“Black and Deep Desires”:

An Essay on the Problem of Evil in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

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Työssäni tarkastelen pahuuden (evil) ongelmaa Shakespearen Macbeth-näytelmän kautta. Lähtökohtana tälle on nykyajan käsitys pahuudesta, joka ei mielestäni tavoita pahuuden ongelman monimutkaisuutta eikä sen laaja-alaisia sekä syviä vaikutuksia. Vaikka pahuus liitetään jossain määrin uskonnon piiriin niin sitä käytetään silti yleisesti uskoon katsomatta. Poliittisissa yhteyksissä pahuutta on käytetty oikeutuksena, josta ilmenee sanan toiseuttava, ihmisyyden poistava vaikutus. Tällainen leimaava käyttö ei sinänsä selitä mitään. Kun jokin leimataan pahaksi niin se on ymmärryksen tuolla puolen—pois ihmisyyden piiristä. Tämä ajattelumalli ei kuitenkaan auta pääsemään selvyyteen pahuuden olemuksesta. Yrittämällä ymmärtää miksi pahuus on olemassa, voimme yrittää vähentää sen vaikutusta. Ymmärrys ei silti sulje pois pahan tuomitsemista.

Aloitan tekstuaalisella lähestymisellä tuoden ilmi Macbethin hahmon muuttumisen vaiheet samalla yhdistäen sen näytelmän monimutkaiseen esteettisten ja moraalisten mielikuvien verkostoon. Tästä etenen kerros kerrallaan syvemmälle näytelmän esille tuomiin moraalisiin ongelmiin: ensiksi, yrittämällä tulkita Macbethiä absoluuttisena pahana kumoan tämän lähestymisen; toiseksi kumoan relativistisen tulkinnan pahuudesta; lopuksi etenen kokemukselliseen tulkintaan pahuudesta. Käytän jäsentävänä apuna ajatuksia Augustinukselta, Tuomas Akvinolaiselta, Kantilta, Kierkegaardilta sekä Nietzscheltä.

Pahuus jäsentyy parhaiten teologisen käsitteistön—kuten jumalan käsitteen—avulla. Tämä ei kuitenkaan edellytä uskonnollista vakaumusta, vaan monituhatvuotisen käsitteistön ymmärtämistä inhimillisen kokemuksen valossa. Pahuus liittyy elimellisesti vapauden käsitteeseen, joka ilmenee perisynnin tai Kantin radikaalin pahan käsitteissä. Lisäksi ihmisen tekemään pahaan liittyy aina määrittämäni hybristinen aspekti. Pahuus ei ole entiteetti tai pelkkä teko vaan kumpuaa fenomenaalisen ja noumenaalisen maailmanrajapinnasta. Pahuus ilmenee meille kokemuksessa olemassaolomme vastaisuutena.

Avainsanat: pahuus, Shakespeare, Macbeth, kokemus

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Introduction

What is evil? How is it defined? Where does it originate? What is to be done about evil? Evil is a concept familiar to everyone. When used (without a postmodern irony), the word evokes condemnation. If something is evil, or described as such, it is diabolical, fiendish, non-human. In an age when untimely human death is reported daily, evil is not unfamiliar to our vocabulary; and yet it is not a word used in reporting events that can be easily described as evil. The word does not readily fit into a secular world. Yet, in spite of Christians and non-Christians not sharing a god, they can, at least, agree that evil happens (Hauerwas, p. 36).

Evil is not a scientific term but a moral one. It is a notion that is obviously entangled with that of "the good" as well as with ideas of right and wrong. Declaring something evil is to take a moral stand—to condemn as utterly despicable. It is a way of "othering," and a radical one at that. This is a reason not to use it lightly. Good and evil also carry—when viewed with secular eyes—the burden of religion, God and the devil. But in a multicultural world, evil is a very imposing word. Stripping away someone's humanity with this label leaves us with a person as the *cause* of an *effect* we perceive as evil. Why did Hitler do it? Because he was evil. Thus, by defining the active subject perpetrating the evil *as* evil leaves the most important question at the mercy of tautology: Why do humans do acts of evil? Because they are evil… But surely there are reasons why normal human beings, like us, commit heinous acts—other than their being ontologically evil. Understanding these reasons does not imply reducing evil to a matter of perspective, nor does it condone it. We still need to condemn evil, although "evil" needs to be used correctly and not as a byword for bad. For example, if we are to question the existence of God, can evil still be a valid category? Is there evil in a secular world, actual evil without the melodramatic undertones?

The question of evil has troubled humankind for millennia. Its nature and origin have undergone rigorous examination from Augustine and Aquinas through Enlightenment figures such as Leibniz, Rousseau, and Kant to Nietzsche and post-Holocaust thinkers such as Arendt. Evil is well featured in art and literature, as poetry and prose have tried to make sense of it and its place in our lives. The problem of evil is very prominent in tragedy and especially Shakespearean tragedies. This is perhaps because of Shakespeare's historical positioning: his tragedies inspect fate as a problem, not a given, and he treats individual ambition, deliberation, and freedom in a similarly critical way. *Macbeth* is particularly relevant here because, as Lynch notes (pp. 29–30), there is a specifically medieval mood to this play, especially in its spiritual and supernatural aspects. It is these aspects that precipitate out the theological-versus-modern complexities of the idea of evil.

Although Shakespeare is widely written on there are surprisingly few book-length studies on the moral aspects Shakespeare, and essentially only one that deals with evil: Bernard Spivack's *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*. I find it even more surprising that Spivack gives very little attention to *Macbeth*, one of Shakespeare's most harrowing tragedies and characters. Spivack (p. 37) groups Macbeth with other villains who are, in his opinion, "verbally and emotionally consistent, and [whose] behavior is morally perspicuous." I could not disagree more with Spivack's assessment because I find *Macbeth* to be an acute study of the problem of evil because it houses motivational ambiguities as well as moral ones. The presence of evil is clear in the play; but where does it stem from and why do we feel sympathy for Macbeth?

In this essay I will lead an expedition into the complexities of evil in *Macbeth*, in search of a deeper understanding of evil and, especially, of how readers relate to these complexities today. These issues are not of merely historical interest. We may have become blind to them, but we are in fact their inheritors and they are an important dimension of our western modernity. We will

begin by plunging directly into the play and identifying important moments and tensions within it. The first chapter will focus on Macbeth, his motivation and decline, and his conjunction with Lady Macbeth, Banquo, and Macduff. This establishes essential coordinates for what follows in terms of a specific dramatic process or narrative. In the second chapter I attempt to read Macbeth as ontologically evil in order to show the limits of such an interpretation. Such an attempt must fail, but for symptomatic, illuminating reasons. The third chapter will therefore go on to consider the problems of identifying evil and to discuss the issue of relativism. It then tries to identify the nature of evil through a juxtaposition of central elements of the play with the character and, especially, the actions of Macbeth. Evil is known only through its manifestations or acts, yet is also an implied surplus to those manifestations: an essence beyond its appearances. But it is not an ontological or metaphysical or essential principle, as various traditions would have it. It relates to a paradox within us. The fourth chapter develops some of the difficulties in this picture, while showing how such an account is necessary to explain who we are when we experience or perpetrate evil. In this attempt, I inspect key theological and philosophical concepts connected to this problem.

The central aim of our journey is to develop a multi-faceted understanding of the problem of evil as well as to provide a working vocabulary to help us deal with the evil we encounter. Furthermore, the aim of this essay is also to justify the responsible use of the word “evil” as it is vitally connected to our perception and experience of the world, to our human way of being.

1. Three Stages of Macbeth

In my initial analysis of Macbeth's motivation, I have divided the play into three sections according to slight but significant changes I perceive in the character of Macbeth as the play develops. For the duration of this chapter, I refrain from explicit analysis in terms of the problem of evil in order to focus on what actually happens with our antagonist and his interaction with other characters. Approaching in this way, with a respect for the specific dramatic, aesthetic, imagistic, and other formal features of the play, uncovers the tangle of issues against which we must test the concept of evil—and helps avoid a reading that raids the play merely to illustrate these concepts (which are therefore go unchallenged). So the elements to be elaborated and accounted for in later chapters are allowed to arise more on their own terms. This is of course not to claim that what follows is a concept-free or neutral reading. But sidelining at this point the main concepts I wish to examine can allow the play to put our ideas of evil in productive movement and tension. I believe this to be a crucial step in understanding the complexity and pervasiveness of evil, and even the way humans are entangled in existence.

1.1 Divided State of Man

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is presented in a heroic light, as he—with Banquo—has defeated the invading army of Sweno, the Norwegian king, as well as the rebels fighting alongside the Norwegians. The Scottish king, Duncan, sees Macbeth as a "valiant cousin, worthy gentleman" (1.2.24) and a Captain is not at a loss for words as he describes Macbeth in battle:

> For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name!—
> Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel
> Which smoked with bloody execution,
> Like valour's minion
> Carved out his passage till he faced the slave,

> Which ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell to him
> Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops,
> And fixed his head upon our battlements. (1.2.16–23)[1]

Indeed, Macbeth's courage and prowess is well lauded and the Captain's description—for Duncan—"smack[s] of honour" (1.2.44). Furthermore, Duncan rewards this bravery and honour by giving Macbeth the traitor's title—the thane of Cawdor. Yet, as Hibbs and Hibbs (pp. 274–5) point out, Macbeth's excellence has a strong air of excess to it: he wished to "bathe in the reeking wounds" (1.2.39) of his enemies, his sword is "smoked with bloody execution", he "unseamed" the rebel Macdonald "from the nave to th' chops", after which Macbeth "fixed his head upon the battlements." Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 275) see him "described simultaneously as courageous and loyal and as excessive, bold, rash, and merciless in his pursuit of the enemy." For that reason, Ross calls him the bridegroom of Bellona (1.2.54)—the Roman goddess of war. In his warring action, he "disdains fortune" and attacks with reckless abandon, not worried about his possible demise. Aquinas aptly comments on this sort of recklessness: "To embrace death is not praiseworthy in itself, but only because it is ordered to some good" (quoted in Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 275). Therefore behind Macbeth's virtues ("courage, honor, the defense of one's own country") is some other higher good, such as justice (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 276). Instrumental goods—like the aforementioned virtues—need to be understood in the light of higher goods (ibid.). In order to view these martial virtues[2] as good Macbeth needs to have a higher, guiding good that separates these virtuous instruments from tools of vice. The issue is intensified by the quasi-personification of "valour" (whose "minion" Macbeth is, or is "like") and "fortune", which seems to exist but is disdained by him; by this whole abstract and metaphorically indeterminate hierarchy in which Macbeth does not occupy a stable

[1] All of the quotations of Shakespeare are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor as general editors.

position. But at this stage the important question dramatically lies in how Macbeth shifts from a seemingly virtuous loyalty to his king to regicide.

The weird sisters play a pivotal role in this. They intercept Macbeth and Banquo, returning from battle, and offer them a prophetic greeting: Macbeth—already thane of Glamis—shall become thane of Cawdor and then king; Banquo, on the other hand, will "get kings, though [himself] be none" (1.3.65). Caught off guard—and unaware of his new title—Macbeth tries to interject before the witches vanish:

> The Thane of Cawdor lives,
> A prosperous gentleman, and to be king
> Stands not within the prospect of belief,
> No more than to be Cawdor. (1.3.70–3)

He seems genuinely surprised at these prospects as if the idea of being a king had never crossed his mind, and in Zamir's (p. 92) opinion it is here—from the witches—that Macbeth gets his ambitious desire. But it is important to add that it is merely the planting of an idea that cannot be believed, while it is simultaneously entertained, that triggers Macbeth's thoughts—nothing supernatural is at work. Kingship is over the horizon, or "prospect", but stepping stones are already being positioned... He banishes the thoughts by declaring the titles equally (im)possible.

But as Macbeth's guard was down for a brief instant when confronted with the prophecies, Banquo made a quick yet astute observation:

> Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
> Things that do sound so fair? (1.3.49–50)

Indeed, why would Macbeth be afraid of such fair prophecies? But as "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.10), for Macbeth it has a foul ring to it, because he actually has thought about becoming king—and perhaps not through fair means—and therefore the witches did not give Macbeth his ambition,

[2] What I refer to as martial virtues are not to be confused with the usual sense of virtue. I consider martial virtues as not being directly good, rather instrumentally directed towards good—instrumental virtues. As they are not inherently good,

they merely amplified it. Thus, it is not so surprising, when getting confirmation of his new title from Ross and Angus, he comments aside: “Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor: / The greatest is behind” (1.3.114–5). Within moments of hearing his future prophesied, he is already living it. This would be an uncharacteristically quick change of heart, if there had not been a seed of regal ambition planted.

Yet, Macbeth does not take this omen directly at face value:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? (1.3.129–36)

His uncertainty stems from trying understand whether this “soliciting” is foul or fair. If the portents are bad, why has he been rewarded? On the other hand, if they are good omens, why does he not wait for “nature” to take its course? Macbeth is at a crossroads, where one way is definitely not good (“doth unfix my hair”) but a “good” alternative is something that his “heart” is not willing to settle for. Although truth and success are here equated with goodness, they are also instruments of temptation (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 282). Something is at work that he experiences as neither natural nor simply fateful (he “yields”), nor something he can choose, or at least choose without dread. Macbeth continues:

> Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not. (1.3.136–41)

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they can be corrupted to evil ends.

Again Macbeth's fears arise, but they are not strong enough to "murder" his ambitious thought. What shakes his "single state of man"—the desire for unity of character (Horwich, p. 369)—is not merely a rift between rationality and feeling. This rift goes deeper. It is his desires in opposition to his fears and both of these sides have rational and emotional components: the truth of his becoming thane of Cawdor is allied with his ambitious and rash heart; the fear of the consequences of his actions is combined with the "horrid image" of doing something that is wrong. He cannot act—or decide—as "function is smothered in surmise." Actually, as Garber (p. 701) comments, Macbeth's "single state of man" "has already become doubleness, divided against itself, and equivocation will undo him. Nothing is but what is not." His ambiguity on this matter allows the ambition within him to swell. There are possibilities, and no firm ground.

Duncan greets Macbeth by saying that "the sin of ingratitude" is "heavy on him" (1.4.15–6). This must feed Macbeth's ambitious side. Duncan adds to this by saying "more is thy due than more than all can pay" (1.4.21). Although Duncan announces that Malcolm shall be his successor, Macbeth does not seem to be dismayed because for him the first two steps (Glamis, Cawdor) are "behind" with one step remaining:

> The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. (1.4.48–50).

For him "the half of the witches' prophecy that has been fulfilled points in his mind to the imminent possibility of the other half" (Cheung, p. 432). This is a turning point for Macbeth because the "succession of the eldest son was not automatic or assured; this is why Macbeth becomes so agitated at the designation of an official heir, who stands in the way of his own ambitions and the witches' prophecy" (Garber, p. 715–6). Moreover, Watson (p. 173) points out that Macbeth's ambition can be legitimate, because it is left unspecified whether Malcolm had a presumptive claim to the throne, or

could it have fallen to Macbeth. In any case, at this stage it is clear that Macbeth has chosen to act, his loyalty all but forgotten, which is hinted when Duncan notes—right before turning to Macbeth—that "signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine / On all deservers" (1.4.41–2), an anachronistically meritocratic thought which does not escape Macbeth:

> Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires;
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.50–3)

Nobleness should not see what Macbeth desires, for perhaps his desires cannot stand the light of scrutiny without being deemed sinister. For Cheung (pp. 433–4) Malcolm's investment turns the fears into desires. These desires, which are "black and deep", come from an unseen place—a place without the illumination of nobleness—and as they are deep, they are hard to grasp as they have burrowed deep, perhaps even to the core of Macbeth's being. Whatever these desires have designated, "the eye fears", but the hand is able to fulfil. "The eye winking at the hand" reminds us of his divided character: Scott (p. 164) sees this as Macbeth wanting to deceive himself. But it is also Macbeth indicating some strong, vague belief in a moral scrutiny, from the stars or his conscience.

Lady Macbeth is aware of her husband's fears and what causes them. Having read of Macbeth's desires and ambitions, she elaborates on the side of Macbeth that is hesitant and troubled by his "black and deep desires":

> Yet do I fear thy nature.
> It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. (1.5.15–9)

She sees in Macbeth's character too much "human kindness" to take the fastest way to the crown. Macbeth has ambition, but it is lacking the illness—the malice—that needs to go along with it. As Lady Macbeth sees it, he already has an "illness" but in the disease-sense of the word. She continues:

> What thou wouldst highly
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
> That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it,
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do
> Than wishest should be undone. (1.5.19–24)

What he "highly" desires, he desires "holily"—with sanctity and devoutness. This suggests that his desires are also deep in another way: they are no trifles for Macbeth but utterly meaningful in a religious way. Yet, as he does not want to cheat to achieve his goal, he is, at the same time, ready to win it unfairly. He wants to have a conscience that gives operative suggestions ("that which cries 'Thus thou must do'") and simultaneously he wants what he fears to do more than to undo it—he wants the action he fears to be in his choices. These observations by Lady Macbeth suggest that she is very aware of her husband's "divided state of man." The wrong kind of "illness" that Macbeth has seems to be some kind of honour and conscience and, for Lady Macbeth, this is a foreign agent in Macbeth that stifles his ambitions. But she has a plan:

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crowned withal. (1.5.14–29)

She will remove Macbeth's impediment with her counsel—she would be like a little devil sitting on his shoulder whispering corrective suggestions to his ear. This whole soliloquy suggests, as it introduces Lady Macbeth, that she has been thinking thus for a while, waiting for this "fate and metaphysical aid" to assist her husband on the way to what he truly desires. But to do this she invokes some "metaphysical aid" for herself:

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,

> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
> To cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.39–53)

With this incantation, she wants to rid herself of "compunctious visitings of nature" and to bar the access of remorse to her. She does not want to see what "wound" she is making nor does she want "heaven to peep" in to the matter. Lady Macbeth wants these "murd'ring ministers" to do to her what she is about to do to Macbeth—to "tend on her mortal thoughts." She wants to be "unsexed," "filled with direst cruelty," and to change what she would use to nourish in order to poison. Lady Macbeth sets herself as a vessel for evil deeds, but there is a continuous fear she has of *directly* perceiving these deeds—she needs the cover of "thick night" and "the blanket of the dark." Not only does she fear her husband's "nature," she also fears her own. Her invocation of fate in the "Hie thee hither" passage was not just an expedient argument to urge Macbeth on, and rather contradictorily so; the same sense of alien presence divides Lady Macbeth and her husband.

And she was right about Macbeth. At this stage his "illness" is still strong (while his malice is weak). He has a clear sense that what he is about to do—to kill Duncan, his king—is wrong. Before the final decision, he is at his most hesitant:

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly. If th'assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success: that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all, here,
> But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
> We still have judgement here, that we but teach

> Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
> To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off… (1.7.1–20)

If the whole business were over with at the moment of the murder, then the deed is best done quickly, thinks Macbeth. But the *if* sparks a riot of thoughts about the consequences. As Cheung (p. 436) notices, "the imagined act teases Macbeth with instant performance." Immediate performance *is* possible, but may immediately set in train a machine-like retribution, in this life or the next. He is anxious in wanting the murder to be over quickly, because he recognises the finality of the "deed" — "the be-all and the end-all"—insofar as it could have positive effects on his life, now. Shanley (p. 308) captures this moment perfectly: "[d]esire, apparent promise of fulfillment, need for speedy action, and immediate opportunity fall together so rapidly as to create an all but inescapable force." With planets aligned so, it must feel like destiny for Macbeth—his time has come.

But the other sense of finality, the irreversible chain of crime and punishments, operates simultaneously. These "bloody instructions" will "return to plague the inventor." Macbeth understands that the deed is likely to backfire on him and that "we still have judgement here"—if found out, that is, he will be punished. But this latter point on judgement—contrasted with the "life to come"—hints at another division within Macbeth: he is thinking about the transcendent world, an afterlife, the "life to come" which, for him, could operate through or upon "this bank and shoal of time;" the judgement could act here in the immanent world. He begins the soliloquy with thinking what *could be*—his personal transcendent paradise becoming immanent—but his musings are cut

short by how things *are* in this immanent world. His deeds will not go unnoticed. Furthermore, as Duncan comes into the fray, Macbeth's moral imaginings anyway move to consider the transcendent, angelic objections to the act.

So Macbeth's comment on the impartial ("even-handed") justice is not just acknowledging that things might not go his way, but it reflects deeply how the immanent world tends to work. Behind this "karma" is an idea that people are alike in their abilities, so if he does something, anyone else can act similarly, thus returning the deed to himself. Or put in a more simple way: everything I do, I do to myself—similar to the more transcendent Golden Rule or the categorical imperative. From this stems a basic trust among people—a basis for society—and breaking this trust is deeply disturbing for Macbeth, something that is partly behind the fear that "doth unfix his hair." Moreover, Macbeth would be breaking three types of social institutions based on trust: those of a kinsman, subject and host. He is afraid of ending up in a Hobbesian natural state, where everyone is at war with one another. Furthermore, he would be killing a man who has many virtues—an example of how to lead one's life—and therefore possessing the respect of many who would not look kindly on his murderer. But Macbeth's soliloquy is not just about worrying about consequences, it also evokes the inherent wrongness—or evil—of murder and, moreover, the murder of a good man. He continues:

> And pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
> That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on th'other. (1.7.21–8)

He strikes a common chord with his audience, expressing why such a deed is simply against humanity. Killing Duncan would be like killing, as the image of pity implies, "a naked new-born

babe”—a “horrid deed” to everyone. It is not just *what* he says, but also *how* it is said. It is not merely rationalizing an action and its effects, but feeling the fundamental pleas against it, and on a bizarre cosmic scale. This pity is also felt towards Macbeth as he acknowledges what this “horrid,” but yet unconsummated, deed is at this stage—his “vaulting ambition.” Besides, many critics have pointed out that, unlike Holinshed’s historical description in which Macbeth had a just cause to overthrow Duncan, Shakespeare’s Duncan is an upright ruler who has repaid loyalty and bravery, as Macbeth well knows: “He hath honoured me of late” (1.7.32). When Macbeth decides against the murder, it is indeed in terms of “worldly prudence, loyalty, reverence for what is good” (Shanley, p. 308). “Worldly prudence” sits oddly here, however, as it keeps an eye on getting what he wants by safer means.

As Macbeth has decided to “proceed no further in this business” (1.7.31), Lady Macbeth steps in and reduces his opposition to fear (1.7.39–41): “Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valour, / As thou art in desire?” She essentially implies that Macbeth is afraid to be himself by denying his ambition, and that he would therefore “live like a coward in [his] own esteem”:

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
> How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me.
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
> As you have done to this. (1.7.49–59)

She argues that he is a coward and a lesser man because of the unwillingness to act. Macbeth was a man when he dared to do it and even more manly when he wanted to be more than he is—a king.

Lady Macbeth is referring to when he "broke this enterprise" to her. Then Macbeth would have made the time and the place for this regicide, but now when "they have made themselves," he is too afraid to act and hence is "unmade" by this time and place. Again, Duncan is likened to a babe, whom Lady Macbeth, if she had sworn like Macbeth had, would have killed while the babe was happily feeding—indeed, her "milk" has turned to "gall." Kierkegaard sees this as abetting her husband with the "power of example" (Cheung, p. 436).

Lady Macbeth wins Macbeth over in convincing him that to become king in this way is in his nature. Not to kill Duncan would be to fear one's true self—Macbeth would be "a coward in [his] own esteem" (1.7.43). Put in a more contemporary way, he would be fighting his own genes—what he is. She echoes a radical individuality that views the world as a solipsistic creation—what is good for Macbeth is good. Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 75) notice a remark in this vein two scenes earlier: "[t]he seeds of Macbeth's eventual assertion of his own arbitrary will as supreme and his consequent nihilism are already contained in Lady Macbeth's desire that they have 'sovereign sway and masterdom'" (1.5.69). Macbeth seems persuaded by his wife, but is still uncertain of success. Lady Macbeth persists:

> But screw your courage to the sticking-place
> And we'll not fail.

She invokes Macbeth's martial virtues, courage—which he demonstrated at the beginning of the play—making this seem no different from killing an enemy on the battlefield. Courage applied in the right place will abolish his fears. But Lady Macbeth's "appeal is not to the virtue of courage, but to a simulacrum of the virtue: fearlessness and daring in the face of obstacles. By isolating courage from the rest of the virtues [she treats] appeals to the governing virtue of justice as unmanly" (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 275). This returns to the problem of these instrumental virtues that need guidance. Such powerful weapons are dangerous when they fall into the wrong hands. Similarly, valour—another of

Macbeth's martial virtues—in war is often motivated by "a love of honor" which is "the desire to cultivate the opinion of others" (ibid., p. 276). This explains why Lady Macbeth's appeal to manliness works—Macbeth wants to be seen as manly, especially to his wife. But manliness is yet another simulacrum she resorts to, as her take on it suggests that "being a man means getting what one wants" (Cunningham, p. 41). Reason, moral or prudential, persuaded Macbeth against the deed but it is suppressed by ambition and scorn from his wife, and by her suggestion that shifting the blame to Duncan's chamberlains will allow Macbeth to escape the punishment he fears (Anderson, p. 167). With the obstacles (which she calls fears, with at least some justification) removed by Lady Macbeth's arguments, he is now ready to proceed.

Just before his fatal visitation on Duncan, Macbeth gives his famous dagger-soliloquy in which the mood of the whole play is present:

> Is this a dagger I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.
> Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,
> And such an instrument I was to use.
> Mine eyes are made the fools o'th'other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still,
> And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
> Which was not so before. There's no such thing.
> It is the bloody business which informs
> Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half-word
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
> Pale Hecate's offerings, and withered murder,
> Alarumed by his sentinel the wolf,
> Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
> With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
> Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,

> Hear not my steps which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
> And take the present horror from the time,
> Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives.(2.1.33–61)

The speech seems to revolve around a dire hallucination. Here we can see what Jan Kott (p. 86) means when he describes *Macbeth* as a nightmare. Macbeth seems perplexed by the dagger: Is it real or not? Is there a difference between the one he sees and the one he feels? This is Macbeth's waking dream, where he questions it, but is unable distinguish whether his eyes deceive or reveal some truth. Garber (p. 708) comments on the

> [i]nternal debate and dialectic, as the invisible dagger turns bloody before his eyes. It is at this point that Macbeth approaches the dread word "murder," which he has all this time been avoiding.

This "fatal vision" shows him the direction he is heading in: murder. When the dagger turns bloody he denies it. It is a denial of what he is going to do. With his inner division, it is a denial of a part of himself: the dagger is either dissuading or persuading. We cannot know which. Kirsch (p. 285) elaborates on this division:

> Freud speaks of the peculiar dread psychotics experience as they recognize that their hold on reality is dissolving. Shakespeare captures that sense of dread in this soliloquy, with the difference, which is part of Macbeth's distinction as a tragic hero, that Macbeth can contemplate psychotic experience without succumbing to it as his wife does.

Indeed, it would be easy and perhaps comforting to view Macbeth as psychotic, as a madman. But he merely contemplates it, as any of us could, and quite level-headedly continues his murderous scheme. This paradoxical quality can be seen in Macbeth's hands: the hands "have the power to be the instruments of his redemption"—they can be used for defence as in the beginning of the play, if they were kept within their proper limits; without that power they are turned into hands of destruction. This fantasy, his "fatal vision," tempts his warlike hands to murder (Lynch, p. 35). But

this murder also has another dimension that the Tarquin reference, guiding our thoughts to *The Rape of Lucrece*, suggests: "[i]f Macbeth is the Tarquin figure here, Duncan becomes the Lucrece-like rape victim, murdered offstage, and emblematizing a death of ideal purity" (Garber, p. 709).

Up until now Macbeth had a claim to virtue, which has, with the murder of Duncan, been turned undeniably to vice. We have seen the inner complexities of Macbeth as well as his propensities to good and evil, and that his shift from a loyal soldier to committing regicide is by no means simple and straightforward. His primary motivation is usually seen as ambition, which works well to this point but the following sections will offer different depth to his actions.

1.2 The Barren Sceptre

When Macbeth returns after assassinating Duncan, he is deeply troubled by his deed, from which his virtue of courage finds no solace:

> Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more,
> Macbeth does murder sleep'—the innocent sleep… (2.2.33–4)

To a brave soldier used to bloody deeds on the battlefield, killing an old man in his sleep is too much and Macbeth is distraught throughout the scene. He has killed the innocence of the soldier, whose safety is found in orders and honour; enemies meet on a level playing-field both aware of what they are doing to one another. Murder or assassination gives no such solace. He delivered his blow when the victim was in their most helpless state. How can he find sleep now that he has broken a sacred trust? This ailment is clearly connected to his actions:

> For Macbeth, though, the horror is already fully present from the moment of the murder, and the curse upon him is sleeplessness, disorder in the world of human nature, the same disease that afflicted Henry IV, and Richard III, and other kings guilty of murder—as well as Brutus when he was contemplating the murder of Caesar. (Garber, p. 711)

One disorder in human nature is clearly shown in Macbeth's inability to say "Amen" (2.2.26–31). For Ribner (p. 158), this signals a separation from God and he connects this to the dagger-soliloquy, where Macbeth describes himself as a wolf, the destroyer of the innocent lamb (symbolizing God), and as Tarquin, the destroyer of chastity (symbolizing the Renaissance perfection of God). From a secular point of view these can be connected to his conscience, again displaying part of Macbeth—and our—inner division.

Even if it is not his conscience denying him sleep, he must fear his deed will be returned to him. This connects back to the doctrine of natural law he affirmed in the opening soliloquy of 1.7. Hibbs and Hibbs (pp. 284–5) have two views of this natural law and the punishment for breaking it: the first is that doing a bloody deed will invite revenge, returning the deed; the second sees the deed as its own punishment—choosing a malevolent path will lead to self-destruction.[3] But Macbeth is deeply troubled by the murder itself, not just its consequences:

> What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red. (2.2.57–61)

His hands have the blood of his sovereign on them. Now the hands return the wink to his eyes. Macbeth's hands cannot be cleaned, instead they will infect, stain all the waters that try to clean them. Seas are turned red, "incarnadine"—the colour of flesh. Lady Macbeth tries consoling but he seems inconsolable. "To know my deed 'twere best not know myself" (2.2.71), as Macbeth says. This compacts the paradox he suffers under: he is his deed; he is sundered from himself since the deed. He is unable to return to the chamber to place the bloody daggers and to frame Duncan's guards, which Lady Macbeth needs to do. As she returns to her husband she remarks:

[3] Hibbs and Hibbs also note that these conceptions of natural law were extant in Shakespeare's time (p. 285).

My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white. (2.2.62-3)

Surprisingly, when Duncan's corpse is discovered, Macbeth has regained his stability. His martial virtues seem to have kicked in again. He gives into his rashness—quite fittingly to cover his deed—and kills the framed guards. He comments on the murder:

Had I but died an hour before this chance
I had lived a blessèd time, for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality.
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead. (2.3.90–3)

This is quite an ambiguous and prophetic statement—for the audience. Also quite ironic as Shanley (p. 310) notes. It feels like an epitaph to Macbeth's conscience. Not only is Duncan dead, but in a way so is Macbeth, as Hibbs and Hibbs argue (p. 286). Some irrevocable change has taken place within him, which, along with the murder, he and Lady Macbeth try to conceal. It is no mere accident the porter speaks at length about equivocation after the death of Duncan (2.3), because from now on mistrust and doubt seem to permeate the play.

Macbeth is crowned king as both Malcolm and Donalbain flee the country in fear of their lives. With success, his former fears and "illness" do not bother him. But Macbeth never expresses what he wants to do when he becomes king and, similarly to Richard III, he does not "dwell on the object of his ambitions" (Zamir, p. 92). He has never given any particular reason for why he wants to be king, except his infantile desire. Like Richard III, he does not seem particularly happy when he achieves his goals. Instead, suspicion creeps up and his fears seem to have found a new place:

Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
And to what dauntless temper of his mind
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he,

> Whose being I do fear, and under him
> My genius is rebuked . . . He chid the sisters
> When first they put the name of king upon me
> And bade them speak to him. Then prophet-like,
> They hailed him father to a line of kings.
> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
> And put a barren sceptre in my grip. . . (3.1.50–63)

From the beginning Macbeth and Banquo seemed to be alike. They have fought alongside each other. Although Macbeth was placed above Banquo in their warlike acts, from Macbeth's point of view Banquo has stronger mental capabilities, under Banquo Macbeth's "genius is rebuked" and Banquo has "a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act in safety." Because the prophecy has "commenced in truths" for Macbeth, he now fears that it will continue to do so and Banquo will be the originator of "a line of kings," whereas Macbeth is left with "a fruitless crown" and "a barren sceptre." It is not enough for him that he is king, but he wants to continue his line and legacy, perhaps to convince himself about his legitimacy, to forget rather than further his crimes. Yet, it is odd that the question of offspring suddenly arises at this point, as if this was Macbeth's motivation for murdering Duncan (Zamir, p. 96). But let us return to when, as Macbeth sees it, Banquo "chid the sisters":

> My noble partner
> You greet with present grace and great prediction
> Of noble having and of royal hope,
> That he seems rapt withal. To me you speak not.
> If you can look into the seeds of time
> And say which grain will grow and which will not,
> Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
> Your favours nor your hate. (1.3.52–9)

Macbeth's fear is more understandable as we see that Banquo, also wanting some recognition from the witches, sees himself equal to Macbeth in wanting his piece of the prophecy. Also he seems to be more emotionally level-headed than Macbeth—perhaps this is the wisdom that Macbeth inferred.

Banquo sensibly asks the sisters for his share in terms where he "neither begs nor fears" their "favours or hate." Macbeth is "rapt withal" by the prophecy. Banquo is calm and more sceptical:

> But 'tis strange,
> And oftentimes to win us to our harm
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles to betray's
> In deepest consequence. (1.3.120–4)

Banquo said this when Macbeth was getting excited about becoming a king: "Glamis and the Thane of Cawdor. The greatest is behind." It is partly advising Macbeth as well as responding to his question—if he is hoping for the prophecy to come true for his part. His worry of being "betrayed in deepest consequence" suggests he is aware that there are ulterior motives behind the prophecy, as well as that it is "an honest trifle", a harmless effort to make them enact it. As the passionate Macbeth is seduced, the more rational Banquo is more wary, as also Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 281) note. But perhaps this is because the prophecy is very different for Banquo than it is for Macbeth. Banquo is left worried:

> A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
> And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,
> Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature
> Gives way to in repose. (2.1.6–9)

He has "dreamt last night of the three weird sisters" (2.1.19) and it has disturbed him. He does not wish it to happen again. Because part of what the sisters said has come true at this stage, his worry is that more will do so. It troubles him because he must consider how his offspring will be kings but he will not. For this to happen he must surely be dead, either of natural or unnatural causes. And if the latter, how will he die while leaving his son to live?

Whilst communicating this to his son Fleance, they are staying at Macbeth's home and when he hears someone walking up to them, he—somewhat surprisingly—draws his weapon. He is very wary of the surroundings and what he says later suggests why:

> Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all
> As the weird women promised; and I fear
> Thou played'st most foully for't. Yet it was said
> It should not stand in thy posterity,
> But that myself should be the root and father
> Of many kings. If there come truth from them—
> As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—
> Why by the verities on thee made good
> May they not be my oracles as well,
> And set me up in hope? (3.1.1–10)

He rightly suspects Macbeth of facilitating his ascent to the throne, but at the same time is reminded of his part in the "women's promise"—and from what we read from Macbeth's fear of Banquo, Macbeth also remembers Banquo's part. Macbeth has noticed—as, perhaps, we have as well—that there is a slight air of arrogance and envy in Banquo, both here and when the prophecy was made, insofar as he wants to be connected to these good portents. "'Tis much he dares" (3.1.52), as Macbeth observes. Macbeth espies a similar, though a more controlled and covert, ambition to his, so he is both frustrated about his "barren sceptre" and afraid that Banquo will do to him what he did to Duncan; even more so because "he hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act in safety." Banquo could easily "act in safety" by simply revealing him, Macbeth, as Duncan's murderer. Moreover, Banquo is there to remind Macbeth of his failure of character: not only did Banquo witness the instigating event to regal ambition but he chose the other option of not acting on it. Therefore, Macbeth also fears that the rewards of his "sacrifice" will be reaped by others:

> Only for them … mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man
> To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings. (3.1.69–71)

Macbeth himself sees that he has given his "eternal jewel to the common enemy of man"—sold his soul to the devil, reminiscent of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. And all this has been done to make Banquo's offspring kings. To alleviate his fears of Banquo and the prophecy—which, for him, are inseparable—Macbeth leaves himself with one option, to have Banquo and Fleance killed.

The murderers succeed in killing Banquo but Fleance escapes the assassination. The death of Banquo gives him some comfort, but hearing about Fleance leaves him "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in/To saucy doubts and fears" (3.4.23–4). The escape adding to his fatigue of not sleeping causes manifestations of guilt (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 287). His immediate worry about Banquo is gone but his fear of the prophecy lives on. Thus, while Macbeth has his back turned, Banquo's ghost—only visible to Macbeth—takes his seat in the banquet table. As Macbeth sees the ghost he has what is best described as a nervous fit. Characteristically for him, it begins with fear which then moves into rage. This change is facilitated by Lady Macbeth, who tries to explain away the ghost to Macbeth:

> This is the very painting of your fear;
> This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
> Led you to Duncan. (3.4.60–2)

She sees the ghost as a "false creation from the heat-oppressed brain" similar to the dagger from Macbeth's soliloquy in 2.1. "Banquo and his ghost … illuminate the basic conflict within the mind of Macbeth" (Ribner, p. 153). So the ghost is indeed "the very painting" of Macbeth's fear. On one hand, it is reminding him of his deeds, of his violation of trust, a residual conscience; on the other hand, it reminds him of the prophecy that is coming true: the dead Banquo is unable to be king, but the escaped Fleance still has potential. In this painting of Macbeth's fear Banquo, fittingly, sits in Macbeth's place, the king's place. Kekes (p. 73) sees that "fear is the recessive and resentment the dominant strain of envy" and that envy is "one's fear of being proved deficient." Macbeth himself noted that Banquo was wiser than he. Crucially, however, Macbeth's fear of Banquo is envy of his "line of kings," which links to Macbeth's inability—his "barren scepter"—to continue his line.

Facing the ghost of Banquo is a crucial point for Macbeth, as he sees that there is no turning back for him, that he has chosen his path which he must stick to henceforth:

I am in blood
Stepped so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned. (3.4.135–9)

Again this echoes Richard III, as Anderson (p. 157) reminds us.[4] They are so far in blood that they cannot get out without spilling more blood, so they continue their current path to its end, as Macbeth has some "things in head that will to hand"—things that "must be acted" before they are examined, judged. Cunningham (p. 40) sees that Macbeth is strengthening himself through evil in order to be rid of fear, pain and remorse—at the same time he is distancing himself from humankind. Earlier, as Cunningham (pp. 39–40) notes, he took himself out of the natural order by severing the "great bond / Which keeps him pale" (3.2.50–1). Similarly, for Ribner (pp. 149–50), the "great bond" refers to a link with humanity and "enjoins him to obey the natural law of God."

In this second section, once Macbeth has become king, his motivation of continuing his bloody path has shifted from ambition to envy due to his insecurities and complex relationship with Banquo. He was Macbeth's closest friend and, perhaps, therefore the greatest threat. The mistrust arose from the prophecy and especially the issue of offspring which Macbeth suddenly took up only after becoming king. Killing Banquo seems rash and excessive because he gave little sign of disloyalty to Macbeth, although Macbeth persuaded himself to do it as a kind of pre-emptive strike. Yet, the troubling—and tragic—part is, especially for the audience, that Macbeth had another chance to step away from these murderous ways and repent, particularly during the encounter with Banquo's ghost. "When Fleance escaped, Macbeth could have realized the futility of his attempt to master all the contingent threats to his power" (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 279). He always had a choice, as reason does give, and has given, alternative actions. But he has waded just as far in blood as he has gone in

[4] Anderson (pp. 161–2) also notes similar ideas in *The Misfortunes of Arthur, Tancred and Gismunda, The Spanish Tragedy, Catiline, The White Devil,* and *Hamlet.*

believing the witches' prophecy. His trust in it surpasses his reasoning. Now it is a new situation for Macbeth, and it is not surprising that he returns to the witches. Like Faustus, he is "seeking forbidden knowledge and demanding answers to the secrets of the future" (Garber, p. 719). And, as we move to the next stage of Macbeth, it is good to note that he is not asking, but demanding.

1.3 Laugh to Scorn the Power of Man

Perhaps the most clear supernatural elements in the play are the three witches and Hecate,[5] who is the goddess of magic and witchcraft. In the beginning of the play, the weird sisters cast a spell over the play and it is their "supernatural soliciting" that starts this chain of events. Hecate reproaches them for doing this without her and, "which is worse,"

> all you have done
> Hath been but for a wayward son,
> Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
> Loves for his own ends, not for you. (3.5.10–3)

She is annoyed that the witches have not used Macbeth instrumentally, for their own ends. Macbeth returns to them wanting to know more of what has been prophesied of him. He is shown three apparitions. The first, an armed head, tells him to be wary of Macduff. The second, a bloody child, advises him in a Machiavellian fashion:

> Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth. (4.1.95–7)

"Bloody, bold, and resolute" are very close to what Machiavelli describes as a prince's *virtú*—qualities that a leader needs to have to run a successful state. Yet, one crucial difference comes from the "laugh to scorn the power of man," because this suggests an arrogance unbecoming to a Machiavellian prince, since he needs a good public image and to be "bloody, bold, and resolute"

behind the stage. This is the crucial difference between the exemplary prince Cesare Borgia and the mad tyrant Agathocles. The third apparition, a crowned child, assures Macbeth the he will never be conquered until Birnam Wood comes Dunsinane and also tells him to be "lion-mettled, and take no care / Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are" (4.1.106–7). Instantly, Macbeth begins to show this arrogance and pride as he wants to know about the prophecy concerning Banquo:

> I will be satisfied. Deny me this,
> And an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know. (4.1.120–1)

Macbeth not only wants to know, he *demands* to know when the sisters urge him not to seek an answer to his question. Because he has risen above everyone else, he not only "scorns the power of man," he also orders the witches, the (seeming) bearers of the supernatural. But for Macbeth, a king's will is law, as Anderson points out (p. 158) and his law extends to the supernatural. With this hubristic move, pride rears its head and, as Aquinas points out, its "characteristic is to be unwilling to be subject to any superior" (quoted in Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 276). From this point of view, a lot of what we have looked on as ambition bears a close relation to pride—the root of which is "inordinate longing for a station higher than what is due." In fact, all of the vices seem to be allied with pride: "[i]f the vice most evident in Macbeth in the opening acts is boldness, the vice that comes to predominate is pride, the chief of all the vices and the vice, along with envy, that is most characteristic of demonic evil" (ibid.).

Macbeth is shown the crown-bearing descendants of Banquo. He is now faced with what he has feared and his anger is directed to the witches who have, in spite of him, disappeared:

> Infected be the air whereon they ride,
> And damned all those that trust them. (4.1.154–5)

[5] She is very often cut out of the play, perhaps because she is too supernatural, especially for a contemporary, secular audience who get their content from the weird sisters and the odd references to heavenly and diabolical creatures.

This damnation hits him as well because he has trusted the witches and will still do so. But Macbeth's relationship with the prophecies is more complex than merely trusting them or not. The classical tragic heroes fought against this sort of prophecy and in doing so they made them come true; Macbeth wants the parts of the prophecies that are good for him but fights against the parts that bode ill. But in wanting to believe the better parts, the other parts are taken in. Ultimately they cannot be separated from each other. Therefore, making some parts come true also facilitates the others. So, in a rash decision to diminish Macduff's danger by attacking his home, he hastens his own demise at the hands of Macduff.

More so than Banquo, Macduff works in a disjunctive relation to Macbeth (whereas Lady Macbeth is in a conjunctive relation). Even before the witches' apparitions singled him out, Macduff was the first and only to challenge Macbeth in his slaying of the framed chamberlains. The description of Macduff is quite different from Macbeth:

> He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
> The fits o'th' season. (4.2.16–7)

Importantly, Macduff has the higher governing virtue of justice, which Macbeth lacks (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 275). And unlike other thanes, he had the courage to leave for England where Malcolm, Duncan's appointed successor, is staying, thus again defying Macbeth—which unfortunately leads to the massacre of Macduff's family.

Malcolm, who is left suspicious after his father's death, tests Macduff because he fears that "A good and virtuous nature may recoil / In an imperial charge" (4.3.20–1). So, he makes himself similar to Macbeth in his attributes and worse:

> When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head
> Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country
> Shall have more vices than it had before,
> More suffer, and more sundry ways, than ever,
> By him that shall succeed… I know

> All the particulars of vice so grafted
> That when they shall be opened black Macbeth
> Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state
> Esteem him as a lamb, being compared
> With my confineless harms…there's no bottom, none,
> In my voluptuousness. Your wives, your daughters,
> Your matrons, and your maids could not fill up
> The cistern of my lust, and my desire
> All continent impediments would o'erbear
> That did oppose my will. Better Macbeth
> Than such an one to reign. (4.3.46–67)

Macduff listens to this and tries to understand what Malcolm is saying while still refusing to hear that the good king's heir sounds like "Devilish Macbeth." Macduff attempts to dilute Malcolm's strong words into ones befitting a moderate king—neither a virtuous king nor a vice-like one. But Malcolm persists in the wicked portrayal of himself, so Macduff is forced to make a judgment that only he seems able to do *and* perform: "Fit to govern? / No, not fit to live" (4.3.103–4). He is able—as are many others, even Macbeth—to make this kind of moral judgment but he alone is strong enough to stand behind it. Unlike Macbeth he withstands temptations and fights against them.

Yet, why would he leave his family behind in Scotland under Macbeth's sovereign terror? Perhaps he thought that even Macbeth would not be so heinous as to kill them. Kirsch (pp. 293–4) suggests that "Macduff leaves his family out of duty to his whole society." Because no one else would act, Macduff had to be the one to persuade Malcolm to return. Viewed from this angle, Macduff can be seen as too trusting, naïve, or thoughtless, but what this clearly shows is that he is not perfectly wise and is as fallible as anyone. This also underlines that his sense of justice is not extraordinary but available to everyone.

Macduff's character is fully revealed when he is told of his family's decease. He is overcome by passion and memorably grieves over the loss. Echoing Lady Macbeth, Malcolm counsels Macduff to let go of his grief and to "Dispute it like a man." Macduff responds: "I shall do

so, / But I must also feel it as a man" (4.3.221–3). Again, unlike Macbeth, he shows what it is to truly be a man, and, as Cunningham (p. 45) notes, he is feeling the "principle of what is proper to man." Zamir (p. 106) sees that he constitutes manhood anew. Moreover, Macduff possesses the single state of man that Macbeth is after, as he has many sides to his manliness: he is a father, and a soldier; he can weep and revenge. He is more integrally human than Malcolm, who wants him to dispute his sorrow and focus on revenge. But Macduff feels the sorrow and through that he readies himself for revenge (Horwich, p. 372). Cunningham continues to elaborate:

> Macduff exhibits a firm allegiance to his human ties and a beautifully ordered capacity for feeling rightly in the circumstances; his response shows how a man ought to feel and emphasizes the importance of feeling humanly. (Cunningham, p. 45)

He exemplifies as attitude needed in the face evil, and returns to revenge and also to set things right, reminiscent of other Shakespearean characters like Richmond in *Richard III* and Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*.

With the massacre of Macduff's family, the king's subjects' fear turns to dangerous hatred (Anderson, p. 161), and thanes that were be loyal to Macbeth join the advancing English army[6] led by Malcolm and Macduff. Macbeth has to a degree succeeded in hardening his heart[7] as he has "almost forgot the taste of fears" (5.5.9). In the eyes of Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 275) there is "something inhuman, something nearly diabolical in his indifference to the good." He hardly reacts at all to the news of his wife's death—his wife who seems to have been driven mad by guilt. Cunningham (p. 45) aptly points out the stark contrast to Macduff and his reactions to the death of

[6] It is fitting that the English play an important though a sidelined role as this play was originally presented to James I of England (VI of Scotland)—who thought himself to be the descendant of Banquo— the King who unified England and Scotland. Many critics suggest that the strong supernatural elements in the play are due also to James I as he had published a book on witches, *Daemonologie*, in 1597.

[7] This is what Dolora G. Cunningham suggests and examines in her article "Macbeth: The Tragedy of the Hardened Heart." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter 1963).

his family—Macbeth shows an inability to feel for others as well as for himself. He famously reflects on the news:

> Out, out, brief candle.
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (5.5.22–7)

To Zamir (p. 95) this exposes the "finer aspects of Macbeth's nihilism;" how "life ends up being not only a valueless copy but also one that is foolishly tailored." He also notes (p. 103) that what remains for Macbeth is hollowness, as he is a faded old man, a sapless "yellow leaf" (5.3.25). The meaninglessness that Macbeth experiences here reflects on his gruesome actions and disregard for human life because he does not seem to value even his own. Again this echoes the deflated Richard III on his throne. Having their ambitions fulfilled hollows them from within. This very meta-theatrical moment, revealing the illusion of theatre, in its meaninglessness becomes—in a truly dialectical fashion—very meaningful, not only revealing Macbeth's inner emptiness behind his motivation, but also mirroring our own existential experience of being thrown into the world, the need to find meaning in our lives.

This is only a brief interval of thought and he is ready to resume action. Shanley points out that no recovery is possible for Macbeth. Yet his state does bear witness to how man's life signifies everything and he is ready to fight for it, although, for him, all he ever did resulted in nothing. He is cornered. Birnam Wood has come to Dunsinane. "Only sheer animal courage remains to … remind us of a Macbeth once courageous in an honorable cause." (Shanley, p. 306) He kills everyone in his path. He does seem to "bear a charmèd life" (5.10) until Macduff enters and professes "not to be of woman born" but from his "mother's womb / Untimely ripped." All of the witches' prophecies have come true, and Macbeth knows it. As Ribner (p. 153) remarks, Macduff is

truly “a force of nemesis generated by Macbeth’s own course of evil.” Macduff mirrors Macbeth’s overconfidence, “the same ethos of blood.” He easily turns to revenge, and savagely kills a king—Macbeth. Macduff is no hero, but acts out his role of nemesis (Kirsch, pp. 293–4). Order is restored.

The natural law Macbeth was worried about breaking did return to him in the form of Macduff, who gives Macbeth, or rather his head, a final entrance. In this final section we saw how Macbeth tried to remove himself from humanity through hubristic pride and in that attempt was countered and brought down. Yet, when faced with Macduff he showed some remorse: “My soul is too much charged / With blood of thine” (5.10.5–6). Fittingly, the thane of Cawdor—in the beginning and now, in the end—has come full circle:

> That very frankly he confessed his treasons,
> Implored your highness’ pardon, and set forth
> A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it. He died
> As one that had been studied in his death
> To throw away the dearest thing he owed
> As ’twere a careless trifle. (1.4.5–11)

Indeed, his meaningless, hollow body—as Macbeth lamented earlier—did have meaning in the end. He did not throw it away but did what he knew best: fought for it. Although the “dead butcher and his fiend-like queen” (5.11.35) is a fitting phrase for the Macbeths, “it does not express the whole truth that Shakespeare shows us of Macbeth’s story” (Shanley, p. 305). It is in an effort to articulate this larger truth, whose complexities this chapter has introduced, that we will next consider Macbeth as *evil.* We shall see how far the phrase “the dead butcher and his fiend-like queen” takes us; and if Shanley’s remark is correct, our journey will not end there.

2. An Evil Macbeth?

Macbeth towards the end of the play can be quite clearly described as evil. In this respect, and many others, he is similar to Richard III, as we have noted. Richard seems to have a unity of character in that he is constant in his maliciousness from his opening soliloquy to his death, whereas Macbeth seems to change during the play, striving to achieve a similar unity of character. But where does this seeming change originate? In this chapter I will attempt to read Macbeth as an evil character: first discussing external influences and second his internal motivation, after which we will look at how these evil thoughts or ideas turn into the realm of performance and action. Finally, I shall take the idea of conscience into consideration—leading us to reconsider the ontological and absolute character of Macbeth's evil.

2.1 External Influences

The witches are the obvious candidate for the cause of Macbeth's turn to evil. Dover Wilson calls them an "incarnation of evil in the universe, all the more effective dramatically that their nature is never defined" (quoted in Ribner, p. 151). Indeed, they do not seem like proper characters, more like an anthropomorphised placeholders for the contingency in nature we call evil. This can be seen in 1.3, when the first witch tells the others she had come across "a sailor's wife" who refused to share her nuts. So the sisters are asked to conjure a fatal storm for the husband. In a sense, they seem to pre-empt Rousseau, as "[e]very sin contains its own penalty as a natural consequence" (Neiman 2002, p. 47); that is, the witches find a moral reason for a natural evil, such as a storm or an earthquake. But actually they *are* the connection between an external world and the human world. Garber (p. 697) clarifies the tradition the weird sisters work from:

> *Wyrd* is the Old English word for "fate," and these are, in a way, classical witches as well as Scottish or Celtic ones, Fates as well as Norns. The Three Fates of Greek mythology were said to spin, apportion, and cut the thread of man's life.

They are a part of a pre-Christian, a more anthropomorphic world where Fates and deities, like Hecate, meddled with human affairs. In that world-view nature was very much an agent, full of active participants: everything, from the trees to the flight of birds, was full of meaning. But shifting from this pagan or pantheistic idea to monotheistic Christianity changed the perceived meaning. Meaning was found beyond nature, beyond the immanent in a transcendent God who is everywhere—but nowhere. The pagan gods had their own places and natural phenomena, whereas a god who is everywhere is for us nowhere in the immanent world—he is in the transcendent world, a place that can be thought of but not pointed to or described.[8] For us, this means that meaning also shifted from the immanent towards the transcendent. But this is not to be accounted for merely by the change to Christianity—because the secularization of it actually plays a more crucial role. Nietzsche (pp. 37–8) describes in *The Birth of Tragedy* how in Dionysian rituals the god was actually present and how this changed into his being merely *re*presented. This sort of debate can still be seen in Shakespeare's time with the doctrine of transubstantiation: "the reformers ridiculed the Catholic clergy in satires that accused priests of practicing magic, mistaking a sign for the thing it signified, and even eating and chewing God" (Diehl, p. 90). Here is where the sisters are situated, as they are part of both the natural and the supernatural. But are they a sign for evil or evil itself?

Macbeth was presented with their "supernatural soliciting" but he was puzzled as to what it meant because he was unable to transcend the very "bank and shoal of time" upon which he had to decide. The witches retain their ambiguity precisely because the decision was left to Macbeth. They are like natural events, like the old gods, of which we could not be sure if they were good or

[8] This is, of course, a very simplified and crude way of presenting this issue because, for example, some—like Spinoza—see God as nature.

evil, but on the basis of what we perceive we have to decide. The witches exactly show us the problem of perception. Are they foul or fair? The witches do not force or advise anything—they just present "facts," as Shanley (p. 307) points out. But, Garber (p. 698) interjects, if they are causative, it is "because, like Iago, they allow [Macbeth] to interpret things as he wants to see them." So, in this vein, they cause Macbeth's decline not because they have ill will, but because they lack good will. Their indifference makes them culpable.

A clearer influence comes from Lady Macbeth, who more clearly spurs her husband to action. She is decisive in Macbeth's decision to proceed with the murder of Duncan. She even devised the plan to do it. But this cunning and cruelty was not directly within her as she had to summon external spirits to "unsex" her and fill her with "direst cruelty." Whether or not this is borrowing cruelty from an external source or merely psyching herself up, some power still lies in her "incantation." There is a similar metaphysics of evil with Lady Macbeth as there is with the witches; someone lends them their power, because they have to use incantations to make something happen. Compared to her husband, Lady Macbeth sees herself as the more "masculine" one, as she has many times pointed out, and, though physically a woman, she claims—aided by her "unsexing"—she is mentally and spiritually a man[9] (Garber, p. 713). The witches also bear some masculine markers: they are described as having beards.

Coursen (p. 380) notes the many similarities and links between the witches and Lady Macbeth, the most important being Macbeth's temptation. The sisters do the initial work which makes the seed within Macbeth grow, but Lady Macbeth makes it flourish. Her success is helped by her knowing Macbeth so well. She is indeed such a crucial part of Macbeth's overall actions that

[9] Of course, in Shakespeare's time the gender was more "performed than natural," as the casts consisted of males (Garber, p. 713).

Freud[10] remarks that they are "disunited parts of a single psychic entity" (quoted in Kirsch, p. 290). Her masculine traits complement Macbeth's and they also negate the "illness" of his "human kindness" that we noted earlier. It would not be overestimating Lady Macbeth's influence to say that without her Duncan would have been alive and well in the morning. Yet, I think Ribner (pp. 156–7) is quite right saying that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth gradually separate after the death of Banquo. But during Macbeth's first two stages, and especially in the first, she is a pivotal character.

The witches and Lady Macbeth, as the chief seducer, put Macbeth to the test. This is very similar to what Aquinas observes about the Devil: "called a kindler of thoughts in so much as he incites to thought, by the desire of the things thought of, by way of persuasion, or by rousing the passions" (quoted in Hibbs and Hibbs, pp. 282–3). Indeed, we did observe Macbeth being tempted by the witches' prophecies, his "black and deep" desires kindled, although he did try to fight against it, his wife urged him on and roused his martial "virtues"—harnessed them—to ensure the completion of the deed. This trial—his inner battle—that Macbeth went through, and what Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 274) note as the witches' and Lady Macbeth's temptation of Macbeth, are what evoke our sympathy for him. The murder feels unnecessary and Macbeth seems to be manipulated into it in such a way that he looks like a victim of external influences: "The concatenation of circumstances which make Macbeth's temptation is such as to seem a trap" (Shanley, p. 307).Yet Macbeth is fully aware of the evil he does and although we still sense entrapment, "we cannot dodge Macbeth's responsibility and guilt—he never does" (ibid.).

These external influences of the sisters and Lady Macbeth can be viewed as devils—or the Classical Fates—that tempt characters on to the path of evil. The sisters, in this view, tempt Macbeth in the sense of suggesting an *end* while leaving him to fill out the *means* part. This ploy

[10] Marina Favila provides an interesting Freudian reading of the play in her article "'Mortal Thoughts' and Magical Thinking in 'Macbeth.'" (*Modern Philology*, 99:1; Aug. 2001)

plays to the ego of the character who thinks he is in control, when actually he never realizes he can choose his goals for himself—he becomes a self-guided missile to a preset goal. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, influences Macbeth from the inside as she knows the right buttons to push. Through praise and scorn she directs her husband. Yet she does this not just out of her own will but more out of what *she* thinks her husband wants. In a sense she can be seen as doing this on Macbeth's behalf. More important, returning to the postulate of the tempting devil, Kekes (p. 168) aptly comments that the devil, for us humans, is a way of evading responsibility for our deeds. Macbeth knew the consequences of his actions and did it anyway. There were many places he could have stopped his descent into evil but he *chose* to wade on in blood. As critics have long pointed out, evil comes from within humans themselves (Ribner, p. 151), an idea we are going to examine next.

2.2 Internal Influences

Ambition has been seen by many as Macbeth's most influential motivator to evil, but as we noted in the initial reading both envy and pride have their places in the play. On the other hand, according to Kekes (p. 63), "[a]mbition… is not intrinsically bad, but it is intrinsically dangerous to be ruled by it." It is true, especially in this context, that ambition, envy, and pride are easily seen as evil, but all of these, in moderation, can be used for something positive. But to get a better understanding of these internal influences and how they relate to evil, let us delve into them further.

Ambition was especially evident in the first stage of Macbeth, in killing Duncan. In the moral literature of the Renaissance it was often seen as a threat to hierarchy and as a disorder in the individual, the family, and the state (Kirsch, p. 270). This threat comes from the desire to surpass one's social place, to ascend in the hierarchy, which is a presupposition for ambition. One could say that it is inequality that breeds ambition, and they would be right in that ambition needs a sense of inequality and hierarchy, but wrong in supposing a causal relation between the two. La Primaudaye

observes that “[i]t is ambitio that setteth the sonne against the father, and imboldeneth him to seeke his destruction of whom he holdeth his life” (quoted in Kirsch, p. 276). This natural hierarchy of familial and social relations is, of course, inescapable to us. Lady Macbeth acknowledges the parricidal implications of their plan to kill Duncan: “Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done’t” (2.2.12–3).

Montaigne observes that there is a part of us that is nourished and bred by the loss and hurt of others. He describes this as a natural law (Kirsch, p. 278). Kirsch connects this to Freud’s notion of the fantasies of very young boys to compete with their fathers, a rivalry that can take on a murderous inflection. Duncan plays into this sort of competition from the beginning as he moves the title of Cawdor to Macbeth. Despite being a good and just king, he is not a strong one, as Kirsch suggests, but he presides over the bloody competition that is the political equivalent of Freud’s parricidal playground. This world invites “the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose” (2.1.8–9). These thoughts are in Macbeth’s mind at the beginning of the play, when Banquo sees him start as the witches hail him. “Freud suggests that a man sometimes will commit murder in order to rationalize his sense of guilt, that guilt is the cause of the crime rather than a result.” (Kirsch, pp. 277–9) The ambition within needs to be fulfilled in order to understand what it is that causes the guilt.

Ambition, in Anderson’s point of view, also explains why it is that Macbeth commits murder but Lady Macbeth does not: “The most violent of all passions, ambition causes men to disregard natural tenderness and every moral consideration of human society” (Anderson, p. 151). Lady Macbeth only says she *would* “dash the brains” of a baby. And even that is only elaborating what she could do *if* she had Macbeth’s ambitions. But as noted above she could not kill Duncan. Macbeth is ambitious and she is not. Anderson (p. 152) also sees this ambition being supplemented

with tyranny and fear. The true name of this tyranny is ferity, which Aristotle calls "a state of savagery worse than any other evil" (Anderson, p. 154). This cruelty is clearest in the massacre of Macduff's family. Fear, on the other hand, can come out of an imagined or real danger and it is connected to having something and the fear of losing it—this can be seen behind the attack on Macduff's castle as well as Banquo's murder. The Machiavellian dictum of being feared rather than loved is perhaps safer for a sovereign; but a fear too strong will lead to an uprising amongst the subjects (ibid.). Tyranny and fear continue from where ambition reaches its apex, more concerned with keeping that which ambition desired and achieved.

Desire connects ambition and envy as they both desire what someone else has. Watson (p. 161) notes that the classical and medieval notion of desire was that it is finite, looking for one particular satisfaction, whereas the Renaissance saw desire (pre-empting Romantic and modern notions) as "an infinite regress," inventing new goals for itself—which Watson connects to the qualities of Tamburlaine and Faustus. Malcolm in 4.3 presents this infinite desire as having "no bottom", saying that nothing "could fill up the cistern of his lust." These notions hold well with Macbeth's "black and deep desires" as he reinvents his motivation with each of his stages.

For Scott (p. 168), once having gained its desires, evil can afford to declare itself. After Macbeth becomes king his tyranny becomes evident, he slowly isolates himself from others (especially from his wife). At this stage his worry and envy of Banquo also surfaced. The sudden shift of interest to the issue of offspring seems to stem from this "infinite regress." But envy is a strong motivator, as Kekes (p. 71) argues in attributing Charles Manson's heinous actions to envy—he also sees Iago's deadly malignity rooted in envy. In this vein, some of Richard III's motivation can be found in his envy of others as he is self-professedly "not shaped for sportive tricks," "rudely stamped," "deformed, unfinished" (*Richard III*, 1.1, 14, 16, 20).

In Macbeth's last stage, pride rose as an important influence. He raised himself above others and "laughed to scorn the power of man" as he was not just a man. Aquinas saw the sin of ambition as an aspect of pride, which was "the worst of the medieval seven deadly sins" (Ribner, p. 149). This is not an undeserved ascription because aspects of it can be seen throughout the play, despite our late recognition of it: an element of pride is present when Macbeth is faced with the obstacle of the Prince of Cumberland—whom he refers to as a "boy" (5.3.3). Duncan's raising of Malcolm above Macbeth solidified his desire for the crown, which is reminiscent of Satan's reaction to the Son in *Paradise Lost*. Macbeth's pride can also be seen in the envy of Banquo, in how he does not want to be proved deficient by Banquo's line of kings—his being unable to produce a successor. His pride is rampant in the final scenes—aided by the latter prophecies—as in an arrogant fashion he kills Young Siward, professing that the devil could not produce a more intimidating name than Macbeth. On Young Siward's death he comments: "swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn" (5.7.13). For Augustine (commenting on man's and Satan's rebellion) pride is a perverse desire of height, abandoning God from self-love, wanting to be like gods, and results in a lessened excellence (quoted in Kirsch, pp. 270–1).

We are yet to touch on one aspect of Macbeth's internal life in the play, which at first glance does not seem to fit in with these sins and vices: fear. Kirsch (p. 277) observes that the play is permeated by the "passion of fear, even more deeply, of dread." Cheung writes more extensively of a Kierkegaardian dread: Kierkegaard defines it as "the alarming possibility of *being able*," as "the abiding state, that out of which sin constantly becomes (comes into being)," and as "a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy." Dread is between possibility and reality. It is the desire to do what one fears, preceding the leap to evil (Cheung, p. 430). This is what Macbeth goes through in the first stage, contemplating Duncan's murder. As Kirsch noted earlier the dagger-soliloquy

captures Macbeth's sense of dread. Kierkegaard gives another description of it: "Dread is an alien power which lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself away, nor has the will to do so; for one fears, but what one fears one desires" (quoted in Cheung, p. 431). Macbeth wants to be king yet fears what it entails. He decides against the deed yet almost immediately returns to it. As Cheung notes, forbidding something underlines it as a possibility. "The possibility of freedom announces itself in dread," as Kierkegaard writes. So in stifling the act Macbeth actually fosters it (Cheung, p. 435). The theme of freedom is important, as it is what allows Macbeth to act, and part of Macbeth's fear is realizing that he actually can act—standing before an abyss of possibilities. Yet dread does not accompany every possibility or choice, as not all possibilities emanate from an abyss, only deep and black ones do.

Ambition, envy, desire, pride, and dread all partake in Macbeth's evil from within. But this division between internal and external, although helpful in a structural sense, is somewhat problematic. How are we to understand, for example, Watson's (p. 162) comment on the similarity of Macbeth's ambition to Dawkins's selfish gene?[11] If it is natural i.e., a gene, is it internal or external to what allows us to make choices? Many might say that it is obviously internal to us, but should we then be able to control it? Genes[12] are used to explain many things from Down's-syndrome to obesity but there is a crucial difference here: Down's-syndrome is beyond our sphere of volition whereas obesity is not—genes may give a starting point for our fat cells, sense of hunger, or metabolism, but they do not shove food down our throats. This sort of deterministic thinking, where genes directly affect our choices, is externalizing an internal debate—the same as presenting a moral debate between a little angel and a little devil standing on our shoulders whispering into our ears and

[11] This is a misreading of how genes work. They are operative on the level of populations, not individuals, which is where the selfishness comes in—they lack the moral agency that individuals have.
[12] Here I refer to their common use of inheritance, not to their scientific use, e.g. Down's-syndrome is caused by an extra chromosome, not precisely to do with actual genes.

then seeing these as representing heaven and hell. Again, as pointed out in the previous section, the devil, genes, or envy can be used in a way to avoid our culpability for evil. As we have now looked at these motivators for evil, let us turn to how these shift from thought to action.

2.3 Thought to Action

Lynch (p. 29) points out that images of hands permeate the play and that hand and other senses, like eyes, correlate with desire and act. In this section, we will discuss these moments where the characters reflect on the interaction of thoughts and action.

One of the first instances is where "The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see" (2.4.52–3). Cheung comments on this: "Macbeth bids the eye to wink at the hand, betraying at once his fear at what the hand will do and his wish to connive at the act when it is done." "Let that be" reveals two sides: first, it shows will to have the deed done; and second, the speaker wants to be dissociated from it." Moreover the eye does not watch it being done but rather fears to gaze on the finished act. Macbeth is not so much tempted to the crown by others, but is himself captivated by the deed (Cheung, p. 434). As we noted in the first chapter, there is an element of self-deception going on here. Although he is captivated by the thought, he does not want to witness its materialization. Something in the eye, the sense, wants to be dissociated from it and by keeping the eye shut for the immediate moment is a way of circumventing any protest.

Lynch provides a varied discussion of hands in *Macbeth*. As a starting point for the play, she notes that

> the most basic and obvious meaning of hands in the play is the most worldly—the shaking or joining of hands to signify a bond of mutual duty or friendship. … This bond, of course, is the very tie that Macbeth's crime severs, so its significance for the play is central. (Lynch, p. 30)

This partly explains the eye's dissociation from the deed, from the hands. Both Aristotle and Galen compare the hand to the soul. The hand as an instrument gives man the capacity to do many things, useful for peace as well as war. An instrument for all instruments (Lynch, p. 33–4). As the hand can be used for many things, it seems very indiscriminate; it can be an instrument of healing, like Edward the Confessor's hands in 4.3, or an instrument for murder as with Macbeth. Lynch (pp. 36–7) sees that Macbeth is characterized by quickly bringing his brutal thoughts to hand—but his art is not a creative but a destructive one, "his hands engineering only the negative, pessimistic side of the human paradox."

The dagger-soliloquy is also an important passage, though pertaining more to the eyes. They show Macbeth the dagger, guiding his thoughts to the murderous deed at hand. It "marshalls" him the way he is going. But as it turns bloody in his eyes, he denies its existence, although just a moment earlier it was "in form as palpaple" as the dagger in his hand. His thoughts on the bloody deed informed his eyes. As we noted in our initial look into this soliloquy, Macbeth denies something in himself, perhaps the same thing he circumvented earlier.

Bloody hands are prominent especially after the first murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as well as Banquo's murderers "conceal their dirty hands with gestures of loyalty and affiliation." Yet the hand Macbeth fears (2.2.60) that turns the seas red, goes "beyond civil trust and obedience" referring to a tradition that sees "the hand as the means for man to lift himself up to God through various acts of moral and spiritual self-definition" (Lynch, p. 31). As the hands reflected the soul, their souls are also bloody. Although the hands are an indiscriminate instrument, what they do leaves a mark in their soul. "It is not so much the crime that cannot be erased—that too—but more specifically the connection the body maintains between the crime and its perpetrator through the synecdoche of transporting of the guilt to one's part, to one's hand." (Zamir, p. 101) Here the hands,

the body, are a place of meaning; therefore it is Macbeth's eyes which communicate something sensible, not merely a projection of thoughts.

As he continues to wade in blood, he wants to break this sensible connection, remove himself from natural order as noted earlier:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale. (3.2.47–51)

The sensible eye is to be separated from his instrumental hand, as what the eye senses or shows "keeps him pale." This is right before Banquo is murdered and the images of his bloody hands still haunt him. To achieve the single state of man he desires, he must be rid of the eye's disruptive sensing. Therefore he must continue his bloody wading and not turn back. Lynch observes that as he chooses evil, he brings "pure negation into being," the "dagger of the mind" becomes a real dagger in his hand—"Macbeth's hands are thus the 'hangman's hands' the 'bloody and invisible hand' of Night that cancels the bonds of life and being." Macbeth's "alacrity in bringing thought to hand … distinguishes Macbeth from his wife." She has "hands of his colour" but they lack his power. When she complains that Macbeth keeps to himself—"Of sorriest fancies companions making" (3.2.11)—she seems to be actually talking more of herself as can be seen from her sleep-walking episodes, where she compulsively and continuously keeps rubbing her hands. Her guilt has turned inwards (Lynch, p. 36).

In this eye to hand, thought to action, sense Macbeth and Lady Macbeth start to differ during the play. Lady Macbeth becomes more reflective and Macbeth less so:

> Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
> Which must be acted ere they may be scanned. (3.4.138–9)

For Kekes (p. 98) this is a frame of mind that prevents Macbeth from doubting the moral rightness of what he is doing. Macbeth's sensible eye shows what the implications of his actions are and he is not so worried by the sensible images themselves, but he is worried about how he *feels* about those images. His feelings become muted towards the end of the play, as

> The very firstlings of my heart shall be
> The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
> To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done… (4.1.163–5)

The heart here represents Macbeth's passions and desires, so what he wants here is a direct route from his thoughts to his actions without any moderation. This disregard of any kind of social sphere, an extreme individualism, returns to his sin of pride. Kirsch observes: in trying to obtain power to change the world to his own mental image, Macbeth wishes to be like a god. "This is the apogee of his ambition." He is no longer concerned with the gap of eye and hand—thought and act—and so he loses his fear: "Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, / Cannot once start me" (5.5.14–5). Because of this he begins to "lose the energy and the definition of life itself" (Kirsch, p. 287). The images he muted conveyed meaning, now he is void of that meaning and the feeling that went with it. Just as there was an absence of feeling at the news of Lady Macbeth's decease.

What enabled Macbeth to commit evil was his systematic shutdown of his moral faculties. He separated morals from actions. To do this he had stop feeling, cut off his natural bonds. But his efforts to gain this distance suggest that there is something naturally moral within him. For the first half of the play the struggle with his conscience is quite evident. This distinguishes Macbeth from Richard III as the latter has few moral compunctions. In the next section we will focus on conscience.

2.4 Dreams, Sleep, Conscience

The bloody hands clearly show the awareness of the evil committed. Macbeth's hands would stain everything and turn all the waters blood red. The imagery of blood is linked to the revenge of conscience (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 292). His bloody hands "pluck out his eyes"—the sight of his bloody hands destroys his sensible vision. This is what Macbeth denied in his vision of the dagger. The air-drawn dagger shows the intensity of Macbeth's imagination, which deprives him of sleep and for the rest of the play he is trying to recover sleep (Anderson, p. 168). Indeed, sleep, the state in which we are most vulnerable to our inner debates as well as physical threats, is where conscience is most evident in the play. After killing Duncan, he describes it:

> Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more,
> Macbeth does murder sleep'—the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast— (2.2.33–8)

In losing sleep, he has lost his innocence, what he has done cannot be taken back. Sleep cleanses and nourishes the mind and body, and waking after it is like being reborn. Sleep deprivation is like famine, slowly disintegrating the body and the mind. This connects to the Porter and the state of body and mind he describes as humorous when drunk because it leaves him after sleep, but such a state is hell for the sober person as it does not leave him (Kirsch, p. 274). Macbeth's crimes return to him in his sleep and in Banquo's ghost, so in order to turn off his conscience, he continues to wade in the bloody waters and needs to kill Macduff so that he will be able to "sleep in spite of thunder" (4.1.102), as Anderson (p. 169) suggests.

Garber (p. 717) notes that where Macbeth leaves the language of blood, Lady Macbeth picks it up. As they are both part of a "single psychic entity," Lady Macbeth turns from being the kindler of Macbeth's evil into his conscience when they, fittingly, start becoming distanced from

each other. Sleep is presented as a natural recuperative element, so Lady Macbeth's sleep walking episode in 5.1 is seen as unnatural. A doctor is observing her while she is sleepwalking and trying to wash her hands of blood. The doctor describes this as "A great perturbation in nature" (5.1.9). The strong-willed temptress who coached her husband out of his "illness"—his human kindness—is now a feeble, mumbling shadow of herself stuck in the twilight of sleep and wakefulness. But this is not an illness or a disease where the cause is external, as the doctor explains to Macbeth:

> Not so sick, my lord,
> As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies
> That keep her from her rest. (5.3.39–41)

Paul Kocher (p. 341) also notes that her ailment is more mental than physical. The doctor, as a typical early modern physician, is more focused on the physical matters than on mental or moral issues, says: "This disease is beyond my practice" (5.1.56). This sort of spiritual matter for Elizabethan physicians—many of whom were atheists—is something where "the patient must minister to himself" (5.3.47–8), as Kocher (pp. 341–2) explains. The doctor, who overhears Lady Macbeth's ranting, also connects the events in the play to "unnaturalness":

> Unnatural deeds
> Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
> To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
> More needs she the divine than the physician. (5.1.68–71)

This suggests that Lady Macbeth needs to reconcile herself to the divine powers because it is mainly these she has violated. Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 292) see that Shakespeare agrees with the doctor's assessment that it is an "unnatural human propensity to violate conscience" and therefore there is "the need for mercy and grace." She "unsexed" herself with "murd'ring ministers" in order to help her husband kill Duncan, "a most sainted king" (4.3.110). Her pillow is there to hear her confessions, but that does not help her conscience as it is no priest. Her actions have returned to "plague their inventor"—in the same way that Banquo's ghost or the ghosts of the murdered who came to trouble

Richard's sleep the night before his battle against Richmond (the only time when some residue of his conscience can be seen). Anderson (p. 171) rightly sees conscience as Lady Macbeth's executioner.

Fear also partly reveals Macbeth's moral conscience. For Anderson (p. 160), fear is to do with fearing that one is only a stepping-stone for someone else—this explains Buckingham's as well as Banquo's deaths. Jan Kott (p. 85) calls this the Grand Mechanism that is evident both in *Macbeth* and *Richard III*—as well as in other king plays. It is a great ladder the top rung of which marks the place of the sovereign, which is systematically prone to change. This image and the fear of it reflect a social—as well as a moral—conscience exemplified in the Golden Rule or the categorical imperative. Behind the fear is, in a Kantian sense, the sense that they—Macbeth and Richard—have legislated a universal law of regicide through their ascent to power. Therefore, it is no wonder that both of them are uneasy as kings and resort to tyranny. Their plotting minds see only plots against their crown, as they do to some extent project themselves into others.

Although we have expanded on Macbeth's ability and motives for evil, the essence of evil still eludes us. We know that Macbeth is self-admittedly responsible for his evil, but can we call him evil in an absolute sense that there is no good in him? As we have seen, he is neither devoid of conscience nor of morals. Shanley (p. 308) comments: "Macbeth is a moderately good man, no better, but also no worse, than the next one." Indeed, it is not correct or right to say the character of Macbeth is absolutely or ontologically or essentially evil. If he was purely evil, why does Macbeth have a problem with his actions and conscience? None of Macbeth's inner influences—ambition, envy, pride, or dread—are unequivocally evil characteristics, in the sense that possessing one of them would make someone evil. If Macbeth were unabashedly evil, would we have sympathy for him, or could his story be a tragedy? Even Richard III has a moment of remorse as he questions himself in 5.5. Yet we are still certain that there is something evil in Macbeth's and Richard's

transgressions. Is evil the *cause* of what happened or the *effect*? Having in this chapter seen that the presumption of essential evil is inadequate to cover the complex problem of evil, as *Macbeth* shows, we will continue in the next chapter to delve deeper into the issues.

3. What Is Evil?

To label Macbeth as evil would deny all the evidence of humanity in him. He would be void of all humanity: a monster. But we can clearly see instances of humanity within him, which is why we react sympathetically. Lady Macbeth cannot be deemed evil as she repents of her life. Can we with good heart judge the witches to be evil? No, as they do anything except announce what they have seen in a prophecy: they are merely mediators—just presenting the message. Yet it makes compelling sense to talk of Macbeth, and the play itself, in terms of evil: the category is kept in play, while the characters seem not really to fit into it, or finally to distance themselves from it. But what is evil then? As we attempt delineate evil, first we have to consider why it is not more evident to us; second, we will inspect the difference between bad and evil; and thirdly, we juxtapose evil with other elements within the play.

3.1 Why Is Evil Not Evident?

From the characters' view point it is hard to see what is going on until the damage is done—evil does not show itself until its goals are reached, as we noted earlier. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth hid their intentions well:

> Duncan wants to "find the mind's construction in the face," but Macbeth is resolved that "[f]alse face must hide what the false heart doth know" (1.7.82). "False face" here includes the wearing of visors and disguises… (Garber, p. 705)

Their success is dependent on not allowing others to suspect them of mischief and they are aided by Macbeth's rashness—his need to act quickly. Yet it is not enough to have a neutral visage, but in order to gain better proximity Macbeth must seem the opposite of his intentions:

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men

> May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
> Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't. (1.5.61–5)

With foul deeds in mind he must look fair. A lot of what Richard III does follow these lines, but he takes this sort of Machiavellianism to a different level: he is rarely directly involved in the murders, and is a consummate politician who is even able successfully to woo the widow of the man who, as even she knew, was killed by Richard. Similarly, though more sinisterly, in *Titus Andronicus* Aaron the Moor pretends to help Titus to save his sons (whom Aaron framed) from an impending death sentence by saying that they would be released if Titus cut his hand off, which he then does only to find out that it did not help his sons. Such villains mask their intentions to ensure success. These examples, though very different, bring up the issue of trust. Ironically, it is Macbeth who describes this situation best:

> And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear
> And break it to our hope. (5.10.19–22)

This is what he did to Duncan, bringing him into his home in double trust. There was also "a double sense" to Duncan's presence for Macbeth: first, he was a guest; and second, he presented an opportunity for the fulfilment of his ambitions. To the very last moments he was immersed in that ambiguity, as he was immersed, throughout the play, in the witches' prophecies—to which he is referring above. Indeed, the theme of ambiguity is quite prominent, which is brought out in the Porter and his talk of equivocation:

> Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both
> the scales against either scale, who committed treason
> enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to
> heaven. O, come in, equivocator. (2.3.8–11)

Not only does this show equivocation amongst people, but it also refers to equivocation within people as well—the ability to "swear in both scales against either scale." Garber (p. 700) continues from here:

> Equivocation: ambiguity, the dangerous double meanings of language. Macbeth … is an equivocator in all things: a man who is split in two directions, who commits murder to become King, and suffers every moment once he is King.

Through this equivocation he is able to deceive others, but he also betrays himself as he is not above the ambiguities of language. In fact, he is especially caught within equivocation as he cannot escape the double meanings of the prophecies. His single state of man shakes as he ponders his options. The relation between his eye and hand illustrates his self-deception—true to what Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 281) claim about sin: it "simultaneously involves knowing, and yet willing not to know, what one is up to." Equivocation works on many levels as Garber (p. 699) notes: "[e]quivocation is closely akin to ambiguity, as well as to indecisiveness, an unwillingness to commit oneself either way." Uncertainty and hesitancy leading to mistrust follow equivocation. After the confusion of Duncan's murder, when everyone runs off to "put on manly readiness," Malcolm and Donaldbain decide to leave as they perceive "daggers in men's smiles" (2.3.139). Duncan's murder has shaken their—as well as the other characters'—trust in their surroundings. "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy" (2.3.135–6). How are they to know who is false and who is true? Malcolm puts this into words:

> Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.
> Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace
> Yet grace must still look so. (4.3.23–5)

Indeed, evil does not declare itself outright. If it were something clear and distinct it would not trouble us so. We are unable to see what is foul and what is fair—they seem almost interchangeable.

The problem of evil for us is well characterized by “fair is foul and foul is fair.” If, in Malcolm’s words, something were to “wear the brows of grace,” how are we to know which it is? Keats puts this in another way: “We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist” (quoted in Baker, p. 19). Both of these work with appearance and reality, but there is a slight difference between them: “fair and foul” suggests that we see things clearly enough but do not know which is which; the “mist,” on the other hand, suggests that we do not even see clearly. The first implies that evil is beyond our perception, its true essence is in a world beyond ours—it is transcendent. The second then implies that evil is in our world, it is immanent—we just do not see clearly enough, the world is blurry to us.

Along these lines, in which I have interpreted these two proponents of the ambiguity of evil, I suggest that they are describing the same problem, although in different vocabularies, and that they describe, to a degree, two thirds of a shift in our understanding of evil. Yet, I do not propose this to be a distinct historical shift, but rather a philosophical postulate to illustrate through caricature some of the problems in our contemporary debate on evil. So, the vocabulary of “foul and fair” describes a world in which there are two levels of existence: the immanent and the transcendent. We are part of the immanent and God is a part of, or rather comprises, the transcendent. The transcendent has access to the immanent, but the immanent cannot access the transcendent. Good and evil are part of the transcendent and we perceive only momentary glimpses of them as of God. In this world, we strive to understand the immanent—whatever suffering or joy we have—through the transcendent, so the transcendent is important to us.

In the vocabulary of the “mist” we are much more focused on the immanent, although not denying the transcendent. God is somewhere in the background, but it is reason and nature that offer us more explanation and solace.“We,” here, is not the same “we” as in “foul and fair,” because

in the “mist” we have become more focused on ourselves, though we do know that others are out there and often can feel and see them if they are close by. The transcendent and evil are still there but evil is seen to be more of an immanent characteristic.

Despite slightly shifting towards a more individual and secular worldview, both of these formulae (“foul and fair” and “mist”) describe the trouble of perceiving evil, both acknowledge a gap between appearance and reality. In our contemporary view, we have become more secular, there is no need for God or the transcendent. The individual is imbued with more power, even in choosing values. Our vocabulary is overrun by commercial usage that feeds on equivocation. We have become very disenchanted with any higher purpose from religion to socialism. The issue of appearance and reality is still there, although it is overshadowed by our modern predicament. Charles Taylor (p. 10) sees that there are three malaises that prevail in our contemporary life:

> The first fear is about what we might call a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons. The second concerns the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason. And the third is about a loss of freedom.

We will touch on all of these as we move on but the first one is crucial to our current issue.

What hinders our perception of evil is the equivocation and ambiguity endemic to it. This stems from the way that we are: our subjective existence separates us, but we are brought together by a common corporeality and a shared ability to communicate. Equivocation shows our ability to deceive each other and ourselves. It is easy to understand how the loss of meaning can occur if we cannot trust what we perceive. But the existence of these utterly negative things we call evil is not called into question. Evil clearly happens in *Macbeth*. In the next section, we will question evil and our moral horizons, against the backdrop of our modern predicament, in order to clarify the meaning of evil.

3.2 Bad versus Evil

The pairings of good-bad and good-evil ought to be distinguished. They are, of course, connected to each other—as they are to right-wrong—but they are not interchangeable. Calling the Holocaust—the prime topic for contemporary discussion on evil—a bad thing, in its disrespect, is not just wrong but bordering on evil itself, because it betrays an utter and blatant disregard for the immense suffering and horrendous devaluation of human life that occurred. The corruption of the distinction between bad and evil is enabled by the distance we have to anything that is actually evil. We are aware that people are suffering and dying but it is far removed from our middle-class existence, or even non-existent to us if if we so choose, because it is mostly mediated to us. The cultural industry gives evil a post-modern twist by making it into subversive individualism and valorising the extreme difference of mass murderers, for example. Evil is repackaged and sold to us. The individual experiences of the bad and mediated evil do not differ much if our intake is that of passive mastication. Horror is the entertainment form of mediated evil, cutting out mental reflection so as not to disturb the bodily sensations. But at some moments reality cuts through the layers of entertainment and distraction we are bombarded with, moments such as 9/11 or shootings at schools. But how is it that bad and evil can even be suggested to be interchangeable?

Let us begin with Nietzsche. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he states that the values of good and bad were posited by an aristocracy that saw themselves and their ways as being good, which was in opposition to what was below them and that was then bad (Nietzsche 1996, pp. 12–3). But the powerless priests reacted against this in *ressentiment*—resentment—by reversing the values of the aristocracy to being evil (ibid., p. 19) and themselves and others of similar powerlessness—like little lambs against big birds of prey—into being good in opposition to evil (ibid., p. 29).

This manner of positing is what Kekes (p. 215) talks about when referring to moral relativism: “If moral relativism simply claimed that some values are conventional, it would be a truism not worth uttering. But it claims more, namely, that all moral values are conventional.” Some values are indeed conventional, as what is considered bad, but evil is less to do with convention—or, in fact, evil shows the unconventionality of some values. At face value, relativism—moral and cultural—seems and is taken to promote respect and understanding of others—even killers—and discussion on morals is deferred. This is similar to Macbeth’s sensible eye, as its judgment is deferred allowing Macbeth’s destructive hands to go unchecked. It is disallowing the outside world to interact with him. Relativism is only a small step from nihilism—in fact, they both use the same mechanics of moral deferral. Interaction on a moral level is denied.

Macbeth’s nihilism is enabled by continuously trying to silence his moral interaction with the world. He chooses to live in his personal mist and tries to remove everyone else from his life. Zamir (p. 96) points out that “Macbeth’s brand of nihilism involves circumventing times and things, a process that enables maintaining the belief in their worthlessness.” He ignores the various chances to stop and seek redemption; he quite literally overlooks what his eyes try to show him. Macbeth especially refuses the problem of conscience his wife has and wants the Doctor to administer some remedy, as if it was a medical disease. He even wanted to defer the death of Lady Macbeth. Zamir (ibid.) continues: “Nihilism is not merely an experience in which things are hollow and valueless but a mode of nonattachment that relies on a manner of looking that goes beyond what there is.” Even attaining the throne is meaningless for him as he does not stop to relish it but he sees himself as a “poor player” whose tale signifies nothing. But, as I pointed out earlier, Macbeth’s sense of meaninglessness displays meaning for us especially in how he treats his inner conflicts:

> Macbeth seldom speaks of his life in terms of the conventional opposition of good and evil; he experiences the conflict within him less as a moral problem than a

> psychological and physiological problem, and thus the absolutes of his personality are more concretely presented than the necessarily abstract language of ethical discourse would permit. (Horwich, p. 369)

Horwich seems to suggest there are "absolutes of personality" that ethical discourse tries to explain, but what ethical discourse *actually* tries to explain are the moral issues that are presented—what is exhibited on stage. By not specifically dealing with moral terms, Macbeth not only describes but he also exhibits nihilism and the problem of evil. What happens on stage is not just abstract discussion of moral issues but it actually exhibits the moral issues. Hibbs and Hibbs note that "Macbeth wrongly supposes that his nihilistic vision is the final word on human life." The play shows this nihilism false, although with the help of a nihilistic, depraved character (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 290).

This is reminiscent of what Nietzsche does with his statement above. By his postulations he is critiquing dogmatic morality, as Bernstein (p. 114) comments:

> Nietzsche's critique of morality is directed to exposing the self-deceptive illusion that the morality of good and evil is *the* universal, *the* only genuine morality. He also wants to show that the good/evil morality, which appears so reasonable, is founded on *ressentiment.*

He wants to prove how dangerous a presumption this morality is. He is challenging a simple transcendental idea of morality, an objective view on it, yet—crucially—"he is not calling into question the idea of 'objectivity,' but calling attention to a more *adequate* notion of what 'objectivity' means" (Bernstein, p. 118). Kekes (p. 130) sees that "as a result, he denies the reality of evil; it exists only as a product of resentful weak minds." Here, I believe, Kekes is wrong, as Nietzsche does not deny the reality of evil per se, but objects to it being founded on *ressentiment*, and therefore wants to move beyond good and evil. In this case, evil merely counters the bad, is an opposing force created by *ressentiment* and, therefore, with this inversion, it actually equates them. If he were to utterly deny evil, he would be the nihilist he is trying to fight against. As Neiman (2002, p. 215) comments: "Nietzsche made us conscious both of the religious origin of the problem of evil

and of the fact that abolishing religion cannot solve it—except at the price of world-destroying nihilism." He also makes clear what power the use of "evil" has and that is why its use should be well founded—there should be an *adequate* notion of what it means.

In order to achieve some adequate notion, it needs to be made clear that "evil" is not interchangeable with "bad." Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 280) suggest that performing an evil act is not just a bad choice but "a culpable error in judgment." The judgment referred to here is a moral judgment, our sense of right and wrong, signifying some sense of a collective natural law. Macbeth did not choose just to steal Duncan's crown, but ended the life of a person who trusted him. Stealing would have been bad, but killing a helpless old man in his sleep, not to mention helpless women and children, is just evil. Kekes (p. 225) continues:

> Evil actions violate [the] requirement [for human well-being] through the inexcusable excess and malevolence of the serious harm they cause. That is why evil actions are much worse than simply morally bad and why they provoke outrage for transgressing limits in a manner that threatens the very possibility of civilized life.

The "black and deep" characterizing Macbeth's evil is not a postmodern sense of "a fashionable colour combined with inner complexity of character" but rather refer to parts that are unknown within us, caverns inside us that have not been illuminated.

By rebuking postmodern relativism and heeding Nietzsche's warning of moral absolutism we have come to a clearer sense of what is at stake with evil. If we cut ourselves off from the outer world, like Macbeth, we lose the social sense to morals and shift into a solipsistic world of nihilism. If we use "evil" unreflectively, due to the absolutist and essentialist sense it carries with it, by deeming someone "evil" we are essentially demonizing them, stripping them of humanity and, therefore, we do not understand what evil is but take it as universal given *and forfeit the chance to object to it*. This is why sympathy for Macbeth is crucial, yet we must not defer judgment on him and

lapse into relativism. But to further clarify evil it is good to juxtapose it with other elements within the play.

3.3 Evil Juxtaposed

In our comparison of Macbeth with Banquo and Macduff we noted a weakness to temptation within Macbeth: both Banquo and Macduff were able to resist a seduction to evil. Yet neither Banquo nor Macduff were without fault. Ribner (p. 154) sees three groups of humanity in the play: in the state of damnation (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth); the average sinful man (Malcolm, Macduff, and Banquo); and those in the state of innocence (Duncan and Edward the Confessor). Although Ribner quite rightly includes Malcolm to the group of average people, this schema is too simplifying for our purposes. And for the understanding of evil this can be even harmful. In *describing* these three groups that can be seen towards the end of the play, he also *prescribes* this division to the beginning, suggesting that some are bound to fail and end up in the first group. Though it carries some weight for other purposes, to study evil in *Macbeth* in these terms would miss the point completely. And the point is that there are propensities to evil in everyone. Macbeth was not the same in the beginning as in the end. Neither was Lady Macbeth, who ended up carrying most of the guilt. Malcolm, in his testing of Macduff, played the part almost too convincingly. Banquo, as we noted, exhibited strong inclinations for a personal ambition of his own. Macduff displayed savagery comparable to Macbeth in killing and decapitating him.

Neither was Duncan innocent, but juxtaposed with Macbeth and his plan he was innocent in the sense that he did little to provoke Macbeth's attack—no just cause, contra Holinshed—in fact, it was quite the opposite: he had rewarded Macbeth with a new title and only "began to plant" him (1.4.28). Duncan is actually a crucial point of reference when considering Macbeth, because without Duncan Macbeth's actions would not seem as terrible as they do. Garber

(p. 703) notes that Duncan is linked with light, day, and stars; Macbeth on the other hand, with darkness, night, and a "brief candle." Ribner (p. 150) sees Duncan as symbolizing the fruitful aspects of nature; Macbeth and his hands have a destructive force on them, as we remember. But Duncan represents, as a king, a higher authority amongst men, which is noted by Macduff upon finding the assassinated Duncan:

> Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.
> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
> The life o'th' building. (2.3.65–8)

His murder is "sacrilegious" and he is the "life of the Lord's anointed temple"—Duncan's murder is a violation against God. Even Macbeth saw Duncan as meek and possessing virtues that would "plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking-off." Similarly, Edward represents divine powers:

> 'Tis called the evil—
> A most miraculous work in this good King,
> Which often since my here-remain in England
> I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven
> Himself best knows, but strangely visited people,
> All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
> The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
> Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
> Put on with holy prayers; and 'tis spoken,
> To the succeeding royalty he leaves
> The healing benediction. With this strange virtue
> He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,
> And sundry blessings hang about his throne
> That speak him full of grace. (4.3.147-160)

This describes Edward's ability to cure scrofula—or the King's Evil—with his touch. He also has powers of soliciting and prophecy similar to the three witches and his healing hands are at odds with Macbeth's destructive hands. Lynch (p. 32) observes that in *Macbeth*, "the hand becomes the

instrument with which man either participates in or repudiates the divine creative act through creative acts of his own."

Duncan and Edward are, then, both representatives of the divine transcendence on Earth and therefore also representatives of natural order. Nature itself also reacts to Duncan's murder:

> The night has been unruly. Where we lay
> Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
> Lamentings heard i'th' air, strange screams of death,
> And prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confused events
> New-hatched to th' woeful time. The obscure bird
> Clamoured the livelong night. Some say the earth
> Was feverous and did shake. (2.3.53–60)

This is what Lennox reported on the night of Duncan's murder. It is as though nature is groaning in pain at what is happening; Macbeth is like a virus attacking the body making it feverous. A similar observation is made in the next scene—after Duncan's body is found—where an Old Man talks to Ross:

> I have seen
> Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night
> Hath trifled former knowings. (2.4.2–4)

He has witnessed the same night as Lennox, which for him is unparalleled. For Ross, the Old Man has seen "the heavens, as troubled with man's act, / Threatens his bloody stage" (2.4.5–6). Ross clearly connects these unnatural events to the murder of Duncan. But there are also other signs: a mousing owl has "hawked" and killed a falcon; Duncan's horses—which are fit for a king—went wild, broke out of their stalls, as to "make war on mankind" (2.4.18). Not stopping there, as Ross witnessed, they—both strangely and ominously—ate each other. This sort of environmental reaction is very different and more severe than the cliché of the dark and rainy night with occasional thunder and lightning. Ross also notices that the day-time is affected:

> Is't night's predominance or the day's shame
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb
> When living light should kiss it? (2.4.8–10)

For the characters, as for the play, darkness ensues from Duncan's assassination. It is murky where light should be. Day is turning into night—in the darkness Duncan was killed and so was Banquo. Darkness is the time for evil deeds. As the Old Man says: "'Tis unnatural, / Even like the deed that's done" (2.4.10-1). Garber (p. 704) notes the unnatural events:

> Night replaces day, nature turns against itself in cannibalistic excess, and the apparition scene with the witches ends, famously, with two great images of the paradoxical and unnatural: a man not born of woman, and a moving grove.

Nature is a strong theme in *Macbeth* and the evil seems to derail many natural propensities, such as sleep—most evident in Lady Macbeth and her unnatural condition of sleepwalking. Macbeth is also seen to detach himself from nature. For Ribner (p. 156), nature's activity is connected to sin: "Man by his sin has forfeited his dominion over nature." He also sees that the curing of scrofula underscores Edward as "an instrument of supernatural grace, designed to cleanse the unnatural evil" (ibid.).

Susan Neiman (2002, p. 39) argues that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was the beginning of the modern distinction between natural and moral evil, and that Rousseau was the first to underline this separation—which also suggests a separation between sin and suffering. With this separation we have a shift in focus from the transcendent to the immanent—on which we touched earlier. With this separation it became easier to perceive the realm of human action as separate from what happens in nature. Murderers are differentiated from earthquakes, floods and so on. This can also be seen in the light of modernity and the steady separation of the human from nature. In fact, the terminological separation has continued so that our contemporary use of "evil" refers solely to moral evil—the category of natural evil is all but extinct. Connected to this is what Kant calls the

metaphysics of nature and the metaphysics of morals, which coincide, respectively, with the realms of nature and freedom, and the laws pertaining to both (Kant 1997, pp. 1–2). Evil, from a contemporary perspective, is to do with morals and freedom. But how are we to consider a murderous lunatic, a homicidal madman from this perspective? Is it within the bounds of moral evil?

Our judicial systems separate cases of insanity from 'normal' murderers and offenders. They are in a sense equated with destructive natural phenomena like hurricanes, things that are outside human control, outside morality in the realm of nature. Perhaps a more suitable comparison is a wild animal—it is outside of control in the sense of predictability, but under control in the sense of management—they can be killed or locked up. But in judging someone evil, we distance them from us, from humanity—accordingly, Ribner (p. 156) sees that evil separates Macbeth from the rest of humanity—thus moving evil from morality towards the realm of nature, leaving it in an odd limbo. Our sense of some people like Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler is to call them monsters, un- and in-human. But unlike many clinically insane cases, they were human beings like any of us, with the difference of their committing atrocious deeds. The difference between Macbeth and Macduff is not that great either, as we noted above. The problem here is that moral evil does not sufficiently account for such cases of human evil. Our experience of evil does not neatly fall into either of the realms of nature or freedom. In fact, Kant was not satisfied with the division between natural and moral—or theoretical and practical, as he also characterizes it—and he tried to bridge it in his third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, consisting of aesthetic and teleological judgment.

In *Macbeth* the connection of natural and moral evil is still intact as can be seen from nature's active participation. This suggests, as we have seen, the existence of some natural law that Macbeth violates. Macbeth's decline into evil mirrors Aquinas's stages of punishment for breaking natural law: the loss of his "eternal jewel"; he comes close to madness; he is left to wallow in his

own sin; and is finally left with only the defense of his bodily existence (Hibbs and Hibbs, pp. 287). This law can also be seen, and would have been seen in Shakespeare's time, as God's law. It is a transcendent law as it elicits supernatural and unnatural responses. In the light of this, where does evil then come from?

Sin would be an obvious answer here—in this case, especially the sins of pride, ambition, and envy. Although sin describes well what has happened, for Augustine sin, or evil for that matter, explains nothing: "To describe enemies as evil ironically has the effect of creating the Manichean world that Augustine was intent on defeating" (Hauerwas, p. 45). The Manichean world is one in which good and evil do continuous battle, where both are absolute entities—ontologically good or evil. This is again placing evil outside our control. Kekes (p. 3) suggests another explanation: "There are various religious explanations, but most of them assume that the failure results from the misuse of the evildoers' reason or will. Evil is thus seen as a defect in evildoers rather than in the scheme of things." Kekes (p. 6) also notes—as have many others—that the Enlightenment also saw the failure of reason as an explanation for evil.

Traditionally, reason is seen in contrast to human passions and emotions. Paster (p. 144) elaborates on emotions: they are essential for survival, produce the right sort of reaction like fight or flight but they also "cloud the judgment, corrupt the will, and seduce the reason." This works also as a quite accurate description of Macbeth's character. He is prone to passionate outbursts, like after Duncan's murder, meeting Banquo's ghost, or in the preparations for the final battle. The central tensions between characters can be seen in light of reason and passion. Macbeth is a slave to his passions whereas Banquo is more in tune with reason. Yet, this is not to reflect negatively on passions, as Macduff uses his own feelings and passions to a positive effect—to strengthen his revenge. Nor, on a larger scale, can reason be glorified, as Richard III in a very rational—and

Machiavellian—fashion plans and executes various murders. Neither reason nor passion can be unequivocally seen as the cause for evil.

We have again come back to our original problem in this chapter: what is evil? We have considered it as an essence, implying that some characters are simply evil, but due to its deferring and reductive qualities—not considering good characteristics in evil entities or evil propensities in good characters—we are likely to agree with Augustine, for whom evil does not ontologically exist, is not in itself a substance (Hauerwas, p. 38). There is no black and white eternal battle between good and evil as Manicheans believed. If it was indeed like this there would be no problem of evil as it would be self-evident to us. Aquinas, following the Augustinian tradition, gives a far more interesting proposition that evil is an action: "sin signifies not only the privation of good, which privation is its lack of order, but also the act which is the subject of that privation" (Hibbs and Hibbs, p. 278). This view connects natural order and law. Although many critics agree with this, I do not because it does not capture what evil is to us, and especially *how* it is to us. For me evil is analogous to God. Evil is not an action, although it does appear in an act: just so, analogously, we do not equate God with miracles, but miracles are seen as proof of God's existence. Therefore, acts of evil are not what evil is, but where evil becomes apparent to us. The problem of evil thus connects elementally to another problem we have already discussed: that of appearance and reality.

This is a problem in which Kant is yet again very helpful. But before going there it should be noted that what we talk about as reality is actually referring to truth, it is how things really are. Caygill (p. 79) explains what appearance is for Kant:

> it is not simply illusion—the deceptive semblance of sensible perception—but rather *experience* within the limits of human intuitions of space and time. However, Kant did maintain a qualified version of the ancient distinction between appearance and truth—between *phenomena* and *noumena*—along with its correlates of becoming and being, the sensible and the ideal, matter and form. (My italics)

This is a problem that permeates our existence. What we perceive as either transcendent or immanent are both phenomenal—the world we perceive—to us, it is the "mist" of our senses that keeps us from getting unmediated access of the noumenal—the world that exists by itself. This does not, however, mean that we only exist in a phenomenal world. The laws of nature are our interpretations of the noumenal—they are not mere convention. Kekes (p. 150) sees that the grounding of a moral argument ultimately lies in facts about human life, our bodily existence. Therefore, not all of our moral values are conventional. Evil appears in, or even from, the gap of phenomenal and the noumenal. How can the realm of freedom coincide with the realm of nature? This is a question that is too vast to be dealt with here (or anywhere). But returning to the problem of evil—as it is related to our actions, is it then a cause or an effect of our actions? I see it as both. Evil implies an essence beyond appearances insofar since it resists relativism as well as any ontologizing and absolutizing in worldly phenomena; but it also resists becoming a purely transcendent principle because we somehow live and sense this transcendence, or excess, too. Evil keeps indicating a higher ground which can never be reached, or fully grasped. This is due to our phenomenal experience of evil. We will delve further in the final chapter.

4. Experience of Evil

Our first attempt at seeing evil as absolute—as ontological—failed, but this has led to an understanding that evil, like our values, is not fixed—a debt we owe Nietzsche. As Neiman noted towards the end of section 2.2, for Nietzsche religious absolutes are false, but abolishing them will lead to an even worse alternative—nihilism. For me, this suggests that our theological framework needs re-examination because evil is connected to it, and this heritage is still with us, subtly or otherwise. Our morals and our perception of evil are *not* tied down to or dependent on religion but they do emerge from a long tradition whose concepts are holistically connected—and perhaps the only vocabulary for moral description of experience, so it is sensible to explore their limits and tensions. I see that evil is best understood through the *concept* of God—and gods—as it has been connected to our experience of the world for well over two thousand years. These concepts still live on in a secular society but they are fragments of a past culture—as MacIntyre points out in the beginning of *After Virtue*—which are understood only partially. The central concepts of this religious vocabulary by themselves seem foreign to a contemporary secular reader. Therefore, some philosophical clarification on the matter will help us to better understand our experience of evil.

But before we continue our journey, which is nearing its end, we need to take a moment to repack some of our baggage. If absolutism and relativism fail us, how are we supposed to view evil? I see good and evil as a kind of dialectic oscillation between two ends: each end turns into the other. In this dialectic, humans (who for Rousseau are naturally good) are trying to move towards the good end, for the sake of inner coherence, a single state of man. On the way to understanding why I find this to be an accurate description of the nature of evil, the first of our final steps is tragedy.

4.1 Tragedy

As Cheung (p. 430) points out, theological and psychological explanations "do not account adequately for our emotional response toward the hero." Nor do they account for our responses to the play. The missing link here, connecting the moral and the natural, theological and psychological, is aesthetics. This involves not only a coherent understanding of the play but also minute intricacies to do with the language. But it is good to note that aesthetics had two distinct meanings in the eighteenth century: the science of sensation—stemming from the Greek term *aesthesis*, perception, which Baumgarten revived—and the critique of taste—referring to a philosophy of art (Caygill, p. 53). Kant draws from both of these disciplines in his own theory of taste (or aesthetics, as we now call it) which can be seen from what he means by 'intuition' (*Anschauung*), the receptive part of human experience. This is connected to bodily sensations, whereas the modern use of *Anschauung* denotes "opinion." In *Macbeth*, we can read what I referred to as Macbeth's sensible eye as coming close to what Kant means by intuition.

So, our response is connected to how we *feel* the play. Ribner (p. 148) refers to an atmosphere of evil, "the pervading mood of darkness and fear in the play, to the imagery of blood, fire, sleep, and animal nature…"[13] This mood is set right from the beginning when the weird sisters cast their spell over the entire play. For Kott (p. 86) *Macbeth* feels like a nightmare—unlike *Richard III* where the Grand Mechanism (Kott's historical machinery of continual regal change) plays a more central role—and it paralyzes and terrifies. He connects this feeling to the way in which the play is presented mostly through personal experience—especially Macbeth's. My own thoughts coincide with this as throughout our journey I have focused on Macbeth, perhaps at the expense of the other characters.

[13] Ribner gets this from Wilson Knight and A.C. Bradley.

In describing the semblance (*Schein*) of art and its relation to moral interpretation, Nietzsche (1999, p. 8) comments in a fashion that well describes Macbeth: "[art's] essential feature is that it already betrays a spirit which will defend itself one day, whatever the danger, against the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence." Macbeth can be seen as an artwork defending his freedom against anything and everything, but Nietzsche does not stop here and is worth quoting at length:

> Here, perhaps for the first time, a pessimism 'beyond good and evil' announces itself, here that 'perverse mentality' it put into words and formulations which Schopenhauer never tired of bombarding (before it actually emerged) with his most wrathful imprecations and thunderbolts—a philosophy which dares to situate morality itself within the phenomenal world, to degrade it and to place it not merely amongst the phenomena (*Erscheinungen*) (in the sense of the idealist *terminus technicus*), but even amongst the 'deceptions' (*Täuschungen*), as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, manipulation, art. … In truth there is no greater antithesis of the purely aesthetic exegesis and justification of the world … than the Christian doctrine which is, and wants to be, *only* moral, and which, with its absolute criteria (its insistence on god's truthfulness, for example) banishes art, *all* art, to the realm of *lies*, and thus negates, damns and condemns it. Behind this way of thinking and evaluating, which is bound to be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I had always felt its *hostility to life*, a furious, vengeful enmity towards life itself; for all life rests on semblance, art, deception, prismatic effects, the necessity of perspectivism and error. From the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked itself out in its belief in 'another' or 'better' life. (Nietzsche 1999, pp. 8–9)

Nietzsche clearly points out why we should be wary of Christian—or in fact any religious—absolute values. Morals should not be just a technical term, nor should they be based in our phenomenal world, based on conventions, but rather—as Nietzsche implies—on life itself. But, as we also noted earlier, abolishing religion would lead to nihilism, as we cannot solely ground our morals on life because life feels disgust for life. I connect this disgust to what Nietzsche calls the Dionysiac, which he uses as an antithesis to the Christian conception of morals: "a fundamentally opposed doctrine and counter-evaluation of life, a purely artistic one" (ibid. p. 8).

Tragedy, for Nietzsche, has its origins in religion (ibid., p. 37), and especially in Dionysian ritual music (the full title of the book is *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*). The two deities of art, Apollo (also the god of prophecy) and Dionysos come together in Attic tragedy—Apollo with his image-making and sculpting, and Dionysos with his imageless music. Nietzsche describes these elements respectively as "dream" and "intoxication" (ibid., p. 14). Macbeth has elements of both deities but the one that is more evident and important to us is the Dionysiac spirit. Intoxication well describes Macbeth's attitude as his hope became drunk from the witches' prophecy and remains so to the end. But more importantly, the Dionysian barbarism, the savagery, the disregard for life and redemption—like Dionysiac music—elicits terror and horror from us (ibid., p. 21). This is what paralyzes Kott. This is how evil is shown to us.

Our sense of tragedy revolves around Macbeth, because even Lady Macbeth's initially strong and subversive character is infected by the "disease" with which she tried to cure in Macbeth. His human kindness and guilt seem to pass to her. The Macbeths, for me, are the divided state of one character, the masculine subsuming the feminine. Yet, this gendered division the Macbeths work with rings false when compared with the Macduffs. Lady Macduff is also a strong character as she shows independence from her husband in being able to remain by herself and also in being critical of her husband's departure. Macduff, on the other hand, reveals that the dichotomy of feeling and manliness is false by embracing both sides and thus showing what it is to be *human*. The Macbeths are unable to perceive this—the value of humanity—which, at least for me, is the true tragedy of *Macbeth*.

Macbeth's initial state of success and the subsequent stages of deepening descent, his swelling depreciation for human value and his consequent fate, "underscore the contingency of human action, the reality of freedom, and the possibility of repentance and conversion" (Hibbs and

Hibbs, p. 280). Aristotle (quoted in Kahn, p. 100) noted that the emotions that tragedy characteristically aroused were those of pity and fear. Pity, I find, is connected to the contingency of actions and events and how they are beyond our control. Fear, on the other hand, is linked to freedom and possibilities, especially those that enable us to commit the same mistakes. Macbeth really exemplifies the possibility for failure in all of us. Yet this is a failure, a fall that we have carried with us for a while, as we will see in the next section.

4.2 Original Sin and Radical Evil

The connection between Macbeth and Milton's Satan was originally noticed by Coleridge.[14] Indeed, a reading of *Macbeth* as a retelling of the Fall myth is quite evident and, until now, I have been reluctant to tackle it. This is mainly because I see it belonging under the heading of "experience" because it is intrinsically connected to the creation myth, which has affected the way we see the world for millennia.[15] But there are, of course, two myths here, as Coursen (p. 376) reminds us: the fall of Lucifer and the fall of Adam.

Macbeth combines these myths into one experience of fallibility. There are many references to "Devilish Macbeth;" the last character to stand alongside him is aptly named Seyton, and Malcolm alludes to the brightest angel that fell, thus linking Macbeth's descent with Lucifer's fall. The parallels to Adam come from seeing Macbeth as subject to temptation, with the role of seducer, either as the serpent or Eve, played by Lady Macbeth. Moreover, Coursen (p. 378) sees that *Macbeth* is a fallen world, where everyone has eaten from the tree of good and evil and, therefore, these two cannot be told apart—so "fair is foul, and foul is fair."

[14] Hibbs and Hibbs (p. 288) as well as Coursen (p. 378) credit Coleridge for this observation.
[15] Original sin was very much an issue in Shakespeare's time: "When the reformers reinvigorated the notion of original sin, adamantly insisting that everyone is depraved by nature and sharply critiquing the Catholic ideals of celibacy, monasticism, and good works that imply otherwise, they cast suspicions on all actions of the human will" (Diehl, pp. 95–6).

Although the external influences are strong, the subject is always responsible for its decision. Coursen (p. 379) elaborates: “Like Adam, Macbeth knows clearly what God’s word is and what the general results of Duncan’s murder must be”—he sees that realizing the “black and deep desires” will have the “deepest consequence.” The choice was Macbeth’s as it was Adam’s and Lucifer’s. As Kekes (p. 165) reminds us, it is the Christian tradition, guided by Augustine and Aquinas, which sees evil as the effect of original sin, “the propensity of human beings to malfunction, choose evil over the good, and thereby pit themselves against God’s morally good order”—thus the evil we perceive stems from within us. Kirsch (pp. 279–80) points out two different sides to this internal “evil”: both Freud and Augustine see it at the heart of human infirmity and guilt, whereas Montaigne sees them as “a natural basis of human conduct.” Although, I do not see either of these at the root of the human propensity for evil, they do resemble Kant’s distinction between two kinds of evil: *malum defectus* and *malum privationis*—which does take us to the root of evil.

Kant also distinguishes between “bad” (*das Übel*) and “evil” (*das Böse*), as we did earlier. He connects “bad” to a feeling of displeasure or pain, but evil is connected to the will. Now for Kant, “human evil is a negative evil of defect (*malum defectus*) not of reason but of the will; it is not a positive will of privation (*malum privationis*); the former involves a negation of the good, while the latter proposes positive grounds for superseding the good” (Caygill, pp. 180–1). We are now interested in the first, the negative evil which leads us to Kant’s notion of radical evil. We will return to the “positive evil” (if there can be such a thing) in the next section.

Radical here refers to “root,” from the Latin *radix*. Thus radical evil means an evil that is independent of other principles, an autonomous evil; it is not merely a perversion of the good. It is a defect of the will, but in Kant there are two words which both are translated into English as “will,”

as Caygill (pp. 413–4) points out. These are *Wille* and *Willkür*. Their distinction is best understood through legal analogy, where *Wille* legislates the law and *Willkür* enforces it. Radical evil is connected to the corruption of *Willkür*, the capacity of choice. Kant elaborates:

> Nothing is, however, morally (i.e. imputably) evil but that which is our own deed. And yet by the concept of a propensity is understood a subjective determining ground of the power of choice *that precedes every deed*, and hence is itself not yet a *deed*. (Kant 1996, p. 79)

This connects to our earlier discussion in 4.3 about the act of evil denoting evil itself. The crucial moment is the moment of choice before the act. Kant (ibid.) sees two meanings in connection with this: the moment before the deed is the *peccatum originarium* or original sin; the deed itself is *peccatum derivativum*, also called vice. The capacity of choice is radical evil or original sin, and the deeds deriving from that are vices.

So, it is in our ability to choose our course of action. Thus, our propensity to evil is elementally connected to one of our most cherished values: freedom. Yet it is crucial to distinguish two senses to the concept of freedom: a negative and a positive freedom. The negative is freedom *from* and the positive is freedom *to*. Radical evil—joined by Kierkegaard's dread—is connected to the latter, positive freedom. It is the abyss of possibilities that lies ahead of us—our inherent *hamartia*. Macbeth killed Duncan, because he *could*, and his martial virtues, turned to vices, helped him accomplish the deed and what followed. The roots of extreme individualism, or solipsistic nihilism, are also situated here in positive freedom. It needs something to keep it in check, which is what we will examine in the next section.

There are still two things for us to note in conjunction with radical evil before we continue. The first is, as Allison (2002, p. 344) points out, our remarkable gift for self-deception. This is based in what Kant calls the three grades to the natural propensity for evil: frailty, impurity, and depravity. Frailty is the weakness to act accordingly to chosen maxims; impurity is mixing moral

incentives with immoral ones; and, depravity, or perversity, subordinates ethical incentives to other incentives (Kant 1996, pp. 77–8). The second point concerns our capacity for self-love, which is connected to the first two of three predispositions of good in human nature: animality, humanity, and personality. Animality is to do with humans as a living being and having self-love in the sense of self-preservation, propagation, social drive; humanity is a physical self-love that involves comparison; and personality is to do with being a rational and a responsible being (ibid., 75). Kant points out the possibilities of misuse and the evil that is also rooted in self-love. Allison (2001, p. 95) elaborates: "As a result of the competitive social context and the effect that it has on our self-conception, an initially innocent self-love can produce the most horrible crimes." We will return to these shortly.

4.3 Instrumental Reason

Reason has been used to ground morality and to give positive freedom comprehensible restrictions. This is what many refer to as the Enlightenment project. It reacted against religious and state authority by using reason as its tool of criticism. But it was deemed a failure, mostly due to the main component of reason. Yet we must inspect this failure as it relates very closely to our problem of evil.

One of the prime examples of Enlightenment reasoning is Kant's categorical imperative—a secular version of the Golden Rule. It has many formulations and I will use one from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

> Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature. (Kant 1997, p. 31)

It is a bid for transcendence connecting the subjective to the universal or inter-subjective. A maxim is the subjective principle of volition valid for every rational being (Caygill, p. 289). "Will" here is

referring to *Wille*, the legislative will. Kant supplements this with the notion that all rational beings exists as an *end* in themselves and should be treated as such, not merely as *means* (ibid., p. 37).[16] He stresses that the chosen personal maxim should be followed out of no other inclination than duty (ibid., pp. 11–13)—we are to do what is right only because it is right. There are two reasons I see for the categorical imperative failing in us: our self-deception and the loss of *telos*.

As we noted in the previous section, self-deception arises from weakness, impurity, and depravity. Macbeth showed his weakness, his *akkrasia*, most clearly when he decided not to "proceed further in the business" of killing Duncan and then faltering. The aspect of self-deception is perhaps more clear in the impurity: allowing immoral deeds to be done for a good end—Macbeth killing in order to becoming king.[17] The depravity aspect is a rejection of the connection between morals and choices, which Macbeth shows in his two latter stages with the blocking of any morality in his actions. But impurity and depravity are connected to an aspect of reason that is very much a contemporary issue and cause for evil: instrumental reason.

In the introduction to the third critique, Kant (2000, p. 60) points out a distinction between two types of practical reasoning: technically practical and morally practical. The former is connected to a philosophy of nature and the latter to philosophy of morals. This coincides with another distinction between theoretical and practical, which are connected to the aforementioned philosophies respectively. Practical refers to anything done in the social human realm. All actions and deeds fall under this heading. Theoretical, on the other hand, is connected to natural sciences and the description of our reality, our making sense of it. The two senses of the practical, technical and moral, are different senses of the word, their connection being merely homonymic. This division of the practical has led to the separation of morals from our everyday actions. What Hampshire calls

[16] Kant also notes at this point that others can be used as means, but he emphasizes that they are not to be used *merely* as means.

Hume's false isolation is a good example of this line of thinking: for Hume good and evil, or any values, cannot be perceived in nature or the external world and it thus would not be "contrary to reason" to prefer the destruction of the world to the smallest injury in our finger (Hampshire, p. 81).

This leads up to the second of Taylor's malaises of modernity, which is instrumental reason, an eclipse of ends. He connects instrumental reason to technological fetishism, contemporary political life, and market-orientated capitalism (Taylor, pp. 6–7). It is basically thinking lodged in the means-ends relation. The problem is not so much with the relation but with the disregard for moral coherence and balance between them—either means or ends have the dominating and overriding position. The dominating position of means is where we focus on the means without clearly understanding where it leads to and this is linked to depravity. Macbeth kills Banquo and Macduff's family due to some obscure sense of ensuring his reign and lineage. The multinational corporations provide more contemporary examples of obscure ends—are they to aid society or society to aid them? The overriding position of ends is where there is a good end that is to be achieved by any means necessary. This is connected to impurity because Macbeth's clear regal desire is to be achieved by the fastest means. Similarly, freedom and democracy are used as justification for very immoral means. These positions of means and ends as well as the self-deception connected to them are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, they are likely to occur simultaneously—yet always connected to a damaged or missing sense of morality. The process of Macbeth's assassination of Duncan is a prime example of this: he continually defers his morals, his sensible eye, first by focusing on the regal ends and with the prophecy he dismisses—or intentionally forgets—the means of murder. And second, when the consequences of his desire to kill Duncan become apparent at the beginning of 1.7, he begins to focus on the means, guided by Lady Macbeth and aided by his martial

[17] This aspect of impurity is perhaps even more clear in Holinshead's version.

vices. This can be seen throughout the play, and as Zamir (p. 99) sums up, for Macbeth "everyone and everything is merely a means to an end that, when reached, turns itself into just another means."

The second reason for the categorical imperative failing in us is also connected to the separation of the moral aspect from practical and instrumental reason. *Telos* is an ultimate end, something we want to achieve, a goal in life. It is what gives meaning to life. MacIntyre (pp. 54–5) connects the failure to larger change:

> the joint effect of the secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism was to eliminate any notion of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*. Since the whole point of ethics—both as a theoretical and a practical discipline—is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a *telos* leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear. There is on the one hand a certain content for morality: a set of injunctions deprived of their teleological context. There is on the other hand a certain view of untutored-human-nature-as-it-is.

The loss of *telos* is linked to the loss of the idea of how to improve ourselves as humans. What was eliminated was our sense of what *ought* to be. So, what is left is the letter of the law but no spirit and a subject deprived of a future. With the loss of *telos*, we also lose meaning, our ends are obscured. This is how Macbeth is in his second and third stage: he has no sense of meaning, he is without *telos*, as all he—and Richard III—can do as king is to continue killing in his nihilistic way. He tries to fill his inner hollowness with the blood of others.

The connection-in-difference, not the severing, of *is* and *ought* (*Sein-Sollen*) enables us to envisage something better than what we have now. It is strongly present in our experience of evil, radically rejecting it. *Is* and *ought* communicate and connect theoretical reason to practical reason. This is not—nor is *telos*—a subjective quality, but is universal in the sense that all humans have it, whether they recognize it or not. Our sense of an alternative, of something better, is what our sense of morals is built on—they are connected to the way we are, to our being. Hence Nietzsche's

comment that morals should not be a technical term—as with instrumental reason—nor should it be based on the phenomenal world. As morals are based on our bodily being they are essentially based on the noumenal world and therefore, for us, they are both immanent and transcendent.

Yet there persists a gap between *is-ought*, as between theoretical and practical. The demand to unite them, as Neiman (2002, p. 323) points out, comes from reason. But it is hard to imagine experience without *is-ought* because it is something we feel. Rather it reason, I would say, is dependent on their connection and separation (means/end interaction). The urge to unite is also a dangerous thing as Macbeth's desire for a single state of man is rooted in this, and so are his subsequent deeds. Macbeth's *identification* of might and right, *is* and *ought*, liquidates the transcendent, placing means in place of ends; it also lets the immanent dissolve into cosmic, fateful Armageddon, and become prey to ends transcending his means. This is how evil works dialectically. The abstract separation of *is* and *ought* is equivalent to their identification, which then is the problem with theodicy. Merely separating *is* from *ought* and disconnecting them from the affirmation of life is perverse. This is exactly what Macbeth does.

This is why we do and must object to Macbeth and his evil deeds, and yet try to understand the evil we perceive. Stemming from the essential freedom of radical evil, his deeds and their wickedness can be hindered by reason and a rational structure for morals. But reason, and especially instrumental reason, has also an ambiguous and equivocating power, which is why it cannot be the basis for morals. Instrumental reasoning is very much connected to Hannah Arendt's idea of the "banality" of evil—the bureaucratic and systemic evil exemplified by Adolf Eichmann. *Telos* seems to provide part of the vocabulary of experience we are missing. But our moral sense requires further clarification, so we shall continue to delve deeper into our understanding and experience of evil.

4.4 Theodicy and Hubris

As we have noticed, there is a vast theological and supernatural framework at play in *Macbeth*. By killing the representative of God Macbeth incurs divine or supernatural wrath. For Watson (p. 176) nature—the Spinozan god—seems to be "the real avenger," while the biological heir Malcolm is just its "stalking-horse." But *Macbeth* is quite different in this sense because God is usually in this play seen as passive or absent, thus prompting questions of the compatibility of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and the existence of evil.

Why does God allow evil things happen to good people? If God is good, why is there suffering in the world? This is what theodicy attempts to answer. For Leibniz, God did the best he could and the world we inhabit is the best of all possible worlds (Neiman 2002, p. 26).There are far worse alternatives to this world. Leibniz's notion is echoed by Pope in his *Essay on Man*: "Whatever is, is right" (quoted in Neiman 2002, p. 33). This seems to be a very naïve *post hoc* response guided by faith. Other attempts try to present suffering as punishment, a trial, a prelude to an eternal life, or as a mystery (Cabrera, p. 19). The answers that theodicies provide are not convincing—theodicy fails as well. But what is important about theodicy is what it tries to do: keep the world morally intelligible, and keep morality intelligible in worldly terms.

Justifying the ways of God to man is an attempt to make sense of the world and of the evils in it. It is trying to comprehend some unity in this divided state. The questions that provoke theodicy are connected to our understanding of *is-ought*. By questioning God, they question our view of the world and how it works. Not attempting some sort of theodicy would take away meaning, leaving us on the edge of nothingness. In a way, theodicy is a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, choosing meaning over nothing. This is what Macbeth is unable to do, so he embraces nothingness. But his evil prompts us by negation to look for something better, to learn from his mistakes. Evil is

intrinsically connected to theodicy. It compels us to make sense of the world, to make sense of ourselves. Therefore, by negation, evil defines humanity. This is where the othering power of evil stems from. Evil is the radical other. It is anti-human, against our being. Yet, we carry it with us. It is the life that is disgusted with life. Evil is what threatens life.

What we perceive as natural evil is what externally threatens us. Moral evil is what threatens us internally—and intersubjectively. As evil threatens our being, it is what we ultimately fear. Macbeth's dread is fear of himself, fear of what he can do or has done. Richard III is the same: "What do I fear? Myself? There is none else by" (5.5.136). But at the same time Macbeth fears what others will do to him. This is due to a natural law within us—an a priori categorical imperative—which is based on automatic self-reflection. Whenever we encounter another human being—another end in itself—there is an automatic reflection within us. It is symmetrical: when we think of doing something to others, we also think of others doing it to us, and vice versa. But this is dependent on whether we actually perceive others as ends-in-themselves. They become obscured if we embrace evil, like Macbeth, or deem them evil, making them our mortal enemies. But at the same time evil brings clarity in a Manichean way, as there is no need for questioning your principles, as fighting evil is self-justifying. This seeming paradox of obscurity and clarity can be explained through the distinction between appearance and reality: as a strong phenomenal sensation it adds contrast to black and white appearances while the colours of reality lose their hue.

But how are we to understand the supernatural activity in *Macbeth* in relation to theodicy? As theodicy is reacting to the passivity of the supernatural or the transcendent, the activity implies no need for theodicy. *Macbeth* has presence that our world lacks. There is meaning in its natural world that is missing for us. It underscores our detachment and alienation from the natural. Our dominion over nature has made us blind to it. But this is perhaps too quick a conclusion. Rather,

meaningful nature is in a similar relation to us as the prophecy is to Macbeth. Something is shown to us but what it means or suggests is obscure. We try to fill the gap with endless interpretation, but we cannot know its true meaning. Whatever it is, it is beyond our phenomenal world, beyond our ken.

The same line is drawn with our relation to God concerning theodicy, as Kant clarifies: "neither God nor his purposes can be objects of philosophical discourse" (Neiman 2001, p. 28). The existence of God is thus beyond our epistemology. But as God is connected to theodicy as much as evil, so when evil negatively defines humanity, God, or rather the concept of god, defines it as well, though in a more positive sense. But the concept of god works as a delineator by standing outside of humanity, so it is also other to us. As evil is something for us to fear, god is something for us to love.

Augustine "makes clear that it is his inability to understand God that makes it impossible for him to rightly understand the nature of evil" (Hauerwas, p. 39). Thus in better understanding the concept of god we can deepen our understanding of evil. From our point of view, god and evil are diametrical opposites connected through theodicy. When we encounter evil as it *is*, our *ought* postulates something that is pointing towards god. Thus god designates a collective *ought* for humankind. With this framework we can redefine the dialectical nature of evil (from the beginning of this chapter) as an oscillation between god and evil. So the subjective transgression of the boundaries designated by god and evil, will result in evil. Even attempting to fulfill the ends of a "divine" *ought* by separating the means and the affirmation of life, despite "moral" intentions, results in evil. The individual must not stray too far from the flock.

In my opinion, any subjective attempt to become god or adopting the guise of god in order to elevate oneself above others results in the evil of hubris. It is the transgression of the boundaries for humanity set by god and evil. Any action that violates another person's being as an end-in-itself is connected to hubris because they are matters that only (the concept of) god has

dominion over. Hubris is part of a long tradition: “Classical stories of ambition were generally tragedies of revenge, in which the gods (or their reflections in nature) took vengeance on *hubris*, on the excessive pride of protagonists from Arachne to Oedipus to Pentheus”—and it reappears as the idea of the Fall in Christianity (Watson, p. 166). Pride is very much connected to hubris as Augustine saw pride as his primal sin, and by this “he is trying to help us see the disorder that grips our most basic desires, as well as our ability to reason which is shaped by those desires, which cannot help but lead to the destruction of ourselves and others” (Hauerwas, p. 43). Macbeth’s descent to evil is characterized by hubris as he takes the power over life and death into his hands.

This pride or hubris is connected to our capacity for self-love, especially its animality and humanity. Although animality and humanity show a predisposition to good, they can be converted to vices: animality into the bestial vices of gluttony, lust, and wild lawlessness; humanity into diabolical vices such as envy and ingratitude (Kant 1996, p. 75). A good self-love in this framework is balanced between itself, *agape*, and *caritas*. Macbeth’s first two stages are dominated by the diabolical vices, but in the last stage as he fights for his life the bestial side becomes more apparent. Hubris has a tendency to return to “th’inventor” in the form of a nemesis—in this case, Macduff. Yet, in this framework the means of the nemesis need to be considered as revenge carries with it the propensity for impurity: it can justify murder in the guise of justice—as does Macduff.

Kahn (p. 98) offers us another point of view into theodicy: “Evil is inherent in man’s lot because of his all-too-human imperfections, because he lacks the omniscience and omnipotence of a god; yet, within the limits of his striving nature, he can achieve some measure of happiness.” We are not perfect, we are not gods. The framework of theodicy shows our imperfect place, the limitations to our epistemology due to our ontological setup. The mechanism of hubris and nemesis works within this theodicy like the categorical imperative as it restricts the positive freedom of

radical evil but unlike the categorical imperative it sets restrictions on our actions that derive from our being in relation to god and evil. God is placeholder of the transcendent we cannot simply seize—it is something that finitizes our categories. Yet god and evil are finitized in relation to us: they only name a surplus sense we feel in the experience of things on this world. Liquidating that sense would be a kind of evil in itself. Evil is not respecting the boundary of god and evil. The Manicheans have a sense of god and evil but no sense of boundaries—Macduff could turn into another Macbeth as god would justify his deeds. On the other hand, relativism liquidates the sense of god and evil, which would eradicate any sense of moral difference in Macbeth's and Macduff's actions.

As the boundary of god and evil is a step forward from the Manichean view and relativism, it relies on the lessons of these previous failures and on a deeper understanding not only of evil but of god. The boundaries also provide a sense of common humanity, a sense of community that we must not stray too far from. Despite the theological vocabulary it does not rely on religious faith but on faith in life, an affirmation of life—a leap of faith to overcome the pitfalls of mere reason. Armed with a better understanding of the *cause* of evil we can now take the final step in understanding the *effect* of evil through the experience of evil.

4.5 Horrors Words Cannot Convey

The play as a whole gives us a sense of how evil is related to our lives. But what about the individual experience of evil? Within the play Macduff is the character who can provide us with insight into this.

He is an interesting and important character. Macduff is a good man although not perfect, which gives him some surface for the audience to attach themselves. Horwich (p. 366) points out that, in relation to Malcolm, Macduff exhibits a "disinterested concern for justice," whereas

Malcolm's reasons are not so disinterested. Macduff's disinterest resembles the Kantian sense of duty in following moral maxims, which again compares to Macbeth having none. They are very similar characters, Macbeth and Macduff, with the pivotal exception that Macbeth chooses evil and Macduff does not. With their characteristic similarities and volitional difference, Macduff's character is the element in the play that allows us—the audience—to sympathize with Macbeth. They exemplify the small but crucial difference between a good person and a wicked one.

One of the important elements that allowed Macbeth's fall was his denial of what I have called his sensible eyes. But Macduff sees what Macbeth denies and it was he that found Duncan's murdered remains:

> O horror, horror, horror!
> Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee. (2.3.62–3)

What Macduff experienced went beyond anything he could describe. The same reaction can be seen later:

> I have no words;
> My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain
> Than terms can give thee out. (5.10.6–8)

The realization of the death of his family, and of who was behind it, stirs emotions that do not translate into language. Or if attempted it would not be the same: "Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives" (2.1.61). *Macbeth* does not unfortunately show us an immediate reaction to an evil act. But a scene in *Titus Andronicus* offers us this.

In the closing scene, Titus has invited the emperor Saturninus, who has been at odds with him, to a feast at his home. He greets Saturninus and his wife Tamora with Lavinia, his daughter, who has been ravished and mutilated—her hands dismembered and her tongue cut out—by Tamora's sons, at his side:

> My lord the Emperor, resolve me this:

Was it well done of rash Virginius
To slay his daughter with his own right hand
Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?

SATURNINUS

It was, Andronicus.

TITUS Your reason, mighty lord?

SATURNINUS

Because the girl should not survive her shame,
And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

TITUS

A reason mighty, strong, effectual;
A pattern, precedent, and warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die.
[He kills her]

SATURNINUS

What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind? (5.3.35–47)

The reaction of Saturninus reflects that of the audience, a mental double-take, despite the obvious and justifying build-up. The reaction comes precisely from the act and how it cannot be justified. We judge this wrong and evil. This judgement is similar to an aesthetic one: there is a subjective and an objective element to it. The subjective comes from me and my point of view, yet it is evoked by the objective (object-like) action or thing in front of me, and I posit a statement which I feel everyone—universally, objectively—*ought* to agree with. Evil is there in the experience and neither of them can be expressed sufficiently with words, by language. It is unnatural and unkind, immediately, yet it is also incomprehensibly so: 'What hast thou done?'

In commenting on Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, T. J. Clark gives, as it seems to me, a description of an experience of evil:

> The running man, from Marin's point of view, is the form of an enunciation. He is a body gathering itself to say something. You could argue that his body—his whole posture and expression—is already a sign. But the point seems to me that he isn't, or isn't securely. He is on his way back into the world of signs, from somewhere—some occurrence or experience—slightly outside it. And even as he raises his hand to *make* a sign, he looks over his shoulder, just to be sure, or because he has not quite escaped from the dark foreground—the place of the visible—into the realm of speech. He is like

> Orpheus looking back at Eurydice. The snake (which is wordlessness concentrated into a form, a hiss) still fixes him with its beady eye. (Clark, p. 106)

Experience is slightly outside language. The form of the snake is horror and terror of evil that defies but provokes enunciation. We cannot describe evil with language. This inability is due to our perception of evil being against *our* being, it is a force so opposed to god that it un-creates us. Therefore, with this understanding, we must condemn it. Not to condemn evil would be to disregard what—and who—we are, ‘unnatural and unkind’.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that Spivack's notion of Macbeth being "verbally and emotionally consistent" and behaving in a morally clear way, is misconceived by revealing the intertwined issues and characters within the play. *Macbeth* shows the complexity of the problem of evil in both the action and reaction of the characters as well as in the aesthetic and imagistic qualities of the language. I have not only suggested but illustrated the depth of our connection to evil. Moreover, I have put forth working framework on which to base our ethics and understanding of the concept of evil. Although this essay does not completely cover or solve the problem of evil—a goal too ambitious for anyone—it does however provide a means towards countering and mitigating the evil we perceive.

Our initial attempt at grasping evil—seeing Macbeth as evil—was a failure, but an important failure. Essentializing/absolutizing evil is staying on the Manichean level. This is a crucial level because it is where most people stay—a natural choice as it is best fitted for personal survival, a place from which evil can be fended off or attacked. Yet that Manichean level allows committing acts of evil in the guise of good. It is prone to *ressentiment* and is what Nietzsche was trying to warn us about in our discussion on bad versus evil. This is a level that has justified evil from the Albigensian crusade to Pol Pot and beyond. Leaving this level is an important step but a step that can easily lead to confusion and relativism. The failure of relativism is also something we must also look beyond and learn from, so that we are able to find firmer grounding for our ethics.

Understanding evil and its relation to the concept of god, as I have pointed out, can provide a firm basis for our morals building on past failures and grounding it on our physical being which is aided by reason and a faith in life. Yet being able and obliged to condemn evil keeps us

aware of the dangers within us and our reason to avoid lapsing into evil. As I have shown, in understanding evil we learn to understand ourselves better.

The rift between appearance and reality shakes our—viewers'—"single state of man" because we are shown apparently heinous deeds that are not apparent to the other characters—or even to the perpetrators themselves. This is part of the reason why tragedy as form is important to us—as we are not spectators of our own lives, we do not see the reality behind appearances. The audience has a partially God-like view of the events, so we often act as the moral centre for the play because we can see what is truly done. Yet it is in the nature of tragedies to undercut this God-like, objective view, in that even the audience is not sure what is happening, and, more importantly, why it is happening. Tragedies gives their audiences a perch from which they can see and judge meaning, while simultaneously denying that direct access to meaning. We perceive the evil Macbeth does and understand the motivation behind it, but the experience still leaves us puzzled. We do not and cannot understand evil itself. The play offers a scent of meaning but denies the dish. We are shown an opaque image of the bridge between appearance and reality but left pondering how or where to find it. But find it we must, or be trapped in ambiguity and uncertainty.

Indeed, an underlying concern of this essay has been to show that literature and works of art reflect who we are. There is truth-content in art but we must be wary of pumping meaning into it, and allow the work itself to have a voice. I have attempted to tackle an enormous task, which is too vast for a single essay, whether or not it is looked on from a literary or a philosophical point of view. Although I have not just suggested but even provided tools for understanding and countering evil, it does not stop here. The problem of evil still lives on. As Watson (p. 179) points out, *Macbeth* "comports a warning, even mourning, about the ethical contradictions produced by ordinary living in the emerging modern world." Instrumental reason and loss of meaning lead to Taylor's third malaise:

a loss of freedom in political and social disenchantment. These malaises provide forms of systemic evil that are opaque and unseen to us, causing suffering amongst billions of people and threatening to destroy the natural world we live in. Kekes (pp. 112–3) provides one point of view on why this is not evident to us—he describes the contemporary life-style of many in westernized society:

> Contemporary popular culture supplies the distractions they seek. Television, recreational drugs, pornography, surfing the Internet, health fads, garage sales, oriental cults, shopping in malls, and spectator sports are some of the familiar forms of distraction. They require little application and energy, give a modicum of pleasure, establish a lukewarm fellow feeling with others who share the same pastime, and can all be viewed as justifiable forms of relaxation to which one is entitled after a day or week of hard work. People can become quite skillful in mixing and varying them so as to avoid jadedness by overindulgence in any one distraction. This skill helps them to get through their lives in a moderately pleasant way by earning a living and filling in the rest of their time. In our age, these distractions are the opium of the people.

The cultural industry uses our loss of meaning and disenchantment with the world instrumentally for the financial gain of individuals—it is a new form of enslavement which we are loath to break from as we do not perceive the evil done to us—by us. The problem of evil persists.

Evil is in our phenomenal world not in the noumenal world beyond us. Yet it is also beyond us for we do not preside over our phenomenal world alone—there are always others. “Deep and black” is our experience of evil. We can delve into the deepest and darkest caverns in search of what made us uneasy, but we will never find any evil there because it resides not in a deep or black cavern but in the shudder of uneasiness—the fear and dread—in all of us.

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