Levinas, Cognitive Science, and Post-Darwinian Fiction: The Conundrum of Conatus in Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles

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In Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891), Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) challenges Victorian conventions that preclude second chances for seduced or exploited women. He suggests that, insofar as she participates in Darwinian drives to survive and flourish, a woman draws on recuperative sources of joy embedded in material existence, in the essence of being. Coming to the aid of the seduced and exploited, such seemingly amoral or egocentric drives serve ethical ends. At the same time, however, the actions of Tess’s victimizer, Alec D’Urberville, reflect naïve engrossment in one’s own sense of well-being, which such drives naturally induce. In effect, Hardy contrasts aspects of the endeavor to persist in being, or conatus, that have become integral, respectively, to contemporary cognitive science and to Levinasian ethics. In cognitive science, conatus has been associated with how an organism’s concern for its being nurtures cooperation, sociability, empathy, and altruism, while, for Levinas, it is associated with identifying one’s own or one’s group’s being, its material flourishing, with the good — an identification that underwrites egoism, imperialism, and racism. Hardy’s novel suggests, paradoxically, that only by separating oneself from naïve, natural equations of the good with one’s own enhanced quality of being can one foster the kinds of being, in personal and cultural, communal life, that make the realization of enhanced

qualities of being, one’s own and others’, integral to the achievement of the good.

In his 2003 study of "the feeling brain," the neurologist Antonio Damasio argues that recent neuroscientific research on emotions and their relation to cognitive and affective life largely supports the general direction of Spinoza’s Ethics (1677). Noting that Spinoza anticipates contemporary accounts of the embodiment of the human mind and grounds ethical reflection on considerations of bodily well-being, he makes Spinoza’s term conatus (endeavor) central to his discussion of how the neurophysiological circuitry through which involuntary emotional responses to stimuli are registered and processed becomes integral, not just to higher-level cognitive activities (planning, decisionmaking, focused attention, etc.), but also to the sentiments governing ethical life. Damasio remarks that brain-damaged patients in whom such emotions as “embarrassment, sympathy, and guilt” appear “diminished or absent” also have histories of poor decisionmaking, and he is able to document that, like sociopaths, such patients process mental images of violence or suffering without being physiologically disturbed. Subjects with unimpaired practical reasoning abilities, by contrast, cannot register such images without measurable autonomic nervous system agitation.

Arguing that all bodily reactions aim, “directly or indirectly, at regulating the life process and promoting survival” and at providing “a better than neutral life state, what we as thinking and affluent creatures identify as wellness and well-being,” Damasio maintains that this “continuous attempt at achieving a state of positively regulated life” was intuited by Spinoza as the “relentless endeavor (conatus) of each being to preserve itself.” In part 3, proposition 6, of the Ethics, Spinoza maintains that “everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavor[s] to persist in its own being,” which leads him to define emotion as “a passivity of the soul, . . . a confused idea, whereby the mind affirms concerning its body, or any part thereof, a force for existence (existendi vis) greater or lesser than before, and by the presence of which the mind is determined to think of one thing rather than another.” Damasio asks: “What is Spinoza’s conatus in current biological terms? It is the aggregate of dispositions laid down in brain circuitry that, once engaged by internal or environmental conditions, seeks both survival and well-being.”

He presents himself as following Spinoza in deriving both reason and ethics from conatus: “The embryo of ethical behaviors would have been another step in a progression that includes all the nonconscious, automated mechanisms that provide metabolic regulation; drives and motivations; emotions of diverse kinds; and feelings. Most importantly, the situations that evoke these emotions and feelings call for solutions that include cooperation. It is not difficult to imagine the emergence of justice and honor out of the practices of cooperation.” Other scholars of cognitive science likewise locate the roots of ethics in involuntary responses. Patrick Colm Hogan notes that “emotion triggers and variables seem to operate without reference to any calculation of ego-relevance,” as when seeing a spider on oneself or another evokes an equivalent “tinge of fright” and an equivalent unthinking action of flicking it away; the “intensity of our response” is “too crude to allow for egocentrism”; moreover, not all “cortical processes are egocentric,” some being “explicitly nonegocentric, such as imagining oneself in someone else’s situation.”

Damasio admits, however, that movement from conatus to cooperation to ethics “pertains to a group” – among animals, “packs of wolves and troops of apes” and, among humans, “the family, tribe, city, and nation” – so that “the best of human behavior,” extending ethical consideration “to wider and wider circles of humanity,” may involve going beyond, or even against, what is “wired under the control of the genome.” Indeed, Damasio’s fellow neurologist Joseph LeDoux cites recent studies showing that “implicit (unconscious) tendencies toward racism are reflected in the degree to which the amygdala [a subcortical fear-registering center] is activated by stimuli representing . . . [a] group [that those being studied are likely to be] biased against.”

Here, cognitive science’s treatment of conatus crosses paths with Levinas’s association of it with the essence of being, with being’s essential self-interestedness, its endeavor to preserve and extend itself, that on the level of subjectivity constitutes the egocentric structure of intentionality. In Otherwise Than Being, Levinas argues that “the
conatus of beings ... takes dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another and are thus together.”^10 Rather than deriving it from conatus, he presents ethics as its antithesis – as what is "beyond essence" and, thus, "otherwise than being": "Irreducible to being s essence is the substitution in responsibility, signification or the one-for-another, or the defecting of the ego beyond every defeat, going countercurrent to a conatus, or goodness" (OB, 18).^11 Arguing that philosophy “from Spinoza to Hegel” "identifies will and reason" so as to reduce freedom to “being the reflection of a universal order which maintains itself and justifies itself all by itself, like the God of the ontological argument,” he characterizes his own thought as lying "at the antipodes of Spinozism."

The tension between Levinas and cognitive science on the relation of conatus to ethics revives a debate at the heart of late-Victorian culture. On the one hand, in The Data of Ethics (1879), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) argues that the endeavor of self-preservation yields a social ethics that is rational and just as well as natural. On the other, in "Evolution and Ethics" (1893), Thomas Huxley (1825–95) argues that the inherent amorality of the "cosmic process" of evolution, predicated on unlimited, unrestrained "self-assertion," must be countered by an "ethical process" that calls into question a naive or instinctual equation of self-assertion with the good. "[T]he practice of that which is ethically best – what we call goodness or virtue – involves," he maintains, "a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows."^12 Whereas in the 1890s Leslie Stephen (1832–1904) and John Dewey (1859–1952) argued – just as, today, advocates of evolutionary ethics, such as Robert Richards, Michael Ruse, and Richard Alexander, argue along the lines of Damasio and other cognitive scientists – that conatus issues in modes of cooperation that yield social instincts and moral sense,^13 Huxley maintained that, although "cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man may have come about," it is, "in itself," "incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before."^14 For, as Levinas would say, the good stands outside the essence or logic of being.

The ethical process, for Levinas, begins once human consciousness separates itself from Huxley’s cosmic process by putting the spontaneity of self-assertion into question: "Consciousness is the impossibility of invading reality like a wild vegetation that absorbs or breaks or pushes back everything around it. The turning back on oneself of consciousness is the equivalent not of self-contemplation but of the fact of not existing violently and naturally, of speaking to the Other."^15 Contemporary critics of evolutionary ethics, such as Alan Gewirth and George C. Williams, similarly insist that, while the evolutionary results of conatus may be necessary to account for human ethics, they are not sufficient. That evolution should produce "a human organism that would reliably practice unfair nepotism and self-seeking conspiracies in a tribal microcosm" follows the logic of conatus, Williams asserts, but that such an organism should come to advocate "compassion towards strangers and even animals" is an extraordinary biological "abnormality."^16 Levinas goes beyond Huxley, Gewirth, and Williams in insisting that dissociating the good from one’s own, or one’s group’s, flourishing entails dissociating the notion of the good from registers of well-being, lest the cosmic process set the terms for understanding the good, as it does in one way in Spencer and another in Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). For the latter, the question is not whether a judgment is true but whether it is "life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving."^17 Nietzsche, of course, departs from Spencer in arguing that natural selection need not favor the best and in rejecting self-preservation as a sufficient evolutionary mechanism. Nonetheless, Levinas enfolds Nietzsche into his broader argument: “Every overcoming as well as every revaluing of Being in the subject would still be a case of Being’s essence” (OB, 17).^18 Nietzschean “supermen,” no less than bourgeois consumers, strive to maximize their own well-being.

Levinas and cognitive science employ
conatus in ways that are not, however, simply oppositional but chiasmic. Stressing the derivation of conceptuality from forms of embodiment evolutionarily structured by the organism's endeavor to survive and flourish, cognitive science explains why Levinas's phenomenological descriptions of being's essence and of intentional consciousness should elicit the reader's recognition and assent. Similarly, Levinas's insistence that ethics precedes and undercuts intentional consciousness dovetails with neuroscientific discussion of the interplay between subcortical and cortical processing of significance. Wilma Bucci notes that, in addition to "the hippocampus-amygdala complex," which is integral to integrating "emotional evaluation and cognitive processing," there is an evolutionary anterior "thalamo-amygdalar" subcortical circuit that registers immediate but "non-specific" emotional-cognitive "input" (regarding possible danger, sense of security, etc.), which "may play an important role in the processing of emotional information in human infants prior to the full maturation of the neocortex and its anatomical connections."21 Levinas's claim that "the beginning of language is in the face" — for, even "in its silence, it calls you" because one's "reaction to the face is a response,"22 is consistent with, although not identical to, clinical research into how interpersonal interaction, especially maternal care and example, fosters mechanisms for transforming "subsymbolic information to nonverbal and then to verbal symbols" that allow "recursive" effects on systems, that is, translating images into words that, in turn, modify the images.23 While in Levinas the face exceeds image, while it comes to denote all in another's subjectivity that cannot be objectified or reduced to image, such movement begins with the arrest of objectifying consciousness effected by actual, material, carnal faces — as the stress on contact, sensibility, corporeality, exposure to another's flesh throughout Otherwise Than Being attests. Because faces speak even when silent, checking the propensity of emotional-cognitive circuitry to assess what it registers exclusively in terms of conatus (see TI, 64–77, 201–9), they make nonobjectification constitutive of the human. For this reason, the experience of welcome, which Levinas associates with the feminine and habitation and home, is logically anterior to the possibility of ethical subjectivity: "The intimacy which familiarity already presupposes is an intimacy with someone. . . . Recollection refers to a welcome. . . . The Other who welcomes in intimacy is. . . . precisely the thou [tu] of familiarity. . . . This [feminine] alterity is situated on another plane than language and nowise represents a truncated, stammering, still elementary language. On the contrary, the discretion of this presence includes all the possibilities of the transcendent relationship with the Other" (TI, 155). In other words, intersubjective intimacy, experiencing others as "thou," precedes the ethical, recognizing one's responsibility to an Other, a "you."

As Hogan notes, because subcortical emotional processing operates "without calculation of any sort," it can "hardly include a calculation of ego-relevance."24 We experience sensations before weighing their bearing on us personally, and, when we do evaluate such sensations, we employ cortical processes that have developed under the guidance of maternal and other adult caregivers, situations in which learning to imagine being in another's position is integral to socialization and language acquisition.25 Indeed, the nonegocentric character of the kind of somatic, involuntary responses that Levinas associates with sensibility and that cognitive science associates with interplay between thalamo-cortico-amygdalar circuitry and the thalamo-amygdala subcortical bypass raises the question of why, if we spontaneously experience fear seeing a spider on someone else, we are not "far more consistently empathic than we are."26 Both Levinas and cognitive science suggest that conceptuality or cortical processing can and do talk us out of viscerally immediate ethical responsiveness, but, whereas Damasio following Dewey, would see conatus extending pursuit of well-being from oneself to one's own group to humanity as a whole, Levinas, radicalizing Huxley, insists that ethics breaks with the logic of conatus, making my well-being inconsequential in relation to my responsibility for the Other.

Tess's involuntary yearnings for happiness, reflective of the conatus woven into nature, challenge a pure morality of self-sacrifice and, thus, put in question Victorian demands that women be self-effacing

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and that fictional seduced women conveniently die or renounce all romantic life. Indeed, Hardy is alert to how expectations of such pure morality may serve gender and class oppression, giving the beneficiaries of British power and the British social order ways of talking themselves out of concern for the suffering of others. To counter such tendencies, he strives to devise narrative strategies that will flush out the reader's involuntary moral sense — that will waylay the reader with ethical significance registered immediately or subcortically before conceptualizing revisions can neutralize its affective agency. At the same time, however, he associates conatus with ungenerous conventional morality, with the desire — pronounced in middle-class Victorian culture — to reproduce received ideas or spread universally one's own manner of thinking. In so doing, he affiliates conatus with an imperialistic essence of being, articulated on the human level as a "multiplicity of allergic egoisms," and most evident in the portrait of Angel Clare's brothers' cognitive and affective insularity: "His Diocesan Synod and Visitations were the mainsprings of the world to the one; Cambridge to the other. Each brother candidly recognized that there were a few unimportant scores of millions of outsiders in civilized society, persons who were neither University men nor churchmen; but they were to be tolerated rather than reckoned with and respected." Hardy can sketch lightly the ethical violence of egoistic consciousness because it is such a pronounced theme in nineteenth-century fiction. But in his work such ethical violence, however reflective of personal selfishness and debased habits of thought, is conceived of as issuing from the same Darwinian drives that naturally come to the aid of such victims of ethical violence as Tess. Thus, Damasio's and Levinas's readings of conatus cross in Hardy's depiction of Tess's embodied purity: the endeavor to flourish that allows her to rally from betrayal and the death of her child and that connects her to the lush natural flourishing of the dairy has its consequence in both ethical and erotic aspects of her love for Angel.

At the beginning of "Phase the Second: Maiden No More," Tess is described as walking along "like a person who did not find any especial burden in material things" (p. 75 [chap. 12]). Unhappily, her unstrained relation with "material things," integral to her organism's recuperation, is undercut by the evangelical sign painter's messages of vindictive divine judgment and retribution. The description emphasizes how the sign painter's words oppose and aspire to master nature: "Against the peaceful landscape, the pale, decaying tints of the copes, the blue air of the horizon, and the lichenized stile-boards, these staring vermilion words shone forth" (pp. 79–80). By having his narrator contrast how a sophisticated observer might see in the signs only "the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time" with how "the words entered Tess with accusatory horror" (p. 80), Hardy evokes a relativistic historicist context unavailable to Tess. Absent that context, she is unable to defend herself against a verbal assault connate with Alec's sexual assault: "the words entered" her. With a ferocity that did not endear him to all readers, Hardy suggests that religion in its decadent moralistic phase functions as rape, that it articulates with particular misogynistic force a male will to power that, more than disciplining women, strikes at their will to live and, symbolically, against the life force itself — as the images of decay in the passage quoted above suggest. Up to this point, the scene lends itself to Nietzschean analysis: in undermining life-enhancing conatus, moralism equates the good with perversions of instincts and emotions that produce a sick animal. But Tess asserts herself by demanding that words be answerable to ethics. When she asks that judgment acknowledge the complexity of circumstances, that "your sin" might not be "of your own seeking," and is told, "I cannot split hairs on that burning query," she declares the sign painter's biblical words to be "horrible": "Crushing! killing!" (p. 80 [chap. 12]). Her ethical condemnation of all moralism that undermines conatus is consistent with Spencer's insistence that "undue subordination of egoism to altruism [is] injurious" and suggests her intuitive awareness of how such discourse, as Spencer no less than Nietzsche argues, can itself serve imperialistic egoism. "A society in which the most exalted principles of self-sacrifice for the benefit
of neighbors are enunciated.” Spencer continues, “may be a society in which unscrupulous sacrifice of alien fellow-creatures is not only tolerated but applauded. Along with professed anxiety to spread these exalted principles among heathens, there may go the deliberate fastening of a quarrel upon them with a view to annexing their territory.” Moreover, in implicitly rejecting an otherworldly religion in favor of a life-affirming one, Tess unconsciously follows the educated classes, who, Leslie Stephen notes, have tacitly exchanged New Testament convictions that “[o]ur best hope is that the whole visible framework of the universe may be dissolved, and a new heaven and new earth be revealed,” for “explicitly founding our moral code on the necessity of adapting mankind to the conditions of this life.” As indicated by her presence at the May Day dance, where “every woman and girl carried in her right hand a peeled willow-wand, and in her left a bunch of white flowers,” “upholding the local Cerealia” (pp. 13–14 [chap. 2]), Tess’s unwitting modernity arises from her roots in a peasant culture only superficially detached from the pagan fertility worship effectively revived in post-Christian sanctifications of all that is life enhancing.

However, Tess does not condemn the sign painter’s messages for Spencerian reasons—that is, because they work against self-preservation and, thus, against maximum happiness in the world—but for Levinasian ones. Because the sign painter’s ideology ignores the circumstances of individual cases, it divests the Other of all that might modify the intentionality that would grasp her. What is “[c]rushing” and “killing” is injustice, and against its unethical indifference she rebels. Revolt leads to liberation from “moral hobgoblins,” “based on shreds of convention” that were “out of harmony with the actual world, not she” (p. 85 [chap. 13]), as is dramatized when Tess puts aside doubts about the efficacy of her baptism of her dying baby on the grounds that “if Providence would not ratify such an act of approximation she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity—either for herself or for her child” (pp. 95–96 [chap. 14]). Here, she frees herself from the paganism implicit in Christianity’s failure to break with imagining Jehovah as a tribal god who controls access to life in exchange for propitiation and rituals; she rejects the transposition of the logic of conatus to another world. In doing so, she subjectively undergoes the theological revolution that Huxley attributed to the eighth-century prophets, the same revolution that underlies Levinas’s religious discourse. According to Huxley: “The student who is familiar with the theology implied, or expressed, in the books of Judges, Samuel, and the first book of Kings, finds himself in a new world of thought…when he reads Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. The essence of this change is the reversal of the position which, in primitive society, ethics holds in relation to theology. Originally, that which men worship is a theological hypothesis, not a moral ideal. The prophets…preach the opposite doctrine. They are constantly striving to free the moral ideal from the stiffling embrace of the current theology and its concomitant ritual. . . . [I]t was an ethical criticism.” Similarly, Levinas’s God “does not fill me up with goods, but compels me to goodness, which is better than goods received.”

The implicit subordination of dogma to ethics is something that Tess shares with many of her contemporaries. When she questions the local parson about the efficacy of her improvised baptism, she places his self-love in tension with his sensibility: “Having the natural feelings of a tradesman at finding that a job he should have been called in for had been unskilfully botched by his customers among themselves, he was disposed to say no. Yet the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses—or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism. The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man” (p. 96 [chap. 14]). To the extent that conatus motivates “the natural feelings of a tradesman,” it is checked by a “dignity,” a “strange tenderness” of voice that “puts into question the naive spontaneity of the ego” and “goes against intentionality” (OB, 91, 111). But, in describing the parson’s “nobler impulses” as “those that he had left” after straining “to graft technical belief on actual scepticism,” Hardy alludes to Stephen’s recurrent discussions of clerical struggles to reconcile traditional
orthodoxy with science and higher criticism: on the one hand, the de facto marginalization of dogma frees the nobler impulses to be ethically responsive; on the other, the practice of duplicity can only be corruptive.36 Moreover, that "victory fell" to the "man" rather than to the "ecclesiastic" suggests the triumph of an "altruistic will," an "instinct of natural benevolence," or love," which Levinas distinguishes from being turned "inside out," being shaken by a "deafening trauma" that places "[b]eyond egoism and altruism . . . the religiosity of the self" (OB, 111–12, 117, 111, 117). Hardy notes that the parson remains abidingly condescending toward Tess, despite being "[s]omewhat moved" (p. 97 [chap. 14]).

By contrast, Tess’s anguished sense of responsibility to her child knows no moderation or shelter. "[D]istressed beyond measure," she offers herself as a substitution, addressing God: "Heap as much anger as you want to upon me, and welcome; but pity the child!" (p. 93 [chap. 14]). Revealing the "true Jahveh [Yahweh]" to be "the moral ideal,“37 ethical trauma allows Tess, for the first time in the novel, to act rather than react or drift. After the baptism and its aftermath, no conceptuality that would displace the primacy of the ethical can intimidate her, as her confrontation with the parson indicates. Not valuing "the kind of heaven lost by . . . irregularity" and not noticing that a jar containing flowers for the grave discloses the "eye of maternal affection" engrossed "in its vision of higher things" (p. 97 [chap. 14]).

Forcing his readers to process cognitively a bad joke (a Keelwell’s marmalade jar decorating the grave) while ethically repudiating the detachment that such humor conveys, Hardy makes it difficult for them not to be shamed by their resemblance to the parson. For him, "a novel is an impression," not an argument,38 and becomes significant only when it partakes of "the mental tactility" issuing from "a power of observation informed by a living heart."39 Hardy copied a sentence of Stephen’s regarding poetry into his notebook for 1 July 1879, a comment that applies no less to fiction: "The ultimate aim of the poet should be to touch our hearts by showing his own, and not to exhibit his learning, or his fine taste, or his skill in imitating the notes of his predecessors."40 Hogan notes: "To know that something is fictional is to make a judgment that it does not exist. But existence judgments are cortical. They have relatively little to do with our emotional response to anything."41

As Levinas implies, Hamlet’s question, "What is Hecuba to me?" and Cain’s, "Am I my brother’s keeper?" are connate in ways that precede distinctions between the fictional and the actual. While cortical judgments of existence of course limit our responsiveness to fictional characters, and while aesthetically generated emotions may deflect us from ethical attentiveness to real life, the immediacy with which Hecuba’s image triggers subcortical emotion and attention suggests that aesthetic empathy points to, and depends on, a "prehistory" of the ego posited for itself" that "speaks a responsibility," for [t]he self is through and through a hostage, older than the ego" (OB, 117). Cognitive science’s evolutionary-developmental account of the relation of the cortical to the subcortical is congruent with Levinas’s account of intentionality’s related and secondary character, its tendency to be interrupted by the impossibility of indifference. Nonetheless, the cognitive scientific account enfolds such nonindifference into a logic of conatus (emotions organized to recognize threats to or enhancements of well-being do so in relation to others as well as ourselves). Whether taken as a preegoistic articulation of conatus (as in cognitive science) or as a preegoistic break with it (as in Levinas), Tess’s ethical subjectivity, as communicated by Hardy’s "impression," renders Victorian gender ideology and theology answerable to ethics. While readers could resist the novel’s impression, they could do so only by appearing to make an idol of convention — in effect choosing a tribal pagan god over a prophetic ethical one.42

To the extent that most readers, from the time of the novel’s initial reception to the present, follow Tess in purging notions of the absolute of all that is extraneous to the ethical, they become, no less than she, heirs to what Levinas views, his anti-Spinozism notwithstanding, as the positive intellectual legacy of Spinoza’s pioneering biblical textual criticism: "Through the multiple authors whom the historical method discov-
ers in sacred texts, the Word of God invites men to obey the teachings of justice and charity. Through historical criticism of the Bible, Spinoza teaches us its ethical interiorization. Tess’s rally unites a Levinasian overcoming of pagan theology with the resiliency of conatus against natural and cultural forces that would undermine her recovery: “The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess” (p. 103 [chap. 16]). “Let the truth be told – women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye” (p. 104).

This happy crossing of Levinasian ethics and conatus is unimpeded by Tess’s love for Angel. His misperceptions and rejection of her illustrate precisely the kinds of cognitive violence that Levinas associates with subjectivity’s lapses from ethical responsibility. Hardy’s portrait of Angel is so riveting, of course, because he is neither temperamentally nor ideologically a likely villain. By the time he meets Tess, he has already undergone a measure of the moral education — chastening pride and correcting prejudice — that had been thematically central to the great early- and mid-nineteenth-century novels: “The typical and unvarying Hodge [a journalistic stereotype of the illiterate, provincial peasant] ceased to exist [within Angel’s consciousness]. He had been disintegrated into a number of varied fellow-creatures — beings of many minds, beings infinite in difference.” Hardy is at pains to stress that Angel does grasp, at least intellectually and imaginatively, the Otherness of others; he realizes that farmworkers had diverse “private views” and that each “walked in his own individual way the road to dusty death” (p. 118 [chap. 18]). The Shakespearean allusion through which Angel processes his impressions (“all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death” [Macbeth, act 5, scene 5]) has a double valence. On the one hand, it suggests that he assimilates even his recognition of other people’s irreducibility to objectification to his own high-culture, aestheticized English framework of intelligibility. On the other hand, it suggests how literature and perception enrich one another — his thoughts call forth and are clarified by “emotion schemas” tied to literary “memory schemas.” Macbeth’s nihilistic image is transmuted into Angel’s affirmation of a plurality of subjectivities, the collective “being-toward-death” that places him, Angel, in a position of ethical responsibility toward each and all.

Coordinate with this at least speculative appreciation of how the Other’s difference rebukes our totalizing cognitions is an opening to heterogeneous stimuli and a willingness to have his interiority modified by what is exterior to it: “Unexpectedly [Angel] began to like the outdoor life for its own sake. . . . He . . . saw something new in life and humanity. . . . [H]e made close acquaintance with phenomena which he had before known but darkly — the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon in their temperaments” (p. 118 [chap. 18]). Evoking Wordsworth’s theme of receptivity to nature attuning the mind to kindliness, Hardy prepares the reader to see the ethical character of Angel’s determination to propose to Tess: “Despite his heterodoxy Clare was a man with a conscience. Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life — a life which, to herself who endured or enjoyed it, possessed as great a dimension as the life of the mightiest to himself. . . . How then should he look upon her as of less consequence than himself; as a pretty trifle to caress and grow weary of?” (p. 154 [chap. 25]). Hardy thus separates Angel from a long line of novelistic cads, from Richardson’s Lovelace, through Austen’s Wickham, to Dickens’s Steerforth and Eliot’s Stephen Guest, to whom readers are encouraged to say, as does Pierre to Natasha’s would-be seducer Anatole Kuragin in Tolstoy’s War and Peace (1865–69), “You surely must understand that, apart from your own pleasure, there’s the happiness, the peace of other people,” a remonstrance that breaks off with the realization that, unlike the implied reader, Anatole is incapable of ever “understanding” any such thing.

Not only does Angel seem to be at a far remove from such characters, who in Tess are represented by Alec; he has arrived intellectually, as Tess has arrived intuitively, at a position that would seem to preclude the ideological, conceptual, or cortical blocking of immediate, subcortical ethical respon-
siveness. Like Tess, he has come to divest notions of the absolute from all that is extraneous to the ethical. The effect on him of the higher criticism inaugurated by Spinoza is to turn him against everything in orthodox Christianity that retains commerce with tribal notions of God. Angel informs his father that, while he loves the church "as one loves a parent," he cannot accept ordination as long as "she [the church] refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theology" (p. 115 [chap. 18]). Unable to accept article 4 of the Declaration (i.e., the Thirty-nine Articles), that Jesus was bodily resurrected, "in the literal sense...to Huxley's essays" (pp. 321-22 [chap. 46]). Unable to accept article 4 of the Declaration (i.e., the Thirty-nine Articles), that Jesus was bodily resurrected, "in the literal and grammatical sense," he finds that his "whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction; to quote...Hebrews, "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain"" (p. 116). Tess later tells Alec that, like Angel, she believes in nothing "supernatural," that she values "the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount," and she summarizes arguments "which might possibly have been paralleled in many a work of the pedigree ranging from the Dictionnaire Philosophique to Huxley’s essays" (pp. 321-22 [chap. 46]). In other words, Angel is given many of the views that Hardy shared with Stephen and Huxley, which would, one might think, wed intellectual tough-mindedness to ethical sensibility.

According to Paul Turner: "Angel was in some ways a positive version of Hardy,"46 Angel is particularly close to Leslie Stephen, whose influence Hardy acknowledged in the authorized biography published by his second wife.47 While admiring Stephen, Hardy also perceived him to be a "difficult man" – "if he did not care for the company, or was in a bad mood, [he] would sit silent for hours" – and was exasperated by his prudish editing and critical judgments.48 Yet, while Stephen’s writings are punctuated by “typical” Victorian class-elitist, sexist, and racist locutions, his "reasoning and arguments foretell Dewey"49 and, thus, contemporary evolutionary ethics. “[R]eject[ing] religion in general and Christianity in particular because it is immoral,”50 Stephen insists, as does Angel (p. 116 [chap. 18]), that we have evolved socially and intellectually beyond orthodox “phraseology”: “We can talk about the corruption of mankind, when we really cherish a firm belief in progress and in the natural origin of all the virtuous instincts.”51 Stephen viewed human history as “evolution from the egotistic to the altruistic stage of development”; unlike Spencer, Mill, and Comte, however, he joined Huxley in dissociating increasing altruism from increasing personal happiness: “since altruism required giving up one’s selfish desires, it required” accepting that “it was better to be good than happy.”52

While not a portrait of Stephen, Angel becomes for Hardy a means of exploring dissonances between ideas and personality that Stephen’s example arresting dramatized. Confronting the paradox that Angel’s intellectual break with orthodoxy and convention increases, rather than decreases, his inflexible association of virginity with feminine purity, Oliver Lovesey argues that "Angel’s antipathy to Christian doctrine produces a devotion to natural laws and the rubric of geology, and a naïve faith in the stability of such markings," with the result that "his worship of female purity derives from a celebration of nature as a transcendental compensation for the loss of God.”53 Thus, Angel views Tess as "a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (p. 130 [chap. 20]), reversing the moral progress indicated by his views of farmworkers "obliterating[ing]" the "conventional farm-folk of his imagination – personified by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge” (p. 117 [chap. 18]). Taking Tess to be "a genuine daughter of Nature” (p. 120), turning aside her various efforts to confess her past because he does not want the idea he has of her to be disturbed, he will not allow ideology to be swayed by sensibility, for his cortical dampening of subcortical impulses is so evolved as to alienate him from moral sense: "She broke into sobs, and turned her back to him. It would almost have won round any man but Angel Clare. Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it” (p. 241 [chap. 36]). When he learns of Tess’s past, Lovesey argues, Angel "feels ruined and abandoned because his assurance in the stability of outward appearances is shaken.”54 Lovesey’s
analysis dovetails with a central Levinasian theme: the death of God radicalizes the propensity of subjectivity to totalize, partly because no notion of divine transcendence underwrites acknowledgment of the other’s irreducibility to mastered knowledge, and partly because the other’s significance is conceived in terms of her part in a system, her “remaining” within the same, that can in principle be subjectively grasped (cf. T1, 21–30, 48–52, 293–94, 109).

Angel’s lapse into a sort of modern paganism that, like the old, deifies life, takes well-being as the ultimate good, is underscored by how, seeing Tess in the “spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervaded the open mead” at dawn, he construes her as “an almost regnant power”; reminded of “the Resurrection hour” because she “looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large,” he calls her “Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly.” She partakes in his disembodying, idealizing, abstracting, and deifying perception — “his own face, though he did not think of it, wore the same aspect to her” (p. 130 [chap. 20]) — as does, arguably, the narrator whenever he lapses into presenting Tess as a mythic concretization of the regenerative conatus informing nature: “Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate” (p. 149 [chap. 24]). However, the narrator’s propensity to join Angel in viewing Tess as “transcendental compensation for the loss of God” is countered by his awareness of the violence, indifference, and antimythic impersonality woven into biological reproduction. Just as Angel’s and Tess’s disembodifying idealizations paradoxically inflame physical desires that serve the interest of being, so the seeming “pastoral experience” of the “idyllic Talbothays dairy farm” turns out to be an aestheticization of the “cunning of nature,” akin to Hegel’s “cunning of reason” in history, which cruelly subordinates subjective life to being’s essence: the dairymaids “writhe verishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature’s law” and, thus, “tossed and turned on their little beds,” and “the cheese-wring dripped monotonously downstairs” (pp. 147, 148 [chap. 23]).

Insisting that Angel’s totalizing misperceptions are shared by all the characters and by the narrator, Peter Widdowson argues for “postmodernizing” the novel: “For Tess is precisely not a novel attempting to offer us a ‘knowable’ character, but rather one which exposes characterization itself as a humanist-realist mystification (producing ‘visible essences’) and which parades the misrepresentation that ‘characterization’ involves by subjecting to irony the falsifying essentialism of ‘faithfully presenting a pure woman.’” Jules Law, following Penny Boumelha, claims that the novel ironizes [its] progressive fetishization of Tess’s body by linking it to Angel Clare’s patently contradictory fetishization of her, with the result that Hardy’s “traffic with hermeneutic undecidability is both intensified and complicated by the narrator’s periodic regression.” Figuring Tess as excess rather than absence, D. E. Musselwhite invokes Deleuze and Guattari to present her as dissolving “molar identities in processes of affective becomings,” her “enormous capacity for life” making her a “haecceity,” a “mode of individuation” that transgresses all normative categories. Such readings effectively make Hardy’s presentation of Tess identical to Proust’s presentation of Albertine. There are, indeed, deep affinities between Hardy and Proust, whom Hardy influenced, but distinctive to Hardy is an emphasis on how the conatus that comes to our aid against victimization, that defends the interests of life in us, likewise allows the Other’s living face to penetrate and disrupt our aestheticizations with its saying.

Confronted with Angel’s “hard logical deposit” after confessing her past, as a consequence of which he insists, “You were one person; now you are another” (p. 228 [chap. 35]), Tess pins her “feminine hope” on “surreptitious visions of a domiciliary intimacy continued long enough to break down his coldness even against his judgment,” which Hardy represents as “the vulpine slyness of Dame Nature” (pp. 243, 244 [chap. 36]). Such “vulpine slyness” has previously undermined all Tess’s efforts to renounce Angel, as when her desire to “lead a repressed life” is overwhelmed by the “strength of her own vitality” (p. 125 [chap.
or when her conviction that she “could never conscientiously allow any man to marry her now” cannot withstand “the brief happiness of sunning herself in his eyes” (p. 138 [chap. 21]). The latter phrase evokes both the naturalness of an instinctive pursuit of self-flourishing akin to a plant’s struggle for sunlight and the interestedness of being in seizeing sunlight for itself, as highlighted in the phrase of Pascal’s that Levinas selects as an epigraph for Otherwise Than Being: “‘That is my place in the sun.’ That is how the usurpation of the whole world began.”62 Despite its acknowledgment of the coalescing of the natural and the predatory, vulpine slyness as Hardy uses it also suggests that unconscious egoism woven into nature aspires, instinctively and rightly, to undermine the intentionality that alienates Angel from his own ethical sensibility. Unhappily, his “love was ethereal to a fault” (p. 244 [chap. 36]), and Tess’s own conscious abasement of egoism to altruism is so intense that she might “have been Apostolic Charity herself returned to a self-seeking modern world” (p. 241). Mirroring Angel’s disembodifying idealizations, viewing him “as an intelligence rather than a man” (p. 123 [chap. 19]), having “hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare” (p. 192 [chap. 31]), Tess lapses into an idolatry that not only victimizes herself, inducing her to become a variant of Nietzsche’s “sick animal,”63 but also does grievous harm to Angel by not insisting that he disentangle his ethical subjectivity from the complacencies of egoism and altruism that configure his options as either “condemning” or “forgiving” her. It is not simply that she looks on him with “worshipful” eyes but that she regresses religiously by taking the absolute to be determinative of the good rather than the call of the good to be determinative of the absolute: “To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be” (p. 192 [chap. 31]).

Being culturally induced not to assert herself, Tess, Hardy implies, echoing Spencer, fails Angel ethically as well as herself: “Both directly and indirectly unselfishness pushed to excess generates selfishness.”64 In her idolatry of him, she allows him to evade the ethical call. Treating her own conatus as inconsequential, she deifies his essence of being.

Hardy’s depiction of the calamitous effects of Tess’s taking Angel’s well-being to be the good might appear to corroborate the most frequent objection to Levinasian ethics: that an asymmetrical, nonreciprocal relation of self to Other aggrandizes the Other into a tyrant, leaving the self no defense against exploitation. In particular, women may be coerced into a “being-for-others” (men, children) that authorizes self-effacement.65 Tina Chanter argues: “Levinas exempted himself from the responsibility of ever taking account of the fact that the infinite ethical obligation for which his philosophy calls . . . is one which a history of oppression has repeatedly demanded of women.”66 Paul Ricoeur argues that, in presenting the ego as “stubbornly closed, locked up,” Levinas’s account is “hyperbolic,” a “systematic practice of excess” that leaves unexplained how the ethical call can be heard if it is not met by a structure of identity already shaped by a Heideggerian “being-toward” marked by self-esteem derived from knowing itself to be aiming for the good.67 More radically, Alain Badiou asserts that ethics in Levinas’s sense and the later Derrida’s “designates above all the incapacity, so typical of the contemporary world, to name and strive for a Good. We should go even further, and say that the reign of ethics is one symptom of a universe ruled by a distinctive [singulière] combination of resignation in the face of necessity together with a purely negative, if not destructive, will. It is this combination that should be designated as nihilism.”68

Badiou’s evocation of resignation coupled with negative will does, indeed, describe Tess’s condition from the time she accepts Angel’s abandonment, through her exploitation at Flintcomb-Ash, to her acceptance of Alec’s offer to take care of her family in return for becoming his mistress.69 Whereas feminist critics such as Chanter suggest that Levinas’s separation of ethics from conatus is apt to invite women to comply with cultural moralisms that serve patriarchal repression, Badiou maintains that the collapse of subjectivity into nihilistic negative will so prevalent in “the contemporary world” follows, not from culturally coerced alienation from conatus, but rather from doing exactly what Levinas warns against – conflating the interests of being with the good. Like Levinas, Badiou identifies the good with what “breaks or
opposes” or exceeds Spinoza's *conatus essendi*, but he differs sharply from Levinas in identifying the good, not with responsibility to the Other, which he takes to be productive only of a nihilistic, apolitical, indeterminate passivity, but with a Nietzschean-Sartrean-Lacanian fidelity to one’s own becoming that alone can allow a subject to be more than a human animal subservient to interest in perseverance in being.

In Badiou and other contemporary philosophers who critique the modern West for neopagan deifications of life as the ultimate or master value, a third account of *conatus* emerges alongside Damasio’s and Levinas’s. This account stresses how conflating the good with persistence in and enhancement of being revives traditional paganism, the worship of life as in fertility cults, except that, under conditions of late modernity, life is reduced to consumption and sensation. Being in life entirely displaces making something of life, which means that *conatus* becomes productive of neither collaborative empathy nor imperialistic egoism, yielding instead “a culture of life” (to use George W. Bush’s phrase) coextensive with the sheer nihilism of life without culture.

For Badiou, such nihilism – taking death as “the only thing that can really happen to someone” and defining *man* in terms of “happiness” – is both the result of allowing a preethical *conatus* to govern one’s life and the consequence of ethics in Levinas’s sense giving priority to responsibility to the Other in ways that alienate one from fidelity to one’s own becoming. Tess’s story reveals, however, the crucial difference between assuming ethical responsibility for others and making an absolute good of their flourishing in being. Her reactions to the sign painter, her baby’s death, and the parson are models for imitation and identification. Her relationships with Angel and Alec are not models, not because the much-victimized Tess is to blame, but because, in Angel’s case, she forsakes *conatus* for an aestheticized ideal of goodness and, in Alec’s, she conflates enhancing the *conatus* of others with securing their good.

Tess is led to submit to Alec because, hearing her siblings singing a song of naive Sunday school comfort on the eve of the family’s eviction, and knowing the world to be structured around the essence of being – convinced, as she earlier tells Alec, while looking at him “with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow’s gaze before its captor twists its neck,” that “the law” is “[o]nce victim, always victim” (p. 332 [chap. 47]) – she cannot help being, in Levinas’s phrase, turned “inside out” by the children’s vulnerability and feels “it beho[w]s her to do something; to be their Providence.” If resignation and negative will overcome her, they do so as a result of viscerally immediate “virtuous instincts” calling her to ethical agency colliding with conceptual, cortically processed certainty that no such agency is possible: “To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify” (p. 357 [chap. 51]). Foreclosing ethical selfishness is the ultimate form of social, cultural violence because it affords us no way of relieving the gratuitousness, the violence, of our natural participation in amoral, unreasoning *conatus*. Tess’s powerlessness at this juncture, however, is a direct result of her idealizing Angel’s conventional notions of goodness, of deifying a particularly dubious “said,” a culturally contingent conceptualization (*OB*, 5–7), in ways consistent with her intuitively modernity. She takes another’s conceptuality, instead of her own, as an absolute that can compensate for the loss of premodern, precritical understandings of God. Hardy here sketches how Levinasian ethics might motivate feminist resistance to the kinds of patriarchal coercion that concern Chanter. Because Tess conflates the call of Angel’s self with idolatrous submission to neopagan notions, her attempt to respond ethically to him undermines her own capacity to persevere sufficiently, to care for herself bodily and mentally sufficiently, and to retain a capacity for ethical agency.

Hardy’s narrative thus suggests that, while ethics breaks with egocentric aspects of *conatus*, its material possibility requires participation in life-preserving and life-enhancing aspects of *conatus*. Edith Wyschogrod argues that Levinas implicitly acknowledges as much, for “his depiction of enjoyment [as a precondition for ethical subjectivity] can be viewed profitably in the context of Spinoza’s analysis of pleasure and of the *conatus* of entities to persevere in exisence.”
Wyschogrod notes that, for Levinas, "it is only from the ground of natural existence that separated being, an I, can emerge . . . in the plenitude of being" and that "enjoyment, love of life," is the "precondition for a separated self." Indeed, "enjoyment already individuates through a positive separation from the world that sustains one and that one savors – a separation lived as interiority," which the "practical satisfaction of basic needs" and having a "home" nurture in ways that open the subject to "the possibility of hospitality and the welcoming of the Other."76 This elaborate natural prehistory of the possibility of ethical trauma is consistent with cognitive scientific accounts tracing the genesis of emotions activated in prereflective empathy (not to be confused with intentional altruism) back to neurophysiological monitoring of bodily well-being. It is likewise consistent with Dewey’s modification of Huxley’s postulate of a purely adversarial relation between the cosmic process and the ethical process: “our animal inheritance” cannot be “an enemy to the moral life, simply because without it no life is possible.”77 All three are consistent with the theme that Stephen, more than a century before Damasio’s similar argument, makes central to his account of the natural origin of virtuous instincts: “No theory can be tenable which virtually asserts reason and feeling to be two separate and independent faculties, one of which can properly be said to govern the other. The reason is not something superinduced upon the emotions as something entirely new. There is no absolute gap between the lower and the higher organisms. The animal instinct may be regarded as implicit reason, or the reason as a highly developed instinct.”78 Notably, Stephen, like Levinas (77, 302–7), identifies consciousness of the Other as the moment when ethics emerges from nature: “Before the agent is enlightened by reflection it is hardly proper to call him either selfish or unselfish; he does not repudiate the claims of his fellows – he is incapable of perceiving their existence. Selfishness or unselfishness is developed as the intellect becomes capable of contemplating the happiness of others besides the agent.”79

Dewey’s and Stephen’s further step, however, is one that neither Levinas nor Hardy, concurring with Huxley, would accept: “the laws and conditions of righteousness are implicated in the working processes of the universe,” for “man in his conscious struggles . . . is moved on and buoyed up by the forces which have developed nature.”80 As George Levine remarks, Hardy’s narrator “affirms” the “value” of “compassionate observation” at the same time that “the strangeness of his focus,” his awareness of the cosmic process, acknowledges “that observation is meaningless outside humanly imagined context”81 – that is, the context of an ethical subjectivity whose abnormality in relation to nature is precisely that of, to use Huxley’s image, “the garden” of ethics in relation to “the wilderness” of evolution.

Portraying a physically debilitated, intellectually shaken Angel responding, albeit too late, to Tess as ethical Other, elaborating the pathos of an Angel come too late to ethical sense to respond to the call of a Tess whose belief in his intentional subjectivity has so exhausted her recuperative powers that only submission to Alec’s predation can safeguard her family from destitution, Hardy suggests that, when modern paganism conflates not just our own but also the Other’s essence of being with the good, it sacrifices to one or another ideological fiction the very conatus that renders ethical life materially possible. Hardy thus points toward reconciling cognitive science’s and Levinas’s accounts of conatus. While neocortical dampenings of subcortical impulses allow intentionality to check sensibility, as in Angel’s obdurate refusal to be moved by Tess, they also allow a capacity for comparison and representation in the service of a sense of obligation or justice to check conflations of in-group conatus with the good, as in Angel’s ultimate repentance and the possibility that the novel can reform readers’ notions of what a pure woman is. Thus, Tess suggests, paradoxically, that dissociating conatus from the good yields forms of material and symbolic culture in which individual and communal conatus are most apt to flourish.

NOTES
1. Damasio suggests that Spinoza’s (1632–77) work could not but scandalize Western thought as long as Cartesian dualism set the terms for reflection – as it arguably did from the time of Leibniz (1646–1716) and Berkeley (1685–1753) to that of analytic philosophy and poststructural-


2. Damasio, Looking for Spinoza, 15. 36.


5. Damasio, Looking for Spinoza, 163.


7. Damasio, Looking for Spinoza, 163.


21. The same applies to Heidegger, who, according to Levinas, "says at the beginning of Being and Time that Dasein is a being who in his being is concerned for this being itself. That's Darwin's idea: the living being struggles for life. The aim of being is being itself." (Wright, Hughes, and Ainley, "The Paradox of Morality," 172).


28. In an essay written concurrently with the composition of Tess, Hardy notes that what distinguishes great literature from photographic or scientific realism is the writer's capacity to discern and communicate ethical significance: "A sight for the finer qualities of existence, an ear for the 'still sad music of humanity,' are not to be acquired by the outer senses alone, close as their powers in photography may be. What cannot be discerned by eye and ear, what may be apprehended only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all its manifestations, this is the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but without that sympathy." ("The Science of Fiction" [1891], in Life and Art by Thomas Hardy, ed. Ernest Brennecke Jr. [New York: Greenberg, 1935], 85–90, 89).


The Conundrum of Conatus


Whereas Heidegger argues that being-toward-death makes authenticity possible (Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarie and Edward Robinson [1962; Oxford: Blackwell, 1973], 303), Levinas rejoins that the death of the Other grounds ethical subjectivity by impressing on one the importance of one's responsibility and the extent of the Other's alterity (Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in Face to Face with Levinas, ed. Richard A. Cohen [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986], 13–33, 26–27; see also OB, 194–95 n. 10). In Hardy's passage, Angel's perception of the farmworkers' walk along "the road to dusty death" yields less anxiety about the finitude of his own phenomenal being than a sense of obligation to others no less circumscribed.


Turner, The Life of Thomas Hardy, 127. Timothy Hands notes that, like Angel, Hardy was powerfully attracted to, but broke with, the evangelical church's ideas and its climate of feeling. See Timothy Hands, Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher? Hardy's Religious Biography and Its Influence on His Novels (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 5–36.

Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 167: "Hardy had been much influenced by [Stephen's] philosophy, and also by his criticism." See also Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, 18–19.

Seymour-Smith, Hardy, 184 (see also 182, 185–89).

Nitecki, "Problematic Worldviews of Evolutionary Ethics," 5.

Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, 19. Hyman cites esp. Stephen's "Are We Christians?"

Stephan, "Are We Christians?" 153.

Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, 21–22. See also Stephen, The Science of Ethics, 404–33.


Ibid., 915–16.


that, pastoral appearances to the contrary, Talbotays is "closer to a factory than to the typical farmhouse, family-run dairy," for its "super efficient" harvesting of "bovine lactation" serves to meet urban, middle-class demand for cows' milk to replace breastmilk. George Levine identifies "uniformitarianism," the application of "uniform" modes of scientific analysis to describe both human and nonhuman phenomena, as a central consequence of Darwinian thought for novelistic representation (see Darwin and the Novelsists, 15-16, 96-97, 131-32).


64. Spencer, The Data of Ethics, 226.


66. Chanter, Time, Death, and the Feminine, 57; and see also Donna Brody, "Levinas's Maternal Method from Time and the Other through Otherwise Than Being: No Woman's Land?" in Chanter, ed., Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas, 53-77.


69. Badiou links negative will to the Freudian death drive, but it also suggests Schopenhauer, whose thought colored both Freud's and Hardy's reflections. Schweik points out that, in 1891, at the time the he was writing Tess, Hardy "made extensive notebook entries from Schopenhauer's Studies in Pessimism" ("The Influence of Religion, Science, and Philosophy on Hardy's Writings," 68).

70. Badiou, Ethics, 49 (see also 40-87). One may question whether Badiou's formulations are less vulnerable than Nietzsche's to Levinas's argument that philosophic valorizations of enhancements of being invariably constitute elaborations of, rather than breaks with, the essence of being.


72. See Agamben, The Man without Content, 68-115.

73. Badiou, Ethics, 35. 37.

74. The adequacy of Badiou's treatment, and understanding, of Levinas might be challenged. He nowhere, e.g., acknowledges Levinas's distinction between ethics and conatus. Indeed, he ignores Otherwise Than Being entirely while citing only Totality and Infinity, which he characterizes in a note as Levinas's "major work" (Ethics, 29 n.1).


78. Stephen, The Science of Ethics, 63. See also Damasio, Descartes' Error, 233–44.
79. See also Levinas, "Ethics and Spirit," 9–10.