THINKING MAKES IT SO

JEAN PASTOR

"THERE IS Nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and evaluate the above statement, but before proceeding with the analysis, a backward glance at its history will prove interesting.

Although popular opinion generally attributes the origin of "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" to William Shakespeare, this idea must come under the heading of a "popular fallacy." In this instance, as in numerous others, Shakespeare has merely articulated one of the commonplaces of the time. In other words, the Elizabethans might have been found using the phrase as we of the present day might use "A stitch in time, saves nine." As far as I could discover, the first written statement employing this idea was in a work by Euphues:

It is ye disposition of the thought yt altereth ye nature of ye thing. The sun shineth upon the dungehill and is not corrupted. (Bond, i. 193)

Later, but still before Shakespeare, Spencer incorporated it in his Faerie Queene:

It is the mind that maketh good or ill. (VI. LX. 30)

From this brief historical data, we can see that this truth was early recognized and has long endured. It must have been rather a favorite of Shakespeare's because he has repeated the essence of it in several plays: in Othello, "'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus" (1.3); and in Romeo and Juliet, "Who even in pure and vestal modesty, still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin," (3.3).

The actual sentence as quoted, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," appears in the second act, second scene, of Hamlet. Here, Hamlet is talking with some of his former fellow-students, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet: ... what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

Guildenstern: Prison, my lord!

Hamlet: Denmark's a prison.

Rosencrantz: Then is the world one.

Hamlet: A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons; Denmark being one o'th' worst.

Guildenstern: We think not so, my lord.

Hamlet: Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

It is clearly seen here how valid this statement is. Hamlet felt Denmark to be a prison because he was suffering there: his friends did not because their associations with Denmark had been pleasant. Our attitude, education, family background, and numerous other factors influence our respective judgments of things. Being on time may seem very important to one person and completely unimportant to another; smoking cigarettes may seem to one person a sin and to another perfectly permissible; one nation may practice polygamy and another legislate against it. Thus it is that we are individuals—through our thoughts respecting multifarious situations.

Having accepted the proverb to be true up to this point, let us meditate upon it in a more expansive connotation. "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" can be pruned down to this
simple statement — there is nothing but thought. This is obvious because all things come under the heading of either “good” or “bad.” That is, the terms good and bad are all-inclusive, covering anything that we might desire to classify. From this it follows that how we think about things determines all we know and all we feel. This concept has been pondered and developed by many philosophers. Plato recognized it when he wrote concerning a man sitting in a cave, seeing only the reflections of the outside world on the cave wall. This constituted the world to him, because it was all he thought about it.

Even the material things that surround us resolve themselves into thought when we realize that our five physical senses, hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling, are reliant upon consciousness for their very functioning and hence, so to speak, for their existence. They are subjective and individual. A sound, for example, until it reaches a human ear, and thence a mind, is merely an air vibration. The vibration set in motion must fall on the ear of a living organism to have any entity. Therefore, we hear from the outside world only what enters our mind. “It is the hearer that makes the music.” Beautiful music falling on an ill-attuned ear loses its beauty.

Can it be possible, then, that we feel, see, hear, and taste our own thoughts? Or that, instead of beginning with a material world from which we receive impressions, we live in a world created first by our thoughts? That the world we live in is just a subjective state of our own thinking? If we would follow and accept the line of reasoning presented, we would have to return an affirmative reply to these questions.

For my part, I cannot presume to do so, but enjoy dwelling on their probability. Like anything of such a transcendental nature, these ideas cannot be discussed and decided upon with unanimous results. One thing is certain, however, that if we decide that it is our thinking that makes our lives either good or bad, we should be most particular about what we give our minds to think about.

**FELICE**

_Marijane Badger_

I had been working hard all summer. When my vacation finally came, I decided to get “away from it all” and rented a cabin on a small lake. I arrived at the resort in the late afternoon of a warm September day. The lake was choppy and angry, little waves slapped at the shore.

“You should have come up sooner, Miss Morgan, we had a lovely summer. All of the vacationers are gone now, although we have a man in the cabin next to yours. I didn’t think you would want to be left absolutely alone. He won’t bother you, but he’ll be there if you get frightened or something.”

A man rowed me across the lake. The cabins hugged the steep deep-forested banks, and the windows of most were boarded up in preparation for winter. The air had become cool and damp, the sky was clouded, but the sun shone through in small rays highlighting the quiet trees.

“You’ll find everything you need in the