

# Philosophy of life in Robert Frost's Poems

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to study **Philosophy of life in Robert Frost's poems**; his use of simple, everyday language, which makes it accessible to a wide range of readers. Poetry can be Considered as 'Philosophic': If it raises certain fundamental questions about life, death and man's position in the universe. Frost's poetry does, indeed, concern itself with these questions; some of the major themes of his poetry being isolation and alienation of man in the universe, extinction and man's limitations. Robert Frost does not have positive answers to these questions, and that is because he does not have any specific creed or system of philosophy to communicate.

To Frost's mind the conflicts and mystery of the universe are beyond the capacity of mankind to solve. On the whole, however, Frost has little in his poems about the contemplative' man who may achieve a sudden, almost mystical, insight into the divine configuration as in *I Will Sing You One-O* and *Two Look at Two*. Generally, Frost's concern is with man's limited success or with his moving failures in achieving heroism or just getting along. These values, brought about by man's efforts to arrive at a compromise with the natural or the supernatural world he has to occupy, are found persistently in Frost's poems. Frost is a Classicist, He believes in the Aristotelian meaning, moderation between extreme views, hope and despair, belief and doubt, self-love and social commitment. Ethically, he speaks for personal integrity and self-reliance. He is aware that "there is no fixed line between wrong and right" but there are "roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed". Frost's Philosophy is Not a Formulated System of Thought: He prefers the wisdom born and bred by understanding, observation and tolerance. Poetry's value, according to Frost, lay in making "you remember what you didn't know you knew". The truths he seeks and presents are innate in the human heart and the common objects, which people may and often do know, but forget. Frost's philosophy is valuable in so far as a home-spun intelligence shines through his poems. They begin in delight and end in wisdom, and offer at least a "momentary stay against confusion". His poems generally convey "home truths". The Wisdom in which Many A Frost Poem Ends is Aphoristic in Nature, each of these aphoristic lines shows a home-spun philosophy, not necessarily consistent if one takes Frost's poetry is a whole. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* ends with a reminder to the reader not to get lost in the snowy woods of this life but to remember the work he has still to do in this life on earth.

Keywords: Nature, Traditional forms, Life, Frost's poetry, Human condition, Imagery

## Introduction

Frost's own views on poetry show, that he not only eschews thought but has also incorporated scientific thought in the texture of his verse. Once he said: If a writer were to say he planned a long poem dealing with Darwin and evolution, we would be tempted to say it's going to be terrible. - And yet you remember Lucretius. He admired Epicurus as I admired, let's say, Darwin. And he wrote a great poem. It's in and out, sometimes it's poetry, sometimes intelligent doggerel, sometimes quaint, but a great poem. Yes, the poet can use the mind in fear and trembling. But he must use it. Frost's Rich and Ripe Philosophy: Frost does not manage to squeeze in among the rank of great philosopher-poets. Yet, the philosophy that oozes from within his poetry calls our attention and cannot be dismissed as negligible or insignificant. The most prominent feature in Frost's poetry is that he has clothed his philosophic thought in a natural conversational style. Frost's 'rich and ripe philosophy' as Gibson put it, his sense of universal understanding, is obvious in everything he writes, even in his earliest works Profundity of expression and conviction is the hallmark of any artist's creations. In Mending Wall, he declares: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall". In Reluctance, he says that to go along the drift and accept the end of a love or a season is a "treason to the heart of man".

Frost consistently inspires his readers with his ethical ideas. He feels, and says it, that difficulties and adversities should not dampen our spirit and we should try to maintain our cool and courage in the face of greatest disappointments and failures. 'Our Singing Strength is a poem that is particularly relevant in this context. The birds in this poem are symbolic of nose stragglers who sing their problems away, undaunted by storms, defeat or adversity of any kind. Frost thinks that man should not always be depressed about his own and others' imperfections. One should acknowledge one's limitations and learn to live with them. This he expresses with rare efficacy and brevity in one of his poems: I take my incompleteness with the rest God bless himself can no one be blessed.

Everything in Frost's poetry rings of keen perception and lived experience. He sees the world as it is. He understands human beings and has an excellent rapport with the rhythm of nature. He can see through the subtle nuances and moods of both the human world and the world of nature. He is neither a mystic endowing nature with a pervading spirit, nor an inveterate optimist, like Browning shrieking in blind ecstasy: God is in His Heaven All is right with the world. He is a sane realist and sees reality in all its stark ugliness and beauty. His poetry engenders in us, not a sense of pessimism, but that of endurance and fortitude. Pointing out this particular feature of Frost's poetry, Elizabeth Jennings says: What is most noticeable in all Frost's reflective poems is an almost total absence of despair or pessimism. It is not that he shuns darkness or difficulties - quite the reverse - but rather that something in his own mind and imagination makes him eager to accept, to examine, and sometimes to reconcile, opposites. He realizes - to put the matter on a very simple level indeed, that without darkness there would be no light, without evil there would be no possibility of freely choosing, without death no life as we know it...

Frost is definitely not a pessimist, as we have discussed. On the contrary, his thoughts tend to lean on the optimistic side of things. Frost's optimism is not a result of a foolish negation of the existence of miseries, problems and anxieties. Instead, Frost takes cognizance of the overwhelming problems that confront mankind and sometimes seems to be in emotional and mental stress because of these. But Frost is never completely disappointed or depressed by these. He is optimistic in spite of these because he can see a way through these problems. He is still hopeful that things can be mended. In fact, his optimism is an incessant growth of the poet's wisdom. John T. Napier feels that in Frost we find a hard-won optimism. Frost's Our

Hold on the Planet appears to state a careful balancing of probabilities, a continuing growth of wisdom. Through all his pondering on the seeming infinite magnitudes of space, Frost has kept his gift for song as man his hold on the planet.

### **Objective:**

This paper intends to explore and analyze Robert Frost's poems and his Philosophy of life ; he wrote about the natural world and the relationship between humans and nature. He used imagery of the New England landscape in his poetry. Also, Frost's poetry is often considered to be deeply personal and introspective, with many of his poems exploring his own thoughts and feelings.

### **Robert Frost's poetry expression of nature, rural life, and human emotions**

Robert Frost's poetry is known for its simple, everyday language and its exploration of nature, rural life, and human emotions. His poems often depict the natural world and the lives of rural people, and they often explore themes of loneliness and isolation. Frost's poetry is also rich in symbolism, and he often used traditional poetic forms such as rhyme and meter to add musicality to his works. Many of his poems also have a personal and introspective tone, and often reflects on his own thoughts and feelings. Some of his most famous poems include "The Road Not Taken," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Mending Wall," and "The Death of the Hired Man."

Robert Frost's poetry is known for its simplicity and accessibility, and is often set in the natural world. His poems often depict the lives of rural people and explore themes of loneliness, isolation, and the relationship between humans and nature. Frost often used symbolism to convey deeper meanings within his works. Many of his poems are set in the New England landscape, and often make use of traditional poetic forms such as rhyme and meter. Frost's poetry is often considered to be deeply personal and introspective, with many of his poems exploring his own thoughts and feelings. Robert Frost's poems are known for their simplicity and accessibility, yet also for their depth and complexity. His poetry often explores themes of nature, rural life, loneliness, and isolation. Frost's poems are set in the New England countryside, and often depict the lives of rural people and the struggles they face living in a remote, isolated environment. Many of his poems also explore the relationship between humans and nature, using imagery of the natural world to reveal deeper truths about human experience. Frost's poetry is also known for its use of symbolism, which can be used to uncover deeper meanings within his works. Additionally, many of Frost's poems are introspective, exploring his own thoughts and feelings. Overall, Frost's poetry is a reflection of the natural world and the human experience, using simple language to convey complex emotions and ideas. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a poem by Robert Frost that describes a speaker's journey through a snowy forest. The speaker is on horseback and is stopping by the woods on a snowy evening. He is mesmerized by the beauty of the woods and the snow and is caught in the moment of appreciating the beauty of nature. However, he is also aware that he has responsibilities and obligations to attend to and must leave the woods.

The poem explores the themes of nature, responsibility, and the pull of the natural world on the human soul. The imagery of the woods and snow creates a sense of serenity and peace, but the speaker is also aware of the demands of daily life that he must attend to. The poem is also a commentary on the human condition and the struggle to find balance between our responsibilities and our desire to escape into the beauty of nature. The last line of the poem "And miles to go before I sleep" sums up the idea of how much work and responsibility is left to do before the speaker can rest.

### **Natural Objects are Sources of Frost's Home-spun Philosophy:**

Frost does not indulge in mystical meditation. He only draws such conclusions that may quietly inspire the common man to gather the necessary moral energy to carry on his struggle. Examples abound, of which the following are but some: We love the things we love for what they are. (Hyla Brook) Earth's the right place to love I do not know where it's likely to go better. (Birches) I have promises to keep And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep. (Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening). Frost is Basically A Poet: Some critics feel that Frost is essentially a poet of immediate impulse; but such a statement is misleading. Robert Frost is a great artist and essentially a poet. He is not a philosopher - he is a philosopher-poet. The writings of a poet are largely dictated by the rhythms of his moods. Expecting any systematic exposition of philosophy from a poet is not only undesirable but is also totally unwarranted. However, from repeated expression of certain views in poem after poem, one can extract certain basic concepts and thoughts of the poet. From an exclusive study of Frost's poetry, we can deduce and isolate his views about God, Nature and Man. His views reveal a large quantum of sanity and profundity. As Gibson puts it, beneath his apparent simplicity and whimsicality, there is an undercurrent of 'the clear stream of rich and ripe philosophy.

Frost Adheres to a Gloomy View of Life: One cannot escape acknowledging the fact that Frost's outlook on life is dull and gloomy. In his very childhood, Frost was uprooted from his native place California and he came to settle in New England. At that time the region was witnessing a decline in prosperity. New England was losing its native hue and was becoming more and more urbanized and industrialized. The rural countryside was becoming increasingly depopulated, generating considerable tension both to thinking and to sensitive people. Deserted farms were a common scene in New England those days, as in Frost's poetry. The people were caught up in the whirling of time - they were facing a grim battle of survival and the future was insecure. The only certainty that any vision of future ensured was dark shadows of tensions, insecurity etc. that loomed largely. It is this background that Frost had in his childhood, the most impressionable period of one's life. This milieu of social and economic upheaval and turmoil leading to a psychological abnormality in many cases, has conditioned Frost's view of life. This is most easily discernible in North of Boston in which Frost presents 'the bleakest picture of life to be found in his collected poetry.' In North of Boston Frost presents hyper-sensitive and neurotic individuals in whose minds, alienation and isolation are the governing factors.

### **Robert Frost does not Give Readymade Answers:**

Frost is always concerned with man, his lot, his place in the universe, etc. He often gets involved in baffling questions. But Frost emerges triumphant in this supreme test of an artist. He does not believe in supplying his readers with readymade answers. When he cannot find an exact solution to a problem or a question, he prefers to be in doubt. "One of the most amiable and also one of the most hopeful things about him is his willingness to admit the strange, the frightening, the foreboding. His poetic skill is quite definitely at its height here, but this does not mean that his poems give easy or glib answers to man's predicament on this earth, or to the poet's personal problems. What makes his poetry so satisfying is what Keats called the poet's 'negative capability' his readiness to be in doubt rather than to find tidy solutions or simple answers. The poem called A Boundless Moment displays Frost's intelligently humble attitude, particularly. He stood there bringing March against his thought, And yet too ready to believe the most. 'Oh, that's the Paradise in bloom', I said; And truly it was fair enough for flowers Had we but in us to assume in March Such white luxuriance as May for ours. The ethical views of Frost are, however, unambiguous and clear and his poetry is, at times, a source of inspiration for his readers..." Frost: Man

is an Isolated Individual: Robert Frost's conception of Man is that of a lonely, isolated, solitary figure. Despite the crowded universe, Man is essentially lonely, alienated from Nature, God and his fellowmen. For him Nature is soul-less mechanical, impersonal and insensate to the human predicament. Man and Nature are guided by two entirely different principles, separated from each other by unsurmountable barriers.

The searching eye and the longing heart might be able to spot some instances when Nature seems to be concerned with or benevolent to Man; but such rare occasions are 'favors and not the rule. In 'The Most of It', the magnificent buck that swims across the lake towards man is the most that nature can give. It is a terrifying poem, as terrifying as W.B. Yeats's The Second Coming and it brings out the completeness of man's isolation in his vast and impersonal environment. Such poems make critics like Trilling declare that Frost's view of the human predicament is a terrifying one.

### **Man's Environment is Hostile:**

Man not only inhabits a neutral, impersonal environment but a hostile one. Nature always attempts to undo what man does. Man always has to fight his way for his survival in a hostile environment. Nothing seems to have been made for Man. In The Star Splitter, the universe is depicted as incomprehensible. There are nature wildernesses, desert places of the heart, etc. which man must condition according to his needs and will. Nature is imperfect and chaotic and Man must order and complete it by incessant pruning and gardening. Human Life-Disjointed: Human life is never smooth-sailing. It is always rough and imperfect. But one must not get disheartened or upset over it. In The Lesson for Today Frost says that 'we can't appraise the time in which we act' but there is history to tell us that there is something always wrong or some indignities or other cause for frustration....There's always something to be sorry for, A sordid peace or an outrageous war Yes, yes, of course, we have the same convention, The groundwork of all faith is human woe'. The ancient priests and the modern man of science-both harp on the eternal theme-something wrong somewhere in the world. Frost feels that the lives of individuals, of nations, of races are full of frustrated and unfulfilled dreams. Life is incomplete and completely meaningless and futile.

Frost has repeatedly stressed man's alienation from nature and from God, his Creator. The reason, the rational faculty, the critical mind is responsible for man's alienation from God. One requires to have a certain quantum of faith to realize one's relationship with God. And this is very difficult for modern man who places the accent of his existence on reason. In the poem The Bear, Frost has likened the rational man to a bear in a cage-all his attempts to comprehend the mystery of the universe are useless. In The Masque of Reason Frost makes it clear that it is faith alone that makes man worthy of God's mercy.

Frost feels that suffering is an inextricable part of human existence. In Trial by Existence, Frost conveys to us that it is foolish to look for any comprehensible logic behind our suffering. The conclusion of the poem is 'a recognition that suffering is always in terms of what we are, not an alien something hitting us by chance from without, but somehow or other implicit in our very constitution'. Human life is nothing but a trial and a test of endurance. In one place, the poet's rational impulse and his emotional exhaustion relieve him from the cramps of religion and he proclaims that there is no God at all. To Frost's mind, God is nothing but a figment of man's own imagination or is so remote and unconcerned that his existence is meaningless.

## Conclusion

Frost is Not a Mystic, he does not see a unifying spirit in Nature. There is nothing Platonic in his view of life; everything is good and valuable in itself, not because it is a foreshadowing of something else. When Frost says that all revelation has been ours he means literally and precisely that. He is fairly taciturn about what happens to us after death partly because he finds much to engage his attention here and now. There are sufficient wonders, natural and supernatural, in everyday life as far as Frost is concerned; he is not, therefore, a visionary poet in the sense that Blake and Wordsworth were.

Frost's poetry is full of thoughts, ideas and a vision of life. But he is not to be considered a philosopher. His philosophy is an integral part of his poetry But one must also keep in the back of one's mind that his philosophy is not essential for the appreciation of his poetry. Like Wordsworth and Yeats, Frost's ideas have grown along with his verse. To conclude this discussion, it is best to quote Lawrance Thompson: this primary artistic achievement, which is an enviable one, in spite of shortcomings, rests on his blending of thought and emotion and symbolic imagery within the confines of the lyrics'. On the whole, Frost's philosophy is not so much a 'coherent, systematic body of doctrine;' rather it is a collection of aphorisms, insights, and bits of pragmatic wisdom, quite miscellaneous and sometimes contradictory". Frost distrusts efforts at understanding the universe in terms of systematic intellectual formulations.

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