CHAPTER II IV

EGOISTS REDEEMED AND ALTRUISTS (I)
EGOISTS REDEEMED

The movement from subjectivity to objectivity, from living for self to living for others, with its concomitant growth in vision and sympathy through experience and suffering is the basic configuration of moral and psychological experience in the world of George Eliot's novels. We shall trace this movement from egoism to altruism, in the course of the development of principal characters.¹

These characters may be termed as Egoists Redeemed.² This category of egoists consists of those who have sufficient means in their natural temperament to escape the terrible retribution and are redeemed ultimately. These are the characters who are ennobled by their suffering and thus illustrate George Eliot's philosophy of meliorism. The central impression emerging from them is the education of the individual will through a unique spiritual transformation —

¹ Moral development for George Eliot consists in a movement from a subjective to the objective approach to reality. In the course of moral evolution, experience of suffering leads to vision, and vision intensifies sympathy. Thus the characters arrive at some version of Feuerbach's religion of humanity. — cf. Bernard J. Faris.

² The other two categories of egoists have been already discussed in Chapter IV.
the shaking off of egoism, and in certain cases the illumination of the self by a slow disillusioned growth of altruism, a consciousness of being sharers of life with fellow-beings.

A close study of the evolution of the individual characters shows a more or less fixed pattern of development.

Adam, the titular hero of Adam Bede, is the first in the line. He has an excellent knowledge of "business" and a strong sense of this relation to the life around him. He is just shown to us in relation to his work and only later as a unique individual. His song is expressive of his upright character:

"Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the newday clear." 3

Adam has a strong personality, and he inspires the admiration of almost all who know him. A more than an average man, he had a strong sense, and a blended susceptibility and self-command:

3 Adam Bede, Chap. I.
The conversation with his co-workers in the workshop reveals his righteousness. He objects to his companions putting down the tools.

"Look there now! I can't abide to see men throw away their tools e' that way, the minute the clock begins to strike, as if they took no pleasure e' their work, and was afraid O' doing a stroke too much."

Mun Taft replies:

"Ah ay, Adam lad, ye talk like a young when y' are six an' forty like me, 'listed O' six an' twenty ye wo be so flush O' marking to nought."4

Indeed, Adam has much to learn; his rectitude is unimaginative. His brother Seth is presented as a foil to him:

'The idle tramps always felt sure they could get a copper from Seth, they scarcely ever spoke to Adam.'5

His self-righteousness is 'the flaw in his character which is partially if not wholly purged by the suffering he undergoes in the course of the story'.6

Adam has the realist's awareness of the nature of things:

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4 Adam Bede, Chap. I.
5 Ibid.
"I've seen pretty clear," he tells Arthur, "ever since I could cast up a sum, as you can never do what's wrong without begrudging sin and trouble more than you can ever see."

Adam is not one of George Eliot's blind, self-seeking egoists. He has not only a vision of the right, but also the strength of will to act according to his convictions, even when this involves privation for himself. His resolution is fed by his strong sense of responsibility towards those dependent upon him. As he works through the night on the coffin that his father has failed to make in time, he muses:

'They that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of those that are weak, and not to please themselves.'

Clearly, he is not one of the pleasure-seeking egoists, nor is he a flawless static figure; the novel is, in fact, the story of his education. 'Adam in the beginning of the story has serious deficiencies, deficiencies which are the counterparts of his virtues. He is often subjective in his attitude towards other people. He attributes to others — notably Arthur and Hetty — virtues which they do not possess; his praise of Arthur at the birthday feast turns out to be excruciatingly ironic. His illusions about Arthur and Hetty leave him open to the shock of disillusionment. . . .

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7 *Adam Bede*, Chap. XVI.
8 *Ibid.*, Chap. IV.
9 Critics like Mrs. Hardy, Reva Stump, Paris and Mrs. Bennett all agree on this.
Adam's chief moral fault is his hardness. His strong resolution sometimes leads him to pride and stubbornness. He is confident that he sees things pretty clear, and shows no uncertainty on moral questions. He tells Arthur:

'It is'n't my way to be see-saw about anything: I think my fault lies the other way. When I've said a thing, if its only to myself it's hard for me to go back.'

Adam's suffering comes out of his rigidity. In the presentation of his character, George Eliot demonstrates the evolutionary process of the development of character.

'Adam extends his expediency and the extension is the first example of George Eliot's tragic pattern. Adam, like Maggie and Esther and Dorothea and the rest, enlarges his imagination and his sensibility. It is the egoist's process towards a wider comprehension and it is George Eliot's version of the tragic sensibility going through pain.'

Being firm and high-principled himself, he had, at first, little sympathy for weakness of character. His father's failing were a great trial to him. On discovering his father's dead body in a brooke, he experiences a remorseful awareness of his faults:

'Adam's mind rushed back over the past in a flood of relenting and pity.'

11 Adam Bede, Chap. XVI.
13 Adam Bede, Chap. IV.
At his father's funeral, he reflects:

'Ah! I was always too hard... It's a sore fault in me as I'm so not and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against 'em, so as I can't bring myself to forgive 'em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul... Mayhap the best thing I ever did in my life was only doing what was easiest for myself... the real tough job for me 'ud be to master my own will and temper, and go right against my own pride.'

Indeed, this self-analysis on his part is a process in his self-education, and he repents for not having been able to ask his father's forgiveness for having been 'too hot and hasty now and then'.

A mere awareness of his rigidity is not enough to produce a marked change in Adam's behaviour. It does not rid him of his righteousness. As Jones remarks:

'. . . It is not a passionate heart that shuts Adam's heart against wrong-doers, so much as a habit of thinking of right and wrong as if they were mathematical certainties.'

His hardness is closely allied to his perception of the order of things and his inflexibility in abiding by his vision of consequences. He has had no experience of weakness, irresolution, or overmastering passion in himself to make

14 Adam Bede, Chap. XVIII.
him tender towards those who have these failings. George Eliot suggests:

"...perhaps here lay the secret of the hardness he had accused himself of: he had too little fellow-feeling with the weakness that errs in spite of foreseen consequences. Without this fellow-feeling, how are we to get enough patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the changeful journey? And there is but one way in which a strong determined soul can learn it — by getting his heart stings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering. That is a long and hard lesson, and Adam had at present only learned the alphabet of it in his father's sudden death."16

The next crisis comes in his relationship with Arthur. Early in the book we are told, 'Next to his brother Seth, Adam would have done more for Arthur Donnithorne than for any other young man in the world."17 and

'Towards the young squire this instinctive reverence of Adam's was assisted by boyish memories and personal regard. . . . He felt sure it would be a fine day for everybody about Hayslope when the young squire came into the estate — such a generous open-hearted disposition as he had, . . .'18

'The first impact of the unpredictable comes for Adam in Chapter XXVIII (A Crisis), when he sees Hetty and Arthur kiss each other. He continues to be severe in his behaviour:

16 Adam Bede, Chap. XIX.
17 Ibid., Chap. XVI.
18 Ibid.
'If he had moved a muscle, he must inevitably have sprung upon Arthur like a tiger; and in the conflicting emotions that filled those long moments, he had told himself that he would not give loose to passion, he would only speak the right thing.'

But he does speak and do the right thing:

'If you get hold of a chap that's got no shame nor conscience to stop him, you must try what you can do by bunging his eyes up.'

He takes it upon himself to punish the wrong-doer, and there is no sense in him of common humanity with Arthur.

In Adam, the life of the good man is, largely identified with the life of the good workman. His moral training, his terminology, and his strength, are all found in his carpenter's trade. His love of Hetty is closely bound up with his social awareness of duty.

Adam defies Hetty. She is 'the prettiest thing God made'; 'she's more nor everything else to me, all but my conscience and my good name' (Chap. 28). His happiest reveries about Hetty are linked up with his vision of 'an opening into a broadening path of prosperous work', and he tells Arthur on seeing him kiss her, that she is something to be worked for:

'And I never kissed her i' my life — but I'd ha' worked hard for years for the right to kiss her'.

19 Adam Bede, Chap. XVI.
21 Adam Bede, Chap. XXXIX.
The third great shock in Adam's tragic process comes with his search for Hetty and his discovery of her crime and imprisonment. This time he is not in a condition to tell himself, "he would not give loose to passion, he would only speak the right thing." Instead, he reacts with spontaneous passion: "It was as if an insulting blow had brought back the spirit of resistance into Adam, ... and he bursts out in anguish," "... its too hard to think she's wicked." 22

He is on the way towards a more complex, and less confident sense of right and wrong, and he 'is no longer sure of seeing anything pretty clear'. Instead, in his new humility he says to Karson Irwine. "I'll do what you think right." 23 This crisis, like his father's death earlier forces him to self-assessment:

'Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state...made Adam look back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence, and he had only now awakened to full consciousness. It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that men should suffer; as if all that he had himself endured and called sorrow before, was only a moments stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity.' 24

22 John Goode says, 'Adam's love {for Hetty} has a clear moral function; in order to ascend to the higher feeling of sympathy which is the basis of man's perfectibility,...'

23 *Adam Bede*, Chap. XXXIX.

24 *Ibid.*, Chap. XLII.
His tragic suffering is, indeed, a step in human sympathy, 'a genuine catharsis within the tragic hero'. Adam recollects all that is past; his self-pity and awe move even beyond Hetty:

"Oh God," Adam groaned, as he leaned on the table, and looked blankly at the face of the watch, 'and man have suffered like this before...and poor helpless young things have suffered like her'.

Adam's own experience of suffering ennobles him to envision the suffering of others. This blending of experience and vision makes him sympathetic towards his fellows. When he learns that the evidence in the court is going against Hetty, he tells Bartle Massey that he will go there: "...I'll stand by her --- I'll own her ---...we hand folks over to God's mercy, and and show none ourselves. I used to be hard sometimes. I'll never be hard again..."

There is a meeting between Adam and Arthur soon after the trial. Its shows how far Adam has travelled since their earlier meeting in the wood:

'Often, in the last fortnight, Adam had imagined himself as close to Arthur as this, assailing him with words that would be as harrowing as the voice of remorse, forcing upon him a just share in the misery he had caused; ...But...the figure before him touched him with the signs of suffering. Adam knew what suffering was --- he could not lay a cruel finger on a bruised man.'

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25 Adam Bede. Chap. XLII.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., Chap. XLVIII.
And now 'he felt no impulse that he needed to resist'.

Although his view of Arthur's offence has not softened, he is able to say firmly: "I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent." And he shakes hands with Arthur in reconciliation.

Maggie Tulliver, with her rebellious emotions and her insatiable curiosity, represents another variation on the type of 'character essentially noble, but liable to great error'. The author's insight into a child's feelings is keener than that revealed by any previous novelist. Walter Allen remarks:

As a rendering of the growth of a girl marked from early childhood to young womanhood, a girl marked by intellectual distinction, a generously ardent nature and a strong capacity for feeling Maggie has never been surpassed.

28 *Adam Bede*, Chap. XLVIII.


Maggie is her father's child, dark-haired and dark-eyed, passionate and wayward. His love for this 'little wench' gives her happiness and security through her tumultuous childhood. His ungrudging pride in her compensates for the criticism about her brown skin and dark hair by her unamiable aunts. Mrs. Tulliver cannot understand the unusual child born to her. Maggie is an affectionate child, who responds to kindness but is impatient of restraint. The greatest thing in her early life is her love for her brother Tom. She gives him much more than the adoring love of a small child for a big brother. Her generous nature wants to help her brother in everything and to absorb all his interest. Thus when the novel begins, we see the nine year old child 'already caught in perplexities — about her straight hair; her brown skin, her temper and absent-mindedness, about her adored, pink-cheeked brother Tom.'

Like most passionate children Maggie can be intensely jealous. She feels that Tom is fond of Lucy, and when she sees her neat little cousin with him, her furious jealousy gets the better of her and she pushes Lucy into 'the cow-trodden mud'. At this the narrator remarks:

32 Maxine Greene: Introduction to The Mill on the Floss
'There were passions at war in Maggie at that moment to have made a tragedy, if tragedies were made by passion only; but the essential TRUE ESOs (Magnitude) which was present in the passion wanting to the action: the utmost Maggie could do, with a fierce thurst of her small arm, was to push poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow trodden mud.' 33

It would be relevant to quote Knoepflmacher here:

"But the little girl's 'passions' will make a tragedy. . . . For in her Lilliputian action Maggie displays the same rashness that will be ruinous to her as an adult. Her passions will lead her to hurt Lucy far more cruelly later, when she elopes with her cousin's fiancé. Then as now, she will be displaced at odds with the reality that is accepted by her more normal brother and cousin. . . .' 34

Maggie is highly imaginative: she is a dreamer — as contrasted with the practical, self-righteous Tom. This only heightens our sense of the acute differences which separate this child from her more normal brother. 35 Born of parents utterly incapable of understanding the complicated subtleties of a nature so alien to their own, she is looked upon by all connected with her as an ill-weed, destined to bring misery upon herself and those concerned with her proceedings. Her impulsive character leads her into eccentricities, for which no allowance is made by her prejudiced family; in vain she


A contemporary of George Eliot says that the novel is the realization of an undeniable theory, 'that the rare gifts of a lively fancy and fertile imagination are fatal to the possession unless accompanied by the strength of mind and moral culture necessary to hold them in subjection. Poor Maggie the heroine of this story, is presented to us as an instance of the truth of this proposition.'
strives to do the right. She feels, by some unforeseen accident or unhappy bungling in her mode of accomplishing it, she will bring about the very opposite of what she intends to. As a consequence, her childhood is passed amid continual upbraidings, bickerings and strife. This is all the more trying for her, as the love and approbation of others is one of the great needs of her peculiar disposition. She yearns for affection with an eagerness of appetite that gains fresh intensity from the fact that few or no attempts are made to please her. She is left entirely to herself, to her own self-regulating principles and development of her own mental faculties.

She loves admiration, and is so much praised by her father, and his friends for her intelligence and her quickness in reading that she thinks even the gypsies will desire to be taught by her. Her great trouble is that she is different from those around her, and too clever for her own peace of mind. Her father is afraid that she is "to 'cute for a woman'."

FR Leavis rightly observes that the whole theme of the book is the contrast between the 'beautiful soul' and her 'commonplace surroundings'.

36 FR Leavis: 'Revaluations (XV) George Eliot (I)' Quoted from Scrutiny, Vol. XIII, 1945-46. He observes: 'She has the intellectual potentiality for which the environment into which she is born does not provide much encouragement. She has the desperate need for affection and intimate personal relations and above all she has the need for an emotional exaltation.'
Maggie loves ardentely, but she expects much more in return. She has an excess of expectation which never makes her easy with her lot. A critic in Macmillan's Magazine rightly commented,

"She has all the involuntary egotism and selfishness of nature that, while eagerly craving for love, loves ardently and imaginatively rather than devotedly." 37

Maggie, indeed, desires recognition and self-fulfilment. She has much to give others, and she wants much in return. As the narrator in the book tells us:

"Poor Maggie was by no means made up of unalloyed devotedness, but put forth large claims for herself where she loved strongly." 38

As the drama of Maggie's life unfolds itself, we feel that here is a basically noble nature with a streak of egoism, 39 rectified gradually in the course of the novel. The first great crisis in her life comes with her father's bankruptcy and illness, when both she and Tom stand on the door-steps of Mrs. Stelling's house to begin their sorrowful homeward journey. Mrs. Stelling comes with a little basket, which she

38 The Mill on the Floss, Bk III, Chap. II.
39 Her egoism is her isolation from the sorrows of others in proportion as she is absorbed in her own.
hangs on Maggie's arm, saying, "Do remember to eat something on the way, dear." Maggie's heart went out towards this woman whom she never liked, and she kissed her silently.\textsuperscript{40} It was the first sign of loving fellowship stirred in her in the hour of her suffering and trial. Tom and Maggie are now to adjust themselves to a life far different from the comfortable one they were accustomed to. Tom's preoccupation with the re-establishment of the family's honour and fortune, and his increased severity of judgement are part of the new hardness life has for Maggie. She had never been at ease with her lot. 'What was it', wondered sympathetic Philip Nakem, 'that made Maggie's dark eyes remind him of the stories about princesses being turned into animals?' George Eliot answers, 'it was that her eyes were full of unsatisfied intelligence, and unsatisfied beseeching affection.'\textsuperscript{41} The only response that Maggie found in her medium was in her father's love and protection and in her brief encounters with Philip. But after her father's failure, life became so hard for her, and the pressure of reality so inescapable, that the need of a real solution, an enduring source of moral strength became imperative.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{The Mill on the Floss}, Bk II, Chap. V.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}
At first when her father is in a dependent state of illness, Maggie's sorrow for herself is subsumed in her love and pity for her father: 'the strong tide of pitying love within her almost as an inspiration, a new power, that would make the most difficult life easy for his sake.' But when Mr. Tulliver becomes fully conscious of his misfortune, he is continually wrapped in 'sullen incommunicative depression' and Maggie gets, 'no answer to her little caresses, either from her father or from Tom — the two idols of her life'.

Not only is there no human response for her spirit, but added to her previous experience 'of conflict between the inward impulse and outward fact, which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature', is a complete deprivation of every familiar possession or object of passionate devotion which could give her comfort, and consequently she is full of despair. Maggie's despair develops in her a sensitivity to human suffering and a craving for spiritual comfort.

Bob Jakin sees Maggie mourning over the loss of her favourite books, and brings her more books, among which is a used copy of Thomas Kempis's, *The Imitation of Christ.*

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42 *The Mill on the Floss*, Bk IV, Chap. II.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
On reading this book, she experiences a sense of awakening and revelation: 'Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world. . . .'

And again,

'Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace.'

Maggie learns that the pursuit of personal satisfaction is the source of all discontent, that only by forsaking love of self can inner peace be achieved. 'It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if there were the central necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires — of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole.'

Maggie is next seen imagining and forming plans of self-abnegation, for 'in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain.'

45 *The Mill on the Floss*, Bk IV, Chap. III.
46 Ibid.
perceive that Maggie has not yet ridden herself completely of her egoism. There is yet a good deal of egoism and exaggeration in her renunciation. She longs alternately for the external peace that a' Kempis' theology promises and for the enjoyment of 'an everlasting crown' which is to be won by self sacrifice.'

Maggie will learn through more experience and suffering 'the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly.'

She emerges into a new stage of moral culture with the lesson of renunciation, 'something that will present motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness, and human looks are hard upon us — something clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves.'

We watch Maggie striving to be good and striving to be satisfied; like ourselves, like human beings everywhere, she must make her choices in an open world. We see all the marks of immaturity in Maggie — in her emotional and spiritual stresses, her exaltations and her renunciations. Her confusions and valuations belong to a stage of development of which the

48 The Mill on the Floss, Bk IV, Chap. III.
49 Ibid.
ability to make essential distinctions has not yet been achieved.

As a result of her immaturity, the spiritual ardour dwindles very quickly into 'panting for happiness'. In the very next book Maggie is in the Red Deeps with Philip Wakem who has come back from abroad. We perceive it was simply the rising again of her innate delight in admiration and love — for 'she really did hope he liked her face as it was now'. The irony of the whole thing is that she argues to herself about seeing Philip again.

'Maggie ascends and descends', contends Mrs. Hardy: 'It is a process more like an eddy than a directing current; because 'the climaxes are reached and then denied.'

She is too ardent, swerving passionately from the extreme of desire to the extreme of self-abnegation. Philip rightly accuses her, "you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature". Philip's influence on Maggie has been aptly described by a critic as 'the awakening of the girl's higher

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51 The Mill on the Floss, Bk V, Chap. I.
faculties under the influence of a mind of wider range and finer tone than her own'.

In Philip, Maggie finds the only genuine response to her intelligence. Philip arouses her tenderness and she has, when she declares her love for him, 'a moment of belief that, if there were sacrifice in this love, it was all the richer and more satisfying'.

Maggie is, however, always uneasy about her relationship with Philip because of her father's hostile relations with lawyer Wakem. But worse is in store for her, when Tom learns about her affair and forces her to terminate the relationship. She accepts Tom's decision; and when she knows that Philip is to visit Mr. Deane's and if she stays there she must meet him, her honesty forces her to ask Tom's permission. Once again her tenderness for Philip renews, and she tells him there is nothing but ill will between Tom and the Wakem family that prevents their marriage.

Maggie's relations with Stephen Guest shows another side of her character. With Philip 'the appeal was more strongly to her pity and womanly devotedness than to her

52 The Spectator, 7 April 1860, in Holmstrom and Lerner (ed): op. cit., p. 25.
53 The Mill on the Floss, Bk V, Chap. IV.
vanity or other egoistic excitability of her nature, the passionate, sensual element had never entered her feeling for him. But Maggie's attraction to Stephen springs from her egoistic delight in the masculine homage and from the day-dream visions of wealth, luxury, ease, and refinement that are prompted by Stephen's presence; and she is overwhelmed by a stronger feeling unlike any she has hitherto experienced.

Maggie has a powerful urge to resist a relationship which will violate her ties of trust, duty and affection to Philip and Lucy, but after much struggle it is overcome by the enchantment into which she is overthrown by Stephen's presence. George Eliot explains that during her two barren years of teaching at boarding school,

'She had slipped back into desire and longing: she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder — she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for and despaired of, becoming more and more importunate.' Her long privation intensifies her susceptibility to pleasure. Stephens singing and furtive attentions excite her, for 'In poor Maggie's highly strung, hungry nature — just come away from a third-rate schoolroom, with all its jarring sounds and petty round of tasks — these apparently trivial causes had the effect of rousing and exalting her imagination in a way that was mysterious to herself. ... The music was vibrating in her still. ... and she could not stay in the recollection of that bare, lonely past. She was in her brighter aerial world again.'

54 The Mill on the Floss, Bk VI, Chap. VII.
55 Ibid., Bk VI, Chap. 2.
56 Ibid., Bk VI, Chap. 3.
Paris comments: 'When she is in such states of dreamy enchantment, Maggie's moral sensibility, her 'higher nature', is inert; memory and vision give way to self-indulgent fantasies about the future or to absorption in the experience of the present moment. She has no consciousness of ties rooted in the past or of future consequences for herself and for others. When the spell is for some reason broken, however, Maggie's vision and sympathy, the products of her early suffering of her life, the result of her despair and her reading of Thomas a Kempis are awakened into activity.'

Maggie's early discipline is still an active force, and she does not deliberately choose to indulge her passion for Stephen. But her will gets overcome by the enchantment into which she is thrown by Stephen's presence. When she glides down the river Floss in a state of intoxicated passivity, she awakens with horror to the reality of her situation:

'She had rent the ties that had given meaning to duty, and had made herself an outlawed soul, with no guide but the wayward choice of her own passion. . . .Her life with Stephen could have no sacredness.'

58 The Mill on the Floss, Bk VI, Chap. XXIV. Laurence Lerner in the Truth tellers (London, 1967), p. 270 writes 'In running off with Stephen Guest, Maggie has been obeying only selfish impulses... But a close perusal of the novel will show that there was no plan for elopement in either Stephen's or Maggie's mind, though the unexpected absence of Lucy and Philip leaves them both alone on the boating expedition.
For Maggie it is a clash between impulse and duty; it is a clash between a life which is motivated and sanctified by the recognition of a moral law which is independent of personal desire and a life guided by nothing but random impulse. The sacredness of life lies for Maggie in obedience to what she feels to be her duty, in faithfulness to the ties of love, trust, and dependence which have grown out of her past life. She tells Stephen, "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment." 59

This is the attainment to the Feuerbachian concept of the religion of humanity. Maggie emerges from self-love and illusions, the needs of Lucy and Philip come to life in her imagination, and she tells Stephen:

'Stephen — don't ask me — don't urge me, I can't argue any longer — I don't know what is wise; but my heart will not let me do it. I see — I feel their trouble now, it is as if it were branded on my mind. I have suffered, and had no one to pity me; and now I have made other's suffer. ...I cannot marry you: I cannot take a good feg myself that has been wrung out of their misery." 60

It was late. Maggie knew, "too late already not to have caused misery: too late for everything, perhaps, but to rush

59 The Mill on the Floss, Bk VI, Chap. XIV.
60 Ibid.
away from the last act of baseness — the tasting of joys
that were wrung from crushed heart."

We feel like George Eliot that.

'There was at least this fruit from all her years
of striving after the highest and the best — that
her soul, though betrayed, beguiled, ensnared,
could never deliberately consent to a choice of the
lower.'61

Maggie's experience and suffering has given her a wider vision
and sympathy for others.

Silas Marner too moves from subjectivity to objectivity
through experience and suffering. According to Blackwood
(his publisher) the story of Silas Marner 'sprang from her
childish recollection of a man with a stoop and expression
of face that led her to think that he was an alien from his
fellows'.62

Silas is equipped with a history of alienation that
reaches much further back than his arrival in Raveloe.63
From what we learn in the first chapter, his whole life has
been a series of disconnections. Fred C. Thomson in his

61 The Mill on the Floss, Bk VI, Chap. XIV.
63 Being isolated from one's neighbours is being locked in
the shell of egoism, George Eliot believes.
perceptive essay on Silas Marner sums up the situation very aptly: "His cramped beliefs, poor education, and ignorance of human nature, together with his natural capacities for affection and faith conspire to make him prominently vulnerable to the misfortunes that suddenly befall him. In devastating succession, he is bereft of friendship, fellowship, love, faith in divine justice, home, native town — everything, in fact, that had meaning for him. The disaster is especially radical because his loss is not so much material as spiritual."

Silas is by nature simple, trusting, affectionate, self-doubting, and defenceless. His trouble springs initially from the too great trust he places in his friend, William Dane: "Whatever blemishes others might discern in William, to his friend's mind he was faultless; for Marner had one of those impressible self-doubting natures which, at an inexperienced age, admire imperativeness and lean on contradiction." When Silas is accused of theft, he realizes that William deceived him. And when the lots declare him guilty, Silas, whose trust in man has been sorely bruised loses faith in divine justice too. 'Poor Marner, went out with the despair in his soul — that shaken trust in God and man which is little short of

65 Silas Marner, Chap. I.
madness to a loving nature.' The final blow comes when Sarah, his betrothed, casts him off and marries William. Silas leaves his native town and migrates to Raveloe. 'What he has lost,' as Thale puts it, is not a creed but a sense of the world.'66

And a sense of the world is what he regains upon his redemption at the end of the novel.

The difference between Raveloe and the town of his origin is so great, indeed, as to make communication between him and his new neighbours all but impossible. As Paris says, "...not only is Silas alien to his fellows, his new neighbours and surroundings are entirely alien and unintelligible to him. He lives now in a 'strange world' which is a 'hopeless riddle' to him."67

The Raveloers look upon Marner with suspicion. For to the villagers, it did not seem certain that 'this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil one'.68

67 Paris: op.cit., p. 139.
68 Silas Marner, Chap. I.
In Raveloe, Silas lives in almost complete estrangement from society, his only contact with his neighbours being in matters of business. In addition to being a stranger, a linen-weaver, and an odd-looking man, he is also an epileptic, and his fits make him an object of fear and distrust to his new neighbours. Silas is thus isolated from the superstitions and provincial inhabitants of Raveloe: 'At the end of fifteen years the Raveloe men said just the same thing about Silas Marner as at the beginning.'

In the absence of an alternative, his life is reduced to the 'unquestioning activity of a spinning insect. . . . His first movement after the shock had been to work in his loom; and he went on with this unremittingly, never asking himself why, now he was at Raveloe... He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse without reflection.'

But while opinion concerning Silas Marner remained nearly stationary, and his daily habits presented scarcely any visible change, his inward life was a history and a metamorphosis as that of 'every fervid nature must be when it has fled, or been condemned to solitude'. Year after year, 'Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening

69 Silas Marner, Chap. 1.
70 Ibid., Chap. 2.
itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended. 71

Earlier in his life at Raveloe, about the time he begins to love guniesas he is drawn towards a cobbler's wife by pity. He recognizes in her 'the terrible symptoms of heart-disease and dropsy' which he had witnessed in his dying mother, and feel's 'a rush of pity at the mingled sight and remembrance' and brings her preparation of foxglove. The incident brings a sense of unity between the past and the present, which might have been the beginning of his rescue from his 'insect like existence' 72. But the curing of Sally oates the cobbler woman is thought of as a dark design; in Silas's powers and motives are badly misconstrued and the benevolent abortive impulse is to deepen the isolation from which he could have been released.

Consequently, Silas' life comes to revolve round his loom and his money. He becomes dehumanized: 'Strangely

71 Silas Marner, Chap. 2.
Edward Wagenknecht in the Cavalcade of the English Novel observes that on loosing faith in God 'he can for a time find no better object in life than the accumulation of money.'

72 Silas Marner, Chap. 2.
Marner's face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which has no meaning standing apart'.

During this drab phase, the monotony of daily drudgery at his loom alternates with his 'mighty revelry' as he pours out his hoarded guineas, bathes his hands on them and rejoices in them as in a 'golden wine'.

Silas's ultimate salvation and the process that leads him to fellowship with his neighbours are Wordsworthian. During the period of his dryness there are hints of what will redeem him. When his earthenware pot breaks, he has enough of the pathetic remnants of piety to save the pieces and set them together in their accustomed place, for it has been his 'companion' for twelve years, 'always lending its handle to him in the early morning, so that its form had an expression for him of willing helpfulness, and the impress of its handle for him of willing helpfulness, and the impress of its handle on his palm gave a satisfaction mingled with that of having the fresh clear water.'

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73 *Silas Marner*, Chap. 2.

74 Ibid.
Lillian Haddakin remarks: "His 'strange history' is that of a double metamorphosis. The first metamorphosis into a miser, following his expulsion from the lantern yard community, is essentially, though not solely, a change in his inward life... The guineas on which his highly ritual centres provide a repository — an unnatural one, and therefore bad for his feelings'.75 His gold as he hung over it and saw it grow, 'gathered his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own.' 76

The loss of the coins, however, means the extinction of feeling for 'in reality it had been an eager life, filled with immediate purpose which fenced him in from the wide clearless unknown. ... But now the fence was broken down — the support was snatched away.'77 The theft of his money brings Silas to the lowest point of desolation: 'was it a thief who had taken the bags? Or was it a cruel power that no hands could reach which had delighted in making him a second time desolate?'78 He exclaims, 'Robbed! I've been robbed!' and he bursts in upon the company of the Rainbow. This is the first step towards Silas' regeneration. The theft of his money is the turning point, as Paris says, in his relations with his fellows:

76 Silas Marner, Chap. V.
77 Ibid., Chap. X.
78 Ibid., Chap. V.
"Left groping in the darkness, with his prop utterly gone, Silas had inevitably a sense, though a dull and half despairing one, that if any help came to him it must come from without; and there was a slight stirring of expectation at the sight of his fellow-men, a faint consciousness of dependence on their goodwill."\(^{79}\)

The actual redemption, however, comes through Eppie, when the loss of gold has prepared him to welcome and love. When he first sees the child, she reminds him of his little sister, and he is taken back to many memories — the Wordsworthian way, joining maturity with the simplicity and purity of childhood:

'It stirred fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe, old quiverings of tenderness — old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life; for his imagination had not yet extricated itself from the sense of mystery in the child's sudden presence.'\(^{80}\)

Silas's 'sense of mystery' over Eppie's appearance seems almost as infantile as the baby's own absorption with 'the primary mysteries of her toes'. Twice he repeats: 'The money's gone I don't know where, and this is come from I don't know where.'\(^{81}\) His consternation is amusing. He feels his gold is transformed into the golden curls of

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\(^{79}\) Bernard J. Paris: \textit{Experiments in Life}, Chap. X.
\(^{80}\) \textit{Silas Marner}, Chap. XII.
\(^{81}\) \textit{Ibid.}, Chap. XIV.
the infant. He is befuddled and awed by his good fortune. Irrationally he fears that with the restoration of his coins Apple may disappear or 'be changed into gold again'.

There is some equity in Silas's situation: his suffering is compensated for by his happiness, which comes about only as the result of a chance, or as Silas sees it, a miracle — as a symbol expressive of providence or of beneficent order in the universe.

A critic in The Saturday Review remarked:

"As in one fit of unconsciousness he lost his all, so in another he obtained a recompense. In either case he was helpless, had nothing to do with his own fate, and was a mere feather in the wind of Chance. From this point all is work and reward, cause and effect, the intellective mind shaping its own destiny. The honest man bestows kindness upon the child and reaps the benefit of it in his own increasing happiness, quickened intelligence and social position." 82

Silas tends the child with care and tenderness. For him the fondling becomes 'an object compacted of changes and hopes that forces his thoughts onward, and carried them away from their old eager pacing towards the same blank limit — carried them away to new things that would come with the coming years.' 83

83 Silas Marner, Chap. XIV.
Lillian Haddakin maintains, "His second metamorphosis, into a loving foster-father, with all that this implies in the way of reciprocal 'blessings' and 'gifts', is swifter than the first, but by no means instantaneous. It depends initially on the agonizing loss of his gold and then on 'pure, natural human relations', the growth of which is necessarily gradual and involves a multitude of interconnecting forms, domestic, social and religious; and being, in the broadest sense, 'social', it also involves verbal forms, as the first metamorphosis did not." 84

Silas is drawn back into the health-giving life of the community by the child Eppie:

"By seeking what was needful for Eppie, by sheering the effect that everybody produced on her, he had himself come to appropriate the forms of custom and belief which were the mould of Raveloe life; and as with reawakening sensibilities, memory also reawakened, he had begun to ponder over the elements of his old faith, and blend them with his new impressions, till he recovered a consciousness of unity between his past and present." 85

With his deep human tenderness awakened, Silas comes to partake in the customs and forms of Raveloe life; he becomes once more a part of the world around him. He even comes to have faith in the goodness of the world. Silas

84 Lillian Haddakin: 'Silas Marner', p. 73.
85 Silas Marner, Chap. XVI.
Warner's alienation from society and loss of faith in God are overcome by his love for Eppie and by the kindly administration of Dolly Winthrop. Since he wanted Eppie to be at no disadvantage in the society of Raveloe, he becomes interested in the practices, standards and institutions of Raveloe life, and in time surroundings and his own past self were no longer alien to him.

The education of Silas may be perceived in this dialogue with Dolly Winthrop:

"And if you could but ha' gone on trustening, master Warner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow-creatures and been so love," says Dolly. "Ah," Silas replies, "but that 'ud ha' been hard...; it 'ud ha' been hard to trusten them."

But now Silas can shore Dolly's faith in the divine love: There's good e 'this world — I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see e' spite o' the trouble and the wickedness."86

Later when Eppie decides to stay with Silas rather than with Godfrey Cass, Silas tells Dolly Winthrop, 'I think I shall trusten till I die'.87

86 Silas Marner, Chap. XVI.
87 Ibid., Chap. XXI.