

do not wish that something might be otherwise; and happy indeed are those of us whose hearts have never echoed the wish of Omar Khayyám,

That we might clasp ere closed the Book of Fate,
And make The Writer on a fairer leaf
Inscribe our names, or quite obliterate! . . .

Ah Love! could you and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Remold it nearer to the Heart's Desire!¹⁰

Now it is undeniable that most of these regrets are foolish and quite on a par in point of philosophic value with the criticisms on the universe of that friend of our infancy, the hero of the fable "The Atheist and the Acorn"—

Fool! had that bough a pumpkin bore,
Thy whimsies would have worked no more (and so on).¹¹

Even from the point of view of our own ends, we should probably make a botch of remodeling the universe. How much more then from the point of view of ends we cannot see! Wise men therefore regret as little as they can. But still some regrets are pretty obstinate and hard to stifle—regrets for acts of wanton cruelty or treachery, for example, whether performed by others or by ourselves. Hardly anyone can remain *entirely* optimistic after reading the confession of the murderer at Brockton the other day—how, to get rid of the wife whose continued existence bored him, he inveigled her into a desert¹² spot, shot her four times, and then, as she lay on the ground and said to him "You didn't do it on purpose, did you, dear?," replied "No, I didn't do it on purpose" as he raised a rock and smashed her skull. Such an occurrence, with the mild sentence and self-satisfaction of the prisoner, is a field for a crop of regrets, which one need not take up in detail. We feel that, although a perfect mechanical fit to the rest of the universe, it is a bad *moral* fit, and that something else would *really* have been better in its place.

Now for the deterministic philosophy, the murder, the sentence, and the prisoner's optimism were all necessary from eternity; and nothing else for a moment had a ghost of a chance of being put into their place. To admit such a chance, the determinists tell us, would be to make a suicide of reason, so we must steel our hearts against the thought. And here our plot thickens, for we see the first of those difficult implications of determinism and monism which it is my purpose to make you feel. If this Brockton murder was called for by the rest of the universe, if it had to come at its preappointed hour, and if nothing else would have been consistent with the sense of the whole, what are we to think of the universe? Are we stubbornly to stick to our judgment of regret, and say, though it *couldn't* be, yet it *would* have been a better universe with something

¹⁰Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát*, Stanza 106, lines 2–4; Stanza 108. [D. C. ABEL]

¹¹Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, "The Atheist and the Acorn." Finch (1661–1720) was an English poet. [D. C. ABEL]

¹²*desert*: desolate. [D. C. ABEL]

different from this Brockton murder in it? That, of course, seems the natural and spontaneous thing for us to do. And yet it is nothing short of deliberately espousing a kind of pessimism. The judgment of regret calls the murder bad. Calling a thing bad means, if it means anything at all, that the thing ought *not* to be, that something else ought to be in its stead. Determinism, in denying that anything else *can* be in its stead, virtually defines the universe as a place in which what ought to be is impossible—in other words, as an organism whose constitution is afflicted with an incurable taint, an irremediable flaw. . . . Regret for the murder must transform itself, if we are determinists and wise, into a larger regret. It is absurd to regret the murder alone. Other things being what they are, *it* could not be different. What we should regret is that whole frame of things of which the murder is one member. I see no escape whatever from this pessimistic conclusion, if, being determinists, our judgment of regret is to be allowed to stand at all.

The only deterministic escape from pessimism is *everywhere* to abandon the judgment of regret. That this can be done, history shows to be not impossible. The devil, *quoad existentiam*,¹³ may be good. That is, although he be a *principle* of evil, yet the universe with such a principle in it may practically be a better universe than it could have been without. On every hand, in a small way, we find that a certain amount of evil is a condition by which a higher form of good is bought. There is nothing to prevent anybody from generalizing this view, and trusting that if we could but see things in the largest of all ways, even such matters as this Brockton murder would appear to be paid for by the uses that follow in their train. An optimism *quand même*,¹⁴ a systematic and infatuated optimism like that ridiculed by Voltaire¹⁵ in his *Candide*, is one of the possible ideal ways in which a man may train himself to look on life. Bereft of dogmatic hardness and lit up with the expression of a tender and pathetic hope, such an optimism has been the grace of some of the most religious characters that ever lived.

Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,
And all is clear from east to west.¹⁶

Even cruelty and treachery may be among the absolutely blessed fruits of time, and to quarrel with any of their details may be blasphemy. The only real blasphemy, in short, may be that pessimistic temper of the soul which lets it take pleasure in such things as regrets, remorse, and grief.

Thus, our deterministic pessimism may become a deterministic optimism at the price of extinguishing our judgments of regret.

But does not this immediately bring us into a curious logical predicament? Our determinism leads us to call our judgments of regret wrong, because they are pessimistic in implying that what is impossible yet ought to be. But how then about the judgments of regret themselves? If they are

¹³*quoad existentiam*: (Latin) as far as existence is concerned. [D. C. ABEL]

¹⁴*quand même*: (French) despite all this. [D. C. ABEL]

¹⁵Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778) was a French writer. [D. C. ABEL]

¹⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Threnody," lines 207–208. Emerson (1803–1882) was an American essayist and poet. [D. C. ABEL]