CHAPTER II

THEMES
'George Eliot was a power of the first magnitude in fiction, and the novel of ideas, the novel with a theme in lieu of plot was her creation'.

Before George Eliot ever thought of making literature out of her earliest impressions of life in the Midland, she had been for years an earnest student of philosophy and psychology, well abreast of contemporary science, the friend and collaborator of the leading thinkers, and herself a writer on philosophical and social subjects. She had translated Strauss and Feuerbach, and was widely known as a free thinker with strong views on ethical questions. In a letter to her publisher she wrote:

Art must be either real and concrete, or ideal and eclectic. Both are good and true in their way, but my stories are of the former kind. I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are, seen through such a medium as my own nature gives me.

The moral intent of George Eliot’s novels is undeniable; all the critics from F. R. Leavis to Henry James have acclaimed it. Henry James, who established her claim as the pioneer

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of the philosophical novel, recorded in his *Partial Portraits* that for George Eliot 'the novel was not primarily a picture of life, capable of deriving a high value from its form, but a moralizing fable, the last word of a philosophy endeavouring to teach by example.'

George Eliot clearly affirmed the moral role of art:

The object of art is the development of beauty — not merely sensuous beauty, but moral and spiritual beauty.

George Eliot emancipated herself from the Evangelical creed in which she had been brought up, but she was deeply religious-minded. In fact, she never repudiated a profound sense, not merely of divine immanence, but also of divine transcendency. The moral code founded on Puritan theology had soaked itself too deeply into the fibre of her thought and feeling. She might have had no belief in heaven and hell and miracles, but she believed in right and wrong and man's paramount obligation to follow right. Duty was the first article of her belief. She admired truthfulness and chastity, industry and self-restraint. She disapproved of loose living and recklessness, deceit and self-indulgence.

The second fundamental in her philosophy is a belief in free will. She thought every man's character was in his own

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4 *Westminster Review*: LVIII (October, 1852).
hands to mould into the right shape or the wrong; and she felt that all his strength should be put forward to mould it right. Nor did she think that man was excused for his failure to follow the right code by the removal of the Supernatural sanction. The third fundamental of her philosophy is a conviction that life is just. However, well-meaning or lucky one may be, one cannot escape the consequences of one's actions; our sins ultimately find us out, and our slightest slip is visited on us.

Thus her philosophy was a moral one. It is in the light of these views that George Eliot constructed her novels. As David Cecil says, 'The ideas which are their germ are all moral ideas, the conflicts which are the mainspring of their action are always moral conflicts.'

In almost all her novels the moral theme is the principal object of treatment. She wrote in *Middlemarch*:

> We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves.

The most universal manifestation of moral stupidity is selfishness, narrowing the human outlook and blinding the insight. The novels exemplify the central impression emerging from them, i.e. the education of the individual will through

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6 *Middlemarch*, Chap. XXI.
a unique spiritual metamorphosis — the shaking off of egoism, and in certain admirable cases, the illumination of principal characters by a slow disillusioned growth of altruism — a consciousness of being sharers of life with fellow-beings. Bernard J. Paris describes this in different terms:

George Eliot placed her major emphasis, however, upon the need for objectivity. She believed that man is born a subjective creature and that objectivity is developed only through the painful education of experience.7

In every novel a major portion of the story delineates the course of egoism in the lives of people. In such novels as Janet's Repentance, Adam Bede, Silas Marner, the moral course is clear. The characters are in a position to do what they think is right, only they are tempted to do something wrong instead; and the conflict turns on the struggle between their principle and their weakness. In Silas Marner, Silas is naturally an affectionate, unselfish character, warped by a love of money, but ultimately redeemed by his love for the child, Eppie; Godfrey Cass is a kindly, well-meaning young man, marred by his inability to admit the disagreeable truth about himself. Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede is another character, marred by his weakness to resist the temptations of the flesh; Hetty is a vain, weak little egoist whose vanity and weakness bring her nearly to the gallows; Janet Dempster

is a generous, idealistic character saved from drink and
despair by the influence of an evangelical preacher. In
The Mill on the Floss, Maggie Tulliver thirsts for righteousness,
though she has the innocent streak of isolation from the
sorrow of others in proportion to her own self-absorption.

Part of Middlemarch is concerned with a similar theme.
Besides the idealist Dorothea, who soars after illimitable
satisfaction, we have Lydgate, a brilliant young doctor, whose
high ambition is frustrated by blind spots in his character.
In a sense the novel is one of moral discovery, each of the
more important characters learning the truth about himself
or herself as a result of what happens to him.

Each of the three stories in Scenes of Clerical Life
presents a subtle, detailed, and absorbing study of egoism.
Countess Czerniaski, the great leech, is the immediate cause
of the sad fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton; and the principal
role of the Countess's intimate relations with the family of
the Rector in making his fortunes sad testifies to the
predominance of the moral theme in this story. Similarly,
the central motif in Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story is the ruinous
effect of the egoism of Captain Wybrow. In Janet's Repentance
too, the moral angle is the principal one.

The moral theme is intensified in the novels that follow.
Adam Bede has for its principal theme the emergence of Adam
and Arthur Donnithorne from narrow egoism to nobler fellow-feeling, resulting in the moral enlargement of Adam and Arthur. 8 Silas Marner, of all George Eliot's works, comes nearest to a 'moral fable'; for it teaches by example the philosophy of mutual influences. It sets forth in quintessence the process of transition from egoism to altruism, the movement of Silas, first under the influence of forces of isolation from humanity to extreme of egoism and then from extreme self-centredness to normal human warmth by dedicating all his resources to the foundling child, Eppie. In The Mill on the Floss, the theme of egoism versus altruism is elevated from the individual level to the general level of St. Ogg's society. On the general level is the conflict between the various selfish interests of the Tullivers and Dodsons and Wakems in the complex structure of St. Ogg's society. Then there is the tragic clash of the warm-hearted, sympathetic Maggie with the narrow, selfish, and feelings St. Ogg's values. 9

The last four novels present a more rigid and concerted demonstration of the theme of egoism. In them the canvas is wider, and the egoists more thoroughly done. In Romola.

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8 See Chapters IV and V of the thesis for details.

9 Rena Stump in her Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels has discussed the theme of egoism at considerable length, through an excellent study of the animal imagery in the novel.
for instance, she reincarnates the story of the Florentine Republic in the 1490s in the moral light of the perennial clash between egoism and altruism. The theme of Romola's education of her soul from egoism to altruism is, indeed, equally appealing.

In Felix Holt, George Eliot shows how the attempts to improve the lot of humanity through political reform are defeated by the vitiating power of egoism. The other thread of the story, again, presents the typical spectacle of the education of Esther Lyon from egoism to benevolence. The so-called 'Transome Story' deals entirely with the conflict of egoisms of Mrs. Transome, Lawyer Jerwyn and Harold Transome.

In Middlemarch, the preponderance of the clash of egoism and altruism is presented with such artistic skill that it leaves the impression of being the characteristic feature of the spectacle of the world, as vanity is in the world of Thackeray's Vanity Fair.

10 Gerald Bullet writes that the dominant theme in Romola is the contrast and conflict between unscrupulous opportunist egoism and self-sacrificing devotion to duty.
11 See Chap. VI of the thesis for Romola's moral development.
Daniel Deronda studies the perennial theme in the upper class society of Grandcourt and Gwendolen Harleth. In this novel the twin themes of egoism and altruism are so distinct that they threaten to divide the novel into two. The Gwendolen story deals entirely with egoism by its masterly study of two extremely cold-blooded egoists, Gwendolen and Grandcourt, and other sinister characters. The Deronda part of the story, on the contrary, deals almost entirely with altruism, preaching by example the Comtean slogan 'Live for others'.

The moral theme, thus, underlies all George Eliot's novels. Wagenknec't observes:

Here is this problem of selfishness, for example. George Eliot's novels hardly deal with anything else. The hapless Hetty Sorrel and the far more deeply criminal Tito Melema destroy themselves in their egoism; Arthur Donnithorne and Rosamond Nincy destroy those who trusted in them. Esther Lyon is a charming girl when we first meet her, and a good girl, but her interests in life are trifling and highly personal. She would have made a perfect heroine for almost any other novelist; George Eliot perceived that one must live for something larger than that.12

As a moralist, George Eliot laid great emphasis on the performance of one's duty and in leading a life of virtue and righteousness. If a person failed to stick to these paths and deviated from righteousness, he was likely to be swallowed up by the swirling waves of moral turpitude. A slip in conduct

12 Wagenknec't: The Cavelcade of the English Novel.
was likely to lead to serious consequences resulting in the deterioration of the moral fibre in the person.

A recurrent theme in George Eliot is the evil which comes about through casual acts of thoughtlessness or through well-meaning incompetence. Tito Melema, Arthur Donnithorne, Godfrey Cass, Maggie Tulliver, are, in turn, assailed by one and the same temptation — to deny, or to put out of sight our duties to others, to gratify some demand for egoistic pleasure or happiness, or to avoid some wholesome, necessary pain. Arthur, vain, affectionate, susceptible, owed no one a grudge, and would have liked to see everyone about him happy. Tito was clever and beautiful, kind and gentle in his manners, without a thought of anything cruel or base. And Godfrey was full of easy good nature, and Maggie, replete with a wealth of eager love. But in the linked necessity of evil, each one of them, beginning with a soft yielding to egoistic desires, becomes capable of deeds or of wishes that are base and cruel. The novelist herself comments on Arthur's predicament, once the irrevocable evil is committed, letting loose a chain of consequences:

His deed was reacting upon him — was already governing him tyrannously, and forcing him into a course that jarred with his habitual feelings.13

13 Adam Bede, Chap. XXVIII.
George Eliot believed that life is just. She was sure that those who live a virtuous life are essentially contented, that those who live a vicious life are essentially discontented. She says about Tito that he was experiencing that 'inexorable law of human souls that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character'. However, well-meaning one might be or, however lucky, one cannot escape the consequences of one's own action:

... our deeds are like children that are born to us, they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never: they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness; and that dreadful vitality of deeds was pressing hard on Tito for the first time.

For George Eliot one of the greatest deterrents to wrongdoing and incentives to right behaviour is a vision of the consequences of our deeds. In novel after novel vividly presents the consequences of wrongdoing. The law of retributive justice found in her novels is a gift of her moral philosophy.

One of the chief themes in Adam Bede is the nemesis that follows wrongdoing, and the irrevocability of the past. Arthur meets a life of shame, shattering his dreams of being a good squire. In Felix Holt, the other theme besides the

14 Romola, Chap. XXIII.
15 Ibid., Chap. XVI.
politicomo-moral one is of retribution following wrong action. Mrs. Transome is a victim of chronic fear, resulting from her lawless action committed long ago. In Tito Melema, Eliot presents the moral consequences which occur when tradition and a sense of social loyalty fail to take root in a basically selfish nature. In *Romola*, the idea of nemesis forms the centre to which all else is made subservient. In *Daniel Deronda*, nemesis overtakes Gwendolen in the form of remorse and self-scorn for having knowingly married Grandcourt that he is father to Mrs. Glasher's children.\(^{16}\)

Events take their natural course: such characters are Godfrey, Arthur Donnithorne, Mrs. Transome and lawyer Jermy, Tito Melema, Bulstrode and Gwendolen Harleth are eventually victims of the nemesis set in motion by their own actions: it is, as George Eliot would say, 'the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth of its kind'.\(^{17}\)

No doubt, her ethical motive is broader than the mere emancipation of thought on the formulation of a political programme. On the one hand, it shows how in obedience to law,
character grows or decays; how a single fault or flaw brings suffering and death and ruin; how, on the other hand, there is a making perfect through suffering, a regeneration through sin itself, a hope for the world through renunciation and self-sacrifice of the individual. As Dowden remarks:

> The same doctrine of the necessity of self-renunciation, of the obligation laid upon men to accept some other rule of conduct than the desire of pleasure is enforced in the way of warning with terrible emphasis. ... Maggie has heard the voice of the great mediaeval bearer of the cross; a higher rule than that of self-pleasing lives in her inner-most conscience, and therefore she has strength at the last to renounce the cruel pursuit of personal joy, and to accept a desert for her feet henceforth to walk in, and bitter waters to alay her thirst.18

Besides Maggie, there is Romola who perfects through suffering and self-denial. She learns it from Savanarola. George Eliot never doubted that human happiness and the full development of individual personality depended on mutual love and service. Joan Bennett explains the reasons for the self-renouncing dictates of the heart:

> Self-sacrifice is good because human happiness depends on it; man cannot live alone and social life is incompatible with unrestrained self-indulgence.19

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The problems which face Hetty and Arthur, Maggie and Stephen, Godfrey and Silas, Lydgate and Dorothea, are all problems concerned with the adjustment of the individual to the community, and with the discovery of a mean point between complete self-repression and unchecked self-indulgence, the motive for self-sacrifice being the happiness of other people.

This leads us to the second major theme, second only to the moral one in George Eliot's novels — the social theme. The general feature of the novels of George Eliot is that in them the story of the individual is subordinated to the story of society; in other words, the macrocosm of the novels dominates the microcosm. The principle is echoed in George Eliot's own words, she writes in *Felix Holt* that 'There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life'.

The story of the individual is secondary to the story of the milieu. The lives and struggles of individual characters are set only in the wider and more significant frame of the times and the web of circumstances. As Barbara Hardy puts it, the human tragedy in George Eliot's novels:

'is always placed in a precisely defined social context, where classes are graded and work brought to life. Like Tolstoy and Zola, though in a less spectacular way, she tries to measure the individual life against the flow of history, showing society as shaping and being shaped by each of its human units'.

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The positivists depicted society as an evolving organism composed of interacting organs, and this positivist conception of society as an organism profoundly influenced George Eliot's vision of the human condition resulting in what she called a socio-political conservatism.

Bissel, in his brilliant essay, shows the different roles the social analysis plays in her novels:

how in Adam Bede it has a minor, background role; how in The Mill on the Floss it bulks much more significantly and strengthens and clarifies the theme; how finally in Middlemarch it helps to determine the choice of material, gives added depth to characterization, and provides one of the ideas by which a diverse and complex world takes a form and meaning ... In Middlemarch, for instance, her vision of society and her vision of the individual never split asunder.21

In Adam Bede, the theme, in its simplest manifestation, is a social one, the tragedy resulting from the love of a squire and a milkmaid. But a close perusal of the book shows that the moral theme overshadows it, and the social structure operates as a background. The social analysis is more complex and persuasive in The Mill on the Floss. The whole theme of the book is surely the contrast between the 'beautiful soul' and the commonplace surroundings, i.e. the struggle between the individual and the milieu. The noble Maggie, highly

strung and intelligent, of intense sensibility and possessing artistic and poetic tastes finds no response from her unsympathetic environment. 22

_Silas Marner_, which has rightly been called by FR Leavis a 'moral fable', works out, in its own way, the interplay of society and individual. _Silas Marner_ is essentially a myth of spiritual rebirth. Marner loses his faith in God and reliance on his fellow beings by the false accusation of theft, migrates from his home somewhere in the industrial north to the village of Raveloe, and there carries on his trade of weaver, but keeps aloof from his neighbours, being left with no object in life than to save and hoard and count his money. One night the treasure disappears and the old miser is full of despair. And then, as he makes up from one of his epileptic fits, the first thing his eyes fall upon is a child's golden hair, which he almost thinks to be his gold. The little foundling who has crept into his cottage becomes the instrument of his redemption, for:

22 David Daiches sees _The Mill on the Floss_ as a complex novel 'in which the moral problems of characters are illustrated by the relation between one character and another, those relations between one character and another, those relations in turn growing naturally out of the daily life and work of different members of a community.' (A Critical History of English Literature, vol. IV).
No child was afraid of approaching Silas when Eppie was near him ... for the little child had come to link once more with the whole world. There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world... 23

In *Silas Marner*, we have George Eliot's most poignant treatment of the theme of alienation. 24 Silas's whole life has been a series of disconnections. First, his opportunities for social participation have been restricted to a Dissenting Sect splintered off by its narrow principles from both the religious Establishment and the surrounding secular world. Even within this tight brotherhood, Silas becomes separated from his fellows by the unaccountable fits, which he refuses to exploit to his advantage. His cramped beliefs, poor education, and ignorance of human nature, together with his natural capacities for affection and faith, conspire to make him preeminently 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. Thomson says 'The disaster is especially radical because his loss is not so much material as spiritual. Silas must learn to live not only in an entirely different region but with an

23 *Silas Marner*, Chap. XIV.

24 *Silas the weaver* is her full study in alienation, anticipating the subtler, more complex treatments of the theme in such characters as Harold Transome and Dorothea Brooke.
entirely new set of values, or rather with the shards of his old ones". All George Eliot's early novels Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner and Felix Holt are a contribution to the data of sociology. In them, she devotes herself to the study of natural history of the social classes, especially of artisans and peasantry; and the degree in which they are influenced by local conditions. Besides a study of their maxims and habits, she also deals with the interaction of the various classes.

The interplay and interdependence of the moral and social themes is the quintessence of George Eliot's philosophy. Her characteristic subject is the necessary submission of individuals to their own society, be it Renaissance Florence or nineteenth-century St. Ogg's. This submission is to be made not so much in the interest of this or that society as in the general interest of the socialization of self. In George Eliot's view any society is preferable to the explosive egoism of the individual. Calvin Bedient rightly says:

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Because of her devotion not to a unique or particular society but to the idea of society itself, George Eliot's documentary realism tends to function as merely the illustration of a moral. ... The essence of George Eliot's fiction is a mixture of moral caution and a strong sentiment of sociality ... 26

Closely linked to this is the theme of social determinism. George Eliot saw a deterministic universe as a marvellously complex unit in which all parts are intricately related to each other, where nothing is really separable, and where past and future are both implicit in the present. Nothing in such a universe is explicable without reference to the time and place in which one has been brought up, with one's friends and relations, with one's past.

It is obvious that George Eliot's extraordinary insight into the workings of society is closely related to this view, probably both as cause and effect. The persistent theme of egoism which isolates man from his natural ties is also related to the notion of a complex deterministic universe. The theme is embodied in the story of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede. This theory finds expression in the words of George Eliot in Middlemarch:

In the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocation in a daily course determined for them, much in the same way as the tie of their cravats, there is always a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. 27

26 Calvin Bedient: Architects of the Self (Berkley, Los Angeles, 1972), p. 34.
27 Middlemarch, Chap. XV.
Social determinism finds its expression best in *Middlemarch*, 'A Study of Provincial Life', no doubt. Here the stories of the individuals become more and more entangled in the framework of the milieu. Its theme, as Gerald Bullet puts it, is 'the diversity of provincial manners and the significance of ordinary lives'.\(^\text{28}\) The canvas now is at its widest; it takes in the whole complex life of a provincial town in the middle of the century, bringing on the scene half-a-hundred different characters. All these characters and social groups touch at innumerable points; their motives and the consequences of their acts are interwoven to a very large extent. They prove beyond doubt that no member of human society can have an independent existence; everything he does affects the remainder.

With the diversity of social class, there is a wider diversity of occupation and profession. Also there is a remarkable fusion of social, material and personal motives of the characters. Lydgate's chosen mission to be a medical reformer is a social as well as an intellectual goal. Dorothea Brooke, like Lydgate, had an ardent desire to be a power for good in the world, but her social sympathy and her 'passionate ideal nature' which 'demanded an epic life' were frustrated by the meanness of opportunity.

This leads us to what is George Eliot's great subject in *Middlemarch*. George Eliot is here investigating human aspirations, in particular the aspirations to serve and to do good, in the light of the two factors that can make or mar their realisation. One is personal, the qualities within the individual himself — self-knowledge or lack of it, strength of will or, otherwise, human frailty; the other is social, the limits to action imposed upon the individual by the society in which he is born, which also dictates the channels open to aspiration.

Dorothea, for instance, had no home ties which bound her to immediate and satisfying duties. She had lost her parents in her childhood, and being educated in Switzerland, she did not find herself identified with the history or interests of any particular community. Her social position cut her off from any vital class feelings or activities:

She was oppressed by the gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid — where the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have sharpened her energies. 29

Her energies and affections were undirected and she was left free to dwell on 'vague ambitions', without achieving anything in the world. The failure of society to provide a path for

29 *Middlemarch*, Chap. XXVIII.
her energies leads to the implicit comparison between Dorothea and St. Theresa in the Prelude:

That Spanish woman who lived three hundred years ago, was certainly not the last of her kind. Many Theresas have been born who have found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity. 30

The interdependence of the various parts of the social organism works for both good and ill. The individual is committed, without choice, to a social life. He cannot disengage his lot from that of his fellows; and, just as he cannot help being acted upon, he cannot act for himself alone — he cannot help shaping the lives of others. As a consequence of this dynamic relation of the individual to his fellows, moral responsibility, duty is built into the order of things.

Often this duty is onerous; but more often it is a precious source of moral direction and value. This is exemplified in the stories of Maggie and Romola. In The Mill on the Floss this duty, resulting from moral responsibility, manifests itself in the form of Maggie's self-sacrifice. She sacrifices first her love for Philip out of duty towards her brother and father and later her love for Stephen for Lucy's sake. Similarly, Romola too continues loving her husband devotedly in spite of Tito's unfaithfulness to her. This duty

30 Middlemarch, Prelude.
ultimately leads to their moral enlargement. 31

Another recurrent theme in the novels of George Eliot is the retarding friction of circumstance on individuals. Her characters frequently find their aspirations and intentions thwarted by circumstances, by the resistance which their will encounters in the will of others and in the pre-existing network of relations which constitutes their medium. More often than not there is a painful disparity between the individual nature and the circumstances in which he finds himself, and the medium presents limitations.

This disparity between the inner self and outer fact is embodied in the plight of Maggie and Dorothea. Both are women of high ideal enthusiasm, whose desire for a widely beneficent function in life, is thwarted by the meanness of opportunity. George Eliot's theme is the paralyzing of noble natures, as the life-histories of Dorothea and Lydgate exemplify.

Sometimes the thwarting circumstance assumes its most menacing shape — in the form of incompatibility in marriage. The stories of the unhappy married lives of Dorothea, Lydgate and Gwendolen testify to this.

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31 G.H. Lewes has rightly said that 'his man's moral life, his desire for the welfare of others, is the consequence of his relation to society'. (Quoted Paris, p. 55.)
Another recurrent theme in George Eliot's novels is that of the mutual influence of human beings in our social order. She advocates the positivist concept of Humanity arising from the glorification of the mortal man who becomes immortal in his noble action. The motto to Chapter XXVII of Middlemarch shows George Eliot's faith in the glorification of man:

Let the high Muse chant love Olympian; 
We are but mortals, and must sing of man.

One of the pervasive forms of the glorification of humanity in the novels is the recurrent theme of the interdependence of human beings. She enunciates it in the Scenes of Clerical Life as the 'Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another!'. 32

It forms the main theme in Silas Marner, described by George Eliot herself as 'The remedial influence of pure natural human relations'. 33

It is the positivist concept of love as expressed in human conduct which underlies the moral theme of the passages from egoism to altruism in all her novels. It is love among human beings that manifests itself in the removal of selfish egoism and its replacement by the altruistic slogan of 'Live for Others'.

32 Janet's Repentance, Chap. XIX.
Dinah Morris, in Adam Bede feels its compelling force, and after a futile ignorant struggle with it realizes its effect on the enlargement of truly virtuous faculties. The salutary and strengthening trait of love is illustrated in the relationship between Philip and Maggie, and Eppie and Silas. It is illustrated in the touching stories of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw and in the story of Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen:

'So potent in us is the infused action of another soul, before which we bow in complete love.'

One of the most explicit doctrinal statements of the magic of such love is found in Silas Marner:

Perfect love has a breath of poetry which can exalt the relations of the least exalted human beings.

This is manifested in Eppie's for Silas. By and by she becomes his religion. Separated from her, he would become again degenerate and lost. At the dreaded prospect of parting, he confesses his dependence on Eppie: '... If I lost you, Eppie, I might come to think that I was forsaken again, and lose the feeling that God was good to me.'

George Eliot felt that religious knowledge and life come to us through the influence of individual souls, whose sympathy and counsel awakens us to a new sense of the value of life, and to a new earnestness to work henceforth not for self, but

34 Silas Marner, Chap. XIX.
for other than self. Thus love, admiration, sympathy and sacrifice of man for man, constitute the religion of humanity.

In the course of the moral evolution of George Eliot's characters, the experience of suffering leads to vision which, in its turn, intensifies sympathy. At the completion of the moral development, George Eliot's characters arrive at some version of Feuerbach's religion of humanity. This moral vision is dramatized again and again in George Eliot's fiction. In Daniel Deronda, for instance, we are shown how two natures are ennobled and enlarged. Gwendolen is rescued through anguish and remorse, and by the grace, human if also divine, which the soul of man has power to bestow upon the soul of man, from self-centred insolence of youth and the crude egoism of a spoiled child. Deronda himself is rescued from the danger of wandering energy and wasted ardours by the enlargement of his moral vision. He is incorporated into a great ideal life, made one with his nation and race, and there is confided to him the heritage of duty which is bound with love.

In working for others than the self, Dorothea too had learnt that life can be given a religious meaning and sanctification if we can respond to those opportunities of beneficence that come our way. A religiously significant life can be achieved by us, through our relations with those immediately around us. Romola too had discovered that life has unquestionable value and purpose, as long as our existence
is not good to others: 'If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain.'

These are some of the major themes, which run through George Eliot's novels, and they have a direct bearing on the kind of characters created.

35 Romola, Chap. LXIX.