A consideration of the influence of contemporary religion, science, and philosophy on Hardy's writings requires some prefatory cautions. First, such influences often overlap, and identification of how they affected Hardy's work must sometimes be no more than a tentative pointing to diverse and complex sets of possible sources whose precise influence cannot be determined. Thus in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Gabriel Oak intervenes to protect Bathsheba's ricks from fire and storm, uses his knowledge to save her sheep, and in other ways acts consistently with the biblical teaching that man was given the responsibility of exercising dominion over nature. At the same time, Oak's conduct is congruent with Thomas Henry Huxley's argument in *Man's Place in Nature* that it is mankind's ethical responsibility to control a morally indifferent environment. However, Oak's actions are even more remarkably consistent with details of the philosophical analysis of man's moral relationship to the natural world in John Stuart Mill's essay "Nature" – though its date of publication makes that influence only barely possible.¹ In this and many other such cases, questions of which, and to what degree, one or more possible sources – "religious," "scientific," or "philosophical" – might have affected what Hardy wrote cannot be resolved with any certainty.

It must be emphasized, too, that Hardy was intellectually very much his own man. He was a voracious reader, widely inquisitive, but usually skeptical and hesitant to embrace wholeheartedly any of the various systems of ideas current in his day. Furthermore – as Hardy many times insisted – the views he did incorporate in his texts were unsystematic and inconsistent “impressions,” often the utterances of various *personae* in specific dramatic situations. In short, elements of contemporary thought in Hardy's works tend to be embedded in a densely intricate web of imaginative connections and qualifications so complex that a consideration of them can hope only partly to illuminate the manifold ways they may have influenced his writings.
Religion

When Hardy was an architect’s apprentice in Dorchester, a dispute with a fellow apprentice and the sons of a Baptist minister on the subject of infant baptism prompted him to more intense study of the Bible and to further inquiry into Anglican doctrine on pedobaptism. Hardy’s autobiographical account of his decision to “stick to his own side” (LW, pp. 33–34) reveals something of the diverse ways religion could influence his writing. The character of the minister in A Laodicean Hardy patterned after the Baptist minister (LW, p. 35); his rendering of the issue of baptism in that novel stems partly from his youthful experience but also from later research (PN, pp. 180–83); and the phrasing he quoted in his autobiography, “stick to his own side,” echoed a phrase from Far from the Madding Crowd in a scene where the rustics engage in a memorably comic discussion of differences between Anglicans and Nonconformists (FMC, xlii, p. 296) – a scene which itself was probably in part inspired by Hardy’s amused recollection of his own youthful decision.

But Hardy’s representations of religion were most profoundly influenced by his loss of faith in Christian dogma. He described himself as “among the earliest acclamers of The Origin of Species” (LW, p. 158) and recorded that he was “impressed” by Essays and Reviews (LW, p. 37); one can only guess at what other intellectual and emotional experiences at that time might have contributed to the erosion of his religious beliefs. He had considered the possibility of a career as a clergyman, and as late as 1865, out of deference to his mentor, Horace Moule, wished he could be convinced by the arguments in John Henry Newman’s Apologia. But Hardy found he could not (LW, pp. 50–51), and in that same year he rejected further clerical aspirations, explaining that “he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views that on examination he found himself to hold” (LW, p. 53). By 1888, when a clergyman asked him how to reconcile the absolute goodness and non-limitation of God with the horrors of human existence, Hardy referred him to the life of Darwin and the works of Herbert Spencer and “other agnostics” for a “provisional view of the universe” (LW, p. 214). Ten years later, in his poem “Nature’s Questioning,” he had his speaker respond to Nature’s puzzled speculations on the origins of the universe with a flat, “No answerer I . . .” (CPW, 1, pp. 86–87) – a reply that characterized one strain of Hardy’s own religious views throughout much of his career.

Yet although Hardy became an agnostic, he remained emotionally involved with the Church: many of his writings dramatize aspects of the pernicious influence of religious doctrines or the ineffectuality of institu-
tional Christianity, but he could also evoke a wistful sense of the loss of an earlier, simpler faith, or affirm the lasting value of Christian Charity. In short, one thing that sets Hardy apart from many of his contemporaries was his capacity to hold the wide variety of “impressions” of religion that inform his writings.

One manifestation of the way Christianity remained a persistent influence on Hardy’s writings is that his fiction is saturated with biblical allusions. Critics have disagreed on how effectively Hardy used them, as commentaries on his references to Satan reveal, but scriptural and other religious allusions in Hardy’s fiction are distributed unevenly, and in some novels they form patterns that obviously play important roles. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, for example, many Old and New Testament references enhance the ambiance of timeless antiquity which is one of that novel’s most important aesthetic features. For *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, on the other hand, Hardy employed allusions to the biblical story of Saul and David as a major structural element in rendering its plot and character relationships. And in *Tess* and *Jude*, where he was particularly concerned with the inimical relationship of religious mores to human lives, scriptural references repeatedly appear in contexts which suggest that Christianity is a pervasive hindrance to the fulfillment of human aspiration.

Hardy’s writings also abound with pejorative characterizations of Christian clergy and other representatives of the Church, as well as with dramatizations of the harmful consequences of Christian teaching: one thinks, for example, of the fanatical text-painter in *Tess*, or of the snobbish and foolishly conventional Felix and Cuthbert Clare, who are ironically called “unimpeachable models” of clergymen (*T*, xxv, p. 162). But Hardy’s presentations of representatives of Christianity and his renderings of the impact of Christian belief on both individual characters and on society generally were remarkably diverse and nuanced. In the novels, he tended to treat clergymen and Christianity with increasing hostility. Maybold in *Under the Greenwood Tree* is mildly parsimonious and class-conscious, but Swancourt in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a social snob whose prejudices do more serious harm. Hardy’s revisions reveal that over the course of time he was increasingly critical of Bishop Helmsdale of *Two on a Tower*, and part of the plot of that novel turns on the cruel choices imposed on the heroine by intolerant Christian attitudes toward human sexuality. By the time he came to write *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy was even more explicit in dramatizing the way Christian teachings had widespread malign human consequences.

An even more various treatment of the limitations of clerics and Christianity is notable in his short stories and poems. “The Son’s Veto,” for
example, depicts how a clerical education shaped a clergyman’s cruel
treatment of his mother, while “A Tragedy of Two Ambitions” delineates
the plight of brothers who realize that to succeed in the Church of England
they must above all be gentlemen rather than scholars or preachers. In
Hardy’s poems there is the well-meaning but bumbling clergyman of “The
Curate’s Kindness,” the hypocritical preacher of “In Church,” the credulous
fool of “In the Days of Crinoline,” the dully indifferent Mr. Dowe of “An
East-End Curate,” the disenchanted Parson Thirdly in “Channel Firing,”
the narrow-minded priest of “The Inscription,” the misguided vicar in “The
Choirmaster’s Burial,” and that sincere (but therefore unpromoted) clergy-
man of “Whispered at the Church-opening.” In short, although one
generalization which can be made about Hardy’s writings is that many
involve the limitations of Christian clergy as well as the personal and social
harm done by organized Christianity, the ways Hardy handled those
themes could scarcely be more diverse.

On the other hand, Hardy from time to time portrayed Christianity as a
transient and ineffectual creed based on dubious legends no longer believed.
As early as Far from the Madding Crowd he had his narrator remark on the
durable usefulness of the great shearing-barn as compared to the worn-out
purposes of church and castle (FMC, xxii, p. 150); similarly, in Tess he
contrasted the endurance of an ancient abbey mill to the abbey itself which
“had perished, creeds being transient” (T, xxxv, p. 230). And in The
Dynasts the Spirit of the Years refers to Christianity as “a local cult”
scarcely recognized because it had changed so much (Part First, 1, vi, lines
1–12; CPW, iv, pp. 53–54). In some poems — e.g., “A Christmas Ghost-
Story,” “A Drizzling Easter Morning,” and “Christmas: 1924” — Hardy
rings emotional changes on the theme of Christianity’s ineffectualness; in
others he fancifully images god as variously flawed — forgetful in “God
Forgotten,” absent-minded in “By the Earth’s Corpse,” and error-prone in
“I Met a Man.” In still others, like “Panthera,” he provides secular accounts
of biblical stories in the manner of those higher critics who persuaded the
speaker of “The Respectable Burgher on ‘The Higher Criticism’” to
abandon scripture and turn, instead, to “that moderate man Voltaire”
(CPW, 1, pp. 198–99).

There were, however, aspects of Christianity and the Church Hardy
treated more positively. Given the testimony in his autobiography of the
sincerity he admired in the Baptist minister Frederick Perkins, it is not
surprising that some of his more sincere fictional clergymen — Raunham in
Desperate Remedies, Thirdly in Far from the Madding Crowd, Woodwell
in A Laodicean, Torkingham in Two on a Tower, and even old Mr. Clare in
Tess — are portrayed with greater sympathy. Furthermore, particularly in
his earlier fiction, Hardy frequently exploited references to Christian values as a means of influencing reader attitudes toward both character and moral situation. *Far from the Madding Crowd* provides a variety of examples. There Hardy used the revelation that Troy’s claim of regular church attendance was false to impugn his character (*FMC*, xxix, p. 204), and he had Bathsheba, in her agitated suspicion of the possibility of Troy’s infidelity, see Oak humbly at his evening prayers and be chastened by his calm piety (xliii, p. 306). Near the conclusion of the novel, he used quotations from Newman’s “Lead Kindly Light” to underscore Bathsheba’s sense of her waywardness (lvi, pp. 402-03) and defined the strength of Oak’s and Bathsheba’s love by an allusion to the Song of Solomon (lvi, p. 409). Then, too, there are poems like “Afternoon Service at Mellstock,” “The Impercipient,” “The Darkling Thrush,” and “The Oxen” which in their very different ways all convey some sense of regret for a faith now no longer possible. Even in his most anti-Christian novel, *Jude*, Hardy had both Sue and Jude agree with *Corinthians* that “Charity seeketh not her own” (*J*, vi, iv, p. 382), and the speaker of his poem “Surview” also affirms St. Paul’s teaching on Charity (*CPW*, ii, p. 485).

As late as 1922, Hardy asserted the need for “an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come” (*CPW*, ii, p. 325). But when he occasionally voiced some dream of a reformed Church, he spoke of it only as dedicated to “the promotion of that virtuous living on which all honest men are agreed” and “reverence & love for the ethical ideal” (*Letters* 1, p. 136 and 3, p. 5 [the latter a quotation from Thomas Huxley]). Not surprisingly, then, in his literary works Hardy did not advance any substitute for the religious faith he had lost. He comically deflated Paula Power’s determination at the end of *A Laodicean* to live according to Matthew Arnold’s vague formula of “imaginative reason,” and, in a far more serious novel, *Tess*, the ultimate norms he invoked involve diverse and conflicting ethical perspectives which at best suggest that human moral worth cannot be reduced to some formula. As David J. DeLaura has persuasively argued in analyses of *The Return of the Native*, *Tess*, and *Jude*, Hardy tended to undercut contemporary optimistic views of achieving some “modern” blend of pagan Hellenic and neo-Christian religion: his treatments of such characters as Clym, Angel, and Sue dramatize in various ways their failures to live by such ideals – and suggest that neither Christianity nor any substitute creed ultimately avails human beings trapped in a blind and morally indifferent universe.
The influence of religion, science, and philosophy

Science

Certainly Hardy’s readings in the scientific thought of his day strengthened his sense that the supernaturalism of theological doctrines was an outdated relic hindering development of more rational views of the world. In a letter to Edward Clodd of 17 January 1897, for example, he bitterly complained of “the arrest of light & reason by theology” (Letters 2, p. 143). Nevertheless, on the whole, the “light and reason” of science tended not to brighten but to darken Hardy’s view of the human condition.

Astronomy and physics

In his poem “Afterwards,” Hardy described himself as having an eye for the “mysteries” of the “full-starred heavens” (CPW, II, p. 308); yet his was for the most part an eye keen for artistic effects rather than for science, and often Hardy’s references to astronomical phenomena are of a distinctly romantic kind. In “The Comet at Yell’ham,” for example, the comet serves primarily as a device for making the poetic point that by the time it returns, “its strange swift shine / Will fall on Yell’ham; but not then / On face of mine or thine” (CPW, I, p. 189).

Two on a Tower, however, was, at least in intention, different, for Hardy described it as having been undertaken specifically “to make science, not the mere padding of a romance, but the actual vehicle of romance” (Letters 1, p. 110). Although he owned a copy of Richard A. Proctor’s Essays in Astronomy, and a few notes in his Literary Notebooks show that he also read other of Proctor’s popular expositions of astronomy, it is clear that in preparing to write Two on a Tower he took pains to more thoroughly familiarize himself not only with practical details – his research included a visit to Greenwich Observatory – but with the larger implications of current ideas in astronomy and physics. As a consequence, whatever artistic deficiencies that novel may be judged to have – including often clumsy uses of astronomical imagery – it is strikingly indicative of what impact the astronomy of Hardy’s day had upon his vision of the human predicament. Among the scientific developments that lie behind Two on a Tower are Sir William Herschel’s discovery that nebulae are clusters of stars at unimaginably immense distances from the earth and his conclusion that those stars, including the sun, must in time burn themselves out – a conclusion later compellingly confirmed by the research of Lord Kelvin, who in 1851 formulated the second law of thermodynamics. It is a vision of the ultimate consequence of Kelvin’s theory of entropy in the universe that Hardy evoked in the words of his “votary of science,” Swithin St. Cleeve:

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And to add a new weirdness to what the sky possesses in its size and formlessness, there is involved the quality of decay. For all the wonder of these everlasting stars, eternal spheres, and what not, they are not everlasting, they are not eternal; they burn out like candles ... The senses may become terrified by plunging among them ... Imagine them all extinguished, and your mind feeling its way through a heaven of total darkness, occasionally striking against the black invisible cinders of those stars.” (TI, iv, pp. 34–35)

Thereafter, Hardy would occasionally return to such grim prophecies of the future. Some time after 1900 he pasted a cutting in his “Literary Notebooks” of a review which dwelled on Ernst Haeckel’s description of the unimportance of man on an unimportant planet doomed to grow cold and lifeless (LN 2, pp. 98–101). Hardy incorporated that troubling image in some of his poems: “In Vision I Roamed,” for example, dramatizes a wandering by “footless traverse through ghast heights of sky” in a universe “trackless, distant, drear” (CPW, 1, pp. 10–11), while in “Genitrix Laesa” Hardy’s speaker sees no point in curing Nature’s ills when “all is sinking / To dissolubility” (CPW, 11, p. 89).

But the ideas of Herschel, Kelvin, and Haeckel were rooted in eighteenth-century Newtonian physics, and one sign of Hardy’s wide-ranging curiosity is that, having lived on into the twentieth century and encountered a radically new physics, he began to ponder its non-Newtonian implications: that time and space are relative to the speed of the motion of an observer, and that time itself is a “fourth dimension.” He took notes on popular expositions of Einstein’s theories (LN 2, pp. 228–29), bought an edition of Relativity: The Special and the General Theory: A Popular Exposition, and, in a letter to J. Ellis McTaggart, 31 December 1919, observed that, after Einstein, “the universe seems to be getting too comic for words” (Letters 5, p. 353). Predictably, Hardy’s readings influenced his poetry. In “A Dream Question” of 1909, for example, Hardy had one of his many imagined gods remark that “A fourth dimension, say the guides, / To matter is conceivable” (CPW, 1, p. 317). But by the time he published Human Shows in 1925, he had absorbed enough of popular expositions of Einstein’s theories to subordinate them more fully to his poetic purposes: thus, in “The Absolute Explains” he imaginatively transformed Einstein’s “Fourth Dimension” from a concept in physics to a place where, comfortably, love, song, and glad experience are all “unhurt by age” (CPW, 11, p. 70, line 45), while the speaker of a companion poem, “So, Time,” is consoled by the idea that time is “nought / But a thought / Without reality” (CPW, 11, p. 72). There is, however, less consolation in Winter Words, where, in a drinking song, Hardy had his speaker resignedly toast the way
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man's apparent importance in the universe had diminished from Thales to Einstein (CPW, iii, pp. 247–50).

Archaeology

In an “interview” on Stonehenge Hardy wrote for the Daily Chronicle, he had thoughtful suggestions for abating its erosion (PW, pp. 196–200), and his account of a dig at Maumbury Ring combines evocations of the excitement of its finds with carefully precise details about the excavated site (PW, pp. 225–31). It was no doubt partly that interest in archaeology which led him in 1881 to become a member of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club – an organization he imaginatively transformed into the “Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club” whose members narrate the stories of A Group of Noble Dames. In 1884, in the course of reading a paper for the Club on “Some Romano-British Relics Found at Max Gate, Dorchester” (PW, pp. 191–95), Hardy made a disparaging allusion to a Dorset antiquary, Edward Cunnington, whom he ironically dubbed a “local Schliemann.” It is almost certainly his awareness of Cunnington’s combination of archaeological incompetence and lack of integrity that lies behind Hardy’s short story “A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork,” in which an unscrupulous local antiquary illegally digs at an archaeological site and steals a gold statuette of Mercury.

But it was above all Hardy’s imaginative setting of the hopes and fears of the living against archaeological records of the indifferent passage of time that is the most moving consequence of his interest in archaeology. Tess’s capture at Stonehenge is certainly his most poignantly effective use of that kind of setting, but only one of many such. Hardy’s Wessex landscapes are studded with prehistoric burial cairns: most memorably the “Rainbarrow” of The Return of the Native, but also the barrows he compared to the many-breasted Diana of Ephesus that appear in The Mayor of Casterbridge (MC, xlv, p. 330), in Tess (T, xlii, p. 273), and, and, again, in his poem “By the Barrows” (CPW, I, p. 317). The inhabitants of Hardy’s Casterbridge live against a backdrop of skeletal reminders that ancient Romans before them also once “loved, laughed, and fought, hailed their friends, drank their toasts / At their meeting-times here” (“After the Fair”; CPW, I, p. 295), and the even more ancient prehistoric originators of Maumbury Ring “mock the chime / Of ... Christian time / From its hollows of chalk and loam” (“Her Death and After”; CPW, I, p. 54, lines 78–80).

In short, just as contemporary astronomy and physics influenced Hardy’s imaginative perception of man’s trivial physical position in the stellar universe, so his writings reveal a similar preoccupation with the way human aspirations are dwarfed in the vast dimensions of archaeological
It is worth remembering, then - given the optimistic tone of Darwin's conclusion to *The Origin of Species* and Huxley's visions of prospects for the possibility of human progress - that the sometimes grimmer image of the human condition notable in Hardy's writing was at least in part rooted in discoveries so compelling as the inexorable implications of the second law of thermodynamics and so poignant as those manifold reminders in his Wessex landscape of how fleeting human hopes and desires appear in the long passage of mankind's time on earth.

*Biological evolution*

Nevertheless, Hardy's letters and notebooks make clear that he had the deepest respect for Darwin and Huxley as representatives of the best scientific thought of his day. It is possible that Darwin's views on heredity (along with those of August Weismann, Herbert Spencer, and William Galton) may have influenced Hardy's treatment of heredity in *The Well-Beloved,* but the chief impact of evolutionary theory on Hardy's writing is notable in two other ways. First, it prompted him to set images of human life against the backdrop of geologic and evolutionary time - a time he would emphasize was incomparably longer than man's archaeological traces. In *The Return of the Native,* for example, his memorable evocation of the timelessness of Egdon Heath ends with a comment on how even its slight irregularities "remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change" (RN, i, i, p. 6), and in *A Pair of Blue Eyes,* when Knight is suspended on the face of a cliff and staring into the eyes of a fossilized Trilobite, Hardy conveyed the immense lapse of evolutionary time that "closed up like a fan" before his eyes by providing a retrospective account, replete with technical terminology, of evolution from man back to that fossil (*PBE,* xxii, pp. 209–10). In his poetry, too, he exploited geology for similar purposes: in "The Clasped Skeletons," for example, an imaginative meditation on the long dead lovers found in a barrow dated about 1800 BC turns on the idea that, in the vast scale of geologic time, they might have been buried only yesterday (*CPW,* iii, pp. 209–11).

But Hardy's insights into the implications of evolutionary theory also influenced some attitudes toward human moral responsibility that emerged in his later writings. As Hardy saw it, "The discovery of the law of evolution ... shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively" (*LW,* p. 373) - a view relatable to those powerful scenes in which Tess mercifully kills wounded game birds (*T,* xli, p. 271) and Jude does the same for a suffering pig (*J,* i, x, p. 64). Similar attitudes underlie such poems as "The Puzzled Game Birds" and "Compassion: An Ode." But Hardy's sense of mankind's new responsibility toward
animals also troubled him: in a letter to Frederic Harrison he expressed doubt that humans would accept the new moral duty thrust upon them (Letters 3, pp. 230-31), and in "Afterwards" he characterized himself as one who "strove that ... innocent creatures should come to no harm," but did so in vain (CPW, 11, p. 308).

However, it was the plight of mankind trapped in a universe oblivious to human feelings and ethical aspirations that not only most powerfully moved Hardy but also set him apart from many of his contemporaries who saw some "grandeur" or "progress" in evolutionary change. To one such optimist, he pointedly stressed that "nature is unmoral" (Letters 3, p. 231), and in his autobiography recorded a note to the effect that "emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it" (LW, p. 153). Hardy took up related themes in his poetry: his "Before Life and After," for example, includes the affirmation that before the evolution of consciousness "all went well" (CPW, 1, p. 333). But it was in his novels that he most plangently rendered the condition of those who futilely aspire to happiness, or fruitlessly strive to achieve ethical ideals, or struggle with painful feelings of moral obligation in a universe otherwise indifferent to such aspirations and feelings. Of his earlier fiction, The Return of the Native most distinctly embodies those concerns. Hardy's characterization of Clym Yeobright as bearing evidence "that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with growth of fellow-feeling and a full sense of the coil of things" (RN, ii, vi, p. 138); his dramatization of Eustacia Vye's frustrated longings for hopeless ideals; his authorial observations on how that "old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation" (RN, iii, i, p. 169) -- all convey the alienation of thinking and feeling humans in a universe indifferent to human ideals and sensitivities.

In a notebook entry of 1876, Hardy copied the following from an article by Theodore Watts: "Science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely the best in an ideal sense, though it must be that which is most in harmony with surrounding conditions" (LN, 1, p. 40). The human predicament in those "surrotions" is no more profoundly explored than in The Woodlanders, Hardy's most Darwinian novel in the emphasis he placed on the bleak struggle for survival in a woodland setting where "the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling" (vii, p. 53). In this context, Hardy's Grace Melbury, Giles Winterborne, Mr. Melbury, and Mrs. Charmond are out of harmony with their surroundings: all rack themselves with futile questions of conscience that, in the end, yield
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no satisfactory results, while the two characters who do manage to find some “harmony” with an environment indifferent to human moral concerns do so at terrible cost—either by renouncing common human desire, as does Marty South, or by selfishly satisfying desire with no regard for others, as does Edred Fitzpiers. In Hardy’s vision of the universe of *The Woodlanders*, there appear to be no acceptable moral choices. *Tess* and *Jude* provide similarly bleak views of the human predicament. In *Jude*, for example, the sensitive and aspiring Jude and Sue are ultimately crushed, while the coarse Arabella and unscrupulous Vilbert are well enough adapted to succeed in satisfying their lower aims.

It was, then, of the consequences of human evolution that Hardy was often particularly pessimistic; in his autobiography, for example, he recorded a note of April, 1889: “A woeful fact—that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment . . . This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences” (*LW*, p. 227). That view Hardy gave most explicit expression to in *Jude*, where he echoed his own ideas in Sue’s distraught imagining that “at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity” (*J*, vi, iii, p. 361).

**Philosophy**

While pondering a world which contemporary science increasingly revealed to be indifferent to human feelings and values, Hardy was also reading widely in and about the works of contemporary philosophers, many of whom were responding to that same world view. To the ideas of some—such as Nietzsche and Bergson—he was so hostile (see *Letters* 5, pp. 50–51, 78–79, and 6, p. 259) that any influence they may have had on his writings could only be negative. But in others Hardy found support for his agnosticism, possible alternatives to the supernaturalism of Christian ethics, and various theories of what forces in an uncaring universe might account for the human predicament and conceivably effect its amelioration. Of those writers who most notably influenced Hardy, the chief were Leslie Stephen, François Fourier, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Ludwig Feuerbach, Auguste Comte, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Eduard von Hartmann.
The influence of religion, science, and philosophy

Four general influences: Stephen, Fourier, Spencer, and Mill

Hardy stated that the editor and philosopher Leslie Stephen had a stronger influence on him than that of any other of his contemporaries, and “The Schreckhorn,” a sonnet celebrating Stephen’s personal qualities, testifies to Hardy’s respect for him. That they could share a wide-ranging curiosity about philosophical questions is suggested from Hardy’s account of how Stephen called upon him to witness his signature on a renunciation of holy orders – after which they talked of “theologies decayed and defunct, the origin of things, the constitution of matter, the unreality of time, and kindred subjects” (LW, pp. 108–09). Throughout the rest of his life Hardy cherished the agnostic Stephen’s friendship (LW, pp. 188), and no doubt his fiction and poetry owe much to the intellectual support Hardy found in such an impressive father-figure.

What influences François Fourier’s ideas may have had on Hardy’s writings were also of an indefinite kind. In 1863 Hardy was enough impressed to sketch – and thereafter preserve – an elaborate diagram of ideas in Fourier’s The Passions of the Human Soul, a work he had obviously studied carefully. It is possible that Fourier’s view that much of human suffering stemmed from conflicts between intellect and passion, resulting often from Christianity’s teachings about marriage, may have influenced some major themes that appear in Hardy’s fiction – particularly his hostile portrayal of Christian views on marriage in The Woodlanders, Tess, and, especially, Jude, which Hardy described as dramatizing the “deadly war waged between flesh and spirit” (J, Preface, p. xxxv).

Contemporary scientific evidences that man was infinitesimal in the vastness of the universe no doubt made Hardy more receptive to philosophical views that challenged conventional perception of space and time. It is not surprising, then, that he declared Herbert Spencer’s First Principles sometimes acted “as a sort of patent expander when I had been particularly narrowed down by the events of life” (Letters 2, pp. 24–25), for one of Spencer’s major arguments was that space and time were incomprehensible. In fact, the question, “What are Space and Time?” with which Spencer opened chapter 3 of his First Principles is probably one source (Kant, of course, could be another) of the line, “What are Space and Time? A fancy!” in The Dynasts (Part Third, 1, iii, line 84; CPW, v, p. 25). It was in Spencer’s writings, too, that Hardy came across the suggestion that there might not be any comprehension underlying the universe (Letters 3, p. 244) – an idea that may have influenced his conception of an unconscious Will in The Dynasts.

A similar kind of influence is notable in Hardy’s response to J. S. Mill.
Hardy claimed that in the 1860s he knew Mill’s *On Liberty* “almost by heart” (*LW*, p. 355), and, in fact, in *Jude* he had Sue Bridehead quote from one of Mill’s arguments for liberty of thought (*J*, iv, iii, p. 234). Certainly Mill’s confident secular individualism, like Stephen’s and Spencer’s agnosticism, encouraged Hardy in the independent pursuit of his own world view. Then, too, some of the ideas Mill developed in his “Theism” – e.g., that there is no need to postulate a beginning to matter and force in the universe and that consciousness may arise from unconscious causes – might have influenced Hardy’s conception in *The Dynasts* of the Immanent Will becoming conscious – though Hardy claimed the latter idea as his own (*Letters* 3, p. 255).

*Feuerbach and Comte*

The effects of the thought of both Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte on Hardy’s writings are possible to identify with somewhat greater specificity. Feuerbach’s idea that the Christian god is the product of man’s need to imagine perfection was twice summarized by Hardy in the phrase, “God is the product of man”; once in a notebook (*LN* 2, p. 166) and again in a letter to Edward Clodd (*Letters* 3, p. 244). In *The Return of the Native*, the narrator’s comment that humans always make a “generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a first cause” (*RN*, vi, i, p. 387) may owe something to Feuerbach’s influence, but there are poems in *Satires of Circumstance* which almost certainly do. In “A Plaint to Man,” for example, one of Hardy’s imagined gods asks, “Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you / The unhappy need of creating me[?]” (*CPW*, 11, p. 33); in “God’s Funeral,” the speaker inquires, “Whence came it we were tempted to create / One whom we can no longer keep alive?” (*CPW*, 11, p. 35, lines 23–24); and in “Aquae Sulis” the Christian god chides the British goddess of the waters of Bath with the words, “You know not by what frail thread we equally hang; / It is said we are images both – twitched by people’s desires” (*CPW*, 11, p. 91).

Far more complex influences on Hardy’s thought may be traced to the writings of August Comte and his Positivist followers. Hardy marked some passages in the 1865 translation of Comte’s *A General View of Positivism* given to him by Horace Moule, and his autobiography includes references to his reading Comte in 1870 and again in 1873 (*LW*, pp. 79, 100); furthermore, his notebooks and letters from 1876 onward show that he read in a *System of Positive Polity* as well as in works by such Positivists as Edward Spencer Beesley, John Morley, Cotter Morrison, and Frederic Harrison. He certainly agreed with Comte’s aim to promote human altruism – which he saw as equatable with the Christian “Love your
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Neighbour as Yourself” (LW, p. 235) – and he acknowledged that “no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positivist teaching & ideals” (Letters 3, p. 53). In his autobiography, he added that if Comte had included Christ in his calendar, it would have made Positivism palatable to people who know it “to contain the germs of a true system” (LW, pp. 150–51).

Yet, for all that, Hardy’s word germs is indicative of the qualified response he took to Comte. For example, in his Social Dynamics, Comte described human progress as a “looped orbit,” sometimes going backward by way of gathering strength to spring forward again. Hardy’s imagination was obviously caught by that metaphor: in one of his notebooks he diagramed it (LN 1, p. 76); later he incorporated it in his “Candour in English Fiction,” and, again, in his “Apology” of 1922 (PW, pp. 126–27, 57–58). But, in that same “Apology,” he criticized the Positivists’ optimistic view of progress (PW, p. 53).

Nevertheless, other influences of Positivist thought can be detected both in Hardy’s fiction and in his poetry. For example, Clym Yeobright’s “relatively advanced” ideas, based on Parisian “ethical systems popular at the time” (RN, iii, ii, p. 174), prompted one reviewer to see him as “touched with the asceticism of a certain positivistic school.” At least one of Hardy’s contemporaries also saw Positivism in Tess. In fact, in that novel Hardy probably did adapt notes he made of Comte’s division of mankind’s “theological” stage into “fetishistic,” “polytheistic,” and “monotheistic” parts (LN 1, pp. 67, 73–74, 77–78): Tess, Hardy’s narrator remarks, is afflicted by “fetishistic fear” (T, iii, p. 28) and her rhapsody to nature is described as “a Fetichistic [sic] utterance in a Monotheistic setting” (xvi, p. 109). Then, too, the book Angel Clare describes as promoting a moral “system of philosophy” (xviii, p. 120), and the “ethical system without any dogma” he accepts (xlvii, p. 319), both call to mind Comte’s System of Positive Polity. Furthermore, in 1887 Hardy had taken notes from the Positivist Cotter Morrison’s The Service of Man, including his argument that primitive religions had no connection with morals (LN 1, p. 190) – an argument which Tess repeats to Alec when she tries to “tell him that he had mixed ... two matters, theology and morals, which in the primitive days of mankind had been quite distinct” (T, xlvii, p. 320). It was probably such particulars, as well as the final change in Clym from moral rigidity to sympathy and love for Tess, that prompted Frederic Harrison’s comment to Hardy that Tess reads “like a Positivist allegory.”

Comte also argued that poets must promote altruism and “adequately portray the new man in his relation to the new God.” Some poems of Hardy’s appear to have been influenced by that conception. His “A Plaint
to Man,” for example, with its theme that humanity must depend on its resources alone for the promotion of an altruistic “loving-kindness” (CPW, 11, p. 34) sounds very Positivist, as do poems like “The Graveyard of Dead Creeds,” “God’s Funeral,” and “The Sick Battle-God,” all of which express some hope for the emergence of altruism in humanity.

**Schopenhauer and von Hartmann**

What is striking about the impact on Hardy of Stephen, Fourier, Spencer, Mill, Feuerbach, and Comte is that, for the most part, they influenced him by the ways they served as role-models for his repudiation of religious belief, or offered some explanation of Christianity’s attraction, or provided an alternative to Christian ethics and values. But, as notes he took on various philosophers ranging in time from Baruch Spinoza to William Clifford reveal, Hardy was also interested in more abstract questions about the nature of what fundamental force or forces might underlie the universe. Of these, his writings were most notably influenced by the central ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann, in addition to such concepts as Herbert Spencer’s suggestion that there may be no ultimate comprehension in the universe and John Stuart Mill’s observation that consciousness may arise from unconscious causes.

In 1907 Hardy undertook to explain to a correspondent that the “philosophy of life” he utilized in The Dynasts was a “generalized form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt.” According to Hardy, its chief features were three: (1) that there is an unconscious and impersonal “urging force” that is immanent in the universe; (2) that man’s individual will is subservient to that Immanent Will, but “whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person’s will is free”; and (3) that the Unconscious Will is “growing aware of Itself ... & ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic” (Letters 3, p. 255). Variations on such unsystematic and generalized “impressions” dramatized by Hardy in The Dynasts and elsewhere were no doubt in part influenced by the writings of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann.

Hardy’s reported comments on Schopenhauer’s influence are contradictory: by one account, he denied being influenced at all (Millgate, Biography, p. 199); by another, he asserted that his “philosophy” was “a development from Schopenhauer through later philosophers.” The latter is more likely. Hardy owned translations of The World as Will and Idea (1896) and On the Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (1889) — in which (among others) he marked a passage asserting that “a will must be attributed to all that is lifeless.” In 1891 he made extensive notebook entries from Schopenhauer’s Studies in Pessimism, including one
emphasizing that “unless suffering is the direct & immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim” (LN 2, p. 28). Furthermore, some time before 1888 Hardy consulted the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to take a note on Schopenhauer’s pessimistic view of the will to live (LN 1, p. 203), and later, no doubt to help clarify Schopenhauer’s confusing prose, he turned to *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia*, from which he took a note on Schopenhauer’s idea of “the unconscious, automatic, or reasonless Will” (LN 2, p. 107).

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer’s influence on Hardy’s writings appears to be limited. His reference in *Tess* to the extremeness of Mr. Clare’s “renunciative philosophy which had cousinship with that of Schopenhauer and Leopardi” (T, xxv, p. 161), for example, expresses no more than the popular image of Schopenhauer’s pessimistic advocacy of renunciation of life – a view which may also have influenced a passage in *Jude* about “the coming universal wish not to live” (J, vi, ii, p. 355). Similarly, the concept of an unknowing immanent “Will” in the universe that figures in “He Wonders About Himself,” in the “Fore Scene” of *The Dynasts*, and in later spirit choruses, may reflect Hardy’s note-taking from *On the Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, or from *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia*, or from other expositions of Schopenhauer’s thought. But, in fact, little Hardy wrote compels attribution to Schopenhauer of influence beyond the level of generality characteristic of popular summaries of his pessimism and of his concept of “Will” as a force underlying the phenomena of the universe.

Specific instances of the influence of Eduard von Hartmann’s ideas on Hardy reveal how radically he would modify them. For example, in the late 1890s Hardy took a note on Hartmann’s view of the “infallible purposive… activity” of an “unconscious clairvoyant” intelligence; he headed that note, “God as super-conscious,” and followed it with an excerpted quotation from Hartmann: “We shall … designate this intell[i]g[ence], superior to all consc[iousness], at once unconsc[ious] & super-conscious” (LN 2, p. 111). To this Hardy added “? processive” above von Hartmann’s “purposive,” and then jotted his observation, “very obscure.” Later, Hardy imported a version of that “very obscure” passage into the mouth of the Spirit of the Years in *The Dynasts*, but again changed the word *purposive to processive* – a term which conveys a concept markedly different from von Hartmann’s:

> *In that immense unweeting Mind is shown*  
> One far above forethinking; processive,  
> Rapt, superconscious; a Clairvoyancy  
> That knows not what it knows…  
> (Part First, v, iv; lines 184–87; CPW, iv, p. 137)
Hence, although Hardy no doubt partly agreed with von Hartmann’s concept of the Will as Unconscious, even when almost quoting him he freely made changes that radically altered von Hartmann’s views.\(^{16}\)

What can be said with greatest certainty is that Hardy’s readings of and about Schopenhauer and von Hartmann confirmed some ideas he had arrived at independently or that he might earlier have derived from Mill, Spencer, Huxley, and others. Schopenhauer did probably suggest to Hardy the name Will for that underlying force in the universe about which he had long ruminated (though Hardy freely used many other names as well), and, by his theory of the “Unconscious,” von Hartmann no doubt reinforced what Hardy himself had already conceived – that such a force could be as uncomprehending as those “purblind Doomsters” in his “Hap” (CPW, i, p. 10). It is likely, too, that Hardy took from von Hartmann the word *immanent* for his “Immanent Will”; at least the translator of the edition Hardy used more than once speaks of the Will as an “immanent cause.”\(^{17}\)

Beyond that, even the most careful efforts to make point-for-point comparisons of what Hardy wrote with Schopenhauer’s and von Hartmann’s thought are bound to be highly speculative.\(^{18}\)

But, finally, it is important to note that, as Hardy judged them, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann took a supercilious view of the forlorn hope which (with some lapses) he clung to for an amelioration of the human condition (see “Apology,” *Late Lyrics and Earlier* [1922]; CPW, 11, p. 325). Furthermore they differed greatly from Hardy in the attitudes they adopted toward the human condition. Just as Schopenhauer’s claim to take a detached view of life was foreign to Hardy’s engaged concern for the suffering of humankind and higher animals, so was von Hartmann’s celebration of an Unconscious evolving at the expense of untold human pain. In the end, neither they, nor any other intellectual influences, altered Hardy’s conviction, conveyed often both in his poetry and his prose, that human aspiration, human feeling, and human hope, however dwarfed in the cosmic scale of things, were nevertheless more important than all the rest.

NOTES


2 See, for example, J. O. Bailey, “Hardy’s Mephistophelian Visitants,” *PMLA*, 61 (1946), 1146–84; Frank B. Pinion, “Mephistopheles, Satan, and Cigars,” *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield,
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8 For an analysis of Hardy’s diagram, see Lennart A. Björk’s Psychological Vision and Social Criticism in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), pp. 38–42.


11 Tess’s speech may also have been influenced by the ideas of John Aldington Symonds; see Björk, Psychological Vision, pp. 131–32.

12 Letter from Frederic Harrison of 19 December 1891, Dorset County Museum.


16 An instance of how freely Hardy would deviate from von Hartmann’s ideas is notable in William Archer’s “Real Conversations. Conversation I. With Mr. Thomas Hardy,” The Critic, 38 (April 1901), p. 316.


18 Examples of such analyses may be found in J. O. Bailey’s Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind: A New Reading of The Dynasts (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), and Walter F. Wright’s The Shaping of “The Dynasts” (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).
FURTHER READING


