CHAPTER I

- DANGLING MAN
- THE VICTIM
- SEIZE THE DAY
The analysis of the three novels - *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day* - constitute the first phase of the evolutionary process of moral consciousness and its social implications with regard to the protagonist's quest to discover the meaning and purpose of human existence in a world which is dispossessed of traditional and religious beliefs, codified, ethical norms and moral truths. The query echoing throughout Bellow's fictive world - how should a good man live, what it means to be a human being? - speaks of the novelist's faith in human potential but for want of lucidity and clarity of vision, the protagonist in the first phase of his search for positive values of life remains dangling in between reason and faith, idealism and nihilism. And he thus finds himself unable to rise to the occasion to resolve the dilemma of the dire facts of history and the arbitrary thwart of the socio-political and cultural institutions. The core of moral sense rooted in social commitment issues from the individual's right relationship with the humanity at large which in the state of *en-soi* is not possible to attain. Bellow by casting his protagonist's bewildered self in the general melee of moral nihilism and meaninglessness impresses upon his mind the fact that there are truths about man other than passive acceptance of the facts of life and that it is by establishing the right relationship between self and the various patterns of social life that the individual can attain moral consciousness and comprehend the significance of the
philosophy of social commitment. In the en-soi state of existence the protagonist suffers from lack of a sense of discrimination and responsibility even towards acts which he commits in isolation. Unwittingly, he wears masks in the name of principles and preservation of his freedom of the self which, ironically, generates evils of untrammelled romantic egotism, self-centredness, alienation and solipsism. In the existing situation, life turns out to be 'a formless jelly' which denies the individual claims of self discovery in relation to the numerous 'others' in the midst of which the self is to rise and accommodate its needs with those of the outer world.

Dangling Man (1944)

Dangling Man, is Bellow's powerful comment on the existential view of man which in absence of moral insights and social concern turns out to be myopic and fragmentary. The individual in face of the onslaught of impersonal and absurd forces responsible for marginalisation of human identity develops a nihilistic view of man's place in the universe and suffers from psychic anguish and spiritual tormentation. The novel begins at a crucial stage in the life of Joseph, the protagonist, in that in the era of hard-boiled-dom he is depicted as 'dangling' and a victim of directionlessness. Joseph is the novelist's exntention of modern man symbolising the crisis of human existence born of dubious value structure and moral confusion. He is a handsome young man, a graduate from the university of Wisconsin, living off the earnings of his wife, Iva, in a single room, uncared of its filthy physical
surroundings infested with cooking odours, roaches and peculiar neighbours. He is waiting, it is told, for his induction in the army after his resignation from his regular job with the Inter-American Travel Bureau because certain verifications are to be made to confirm his identity of being a foreign national. At last the call comes after waiting for a period of seven long months during which Joseph, the title suggests, remains a 'dangling man' between the civilian life and the army. During this period Joseph confronts seeds of new experiences of significant value. His primary function is to comprehend what it means to be moral in context of social realities which, he perceives, he cannot do unless he properly understands the meaning of the freedom of self and its relation to the outer world. He says to himself "I must know what I myself am." During this period of 'dangling' Joseph gets opportunity to look at the world from his own point of view and thus confronts the problem of individual's relationship with the society which is, of course, a prelude to the rise of his moral graph. Joseph calls this period of 'dangling' as "a state of demoralisation." But how strange that he wants to record it in the form of a journal, perhaps it is a device which ironically turns his self to inwardness and instead of getting involved with the humanity at large, he is alienated. The impersonal flow of pressure and distractions from the outer world presents the kaleidoscopic view of 'reality' in

the face of the various ambiguities, dilemmas and pains of isolation.

Joseph is left alone ten hours a day in a single room, 'a six-sided box' with only Iva, his wife, to keep company and this implicit lack of communication at human level renders him no longer a socially affable person which he used to be in the past. The novelist's use of the diary form as a technique to depict the struggles and tensions further alienates him from a life of involvement and social obligations. It, otherwise serves as an emotional prop which is symbolic of the inner crisis of his moral being:

"In my present state of demoralization, it has become necessary for me to keep a journal - that is, to talk to myself - and I do not feel guilty of self-indulgence in the least. The hard-boiled are compensated for their silence; they fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room."  

Joseph's diary of January 2, 1943 unravels how a life of solitude and inaction generates the state of utter confusion and timelessness to the extent that even days lose their distinctiveness. He finds hard to distinguish Tuesday from Saturday. The thought of his own passivity and inertness in comparison to other's activeness sharpens the pangs of inertia and dangling and he grows more and more dissatisfied. Every minute he is losing bits of his essential humanness, initiation and will. The process of deterioration sets in and the resultant feelings of bitterness and spite

1. Ibid., pp.9-10
corrodes his endowment of generosity and goodwill. The self gets disenchanted to the point of hallucinations:

"I HAVE begun to notice that the more active the rest of the world becomes, the more slowly I move, and that my solitude increases in the same proportion as its racket and frenzy."  

His thought process grows sickening and as a result he finds himself growing 'rooted to the chair', and the irony is that he never tries to extricate himself from this state of inertia and moral bewilderliness on the plea that any move of his from the existing predicament would further put him in a disagreeable state. What a lame excuse of romantic egotism!

He is lonely in the real sense in a city where he has lived nearly all his life. The contrast is apparent between his voluntary confinement and the activities of the outer world cracking with laughters, people flying planes, fighting bulls or catching tarpons:

"And so I am very much alone. I sit idle in my room, anticipating the minor crises of the day, the maid's knock, the appearance of the postman, programs on the radio, and the surges, cyclical distress of certain thoughts."  

A life of extreme individuality and non-involvement turns him into a cynic. Bellow underlines his cynicism and moral nihilism through the technique of self-mockery which the Jewish writer uses as a response of the protagonist known as schelmie in the Jewish-American fiction to face up the naked realities of his existence; instead of hitting back at

1. Ibid., p.13
2. Ibid., p.12
a powerful adversary he resorts to exaggerated outpourings to assert his sense of superiority and justify the fall of God. His laughter, in the words of Allen Guttmann, is a "way to mediate the chasm between his spiritual claims and his material situations."¹

Joseph's predicament is similar to that of the schelmiel image in his relations with the servants in the house. The maid, it is told, dares to smoke only before him because "she recognizes that I am of no importance."²

What does Bellow suggest by showing Joseph falling into subsequent hell of self-indulgence, individualism, irrationality and a sort of moral darkness? Perhaps he is hinting at the philosophy of the social phenomenon how an individual for want of developing certain moral truths about life is reduced to the level of a displaced being. That is why Bellow draws the graph of his regressive moral self through his relations with the landlord, his father-in-law, his family members including his wife, Iva, and his friends Abt, George Hayza, Minna, Myron and Robbie Stillman whom he includes in his plan of establishing "a colony of spirits", or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness and cruelty."³ As already pointed out Bellow does not propose the

2. Dangling Man, p. 15
3. Ibid., p.39
enslavement of self but what certainly he chastises the protagonist for are his day-dreamings and romantic imaginings which rob him of having meaningful relations with the humanity outside the world of his own creation. His anarchic affirmation of the self which is tantamount to hipsterism is obvious in his visits to the family and a few secret visits to one, Kitty, the partner of his secret romance, which shows that his involvement in a life of social obligations is marginal. The state of passivity and the stance of neutrality has destroyed initiation in him, he behaves like a romantic buffoon* distrustig everyone including his own wife, Iva. Perhaps he is aware of his growing gradual drifting to a state of alienation and estrangement and develops an irresponsible notion that everybody ignores him. Marcus Klein has rightly pointed out as to what his cult of affirming the rebellious self has resulted in: "Alone and allowed to test his dreadful freedom, he becomes irritable, self indulgent, over sensitive and quarrelsome."1 He frequently picks up scuffles with Iva, he quarrels with the landlord and beats his wayward niece, and refuses to accept help from his brother, Amos. He chastises Iva for being anti-social who discourages communication but he never puts on record his own singular whimsicalities which (perhaps he is not conscious of it) render him asocial and an alienated being. Bellow makes him record the mode of relationship existing between him and Iva:

"We no longer confide in each other; in fact,

1. After Alienation, p. 63
there are many things I could not mention to her. We have friends, but we no longer see them."

His picking up a quarrel in the bank on point of confirming his identity has human implications and, ironically speaking, instead of rising above the inadequacies and weaknesses of romantic egotism to moralise his behaviour, he grows gingerly critical of his relations and friends. He looks upon them as 'shallow', 'cruel' and 'opportunistic'.

One may hold Joseph not wholly responsible for such nasty and brutish actions. And the view, for a while may seem rather a sane explanation of the scale of value existing between him and the outer world. But it is also true that he cannot be entirely exonerated from the moral chaos which he has built around his own self like a romantic in a bid to keep his identity and individuality intact which during the process has destroyed the warmth and piety of relations with the world. He is left a misfit, an alien in a hostile universe to stand on his own pedestal for living a life of significance and value. But what happens is that in absence of moral steadfastness and social concern he loses sense of direction and human responsibility, and the 'freedom' he gains is no freedom but a self styled state of alienation imprisoning his own self within the walls of a towering room. To quote his own words, "I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail. My perspectives end in the walls."  

1. Dangling Man, p. 12
2. Ibid., p. 92
If Joseph is conscious of the growing spell of separation and alienation, why does he not take into consideration the evil consequences of living a life of freedom bereft of any moral consciousness and social concern? It is the bane of en-soi, the self is condemned to live. And that is why he "suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it."¹

Joseph had asked himself a question even before the action of the novel begins - how should a good man live, what ought he to do? But the plan to resolve the dilemma which the question entails is frustrated for the apparent reason that his idea to entertain some fixed patterns of existence and then try to fix life into them lacks moral and human commitment. One such pattern, for example, is to live life in terms of his own concept of 'ideal constructions' to save the world from being, in the words of Hobbes, "nasty, brutish and crude." However, if the nature of existence is as such and human survival is a brutal struggle, then the menace threatening life can be faced up by coming together of the like-minded people to share each others agony and pain. Joseph is in search of 'those others' whom, he feels, he has found, but soon with the lapse of time he develops certain misgivings about its success to see his applecart being upset. He realises that he must" take into account all that was natural, including corruptness. I had to be faithful to the facts, and corruptness was one of them."²

¹. Ibid., p.30
². Ibid., p.40
Bellow, introduces an objective correlative to project the valuelessness being rampant in the American way of life partly to show up imperfections in Joseph's own being. It is the Servatius party arranged by Minna at her own house where the behaviour and the true self of his oldest friend, Abt, turns out to be vulgar and highly disgusting and Joseph's dream of establishing the 'Colony of the Spirits' seems to slip from his fingers. As a matter of fact, Minna once was engaged to Abt but later she changed her mind and married Harry Servatius thereby leaving Abt a case of complex history of injured feeling. The party was a dreadful show of shame, hatred, distortions, strain and corruption to the degree that people began to think of leaving the place. Joseph failed to comprehend the nature of reality of human existence:

"In reality, the Servatius party merely forced on my attention certain defects in the people around me which, if I had been as astute as I should have been, I would have recognized long before."¹

It is the explicit failure of any fixed patterns of life for want of moral consciousness which, while the party blares on, makes Joseph brood over the moral implications and meaning of human purpose of such gatherings:

"And it came to me all at once that the human purpose of these occasions had always been to free the charge of feeling in the pent heart; and that, as animals instinctively sought salt or lime, we, too, flew together at this need as we had at Eleusis, with rites and dances, and at other high festivals and corroborees to witness pains and tortures, to give our scorn, hatred, and desire temporary liberty and play. Only we did these

¹. Ibid., p.39
things without grace or mystery, lacking the forms for them and, relying on drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked in vengefulness and hurt."

In order to enliven the party the members are in search of something exciting and sensational to go on. It is suggested that Abt should make a show of his art of hypnotism which initially he rejects but later gets ready to do when Minna offers herself as a specimen. She is made to lie loosely outstretched under the spell of hypnotism. Abt, her former lover uses this opportunity to wreck revenge by way of insulting a woman publically - he pinches her hand cruelly, taps her cheek four times asking her to count the number which she, under the spell, is rendered helpless to do. The whole show of meanness and indecency is morally revolting, the implication of which perhaps Joseph will not fully comprehend at the moment. But his idea of the 'Colony of the Spirits' is certainly shattered and he thinks of finding an exit to be out of this moral mess. Even his wife, Iva, fails to qualify the criterion of 'Ideal Constructions' for her committing acts of defiance twice:

"Joseph," said Iva from her chair near by, "will you get me some more?" She held out her glass. "Iva," said Jack Brill, with a warning laugh. "Go slow."
"With what? The punch?" √
"It tastes mild, but it isn't mild at all."
"May be you shouldn't drink any more of it," I said, "since you're not feeling well."
"I don't know why I'm so thirsty. I haven't eaten anything salty."

1. Ibid., p.46
"I'll bring you some water if you like."
"Water." She drew back the glass contemptuously.
"I wish you wouldn't drink tonight. It's a strong punch," I said. My tone was unmistakable. I did not mean to be disobeyed. Yet a little later I saw her at the bowl and frowned at the quick motion with which she raised her arm and drank. I was irritated enough to consider, for a moment, striding up and snatching the glass away."1

Joseph feels terribly embarrassed to see Iva and Minna getting worse and worse at the party under the influence of drink. He turns to Iva with a gesture to leave the party which she brazenly dismisses and to Joseph's proposal that he is going to get her coat, her answer - "What for? I don't want to go yet," - does not fit into the scale of 'ideal constructions,'. But things would have been different if he could have risen above the common level of humanity and come closer to the vision and let Iva have her way to fulfil social obligations. However, Stillman saves the situation at such a crucial juncture when Joseph intends to break the party since his wounded self finds it hard to reconcile with Iva's nauseating behaviour and acts of disobedience which directly casts lurid gleams over his plan in general:

"For let us admit the truth. One was constantly threatened, shouldered, and, sometimes invaded by "nasty, brutish, and short," lost fights to it in unexpected corners. In the colony? Even in oneself. Was anyone immune altogether? In times like these? There were so many treasons; they were a medium, like air, like water; they passed in and out of you, they made themselves your accomplices; nothing was impenetrable to them."2

1. Ibid., pp. 43-44
2. Ibid., p. 56
And therefore the party serves as a microcosm of reality of world in all its betrayals and evil, acts of treasons, falsity and inhumanity. Joseph's problem is moral since he has to reorchestrate his vision in accordance with the existing patterns of life. As a votary of the cult of individualism and meaningless freedom Joseph will not get at the genesis of the acts of treason which he experienced at the Servatius party. But what is more baffling is that he himself feels hardly concerned with his own disorderly and socially irresponsible conduct which becomes manifest during his use of violence he perpetrates on his landlord, Mr. Gesell. It so happens that on a Sunday afternoon at about two o'clock when they had been listening to a Brahms concerto, the electricity current is shut off for repairs. Joseph walks out down stairs to look into the details, 'kicking rods, board-ends, and pieces of wire' out of his way like an angry young man and finds Gesell there working on the stoker. He loses patience and chastises the landlord like a disillusioned child which is a powerful reflection of his lack of commitments to the collective cause of community:

"Why did you turn off the current?" I said. "I had to work on this stoker, that's why."
"Why the devil do you wait until Sunday? And why couldn't you tell us beforehand?"
"I don't have to get your permission to work on this stoker," he said.
"How long are you going to keep it off?"
Ignoring this question, he turned sullenly back to his bench.

"Well, how long?" I repeated. And, when I saw that he was not going to reply, I took him by the shoulder and, forcing him round, pushed aside the pipe and struck him. He fell, the pipe clattering under him on the cement. But instantly he was up again, brandishing his fists, shouting, "If that's what you want!"
He could not reach me. I carried him to the wall, hitting repeatedly into his chest and belly and cutting my knuckles on his open, panting mouth. After the first few blows, my anger vanished. In weariness and self-disgust I pinned him against the bricks. Hearing his thick, rasping shouts, I said pacifyingly, "Don't get excited!"  

The aftermath of the incident generates feelings of shame, weariness and self-loathing which is certainly a passive attestation of moral prompting and what precisely it lacks is its social implications in that his act of violence is also a show of man's beastliness which he himself saw at the party as Iva later impresses upon his mind:

"This was a rebellion against my own principle. It alarmed me; and the treasons I saw at the Servatius party were partly mine, as I was forced at the time to acknowledge."  

Joseph has one hour discussion with the 'Spirit of the Alternatives' during which he learns a number of truths about human mind and its limitations, rationality, the instinctual comprehension of reality, and lastly, how to be human. But one question which continues to echo till the end of the novel is - has Joseph in reality realised the impracticality of ideal constructions? The show of evil in relation to nature of human reality about man at the party enlightens Joseph's dream of creating a 'colony of the spirits', he feels that so much untruth pervading human world may destroy his plans and idealisations. That is why a hazy notion which is essentially of moral nature begins to

1. Ibid., pp. 145-46
2. Ibid., p. 147
rise to flash on his mind the facts of reality: it is foolish to talk of good people, good neighbours, good society, good wine in abstraction, they would not stand the reality of the world outside their social context. The idea of 'Ideal Construction' is an obsessive device which exhausts man's moral stamina but Joseph will not be able to live such a pattern of existence unless he underlines the gap between the 'Ideal Construction' and the 'reality' of the world which is the only truth. The right relationship of the self with the outside world in relation to its romantic idea of freedom is to be comprehended in right perspective, that inner life of the self without social commitment and involvement with life of the community is fakery and even to talk of spiritual quest without social implication is a foolish preposition. The claims of the exponents of the affirmation of self outside human territory of social concern is an absurd idea which Joseph too will have to abdicate during the process of moral graftings.

Life can be lived meaningfully only in relation to the life of others. If by now Joseph has not done well in this regard as becomes obvious in his relations with the family members, his hasty generalisation that perhaps others too like him would fall a prey to these inadequacies of life is highly misleading. In moments of moral flutterings he comes closer to the vision and goodness when he understands that: "goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other man, attended by love." But what distracts him from

1. Ibid., p. 92
the attainment of moral consciousness is the problem of accommodation of the self with the 'numerous other selves' which without the self would be 'imprisoning self'. And there can be no idealisation of plans or principle which can unlock the imprisoning self. Joseph has to understand the moral truth of Spinoza's statement that the highest virtue is the 'preservation of the self' but by the 'preservation of self' Spinoza does not mean affirmation of the anarchic self or adhering to the cult of the beatniks. The individual experiences pangs of alienation and loneliness in the wake of which the hold on moral codes is loosened and man is helplessly condemned to living a life of absurd existence. Life is defined fully in its moral beauty in social interaction and involvement. What pales Joseph's vision from the start is that his moral quest has no direction and that is why does not fit into the fixed pattern of existence, one implication of which is that he is denied to share the collective fate of humanity. He, no doubt, dismisses the idea of individual freedom which he has been espousing earlier by deciding to join the army:

"What we really want is to be stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened." ¹

Joseph, therefore, exhausts his stamina trying to guard his inner defences, the ones that really mattered, but it is one's strategy to face up the problem of preservation of self in relation to the impersonal threats of the outer world.

¹. Ibid., p. 154
John J. Clayton rightly sums up that Joseph proposes to "preserve the self, its dignity and freedom."¹

Bellow uses the device of symbolism to project his protagonist's inner state of mind and the resultant moral chaos and loneliness when he has nothing to do but indulge in self scrutiny, waiting desperately for the call of induction. The whole situation is symbolic: like Camus's Sisyphus who accepts the rock as his fate and begins to push it towards the summit believing that there "is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn".² Joseph's solitary room becomes his rock, his fate within which he has to create values and rearrange the pattern of existence but he lacks this moral realisation which Sisyphus develops during his descent towards the lower world that what constitutes the victory torture will also crown/at the same time. He presses his forehead on the glass window, perhaps to seek relief from the burning sensation of the nightmarish nature of loneliness to ensure hopelessly if the inner could overcome the crisis hitting him in the face. But what is at the root cause of this invisible assault of emotional turmoil is his purposeless existence which displaces him from all sense of time to the degrees that even the present ceases to convey any meaning at all. He looks upon himself as a case of split-up personality, having two halves of self and for his real identity he refers to his past self:

"I have not tried to bring myself up to date, either from indifference or from fear. Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings."¹

David D. Galloway's comment in relation to Joseph's distorted view of time-sense is pertinent, having its psychological and moral base. It is, to quote the critic, "an attitude of indifference to the physical and withdrawal from temporal existence in the world of sense into more speculative and timeless self awareness."² And thus Joseph is on verge of losing his human identity, partly due to the fact that, unlike an absurd hero, his hopes are to rest on the future whereas the vision demands that they ought to have been forced out of the existing situations which Bellow believes is the only reality. What is disturbing is that inspite of the fact that he is well aware of his gradual deterioration and that human values are to be attained in community yet he never makes attempts to extricate himself from the self-inflicted state of drudgery and demoralisation. And even if he ever stands out to define himself against the social milieu, the violence characterizing his behaviour with those who come in his contact, has no moral sanction. Caught up thus in between the strains and strangulations of the inner and the outer world, Joseph feels as if he were "a sort of human grenade whose pin has been withdrawn and the explosion can occur any moment destroying his ideals and dreams."

¹. Dangling Man, p. 26

If Joseph is blind to the ironic implications of the price which one has to pay for a passionate desire to live life on this earth, what is the novelist's stance to this proposition of his hero? Does he support such a view of reality or leave Joseph to evolve objectively and independently his own vision by himself to face the naked ironies of human existence? Joseph's case is problematic because of the fact that his endorsement of Goethe's existential view of man is grounded in the philosophy of moral nihilism and passivity. He has to recognise the truth of man that man is no more than a choice making animal: "Continued life means expectations. Death is the abolition of choice. The more choice is limited, the closer we are to death." And thus, "the greatest cruelty is to curtail expectations without taking away life completely."\(^1\) The solution to face up the absurdity and meaninglessness of life does not lie in negation of life which is in fact outrageous to the ultimate vision of human reality. Instead, it is in the philosophy of hope that one can escape the imaginary fears of meaningless survival on this 'blighted' planet. Joseph has to understand the nature and significance of life in its relatedness to social obligations in the framework of moral awareness which alone will authenticate the self in a universe wherein survival, in Darwanian terms, is a brutal affair.

Bellow uses an episode to show Joseph's lack of moral

\(^1\) Dangling Man, p. 148
consciousness and social commitment when his socio-political
dream to realise the idea of 'common humanity' is frustrated.
At the age of seventeen, Joseph is drawn towards the Communist
ideology: he joins the Communist party to see the
Communists devoting themselves "to the service of some doodle, the Race, 'le genre humain'." During this phase of
temporary political orientation, he is swept away by the
slogan "United Front from Below" and talks fairly and loudly
about the German Social Democracy. But soon the enthusiasm
evaporates when he sees the failure of the belief of the
communists in the theory of revolution to change the world
for the overthrow of a bourgeois state:

"Blood will run, the power will change hands, and then the state will wither away according to the in-ex-or-able logic of history."^2

But as a Communist activist Joseph's sense of
disillusionment with the working methods of the party is
equivocal: the Communists wanted to seek the shift in power
from the hands of the bourgeois to that of the
proletariats. But it is wrong somewhere in the system which
further distorts his vision. He feels that "any hospital
nurse did more with one bedpan for 'le genre humain' than they
did with their entire organisation."^3 The word Reformation
no longer seems awe-inspiring, it has lost its lustre for
Joseph and thus he looks upon it as a 'terrible' thing.

1. Ibid., p.34
2. Ibid., p.35
3. Ibid., p.34
Joseph's subsequent encounter with comrade, Jimmy Burns at the Arrows is a fine illustration to speak of his faulty moral insights into truths of life. It reminds him of his discredited self because for his defection from the party Burns looked at him "in the way which is, I suppose, officially prescribed for 'renegades'." Burns deliberately avoids Joseph, he even refuses to recognise him because for him Joseph's identity is reduced to 'non person'. How strange that instead of locating the cause of confusion into his own self Joseph feels offended to see Burns behave like a 'boob', perhaps under the instruction of the party as he later tells Myron. He sees no reason as to why the communists consider people outside their organisation as "contemptible petty-bourgeois renegade."^2

As a matter of fact Joseph's anger at Burns's insolence has a point which partly suggests that Joseph is incapable to judge human acts in right perspective. There are reasons for what Joseph does and on Myron's asking as to why he is creating a scene, he says:

"It's the principle of the thing. It seems to escape you. Simply because I am no longer a member of their party they have instructed him and boobs like him not to talk to me. Don't you see what's involved?"
"No," Myron said carelessly.
"I'll tell you what's involved. I have a right to be spoken to. It's the most elementary thing in the world. Simply that. I insist on it."
"Oh, Joseph," said Myron.
"No, really, listen to me. Forbid one man to talk to another, forbid him to communicate with someone else,

1. Ibid., p.32
2. Ibid., p.36
and you've forbidden him to think, because, as a great many writers will tell you, thought is a kind of communication."¹

And thus Joseph could not reconcile with the psychology of betrayal of a cause to which once he stood committed. The party's insistence on a certain code of discipline in the name of claiming totality of freedom for man, Joseph feels, breeds a class of tyrants and the system damages the very spirit of human freedom and responsibilities both at the individual and the social levels. This speaks of a stir within the self to show that it no longer will claim the view of the votaries of individual freedom, which Joseph shared in the past but there is hardly any progression in the direction to be what he is not because he is not clear of its precise nature in context of social reality. Life lived exclusively has no significance. Such a view generates disvalues such as self-centeredness, cynicism and moral perversion in man. At times it seems as if Joseph is willing to share his creator's belief that a life of involvement and social concern has its own moral beauties.

In Joseph's refusal to the suggestion of Amos, his brother, that he should join war as an officer, there are implicit moral flashes in moments of contemplation that it is human to get oneself involved with the fate of entire humanity rather than aspiring to live on the benefits of war, which is a human tragedy:

¹ Ibid., p. 33
"Myself, I would rather die in the war than consume its benefits. When I am called I shall go and make no protest. And, of course, I hope to survive. But I would rather be a victim than a beneficiary." 1

Joseph's acceptance of war is symbolic of his progression from inertia to action-oriented philosophy of life. But he continues to be skeptic about the vision that it is through social commitment that one can gain hold on life.

"To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room. Perhaps I could sound creation through other means. Perhaps. But things were now out of my hands. The next move was the world's." 2

Joseph's surrender to regimentation at the end shows a departure from Camus's ethics of the absurd which demands a ceaseless struggle and continued dissatisfaction with the existing order, yet at the deeper level it is an act of defiance to explain the limits of individualism and place faith in human potential to free the self from the 'imprisoning' inwardness so as to make it an active component in the flux of life. There is a gap between Joseph's frequent flashes of realisation and giving them a concrete shape by being an active participant in what goes around him in the world. He knows that without the shift in his attitude towards life, the world, books, self and freedom,

1. Ibid., p.84
2. Ibid., pp. 190-91
responsibility and 'ideal construction', it is unimaginable to dream of existing as a whole man, which, he is sure, he cannot be "without aid." And the 'aid', he has in mind is, of course, the creation of moral awareness which will make the self rise above the mundane realities of the world:

"We are all drawn towards the same craters of the spirit - to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace."2

And therefore in the wake of the failure of any specific strategy of survival being final, the moral consciousness urges upon man to evolve certain cardinal patterns of existence and try to live up to them for comprehending the deeper significance of consciousness including its limitations.

The Victim (1947)

The Victim, is a sequel to Dangling Man in terms of its shift from understanding the meaning of self to accountability and responsibility for acts which man commits irrespective of any intention. The novel seeks to chart the protagonist's upward moral thrust towards self-discovery rooted in social realities through the two stories - one dealing with 'Asa Leventhal-Kirbee Allbee relationship' constitutes the main theme, the other dramatizes Asa's relations with Max's family and is contrapuntal to the main situation. During the process, Asa is caught in the conceptual dilemma of inertia and impassiveness in the absence of

1. Ibid., p.68
2. Ibid., p.68
adequate insight into the nature of being and its commitment to self and society. If limitations are inherent, so are potentialities and within this equation man has to act out his moral drama of relatedness between the two kinds of obligations—personal and social. Bellow shares Frostian existential view of man in regard to human responsibilities, he is certainly for a limit to the two extremes of responsibility between which man has to seek balance to resolve the problem of existential human accountability. But the proposition becomes lopsided when man for want of illumination resorts to quixotic individualism in utter disregard to the demands of humanity by stretching his personal obligations to the extreme of self-sacrifice which makes the whole concept equivocal. The book clearly illustrates and exemplifies the truth of human relations that in order to be human one has to own responsibilities for what one does for himself and for the society.

The novel probes into the nature of the self in the state of en soi and its need of self-realisation and commitment to its own self and to the vast humanity. Bellow knows that "absolute responsibility is an impossible ideal, a saint's ideal," but the questions the book intends to comprehensively deal with are moral comments on man's powers to materialise his 'ideal constructions' such as—what does the self owe to the rest of humanity, how much should a man let the external world limit his self and where and how does the individual freedom run up against the responsibility of
inter-relatedness? The morality of this obligation of man towards other is explained through the two epigraphs upon which hinges the main theme of the book. The first is 'The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni', taken from Thousand and One Nights which Bellow uses in the beginning of the novel to spin out a moral cord indicating that man stands also responsible for acts not only in the physical but/in the invisible world of the supernatural beings. The wealthy merchant, the tale narrates, has a dramatic confrontation with a huge Ifrit with a sword in his hand for his son is struck down by the stones of dates which the merchant threw at him unintentionally:

"... and lo! an Ifrit appeared, huge of stature and brandishing a drawn sword, wherewith he approached the merchant and said, 'Stand up that I may slay thee even as thou slewest my son!' Asked the merchant, 'How have I slain thy son?' and he answered, 'When thou atest dates and threwest away the stones they struck my son full in the breast as he was walking by, so that he died forthwith.'\(^1\)

The second epigraph which Bellow uses for moral conditioning of the protagonist's self is a kind of moral fable. It is De Quincey's The Pains of Opium showing up the vision of suffering humanity as suggested by the imagery of the ocean and myriad human faces to intensify the moral significance of the former tale:

"... upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea

appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generations..."1

The mysterious revelation and the relatedness of one human face with the many is, as Bellow would have it, in the words of Max F. Schulz the "assimilation of the individual into society"2, which is the goal of the Bellow novel. F.J. Hoffman also avers that a "Bellow hero moves into society with a desperate hope that the human dilemma will be solved in community recognition and action."3 On the issue of man's predicament after alienation, Marcus Klein agrees with Hoffman's assimilation of the individual into the society but he shifts Hoffman's emphasis on 'total absorption' of the individual within the 'whole' to 'accomodation' - "That simultaneous engagement and disengagement ... that tricky distance between the sense of one's self in one's freedom and the sense of society put out there."4

Bellow from the start intends to depict Asa's problem of moral inadequacies and the resultant apathy

1. Idem
4. After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century, p.30
towards the value of social concern as becomes manifest in his mode of life philosophy characterised by a lonely, settled but 'indifferent' life. He is not 'sullen but unaccommodative' and 'impassive as usual'. His mother died when he was hardly eight years old in a mental asylum as a case of desertion and a victim of his father's inhumanity and irresponsibility. As a matter of fact, his father's Machiavellian ethics, which converts man into a self-centered cynic, and the loss of his mother's sanity, her 'mad-looking' face - "... he dreaded it, he dreaded the manifestation of anything resembling it in him self" - stunned his sensibilities and he fears he might lose his sanity any moment. As such, his consciousness deteriorates into abysmal misgivings, sleeplessness, endless bad dreams and hallucinations which shows that he is like Hamlet, one step removed from schizophrenia; he hears the bell ring while no one presses it outside, he imagines he has had sleep for hours whereas he has slept for five minutes only. Even darkness seem to emanate mortal fear and that is why he keeps bathroom lights on in the night, perhaps fearing the assault of some invisible fist. All this reflects that Asa Leventhal was sure unwell though Mary his wife rightly diagnoses the genesis of such claustrophobic fears; "If you were a little more sure you wouldn't let yourself be bothered." \[1\]

After graduation, we are told, Asa moves to New York, embodying Bellow's idea of the city, "a dense agglomeration of misery and competition, survival is a Darwinian

1. The Victim, p.49
fight, but the aim of survival is essentially moral." The
overwhelming sense of isolation begins to almost impercepti-
ably corrode the sensibility to the degrees that he is
rendered 'expressionless', the large flat he lives in is
'unbearably' empty and he desperately longs for human
company. Robert R. Dutton underlines his pangs of isolation,
comparing it with the existing situation in which Bellow
places Joseph, the protagonist of Dangling Man: both are
isolated and alienated and in a sense both are 'dangling'
and 'victims'.

For a short while, Asa works for a friend of his
uncle Schacter, who is an auctioneer. Harkavy encourages
Asa to join a pre-legal course at a night college which he
does but leaves in between in despair and thinks of continuing
to work as Harkavy's assistant which is a clear reflection
of his vascillating and unsteady attitude to accommodating
his interests with the ways of the world. After Harkavy's
death, Asa begins to drift as is suggested by a few random
jobs he does such as selling shoes on Saturdays in the
basement of a department store, working as a fur dyer or
clerking in a hotel till he joins civil service and is
planted in Baltimore Custom House. There widens Asa's
territory of self, he mixes with the people and visits
parties and opera performances but "with a kind of alien,
sceptical interest." On one occasion at a party he happens

2. The Victim, p. 18
to meet a tall handsome girl. She is Mary whom he later marries after a temporary break of an engagement when the girl made an open confession of her love for a married man. Asa, on Daniel's advice, leaves Baltimore for New York with the understanding that he would establish his own trade in New York with the active procurement of help of Daniel, Harkavy's son, who is in paper business. Asa is blind to this urban, naturalistic and oppressive milieu of the city even if the universe turns otherwise and that is why his great expectations become great deceptions when he gets little help from Daniel. Now the reality of the situation dawns on him but there is no tangible alternative to replace it—life seems to be a three-legged race, a very painful and humiliating experience, if lost, and Asa feels as if it represents that part of humanity which is known as "the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined."¹ His desperate need is now a job and in order to get one, he resorts to clownish and grotesque behaviour. However, Williston keeps him against leave vacancy in place of one of his men, Gates, who falls sick. But on the return of the man he loses the job and, in the words of the novelist, what he made of himself was - "difficult, touchy, exaggerating, illogical, overly familiar."²

And therefore what seems to shatter Asa's sense of security and humanness, outside the pressures of the outer

1. Ibid., p.23
2. Ibid., p.39
world is the persistent fear of socio-religious forces which heightens his psychic and spiritual isolation. As such, he loses faith not only in the healing power of love and potential of humanity but also in his own selfness, and this state of moral wilderness and confusion generates apprehensions and delusions the assault of which he can surmount only by understanding the right relationship between the individual and the society. He develops feelings that the entire world has gone anti-semitic he looks upon his predicament as a case of persecution-complex whereas the reality is he is never persecuted at all. Rather the fact is that Asa's burden of guilt and responsibility, dread of racial prejudices are all of his own creation and issue from his lack of moral consciousness and involvement with life. Life is larger than man-made barriers and its moral depth can be implicitly realised in what Marcus Klein calls 'accommodation'. Man, as the existentialists define, has no fixed essence given in advance, he is 'unfinished' and 'incomplete' and therefore he will be what he makes of himself. Judged in existential perspective, Asa lacks this fundamental moral insight that it is through assimilation of the individual within the flux of community life that the self gains concreteness of existence to validate Sartre's proposition that 'existence precedes essence'. The simple implications are that 'to exist' is taken in the sense of 'standing out from nothingness' but in it man's role is distinct in that the 'being'
arrives at an awareness which is, of course, a heightened state of reality.

Asa's interview with Allbee's master, Rudiger, though takes place outside the action of the novel, is of a very interesting nature which Bellow uses to effect the shift in Asa's stance of accommodating his interests with renewal energies with his own self and the society. Rudiger, the novelist tells, is a big shot, a personification of the principle of lassiez faire in economy for whom the gods of materialism are primary. What went off wrong in the interview is the essential incompatibility of the two antagonistic selves - Rudiger's misplaced stint that he has the privilege to insult and demoralise anyone who is needy and unemployed which Asa's Jewish sensibility rejects. And thus a scene is created at Dill's building in the office where Allbee works. Allbee recommended Asa to Rudiger, his employer, since he was desperately searching for a job. Asa feels uneasy in the office for the simple reason that Rudiger keeps him waiting for nearly an hour in the reception room and a few minutes in the office. Asa feels as if he were like one whom Rudiger will not hire and who came simply to waste his time. This ignites a battle of heated exchange of words between the two, each tries to outrun the other to assert his supremacy. However, Rudiger's temper is cooled down when Asa gives Allbee's reference. Looking at him, Rudiger
questions:

"What's your experience?' he said... What newspapers have you been on?'

'No papers', Leventhal said rather nervously.

Rudiger burst out, inflamed, 'Then what in the name of hell are you taking up my time for? What are you doing here? Get out. By Jesus, you come pesterin around here when I'm busy without a goddam thing to offer.'

'I'm sorry to bother you.' Leventhal spoke stiffly, not to reveal his alarm.

'This is a news magazine. If you have no news experience, you've got no business here. Do you think we run a vocational school?'

'I thought I could do the work. I've read your magazine, and I thought I could'...

'Oh, did you? Did you?'

'Yes...' He was beginning to recover his presence of mind. 'I didn't know my experience wasn't the right kind for you.' I have a letter from Mr. Silliston. He says he knows you'. "Well, Mr. Williston said he didn't see why I shouldn't be able to handle a job here..."

'Nobody asked him. I don't care what he said.'

'I think he knows what he's talking about. I respect his opinion.'

'I know my own business. Never mind about Williston. I ought to know what I need here. You're not it.'

'You probably know your business,' Leventhal said stolidly, evenly, hunching his head forward. 'I'm not saying you don't. But there's nothing so special about your magazine."1

On Rudiger's asking as to why he has come if he finds it so bad, Asa answers that he needs a job. This makes Rudiger's face afame with anger. He glares at him crazily and asks him to get out:

"Out, out, out!' Rudiger repeated, pushing over his desk with both arms. 'Out, you case, you nut, you belong in the asylum! Out! You ought to be committed!'"2

1. Ibid., pp. 40-41

2. Ibid., p. 43
The fallout of the interview, dramatically, turns out to be blighted for both Asa and Allbee in that Rudiger's primitivistic irrationality wrongly judges Allbee's role in the 'show'. Consequently, he fires Allbee for Asa's impudent behaviour. Time wears on, Asa finds a job in the Burk Beard and Company and feels satisfied with his lot but Allbee is rendered jobless and the resultant state of financial crisis makes life miserable to the extent that his wife deserts him. Her subsequent death leaves Allbee a derelict. And thus very naturally Allbee holds Asa wholly responsible for this catastrophe in the sense that racial prejudices pervert the vision and Allbee, the Gentile, develops the notion that Asa's wilful act to insult Rudiger is a calculated move to wreck revenge on him for his insulting Daniel, a Jewish friend of Asa, at Williston's party. But the reality is otherwise - Allbee, like Asa, too is to grow in moral illumination and has to develop moral consciousness to learn the value of limits within which an individual can be held responsible for his acts. Nevertheless, within the existing situation as such, the central issue confronting Asa is: should he own responsibility of Allbee's accusation or dismiss it as a case of moral distraction? Though Asa blatantly denies Allbee's accusations, yet he has a flash of insight into the heart of things and strangely feels that he could be the genesis of Allbee's fall: "Had he unknowingly, that is unconsciously, wanted to get back at Allbee?" The more he thinks of liberating himself
from Allbee's accusation, the more he feels that the inner self is on verge of freezing sensations. Since Mary has gone with her mother because her father had recently died, the pangs of loneliness make him feel restless and he moves out to a park where the suddenness of encounter with a stranger breaks the inner stillness and passivity. The stranger calls him by name, a faint recollection rises and Asa recognises Allbee but when he turns to walk off Allbee accosts him and the ensuing dialogue between the two is balanced on high-pitched comic irony:

"Well, you got my letter, didn't you? And I asked you to meet me here tonight...?"
'You wrote me a letter? What in the world for? I never got a letter from you. I don't understand this.'
'Neither do I; if you didn't get it, this would be quite a coincidence. But,' he went on, smiling, 'of course you're pretending you didn't get the letter.'
'Why should I pretend?' said Leventhal excitedly. 'What reason have I got to pretend? I don't know what letter you're taking about. You haven't got anything to write me for. I haven't thought about you in years, frankly, and I don't know why you think I care whether you exist or not. What, are we related?'
'By blood? No, no...heavens!' Allbee laughed."

Allbee's inference and simultaneous disclaim of relationship by blood open up one major theme of the book - what ties a man with a man - family, religion, cultural affinity, determinism or essentials of humanity? Or to what extent should man stretch his sense of responsibility and relatedness towards others? Asa and Allbee, though not related by blood, yet share some deeper fundamental ties

1. Ibid., p.29
binding the two into the bond of togetherness. And thus Asa's refusal to recognise Allbee, his alter ego, or what Sartre calls, 'the other', is overtly a gesture of lack of social concern and incapacity to share the joys and sorrows of humanity.

Since Asa is living a settled and stable life opposed to Allbee's tramp-like wanderings, Williston's advice that he should be charitable and help Allbee to tide-over the mess he is in, shakes him violently. That is why before Allbee meets Asa for the second time, Asa internally begins to feel involved in his affairs:

"I did go wrong with Rudiger, I know, and that whole business was unfortunate. I won't try to duck out of it, although I could if I wanted to."  

Asa begins to comprehend the inter-subjective nature of man's existence and this realization leads to the discovery of the realms of self that self realization is possible in involvement rather than in escape from demands of life. But what is disheartening is that human heart for want of Camusian lucidity of vision develops a tendency to respond to the urges of neglect and moral nihilism, he turns indifferent to the suffering of others and during the process he is converted into a fragmented, lonely and passive being. While waiting for his nephew at South Ferry, Asa's reflections over man desperately running in the egg-race of life to win, no matter if others fail, are moral to dissuade him from the

1. Ibid., p.143
risks involved in living life of naked individualism and moral anarchy. And therefore unless Asa keeps this principle of social concern and commitment in view, he cannot free himself from the burden of self:

"...if you shut yourself up, not wanting to be bothered, then you were like a bear in a winter hole, or like a mirror wrapped in a piece of flannel. And like such a mirror you were in less danger of being broken, but you didn’t flash, either. But you had to flash. That was the peculiar thing. Everybody wanted to be what he was to the limit."[1]

The analogy of mirror-imagery is a fine illustration to project Asa's myopic vision: the self, when alienated from the society, is like a mirror wrapped up tightly in a flannel, giving out no flash. Asa's self can give out a flash only by comprehending the significance of its relatedness with the other selves. When things in nature are bound up within the law of limit, Asa reflects, why man alone is subjected to moral drifting? Bellow employs the technique of contrast to clearly show Asa's being tied to the state of en-soi. The two modes of existence of the being the en-soi and pour-soi are sharply differentiated in terms of consciousness: man in comparison to plants and animals is endowed with capabilities to stretch his imagination to any limit - the more he recognises the limitations of limit, the nearer he is to moral awareness:

"... everything else in nature was bounded; trees, dogs, and ants didn't grow beyond a certain size. 'But we,' he thought, 'we go in all directions without any limit.'"[2]

1. Ibid., p.85
2. Ibid.. p.70
If the book's strategy on the one hand is to show the evolution of moral consciousness of Asa in the state of becoming, it equally shows concern with Allbee's self which badly needs moral conditioning as becomes illustrative in his shoving off his burden of wretchedness and degeneration on Asa without looking at his own share in his moral debacle. Asa permits to share his room and Allbee, on the contrary, the account goes, converts the flat into a filthy habitation within a few days, he grows savage and disorderly to the extent to use his bathrobe and read his most personal clippings including marriage letters. Since, Asa's passivity and annoyance has lapsed into a state of inertness, it encourages Allbee to make more roads into his life. The much feared 'show down' comes when Asa, after a two-day absence, returns to find the door locked, he breaks it down to discover Allbee, to his horror, with a strange woman in bed who resembles the landlady, Mrs Nonez, whom Asa has covertly desired. The whole thing is outrageous because Asa is wounded in his sub-conscious and, being highly vulnerable to this state of humiliation, feels as if he is a victim of betrayal and corrupt love. This powerful scene is designed to intensify Asa's identification with Allbee, 'his double' so as to release him from the sheltering cocoon he has built around himself to escape life, its horrors, evils and sufferings, frustrations and failures. The intermingling of the identities of the two is symbolic in the sense that Asa is forced to look into his own evil self through the
debasement of Allbee and therefore his self is to grow into a life of moral awareness and commitment. He feels guilty of adultery as if it is not Allbee making love outside marriage but it is he who himself has been infidel to Mary. It is through a series of sufferings and humiliations that Asa begins to comprehend the limits of responsibility and accountability. His struggle with Allbee in the gas-fitted apartment is an indication of his preference for affirming life against death which could be the beginning of the sign of rise of new consciousness provided it is grounded in social context. The evil in Asa is destroyed which he has shared through his alter ego (Allbee) for moral survival of the being.

But Allbee's case is different. He is still in the dark about the tragic aspect in life: he holds social determinism and the blind movements of destiny responsible for human tragedy. What a lame excuse of a bohemian!:

"Now it's all blind movement, vast movement, and the individual is shuttled back and forth. He only thinks he's the works. But that isn't the way it is. Groups, organizations succeed or fail, but not individuals any longer."

1. Ibid., p. 62
if he is freed from the bond of responsibility and commitment, what moral obligations he has towards his own self and others. At last, Allbee is thrown out which, at symbolic level, amounts to the act of purgation of the baser and the asocial feelings in Asa: he regains the poise and calm and feels himself much 'younger' and 'healthier' than before. Bellow's intention is clear that any act committed in isolation may lose its human implication and the understanding that men are related with one another by a general lot of suffering and responsibilities. This brings Asa closer to the realisation and its moral promptings lead him towards establishing solidarity with humanity.

Bellow's strategy in regard to portraying Allbee's moral disorientation contributes to the main theme of the novel which includes his irresponsible misadventure to gas himself to death in Asa's flat. He makes a confession of it when he has his last meeting with Asa outside the theatre which shows that Allbee, like Asa, seems to have grown wiser, affable and reconciled to live a life of a purposive being. Allbee explains:

"'I want you to know one thing,' said Allbee. 'That night... I wanted to put an end to myself. I wasn't thinking of hurting you. I suppose you would have been... But I wasn't thinking of you. You weren't even in my mind!' Leventhal laughed outright at this.

'You could have jumped in the river. That's a funny lie. Why tell it? Did you have to use my kitchen?'

Allbee glanced around restlessly. The bays that rose into his loose blond hair became crimson. 'No,' he said miserably. Well, anyhow, I don't remember how it was.
I must have been demented. When you turn against yourself, nobody else means anything to you either.' Bitterly shame-faced and self mocking, he took Leventhal's hand and pressed it. 'But I want to say that I owe you something. I was trying to get around it when I talked about trying to kill myself only.'  

Bellow uses the words of a drama critic, Schlossberg, to articulate his own moral position to explain 'what is human'. The critic uses a theatrical expression:

"It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human.. Good acting is what is exactly human. And if you say I am a tough critic, you mean I have a high opinion of what is human. This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either.'"

Human life, Schlossberg observes, has a subangelic nature, richness of moral grandeur and beauty but only on the condition that it is human, not sub-human or superhuman. Though the words are not addressed to Asa yet they directly mean to say something to him since his self has been trying to escape from what life entails - suffering, humiliation, sense of mortality. Asa through comical confrontations with his alter ego ultimately gains moral awareness which becomes obvious in his summing up the whole issue, "he liked to think 'human' meant accountable in spite of many weaknesses - at the last moment, tough enough to hold."  

1. Ibid., p.237  
2. Ibid., pp.112-13  
3. Ibid., p.129
Asa and Allbee meet several years later at a theatre. Allbee seems to have achieved harmony at least with his own self at superficial level. He makes confession of the debt to Asa for his initiating him into a new life, he feels the urgency to be what he is not as he explains. "The type comes to terms with who ever runs things." The plot ends with Asa calling to Allbee to wake and explain his idea of "who runs things". But the curtains go up and Asa finds no answer which is perhaps in keeping with the strategy of the novel since he has yet to rise above the common level of humanity to gain realisation that the self can achieve transcendence by penetrating the barriers raised around itself to have a view of reality which is no reality at all. Bellow is well aware of the moral problem confronting the writer, i.e. the creation of moral consciousness which is imperative and which takes place at two levels - at the level of the character and of the readers - that the existence of others is also a reality and that one can attain vision of higher reality, 'grand synthesis' by assuming the rebel's philosophical attitude of 'All or Nothing'. That is what is necessary for an individual as a human being is equally necessary for all men. The Bellow protagonist, while confronting this moral question - how to be out of an insulated world of the self into a common world? - in the first phase of consciousness, shows no symptoms of mobility and progression. Even the realisation of what is supposed to be morally human only takes place in the mind and the self for want of seminal insights, remains passive. Joseph's recognition is illuminating
when he says that he "had not done well alone", because "to be pushed upon oneself entirely puts the very facts of simple existence in doubt."\(^1\) Asa too having realised the value of interaction of the individual with society has developed a sense of responsibility for a stranger with whom he shares no recognisable filiations but Bellow introduces a sub-plot to impress upon his mind the value of responsibility and accommodation.

The sub-plot deals with Asa's relations with his brother Max's family which helps him make a reexamination of his idea of responsibility, perhaps of guilt through his efforts of help and advice. For a long time, Leventhal has had little communication with Max and his family. His wife Elena and the two children are living in New York since Max was away at work in Texas. One day his nephew, Mickey, falls ill and he has to stay with the family to attend on him. Asa feels disappointed and dissatisfied to find himself in Elena's house, yet he carries on with his duty in a routine, impassive manner. But with Mickey's condition growing serious, his passivity is broken and he feels more involved in the precarious situation. After a long debate he prevails over Elena that the boy be taken to the hospital. What is significant in the whole episode is that Asa atleast begins to understand what it means by being responsible or irresponsible. Asa, blames Max for turning impassive towards familial obligations by way of transferring his burden on others.

\(^1\) Dangling Man, pp. 190-91
After Mickey's death Asa reconciles with the tragedy but he is yet to learn about man's accountability in social dealings. That is why he holds himself responsible for Mickey's death in that it was at his initiation that the child was moved to the hospital. Asa's point of view is distorted for want of a clear vision, a sort of moral awakening, as becomes manifest in his turning alcoholic to make penance for the guilt. For quite sometime, Asa is haunted by imaginary fears, depression, yet he simultaneously develops an understanding that the tragedy will bring the family together. The plot ends with Max and his family returning to Texas but what is illuminating is that contrary to Asa's fear, Max feels highly obliged to him for the valuable help rendered to them at the time of crisis. The episode may not provide concrete resolutions but it certainly affirms man's potentialities: Asa as a victim of moral confusion, becomes aware of the significance and role of deep and honest feelings of responsibility and accountability in man's life. His nature allows for an "evoking of possibilities where none but limitations exist."¹ It creates a stir in Asa's level of consciousness to bring him closer to the realisation that human means "accountable in spite of weaknesses,"² that is, man has to sometimes 'own' guilt and responsibility in all their naturalness and immediacy, even for things he can be hardly held responsible for. Someone may look upon it as unfair to hold anyone accountable for the situation he never

intended to create but Bellow believes that the pattern of human existence is such and the 'debt' must be paid for it. If it remains unpaid it will deny man his humanness and his attempt to rise above the petty materialistic concerns of life will bear no fruits. Mickey's sickness and subsequent death thus obliges Asa to accept the facts and nature of the existing world wherein he has so long sought to evade its sufferings and culpabilities. What he actually needs now is the tacit understanding of right relations with the numerous others and the moral awareness of the wider implications of his dilemma of existence and the vision to see beyond the immediate conclusion.

Seize the Day (1956)

Seize the Day is about man's existential dilemma in regard to the creation of moral consciousness in a world full of disvalues such as selfishness, cynicism, moral perversion and suspicion. Continuing the line of argument as established in the earlier two novels the book is a powerful portrayal of an utterly isolated, profoundly alone and passively fragmented protagonist caught in the moral chaos created by his own quixotic romantic cult of the freedom of self in absence of moral awareness and social concern. That is why the idea which the book develops is that man's moving between the two extremes - his passive submission to conformity and determinism without resistance
in a bid to retain his selfness and his falling a helpless victim to stupid romantic notions - will be of no help to establish the "locus of reality and value." Rather, such a philosophy of life generates the all pervasive feeling of confusion, absurdity and nihilism in a world where the only god to be worshipped is Mammon, and which offers no kinship to man, no spiritual guidance to overcome ignominies of life. Consequently the 'being' is on verge of fragmentation because in the state of en-soi it is totally unaware of the assault of the absurd forces on its dignity. It is by way of resistance and revolt against the very conditions of living that man can overcome limitations of life to make human relations enduring, that is, man can control his existence provided he wills to do so and his actions are prompted by moral insights into ontological nature of the world.

Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of the novel, represents a shift in the perspective from the 'victimised being' of the two earlier counterparts - Joseph and Asa Leventhal in the sense that, unlike them, he begins to understand as to where lies the wrong and how to remedy it. Joseph's 'stillness' and 'inertia' and Asa's 'stirring' open up possibilities for Tommy to evolve his own strategy of survival, the value of which lies in the acceptance of the limitations of the self. Forty-three years old Tommy, a father of two sons, is a depiction of the absurdist's vision of man's confrontations with the nature of reality. He is an ex-Hollywood actor, an ex-salesman, the son of a successful
father, jobless, alone and fragmented. His education has been desultory. He left the school to go to Hollywood and now he feels ashamed of his intellectual deformity. "He was the only member of the family who had no education. This was another sore point".\(^1\) He inherited sensitivity from his mother and it is with her death, tragedy in his life begins. In fact it was the beginning of the end of the family life in that his father, Dr. Adler, constantly spurned him and his relations with his wife, Margaret, also turned frigid.

The action begins in the impersonal world of a public hotel, Gloriana, in New York City which is symbolic of lack of love and communication in modern man's life. But for Tommy the urgency is to 'seize the day' rather than continue to freeze on passivity and inertness, he has to evolve his own set of intrinsic values to live by. His isolation is prominently projected in the mode of relationship between him and his father, Dr. Adler, who is vain and self-centred. The two live on different floors as if they are totally strangers to each other. There is hardly any sharing of emotions and love between the two and even the chance meetings at breakfast-table in the morning are formal encounters as they do not open their heart to each other. The world they inhabit is perhaps highly impersonal by its very nature wherein people meet each other wearing masks and pretensions as if by rule. And thus in absence of

communication and love, Tommy confronts profound loneliness, spiritual anguish and psychic distractions, and finds nobody to share feelings and emotions. To keep up his spirits, he smokes a cigar, and wears a hat to 'conceal' the resultant troubles but ultimately finds things too unwildy to manage: "He was aware that his routine was about to break up and he sensed that a huge trouble long presaged but till now formless was due." Even Dr. Adler, strangely enough, cares little of Tommy's desperate isolation. As a matter of fact more than money - "I don't need that sort of money" - the son wants love, understanding and warmth of human heart but the response of the octogenerian old father is frigid and detached to the degrees that Tommy's repeated attempts to establish communication with his father turn futile and bring no spiritual solace. He is even no longer able to pretend 'doing all right' and feels contented with the existing predicament. The situation takes a comic turn when Tommy tries to tell his father about his plight which is responded by the simple, impersonal nodding of the Doctor - father while he is examining the patients:

"It made Wilhelm profoundly bitter that his father should speak to him with such detachment about his welfare. Dr. Adler liked to appear affable. Affable! His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or ease his heart to him."2

One natural corollary of this pose of rigidity of the father is that the disenchanted boy turns to the second

1. Ibid., p. 4
2. Ibid., p. 10
father-image, Dr. Tamkin, since his own father has betrayed him. "Dad is no longer the same person".1 Tommy fails to understand the mechanics of the callousness of behaviour towards him which is as much the same as it is with the patients. This sense of rejection, indifference and unwantedness inflicts a scar on his psyche and he ruminates: "Couldn't he see - couldn't he feel? Had he lost his family sense?"2 The whole situation is allegorical. Dr. Adler's betrayal is symbolic of the betrayal of mankind by the divine providence but his turning to the power of miracles will land him into troubles. What he needs in the existing situation is the generation of confidence in his own powers. Within this frame work, Dr. Adler's advice to Tommy not to turn to a mysterious person, Dr. Tamkin, is not doubt partly sane but full of overtones of tragic irony:

"Wilky, perhaps you listen too much to this Tamkin. He's interesting to talk to. I don't doubt it. I think he's pretty common but he's a persuasive man. However, I don't know how reliable he may be."3

But the real intent of the novel lies elsewhere. It is not only Dr. Adler who is responsible for their strained relations, there stands a long history of bitterness, misunderstanding and injured feelings between the two. The parents wanted Tommy to join the medical profession which his romantic self flatly rejected on rather flimsy grounds,

1. Ibid., p.11
2. Idem
3. Ibid., p. 10
perhaps to assert and have his own way:

"I can't bear hospitals. Besides, I might make a mistake and hurt someone or even kill a patient. I couldn't stand that. Besides, I haven't got that sort of brains."  

Tommy at the stage is unable to realise that no sane person will admire his stance of self-scrutiny and defence mechanism in regard to his level of intellectual capacities unless he virtually gets involved in what he is made to undertake. However, Tommy's vacillation to join the medical profession leads to frequent quarrels and ugly exchange of words in the family. On one such occasion, he reflects, how he yelled at his mother and later realised that it was an act of moral effrontery and manifestation of naked individualism.

"I couldn't affect one way or another. Mama was the one who tried to stop me, and we carried on and yelled and pleaded. The more I lied the louder I raised my voice, and charged - like a hippopotamus. Poor Mother! How I disappointed her."  

Tommy, like a romantic, develops narcissistic obsessions of self under the impression that his face is photogenic and features are strikingly handsome and, therefore, he can make his fortune as an actor in the dreamy world of Hollywood. With this miscalculation, Tommy moves to Hollywood to try his luck. He changes his name from Wilhelm Adler to Tommy Wilhelm which gives a rude shock to his father because in this change of identity of name he sees his failure to fit his son into his own pattern of an idealised profession.

1. Ibid., p.16
2. Ibid., p.15
But with the unfavourable screen test the Hollywood dream is shattered, his pride does not let him accept a secondary role in the industry. Instead of becoming a screen star, he works as an orderly in a Los Angeles Hospital, and thus he wastes away seven long years of the formative period of life. Consequently, he becomes a misfit sharing Joseph's predicament to go in any profession of choice. Later he joins the Rojax Corporation which deals in playground equipments and worked for nearly 10 years and was in the line for the post of Vice-Presidency.

The one vital problem confronting the modern man today in America is the problem of isolation and the disintegration of self. Man can escape its assault and reconstruct the image through involvement with and love of mankind. But the question is who will initiate the move to restructure the self caught in the murky coils of moral sloth? The dilemma is resolved in what the existentialists think of man: it is man, not a god, who has to be his own maker, he will be what he makes of himself. The modern man's dilemma is shared by Joseph. This phase of isolation and excruciating spiritual anguish becomes all the more unbearable by Margaret's apathetic behaviour and inhumanity. When Tommy approaches his father to discuss his strained relations with Margaret, the old man holds him responsible for the creation of such a chaotic situation in the family. This response of Dr. Adler is quite disheartening and Tommy feels that his father is
laying the whole blame of marital disharmony on him alone, perhaps to escape financial help. On his asking as to why he left Margaret, Tommy explains his position which hardly cools down the old man's temper. He warns him to "pay for your stupid romantic notions." Tommy feels that it was a mistake to come to New York and live near his father. "New York is like a gas... My head feels so tight, I don't know what I'm doing. He thinks I want to take away his money or that I envy him. He doesn't see what I want." Sensing that his father is playing the game with dice loaded, Tommy, like two a penitentiary makes admissions to win the old man's sympathies - that he had relations with a woman in Roxbury and that the Hollywood dream was a false step. But he is not moved to compassion and continues to nag him on the question of upholding the sacramental values of marriage. The boy pathetically cries:

"Ah, Father, Father!" said Wilhelm. "It's always the same thing with you. Look how you lead me on. You always start out to help me with my problems, and be sympathetic and so forth. It gets my hopes up and I begin to be grateful. But before we're through I'm a hundred times more depressed than before. Why is that? You have no sympathy. You want to shift all the blame on to me. Maybe you're wise to do it." Dr. Adler had been rendering financial help to Margaret when Tommy was in the army. But now he is not willing to share this responsibility, not that Tommy is living the life of a reckless bohemian but because it is the uncompromising pride and eccentric obduracy which has made him highly

1. Ibid., p.51
2. Ibid., p.50
3. Ibid., p.53
utilitarian and self-centred. Living a life of extreme loneliness and irresponsibility in familial matters for long, Dr. Adler has developed a sense of fear and insecurity which is a bane of capitalism. He is persistently haunted by the imaginary fears that if he starts sending money to Tommy, he will soon be left penniless. Even his disgust with the evil of parasitism in human conduct is an expression of a paranoiac feverish imagination:

"I'm still alive, not dead. I am still here. Life isn't over yet. I am as much alive as you or anyone. And I want nobody on my back. Get off! And I give you the same advice, Wilky. Carry nobody on your back."1

Such an attitude of utter irresponsibility, carelessness and chastisement shakes Tommy violently. On emerging out of the dining hall with unsteady legs Tommy has a smell of the salt odour of tears in his nose, under fits of self-loathing he reproaches himself using dirty names which is also a general comment on the bourgeois ethics of life but it is otherwise symbolic of the fact that the process of purification of self has set in: "Ass! Idiot! Wild boar! Dumb mule! Slave! Lousy, wallowing hippopótamus!"2 Self condemnation illumines human spirit, the vanity and falseness of pride that he is the son of an illustrious father is shattered. He is virtually thrown into a ridiculously contemptible state of begging and feebleness. Tommy is not blind to the fact as to why Dr. Adler is hiding his financial failures and praising

1. Ibid., p.55
2. Idem
him to Mr. Perls when he is working for the Rojax Corporation. Perhaps it is his tactics to evade his own responsibilities and partly to induce the romantic dream in the son's mind.

Tommy has been hankering after a life of stupid romantic notions and during the process gets alienated from his own self, the family and the outer world. For lack of comprehending the limitations of the self in its relatedness to others, he continues wallowing in the state of passivity and moral inertia. Besides, there is a long list of his victimisers including his wife, Margaret and the two sons, Mr. Perls, a German refugee from a concentration camp, and Mr. Rappaport, an elderly player of the money-market, who are also in one or the other way instrumental in intensifying his loneliness and distress. His extra-marital relations are also responsible for creating feelings of mistrust and bitterness. Margaret does not agree for divorce. Tommy has to support her and the two children. He bears all their expenses including the educational insurance policies. When Margaret agrees for divorce she sets conditions which are contrary to his expectations. He thought that she would come to sympathise him in times of crisis but his encounter with her turns out to be equally exasperating as with that of Dr. Adler and later of Tamkin.

As such Tommy is badly shaken by the corrupt, suffocating and superficial influences and the financial crisis. Since his father flatly refuses to procure any financial succour for him and he has already suffered heavy losses on the
Tommy's readiness to believe in Tamkin's verbal ingenuity is contrary to comprehending the meaning of the limitation of the freedom of self and thus symbolic of man's moral inadequacies. Like Frostian neighbour, man moves in darkness looking for moral anchorage to tie his belief with. The imagery of water used in the beginning of the book, 'the elevator sank and sank' suggests that the protagonist is really in deep waters with no life-line within sight. The situation is highly metaphorical. Tommy has the consciousness of this stage of 'being' 'sinking deeper and deeper' but ironically he never thinks of rising above the level to overcome the ignominious current of life. Though with his coming to Dr. Tamkin there is a stop to his quarrel with his father and the resultant violence, he finds himself "flowing into another channel"1 which is a sufficient indication that the 'being' is in a state of being different from what it is. His ruminations are despairing but full of illumination and insight. "What have I let myself in for? The waters of the Earth are going to roll over me." The words 'waters of the Earth' are enough to remind him of the real and thorny character of the world upon which life will bleed if one fails to come to terms with its demands. For a person like Tommy, whose alienated being has yet to realise the social and moral implications of the existential view of man like, what is significant is the act, not an idea or a thought in

1. Ibid., p. 57
counter in the stock market, Margaret's persistent demand for higher alimony makes his life bleaker. He sees no escape from such a state of wretchedness and helplessness and thus sends, to Margaret's annoyance, the post-dated cheques, fearing to raise the amount within the stipulated time. Margaret has unleashed a campaign of vilification - she speaks ill of Tommy to everyone she happens to encounter and strikes at him perhaps to settle scores, with such intense ferocity that Tommy feels almost choked down by her repeated assaults. This finds expression in his confession to his father:

"Well, Dad, she hates me. I feel that she's strangling me. I can't catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I'll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can't catch my breath."¹

In spite of doing his best to bear with Margaret's stupid antagonism Tommy just could not get along with her. The book concentrates on the essential incompatibility draining out the essence of conjugal bliss: "She was one way and I was another. She wouldn't be like me, so I tried to be like her, and I couldn't do it."² On one occasion her patience is fagged out and she leaves an urgent message for Tommy to speak to her on the phone regarding the post-dated cheque. Tommy breaks into heavy sweat in the narrow telephone booth, the tone is partly apologetic and self-pitying but full of confusion and lack of direction:

1. Ibid., p.48
2. Ibid., p.51
"I've had some bad luck. As a matter of fact, it's been so bad that I don't know where I am. I couldn't tell you what day of the week this is. I can't think straight. I'd better not even try."1

Tommy discovers a favourable opportunity to impress upon his father's mind the sense of familial obligations when the old man exhorts him to stop sending money to Margaret and the children. He plays a trick to trap Dr. Adler in the line expecting that he, like him, will also feel responsible towards him, his only son. "Oh, but my kids, father. My kids. I love them. I don't want them to lack anything."2 The argumentation has a halo of romanticism for the fact that forty-four years old Tommy cannot afford to behave like a kid. He is expected to feel more accountable for his acts. Tommy's childish behaviour finds reflection when he so brazenly describes Margaret to be a strange kind of woman, he wants her to feel concerned about his plight that "he was nearly at the end of his rope"3 but the strange thing is that he never talks of the genesis of the trouble and misunderstanding - how it started and who is directly responsible for it. The trick misfires because Adler does not feel convinced and takes the whole thing as a piece of acting.

"Strange, Father? I'll show you what she's like." Wilhelm took hold of his broad throat with brown-stained fingers and bitten nails and began to choke himself.
"What are you doing?" cried the old man.
"I'm showing you what she does to me."
"Stop that - stop it!" the old man said and tapped the table commandingly."4

1. Ibid., p. 111  
2. Ibid., p. 46  
3. Ibid., p. 30  
4. Ibid., p. 48
Later when Tommy suffers loss of money on the stock market he is hopelessly cast away by both his father and Margaret. And thus instead of securing any help, they accuse him of creating his own world of self-indulgence and moral anarchy devoid of any social sense. It is, therefore, the utter callousness and indifference of his father on the one hand, and Margaret's ferocious brutality and violence on the other, that make his predicament all the more precarious. They feel that his sufferings and failures are genuine and he deserves them. In the words of the novelist Margaret, "hit him and hit him, beat him, battered him, wanted to beat the very life out of him."¹ The materialism and sophistication of Dr. Adler brings Tommy in direct conflict with him - the doctor turns down the genuine request for help in time of crisis as if the filial chord binding the two is congealed signifying the total collapse of relations.

"Father, listen! Listen!"
"Go away from me now. It's torture for me to look at you, you slob!" cried Dr. Adler."²

If Dr. Adler's inhumanity towards Tommy is examined in context of his philosophy of materialistic epistemology, it is certainly a manifestation of a morally fractured vision which becomes expressive in his changing pattern of behaviour from moment to moment, and his unsteady outlook on life. For example, when he is alone, he is highly critical of Tommy's romantic day-dreamings but when he is in the public,

1. Ibid., p.113
2. Ibid., p.110
he assumes a different stance: he is a votary of the principle of money power. He is totally blind to the ironic implications that such a view monetizes human relations and crushes finer sensibilities. The book seems to use this disorientation of vision of the doctor for the moral orientation of Tommy. That is why, unlike Adler, Tommy is conscious of the moral damage as caused by the commercialisation of the human relations, even the very thought of it brings congestion but he is yet to make life grow into this philosophy of moral illumination:

"Uch! How they love money, thought Wilhelm. They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn't have it you were a dummy, a dummy! You had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth. Chicken! that's what it was. The world's business. If only he could find a way out of it."1

Tommy feels appalled to see even the most affluent people suffer from want to want and discontentment and clamour for something unattainable in life which shows that he is well aware of the dehumanizing impact of money on man, but the irony is that his own acquisitive self cannot rise above the petty consideration of life, he cannot abdicate the philosophy of self aggrandisement, opportunism and rat race knowing that it corrodes the level of consciousness and the higher truths of life.

"Too much of the world's business done. Too much falsity. He had various words to express the effect this had on him. Chicken! Unclean! Congestion! he exclaimed in his heart. Rat race! Phony! Murder! Play the Game! Buggers!"2

1. Ibid., p. 36
2. Ibid., p. 17
Bellow builds a case for the justification of Tommy's turning elsewhere for help when he is finally rejected by his father. The glamour of his youthful face, fades out, and his looks grow untidy and unrested. Excessive smoking causes strange redness in his eyes rolling up barbarously in the sockets. Consequently, he begins to take drugs and stimulants even in the presence of his father to escape the trauma of the sordid realities of life, but what he gets in return is the growing numbness of the body and the spirit. Even the prayer made to God for redemption brings no spiritual solace.

"Oh, God," ... "Let me out of my trouble. Let me out of my thoughts, and let me do something better with myself. For all the time I have wasted I am very sorry. Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy."¹

He is like a Beat at the bottom of his personality. However, as a result of Dr. Adler's calculated avoidance of sharing fatherly responsibilities the communication and understanding between the two deteriorate to the level that to talk of responsibility is merely regarded as "strange challenges." And, therefore, the son-image feels totally disillusioned and finds very bleak chances of seeking any financial help from his father. His coming closer to Dr. Tamkin is an artistic twist in regard to bringing realisation that there is a world outside the self in the midst of which he has to live and create his own destiny.

¹. Ibid., p.26
Dr. Tamkin is presented as Tommy's alter-ego since something of Tamkin is inherent in him. Tamkin is Tommy's Mephistopheles, the power-intellect sans conscience to control his destiny for sometime. He has read the best of literature, science and philosophy including the works of Aristotle, Freud, W.H. Shelton. And thus his scholarly persuasions and the philosophy of the existence of more than one soul in human body enchant Tommy who discovers in his power of learning and philosophy a panacea to his ailments: Tamkin makes a show of his hypnotic skill as if practicing miracles to create illusion of genuineness. He presses the handle of a knife against his heart and tells:

"In here, the human bosom-mine, yours, everybody's - there isn't just one soul. There's a lot of souls. But there are two main ones, the real soul and a pretender soul."¹

¹ Tamkin's interpretations of the two souls being eternally at war with each other is medievalistic in conception: the struggle between the good and bad to possess human soul. The pretender soul is narcissistic in character and feeds on vanity and confusion but with the rise of the true soul the self feels morally enlightened, the man comes closer to vision that has been hitherto blurred. There is a thin line dividing the two zones of reality and, therefore, in order to separate the husk from the grain man cannot fall on any intellectual formulation alone when no philosophy does ever reflect the total view of what Heidegger calls 'human reality'.

1. Ibid., p.70
the state of passivity to create a meaning in life. The escape lies, not in romantic imaginings that any time the miracles could fall from the sky but in comprehending the significance of the existential essence that the essence, "is what has been ... essence is all that human reality apprehends in itself as having been."¹

In Tommy-Tamkin relationship the same old story of betrayal, falsity and exploitation is reflected: the ruinous losses Tommy suffers on the stock market are symbolic of his moral and social wreckage. And out of its ashes is to rise the phoenix, symbolic of man's moral sense grounded in social concern which makes him realise the limits of the cult of romantic separatism and seek harmony with self and society. Under the rise of new moral impulses, the whole of Tommy is not to be controlled by Tamkin which becomes manifest during the course of story telling when Tamkin did not allow any intervention and demanded perfect silence, which is a reflection of his intellectual pride and supremacy. But Tommy shows annoyance because the stuff of these wild stories is offending to his sensibilities. This is what Bellow precisely seems to say that man can control his existence, provided his actions are prompted by moral consciousness and he wills to do so, and that he does not leave it to the dictates and mercy of the outer forces:

"Damn it, Tamkin!" said Wilhelm roughly. "Cut that out. I don't like it. Leave my character out of

¹. Being and Nothingness, op. cit., p.72.
And thus it is the counsel of Dr. Tamkin, the supposed financial wizard, which injects irony into the title to reveal the machiavellian reality of his character. What evidently he wants to imprint on his student's mind is that the day remains 'unseized' if he fails to develop economic efficiency and the form of consciousness required at the speculation counter:

"The spiritual compensation is what I look for. Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That's the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real - the here-and-now. Seize the day."2

The scene wherein Tamkin leads Tommy through a crowded city to the brokerage office where he is supposed to make his fortune on the counter evokes images of a Christian parable, recalling the temptation of Christ by the Devil. Jesus Christ drove away the devil asking "Away from me, Satan! ... Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."3 but we know that Tommy will not be able to free himself from the sinister trap of his victimizer and choose dignity to be with himself. Bellow's intentions to show that miracles fail man and that man should fall on his own resources and potentialities are clear when we see Tommy lose money at the

---

1. Seize the Day, p. 88
2. Ibid., p. 66
3. The New Testament, St. Matthew, 10
speculation counter. And as the money is lost, so is Tamkin. Sensing the impending financial crash, Tamkin promptly disappears into the crowd, leaving the victim in a state of utter discomfiture. Tommy is materially ruined, he feels as broken but the truth dawns on him. Malcolm Bradbury sums up that "through counterfeit meanings we might come to a humane truth." The final step, though paradoxical, is built on comedy: Tommy chases the trickster jostling through the indifferent human faces and finds himself in a funeral parlour. He looks down on a dead body of a gray-haired stranger with a meditative look in his eyes that evokes horror. He studies the dead man as the visitors are moving in lines, "With great stifling sorrow, almost admiration, Wilhelm nodded and nodded."2

The whole setting is symbolic of the baptismal ritualism - the tears supply the water for baptism, they come from deep within with illumination that man in mortality has little choice but to "seize the day" if he wills so. And the tears shed for the body of another man are the tears for the discovery of human mortality "that makes the living and the dead into one community, making life senseless and making living activity into a value, because it is simply all there is."3 And, therefore, with every gaze there rises a new understanding, a consciousness which urges him to look beneath the surface of things and make him walk with better

1. The Modern American Novel, p. 56
2. Seize the Day, p. 117
3. The Modern American Novel, p. 56
understanding between the practical material world and the larger world of 'being':

"The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need."

Tommy is mistaken by the crowd of mourners for a close relative of the dead man. And certainly if he is not related to the dead person 'by blood' (as Asa is not related to Allbee) there is a bond tying all human beings in togetherness - the bond of life and death. And therefore in the face of the stranger, Tommy confronts both himself and the humanity. Man's confrontation with death is not triumphant but it is not despair and lamentation either. Tommy sinks "beneath the watery flow," he sinks "deeper than sorrow" but it is not exactly sorrow because the hitherto unfelt joys of peace are restored to him in that the sight of the dead man enables him to see into the heart of human reality. The situation urges upon man to live with joy and in harmony in face of the ubiquitous fear of death which is the only human response to meet the sinister design of a Manichean universe. Tommy sees his own fate in the coffin whereas the other mourners stand indifferent to this aspect of human reality, man is condemned to:

"His efforts to collect himself were useless. The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled

1. Seize the Day, p. 118
upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all his heart.

He, alone of all the people in the chapel, was sobbing. No one knew who he was...

"Oh my, oh my! To be mourned like that," said one man and looked at Wilhelm's heavy shaken shoulders, his clutched face and whitened fair hair, with wide, glinting, jealous eyes.

"The man's brother, maybe?"

"Oh, I doubt that very much," said another bystander "They're not alike at all. Night and day."

What is enduring in human relations is the awareness of the value of social concern that binds man and man into group loyalty, loyalty to humanity at large rather than to the individual.

The book ends indisputably on a different note in regard to the effect that Tommy now comprehends the meaning of self in its relatedness to numerous others'. His experiences with Dr. Tamkin in regard to attaining material success and the subsequent frustrations and failures have now overhauled his being. He develops insights to respond better in a humanistic way to the pressures of this material world. There is a stir, the layers of sluggishness and moral confusion get straightened and the self gains consciousness which is moral in character. Neither the errors of the past will continue to frustrate his endeavours towards moral perfection, nor will he shed tears in helplessness and despair. He has also learnt that the old and the lost constructions as embodied in his father, Dr. Adler, will no more pervert his imagination, nor will the disillusioning

1. Ibid., p. 118
intellectual imaginings as manifested in Dr. Tamkin distort his vision. Tamkin's words, "A man either creates or he destroys. There is no neutrality." reveals the universal truth of life the essence of which lies in involvement, interdependence and understanding since neutrality ensures no illumination and resolution to reconcile with the nightmare nature of human existence.

...