CHAPTER EIGHT

VICIOUS MOLE OF NATURE

ON THE frosty night when Hamlet and his friends mount the platform at Elsinore to meet the ghost, they are greeted by a burst of noise from within the castle. Shouts, laughter, the stamping of feet, the blare of trumpets, and an occasional cannon shot resound through the tower. Seeing Horatio's lifted eyebrows, Hamlet explains in some embarrassment that it is just a drinking party of the King’s, common enough, but unfortunate because such a custom belittles the Danes in the eyes of other nations and undermines their highest achievements. A small blemish, perhaps, but enough to infect the whole state. And then, seizing on this idea with his usual alertness, Hamlet applies it to the human race. Every man, he says, has in him a “vicious mole of nature.” It may be merely a bad habit or a quirk of temperament; it may be an inherited streak of vanity, a petty selfishness, or a tendency to cruelty. But small or large, it prevents the man from fulfilling the promise of his better qualities, and cancels out the nobility that exists around it.

The play that follows is a vivid commentary on Hamlet's statement. The loving gentleness of Queen Gertrude, which
has led her son to idolize her, bears with it the blemish of frailty; too pliant, she drifts away to the seductive Claudius, with consequences devastating to her son. The mole has spread into an ulcer. The Danish royal family, respected and feared for its firm administration and uncompromising standards, breeds in itself a man who shares his brother's political talent but whose ambition drives him to fratricide and nearly destroys the state. This time, in Hamlet's own words, the mole has become a cancer. And in the Prince himself, the hope of the country, who combines intellectual genius with the most attractive honesty and social grace, there lies latent the nervous instability and fatal indecision that render useless all his noble qualities. Everywhere, in man or nation, "rank corruption, mining all within, infects unseen."

Sooner or later everyone who thinks about the nature of the world must face the question raised by this vicious mole of nature. Why should goodness never be free to work out its beneficent influence? Why should it be impeded and nullified by the blemish that exists inseparably from it? What could be more wasteful than to create high possibilities only to cancel them out in the next breath? What kind of universe is it that does things in this way? However the question may be answered, no honest person can take it lightly. To shrug one's shoulders at it or dismiss it as merely beyond our comprehension is to stultify one's intellect. The existence of evil is too real to be ignored. From the accidental death of a child to the intentional destruction of warfare, from the physical pain of cancer to the torture of poverty, from the natural ravages of a flood to the man-made ravages of a Buchenwald concentration camp, human suffering is spread before us in ferocious intensity. It harasses the world without regard to justice and without distinction of persons. It is the most serious and immediate question that philosophy must face.

In philosophic discussion the whole matter is called the problem of evil. Let us say at once that, despite many
attempts, no one has ever solved it to the satisfaction of more than a few other people, and it remains as grimly intractable as ever. Before we discuss it we should define it more precisely to see just where the difficulty lies. We must not forget that it is a metaphysical problem. The question is not, what should we do about evil? nor even, why does evil exist? Rather it is this: What is the nature and structure of a universe which contains both good and evil simultaneously? Since the two are mutually destructive opposites, can the inclusion of both in the same world be accounted for on any rational basis? It is a question of coherence and consistency. An analogy may help to make this clear. Imagine that a small boy trying to climb a tree has caught his foot in a fork of the branches and is crying for help. A man runs up to the tree, disengages the child's foot with the greatest care not to hurt it, dries the tears with his handkerchief, offers him a piece of candy, and at the same moment with his other hand presses a red-hot iron against the back of the boy's neck. What would you think? Obviously that the man is insane. What, then, can we think when the universe treats human beings exactly as this lunatic treated the child, first taking pains to give them the means of survival and the possibility of happiness, and instantly inflicting upon them hideous and wanton torture? The problem of evil, then, amounts to the question whether, on the basis of observed facts, we can vindicate the sanity of the universe.

It might be thought that this problem exists only for theistic philosophers. If one believes that the universe was created by an all-powerful, benevolent God, then the place of evil in it becomes particularly difficult to explain, and an explanation becomes particularly necessary. It would seem that God must be limited either in power or in goodness if He allows His creatures to suffer as they do. If one does not believe in God, then the problem appears much less pressing. To a certain extent this is true; as we shall see, theists have
made strenuous efforts to meet the difficulty. At the same time, those of other metaphysical beliefs are not exempt from it. Any metaphysic aims at a coherent explanation of all the facts; and the simultaneous existence of good and evil seems to be a striking incoherence, a self-contradiction in any theory of how things are organized. It therefore is a lion in the path of materialists and idealists alike.

As we have said, it has never been solved. Our object in this chapter is first to examine a few of the attempted solutions, to show wherein they are inadequate, and then to discuss the nature of the contribution which a study of literature may make to our thinking on the question. This contribution is unlike any that we have seen hitherto. Instead of being merely an illustration helping to clarify the idea, it furnishes a specific attitude toward it. Instead of setting forth a variety of reactions to the problem, the examples we shall study are varying expressions of a single point of view. Though in no sense a solution, it may be that this point of view is one of the most valuable contributions that imaginative literature can make to philosophy.

Nobody likes the father who says to his son, "This hurts me more than it does you." A similar feeling is aroused by many of the theories that purport to solve the problems of evil. They are too smug, too urbane, too forgetful of the reality of pain. They give the impression of having been concocted by persons who find it easy to theorize about evil because they have never experienced much of it. In fitting evil into the scheme of things, they lose sight of the individual who is exposed to it. Speaking of force and natural selection, they forget the rabbit caught in the talons of the eagle, or the parents whose child starves to death in a country at war. Part of this is inevitable because philosophy must generalize, but it is well to be aware of the danger and do one's best to avoid it.
An example of such a point of view is that of the idealists who hold that physical objects are mere phenomena of ideas, and that all ideas are united in the Idea of the Good. To capitalize these words is felt to make the theory more forceful. In this view evil does not exist at all. It is mere error, a mistaken interpretation of the facts; if it is anything, it is a negation or deprivation of good. If one gets in the proper emotional state, he will no longer believe in it or be troubled by it. The best answer to this is that, if one wishes to remain a human being, he had better be troubled by it. According to physicists, there is no such thing as cold; it is merely the absence of heat, a negation or deprivation of an active phenomenon. But to a person freezing to death, absence of heat is just as bad as if cold really existed. The theory is not a solution, but a matter of phraseology. Whether we call it the problem of evil or the problem of the absence of good does not change it in the least. The question only becomes: why, in a coherent universe, should good be so often absent? It becomes the problem of deprivation, and no one has solved that either.

Laying aside this general type of theory, let us examine a few of the attempted solutions which have found wide favor. First, what does science have to say on the matter? When a scientist considers it at all, he is likely to explain it away rather than try to solve it. To him, good and evil are names for human preferences and dislikes, expressions of emotion rather than objective facts. What pleases us we call good; what pains us we call evil. These values which we place on different kinds of experience are entirely man-made, with no relation to the experiences themselves and no importance in the universe. Who are we to project our values upon the cosmos? To wonder at the existence of evil is to assume that the universe takes account of our pleasures and pains. Obviously, it does not. The cosmic activity proceeds by laws complete in themselves, unrelated to our likes and
dislikes. When we infringe a law of nature, we suffer pain, which has the function of warning us that we are doing something illegal. Natural laws are neither good nor bad except as we ascribe values to them. If our automobile gets a burned-out bearing, we complain about the fact of friction and try to eliminate it; but if a child drowns because he slipped on a wet stone beside a lake, we complain because there was not enough friction to keep him from falling. “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” Regarded in this way, the problem simply disappears.

Or does it? Most people greet this theory with instinctive repulsion. No less than the idealist view does it seem to avoid the issue and turn out to be a mere matter of words. It again ignores not only the individual but the whole human race. What does it matter if the life of the drowned child has no cosmic importance, and if the pain involved is only an emotion of the parents? Why, then, do we have a cosmos in which life has no importance? What coherence is there in a universe which tricks parents into valuing their child’s life and then ruthlessly frustrates that value? This is the immediate reply to such a solution. It may be put into more formal terms as follows. Whether or not human values have importance in the universe, the cosmos developed those values and must therefore take responsibility for them. Human emotions are as much a part of nature as friction is; suffering is no less germane to natural law than osmosis. Nature created those values. If they are inconsistent with it, then the universe has split apart and lost control of itself. The inconsistency or lack of coherence is the essence of the problem.

Suppose now we place God in the universe and take the point of view of the theist. The inconsistency at once becomes acute, for theists will not admit that their God is evil or can condone evil. How can they account for its presence and power? Their answers involve two main arguments.
The first of them is that God deliberately placed evil in
the world to be used as a method of training and strength-
ening human souls. Meeting difficulties toughens a soul just
as exercise toughens a muscle; without such training the soul
or the muscle atrophies. That is what Browning meant when
he urged us to welcome each rebuff as a spur to effort, and
what Leibniz meant when he praised a world that contained
just the right proportion of good and evil. In defending this
view, theists use the effective analogy of a parent and child.
In his relation to the child, a parent possesses both good will
and power, as God does toward a human being. Nevertheless
a wise parent does not try to shield the child from all pain
or suffering. He may punish the child, deprive him of what
he wants, force him to take medicine or have his tonsils
removed, let him touch a stove to find out for himself that
it is hot. In later years a father may allow his son to get into
trouble so that he may gain maturity by finding his own way
out. To the child such actions seem cruel and heartless
because he lacks wisdom to understand their purpose; later
he may thank his parents for them. Likewise men blame God
for confronting them with evil, because they cannot under-
stand God's infinite wisdom.

It would be pleasant if this appealing argument were as
strong as it first appears, but a little consideration of it
raises doubts both of the analogy itself and of the idea of evil
as training. If he can help it, the parent does not allow his
child to be killed by walking off a cliff. God does. The parent
does not subject his child to sufferings which prevent him
from ever developing into a normal human being. God does
this whenever a congenital idiot is born. In the example of
the accidental drowning of the child, one might argue that
such an event strengthens the character of the parents by
making them endure bereavement; but what of the child,
whose potentialities are blotted out in the process? Like other
explanations, this one ignores the individual ruined by the evil, and postulates a God who employs means so ruthless that no incidental advantage can justify them. Finally, abandoning the analogy for the idea behind it, we become uneasily aware that the argument proves too much. If, as it asserts, character training by means of evil is a good thing, then we should not wish to eliminate evil. Indeed, we should foster it. If it is God's method, let it be ours also. It is not hard to justify almost any destructive action by finding some theoretical good that might ensue for someone. This application of the argument the theist hesitates to admit but does not easily refute.

At this point he frequently resorts to a second line of reasoning. Thus far he has been trying to show that God can permit evil and at the same time be both omnipotent and benevolent. Perhaps there is something wrong with the assumption that God must possess both power and goodness. Perhaps He does not after all have unlimited power. If not, then He need no longer be held responsible for the existence of evil. For this reason the concept of a limited or finite God has recently been gaining favor among theists. It then becomes necessary to explain how God's power comes to be limited, and the theist answers that it might have occurred in any of three ways. (1) It may be limited by the existence of a Devil or malevolent cosmic entity whose power is equal to God's and with whom God continually wars. (2) God, along with the universe, may lack perfection because He is evolving into something better, working to eliminate the evil inherent in a universe of matter, and needing man's co-operation to help the process along. (3) God may voluntarily have relinquished a portion of His power in order to endow human beings with free will, which necessarily includes freedom to suffer and to make mistakes. Unfortunately none of these explanations establishes the coherence of the universe, and each is open to serious objections.
The first one is the weakest, and is no longer taken very seriously. If there is a Devil, then either God created him or he created God or both have existed eternally. If God deliberately created a malignant power, then an omnipotent good being permitted evil to come into existence, and we no longer have a limited God at all. This supposition begs the question. Why an all-powerful Devil should create a force of good to oppose him is hard to see. No, the only possibility is that both have always existed and always opposed each other. But as we examine this theory we see that it makes matters worse instead of better, for it is merely a symbolic restatement of the original problem. What sense can be made of a universe composed of two forces endlessly destroying each other? Instead of reconciling the apparent inconsistency of the world, this theory makes its inner character that of a schizophrenic split personality, and fails to vindicate the sanity of the universe.

Somewhat more logical is the idea of an evolving God, what Shaw calls an eternally unfulfilled purpose. It is inspiring to feel that the created world can co-operate in this evolution, and is as necessary to God as He is to it. But the theory still leaves the original dilemma untouched. Suppose God is identical with the purpose or energy of the universe; then we have a pantheistic system governed by a natural law to which human values are irrelevant, and we are merely restating the scientific argument that was discussed above. Suppose God to be a personality separate from the material universe and attempting to mould stubborn matter to His good purposes; then God was at some time confronted with this mass of matter as a sculptor is confronted with a lump of clay or a mathematician with an equation. Indeed, one modern theory refers to the world in mathematical terms as "the Given," the conditions of the problem that God must solve. Nevertheless we have a right to ask, who or what gave it? How render coherent a universe which simultaneously
produces a God and a Given, with the result that in their interaction human beings suffer untold misery? Was it wise or righteous of God to accept the gift?

The most commonly used explanation is the third one, that God intentionally limited Himself in order to give man the advantage of free will. Having once made this limitation, He is no longer able to prevent man from choosing evil rather than good. Thus God's goodness is established, inasmuch as He even gives man part of the divine power. It is disconcerting to find that this argument also is merely an old one stated in different words. Why should man have freedom of choice? Obviously to develop his personality to the highest possible point. How can it be said that this aim is accomplished by a method which often results in the total destruction of a personality? A parent gives his child the priceless benefit of a complete freedom of choice—freedom to go to the medicine cabinet and swallow a bichloride of mercury pill or freedom to take a pistol from the drawer and shoot his baby brother. Would this establish the goodness of the parent? Rather it would cast grave doubts upon his sanity; and we are still trying unsuccessfully to vindicate the sanity of the universe.

The failure of the theistic arguments has been considered at length because there the problem is most acute and the lack of success most bitter. We may conclude our sampling of attempted solutions by noting an interesting psychological theory about good and evil. It is based on the fact that nothing can be perceived by the senses except in terms of its opposite, or at least in terms of a contrast with some different perception. Light is perceptible only because darkness sometimes replaces it, or because some objects are brighter than others. If our whole environment were constantly of a single uniform brightness, we should be unaware of the existence of light. It would not be part of our experience. If everything tasted and smelled exactly alike, we should have no per-
ception of taste or smell. An unchanging, continuous sound would not be sound at all; we hear something only when it becomes louder or softer. Perhaps the same is true of good and evil. If everything were uniformly good, it would cease to be good, and all values would disappear. In fact, there is no such thing as good or evil; events are only better or worse than other events, given value only by contrast. It is consequently impossible to imagine a life containing only good, for it would not be life. If consciousness exists at all, it must contain both good and evil. Suffering is the price we pay for consciousness, and no inconsistency is involved.

Though this idea is a fascinating one and will prove important in the literary treatment of the problem, the objections to it are evident. Like some of the theistic arguments, it would lead to the acceptance and even the fostering of evil. For if the fight against human misery should ever succeed in eliminating it, then human consciousness would cease to exist at the same time. Why, then, should we carry on the fight with any particular ardor? Moreover, if consciousness is inseparable from pain, should the universe have developed it at all? If the choice is to have both good and evil or to have neither one, is the decision entirely clear? There is much to be said for nothingness over against an existence which pays the price of physical and mental torture. Thus the theory ends by casting doubt on the value of life itself, and leaves a universe which created it on such terms still of doubtful sanity. The problem of evil has not been solved.

It would be too much to expect that literature should succeed in a field where so much philosophic thinking has left the problem unanswered. No such claims are made for it. Literature, of course, frequently portrays the presence and power of evil in the world, the intensity of human suffering, and the way in which this suffering is often cumulative as
one lie is covered up by two more and the vicious mole of
nature eats into the healthy tissue around it. Tragic drama
from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to Ibsen's *Ghosts* is primarily
concerned with the existence and meaning of evil. Its effects
on individual character are studied in novels such as Dosto-
uevo's *Crime and Punishment* or Jakob Wassermann's *The
World's Illusion*. Anyone who likes to reassure himself that
the world is a fairly happy place and that misfortune is
usually a person's own fault should read such books frequently
to keep alert and active his awareness of human suffering.
This is one of the values of tragic writing.

In this chapter, however, we shall not use literature as
a source of illustrations of the problem. Rather we shall try
to demonstrate that art has at this point something to con-
tribute to philosophy, that the artistic and imaginative
approach creates something different from any of the theories
we have discussed. It is not just another solution; indeed, it is
not a solution at all, but an attitude of mind, an emotional
set. If we are to take everything into consideration, we should
examine the problem with our intuitive as well as our purely
logical faculties. Art is the externalizing of an intuition, the
giving of concrete form to an imaginative apprehension of
the world. Occasionally an artist transmits to us an intuition
that does, at least for the moment, seem to reconcile a world
of good and evil with an emotional insight beyond the reach
of logic. It is a few such pieces of literature that we are now
to study.

It is interesting that they appear in the works of the
greatest writers, as one evidence of their greatness. Only those
artists who have unusual powers of expression can put them
into words. It is even more interesting that they are in
essential agreement with one another. However unlike the
personalities involved, no matter how different the modes of
expression they use, the intuition is the same. Though it
includes something of the theistic and of the psychological
theories already mentioned, it is different from either of them.

In discussing the psychological theory, we found that it ends by casting doubt on the value of life. It is at this point that the artist's imagination takes up the idea. His approach to it is based on the necessity of choosing between life and death. If one chooses life, he thereby elects to experience both good and evil. If he is unwilling to accept this double nature of existence, he chooses death. It is both or neither, never one without the other. And this is true not merely in the mind, as the psychological theory states, but as a matter of objective fact. For life, by definition, involves a series of organic tensions, an opposition of forces which maintain the physical and chemical balance of the body, to say nothing of its precarious mental balance, a delicate adjustment that is forever threatened with collapse. This unavoidable danger of destruction is the evil in life. If we eliminate it, we die. A living object is in balanced but unstable equilibrium; a dead one is in stable equilibrium, and runs no more danger.

If, therefore, a person thinks life preferable to death, consciousness preferable to oblivion, by that choice he achieves an emotional reconciliation to the existence of evil. That existence is no longer an inconsistency, but a necessity to the definition of life. The choice is not an easy one, especially to a sensitive artist. The seductive attractions of death must not be underestimated; the will to relax one's hold on life is strong. Some artists make that choice. But most of them, especially some of unusual genius, end by preferring life in the full knowledge that they are thereby reconciling themselves to evil and suffering. We shall examine three examples of this artistic intuition, representing different ages and types of literature. They are the odes of Keats, the tragedies of Shakespeare, and the novels of Thomas Mann.

Whatever John Keats felt and wrote about human suffering was the result, not of theorizing, but of his own
experience. Though he lived only twenty-five years, those years brought him more hardships and disappointment than the average person endures in seventy. The difference between the poetry he wrote at twenty and that which he wrote at twenty-three shows an incredibly rapid maturing of the personality. He is a living example of the development of a character through the experience of pain. His father and mother both died before he was fifteen. His favorite brother George emigrated permanently to America. In the same year he took care of his younger brother Tom through the final months of tuberculosis, and was present at his death. When he fell in love with Fanny Brawne, he felt little hope of marrying her because of his poverty, his increasing ill health, and her less than ardent return of his feelings. His attempts to earn a living by writing were thwarted by a series of wanton cruelty reviews which went out of their way to ridicule his youthful faults of style in a tone of inexcusable sarcasm. Convinced that his life would be short, he fought against time to overcome his mannerisms and produce poetry that would last. He died a lingering death, in a foreign country with only one friend near him, and under the false impression that he had failed. It would have been natural for him to feel nothing but bitterness about human life. It is hard to believe that his later poetry achieved one of the most impressive imaginative reconciliations of the problem of evil.

Nor did Keats arrive at his conclusion by chance or by instinct. His letters, particularly those to his brother George, show that he had given the matter long and careful thought. For example, in February, 1819, he began a diary-letter to which he added at intervals for more than two months. In one section written in April, he discusses at length the theistic solution of evil as character-training, suggests modifications in it, and advances a tentative outline of the psychological relation between good and evil. It is a mistake, he says, to regard this world as a vale of tears from which we are rescued.
into the bliss of heaven. Instead, it should be called a vale of soul-making. By soul he means a unique individual personality. Human beings are born with an intelligence but no soul. Some never develop one; the few who do must undergo many difficult experiences to create it gradually in the stress and strain of life. So far Keats is close to the theistic solution; now he goes on to describe the process by which soul creation occurs. It takes place through the interaction of three elements: the logical mind, the emotions or intuitions, and the external world to which the first two must adapt. No one or two of these is enough to make a personality; all three are necessary. In the letter we can see Keats thinking out this idea as he writes; his mind is busy with it, but it has not yet taken a poetic form.

I can scarcely express what I but dimly perceive, and yet I think I perceive it—that you may judge the more clearly I will put it in the most homely form possible. I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the human heart the horn Book read in that School—and I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school the Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways.¹

This letter gives unusual evidence of the genesis of a poetic idea, and of the way in which Keats's own personality was developing by the interaction of these same three elements of logic, intuition, and painful experience. Less than a month after he wrote the passage he had transformed this raw material into poetry. He had seen the necessity of making the symbolic choice between life and death, had recognized clearly the alluring attractiveness of yielding to death, and had rejected that escape in favor of the energetic continuance of life, no matter how painful.
This intuitive approach to the problem of evil is revealed in two poems, which must be studied together to make the idea clear; it appears in the content of both separately, and especially in a comparison of the two. They are the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the *Ode on Melancholy*. Though it is certain that these odes were written at very nearly the same time, some doubt exists as to the exact interval and as to which came first. This discussion follows the authority of Sir Sidney Colvin, who believes that both were written in May, 1819, that they should be taken together as companion pieces, and that the nightingale ode precedes the one on melancholy.\(^2\) This conclusion is also confirmed by internal evidence. Assuming it to be true, the two poems seem to exhibit Keats in the very act of making his philosophic choice between life and death.

The *Ode to a Nightingale* opens with a direct statement of personal suffering: "My heart aches." After our summary of what Keats was enduring at the time, this needs no comment. His world was filled with evil; yet at the same time his keen senses and strong love of natural beauty kept alive his feeling that this world has high possibilities of good. In this apparently irreconcilable contrast he is specifically facing the problem of evil. In sorrow he listens to the song of the nightingale. The inner conflict between beauty and pain has dulled all his senses. The two emotions so counteract each other that his mind and body fall into a lethargy. He feels too heavy to move.

> A drowsy numbness pains
> My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
> Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
> One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk.

In this state of low vitality, feeling as if the waters of forgetfulness were closing over his head, he is too enervated to deal with any of life's problems. Instead he longs to escape all pain and responsibility into a world of pure happiness. Why must
beauty be linked with sorrow? Why could there not be a realm in which only good exists? Perhaps the song of the bird gives evidence that there is such a realm. The nightingale is so relaxed, singing with such "full-throated ease," that to imagine it experiencing pain is impossible. It must possess the secret of unalloyed happiness. And so Keats utters the wish that he might

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Here is summed up the transitoriness of good and the inevitability of evil, made particularly personal by the reference to his brother's death. The natural reaction to such a world is the wish to escape.

This wish Keats at once fulfills in a poetic daydream. He imagines himself out of the world, alone in a forest on a dark night, seeing nothing around him, but gaining vivid impressions from his other senses. In his face he feels a faint breeze that brings him the scent of violets and musk-rose, and he hears louder and clearer than before the ecstatic song of the nightingale. The perfect world is his, the experience of good without evil.

Of course, it is only in his imagination; he never deceives himself by mistaking it for reality. Such a world cannot exist, and when the dream is over the sorrows of life will again flood upon him; the paradox of the inconsistent union of good and evil will reassert itself. Why should he wish to return? Why not relinquish the brief joys and certain pains
of life, and sink past Lethe into full oblivion? Why not give up? It is at this point in the sequence of his emotions that the tempting death-wish comes to him.

Darkling I listen, and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme
To take into the air my quiet breath:
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

Nevertheless, almost as soon as the wish is uttered, his mind recoils from it. Death is no solution. To give up the struggle and sink into a state where there is no sensation of any kind will indeed eliminate pain; but it will also eliminate beauty and value. The nightingale will go right on singing, unheard and unappreciated. For the beauty and perfection symbolized by the bird-song are just as immortal as the evil and suffering.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread three down.

And so Keats, overcoming the wish for death which has momentarily allured him, returns from his dream to the real world.

It is significant, however, that the mood of his return to life is a negative one. He does not accept life; he rejects death. He comes back to himself as one awakens from an anesthetic, dazed and a little resentful, feeling as if he had been victimized by the nightingale’s song.

Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.

Though he has been temporarily taken in, the illusion cannot last and gives no satisfaction. Again he is alone in the world.
of pain, still lethargic, uncertain whether he sleeps or wakes, is dead or alive. As the poem ends, Keats has achieved no true reconciliation to the "vale of soul-making." His mind is suspended inertly between the struggle of life and the non-entity of death.

In the days that followed the writing of this poem Keats's mind must have revolved the problem many times, until, as his imagination penetrated more and more deeply into the mysterious relation between happiness and pain, he made his choice; That choice is the subject of the *Ode on Melancholy*. The opening phrase is now not a simple statement of his feelings, but a sudden, sharp warning. The poem begins: "No, no, go not to Lethe." This line is usually explained as referring to a preceding stanza which Keats wrote and then rejected, a stanza which describes the soul as setting out in a phantom boat in search of melancholy. By this interpretation Keats is warning the reader that melancholy is not found by resorting to superstition and folklore. This is certainly part of his meaning, but the line is open to another no less reasonable interpretation. It may be that Keats's mind was harking back to the nightingale ode, where he had spoken longingly of sinking "Lethe-wards," and that he was now announcing his rejection of that escape into forgetfulness, his new conviction that the music of the nightingale had been a siren's song. Therefore he calls sharply, "No, no, go not to Lethe!" That is the wrong choice, and he now has a better one.

The stanza following repeats the warning in symbolic terms, calling up a series of images associated with sleep and death, of which the human soul must beware: sedatives and opiates like wolf's-bane and deadly nightshade, funereal objects like owls and yew-trees, death-symbols like the Egyptian beetle and the Greek moth. The line "Nor let . . . the death-moth be Your mournful Psyche" is especially rich in connotation. Psyche was the goddess of the soul, which took
the form of a moth emerging from the mouth of a dying person. But for most readers the principal association of the name is with the love story of Cupid and Psyche. Playing on this train of thought, Keats means, do not let your Psyche be the mournful state of a dying soul—in other words, don't fall in love with easeful death, as Keats himself had almost but not quite done. Thus we have, not a logical, but a purely imaginative statement of his rejection of the death-wish.

The last two lines of the stanza are puzzling until they are connected with the new decision which Keats had made. They give the reason for his exhortation to avoid Lethe. Do not resort to anything that will dull sensation, he says:

For shade to shade will come too drowsily
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

This is a surprising statement. The very reason people take opiates is to drown their sorrows, and here is Keats saying you must avoid them for fear of drowning your sorrows. Do not wish to stop suffering; cherish it as a value instead of fleeing from it is an evil. These lines are strong evidence of the new intuition which had come to Keats between this poem and the preceding one.

The second stanza parallels the images of the first with a series of beautiful pictures associated with life and health: tiny leaves in April, spring flowers, June roses and peonies, and the iridescence of waves on the beach. The view of suffering as a value is repeated in the comparison of a mood of melancholy to an April shower which makes the flowers grow better. These two parallel stanzas now converge in the third, which is Keats's final expression of the inseparable union of good and evil in life, and his joyful acceptance of that union. Let us read the entire stanza, remembering that "she" refers to the goddess Melancholy, that is, to human suffering.
Here again beauty and joy are as transitory as they were in the nightingale ode, and pleasure turns to poison in the time a bee takes to gather nectar from a flower. Keats never ignores or glosses over human pain. What he does is to transform it magically from a punishment to a privilege. The experience of pain is something of which a man must be worthy. If he does not experience it he is not fully human, but half dead. For poignant pain can be felt only by a mind sensitive enough to experience both it and pleasure in the highest degree. Otherwise it is not pain at all, but Lethcan dullness. If a man is susceptible to keen suffering, then only is he able to burst the grape of joy in his mouth and savor it against his palate. Great good can exist only in the life of a being for whom great evil also exists. Either alone is impossible. And Keats has at last reached the place where he is ready to choose the combined extremes of good and evil rather than the oblivion that removes both. This ode, then, illustrates the contribution of art to philosophy for which we are searching. In the imaginative mood which it creates, good and evil are no longer destructive opposites, but parts of an underlying unity. At least during the time that a reader allows himself to become absorbed in the poem, he feels that the sanity of a universe which includes both good and evil is vindicated.
Having seen the subjective, individual reaction of a lyric poet, let us turn to a completely objective picture of the world in the tragedies of Shakespeare. Here we find no personal choice such as we have just analyzed, no direct statement of any philosophy. What Shakespeare's attitude was must be inferred from the nature of the world he creates for his characters, the kind of evil that surrounds them, and the relation that seems to exist between it and the forces of good. This evidence will lead us to the conclusion that there is implied in Shakespeare's tragedies an imaginative choice similar to that of Keats, though set forth on a much larger scale.

When Shakespeare is brought into this discussion, one's indebtedness to his many commentators is so great that it cannot be adequately acknowledged. Everyone interested in his philosophy should read particularly the opening lecture of A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy entitled "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy." Having done so, he will be unable to stop until he has finished the book, and will then wish to reread the tragedies themselves. They are, of course, so rich in material for thought, and offer so many inviting themes for study, that we must resist the temptation to stray into bypaths, and remember that our one object is to discover the relation between Shakespeare's created world and the problem of evil.

As before, two of the attempted solutions to the problem appear to a limited degree in Shakespeare, but are insufficient to explain his attitude. The theory that evil is character training seems to be confirmed by the example of King Lear, whose sufferings aroused in him a sympathy and thoughtfulness of others that he had never felt before. But in other cases ill fortune merely destroys the personality instead of developing it; for example, Ophelia's bereavement promptly drives her insane and results in her death. Evil may or may not strengthen a character; in Shakespeare's world there is no
The psychological theory also appears in his plays, but in a somewhat reversed form. Instead of asserting that evil is necessary to make possible a conception of good, he gives the impression that, since extremes of good and evil exist in the world, it is wise to make use of the evil wherever possible to intensify our awareness and admiration of the good. This is at any rate the effect of such contrasts as those between Iago and Desdemona, or between Goneril and Cordelia.

But neither of these ideas explains his point of view. If we keep in mind the artistic choice just described, between the tension and dangers of life on the one hand and the securely stable inertia of death on the other, we find that his plays impress us as giving the same answer that we have already seen: a preference for a life including extremes of fineness and evil over a state of dull nonentity containing neither. If it must be both or neither, then both—that is what one feels in reading the tragedies. This does not mean that Shakespeare considered life good or happy or just. In his world virtue is not rewarded, poetic justice does not appear, and there is no sentimentalizing of the facts. But the point is that, however unfair and painful it may be, its author preferred it because its only alternative is passive non-existence. Moreover, his readers and audiences have confirmed that choice. Scores of plays which depict a far more agreeable world than Shakespeare's tragedies do, a world in which poetic justice reigns and goodness is triumphant, have disappeared permanently; but his plays, in which painful feelings reach an almost unbearable intensity, have gained vitality by the passing of three centuries. In short, there seems to be something about Shakespeare's tragic universe that makes people want to live in it.

Let us now outline its characteristics, and show their development by referring to three of the plays written during a period of ten years: *Romeo and Juliet*, his best early
tragedy, about 1594; Hamlet, rewritten several times from about 1598 to 1603; and Othello, played in 1604. In certain points they are alike; in others they differ so as to exhibit an evolution in his ideas of a tragic world. Taken together they account for his preference of suffering life over impregnable death.

The first characteristic of this world is Shakespeare's emphasis on the fact that good and evil are inseparable in it, and that both are present to an exaggerated degree. There is nothing matter-of-fact or dull about the plays; they are filled with vitality, with action and emotion on a more intense level than that of ordinary existence. The more of life there is in them, the more of both good and evil we may expect to find. The presence of these two qualities in unusual strength is what creates the fatal conflict.

In general terms, Shakespeare's view is this: As long as any organism remains normal and mediocre, it can survive for a long time without anything much happening to it. But as soon as it develops some extraordinary beauty or goodness, some intense manifestation of life, then at the same time it creates an evil weakness which destroys that new development. Any great achievement is so unstable, delicate, and transitory that it is particularly susceptible to danger and bears with it the seeds of destruction. This applies to any living thing. A rosebush can survive a hard winter. From October to May it has created nothing of importance, attracts no attention, and is hardly worth looking at. When a flower appears on it in June, it is admired for having accomplished an extraordinary creative act. But the flower is so delicate that it can last only a few days and disintegrates in the first rainstorm. Similarly, among human beings, a genius often has such an unstable nervous organization that he is unable to adapt to the normal life around him. When the life force experiments for improvement, it creates good and evil inseparably. That the extraordinary cannot survive is tragic, but the important
fact is that even its temporary existence impresses us as so admirable that it reconciles us to the character of the world which produced it. This is what Shakespeare’s tragedies imply.

Each of the three plays we are using as examples describes such a flowering period in the life of a country or an individual, in which good and evil are intermingled; the third one demonstrates their inseparability in an exact and striking fashion. *Romeo and Juliet* takes place in a Renaissance Italian city, *Hamlet* at a high point in the medieval Danish empire, *Othello* in powerful sixteenth-century Venice. In the first, the environment of the southern Renaissance produces strong and sensitive emotions, which result on the one hand in a murderous feud between rival clans, and on the other in two people who emerge from the center of this quarrel to feel nothing but loving absorption in each other. The close union between good and evil is symbolized in the character of Mercutio, who is a young man of charm, wit, and delicate poetic sensitiveness, yet at the same time coarse, bawdy, and dangerously quarrelsome. It is he who utters the beautiful account of the dreams that Queen Mab brings to sleeping humans; it is he also who baits Tybalt into the fatal street-fight. In the outcome, good and evil are equally inseparable: the lovers are dead, but their death has ended the feud.

In the second play, the Danish court has reached an abnormally high development of wealth, pomp, culture, and foreign conquest. In doing so it has brought forth two persons of extraordinary powers, both members of the royal family, both of intelligence, courage, and sensitive feelings: the king’s son, a courtier, soldier, and scholar, “the expectancy and rose of the fair state,” a youth of brilliant intellect and imagination whose friendly charm has endeared him to the whole country; and the king’s brother, a man with administrative talent, fertility of resource, and acute knowledge of
human nature, whose ambition has led him to murder. Not only are the two equated as "mighty opposites," but they are complementary in that each has what the other lacks. Hamlet's particular weakness is self-deception, the inability to face facts; Claudius' greatest virtue is his realistic appraisal of his own deeds, his refusal to pray for forgiveness because he knows he will not give up the fruits of his crime. The same mingling of good and evil is evident within Hamlet himself. Being a genius, he represents at once the highest development of human life and its accompanying dangers. He pays the penalty for his greatness by the nervous instability that makes him the prey of moods and the victim instead of the master of his emotions. The generous idealism of his nature exposes him to easy disillusionment which paralyzes his powers of action at the important moment. Unusual sensitiveness involves unusual suffering.

In Othello Shakespeare not only repeats this idea but strengthens it by an interesting addition. First, both the good and the evil are more extreme than in the earlier plays. Othello excels Hamlet in simple dignity and affectionate trustfulness of nature; Desdemona is much stronger and more attractive than Ophelia; Claudius is almost a scrupulous man compared to Iago. But these extremes are made inseparable for the ironical reason that they help create each other. If Othello and Desdemona had not been so good, Iago could not have been so bad. He counted on their admirable qualities to make his plot succeed. Othello is instinctively too loyal and honest to suspect malice in others. Desdemona will inconvenience herself to do anyone a kindness. As Iago remarks with satisfaction,

She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested. (2:3:325)

Therefore she will earnestly try to have Cassio reinstated in his office, so earnestly that a little skillful prodding from
Iago will make Othello wonder whether her interest in Cassio is more than sisterly. This ability to make use of his victim's most admirable qualities is one of Iago's devilish traits. It greatly intensifies our impression of the inextricable union of good and evil in Shakespeare's world. The fact that evil succeeds because of the very existence of good is made clear to the audience when Iago says,

So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all. (2:3:363-5)

This imaginative world, then, is composed of an indissoluble mixture of good and evil because it contains exceptional vitality, an intense manifestation of life. Suppose the persons who inhabit it were less fully alive, more average and ordinary as they usually are in the real world: would it still exhibit this union of extremes? Shakespeare takes care to show that it would not, by including in each play one or more average characters who feel very strong emotion, whose reach never exceeds their grasp, who take few risks and are subject to few dangers. It is they who survive. They keep the world going, but do not give us the impression that their lives will be very interesting or will contain much possibility of development. Like the hardy plant that lives over the winter, they will remain unchanged for a long time, but will produce no flower.

Of such a nature is Friar Laurence in Romeo and Juliet, a well-meaning, comfortable man in whom both Romeo and Juliet confide. He prevents Romeo from committing suicide, and then delivers a long lecture on self-control which leads Juliet's nurse to exclaim that she could stand there all night listening to such good counsel. To comfort the distracted Juliet he suggests the device of the sleeping potion, which he can supply because he is an enthusiastic gardener and herbalist. When his plan unluckily fails and he finds Romeo
dead in the Capulet vault, he first rather feebly urges Juliet to come away and enter a nunnery; then, hearing a noise, he runs away, is picked up by the police, and tells the whole story to the rival families. If everyone were as prudent and cautious as Laurence, society would be less exposed to evil; yet most readers would prefer to have known Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio for a short time than to grow old in a world filled with Laurences.

In *Hamlet* the principal surviving character is Horatio, whom we have already discussed as an example of a balanced personality. He is a taciturn scholar with a dry wit and an air of quiet skepticism. Though he would never harm anyone, he shows no trace of leadership or creative ability. It is an excellent thing for the effervescent Prince to have a friend so loyal, so reserved, and so steady. His fidelity even makes him want to die like an ancient Roman when Hamlet is killed, and Hamlet's last act is to seize the poison cup and beg Horatio to live in order to tell his story truly to the world. No one dislikes him, yet no one is perfectly sure whether or not he is there. If we had met no one with a great personality we might feel comfortably satisfied with Horatio; but once having known Hamlet, with all his irritating moodiness and instability, we know that a world of Horatios would not compensate us for the loss of an exceptional human being.

Othello and Desdemona are survived by Cassio, the young lieutenant who has been the innocent instrument of Iago's plot. The almost universal reaction to him is, nice fellow but no heavyweight. An amiable and popular officer, he enjoys being a favorite and finds it hard to say no to anyone. His manners are courtly, his conversation pleasantly exuberant with just a touch of flamboyance. When he is demoted for getting drunk on duty he is naively remorseful and too ill at ease to face his commanding officer afterwards. He is ineffective, but attractive in his weaknesses; one can understand why Desdemona took up his cause and why he
exasperated the coldly efficient Iago. As Governor of Cyprus he will be honest, genial, hounded by pressure groups, and deceived by diplomats. Compared to Othello he seems tenuous, half-existent, an average agreeable man not outstanding in any way; and now that the reader has known Othello, Cassio is no longer enough. The life force has done better than he, at the cost of intense suffering to which pleasant mediocrity is not subject. They are all very nice, these surviving characters; but Shakespeare makes most readers prefer a world containing an exceptional amount of both good and evil to a world containing neither. This preference implies a reconciliation of the problem of evil itself.

It should be observed that Shakespeare makes only sparing use of the idea of evil as character training, and does not lose sight of the fact that it is as likely to destroy character as to strengthen it. This is one evidence of the clear-sightedness of his outlook. While he shows that Romeo and Juliet were matured by their difficulties, he also implies that they grew up too fast and somewhat artificially. Fewer obstacles and a more natural development would have been better for them in the end. In fact, the tragic outcome of the story is brought about partly by their too precipitous maturing. Juliet, at first meekly obedient to her parents, learns so quickly to think for herself and dissemble her feelings that she goes too far. Her pretense of eagerness to marry the family candidate, Count Paris, is convincing enough to lead her father to advance the time of the wedding and so frustrate Friar Laurence's plan. In the earlier scenes Romeo is a sentimental weakling who dallies instead of making up his mind. At the end he has matured enough to decide instantly upon a course of action; he rushes back to Verona and kills himself without even pausing to notice that Juliet is on the very point of reviving. A few minutes' delay would have saved both their lives.
In the other two plays also the effect of evil on character is not always strengthening. It does have a good effect on Desdemona, whose endurance of undeserved torment increases her native gentleness and unselfishness, until as she is dying she tries to save Othello from being accused of her murder. But it is hard to see how either Hamlet or Othello is improved by suffering. Before their troubles begin, both are well-adjusted people, popular and successful; their weaknesses are latent, and have caused them no trouble. It is their contact with evil that brings out these weaknesses. The shock of his mother's infidelity and his uncle's crime plunges Hamlet into irresolution and almost unseats his mind. The painful jealous doubt engendered by Iago destroys Othello's carefully guarded habit of self-control and drives him into ungovernable anger. At the end, it is true, each recovers something of his original character; but a reader may justly ask whether it would not have been better to keep it in the first place rather than to regain it too late. On the whole, it is not as a means of improving character that Shakespeare finds his reconciliation to a world of good and evil.

In this respect the three plays are much alike, but in another phase of the treatment of evil they are different. Whatever may be its effect on the good characters, the evil in Shakespeare's tragedies becomes increasingly self-destructive. This is one of the most noticeable changes from his earlier to his later tragedies. It is hardly at all true of Romeo and Juliet, where the denouement involves a series of ironic coincidences. Only indirectly does the feud destroy itself. If the lovers had happened to escape, as they might easily have done, the family quarrel would probably have raged all the more fiercely. The combatants, temporarily sobered by the sudden death of the two young people, shake hands all around and agree to call it quits. One may wonder how long the truce will last. In Hamlet the destruction of the evil
power is definite enough, and is self-caused in the sense that Claudius over-reaches himself in plotting the elaborate trap of the fencing-match. Hamlet, who never acts except on impulse, is aroused to such fury by discovering his uncle's perfidy that he does the deed which he has so long postponed.

Yet here the reader never feels the precise, almost uncanny impression that strikes him in Othello, an impression that the evil has destroyed itself because it is evil. Iago belongs properly at the bottom of Dante's hell because his chief characteristic is coldness of heart, a freezing of human feeling so complete that such things as sympathy and altruism are to him not only contemptible but unintelligible. His logical mind concocts an almost perfect plot, but he fails because he does not understand that anyone could have a purely disinterested love for another person. It must have occurred to him that his wife Emilia might give him away; he takes the risk of sending her to Othello's room, however, because he cannot see what she has to gain by betraying him. He is right—she has everything to lose. Yet she reveals the truth out of sincere affection for Desdemona. The particular kind of evil in Iago's nature prevents him from foreseeing this possibility, and hence this evil is specifically self-destructive. A reader's consciousness of that fact powerfully reinforces Shakespeare's implied choice of a world combining the extremes of good and evil over a world of lesser vitality.

No reader will feel that Shakespeare's tragedies solve the problem, or in any way lessen the mystery of a divided universe. The value of reading his plays does not lie in the discovery of some easy answer to this problem of philosophy. It lies in the fact that Shakespeare illuminates for us the real world by creating an imaginary one, not idealized or falsified, just as inconsistent as ours seems to be, yet one which most people would not exchange for a consistent one that included no greatness, no dangers, and no pain.
The novels of Thomas Mann may well conclude our study, because, while reiterating the imaginative choice made by Keats and Shakespeare, they speak in terms of modern life and are filled with meaning for the twentieth century. In Keats the emphasis is on the mental processes of the individual thinking out the problem; Shakespeare creates a group of objectively portrayed characters; Mann faces the problem of evil in civilization as a whole, the endless conflict of life and death in the course of history. By the use of certain symbols he is able to show the close amalgamation of these forces more vividly than either of the others. We shall first examine some of Mann's characteristic methods of writing, and then see how these methods enable him to express the idea which sums up his imaginative choice between a life containing good and evil and a death containing neither.

His main characteristic is his inclusiveness, a habit of mind which leads him to reconcile and fuse ideas that appear to be opposites, to take account of many diverse factors, and to hold them in suspension until he has extracted and unified the values of all. Though he has exhibited this philosophic point of view from the first, it has broadened and matured in the course of his writing.

Mann's boyhood was spent in the mercantile city of Lübeck, where his first opportunity to reconcile opposites appeared in his own family. His father was a strict, respectable, middle-class merchant; his mother a Portuguese-Creole musician; and these hereditary strains of the conventional and the artistic produced a conflict in his mind. He tried and rejected a business career; he tried a free Bohemian life in Italy, and rejected that too. Then a happy marriage combined with successful literary work resolved the problem. He has written four major and four minor novels, numerous short stories, and several social and critical essays. We shall consider his reaction to the problem of evil in three of the great novels: *Buddenbrooks* (1901); *The Magic Mountain*
(1924), which brought him the Nobel Prize; and Joseph and His Brothers (1931-1944).

Buddenbrooks, derived partly from his home experience, traces the gradual decay of a nineteenth-century German mercantile family to its eventual extinction. Its scene is limited to one region and one class of society; its background is the strict German social and economic system of Mann's early years. The Magic Mountain expands its horizon to include a panorama of European society before World War I, by presenting a cross-section of it assembled in a Swiss tuberculosis sanitarium, where the struggle with disease and death brings out the patients' best and their worst qualities. It is here that Mann deals most directly with the death-wish, the temptation to relax forever in the comfortable but morbid atmosphere of the Berghof. In Joseph and His Brothers, he again enlarges his field by exploring the remote past, enriching the Biblical story by filling in its human details, connecting it with folklore, and developing it into a philosophy of history. The three novels show an evolution toward greater scope and power, more skillful use of symbolism, and richer philosophical content. They also exhibit a process of self-discovery on Mann's part, because the second and third books each develop ideas implicitly present in the preceding one, so that his whole work is unified by his single point of view toward the problem of evil in history.

On first reading the novels, a person will probably observe a characteristic habit of Mann's; he likes to portray his characters in contrasting pairs—the respectable Thomas Buddenbrook opposed to his flighty brother Christian, the rebellious Hans Castorp to his disciplined cousin Joachim, a series of brother-pairs like Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and Reuben. Though at first these contrasts seem clear and definite, we soon find that they begin to dissolve at the edges into unexpected similarities. The two Buddenbrook boys, though opposite in temperament, both come to grief in
the struggle to adapt themselves to family pressure; Hans Castorp is pleased to find his incorruptible cousin threatened by the same dangers to which he himself is exposed. All this is technique of character-portrayal, but we next discover that Mann uses the same method in his treatment of ideas. Each idea appears as a contrast between two phenomena which at first seem direct opposites, but are later partly reconciled and fused. Three of these pairs we may examine briefly as stepping-stones to Mann's central philosophy: his contrast between the artist and the practical man, between democracy and authority, and between life and death.

The first of these springs from his early experience. Heredity and environment instilled into him the conflict of the artistic with the practical point of view, the Bohemian, eccentric, and experimental attitudes with the solid, moral, and conservative ones. This is the principal subject of Buddenbrooks, where it explains the disintegration of the family. For a century the Buddenbrook fathers have transmitted to their sons a hard-headed business ability. Then in two generations appears an odd neurotic strain, a shockingly impractical bent for daydreaming and artistic pursuits, which saps the family unity and ruins the business. At the same time, in Mann's usual style of balancing forces, it adds both interest and human sympathy to the arid Buddenbrook clan. The same contrast continues, with less emphasis, in the later novels. Hans Castorp is distracted from his priggish upbringing by the free-thinking radicalism of some of his friends in the sanitarium; and the brilliant, mercurial Joseph is contrasted with his matter-of-fact, farmer-shepherd brothers. Though the advantage is now on one side, now on the other, the best development of human life always comes from a contact and interaction of the two.

More directly connected with Mann's philosophy of history is his second contrast, that between democracy and authoritarianism. From the beginning of his work, he foresaw
that this was to be an important twentieth-century problem: which is paramount, the efficiency and stability of the group or the development of the individual? His answer again is typical. The best results, he shows, come from an interaction of the two, with the individual stimulated to greater effort by his struggle with the group. Some such challenge is necessary for the individual to develop, but if the group is so powerful as to stifle him society becomes static.

Two examples of this contrast will show how Mann uses it in the novels. It is implicit throughout *Buddenbrooks*, where the authority of the family is pitted against the desire for individual freedom in the younger generation. Consul Buddenbrook is shocked when his daughter Tony wishes to marry a poor student who believes in freedom of the press and equal opportunity before the law. This will never do; and the weak-willed Tony is engulfed by kindly but unrelenting family pressure until she unhappily marries the proper person. Her easy surrender turns out badly for the family, because the proper person proves to be a swindler seeking refuge in the Buddenbrook wealth. But the opposite extreme, as usual, is equally bad. Tony's brother Christian, discarding all family authority, becomes a dissipated individualist who never accomplishes anything.

The idea is further developed by a symbolic contrast in *The Magic Mountain*. Among the inmates of the sanitarium are two remarkable men, an Italian named Settembrini and a Ukrainian named Naphta. Settembrini is a charming friend, a man of liberal sympathies and earnest public spirit, a supporter of the common man, a believer in orderly democratic social progress, engaged in writing a book on sociology. Naphta is a shrewd, truculent upholder of totalitarianism, advocating a strong state that will keep the masses obedient by force and torture. Hans Castorp learns much from their debates. Settembrini is so smoothly eloquent that his words slide from his mouth like fresh hot rolls from the oven;
Naphta’s speech is incisive and uncompromising, so cuttily logical that Hans, whose sympathies are more with Settembrini’s democracy, fears uneasily that liberalism may be a little too tolerant to be effective against the brilliant fascist. He is mistaken, however, in a way that somewhat prefigured later events. As time goes on, Naphta grows more aggressively insulting, deliberately baiting his opponent and finally challenging him to a duel, just as fascism acted toward democracy in 1938-1939. Then, under the stimulus of crisis, Settembrini reacts calmly and courageously; Naphta, disconcerted by his unexpected efficiency, becomes pathological and screaming, and eventually shoots himself. That was Mann’s forecast in 1924 of the future of totalitarianism.

The suicide of Naphta leads us to the third and most important contrast, that between life and death, which is emphasized in all three novels. Here Mann’s balancing technique is especially evident. On the one hand, he pictures death as the destroyer of life’s values, and equates it with all human tendencies to relax or give up. Anything that saps the energy and weakens the will to live is a manifestation of death. What really wrecks the Buddenbrook family is not external necessity but a slackening of their morale, seen at its most pathetic when little Hanno, the only child, says to a friend, “I get so tired of things. I’d like to sleep and never wake up... I can’t want anything... Nothing can come of me, that is perfectly sure.” And soon afterward Hanno dies of typhoid fever because he lacks the will to fight the disease. Similarly Hans Castorp is almost destroyed by the insidious impulse to stay in the sanitarium, to sink into a pleasant lethargy which is moral death.

But this negative view of death is only half the picture. According to Mann, death is not only a danger but also a necessity to the highest development of life, just as the death of a seed in the ground is necessary to the growth of a plant. To illustrate this he works out the various forms of his most
important symbol, generally referred to as the symbol of the pit. The name is taken from the dry well into which Joseph was thrown by his brothers, but the idea is found in all the novels. By a pit Mann means any apparent destruction which leads to a richer life. As an experience temporarily degrading, but necessary for development, it is closely linked with the problem of evil.

In *The Magic Mountain*, for example, Hans Castorp's easy and respectable childhood has made him rather blasé, so assured of his own comfort and importance in the world that he becomes indifferent, having no intellectual or human interests outside his own small orbit. Physical work fatigues him, and thinking bores him. Never having been fully alive, he is easy prey to the forces of death which surround him in the sanitarium. When the doctor informs him that he is a tubercular type and would profit by a longer stay, he willingly embraces the hospital regime, takes his temperature three times a day, "assumes the horizontal" in the deck chair on his balcony, and gradually loses track of time. If he has any qualms of conscience, he rationalizes them away by arguing that it is his duty to stay there and bring consolation to the dying patients whom he visits regularly. Breaking all ties with his home, he basks in the freedom of doing nothing. In short, he sinks into the pit of an intellectual death.

But he does not quite die. At the moment of his deepest immersion in the pit, mysterious forces of life begin to work in his mind, forces that would never have emerged if his career had followed its normal course. One evening as he lies on his balcony looking idly up at the clear sky, he begins to wonder about the motions of the stars. Often as he has seen them before, he has had no time or inclination to bother about them; and now for the first time he feels the faint stirring of intellectual curiosity. He buys and reads a book on astronomy; this leads him into mathematics, then into chemistry, biology, social science, and philosophy. As he penetrates
toward the crucial problems of human thought, his blase attitude sloughs off and his mind comes alive. All this is made possible by the same experience which had almost killed it: his new freedom. For the freedom to sink into lethargy was also freedom to inquire and think, a process which had hitherto been stifled by his conservative rearing. Thus the apparent destruction of the pit proved to be the gateway to a richer intellectual life than he had ever imagined. Mann leaves no doubt of his preference for a world that includes freedom to experience both good and evil over one that contains neither.

In his next novel Mann expands this idea by linking it with mythology and folklore. One fact of nature most clearly apparent to primitive man was the frequency with which natural objects die and then revive. Each year vegetation falls into the death of winter only to flourish again in the spring. The sun, buried under the earth at night, reappears in the morning. Hesper, the evening star, periodically vanishes in the sun's rays and is reborn as the morning star Lucifer. These phenomena led every primitive race to develop a myth about a being who, after passing through the underworld, re-emerges a greater hero than before. Such were the careers of the Greek Adonis, the Hebrew Jesus, the Babylonian Tammuz, and the Egyptian Osiris; and such a folklore figure was Joseph, marked out from birth as the racial hero who must die in order to live better.

It is not that Mann dehumanizes Joseph into a supernatural being. As usual, he strikes a balance by depicting a convincingly realistic young man, but never letting the reader forget the symbolism behind him. To develop his full power, Joseph must go to the pit. He goes there because of his human weaknesses; and those weaknesses are the direct result of his destined greatness. For Joseph is superior to anyone around him; his father and brothers know it, and unfortunately he knows it too. So attractive, intelligent, and
precocious is he that he falls victim to his own superiority. Discovering that he can induce his father to give him anything by turning on his charm at the right moment, he concludes that everyone must love him and must exist solely for his convenience. He becomes, in brief, a spoiled brat, and thoroughly deserves to have his brothers throw him into a pit. This, the most terrifying and disillusioning experience he has had, turns out to be the best thing that ever happened to him. Hitherto he has had cleverness without the imagination to see how others might feel toward him; now, being really intelligent, he develops this imaginative insight and comes out of the pit determined to avoid his faults in the future. Gradually he attains honest human understanding; and thus, by passing through the apparent death of the pit, he achieves a character which later enables him to save his whole tribe from extinction. Again the forces of life and death are symbolically fused.

These illustrations show that Mann's typical method is to hold up apparent opposites against each other, to show how they often become merged, and to demonstrate that an interaction of the two has more value than the extreme of either alone. Creative art, democracy, vitality itself, cannot exist in a vacuum; such growths are firmly rooted in the soil of their opposites, conservatism, authority, and death. Good cannot exist without evil; it is both or neither. On this foundation, Mann now bases the central idea of his whole work, by expanding these contrasts into a single unified philosophy of history, which may be called the concept of the dualism of life or the balance of forces.

Briefly stated, this concept is as follows. In the perspective of history any single force, no matter how powerful, seldom accomplishes much alone. Most progress occurs only when two opposing forces first conflict, then interact and amalgamate to produce a new synthesis. In fact, every historical influence is subject to a law of diminishing returns;
the longer it exerts pressure in one direction, the weaker that pressure becomes and the greater the necessity that it should meet the stimulus of a new opposing influence. This law applies alike to physical, mental, and social energies. The fertility of a region gradually wanes during the summer until, though September may be as warm as June, the crops wither, the leaves turn brown, and the land must endure the destructive experience of winter before it is ready to produce again.

In nature, the clearest example of this dualism of powers is the balance between centrifugal and centripetal energies in the solar system, a balance which makes life possible. If centripetal force were unchecked, the planets would fall into the sun and be consumed; if centrifugal force existed alone, they would fly off into freezing interstellar space. As long as the two are balanced both are used profitably. In applying this to Mann’s idea, we find that the important question is, how did this balance originate? Though there is no certainty about it, according to many modern astronomers a likely explanation is that in the remote past a wandering star happened to approach somewhere near our sun, which for milleniums had existed in a condition of static potential energy, unchallenged centripetal force. All this energy had accomplished nothing until the coming of the alien intruder. Then the star’s gravitational pull almost destroyed the sun for good—but not quite. Instead, it disrupted the sun’s static condition, pulled off pieces of it, and turned them into whirling planets, thus creating conditions in which life could exist. This is exactly analogous to Mann’s idea. Life results from an apparently destructive conflict; what appeared fatal proves to be a useful stimulus.

It now becomes evident that Mann’s three typical contrasts, which we have examined, are alike in being facets of this one idea, each involving a struggle between an explosive outward-tending and a static inward-tending force. In the first one, the explosive energy is the individual genius of the
artist, which always disrupts the static patterns of conventional society as the star disrupted the sun. In Mann's view, society will progress most effectively when it contains a few, but not too many, explosive individuals to stir it to action. In the second contrast, the democratic idea of individual freedom is the outward-tending energy which breaks through the bonds of uniformity and stability that a totalitarian state tries to perpetuate. Finally and most significantly, the ultimate static repose is death, constantly encroaching upon and constantly defeated by the most explosive of forces, life.

Thus Mann universalizes the idea, implying throughout his choice of a life rooted in death, a good growing out of evil, rather than a passive absence of either. In distinction to both Keats and Shakespeare, Mann applies the idea directly to history. According to this idea history proceeds in a series of recurrent crises caused by the periodic conflict between static society and some new dynamic energy. It therefore falls into alternating eras of repose and violent agitation, of polished society and sudden upheaval. In a long discussion of this idea in the introduction to Joseph and His Brothers, Mann calls each of these cycles a "time-coulisse" or groove of history, and shows that they have been repeated as far back as our knowledge extends. Then he illustrates the point by projecting our present civilization back four thousand years and showing its similarity to that of ancient Egypt. After an original emphasis on the strangeness of this antiquity, he gradually inserts little bridges between it and modern life until their full significance is revealed toward the end of the volume Joseph in Egypt.

When Joseph arrived in the Nile valley, Egypt was an old and tolerant civilization, a melting-pot of the Near East, prosperous and soft, growing careless and relaxing its vigilance—in short, sinking into a pit just as Hans Castorp had done. This contented land did not suspect that it was about to be torn apart by a social upheaval produced partly by an
alien invasion and partly by an internal fifth-column who called the old order decadent and aroused the mob to overthrow it. The crisis is focussed in a religious conflict. The old god Atum-Re of the Delta, genial, tolerant, and universal, runs into competition from the new god Amun-Re of Thebes, an exclusive, harsh, nationalistic, and violent deity, preaching "an organic and militant unity." As the story proceeds, the terms used become weirdly familiar, and suddenly we find ourselves brought sharply back to the modern crisis of the nineteen-thirties. The new Amun politicians advocate force and torture for the good of the state; they gather bands of storm-troopers; they uphold racial superiority and deplore contamination of the pure blood of the Egyptian master race; they play on the feelings of the mob with catchwords. They almost kill Joseph and destroy Egypt. But Mann shows that if Joseph personally and Egypt as a society had not been forced to meet this challenge, then their easy self-satisfaction would have buried them in lethargy. It was the conflict which aroused their latent vigor; it was the existence of evil phenomena which kept them alive. The creative individual, the democratic ideal, the forces of life, were stimulated by the danger to become aware of their own failings and remedy them before it was too late.

Mann has not always made this imaginative choice as clearly as he does in the story of Joseph. No one has been more aware of the strength and attractiveness of the death-wish, or of the cruel uncertainty of the struggle that maintains life. Just as the orbits of many former stars may have intersected so closely that nothing but devastation has resulted, so in Buddenbrooks the forces of death overwhelm the family, and in The Magic Mountain Hans is so weakened by the struggle that his victory is equivocal. But Joseph passes through the pit and emerges triumphantly. Mann's recognition of the fact that this result sometimes does occur and that in no other way can life be preserved at all constitutes his
intuitive reconciliation of the problem of evil. It is the
more impressive to a reader because it is not a joyful or a
facile reconciliation. The problem is not solved. The in-
consistency of the divided universe is still a dark mystery.
But if occasionally an intruding star can produce a solar
system on which life can appear, and if an experience of
suffering can sometimes increase the vitality of the sufferer,
then the sanity of the universe is to that extent vindicated.

In the first chapter of this book it was said that an in-
troduction to the ideas of philosophy through the medium
of literature is a more concrete approach than the direct
study of philosophic writings. For vivid illustrations and for
the arousing of a reader’s interest the novel, the poem, and
the drama are invaluable. In this last chapter we have seen
a still more important contribution that literature can make.
Intuitive perception, when organized and controlled in a
work of art, is not hostile but complementary to pure logic,
and can create ideas which logic alone is incapable of ex-
pressing. Literature, then, has the power not only to il-
lustrate the concepts of philosophy, but to bring about a
mood of imaginative understanding which carries them alive
into the minds and emotions of its readers.