

Optimism and Romanticism

Author(s): Arthur O. Lovejoy

Source: *PMLA*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Dec., 1927), pp. 921-945

Published by: [Modern Language Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/457545>

Accessed: 23-03-2015 16:15 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Modern Language Association* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *PMLA*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## OPTIMISM AND ROMANTICISM

THE purpose of this paper is, first, to attempt to correct a still rather widely prevalent error concerning the logical import and the usual emotional temper of eighteenth-century optimism, and, second, to point out that the significance in the history of ideas of the multiplication and the popularity of theodicies in the first half of that century consisted less in the tendency of these arguments to diffuse optimistic views of the nature of reality than in their tendency to procure acceptance for certain new ideas of the nature of the good, which the logical exigencies of the optimistic argument involved—ideas pregnant with important consequences for both ethics and aesthetics, since they were to be among the most distinctive elements in what perhaps best deserves to be named “Romanticism.”

## I

The common thesis of eighteenth-century optimists was, as every schoolboy knows, the proposition that this is the best of possible worlds; and this fact, together with the connotation which the term “optimism” has come to assume in popular usage, has given rise to the belief that the adherents of this doctrine must have been exuberantly cheerful persons, fatuously blind to the realities of human experience and of human nature, or insensible to all the pain and frustration and conflict which are manifest through the entire range of sentient life. Yet there was in fact nothing in the optimist’s creed which logically required him either to blink or to belittle the facts which we ordinarily call evil. So far from asserting the unreality of evils, the philosophical optimist in the eighteenth century was chiefly occupied in demonstrating their necessity. To assert that this is the best of possible worlds implies nothing as to the absolute goodness of this world; it implies only that any other world which is metaphysically capable of existence would be worse. The reasoning of the optimist was directed less to showing how much of what men commonly reckon good there is in the words of reality than to showing how little of it there is in the world of possibility—in that eternal logical order which contains the Ideal of all things possible and compossible, which the mind of God was conceived to have contemplated “before the creation,” and

by the necessities of which, ineluctable even to Omnipotence, his creative power was restricted.

At bottom, indeed, optimism had much in common with that Manichean dualism, against Bayle's defense of which so many of the theodicies were directed. Optimism too, as Leibniz acknowledged, had its two antagonistic "principles." The rôle of the "evil principle" was simply assigned to the divine reason, which imposed singular impediments upon the benevolent intentions of the divine will. The very ills which Bayle had argued must be attributed to the interference of a species of extraneous Anti-God, for whose existence and hostility to the good no rational explanation could be given, were by the optimist attributed to a necessity inhering in the nature of things; and it was questionable whether this was not the less cheerful view of the two. For it was possible to hope that in the fullness of time the Devil might be put under foot, and believers in revealed religion were assured that he would be; but logical necessities are eternal, and the evils which arise from them must therefore be perpetual. Thus eighteenth-century optimism not only had affinities with the dualism to which it was supposed to be antithetic, but the arguments of its advocates at times sounded strangely like those of the pessimist—a type by no means unknown in the period.<sup>1</sup> The moral was different, but the view of the concrete facts of experience was sometimes very much the same; since it was the optimist's contention that evil—and a great deal of it—is involved in the general constitution of things, he found it to his purpose to dilate, on occasion, upon the magnitude of the sum of evil and upon the depth and breadth of its penetration into life. It is thus, for example, that Soame Jenyns, in one of the typical theodicies of the middle of the century, seeks to persuade us of the admirable rationality of the cosmic plan:

I am persuaded that there is something in the abstract nature of pain conducive to pleasure; that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal happiness. . . . Scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchased by the previous or consequential sufferings of themselves or others. Over what mountains of slain is every

<sup>1</sup> See, for an example, the writer's paper "Rousseau's Pessimist," *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXXVIII (1924), 449; and for an earlier one, Prior's *Solomon* (1718), a poetical elaboration of the thesis that "the pleasures of life do not compensate our miseries; age steals upon us unawares; and death, as the only cure of our ills, ought to be expected, not feared."

empire rolled up to the summit of prosperity and luxury, and what new scenes of desolation attend its fall. To what infinite toil of men, and other animals, is every flourishing city indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of life, and what vice and misery do those very equipments introduce. . . . The pleasures annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers.<sup>2</sup>

This gloomy rhetoric was perfectly consistent in principle with optimism, and it manifested at least one natural tendency of the champions of that doctrine; for the more numerous and monstrous the evils to be explained, the greater was the triumph when the author of a theodicy explained them.

The argument, indeed, in some of its more naïve expressions tends to beget in the reader a certain pity for an embarrassed Creator, infinitely well-meaning, but tragically hampered by “necessities in the nature of things” in his efforts to make a good world. What could be more pathetic than the position in which—as Soame Jenyns authoritatively informs us—Omnipotence found itself when contemplating the creation of mankind?

Our difficulties arise from our forgetting how many difficulties Omnipotence has to contend with: in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict innocence or be the cause of wickedness; it has no other option.<sup>3</sup>

In short the writings of the optimists afforded abundant ground for Voltaire’s exclamation:

Vous criez “Tout est bien” d’une voix lamentable!

Voltaire’s chief complaint of these philosophers in the *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster* was not, as has often been supposed, that they were too indecently cheerful, that their view of the reality of evil was superficial; his complaint was that they were too depressing, that they made the actual evils we experience appear worse by representing

<sup>2</sup> *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1757), 60–2. Jenyns for the most part merely puts into clear and concise form the arguments of King, Leibniz and Pope; but he differs from these in unequivocally and emphatically rejecting the freedomist solution of the problem of moral evil. His book had a considerable vogue, went into numerous editions, and was translated into French.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 104, where the curious reader may, if he will, find why this option was “necessary,” and how “Infinite Wisdom” made the best of it.

them as inevitable and inherent in the permanent structure of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

Non, ne présentez plus à mon coeur agité  
Ces immuables lois de la nécessité!

An evil unexplained seemed to Voltaire more endurable than the same evil explained, when the explanation consisted in showing that from all eternity the avoidance of just that evil had been, and through all eternity the avoidance of others like it would be, logically inconceivable. In this his own feeling, and his assumption about the psychology of the emotions in other men, was precisely opposite to that of Spinoza, who believed that everything becomes endurable when we once see clearly that it could never have been otherwise, that it is truly rooted in the eternal world of Ideas: *quatenus mens res omnes ut necessarias intelligit, eatenus minus ab affectibus patitur*.<sup>5</sup> Though most of the optimistic writers of the eighteenth century were less thorough-going or less frank in their cosmical determinism than Spinoza, such philosophic consolation as they offered was at bottom the same as his. It was an essentially intellectual consolation; the mood that it was usually designed to produce was that of reasoned acquiescence in the inevitable, based upon a conviction that its inevitableness was of the nature of *logical* necessity, and was due to no arbitrary caprice; or, at a higher pitch, a devout willingness to be damned—that is, to be as much damned as one was—for the better demonstration of the reasonableness of the scheme of things. Whether confronted with physical or moral evils, wrote Pope, “to reason well is to submit”; and again:

Know thy own point; this kind, this due degree,  
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.  
Submit!

It is, of course, true that the optimistic writers were eager to show how good comes out of evil; but the point which it was

<sup>4</sup> Voltaire, however, is arguing in the poem against two distinct and essentially opposed types of theodicy: the philosophical and necessitarian type, which endeavored to explain such a thing as the Lisbon earthquake as

l'effet des éternelles lois

Qui d'un Dieu libre et bon nécessitent le choix,

and the theological and indeterminist type, which saw in such catastrophes special interpositions of deity in punishment of men's free choice of moral evil. The reasonings aimed at these two opposite objectives Voltaire confusingly runs together.

<sup>5</sup> *Ethica*, V., Prop. 6.

indispensable for them to establish was that it could come in no other way. It is true, also, that they were wont, when they reached the height of their argument, to discourse with eloquence on the perfection of the Universal System as a whole; but that perfection in no way implied either the happiness or the excellence of the finite parts of the system. On the contrary, the fundamental and characteristic premise of the usual proof of optimism was the proposition that the perfection of the whole depends upon, indeed, consists in, the existence of every possible degree of imperfection in the parts. Voltaire, once more, summarized the argument not altogether unjustly when he wrote:

Vous composerez dans ce chaos fatal  
Des malheurs de chaque être un bonheur général.

The essence of the optimist's enterprise was to find the evidence of the "goodness" of the universe, not in the paucity but rather in the multiplicity of what to the unphilosophic mind appeared to be evils. And it was also from this central paradox of optimism that those ulterior implications followed which were to help to generate the "Romantic" view of life and of art.

## II

All this can best be shown by an analysis of the argument in its logical sequence, as it is set forth in the earliest and, perhaps, when its indirect influence is also considered, the most influential, of eighteenth-century theodicies—the *De origine mali* (1702) of William King, then Bishop of Derry, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin. The original Latin work does not appear to have had wide currency; but in 1731 an English version appeared,<sup>6</sup> with copious additions, partly extracts from King's posthumous papers, partly original notes "tending to vindicate the author's principles against the objections of Bayle, Leibnitz, the author of a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty, and others," by the translator, Edmund Law, subsequently bishop of Carlisle. The translation went through five editions during Law's lifetime;<sup>7</sup> and it seems to have been much read and discussed. Law was a figure of importance

<sup>6</sup> *An Essay on the Origin of Evil by Dr. William King, translated from the Latin with Notes and a Dissertation concerning the Principle and Criterion of Virtue and of the Passions; By Edmund Law, M. A., Fellow of Christ College in Cambridge.* I quote from the second edition, Lond., 1732, here referred to as "Essay."

<sup>7</sup> The dates are 1731, 1732, 1739, 1758, 1781.

in his day, being the spokesman of "the most latitudinarian position" in the Anglican theology of the time;<sup>8</sup> and his academic dignities as Master of Peterhouse and Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge in the 1750's and 60's doubtless increased the range of his influence. There can hardly be much doubt that it was largely from the original work of King that Pope derived, directly or through Bolingbroke, the conceptions which, re-arranged with curious incoherency, served for his vindication of optimism in the First Epistle of the *Essay on Man*.<sup>9</sup>

It can by no means be said that King begins his reflection on the subject by putting on rose-tinted spectacles. He recognizes from the outset all the facts which seem most incompatible with an optimistic view: the "perpetual war between the elements, between animals, between men"; "the errors, miseries and vices" which are "the constant companions of human life from its infancy"; the

<sup>8</sup> Stephen, *English Thought*, p. 406.

<sup>9</sup> Bolingbroke in the *Fragments* quotes King frequently and with respect; he recognizes in him the one theologian who "saw plainly" the truth of the thesis which Bolingbroke devotes scores of pages to developing and defending, *viz.*, that man is not the final cause of the creation; and his own argument for optimism, though less methodically stated, follows in great part the same line as King's (see references below). I can see no reason for doubting that in the *Fragments* as printed we have, as Bolingbroke asserted, in a somewhat expanded form "the notes which were communicated to Mr. Pope in scraps, as they were written," and utilized by the latter in writing the *Essay on Man*; the numerous and exact verbal parallels between passages in the *Fragments* and the *Essay* are not susceptible of any other probable explanation. (See Bolingbroke's *Works*, 1809 ed., VII, 278 and VIII, 356). Law wrote in the preface to the 1781 edition of the *Essay on the Origin of Evil*: "I had the satisfaction of seeing that those very principles which had been maintained by Archbishop King were adopted by Mr. Pope in the *Essay on Man*." When this was challenged by a brother-bishop, Pope's truculent theological champion Warburton, Law replied by referring to the testimony of Lord Bathurst, "who saw the very same system in Lord Bolingbroke's own hand, lying before Mr. Pope while he composed his *Essay*;" and added: "The point may also be cleared effectually whenever any reader shall think it worth his while to compare the two pieces together, and observe how exactly they tally with one another" (*op. cit.*, p. xvii). Such a comparison seems to me to give reason to believe that Pope made use of King's work directly, as well as of Bolingbroke's adaptation of a part of it. Since it was in 1730 that Pope and Bolingbroke were "deep in metaphysics," and since by 1731 the first three Epistles seem to have been completed (*cf.* Courthope, V, 242), it must have been from the Latin original, not Law's translation, that the poet and his philosophic mentor drew. Thus essentially the same theodicy appeared almost simultaneously in Law's English prose rendering and in Pope's verse. On the relation of King's work to Haller's *Ueber den Ursprung des Uebels* (1734) *cf.* L. M. Price in *PMLA*, XLI (1926), 945-8.

prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. There are "troops of miseries marching through human life." And King is innocent of the amazing superficiality of Milton's theodicy; while he, too, assumes the freedom of the will, he sees clearly that this assumption can touch only a fraction of the problem. Not all evils are "external, or acquired by our choice"; many of them "proceed from the constitution of Nature itself."<sup>10</sup> The dualistic doctrine of Bayle, while it, too, has the advantage of "acquitting God of all manner of blame," is philosophically an "absurd hypothesis." King, in short, is to attribute evil, not—at least not primarily nor chiefly—either to the mysterious perversity of man's will or to the machinations of the Devil; he is to show its *necessity* from a consideration of the nature of deity itself. His undertaking is nothing less than that of facing all the evils of existence and showing them to be "not only consistent with infinite wisdom, goodness and power, but necessarily resulting from them."<sup>11</sup>

The traditional division of evils into three classes—evils of limitation or imperfection, "natural" evils, and moral evils—provides the general scheme of the argument, which is, in brief, that there could not conceivably have been any creation at all without the first sort of evil; and that all of the second sort, at least, follow with strict logical necessity from the first. Even Omnipotence could not create its own double; if any beings other than God were to exist they must in the nature of the case be differentiated from him through the "evil of defect"—and, as is assumed, be differentiated from one another by the diversity of their defects. Evil, in short, is primarily privation; and privation is involved in the very concept of all beings except one. This Law puts in the terms of Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy in his summary of King's "scheme":

All creatures are necessarily imperfect, and at an infinite distance from the perfection of the Deity, and if a negative principle were admitted, such as the Privation of the Peripatetics, it might be said that every created being consists of existence and non-existence; for it is nothing in respect both of those perfections which it wants, and of those which others have. And this . . . mixture of non-entity in the constitution of created beings is the necessary principle of all natural evils, and of a possibility of moral ones.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Essay*, I, 103.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–113.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX. This argument remained as the usual starting point of a numerous series of subsequent theodicies, some of which have a place in literature: *e. g.*,

In other words, in King's own phrase, "a creature is descended from God, a most perfect Father; but from Nothing as its Mother, which is Imperfection." And the virtually dualistic character of this conception is shown by the fact that the inferior parent, in spite of the purely negative rôle which appeared to be implied by her name, was conceived to be responsible for many seemingly highly positive peculiarities of the offspring. This, however, was felt to be an unobjectionable dualism, partly because the second or evil principle was called "Nothing," and partly because its existence as a factor in the world, and the effects of it, could be regarded as logically necessary and not as a mysterious accident.

But the significant issue did not lie in this simple, almost tautological piece of reasoning. Doubtless, if the Absolute Being was not to remain forever in the solitude of his own perfection, the prime evil of limitation or imperfection must characterize whatever other beings he brought forth. But that evil was not thereby justified unless it were shown, or assumed, that the creation of such other, necessarily defective beings is itself a good. This crucial assumption King unhesitatingly makes, as well as a further assumption which seems far from self-evident. Even if it were granted that it is good that *some* beings other than God, some finite and imperfect natures, should exist, would it not (some might ask) have been less irrational that only the highest grade of imperfection should be generated—as had, indeed, been originally the case, according to an account of the creation supported by a considerable weight of authority in the theological tradition of Christianity, and comparatively recently revived by Milton.<sup>13</sup> If God could be supposed to need company—which it seemed philosophically a paradox and was theologically a heresy to admit—should it not at least have been good company, a *civitas dei* composed wholly of pure spirits? King saw no way of achieving a satisfactory theodicy unless this latter question were answered (again with the support of many ancient and medieval writers) in the negative. It was requisite to show that not only imperfection in general, but every one of the observable concrete imperfections of the actual world, ought to have been

---

Victor Hugo still thought it needful to devote a number of lines to the exposition of it in *Les Contemplations* ("Ce que dit la Bouche d'Ombre," 350 ff.).

<sup>13</sup> See the patristic authorities cited by Sumner in his tr. of Milton's *Christian Doctrine*, 187, n. 4. The view adopted by Milton, however, was of dubious orthodoxy. It had been rejected by Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 61, a. 3; and by Dante, *Paradiso* XXIX, 37.

created; and this could not be shown unless it were laid down as a premise that it is inherently and absolutely good that *every* kind of thing (however far down in the scale of possibles) should actually be, so far as its existence is logically conceivable, *i.e.*, involves no contradiction.

This proposition then—expressed in theological terminology—was the essential thesis in the argument for optimism propounded by King and Law. There is inherent in the divine essence as an element in God's perfection a special attribute of "goodness," which makes it necessary that all other and less excellent essences down to the very lowest—so far as they are severally and jointly possible—shall have actual existence after their kind.

God might, indeed, have refrained from creating, and continued alone, self-sufficient and perfect to all eternity; but his infinite Goodness would by no means allow it; this obliged him to produce external things; which things, since they could not possibly be perfect, the Divine Goodness preferred imperfect ones to none at all. Imperfection, then, arose from the infinity of Divine Goodness.<sup>14</sup>

And, thus committed by his own nature to the impartation of actual being to *some* imperfect essences, God could not refuse the boon of existence to any:

If you say, God might have omitted the more imperfect beings, I grant it, and if that had been best, he would undoubtedly have done it. But it is the part of infinite Goodness to choose the very best; from thence it proceeds, therefore, that the more imperfect beings have existence; for it was agreeable to that, not to omit the very least good that could be produced. Finite goodness might possibly have been exhausted in creating the greater beings, but infinite extends to all. . . . There must then be many, perhaps infinite, degrees of perfection in the divine works. . . . It was better not to give some so great a degree of happiness as their natures might receive, than that a whole species of being should be wanting to the world.<sup>15</sup>

Not only must all possible *species* enjoy existence, but, adds King's editor, "from the observation that there is no manner of

<sup>14</sup> King, *op. cit.*, I, 116 f. For the same conception of the Scale of Being and its necessary completeness in a well-ordered universe, *cf.* Bolingbroke, *Fragments* (*Works*, 1809, VIII, 173, 183, 186, 192, 218 f., 232, 363, 364–5).

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, 137f, 129–131f, 156. Both King and Law fell into curious waverings, and in the end into self-contradiction, when the question was raised whether the number of degrees in the scale of being is actually infinite. Into this it is unnecessary to enter here.

chasm or void, no link deficient in this great Chain of Being, and the reason of it, it will appear extremely probable also that every distinct order, every class or species, is as full as the nature of it would permit, or [Law devoutly but, upon his own principles, tautologically adds] as God saw proper.”

The foundation, then, of the argument for optimism was a very old conception, than which few, I think, have affected Western thought more profoundly or at more diverse points—but which has been so little recognized or connectedly studied by historians that it has received no appropriate name. I shall call it the principle of plentitude. It is the assumption that a good or rational universe must be a *plenum formarum*, that every Platonic Idea has—subject only to the law of contradiction, to the limitations of logical impossibility and impossibility—a valid claim to existence, that if a single such claim remained avoidably unrealized the world would be *eo ipso* shown to be, not merely incomplete, but irrational and therefore evil, and that the entire series of other essences whose necessary actualization is thus implied by the assumption of the perfection of the divine essence must constitute a minutely graded hierarchy, a *continuum* of forms from highest to lowest, of which any two adjacent members differ only infinitesimally. The conception takes its start in a famous passage of the *Timæus*;<sup>16</sup> it is the essential principle of the dialectic of Neoplatonic emanationism;<sup>17</sup> it had been used by Abelard in the twelfth century as the basis at once for a proof of cosmical determinism similar to Spinoza's, and of optimism similar to that of King and his eighteenth-century successors;<sup>18</sup> it had played a great part in the system of Thomas Aquinas, though accompanied by ingenious distinctions and elusive modifications designed to rid it of its heterodox consequences;<sup>19</sup> and in the seventeenth century it had been a favorite theme of some of the English Platonists. On the other hand it, or the rationalistic premises on which it rested, had been rejected, as inconsistent with the freedom of the divine will, by a slightly less long line of philosophers and theologians, notably by Peter Lombard in the famous compend which was for centuries the chief textbook of students of theology,<sup>20</sup> and by Duns Scotus and his

<sup>16</sup> *Timæus*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Cf., e. g., Plotinus, Enn. V, 4, 1; IV, 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Introd. ad Theologiam*, III; in *Migne, Patrol. Lat.*, CLXXVIII, cols. 1093-1101.

<sup>19</sup> *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 75; II, 45; II, 68; II, 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Liber Sent.*, I, 442.

followers; and it had been not only conspicuously absent from, but plainly contradicted by, the cosmogony and theodicy of Milton, who in this matter is a continuer rather of the Scotist than the Thomist tradition. Since the principle of plenitude had received expression from hundreds of writers before King, its utilization by later optimists is no evidence that they derived it from him. Nevertheless, for reasons already indicated, the probability remains that it was because of the reiteration and elaboration of the principle in the *De origine mali* that Pope gave the fundamental place, in his own argument for the thesis that whatever is, is right, to the premise that, in the "best of systems possible,"

All must full or not coherent be,  
And all that rises, rise in due degree.

For the purposes of a theodicy, the principle of plenitude served most directly and obviously as an "explanation" of the "evil of defect." The limitations of each species of creature, which define its place in the scale, are indispensable to that infinite differentiation of things in which the "fullness" of the universe consists, and are therefore necessary to the realization of the greatest of goods. Man, therefore, cannot rationally complain because he lacks many endowments and means of enjoyment which might conceivably have been granted him. In Law's words:

From the supposition of a Scale of Being, gradually descending from perfection to nonentity, and complete in every intermediate rank and degree, we shall soon see the absurdity of such questions as these, Why was not man made more perfect? Why are not his faculties equal to those of angels? Since this is only asking why he was not placed in a different class of beings, when at the same time all other classes are supposed to be full.<sup>21</sup>

It was, in short, "necessary that the creature should fill the station wherein it was, or none at all." If he were anywhere else, he would not be the same entity; and if he did not exist at all, there would be a gap in the series, and the perfection of the creation would thereby be destroyed. Undeniably these distinguishing deficiencies "bring many inconveniences on the persons whose lot it is to fill that part of the universe which requires a creature of such an imperfect nature." For example, a man has no wings, a perfection granted to birds.

<sup>21</sup> *Essay I*, 131. The argument may already be found in Plotinus, *Enn.* III, 2, 11.

'Tis plain that in his present circumstances he cannot have them, and that the use of them would be very mischievous to society; and yet the want of them necessarily exposes us to many inconveniences. . . . A thousand instances may be given where the evil of imperfection necessarily subjects us to disappointment of appetite, and several other natural evils, which yet are all necessary for the common good.<sup>22</sup>

To this particular form of purely logical consolation Pope recurs repeatedly, with fairly evident dependence upon King. In a "full" system "there must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man"; and the occupant of that rank cannot rationally desire the distinctive attributes of those below or those above him in the scale.<sup>23</sup>

Why has not man a microscopic eye?  
For this plain reason, man is not a fly.

And

On superior powers  
Were we to press, inferior might on ours;  
Or in the full creation leave a void,  
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed.<sup>24</sup>

But if the principle of plenitude had been applicable only for the explanation of the "metaphysical" evil of limitation or particularity, it would not have carried the optimist far towards his goal. Most of the things we call evil hardly appear to be adequately describable as mere deficiencies. Even a Platonistic philosopher with a toothache will probably find it difficult to persuade himself that his pain is a wholly negative thing, a metaphysical vacuum consisting merely in the absence of some conceivable positive good. King was therefore forced to use some ingenuity—or rather, to utilize the ingenuity of his many precursors—in order to exhibit the numerous train of "natural" evils as equally necessary implications of the same fundamental principle. He seeks to do this, in the first place, on the ground that in a really "full" universe there must be opposition. Creatures necessarily crowd upon, restrict, and therefore come into conflict with, one another. This necessity appears in its primary form in the motion of matter. It was theoretically possible for God to have so disposed matter that it would move "uniformly and all together, either in a direct

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> For the same argument in Bolingbroke, see *Fragments (Works, 1809 ed., VIII, 233, 287, 363, 364-5)*.

<sup>24</sup> *Essay on Man*, Ep. I, 48, 193-4, 241-4.

line or in a circle and the contrariety of motions by that means be prevented." But a material system so simple and harmonious must also, we are assured, have been barren and useless.

Such a motion therefore was to be excited in it as would separate it into parts, make it fluid, and render it an habitation for animals. But that could not be without contrariety of motion, as any one that thinks of it at all will perceive. And if this be once admitted in matter, there necessarily follows a division and disparity of parts, clashing and opposition, comminution, concretion and repulsion, and all those evils which we behold in generation and corruption. . . . The mutual clashing of these concretions could therefore not be avoided, and as they strike upon one another a concussion of the parts and a separation from each other would be necessarily produced, . . . [*i.e.*] corruption.<sup>25</sup>

And since man's place in the Scale of Being is that of a creature partly material, partly spiritual, he is necessarily involved in, and unhappily affected by, these collisions of matter. The pre-occupation of the optimists with the notion of the "fullness" of the organic world sometimes led them (by a natural confusion of ideas) to draw an almost Darwinian or Malthusian picture of a Nature over-crowded with aspirants for life and consequently given over to a ubiquitous struggle for existence. King assures us that there is something like a housing-problem even in Heaven.

If you ask why God does not immediately transplant men into heaven, since 'tis plain they are capable of that happier state; or why he confines them so long . . . on the earth as in a darksome prison, . . . I answer, Because the Heavens are already furnished with inhabitants, and cannot with convenience admit of new ones, till some of the present possessors depart to a better state, or make room some other way for these to change their condition.<sup>26</sup>

Into the further naïve reasonings by which King seeks to deduce the genesis of "pain, uneasiness and dread of death," and indirectly of the other emotions by which man is tormented, we need not enter. It suffices to quote the concise genealogy of woes in which he sums up his reasons for holding this to be the best of possible worlds:

Behold how evils spring from and multiply upon each other, while infinite Goodness still urges the Deity to do the very best. This moved

<sup>25</sup> *Essay*, I, 147-8; cf. *Essay on Man*, I: 169:

But all subsists by elemental Strife,  
And passions are the elements of life.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 134.

him to give existence to creatures, which cannot exist without imperfections and inequality. This excited him to create matter, and to put it in motion, which is necessarily attended with separation and dissolution, generation and corruption. This persuaded him to couple souls with bodies, and to give them mutual affections, whence proceeded pain and sorrow, hatred and fear, with the rest of the passions. Yet all of them are necessary.<sup>27</sup>

Such an argument for optimism closely resembles, and might easily be substituted for, some of the formulas in which primitive Buddhism summed up the creed of pessimism.

The author of the most popular English theodicy of the mid-nineteenth century found, as everyone remembers, peculiar difficulty in the spectacle of "Nature red in tooth and claw with ravin"—in the universal conflict, the daily and hourly cruelties and little, dumb tragedies, which are hidden behind the surface-beauty of every field and wood. But to the typical eighteenth-century writer of a theodicy, even these aspects of Nature gave little trouble. He was no more blind to them than Tennyson; but his universal solvent, the principle of plenitude, served him here as elsewhere. Doubtless, King granted, God could have made a world free from these horrors, simply by refraining from creating carnivorous and predacious animals. But this, again, would have meant a world less full of life.

A being that has life is (*caeteris paribus*) preferable to one that has not; God, therefore, animated that machine which furnishes out provision for the more perfect animals; which was both graciously and providently done: for by this means he gained so much life to the world as there is in those animals which are food for others; for by this means they themselves enjoy some kind of life, and are of service also to the rest. . . . Matter, which is fit for the nourishment of man, is also capable of life; if therefore God had denied it life, he had omitted a degree of good which might have been produced without any impediment to his principal design, which does not seem very agreeable to infinite goodness. 'Tis better, therefore, that it should be endowed with life for a time, though 'tis to be devoured afterwards, than to continue totally stupid and unactive. . . . Let us not be surprised, then, at the universal war as it were among animals, . . . or that the strong devour the weaker.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 176. The argument for the necessity of natural evils based upon the principle of plenitude is supplemented by that drawn from the indispensability of uniform general laws; *e. g.* I, 150–3, 196–7; *cf. Essay on Man*, I, 145 ff. This part of King's reasoning does not fall within the theme of the present paper.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 184–5.

The application of this to the special case of domesticated animals reared for slaughter, which furnished Pope with the theme for some characteristic and detestable lines, was also made by King. Man

Feasts the animal he dooms his feast,  
And, till he ends the being, makes it blest.

Undeniably the carnivora were among the antecedently possible kinds of creatures; and if the excellence of Nature or its Author consists quite simply in having as many kinds as possible, nothing more need be said in justification of the existence of such animals; in the words of another contemporary divine, quoted with admiration by Law, "it is evident that by this means there is room for more whole species of creatures than there otherwise would be, and that the variety of the creation is thereby very much enlarged and the goodness of its Author displayed."<sup>29</sup> The tendency of the theodicies to promote belief in the blessedness of sheer multitude, the all-importance of having an abundance of "different natures" in the world, at whatever cost, could hardly be better illustrated.

But even if the criterion of the goodness of the universe were assumed to consist, not solely in the diversity of creatures, but in the quantity of the *joie de vivre* it contains, the creation of beasts of prey could still, according to a further argument of King's, be justified. "Animals are of such a nature as to delight in action, or in the exercise of their faculties, nor can we have any other notion of happiness even in God himself." But among the pleasurable activities conceivable before the creation were those which might attach to the procuring of food by predatory creatures. Why, then, should these intense and positive pleasures be lacking, merely that feebler kinds might be spared the transitory pains of being pursued and eaten? Clearly, since "the infinite Power of God was able to produce animals of such capacities," his "infinite Goodness" may "be conceived to have almost compelled him not to refuse or envy (them) the benefit of life." "If you insist," says the archbishop genially to a supposititious critic, "that a lion might have been made without teeth or claws, a viper without venom; I grant it, as a knife without an edge; but then they would

<sup>29</sup> J. Clarke, *Discourse concerning Natural Evil*, 1719; the same argument in Plotinus, *Enn.* III, 211. Goldsmith, among others, was still repeating it later in the eighteenth century; v. his *Essays* (1767), 132.

have been of quite another species [*i.e.*, there would have been a missing link in the Chain of Being], and have had neither the nature, nor use, nor genius, which they now enjoy." As for the lion's victim, if it were a rational animal it doubtless would, or at all events should, rejoice as does its Maker in the thought of the agreeable exercise which it is affording the "genius" of the lion. If the victim be not endowed with reason, or be too mean-spirited to take a large philosophical view of the matter, the consoling insight into the higher meaning of its sufferings is still, through the happy ordering of things, left to be enjoyed vicariously by optimistic archbishops.<sup>30</sup>

Plainly this amiable and devout ecclesiastic had, in the course of his endeavor to justify God's ways to men, been driven not only to a conception of God but also to a conception of ultimate values which came somewhat strangely from a Christian teacher. Though King would, of course, have said that his God was a God of love, the term must necessarily have had for him an unusual sense. The God of the *De origine mali* loved abundance and variety of life more than he loved peace and concord among his creatures and more than he desired their exemption from pain. He loved lions, in short, as well as lambs; and loving lions, he wished them to behave in accordance with the "nature," or Platonic Idea, of a lion, which implies devouring lambs and not lying down with them. And in these preferences the "goodness" of God was assumed to be most clearly manifested—"goodness" thus coming to mean a delight in fullness and diversity of finite being, rather than in harmony and happiness. King and his editor seem only occasionally and confusedly aware how deeply their argument has involved them in such a radical transvaluation of values; they

<sup>30</sup> It is only fair to add that King is equally ready to view as "necessary," and consequently to approve and justify, specific evils less remote from archiepiscopal experience, such as "gout, one of the most tormenting diseases that attend us"—by which, in fact, this resolute optimist was cruelly harassed for nearly half a century, and from an attack of which, according to his biographer, he died. (See Sir C. S. King's volume, 1906, p. 14 and *passim*). Gout, the archbishop observes, in a sportsmanlike if not wholly edifying vein, has compensations which, on the whole, outweigh its pains: "Who would not rather endure it than lose the pleasure of feeling? Most men are sensible that eating certain meats, and indulging ourselves in the use of several drinks, will bring it; and yet we see this doth not deter us from them, and we think it more tolerable to endure the gout, than lose the pleasure that plentiful eating and drinking yields us." (I., 177). Why it was "necessary" *a priori* that these pleasures should be purchasable only at that price remains, in the end, somewhat obscure.

waver between this and the more conventional conception of "divine goodness," and for the most part touch but lightly upon the more paradoxical implications of their premises. Yet they at times betray some uneasy feeling of the incongruity between these premises and certain traditional elements of Christian belief. It was, for example, a part of that belief that in the earthly paradise before the Fall, and also in the celestial paradise which awaits the elect, most of the evils which these theologians were zealously proving to be "necessary," because required by the "divine goodness," were in fact absent. It seemed, therefore, difficult to avoid the awkward dilemma that either the paradisaical state is not good, or else a good "system" does not, after all, require quite so much evil and so many degrees of imperfection as the authors of the theodicies conceived. King meets this difficulty but lamely; he is, in fact, driven to suggest that the felicity of our first parents in Eden has probably been somewhat exaggerated: "it doth not appear that Adam in Paradise was altogether without pain or passion," but rather "that he was only secured from such pains as might cause his death, and that for a time, till removed to a better place."<sup>31</sup>

The outcome of King's reasoning (so far as it was consistently carried through) is not, of course, surprising. He who attempts a theodicy without first shutting his eyes to a large range of the facts of experience, must necessarily take for the object of his piety the God of Things as They Are; and since things as they are include the whole countless troop of natural ills, it became necessary so to transform the conception of the good as to make it possible to argue that these ills are—not, indeed, goods, considered by themselves—but implicates of some supreme good, in the realization of which the essential nature of deity is most truly manifested. The principle of plenitude, taken as a species of value-theory, was a natural, if not the necessary, result of this enforced revision of the notion of good. Certainly that which the Author of Nature as it is chiefly values could not, on empirical grounds, be supposed to be identical with those things which men have commonly set their hearts upon and have pictured to themselves in their dreams of paradise. Stated in its most general terms, the paradox underlying all these singular implications of the optimist's reasoning is the assumption which is of the essence of

<sup>31</sup> *Essay*, I, 176; cf. also 148–9.

the principle of plenitude itself—that *the desirability of a thing's existence bears no relation to its excellence.*

King's further reflections upon the problem of evil do not concern us here, since the conception of the Chain of Being does not much figure in them. It might, indeed, and with more consistency, have done so. For the sort of evil not dealt with by King upon the principles already indicated, namely, moral evil, might naturally have been regarded as a special case of the "evil of defect." A creature having the specific degree of blindness and weakness appropriate to man's place in the scale, and at the same time subject to the passions which King had represented as necessarily inseparable from our psychophysical constitution, could hardly fail, it would seem, to make frequent "wrong elections." So much, indeed, King is constrained to admit; there are many errors of conduct which are due to our ignorance and necessary imperfection, and these are to be classed among the "natural evils" and explained in the same manner as others of that class. But there remains a residuum of "moral evil" not so explicable, but due to a "depraved will." On this theme King for the most part repeats the familiar arguments. Bolingbroke did not follow the archbishop in this, but derived the necessity of moral evil directly from the principle of plenitude. If men had been so constituted as to follow always the ethical "law of nature, . . . the moral state of mankind would have been paradisaical, but it would not have been human. We should not have been the creatures we were designed to be, and a gap would have been left in the order of created intelligences."<sup>32</sup> In this application of the principle, the antinomian implications of which are sufficiently obvious, Bolingbroke had been anticipated by so saintly a philosopher as Spinoza:

To those who ask, Why has not God created all men such as to be directed solely by the guidance of reason, I reply only that it is because he had no lack of material wherewith to create all things, from the very highest to the very lowest grade of perfection, or, more properly speaking, because the laws of his nature were so ample as to suffice for the production of everything that can be conceived by an infinite intellect.<sup>33</sup>

This was carrying a step farther the argument which Pope was to versify: since the best of systems must be as "full" as possible,

<sup>32</sup> *Fragments or Minutes of Essays*, Sec. XVI.

<sup>33</sup> *Ethics*, I, *ad. fin.*

Then in the scale of reasoning life, 'tis plain,  
There must be somewhere such a rank as—

not man only, but also, among men, the fool and the evil-doer.

### III

The theodicy of Leibniz was in most essentials the same as that of his English precursor;<sup>34</sup> and in summarizing with approval the main argument of the archbishop's *bel ouvrage, plein de savoir et d'élégance*, Leibniz significantly accentuated the theological paradox contained in it:

Why, someone asks, did not God refrain from creating things altogether. The author well replies that the abundance of God's goodness is the reason. He wished to communicate himself, even at the expense of that delicacy which our imaginations ascribe to him, when we assume that imperfections shock him. Thus he preferred that the imperfect should exist, rather than nothing.<sup>35</sup>

This emphasis upon the implication that the Creator of the actual world cannot be supposed to be a "delicate" or squeamish God, caring only for perfection—and that, in fact, he would, if more nicely selective in his act of creation, have thereby shown himself the less divine—illustrates clearly the tendency of the optimistic argument to generate a new conception of that in which the goodness of things in general consists. And in developing the theory of value thus implicit in optimism, the German philosopher is franker, more ardent, and more cheerful, than the Anglican theologian. Some analogies in human life to the standards of valuation which the optimists had applied in explaining the supposed purpose of the deity in the creation are not obscurely suggested by Leibniz.

Wisdom requires variety (*la sagesse doit varier*). To multiply exclusively the same thing, however noble it be, would be a superfluity; it would be

<sup>34</sup> There is no question of any influence of King upon Leibniz or of Leibniz upon King. Though the *Théodicée* was not published until 1710, eight years after the *De origine mali*, the greater part of it was written between 1697 and the beginning of 1705; and the ideas it contains had long been familiar to Leibniz. Cf. Gerhard's preface to Leibniz's *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. VI, 3-10.

<sup>35</sup> "Remarques sur le livre sur l'origine du mal publié depuis peu en Angleterre," appended to the *Théodicée*; *Philos. Schriften*, VI, 400, ff. Leibniz observes that he is in agreement with King "only in respect to half of the subject;" the disagreement relates chiefly to King's chapter on liberty and necessity, which (quite inconsistently with the implications of his argument for optimism) asserts that God exercised a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* in creating the world.

a kind of poverty. To have a thousand well-bound copies of Vergil in your library; to sing only airs from the opera of Cadmus and Hermione; to break all your porcelain in order to have only golden cups; to have all your buttons made of diamonds; to eat only partridges and to drink only the wine of Hungary or of Shiraz—could any one call this reasonable?<sup>36</sup>

Something very similar to this had, in point of fact, been regarded as the essence of reasonableness both by neo-classical æsthetic theorists and by a multitude of influential moralists. It would scarcely have seemed evident to the former that two copies of Vergil are of less value than one copy *plus* a copy of the worst epic ever written—still less that a reading of the first followed by a reading of the second is preferable to two readings of Vergil. And the apparent object of the endeavor of most ethical teaching had been to produce a close approach to uniformity in human character and behavior, and in men's political and social institutions. The desire for variety—or for change, the temporal form of it—had rather commonly been conceived to be a non-rational, indeed a pathological, idiosyncrasy of human creatures. But Leibniz not only gave it a sort of cosmic dignity by attributing it to God himself, but also represented it as the very summit of rationality.

The ethically significant consequence which is most plainly drawn from this by Leibniz is that neither what is commonly called moral goodness, nor pleasure, is the most important thing in the world. Both hedonism, in short, and an abstract moralism (such, for example, as Kant and Fichte were afterwards to express) were equally contrary to the value-theory implicit in the principle of plenitude. Virtue and happiness both, of course, have their place in the scale of values; but if it were the highest place, it is inconceivable that God would have made the kind of a world he has made.

The moral or physical good or evil of rational creatures does not infinitely transcend the good or evil which is purely metaphysical, that is to say, the good which consists in the perfection of the other creatures. . . . No substance is either absolutely precious or absolutely contemptible in the sight of God. It is certain that God attaches more importance to a man than to a lion, but I do not know that we can be sure that he prefers one man to the entire species of lions.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Theodicæe*, § 124.

<sup>37</sup> *Theodicæe*, § 118.

To this thesis Leibniz reverts again and again throughout the *Theodicy*:

(It is) a false maxim that the happiness of rational creatures is the sole purpose of God. If that had been so, there would, perhaps, have been neither sin nor unhappiness, not even as concomitants. God would have chosen a set of possibles from which all evils were excluded. But he would in that case have fallen short of what is due to the universe, that is, what is due to himself. . . . It is true that one can imagine possible worlds without sin and without suffering, just as one can invent romances about Utopias or the Sévarambes; but these worlds would be much inferior to ours. I cannot show this in detail; you must infer it, as I do, *ab effectu*, since this world, as it is, is the world God chose. . . . Virtue is the noblest quality of created things, but it is not the only good quality of creatures. There is an infinite number of others that attract the inclination of God; it is from all these inclinations together that the greatest possible sum of good results; and there would be less good than there is if there were nothing but virtue, if only rational creatures existed. . . . Midas was less rich when he possessed only gold.<sup>38</sup>

To this is added the trite æsthetic argument for the indispensability of contrast in the production of beauty in a work of art, and, indeed, in the mere physical pleasure of the gustatory sense:

Sweet things become insipid if we eat nothing else; sharp, tart and even bitter things must be combined with them so as to stimulate the taste. He who has not tasted bitter things does not deserve sweet, and, indeed, will not appreciate them.

Thus the argument for optimism represented the Cosmic Artist as cramming his canvas with diversified detail to the last infinitesimal fraction of an inch; as caring far more for fullness and variety of content than for simplicity and perfection of form; and as seeking this richness of coloring and abundance of contrast even at the cost of disharmony, irregularity, and what to us appears confusion. For there is much truth, says Leibniz, in "the fine principle of St. Bernard: *ordinatissimum est, minus interdum ordinate fieri aliquid.*"

#### IV

The word "Romanticism," I have suggested in an earlier paper, ought to be used in the plural or with the indefinite article; there is a formidably large collection of distinct, seemingly unrelated, and even opposed, ideas or tendencies to which the name has been

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, §§120, 10, 124; cf also 213.

applied by different writers, and since none has taken the precaution of obtaining copyright for the term, it can hardly be said that one of the current uses is more authorized than another.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, if one were to select from among these meanings that one which would do most to clarify the history of ideas, the criteria to be applied are not difficult to formulate. It is usually agreed that "Romanticism" should designate a thing which, if it did not originate, at all events became far more explicit and potent, in the later eighteenth century, and was essentially anti-thetic to the tendencies of thought and taste dominant in the earlier part of that century and in the preceding one. "Romanticism" *par excellence*, then, should be that change in ruling presuppositions, occurring in the period in question, which is at once the most profound, the most completely and significantly opposed to the preconceptions alike of the ruling philosophy of the Enlightenment and of the neo-classical æsthetics, the most fruitful of revolutionary consequences, and from which the greatest number of other "Romanticisms" can be seen to derive. If the same innovation can be shown to have been fundamental in the program of those German writers who first introduced the term "romantic" into the vocabulary of philosophy and literary criticism, it would be still better entitled to be considered the prime Romanticism.

There is one manifest change in fundamental conceptions which meets all these criteria. For two centuries the thought of the Western world and, above all, the efforts made during those centuries for improvement and correction in beliefs, in institutions, and in art, had been, in the main, dominated by the assumption that, in each phase of human activity, excellence consists in conforming as nearly as possible to a standard conceived as universal, static uncomplicated, uniform for every rational being. Rationality and uniformity were, indeed, commonly assumed to be inseparable notions, and there was a marked tendency to define the rational simply as that which is found to be actually universal in the human mind. "Nature" was the word oftenest used to designate such a standard of excellence; and the amazing proposition endlessly reiterated by seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers was that nature "is everywhere the same." The norm, then, whether of truth or of beauty, was simple and invariant. In religion the champions of deism, the religion of nature,

<sup>39</sup> On the ambiguities of the term, *cf.* the writer's "The Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA*, XXXIX (1924), 299 ff.

sought to bring men back to the simple creed which could be supposed (in Leslie Stephen's phrase) to be literally catholic, *i.e.*, to have been understood and accepted *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*. Ethics was summed up in the law of nature, of which universality was the distinguishing mark:

La morale uniforme en tout temps, en tout lieu.

Political philosophy, in so far as it rested upon the notion of natural rights, was concerned only with that which is generic in man; and it tended on the whole, though not without important exceptions, to set up a uniform scheme of government as the ideal for all peoples. In the æsthetics of literature the high neo-classical dogma demanded that the subject-matter and emotional content of a drama or epic should be limited to that which is universal in human experience and capable of appealing equally to all men in all times and all lands. It was their supposed greater universality, both in content and in appeal, which constituted the essence of the superiority attributed to the classical models. In every domain, in short, the program of improvement or reform was one of simplification, standardization, the avoidance of the particular, the elimination of local variations and individual diversities supposed to have arisen through some strange and unhappy aberration from the uniformity of the "natural" order.<sup>40</sup>

There has, in the entire history of thought, been hardly any change in standards of value more profound and more momentous than that which came when the contrary principle began widely to prevail—when it came to be believed that in many, if not all, phases of human activity, not only are there diverse excellences, but that diversity itself is of the essence of excellence; and that of art, in particular, the objective is neither the attainment of some ideal perfection of form in a small number of fixed *genres*, nor, on the other hand, the gratification of that least common denominator of æsthetic susceptibility which is shared by mankind in all ages, but rather the fullest possible expression of the abundance of differentness that there is, actually or potentially, in nature and human nature, and—for the function of the artist in relation to his public—the evocation of capacities for understanding, sympathy, and enjoyment, which are latent in most men, and perhaps never capable of universalization. These

<sup>40</sup> A part of Milton's argument in the *Areopagitica* is perhaps the most remarkable seventeenth-century exception to this universalism.

assumptions, though assuredly not the only important, are plainly the one *common*, factor in a score of otherwise diverse tendencies which, by one or another critic or historian, have been termed "Romantic": the immense multiplication of *genres* and of verse-forms; the admission of the æsthetic legitimacy of the *genre mixte*; the *goût de la nuance*; the naturalization in art of the "grotesque"; the quest for local color; the endeavor to reconstruct in imagination the *distinctive* inner life of peoples remote in space or in cultural condition; the *étalage du moi*; the demand for particularized fidelity in landscape-description; the revulsion against simplicity; the distrust of universal formulas in politics; the æsthetic antipathy to standardization; the apotheosis of the "concrete universal" in metaphysics; sentimentalism about "the glory of the imperfect"; the cultivation of personal, national and racial idiosyncrasy; the general high valuation (wholly foreign to most earlier periods) of originality, and the usually futile and absurd self-conscious pursuit of that attribute. It is, however, of no great consequence whether or not we apply to this transformation of current assumptions about value the name of "Romanticism"; what it is essential to remember is that the transformation has taken place and that it, perhaps, more than any other one thing distinguishes, both for better and worse, the prevailing assumptions of the thought of the nineteenth and of our own century from those of the preceding period in the intellectual history of the West.

Now the historical thesis which I here suggest—space is not available for the full proof of it<sup>41</sup>—is that the general transition

<sup>41</sup> The rôle of the principle of plenitude, as it had been presented by the optimistic writers, in bringing about this transition may most clearly be seen in Schiller's *Philosophische Briefe*, especially the *Theosophie des Julius* and the concluding letter; in the passages in the *Athenaeum* in which Friedrich Schlegel developed the conception of *romantische Poesie* (on which see the writer's papers, *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 1916 and 1917); and in Schleiermacher's *Reden* (especially II and V) and *Monologen*. I cite only the following: "So ist mir aufgegangen, was jetzt meine höchste Anschauung ist, es ist mir klar geworden, dass jeder Mensch auf eigne Art die Menschheit darstellen soll, in einer eignen Mischung ihrer Elemente, damit auf jede Weise sie sich offenbare, und wirklich werde in der Fülle der Unendlichkeit alles was aus ihrem Schosse hervorgehen kann . . . Allein nur schwer und spät gelangt der Mensch zum vollen Bewusstsein seiner Eigentümlichkeit; nicht immer wagt ers drauf hinzusehn, und richtet lieber das Auge auf den Gemeinbesitz der Menschheit, den er so liebend and so dankbar festhält; er zweifelt oft, ob er sich als ein eignes Wesen wieder aus ihm ausscheiden soll . . . Das eigenste Bestreben der Natur wird oftmals nicht bemerkt, und wenn am deutlichsten sich

from universalism to what may be called diversitarianism in the normative provinces of thought was promoted—by no means solely, but perhaps chiefly—by the emphasis and reiteration given to the principle of plenitude in the arguments of the eighteenth-century defenders of optimism, in the course of the controversy in which so considerable a part of the religious interest and intellectual energy of that age was absorbed. These subtle philosophers and grave divines, and poets like Pope and Haller who popularized their reasonings, rested their assertion of the goodness of the universe ultimately upon the same ground as Stevenson's child in the nursery:

The world is so full of a number of things.

This did not, it is true, necessarily make them "as happy as kings." That was a matter of individual temperament; and in point of fact most of them had not the child's robust delight in the sheer diversity and multiplicity of things. They were often men whose natural taste or training would have inclined them rather to prefer a somewhat thin, simple and exclusive universe. The philosophers of optimism were not, in short, as a rule of a Romantic disposition; and what they were desirous of proving was that reality is rational through and through, that every fact of existence, however unpleasant, is grounded in some reason as clear and evident as an axiom of mathematics. But in the exigencies of their argument to this ambitious conclusion, they found themselves constrained to attribute to the Divine Reason a conception of the good extremely different from that which had been most current among men, and especially among philosophers; and they were thus led, often against their original temper and intention, to impress upon the minds of their generation a revolutionary and paradoxical theory of the criterion of all value, which may be summed up in the words of a highly Romantic and optimistic lover of paradox in our own day:

One thing alone is needful: Everything.  
The rest is vanity of vanities.

ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY

---

ihre Schranken offenbaren, gleitet an der Scharfen Ecke das Auge allzuleicht vorbei, und hält nur das Allgemeine fest, wo eben in der Verneinung sich das Eigne zeigt." (*Monologen*, ed. Schiele, 1914, p. 30).