



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2017; 3(7): 553-554  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 22-05-2017  
Accepted: 24-06-2017

**Dr. Kamini Singhal**  
Associate Professor,  
Department of English,  
S.D. P.G. College,  
Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh,  
India

## Browning's philosophy of life: His optimism

**Dr. Kamini Singhal**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2017.v3.i7h.9841>

### Abstract

Browning did not identify himself with any particular school of philosophy. But he was a great nineteenth century thinker, having on the one hand a sympathetic attitude towards science and the spirit of intellectual enquiry, and the other a deep faith in God and the immortality of the soul. His poetry is an artistic exposition of his philosophical thoughts on god, the immortality of the soul, love, the world and human life – all inspired with his optimism.

**Keywords:** Browning's philosophy, life, his optimism

### Introduction

While scientific materialism was destroying belief in God and while Tennyson was trying to bring about a compromise between knowledge and faith, Browning stuck firmly to his faith in God. This is remarkable because the philosophical thought of the age was predominantly pessimistic as found in Arnold, Hardy and Edward Fitzgerald. He considers God to be the supreme power, while nature is the thought of God, and man is like clay shaped by him. He ridicules the theory of the short-lived of human life and happiness in the following stanza of Rabbi Ben Ezra.

“Fool! All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever, post recall;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure,  
What entered into thee?  
That was, is and shall be:  
Time's wheel runs back or stop: Potter and clay endure.”

God, he says, “is the perfect poet, when in his person acts his own creations.” The whole universe is permeated by God.

“God dwells in all,  
From life's minute beginnings up at last to man.”

God is not a blind or a cruel power intent on punishing and destroying man. God is full of love and sympathy for all his creation, especially for man. The other firm belief of Browning is in the immortality of soul. He believes that man lives in two worlds, the finite and the infinite. He is conscious of the spiritual world moved by the enthusiasm, longings and aspirations of the soul. Death cannot extinguish the soul. God is the potter who creates forms of life on the wheel of time. This material world is the clay. God, the soul and the clay last forever, only the clay changes its form. He says that God has placed man on the moving wheel of time, which is only

“Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent,  
Try thee and torn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.”

### Correspondence

**Dr. Kamini Singhal**  
Associate Professor,  
Department of English,  
S.D. P.G. College,  
Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh,  
India

The soul is eternal, only it dwells in different bodies that are subject to the “dance/of plastic circumstance”.

The next question that engaged his attention was – what is the aim and purpose of life? Why have we been sent into his world? At first Browning thought that power and knowledge were the twin ends of life, but soon he realized that these could not be beneficial unless they were combined with love.

“Love which kindles and exalts both power and knowledge he deems to be the quality by which man touches the infinite, a quality common to God and man”.

Love allied with knowledge and power ought to be the main quest of the human soul.

Browning’s faith in God and soul did not preclude his interest in the world and human life, which he believed to be real and good. According to Chesterton,

“He thought the world good because he had found so many things that were good in it- religion, the nation, the family etc”. In *The Last Ride Together* he asks “earth being so good, would heaven seem best”.

Man’s aim in the world is to achieve perfection. There is certainly evil in the world, but it spurs a man to action, to fight with it, to overcome it, and to realize himself. Thus Browning’s view, as Young puts it, is “that the whole world of life, the whole purpose of love, which gave it worth, lies not in perfection but in the effort to become perfect.”

Evil is a hindrance in man’s way. It is man’s enemy, but it is an enemy without whose presence progress is not possible. Evil is a condition of man’s moral life and his moral progress. It is out of evil that a man forms ideals that are higher than his grasp. In *Antrea Del Sarto* he says,

“Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what’s a heaven for?”

Life is a continuous struggle towards an ideal never completely attained and never to be completely attained. Sufferings and disappointments come to test us. In *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, he says that we should welcome each disappointment because it comes to teach us that we should neither

“Sit nor stand but go”. He says,  
“Be our joys three-part pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe”.

Browning had a satisfactory answer to those who were doubtful of the utility of the life of struggle when failure was the lot of man. To such pessimists of his age, he held out the philosophy of optimism. He said that a man was judged by God not by his success or failure. God judged a man by his aspirations, his ideals, and his efforts to achieve his end. In the XXIII and XXIV stanzas of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* he says that common persons only see “things done”, but God sees a man’s intensions and his efforts. A man’s greatness does not lie in actual achievements but in,

“All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man’s amount.”

Failure on earth should not depress a man’s spirit, because death is not the end of life. We might succeed in other worlds. Human soul is immortal, and life succeeds life. What man has failed to achieve in this world, he will achieve in the next world. In *A Grammarian’s Funeral* he says

“What is time? Leave now for dogs and apes!  
Man has forever”.

Such is the optimistic philosophy of Browning. His optimism, says G.K. Chesterton, “was not founded on any arguments for optimism, nor on opinions, but on life which was the work of God.”

Faith in God, in the immortality of the soul, in love, in constant striving towards perfection without caring for success nor failure, in nobility of purpose and intension – these Browning asserted in the age of Arnold and Hardy that was in the grip of doubt, despair, agony and disillusionment.

## References

1. Miller Betty. Robert Browning, a Portrait.
2. Cohen JM. Robert Browning.
3. Selincourt Aubrey. Six Great Poets.
4. Walker Hugh. Literature of the Victorian Era.
5. Long William J. A History of English Literature.
6. Rickett A. Compton. A History of English Literature.