CHAPTER VIII

3. The Philosophy of His Work — (D) Humanity

(a) Humanity in 18th century thought:

The predominance of humanity in the 18th century thought was brought about by the moral philosophy of the age, which stressed the essential goodness of man and the supremacy of his moral faculties;

"they were given us" — says Adam Smith — "for the direction of our conduct in this life ... they were set up within us to be the supreme arbiters of all our actions, to superintend all our senses, passions and appetites, and to judge how far each of them was either to be indulged or restrained".1

At the beginning of the century, Addison, after debating the merits of faith and morality, had held the view that faith is vindicated in morality, religion in humanity —

"We should not embrace any faith which does not contribute to, or improve, morality. ... We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another".2

The moral philosophers were sceptical of reason, and set up feeling as the basic instinct in man and the source of all virtues and moral faculties, and even of belief. According to Hume, for example, belief is not an idea, but a feeling;

"... belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles of which we are not masters".3

This feeling is our greatest concern, for it works up our humanity, in which our existence is vindicated and glorified. The most abstract speculations about human nature are but secondary to practical morality. Voltaire says that our 'strength', our 'prudence',
our 'temperance', are good qualities; but it is not enough to have them, or even to be 'just'; we must "do good"; for this is the 'really cardinal' virtue. Of the divine virtues, namely, faith, hope and charity, he says that the first two are not real virtues, for

"one fears and one hopes, according as one receives a promise or a threat".5

Charity, or 'doing good' is 'the sole true virtue'. Humanity is man's true heritage and glory;

"he who has no part in this interchange (of kindness among men) should not be counted (as man)".6

The cause of humanity is supreme.

Humanity gave strength to the movement of deism, which weakened orthodoxy, and liberalized religious and social thought (Chap.I). Deism - we have noted - received its impetus from Renaissance humanism, which discarding the traditional belief in man's sinful state re-established divinity in God's creation, and shifted the emphasis from rituals to human relationship in matters of religion. The movements of deism and moral philosophy are in the 18th century are clear indications of the new importance of humanism in the age. The concept of the 'chain of being', widely prevalent in the early 18th century, provided a strong impetus to humanity. This concept was the natural fruit of the development of physical sciences - from Copernicus to Newton, which enlarged man's vision of the universe and fostered a new contemplation of this world of ours. The idea was taken up by Locke, who refers to the vast peopling of this universe - on land, in water and the air, by creatures of infinite variety, who are close-linked in a continuous series, that
"in each remove differ very little one from the other". We are linked to 'the lowest state of being', as much as to 'the infinite being of God'; indeed, we are 'much more remote' from the latter than from the former. The Supreme Architect, by his design and infinite goodness, has made it so. Addison, referring to this idea and to Locke, says that man

"who in one respect is associated with angels and archangels, may look upon a Being of infinite perfection as his father, and the highest order of spirits as his brethren, may in another respect say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister".8

Pope refers to this

"Vast chain of being! which from God began, Natures aethereal, human, angel, man, Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see, No glass can reach; from Infinite to thee, From thee to nothing".9

So poet Thomson refers to

"The mighty chain of beings, lessening down From infinite perfection to the brink Of dreary nothing ...".10

Now, when we consider ourselves as but a link — however important — in a universal chain of existence, our ego vanishes, and we can see the beast as well as the divine in us. Hughes, of the Spectator, refers to a saying of Pascal, in which the French savant enjoins man's equal remembrance of his greatness and smallness, as a mark of true wisdom. This idea provides the basis of Sterne's argument for his heart's natural sympathies for the Negro, Ignatius Sancho, with whom he felt linked by 'ties of blood' as with the 'fairest face about St. James's', and for his equating of man and beast in his work. Tristram, sitting between poor Maria and her goat, asks her, after she looked on him and her goat
alternately -

"Well, Maria, what resemblance do you find?" 13

Then, as narrator, he explains to his reader that he asked the question from no motive of 'unseasonable pleasantry', but 'from the humblest conviction of what a beast man is'. The caged starling's cry (in S.J.) -

"I can't get out; I can't get out" 14 - becomes a universal cry of freedom from bondage. The whole world is man's kin.

Humanity rules 18th century thought. Addison's emphasis on it has been already noted (p. 144, ante, also Chap.II, pp. 27, 40). Addison commends the ancient writers, Xenophon and Sallust, for their characters of humanity. Steele regarded humanity as the crown of human virtues, and considered learning useless without it. Even the so-called misanthrope, Swift, stresses the value of the noble feelings of 'love, honour, friendship, generosity'. He knew the use of laughter as conducive to humanity; laughter, he said,

"clears the breast and the lungs, is sovereign remedy against the spleen". 16

It is for the good of mankind that prompts Swift to lash at its perversions. This is nowhere better seen than in his *Gulliver's Travels*, in which Thackeray saw only a frightful assertion of 'the worthlessness of all mankind'. Swift's humanistic 'motif' is evident in his Introductory Letter ("A letter from Capt. Gulliver to his cousin Sympson"), as well as at the conclusion of his work. It is seen in the peaceful nature of all pursuits of the Brobdingnagians, their indifference to political gaming, in their King's
indictment of the weapons of war and glorification of all work that contributes to man's happiness, in the emphasis on friendship and benevolence among the many virtues of the Houyhnhmens, whose poetry too sings of the 'exalted notions of friendship and benevolence'. Swift assailed mercantilism and colonialism on grounds of humanity —

"... a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the top-mast; they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the king ... they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more by force for a sample, return home, and get their pardon. Here commenceth a new dominion acquired with a title by divine right. Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free licence given to all acts of inhumanity and lust; the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants; and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people".25

Delise's Moll Flanders is a representative of many a victim of the new commercial civilization of her age, which smothers human values. Her story is a story of suffering, of the sacrifice of her inner humanity, to the compulsion of a commercial society. The conflict between these outward and inward pulls continues as a refrain almost throughout the novel. At her first desertion by her lover, who promised to marry her, she cries out to him —

"If then I have yielded to the importunities of my affection, and if I have been persuaded to believe that I am really your wife, shall I now give the lie to all those arguments, and call myself your whore ...? And will you transfer me to your brother? Can you transfer my affection?"26

She in due course becomes a victim of circumstances, a rogue for a living. But the cry of her soul's agony runs throughout her story;

"... the vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination".27
The story closes with her painful awareness that deadness of soul is 'the completest misery on earth'.

The descent into the common life on earth, which marks the 18th century novel, and distinguishes it from earlier fiction presupposes the glory of our earthly existence. Bunyan saw our world as full of temptations, and the fulfilment of man's destiny in heaven. The heroes and heroines of 18th century fiction achieve their glory, material or spiritual, on this earth. Pamela, Clarissa, Joseph Andrews, parson Adams, Dr. Primrose, in their different ways, are the shining examples of virtue, and reveal the greatness of human existence. Even the rake Tom Jones endears himself to us, or at least to his creator, by his human qualities. Springs of humanity well out of the rough rocks of Smollett's temperament. Commodore Trunnion, who always speaks in his naval phraseology (even when he is going to his marriage, in his old age), is a shining example of his creator's comic genius. The gouty Matthew Bramble, the chief figure in Smollett's last and best work, Humphry Clinker, is as much kind-hearted and generous as irritable and whimsical. The distinction of the 18th century novel - whether it is a novel of sentiment or of manners - is in its realism, both of theme and character, and in its moral aim sustained by the reliance on conscience rather than on faith. In a word, the glory of man's state is firmly established in the 18th century novel.

(b) The character of Sterne's humanity:

But none, in English fiction, reaches Sterne's stature as an apostle of humanity in his age. In an important written
statement, he valued his work for 'wit or humour', but even more for 'Humanity and good nature', which he considered 'better than both'. Sterne considered compassion and humanity of character not only as the prime virtue of man, but as 'a security for all the rest' of virtues. He says through his most lovable character, Uncle Toby -

"I love mankind more than either" (i.e., 'glory' or 'pleasure').

Not only his Toby - whom Hazlitt described as 'one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature', but almost all his characters are distinguished by the quality of humanity. They are aglow with the instinct of 'sympathy', which Sterne, rejecting the selfish system of Hobbes in favour of the moral thought of his own age, considered to be the basic natural instinct in man and his supreme glory.

Naturally, Sterne's humanity was realized through feeling. He not only felt intensely, but had a positive faith in the efficacy of feeling, which works up the instinct of 'sympathy'.

The example of universal love set by his uncle Toby when he released the disturbing fly, left a lasting impression on Tristram's mind, by working upon his feelings - by sending through his whole frame 'one vibration of most pleasurable sensation'. Explaining why he readily granted his valet's prayer for a holiday (to enable the latter to meet his girl), the 'sentimental traveller' says -

"We must feel, not argue in these embarrassments - the sons and daughters of service part with liberty, but not with nature in their contracts...".

Referring to his pleasant meeting with the fille de chambre, and
to his warmed-up heart arousing his feelings of fellowship, he says that he

"felt the conviction of consanguinity so strongly"—that he saw in her face 'a family likeness'. Sichel ignored this place of feeling in Sterne's philosophy, when he said that Sterne's feeling was 'unbacked by purpose'. In fact, Sterne's humanity richly glows with his feeling.

The range of Sterne's humanity is truly astonishing.

He felt the heart-beat in all creation — man, bird and beast. The stream of humanity that excite Sterne's loving interest include 'beggars, pilgrims, fiddlers, friars'. The lay man interested him more than sophisticated company. Traveller Tristram casts his curious eyes on the common human beings, usually ignored by others — namely, the barber who shaved him at Calais, the slothful driver of the post-chaise munching his bread and showing his pearly white teeth at Tristram's offer of a little reward for speedier drive, the inn-keeper's daughter at Montrieul — extremely interesting as a human being, throbbing with sensation and a warm heart, the gardener-cum-muleteer — 'a little, hearty, broad-set, good-natured, chattering, toping kind of fellow', a very 'son of Adam' the drum-maker with whom Tristram was 'in deep conference' on the road, the charming rustic chorus whose song and dance made him feel the bliss of heaven, and so on. In his Sentimental Journey, too, Sterne's picture-gallery is made of the common humanity. We have the begging monk, whose present of his snuff-box to the author was treasured by the latter throughout his life

"as I would the instrumental parts of my religion, to help my mind on to something better."
We have the dwarfs on the Paris roads - the 'poor blighted part of my species', the luckless Notary of the Fragment, the extremely hospitable French peasant and his family, and so on. Sterne says that he can see more of human nature in 'single short' scenes of common humanity than in 'a dozen French plays compounded together'.

Sterne's warm-heartedness towards the so-called inferior classes was something unique in his age, or in any age. Richardson's Pamela (a servant-maid), Fielding's Tom Jones (a foundling), Smollett's Clinker (a poor postillion), are all major characters, and are treated very humanely by their creators; but these 'low' characters - it may be noted - gain their ultimate importance by rising to rank. Sterne never betrays this class-consciousness, which, with all the cult of sensibility, quite persisted in his day. Clarke notes that even the devotional books, manuals and sermons were "aimed at specific classes of the nation - sailors, soldiers, farmers, public-house keepers, and the like". There were special manuals, or Instructions, for servants, in which the ideal prescribed for them was unstinted obedience; their participation in a wider social life, and individual pursuits of happiness were discouraged. Clarke refers to an American pastor, who reminded his White audience that

"slaves when baptized do remain slaves still, so that whatever rights or privileges they acquire by being made Christians, do all belong to another life".53

The ethical injustice of this institutional belief in the Negro belonging to a lower order of mankind is beautifully revealed in Sterne's reply to a Negro correspondent, who
had written to him, greatly admiring him for his creation of Un-
cle Toby and for the humanistic appeal of his sermons. Sancho(the Negro) had requested our author to

"give one half-hour's attention to slavery, as it is
practised in our West Indies ... in your striking ma-

iner".54

Sterne's reply is worth quoting here at some length -

"There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little
events (as well as in the great ones) of this world : for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of
a friendless poor negro-girl, and my eyes had ... wh-
en your letter of recommendation, in behalf of so ma-
ny of her brethren and sisters, came to me - but why
her brethren? or yours, Sancho? any more than mine?
It is by the finest tints, and most insensible grada-
tions, that nature descends from the fairest face ab-
out St. James's, to the sootiest complexion in Africa: - at which tint of these is it, that the ties of bloo-
d are to cease? and how many shades must we descend lo-
er still in the scale, ere mercy is to vanish with th-
em? But it is no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for
one half of the world to use the other half of it like
brutes, and then endeavour to make them so. ... in se-
rious truth, it casts a sad shade upon the world, that
so great a part of it are, and have been so long bound
in chains of darkness, and in chains of misery".55

The story of the 'negro-girl', referred to in Sterne's letter, co-
mes incidentally in the conversation of Toby and Trim. To Trim's
question, if a Negro has a soul, his master replies that he is
not 'much versed' in such matters, but that he believes,

"God would not leave him without one, any more than th-

ee or me".56

Why then is 'a black wench' used worse than 'a white one'? - Trim

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asks, and then gives the reply himself, namely that, there is 'no

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one to stand up for her'; Toby whole-heartedly agrees. Here Ster-
ne's humanity reaches universal proportions. Like Dickens of a
later age, Sterne, in his own way, saw in institutional tyranny
the sacrifice of the finer values of life.
Sterne denies nobody the dignity of man. His depiction of master-servant relationship is a gem of humanistic writing. When Trim hesitates to speak out his different opinion to his master Toby, the latter assures him as a friend -

"Why else do I talk to thee, Trim?"

Sterne honours the servants' personality as much as their masters'. La Fleur's abounding joy at the opportunity of serving his master expresses itself in his treating the Count's servant to hearty drinks in the back-parlour of his master's hotel. And the Count's servant, too, invites him in return, to his own place in the Count's hotel, where, in the kitchen, La Fleur's jolly spirits take wing and radiate happiness all round. His servant's capital quality - namely, his festivity of temper, shamed the 'sentimental traveller' 'into one of a better kind'. He gladly grants his servant a holiday to enable him to enjoy an amorous adventure. In the Paris hotel, he conceals his tear of grief (caused by the reflections on the miseries of bondage) from La Fleur, to save him heart-ache. As Maria's old mother tells the 'sentimental traveller' the sad story of her daughter, La Fleur by his side is moved to tears; this touches our traveller's own heart deeply, and he beckons to the postillion to "turn back into the road". This equating of his own sensibility with his servant's is a glowing illustration of the author's faith in universal equality.

Dr. Johnson had little faith in the equality of man, so passionately preached by Rousseau. Equality of man - Dr. Johnson saw - was fraught with dangers; for it would, according to him, involve 'a perpetual struggle for precedence'. He, therefore,
was for 'fixed invariable rules for the distinction of rank'. The moral philosophers of the age, on the other hand, believing, as they did, in the prime potency of the heart, stressed the natural equality of man. Francis Hutcheson, for example, pointed out that the laws of God and nature enjoin that the 'natural rights', such as, the right to life, the liberty of action, the right of private judgment, the right to society, and so on,

"belong equally to all. ... These laws prohibit the greatest or wisest of mankind to inflict any misery on the meanest". 66

So Sterne says that when we deny the equality of man, we practise self-deception -

"And trust me, Yorick, whenever it is not so (i.e., when 'man to man' is 'not equal throughout the whole surface of the globe'), man is false to himself". 67

Even Sterne's beggars have a human dignity. The author's encounter with the beggars outside the Montrul hotel is one of the most heart-warming scenes in the Sentimental Journey. They are quite an interesting group. There is the man-beggar in tatters, who withdraws his claim in favour of a woman-beggar; another - a 'poor little dwarfish, brisk fellow' - offers snuff to his fellow-beings, pressing it 'upon them with a nod of welcomeness'; the author himself takes a pinch of it. There is the dignified beggar, who had seen better days and who quietly turned away when the other recipients of the author’s charity invoked God’s blessings upon him;

"and I thought he thanked me more than them all". 70

The author studies their behaviour, their individuality, their humanity, with the utmost sympathy and psychological insight.
Sterne's humanity extends to the dumb sentient creation of God. One of the finest things in *Tristram Shandy* is Tristram's quiet communion with the ass that has strayed to his hotel-door at Lyons, and

"stood dubious with his two fore-feet on the inside of the threshold, and with his two hinder feet towards the street, as not knowing very well whether he was to go in or no".\(^71\)

Now, Tristram cannot strike an ass, of all animals; for

"there is a patient endurance of sufferings, wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage".\(^71\)

But Tristram has more than mere sympathy for the animal. He treats him as his 'fellow creature', and engages in a silent, friendly converse with him, reading his mind and framing his responses from 'the etchings of his countenance'.\(^73\) He can hold this converse - Tristram says - with other animals, too; but their responses are in the form of short final replies; whereas, with the ass he "can commune for ever".\(^74\)

The Lyons ass was eating the stem of an artichoke; but - Tristram felt - the pleasure of eating was hindered by the unsavoury taste of the article. And in the 'little peevish contentions of nature betwixt hunger and unsavouriness', the artichoke dropped from his mouth several times. Tristram then offered him a macaroon. Later, as narrator, analysing his inner feelings and ideas of the moment, Tristram says that his gift of the macaroon was probably motivated by a desire to see how an ass would eat a macaroon, rather than by sheer benevolence. However, after the ass ate his macaroon, Tristram presses him to come in.

The poor beast being heavy-loaded,

"his legs seemed to tremble under him".\(^75\)

As Tristram pulls at his halter, it breaks in his hand; •
"he looked up pensive in my face - 'Don't thrash me with it'" — 75

Thrashing, of course, was furthest from Tristram's mind; ("If I do, said I, I'll be d—d"). At that moment, the master of the ass coming in,

"let fall a thundering batinado upon the poor devil's cropper" — 75, thus unceremoniously putting an end to Tristram's loving converse with the ass. Elsewhere, too, we find Tristram communing with the mule that was drawing his carriage and suddenly stopped on the way on hearing a sound. He assured the animal that it was only the sound of music, and at once imagined the animal's reply that he was frightened to death. And then, we have the two mules, drawing the carriage of the abbess of Andouilletts and Margarita, who - we are told - were, like human beings, "creatures that take advantage of the world" — 77.

And so, when the elder of them - 'a shrewd crafty old devil' - found out by a side-glance, at the turn of the road, that their driver had left (he had gone for a while to warm himself up at the near-by inn, after giving each of them a sound lash,"as much as to say 'here I am ... get on'")

"By my fig! said she, swearing, I'll go no further — And if I do, replied the other, they shall make a drum of my hide. — And so with one consent they stopped thus —" — 80

Sterne's elder mule, incidentally reminds us of Virginia Woolf's 'father rook' —

"... old Joseph was her (Mrs. Ramsay's) name for him, ... a bird of a very trying and difficult disposition" — 81

The Nampont ass, in Sentimental Journey, was 'a patient partner' of his master's sufferings, and was 'unto him as a friend'.

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During a temporary separation, they sought each other with the same earnestness and anxiety, and did not eat or drink till they met. After his companion dies, the poor man is stung with remorse for not having used him more kindly, and grieves for him as one does for one's fellow-creature.

In Sterne, the man-animal relationship, wherever it is, is easy and intimate. The lean parson Yorick rode his lean horse "not only to keep himself in countenance, but in spirits". They had the same spiritual affinity between them as Don Quixote and his Rosinante. Sterne never treats animals as inferior beings; they are invested with a personality; they communicate with us. Their thoughts and feelings are studied with a loving-zeal. They enter into the brotherhood of man. Sir Ifor Evans missed the real significance of Toby's words to the disturbing fly — surely

"... why should I hurt thee? — This world/is wide enough to hold both thee and me" — when he noted in them mere sentimental effusion. Toby's words, on the other hand, are a glowing illustration of his creator's faith in universal equality and his fine sensibility.

Sterne reasserts the Renaissance faith in the equality of all creation, which (faith) had been voiced by the humanist Montaigne. Montaigne considered the distinction between man and beast foolish. It is man's vanity, that he considers himself superior to the rest of God's creation. Beasts have not only instinct, they have intelligence and understanding, and also have their own languages for communication.

"It is a matter of divination to guess in whom the fault is, that we understand not one another. For, we understand them no more than they us. By the same reason, may they as well esteem us beasts, as we them".
Later, Locke admitted in animals not only perception and sensation — the source of all ideas, but the

"faculty of laying up and retaining the ideas that are brought into the mind".90

So Hume, in Sterne's own age, believed that

"the beasts are endowed with thought and reason, as well as men".91

Voltaire ridicules those who regard animals as mere 'machines, bereft of understanding and feeling'; he makes an inspired assertion of their having 'feeling, memory, ideas'. And Gilbert White, the well-known 18th century naturalist and scientific observer of animal life, noted an intelligent friendship among animals, 'a wonderful spirit of sociality in the brute creation, independent of sexual attachment'; he notes this rational companionship even among different species of birds and beasts.

Sterne studies all life in human terms. As a traveller in France and Italy, he is interested not in social or political systems, nor in architecture or painting. He values a living human being more than his transfiguration by Raphael. This thirst for knowing man, living in the flow of his feeling and ideas, leads him out of home. His journey — it may be remembered — is

"a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of Nature, and those affections which arise out of her, which make us love each other, and the world, better than we do".96