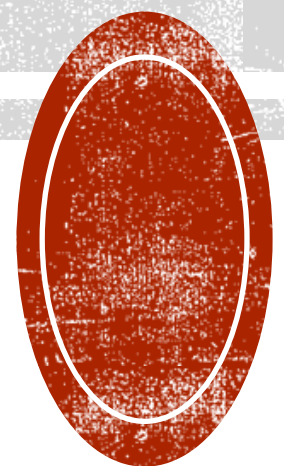


# THE “GREAT TWITCH” “SPIDER WEB” THEORY THE GREAT SLEEP

Themes that conflict and provide acceptance with Jack’s “IDEALISM.”

**Idealism** is the philosophy that believes the ultimate nature of reality is ideal, or based upon ideas, values, or essences. The external, or real world cannot be separated from consciousness, perception, mind, intellect and reason in the sense of science.



# THE "GREAT TWITCH"

- At the end of Chapter Seven, Jack dreams the idea of the "Great Twitch": everything everyone does is controlled by some random impulse "in the blood." If this is true, then nobody has any responsibility for any consequences their actions may have. This idea is comforting to Jack, who uses his dream to shield himself from responsibility for what he has done in the past. Under the "Great Twitch," nobody is truly responsible for Willie's and Adam's deaths, for Judge Irwin's death, or for the failure of Anne and Jack's relationship.
- Over the course of the last three chapters of the book, Jack steadily comes to realize that the "Great Twitch" theory is incorrect. First, he is forced to consider the deliberateness of Judge Irwin's suicide and the clear reason for his action. Later, he places the blame for Willie's death on Tiny Duffy, causing him to realize that if someone is to blame for Willie's death, then people do indeed have responsibilities for certain things, so the theory would be false.



# "SPIDER WEB" THEORY

- The "spider web" theory is the basic idea that all people and events are in some way interconnected, even if certain connections are inscrutable.

*The world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle... (260)*

- The theory implies that if one cares not to hurt others, one must act in an ethical and moral fashion with regard to taking responsibility for one's own actions inasmuch as that conduct can have damaging effects on others. This theory is introduced at the end of Chapter Four to describe what Cass Mastern came to realize.



# THE GREAT SLEEP

- Jack falls into three periods of "Great Sleep": first, after he is unable to finish his graduate thesis on Cass Mastern; second, after his marriage to Lois falls apart; third, after he quits his job as reporter. The "Great Sleep" is simply a period of prolonged sleeping and idleness in Jack's life. He slips into these periods of inactivity--if not also depression--usually after a failure in some aspect of his life. This pattern functions to depict Jack's deep-seated tendency to try to escape his problems and to escape responsibility for his past actions. It also suggests Jack's general lack of ambition and sense of purpose in life.



# "SPIDER WEB" THEORY

The idea of the "spider web" was formulated not by the young graduate student Jack of the early 1920s or the political muckraker Jack of the mid-1930s, but by the Jack speaking from 1939 after he had come to take responsibility for his actions. This is the concept that Jack, throughout his life, had difficulty comprehending. It is the underlying principle of Cass Mastern's motivations that Jack, as a graduate student, could not or would not bring himself to understand.

Jack's realization of the truth of the spider web theory and his rejection of the opposing ideas of moral relativism and the "Great Twitch" are key aspects of the change he undergoes in the final half of the novel. Hence, the theory is a moral metric by which Jack's own progress towards the realization that he must take responsibility can be gauged.

