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Positivism in the Works of George Eliot

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POSITIVISM IN THE WORKS OF GEORGE ELIOT

by

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This paper attempts to find in the facts of George Eliot's life the evidences of Positive Philosophy, to trace the philosophy to its logical basis and to show its influence on her work. There are many who say such a study is useless or at best unimportant, but I do not agree. I am not attempting to "piece out" an entire philosophy by combining fragmentary allusions I have found in her work. I am not disappointed to find her thought inconsistent, or mixed, or different at one period from another. There is no philosophical system that must not admit ambiguity and inconsistency if it proceeds far enough. Life presents problems which probably never will be solved.

Then, too, the literary artist need not settle all the problems of existence before he begins to write. His province is merely to record the manifestations of eternal problems in actual life. The literary artist does not theorize or expound; he observes with sensitivity and records with sympathy and proportion. Philosophy and literature have their separate spheres: the former strives for accuracy and consistency, the latter for adequacy and beauty. In writing this paper I am not insensible to this distinction, and I remember that George Eliot was not a philosopher in the strict sense of the word.

But she was a student of two philosophies that shaped her observations of life, and for a study of her work, an understanding of her point of view is of great importance.
Since this paper is a discussion of George Eliot's Positivism, there may be an objection to the introduction into the study of her appreciation of Greek thought. This is absolutely essential to an evaluation of her Positivism, for in the former philosophy lay her greatest strength and in the latter her greatest weakness.

It is with regret that I avoid comment on George Eliot's characters, her wit and humor, her power of description. For the most part, they are irrelevant to this study, but they help to qualify her as a unique figure in literature.

This study is concerned with all my major academic interests. Hardly one of my college professors is not represented here. My thanks are due my science professors who opened to me a wider world of living creatures, and to the philosopher in whose classes I spent some of the most treasured hours of my school days.

Among the many grateful acknowledgments due Dr. John S. Harrison for his helpful suggestions in this study, the most heartfelt is for his introducing me to the world of Greek tragedy. But for it, I should not have cared to write this paper.
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CHAPTER I

GEORGE ELIOT'S ACQUAINTANCE WITH POSITIVISM

Preparation

A consideration of the works of George Eliot shows us that the main element in both character and setting is the humble life of provincial England which she ennobles in her works. But in plot construction the influences of her girlhood do not operate. Here we see evidences of a blend of two philosophies: Greek Idealism, and the Positive Philosophy of the scientific age.

"Her roots were down in the pre-railroad, pre-telegraphic period, the days of fine old leisure,—but the fruit was formed during an era of extraordinary activity in scientific and mechanical discovery. Her genius was the outcome of these conditions. It could not have existed in the same form deprived of either influence."

George Eliot was born into a respectable Warwickshire family of modest circumstances. The prosaic conditions of her early life gave little promise of the achievement that lay ahead. In the entire story of her success, self-conquest is the keynote.

Her father, Robert Evans, a land-agent for Sir Francis Newdigate, was a conservative man with an acute mind and an indomitable will. Her mother was practical, shrewd, and brisk. The family lived by a tradition of economy, affection and orthodoxy.

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1 J. W. Cross, Life of George Eliot as Told in Her Letters and Journal (Boston: Dana Estes and Co. N. D.), I, 8
Their home life was quiet and wholesome. We would have a scene typical of the Evans home if we could envision Mrs. Evans at her knitting by the fireside, Chrissie, the older daughter, sitting nearby with needlework, young son Isaac, little-boy-like, taking inventory of the trivial treasures of his pockets, while the middle-aged Mr. Evans taught the youngest child, Mary Anne to read.

The farm life outside was wholesome and delightful. As children Mary Anne and Isaac had the run of the trimly hedged countryside. They roamed along the Brown Canal nearby, watched the barnyard animals and hung curiously around dairy and kitchen.

Nevertheless, the life was rather meagre in social contacts. These came chiefly through church attendance. Mary Anne was baptised at the church at Chilver's Coton and attended regularly until her twentieth year.

Mr. Evans had a profound respect for the basis of the religious institution—dogma. Though not a fanatic, he was zealously orthodox and expected his daughter to be so as well. Their religious life was marked by blind confidence in Evangelical teaching which had prompted the recent movement to tighten the governance of the English Church. Given the dignity of intelligent acceptance, the orthodox view served her very well during her early years. She observed it with the deepest seriousness and in her late teens practised the most rigid asceticism, dedicating all her energies to virtuous living, denying herself the innocent pleasures of frivolous dress and secular music. On a visit to London with her brother at the age of eighteen she declined a symphony and spent her money for a copy of Josephus.
Unlike her neighbors' her moral life was ruled by more than the prosaic respectability of church-going and common sense. Her idea of goodness consisted in more than milling the cheese finely, wearing proper mourning for deceased relatives and maintaining unimpeachable order of the articles in the bureau drawers.

Her morality was wider because her interests were more profound. From her earliest babyhood she had been motivated by an eager passion to learn. She had attended girls' schools until she was sixteen when, at the death of her mother she undertook the management of the household at the expense of continuing her formal education.

This was almost like imprisonment to her. She had loved her studies passionately and already half-formed visions had come to her that the power of her mind was to achieve greatness. She continued her studies on her own initiative. She read continuously and learned German and Italian almost unaided. We understand very well the repression she had in mind when she said, "You may try but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl."

The conditions of her early life have their very important direct influence on her works, but our concern with them here is indirect; they act negatively to prepare her for a new way of life.

One of the outstanding qualities of George Eliot's novels is their scholarship. They are marked by a keen rationality, a thoughtful rather than an emotional approach. There is also a tendency to

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philosophic discourse which distinguishes the author as a scholar. George Eliot's schooling, so much of it obtained without supervision, prepared her for an inquiring approach to the problems of life. She read not only novels and poetry, but metaphysics, science, history, theology and mathematics.

Early in her school years she showed a talent for music and enjoyed playing the piano throughout her life. Before she was ten years old she became recognized in school for her literary compositions. But most important of all for our consideration was the fact that she had an inquiring mind and a very penetrating power of reasoning.

Before she was twenty she had made the inevitable step for one of so unresting a mind. She had begun to inquire into the premises upon which her well-regulated and narrow existence was founded. A new project she had in mind was to study ecclesiastical history and to make a chart to record the main events. In such a study it was inevitable that she should inquire into the philosophical substantiation of the dogmas of orthodoxy. And while dogma has an important position in human thought, it does not at all satisfy the inquiring intellect.

Her study reaching back into source material and carried out over a period of some two or three years finally brought her to the conclusion that Calvinism was the only valid form of Christianity and that it was unacceptable because its motive was the entirely self-
ish interest of personal salvation.

This decision wrought in her life a conflict whose importance cannot be overestimated. She had cut herself loose from the accepted mainstays of her traditional life; she must rebuild her world on another pattern.

What this pattern was to be was also decided by her scholarly interests. As if prophetic of the direction her intellectual pursuits were to take, her first book, *The Linnet's Life*, introduced her at pre-school age to the two intellectual fields she was to unite, that of science, and that of the ideals. Her favorite passage in the book was illustrated by a picture of the Mother Linnet feeding her young. Here she was called upon to become a young naturalist observing the habits of birds and at the same time a sympathizer with the tender emotions touched in home life and motherhood.

**Interest in Science**

Her interest in scientific matters remained with her throughout her school years. She studied astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and geology. Through these studies she gained two attitudes toward science, one appreciative where scientific materials are concerned, and the other disciplinary, where scientific method is used.

From the first attitude sprang her characteristic habit of expressing ideas through figures of speech or images drawn from science. These are abundant in every one of her productions. The following is quoted because it shows not only in figurative but in literal fashion her interest in science:
"I have lately led so unsettled a life, and have been so desultory in my employments, that my mind, never of the most highly organized genus is more than usually chaotic; or rather it is like a stratum of conglomerated fragments that show here a jaw and rib of some ponderous quadruped, there a delicate alto-relievo of some fern-like plant, tiny shells and mysterious nondescrpts encrust-ed and united with some unvaried but useful stone. My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton; newspaper topics, morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, etymology and chemistry, Reviews and metaphysics,—all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening accession of actual events, relative anxieties and household cares and vexations.

If at this period George Eliot followed "Reviews and metaphysics" it would be impossible to suppose she escaped the influence of the scientific movement in the philosophy of her age. The advancements in biological science were being felt, and such men as Spencer, Darwin and Huxley were gaining recognition for their reinteretions of life in the light of scientific knowledge. The limits of the scientific method were being widened; empirical philosophy was turning its theorizing to all fields of human knowledge.

As we have seen, George Eliot's inquiries had led her to dissatisfaction with orthodox religious thought because dogma denied the privilege of inquiry to the reason. Abandoning the world of tra-
ditional religious thought, it is but natural that she should turn
to the explanations offered by the world of science.

George Eliot possessed above all qualities a firm integrity. She was ready to fight for her convictions. The most true literary representation of her own character, that of Maggie Tulliver, exemplified her rebellious nature truthfully. George Eliot as well as Maggie Tulliver had vented her childhood wrath and frustration on an old wooden doll whose head she had ground upon the floor in moments of strong feeling.

George Eliot's new conviction regarding religion and science inevitably clashed with the tradition of her father. A serious disagreement ensued and she passed one of the most difficult periods of her life before the difference was settled amicably.

Early Positivism—Coventry

The immediate influence in George Eliot's rebellion, and the friends who comforted her in her trouble were a group of new associates in Coventry, the Brays and the Hennells. Their influence on her thought should be considered seriously for it was very great.

Charles Bray was the author of a book, The Philosophy of Necessity, which interpreted the universe in terms of scientific law. She who had been hampered by dogmatism, who was confident in the power of reason accepted the doctrine enthusiastically. It was her first close contact with the Positive Philosophy. The book's main purpose was to emphasize the principle of cause and effect as an explanation of all phenomena.
The principle was applied even to the realm of mental activity: The principle which integrates the mind is that of cause and effect. George Eliot expresses acquiescence in a letter to Bray:

"In the fundamental doctrine of your book that mind presents itself under the same conditions of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena, (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex) I think you know that I agree."  

Mrs. Bray's brother, Charles Hennell, also influenced George Eliot. His book, *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, attempted to treat scripture as history and to account for the Biblical miracles as action explainable by scientific law.

Through Hennell she became acquainted with Miss Brabant, his fiancee who entrusted George Eliot with the commission she herself had agreed upon, namely the translation of Strauss' *Leben Jesu* from the German. She began the work in April, 1844 and completed it, one short vacation intervening in April 1846. Strauss, also influenced by the scientific movement had treated Jesus as a purely historical figure, the miracles as ordinary scientific phenomena.

These writings represent the application of scientific principles to a wider group of life problems than science had attempted to deal with before.

It was not however until after the death of her father that at the age of thirty George Eliot, now on the way to a literary career

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Ibid., p.356
in London, came under the full influence of Positivism.

Later Positivism—London

For some months she had been contributing articles to a literary-philosophical journal, The Westminster Review. In 1851 she accepted a sub-editorship, and through this work came in contact with the main current of philosophic thought.

A modified continuation of the thought initiated in her translation of Strauss is seen in her articles "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cuming" and "Worldliness and Otherworldliness: The Poet Young." She expresses the idea that the part of Christianity which is of most value is that which treats Christ as a human teacher of brotherly service.

"The idea of a God who not only sympathizes with all we feel and endure for our fellow-men, but who will pour new life into our too languid love, and give firmness to our vacillating purpose, is extension of multiplication of the effects produced by human sympathy; and it has been intensified for the better spirits who have been under the influence of Orthodox Christianity by the contemplation of Jesus as a God manifest in the flesh."

"So long as belief in propositions is regarded as indespensable to salvation, the pursuit of truth as such is not possible any more than it is possible for a man who is swimming for his life to

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make meteorological observations on the storm which threatens to
overwhelm him."

Such a view of the religious problem is distinctly a re-
bellion against the dogmatic assumptions of orthodoxy, a view of re-
ligion founded not in faith but in fact. Dogmas are seen as shackles
which restrain man from accurate thought.

These are the ideas she emphasized in a review of The Pro-
gress of the Intellect by Mackay, an editor of the Westminster Review.
In this essay, she hints an acceptance of the theory of Evolution
applied to social and cultural progress:

"Our civilization and yet more our religion, are an anom-
alous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us
like so many petrifications from distant ages, with living ideas,
the offspring of a true process of development. We are in bondage
to terms and conceptions, which, having had their roots in conditions
of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality,
and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue. The effort
to spread enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by these
idola theatri ... Each age and each race has a faith and a symbol-
ism suited to its needs and its stage of development and...for suc-
ceeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms
of the past is as futile as embalming the dead body in the hope that
it may one day be resumed by the living soul."

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6 Ibid., p. 128

7 J. W. Cross, op. cit., I, 132
Divine revelation, a theological manifestation of the supernatural is explained by the scientist as merely scientific discovery. God is the force working behind the phenomena of science, but we come in contact with Him only through observing the phenomena of life.

"It is Mr. Mackay's faith that divine revelation is not contained exclusively or pre-eminently in the facts or inspirations of any one age or nation, but is coextensive with the history of human development, and is perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation as firmament after firmament becomes visible to us in proportion to the power and range of our exploring instruments. The master key to this revelation is the recognition of the presence of undeviation law in the material and moral world—of that invariability of sequences which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science; but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion. It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible."

If any phase of George Eliot's philosophy is worthy of emphasis and reemphasis for its influence on her literary work, it is this doctrine of cause and effect, of invariability of antecedent and consequent, for it recurs continually in her treatment of moral life.

She was newly impressed with the doctrine through her acquaintance in London with Herbert Spencer, the philosophical champion of the theory of Evolution to whom she referred in one instance.

8 Ibid.
as an "...original and profound philosophical writer."

The philosophy of Spencer was strictly deterministic—that is, it was based upon the assumption that all the phenomena of existence are explainable in terms of cause and effect. Mackaye and George Eliot spoke of cause and effect in the moral world, but Spencer's world was purely materialistic. He accepted an ultimate principle behind and beyond the observations of science, something which would harmonize religion and science, but he did not speculate as to the nature of this Ultimate. He did not deny that its essence might be Mind, but the only treatment of mind in his system described it not as an entity, but as a manifestation of material interaction in the cause-effect pattern of temporal sequence. The direction this sequence should take was inherent in conditions of matter; it was accidental, in the sense that it was not controlled by any intelligence.

His theory of Evolution had as its basis two presuppositions: the Persistence of Force, and the Indestructibility of Matter. These two principles initiate a chain of cause and effect whose possible origin or ultimate end is not a matter of speculation to him.

If "pattern" is taken to refer to the manifestation of Mind as an entity, then Spencer, and with him George Eliot rejected the idea. George Eliot's friend, Sara Hennell, had been writing in defense of the scientific view and had rejected the idea of creative design in nature, substantiating her rejection with an analogy drawn from science. George Eliot's criticism of Sara Hennell's view reveals much about her own opinion:

\[Ibid., p.245\]
"I showed the passage on the eye... to Herbert Spencer and he agrees with us that you have not stated your idea so as to render it a logical argument against design. You appear to imply that development and gradation in organs and functions are opposed to that conception which they are not. I suppose you are aware that we all three hold the conception of creative design to be untenable. We only think you have not made out a good case against it."

But there is evidence elsewhere to the effect that George Eliot considered Spencer's materialism superficial: "...The Development Theory and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the process."

These apparent contradictions, acceptance of materialism on one hand, and on the other the recognition of an unknown power at work within the material world, show an inconclusive state of questioning on George Eliot's part. She was torn between her efforts at strict empiricism and the postulation of an unknown shaping principle which would necessarily take on some to the qualities relegated by dogma to an orthodox God.

There was none of the idealism in Spencer's world that George Eliot's early Christian training had taught her to crave as the soul-satisfying element of existence.

This hunger was only partly satisfied by her acceptance of the culminating philosophy of the scientific age--Positivism in the narrow

10 Ibid., p. 329
11 Ibid., II, 113
sense—the theory of the Frenchman, Auguste Comte. She was originally stimulated to study Comte by her close intellectual association with a friend of Herbert Spencer, George Henry Lewes who was at first a student and later an ardent admirer of Comtist thought. The philosophies outlined above occupied George Eliot during her pre-fictional years, but during her productive period Comte’s theories were her chief philosophical study.

Comte’s Philosophie Positive divided all the materials of knowledge into six sciences: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology (including psychology) and sociology. The order in which they are given is his own; man arrives at complete knowledge first of the science of mathematics. Astronomy grows out of it and is dependent upon it. Physics depends on astronomy and mathematics, chemistry on physics and its predecessors and so on.

There are, according to Comte, three stages of knowledge, the Theological, the Metaphysical, and the Positive. The Theological which was the most primitive, considered the facts of the universe as ruled not by invariable laws of sequence, but by single direct volitions of beings whose essence was life and mind. The mode of thought which M. Comte termed Metaphysical accounted for phenomena by ascribing them not to volitions, but to realized abstractions. He believed in cultural evolution. In the Metaphysical stage the mind had developed beyond the concept of an all-embracing God, breaking existence into numerous spontaneous forces, each with intelligence.

The highest stage of thought, according to Comte, the Positive, was the scientific stage wherein all experience was observed as re-
lated by cause and effect in temporal sequence and all existence is
embodied in scientific law. According to Comte, we must rid ourselves
of all fetish, all superstition of the theological stage and symbol-
ism of the metaphysical stage in order to be fit for the field of po-
tive thought where such "lifeless barbarisms" have no place.

Parallel to this, George Eliot says in her review of Huxley:
"Every phase of human development is part of that education of the race
in which we are sharing. Every mistake, every absurdity into which poor
human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we
may reap the benefit."

According to Comte, all the problems of existence could be ap-
proached by means of scientific method. That is to say all knowledge
concerns the particular instances of experience. He stated this to
be true not only of the material world, but of the world of mind as
well. Comte did not recognize mind as an entity—that was a habit of
the Metaphysical stage of thought. Thought of the individual, then,
is material response to the environment. The highest status of mind
is thought in its social expression, and social morality becomes Comte's
religion. He looked upon society as a developing organism dependent
for perfection upon the activities of individuals for the social good.
Moral action, though originating in the individual is not egoistic, but
altruistic. The highest good is social service.

This view of religion was a far cry from the orthodoxy George
Eliot had accepted in her early years, but one element of it appealed
to her. We have seen that she objected to Christianity on the ground

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
that she found its chief motive selfish. She was able to adopt
Comte's altruism, to glorify it into an ennobling aceticism which
was in a sense a return to her old view, but with a practical rather
than an ideal aim. The idea of self sacrifice for the good of others
became one of her dominant themes; her most precious ideal was the
ideal of duty. F. W. H. Myers tells the following incident about
the novelist:

"I remember how at Cambridge I walked with her once in Fel-
lows' Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred
somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words,
God, Immortality, Duty,—pronounced with terrible earnestness how
inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet
how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have stern-
accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law.
I listened, and night fell; her grave majestic countenance turned
toward me like a Sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she with-
drew from my grasp one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left
me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates. And when we
stood at length and parted, among that columnar circuit of forest
trees, beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be
gazing like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats, amid empty halls,—
on a sanctuary with no presence to hallow it and heaven left lonely
of a God."

For her, virtue and duty were synonymous, and duty consisted
in Comte's highest good—human service. She expressed the idea in

13 F. W. H. Myers, Essays Classical and Modern (London: Mac-
millan and Co. Ltd., 1921), p. 495
her habitual scientific imagery:

"We should aim to be like a plant in the chamber of sickness dispensing purifying air even in a region that turns all pale its verdure and cramps its instinctive propensity to expand. Society is a wide nursery of plants where the hundreds decompose to nourish the future ten, after giving collateral benefits to their contemporaries destined for a fairer garden."

George Eliot expressed great indebtedness to Comte for the "enlightenment he conferred" upon her life, and throughout her life contributed money to the Comtist fund which maintained the Positive Church.

One influence on George Eliot's Positivism remains to be considered, that of her husband, George Henry Lewes. He prompted her interest in Comte. His greatest claims to note lay in three of his books, *Life of Goethe*, *Seaside Studies*, a biological treatise, and *Biographical History of Philosophy*. He was a scientist-philosopher of some ability but was less noted than Spencer.

His importance in her life aside from personal relations lay in the fact that he united for her the fields of science and literature. He was a versatile genius who had wavered between literature and medicine, science and philosophy. When he met George Eliot he was writing articles about Positivism for a liberal journal called the Leader. Throughout her career he acted as her chief critic and manager, and his literary talents adapted him admirably for the work. On the other hand his pursuits and enthusiasms kept science and

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*J. W. Cross, op. cit., I, 58*
Positive Philosophy continuously before her mind. Her blending of the fields of literature and science she owed partly to his influence and to his contacts with many scientists on the Continent.

During the first year of their union (1856) they had a remarkable visit to Ilfracombe. He was collecting specimens for his "Seaside Studies" and she was basking in the natural beauty around her. The trip was memorable for two related reasons: first because it was then that she decided seriously to try her hand at fiction writing, and second because on this trip she came in intimate contact with the materials of biological science while collecting polyps and jelly-fish in the ocean shoals. Among the crags and hills that appeared to the scientist as a world of geologic wonders, she saw at first hand what the scientist saw, for she was a whole-hearted student. But she was also a creature with an unusual imagination and a passion for beauty, so that the geologic wonders were to her a many-colored fairyland and wading for polyps a tremendous, mysterious, beautiful adventure. This stimulation, more emotional than intellectual in nature did much to augment her devotion to scientific studies. But the intellectual impulse led her to believe, with Comte that by scientific study, man could arrive at perfect knowledge of the world. Such an influence might have made a critic of her, but the aesthetic appreciation of that kinship with living things which devotes poets to science is the force that turned her at this time to fiction writing, and George Henry Lewes was the chief influence.
Her Positivism Summarized and Evaluated

We have exposed now the contacts George Eliot made with Positivism from the time it led her away from orthodoxy until the time it found her eager for a career in fiction writing. Let us consider its principles now and evaluate them as the basis for literary production.

A consideration of her Positive Philosophy may be handled under two chief heads: method, or how the Positivist proposed to attain knowledge; and doctrine, or what conclusions he reached by use of his method.

The method of Positivism is the synthetic method explained by Spencer in the early chapters of his book Synthetic Philosophy. The scientific philosopher assembles the data of experience, according to a general similarity, and these genera are combined in a broader category of generality, until the categories emerge as a synthesis of particulars whose basis of synthesis is then accepted as a principle. It was Spencer's belief that science and religion would coalesce in the most abstract generality of each. But this coalescence was never made because Spencer did not choose to consider ultimate principles, and did not test his method by trying to reach ultimates through it. Indeed, he saw no necessity for doing so.

Positive knowledge is knowledge of the particular in aggregate. It is not the province of the scientist to know the ultimate nature of things, and therefore can never become philosophy as Spencer and George Eliot suspected.

The universal is implied in the particular, but we can not
reach universality in thought by considering the particular as such. In a synthesis of particulars we have only a collection of units. Merely hypothecating about them as units will not make them a unity. Unity is not achieved by the practice of observation, but by insight into the universal truth involved. And thought is rooted in the universal.

The only criticism of scientific method in philosophy is that science is not philosophy. Both Spencer and Comte admitted this, but, the admission made, they proceeded to explain the universe in terms of science as if science itself were not limited. George Eliot supplied this limitation, perhaps without realizing how serious it was.

The method of science still appealed to her: "Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma. Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breadth of science is a contest with mistake and must keep the conscience alive."

When she turned from religion to science, she was merely exercising that important function of the empiricist, namely to remind the rationalist and the idealist that there is a world of facts as well. She revolted against the insincerity of "other-worldliness" and plunged herself into the minutae of this painful, joyous, revolting, beautiful life.

Throughout her writings she remained very close to it. Her solemn representation of things as they are; as they must sometimes heart-breakingly be,—call it realism, or the birth of naturalism,

15George Eliot, Middlemarch, (Chicago: Rand McNally Co.).
or failure to recognize the heart of literature—there are critics of all three persuasions—yet this very nearness to life itself is a direct and obvious outcome of the pedestrian literalness of the experience philosophy.

To this attitude she owes her greatest literary purpose: the elevation of ordinary characters and common life to the plane of significant treatment in literature. But, let it be thoroughly understood that, with the aim once settled upon, she was able to achieve it only by abandoning positivism in the strict sense and turning to a very different philosophy, that which underlies Greek tragedy.

Let us turn now to an evaluation of positive doctrine. We have emphasized throughout her adherence to the view that the phenomena of existence present themselves in a temporal sequence of cause and effect, that there is a marked invariability of antecedent and consequent. This is known in philosophy as the doctrine of determinism, and was not at all a new idea of the scientific era.

However, it received an emphasis and an interpretation in positivism which was new. The determinism of Spencer is strictly materialistic. His theory of evolution emphasized how the action of an organism was dependent upon its inherited structure on one hand and upon its material environment on the other. All the world, even that of thought had its basis in matter which interacted according to a given sequence. Even the discernment of such a sequence by his own mind was implied to have a material basis. It is obvious that such a system is superficial, dogmatic and lifeless.

It served only to make George Eliot aware of a few scien-
tific principles which she used in her work. We can not be or do what we would because we are born with a certain organic limitation which will determine to some degree the nature of our action. What George Eliot knew further that Spencer did not is that we are also born with a spirit that continuously strives to transcend those limitations.

Comte's system was a little more productive of ideas which could be effectively interpreted in literature. His determinism, while not strictly materialistic, was kept within the confines of scientific particulars. Concerned only with the empirical view of life, the only non-material element it could contact was individual thought, and the highest expression of this was social intercourse or the exchange of finite ideas. His fixed sequence of antecedent and consequent, then could move to no more ultimate realm than that in which society was viewed as a developing organism integrated by the thoughts of the individuals comprising it.

For Spencer, the highest good was adjustment to environmental conditions. The final price for non-adjustment was annihilation. But the individual was not free to choose between these two conditions. He and his entire moral nature were merely a part of an all pervading mechanism.

According to Comte, he was a good man who took his place in the "social organism" and performed his social functions well. Only by studying the "social organism" by the method of Positive thought could the individual discern what his place in society was to be.
Comte's one ethical doctrine, that of self-denial for the performance of duty was a blind concept because it had no reference to ultimate principles.

This analysis makes Positivism quite unattractive, its ethics sentimental, but it was not so to George Eliot. The ideal of self-sacrifice and human service in the discharge of duties held great dramatic possibilities. The compulsion of the physical self against the better reason, of the hereditary propensities and conditions against antagonistic aims, of social duties against personal inclination, all embodying strong dramatic elements, came to be in George Eliot's mind, outgrowths of Positivism.

As she says, "A tragedy has not to expound why the individual must give way to the general; it has to show that it is impelled to give way, the tragedy consisting in the struggle involved and often in the entirely calamitous issue in spite of a grand submission."

The problem, then, restated is that of the individual struggling against a predetermined world, a world whose conditions are largely beyond the control of the individual. Positive determinism impressed George Eliot because it represented this great world of conditions impelled by an unalterable sequence of cause and effect. But she recognized a narrow fatalism in the system denying the individual capacity for moral action. She protested her belief in an individual will apart from the compulsion of the system: "I shall not be satisfied with your philosophy," she said in one instance, "until you have conciliated necessitarianism...with the practice of willing strong-

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16 J. W. Cross, op. cit., III. 35
ly...there is nothing to hinder you from it--except, you will say, the absence of a motive."

In other words, man is placed in the midst of a series of accidental conditions which are devoid of a directive intelligence, but he has wishes of his own apart from this "necessity", and intelligence enough to recognize when events run counter to these wishes. He struggles against compulsion, and is often noblest when he knows his struggle is sure to end in defeat. The triumph asserted is that of the crushing, unintelligent mechanism of the universe. Such a doctrine in literature is not worth striving for even if the writer finds the opportunity to paint "a grand submission".

**Positivism and Greek Thought**

The requisite for George Eliot was a system that admitted of the compulsion science had emphasized, but yet a system with breadth and significance. The human soul accepts personal defeat if that defeat represents triumph for a larger, more perfect order than that of human life. Where could George Eliot find a system embodying these dramatic clashes and yet not abstract in its "otherworldliness", but with a reference entirely human? For she was interested in the drama of man, not of God.

The answer to this need came to her in Greek tragedy. She had read the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus as a girl in her study of Greek, and reread them many times later in life. One of the last notes in her journal, made only a few days before her death speaks of

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the anticipation with which she and her husband, Mr. Cross looked forward to reading the dramas together.

The Greek dramas answered her requirements because they presented the drama of human beings caught in the meshes of a deterministic sequence such as had always held an intellectual attraction for George Eliot. But the nature of this determinism is rational and moral instead of physical and particular. Here we have the unchecked sequence as an emanation from an ideal world. The pattern it imposes on human conduct is an intelligent pattern, and, according to the Greek concept, a divine pattern. Everywhere the ideas manifest in this system are universal, and meaningful in the ultimate order of things. They transcend the world of action entirely, and man defeated in his own aims by the Greek Nemesis contributes by his personal failure to the great rational order of things in which the Good vindicates itself. Such a defeat is nobler than triumph and satisfies the soul. It gives eternal meaning to human experience.

The system is broad and balanced. It works through the medium of human acts. It is sane and real—cannot be accused of "otherworldliness" and vague abstraction. It works on the assumption that the corporeal world functions in a sequence representing realistically the ideal relations of a perfectly rational world which transcends and motivates our own. Because of the perfect pattern for which human conduct depends for its motivation, all wrong-doing must be avenged, all evil punished. This punishment is attained through an indomitable pattern of human events ruled over by the gods and ultimately by a metaphysical necessity. Within this necessity human action is free, but that action no matter what its course will manifest itself as a
working out of the divine plan.

But sometimes, unmolested, human freedom would run counter to the universal plan. Man is often recalcitrant and must be plagued into submission. Accordingly, the Greek tragedies often present a group of furies, often members of the chorus, whose function it is to be the direct agents of moral law and to bring about retribution.

As in the case of Aeschylus's Orestea, Clytemnestra's crime of murdering her husband was avenged by her son, Orestes, who murdered her. But this was in itself a crime, so furies, or earth-spirits representing the murdered mother plague Orestes until he is forced to appeal to Pallas Athena. She hears his trial and casts the deciding vote to acquit him. Then she transforms the furies into spirits of good-will who guard her holy temple. This is an instance of the fine Greek sense of moderation. Retribution and suffering are not allowed to run to extremes. A spirit of tolerance, rationality and balance checks such a tendency.

The strong moral-rational tone of Greek thought appealed to George Eliot. Compulsion initiated by moral law could be interpreted as part of the world of nature. The pattern of literary action could be derived from the Greek concept, but the expression of that could be clothed in the particulars of scientific knowledge.

George Eliot's literary philosophy is a blend of these two philosophical systems. She combines them in varying proportions, and unifies them in the medium of characters and setting made known to her.

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In accepting this proposition, George Eliot had come a long way, logically, from the contention that there was no such thing as creative design.
during her girlhood. We notice that the early novels are strongly dependent upon Greek thought and that later works while still concerned with Greek themes become more clearly propaganda pieces for Positivism. But insofar as her work achieved literary excellence, her characters and plots are vitalized by the broad, universal view of Greek thought.
CHAPTER II

DETERMINISM IN GEORGE ELIOT'S PLOTS

General Nature

We have seen that the chief philosophical doctrine of George Eliot is determinism, and that in her works it is a combination of scientific mechanism and Greek idealism. We have noted that if we trace the two views to their metaphysical bases we find them incompatible, and if we take the scientific philosophy seriously, contradictory. But we must remember that George Eliot's philosophy was not meant to be a system; it is merely the foundation for a literary interpretation of life, and as such is no more contradictory than certain principles apparent in life itself seem to be.

The blend of two philosophies so different in their concepts, will make the problem complex. Therefore, the plots are grouped according to their elements. This is an artificial procedure; the groups overlap, and except for distinctness and emphasis it has no value.

Scientific Determinism and Greek Themes

We find only a hint of Greek thought in the Poe-esque short-story, The Lifted Veil; its main view of determinism is scientific. The chief character is Latimer, who at the opening of the story, told in retrospect, awaits death of heart disease. His entire life has been preordained by some unexplained power (which we feel to be unin-
telligent), and he has foreknowledge of what lies ahead of him. He experiences abnormal periods during which he lapses into a semi-conscious state when the future becomes clear to him in the form of remarkably detailed tableaux. Through this type of premonition he has acquired at various periods, foreknowledge of a trip to Prague, of a meeting with his brother's fiancee, Bertha Grant, of marriage and unhappy domestic life with her, of her attempt and failure to murder him, and finally of his own death complete in detail even to the date. Each event takes place exactly as he foresaw. There is no struggle on Latimer's part, only a passive dread.

If there is a moral issue in the story, it concerns his wife, Bertha, who shields her plot to murder him. She had thought her maid, Archer, with whom she had quarreled would die before exposing her. But it was Bertha's destiny to be found out. The agent of this destiny, Dr. Charles Meunier, a friend of Latimer, visiting in the house at the time of Archer's illness. The working of destiny is through the manipulation of science: By performing a delicate and rare operation on the dying woman, he is able to revive her until she can make a full accusation of her mistress. Bertha's punishment, entirely too light for our satisfaction is estrangement from the husband she hates.

Bertha's part in the story may be taken as a working of the Greek law of Nemesis, but if so it wastes its effectiveness on trivial material. Then too, the plot lacks unity. Until the end, we are led to believe Latimer's mental power is the chief concern of the plot, but Latimer's own story lacks point. It is entirely passive.
As George Eliot herself explained, the purpose of *The Lifted Veil* was to indicate that the possession of unusual supernatural talents does not make for happiness. The theme, though permissible, is poorly illustrated in Latimer who is presented as mentally deranged rather than endowed.

As the story stands it is almost entirely a product of scientific philosophy. First of all the subject of psychological abnormality as a theme for literature belongs to the scientific movement of thought. The determinism, very strongly felt, concerns no rational principle behind a rather mechanical flow of events. The extreme depression of the story defeats Bertha's story if it is meant to illustrate moral law. Here man becomes Spencer's mere aggregate of matter, jounced and scraped and battered by contending forces and devoid of intelligence to resist or to resent the unstemmed flow of events. If Latimer's mental ability was unusual, it was also unwholesome, only emphasizing the dark, unalleviated face of fatalism.

In "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the advance is in the direction of better organization, greater acknowledgment of spiritual forces in life, and not at all incidentally, better literature.

Here the title character stands outside the main current of action which concerns Caterina Sarti, a beautiful Italian girl reared as an orphan in England. She is passionately in love with a well-born young fop, Captain Wybrow who swears his devotion until he begins courting Miss Assher whom his uncle wishes him to marry. When the engagement is announced, Miss Assher and her mother come to visit
at the manor, and Caterina, torn by jealousy behaves very badly. This is the inevitable chain of events for the passionate nature fed on the hope of a love to be fulfilled. Captain Wybrow merits all the discomfort of his position, though his shallow nature is incapable of real suffering. A moral note is sounded in the sequence of events when in his confusion and annoyance at being beset by two jealous women, he dies of heart disease. 19

Caterina's jealousy had reached a danger point. Concealing a dagger in her gown she goes to meet Wybrow in the garden, only to find him already dead. Her subsequent illness was caused less by grief than by remorse (as if she had done the deed.) Caterina as well as Wybrow is subject to the moral law of consequences though it is not much emphasized in either case.

The character who holds our sympathy in the story is Maynard Gilfil, the young preacher who loved Caterina silently and unselfishly. After the Wybrow affair, she married him, but lived for only a few months. The law of consequences is of a scientific nature as it applies to Gilfil, and is expressed in scientific imagery. His eccentricities and brusqueries in old age are explained as the effect of his early sufferings in Caterina's pain and death, just at the knots and lumps on an old tree are its adjustment to a pruning of the vigorous young shoots. This analogy summarizes Mr. Gilfil's story which acts as a framework to the fatalistic tale of Caterina.

Either philosophy is revealed in "Amos Barton" (Scenes of Clerical Life), according to the interpretation we give the char-

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19 Incidentally, George Eliot's male characters are weak.
actor of Reverend Barton. Amos is a poor clergyman whose stipend simply will not reach far enough to support his wife and seven children. Milly Barton, the ideal wife and mother is martyred by the countless services she performs for her family. All the rigors of household economy fall upon her willing shoulders. Amos adds to her hardship unintentionally by his personal inadequacy, his "quintessential mediocrity". This is an organic limitation in him, the sort of limitation the scientific philosophy emphasizes. He is so concerned with the problem of eternal damnation, (which according to George Eliot, may be only legendary) that he can not appreciate the mortal goodness of his wife. He adds to Milly's burdens by inviting a countess to live with them in the hope that she may be able to win him preferment with the rector. Poverty, ill health, neglect, and over-work are too much for Milly. She dies bearing Amos another child. Then Amos feels the law of consequences; in the moment of his loss, he values Milly adequately for the first time in his life. A new note of irony is sounded in this story: Amos, like Oedipus, unwittingly sought his own destruction.

The law of consequences in Amos Barton moves toward a more full expression of Greek thought, but is still shackled in its effectiveness by our sense that Milly's suffering was not inevitable, and that her husband's weaknesses are not essential to all the human race.
Social Union and Greek Themes

George Eliot's political novel, *Felix Holt*, embodies the Greek theme of Nemesis in two integrated lines of action, and treats the social theme in a third, less closely related story. The latter element concerns Felix Holt, an ideal radical struggling for an enlightened and unselfish society for the sake of which he rejects his father's profession because he considered it unfair to society. He tolerates his mother's nagging—she is an inimitable character—and suppresses his love for Esther Lyons in order to maintain the status he feels just and right for him.

The first Nemesis theme concerns Mrs. Transome, a proud and handsome woman. In her youth she grew weary of her ineffectual husband and her weak little son and encouraged the attentions of a fine looking young lawyer, Mr. Jermyn. Their acquaintance grew into passion and she became the mother of a son by him. Transome accepted the child, Harold, as his own, and neither husband nor son suspected the woman's secret relations. Transome did not even become suspicious when she contrived to have the management of the estate put entirely into Jermyn's hands. As the latter's influence grew, his passion waned. Before long he married and had a legitimate family of his own, which he supported at least partly through his interest in the Transome affairs.

Mrs. Transome meanwhile was beginning to taste the first bitterness of retribution. Her husband, a weak, abstracted man became a haunting presence rather than a companion. Their son died, and Harold left home at an early age to seek his fortune in the Colonies.
This left Mrs. Transome wholly at the mercy of Jermyn who appropriated the Transome income as he wished and held a continual threat of revelation and shame over the powerless woman's head.

This fate was bitter enough, but she was to know even greater pain growing ironically out of her chief hope.

Harold, married to a beautiful Greek slave who bore him a son and then died, was to return to Transome Court bringing his child with him. Mrs. Transome believed at last there would be affection for her. But Harold's child was a small edition of the cruel, black despot, and Harold himself was cold and self-willed.

He occasioned his mother great misgivings first by departing from family tradition in politics where he failed in a bid for public office, and then by trying to wrest control of the estate from the hands of Jermyn.

The final pangs of retribution came to the lonely old woman when her son forced Jermyn to a "show-down". Angry and determined to ruin where he could not rule, Jermyn revealed publicly to Harold that he was his father.

To a less pronounced degree than his mother, Harold was subject to the universal moral law. His was an unloving nature. His sole interest was to "get along" in the world, and he was unscrupulous in his efforts. His animosity toward Jermyn was richly repaid by the man's revelation. More than this. He never had any particular interest in Esther Lyons until he learned she was a rightful heir to half his estate. In the face of all his efforts, this was disastrous. He determined to make friendly overtures so that the settle-
ment might be made somewhat in his favor. To his surprise, he found the girl quite agreeable, and so determined to marry her, thus uniting the two shares in the estate. These selfish motives met their just measure of punishment when Esther rejected him, surrendering her share in the estate, for he realized then that she was the only woman he had ever really loved.

We find a recurrence of the Nemesis theme coupled with a fuller revelation of the social brotherhood idea in one of George Eliot's best known novels, *Middlemarch*. The two themes remain dual in their force for they concern separate threads of plot.

The scientific philosophy gives a pedestrian tone to the main theme, the struggle of fine-minded individuals against the defeat of environmental circumstances. There is a parallel development of two characters, both activated by ideal aims, both struggling against the shackles of an unsympathetic world. The story exemplifies the contest of human ideals against a narrow culture.

Dorothea Brooke, with only a modicum of education, aspires to do some noble work in the world, some significant act which will represent her yearnings after the Good and the True. She has a fine mind, but no particular capability, no specific channel for her genius, unless it be her generous and sympathetic nature. She is a resident of Middlemarch, a small English town which is activated by a superficial and often vicious ambition. Dorothea has visions of social improvement, humanitarian reforms. She wishes to build better cottages for the tenants in outlying farms, to found a charity ward in the hospital and to enlighten people who are oppressed by ignorance. She is checked on every hand by narrow conventions, lack of influence and of
sympathy.

At last her ideal motives find what she believes an adequate channel in her marriage to a well-to-do scholar, already middle aged, a bachelor, Mr. Casubon. Dorothea anticipates a life of affection and understanding with him in which she will lighten the burden of scholarship with inspiration and devotion to him and his work.

Her world of hopes and aspirations crumbles when, through his repeated abuse she learns that he is no more than a selfish, egotistical pedant whose Key to All Mythologies has no more ideal or practical value than the dust of rotting old books. His final abuse before he dies is to will her all his money on condition that she does not marry his nephew young Ladislaw who loves her. This comes to Dorothea as a tremendous revelation of Casubon's jealousy, mistrust and pettiness, and to those who love her and believe in her, as a stinging insinuation.

Dorothea is above being resentful, but she is utterly lost. Her life is desolate until she finds a new channel for her goodness in serving her fellow men. This links her with another line of action.

At the time of Dorothea's marriage a new doctor had come to Middlemarch, the young and handsome Tertius Lydgate. He too had ideals as grand as those of Dorothea. He intended to be more than a small-town-practitioner shaped by the routine of gout and gossip, typhoid and tonsilitis. His ambition is to carry on advanced medical research in his spare time and so to fight in the brave crusade against pain and disease. But, like Dorothea, Lydgate makes the wrong marriage. He falls into the charming snare of Rosamond Vincy's smiles and
small talk, dreams his way through a rosebud romance, and awakens to find himself dominated by a selfish, ignorant woman in no sense prepared to sympathise with his highest aims. She forces him to make unnecessary expenditures to feed her vanity, driving him with tears and accusations farther and farther into debt and despair. At last, when he is about to lose their furniture through foreclosure, he lays his case before Rosamond's uncle, Mr. Bulstrode who gives him the money to discharge the debt. But Bulstrode almost immediately becomes involved in the death of a man whom he had hired Lydgate to attend, and public opinion, always ready to gossip, interprets the loan as a bribe. Lydgate faces ruin. A doctor is worth no more than his reputation.

At this crisis, Rosamond forsakes him and it seems as if there is no hope for him. But Dorothea is prepared through her own humiliation to understand his trouble. She affirms her belief in him, gives him the money to repay Bulstrode and turns the tide of opinion in his favor. He resumes his life with Rosamond with new courage, but never achieves the great aims he had set for himself.

In return for her kindness Rosamond explains to Dorothea that Ladislaw has not been carrying on a flirtation with her as Dorothea had thought. Still desiring a close and satisfying tie with some human being, Dorothea consents to marry Ladislaw whom she loves and to surrender Casubon's fortune.

In this theme intended to exemplify the Comtist idea of human fellowship in the social organism, we find distinctly the influence of Greek drama. Dorothea and Lydgate both represent after a fashion, the
noble character of the Greek Prometheus struggling to enlighten mankind. There is, however this difference: The struggle of Prometheus in myth and drama was idealized by the process of rational treatment until his action comes to have pure and universal significance. Lydgate and Dorothea, on the other hand are products of scientific thought in that they are bound by shackles of particularity to the world of actual events, and they lack the clear, glorified coloring of the ideal. They are drab with the haze of every day life. They represent the defeat of an ideal it is true; Lydgate in never being able to accomplish greatness, Dorothea in satisfying herself with a mediocre life with Ladislaw who is weak and unsatisfying. But primarily they represent real life.

The Lydgate-Bulstrode affair links to the two main plots just outlined, a third and minor plot told in retrospect and representing Bulstrode's destiny. The old idea of Nemesis is used. As a young man Bulstrode had been associated in a not-too-respectable pawn shop business with a man by the name of Raffles. The owner of the business, a well-to-do widow, was alienated from her daughter who had made a misalliance. She sought this daughter with the intention of mending their misunderstanding. Bulstrode had information of the woman's whereabouts, but he withheld it, leading the mother to believe her child was dead. As a result, she married Bulstrode, soon died and willed him all her money. With this he removed to Middlemarch, married into the Vincy family and established a household.

In the course of the story Bulstrode learns that Ladislaw is a son of the lost daughter, now dead. At the same time Raffles re-
enters the story. He is now a dissolute and wasted man ready to stoop to blackmail for a maintenance. Knowing the facts of Bulstrode's past he threatens to expose him. Bulstrode had gained a measure of happiness and respect which he cannot bear to lose so he complies to Raffles' repeated demands. Raffles pushes the matter until the situation becomes quite intolerable. He becomes somewhat of a Greek fury giving Bulstrode no relief from the remorse the guilty man feels. In order to make amends, and to reduce Raffles' power, Bulstrode calls Ladislaw to him and offers him money. But Ladislaw understands the motive and rejects the offer just as he had rejected a maintenance from Casubon when he fell in love with Dorothea.

Just when it appears that there is no easing the situation, Raffles falls ill of drink and dissipation. Bulstrode welcomes the thought of the man's death in spite of himself, but he feels bound to call for the services of Lydgate. The temptation becomes too great, however, and he deliberately disobeys Lydgate's orders. Raffles dies.

But the damage is done. He had already spread the story of Bulstrode's past. The man is doubly ruined, caught in a chain of inevitable circumstances, punished for his past wrongs by ruin into which he drags his wife and Lydgate as well.

The rational concepts of Greek thought operate in this novel in spite of George Eliot's attempt to explain the action in the terminology of Positivism. Speaking of Dorothea she states her theme:

"Certainly those determining facts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble in-
pulse struggling under prosaic conditions... While this is in the social air in which mortals begin to breathe there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life where great feelings will take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventional life any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of her brother's burial; the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorothas some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know.

"Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that of which Alexander broke the strength spent itself in channels which had no great name on earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs.

It is then, the social implications of Dorothea's story that interest her creator.

Perhaps the most artistic union of the "social religion" with Greek thought is made in her little masterpiece, Silas Marner. The Greek concept affects Godfrey Cass, the father of Eppie. His

\[2^o\] George Eliot, Middlemarch, p.338
first wrong-doing was neglect of his wife, a dishonored and weak woman. As a result she intended to plague him with her presence at a party among his friends. If she had done so she would have resembled the Greek furies who plague the errant one to a recognition of his crime. But she fell in the snow, drugged with laudanum and froze to death.

Cass then had the choice of recognizing his baby daughter, Eppie, but he could not bear the disgrace of his marriage in the face of eminently respectable Nancy Lammeter whom he loved. Again he chose the easy wrong.

Years later when the secret became known to his wife who offered to accept Eppie, the inexorable consequences of his wrong-doing bore in upon him: Eppie refused to leave Silas Marner who had loved and sheltered her during the years when her birth-right was denied. The bitterness of this retribution, (a bitterness not intended on Eppie's part) was made the more intolerable by the fact that Cass' marriage to Miss Lammeter had been barren.

Positivism in Silas Marner comes in the expression of the glorified social morality that was the Comtist religion. Wordsworth had studied nature, and had come to love his fellow-man, and conceived the emotion much more deeply than Comte could; but George Eliot was interested in the doctrine from the intellectual as well as the aesthetic point of view.

By an act of unfaithfulness on the part of a friend, and of the woman he loved, Silas was so deeply hurt that he closed his heart against all human contacts, moved into a land where he was a stranger
to all, and occupied his mind with the solitary routine of weaving linen. Seeking some sort of emotional alleviation, he began to hoard gold coins hoping they would fill for him the terrible vacancy in his heart. Despair became almost unbearable when his gold was stolen by Cass' younger brother. It had been the only vitalizing element in his life. Long ago he had forgotten the sunshine of social contacts. His nature had become dwarfed. On this subject Comte would say that we are organs in society and that when we deny ourselves community with others we become as the atrophied limb, dwarfed by disuse.

With beautiful symbolism George Eliot tells how the near-sighted weaver, seeing Zippie's yellow curls in the fire-light believed them to be his gold returned. But she filled a greater place in his life. Through his love and service to her she led him back into the circle of warm human hearts where he discovered again that his heart beat as theirs. The parallel and balance of this sequence of events is beautiful: By his own neglect, Cass gave to Silas a richer gift than his brother had stolen from him, and then realizing the preciousness of the gift, he learned too late that by giving, Silas had taken it as his own by bonds too strong to be broken.

The story of Romola is most elaborately treated in terms of the Nemesis theme, but the idea of social brotherhood is also incorporated into the plot though less artistically than in Silas Marner. The entire plot moves on the activation of two contrasted characters both Classical in conception. Romola Bardi, the beautiful Florentine Pagan who turns Christian under the inspiration of her teacher, Savonarola, represents the ideal Stoic temperament. Self-denial was her daily fare. Her entire life was dedicated to moral virtue whose cri-
terion was the reason. She is contrasted in the book with Tito Melcemu, a young Greek whom she marries. He is a delightful, handsome young man, too devoted to pleasure ever intentionally to cause pain to anyone. He represents in the early part of the book an agreeable type of the Epicurean character, but he is weak. The entire plot concerns his moral degeneration and its effect on the other lives.

With the contrast of these two characters implying dramatic clashes by their very natures, George Eliot weaves the essentials of plot on the pattern of Greek drama. The action concerns primarily Tito's moral weakness as the various incidents illustrated them, and the consequent suffering that is inflicted on him and those near to him.

He begins by abandoning his adoptive father old Baldassarre in the hands of pirates who intend to sell him into slavery. Tito's escape and subsequent flight to Florence with several valuable rings and other belongings of Baldassarre enable him to begin his life anew. There are many opportunities in Florence for a young man of his intellectual attainment—he a remarkable scholar, taught by his father, a man of grave and fine intellectual power. Also Tito has an irresistible grace of person which makes his knowledge all the more agreeable.

When he attains a position studying with old Bardo Bardi, the blind scholar, his immediate needs are beautifully fulfilled. The old man needs him, for his own son, Dino, has deserted his non-Christian family to join the priesthood, a blow from which Bardo never recovered. Tito can fill the place of this son all the better because he immediately falls in love with Bardo's beautiful daughter, Romola, and she with him. For a pleasure seeking nature such as Tito's, prospects
like these could not be renounced for the uncertain commission of duty. He would not permit himself to think of Baldassarre's safety.

This great breach of moral law entailed its own formidable Nemesis which began to haunt Tito almost immediately. It came in the form of a note borne to him by Fra Luca, a priest. The message was from Baldassarre telling that he had been sold into slavery but could be ransomed. Supplied with quite definite information as to Baldassarre's whereabouts, Tito still refuses to act. The scent with Fra Luca is remarkably powerful in the sense of foreboding it arouses in Tito's mind. After that, he was never completely at ease. The remainder of the story concerns the various incidents that build up in Tito's conscience a sense of fear, of dread, of shame that finally overmaster him.

The day after Tito declares his love to Romola the "shadow of Nemesis" falls again. Dino, or Fra Luca as he is called, had left Florence after his meeting with Tito but from Nello, the barber, Tito learns the priest has returned. This excites in Tito a dread for he has learned that the same Fra Luca is Romola's brother. It is a bad moment for him when he learns that the priest is dying and that Romola is going to see him despite her father's prohibition. It seems that Dino has a dying message for his sister. Tito's meeting with her on her way to the Duomo marks another thrust of the inescapable Nemesis. Tito's guilty imagination can present to him the idea of no message except the one which will ruin him. He might have eased the pressure by telling her the whole truth--Tito was not blunt where moral values were concerned; he realized this would have been right--but the
risk was too great. He was not master of himself (a familiar idea in George Eliot, and one never more effectively used than here.) It was several hours before Tito's anguish was stilled by knowledge that Dino's message had not concerned him.

But that an unhappy fate lay in store, Dino knew for he revealed to Romola a vision he had had in which she walked with her father and another man through a grave-yard of manuscripts into an uncompromisingly black doom.

Tito's advance in public life is phenomenal because his duplicity enables him to play each political party against its rival for his own benefit. A few months after his marriage to Romola he is already a prominent citizen. He is standing with a group of men on the steps of the Duomo discussing the recent French seizure of Florence when a group of prisoners are led through the streets, one of whom is Baldassarre. Due to a new change in party policy these prisoners are released amid uproar of dissent among the populace. Baldassarre, knowing he will be safe within the Duomo rushes up the stone steps, stumbles and prevents a fall by clutching the figure of Tito. Tito's quick look of alarm occasions inquiry as to the prisoner's identity. Tito answers, "Some madman surely!" and with these words is utterly lost. Baldassarre disappears into the Duomo in an instant, but the work is done: the love of father for son is replaced by the indelible imprint of hate. It is clear to him now that Tito's failure toward him is intentional.

This meeting was not mere coincidence. It was the irresistible power of moral law working the destruction of the wrong-doer.
It is thoroughly Greek.

It was still not too late for a truthful word to turn the tide, but Tito lacked the moral courage to speak it. The reader is excited continually by incidents that approach full revelation, but fall short. It is as if the tide waters of destruction are rising against a levee whose faltering strength barely holds them back.

The tides strike a weak place in the wall of deception when, a few days later Romola, visiting a friend, the artist, Piero, sees a portrait of Tito's handsome face crossed by the most gripping, unutterable fear. Piero explains that he had noted the expression on Tito's face a few days ago as he stood on the steps of the Buono, and had thought it very powerful because of the contrast of Tito's almost womanly beauty with the ugly savagery of fear. He must find an object of that fear in order to complete the picture.

The certainty of Tito's destruction is further symbolized when a few days later, Piero meets Baldassarre wandering about the streets, demented by his hatred. His vengeance is his only clear thought. He is willing to work slavishly for weeks for the price of a dagger. Piero, struck by the evil threat that lay in the monomaniac's countenance, thought immediately of Tito. With Baldassarre as an inspiration, the artist finished his portrait.

But Tito's unfaithfulness to Baldassarre was not his only wrong. Romola's father, Bardo had died satisfied in the assurance that his very valuable library, containing his own writings would be made public to the citizens of Florence. But knowing her very strong wishes to abide by her father's request, Tito nevertheless sells the
library and it is moved to France. The scene where he reveals this to Romola is a masterpiece in character drawing showing the contrast between Epicurean and Stoic temperament. The consequence of this inconsiderate act was his entire loss of Romola's respect and confidence.

As has been pointed out the Nemesis of Greek drama often acts through the agency of an avenging fury. As Baldassarre's knowledge of Tito's success in Florence grows he resents more deeply Tito's utter denial of the father who had sacrificed for him since babyhood. The thought of revenge becomes sweeter and more dominating. He becomes indeed as a Greek fury staring accusingly at the wrong doer, pursuing him without rest, giving him no hope of peace or salvation.

Baldassarre becomes acquainted quite by accident with Tessa, Tito's mistress and the mother of his two children. She takes pity on the old man because he is feeble and apparently of unsound mind. One night when Tito comes to visit her she tells him about the old man sleeping in the woodshed. Tito's guilty conscience tells him at once who the man must be. Several weeks ago he had taken precautions against a later meeting with Baldassarre. He had bought a mail shirt of iron chains, but this protection for the body is only a "garment of fear" making a coward of the soul within. So protected, Tito determines to face Baldassarre and to try to make amends. As soon as he enters the woodshed, the old man, brooding in the moonlight, throws his weapon and shatters it helplessly against the coat of mail. Tito flees convinced more than ever of the desperateness of his situation.

He attends an important political banquet some weeks later at the Rucellai Gardens. Baldassarre gains admittance and denounces Tito
before his colleagues. Tito's defense is to try to convince the gathering that the old man is insane; he finally has him imprisoned to pay for his intrusion.

But Baldassarre is more successful than he thinks. Tito's duplicity intimated in one matter, it is suspected in another. He has been playing "double" in politics for some time; now he is coming to be suspected by both parties.

A crisis occurs in Florentine public life which culminates in a riot. Tito is mobbed by a band of true Greek Furies, and is borne along the streets by the murderous crowd. In order to save himself, he jumps into the River Arno and battles with the tide for several miles. When he finally gains the bank in safety he is more nearly dead than alive.

It is not coincidence, but the final outcome of moral law that the crazed Baldassarre should find him there, weak and resistance. Vengeance is his. He clasps his hands about his son's throat and gives his triumph all his strength. Tito and Baldassarre both die locked in an embrace of hatred. The plot of Nemesis ends here.

The Positive element in Romola deals with its ethical theory, but is founded for purposes of this novel on the Classical concept of Stoical character.

Romola, a pagan seeks to rebuild her moral life when the brother she loves turns away from her and dies, and when the father she has loved and honored also passes away. She tries to accept Tito's life of pleasure, to live in an exquisite world of sensuality. But there is no satisfaction for her in this. Virtue, known by reason
must be her criterion.

When she argues with Tito about the library, she realizes this fact irrevocably. Life with him is unbearable. She determines to leave, but just outside Florence, she meets Savonarola who preaches to her of the virtue in duty, even if onerous and uninspired. She returns silently to comply with her husband's wishes. Her inspiration lies in the person of her great teacher. But later after he permits the execution of her uncle, she turns entirely to the Com-Gist ideal of social service for the pattern of her conduct. Her action is shaped accordingly when she serves a plague-stricken village, and returns to Florence to care for Tito's mistress and her children.

Nomola stood outside the main current of action and watched the law of Nemesis do its work of destruction. After this experience, the ideal of human service revitalized her life. The Com-Gist religion performs the same function for another George Eliot character, but after retributive justice has worked in her own life.

"Janet's Repentance," (Scenes of Clerical Life), concerns the degradation and regeneration of a character. The degradation, caused by conditions beyond her control is bound up with the cruelty and weakness of her husband Richard Dempster. Both had contributed by their acts to a mesh of circumstances that threatened to entrap them both. Dempster is presented as a hot headed young fellow who, as his mother says, might have been a good man if he had married the right woman. The first presentation of him is in the Red Lion where he drinks with his neighbors. They are discussing religious reform, and he speaks with rash intolerance of the Evangelical preacher just come to Milby, Mr. Tryan.
Janet enters into wrong-doing with him when they cooperate to compose a play-bill to mock Tryan’s first Sunday sermon. When the vicious prank is not well received in Milby, Dempster suffers the loss of one of his best clients in his law practice.

Conditions at the Dempster house, already bad, grow worse. Mr. Dempster increases his drinking. Janet, discouraged and frightened leaves off caring for her home; grows shiftless and at last, to dull her despair begins drinking excessively too. Abuse piles upon abuse, misunderstanding upon misunderstanding, not by means of outright incidents, but by subtle suggestions of discontent and resentment. One evening when Mr. Lowme and Mr. Budd come to dine, Janet excites Dempster’s anger by laying out his dinner clothes when he does not intend to dress. He throws them in her face and she refuses to pick them up. Half crazed with drink, he becomes so angry that when the dinner guests have left he thrusts Janet out-of-doors in her night dress.

She flees to a neighbor’s home and is ill for several days, bodily as well as mentally. So desperate is her situation that she determines to seek the aid of the man she has wronged so grievously, Mr. Tryan. The very fact that his gentle understanding is her only solace in this desperation comes upon her as the most cruel form of retribution. The scientific type of determinism is also important in the plot, for Janet’s habit of drinking is based upon the fatalism of organic nature. It is given great power in her confession to Mr. Tryan:

“I was ashamed and I hated what I did, but almost while the thought was passing through my mind that I would never do it again, I did it. It seemed as if there was a demon in me always making me rush to do
what I longed not to do. And I thought all the more that God was cruel for if He had not sent me that dreadful trial, so much worse than other women have to bear, I should not have done wrong in that way...I shall always be doing wrong and hating myself after—sinking lower, and knowing that I am sinking."

The visit of Tryan is important for two reasons: it reveals Janet's sense of impending doom rooted not only in her acts but in the organic and moral weakness behind her acts. And too, it serves as a revelation of one of the author's positivist themes, fellowship in suffering. By sharing Tryan's own sorrows and those of the other people around her; Janet became a regenerated creature, loved and respected by all. In order to explain this miracle of the human soul, George Eliot states:

"She tried to have hope and trust, though it was hard to believe the future would be anything else than the harvest of the seed that was being sown before her eyes. But always there is seed being sown silently and unseen, and everywhere there come sweet flowers without our foresight or labor. We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours."

The seeds Dempster sowed bore him a painful harvest. During Janet's absence he had driven recklessly in the carriage, had overturned and broken his legs. Crazed partly by pain he tossed in agony on his bed and died in the horrors of delirium tremens. Janet was


22 Ibid., pp. 67-68
with him at his death. The reader is left to consider the proposition that if Dempster could have given himself over to loving his fellow man as Janet did, he would have saved himself.

This Positivist concept growing out of the organismic view of society, is pronounced in many George Eliot novels. It is the theme of her dramatic poem, Armgarnt. Armgarnt, who has her whole heart set on being a great singer is so obsessed with her art that she can not consider the love of the Graf who wishes to marry her. We can accept the opinion of the critics that her singing is divine, her person lovely, her manner charming, but she is too much possessed by the idea of her own greatness. Fate is cruel in rewarding her arrogance by afflicting her with a disease in which she suffers the complete loss of her voice. The months repair it, but her critics tell her she in never to be worthy of the opera and concert stage again.

Worse than anything, obscurity hurts her, but she accepts it with good grace, rejects a second proposal of the Graf and retires with a close friend to an humble existence teaching others to sing, to measure up to the glory that has been hers. Again the theme of retribution, though not strongly felt, is allied with the social idea.

The theme arises, so George Eliot tells us, from our heredity. One of the most impelling inheritances is that of racial qualities. It is the theme of her last novel Daniel Deronda, in which the title

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23 This fellow-feeling is the quality that Latimer in The Lifted Veil is presented as lacking in place of his supernatural gift of prophecy.
character must perform his duty as a Jew, and is impelled by cir-
cumstances to such action before he knows that he is of that race.
He has never known his true parentage, but he feels sure Sir Hugo
Mallinger with whom he lives is not his uncle.

In the course of the story he falls in love with a beautiful
young Jewess whom he rescues from suicide by drowning, but he does not
confess his love because she has determined to marry no one but a Jew.
He occupies himself in seeking her lost brother Ezra, whom he meets
as Mordecai. Through this beautifully drawn figure he becomes inter-
ested in Hebrew language and history, and the Zionist movement. So
Daniel welcomes the news that his own parents are Jews of a promi-
nent family. His mother had let Mallinger rear him because she did
not wish to pass on the racial tradition to her son which she hated.
This story intends to show how inescapable are the claims of heredi-
ty in shaping our duties—a Positivist theme.

The Nemesis plot concerns Daniel only secondarily. Fascinat-
ing, vain Gwendolen Harleth excuses her selfish desire for a wealthy
husband on the ground that her family needs financial aid. She breaks
innocent Harold Gascoigne's heart, and permits herself to be married
to Grandcourt for whom she feels only a superficial temperamental
alliance.

She entered into the marriage with Grandcourt knowing that he
had had a disagreeable past life. He had seduced a Mrs. Glasher who
had left her husband and had borne Grandcourt three children. He
supported her but had grown tired of their affair and had no intention
of marrying her. Gwendolen became his wife knowing Mrs. Glasher was
desperate. For Mrs. Glasher had met her in secret and had sworn to get vengeance for her marriage to him. Gwendolen was trying to build her happiness on another's desperation. The facts of the case are relieved of their baldness by a great deal of rationalization on Gwendolen's part. She tells herself that she really loves Grandcourt, that her family will benefit by the marriage, and that she will influence him to be freer in his gifts to Mrs. Glasher and her little ones than he would be if left a bachelor.

The first ominous murmur following the marriage occurs on the first day in the Grandcourt home. Grandcourt has requested a set of diamonds of Mrs. Glasher which he had given to her years ago. He wishes now to present them to Gwendolen as a wedding gift. Mrs. Glasher returns the jewels but in doing so assumes the role of a Greek fury, for she will not permit Gwendolen to forget her own distress and the wrong that aggravates it. Inside the jewel case is a note cursing Gwendolen, praying she will know neither happiness nor peace with Grandcourt, reminding her that her own claim upon him is more profound. Gwendolen is poisoned; retribution has begun. From that time forward Grandcourt's unfeeling nature is more and more repulsive to her. She tries to subject herself to his will, for her friend, Daniel Deronda, acting as the temperate intelligence, tells her she must bear her unhappiness with patience. The more she tries the more repulsive her alliance with Grandcourt becomes. Always her thought of Mrs. Glasher stands in the way of her happiness. Her dark eyes full of jealousy fall upon them as they ride together through the fields.

In the shadow of this hatred the girl realized for the first
time her own shallowness, and finding so little happiness in the conditions about her, longs desperately to do some act that will be significant in the final balance of things.

As the situation becomes more and more intolerable with Grandcourt, she seeks Deronda's company, at first to explain her acts, and later to confess her desperation. Grandcourt, afraid this relation is deepening into not love, determines to take her away. They go for a fishing trip in the Mediterranean. Grandcourt has used Gwendolen's fear and resentment to tame her until she is little more than his slave.

In this instance she rebels. She goes on a short fishing jaunt with him, intending to murder him while they are out. As in the case of Caterina, fate works more swiftly than she can. The mainstay of the sail swings around, hits Grandcourt on the head, and throws him into the ocean. The good impulse in her mind, Gwendolen seized a rope, ready to throw it to him. As his face appears above the waves her old hatred returns. She remembers her desire to see him dead and cannot throw him the rope. Again he disappears, and again arises, and there is still this indecision. At last, when it appears too late, she believes herself to be a murderess and throws her own body into the sea. She is rescued; Grandcourt is not.

In his will he has left only a small maintenance for her; the remainder of the estate goes to Mrs. Clasher and his children.

Gwendolen then tries to find her happiness with Daniel Deronda, but he reveals to her that he is a Jew and has set his heart on a Jewish bride. Retribution is complete. The haughty woman is at last

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24 Retribution deepens in that she must be removed from the only mind in which she finds solace.
broken in pride and forced to settle down to the modest existence she has tried to escape. Her need at this time is the Comtist virtue of living for the well-being of others. Perhaps she cultivates it, for she comes to her new life with real earnestness, thanks to the teaching of Daniel Deronda.

The Nemesis idea is the greatest force in shaping the plot of this novel, Daniel's hereditary duty being of only secondary interest. Her most complete use of the idea of duty conflicting with personal aims comes in her poetic romance, *The Spanish Gypsy*.

The beautiful Spanish maiden, Fedalma, reared in the home of a Spanish nobleman is in love with his son Don Silva and he with her. Don Silva wishes to hasten their marriage because he feels Fedalma is in danger from the Inquisition.

On the wedding eve, Fedalma is visited by an old Gypsy chieftain, Zarca, lately escaped from prison. He interrupts her dreams of the happiness she will know as the wife of Silva by revealing to her that she is his daughter and that the future of their race lies in her hands. After great inward struggle, she consents to go with him and serve the gypsies.

Don Silva, unable to reconcile himself to her decision follows her. When he sees he is unable to persuade her to ignore her duty, he determines to accompany her and to serve her cause. In doing so, he permits himself to forget that his heredity involves a duty of his own so great is his passion for the beautiful girl.

But just as a merciless choice has been forced upon Fedalma, so he too is forced to choose between love and duty. The Inqui-
sition leader requests him to fulfill his duty to the Spanish government and to the Church by murdering Zarca. His character is as strong as Fedalma's; he too is capable of making the difficult choice. He murders Zarca, and Fedalma, dead to all hope of personal joy leads her people to safety in Africa, thus contributing by her suffering, as the Positivists would have it, to the more perfect development of the state.

Again an individual is impelled by destiny, but the moral struggle, though great is clouded by a haze of discussion drawn from the social sciences. A doubtful theory usurps what should have been interest in the universal pattern.

**Purely Greek Themes**

*Adam Bede*, her first long novel, is her purest expression of Greek thought, and its structure is the most perfect of all her works. The entire novel depends on the Greek concept of Nemesis.

Arthur Donnithorne is the young heir to the estate; Hetty Sorrel is the niece of his model tenants, the Poyzers. The story begins when Donnithorne and Mrs. Poyser step into her dairy. There he catches sight of Hetty as she stands among the crocks making butter. He is greatly attracted by her for she is a creature of rare beauty. In order to have some pretext for talking with her, Arthur asks her to dance with him at his birthday celebration to be held soon when he will mark his coming of age.

Mrs. Poyser is grateful for his courtesy, but Hetty, a foolish imaginative girl, interprets his gallantry as amorous interest.
While Mrs. Poyser is out of the room, Arthur succeeds in learning that Hetty intends to walk through the wood to the manor house the next evening. He is so delighted that he half-way intends to meet her.

When Arthur leaves, Hetty's mind is filled with bright fancies. It is her ambition to be a lady. She is quite conscious of her charms, and feels sure they would be wasted on any of the neighborhood aspirants of her own station. As she dwells on the thought of Arthur's attentions, the idea takes more and more definite shape in her mind that she will become Lady Donnithorne.

Arthur awakens the next morning without being able to shake Hetty's image from his mind. The thing is fantastic of course, but it is remarkable the hold she has gotten on his imagination. He would be safer not to see her again. He had been perhaps too friendly in the dairy the day before. He determines to go on a short trip that day so as not to see her when she comes to the manor house. But he finds he cannot go, for his best horse is lame. He takes the second best and gallops off for a visit with a friend, planning to stay until rather late so as to return home after Hetty has left.

Arthur is taking all these precautions because, without admitting it, he is infatuated with Hetty, and he foresees the danger of the situation. Hetty is a common tenant; he is to become lord of the manor. He must strive for the respect and love of his tenants without incurring intimacy. He must avoid Hetty in order to dismiss her from his mind.

But fate wills otherwise. After his careful calculation of time he finds his friend is not at home, and consequently passes through the wood just as Hetty is on her way to the manor house. They talk and
Arthur, seized by a great fascination, cannot make himself say the neutral things he has intended. One remark he makes in his effort to be cool sounds like a rebuke to Hetty who begins to weep. Arthur can do nothing but take her in his arms, so easily does he fall into beguilement.

They part abruptly, but a few hours later Arthur meets her intentionally meaning to say something that will give the past scene a coloring of propriety and casualness. He is not master of succeeding events, for this time Hetty sobbs outright and Arthur kisses her.

George Eliot takes care to explain that Arthur did not deliberately involve Hetty in a bad situation. Rather, their attraction toward each other is quite beyond the control of either. Before he knows what is happening he is quite obsessed with his passion for her, and Hetty never realizes how foolish are her dreams of being Lady Donnithorne.

Meanwhile the village carpenter, Adam Bede, who played with Donnithorne as a boy, is also hopelessly in love with Hetty and ignorant of her relations with the young squire, reads in her blushes and sly looks a new promise for himself. At about this period, while walking through the wood, Adam chances to see Hetty and Arthur making love. Realizing the difference in their station, he forces Arthur to fight with him, and strikes him to the ground. Already Hetty's vanity and Arthur's uncontrolled passion are meeting their just retribution and Adam is the fury. But Nemesis has only begun its operation.

Not realizing how far the relation already has gone, Adam tells Arthur of his love for the foolish girl, and demands that he write her a note explaining their difference in station and thus breaking off
their affair. Arthur realizes this is right, for he can never marry the girl, so he writes the note and then leaves to join his regiment.

Some weeks later Hetty consents to marry Adam, but as the time of the marriage approaches she proposes to go for a visit to her friend Dinah Morris, a young Methodist preacher.

Instead, she goes to seek Donnithorne for she is soon to bear his child. Hetty meets only disappointment for he has left his station.

She does not dare to go home. She dreads to face Dinah, and she fears she will die of hunger or neglect before she can travel to either place of safety. She spends the last of her money at an inn where her child is born. Then she travels the midland countryside longing for the courage to commit suicide. But the principle of Nemesis has not done with her. She abandons the baby at last, burying it in a shallow grave. Returning to the spot with its cries still ringing in her ears she finds it gone. She is arrested and taken to prison.

When the news reaches Adam he is infuriated at Donnithorne's unmanly part in the affair and swears a desire to see him suffer as Hetty has suffered and as he himself has suffered in his pity and shame for her. He becomes truly a modern representation of the old Greek fury.

But even the furies are tempered by a balance of rational tolerance. So George Eliot observes this rule of moderation. Rector Irvine, who has been the philosophical intelligence throughout, talks with Adam during Hetty's trial and makes him understand that none of the wounds of wrong-doing are healed by hatred. So Adam's mind is tempered to a generous sympathy; like Aeschylus'
Eumenides, his nature is deepened so that he finally finds happiness with Dinah as his wife.

Hetty is saved from execution by a reprieve gained by Donnithorne, but she is transported and dies soon after. Arthur, his secret known, must abandon his dream of being the much loved squire among his tenants. In order to save them further unhappiness he leaves to join his regiment permanently. A ruined life is his retribution.

The theme of Nemesis is very powerfully handled in Adam Bede, the entire novel deriving strength from the dramatic power of the theme. It is relatively pure and direct, losing nothing in the useless theorizing that often obscures George Eliot's point. In many respects, this is her finest work, truly a masterpiece.

Through an analysis of these plots it becomes apparent that the two philosophies can be blended, but only at the expense of interpreting one of them superficially, or at the cost of structural unity. The division is inherent in the rational basis of the two philosophies.

The heart of the matter is expressed in the following comment on the character of Maggie Tulliver, George Eliot's autobiographical heroine in The Mill on the Floss:

"A creature full of eager passionate longing for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge, with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her, with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it. No wonder when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward that painful collisions come
of it."

In Middlemarch we noted genius struggling against practical limitations. Now we note genius in an elemental struggle, not against practical limitations so much as the very nature of her life. The problem is deeper than social. It is rooted in the very nature of life. It is the eternal struggle and misunderstanding at which we have been hinting all through this study: the divergence, in fact the irreparable break between the particular and the universal, the factual and the ideal, the changing and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, the partial and therefore the false, and the entire and therefore the true. I do not believe I am reading too much into Maggie's struggles when I draw these analogies, nor am I going too far in suggesting the problem as George Eliot's own.

Maggie lived a rampant childhood with her brother Tom in The Mill on the Floss where her self-willed father managed proudly to regulate his affairs and her mother, formerly a Dodson, (a strong recommendation,) lent moral support.

Maggie was a passionate child obsessed with the "dreamy music" of the universal world. Hers was a sensitive nature conscious from the first of that perfect world that alone could make experience meaningful and give her soul peace and beauty.

Not only Maggie, but George Eliot herself, beat an old wooden doll's head on the worm-eaten attic floor to relieve the frustration she felt in the incompleteness of life as we must live it in the senses.

25 J. W. Cross, op. cit. I,18 (Quoting The Mill on the Floss)
Maggie rebelled too, by tossing her heavy black hair from her face and finally by taming it with the scissors. She romped on the muddy banks of the Floss; she defied the narrow urbanity of Aunt Glegg. When life became too unsatisfactory, she ran off to live with a troop of gypsies with whom she had a frightful and marvellous adventure. Her first real disillusionment came when she discovered them to be not agreeably romantic, but coarse and dirty.

She found life to be falling short of the standard she had set for it too, when she caught her first perch. Tom told her she would have no luck if she did not learn to watch her line attentively. This was the virtue she must practice in order to succeed. And life was good as long as virtue had its reward. But her eyes grew tired, and she found that the watching became a heavy charge. After minutes of idleness she withdrew her line to find that quite by chance she had hooked a very fine perch. She was disappointed that there was no reason behind her triumph, and it occurred to her too that the event just as easily might have worked to the reverse; she might have been faithful without success. She was to learn all too bitterly that the beautiful world of ideals that she was forced to relinquish here was very elusive, and that love it as we may, unsympathetic conditions will come between us and our cognizance of it.

One of the unsympathetic accidents initiates a long train of events which George Eliot treats according to the pattern of Greek determinism.

Mr. Tulliver borrows a large sum of money with which to pay for Tom's schooling. He gives his personal note to a friend, pur-
posely avoiding borrowing from the outstanding financier of the town of St. Ogg's, Mr. Waken, who had aroused Tulliver's enmity on previous occasions. It is the shearest ill fate, then, when the friend's business fails that he is forced to sell the note to Waken.

Tom and Maggie have gotten acquainted with Waken's hunchback son, Philip, at Tom's school, and in spite of Tom's natural resentment of the boy's superior intellect, Waken becomes a good friend to both of them, and Maggie, in a moment of pity and gratitude has kissed him, to show her good will.

Five years later Waken decides to foreclose and "sell Tulliver out". Due to pitiful plea made secretly by the hen-like Mrs. Tulliver, Waken decides to buy the mill with all its furnishings, rent it to Tulliver, and to hire him to manage it. In this way the outward life to the Tullivers would be unchanged.

But the hot-tempered man takes this as the deepest insult, and in a fit of fury he horse-whips Waken. Later he thinks better of his decision and submits, hoping that Tom may be able to earn enough money to buy the mill back if he dies before he himself can accomplish it.

It soon becomes obvious that Tulliver's health is failing and that he probably will die before he has revenge on Waken. He gathers his family together with the family Bible before him. He forces Tom and Maggie to sign their names to a statement he writes down to the effect that they are to carry on his animosity to the second generation and to curse every offspring of the Waken family. Maggie thinks with a pang of Philip, but signs her name.
As fate will have it, this modern Antigone falls in love with her Haemon in the person of Philip Waken. The depth and purity of this love forms some of the most beautiful passages in all of George Eliot's writing. To Maggie, Philip represents more than her enforced choice between love and duty. His world, the world he gives to her, a world of books and music and painting, the world of beauty and generous, significant concepts, clashes with the narrow existence of superficialities so dogmatically held by her aunts and her mother. In accepting Philip's love she is freeing her spirit for community with his in a grand and noble life. In rejecting it, she is to shackle herself to an ignorantly restrained surface existence. But duty wins with her, and she knowingly chooses the narrow life.

With a new and modern coloring the story of Sophocles' Antigone is retold. At first reading of the story it is a disappointment that the novel does not end with Maggie's rejection of Philip's love. And if the contest had been merely between love and duty, George Eliot would have ended her novel here. But this story, rightly or wrongly, is only one very important manifestation of a more general struggle.

As we have stated above, the novel concerns an individual who lives in a world of particular events and sense impressions—nothing represented by the Claggs and Dodsons goes deeper than this. But this individual is sensitive and passionate in her craving for some principle which will give significance to life. Love for Philip represents a possible realization for her soul. Rejecting it, she must lose herself in the old, meaningless existence. But her rebellious spirit is not at rest. Denied the spring-tide of her most sig-
significant love, she
consciously seeks relief in a second love, entirely
unworthy of her, love with the polished and affable fop, Stephen Guest.

In submitting to this entirely meaningless outlet, inevitable in
the force of her repression, she brings sympathetic grief to Philip,
heartbreak to cousin Lucie, who is engaged to marry Guest, intolerant
shame to Tom, and ruin to herself.

The only adequate end to the story is utter annihilation. But
just as the sufferings of Oedipus were recognized in his death by the
gods, so Maggie's brave battle is recognized. In the very moment of
death, as the flood waters whirl about her boat, she is reunited in
spirit with the brother of her childhood. In that brief moment of
embrace and death the happy times are recalled by his word, "Magsie"
when the two of them lived a deep companionship and their innocent
rebellions were a glorious expression of the tempestuous souls within.
CHAPTER III

EVALUATION OF GEORGE ELIOT'S POSITIVISM

Determinism

Let us recapitulate once more by reviewing the chief doctrines of Positivism that George Eliot used, and by evaluating the expression made of them in the plots just analyzed.

As we stated in Chapter I of this study, Positivism and Greek thought have a superficial similarity in the doctrine of determinism. But, as we stated, that of science has its expression in the particular, and that of Greek tragedy has its expression in universals.

Since literature deals not only with sense appearance (as the realist contends) but with human values discernible only by the intellect, Positive determinism falls short of the literary standard.

We find in the works of George Eliot not a single plot built on the deterministic pattern which does not depend on moral qualities for its significance. And in each instance, whether the determinism takes the pattern of retribution as in Middlemarch, Romola, Adam Bede, and Silas Marner, or of individual struggle against a larger destiny as in Mill on the Floss and Spanish Gypsy, we can find the prototype in the Greek tragedies George Eliot read.

Let us consider possible exceptions to this statement. As we noted, The Lifted Veil only hinted at the theme of retribution and
seems to have no basis in the Greek tragedies. Its introspection is a product of the modern science of psychology; its sequence of events is atomistic, not rational. If the story has any appeal, to what does it owe it? Probably our chief sympathy is with Latimer whom we are constantly expecting to rebel against the strange power of prevoyance laid upon him. We expect conflict in his own mind and are less interested in his wife's subterfuges than his own peculiarity. It is a disappointment when his spontaneous rational nature does not express itself in conflict with the mechanistic behavior of his mind.

The story would have failed utterly if its only theme had been psychological mechanism without implying a world outside that particular view of mind, even though positivism negated such a view as fabulous and mythical.

We may look upon Caterina's passion in its tempestuous course as embodied in an organism out of control. But what literary significance would such a theme hold deprived of the moral coloring of Wybrow's conduct and the terrific internal struggle of Mr. Gilfil?

The same argument may be made of Janet's dipsomania. It represents the kind of determinism that could grow out of Spencer's universe. But Janet's organic weakness is only minor, serving but to emphasize her despair and degradation, elements in a larger moral struggle.

Then there is the case of Armgarnt. The disease which caused the loss of the voice is an instance of the amoral, particular pattern. And again, it has no significance when considered alone. Its significance lies entirely in the ideal world of strivings after beauty and
completeness.

The real heart of George Eliot's plots is not Positivism. A man's realization that his blind stupidity has resulted in irreparable loss (Amos Barton) is purely an ideal theme that transcends his patched tailcoats and sermons on damnation at the poor-house. A man's unfailing love for a woman who cannot give her heart to him (Mr. Gilfil) surely transcends the passions they feel. And so it goes. Positivism is not adequate to explain a single George Eliot plot.

**Status of Her Social Ideas**

But we have yet to give a final evaluation of the the Positive idea of human fellowship, society growing by the power of individual contributions. The following excerpt from a letter to a Positive friend explains the idea:

"My books have for their main bearing a conclusion ... without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life, -- namely that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man; and that the idea of God so far as it has been a high spiritual influence is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i. e., an exaltation of the human) "

The Positivist never explains how, denying what he calls Metaphysical he can arrive at any gloryfying or exalting concepts which will vivify his characters, making them finely endowed living things, capable of sacrifice and service. The system is amoral and dead, and so far George Eliot is moral and alive, she is not a Positivist.

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In all her best novels the Positive element is non-essential; or it is something else, called by the terminology of Positivism; or where it is pure exposition, it does not belong in creative literature and mars rather than strengthens her work.

Janet as a social servant is significant only in the light of her past sins and retributions, and because she is undergoing constant moral struggle to keep from reverting to the past.

The critic, Leslie Stephen says, "...Romola's sentiments show rather too clearly that she has been prematurely impressed by the Positivist religion of humanity," and goes on to say the character was handled unnaturally in several instances in order that she might exemplify a doctrine. It is true that Romola was prompted by humanitarian sentiments, and that in at least the scene where she drifts down the river in a barge to happen onto a plague-stricken village waiting for her succor, the action is weakly integrated. On the whole, however, one might well remark that Positivism was as little an expression of Romola's soul as it was of George Eliot's own.

Felix Holt was also devoted to the service of society, but his desire seems to be less that society as a whole should progress as an evolving organism than that every man should know his own soul well enough to take his proper place in a world of other men—an idea more Platonic than Positive.

In a sense, Dorothea is a Comtist heroine. Her belief in Lydgate is meant as an instance of human brotherhood. It too depends on

the ideal elements of the story for its magnitude. It is significant only in the light of the shattered ideals and trampled ambitions of both Lydgate and Dorothea who, like Prometheus, battled all their moral courage against the destruction of their ideal aims.

Daniel Deronda devotes himself to the social and political regeneration of the Jewish race. The important thing here is racial inheritance, but both his service and the necessity for it are dependent for literary effect on the ideal struggles of Mirah and Mordecai and Daniel's love for them.

In The Spanish Gypsy she uses the racial theme more fully. Fedalma's social responsibility, however, becomes the theme for literature only when it becomes the outward expression of a moral conflict not at all implied in the bald facts of the case.

In short, the Comtist ideal of organic social union, as George Eliot handles it implies more pure spirituality than Comte would admit. Was it for the sake of Tito as a social organism that Romola suffered his presence? Did she tolerate his duplicity merely because of the importance of a wife's position to society? Was it not rather that Romola recognized the moral power of duty and saw that it was good? Did Dorothea, frustrated and lonely, tighten her hold on what was good and true because she sensed her responsibility to society? Or was it simply because, knowing virtue, her soul yearned toward it?

The truths of Positivism and those of Greek thought are of a different order. Admit the latter, and you have breadth to include the former, although by comparison, they are superficial.
Positivism and Her Realism

But we have not yet disposed of the influences of Positivism on her work. We have yet to consider the more subtle matter of treatment, technique. Here the influence of Positivism is the most genuine and entire.

It is the largest contributing factor to her realism. The scientist's myopia is a commendable counterbalance to the unchecked and rampant vagueness of the undisciplined idealist. The insincerity of the aesthete and the dogmatist forced upon George Eliot an admiration of scientific method and temperament.

In most cases her fidelity to fact is a point of strength. The quality which makes George Eliot unique in English literature is her ability to transcribe the eternal struggles of Greek tragedy into novels of common English life. That very valuable function of the empiricist to recall the idealist from his universe of hazy abstraction to the world of real, every-day events certainly is not lost here.

George Eliot states the doctrine of realism in Amos Barton when she describes him as a creature...

"...whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably wicked, nor extraordinarily wise. They are simply men of complexions more or less muddy whose conversation is more or less bald and disjointed. Yet these commonplace people--many of them--bear a conscience and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out toward their
first-born and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance—in our comparison of their dim existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?

"...learn with me to see some of the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes and speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones."

But often, the realism is weighty. We love "aggie in The Mill on the Floss" because of her spirited nature and sympathy with her for the prosaic conditions of her life. Throughout the first part of the book we anticipate her rebellion and prepare ourselves for the salvation of her intellectual and emotional life. As the demands of Tom and her father grew more and more unbearable in the light of her more entire love for Philip we gloried in her rebellion. But when suddenly she complied with the demands of the situation we accepted this, for we felt that it was her destiny to comply. We could see in her conduct the working of a universal principle. When however rebellion finally came it was not in the direction of a fuller realization. It was more a defeat of her finer nature than her compliance had been. In the unalleviated circumstances of her life we come too near to seeing a denial of spiritual principles rather than a defeat of them.

Realism is a slightly too heavy ballast for Dorothea's story too. The character us regressed, from time to time the subduing of emotion—
at turmoil which often comes from George Eliot's pen as an exquisite expression of sensitivity becomes instead a disappointing, rather heavy

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sense of incompleteness.

In Daniel Deronda, for example, the reader almost cries in frustrated desire to have the man reveal himself as a human being.

Perhaps she herself felt this sense of limitation, for she uttered one of the most true criticisms of her work, "My predominant feeling is not that I have achieved anything, but that great, great facts have struggled to find a voice through me, and have only been able to speak brokenly." 29

Positivism as Her Personal Problem

This brings us to a consideration of George Eliot's philosophy as it constituted a personal problem for her. It was stated above that The Mill on the Floss is probably autobiographical in more that the details of Maggie's early life. The problem, if correctly interpreted above, is also autobiographical.

Just as Maggie was caught in the dilemma between surface existence and life's greater significances which her sensitive insight prompted her to recognize, so George Eliot was caught in the dilemma of two basically incompatible philosophies both of which attracted her.

As we have seen revolt against the half-understood dogmas that ruled Christian worship as she had contacted it, impelled her to respect scientific accuracy and fidelity to fact.

But she recognized its limitations too and knew that facts are not all of existence. Therefore the universal concepts of Greek thought appealed to her. Finding in science a certain dramatic power she determined to combine the two philosophies and made the mistake

29 J. W. Cross, op. cit., III, 219
of trying to accept Positivism literally instead of taking it merely as a suggestion of a particular kind of truth.

She is wrong, for example when she carries the idea of social evolution to the point of saying the days of Antigone’s heroism are past, for this heroism is based upon eternal concepts of human values which must find their expression in every age no matter what the cultural medium for these concepts are inherent in the unchanging nature of life and of thought.

The charge is probably true that George Eliot, impelled by her devotion to George Henry Lewes, tried to make of her novels propaganda pieces for scientific philosophy. It is a fact that every one of her works from *Adam Bede* on is dedicated to him. This was her method for pointing out that her irregular union yielded its valuable fruit which, she says, never could have been produced but for the happiness his love had conferred upon her life.

It has been the purpose of this study to show that where George Eliot’s works have succeeded as literary productions that excellence depended not at all on Positivism but rather on the Greek idealism embodied in the classic tragedies. For the fact is unalterable that science concerns itself with the particulars of existence and that taken as such they can never have ultimate meaning. The scientist does not intend them to. But the problem for the literary artist is quite different from that of the scientist, and since this is true, thorough realism must fail in the world of art.

If George Eliot had not been abundantly gifted with an unfaill-
humble outer manifestations the deeper significances of human life, she could not have risen above the limitations Positivism laid upon her. For, as George Eliot protests, it is a grave error to confuse science with life. "men she accepted Positivism, then, she modified its view to embrace the ideal world; what she loses in consistency she gains in adequacy; but Positive thought does not deserve credit for the adjustment.

However, she did not entirely escape the dilemma of bare facts on one hand and emotional idealism on the other. She accepted scientific thought as fundamentally true, but often failed when she attempted to apply it to human life. In some cases she blames the failure on lack of thoroughness in carrying out the use of scientific method:

"With all due regard for Harold Transome, he was one of those men who are liable to make the greater mistakes about a particular woman's feelings because they pique themselves on a power of interpretation derived from much experience. Experience is enlightening, but with a difference. Experiments on live animals may go on for a long period, and yet the fauna on which they are made may be limited. There may be a passion in the mind of a woman which precipitates her not along the path of easy beguilement, but into a great leap away from it."

Sometimes she frankly states a skepticism about the application of science to some phases of existence. For example, Felix Holt, speaking of his love for Esther says:

"I wonder whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life."

Contrary to the views of some critics, George Eliot is to be admired for her scholarship. Evaluating her as a literary figure, Blanche Colton Williams says, "Academically she towered above all and whereas much learning justly or unjustly is held to interfere with the operation of genius, much learning strengthened her accuracy, seriousness, and her purpose of enriching earth's total of art."

But the fact is unavoidable that her two different views of existence remained antagonistic. "My imagination is an enemy that must be cast down ere I can enjoy peace or exhibit uniformity of character."

"The fields of poesie look more lovely than ever, now I have hedged myself in geometric regions of fact, where I can do nothing but draw parallels and measure differences in a double sense."

"When a sort of haziness comes over the mind making one feel weary of articulated or written signs of ideas, does not the notion of a less laborious mode of communication, of perception approaching more nearly to intuition seem attractive?"

31. Ibid., p. 245
33. J. W. Cross, op. cit., I, 54-55
34. Ibid., p. 50
35. Ibid., p. 58
"To the end of her days George Eliot suffered from these warring impulses within, which led her...to a division of herself. Her logical nature rebelled. She had no peace except in unity. She was rarely at peace."

She labored at the incongruity until it became tenable. Sometimes, when she is at her best, she loses herself in the vast, mysterious power of human life, and then she transcends the bonds of theory and bears a closer kinship with the religionist, the idealist and the Greek dramatist-philosopher than she herself suspected.
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