses the barriers and tastes the forbidden fruit of freedom. Some instinct in her compels her

'To make no more of a wall than an open gate, /And think no more of wall-builders than fools.' ("The Cow in Apple Time", PRF, pp. 124 - 25). But the freedom and defiance are short-lived. She flies leaving the worm-eaten apples half-bitten.

Man, residing on the other side of the fence is allowed to wander free in his imagination. But the moment of enlightenment evades him. nearer, yet apart, nature maintains her distance. 'We dance round in a ring and suppose, / But the secret sits in the middle and knows'("The Secret Site" PRF, p. 362). Man's feeble efforts in having a harmonious relation with nature are a crushing defeat breaks his heart as in "Reluctance."

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end.

("Reluctance" 11 19-23, PRF, pp. 29-30).

In "Desert Places" (PRF, p. 296) and in "The Vantage Point" (PRF, p. 17) Frost experiments with a cautious
intermingling of the disparate units of the cosmic scheme. But the integrity of the single self remains undisturbed. The interaction of subject with its vast environment is but brief. It is only a momentary illusion and no irrefutable evidence leading to a metaphysical monism. Subjects and objects remain unruffled even after the mingling. In "Desert Places" (PRF, p. 296) a white blanket of snow obliterates all the differences. Under the veil of benighted snow, everything is swathed in a whiteness, all other objects merging into oblivion. The theme of 'outer' and 'inner' weather is treated in a darker mood. The correspondence between the two forces, man and snow, is effected by an appositive, man's loneliness and blanker whiteness of benighted snow, the two terms in juxtaposition are subsequently marshalled into the analogical structure of the outer and inner 'weather'. An exchange of 'Outer' with 'inner' happens in the effective closure. 'I have it in me so much nearer home/ To scare myself with my own desert places.' The outer becomes the inner. The poet recollecting the void within himself ('his own desert places') leaves the non-human world of 'Stars' behind. In that very remembrance the momentary unity is displaced by dualism, the self and outer world, humanity and nature remain
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secluded. In "The Vantage Point", the point he chooses, a strategically located spot to remain in isolation and to meditate, over the opposition of nature and man. From this "Vantage Point", the poet indulges in deep meditation over the eternal mystery of life and death, past and present, dwellings of living men and the graves of dead. But when such mystic pondering become tiresome, he turns to let the warm sunlight in from the hillside. The smell of the plant and the sight of an ant crater revive the living present for him. Here again at the moment of losing his identity in his contemplation, he turns back sharply to the pulsating life on earth. Something in him is distinctly against mergings and unifications. 'If tired of trees I seek again mankind' ("The Vantage Point", PRP, p. 17).

The poem "Tree At My Window" (PRP, 251-52) is an illustration of a interaction between 'enclosed self' and 'the weathered tree', symbolizing man and nature. The tree slips into human phase, dreams and speaks. The 'human self' is transformed into a tree, swept and tossed. The first stanza of the poem initiates the relationship. 'But let there never be curtain drawn/ Between you and me'. The second stanza introduces a bold metaphor to characterize the tree as 'vague
dream-head lifted out of the ground" in which the tree gains a certain enlarged nightmare feeling. The tree is treated anthropomorphically. 'Not all your light tongues talking aloud/ could be profound'. In the third stanza of similitude is achieved through syntactic parallels. "But tree I have seen you taken and tossed/ And all but lost'. The terminologies are further interchanged, man 'was taken and swept' like tree, and the tree, after 'talking aloud' in the previous stanza, has 'seen' the man's conditions.

The interaction is not like romantic intermingling of 'a deeper something interfused'. It is only an arbitrary naturalizing the 'inner' and the humanizing 'the outer'. It is not a complete one as the poet permits only the lowering of his 'sash' and not drawing of the 'curtains' between nature and the 'self'. A middle path is reached where the tree is less of a tree and more human, and man more of passive object, taken and swept.'

The last stanza works towards an effective closure to the poem, 'your head so much concerned with outer,/ Mine with inner weather'. The comparison stated in the first stanza, ends in the last, where 'fate' is imagined
to be putting the seal on it as if the fulfilment of the analogy is something ordained and beyond the speaker's control.

In the pluralistic scheme, the differential between the integrated parts is maintained. The twin principal components of Frost's dualistic philosophy, nature and man, are never permitted to merge completely. A mock retaliation is staged against nature in "Stars" (PEP, p. 9). "An Old Man's Winter Night" (PEP, p. 108) shows a close transaction between the two contexts, the old man and the things which constitute his immediate surrounding. The old man's physical existence, is conditioned by the circumambient objects, which are inseparable. In the personification of the night, the person and the object are shifted to a middle ground. ("All out-of-doors', and 'empty room'). Man and outer surroundings are interrelated in the activities of the night.... 'The log that shifted with a jolt/ Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted.' But in the final analysis, it is suggested that it is only an emblematic world well outside the human sphere, a presence not deeply concerned with man. The romantic bias of unity is rejected. Nature, manifested in the starlit night reveals everything without a sense of
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intimacy it remains as an alien presence unmindful of man's destiny. 7

The concept of an insentient, unconscious brute nature compels the poets to search for alleviation. Their search has taken them into the arduous and complicated labyrinths of philosophical contemplations. Hardy's Odyssey takes him on the hazardous path of monism. His philosophy of monistic unity denies creativity and autonomy. The analogy which Hardy vainly tries to establish between man and nature is not for Frost divinely sanctioned. Frost views it as being continuously created by man's own imagination. The analogy, when achieved, has always been an act of will, and in anticipation of and in accordance with the cosmic scheme. The very attempt of unifying diverse entities is to Frost a defiance against nature's lack of purpose. Frost's philosophy reflects George Santayana's views,

The universe, apart from us, is a chaos, but it may be made a cosmos by our efforts and in our own minds. The laws of the events, apart from us, are inhuman and irrational, but in the sphere of human activity they may be dominated... We are a part of the blind energy behind nature, but by virtue of that energy we impose our purposes on the part of nature which we constitute a control. We can turn from, the stupefying contemplation of an alien universe to the building of our own house. 8
Frost's pluralism permits creativity and gives an impetus to view nature in a better perspective. The deserted heath does not remain desolate for long. Spring reclaims and revives life. Out of the rubble comes the seedling, a nascent life and a new hope for humanity to continue.

Slave to a spring time passion for the earth,
How love burns through the Putting in the Seed,
On through the watching for that early birth
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,
The sturdy seedling with arched body comes
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.

("Putting In the Seed" 11 9-14, PRF, pp. 123-24).
can improve his lot in the incomprehensible cosmic scheme.

Hardy discerns a glimmer of hope creeping slowly into the dismal picture. The universe may be vast, impersonal and terrifying, but life is implicit in it. The despair of pessimistic ponderings is relieved by his melioristic visions of mild hope. The ultimate power is visualized as an ambivalent power—a just and benevolent order, and also as a malicious, relentless and indifferent fate. If nature 'gropes' with her 'sightless orbs', plodding her way dead-reckoning and in 'darkness of affliction' ("The Lacking Sense" CPH, 116 - 18), she also manifests some motion or spirit, responsive to man.

The universe is not stationary, it is in a state of flux. Nature, which is a part of the universe also changes as a consequence. In Hardy's concept, man is endowed with consciousness. If perception is to be found in humanity, Hardy visualizes it to spread and gradually inform the General Will, till it 'fashion all things fair'. ("Consciousness the Will informing till it fashion all things fair!" (The Dynasts,
After scene, p. 706). Nature may be intimidating, but humanity refuses to be discouraged. Rays of light penetrate into the realm of a hopeless gloom.

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced
With loving kindness fully blown.

("A Plaint to Man" 11 28 - 31, CPH, pp. 325 - 26)

In Hardy's impression, men are nobler than the 'unconscious cosmos which crushes them. Hardy's hopes for future are in the influence of human reason over the evolution of man-kind. The view of nature as being an unconscious driving force is not new. But Hardy says in Life

I think the view of the unconscious force, as gradually 'becoming conscious i.e., that consciousness is creeping further back towards the origin of forces had never (so far as I know) been advanced before The Dynasts appeared.

The poem, "Life and Death At Sunrise"
(CPH, pp. 730 - 31) reaffirms the eternal process of life and the stability of the insentient landscape against the mortality of the human. The present may be desolate, but if one waits with courage, the future may be bright. 'Looking forward to the spring/One
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puts up with anything.' ("Before and After Summer" 
CPH, pp. 333-34). The life-force, even in the lower 
order of creation like 'snow-drop', or a 'prim-rose'
is compulsive. Winter may leave them bare - But 
Spring season inspires them to bloom. 'that life 
will not be blazed off/without rude reason till hope 
is dead', ("At Castle Boterel", CPH, pp. 351-52).

Frost knows that winter death has never tried 
the earth with any success. The heaped snow melts. 
Out of decay life bursts forth in all its might. 
It makes the 'settled snow-bank steam', bursting 
forth into the poet's narrow-stall, ("To the Thawing 
Wind" PFR, p. 11) and giving pleasure in the orchard 
white, ("A Prayer In Spring", PFR, p. 12) 'happy bees', 
'the fruited bough of juniper', the June grass, and 
blackening heads of clover. The ice thaws letting 
'ten million silver lizards out of snow' ("A Hill 
Side Thaw", PFR, pp. 237 - 38). As Howe Waggoner 
has observed in a very sensitive commentary life 
itself is a product of the death current,

Though the inanimate universe, seems to be "running 
down" life, which pushes up the stream against the 
death-current, is a product of the very current 
against which it struggles. Life breasting the 
current of entropy can only be described as a part 
of the stream turning back on itself. 10
Frost's "Desert Places" emphasizes the same point. Here a desolate winter scene unfolds. Snow, symbolic of death and annihilation, wraps everything into oblivion. But when it reaches the climax of a hopeless despair, the poet abruptly turns back to concentrate on a few objects which promise life, the return of the spring and the resurrection of the frozen field.

'The ground almost covered in snow, / But a few weeds and stubble showing last' ("Desert Places" PRF, p. 296). Man has need to nature, though he should never make the mistake of crossing the wall into her pasture. Natural elements should not be badly treated ("A Brook In the City", PRF, p. 231).

Frost's dualistic philosophy allows man to attain better rapport with nature by his cardinal qualities of acceptance, courage and resistance. Though fear is inherent in man, 'that life is of no avail', he braves the tremendous forces of nature. Brown in "Brown's Descent" apparently knows this unwritten law properly. He takes the long-way home rather than attempt a two-mile climb over ice. Here resistance would have been fatal. 'He bowed with grace to natural law' ("Brown's Descent" PRF, p. 305). The
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code of behaviour in such instances has to be a matter of non-interference with the phenomena and processes of the natural order. Another instance of simple acceptance is the brood of young Lorens of "Blueberries". They never rebel against nature. Stoically they adjust themselves and adapt to their surroundings. 'Just taking what Nature is willing to give' ("Blueberries", PRF, pp. 59 - 62).

In each of the images, the road, the unharvested area, the swamp, and the wood-pile, the witness-tree, and spring-pools, Frost sees a vision of nature, amenable if accepted on her own terms. Frost knows in nature one can only hope to have intimations of 'something' ("For Once, Then, Something" PRF, p. 225) which can be embodied finally within the natural universe itself. Frost seeks only a momentary clarification of life against the confusion. For the rest he is ready,

To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end.

("Reluctance" 11 21-24, PRF, pp. 29-30).

But it is not an acceptance of cowardly passivity. It is a prudent principle. The ideas of
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will, awareness and free choice are fundamental to his vision. Frost also knows that absolute harmony in nature is impossible. 'Of Ceasing-to-Question-What-Doesn't-Concern-Us', ("Too Anxious for River", PRF, pp. 379 - 80). Somewhere in the complex labyrinth of nature, there is some principle that denies an all out oneness with her, or any human attempt to impose limits on it. 'Nature within her inmost self divides/ To trouble men with having to take sides'. ("From Iron", PRF, p. 468).

Thus the swinger of birches swings between earth and sky, despair and hope. Hardy's hope is that 'Twice no one dies', ("Tenebris" I CPH, p. 167). With loving-kindness operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the medium of free will, the life force will go on. Hardy and Frost's final message is that the bleakest of lives can still be sources of happiness; even if 'nature is diminished', and old thrush can sing of 'some blessed hope' ("The Darkling Thrush" CPH, p. 150). Frost finds even in the chaotic universe a meaning and purpose that could lead to a sanguine vision.
We may doubt the just proportion of good to ill. 
There is much in nature against us. But we forget: 
Take nature altogether since time began, 
Including human nature, in peace and war, 
And it must be a little more in favour of man, 
Say a fraction of one percent at the very least, 
Or our number living wouldn't be steadily more, 
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased.


Thus the above analysis leads to the conclusion
that the poets have not attempted to evolve a systematic
philosophy. They are not philosophers in the
conventional sense. They have repeatedly disclaimed
allegiance to any philosophy. Hardy has declared in
his 'General Preface', 'Positive views on the whence
and wherefore of Things have never been advanced by
this pen as a consistent philosophy'. 11 The poet's
creative period had spread over four decades,
and their concepts/views had undergone several revisions
as influenced by the intellectual fervour, anxiety
and emotional turmoil of the period. Therefore, it
is not possible to trace a pattern of a 'coherent
scientific theory of the universe'. In the Preface
to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper, Frost
observes that he and Robinson, 'should hate to
be read for any theory upon which we might be
Critical acclaim as to their stature as originators of a systematic epistemology remains divided. Some critics endow them with philosophical visions of Wordsworth, while others classify them as 'Spiritual drifters.' Margaret Drabble does not find Hardy a professional philosopher, as he is 'quite illogical.' According to her Hardy is most convinced when the speculations are gloomiest.

Probably anticipating such diverse and conflicting opinions, Hardy himself tries to define the nature of his philosophy. In his preface to Poems of the Past and Present he says, 'Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change.' Frost's frequent uses of phrases such as 'a way of grappling with life', 'a little voyage of discovery', 'a way out of something' reflect his prime concern as a quest toward a new insight on the strength of experience. Their general temperamental approach to the universe forms their philosophy.

Hardy views life as a thing to be put up with, rather
than a seat for existence, Pain and death are inherent ("To An Unborn Pauper Child", CPH, pp. 127-8).
His philosophy is his realistic reading of life. Frost's on the other hand is a practical philosophy.
He distrusted systems and systematic way of philosophising. He says in a letter, 'I'm afraid of too much structure, some violence is always done to the wisdom, you build a philosophy out of."
Frost is not a mere realist like Hardy. He is generally aware of the differences between his poetic projection and the actual scene. His use of 'as if' ('It looked as if a night of dark intent was coming,.......'
"Once by the Pacific" PRF, p. 250 italics are mine), and 'as 't were'("Into My Own" PRF, p. 5) are suggestive of a reflection of his inner self. His need to transmute the fear of having 'desert places' of his own ("Desert Places" PRF, p. 296) an inner barren world find expression in the blank scenes in his poetry.
'A blind whiteness of benighted snow/ With no expression, nothing to express' (Ibid). The differences between the perceived and the projected forms the basis of modern epistemological problem.
Their observations are disparate and inconclusive. They are lonely ponderings over the question of man's relation to the natural world and the flux of time. They are not co-ordinated metaphysical meditations stretching beyond the current experience. The fugitive impressions belong to passing moments. Hence, it is futile to attempt a consistent philosophy out of their works. Their views are tentative swinging between affirmation and negation. Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" (CPH, p. 190) shows an instance of guarded affirmation and a tentative belief in progress. It is his earnest desire to join the thrush in its belief. In this yearning is the suggestion of an affirmative approach. This is delicately balanced against a background of deadness, blindness and despair. The thrush seems to know about 'some blessed Hope', some hidden spirit in the frail little gaunt bird arises as sap in the twig. Life and hope surge against a darkling landscape. It is in a way an invisible instinct towards self-delight.

Similarly, Frost's affirmative attitude is projected against a background of negation. In "The "est-fittnning Brook", (PRP, pp. 257-60), the
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flow of existence moves inexorably towards decay.
The brook symbolizing existence, 'that sadly runs away,
'To fill the abyss's void with emptiness'. It is,
'the universal cataract of death.' That spends to nothingness'.
But a small pebble turns the complexion of the situation,
saving it from an existential despair. A strange
resistance makes the water thrown back toward the
source. The husband views it as a positive sign from
nature, 'that life is indomitable'. In "The Onset"
(PRFF, p. 226) 'I know that winter death has never
tried the earth but failed'. Hope emerges out of
a bleak wintry desolation. A laodicean hope is
expressed at the end of "Our Hold On the Planet"
(PRFF, p. 349). The affirmation is weak and minimal
following a guarded logic stressing the 'just proportion
of good to ill' in the encounter between man and
nature. 'And it must be a little more in favour of
man, / Say a fraction of one percent at the very
least'. It is merely 'a fraction of one percent'.
Even though the affirmation is not exultant and
exuberant, it certainly is a positive attitude to
life. His positivism is a product of his pragmatism,
an acceptance of life on its own terms. Frost's
pragmatic inclination is clearly seen in "Hyla Brook" (PRF, p. 119) The well-known lines of "Mowing" (PRF, p. 1218) also illustrate Frost's pragmatic outlook, "It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,/ Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:

Negativism is expressed in several poems depicting the powerlessness of meek individuals against the mighty forces of nature. Man's alienated state, according to Hardy, has originated from a weak impulse. An impulse which was

... benumbed at birth
By momentary chance or vile, has missed its hope to be

Embodied on the earth;
And undervoicings of this loss to man's futurity
May wake regret in me.


Hardy projects an utterly hopeless negative assessment of the existential laws in "To an unborn pauper Child". (CPH, pp. 127-8) 'Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make,/ Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake'. Hardy's monistic doctrines do not possess a viability to expand into new horizons marked by human independence.
Man as a part of the cosmic design is subjected to the Will of the great Immanent Will. 18

Frost's poems of affirmation are not as convincing as his other poems with the theme of negation. An unequivocal stark declaration appears in "Bereft" (PRF, p. 251). "Word I was in my life alone,/ word I had no one left but God". The denial of hope is absolute without any moral or spiritual pretensions. Faith in a benevolent nature is shown as nullified in "Storm Fear" (PRF, pp. 9 - 10) where the world in the grip of a terrible storm represents a protean malefic force at work and man as a fugitive struggling against its fury. 19 'And my heart owns a doubt'. The speaker is devoid of hope, Man's simplest dreams of security and comfort are mercilessly tossed aside, as the brute force becomes active. Here and in "Ghost House" (PRF, pp. 5 - 6) The speaker envisions nature's relentless scourge of humanity. In "Ghost House" a 'comforting' bar is obliterated by the unabated destructive mood of nature.

The epistemological perspective projected by Hardy and Frost is, in reality a confluence of several philosophical trends. 20 Agnosticism and positivism,
pessimism meliorism existentialistic determinism
and, hopeless negation and scientific humanism are
mingled in their ultimate visions. DARWINISM
domines Hardian philosophic-views. His poems
"In a Wood" (CPH, pp. 64 - 65) and "Drinking Song"
(CPH, pp. 905 - 8) and novels Return of the Native,
and The Woodlanders project the struggle for
supremacy in nature.

Frost, on the other hand, is troubled by the concept
of natural selection propounded by Charles Darwin.
He opposes Darwin and defends the Christian faith in
God's creation. His poetry reflects the conflicting
attitude towards nature as shaped by religious faith
and scientific doctrine. On the one hand nature is
looked upon as a battle ground, hostile and indifferent
("Once By the Pacific", PRF, p. 250), ("Design"PRF, p. 302)
("Census Taker" PRF, p. 174); on the other it is the
expression of the glory of God and the firmament
considered as a palpable evidence of a divinely,
ordained universe. ("A Prayer in Spring" PRF, p. 12)
("Rose Pogonia" PRF, p. 13) ("Pasture" PRF, p. 1).
Frost has effectively given expression to such opposing
concepts by varying the tone and mood. His romantic
affinity is figured in a belief that it is impossible to achieve a harmonious relationship between man and nature and that the romantic concept of a trinity of God, Nature and man an illusion. The poem "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight" (PRF, p. 266), illustrates Frost's ambiguous presentation of totally dissimilar views. It throws light on the Victorian controversy between evolutionary theory and Deistic faith. In the third stanza the ambiguity is predominant.

And if men have watched a long time
And never seen sun-smitten slime
Again come to life and crawl off,
we must not be too ready to scoff.

("Sitting By a Bush In Broad Sun Light" ll 9-12, PRF, p. 266).

It can be interpreted as a defense of the scientific theory of spontaneous generation. The very absence of a recurrence of the phenomenon of a tiny spark coming alive from the sun introduces the ambiguity. Opposed to this view is creation, as God inspired miracle in which Adam is created by God from a dust particle. In the second stanza Frost says, 'There was one time and only the one/ when dust really took in the sun'. Evocatively it refers to the time
when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The fourth stanza elaborates God's pledge to Moses, 'God once declared He was true..... Then descended of old on the bush'. Again in the fifth and final stanza a further reference is made, 'God once spoke to people by name. The sun once imparted its flame'. The analogies represent two conflicting views, the scientific and the Christian faith.

Their philosophic ideas are not fundamentally different. But the ultimate vision into which their philosophies lead are different. There is a similarity of view in holding the universe as remote and neutral. Frost does not compromise his beliefs and convictions. He has survived the ravages of two great wars and other ills. His long life illustrates his pragmatic positive approach to nature. He has nurtured hope in the midst of despair, courage in the face of dark bleak visions and resistance against the onslaught of time. He has seen all that Hardy had seen and felt, but he is free from a total bleak nihilistic vision. He has analysed the human situation in a constructive affirmative way. Hardy's views are characterised
by nescience and a sense of helplessness. Therefore Hardy's visions are not of an unrestrained optimism and faith in benevolent universe. His is a guarded a cautious mild hope of 'Meliorism'. He is restricted and restrained by the narrow range of monism which he chose as the most widely accepted philosophical view. The mindless, impercipient Immanent will does not inspire unrestricted hope. It is a conditional working of consciousness. Frost does not present a tragic, hopeless surrender. His is the strategic policy of the Drumlin Woodchuck's canny adjustment. It is an ambivalent view of nature as sinister and benevolent. He holds the view that our mental acts constitute the world of our experience. Hardy's note of 1901, sums up their idiosyncratic approach.

"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 this own experience."
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2. Ernest Brenneck; T. Hardy, Universe (Boston, 1924), p. 66.
   cf. (a) Margaret Drabble also expresses a similar opinion, "Hardy was all the world and space as one vast system, all in a sense alive. Perhaps the simplest way to summarise his thinking in a phrase would be call him a pessimistic pantheist." (b) Margaret Drabble, The Genius of T. Hardy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p. 144.
   (b) Tom Paulin says; in T. Hardy The Poetry of Perception 'Like Shelley, Hardy was a monist - this is the philosophy of unity' which Shelley mentions in a passage Bagehot quotes from his essay 'One life'.
   The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of metaphysics is that of unity; Nothing exists but as it is perceived'. And like Crabbe in "The Lover's Journey" both Shelley and Hardy apply this idea to sexual relationship as well as to man's relation to the universe:


4. Life, p. 337.

5. The unconscious aspect of nature appear in a number of poems like "The Lacking Sense", "The sightless are her orbs" (CPH, pp. 116-118), "The Mother Mourns", "For Reason is rank in my temples, /And Vision unruly", (CPH, pp. 111-113). "The Sleep-Worker", "As one, who held in trance, has laboured long" (CPH, pp. 121-29) and finally in The Dynasts:
   Thus doth the Great foresightless mechanise
   In blank entrancement now as evermore
   Its ceaseless artistry in circumstance
   (The Dynasts, After scene, p. 702.)
6. Hardy explains his stand as, "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst; that is to say by exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible; briefly evolutionary meliorism."  

Collected Poems of T. Hardy, Preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier CPH, p. 557.

7. See Reginald L. Cook's statement, in The Massachusetts Review. "In 'Stars' and 'An. Old Man's Winter Night' the cosmic order might reveal everything in its appointed place, but it was also, mark the view, emblematic of a world external to man as a presence and unmindful of his destiny. Antiromantically Frost unlike Thoreau, declined to read moral purposes in natural phenomena".


13. See Barry D. Bort, (Frost and the Deeper Vision" The Mid West Quarterly, Vol. V, No. 1 (Aut. 1963), pp. 59 - 67). who, classifies two types of poets an ingenious nature lover, and, "On the other hand, there is the poet for whom external nature has a philosophically serious significance, either deliberately worked out or revealed by its implicit presence in a substantial body of work. Such poets may be capable of compelling powerful responses in the receptive reader, responses which an ethical or a metaphysical dimension in their degrees, Lucretius, Wordsworth, Hardy and perhaps Robinson Jeffers are representative of the class."
14. See Ivor Winters' seething criticism of Frost in his article 'Robert Frost: or, The Spiritual Drifter', He cites four poems, "The Road Not Taken", "The Sound of the Trees", "The Hill Wife" and "The Bearer of Evil Tidings" to show 'The whimsical, accidental, and incomprehensible nature of the formative decision'. He says, "The Road Not taken", for example, is the poem of a man whom one might fairly call a spiritual drifter...."


18. Hardy discusses the question of man's will and the Immanent Will in a note in his journal, "The will of man is, according to it, neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing a pianoforte of themselves, when he talks or thinks of something else and the hand does not rule them". Later Years, p. 125.

19. cf. Gaston Bachelard's comment on the theme of space in "Storm Fear". He says, "Outside the occupied house, the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is non-house in the same way that metaphysicists speak of a non-I and between the house and non-house it is easy to establish all sorts of contradictions.... The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, ruffles every sound, conceals all colours. As a result of this universal whiteness we feel a form of cosmic negation in action."

20. CP Kenneth Marsden finds Hardy as Possessing Philosophical views, but no Philosophical View (Italics are mine).

21. See, Frost’s response to DARWINISM, in Lawrence-Thompson, The Years of Triumph. To Frost, one of the most important elements in Bergson’s highly poetic philosophy was the denial of essentially deterministic elements in the Darwinian theories. Lawrence Thompson, The years of Triumph (1915-1938) (New York, 1920), p. 302.

22. T. Hardy’s note on Dec. 31st, 1901, found in his Journal. See Frost’s interview with Henry Coon. The Amherst student on October 19, 1953, Coon says, “Perhaps the most striking feeling that one gets from speaking with Robert Frost is the conviction that here is a man who has found a philosophy of life on a down-to-earth basis.” Ed. Edward Lathern, Interview with R. Frost (New York 1967), p. 119.