CHOICE
THE CONCEPT OF CHOICE

"To be or not to be" is a crucial question in Hamlet. It is a question of choice & everyone has to face such an either or situation involving choice. Choice may be either intellectual or volitional. When intellectual, it proceeds from an already inclined or fixed disposition, so that there is no further development of character. But when the choice is volitional, it tends to cause change—either growth or degradation of character, & when moral issues are involved, a volitional choice may mean a lot more than in other cases; it then involves the self as a whole & determines further restrictive choices, moral as well as intellectual.

Man is confronted in his everyday life with a large number of possibilities. But since life is full of action, one cannot but choose one course of action from among these large number of possibilities. The choice he makes determines the quality of his life. In other words, man makes himself by this choice. Kierkegaard's notion of human existence involves this freedom of choice. Man can choose since he is free. But the freedom is the freedom to choose in a "situation" & from among a set of given possibilities. His freedom is thus limited. We become human beings by facing & assuming decisions, alone in those difficult & critical situation in which there is no way of demonstrating whether we are deciding rightly & when we have to act in faith.

The difficulties of choice are due to the false perspective to pre-occupation with our personal welfare & our blindness towards the claims of others, to our ignorance & doubts whether some means could justify our ends & so on. The paradox that actions seem to be both chosen & not chosen. Oedipus's killing of Laius is the classic example. It was both chosen by Oedipus & yet not chosen by him. So, "if human beings credit themselves with power to choose or not to choose what they do, and many of them do credit themselves with it, it is because the body of concepts and beliefs in terms of which they think about their action implies that they have it."¹

"Another important aspect of choice was that it must be directed to acts that were within the individual's powers to perform. It was thereby distinguished from wishing, because a person might wish for all sorts of impossibilities though he could not be said to choose any such."  

The choice between two desires depend on their relative strength. But, we must remember that the simple type of choice is not really representative of the more important choices which a mature person has to make, for his choice becomes an expression of his character & mental faculty. Thus, a man who has to decide— as Colby in *The Confidential Clerk*— whether he will continue in his present vocation or accept a new career, is deciding ultimately between two complex schemes of life.

We, therefore, must indicate the psychological process involved in this higher development of conation i.e the part of mental life having to do with striving, including desire & volition, & action. One practical relation that must soon be forced upon the attention of an agent trying to bring about an ideally represented state of things is that of means & end. With this fuller recognition of this relationship among objects comes the process of deliberation, in which the agent seeks to discover the means of attaining an end or to determine which of two or more ways of attaining it is the best.

Aristotle seeks to explain deliberate choice & offers reasons why deliberate choice cannot be identical with desire, passion, wish, or opinion. He points out that we appraise opinions according to whether they are true or false or arrive at in the right way; but we never appraise choices for these reasons but rather because they are good or bad or fail or succeed in attaining an end. Aristotle concludes that a choice is, 'a voluntary act preceded by deliberation'. We also speak of choice as a function of practical intellect or purposive thought. And Aristotle's implication seems to be that deliberate choices are actions whose reasonableness depends on how they are directed toward goal.

In Aristotle's analysis of the deliberative process, choice is expressly

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characterized as choice of the means. Such a view of choice will not, however, apply to all cases without strain. For, although in every choice between two objects or courses of action some end is implicitly assumed, there is an obvious difference between the case in which the end or criterion is explicit from the start of the deliberative process & the case in which it emerges only as a balance of advantage at the end. And we must further recognize the possibility, of which Aristotle takes no account, that even where we start with a certain end explicitly before us, our deliberation may, by bringing out other elements of significance in our end which we had not before fully appreciated, cause us to modify or abandon altogether. In short, the more important the matter for decision is, the more does the choice tend to express, not an isolated desire for a particular end, by the whole character of the agent or what is the same thing, his ultimate all-inclusive desire for the kind of life which is to him best. And the more strenuously a man lives, the more will the unity of his character tend to work itself out in even the simple actions of his daily life.

It is for choices of a more or less deliberate kind that the term 'will' is often reserved in psychological & ethical decisions. But we must not take for granted the new term denotes a new faculty of mind. The expression 'fiant of will' often used in this connexion, therefore, is very misleading; because the man who seriously sets himself to deliberate must mean to come to a decision. Moreover, with some sort of decision already vaguely outlined in the form of possible alternatives, & his only job is to remove what is doubtful & make the proper course of action clear, for any reason remained for withholding consent, the deliberation could not have complete & the agent hesitates & holds himself back from action.

No one deliberately chooses anything which he knows to be utterly out of his reach. We choose between alternatives which we believe are within our power, & our choice, in the end, is a choice between conflicting values. Moreover, we usually have too little time for mature reflexion. Most of our deliberations are cut short because life is brief & the need for action claimant. In contrast to the deliberate choice, will is a subtler thing, with a wider net,
so when we speak of a formed will, we mean the whole character of a man, like Thomas, so far as it can be expressed in action. A man's habit of choice pertain to his will as well as his choice on this or the other occasion, & so do his capacities & his general aims.

The act of the will that is concerned with means to an end; it is distinct from the act of deliberation that proceeds it & from the act of execution that follows it. According to Aristotle, when one wishes an end, which he sees as his good, his choice must necessarily be concerned with the means to that end, i.e. with the actions that will attain it, insofar as these lie in his favour & the things that are in his power. So Aristotle asserts that choice in man must be voluntary.

St. Augustine, reflecting on the concept of choice within the context of Christian revelation, sees it as being vitiated by sin; in his view, it was perfection of man before Original Sin, a perfection that can be restored only by the gift of Divine grace. According to the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquines, choice is substantially not an act of reason but of the will for choice is accomplished in a certain movement of the soul towards the good; it is an act of appetitive power. He follows Aristotle's view on choice i.e. it is concerned with means to an end. Likewise, he sees in man's faculty of choice the proper explanation of the freedom or free will, so he views that man does not choose out of necessity but freely; whether man has chosen or not depends on to act or not. Descartes makes the important point that liberty of choice is not to be confused with indifference towards various alternatives, which he sees move as a defect of knowledge than as a perfection of the will.

For Kant & his followers, freedom of choice is described from the exigencies of the practical reason & from moral law; thus choice is nothing more than man's autonomy in legislating for himself. In Kant's view, freedom does not consist in being able to choose one alternative or the other, but in the will's not being passively determined; will is a law unto itself independent of any quality in the object presented to it.

Satre views that choice & freedom are not absolute one because objective conditions, biological properties, & natural laws are not within the power of the self to choose.
Moreover, human consciousness is not bound by external conditions for the human self is capable of resisting & refusing any compelling force. His famous proposition is that 'existence precedes essence' implies that individual have no prior essence; instead they choose to live in a certain way. "Thus, hunger as a biological event is not chosen, but fasting, even to death, shows that desire for food is not an objective condition that compels action but rather a matter of choice. ... Even bad faith is a choice to evade responsibility and seek a determined cause for one's action. Thus, choice is ineluctable in human consciousness; we are condemned to be free. ... Freedom means that the choicer is totally responsible for the choice and for how this choice influences the WORLD."

Whenever a man exercises his will, & makes a voluntary choice of one out of various possible courses, an event occurs, whose relation to contiguous event cannot be included in a general statement applicable to similar cases. There is something wholly capricious & arbitrary, belonging to that moment only; & we have no right to conclude that if circumstances were exactly repeated, & the man himself absolutely unaltered, he would choose the same course.

**Characteristic of choice:**

"First choices, unlike beliefs, are neither true nor false. We rate choices by calling them good or bad, wise or foolish, and correct or incorrect. When 'correct' and 'incorrect' mean that a choice is suitable or unsuitable for the attainment of some end, but we never rate choices by calling them true or false. ... although choosing is sometimes the same as deciding, in most contexts choosing is more closely related to action than in deciding, and deciding is more closely related to intending than is choosing."

Prior to Sartre, people have the same view of Aristotle that none can escape the responsibility for his actions even though he has acted in ignorance so far as he is capable of deliberating. Jennifer Trusted in *Free Will and Responsibility* neatly sums up this aspect of Aristotle's view that Aristotle "did not intend to imply that if a person acted without

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deliberation he would not be responsible for his actions. Such a person would be acting in ignorance, and acting in ignorance does not absolve from responsibility. We are responsible if we are capable of deliberating, whether or not we do in fact deliberate."

Many religions of the world pose two enigmatic problems: is salvation determined by a divine choice or is it a matter of personal self-determination? While the former is termed as 'predestination', the latter is called 'free will'. In spiritual matters, the freedom of will have two common ways of thinking: free will as a freedom of choice, whereby one does freely what one has also had the power to choose to do, & free will as the absence of compulsion, whereby one willingly does what one does without actively choosing what is done voluntary necessity. Predestination refers only to the voluntary divine choice of certain groups or individuals for salvation. Election is more commonly substituted for predestination, & in biblical studies, election has been the preferred term for referring to divine choice, which have already been elaborately discussed.

Often predestination & free will are considered as paradoxical, yet complementary. But free will is understood not as freedom of choice but as voluntary necessity i.e. where freedom means the absence of compulsion, necessary acts determined by God nonetheless can be freely done. Almost all predestination theologies have maintained that the predetermined will acts freely & with consequent responsibility for its action, even though it lacks the power to choose its actions.

Just as the Jewish Rabbi Akiba could say that all is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given, & Christian theologians could combine belief in predestination & free will, so Hindu philosophy could combine the determinism with faith in the power of moral initiative. "Karma rightly understood," says Radhakrishnan, "...does not fetter the mind or chain the will. ...Man is not a mere product of nature. He is mightier than his Karma. ...The law of Karma, which rules the lower nature of man, has nothing to do with spiritual in him. The Infinite in him helps him to transcend the limitations of the finite. The essence

of spirit is freedom. By its exercise man can check and control his natural impulses. Man oscillates between nature and spirit, and so is subject to both freedom and necessity."

"...if it is agreed to call every act free which springs from the self and from the self alone, the act which bears the mark of our personality is truly free, for our self alone will lay claim to its paternity. It would thus be recognized that free will is a fact, if it were agreed to look for it in a certain characteristic of the decision which is taken, in the free act itself."

"Determinism is the doctrine that what happens must happen—that all true propositions recording events in the universe are necessary propositions and all false ones impossible." Thus as a doctrine it implies that under a given condition everything that ensues is bound to happen as it does & in other possible way; thus nothing in nature is contingent, nor is there any room for human freedom. Determinism denies, thus, the reality of choice, because of a complete casual connectedness of motives volition with physical, psychological, social, even unconscious forces.

Theory of indeterminism holds that it is not impossible for an individual to choose a course of action independent of the stimuli affecting him or the motive prompting him at the time of making his choice. So he himself determines his course of action in crisis & guided by his own accord—though he is influenced by his morality. Indeterminism, in other words, insist that man, however limited in choices, still is free to choose among alternatives to put such choices into action.

Choice in philosophy, a corollary of the proposition of free will i.e. the ability voluntarily to choose to perform one of several possible acts or to avoid action entirely, which is independent of natural, social, or divine restraints. An ethical choice involves as ascribing right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse, to alternatives. Free will is the capacity to choose among courses of actions, things, desires & so forth & also requires to take full moral responsibility. We call will to be free only when there is no direct coercion, compul-

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sion, or distortion of truth & also that alternatives for the choice be at hand.

It is still confusing & pose a problem when one is forced to choose between free will & predestination. We have people who have accepted events as the will of God & have made no progress but merely carrying on reasonably satisfactory life. The people who thinks they can determine events by action according to their own will, may be subjected to disaster or have contributed to advancement of humanity & enjoyment of a fuller life. Whether these advances were fated or not simply cannot be proved; the individual must make personal choice of an explanation of the working of the universe.

We know, according to the doctrine of Karma, although every human being creates his own limitations through his thoughts & actions, yet he has the option to continue or to resist the tendencies. This freedom of will & possibility of free choice are nothing but a reflexion in each person of the freedom of the consciousness within. This doctrine is thus an attempt to bring the ideas of fate & free will together in a balanced way. A man may view that what happens to him in his present life is nothing but his fate; but this is not the whole truth because the evolution of man's intelligence has permitted at least an appearance of some modicum of free will of self-determination; hence he is free to improve his character in preparation for future. He is therefore chooser of good or bad & fashions his life in his own way.

Satish Chatterjee & Dhirendramohan Dutta, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy sum up the unexplainable doctrine of Karma that "This law helps us to explain certain differences in individual beings, which cannot be explained by the known circumstances of their lives. It is not infrequently that we find that men who are born and brought up under the same or similar circumstances differ very much in respect of their achievements and enjoyments in life... Some of them, we find, are obviously due to the different actions performed by us in this present life. But many of them cannot be explained by reference to the deeds of this life." 

We are often moved to action by forces we do not understand. But we can learn about these forces, & control them. Psychology has shown us that we are less free than we thought, but it has also shown how to become freer. Social psychology has shown how much of our action is explainable in terms of our environment, & genetics how much in terms of inherited physical characteristics. But we see how it is possible to overcome the deficiencies of environment or inherited physique. So a boy who has grown up in an area where everyone steals, & somehow has acquired the ability to avoid stealing, will be unlikely ever to steal in later. Similarly, who has grown up in a middle-class family in a sudden need may succumb to a temptation he had never before experienced.

Truly we have in the Renaissance tragedy, the Christian assumption that man is free to act one way or another is lost in the reality of evil. "since our erected wit," says Sidney in the Apology for Poetry, "maketh us know that perfection is, and yet our infected will, keepeth us from reaching unto it." 10 So though Leibniz holds that our fates, & indeed the entire course of the cosmos, were determined, yet in the Paradise Lost Milton's 'defence' of God implies that Adam & Eve were free to choose to eat or to abstain from the forbidden fruit, but they were too weak to resist the temptation. Ultimately they were destined to succumb and that is why God could foresee their Fall.

Leibniz associated choice with the will's being induced to act by the element of goodness in what it chooses, "The will is never prompted to action save by the representation of the good, which prevails over the opposite representations. ... For that very reason the choice is free and independent of necessity, because it is made between several possibles, and the will is determined only by the preponderating goodness of the object." 11

It is among the existentialist thinkers, however, that 'choice' has received the greatest emphasis as a philosophical concept. For them, 'choice' is connected with the

question of freedom & the ultimate openness & roundness of the human condition. Perhaps it would not be going too far to say that freedom is the supreme value among them. This robust sense of freedom leads to a strong sense of responsibility that is placed on the individual & marks the particular ethical dimension adopted by many existentialists. According to them, human existence is said to be 'authentic' when the individuals freely chooses who & what he will become. The freedom to choose & decide is, of course, never absolute; as the human being is finite, inserted at a given position in space & time & therefore, subject to all the constrains & influences that operate at that point. Thus, his freedom is always threatened.

For Kierkegaard choice is so fundamental that without it there can be no such thing as good or evil: "My either / or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil / or excludes them. ... It is, therefore, not so much as a question of choosing between willing the good or the evil, as of choosing to will, but by this in turn the good and the evil are posited." Ramanuja, the interpreter of the Vedanta, "also held that the choice of good or evil nonetheless included personal acts performed by means of a God-given freedom." In Heidegger's view that both the present state & ultimate potentiality of human existence are rooted in the attitude towards choice, "for not choosing signifies choosing to make this choice—deciding for a potentiality—being, and making this decision from one's own Self." We have to keep in mind that our will to live primarily biological one i.e. necessity. But our seeming will to choose may, under circumstances, be oriented otherwise than the biologically, for we can choose to die as a sacrifice for others or by taking our own lives in despair or through a sense of honour.

Eliot discusses his idea of choice in *Knowledge and Experience* in terms of will: "From a purely external point of view there is no will; and to find will in any phenomenon requires a certain empathy; we observe a man's action and place ourselves but not wholly in his position; or we act and place ourselves partly in the position of an outsider. And this doublessness of aspect is in fact the justification for the use of the term."\(^{15}\) Eliot's idea is also supported if we remember that even the psychologist studies the mental state of other by moving beyond external observation & placing himself 'partly but not wholly' in other person's position. Again, while discussing on verse drama Eliot opines, "It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of; it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will; and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstance and the doomed or sanctified being."\(^{16}\)

His concern with the crisis of human will & fulfilment, finds a place in the radical act of transforming self. Being a Christian dramatist, the acts of the unregenerate of the purged will constitute the most significant agons of life because, according to him, they are the central determinants of the fate of man. Thus, there is a tragic exultation both for those who choose to transform themselves to accept the dictates of "the obstinate, the tougher self" (p.153) & also for those who give up "The self that wills" (p.153) to peace in martyrdom. The Christian hero like Becket loses his will in the will of God, & in either case, acting is suffering & suffering action, it is a terrifying choice to make i.e. whether to consent the eternal pattern or the demonic assertion of the self. The agony of the will, however, is rendered on the level of intellect.

We know that the drama is a drama of crisis in a given moment which require the choice of future course of action, including not to act is itself an action. Since Eliot’s dramas of responsibility & choice based upon classical myth & French convention, they offer a deep incisive judgement.

His plays consist of a single action, the distinctive act of choice, based upon classical myths. M.C. Bradbrook points out: “The action is of the slightest. A single moment of choice, the Kierkegaardian choice, is set before the main character; the rest of the play leads up to and leads away from this moment. There are no sub-plots, minor interests, or digressions. The moment of choice is the same for all. There is often actual repetition from one of these plays to another.”

Indeed in each of the plays, there are characters of different degrees of consciousness. They are all faced with a particular situation, which demands that they should make a ‘choice’ & it is this choice which, in Aristotelian sense, reveals their characters, & the level of consciousness they have achieved. Thus in Murder in the Cathedral, the spiritual awareness of Thomas is not shared by the priests or the knights, & when confronted with a ‘choice’ he chooses martyrdom & death. In The Cocktail Party, both Celia & the Chamberlaynes have to make a choice, & their choice determines their future & reveals their respective spiritual awareness. Hence they are rightly called ‘drama of responsibility & choice’.”Situation demands of man that he should chose, having a freedom that is perceived within the framework of a deterministic system. By his choice, or a succession of choices, the facets of his character are in turn illuminated.”

By applying, what Matthew Arnold prescribes, the Touchstone method, we find that Becket holds the seed of future tragedy, as his initial decision will but a ‘foregone conclusion’.

In all the three plays – Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, & The

Cocktail Party;— the central character has literally to choose between life & death—they own deaths for Thomas & Celia; Harry makes the choice that kills his mother.

Like Yeats, Eliot supports an idealistic “non-Aristotelian” theatre: his protagonists are not battered to bits by social pressure, but have the insight & self possession to make choices. His leading characters are nothing beside the presentation of their soul. “They do not live independently, implementing their will, imposing their desires, fighting against other wills and desires; they are not opposed to other human beings in the drama of egoistic assertion that is universally and continually being enacted.”19 His characters do make choices & decide upon courses of action without regard to the consequences of the action. Moreover, they also acquire substantial personalities through the process of making decisions. And the main action centre round the prolonged & painful process of making decisions.

In Shakespeare we have the major characters who shape their own destiny, & their decisions, influence the fate of others as well. On the contrary, Eliot’s heroes are mainly concerned with their own spiritual salvation & their decisions do not necessarily follow from their judgement but from the set pattern of these plays & the minor characters are only indirectly influenced by the heroes’ actions.

In his plays, Eliot shows that ‘a right choice’ rewards redemption, whereas ‘a wrong choice’ is a ‘state of death in life’. Thus, Thomas & Harry exemplifies that a right choice is the repentance, which leads to the goal of redemption. Regarding the freedom of will we notice in Thomas, in the form of submission to the will of God.

Similarly, in Harry, we find his choice of self-mortification—“The heat of sun and the icy vigil,/ A care over lives of humble people,” as a means of expiation to illuminate his spirit. The characters of ‘second-order’ also make their free-choice. So Edward & Lavinia choose the domestic life, but ignorant about missionary pursuits because they do not understand the very implications of the curse, therefore, have to make their choice in the materialistic existence. Those who make wrong choice are inferior, simple, & ordinary for

they are unable to understand the spiritual order, hence confined within the materialistic world alone. On the other hand, those making right choice belong to superior group who expelled the curse & their life is full of meaningful actions. One cannot, however, always make right choice, & vice versa.

George T. Wright in his penetrating analysis of Eliot's characterization that the poet cares little for their individual qualities & remarks "what he cares about is their relationship to certain enduring archetypal roles. They act, consequently, if they act at all, in conformity to the demands of their roles rather than from what we should call personal motives." 20

Becket's agon is performed in the divine arena where the true action—the nature of hero's choice—took place. The action is simple, in the words of Eliot, "A man comes home, foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed" ("Poetry and Drama," in PP, p. 80) first spiritually, & then physically. The play is set in motion by God's will for he "has lost his will in the will of God" (p. 33); so Thomas is not an active agent. "There is not a parallel natural cause, one human action from which everything stems." 21

The play poses many questions regarding choice: Has a man spiritual right to choose his own death for any cause or pretext, when Christianity, like any other religion, emphatically forbids self-slaughter? What is the difference between a martyr & ordinary suicide? And even if one is justified in dying for the right cause & right faith, where is the absolute certainty that the faith for which one is going to die is the right one? These are the problems relevant to the spiritual condition of Thomas. He is not a saint from the beginning of the play. He becomes a saint only by choosing martyrdom.

Thomas must "learn to care and not to care; for if he merely chooses not to care, and abandons himself to his destroyers, he [sic] will be suicide rather than a martyr. Probably no drama has ever explored so subtle a moral point". 22 The free human choice is necessary to the fulfillment of the design of Providence. But such a choice made by fallible men who know & do not know what is to act or suffer. Thus the battle with the recalcitrant will shuns the self-sacrifice.

If we apply the dictum—the character is destiny, Becket's decision at the very onset will be his fate. The first choice presented to the Archbishop is to return to France, but he decided not to do so. The temptation episode reveals the true nature of his character. And ultimately his decision to affirm the right of the church, prompted by the inner certainty as the Will of God, causes his death.

The play exists as a moment of choice of the elect, who sees he has the responsibility of making a choice on behalf of all. By this decision he crosses an internal boundary line, after which he is "not in danger; only near to death." "The first part sets forth the whole of the psychological choice that the action is only to ratify. It presents the motive of suffering through Becket's decision not to act." 23

Becket is impressive as a type of figure pushed by circumstances to the lonely position of having to resolve a grave conflict within himself & ultimately with reference to principles which transcend prudence, politics, & social utility. The central action of the play lies within Becket himself, & the culminating point of the play is Becket's decision to accept martyrdom or rather his final understanding of the proper reasons by which his decision might be justified, & its true meaning.

Thus, the significance in the Becket's story lies in the struggle through which a man of proud & indomitable will—in the words of the Four Tempters, "This man is obstinate, blind...Lost in the wonder of his own greatness" (p. 28) — becomes, at last, an instrument in God's hands.

Indeed, it was Robert Speaight, who played the role of Becket in the festival of Canterbury, was puzzled "how the positive character of Becket's personality could be reconciled with so passive a protagonist?" 24 So, Robert Speaight's "initial feeling was one of the vague disappointment" for Becket was,"Assailed by the tempters, importuned by the Chorus, harassed by the Priests and murdered by the Knights...go forward to predetermined fate." "...the Becket of Murder in the Cathedral was a man," Speaight observed "more acted upon than acting, but there is a tremendous force in his passivity. His submitted will had the strength and resilience of steel,..." He further analysed, as an actor, "It was true that Becket was an idea rather than a character, but there was a strong challenge to clothing the idea with flesh and blood." 25

23. Grover Smith, p. 182.
In the Murder, "The problem of subjugation of individual will to the will of God," Norman Nicholson views, "is given in its simplest and most forcible form." Thus, the central action lies within Becket himself, & the culminating point of the play is his justification, & final understanding of true meaning of his decision i.e. to accept martyrdom. The choice made by Thomas is not however, for the life-time of one man only, rather as a "part of the pattern of timeless moments". Though he foresees that in returning he is choosing his death, even then, after meeting with the four Tempters, he decides to stay in England.

In the temptation scene, which Maxwell calls, "the focal point of the play," Thomas, the "man who played a certain part in history" (p. 27), was able to reject the first three 'temporal Tempter's offer' "with comparative ease". But, "For a man of many parts," it is too difficult for Becket to ignore,

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\text{glory after death. ...}
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\text{Think of pilgrims, standing, in line}
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\text{Before the glittering jewelled shrine,}
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\text{From generation to generation}
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\[
\text{Bending the knee in supplication,}
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\[
\text{Think of the miracles, by God's grace,}
\]
\[
\text{And think of your enemies, in another place.}
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(P.26)

But he recognizes this offer as "Dreams to damnation" for "I know that history at all times draws / The strongest consequence from remotest cause." Thus, he ultimately resolves not "To do the right deed for the wrong reason" (p.30).

The main function of the first three Tempters is to highlight Archbishop's past & in no way to influence the future. Their real function is to show the extent of his susceptibleness to the attraction of his former life. The First Tempter is "an old friend" of "Old Tom, gay Tom, Becket of London" (p.18), "When the King, and you and I were all friends... /.../...with wit and wine and wisdom!" (pp.18-19), which Thomas rejects "in the life of one man, never! The

29. Ibid., p.184.
same time returns" (p.19). The Second Tempter asks him to "guide the state again" as "Chancellor richly rules" for "Real power/ is purchased at price of certain submission" (p.21). But Thomas rejects the "Temoral power". Then enters the Third Tempter, "an unexpected visitor", "a rough straightforward Englishman", "the backbone of the nation", seeks "To a happy coalition / Of intelligent interests" & "Church favour would be an advantage" (p.23). But this, too, Thomas rejects to "treacheries as you have done before : / No one shall say that I betrayed a king" (p.24).

It is noticeable that each Tempter, like Thomas, in turn rejects the argument of the preceding one. So Second Tempter rejects the First one as "deceitful shadows": similarly the Third Tempter rejects the possibility of renewal of friendship between Thomas & the King as proposed by the Second. And the Fourth Tempter rejects all earlier temptations offered.

The argument put forward by the Fourth Tempter is apparently incongruous for his purpose is to tempt Thomas to snatch at martyrdom for his own glory. So Fourth Tempter prophesies a time when there will no longer any such glory:

When men shall declare that there was no mystery
About this man who played a certain part in history.  
(p.27)

In fact both the temptations are deadly; while the first one is a blasphemy of using martyrdom & sanctity as personal glorification:

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.  
(p.27)

The second one is to undermine Thomas’s faith by forecasting a time when all faith will be lost & this despair in itself is the greatest sin. So the four Tempters dissolve "in a fifth temptation— the temptation to despair, by asserting that everything is vanity & illusion...".  

With the Fourth Tempter’s retort "You have often dreamt them" & ironical throw-back "You know and do not know, that action is suffering, / And suffering action" (p.27).

shows how tangle of motives remain with Thomas, luring him on to martyrdom not as a result of losing his will in God's, but as an act of self-aggrandizement. He may be taunting Becket for his pose of superior wisdom, but as the Archbishop's inner voice he is also speaking prophetic truth.

There are dual possibilities about the role of this last Tempter, Eliot expressed to Martin Browne in 1956 i.e. after twenty years of the play's performance, "an evil angel or possibly a good angel. After all the fourth tempter is gradually leading Becket on to his sudden resolution and simplification of his difficulties" 32, for which Eloise Knapp Hay appreciates, "Only a playwright thoroughly versed in 'the negative way' could imagine a good angel appearing to Becket in the guise of a dangerous tempter." 33

When the women of Canterbury, his spiritual dependents who act as an external prompter, cry out: "O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself that we may be saved;/ Destroy yourself and we are destroyed" (p.30). Then only he realizes that his decision is no longer personal one but for the well-being of the Church, & particularly of these members of it, the women of Canterbury & able to shake off his hesitation & thus utters: "Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:" (p.30).

The germ of resolution has sprung from the worst source, for "The last temptation is the greatest treason: / To do the right deed for the wrong reason" (p.30). He says, "I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end," meaning both that he will not serve the purpose of the sword, even as intentional martyr, & also that he will not act on his own volition until the sword has done its work.

The episode shows, as R.H. Lesser in "The Christinity of Murder in the Cathedral" finds, "that saints are human, still open to temptation – and still capable of falling. If Thomas could dismiss the early Tempters easily it is not that the struggle had not been long and serious. In fact even now there is a struggle, as there will be up to the hour of death – 'the

32. E. Martin Browne, p. 58.
impossible is still temptation'. A saint, even less perhaps a martyr, is not made in a day."  

So Thomas must consent to the turning of the wheel so that the Divine pattern may subsist i.e. the individual life may have direction & meaning. We have already discussed on Eliot's use of 'still point' by Ethel F. Cornwell in *The Still point*. "The pattern is suffering and action, or discipline — which is the counterpart of action; and the necessity of such suffering and action in the development of one's spiritual being... is one of Eliot's dominant themes."  

F.B. Pinion in *A T.S. Eliot Companion* considers the image of wheel is taken "from the Brahma — Wheel of the Upanishads, presents the world of time which revolves around, and is always related to, God eternal at the still point of the centre. Man's action of an infinitely larger process to which he must consent; action, therefore, is suffered, and what is suffered determines action."  

Towards the end, the Chorus consent, like Becket to look ahead to an end of action & suffering. They occupy a circumference of which Becket is the centre because they choose to rely on him at the source of the movement they participate in. By their choice, consequently, they become the circumference of the wheel, & Thomas becomes the centre.

Thomas exercises his power of individual choice to shape his destiny, actively rejecting the Tempters & working to perfect his will. The necessity for man to choose extends to the audience, which becomes a participant to the audience. Both speeches — the sermon & Knight's apologia — emphasize that one cannot escape one's complicity in the actions of others. So the audience is called upon, whether it knows it or not, to make a choice between two mutually incompatible standards of judgement. On the one hand, a way of judgement in which one examines & assesses cause & effect, the evidence of the senses & the probabilities suggested by experience. On the other hand, a way in which judgement is reserved for God:

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It is not in time that my death shall be known;
It is out of time that my decision is taken
If you call that decision
To which my whole being gives entire consent.
I give my life
To the Law of God above the Law of Man. (P.49)

The Knights speeches show, in the words of F.O. Matthiessen in "T.S. Eliot's Drama of Becket": "In consequence of their conception of deterministic process, no individual can be blamed for oppression, exploitation, or crime that he undertakes in the cause of the State. There are only social forces and expediency, the responsibility of a human will for its own actions has been utterly lost." Their apologia actually serves "the temptation of the audience" through which it must pass before it can share the final celebration of the martyrdom, for Eliot "wanted to bring home to the audience the contemporary relevance of the situation" ("Poetry and Drama," in PP p.80).

Being a Divine drama there is but very little choice of human will. So there is little physical action in the play, for Eliot's primary purpose is to define martyrdom & its meaning both at a specific time & for all time. Here martyrdom is seen as a sacrifice made in submission of the personal will to God's will & made for the redemption of human sins. Similarly, as the plot is subordinate to the theme, so also are characters, who are to a certain extent abstract, stylized, and symbolic of mankind in general.

38. David Jones, p.61
THE FAMILY REUNION

The problem of Harry's choice, as an individual in modern literature is a special case worth to be studied who bears a burden of personal and inherited guilt—a type of moral awareness. His problem is that of the religious man in a secular society, comparable to that of Tennyson's Ulysses who "have suffered greatly, both with those! That loved me, and alone;...Among these barren crags." In the Christian drama we witnessed man's agony in coming to God. Now we must be concerned with the pain & the tragic understanding of man having to replace God. In the words of Camus, "Choosing between heaven and a ridiculous fidelity, perfecting oneself to eternity or losing oneself in God is the age-old tragedy in which each must play his part." In other words, with the changed theatrical metaphor, we have another theatre of will, where the world becomes a universe newly created by a man's act of commitment & the exercise of human freedom. Unlike "Destiny waits in the hand of God" in the previous play, now destiny is in the hands of man, willing, choosing, & acting. This is the most autobiographical play, where Eliot "posed his continued dilemma: should a man at the end of a tormenting marriage seek salvation through natural love, or through a lone pilgrimage across a whole 'Thibet of broken stones' that lay, fang up, a lifetime's journey?"  

It is a drama of inner life. The character contrasts which runs through it—whether he or she attempts to live on the surface & pretends to ignore the spiritual destiny of man, or accepts a predicament which is essentially tragic. The characters who willfully shut their eyes & seek to enjoy sham happiness by living superficially are Amy, two of her sisters, her two brothers-in-law, & Dr. Warburton; those who face the obligations & pain of living in reality in various degrees are Agatha, Mary, & Harry, whose conscious is the seat of the drama.

Between the platitude of a family reunion, Harry must select the right drama from three alternatives on offer: his family's drama of return; Mary's drama of renewal through

40. Lyndall Gordon, p.50.
love; & the still obscure drama of the furies. Harry learns that his childhood was unhappy because Amy relentlessly usurped freedom of choices, as Mary says “all seemed to be imposed upon us” (p. 76), which even Amy realizes “I always wanted too much for my children. I More than life can give” (p. 117).

He discovers the alternative way to escape is to ‘turn again’ & face the ministers of vengeance, to accept renunciation & suffer as a penance. He chooses to go “To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation” (p. 111) which resembles a purgatory on the earth. This imagery is in consonance with Agatha’s earlier comment, on the consciousness of his unhappy family: “Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame” (p. 105).

Harry understands that vengeance of the Furies is over & he must pursue them rather than pursued by them. His choice must be between the tragedy of his mother or own reconciliation with God & rediscovery of his soul. Therefore his decision to leave Wishwood implies the demolition of the careful, self-willed structure of his mother’s plan; even though Dr. Warburton has warned him “A sudden shock might send her off at any moment” (p. 92), by sticking to his resolution Harry consents to her death.

After he chooses to separate from his mother, he chooses to turn himself towards religious conversion, which is also usual theme of Eliot. So he turns away from his former domestic life of emotional over-dependence on possessive mother, & turns instead to a life of chosen & willing love in religious form. Helen Gardner, in The Art of T.S. Eliot aptly says, “The true meaning of the play is not, however, in Amy’s death, which is merely a consequence, but in Harry’s conversion; and that, like Thomas’ sanctity, we have to take for granted. It cannot be expressed in dramatic terms”41 for what precisely he goes to in his future life is rightly left uncertain.

Initially, Harry is fleeing the avenging spirits, turning in ignorance from the means of grace as the Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral, for both ‘fear is in the way.’ Harry knowing & not knowing, sensing suffering, but not realizing its cause & significance; like them he

41. Helen Gardner, p. 155.
must come to terms with his fear & instead of avoiding, he must follow the Furies, seeing them as spirits not of annihilation but of regeneration. In both cases the action is concerned with a change in point of view & a moment of decision; it consists of a growth of understanding.

Since Harry's moment of illumination is the moment of decision & thus the determining symbol of the play, it reveals implicitly the nature, both cause & effect, of Harry's pilgrimage. He chooses the negative way not for escaping but it appears inhuman from a naturalistic point of view: "Love compels cruelty! To those who do not understand love" (p. 109), its purpose is to develop a deeper & more permanent vision of Incarnation. It means his knowledge of love may redeem the past & fructify in the lives of others:

I know that I have made a decision
In a moment of clarity, and now I feel dull again.

... I am still befouled,

But I know there is only one way out of defilement –
Which leads in the end to reconciliation. (p. 109)

Like Thomas, he is faced with a challenge to make the final renunciation of the will as upon the renunciation of earthly ties, affection for the ghost of the family & ghost of the play. Like Thomas, Harry undergoes his temptation; rejects the way offered to him by Amy & Mary, & accepts the way of Agatha. He accepts the burden, as Agatha says, "... chosen! To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer" (p. 105).

Mary's role in the choice made by Harry, however, cannot be undermined, for she, too, has her insight; gives direction & a sense of purpose: "What you need to alter is something inside you / Which you can change anywhere—here, as well as elsewhere" (p. 80).

In this play, like Murder in the Cathedral, we also have a intense moral struggle before making his crucial choice in Harry's mind; a veritable battlefield of vague, unnamed feelings—both conscious & unconscious. It is the intersection of different planes of living.
He says, “They don’t understand what it is to be awake; To be living on several planes at once / Though one cannot speak with several voices at once” (p. 98).

Agatha tells Mary “there is no decision to be made; / The decision will be made by powers beyond us / Which now and then emerge” (p. 77). Again, Harry says to Mary “I was part of the design / As well as you. But what was the design?” (p. 78). Though the attraction of Mary means a possible ‘way of escape’, the Furies come in the nick of time to warn him away from this evasion — though at that moment he misunderstands their function i.e. his rejection of the “design” means acceptance of Mary’s love as an excuse for not sacrificing himself, or acceptance of the “design” means sacrificing ‘the way of escape’ offered by Mary. But Harry neither accepts Mary’s love nor rejects it for spiritual growth, so that he rejects the Furies, he has neither Mary’s love nor hope, because the past is still unredeemable.

Harry rejects Agatha’s motherly love by which he sacrifices the possibility of happiness offered by her & accepts the divine pattern. Now Agatha “…steps into the place which the EUMENIDES had occupied” (p. 180) is her choice of the “design” & her sacrifice for him, who has become a son to her.

Besides Agatha, the spiritual guardian, Furies—the three Greek goddesses of Revenge—also provides the right direction to Harry. Eliot has introduced the supernatural characters in the Greek manner, who symbolize the destiny in human affair. According to Greek mythology, everything is predestined & pre-determined with minimum free-choice is permitted to the individual who can choose as he is predestined to choose. The progression of spiritual insight of Harry is also greatly contributed by the Furies to whom he tries to escape initially, but later chooses to follow them. Thus they turn into benevolent angels of Christian conception to guide the hero.

In the beginning, he is a man, caught “Between two worlds” (p. 115); by the end, he is able to make his choice, & follows the chosen path with courage & determination. He has risen above normal ‘dangers and fears’ & henceforth he would live on a higher spiritual
plane. In the beginning he might be a 'Hamlet figure', but by the end he is a Christ figure, who chooses to undergo crucifixion for the salvation of his family. Thus, when he makes his decision & accepts the Eumenides as friendly, he affects the lives of the other members of his family.

The choice between undertaking a spiritual journey or remaining to tend the hearth, however, is not explicitly presented; no evidence to enable it to recognize that Harry's problem is spiritual rather than moral, & that the act of murder itself is only incidental to the nature of his struggle. Harry 'elects' to suffer & expiate. We must acknowledge, however, that this 'choice' is made without any inner conflict. We are not given any idea of Harry's struggle to overcome the temptation that is offered to him, a struggle which always precedes any crucial decision. This absence of conflict weakens the dramatic effectiveness of Harry's 'choice'.

In this context, it would not be irrelevant to quote Damayanti Ghose who interprets the word 'Wishwood': "The name Wishwood reminds me of the Hindu image of the wishing tree, 'Kalpataru' as it is known in Sanskrit, to which people pray for fulfilment of all their wishes." But in this play the name 'Wishwood' becomes ironical one for Amy's wish to "keep Wishwood alive" (p.59) for which she "prepared the situation" (p.113), but "The clock has stopped in the dark!"

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THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Since our moral duty is to fulfill our personality i.e. discovering what we wish means discovering what we are, the present play is concerned with choices of four personalities. But they have Hobson’s choice in the end i.e. choose to be oneself or choose not to be. There is doublessness of action also in his treatment of choice which is made, the duty of each person being to follow his or her calling. So this play is the result of fusion between the ancient Alcestis myth’s idea of duty & the assumption that in the modern social comedies men & women find full expression of their personality in terms of love.

In this play the martyr, the life sacrificed is not at the centre of the play; the true centre of the play is the common condition, the more negotiable alternative of the trivial round which gives the play its title. Eliot distinguishes between the person chosen for a life of complete sacrifice and the common ordinary Christian. In this play, there are two ways to attain salvation & meaningful life – while the former is spiritual, latter is worldly life; the more difficult but exalted way of divine love chosen by Celia, & the more ordinary way of human love chosen by Edward & Lavinia. So Lavinia’s ‘resurrection’ is accomplished, not by sacrifice, but by an acknowledgement of limitations in the worldly terms i.e. the adventurous ways of the spirit for the few who are beacons to light the paths for other’s; the other is the life of civilized tolerance in the mundane existence.

Our life is comparable to that of acting in play whose plot is unknown to us, playing roles not chosen by us, our choice is limited to the extent whether we will accept those parts or invent something else for ourselves. Since life is full of actions one cannot but choose one course of action from large number of possibilities. The choice one makes determines the quality of his life. For the moment of time, however, while certain actions become much less important, others much more, for “we have to make a choice to accept the pattern as real, or deny it as illusion.” Ultimately we realize that a man is not fully in control of his actions & sometimes this is not his fault. We are often moved to action by

43. Leo Aylen, Greek Tragedy and the Modern World, p. 165.
forces we do not understand, sub-conscious impulses & desires; yet we can learn about these forces. Human actions is not really determined by the transient desires, the petty motives & calculations of interest, of which an introspective psychology makes so much. The true forces, however, lie far deeper, the real shaping & direction of his life.

The Cocktail Party shows two ways of conduct: the way of the world & the way of the sainthood. The right decision for each person must be based on a recognition of one’s true-self— not mere desire & volition but “The obstinate, the tougher self” (p.153) that lies at a deeper level. Each person must seek a suitable place in life & leaves the rest in the hands of God, as Reilly advises to Edward “Resign yourself to be the fool you are” (p.135), which means to lead the humdrum life is not as bad as considered to be; so it should be accepted gracefully. Each & every person is offered a choice & must make one, though it is not very illuminating to be told that ‘the right choice is the choice you cannot but make’, though indeed a sense of destiny runs faintly through the play. However, each person gets what he craved for.

There are two voices in the human mind or soul. One voice dictates us to do the right, the good & whatever is fair, honest, & beneficial to all mankind. The other voice dictates us to do what is false to all others in the world except to oneself from the material point of view. The nobler voice represents the moral or the spiritual aspect of human life & character, while the grosser voice of conscience represents the physical or material side of life & character. One can, choose between true & false if he merely listens to the voice of conscience.

Moreover, the choice of each one depends not upon “The shadow of desires of desires” (p.182), but upon once capability. So we must recognize our limitations, “you must accept your limitations”, as Julia says & choose the ways of life best fitted to us, however hard they may be. Thus, Reilly finds Edward & Lavinia though “Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,/ Yet never quite successful” (p.179), for they “are the self-deceivers” (p.179). Besides, they think someone else to blame: “you could accuse each
other of your own faults, and so could avoid understanding each other" as Reilly observes. Celia, who is “something different” (p. 141), on the other hand, acknowledges that “there’s something wrong with” her & she has “no one to blame” (p. 185) shows her higher sensibility than that of the Chamberlaynes.

We have to choose between living for ourselves & working for some social end. The real question here is whether we shall choose to suffer when we could avoid it, & when we shall gain nothing ourselves by doing so. The answer will vary with the person concerned, & the degree of suffering. It is very much a matter for decision according to the particular situation. It is well known fact that characters reveal themselves through their thoughts & consequent actions to secure their foundation on which they may build their futures. In this play, four people are faced with the problem of making a choice. Celia’s state of mind, before taking her decisive step to join in the dedicated missionary life, may be expressed in terms of William James:

All our attitudes, moral, practical or emotional, as well as religious, are due to the ‘objects’ of our consciousness, the things which we believe to exist, whether really or ideally, along with ourselves. Such objects may be present to our senses, or they may be present only to our thought. In either case they elicit from us a reaction; and the reaction due to things of thought is notoriously in many cases as strong as that due to sensible presences. It may be even stronger. The memory of an insult may make us angrier than the insult did when we received it. We are frequently more ashamed of blunders afterwards than we were at the moment of making them; and in general our whole higher prudential and moral life is based on the fact that material sensations actually present may have a weaker influence on our action than ideas of remoter facts.44

In case of Celia we have but least mother fixation as we have in Harry. So she hardly vacillates to take the unknown path, rather she is so quick in making her decision is that she is ready to start for journey on the very night “by nine O’clock” (p. 191), without any preparation. Celia’s choice is important as it indicates a higher spiritual level having the power to influence the lives of others for the real saints choose not only the path to sacrifice but also make others to realize his or her ‘choice’. Celia, in a way, may be said to continue Harry’s

story, for we leave Harry at the moment when he makes his choice & reconciles himself to his destiny. “In Harry we see the progress to the decision, in Celia its result.”45 But the difference is that she is more human than Harry & “the main moral figure of the piece, to work out her salvation.”46

Celia’s choice means relinquishing ordinary social life for religious vocation with a view to communion with God through devoted nursing among primitive people at a remote place. Since she has been presented as a strong-willed sensitive, “more conscious” (p.209), & “something different /From company or solitude” (p.141) as Peter, who loves her, comments. Her choice of the way of divine love seems completely believable & authentic one; her decision is certain as suggested by a series of declarative statements: “That sounds like what I want” (p.190), “Then I choose the second” (p.190), “I am not frightened / But glad” (p.190), “I want your second way” (p.191).

Her trouble is a peculiar one, something quite abnormal, for at the beginning she tells Reilly in his consulting room: “I feel perfectly well. /I could lead an active life—if there’s anything to work for” (p.185) & again “I’d do anything you told me to get back to normality” (p.185). But after while she chooses to atone, to seek to be cured of emptiness & failure. Then Reilly offers her the choice to live a normal life—marrying where “Two people who know they do not understand each other, / Breeding children whom they do not understand / And who will never understand them” (p.189).

Reilly’s alternative choice is unknown which “requires faith—The kind of faith that issues from despair” (p.190). The second choice has no destination, & the journey is blind & terrifying. Celia chooses this way of absolute sacrifice, which is her vocation. When Celia makes her decision both Reilly and she emphasize that it is her own free choice. The two functions of being a seeing eye & of leading people towards the point where they can make their own clear choice obviously compatible.

45. Maxwell, p. 194.
She adopts negative way which "leads towards possession/ Of what you have sought for in the wrong place" (p. 190) for the soul has to achieve divine union by divesting itself of the love of created beings. When she asks whether the affirmative or negative way is better, Reilly replies:

Neither way is better.
Both ways are necessary. ...
To make a choice between them.

Both ways avoid the final desolation
Of solitude in the phantasmal world

Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.  (pp. 190-191)

Inspite of the fact that the second one is terrifying journey, she is not frightened at all, rather she is too glad to accept this 'lonely way'. Ultimately "Celia has to choose between re-adopting the life in society... and devoting herself to austere withdrawal from her circle," as Maxwell comments, her choice is irremediable and irrevocable, "because she is the kind of person who can choose to dedicate her life, will accept whatever that dedication may impose."47 She chooses the hard, the terrifying way to fulfilment, & having made the choice, she becomes a character fulfilled. And when we hear of her death in the most humble way imaginable, but the fact adds nothing dramatically speaking, to our knowledge of her as a woman capable of making the hard choice.

Reilly guides her to make the choice of pain which "unknown and so requires faith", but once treded successfully, it will give her that possession which she has "sought for in the wrong place" (p. 190). We see her fixity of purpose & firm faith in her vocation unto the last. So, while two other missionaries have deserted & fled away, she is the only one who have decided to stay there to serve the natives. Thus Reilly's prophecy "Whichever way you choose will prescribe its own duty" (p. 190) comes true, though he himself says, "I do not understand / What I myself am saying" (p. 193). And, above all, since "Celia has chosen to conduct her love affair with God rather than to be content with the reflection of God's love in

47. Maxwell, p. 193.
the love of creature for creature. The price of looking directly into the face of light is great and blinds the lover to reflected glory." So she has to pay the price of her will.

Edward & Lavinia, representing average humanity, are a married couple whose life is wretched & miserable because of mutual misunderstanding & indifference—"only pieces of a total situation" (p.177). They must learn to put up with one another & not regard marriage as a veil for the indulgence of egotism. Each considers the other incapable of being loved & loving. So, they choose to violate the sanctity of their marriage vows & turn to others for love & sympathy—Edward by loving Celia tries to prove himself that he is capable of loving, & Lavinia turns to Peter to show that she is capable of being loved.

D.E.S. Maxwell finds the complacent outlook of Edward, Lavinia, & Peter & contrasts with the supreme spiritual exaltation of Celia. While the "material, literal minded and visionless" (UPUC p.153) people, in order to preserve their limited happiness available to them in the earthly existence, have to accept the conditions of their choice & are sustained by the self-sacrifice of Celia. Though their path is easy one & full of prosperity & material gains, leads nowhere but to spiritual decay.

The outcome of their choice is another cocktail party where "A retreat / For people," Reilly says, "who imagine that they need a respite / From everyday life." (p.178), "a resignation to unconsciousness, or at best to a conscious of being unconscious. It is, also a resignation to sub-humanity—what might still be called bestialism—as the characteristic word 'breeding' shows. It is a resignation to making a bad job of life," because as Reilly says, "The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it—/ Except of course, the saints" (p.182), shows which is a resignation to make a bad job. Incidentally, the use of the word "breeding" in Reilly's assessment recalls the "Dante" essay of 1929, where Elliot remarks that the love of man & woman "is only explained and made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals" (SE p.274), which is self explict in the context of the play.

They arrive at the state "Then what can we do / When we can so neither back nor

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forward?" (p.182), puzzled Lavinia asks Reilly in his consulting room. Ultimately they choose to try to understand each other & to make a more meaningful conjugal life; they choose to have faith on each other & hope for the future. Their choice means that they face the knowledge of their own & each other's difficulty in living & giving; they make the best of a bad job, they go on with the conventional social duties represented for them by cocktail party.

Though Edward & Lavinia should have enjoyed their best moments without a party as Lavinia says, "I don't want to see these people" (p.212). Yet they have no choice at all but to invite the friends for the party. "This is a travesty of true choice, not acceptance but a mockery of acceptance,"50 because "life is only keeping on" (p.212), which is their destiny.

An equally important theme concerns self-deception & self-knowledge, for the major characters must realize their own delusions & imperfections before seeking redemption. These themes are skillfully conveyed through the characters of Edward, Lavinia, & Celia, all of whom are self-deceivers who undergo the painful experience of discovering their own & others' true identification. So in his consulting room Reilly exposes the stark truth to Edward & Lavinia about their true nature: to Edward "you were lying to me / By concealing your relations with Miss Coplestone (p.179) & to Lavinia; "But you failed to mention that the cause of your distress / Was the defection of your lover—" (p.180) & as Edward alleges her "You seem to have been much more successful at concealment / Than I was" (p.180). On both Reilly observes:

My patients such as you are the self-deceivers
Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,
Yet never quite successful. (p.179)

Again, the theme of facades in human relationships receives emphasis throughout the play, & Julia's pointed remarks the choice between putting on "proper costumes" or assuming "new disguises" in Edward & Lavinia's relationship. Celia complains to Edward,

"Twice you have changed since I have been looking at you" (p.154). But as Reilly says to Julia, "Each unable to disguise his own meanness/ From himself, because it is known to the other" (p.192).

Just before the end of the play, Julia points out: "Everyone makes a choice, at one kind or another, / And then must take the consequences" (p.211). So Celia has made her choice, that Peter has to make his choice — to go & make the film — that the Chamberlaynes in reconciling & carrying on with their lack-lustre marriage, & that they will all now have to entertain guests who are arriving for the cocktail party as "appointed burden" (p.212); so when the bell rings & Lavinia says, "I am glad its begun" (p.212), they are constantly trying to begin & to begin again.

Eliot suggests that there are two ways to attain salvation & a meaningful life; the more ordinary way of human love chosen by Edward & Lavinia, & the more difficult but more exalted way of divine love chosen by Celia. Here the distinction between the way of the saint & the way of ordinary experience is clear, & Eliot is explicit in his statement that each way is valid.

In this play, unlike *The Family Reunion*, the two worlds — the social & the supernatural, are more closely related. It begins with an unsuccessful party & ends with a successful one. In the interval the trivialities of social exchange have all been explored & their implications fully brought to light. The four main characters have reached three different solutions: the solution of work & success; the solution of accepting the limits of "the human condition" & maintaining the common routine, learning to avoid excessive expectation; the other solution of a difficult vocation & a violent death.

Stephen Spender in "The Search for Religious Vocation," neatly sums up too much emphasis on the aspect of choice in Eliot's plays: "A problem for Eliot as a playwright is that for him the choice of eternity is so obviously preferable to that of life on this earth that it is difficult for him not to make actual living seem second-rate."\(^{51}\)

To conclude, we may quote Philip Rahv who have more balanced view on the play. "The two ways of life ... are so inadequately embodied in a living action that what comes through to us is no more than another theory of human existence rather than a lively representation of it," so the Chamberlaynes, "have no motive-power except that of illustrating as neatly as possible the weltanschauung which the author imposes upon them by main force."\textsuperscript{52} And in case of Celia, "the exemplar of the second ... What can be more hollow than this attempt to enforce the claims of transcendent goodness by releasing the claimant from her dramatic obligations ... packing her off to Africa to perform missionary work and die the death of a Christian martyr? It is too easy, too pat\textsuperscript{53}, "it is religious melodrama of an appallingy conventional sort\textsuperscript{54}, however, "We are fortunate to have Eliot's account of his self-education as a playwright. It is a scrupulous account, convincing us of the positive nature of his effort to restore poetic drama."\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 202.
"The Confidential Clerk, another play about choice being reconciled with necessity," as Hugh Kenner asserts. Similarly, Frederick Lumley says that the play's "most serious level seems to be a debate on the proposition: 'If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms upon life, you must accept the terms it offers you.' No longer are we dealing with matters relating to life and death but merely to our choice of what we want to do in this world." Richard Findlater is of opinion that the play is "... a tragicomedy of choice ... all of his characters choose their destiny at the moment of crisis." A.G. George analyses the play from the point of view of Existential philosophy; Kierkegaardian aspect in this play consists in the decisive opposition between the sphere of art & worldly enjoyment on the sphere of religious reality. George concludes "that in The Confidential Clerk, Eliot presents modern man with either the choice of salvation through religion or the choice of perdition through everything else."

Grover Smith discusses the theme of choice in terms of God's will to gain happiness in life. If one wants to choose one's ideal vocation, he can, though it is limited & defined; & fulfilled by one's relation with others or with God. This can be achieved only by self-knowledge through communication with others & understanding of them; else whatever ideal it may be, it becomes too high to achieve. "But although one cannot irresponsibly accommodate the actual to the ideals, one can certainly, by comprehending the actual, extract the actual potentially in it."

The play, thus, though lacks an over spiritual or religious message, it conveys successfully the meaning that through one's vocation, one does the will of God & attain happiness. At the personal level, this play may be considered as the reflexion of the dramatist's own preoccupation with the search for vocation – shifting between poetry &

56. in Denis Donoghue, The Third Voice p.146.
58. Denis Donoghue, p.147.
60. Grover Smith, p. 238.
philosophy, & between literature & banking. The play shows that Eliot is moving towards comedy as a means of examining the choice between the ordinary routine & the dedicated life that leads to beatitude.

The play has put forward several choices out of which one can select. Firstly, whether one should be a second rate artist or prefer to efficient financier or confidential clerk? Secondly, which is preferable – to serve fellow humanity or God? Thirdly, are we to follow our desires as second raters or follow the larger pattern of society, of which we are capable of? And finally, can one have a vocation to be first-rate? What has the vocation to do with success?

As in *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*, a choice is made between a normal family life & a dedicated life leading away from the family. But in *The Confidential Clerk* the exceptional person is much more closely integrated in the pattern of ordinary life. The clue to the plot is not a question of who we are, but of what we choose to be, it is suggested, follow in our father’s footsteps. Young Colby of doubtful origin, failed organist but with a talent for finance, can choose one of several fathers who offers themselves to guide his footsteps; for all of them are or have been, faced with related choices, & they are only reminded that once they “have to adopt ourselves to the wish that is granted” (*p. 284*).

Here the theme of choice is decorated with several variations ranging from the poignant to the farcical one, but unlike the earlier plays, here the recognition of choice is made long ago, as early as “for twenty-five years?” (*p. 286*). For instance, Mrs. Guzzard chose long ago to be her son’s aunt, not his mother, to pretend that her own child was her dead sister’s illegitimate baby. Lady Elizabeth, similarly, declined her motherhood & fantastically forgot the name & address of the foster mother, after the death of her lover. Sir Claude is not far behind to follow the classical comic convention & also steps into the path of Lady Elizabeth & Mrs. Guzzard by maintaining a fiduciary relation with his illegitimate daughter, safely passing her off as the daughter of a dead friend. Inspite of his passion for pottery, he decided to be a financier on the plea that he would never be a more than a
second-rate potter & maintains pottery as an avocation.

Among the alternatives, we always have to make a choice under actual circumstances & that too within the limit of boundary. So, among the various choices, which Colby confronts, first is to be Sir Claude’s son & follow his trade & consequently be his legal heir, followed by Lady Elizabeth's offered-temptation to have him as her son & also “there's something in us, / ... which isn't just heredity, / But something unique.../... / That we are nearer to God than to anyone" (p.257).

And when Mrs. Guzzard asks him whose son he would like to be: “Sir Claude’s — or the son of some other man / Obscure and silent? A dead man” (p.286), he opts for the latter. The final offer from Eggerson: “Joshua Park may be only a stepping-stone /To a precentorship! And a canonry!” His reply is realistic one: “We'll cross that bridge when we come to it” (p.290), for he already have “abandoned my illusions and ambitions” (p.289). Kaghan rightly points out in relation to the nature of individuality & duty of each person to work out his/her destiny; “We wanted Colby to be something he wasn’t”, Lady Elizabeth’s introspection: “Between not knowing what other people want of one, / And not knowing what one should ask of other people, / One does make mistakes!” (p.291) sums up the theme of the choice.

D.W. Harding in “Progression of Theme in Eliot’s Modern Plays,” finds: “The main movement of the play is concerned with the discovery of one’s identity and the choice of vocation and it works up to Colby’s rejection of the temptation Sir Claude holds out of resigning himself to doing the wrong job extremely well because he has no promise of distinction in his own proper job. The significance of loyalty to one’s vocation is emphasized by taking conventionally uninspiring vocations”61. By the use of “Light from the East” (p.220), Lady Elizabeth implies that the course of one’s life is not entirely controlled by one’s heredity, so Reilly has to admit his inability to work of the will over deterministic psychology.

Here the proverb ‘Blood is thicker than water’ is used in reversed pattern; therefore

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it shows that blood relationship is not in itself a guarantee of love. Love must be earned by deserving as Colby turns to Eggerson by rejecting his real parent; so inspire of Lady Elizabeth’s embarrassment, she has to overture to Kaghan & we have Sir Claude’s anguished plea to Lucasta for moral support.

It is Colby’s unwillingness to accept an imposed identity, to live a divided life in two separate worlds of time and eternity, of matter and spirit, that sets the search for his identity in motion & thus transfigures the understanding of the less perceptive characters. He, thus, rejects the part forced upon him. The process of his choice is evidently advanced by his conversation with Lucasta, where she offers him what he offers her, the chance of communicating with another person; & “beginning to understand another person” (p. 247) is understanding oneself.

In The Confidential Clerk the refuge of illusion which most of us want to take in times of mental stress has been suggested in the portrayal of the character of Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer who always, & consciously at that, wants to keep herself under the shelter of various queer make-beliefs.

The play, thus, emphasizes the attainment of an ideal within the limitations of actuality & the limitations that the past can impose on freedom of choice & acceptance of the consequences. Grover Smith rightly points out: “its closing scene suggests, like The Family Reunion, that a free approach to the meaning of one’s life can redeem and remake the past”  

About the qualitative aspect of the choice between the old & the new generations, Carol Smith is with the latter: “The members of the older generation realize their mistakes and the members of the younger generation choose more wisely and with more self-understanding than their chastened elders.”  

Mrs. Guzzard, as a god-mother “like to gratify everyone’s wishes” (p. 284) but herself chooses to sacrifice & gives up her “place as Colby’s mother” & her “ambitions for Colby”

63. Carol Smith, p. 204.
so that her son “was assured of a proper start in life” (p.287) for which Sir Claude rightly alleges, “You pretend to have carried out a deception / For twenty-five years?” (p.286). But ultimately she realizes, before certain falls, & laments:

Had our wishes twenty-five years ago;

But we failed to observe, when we had our wishes,

That there was a time-limit clause in the contract. (p.291)

The play touches the problem of understanding, giving emphasis to the need for trying to understand i.e. recognizing the limits of mutual understanding & making allowance for them: “What’s so difficult / Is to recognise the limits of one’s understanding” (p.274). Here, unlike earlier plays, the emphasis is upon the need to try to understand, while never assuming that one has succeeded:

It’s when you’re sure you understand a person

That you’re liable to make the worst mistake about him. (p.222)
The Elder Statesman:

In this play, the notion of the freedom of will in relation to salvation arises out of the everyday experience of free choice & personal responsibility. There seems to be a human need to feel in control of one’s life, which we may label as a sense of autonomy in the modern context. Here, the hero confronts with “the necessity of choosing between damnation and salvation” as William Spanos says. So we find the adverse effect of his selfish imposition of his will on others for his possessiveness. Thus Monica’s affirmation of love for Charles exists only in their private world. Later when Michael desires to “go far away / To some country” (p.331) & could take “a different name” (p.334) he realizes, as Mrs. Carghill says, “He’s the picture of you, Richard,/ As you were once” (p.334), that the mask which he is maintaining so far has been shattered & he faces his “hollow” private self. He ultimately opts to face his pursuers: “It is through this meeting that I shall at last escape them”. He acknowledge his responsibility for corrupting others – past ghosts, & by which he sees himself “emerging from spectral existence into something like”.

Lord Claverton’s past misdeeds & consequent mental agony in the present may be viewed as the result of his conscious choice because “According to the principle of karma there is nothing uncertain or capricious in the moral world. We reap what we sow. The good seed brings a harvest of good, the evil of evil. Every little action has its effect on character. Man knows that some of the tendencies to action which now exist in him are the result of conscious or intelligent choice on his part. Conscious actions tend to become unconscious habits...It is psychological principle that our life carries within it a record that time cannot blur or death erase.”

Damayanti Ghosh, in *Indian Thought in T.S. Eliot*, also endorses the same view in the context of this play when she says:

On the other hand, karma as a law of causation is very much connected with the idea of predestination and free will. Eliot’s last play, *The Elder Statesman*, which deals with the idea that one’s destiny is irrevocable and consists of a chain of consequences, makes

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65. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 1,244-245.
a good example of his awareness of this particular aspect of karma. The change of names (Dick Ferry to Lord Claverton, Fred Culverwell to Frederico Gomez, and Maisie Montjoy to Mrs. Carghill) is a significant aspect of this drama through which the persons involved are symbolically reincarnated. The forgotten past comes back in human forms to Lord Claverton. In this way Gomez and Mrs. Carghill are more symbolical than real as characters, and their sudden appearance comes as a reminder that no deed can be escaped and its effects must follow. 

As Karma grinds down & measures the finest shreds of each man's hidden personality, Lord Claverton is entirely enmeshed in a web spun by himself. His own nature entraps him. So long as he lives he must be subjected to the inexorable law of Karma & he can do nothing but submit to it. Thus, when Lord Claverton meets his spectres from the past he realizes the futility of escaping from his past sins & accepts the inevitable impact of his own deeds on his present & future. And this "recognition of the reality of sin is a new life" ("Baudelaire," in SE p.427); thus he chooses to confess to his daughter.

We should be aware the threefold meaning of the term that Indian philosophy attributes to it: 1. work, a deed, the yoga of action; 2. effect of a deed, or the fruit of action; & 3. the law of causation governing actions & their effects on the physical & psychological plane. Eliot's approach to karma follows the same threefold pattern.

Both of Lord Claverton's ghosts have perverted the saving power of love into the destructiveness of hate. Together they choose to enact their revenge upon him through his son Michael, who is not only "the image" of his father at his age but onto whom all of his father's youthful follies are projected. Lord Claverton's unconscious recognition of this fact is indicated by his continual concern lest his son runs over someone or becomes involved with the wrong woman & the wrong friend. Michael, who has been forced to live in the false world of his father's public roles, wants only to escape his name & heritage by going abroad & taking another name & identity. His rebellion has led him, ironically, to the same form of escape taken years before by his father.

The dedication page of The Elder Statesman is the acceptance of Eliot's happy domesticity the claims of which he had declared in The Cocktail Party. Here we also have

the recurring themes i.e. the individual's responsibility for the consequences of his actions, the need for honesty in human relations, the tendency to project false images, the necessity for each to choose as a free moral agent, & the irony of the past. Eliot's themes receive their best expression in the lines according to Lord Claverton. Edward of *The Cocktail Party* could have learned from Lord Claverton's comment on facades:

I've spent my life in trying to forget myself,
In trying to identify myself with the past
I had chosen to play. And the longer we pretend
The harder it becomes to drop the pretence,
Walk off the stage, change in to our own clothes
And speak as ourselves. (pp. 340-341)

Harry of *The Family Reunion* would agree with Claverton that "It's harder to confess the sin that no one believes in / Than the crime that everyone can appreciate!.../And the sin is in relation to the sinner" (p.345). Amy of *The Family Reunion* might profit from Lord Claverton's recognition of parent's tyranny of children:

Why did I always want to dominate my children?
Why did I mark out a narrow path for Michael?
Because I wanted to perpetuate myself in him.

I've only just now had the illumination
Of knowing what love is. (p.353)

The play asserts that man has the power of moral choice by virtue of his existence & dignity as a human being. So, Lord Claverton, like Harry, decides not to run away from his spectres & that too unambiguously from his own resources as an individual moral being. Thus when Monica urges him to escape from obnoxious familiars—Gomez & Mrs. Carghill—he asserts that there is no escaping oneself. We agree that though his choice leads not to the conventional "happy ending", yet certainly leads to the radical extension of the circum-
ference of insight of his inner world.

Unlike earlier plays which present the struggle for salvation of the hero, who rejects the world of humanity for own sake, in *The Elder Statesman*, Lord Claverton does not use the world as scapegoat, & burdening it with his guilt before casting it off. He is fully aware of his enemies – cowardice, meanness, & emptiness – are within him which can be overcome by act of will.

Unlike previous plays Lord Claverton is not a man of conscience & consciousness, confronting a hostile world & then destroying it or transcending it – but a man confronting himself. So, the place of the scapegoat scene is now taken by those factors of cowardice, meanness, & emptiness which he sees in himself, & does neither put the blame on society, nor Nature, nor on any other capitalized malignity. And this involves an act of moral choice & act upon.

In terms of Eliot’s ethos, man has free will & does not commit sin “by a divine thrusting on”. So, like Oedipus, instead of killing his father for refusing to yield the right of way at a crossroad, he has run over an old man who was already dead. Moreover, instead of marrying his mother, he has taken a woman as his mistress. Because of his guilt-conscious, he finally, acknowledges his responsibility for his corrupt influence on others.

He thus recognizes his weaknesses as an individual moral being & able to balance between introspection & action, after identifying his inner & outer actions, which ultimately leads to his awakening & decides the cause of action within himself & neither from any outside agency nor involve any ritual act of choice already predetermined for him.

Lord Claverton has to strip himself of his impersonation of various roles of elder statesman & irreproachable father & husband & accept the truth about his real nature & his shabby past when he can strip himself of illusion, & risk being loved for himself alone, to give up control of others. So, unlike Oedipus he is not the victim of any divine dispensation, rather a free moral agent & it is his moral cowardice to blame. He acts upon the prompting of his own conscience & upon his intuitive understanding of human relationship.
Martin Browne comments very appropriately on the way in which the play differs so markedly from the history of Oedipus: "Oedipus is a whole man, who belongs to an age which holds certain firm convictions about the nature of man ... Eliot writing in an age of shifting sand, in which man yesterday and man today are two different beings."67 This view is agreed with Eliot's own for he himself tells in an interview to Donald Hall in 1959 that he "wouldn't like to refer to my Greek originals as models."68

Michael wants to lead a life which dictates his own moral conviction, decides to escape his name & heritage by going to a foreign country & taking another name & identity, to liberate himself from his father's influence. Ironically, his rebellion has led him to the same form of escape as his father. His decision, however, is a proof of his temperamentally affinity with his father & mirrors his father's attitudes as well; his course of action will lead him nowhere but to duplicate his father's failure. Thus, we find the working of Karma as the past is never dead & the present continues into the future.

Although Monica implores her brother not to commit the kind of suicide which abandonment of his family & his "very self" will involve, he cannot be persuaded to change his decision. Lord Claverton realizes that every man must assume the responsibility for his own moral choices: "Michael's a free agent. So if he chooses / To place himself in your power..." (p.349).

67. Martin Browne, p. 311.
At first Lord Claverton disclaims all responsibility: "you were a free moral agent." But he discovers eventually that this is not the way to escape his ghosts. In watching the re-enactment of his own false course in the action of his son, Lord Claverton is finally brought to the awareness of his own responsibility for his son’s nature & his need to face the past himself; with a new humility he vows to learn the lessons of the past if time will allow him:

Do I understand the meaning

Of the lesson I would teach? Come, I’ll start to learn again.

Michael and I shall go to school together.

We’ll sit side by side, as little desks

And suffer the same humiliations

At the hands of the same master. But have I still time?

There is time for Michael. Is it too late for me, Monica? (pp.337-338)