

George Bernard Shaw's Philosophy of Life Force in Man and Superman

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Abstract:

In Man and Superman Shaw expresses his views about the Life Force and Superman. The play presents the Shavian idea about creative elaboration of the Life Force. According to his gospel the Life Force is making trials in order to produce a better form of life or to evolve super mortal beings. The purpose of this paper is to show that the Life Force gospel of George Bernard Shaw is the principal structural principle in his play; it provides the introductory dramatic conflict, bending the forces of creative elaboration against those of eyeless instinct, recession and destruction. The Life Force is a universal impulse whose purpose is to attain ever advanced situations of tone – knowledge. The Life Force is important; it can produce the forms of life necessary to its purposes. It's also, still, stupid; it doesn't know the direct path to its end, but must seek this end via the route of trial – and- error, frequently raising obstacles to its own progress.

Keywords: Creative Elaboration, Life Force, Shavian Philosophy, Humanism, Superman.

Shaw's knowledge of Economics and Philosophy was comprehensive. His end was to establish a better world by the sweats of realists who acted out of a genuine liberal love for humanity. Shaw was told by socialistic ideals and he plant in Samuel Butler an answer to the Darwinian system of elaboration. Darwin's natural selection didn't speak of an overarching purpose. Butler was speaking in social and socio – evolutionary terms. From Butler he plant this idea of Life Force which was basically the motivating factor for mortal progression. Combining it with the idea of the superior man, Shaw created his idea of the Shavian superman. Shaw wanted to show through his plays how men, using their Life Force, try to produce a paradigm of a advanced socio – intellectual standard with a newer sense of morality and a new profitable system.

In this play Shaw dramatizes the base and nature of the magnet between men and women which we call love. Shaw felt that coitus is the appetite which is created in men and women by the Life Force whose end is the betterment of the race. In ultramodern society most women want to get married as soon as possible and utmost men want to avoid getting married as long as possible. Life Force picks up a woman as a willing agent. Under this alleviation she's in a 'fury of creation'. Still, she decides to marry him, If she feels artificially that a certain man

would be a proper father for her children and would be suitable to look after them well. However, she pursues him relentlessly till his opposition breaks down and he agrees to marry her, If there's no maternal or social or ethnical or profitable handicap. This results in the love chase of the man by the woman.

As Don Juan tells us, “ Sexually Woman is Nature’s contrivance for immortalizing its loftiest achievement. Sexually, Man is woman’s contrivance for fulfilling Nature’s decree in the most provident way. ”

Nature of Life Force:

The Life Force rejects/removes the old to create the new. The process is essentially a re-birth of the old in a superior form. It is not life that is challenged but the old outdated and outmoded form of life that is targeted and re-formed. This is the socio-moral evolution Shaw is talking about. It is also known as Creative Evolution (Henri Bergson). It is a process in which Life and Matter combine - matter is inhabited by life to exercise its instincts. Creative Evolution’s goal is to create ‘superman’ and fulfill his purposes as configured by the universe. This may be thought of as Eugenics, the science of creating only advantageous traits in children, keeping the undesirable traits at bay.

Life Force and Women:

Life Force is a power which seeks to perfect creation through evolution. According to Shaw, man is the instrument of the Life Force for the evolution of higher forms. He conceives the Life Force as working through women to create man who is designed to carry life to higher levels. In Man and Superman, Shaw writes, “Sexually woman is Nature’s contrivance for fulfilling Nature’s behest in the most economical way.”

The idea of selective breeding is seen as necessary in the process of Creative Evolution, and as seen in Man and Superman, has a specific view of women. This Life Force allocates a problematic (from the modern point of view) location for women as conditioned to seek the perfect mate. That becomes their primary function. This in fact clashes with the idea of a ‘liberated’ ‘new’ woman figure as perceived in Shavian drama. Shaw specifically speaks of superman, the gender of that figure is not negotiable.

Ann Whitefield:

Ann Whitefield, the female protagonist of the play Man and Superman, is a strong, energetic, beautiful and cultured lady. She is often called the archetype of the vital woman – conforming to the Creative Evolution theory. Her aim is to find the perfect mate – the perfect father for her progeny. Her target is John Tanner, the male protagonist of the play. She becomes successful in her quest. She has no moral qualms and deceives people when she feels the need to do so. She manipulates people into doing what she wants. Tanner calls her deceptive but cannot reject her at the end.

In this play the Life Force decides that Ann Whitefield is fit to become a mother of a superman. Now she must find a suitable man who would become the father of her child. Her instinct tells her that John Tanner is the best man for that purpose. The Life Force then impels her to catch this man, uses every trick to break his resistance and marry him. This is what is called love or sexual attraction. She pursues him across the European continent and creates conditions in which he is forced to marry her.

The purpose of the Life Force is not happiness but betterment. Perhaps Ann would have been happier if she had married Octavius who loved her passionately. But she selects Tanner because her instinct tells her that he would be a better father for her children. To Tanner marriage is a 'shameful surrender', 'an acceptance of defeat'. But he feels attracted towards Ann because he is in the grip of the Life Force. He says, "I love you. The Life Force enchants me : I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you. But I am fighting for my freedom, for my honor, for myself, one and indivisible."

When Tanner suggests that she had laid the trap for him, she says that the trap was laid, "from the beginning – from our childhood – for both of us – by the Life Force."

When John Tanner announces his marriage to Ann he says, "What we have both done this afternoon is to renounce happiness, renounce freedom, renounce tranquility, above all, renounce the romantic possibilities of an unknown future, for the cares of a household and a family."

Conclusion:

Thus Shaw has analyzed the nature of the attraction between men and women in this play. He has shown that men and women fall in love with each other not because of romance or beauty or desire for happiness but because they are in the grip of the Life Force which creates a sexual attraction between them in order to produce a race of superman. George Bernard Shaw was the distinguished dramatist of England, who propounded the theory and concept of Life Force. He considers that the wills of females are more determined than male. This is the reason that almost in all his plays women were influenced and commanded by Life Force. So it is noticed that the concept of Life Force is very relevant in the plays of G. B. Shaw.

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