TENNYSON
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I’m going to leave it to you to distill from our discussions the key themes and characteristics in the works of each writer/artist and to find additional themes and ideas on your own. However, to give you a little more of a helping hand, I have tried here to pull together in loose summary fashion a few of the assumptions/issues (the “world view”) that I think you might have seen underpinning Tennyson’s poetry:

Tennyson uses musical qualities in his verse to establish that content and style, idea and process, are inextricably linked (see “Lady of Shalott”).

Tennyson often builds themes around isolated “orphaned” figures, who peer at the “outside world” from within one form or another of enclosing “prison” (see “Lady of Shalott,” “Tithones,” “Locksley Hall,” and In Memoriam).

The poet is a truth-seeking, intellectual “warrior” on whose vision the world depends for its “salvation” (see “The Poet” and In Memoriam). At the same time, Tennyson has a clear aversion to violence and human suffering.

The poet must separate himself/herself from the entrapping vulgarity, distractions, and transience of ordinary life, yet be aware of the dangers of isolation, detachment from authenticating “real life.” The poet must engage with life to be authentic as a human being, yet direct confrontation with reality can endanger the artistic vision (see “Lady of Shalott”).

Desire can be deadly. It can haunt and destroy the soul (see “Lady of Shalott,” “Ulysses,” “Tithones,” and “Locksley Hall”). Time is often conceived of as something that wastes us, as well as being a mode for progress.

Memory is often configured as the way we mark loss, our deprivations, rather than a means for joy.

We must seek always to progress, escaping stagnation or psychological paralysis (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam).

Life often poses for us problems for which there appear to be no satisfactory, “untragic” solutions (see “Lady of Shalott,” “Ulysses,” and “Tithones,” among others).

The human (and humane) is ultimately at odds with science, which often either denies or misdirects the instincts of the heart and soul (see “Locksley Hall,” In Memoriam, and “Vastness”).

What is spiritual is good. Materialism is usually configured as something bad and unspiritual.
Truth, like God, is absolute. Tennyson tends to see the world in terms of absolute truths, albeit problematic ones.

God is manifest in everything good. Tennyson ultimately believes that “thro’ the ages one increasing purpose runs”. It is our task to attach ourselves to that (God’s) purpose (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam).

True love is forever and is basically impervious to decay or loss (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam).

Tennyson assumes that personality, which is a part of one’s soul, is not lost in death. We carry with us into the afterlife our individuality and still care about those we loved when we were alive.

The improvement of the soul is a social, not an individualistic, endeavor. Truth cannot be found in isolation. The social authenticates the individual (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam).

One is a part of a human community. There is a universal connection, a bond with others, despite individual differences and inevitable contingencies (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam). We gain our spiritual renewal through attaching ourselves to the larger unity of human life, the “Greater Soul.” We are “completed” by others.

As we “educate” ourselves (that is, become more sensitive to truth), we gain more faith in intrinsic good—even though that faith is not (and cannot be) built on material, scientific evidence (see In Memoriam).

The human (and humane) is at odds with both Nature, which (in contrast to the Romantic view) is “red in tooth and claw” (see In Memoriam and “Vastness”).

The healing principle of growth is tied to the awakening of the creative impulse, which is a form of cultural and human bonding. The struggle for intellectual certitude is parallel to the process of artistic growth (see “Locksley Hall” and In Memoriam).

Faith should not be blind. We often need to come to it through intellectual doubt and struggle.