"Crawling between earth and heaven" : Shakespeare and Elizabethan Aristotelianism

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“CRAWLING BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN”:
SHAKESPEARE AND ELIZABETHAN ARISTOTELIANISM

by

Matthew Fairchild Vivyan

A Dissertation

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I dedicate this work to Maude Fairchild,
for certain seeds and sparks of the virtues
that are within us by nature.
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Introduction¹

One has every reason to believe that many other Aristotelians are still to be discovered as players with important roles in the unfolding of early modern history.

-Charles Schmitt²

Shakespeare’s appeal transcends time and culture. His plays have been approached from the perspectives of every age and culture, every religious, political, philosophical, and literary school of thought; and to this there is no end in sight, for future ages will also have something new to say, from a new perspective, about Shakespeare and his plays and sonnets. The body of Shakespeare criticism is at once overwhelming in its immensity and extraordinary in its diversity of orientations. The purpose of the present study is not to add to the existing pile yet another fashionable (or, in this case, unfashionable) critical interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays. Harold Bloom’s belief that “You can bring absolutely anything to Shakespeare and the plays will light it up”³ has already been proved true by Aestheticists, Deconstructionists, Feminists, Marxists, Freudians, Modernists, New Historicists, Postmodernists, Postcolonialists, Queer theorists, Eco-critics, and countless others. Such literary theories tell us much more about the period in which they were written than they do about the period in which Shakespeare wrote his plays, and while they can for a time gain the acceptance of an academic audience, they eventually and invariably fall out of fashion and are replaced by newer, more timely and relevant literary theories. The

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¹ I wish to acknowledge the support and contributions of my dissertation committee. Thanks to Distinguished Professor John Monfasani, whose extensive knowledge of Renaissance philosophy proved indispensable. Thanks also to Professor Martha Rozett, whose outstanding teaching facilitated my entry into the world of Shakespeare Studies and whose feedback and suggestions greatly improved both the content and structure of the dissertation. Especial thanks to Distinguished Teaching Professor Warren Roberts, a fellow toiler in the fields of history and literature, and a living exemplum of constancy, humility, and wisdom.


purpose of the present study, on the other hand, is to illuminate several of Shakespeare’s plays through the employment of proper historical method. In Part One, Chapters 1-2, I draw upon the findings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians of philosophy in order to present a general outline of Renaissance Aristotelianism—the philosophical system that predominated during the period in which Shakespeare wrote his plays. In Part Two, Chapters 3-6, I show that in *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare demonstrates a highly sophisticated, comprehensive understanding of Aristotelian moral philosophy which, I argue, he gained by reading John Case’s *Speculum quaecstionum moralium* (1585), the standard Elizabethan commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

**PART I: THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION**

1

**Renaissance Aristotelianism**

The work of several twentieth-century historians of philosophy has fundamentally changed our understanding of Renaissance Aristotelianism: first, by disproving the long-held view of the Middle Ages as the age of Aristotle and the Renaissance as the age of Plato; and second, by showing the extraordinary diversity of orientations and approaches within Renaissance Aristotelianism generally. Bianchi provides the following summary of the now-discredited view: “the philosophy of Aristotle, after spreading throughout Latin Christendom in the wake of the great wave of translations from Greek and Arabic begun around 1125, reached
its greatest diffusion in the thirteenth century, came to a profound crisis in the fourteenth, and then suffered in the fifteenth under the challenge of Platonism." 4 The work of twentieth-century historians of Renaissance philosophy has proven that Aristotelianism retained a central position in Western thought from the twelfth well into the seventeenth century, and that during the Renaissance interest in Aristotle far exceeded interest in Plato. 5 Bianchi finds that “in the Renaissance there was a far larger number of manuscripts, printed editions, translations, and commentaries on Aristotle than on any other philosopher.” 6 By the beginning of the seventeenth century, more than 3000 editions of Aristotle’s works had been published, compared to only fourteen editions of Plato’s works. 7 And there were twenty times more commentaries on the works of Aristotle than on those of Plato. 8 Schmitt states that “the Aristotelian tradition of philosophy and science continued to hold a dominant position, as is evident to anyone who considers the range of writings produced during the Renaissance period.” 9 In discussing the influence of Aristotelianism, Kristeller states that during the Renaissance “in some ways it even increased rather than declined.” 10 Schmitt concurs, noting that from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries “the number of translations, commentaries, and expositions of various sorts based on Aristotle’s writings… is far greater than what we find for the Middle Ages.” 11 The sixteenth century, according to Bianchi, was a particularly productive period in which “more translations of Aristotle and his commentaries were undertaken, both in Latin and into vernacular

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 49-50.
7 Ibid., 50.
8 Ibid.
languages, than had been produced in all previous centuries.”  

Schmitt also points out that as late as the seventeenth century, “several branches of the Peripatetic system displayed continuing stamina.” For example, Aristotle’s work in poetics and literary theory not only remained the dominant influence well into the seventeenth century, but also provided the doctrinal foundation upon which later neo-classical works were based.

While Aristotelianism retained its preeminent position from the twelfth through the seventeenth century, it also underwent significant changes at the hands of scholastic and humanist scholars. Hankins warns against assuming “that Aristotle’s privileged position in the arts (or undergraduate) curriculum meant that his authority was unquestioned and unquestionable.” Aristotle’s work was most often criticized for being in one respect or another incongruent with Christian teaching, and most of the adjustments that scholastics made to classical Aristotelianism were attempts to synthesize classical and Christian thought. Humanism eventually replaced scholasticism—altering the medieval educational system and the intellectual climate generally—but it did not result in the displacement of Aristotelianism as the key intellectual force in European education. Kristeller notes that during the Renaissance “university instruction in the philosophical disciplines continued everywhere to be based on the works of Aristotle; consequently, most professional teachers of philosophy followed the Aristotelian tradition, used its terminology and method, discussed its problems, and composed commentaries and questions on Aristotle.” According to Kristeller, the Renaissance remained “in many respects an Aristotelian age which in part continued the trends of medieval Aristotelianism, and

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13 Schmitt, John Case, 8.
15 Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, 34.
in part gave it a new direction under the influence of classical humanism and other different ideas.”¹⁶ The humanists, according to Kristeller, attempted to “recapture the genuine thought of Aristotle apart from its supposed distortions by medieval translators and commentators.”¹⁷ It is therefore important to acknowledge certain distinctions regarding Renaissance Aristotelianism: first, it differed in some ways from its medieval predecessor, which itself in some ways differed from classical Aristotelianism; and second, in its singular form “Renaissance Aristotelianism” belies the great diversity that existed within this system of thought. Schmitt instead prefers to speak of “Renaissance Aristotelianisms,”¹⁸ because “Concealed beneath the umbrella of ‘Aristotelianism’ are a very large number of thinkers of very diverse orientation…. who used the corpus Aristotelicum in varying ways, emphasizing different works of the master and blending genuine Aristotelian doctrine with a vast range of interpretative and corroborative material from many other sources.”¹⁹

In most respects, Renaissance Aristotelian moral philosophy follows the same patterns as Renaissance Aristotelianism generally; principally, that it remained the dominant moral philosophy throughout the period and well after, and that under the heading of Renaissance Aristotelian moral philosophy there was produced a multiplicity of interpretations and orientations. Kristeller writes that Aristotle’s moral philosophy during the Renaissance “continues in many ways the traditions of medieval Aristotelianism, which were very much alive at the universities, in Italy as elsewhere.”²⁰ Schmitt notes “how vital a force were Aristotle’s moral philosophy writings in the humanistic culture which started in Italy and later spread to

¹⁶ Ibid., 47.
¹⁹ Schmitt, John Case, 218.
²⁰ Kristeller, Renaissance Thought II, 33.
other European cultural areas.” Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* was particularly popular during the Renaissance, and Bianchi finds that “at the end of the sixteenth century the *Nicomachean Ethics* was available in frequently republished medieval and fifteenth-century renditions, beside which were ranged a dozen new ones, plus numerous vernacular translations and paraphrases.”

According to Schmitt, only the *Organon*, “which did still provide the basis for the educational system as a whole, competed with [the *Nicomachean Ethics*] in the number of sixteenth-century editions. Moreover, the *Nicomachean Ethics* kept its central position among the works of moral philosophy, surpassing in popularity the other ethical works (‘Eudemian Ethics’, ‘Magna Moralia’, and ‘De virtutibus’) as well as the ‘Politics’, ‘Rhetoric’, and ‘Oeconomics.’” Schmitt describes the influence of Aristotelian moral philosophy during the Renaissance as “very widespread, indeed, and by no means confined to one social or economic class.” Schmitt also recommends that the Philosopher’s “position in more informal contexts should not be minimized.” Kristeller articulates the same view in his summary of the results of the widespread study and application of Aristotelian moral philosophy during the Renaissance:

…practically every writer of the period was acquainted with the main doctrines of Aristotelian ethics and was inclined to adopt them or discuss them. Aristotle’s views that the supreme good of man must include a minimum of external advantages and that the contemplative life is the highest goal of human existence are as familiar in the moral literature of the Renaissance as are his distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, his definition of the moral virtues as habits and as means between two opposite vices, and his detailed descriptions of individual virtues and vices.

Like Renaissance Aristotelianism generally, Renaissance Aristotelian moral philosophy was therefore well known in both formal academic settings and informal intellectual settings. Schmitt

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22 Bianchi, “Continuity,” 54.
24 Ibid., VII, 90.
26 Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought II*, 34.
observes that “more than for any other group of works the Aristotelian writings on moral
philosophy were subjected to a wide variety of interpretative and pedagogical techniques,“27
which included but were not limited to editions, translations, commentaries, summaries,
compendia, collections, sententiae, quaestiones, introductory orations, paraphrases, metaphrases,
disputations, verse translations, general treatises, philosophy textbooks, and systematic
expositions. Lines finds that Renaissance works on Aristotelian moral philosophy “display a
surprising variety of literary forms and approaches to the work.”28 Sixteenth-century European
publication records speak to a strong interest in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the sixteenth century
alone, 22 Greek text editions of the *Nicomachean Ethics* were published; 12 editions of the
Greek-Latin text; 156 Latin translations, including 64 editions of Johannes Argyropylous’
translation. The *Nicomachean Ethics* was translated into English, French, Italian, and Spanish;
and 33 other editions took the form of a commentary, paraphrase, or the like—the most popular
being the commentary of Donatus Acciaioulos, which went through 17 editions.29 Not included in
this publication summary is the substantial body of Renaissance literature that employed
Aristotelian moral philosophy toward a variety of ends. In his study of Renaissance literature on
the virtue of honor, Watson finds that “Almost every work of moral philosophy of the 16th
century has a section on the twin concepts of honor and nobility; in each of these discussions we
find the basic Aristotelian definitions systematically presented as the standard, authoritative

28 David A. Lines, *Aristotle’s “Ethics” in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the
60-76; and Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Renaissance Aristotelianism,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 6 (1965):
157-74.
Authors* (Florence: Olschki, 1988).
definitions.”30 By way of comparison, Platonism had little influence on Renaissance moral philosophy, as Renaissance Platonists were generally more interested in metaphysics and cosmology. While many Renaissance ethical systems were based upon Aristotelian principles, there was none based upon Platonic principles. The Platonic theory of love, as discussed in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, was indeed influential during the Renaissance, but, as Kristeller notes, its influence was limited to “the subject matter of poems and lectures and of a special branch of prose literature.”31 Watson provides an instructive example of the ways in which Platonism and Aristotelianism were often used to different ends within a single work, and how even when Platonism became fashionable in courtly circles, Aristotle remained the principle source for discourses on standards of conduct. Watson finds that in Count Romei’s *The Courtiers Academie* (1598),32 “the courtiers are thoroughly Platonic in their discussion of love but their discourse on honor contains thirty-seven references to ‘the Philosopher’ for authoritative definitions of this concept (to his *Rhetoric* and *Politics* as well as to the *Nicomachean Ethics*) and only six to Plato.”33 Aristotle’s influence can also be seen in some of the sixteenth century’s most important works. In the *Essays* (1580) Montaigne frequently draws upon Aristotelian moral philosophy,34 as does Castiglione in *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), the most influential Renaissance treatise on courtly conduct.35

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33 Watson, *Shakespeare and Honor*, 66.
Elizabethan Aristotelianism

The intellectual transformation of sixteenth-century England follows the general pattern of the intellectual transformation of Europe that was initiated by fifteenth-century Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance came to England belatedly through continental channels, and while the humanist movement did reshape the intellectual climate of sixteenth-century England, it was never as vigorous as it was on the Continent, where, for example, translations of classical works were much more numerous. Schmitt finds that none of the roughly 500 fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Latin translations and revisions of Aristotle’s works was produced by an Englishman.36 Nor were there many English vernacular translations of Aristotle’s works: none of Aristotle’s logical, metaphysical, or scientific works, and only one English translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.37 Until the Reformation, the English educational system remained scholastic and its universities’ curricula were based upon the *Corpus Aristotelicum*. The Reformation and Henry VIII’s separation from Rome had mixed effects on the English intellectual climate. On one hand, England cut itself off from Italy, the center of humanism; on the other hand, the Reformation compelled Protestant theologians and apologists to defend the new doctrine, and humanist learning provided the best means by which to achieve that end. Together the Reformation and humanism caused a fundamental change in the English educational system as the scholastic curriculum of the past three centuries was modified.38 By 1565, medieval logic had been

removed from the Oxford and Cambridge curricula, and humanist rhetoric had become central to the Cambridge curriculum, yet the sixteenth-century English university syllabus remained Aristotelian.\(^{39}\) Even as late as the seventeenth century, Aristotelianism still offered the most effective system through which England could strengthen its intellectual standing in Europe.

While Aristotelian natural philosophy came under attack in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and was finally defeated in the seventeenth century, Aristotelian moral philosophy retained its preeminence throughout the Renaissance, especially in Northern Europe. In fact, there is evidence of a broad and significant revival of interest in Aristotelianism in late-sixteenth-century England, which, according to Schmitt, lasted well into the seventeenth century.\(^{40}\) In studying Renaissance publications of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Schmitt finds “the imbalance of Northern European editions as compared with Italian ones is far greater than with most other works of Aristotle”\(^{41}\) Whereas continental publications of Aristotle’s works began to decline, in England one finds the publication of new translations; an increase in printed editions, commentaries, and textbooks; the influence of Aristotle’s ideas on prominent humanists; the continuity of Aristotelian themes in the field of science; and Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* holding central positions in the arts.\(^{42}\)

A brief survey of the influence of Aristotelianism on sixteenth-century English writers will show the tremendous range and flexibility of the Aristotelian system. Schmitt notes, “By the sixteenth century there were current a remarkable number of forms into which the moral

\(^{42}\) Schmitt, *John Case*, 5.
doctrine of Aristotle could be cast for the needs of a wide range of different readers.” In England as on the Continent, Aristotle’s moral philosophy continued to provide the basic framework and terminology used in academic and social treatises. Given Aristotle’s central position in both the medieval university curriculum and informal intellectual circles it is not at all surprising that the works of many diverse English writers drew upon Aristotelianism generally and the *Nicomachean Ethics* in particular. In *The Boke named the Gouernour* (1537), a treatise on moral philosophy intended to instruct future leaders of the realm, Thomas Elyot acknowledges his indebtedness to the “warke of Aristotell called Ethicae, wherein is contained the definitions and proper significations of every virtue.” Richard Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594-1600), a treatise on proper church governance, is described by Craig as “a noble example of the cosmological thinking of an enlightened Christian Aristotelian.” And Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) is deeply indebted to the Aristotelian virtues. In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser discusses the design of the *Faerie Queene*:

> In the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and conteineth in it them all, therefore, in the whole course I mention the deedes of Arthure applyable to that vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the xii. other vertues, I make xii. other knights the patrones, for the more variety of the history.

The iconoclastic Marlowe, too, incorporated Aristotelianism into his works. However, the evidence suggests that Marlowe culled his Aristotle from the French philosopher Petrus Ramus.

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45 In Watson, *Shakespeare and Honor*, 60-61. See Elyot, *The Boke named the Gouernour*, Book I, Chapter II.
(1515-1572) who, according to Honan, “was said to oversimplify Aristotle.”\textsuperscript{48} When Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus refers to Aristotle’s \textit{Analytics}, he quotes Ramus instead of Aristotle. Marlowe was not alone in his interest in Ramus, for as Sutton writes, “many academics had thrown their caps over the moon for that archetypal anti-Aristotelian, Petrus Ramus.”\textsuperscript{49}

English commonplace books provided Elizabethans easy access to classical writers such as Aristotle. In the mid-sixteenth century, William Baldwin “gathered” and “Englished” biographies and proverbial sayings of the classical writers in his \textit{A Treatise of Moral Philosophy Containing The Sayings of the Wise}. Baldwin’s work was popular and underwent several editions, but it is not a product of the humanist tradition, and the classical writers that emerge from Baldwin’s book are inauthentic, medieval Christian copies of the historical figures. Baldwin fits the sayings of the classical writers into a proverbial model derived from Scripture, and his conception of the world is traditional, medieval, and Christian. In Book 2, Chapter 3, “Of the Soul; and the governance thereof,” Baldwin provides the following spurious quotation from Aristotle: “As the beginning of our creation cometh of GOD; so is it meet that, after death, our Soul return to him again.”\textsuperscript{50} Baldwin’s Aristotle denies the eternal nature of the universe, believes that the universe was created by God, and considers the soul immortal and destined to reunite itself with God. Baldwin’s Aristotle sounds much like Ecclesaistes, who wrote, “Then

\textsuperscript{49} Dana Sutton, Introduction to John Case, \textit{Speculum Morailium Quaestionum} (1585). A hypertext edition by Dana F. Sutton. The University of California, Irvine. Posted September 18, 2002. Last Modified April 12, 2003. \url{http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/speculum/intro.html}. The schism between “Ramists” and “Aristotelians” was not limited to England, but debates between the two groups were particularly vigorous at Oxford and Cambridge. William Temple and John Case were, respectively, the English champions of the Ramist and Aristotelian camps. Temple, a logician, issued a 1580 tract defending Ramus against the attacks of Everard Digby. And Sutton notes that “in the introductory material to the [\textit{Speculum}] Case reveals full awareness of the need to struggle against Ramism and recall University men to Aristotle.”
\textsuperscript{50} William Baldwin, \textit{A Treatise of Moral Philosophy Containing The Sayings of the Wise}. Gathered and Englished by William Baldwin (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1555), 86.
shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (12:7). In Book 2, Chapter 2, “Of God; of his power, and of his works,” Baldwin’s Aristotle says, “It should seem that GOD careth not for wicked people. No man may escape the just judgement of GOD.”51 Here again we have a Christianized Aristotle who, contradicting the authentic Aristotle, believes that God not only concerns himself with human affairs, but also enacts retributive justice in this world. Baldwin’s Aristotle, in contradiction to the authentic Aristotle’s discussion of the acquisition of virtues through habit, says “Science is had by diligence: but Discretion and Wisdom cometh from GOD. Commit all thy causes to GOD, without any exception!”52 And in Book 3, Chapter 14, “Of Anger, Wrath, Envy, Malice, and Revenge,” Baldwin’s Aristotle considers humility a virtue, whereas the authentic Aristotle celebrated the great-souled man, who thinks highly of himself and does some with good reason.53 Baldwin’s work constitutes but one type of source through which an Elizabethan could have come to know Aristotle; in fact, there were many different versions of Aristotle available to Elizabethans. If, however, one wished to discover a more authentic Aristotle, one would have needed to consult Latin translations or scholarly commentaries on Aristotle’s works, which themselves to varying degrees Christianized ‘The Philosopher.’

Schmitt has identified John Case (1546-1600) as one of the most important figures in the revival of interest in Aristotelianism in late-sixteenth-century England. Case studied at St. John’s College, Oxford, where he earned his BA in 1567, his MA in 1572, and his MD in 1589. Schmitt describes Case as “a part of an older tradition,” whose “philosophy was in general conservative

51 Ibid., 88.
52 Ibid., 83.
53 Ibid., 153.
rather than progressive." Yet to describe Case as traditional is not to suggest that he was in any way a relic of a bygone intellectual era; to the contrary, he was an active participant in Elizabethan intellectual life, which itself was traditional and grounded in Aristotelianism. And just like other English Aristotelians of the period, “Case was more interested in moral philosophy and dialectic than in metaphysics or natural philosophy, and this choice was in keeping with the educational programme of the English universities, which at this time were less concerned with the higher faculties of law, medicine, and theology than with the broader mission of the arts curriculum in its post-humanist version.” It was in the field of moral philosophy that Case made his most important contributions to Elizabethan thought, and the popularity of his works in this field attests to the continuing and important influence of Aristotelianism in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England. John Case’s 1585 exposition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Speculum quaestionum moralium*, immediately upon publication became the “standard English exposition of the subject until Golius’ work in 1634.” Case’s work was one of the first printed by the newly-created Oxford University press, and following its initial publication Case’s *Speculum* was elsewhere reprinted several times in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Schmitt notes, “Save for a few introductory logic textbooks, Case’s expositions were reprinted more frequently than any other English philosophical works of the sixteenth century.” And Kristeller considers Case’s work in moral philosophy “important as a rare example of a type

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58 Ibid., 139.
of literature that must have flourished also at the English universities to a greater degree than is usually realized.”

Case’s Speculum constitutes the most popular, accessible, and comprehensive English treatment of Aristotle’s Ethics available during the Elizabethan period and well after. According to Schmitt, each of Case’s books “follows the structure, book by book, of the relevant text of Aristotle. If not all points taken up by Aristotle himself are treated, the major themes of each constituent book certainly are. The orientation is essentially a didactic one directed towards the teaching needs of late-sixteenth-century Oxford.” Schmitt describes Case’s Speculum as “a reasonably accurate and clear exposition of the original,” yet there are substantive differences between Case’s Speculum, other medieval and Renaissance commentaries, and, especially, Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Bianchi identifies Case as one of the many Renaissance scholars who were “determined to cull the most essential sources for a representative synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy, thus taking an important step on the commentary’s evolution into the textbook.” For Case, the essential sources included not only a Latin translation of the Nicomachean Ethics, but also the works of early Church fathers such as Augustine, medieval scholastics such as Aquinas, and Renaissance humanists such as Baptista Mantuanus—all of whom to varying degrees accommodated the classical philosophical system into Christian theology. As a work that synthesizes Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, Christian teachings, and

59 Kristeller, Renaissance Thought II, 41.
60 Schmitt, John Case, 144.
61 Case also made important contributions to the moral education of Elizabethan England through his Latin primers, ABCedarium moralis philosophiae (1596) and Ancilla philosophiae (1599), both of which were used extensively at the grammar school level (Ibid., 148). Of course, their dates of publication preclude Shakespeare having read them while he was a student at Stratford grammar school.
scholastic and humanistic commentaries, while also frequently quoting classical prose and poetry, Case’s *Speculum* differs markedly from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in its content, structure, and style. Bianchi also identifies Case as one among several sixteenth-century commentators who expresses a new attitude toward the role of commentator: “though most of their ideas remain essentially Peripatetic, they present them more as their own than as Aristotle’s; therefore they conceive their works as independent contributions to the field of practical philosophy and refuse, more or less explicitly, to identify the teaching of ethics with the task of commentating on the homonymous Aristotelian treatise(s).” Case’s colleagues, whose praises fill the first few pages of the *Speculum*, certainly conceived of moral philosophy, and perhaps morality in general, as much Case’s achievement as Aristotle’s. For example, Martin Colepeper, MD, writes: "Why have your teachings lain hidden in a humble cottage, Case, you who have not deserved to have lain hidden in your cottage? These moral teachings are worthy of the light, the marketplace, the Schools, and you yourself are more worthy of the light, the Schools, a position of renown." Michael Greene assures Case, “your fame will endure. These books are a great enough monument for you. No age will cut short your praises, there will be no century in which the earth will not pronounce your name.” And an anonymous admirer of Case insists, “Rightly you are called a son of John the Baptist, for you are the first among our men to teach Ethics.” Within the very broad context of Renaissance Aristotelianism, Case articulates but one among many versions of Aristotelian moral philosophy, but on the other hand, within the much narrower context of Elizabethan Aristotelianism, Case and his *Speculum* are extraordinarily important—

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64 Case’s prose is simple and clear, a hallmark of Renaissance humanist commentaries, yet the work is structured using the scholastic *quaestiones*.  
66 Preliminary Matter, *Speculum*.  
67 See Bianchi, “Renaissance Readings.”
for he is the English system’s leading voice. In noting the dearth of English works on Aristotle produced during the Renaissance, Lines writes, “We know of only one prolusion for the fifteenth century and of the commentaries by John Case [1546-1600], William Temple [1555-1627], and Cuthbert Tunstall [1474-1559] for the sixteenth.”68 The 1554 work of Tunstall, an English Catholic bishop, is an abridgement of the Ethics.69 And Temple, a Ramist, was primarily interested in logic and dialectical method. Therefore, in any study of the influence of Elizabethan Aristotelian moral philosophy on Shakespeare and his plays, Case’s Speculum is the most appropriate and illuminating text to which a scholar may turn.

PART II: SHAKE SPEARE AND ARISTOTELIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Historiography

Not until the mid-twentieth century did scholars begin exploring the influence of Aristotelian moral philosophy on Shakespeare’s plays. The dearth of work on this subject is in some respects rather surprising, for in his plays Shakespeare twice mentions Aristotle by name, first in The Taming of the Shrew (1593) and later in Troilus and Cressida (1602), and each time the reference relates to moral philosophy. To explain the dearth of work on Shakespeare and Aristotelian moral philosophy, one might suggest that the Nicomachean Ethics is not a text that the literary scholar is likely to read during their course of study, just as the historian of

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philosophy is unlikely to read Shakespeare during theirs. Furthermore, the specious view of the Renaissance as the age of Plato—which, perhaps not coincidentally, held sway until the mid-twentieth century—would have effectively pointed Shakespeare scholars away from rather than towards Aristotle. In the first half of the twentieth century, only John Erskine Hankins argued for Shakespeare’s direct indebtedness to Aristotelian moral philosophy. In The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays (1941), Hankins observes that in Hamlet Shakespeare’s conceptions of courage, honor, and justice are Aristotelian,\textsuperscript{70} that in King Lear Shakespeare may have borrowed Aristotle’s reference to cannibals,\textsuperscript{71} and that Shakespeare’s conception of bestiality, which the playwright expresses in several plays, is congruent with Aristotle’s description of bestiality.\textsuperscript{72} Hankins’ work received little attention from other scholars—it is almost never cited—and his argument for Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Aristotle is not even mentioned by Duthrie in his 1943 review of Hankins’ book.\textsuperscript{73} While Hankins’ work was ahead of the curve, it is not without its problems. First, some of Shakespeare’s alleged indebtedness to Aristotle can be better or more easily explained by identifying a source other than the Nicomachean Ethics to which Shakespeare could have turned. For example, while Hankins suggests Shakespeare’s conception of bestiality in The Tempest came from the Nicomachean Ethics, there is now a general consensus among editors and scholars that Shakespeare drew from Montaigne’s essay, “Of Cannibals,” which was available in the original French as well as in John Florio’s English translation.\textsuperscript{74} Second, Hankins’ understanding of the process by which Shakespeare wrote

\textsuperscript{70} John Erskine Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 74-77, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{72} This argument was more fully developed in John Erskine Hankins, “Caliban the Bestial Man,” PMLA 62.3 (1947): 793-801.
Hamlet suffers from his adherence to now-discredited views on the order in which Shakespeare composed the quarto and folio editions of that play. And third, when stating with certainty that Shakespeare had read the Nicomachean Ethics, Hankins seems unaware of the availability and popularity of Renaissance commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics, for he only notes that Aristotle’s Ethics was available to Shakespeare “in several Latin translations and in a short English compendium, John Wilkinson’s The Ethiques of Aristotle (1547).”\textsuperscript{75}

The second half of the twentieth century saw a modest increase in the number of scholarly works on Shakespeare and Aristotelian moral philosophy. In “Measure for Measure: A Play of Incontinence” (1960), Wasson convincingly shows that Shakespeare’s conceptions of justice and incontinence are Aristotelian.\textsuperscript{76} In Shakespeare’s Tragic Justice (1961), Sisson observes that in the opening scene of King Lear the protagonist exercises the two main branches of Aristotelian justice, as described in the Nicomachean Ethics. Without claiming that Shakespeare had read Aristotle, Sisson simply shows that Lear first exercises distributive justice by dividing his kingdom equally among his daughters, and “retributive justice also comes at once into action, upon an ungrateful daughter and a rebellious servant Kent.”\textsuperscript{77} It is highly unlikely that the Nicomachean Ethics is the source for this opening scene, for here Shakespeare closely follows his source, The True Chronicle History of King Leir (c. 1590), which contains Leir’s exercising both types of Aristotelian justice.\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, the affinities that both Richmond (1967) and Kaufmann (1980) see between Shakespeare’s Coriolanus and Aristotle’s great-souled,

\textsuperscript{75} Hankins, Hamlet and Other, 116n. The Ethiques is the least likely work to which Shakespeare might have turned for his Aristotelian moral philosophy, as it was never reprinted after 1547 and therefore would have been out of circulation by the turn of the century.
\textsuperscript{76} Measure for Measure is treated in Chapter 5 of this present study.
\textsuperscript{77} C.J. Sisson, Shakespeare’s Tragic Justice (Scarborough, Ontario: W.J. Gage, 1961), 91.
\textsuperscript{78} For a side-by-side presentation of the two texts, see [http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/kinglear/kinglear.html](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/kinglear/kinglear.html) See also Hardin Craig, “The Ethics of King Lear,” Philological Quarterly, IV (1925).
magnanimous man can all be traced back to Shakespeare’s source material.\(^7^9\) In writing
Coriolanus, Shakespeare relied heavily on “The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” from
Thomas North’s sixteenth-century translation of Plutarch’s Lives,\(^8^0\) in which Coriolanus exhibits
all of the qualities of Aristotle’s great-souled man. In the Arden critical edition of Troilus and
Cressida (1982), Palmer provides the first extended treatment of the influence of Aristotelian
moral philosophy on that play, which takes the form of an appended collection of alleged
parallels between Shakespeare’s play and a modern English translation of Aristotle’s
Nicomachean Ethics.\(^8^1\)

Toward the end of the twentieth century, three decades after the myth of the Renaissance
as the age of Plato had been debunked, and more than a decade after Schmitt documented the
revival of interest in Aristotelianism in late-sixteenth-century England, scholars arguing for
Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Aristotle began citing the findings of twentieth-century historians
of philosophy. In “Aristotelian Wealth and the Sea of Love” (1992-93), Wheater begins her
criticism of The Merchant of Venice by noting, as I have done here, the dearth of scholarly works
on Shakespeare and Aristotelian moral philosophy: “the large amount of evidence available to
show how deeply [Shakespeare] responded to one of our greatest works of moral philosophy,

\(^7^9\) Richmond observes that “In many ways Coriolanus, of all Shakespeare’s heroes, comes closest to Aristotle’s
magnanimous man. Scarcely an act of Shakespeare’s Coriolanus fails to match this pattern.” H. M. Richmond,
simple reading of a couple of pages from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics is sufficient to give anyone a new
perspective on Shakespeare’s ninety-fourth sonnet, his Coriolanus, and his other tragedies.” Walter Kaufmann,
\(^8^0\) See William Shakespeare, Coriolanus. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. Philip Brockbank (London: Thomson
Learning, 2006), 313-368. On Plutarch’s borrowing from Dionysias, see D.A. Russell, “Plutarch’s Life of
\(^8^1\) Troilus and Cressida is treated in Chapter 5 of this present study. William Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida.
of Palmer’s ‘parallels’ are wide or commonplace and not convincing.” W. R. Elton, “Aristotle’s ‘Nicomachean
Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, has been (on the whole) strangely unrecognized.” 82 To show that it “is not inherently unlikely” that Shakespeare was influenced by Aristotle, Wheater mentions Schmitt’s findings that “scholars and divines in England at this period read Aristotle widely, in Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.” 83 Wheater identifies several key Aristotelian ideas—“happiness, pleasure, virtue, the mean, choice, equality, justice, and friendship”—that are “apparent in *The Merchant of Venice*” but “not subjected to such exclusive or searching analysis.” 84 In “Aristotle’s ‘Nicomachean Ethics’ and Shakespeare’s ‘Troilus and Cressida’” (1997), Elton identifies in the two works parallels “regarding ethical-legal questions surrounding an action: issues of the role of the voluntary or the involuntary, of volition and choice, of choice and virtue, and of virtue and habitual action.” 85 Elton acknowledges the popularity of Aristotelian moral philosophy in the Elizabethan age, he cites the work of several historians of philosophy as he argues for Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Aristotle, and he supplements his use of a modern translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a few excerpts from a sixteenth-century Latin translation as well as quotations from John Case’s *Speculum*. 86 In “Fixing Moderation” (2007), Crosbie argues that *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare’s bloodiest tragedy, is Aristotelian in its “use of extremity to define the ethical.” 87 To add plausibility to his Aristotelian reading of the play, Crosbie cites historians Schmitt and Lines, as well as literary critics Elton and Wasson. 88

Crosbie’s primary purpose is to show that the action of the play follows Aristotelian ethical

principles, and thus Titus’ murderous behavior should actually be read as “a redefined moderation within extreme circumstances.”

One can therefore conclude that historians of philosophy have contributed to Shakespeare studies in that a few Shakespeare scholars, albeit belatedly, have in their work acknowledged that the Renaissance was very much an age of Aristotle and that there was a revival of interest in Aristotelianism in England during Shakespeare’s lifetime. However, Shakespeare scholars have yet to acknowledge two other equally important conclusions reached by historians of philosophy: that there were many Renaissance Aristotelianisms, and that they are all markedly different from classical Aristotelianism as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. From Hankins (1941) to Crosbie (2007), every scholar who has argued for Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Aristotelian moral philosophy has primarily read Shakespeare’s work against a modern translation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*—texts that invariably present a version of Aristotelian moral philosophy with which Shakespeare and his contemporaries would not have been familiar. While it is the scholar’s prerogative to approach Shakespeare’s plays in any manner he or she sees fit, there are repercussions for anachronistically reading Shakespeare’s plays against a modern translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. By ignoring the significant changes to classical Aristotelianism that occurred throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods, the scholar who primarily relies upon a modern translation might only recognize in Shakespeare’s plays the particular aspects of Renaissance Aristotelianism that accord with those present in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Conversely, the scholar might not recognize in Shakespeare’s plays characteristics of Renaissance Aristotelianism—such as the belief in divine providence—that contradict characteristics of classical Aristotelianism. Or Shakespeare’s faithful articulations of

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89 Ibid., 163.
Renaissance Aristotelianism might even be read as being anti-Aristotelian, in cases when they contradict classical Aristotelianism. The scholar might also fail to recognize that the structure and style of Shakespeare’s ethical discourses often follow the structure and style of medieval and Renaissance commentaries of Aristotle’s ethics rather than the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself. Reading Shakespeare’s plays against a modern translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* can at best lead to an incomplete appreciation of Shakespeare’s Aristotelianism; by reading Shakespeare’s plays against a work of Renaissance Aristotelianism, one could better appreciate Shakespeare’s Aristotelianism; and if one were to read Shakespeare’s plays against the actual text to which Shakespeare turned for his Aristotle—if he did indeed turn to a particular text—then one could fully appreciate Shakespeare’s Aristotelianism. To-date there does not exist a single scholarly work in which Shakespeare’s plays are read primarily against a Renaissance work—let alone an Elizabethan work—on Aristotelian moral philosophy. After I first detected the influence of Aristotle on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and other plays, my search for a textual example of Elizabethan Aristotelianism led me to John Case, and ultimately to the conclusion that Case’s *Speculum* is the source of Shakespeare’s Aristotelianism. Unlike *The Taming of the Shrew, Titus Andronicus, The Merchant of Venice, and The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure*, and *Timon of Athens*—the four plays discussed in Part II, Chapters 3-6—contain explicit, extensive, and highly sophisticated ethical discourses that are absent from Shakespeare’s source materials and which could only be the product of the playwright having read a work on Aristotelian moral philosophy; and in their structure, style, conceptual relationships, and poetic metaphors and imagery, Shakespeare’s discourses much more closely follow Case’s *Speculum* than they do Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. 
Hamlet’s Questions

Introduction

Few if any works in Western literature have received as much attention and analysis from scholars, critics, and laypeople alike as has Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The character of Hamlet has throughout the centuries acted as a sort of mirror, reflecting the perspectives of those who have critically approached the play. In Hamlet Goethe saw a Young Werther, while Nietzsche saw the Dionysian man. In this chapter I offer three insights that illuminate the process by which Shakespeare wrote and revised *Hamlet*. First, that for the philosophical aspects of the play Shakespeare was entirely indebted to Aristotelian moral philosophy. Second, that Shakespeare’s sophisticated understanding of this system is the result of his having read John Case’s *Speculum Moralium Quaestionum* (1585), the standard Elizabethan commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. And third, that the qualitative difference between the 1604 second quarto and 1623 Folio versions of *Hamlet* is the presence of Aristotelianism in the former and its absence in the latter.

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90 To Goethe “it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it. In this view the whole piece seems to me to be composed. There is an oak-tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom; the roots expand, the jar is shivered. A lovely, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away.” In F. E. Halliday, *Shakespeare and His Critics* (New York: Shocken, 1963), 213.

91 In Nietzsche’s view, both Hamlet and the Dionysian man have “penetrated into the true nature of things, — they have perceived, but it is irksome for them to act; for their action cannot change the eternal nature of things; the time is out of joint and they regard it as shameful or ridiculous that they should be required to set it right. Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion — it is this lesson which Hamlet teaches, and not the idle wisdom of John-o’-Dreams who from too much reflection, from a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action at all. Not reflection, no! — true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, preponderate over all motives inciting to action.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Dover, 1995), 23.
Hamlet is unique among Shakespeare’s plays in that there are three significantly distinct extant printed versions of the play: the 1603 First Quarto (Q1), the 1604 Second Quarto (Q2), and the 1623 Folio (F). On 26 July 1602, the Revenge of Hamlett Prince of Denmarke was entered in the Stationers’ Register, but scholars agree that Shakespeare probably completed the manuscript of the first version of Hamlet sometime around 1600. Scholars did for many years believe that Shakespeare wrote the various versions of the play in the order in which they were published. Scholars now agree that in compositional order Q2 precedes F, F is a revision of Q2, and Q1 is a pirated text that derives for the most part from F rather than Q2. Therefore, The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke (Q2 1604), represents Shakespeare’s first
version of the play. The title page of Q2 describes the text as “newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie,” which suggests that while it was probably written a few years earlier, its publication may have been prompted by the publication of the pirated and debased Q1 a year earlier. The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke (F 1623) was published as part of Shakespeare’s complete works. Its title page states the plays within are “Published According to the True Originall Copies.” Qualitatively, the Folio represents Shakespeare’s revision of Q2. Both versions of the play are exceedingly long, and if Shakespeare’s purpose in revising Hamlet was to produce an acting text, then he was unsuccessful. In fact, both Q2 and F may very well have been created as literary texts; regardless, their excessive length may have provided the impetus behind the creation of the actable Q1, whose title page states that the pays “hath beene diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where.”

100 Facsimile in Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 79.
101 F omits roughly 200 lines from the second quarto while adding just fewer than 100 new lines (Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 82). See also Jenkins 64-65 in William Shakespeare, Hamlet. The Arden Shakespeare. Second Series. Edited by Harold Jenkins (London: Thomson Learning, 1982).
102 Edwards makes a strong case against the second quarto and Folio being performance texts. First, he believes “There is no chance of a play of over 3,500 lines being acted in full.” Second he argues “a text so deficient in its stage directions could never have served in the theatre. The Folio follows the second quarto in omitting very many exits, and some entrances too, and it actually leaves out some important exits which are present in the quarto.” Finally, he argues that “A working promptbook would have regularised and filled out the mechanics of staging in a consistent manner, and this would be reflected in any printed version based on it” (Edwards, Cambridge Hamlet, 20). Mechiiori believes that “behind Q2 there is a play for the closet, not for the stage” (In Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 81). The marginalia of Gabriel Harvey may support the theory that the second quarto and/or Folio are literary rather than acting texts. Harvey writes, “The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis: but his Lucrece, & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort.” Note that here Harvey lists Hamlet alongside two printed poems, not two performed plays. Perhaps Harvey had read Hamlet and had not seen a performance of it. If Gabriel Harvey had seen a performance of the intellectually inferior Q1, it is doubtful that he would have thought that among Shakespeare’s plays it especially had the stuff to please the wiser sort. Gabriel Harvey’s Marginalia. Collected and ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head, 1913), 232. See also Jenkins, Arden 2nd Hamlet, 3-6, 573-74.
103 Facsimile in Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 75.
The Hamlet story had a long history even before Shakespeare set to work on it at the turn of the seventeenth century. It derives ultimately from the old Amleth legend, written by Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth century and printed in Paris in 1514. It was also available to Shakespeare in Belleforest’s sixteenth-century French translation. And there was an anonymous late-sixteenth century Elizabethan play, the so-called Ur Hamlet, of which there is no extant text. Only contemporary allusions to that play have survived, and they make mention of tragic speeches and a ghost who cries revenge. In its basic structure and action, Shakespeare’s Hamlet closely follows the well-known legend, and like the Ur-Hamlet it contains speeches and a ghost. The aspects of the play that Shakespeare borrowed and those that he innovated are therefore, within reason, definable and limitable. For his Hamlet Shakespeare guided the old legend into the light of Renaissance Europe by adding an academic aspect to the play. The extensive incorporation of Aristotelian moral philosophy constitutes Shakespeare’s most important innovation in his first version of Hamlet (Q2). Shakespeare’s other important innovations—making university students out of Hamlet and his friends Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildernstern, and adding two other youths, Laertes and Fortinbras—facilitated his turning the traditional revenge tragedy into an exploration of moral philosophy. And just as the differences between Shakespeare’s Hamlet and its predecessors are, within reason, definable and limitable.

104 The Ur-Hamlet was probably written by Thomas Kyd. Cf. Alexander and Bloom (Bloom, Invention, 383).
105 It is not altogether clear whether or not the ghost of the Ur-Hamlet was Hamlet’s father. In Belleforest, the Polonius character does not have children; Shakespeare made Hamlet’s love interest in Belleforest into Ophelia, Polonius’ daughter. Laertes, Polonius’ son, seems also to be Shakespeare’s creation. Horatio seems to derive from a stock character, the loyal friend, based perhaps on the character of the same name in Thomas Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy (1593?).
106 Surely every scholar recognizes Shakespeare’s addition of university students to the play. Hanson identifies the academic aspect in “the references to Wittenberg, the invocation and performance of philosophy, the beloved poor scholar, the treacherous gentleman school friends,” which she describes as “superfluous to the play’s action.” Hanson argues that the academic aspects that Shakespeare added to the Hamlet legend may have been designed to modernize the play, distinguish it from the bloody revenge play, and flatter an intellectual audience. Hanson’s main interest, however, is the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio, the means by which the play “begins by attempting to assert the congruence of learning and nobility,” and “ends by exposing learning’s challenge to nobility.” Elizabeth Hanson, “Fellow Students: Hamlet, Horatio, and the Early Modern University” Shakespeare Quarterly 62.2 (2011): 205-301, esp. 207, 226-27.
limitable, so too are the differences between Q2 and F. An analysis of these differences is the most effective means of entering the mind of Shakespeare and identifying the intentions behind his revisions to *Hamlet*. In this chapter I will show that Q2 is a sophisticated articulation of Aristotelian moral philosophy, and through a purposeful revision of Q2 Shakespeare systematically removed the vast majority of the play’s Aristotelianism and thus produced in F a more traditional revenge tragedy.

That Shakespeare should have become interested in Aristotelian moral philosophy is not at all surprising, as his life and professional career coincide with a revival of interest in Aristotelianism in England. Shakespeare’s extensive use of Elizabethan Aristotelianism in Q2 includes but is not limited to the following positions, arguments, and definitions: virtue as the mean; the acquisition of virtue and vice through habit; habit as a sort of second nature; bravery as a complex virtue that locates the means related to the feelings of fear and confidence; the blessed or happy man; the belief in divine providence; the function argument; happiness as the highest good; the three lives and their varying definitions of happiness; the rash and bold man; intemperance and its remedies; the faculties of soul; magnanimity; honor; spurious fortitude; and suicide. Many of these positions, arguments, and definitions in *Hamlet* can be found in the original *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as Latin translations and medieval and Renaissance commentaries. Shakespeare certainly could have consulted Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* directly by reading one of the many Latin translations produced in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, he could have read one of the many Latin commentaries on the work. Or he could have done both. However, there are limits to how Shakespeare might have come to Aristotelian moral philosophy. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of Aristotelianism, especially regarding moral philosophy, which he could not have come to by way
of popular commonplace books or by here and there picking up that which was in the so-called Elizabethan air. The textual evidence suggests that when writing *Hamlet* Shakespeare primarily relied on John Case’s *Speculum*. Case’s death in early 1600 may have prompted Shakespeare to turn to the *Speculum*; however, it is more likely that Shakespeare first decided to recast Hamlet as a university student and then turned to Case’s *Speculum* because it was at the time the standard university textbook for students of moral philosophy at Oxford and Cambridge. As one should expect, there are similarities and differences between Aristotle’s teachings in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Case’s teachings in the *Speculum*, and while Hamlet often follows Aristotle, he always follows Case, even in instances when Case’s position contradicts Aristotle’s. In other words, Case and Hamlet both articulate what one might call Elizabethan Aristotelianism, quite distinct from classical Aristotelianism as articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Furthermore, Shakespeare structured three of Hamlet’s philosophical soliloquies in the same manner as Case explices Aristotle’s moral philosophy in the *Speculum*. The structure derives ultimately from scholasticism. Each book and chapter of Case’s commentary on Aristotle corresponds to that of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; but unlike Aristotle, Case begins each chapter with a series of *quaestiones*, followed by an exposition of the standard Aristotelian positions, then a series of objections and responses, and finally a conclusion. Case’s back-and-forth style, with its conflicting opinions expressed in writing by one person but through opposing voices, has a schizophrenic quality that may well explain some modern critical interpretations of the character of Hamlet. Bloom, for example, suggests “Shakespeare created [Hamlet] to be as

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108 To facilitate effective study, in each chapter Case also summarizes the Aristotelian positions by employing Ramist tabulae, the *distinctio quaestiones*.
ambivalent and divided a consciousness as a coherent drama could sustain.”

Edwards describes Hamlet as “a hero who is a tangle of conflicting tendencies.” But Shakespeare’s contemporaries, if they were familiar with Case’s work and/or philosophical commentaries generally, would have immediately recognized the deliberative form of Hamlet’s philosophical soliloquies. The *quaestio* is a scholastic innovation, the basic unit that structures medieval philosophical discourses. Hamlet’s consistent use of the *quaestio* at the beginning of his soliloquies suggests that Case’s work not only provided Shakespeare with the principles of Elizabethan Aristotelian moral philosophy, but also informed his conception of what it meant to philosophize and how philosophical discourses should be structured.

**Prolegomenon**

The intellectual and ethical framework of Hamlet’s Denmark is thoroughly medieval, an expression of a worldview shaped by the slow and meticulous integration of classical and Christian cultures. The Aristotelian moral philosophy that Shakespeare employs in *Hamlet* operates within this worldview; indeed, the world view itself is deeply influenced by Aristotelianism. In this regard, there is nothing modern about the Prince or the world in which he lives. Denmark is part of the traditional, Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, with its corresponding Great Chain of Being that inextricably links the entirety of existence, from God on high to the lowliest of creatures. Throughout *Hamlet*, as in all of Shakespeare’s plays, the

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111 While Hamlet’s first soliloquy serves to establish the corruption of the world and identify it as the cause of the Prince’s melancholy, his other three major soliloquies are philosophical discourses structured around a particular *quaestio*: “Am I a coward?” (2.2.506); “To be, or not to be — that is the question” (3.1.55); “What is a man…” (4.4.32). Case’s *Speculum* contains *quaestiones* that correspond perfectly with these and many other questions implicitly and explicitly posed by Hamlet throughout the play.
Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology is operative. Claudius believes “the star moves not but in his sphere” (4.6.15). In a recent love letter to Ophelia, Hamlet wrote, “Doubt thou the stars are fire,/ Doubt that the sun doth move,/ Doubt truth to be a liar,/ But never doubt I love. (2.2.114-7). When the melancholic Hamlet speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he describes the traditional, closed world of the Middle Ages: “this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” (2.2.264-69). Within this cosmology, man is very much at the center of things, positioned between God and the angels above and the beasts and plants below. Man’s tripartite soul possesses a rational part that links him with God and the angels, but it also possesses two irrational parts, sensitive and nutritive, that link him to beasts and plants respectively. Hamlet predicates his medieval-Aristotelian conceptions of virtue and vice on the existence of this medieval worldview, for ethics is the unique concern of man as he attempts to navigate through this world. When man’s senses and appetites accord with reason, he becomes virtuous, and when they do not, he becomes vicious. The Ghost of King Hamlet discusses virtue and vice within the framework of the Great Chain of Being: “But virtue, as it never will be mov’d,/ Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,/ So lust, though to a radiant angel link’d,/ Will sate itself in a celestial bed/ And prey on garbage” (1.5.53-57). Hamlet explicitly identifies the challenges of the human condition when he asks, “What should fellows as I do

112 Thompson notes, “the second line has given editors trouble, since it refers to the Ptolemaic belief that the sun moved around the earth – a belief that Shakespeare (if not Hamlet) knew to be outmoded” (Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 246n). Other cosmological allusions in the play are congruent with the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, which supports editors’ assertions that Hamlet is no Copernican. There is, however, no positive evidence in any of the plays or poems for Shakespeare’s understanding of or belief in the heliocentric model. For Case’s misunderstanding of Copernicus’ cosmology, see Book 5, Chapter 2 of John Case, Sphaera Civitatis (1588). A hypertext critical edition by Dana F. Sutton. The University of California, Irvine. Posted March 13, 2002. http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/sphaera/5eng.html
crawling between earth and heaven?” (3.1.126-27). Aristotelian moral philosophy provides answers to this question.

Shakespeare’s ubiquitous use of both classical and Christian language and imagery, here in *Hamlet* but also more generally throughout his works, is typical of his age. It invites contradictory critical assertions relating to Shakespeare’s personal beliefs and learning. Helen Gardner, reading Shakespeare through a Christian lens, predictably finds “in the ethical temper of Shakespearian tragedy, with its emphasis on pity as the great human virtue, and in the images he so constantly presents of love as a giving, not an asking, a distinctively Christian conception of human goodness.”113 Walter Kaufmann, the most important twentieth-century translator and biographer of Friedrich Nietzsche, predictably argues Shakespeare “celebrated this world in a most un-Christiant manner: its beauties and its grossness; love between the sexes, even in its not particularly subtle forms; and the glory of all that is transitory, including intense emotion. Suffering and despair were to his mind not revelations of the worthlessness of this world but experiences that, if intense enough, were preferable to a more mediocre state.”114 Shakespeare’s integration of the classical and Christian makes it possible for Gardner to argue Shakespeare “knew the Bible extremely well, much better it appears, to judge by the amount of biblical reference and quotation in the plays, than the majority of contemporary dramatists”; yet Hight, a classical scholar, argues Shakespeare “knew more about mythology than about ancient history—he knew the classical myths far better than the Bible.”115 The classical and Christian worldviews had by the Elizabethan Age become so comprehensively integrated that scholarly attempts to separate the two, or favor one against the other, are both impossible and beside the point.

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114 Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, 4-5.
Hamlet’s world is the late-medieval world, and in his eyes this world has been corrupted. The death of King Hamlet and the hasty remarriage of Queen Gertrude are the cause of Hamlet’s melancholy, and both events stand as particular examples of a general corruption. In his misanthropy and resentment Hamlet is not however following the Christian tradition of emphasizing the universal depravity of man; to the contrary, his late father, King Hamlet, was the embodiment of ideal manhood, a great symbol of what man ought to be. In act 2, scene 2, Hamlet articulates the Renaissance belief in human excellence: “What piece of work is a man — how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me — nor women neither” (2.2.269-75). Aristotelianism is the locus classicus of this optimistic, pagan-humanist notion. Though profoundly disappointed with mankind, Hamlet does not deny the potential for human excellence. Denmark is rotten not of necessity due to the Fall of Man, but rather because its inhabitants choose to live lives of bestial oblivion—their better natures are consumed by unrestrained appetite, which mars their judgment. Virtue has abandoned Hamlet’s world and left it full of vice. Claudius too recognizes the injustice of this world; indeed, both his successful usurpation of the throne and his marriage to the Queen are proof of it. He does however recognize that justice will eventually be served: “In the corrupted currents of this world/ Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice,/ And oft ’tis seen the wicked prize itself/ Buys out the law; But ’tis not so above:/ There is no shuffling, there the action lies/ In his true nature” (3.3.57-62).

Neither Hamlet’s feigned madness nor his melancholy is a Shakespearean innovation. Feigned madness, a tradition of revenge tragedy, is present in Saxo and retained by Belleforest,
who added melancholy to Hamlet’s character. In the original story, Hamlet’s feigned madness is required, because Fengo murders Horwendile openly in the banqueting hall and therefore has reason to expect that Amleth will seek revenge. In Shakespeare’s version of the story, Claudius secretly murders King Hamlet and, until the appearance of the Ghost, Hamlet has no reason to suspect that Claudius had anything to do with the death of the King. Likewise, being unaware of the Ghost’s visitations, Claudius has no reason to fear Hamlet or wish him away; to the contrary, Claudius states Hamlet’s “intent/ In going back to school in Wittenberg… is most retrograde to our desire./ And we beseech you bend you to remain/ Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye./ Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son” (1.2.112-17). Only after meeting the Ghost and learning of his father’s unnatural death does Hamlet decide to adopt “an antic disposition,” which is not required and throughout the play will be turned on and off. Hamlet also often explicitly informs other characters that he is not mad. The antic disposition, then, is little more than a superfluous though entertaining residual link to the old story.

Shakespeare’s Hamlet is entirely justified in his retaining the melancholic disposition of Belleforest’s Hamblet. Against the ideal medieval cosmological order and the Denmark of the Prince’s youth, present-day Denmark is to Hamlet a profoundly disappointing place as a result of King Hamlet’s death and Queen Gertrude’s hasty remarriage. According to Ophelia, the melancholic Hamlet was, in those halcyon years, “The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s eye, tongue, sword,/ Th’expectation and rose of the fair state,/ The glass of fashion and the mould of form,/ Th’observed of all observers” (3.1.150-53). The death of Hamlet’s father is a sufficiently

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116 Cf. Hamlet’s criticism of Claudius, “That one may smile and smile and be a villain” (1.5.108) with Case’s general criticism: “They lie about all things, they greet you sweetly, they often return your greetings, but they have a smooth face and a deceiving mind” (4.7).
117 Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: “I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw” (2.2.315-16). And Hamlet to the Queen: “My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time/ And makes as healthful music. It is not madness/ That I have uttered” (3.4.138-40).
traumatic event to warrant Hamlet’s melancholic disposition. Watson argues “All of Hamlet’s bitterness—his sarcasm and irony toward his fellow courtiers, his nausea over his mother’s remarriage, his contempt for Ophelia’s father, and, finally, his general misanthropy and distrust of the world and consequent longing for death—springs from one central source, his tremendous admiration for the heroic qualities of his great king-father.”

The late King Hamlet is throughout the play unreservedly praised. Horatio praises King Hamlet’s military prowess by recalling how he “smote the sledded Polacks on the ice,” and calls him “our valiant Hamlet/ (For so this side of our known world esteem’d him)” (1.1.62, 83-84). Hamlet idealizes his father, saying “‘A was a man, take him for all in all” (1.2.187), and he frequently uses the cosmological framework of the Great Chain of Being to set Claudius against this ideal of manhood and virtue, creating an unequivocal contrast between the Queen’s two husbands: “So excellent a king, that was this/ Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother… Heaven and earth,/ Must I remember?…/ O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason/ Would have mourned longer – married with my uncle,/ My father’s brother (but no more like my father/ Than I to Hercules)” (1.2.139-43, 150-53). The Ghost shares Hamlet’s dim view of Claudius, whom he describes as a vicious, incestuous, adulterate beast—a usurper of the crown and Queen (1.5.42).

In the play’s first soliloquy (1.2.129-58), Hamlet explicitly states that the death of his father and the hasty remarriage of his mother to his father’s inferior brother are at once evidence of the world’s corruption and the cause of his melancholy. Hamlet first announces that he is melancholic, wishing that either “this too too sallied flesh would melt,/ Thaw and resolve itself

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118 “For the Elizabethans, the bonds which linked father and son were of enormous intensity and were similar to the links which bound king and subject. The Elizabethan audience would therefore have grasped immediately that Hamlet’s grief over the death of his father was as limitless as his admiration for him.” (Watson, *Shakespeare and Honor*, 389).

119 Rosencrantz later says that Hamlet “does confess he feels himself distracted./ But from what cause a will by no means speak,” (3.1.5-6); earlier, the Queen—in an uncharacteristic show of sense and judgment—gets the causes right: “I doubt it is no other but the main –/ His father’s death and our hasty marriage” (2.2.565-67).
Hamlet’s desire to remove himself from the world is precipitated by his dim view of the world, a typical symptom of melancholy: “How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable/ Seem to me all the uses of this world!/ Fie on’t, ah, fie, ’tis an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely” (ll. 133-37). This was not always Hamlet’s view, but the events of the past few months, which include the death of “So excellent a king” and the Queen “married with my uncle,” “cannot come to good” (ll. 139, 151, 158). Recent events therefore justify Hamlet’s present view.

The Queen’s choosing in the first place to marry and fornicate with her brother-in-law, let alone doing both so soon after the death of her husband, is for Hamlet evidence of a world turned up-side-down, in which “Virtue itself of Vice must pardon beg” (3.4.152). However, the appetitive part of the Queen’s soul seems always to have predominated, for when her first husband lived “she would hang on him/ As if increase of appetite had grown/ By what it fed on” (ll. 143-45). But now, within a month of the King’s death, she is married to Claudius—even “a beast that wants discourse of reason/ Would have mourned longer” (ll. 150-51). The Queen’s latest actions lead to Hamlet’s general indictment of her sex, “Frailty, thy name is Woman,” but surely the men at Elsinore are no better, and Hamlet is not alone in his recognizing a general corruption in the realm (l. 146). Marcellus flatly states “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.4.90). Therefore Hamlet’s melancholy is not merely the product of the imbalance of the four humours, nor is it a sign of his inability to cope with a changing, modernizing world; rather, his melancholy is the physical and mental manifestation of his profound disappointment in a world that by several accounts has been corrupted by human vice. Hamlet’s view—“The time is out of joint” (1.5.186)—is his own, and one must resist seeing in Shakespeare’s plays
explicit expressions of the playwright’s personal views; but Hamlet’s sentiments were common among Shakespeare’s Elizabethan contemporaries. For example, Case frequently admonishes Elizabethan society, claiming “The morals of our time are dissolute indeed. How many pictures of Venus are painted everywhere? How many palaces of this wanton little whore exist? How many shows about Thais are performed all over?” (3.10). He later exclaims, “Oh the times in which we live! How many men has the gullet, the belly, base lust destroyed! What do you seek, glutton? Food. What do you thirst for, tospott? Wine. What are you after, wanton? Sex” (3.12). In Elizabethan England, one need not have had Calvinist leanings in order to decry the moral corruption of the world, and one need not have looked exclusively to the Bible for solutions. In the preliminary matter to the Speculum, Case writes that moral philosophy “teaches us how to banish the mind’s diseases, moderate the affections, guide the reason, and ornament all life with the gems and decorations of the virtues. For just as the ills of the body are cured and soothed by wholesome medicine, so are the mind’s vices by moral philosophy.” Hamlet, then, shares with Case and other Elizabethans a dim view of the world, but as we shall see he also shares their belief in a just cosmological order and the transformative power of moral philosophy. Throughout the play, Hamlet employs Aristotelianism and fixes his thoughts upon the moral virtues of temperance and bravery, and attempts to expel their vicious counterparts that presently predominate at Elsinore.

**Questions 1-4**

*Are the faculties of the soul correctly defined?*

*What is intemperance?*

*What are the remedies for intemperance?*

*Is virtue within us by nature or acquired through habit?*
In act 3, scene 4, Hamlet meets with the Queen in her chamber, eager to make his mother realize the errors of her ways: “Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge./ You go not till I set up a glass/ Where you may see the inmost part of you” (3.4.17-19). He expresses his profound disappointment in her marriage to Claudius, who was ever the inferior to King Hamlet. The Prince implores his mother to be receptive to her son’s arguments and instruction. Hamlet employs Aristotelian moral philosophy in an attempt to make his mother’s heart once again virtuous. Hamlet admits that it may be too late for his mother if indeed her vicious habits have become like second nature to her: “If damned custom have not brazed it so/ That it be proof and bulwark against sense” (ll. 35-36). Nevertheless, he hopefully places in front of the Queen pictures of King Hamlet and King Claudius, and asks, “Have you eyes?/ Could you on this far mountain leave to feed/ And batten on this moor?…. what judgement/ Would step from this to this?” Using Aristotelian psychology and moral philosophy, Hamlet exclaims, “Sense, sure, you have –/ Else could you not have motion. But sure, that sense/ Is apoplexed, for madness would not err/ Nor sense to ecstasy was ne’er so thralled/ But it reserved some quantity of choice/ To serve in such a difference” (ll. 69-74). Greenwood, who first identified Aristotelianism as the source for these lines of Hamlet, writes “In the De Anima (Bk. ii. chs. 2 and 3) we are told that the faculties of the soul (which is here co-extensive with the vital principle) are growth, sense (or sensibility), desire, motion, and reason. Plants have only the principle of growth; animals have sense as well, which is the distinguishing faculty of the animal soul. ‘For even of things which do not move or change their place, provided that they have sense, we say that they are animals,

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120 The title of Case’s Speculum employs the mirror metaphor, which is also frequently employed throughout the work’s Preliminary Matter. For example, Arthur Yeldard, Doctor of Theology and President of Trinity College, Oxford, writes, “Let each of you who loves understanding the doctrines for living life, and holding these fixed in your mind, come hither, see how Case of Oxford has placed them in his small Mirror to be seen by your eyes. See how this Mirror is small, but none clearer, it shows the work of his great industry. For whatever of moral wisdom Socrates’ genius has brought down to earth from highest heaven, whatever erudite Aristotle has learned from his mouth and put into his books, this Case has embraced in this small mirror, polished with great art, and made it easy to see.”
not only that they live.’ Then comes motion, so that motion implies sense, and an animal that has motion must necessarily have sense as well.” 121 Hamlet is suggesting the Queen’s sense must be paralyzed, because even those whose sense is debilitated through madness or fantasy would retain some ability to differentiate and choose between such mighty opposites as Kings Hamlet and Claudius. Hamlet’s use of “choice” reflects the Aristotelian view that praise or blame can only be attached to voluntary action, 122 therefore virtuous and vicious acts are done by choice. Case states “intemperance conjoined with pleasure is more voluntary than fear of mind upon which pain attends” and “intemperance is more deserving of reprehension than is fear, because of foul pleasure, which is its minister” (3.12). In this statement Case brings together for comparative purposes temperance and bravery, the two individual virtues of character central to Hamlet, and like Hamlet he exhibits considerable reprehension when discussing intemperance, while he treats fear much more sympathetically. 123 Hamlet’s invective is particularly devastating because he never suggests that his mother possesses reason, the highest and uniquely human faculty of the soul. She has growth, desire, and motion; she seems to have sense, but only in a paralyzed state; but there is no mention of reason. In her choosing to marry Claudius, the Queen completely lacks discernment, for Hamlet argues that even “a sickly part of one true sense/ Could not so mope” (ll. 78-79). In arguing that with sense alone the Queen should be able to differentiate between Kings Hamlet and Claudius, Hamlet follows Case, who explicitly links temperance with the senses: “we are properly called temperate then, when we rightly moderate our taste and touch. But I know not how much poison pleasure spreads from taste and touch to

122 According to Aristotle, for actions to be voluntary they must not be done under compulsion and the agent must know the circumstances. (Nicomachean Ethics 2.1).
123 Hamlet’s ethical discourses are almost exclusively concerned with the intemperance of the Queen and Denmark generally, and the bravery, lack of bravery, or spurious bravery of himself, Laertes, and Fortinbras.
the other senses” (3.10). Case immediately moves from taste and touch to hearing, seeing, and smelling: “With voice it captivates the ear, with face the eye, with fragrant garment the nose.” So too does Hamlet, positing “Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight./ Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all” (ll. 76-77). In revising Q2, Shakespeare returned to this passage (3.4.51-86) and with surgical precision removed ll. 69-74 and 76-79--the most explicitly and doctrinally Aristotelian lines of the passage. Shakespeare’s cuts to this passage are some of the most telling of all his revisions to Q2, for he did not simply omit an entire scene or cut short a long passage; rather, he went line-by-line and cut as much of the Aristotelianism as he could without compromising the meaning and integrity of the scene. Here the cuts show purposeful and systematic authorial revision.

The Queen’s age makes her intemperance particularly shameful. With her “matron’s bones,” she is well past the youthful stage of life in which the passions are most powerful (l. 81). To the youth Hamlet says, “proclaim no shame/ When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,/ Since frost itself as actively doth burn/ And reason pardons will” (ll. 83-86). By contrasting the aged Queen and the youth, Hamlet emphasizes the voluntary and inexcusable nature of the former’s actions, and the appropriate, almost compulsory and therefore involuntary nature of the latter’s actions. This follows Case, who writes, “in boyhood and the flower of youth this vice of concupiscence is at its hottest” (3.12). Reason can forgive the passionate and intemperate will of youth, therefore Hamlet proclaims shame on the Queen alone, whose reaction to Hamlet’s accusations proves that the Prince has hit his mark: “O Hamlet, speak no more./ Thou turn’st my very eyes into my soul/ And there I see such black and grieved spots/ As will leave their tinct” (ll. 87-90). Yet Hamlet does not relent until the Ghost appears to at once remind Hamlet of his “almost blunted purpose” and relieve the Queen by turning Hamlet’s attention away from
castigation and toward instruction and encouragement: “But look, amazement on thy mother sits! O step between her and her fighting soul. / Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works. / Speak to her, Hamlet” (ll. 108-11). Hamlet is not alone in his disappoint in the Queen, for as Watson writes, “Both father and son had obviously held Gertrude in high esteem. They had expected of her the passionate attachment which Hecuba shows for Priam (the play within the play)… Her fickle behavior is the source of their bitter disillusionment…. But even the Ghost can not completely forget his former love for his wife and so he admonishes Hamlet not to take revenge upon her.”

Having not herself seen the Ghost, Gertrude fears that Hamlet is indeed mad; of course, Hamlet is not mad, for the Ghost was seen earlier and on more than one occasion by the night watchmen and the skeptical and highly sensible Horatio. The incredulity of the Queen has no bearing on the veracity of the Ghost, for in Q2 the Queen’s lack of sense has just been well established by Hamlet, who now assures her, “My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time/ And makes as healthful music. It is not madness/ That I have uttered.” (ll. 138-40). Hamlet dutifully appeases his father’s spirit by following severe criticism with advice for the Queen; in doing so, Hamlet provides what Case describes as the two best remedies for intemperance: castigation and abstinence (3.12). Hamlet implores the Queen to “Confess yourself to heaven,/ Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come,/ And do not spread the compost on the weeds/ To make them ranker” (ll. 147-50). Castigation has taken the form of Hamlet’s severe criticism and the Queen’s repentance. Abstinence would then insure that the Queen avoids the further spread of vice. Hamlet’s ethical instruction in which he implores the Queen to abstain from sleeping with Claudius naturally and necessarily follows his severe criticism, for as Case states, “there is no profit in uncovering a wound if you do not apply a medicine” (3.12). Having first castigated his mother so as to put her into the proper frame of mind to repent and receive

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124 Watson, Shakespeare and Honor, 271-72.
instruction, Hamlet will now counsel abstinence—the second remedy for intemperance and the means by which the Queen may become virtuous.

**Questions 5-6**

*What are the remedies for intemperance?*

*Are the virtues within us by nature or acquired through habit?*

In the following passage, present in Q2 but almost entirely cut from F, Hamlet prepares to prescribe abstinence, the second remedy for intemperance. He begins by articulating the orthodox Aristotelian positions that (a) virtue and vice are acquired through habituation, and (b) habituation is a sort of second nature:

> Assume a virtue if you have it not.  
> That monster Custom, who all sense doth eat  
> Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,  
> That to the use of actions fair and good  
> He likewise gives a frock or livery  
> That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight  
> And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
> To the next abstinence, the next more easy.  
> For use almost can change the stamp of nature  
> And either [lodge] the devil or throw him out  
> With wondrous potency. (3.4.158-68)

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125 The italicized lines in the following passage are omitted from F.  
126 The word in brackets is missing from Q2. Thompson chooses “shame”, while Jenkins chooses “lodge”, which more appropriately restates the alternative between habit either securing vice [“of habits devil” and “lodge the devil”] or removing vice [“angel yet in this” and “throw him out”]. Thompson’s “shame” makes “throw him out” redundant, as both “shame” and “throw him out” constitute victories over the devil, i.e., the eradication of vice through habit.
Hamlet’s belief that virtue and vice are acquired through habit derives ultimately from Book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle discusses virtue of character (ēthos), which “results from habit (ethos)” (1103a17-18). The Philosopher states “what we do in our dealings with other people makes some of us just, some unjust” (1103b14-15). Case follows Aristotle in denying that virtue is within us by nature, and he describes habituation as both “the cause and means of acting well” and “the principle of acquiring virtue and of preserving it when acquired” (2.1). Hamlet therefore encourages the Queen to “Assume a virtue if you have it not,” because as an Aristotelian he believes that habit can be a “monster” or an “angel.” Aristotle believes “abstaining from pleasures makes us become temperate, and once we have become temperate we are most capable of abstaining from pleasures” (1104a34-1104b). Hamlet likewise highlights the benefits of that first virtuous act: “Refrain tonight,/ And that shall lend a kind of easiness/ To the next abstinence, the next more easy.” Hamlet goes on to articulate another orthodox Aristotelian position—that habit is a sort of second nature. In Aristotle’s view, “the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit” (1103a24-26). Aristotle also states “the reason why habit is also difficult to change is that it is like nature” (1152a31-32). Case believes “certain seeds and sparks of the virtues are within us by nature, but in such a way that their habit and activity cannot increase without usage,” and habit invariably becomes “a second nature: if it be good, it makes men earnest, if it be bad, it makes them rascals” (2.1). Likewise, Hamlet tells his mother that habit “almost can change the stamp of nature/ And either lodge the devil or throw him out/ With wondrous potency.” If one becomes virtuous by acting in accord with virtue; if one becomes vicious by acting in accord with vice; and if habits have a cumulative effect in that over time

127 Aristotle’s two comments regarding (a) the acquisition of virtue through habit, and (b) habit as second nature, occur in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.2 and 7.10 respectively. Case’s corresponding comments occur in adjoining sentences in *Speculum* 2.1, thus making Shakespeare’s direct indebtedness to Case, and not Aristotle, more likely.
they become virtually permanent; then there is some hope for the Queen yet, if only she would
follow Hamlet’s advice and abstain from sleeping with Claudius. The Queen asks, “What shall I
do?” and Hamlet answers, “Not this, by no means, that I bid you do — / Let the bloat King tempt
you again to bed” (ll. 179-80). Shakespeare’s revisions to this passage follow the same logic as
his revisions to the earlier passage in act 3, scene 4, discussed above. Between ll. 158-68
Shakespeare cut ll. 159-63 and 165-68—the most explicitly and doctrinally Aristotelian lines of
the passage. F retains just enough to preserve the integrity and purpose of the passage, which is
Hamlet’s imploring his mother to refrain from sleeping with Claudius (ll. 158 and 163-65). In
Q1, pseudo-Shakespeare simply rewords F’s truncated appeal: “if euer you did my deare father
loue./ Forbeare the adulterous bed to night/ And win your selfe by little as you ma
y,/
In time it
may be you wil lothe him quite.” In creating F, Shakespeare made some of his most significant
cuts here in act 3, scene 4 of Q2. He systematically removed Hamlet’s Aristotelian discussions of
(a) the relationship between sense, motion, and reason as they pertain to the tripartite soul (ll. 69-
74), (b) the role of the senses regarding intemperance (ll. 76-79), (c) the acquisition of virtues
and vices through habit (ll. 158-63), and (d) habit as a sort of second nature (ll. 163-68).¹²⁸

The Aristotelian positions that one acquires virtues and vices through habit, and that habit
is a sort of second nature, are in fact earlier introduced by Hamlet in act 1, scene 4 of Q2, when
Hamlet discusses Elsinore’s drunken courtly revels (1.4.8-38). As Hamlet, Horatio, and
Marcellus keep midnight watch in anticipation of the Ghost’s return, they hear trumpets and
ordnance going off. Hamlet explains that “The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,/
Keeps wassail and the swagg’ring upspring reels,/ And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish

¹²⁸ Edwards argues that collectively these cuts “may all reflect Shakespeare’s own tightening of his dialogue as he
wrote,” because each passage “has an uncertainty of control about it which suggests a tentative exploration from
which Shakespeare pulled back” (Edwards, Cambridge Hamlet, 12-13).
Horatio asks if this behavior is customary, and Hamlet answers in the affirmative: “Ay, marry is’t,/ But to my mind, though I am native here/ And to the manner born, it is a custom/ More honoured in the breach than the observance” (ll. 13-16). Hamlet argues that the King’s vicious custom makes Denmark “traduced and taxed of other nations:/ They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase/ Soil our addition, and indeed it takes/ From our achievements, though performed at height./ The pith and marrow of our attribute” (ll. 18-22). In Q2 only, Hamlet’s reply develops into an Aristotelian discourse as he moves from the particular observation that a single vice has destroyed the reputation of Denmark the macrocosm to the general observation that a single vice often destroys the reputation of man the microcosm:

So oft it chances in particular men
That, for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth wherein they are not guilty
(Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By their o’ergrowth of some complexion
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o’erleavens
The form of plausive manners – that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect
(Being Nature’s livery or Fortune’s star),
His virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault. (1.4.23-36)

The purpose of this discourse is to identify the two ways by which men may become vicious. Hamlet explains that men may come to carry “some vicious mole of nature” either naturally, “By their o’ergrowth of some complexion,” or morally, “by some habit that too much o’erleavens/
The form of plausible manners.” Hamlet’s position is a doctrinal articulation of Aristotelian moral philosophy. Substantively it is nothing more than a versification of Case’s position that vice is “considered in two ways, either naturally as they follow the constitution of the body, and as such they are passions, or morally, as they are acquired by customary activity, and as such they are said to be vicious habits” (3.6). Later, in act 3, scene 4, Hamlet instructs his mother that virtues are acquired and actualized in the same way as vices.

Reading Hamlet’s speech on vice as a clear articulation of Aristotelian moral philosophy relieves the passage of the problematic nature ascribed to it by critics and also challenges the most widely accepted theories regarding the composition of Q2 and F. Thompson notes “the long sentence from [lines] 23 to 38 is convoluted and some details of expression are complex.”129 Nosworthy believes here Shakespeare “lapsed into incoherence” and “never intended to retain these lines in the final draft of the text.”130 Edwards likewise argues there is “much to be said for the view that Shakespeare was dissatisfied with [these lines] as he wrote.”131 The meaning of the final lines of Hamlet’s speech, just before the Ghost enters and interrupts, is indeed difficult to penetrate: “the dram of eale/ Doth all the noble substance of a doubt/ To his own scandal” (ll. 36-38). However, the preceding lines cited above (ll. 23-36) are neither convoluted nor artistically unsatisfactory. Editors and critics deem these lines artistically unsatisfactory because they do not understand the passage. Unfortunately, the fact that Shakespeare omitted these lines (ll. 17-38) in F seems to support their reading, but here again Shakespeare has cut as much of the Aristotelianism as was possible while still retaining the meaning of the passage, which is retained in ll. 13-16.

129 Thompson, _Arden 3rd Hamlet_, 204n.
The critic who wishes to move beyond the view that Hamlet’s impenetrable and unsatisfactory discourse warrants omission must face the challenge of identifying the philosophical underpinning of this passage. Cefalu reads Hamlet not as an Aristotelian but rather a behaviorist who articulates “the early modern assimilation of the Augustinian-Protestant theory of the ineradicability of vicious habits.”

The Hamlet text does not however justify such a reading; in fact, when Hamlet assures his mother that through habituation her vices can be replaced by virtues, he is explicitly taking a position in direct opposition to the theory of the ineradicability of vicious habits. Consequently Cefalu struggles to accommodate Hamlet’s arguments into his self-imposed critical framework. For Cefalu, “Hamlet's logic is perplexing: he compares an acquired tradition or custom with a behavioral disposition which is unequivocally described as a permanent and inherited defect of nature. For Hamlet's standpoint to make sense he must be making one of two tacit assumptions: either acquired tradition and custom are like inner defect because they are both ineradicable and unchangeable, or inner defect is not really an inherited quality but is rather like custom and tradition.”

Cefalu erroneously concludes that the former assumption—that one’s habits are ineradicable and unchangeable—“holds the analogy together.” Never in the play does Hamlet articulate this position; in fact, Hamlet consistently argues the latter, contrary position, which Cefalu rejects—that one’s traditions and customs are eradicable and changeable to such a degree that through a change in habit one can almost change one’s nature. Hamlet, for example, tells Ophelia that “virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it” (3.1.117-18). If our nature (“old stock”) is defective, a trace of it will linger on even if virtue has, through habit, been grafted onto it, i.e. one’s inner nature may not be

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133 Ibid., 408.
134 Ibid.
completely eradicable but vicious habits certainly are. If Hamlet did believe that habits are ineradicable and unchangeable, then he would not say to his mother that habit can “either lodge the devil or throw him out with great potency;” nor would he implore her to change her habits, “assume a virtue,” and “refrain tonight” from sleeping with Claudius; nor would he tell her that concurrent virtuous acts make “the next more easy,” until they become virtually indistinguishable from one’s nature, almost eradicating the inner defect, if one existed in the first place. What Hamlet says to Ophelia, and everything he says in the Queen’s chamber and on night watch, contradicts Cefalu’s assertion that Hamlet articulates the Augustinian-Protestant theory of the ineradicability of vicious habits. Hamlet’s position is the one commonly held by Aristotelians, in which virtues and vices may arise naturally or morally but cannot be actualized and preserved without usage.

Hamlet’s proverbial sentiment—that one vice can ruin an otherwise virtuous character—does not require a direct source, but Andrews may have found it in Thomas Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind in General*, a late-sixteenth/early-seventeenth century book on moral philosophy. The similarities between Hamlet’s discourse on the stamp of one defect and the following passage from Wright are indeed striking:

> It impeacheth, questionless, greatly a grave mans credit, a great man’s authority, and a civil man’s good conversation to be subject to some one only inordinate passion; for such a corrupt judgement hath now so much prevailed with men, yea, and ever hath been, that they will condemn the whole for some one notable defect; as for example if we see a picture of a man or woman, drawne with exquisite colours, great proportion and art, yet if there bee but one eye, one arm, yea, or one finger out of square men will say the image is spoiled for that one defect…. there is no man so well qualified but always the world will condemn him because they judge him stained with some passion. . .

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Andrews notes *The Passions* was available in manuscript in 1598, which would have made the text available to Shakespeare prior to his writing *Hamlet*. Wright (b. 1561) was an Elizabethan stalwart of the Catholic faith who left England in 1577 to prepare for the English Mission by training under Jesuits at the Douai Seminary in Northern France. Wright’s ties to Essex and Southampton place him within the same circles as Shakespeare, making their acquaintance possible if not likely. For Andrews, “Whether or not Shakespeare is echoing Wright is of relatively little moment. What is important is that Hamlet's speech and Wright's discourse deal with the same subject from the same point of view.” Andrews does not attempt to label Wright’s point of view, and he may not know that Wright was an Aristotelian, but for our purposes the striking similarities between the positions of Hamlet and Elizabethan Aristotelians such as Thomas Wright matter a great deal. In *The Passions*, Wright employs an Aristotelian-Scholastic framework and relies heavily on Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. Newbold writes, “Much of the material that Wright uses out of Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Damascene, and others (especially Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*) has been mediated through Aquinas’s text.” However, from the opening lines of Wright’s work the direct influence of Aristotle is apparent to anyone familiar with the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “There can be no man who works by right reason, but when he first intends his work, he aimeth at some end, he levels at some good” (1.1.7-9).

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137 For a short biographical sketch of Wright, see Newbold’s Introduction to Wright’s *Passions*, 3-16.
139 Newbold, Wright’s *Passions*, 30.
140 See the opening lines of *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good” (1094a1-2).
Questions 7-8

Is virtue the mean between excess and defect?

Does the brave man or the cowardly man delay?

Wright’s use of Aristotle is of course too frequent and substantial to comprehensively discuss here, but the following example is indicative of his pervasive use of Aristotelian standards and terminology. In describing the virtues, Wright states “Every moderate passion bordereth betwixt two extremes, as liberality betwixt avarice and prodigality, temperate diet betwixt gluttony and scarcity, fortitude betwixt desperate boldness and superfluous fear (called timidity)” (3.2.14-18).\(^{141}\) Here Wright expresses the standard view found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Virtue, then, is a state that decides, consisting in a mean…. between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency” (1107a1-4). Almost every medieval and Renaissance treatise on moral philosophy, whether written by a Catholic or a Protestant, employed the Aristotelian mean. Therefore Wright need not have read it directly in Aristotle, although he surely had. The Anglican Case holds to the same bifurcated view of the vices: “the one (which exists in excess) is called Too Much, and the other (which exists in defect) Too Little” (2.2). Hamlet first uses the Aristotelian mean as he greets his friends and fellow students, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The wiser sort among Shakespeare’s readers would have enjoyed the following good-natured, bawdy exchange:

**HAMLET** My excellent good friends. How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?

**ROSENCRANTZ** As the indifferent children of the earth.\(^{142}\)

**GUILDENSTERN** Happy, in that we are not ever happy.\(^{143}\) On Fortune’s cap we are not the very button.

\(^{141}\) See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a20-24.
\(^{142}\) Read indifferent as “ordinary, at neither extreme” (Thompson, *Arden 3rd Hamlet*, 254n).
HAMLET Nor the soles of her shoe.
ROSENCRANTZ Neither, my lord.
HAMLET Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours.
GUILDENSTERN Faith, her privates we.
HAMLET In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true—she is a strumpet.

(2.2.219–31)

This exchange serves a dual purpose as it at once humorously locates the virtuous Aristotelian
mean in the private area of a female and effectively identifies kindred relationships that will later
be severed under the pressures of Claudius’ political maneuvering. Shakespeare therefore
justifiably retained this passage in F despite his otherwise consistent removal of Aristotelian
discourses. The vulgar play on Aristotelian moral philosophy seems however to have escaped
pseudo-Shakespeare, who in the corresponding passage of Q1 can do no more than establish the
amiable relationship between Hamlet and his schoolfellows. In Q1 Hamlet greets his friends,
saying “What, Gilderstone, and Rossencraft,/ Welcome kinde Schoole-fellowes to Elsanoure.”
And Gilderstone responds, “We thanke your Grace, and would be very glad/ You were as when
we were at Wittenberg.”

In act 3, scene 2, Hamlet again draws upon the Aristotelian mean as he provides advice to
the visiting players. Hamlet tells them that in their performance they should endeavor to locate
the mean by observing degree and moderation, and by avoiding excess and defect, the result of
which will be a virtuous, harmonious, and balanced performance.

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for, in
the very torrent, tempest and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness…. Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance—that you o’erstep not the

143 In the Folio text, “over-happy.”
modesty of nature. For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing. (3.2.4-20, my emphasis)

Hamlet’s delay can be powerful stuff for the critic who wishes to read Hamlet as an esthete, an academic, or an existentialist—a highly sensitive and refined character that delights in intellectual speculation and/or has determined that action itself is futile and absurd. Does Hamlet think too much? Or was Nietzsche correct in believing that Hamlet thinks too well? It is worth remembering first that delay is an essential part of the old story, where it is shrouded in feigned madness and proves purposeful. In Shakespeare’s version of the story, Hamlet’s delay is both purposeful and entirely justified on moral grounds. Hamlet begins his second soliloquy (2.2.485-540) with self-chastisement over his failure to revenge himself for his father’s murder: “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” He is embarrassed that the player “Could force his soul so to his own conceit/ that from her working all the visage wanned/ – Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect./ A broken voice, and his whole function suiting/ With forms to his conceit” (ll. 488-92). The player was able to match his words, expressions, and actions to a fiction, “all for nothing” (l. 492). Hamlet, on the other hand, has real “motive” and “passion,” yet he is not properly stimulated to his cause and “can say nothing.” Hamlet explicitly identifies his just cause: “a king/ Upon whose property and most dear life/ A damned defeat was made” (ll. 504-506). Hamlet therefore posits a quaestio, “Am I a coward?” (ll. 506) and answers in the affirmative: “I am pigeon-livered and lack gall” (ll. 511-12). He exclaims, “Why, what an ass am I: this is most brave,/ That I, the son of a dear murdered,/ Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell” (ll. 517-19). Seeming incapable of action, Hamlet “Must like a whore unpack my heart with words/ And fall a-cursing like a very drab” (ll. 520-21). But Hamlet is only a coward for not

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14 Hazlitt, for example, writes that Hamlet “is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be…. He is the prince of philosophical speculators” (In Halliday, Shakespeare Critics, 215).
acting if his father was in fact murdered by his uncle, and it is worth remembering—for Hamlet
is about to remember—that until now the word of the Ghost is the only source of evidence that
King Hamlet was murdered by his brother. For Hamlet and his Elizabethan audience, uncertainty
would have lie not in the actual existence of a spirit at Elsinore but rather in the nature of that
spirit—whether it is benevolent or malevolent. Rowse argues while Shakespeare probably
believed in ghosts, “we may be certain that his audience did.”145 Up to this point in the play,
Hamlet has been operating under the assumption that the spirit “is an honest ghost” (1.5.137), but
he then breaks away from that train of thought, refocuses, and provides the objection: “Fie
upon’t, foh! About, my brains!” (2.2.522). Hamlet’s rejection of the initial assertion that he is a
coward leads to a newly-found determination to acquire further proof of his father’s murder by
testing his uncle: “I’ll have these players/ Play something like the murder of my father/ Before
mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks./ I’ll tent him to the quick. If ’a do blench/ I know my course”
(ll. 529-33). This is the sensible course of action, for perhaps the Ghost is not what it appears to
be; it “May be a de’il, and the de’il hath power/ T’assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps/
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,/ As he is very potent with such spirits,/ Abuses me to
damn me!” (ll. 534-38). Hamlet realizes that the word of a dubious spirit is not good counsel:
“I’ll have grounds/ More relative than this. The play’s the thing/ Wherein I’ll catch the
conscience of the King.” (ll. 538-40). Hamlet’s delay is therefore more than a matter of
Shakespeare’s blind adherence to the old legend, and it is certainly not a symptom of a fragile
and ill-equipped constitution; to the contrary, delay is a characteristic of the brave men, whose

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145 Rowse writes, “In the sixteenth century everybody believed in the supernatural; everybody believed, more or
less, in magic, or the possibility of magic; everybody believed, to a greater or lesser extent, in the stars.”
Shakespeare’s depiction of the Ghost in Hamlet is congruent with contemporary beliefs: “Ghosts appear at midnight
and must away before cockcrow. They walk the earth, until they are appeased—some, like Hamlet’s father, by
revenge. Others, unappeased, have to be ‘laid’ or exorcised; in the North Country it was held that only a Catholic
priest could exorcise a ghost—there was a rationale in that.” A. L. Rowse, The Elizabethan Renaissance: The Life of
actions are the result of careful deliberation. Case identifies six offices of the brave man, three proper and three common, the first of which is “delaying, not to conclude his business without counsel.” The other five offices are: “To run risk, not without prudence. To strike his enemy, not without justice. To await his enemy. To sustain a blow. To take to flight when reason commands” (3.9). It would be rash to act without first receiving good counsel—as Laertes shall later demonstrate—and presently Hamlet’s only counsel has been the Ghost. In the above soliloquy, Hamlet objects to his self-accusation of cowardice as soon as he realizes that for an act to be brave and not rash one must be sure the cause is right. He therefore asserts he must have “grounds more relative than this.” The King’s negative reaction to the play-within-a-play (3.2.261) provides Hamlet the proof he needs to justify revenge, and he never again questions the legitimacy of the act itself. He does once more delay (3.3), but again he justifiably delays following careful deliberation. In this instance Hamlet could have killed his uncle while “‘a is a-praying,” but to do so would not serve Hamlet’s purpose. Hamlet pauses to deliberate so that the act “would be scanned” (3.3.73-75), and he determines that killing Claudius while he is in prayer would send the usurper to heaven, while Hamlet’s father, who was killed “grossly full of bread/With all his crimes broad blown,” presently suffers in purgatory (ll. 80-81).146 Hamlet therefore again delays killing the King because to kill him in this manner “is base and silly, not revenge” (l. 79). Given Claudius’ proclivity for vice, Hamlet is certain that there will be plenty of future opportunities to revenge himself, when Claudius “is drunk, asleep or in his rage,/ Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed,/ At game a-swearin’, or about some act/ That has no relish of

146 The Ghost says it was “Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,/ Unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d,/ No reck’ning made, but sent to my account/ With all my imperfections on my head” (1.5.76-79), consequently, it is “Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night,/ And for the day confin’d to fast in fires,/ Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/ Are burnt and purg’d away” (1.5.10-13).
salvation in’t” (ll. 89-92). Both in delaying to seek further proof of Claudius’ guilt, and later to prevent Claudius from going to heaven, Hamlet shows good judgment, regardless of whether he bases his particular criterion on Aristotelian moral philosophy or Christian theology. The intellectual integration of these two disparate and seemingly incompatible worldviews had of course long ago taken place in medieval Europe.

Questions 9-11

Is bravery defined aright?

Does the brave man feel fear?

Does the brave man choose things out of fear of a greater evil?

HAMLET: To be, or not to be, that is the question;
    Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
    The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
    Or take up arms against a sea of troubles
    And by opposing end them; to die: to sleep –
    No more, and by a sleep to say we end
    The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
    That flesh is heir to: ’tis a consummation
    Devoutly to be wished – to die: to sleep –
    To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there’s the rub,
    For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
    When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
    Must give us pause: there’s the respect
    That makes calamity of so long life.
    For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
    Th’oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
    The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
    The insolence of office and the spurns
    That patient merit of th’unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin. Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life
But that the dread of something after death
(The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns) puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Thus conscience does make cowards –
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. (3.1.55-87)

Nowhere is Hamlet more the student of Aristotelian moral philosophy than in his famous
“To be or not to be” soliloquy, which deals with the virtue of bravery. Case describes bravery as
“the greatest of all virtues,” and in this revenge tragedy it is literally the quaestio (3.6). Bravery
is also one of the more complex moral virtues because it relates to two feelings, fear and
confidence, whereas other virtues relate to only one.147 The brave man must be moderate in his
fear and moderate in his confidence, while immoderate fear and/or immoderate confidence,
according to Case, destroy bravery (2.2). Aristotle writes that the brave man is moderate in that
he “stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right
way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident” (1115b18-19). Hamlet begins this
soliloquy with the quaestio: What is bravery? He posits two possible answers: it is either “nobler
in the mind,” i.e., more virtuous, to be or not to be. Continuing to follow the structure of Case’s
Speculum and the practices of medieval commentaries generally, Hamlet first provides the

147 See Irwin, Aristotle’s Ethics, 211.
reference for *to be*: “to suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” He then provides the reference for *not to be*: to “take up arms against a sea of troubles/ And by opposing end them.” Having established the opposing references, he next argues in favor of the latter, stating that its end, death, is pleasant: “to die: to sleep –/ No more, and by a sleep to say we end/ The heartache and the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to: ’tis a consummation/ Devoutly to be wished.” The objection, that death may be painful, presently follows: “to die: to sleep –/ To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there’s the rub./ For in that sleep of death what dreams may come/ When we have shuffled off this mortal coil/ Must give us pause.” Hamlet concludes the objection by stating that man would not choose to endure all the unpleasantness of life, “But that the dread of something after death/ (The undiscovered country from whose bourn/ No traveller returns) puzzles the will.” Hamlet has therefore identified fear, which Aristotle defines as “the expectation of something bad,” as the principle feeling that causes men to choose *to be* over *not to be* (1115a9). Case, like Aristotle, argues that fear itself is not a vice, for “there are certain things which we should dread” (3.6). According to Aristotle, one should fear death, for it “is the most frightening of all, since it is a boundary” (1115a27). Case describes death as “a kind of dissolution,” while Hamlet describes it as “the undiscovered country” (3.6). According to Hamlet, fear that the unknown may bring greater evils than the known “makes us rather bear those ills we have/ Than fly to others that we know not of.” This is not an endorsement of *to be*; rather, it is an explanation of the deliberative process by which most people choose *to be* rather than *not to be*. But Hamlet did not begin by asking why one action is more often chosen over the other; rather, he began by asking which of the two actions is virtuous. His unequivocal answer concludes the soliloquy: we choose *to be* out of fear of greater evils after death, and “Thus conscience does make cowards –/ And thus the native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied o’er with the
pale cast of thought./ And enterprises of great pitch and moment/ With this regard their currents turn awry/ And lose the name of action.” Immoderate fear contaminates natural resolve and destroys the impulse to act. The coward chooses to be and suffers the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, whereas the brave man, he who is nobler in mind, chooses not to be and takes arms against a sea of trouble. Hamlet’s most famous speech, perhaps the most famous speech in all of literature, is not merely a decorative piece of aimless philosophical speculation. Hamlet is not forestalling, nor is he in the midst of an existentialist dilemma; nor is he inviting the reader into the darkest recesses of his subconscious mind; rather, the reader passively participates in a typical, university-style discourse on moral philosophy. Drawing upon his study of Aristotle, Hamlet has engaged in a deliberative exercise that has yielded good counsel. He has clearly identified two possible courses of actions, and he has determined that one, endurance, is cowardly, and the other, revenge, may be brave. That is yet to be finally determined, for bravery is a complex virtue, involving the two feelings of fear and confidence. In this soliloquy, Hamlet locates the excessive extreme regarding the feeling of fear.

In Q1 there is no quaestio regarding bravery in relation to the feeling of fear, nor is there any concern for what is virtuous: “To be, or not to be, I there’s the point.” The two possible answers to “the point” lack references to cowardice and bravery. The soliloquy thus loses its ethical force as the principal question is reduced to whether or not death is the equivalent of sleep: “To Die, to sleepe, is that all?” The Hamlet of Q1 begins by stating the affirmative position, “I all,” then immediately proceeds with the objection: “No, to sleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes./ For in that dreame of death…” The familiar recitation of life’s vicissitudes follows— for pseudo-Shakespeare has better remembered these lines than he has understood the
structure and purpose of the soliloquy—and Hamlet concludes that our fear of a greater evil after death “makes cowardes of vs all.”

Questions 12-13

*Is the Stoic correctly defined?*

*Is the blessed man correctly defined?*

Horatio is Shakespeare’s elaboration on the loyal character in Belleforest who provides Hamlet with good counsel by alerting the Prince to the trap set by Fengon and his nefarious counselors. Horatio is Hamlet’s friend, a fellow student, and a Stoic; he seems to have arrived at Elsinore not from Wittenberg but rather from the pages of Julius Caesar. When in act 1, scene 1, the night watchmen speculate that the Ghost’s recent visitations portend civil strife, Horatio agrees and draws a parallel between the deaths of King Hamlet and Julius Caesar: “In the most high and palmy state of Rome/ A little ere the mightiest Julius fell/ The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead/ Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets” (1.1.112-15). Despite recent scholarly attempts to enlarge Horatio’s social, political, and economic importance in the play, the character’s personal circumstances are never meaningfully discussed outside of Hamlet’s brief description of Horatio as poor yet good spirited (3.2.53-55). In fact, Shakespeare seems to have been unusually inattentive to the consistency of Horatio’s character. For example, when Hamlet first sees Horatio and asks what brings him from Wittenberg to Elsinore, Horatio replies, “My lord, I came to see your father’s funeral” (1.2.175); yet Hamlet’s father has been dead some two months and Hamlet has not yet seen Horatio at Elsinore, not for the funeral nor for the wedding of Gertrude and Claudius. In act 1, scene 4, Horatio asks Hamlet if the King’s drunken revels are a Danish custom, suggesting that Horatio is not a Dane; yet in act 5, scene 2, Horatio says “I am more antique Roman than Dane,” suggesting that he is in fact native to Denmark. When Horatio
and Hamlet are in the graveyard, Horatio seems not to recognize Laertes, though both are Danes. Furthermore, Horatio had earlier been keeping a close watch on Ophelia, yet he seems not to have told Hamlet of her death, for in act 5 Hamlet is unaware of whose funeral he is presently attending.

Horatio’s Stoicism, however, is pervasive and consistent, suggesting that it was the character’s philosophical disposition and his relationship with Hamlet, and not his personal circumstances, that primarily concerned Shakespeare. As a Stoic, Horatio is characteristically skeptical that a ghost has been visiting Elsinore, saying “Tush, tush, ’twill not appear” (1.1.29). Horatio does however become a believer after seeing the Ghost, but not “Without the sensible and true avouch/ Of mine own eyes” (ll. 56-57). Horatio also exhibits the Stoic sense of duty. In act 1, Horatio feels it his duty to inform Hamlet of the Ghost’s presence at Elsinore (1.1.178, 1.2.122), but throughout the play he is also dutiful to the state in ways that seem to be incongruent with his friendship with Hamlet. For example, Horatio readily serves Claudius when, after Ophelia’s initial display of madness, he is instructed to “Follow her close. Give her good watch” (4.5.74), and again after Ophelia’s burial, when the King tells Horatio to watch over Hamlet: “I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him” (5.1.282).

The corrupt currents of Hamlet’s world make Shakespeare’s invention of a character like Horatio, one upon whom Hamlet can rely, essential both to the plot and to the protagonist’s mental wellbeing. Watson writes, “Horatio’s devotion and steady reliability represent the only constant beam to brighten a world which would otherwise be completely immersed in spiritual darkness.” Horatio therefore serves practical and intellectual purposes as he plays the part of the ideal friend and Stoic. The Aristotelian Hamlet and the Stoical Horatio are a natural fit. Case

148 Watson, Shakespeare and Honor, 263.
discusses how from an intellectual perspective Aristotelians view Stoics as “friends” (1.4-5). Stoics believe that virtue is the highest good and within us by nature. Case rejects the Stoic definition of happiness as virtue because from an Aristotelian perspective happiness must come from activity, whereas virtue “can exist in a sleeping man, i.e., in a man doing nothing, but happiness cannot be in him thus” (1.4-5). While the Stoic holds to a philosophically inferior position, he is nonetheless worthy of praise for his valuation of virtue, rather than honor or pleasure, as the *sumnum bonum*. In act 3, scene 2, Hamlet’s epideictic speech on Horatio begins as Horatio enters and characteristically says, “Here, my sweet lord, at your service” (l. 49). Hamlet replies, “Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man/ As e’er my conversation coped withal” (ll. 50-51). This excellent, terse statement of praise emphasizes Horatio’s virtuous, well-balanced disposition, and it will stand in sharp relief to Laertes’ ireful disposition. But in typical fashion Hamlet expands on his thoughts by providing references:

For thou hast been

As one in suff’ring all that suffers nothing –

A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards

Hast ta’en with equal thanks. And blest are those

Whose blood and judgment are so well co-meddled

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149 Case begins 2.1 with the following *quaestio*: “are the virtues within us by nature, as the Stoics once said?” He commends but does not endorse the Stoic opinion “that virtue is Man’s *sumnum bonum*. Indeed I know not in what scales to weigh this argument, yet I join Aristotle in saying that, Keno, who takes virtue for human happiness is a friend… but truth is more a friend, which takes the constant activity of virtue. For even though virtue be more precious than gold, even though virtue alone survives our deaths, nevertheless if you understand it as existing in habit rather than action, in peace rather than in motion, and if you keep it in your pocket rather than your hand, then assuredly, just as it does little to serve as an example for others, so it fails itself in seeking after the title of happiness. Since therefore virtue is one thing, but virtue’s activity, another, I posit the latter as the means and the former as the prize, the latter as the root and the cause, the former as the fruit and the end” (1.4-5).

150 On courtiers and courtly life, see Hamlet’s remark, “No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp” (3.2.56), and Case’s quotation of “an old saying: *Many years are now gone past.* / *Faith in contracts doesn’t last.* / *Honeyed tongue, sugared words.* / *Hide gall in heart, and hateful swords*” (4.7). See also Hamlet’s observation that at court “one may smile and smile and yet be a villain” (1.5.108), and Case’s observation that flatterers “lie about all things, they greet you sweetly, they often return your greetings, but they have a smooth face and a deceiving mind” (4.7).
That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave and I will wear him
In my heart’s core – ay, in my heart of heart –
As I do thee.” (ll. 61-69).

The characteristics that Hamlet ascribes to Horatio are not specifically those of a Stoic. As a derivative moral philosophy based in large measure on the principal features of Peripatetic philosophy, the ideal Stoic will necessarily share many characteristics with Aristotle’s blessed or happy man. And while we may be certain that Shakespeare created Horatio from the Stoic mold, it does not necessarily follow that Shakespeare drew directly from Stoicism when writing Hamlet’s speech in praise of Horatio. Hamlet’s encomium bestows upon Horatio the same characteristics as Case uses in his description of Aristotle’s blessed or happy man. And in both texts these characteristics are presented in the same order. Case writes of the blessed man:

I admit that the blessed man is stricken by fortune’s darts, is afflicted by diseases, is wounded by many extremities of evil. Yet he does not weaken, indeed this is when he most shines and triumphs…. the happy man is wise, brave, always striving after virtue, so as always to put fortune to rout; not to mention that the blessed man can always overcome her storms, since he is always wise and has calmly endured what chance has offered. For if they are good and fortunate, they make his life more pleasant; if they are bitter and unpleasant, they make him far more blessed (1.10)

As Shakespeare’s Horatio suffers all yet suffers nothing, Case’s blessed man is afflicted and wounded but does not weaken. As Horatio takes Fortune’s buffets and rewards with equal thanks, the blessed man is stricken by fortune’s darts and he endures both the good and bad that chance has offered. As Horatio is blessed because his passion and judgment are well balanced, the blessed man is wise and calm. In Q1, Hamlet describes Horatio as just, but pseudo-
Shakespeare does not then provide the Aristotelian references that are present in Q2 and retained in F.  

While Hamlet’s praise for Horatio in Q2 and F is substantive and unequivocal, Horatio and his Stoicism are never more than second best to Hamlet and his Aristotelianism. Gardner observes “Shakespeare was much aware of the Stoic concept of human nobility and the Stoic ideal of the wise man who ‘rules the stars’; but the essentially self-regarding ideal of *apatheia* has not entered at all deeply into his imagination of the human ideal.” In Watson’s study of Renaissance moral treatises, he notes “none of the moralists we are discussing pay attention to those cardinal aspects of Stoic philosophy—as, for example, ascetic denial of pleasure, complete suppression of passion, or self-sufficient individualism—which contradict the teachings of the Academic and Peripatetic schools.” Hamlet says to Horatio, “Nay, do not think I flatter,/ For what advancement may I hope from thee/ That no revenue hast but thy good spirits/ To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flattered?” (ll. 52-55). To draw a parallel between *Hamlet* and *Sonnet 94*, which was likely written around 1600, Hamlet is the Prince with the power to hurt and the ability to move others, he who shall inherit heavens graces; while Horatio, the poor scholar, is only the steward of Hamlet’s excellence.  

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151 See Q1:  
*Hamlet*: *Horatio*, thou art euen as just a man,/ As e're my conversacon cop'd withall.  
*Horatio*: O my lord!  
*Hamlet*: “Nay why should I flatter thee? Why should the poore be flattered?/ What gaine should I receiue by flattering thee?/ That nothing hath but thy good minde?/ Let flattery sit on those time-pleasing tongs,/ To glose with them that loues to heare their praise,/ And not with such as thou *Horatio*” (Section 9).  
152 Haydn argues that here Hamlet is specifically praising Stoicism, and then concludes that Hamlet’s “self-appointed task” is “to achieve such a state, to approximate the integration of an Horatio.” Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Grove, 1960), 625.  
Questions 14-20

What is the special function of man?

What is the highest good?

Is bravery correctly defined?

Is the bold man correctly defined?

Is honor correctly defined?

Is magnanimity correctly defined?

Does the brave man feel fear?

HAMLET: What is a man

If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast – no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th’event
(A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward) I do not know
Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do,
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do’t. (4.4.32-45)

In this first part of the play’s final soliloquy, Hamlet identifies man’s highest good, he returns to the feeling of fear in order to identify the deficient and excessive extremes between which the mean lies, and he then restates that he has cause to be moderately confident in his undertaking. Hamlet begins by employing Aristotle’s function argument in an effort to establish a clear
statement of the highest human good, the \textit{summum bonum}. Regarding the function argument, Aristotle writes:

For just as the good, i.e. [doing] well, for a flautist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and characteristic action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function…. What, then, could this be? For living is apparently shared with plants…. The life next in order is some sort of life of sense perception; but this too is apparently shared with horse, ox, and every animal. The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the part of the soul that has reason…. We have found, then, that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason. (1097a25-1098a8)

The medieval cosmological hierarchy, of which man is the very center, incorporates Aristotle’s differentiation of plants, beasts, and man based upon faculties of the soul. Man occupies a place between angels and beasts, sharing characteristics with both. He therefore has the capability to live his life on a variety of levels, depending upon the dominant tendency of his soul. Earlier in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle argues that while men generally agree that happiness is the highest good, they have differing definitions of happiness, which inform the ways in which they choose to live their lives. Hamlet’s \textit{quaestio} (What is a man?) approximates Aristotle’s employment of the function argument to arrive at a definition of man’s \textit{summum bonum}.

Aristotle identifies “three most favored lives: the lives of gratification, of political activity, and, third, of study” (1095b16-17); it is worth noting that at Elsinore all of the main characters (and many of the secondary characters) clearly and comfortably fit into one of Aristotle’s so-called three most favored lives. Aristotle first states that “The many, the most vulgar, would seem to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure, and hence they also like the life of gratification. In this they appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life for grazing animals” (1095b18-21). Case describes the argument for pleasure as “the saying of a cow, not a man,” and asks, “if it is (to conclude with the Philosopher) a plague shared in common by us and the
beasts, how can it be that it is Man’s proper end and *sumnum bonum*? (1.4-5). Following Aristotle and Case, Hamlet argues that the man who chooses a life of gratification in which “his chief good and market of his time/ Be but to sleep and feed” is “A beast — no more” (ll. 33-34). Throughout the play, Hamlet’s (and the Ghost’s) persistent use of bestial imagery reflects their view that the life of gratification predominates at court generally, but especially so in the characters of Claudius and Gertrude—both have motion, and should therefore have sense, but what lack of judgment! Deciding then that a life of pleasure is not man’s highest good, Hamlet follows Aristotle and Case in identifying reason as man’s unique endowment and special function.\(^{156}\) Hamlet first identifies man’s “large discourse”, i.e., power of reasoning, as his unique endowment; he then states that such a “capability” must be active and not merely “fust in us unused” (ll. 35-38); and just as Aristotle argues “happiness appears to be one of the most divine things,” Hamlet intimates that reason—which makes human happiness possible—is god-sent and “godlike” *(Nicomachean Ethics* 1099b16-17 and *Hamlet* 1.37).

In the first seven lines of this soliloquy, Hamlet begins with a *quaestio* related to the highest good, and he successfully employs the function argument to provide the doctrinal Aristotelian definition of the highest good. Following an Aristotelian pattern, Hamlet then reintroduces the mean in order to arrive at a comprehensive definition of happiness. Aristotle concludes that for a man to be happy, rational activity must be in accord with virtue, and he again defines virtue as the mean between excess and defect (1107a1-4). Hamlet appropriately identifies the two extreme states related to rational activity: “Now whether it be/ Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple/ Of thinking too precisely on th’event” (ll. 38-40). In this either/or proposition concerning the mean as it relates to rational activity, Hamlet first identifies bestial

\(^{156}\) This point will soon be reiterated by Claudius as he laments the mentally unhinged condition of “poor Ophelia/ Divided from herself and her fair judgment,/ Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts” (4.5.84-86).
oblivion as the deficient extreme, for as Case states, “Bestiality lacks reason” (7.6). This assertion is based upon the medieval-Aristotelian distinction between the tripartite human soul and the bipartite bestial soul; the latter possesses nutritive and sensitive parts but lacks the rational part that the former possesses exclusively.\(^\text{157}\) Hamlet then identifies thinking too precisely as the excessive extreme, for an overuse of the rational part of the soul likewise misses the approximated virtuous mean. Here as in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, Hamlet attaches cowardice to excessive rather than defective rational thought, explicitly stating that the former “hath but one part wisdom/ And three parts coward” (ll. 41-42). Hamlet’s discussion of cowardice might seem redundant following the “To be or not to be” soliloquy on the same subject, yet his return to it suggests that he has already located the mean as it relates to confidence. The next lines of the present soliloquy confirm this as Hamlet states that he has “cause and will and strength and means/ To do’t,” and shortly after that he explicitly identifies his cause as “a father killed, a mother stained,/ Excitements of my reason and my blood” (ll. 43-45 and 56-57).\(^\text{158}\) If Hamlet’s confidence is moderate, then immoderate fear must account for his inaction.

In his mind Hamlet has already decided that his cause is right and he should therefore be moderately confident. He then shares with the reader the deliberative process by which he became moderately confident. Hamlet states “Examples gross as earth exhort me,” and he contrasts his cause with that of Prince Fortinbras of Norway—whose army presently stirs against the Poles “to gain a little patch of ground/ That hath in it no profit but the name” (ll. 17-18).

\(^\text{157}\) In his reading of Hamlet’s act 4, scene 4 soliloquy, Shapiro begins by arguing that Hamlet is convinced that “‘Thinking too precisely’ is as beastly as acting impulsively….” and then concludes that Hamlet “can’t shake the idea of his own bestialness, which now seems to him grounded in his cowardly habit of hairsplitting analysis.” James Shapiro, \textit{A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare} (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 309.
\(^\text{158}\) Thompson/Taylor glosses “excitements” as “motives to incite,” i.e., cause (Thompson, \textit{Arden 3rd Hamlet}, 371n).
contrast between Hamlet’s great cause and Fortinbras’ small cause supports the conclusions that Hamlet is moderately confident while Fortinbras is rash.\textsuperscript{159} Hamlet’s proof by examples is strikingly similar to that of Case in his commentary on bravery. Case first provides earthly examples, both classical and biblical, of brave men: “Such was Aemilius, who freed his captive father, killed his enemy, and earned a statue. Such was Leonidas, who, as Justin tells us, defend his nation against a countless host of Persians. Such was King David who on behalf of his religion and divine worship stoutly put down and killed a monster of blasphemy, namely Goliath” (3.6). Case concludes that these brave men all fought for the right cause. He then provides two examples of specious bravery: “Ajax fought, but rage drove him; Catiline fought, but his inspiration was ambition” (3.6). The Fortinbras of Q2 is Hamlet’s Catiline, a bold military commander who is highly sensitive to honor and inspired by ambition. Horatio suggests as much when earlier in the play he describes Fortinbras as one “Of unimproved mettle, hot and full,” who has “Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes” (1.1.95-97). Now, in act 4, scene 4, Hamlet describes Fortinbras as “a delicate and tender prince/ Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed” (ll. 47-48).\textsuperscript{160} Fortinbras has no cause for fighting other than his own “divine ambition,” which implies excessive, supra-human ambition. And the twenty thousand men he has brought to battle the Poles certainly exceed what is warranted to fight for the worthless piece of land that Hamlet values no more than “an eggshell” (l. 52). Through proof by examples Hamlet has shown that his cause is just, whereas Fortinbras’ cause is not. It is worth noting that in the next scene Laertes will return to Elsinore and, like Ajax, be driven by rage. Therefore Fortinbrases and

\textsuperscript{159} Shapiro argues, “The example of Fortinbras confirms for [Hamlet] that there can be no right way forward” (Shapiro, Year, 309).
\textsuperscript{160} Thompson/Taylor glosses “delicate and tender” as “highly sensitive to the question of honour” (Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 370n). One might go further and say that Hamlet implies Fortinbras is overly sensitive to honor. Hankins, who reads “delicate and tender” as Hamlet’s high praise of Fortinbras, has difficulty with the ensuing lines in which Hamlet clearly disapproves of Fortinbras’ actions against the Poles.
Laertes, both of whom Shakespeare invented, approximate Case’s two examples of men who seem brave but are not, just as Hamlet is an approximation of those men whom Case describes as brave.

By juxtaposing the particular, respective examples of Fortinbras and himself, Hamlet has distinguished between spurious and genuine bravery by identifying just cause as the virtue’s criterion. He first defines what bravery is not, and then defines what it is: “Rightly to be great/ Is not to stir without great argument/ But greatly to find quarrel in a straw/ When honour’s at the stake” (ll. 52-55). This is no different than Case’s position: “it is not the fight, but rather the cause, which creates and defines the brave man” (3.6). The seemingly brave man fights without great cause, whereas the truly brave man will be identified not by the nature of the fight itself but rather the rightness of the cause. Hamlet’s description of the brave man includes a reference to honor, which accords with the standard Aristotelian description, expressed here by Case: “The courageous man is therefore full of courage in undertaking and undergoing the dangers that suddenly arise or otherwise occur among the tragedies of this life, for the sake of honor” (3.6).

From an Aristotelian perspective, Hamlet’s lines could not be more straightforward. His use of “honor” is distinctively Aristotelian, and the definition and distinction of the term are implied throughout Q2; but the term has caused considerable difficulty for critics who do not recognize Q2’s Aristotelianism and consequently and erroneously identify honor with Fortinbras and

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161 This passage has caused a great deal of difficulty for editors and critics. To make sense of it, some editors argue that the single negative in “Is not to stir without great argument” should be read in a double sense (Hibbard in Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 371n.; Jenkins, Arden 2nd Hamlet, 346n.; and Kermode, Riverside, 1220n.). However, the text requires no such manipulation. In noting Hamlet’s objection to fighting without great argument, Hankins cites a passage on magnanimity from the Nicomachean Ethics (1124b7-9): The magnanimous man “does not face dangers in a small cause; he does not face them frequently, since he honors few things; and he is no lover of danger. But he faces dangers in a great cause, and whenever he faces them he is unsparing of his life, since he does not think life at all costs is worth living.” (In Hankins, Hamlet and Other, 74-75n.)
Laertes rather than Hamlet. Aristotle’s heroic, magnanimous man “is concerned especially with honors and dishonors” because he believes honor “is the greatest of external goods. Hence [he] has the right concern with honors and dishonors” (1124a5 and 1123b21-25). Case provides the object and distinction of magnanimity. Its object is twofold: “external, which is honor; and internal, which is a moderated appetite for honor, and this is found in the magnanimous man himself” (4.3). Magnanimity is understood in two ways, commonly and properly. Commonly, magnanimity “is concerned with the objects of fortitude and the other virtues.” Properly, it “is concerned with honors, either by seeking them justly and modestly, by accepting them sparingly and decorously, and by enjoying them soberly, carefully, and profitably” (4.3). The magnanimous man, in short, will be brave and will have the proper attitude to honor. On the other hand, Fortinbras and Laertes are examples of those who immoderately value external honor by erring on the side of excess. Case describes this immoderately excessive attitude to honor as “exaltation of mind and arrogance, which creates such a swollen head that we snatch at honor’s fleeting shadow more avidly than lions at their prey…. Its attendants are insolence, boastfulness, ambition, discord, sedition, interfering, and self-love…. How many and what great massacres of men, how many and what great collapses of commonwealths have been engendered by this thirsty little ambition for honor!” (4.3). Therefore, Fortinbras, Laertes, and Hamlet can each be most concerned about honor while having different attitudes to it, which they

162 Haydn expresses the predominant critical understanding of the role of honor in Hamlet: “In terms of allegiance to the code of honor, Fortinbras and Laertes are the important characters” (Haydn, Counter-Renaissance, 621). Hankins’ equating Fortinbras with honor leads him to believe that in the latter line (“But greatly to find quarrel in a straw/ When honour’s at the stake”) Hamlet is referencing and praising Fortinbras, and therefore “seeming to contradict his earlier statement” in which he disapproved of Fortinbras’ military excursions. Consequently, Hankins finds Hamlet’s definition of bravery to be somewhat contradictory and he perceives a “struggle in Hamlet’s mind between the motives of justice and honor” (Hankins, Hamlet and Other, 75). Shapiro reads these lines as Hamlet determining that “greatness consists not in refraining to act unless the cause is great but in fighting over any imagined slight,” a position which Shapiro describes as “the discredited argument for a culture of honor” (Shapiro, Year, 310).

163 According to Case, honor is twofold: “internal, which is the reward of happiness”, and “external, which is the object of magnanimity. Magnanimity seeks both, but is most concerned with seeking and moderating the latter” (4.3).
respectively express throughout Q2 in both their actions and Shakespeare’s varied application of the term. As one who immoderately values external honor by erring on the side of defect, a Stoic like Horatio may be said to represent the opposite end of the spectrum. Therefore in Q2, Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras, and Horatio respectively establish the moderate, excessive, and defective attitudes to honor as conceived by Aristotelians.164

Hamlet concludes the peroration by announcing an end to the deliberative process: “O, from this time forth/ My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth” (ll. 64-65). These are the words of a Prince who has again provided himself good counsel and is now convinced that his own cause—revenge for his father’s murder and his mother’s disgrace—is great and just. Hamlet has also distinguished spurious bravery from genuine bravery. Moderately fearful of death and moderately confident in his undertaking, Hamlet is now fully resolved to carry out the revenge that will ultimately free Denmark from its vicious king but at the same time rob Denmark of its leading light.165 In many respects Hamlet’s final soliloquy is the most important soliloquy of the play. In it Hamlet makes use of Aristotle’s function argument to establish the highest good for man; he briefly summarizes the relationship between rational thought and the feeling of fear, which featured prominently in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy; through proof by examples he distinguishes between the brave and the seemingly brave man; and he arrives at a definition of bravery that justifies his being moderately confident in his cause. The marked difference in Hamlet’s character from this point on—the assuredness with which Hamlet comports himself in act 5—is a direct consequence of his having completed his deliberations here in act 4, scene 4.

164 On Aristotle’s view of honor, Irwin writes: “Aristotle rejects the single-minded pursuit of honor, since he takes happiness to include goods that depend on the agent himself, not on other people’s attitude to him. But he also rejects the extreme view that honor is unimportant and irrelevant to happiness. He devotes 4.3-4 to the virtues concerned with the proper attitude to honor” (Irwin, Aristotle’s Ethics, 334).
165 Shapiro reads the soliloquy as Hamlet concluding “that he’s a beast if he acts and a beast if he doesn’t” and that “to take revenge after this is to concede that he is no better than Fortinbras” (Shapiro, Year, 309 and 311).
The Hamlet of act 5 is settled.\textsuperscript{166} F’s complete omission of Hamlet’s final soliloquy has challenged editors and critics to account for and justify Shakespeare’s revisions.\textsuperscript{167} Shakespeare’s omission of Hamlet’s final soliloquy from F is simply another instance of his removing the Aristotelianism present in Q2. This omission stands beside the cuts made to Hamlet’s Aristotelian discourse on Danish drunkenness and individual vice in act 1, scene 4, and Hamlet’s Aristotelian castigation of and instruction to his mother regarding her intemperance in act 3, scene 4. Shakespeare’s omission of this soliloquy in act 4, scene 4 also improves the character of Fortinbras, who in F no longer exemplifies the seemingly brave man of Aristotle’s \textit{Ethics}. To further improve the character of Fortinbras, Shakespeare went back to one of Horatio’s lines in act 1, scene 1, and turned Fortinbras’ “lawless” followers into less objectionable “Landlesse” followers (l. 97).

\textsuperscript{166} Haydn explains “the marked difference” in the Hamlet of act 5 as the result of Hamlet successfully integrating “the opposition between honor and Stoicism” and thus coming “to that conciliatory, positive position of the great central Christian-humanistic tradition” (Haydn, \textit{Counter-Renaissance}, 635-36). In placing Hamlet between the two extremes of honor and Stoicism, I believe Haydn comes close to recognizing the true nature of Hamlet, despite his not recognizing the Aristotelianism behind the Q2 \textit{Hamlet}.

\textsuperscript{167} Here as elsewhere Edwards argues that cuts made to the second quarto text result from Shakespeare’s recognizing that certain lines and passages were intellectually and/or poetically inferior. Thus Edwards describes Hamlet’s fourth soliloquy as “not one of the great soliloquies,” and “much less intricate, subtle, mobile and suggestive than the two great central soliloquies.” He finds the soliloquy “insufficient and inappropriate for Act 4 of \textit{Hamlet}” because by this point in the play “Hamlet’s thoughts and emotions have become far too complicated and deep…. Hamlet has become so immense in his mystery, so unfathomable, that the speech is scarcely adequate for the speaker” (Edwards, \textit{Cambridge Hamlet}, 17). One must admit the attractiveness of interpreting the Hamlet of act 4 as “immense in his mystery” and “unfathomable,” existing somewhere beyond knowing and language; but it is here that Hamlet is at his least mysterious and complicated, and the Aristotelian discourse that shapes the fourth soliloquy effectively relieves Hamlet of any indecisiveness. Hibbard argues that the lines of the fourth soliloquy “do nothing to advance the action, nor do they reveal anything new about Hamlet and his state of mind” (Hibbard in Thompson, \textit{Arden 3rd Hamlet}, 19-20). Yet the fourth soliloquy ends Hamlet’s deliberative process and therefore reveals a new, settled, and fully resolved Hamlet, one who has finally attained a state of mind that only now makes the tragic advance of action in act 5 possible. Shapiro considers this scene “the turning point of the play, crystallizing for Hamlet the futility of heroic action” (Shapiro, \textit{Year}, 308). Yet Hamlet proceeds to engage in heroic action in the very next scenes.
Questions 21-22

Is the rash man correctly defined?

Is anger a spur to bravery?

Throughout the play, Laertes, like his father Polonius, is principally concerned with the life of social and political honor, which ultimately explains but does not justify his obsession with revenge that causes him to act rashly in the latter part of the play. From an Aristotelian perspective, Laertes, Polonius, and Fortinbras represent those who are of the opinion that honor is the highest good. Case states “There is no need for me to employ many words in disputing about the second opinion…. Fortune’s ladder is slippery, and envy always attends upon rule: the higher you climb, the harder you fall. Honor, says the Philosopher, resides in the man conferring the honors, but happiness is in the happy man himself, therefore honor is not happiness” (1.4-5). Aristotelians believe that happiness, the highest good, must be self-sufficient and independent of others’ opinions and actions. Laertes’ concern for his family’s public reputation, which of course depends upon the opinions of others, consumes him and causes him to be rash. His advice to Ophelia before his departing to France establishes his concern for honor. Worried that Ophelia will sully her reputation by giving herself over to Hamlet, Laertes says to her, “Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain/ If with too credent ear you list his songs/ Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open/ To his unmastered importunity” (1.3.29-32). In act 4, scene 5, while Hamlet is away, Laertes returns to Elsinore in a towering rage, determined to revenge himself upon his father’s murderer and thereby restore his family’s reputation. As Laertes arrives at Elsinore, the Messenger warns Claudius that the noble youth has come to court “in a riotous head” (4.5.101). Laertes is overly eager to act and woefully uninformed: “Where is my father? … How came he dead?” (ll. 127, 129). Before receiving answers to what must surely be
considered essential questions, Laertes exclaims “To hell allegiance, vows to the blackest devil./ Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit./ I dare damnation. To this point I stand –/ That both the worlds I give to negligence./ Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged/ Most thoroughly for my father.” (ll. 130-34). In his lack of deliberation, in his disregard for the effects of his actions, in his revolt against the well-established cosmological order, and in his overconfidence and fearlessness, Laertes provides an exact inversion of the cowardly disposition articulated by Hamlet in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, in which the cowardly man is incapable of action. Laertes’ thoughts characteristically gravitate toward the indecorous manner in which Polonius’ body was disposed: “His means of death, his obscure funeral –/ No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o’er his bones,/ No noble rite, nor formal ostentation –/ Cry to be heard, as ’twere from heaven to earth,/ That I must call’t in question” (ll. 205-209). Laertes’ words and actions provide the reader with an exemplary depiction of Aristotle’s rash man, one who is neither moderately fearful nor moderately confident. Case’s rash man, “as if full of wine, rages and roars without any counsel, without any wit, and very often pays the forfeit for his rashness, not without bloodshed. His special quality is to rush against his foeman, overconfident in his strength and sinew, and to boast frequently” (3.7). Laertes fearlessly disregards the consequences of his actions—in this life and the next—and blindly races ahead towards what he knows not. Hamlet’s soliloquies on bravery (3.1 and 4.4), together with Laertes’ rash acts and wild words, respectively establish deficiencies and excesses related to the virtue of bravery: first, that excessive thought and fear, and/or defective confidence, make one cowardly; and second, that defective thought and fear, and/or excessive confidence, make one rash. Laertes’ behavior is especially telling because it follows on the heels of Hamlet’s reaching the virtuous means concerning bravery, both moderately fearful and moderately confident.
After Hamlet returns to Elsinore in act 5, scene 1, Shakespeare’s Q2 portrayal of Laertes as the rash man continues as the enraged youth leaps into his sister Ophelia’s grave: “Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead/ Till of this flat a mountain you have made/ T’o’ertop old Pelion or the skyish head/ Of blue Olympus” (ll. 240-43). Laertes’ actions match his words as he leaps out of the grave and attacks Hamlet. Hamlet defends himself and threatens Laertes, saying “I prithee take thy fingers from my throat,/ For, though I am not splenative rash,/ Yet have I in me something dangerous.” (ll. 249-52). Here Hamlet explicitly describes Laertes as rash, while also announcing his own magnanimity. Hamlet then mocks Laertes’ spurious bravery, his words and actions, by parodying Laertes’ raging expression of love for Ophelia. Hamlet says, “’Swounds, show me what thou’lt do./ Woul’t weep, woul’t fight, woul’t fast, woul’t tear thyself,/ Woul’t drink up easel, eat a crocodile?/ I’ll do’t” (ll. 263-65). If Laertes will jump in the grave, “so will I,” says Hamlet (l. 268). Hamlet then mimics Laertes’ affected speech and its mythological imagery: “And if thou prate of mountains let them throw/ Millions of acres on us till our ground,/ Singeing his pate against the burning zone,/ Make Ossa like a wart” (ll. 269-72). Hamlet demonstrates that it takes little effort and no virtue to physically and verbally match Laertes point for point and rhetorically pile Ossa upon Pelion: “I’ll rant as well as thou” (ll. 272-73). In this exchange Hamlet shows contempt for Laertes, while also exposing Laertes’ words and actions for what they are—expressions of fearlessness and overconfidence. The Queen thinks Hamlet’s remarks are “mere madness,” but in fact Hamlet’s mirroring Laertes has an instructional purpose: what Laertes tries to pass off as bravery is, according to Case, “a false and spurious fortitude, a bogus and lying imitation of true fortitude,” that “depends upon hope for honor…” and too often “they are deemed most brave, not who excel in habit of virtue, but who,

168 Citing Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.7., Hankins observes, “Laertes is rash, acting impulsively; Hamlet is slower to action but dangerous when he is aroused.” (Hankins, *Hamlet and Other*, 77).
169 See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.3.
either enticed by reward of honor or stricken by fear of shame, fight most fiercely” (3.7-8). Just as Fortinbras’ cause for fighting is ambition and military honor, Laertes’ cause for fighting is rage and political and social honor. Both men seem brave, but as Case reminds us, “it is not the fight, but rather the cause, which creates and defines the brave man” (3.6).

**Question 23**

*Is God concerned with man?*

In act 5, scene 2, Hamlet speaks with Horatio and recalls his recent adventures at sea—how he discovered the King’s commission condemning him to death, and how he replaced it with one written in his own hand condemning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death. Hamlet admits to acting rashly and then pauses a moment: “And praised be rashness for it – let us know/
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well/
When our deep plots do fall – and that should learn us/
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends./
Rough-hew them how we will” (ll. 8-11). Hamlet says indiscretion sometimes, but not always, serves us well. Most importantly, Hamlet’s reflection reveals his belief in divine providence. His actions at sea were successful not because they were, *ipso facto*, rash, but because they were fortuitous—Hamlet happened to discover the King’s commission and he was able to seal the new commission only because he happened to have his father’s seal in his purse, “Why even in that was heaven ordinant” (l. 48). Thus Hamlet can conclude that divine providence is operative and purposeful, regardless of how carefully or carelessly one tries to achieve one’s ends; a belief in divine providence is also a wonderful remedy for excessive thought, which Hamlet has shown does so often lead to cowardice and inaction. To Hamlet’s profession of faith in divine providence, Horatio the Stoic replies, “That is most certain.”
At first glance, then, Hamlet the Aristotelian seems to have vanished, replaced perhaps by Hamlet the Stoic or Hamlet the Christian theologian. It would be easy to overemphasize the Christian element in Hamlet’s remarks on providence, for they follow hard upon the grave-diggers’ discussion of Christian burial—with its folk humor reminiscent of the morality plays—and the unsanctified burial of Ophelia, whose “death was doubtful” (l. 216). Haydn, on the other hand, reads Hamlet’s words as an acceptance of “the Stoic *fatum*.” Hamlet’s belief in divine providence does seem to betoken a Stoic and/or Christian sentiment incompatible with doctrinal Aristotelianism. Kraye describes the God of Aristotle as one who is “totally absorbed in self-contemplation and remote from the world he did not create and may not even know, is clearly unconcerned about the fall of a sparrow.” In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes, “It must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking” (1074b32-34). However, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle does concede that “if the gods pay some attention to human beings, as they seem to, it would be reasonable for them to take pleasure in what is best and most akin to them, namely understanding” (1179a25-27). This however is a highly qualified statement, and Kraye believes “This view of divinity does not fit with the Peripatetic tradition that limited providence to the celestial spheres, much less with the first prime mover of *Metaphysics 12*. It can perhaps best be explained as an example of Aristotle accommodating himself to the religion of his day.” Had this been Aristotle’s only admission that God may be concerned with man, it probably would

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170 Rowse writes, “Ophelia’s death by drowning may have been suggested by an event that made an impression on the little community of Stratford…. Katherine Hamlet was drowned in the Avon at Tiddington at the end of the year 1579. With Shakespeare the name of Hamlet would be enough to bring it all back, and this is the more likely in that there had had to be a coroner’s inquest in Stratford with twelve men of the jury to decide whether it was an accident or suicide” (Rowse, *Shakespeare*, 327-28).

171 Haydn believes that Hamlet’s profession of faith contains “many Stoic elements” (Haydn, *Counter-Renaissance*, 634).


173 Kraye, “*De mundo*,” 343.
have been sufficient evidence for medieval scholastics eager to synthesize classical philosophy and Christian theology. But Aristotle’s *Physics* also provides room for a Christian interpretation. In Book 2, Aristotle seems to endorse the concept of divine providence, stating “when an event takes place always or for the most part, it is not incidental or by chance…. It is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not observe the agent deliberating” (199b24-28). Later, in Book 8, Aristotle argues that “the first mover must be something that is one and eternal” (259a14-15). Surely this would be enough evidence to incorporate the belief in divine providence into medieval and Renaissance Aristotelianism, but there is also the spurious *De mundo* of pseudo-Aristotle, which proves beyond doubt that The Philosopher has the light of nature.\footnote{Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo*. Translated by E. S. Foster (Oxford: Claredon, 1914).}

Pseudo-Aristotle’s *De mundo*, according to Kraye, “presents providence as pervasive throughout the entire universe and as affecting all entities within it, a view in conflict not only with the self-absorption of the unmoved mover but also with the belief in a circumscribed divine influence which the doxographical tradition, the Church Fathers, and Alexander of Aphrodisias attributed to Aristotle.”\footnote{Kraye, “*De mundo,*” 341.} In *De mundo* pseudo-Aristotle defines “universe” as “a system made up of heaven and earth and the elements which are contained in them. But the word is also used in another sense of the ordering and arrangement of all things, preserved by and through God” (391b9-11). Pseudo-Aristotle later advances this argument, stating that “All things are from God and were framed for us by God, and that no created thing is of itself sufficient for itself, deprived of the permanence which it derives from him…. and therefore “Inasmuch as it is the nature of the divine to penetrate to all things, the things also of our earth receive their share of it” (397b32-34, 14-16). Kraye argues that the God of *De mundo* is “much closer to Christian notions of divinity than the generally accepted interpretations of Aristotle's God…. Those who believed that
Aristotelianism was essentially compatible with Christianity were therefore inclined to support its authenticity.”176 In the late-sixteenth century, De mundo was still generally regarded as one of Aristotle’s works.177 While certainly not one of The Philosopher’s most well-known works, throughout the sixteenth century De mundo was available in Greek, in Latin and French translations, and also through various commentaries and paraphrases.178 The spurious work was also included in many Renaissance editions of Aristotle’s complete works, a testament to its perceived authenticity.179 During the sixteenth century, the number of editions of the Greek text of De mundo rivaled that of the Poetics, and Latin translations of De mundo were much more numerous than those of the Poetics.180 In the Speculum, Case twice suggests that De mundo is an authentic work. First, he encourages the reader to “carefully go through the book De Mundo, the tenth Book of the Ethics, and the final three of the Metaphysics, from which you will learn much about the eternity of the mind, the dignity of the sensible and blessed spirits, much about the majesty of the Primum Mobile, and much about the contemplation of all things in their First Cause” (1.11). Second, when Case discusses divine providence he refers to De mundo as one of

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176 Ibid., 342
177 Ibid., 341-48.
Aristotle’s books, in which The Philosopher writes “we should worship God with hands uplifted heavenward” (10.9).

Therefore, rather than being incompatible with Elizabethan Aristotelianism, the belief in divine providence is one of its central tenants. In another work, the Reflexus Speculi Moralis (1596), Case posits the following quaeestio: “Is there something divine in all fortune?” He then provides the orthodox Renaissance Aristotelian answer which is qualitatively the same as Hamlet’s profession of faith in act 5, scene 2: “in fortune there is something divine; with respect to human ignorance of its cause it is said to be fortuitous, but with respect to God who disposes all things it is said to be certain and necessary” (2.8). In the Speculum, Case first writes: “God cares for human affairs, since He is disposed towards Man: With His infinite mercy, whereby He loves all things; With His infinite wisdom, whereby He perfects all things; With His infinite providence, whereby he rules all things” (10.8). He then proves his assertion by testimony and authority:

As Aquinas defines it, the light of nature is right understanding whereby Man is guided by his own industry, not without God’s general influence. According to this light, the philosophers first learned that there is one Prime Mover, and that He is simple, infinite, true and unalterable, Who has disposed all things and by means has directed them to their proper ends. This is clear in Book VIII of the Physics and Book XII of the Metaphysics. I add to this that they, thus illuminated, also understood by force of reason that the greatest honor is to be paid to this eternal and immutable good. This also stands in Book I of the Ethics, where the Philosopher teaches that greater honor is owed to God than to the happy man. And likewise in the preceding chapter of the present Book [10], where he demonstrates that those living in accordance with mind and wisdom are dearest to God. (10.9)

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181 See Book 2, Chapter 8, Question 11 of John Case, Reflexus Speculi Moralis (1596). A hypertext text and translation by Peter L. P. Simpson. The City University of New York. Posted October 21, 2009. [http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/reflexus/]
Therefore, if Shakespeare did in fact consult Case’s *Speculum* when writing *Hamlet*, he would have assumed that *De mundo* was one of Aristotle’s works, he would have considered the belief in divine providence to be an essential component of Aristotelianism, and he would have been made aware of the other works in which Aristotle himself discusses the subject, should he have wished to pursue the subject further.\(^{182}\)

**Questions 24-26**

*Is the bold man correctly defined?*

*Is anger a spur to bravery?*

*What is magnanimity?*

By the end of act 4, Hamlet possesses what Aquinas would describe as right understanding whereby man is guided by his own industry, and Hamlet’s adventures at sea have provided further evidence of the King’s guilt. The settled Hamlet can therefore ask Horatio two revenge-related questions for which he already has the answer: “Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon? … Is’t not perfect conscience?” (5.2.62, 66). The action of the play can now work itself out to its tragic conclusion with its protagonist resolved to the inevitable fact that compulsory and just revenge must come at the expense of his life—that Hamlet must, as he prophesied earlier, be heaven’s “scourge and minister” (3.4.173). Yet F contains an interesting additional passage that follows Hamlet’s fifth-act assertion that revenge is just. Hamlet says, “But I am very sorry, good Horatio,/ That to Laertes I forgot myself,/ For by the image of my cause I see/ The portraiture of his. I’ll count his favours;/ But sure the bravery of his grief did put

me/ Into a towering passion” (F 5.2.75-80).\(^{183}\) In Q2 Shakespeare makes every effort to portray Laertes as rash, not brave, so within this well-established Aristotelian framework there is no place for Hamlet’s use of the word bravery, nor should he equate himself with Laertes. Yet Jenkins argues that “The absence of these lines from Q2 is difficult to explain except as an accidental omission.”\(^{184}\) The addition of these lines in F complements Shakespeare’s systematic removal of the Aristotelianism that shapes the ideas and actions of Q2, while at once providing a more sympathetic view of Hamlet’s rival.\(^{185}\)

In Q2 only, Osric, the courtier who is desperate to please and utterly lacking in sense and judgment, then proceeds to commend Laertes to Hamlet, saying, “believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak sellingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see” (5.2.92-97). Hamlet plays along and affirms Osric’s commendation by issuing a highly affected reply that is equally vacuous, ornamental, and fallacious—for throughout the second quarto Laertes has shown that he lacks excellence and Osric’s speaking to the contrary only provides further proof (II. 98-105). F omits both Osric’s commending Laertes and Hamlet’s reply. Regarding the characters of Hamlet and Laertes, the presence of these lines is necessary to Shakespeare’s intentions in Q2, just as the omission of these lines is necessary to his intentions in F.\(^{186}\) In both Q2 and F, Osric then asks, “You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is,” but only in Q2 does Hamlet respond, saying, “I dare not

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\(^{183}\) Regarding these lines, Thompson notes that editors “Edwards and Hibbard both argue that they are part of a later authorial revision” (Thompson, *Arden 3rd Hamlet*, 472n).

\(^{184}\) Jenkins in Ibid.

\(^{185}\) In his comparative study of Q2 and F, Shapiro argues that “With Fortinbras’s role now diminished to the point where he could no longer serve as Hamlet’s opposite, Shakespeare had to go back and turn Laertes into a worthier antagonist and ultimately Hamlet’s double” (Shapiro, *Year*, 313).

\(^{186}\) Thompson notes that editors “Edwards and Hibbard commend F’s omission of these lines, which they see as ‘over-elaboration’ and ‘unnecessary to the plot’” (Thompson, *Arden 3rd Hamlet*, 440n.)
confess that, lest I should compare him in excellence. But to know a man well were to know himself” (ll. 121-24). In order for Hamlet to know the quality of Laertes, he would have to match or compare to it by being rash and lacking excellence. In F, Shakespeare needed to cut Hamlet’s reply in order to accommodate and not contradict the additional lines in which Hamlet says he sees in Laertes the portraiture of his own image (F 5.2.77-78).

As Osric exits, a Lord enters and says to Hamlet: “The Queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play.” Hamlet responds: “She well instructs me” (ll. 184-86). The conversation between Hamlet and the Lord is present only in Q2 and the Queen’s request that Hamlet speak kindly to Laertes illuminates the ensuing conversation between the two youthful opponents. But first Horatio, eager to serve and fully confidence in his friend’s discernment, says to Hamlet, “If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit” (ll. 195-96). If Hamlet wishes to delay then Horatio will be the facilitator, for delaying and taking flight when reason commands are both offices of the brave man. Hamlet, however, is settled and therefore rejects Horatio’s offer to forestall. Echoing Matthew, Hamlet reiterates his belief in divine providence, saying, “There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (ll. 197-98).\(^\text{187}\) And as everyone gathers in the hall, Hamlet fulfills his mother’s request that he “use some gentle entertainment to Laertes.” Hamlet’s earlier comment that the Queen “well instructs me” must be read ironically, for the Queen has throughout the play demonstrated a lack of sense and judgment that renders her instruction meritless—her opinion carries no more weight than Osric’s. Hamlet therefore proceeds to issue a disingenuous apology to Laertes: “Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong,/ But pardon’t as you are a gentlemen./ This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,/ How I am punished with a

\(^{187}\) From the 1560 Geneva Bible, Matthew 10.29: “Are not two sparrows solde for a farthing, and one of them shal not fall on the ground without your Father?”
By capitalizing on the public assumption that the Prince has been mad, Hamlet absolves himself of responsibility for Polonius’ murder and perhaps for Ophelia’s suicide as well. Laertes, ever-obsessed with honor, replies with an equally disingenuous acceptance of Hamlet’s apology: “I am satisfied in nature…. But in my terms of honour/ I stand aloof and will no reconcilement/ Till by some elder masters of known honour/ I have a voice and precedent of peace/ To keep my name ungored” (ll. 221-27). Laertes’ disingenuousness is undeniable as he has recently and at length conspired with the King and presently aims to mortally wound Hamlet in the duel (4.7). In Q2 Hamlet’s apology is nothing more than the reluctant fulfillment of the Queen’s request, yet F’s omission of that request makes Hamlet’s apology appear to be the fulfillment of F’s additional passage in which Hamlet promises to reach out to brave Laertes and “count his favours” (F l. 78). Together the omission and addition make Hamlet’s apology seem both self-initiated and genuine, which serves to improve the character of Laertes. Shakespeare’s revisions to act 5 are therefore congruent with the general pattern of revision evident in the first four acts. Here in act 5 Shakespeare purposefully cut many of the passages that depict Laertes as the rash man. He also added a passage in which Hamlet describes Laertes as brave and considers him his equal. By removing much of the Aristotelian moral philosophy while also improving the character of Laertes, Shakespeare effectively created a second version of Hamlet. This version, the Folio text, lacks the philosophical sophistication of Q2 and more closely resembles a traditional revenge tragedy.

188 Editors and commentators generally agree that Hamlet is in this speech being disingenuous. See, for example, Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 449n.
Questions 27-29

Is death in war the object of the brave man?

Is suicide in no wise to be called brave?

In the death scene that follows the duel, Hamlet displays the characteristics of Aristotle’s magnanimous man. As Hamlet is struck by the poisoned tip and death approaches, he retains his contempt for Claudius, “thou incestuous, damned Dane!” (5.2.309); he bids adieu to the “Wretch Queen”; and he asks Horatio to “report me and my cause aright/ To the unsatisfied” (ll. 321-22). In his request to Horatio, Hamlet appropriately couples his honor and his cause because the former is predicated on the latter. Horatio, self-described as “more an antique Roman than a Dane,” would rather commit suicide than live on: “Here’s yet some liquor left.” (ll. 325-26). But Hamlet will have none of it, for as an Aristotelian and a Christian he holds the orthodox position against suicide. Case describes suicide as “the mark of a despairing man, not of a brave one,” an act that will “leave a shameful name to posterity” (3.7). Besides, Hamlet believes that Horatio still has a service to provide: “O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,/ Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!/ If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart/ Absent thee from felicity awhile/ And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain/ To tell my story” (ll. 328-32). Here Hamlet displays a concern for honor that is markedly different from that of Laertes and Fortinbras, who over-value external honors, and that of Horatio, whose Stoic self-

189  Horatio the Stoic approves of suicide, whereas Hamlet the Aristotelian does not. For the standard Elizabethan Aristotelian view of suicide, see Case: “Hence Aristotle concludes that suicide is the mark of a despairing man, not of a brave one. Brutus is deemed brave, but he despised. Cato was said to be great-minded, but he despaired. Antony was martial, but he was overcome by fear and despaired. Lucretia’s little dagger made her neither chaste nor brave. Why waste more words? To commit suicide is to murder nature herself, it is to offend the commonwealth, it is to violate the laws, it is to leave a shameful name to posterity, it is to rouse God (Who gave us life) to swift vengeance. Suicide is therefore not the mark of a brave man, but of a man laboring under extreme dread and pain” (3.7).

190  Hamlet explicitly acknowledges doctrinal Christian opposition to suicide, “Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d/ His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!” (1.2.131-32).
sufficiency minimizes the value of external honors. Hamlet rightly believes that he deserves honor and is rightly concerned that his reputation as a vicious, mentally deranged murderer will lead to his dishonor, which the magnanimous man, according to Aristotle, will disdain because “it will not be justly attached to him” (1124a12). Unfortunately, Hamlet is presently in the throes of death and must therefore leave to Horatio the business of restoring his honor.

Fortinbras arrives at Elsinore just as Hamlet shuffles off his mortal coil. He assumes control of Denmark and commands that Hamlet receive a proper military burial. “Let four captains/ Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,/ For he was likely, had he been put on,/ To have proved most royal. And for his passage/ The soldier’s music and the rite of war/ Speak loudly for him…. Go, bid the soldiers shoot.” (ll. 379-87). Hamlet’s military burial may seem inappropriate, especially given the Prince’s critical reputation as a modern intellectual who lacks the martial faculties of his father. However, Hamlet’s concern with honors and dishonors, and his military burial, are the final articulations of the Aristotelianism that dominates the second quarto text of Hamlet.191 Throughout the play and especially in the soliloquies, Hamlet is concerned with bravery and the attendant topics of cowardice, rashness, death, and honor. In Aristotle’s view, death in war is the object of the brave man (1115a25-b6). Case’s discussion of death stands as an excellent summary of Hamlet’s development. The play depicts the deliberative process by which Hamlet locates the virtue of bravery, “armed with which a man will freely and fearlessly undertake perils of death, and when he has undertaken them nobly see them through for equity’s sake” (3.6). Having seen his undertaking through, Hamlet has successfully rid Denmark of the incestuous, damned usurper. He has epitomized bravery by engaging in combat and dying in the

191 One should not discount the simple explanation that military burial is Fortinbras’ idea, as he is the character who most values military honor and would therefore consider military burial to be the highest expression of respect that he could pay to Hamlet.
service of his family and country. From an Aristotelian perspective, the nature of the fight itself matters little compared to the nature of the cause. Hamlet’s cause was just and therefore he was brave. Furthermore, he could not have had a better death, for as Case states, “although the brave man does not refuse danger to his life in other just and honorable causes, yet he seeks honor especially out of the steel and flame of battle; hence death in war (the most terrible and fearful of all deaths) is said to be his proper object” (3.6). Military burial is therefore the most appropriate and highest honor that can be paid to the brave Hamlet. And Horatio will see to it that Hamlet’s wounded name is mended and that the Prince’s bloody deeds will become most famous. For according to Case, fame, “the tongue and trumpet of immortality, attends on death in war, since, as says Seneca, this manner of death is possessed of more honor than danger, more glory than pain and suffering” (3.6).

Conclusion

Having identified the Aristotelianism that dominates Q2; having posited John Case’s Speculum as the source to which Shakespeare turned for his Aristotle; having demonstrated that it is this Aristotelian framework that Shakespeare sought to remove when revising Hamlet; it is prudent to return presently to the matter of composition and to clearly state my hypothesis regarding Shakespeare’s revisions to Hamlet. While Thomp/Taylor caution that “any new or sensational theory would very probably be simply wrong,” I should like to think that my analysis of Hamlet advances our understanding of the play and answers many of the questions related to Shakespeare’s process of composition and revision. The printed Q2 text gives every

192 Case summarizes his discussion of bravery using a tabula in which he states that death in war is the proper object of the brave man because it is: “Most difficult, because of the strife; Most fair, because of the decorum; Most honorable, because of the cause; and Most renowned, because of the reputation that attends upon martial men” (3.6).
193 Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 137.
indication of a being a tragedy framed around Aristotelian moral philosophy and based ultimately upon some form of Shakespeare’s autograph, which I shall call the Aristotelian manuscript. F gives every indication of being a more traditional revenge tragedy based upon some form of Shakespeare’s autograph written after the Aristotelian manuscript, which I shall call the Revenge manuscript. It is highly likely the printed title pages of both Q2 and F are correct in stating that the work is based on a true and perfect copy, as the former was likely based on the Aristotelian manuscript and the latter on the Revenge manuscript. The Aristotelian manuscript has much in it to, as Gabriel Harvey wrote, “please the wiser sort,” but perhaps, as Hamlet would say, “’twas caviare to the general” (2.2.374). When it came time for the acting company to create its own version of Hamlet, it is little wonder that Q1 more closely resembles the Revenge manuscript than it does the Aristotelian manuscript. My hypothesis fits comfortably within the prevailing views of modern editors regarding the composition of the plays generally: that Q2 represents Shakespeare’s first version of Hamlet, while F is a product of revisions to Q2, and that Q1 is a pirated text that most closely resembles F. My hypothesis is original in that until now scholars have not been able to explain the reasons for and nature of Shakespeare’s revisions to the Q2 text. Since the Aristotelianism in Q2 has gone almost completely unnoticed, scholars have consequently and naturally failed to see either its absence in F or its presence in

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194 While some editors accept Q2 as the basic copy-text for critical editions, others accept F; and conflated texts are not uncommon. My findings however show that Q2 and F are two distinct works, with fundamentally different meanings and intentions behind them. Both Q2 and F should be acceptable copy-texts, but they should be recognized as distinct works. Conflated texts, on the other hand, present an incoherent and contradictory rendering of Hamlet that is neither in the spirit of Q2 nor F.
195 Gabriel Harvey’s Marginalia, ed G.C. Moore Smith (1913), 232. Also in Jenkins, Arden 2nd Hamlet, 3-6, 573-74.
196 Edwards and Taylor both argue that Shakespeare was personally responsible for most of the cuts and additions that ultimately produced F, and that Q2 and F are distinct artistic works. Jenkins and Taylor both identify Q2 as an authoritative text that derives in large measure directly from Shakespeare’s foul papers, i.e., the Aristotelian manuscript; that F derives to a significant extent from another (manuscript) source; and that this source derives ultimately from foul papers,” i.e., the Revenge manuscript (Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 82-83). Jenkins views the Folio text as a debasement of the Aristotelian manuscript, while my findings agree with Taylor’s view that F and Q1 derive from the distinct Revenge manuscript. Taylor believes that “lying behind Q1 is the text lying behind the Folio text of 1623” (In Thompson, Arden 3rd Hamlet, 84).
the collective omitted material. Any hypothesis of Shakespeare’s revisions to *Hamlet* should first identify the nature of the material Shakespeare cut from Q2 and added to F; it should then explain how the revisions affect the play; and finally it might speculate as to the intentions behind Shakespeare’s revisions.

Existing scholarly hypotheses invariably rely on a theory of artistic imperfection and employ circular reasoning in the following manner: begin by assuming that Shakespeare must have omitted the lines with which he was dissatisfied; then provide a reason for Shakespeare’s dissatisfaction, e.g., that he must have deemed the lines and passages inferior, incoherent, or contrary to the dramatic requirements of the play; then read the omitted lines and passages as intellectually, poetically, or dramatically inferior; finally, conclude that these lines warranted being cut. According to Hankins, most twentieth-century critics, such as Lewis, Stoll, Robertson, and Eliot, believe that revisions to Q2 were made necessary by “the basic incongruity between the character of Hamlet as Shakespeare conceived him and the actions which the plot requires him to perform, an incongruity which the dramatist could not overcome.”197 More recent hypotheses regarding Shakespeare’s revisions to *Hamlet* have not substantively moved beyond the theory of artistic imperfection.

In his explanation of Shakespeare’s revisions, Edwards argues first that Shakespeare set out in *Hamlet* to create a protagonist “who is a tangle of conflicting tendencies;” second, in creating Hamlet “Shakespeare would have written a lot of tentative material;” third, “in the end some of this material would seem redundant or wrong, and not to belong anywhere;”198 fourth, the foul papers behind Q2 therefore “contained a certain amount of material which Shakespeare

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had decided he didn’t want;” and fifth, that in these foul papers Shakespeare had indicated that he wished certain lines to be cut, but the “cancellation marks he used were not observed or not understood” by the compositor.\textsuperscript{199} Since not a single manuscript of any of Shakespeare’s plays and poems has survived, Edwards’ hypothesis is unsatisfactory in the first place because the cancellation marks on Shakespeare’s foul papers have been imagined by Edwards, as a means of explaining how these so-called unsatisfactory lines managed to find their way into Q2. To preserve the theory of artistic imperfection without robbing Shakespeare of his genius, the unfortunate compositor falls on his sword and takes responsibility for the presence of the so-called inferior material in Q2. Wells/Taylor describe Edwards’ hypothesis as “unsatisfactory,” but they do concede that it “at least represents an advance over previous studies in recognizing the artistic logic behind several major Folio variants, and in accepting that only Shakespeare could have been responsible for that revision.”\textsuperscript{200} One might question how much of an advance Edwards’ hypothesis represents; it simply retains the theory of artistic imperfection to explain the cuts, and it adds the imaginative idea that the compositor failed to execute Shakespeare’s instructions. Edwards is however right to argue, as all present-day editors do, that Shakespeare’s cuts to Q2 are intentional; but he and they cannot identify the specific intentions behind the cuts Shakespeare made. Edwards is also right to argue Shakespeare was directly responsible for the differences between Q2 and F. In order to remove the Aristotelianism from Q2, one must first recognize the Aristotelian lines and passages. The precise, systematic, and purposeful adjustments to specific lines and passages suggest the Aristotelianism was removed from the play by the same person who inserted it into the play in the first place, i.e., Shakespeare himself.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 19.
Q1, on the other hand, is a demonstration of what happens when someone other than Shakespeare gets hold of *Hamlet* and revises it.

Shapiro provides what he considers to be “The most plausible and economical reconstruction of what happened.” He argues in late 1599 Shakespeare completed the first version of *Hamlet*, the manuscript behind Q2. In writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare was, according to Shapiro, “letting the writing take him where it would.” Shakespeare held back this first version of the play, which he soon “revised extensively as he wrote out the play again in a fresh copy.” Shapiro believes Shakespeare also set to revising *Hamlet* without knowing “in advance what kinds of changes he would make,” and was in this second version “still letting the work follow its own course.” This revised version, i.e., the manuscript behind F, was completed by the winter of 1600, at which time Shakespeare made it available to the acting company.201 For performance, an abridged version, what would become Q1, was still required. Shapiro writes, “Whether Shakespeare abridged it himself, left it to others, or collaborated in the effort, we do not know.”202 In arguing that Shakespeare first completed Q2, then revised it to create F, which was then used by the acting company to create Q1, Shapiro follows the most widely accepted chronology of composition, although his proposed dates of composition are a bit earlier than most. However, there is no way of showing that in Q2 and F Shakespeare let the writing take him where it would. If Shakespeare did not have definite intentions when he began writing Q2, then it is rather extraordinary that he should have created so many lucid, doctrinal articulations of Aristotelianism, spread evenly throughout the play and spoken exclusively by the protagonist. It is also extraordinary that Shakespeare’s innovations—namely the academic aspect; a refashioned, university-educated Hamlet, and the newly created characters of Laertes, Fortinbras,

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201 Shapiro, *Year*, 304-305.
202 Ibid., 316.
and Horatio—all fit perfectly into the Aristotelian framework. And if Shakespeare did not approach the process of revision with definite intentions, it is then especially extraordinary that almost all of his revisions appear systematic and purposeful, as the cuts eliminate the lines that clearly articulate Aristotelian moral philosophy, while the additions improve the character of Laertes.

Shapiro’s theory that Shakespeare wrote both versions of *Hamlet* without first having definite intentions appears to be predicated on his reading of Hamlet’s soliloquy in act 4, scene 4, which he argues “left the resolution of the play incoherent and had broken too radically from the conventions of the revenge plot.” Here Shapiro is simply following the theory of artistic imperfection: the final soliloquy creates intractable dramatic problems, so “Shakespeare now had to choose between the integrity of his character and his plot, and he chose plot. Hamlet’s climactic soliloquy had to be cut.” According to Shapiro, by cutting the final soliloquy Shakespeare created a Hamlet who is “no longer adrift, no longer finds himself in a world where action feels arbitrary and meaningless.”

In short, the hypotheses of Edwards and Shapiro are both variations on the theory of artistic imperfection. Whereas Edwards depends upon the existence of imagined cancellation marks, Shapiro depends upon the notion that Shakespeare created and revised without purpose. Neither Edwards nor Shapiro clearly identify the nature of the collective omitted material, which should be a prerequisite to speculating about the intentions behind Shakespeare’s revisions. I have shown that almost all of the passages cut from Q2 establish, articulate, and reinforce the

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203 Ibid., 312.
204 Ibid., 314. Shapiro’s belief that Hamlet has recognized the futility of action is similar to Nietzsche’s Dionysian reading of Hamlet.
play’s Aristotelianism. Shakespeare systematically revised Q2 by removing or abridging most of Hamlet’s discourses that employ Aristotelian principles, and by removing lines, passages, and whole scenes that in explicitly Aristotelian terms depict both Laertes and Fortinbras as rash, bold, and seemingly-brave men. Shakespeare’s additions to the play were limited to elaborations on Hamlet’s melancholy, a topical reference to the child actors of London, and, most importantly, the improvement of Laertes and Fortinbras. Therefore Shakespeare’s revisions reflect his intention to recast *Hamlet* as a traditional revenge tragedy, which required that he remove from the play as much Aristotelianism as was practicable.

We shall never know why Shakespeare no longer wished his *Hamlet* to be a discourse on Aristotelian moral philosophy in which genuine bravery is distinguished from specious bravery. But given Shakespeare’s connection to the Southampton circle, in which the politically and militarily ambitious Essex featured prominently, it is not inconceivable that Shakespeare hoped that Q2 *Hamlet* would have some real world influence. Just as Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* provided instruction to Southampton, perhaps *Hamlet* was written to instruct, or rather warn, Essex. Shakespeare probably began work on *Hamlet* in late 1599 or early 1600, while Essex was confined to York House following a failed and disgraceful military campaign in Ireland—a campaign not unlike Fortinbras’ campaign against the Poles. And like Laertes, Essex’s hot-headedness and immoderate attitude to social and political honor had often led to embarrassing displays at court. While under house arrest the thought of rebellion took hold in Essex’s mind. He acted quickly after his release in August 1600, but by February 1601 the rebellion had failed and Essex was dead. Perhaps it was after these events of early 1601 that Shakespeare returned to *Hamlet* and began his revisions. With Essex gone and Southampton in the Tower, there was no
longer any need for a didactic play setting genuine bravery and proper concern for honor against their mighty and fatal opposites.

4

Aristotelian Preconditions of Virtue in *Troilus and Cressida*

Shortly after completing his revisions to *Hamlet*, Shakespeare began work on *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), an intellectual satire on the themes of love and war.\(^{205}\) Like *Hamlet*, the textual history of *Troilus and Cressida* is highly problematic. The play was registered on 7 February 1603, but a quarto edition was not published until 1609. The quarto itself is not without problems, for it was published “in two states with two different title-pages and front matter, one advertising the play as having been acted by the King’s Majesty’s servants (Shakespeare’s acting company) at their public theatre, the Globe, the other insisting that the play was never acted.”\(^{206}\) An edition of the play also appears in Shakespeare’s complete works, the 1623 Folio, but there it is not listed in the table of contents, it lacks pagination, and it is awkwardly situated between the histories and the tragedies.\(^{207}\) Unlike the quarto and Folio versions of *Hamlet*, the quarto and Folio versions of *Troilus and Cressida* are not qualitatively different.\(^{208}\)

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\(^{205}\) Barton notes that the play is “Argumentative and intensely verbal, almost self-consciously intellectual” (Barton, *Riverside*, 481).


The historian A.L. Rowse argues *Troilus and Cressida* captures the mood of turn-of-the-century Elizabethan England. The optimism and patriotism of the 1580s and 1590s that Shakespeare brilliantly captured in his history plays had, by the early 1600s, run its course. Rowse observes

The general mood in these years was one of disenchantment, of war-weariness and longing for it to come to an end, no desire for any further futile heroics, after the sputtering out of the brightest luminary in treason. That had not put an end to the feuding and faction-fighting, the bitter intrigues at Court, sparring for position over succession, for favor with the successor…. It was hardly likely that the most sensitive intuition at work in that age would fail to register all this: it is the mood of the play. And more, it is its subject. Put all the faction-fighting of the last years, the war of which the heroic phase was long past, petering out in discontent, general malaise and disease, the romantic cult of love and love-poetry, put it all into the remote past of the Trojan war and it was possible to pass savage comment on the follies of the time they were passing through. ‘A plague on both your houses’ is the message of the play.  

In order to pass savage comment on the Greeks and the Trojans, Shakespeare needed to first articulate a standard of conduct by which the two sides might be judged. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare first establishes a standard of conduct based upon the traditional medieval view of degree and order, which in large part is indebted to Aristotelianism. Ulysses’ speech on degree and order is Shakespeare’s most explicit and comprehensive articulation and endorsement of the medieval worldview. *Troilus and Cressida* also contains three highly specialized discourses on Aristotle’s preconditions of virtue: voluntary action, election, and deliberation. These selected passages, rather than the play as a whole, shall be the focus of this chapter.

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Question 1

What is the medieval worldview?

Early on, in act 1, scene 3, Ulysses, whom Haydn describes as the “sturdy moral teacher,” 210 establishes the intellectual and moral framework of the play through his articulation of the traditional medieval worldview. Spencer describes Ulysses as the character “who acts throughout as the voice of common sense and practical wisdom, learns that there is nothing he can do which will enforce the standards of order and perseverance which he so eloquently describes.” 211 Rowse observes the just course of action “is always expressed or implied by Ulysses,” and he argues “Of all Shakespeare’s characters Ulysses is the one who most completely expresses his creator’s views: indeed he hardly speaks anything else.” 212 Ulysses first describes a just and well-ordered world:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order.
In noble eminence enthroned and sphere
Amidst the other, whose med’cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of the planets evil
And posts, like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad. (1.3.85-94)

He next describes the disastrous cosmological, earthly, and social consequences that invariably follow the disruption of order:

210 Haydn, Counter-Renaissance, 611.
212 Rowse, Shakespeare, 341-42.
But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixure! O, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in school and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogeneity and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, scepters, laurels,
But by degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead. (1.3.94-115)²¹³

The disruption and violation of order has moral consequences, because the moral order of the
world is inextricably linked to the cosmological order. Without degree and order:

Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,

²¹³ Possible sources include homilies: “Concerning Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates” and “Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion.” Bevington notes that the “conception of an ordered cosmos interconnected
with physical and moral order in life on earth goes back to Pythagoras, the Platonists and the Stoics” (Bevington,
Troilus, 358, 1.3.78-108 LN). Absent from Bevington’s list of ancient philosophers is Aristotle, to whom much is
owed. Aristotle’s classifications—his concept of ordering and ranking—provided the basis for the Scholastic Scala
Naturae; and the medieval concept of the Great Chain of Being is a synthesis of the Scala Naturae, the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian cosmology, and Christian theology.
Between whose endless jar justice resides,\(^{214}\)
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey
And last eat up himself. (1.3.85-124)

Ulysses’ warning is clear: through the violation of degree and order a just society descends into, and is ultimately consumed by, bestial oblivion. Ulysses employs the orthodox Aristotelian definition of justice as a mean between defective and excessive extremes (ll. 116-17). When force, rather than reason, determines right from wrong, justice is lost. An absence of justice implies the absence of reason in accord with virtue, for according to Aristotle the special human function is “activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason,” which distinguishes man from beast; therefore, when man does not observe degree and order as prescribed by reason, “everything includes itself in power./ Power into will, will into appetite;/ And appetite, an universal wolf;/ So doubly seconded with will and power,/ Must make perforce an universal prey/ And last eat up himself” (Nicomachean Ethics 1098a7 and Troilus ll. 119-24). Ulysses’ encomium of degree and order has moved from the heavens to the earth as he has warns of the

\(^{214}\) Aristotle writes, “Justice is a mean, not as other virtues are, but because it is about an intermediate condition, whereas injustice is about the extremes” (1134a1-2). On the intermediate condition: “the intermediate condition relevant to justice is determined by the way in which just actions and states of affair are intermediate and equal—between suffering undue harm for another’s benefit and gaining undue benefit by another’s harm. In the case of the other virtues, the property of being intermediate belongs to the state of the virtuous person, not to the corresponding activities. In the case of justice, this property belongs to the activities” (Irwin, Aristotle’s Ethics, 232).
disastrous consequences of disorder on society generally. He then moves from the general to the particular, arguing that it is this very disruption that presently plagues the Greek camp.215

And this neglection of degree it is
That by a pace goes backward in a purpose
It hath to climb. The general’s disdained
By him one step below, he by the next,
That next by him beneath; so every step,
Examined by the first pace that is sick
Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
Of pale and bloodless emulation.
And ‘tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,
Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,
Troy in our weakness lives, not in her strength. (1.3.127-37)

The venerable Nestor agrees that the Greeks could be undone by personal rivalries within the camp: “Most wisely hath Ulysses discovered/ The fever whereof all our power is sick” (1.3.138-39). Agamemnon then asks Ulysses to identify the remedy of the sickness. Ulysses blames the sickness on the insolent insubordination of Achilles and his Patroclus (1.3.142-84). The Trojan messenger Aeneas then arrives in the Greek camp to inform the Greeks that Hector wishes to challenge the best Greek warrior and do battle “Midway between your tents and walls of Troy” (1.3.278).

Questions 2-4

What is election?

What is a voluntary act?

What is an involuntary act?

215 Spencer observes, “what we see on the stage is a complete violation of the whole traditional belief. Instead of order we have anarchy, instead of degree there is violent personal rivalry” (Spencer, Nature of Man, 112).
As all others exit, Ulysses and Nestor are left to discuss who among the Greeks shall face Hector in battle. Thus begins the deliberative process by which Ulysses and Nestor choose a champion to face Hector. Ulysses sees Hector’s challenge as an opportunity to perhaps solve the Achilles problem and thereby restore degree and order: “Blunt wedges rive hard knots; the seeded pride/ That hath to this maturity blown up/ In rank Achilles must or now be cropped/ Or, shedding, breed a nursery of like evil/ To overbulk us all…. This challenge that the gallant Hector sends,/ However it is spread in general name,/ Relates in purpose only to Achilles” (1.3.316-24). Nestor concurs, hoping that Achilles “will with great speed of judgement,/ Ay, with celerity, find Hector’s purpose/ Pointing on him” (1.3.330-32). Because Nestor believes that Achilles is the obvious choice to face Hector, he asks, “Who may you else oppose,/ That can from Hector bring his honour off,/ If not Achilles?” (1.3.334-36). Believing that the deliberations have therefore come to an end, Nestor uses explicitly Aristotelian language to summarize the proceedings:

It is suppos'd
He that meets Hector issues from our choice;
And choice, being mutual act of all our souls,
Makes merit her election and doth boil,
As ’twere from forth us all, a man distilled
Out of our virtues.216 (1.3.347-52)

Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Aristotelianism is evident in Nestor’s use of words such as choice, merit, election, soul, and virtue, which the character employs to describe the voluntary nature of

216 The following lines were added in the 1623 Folio edition: “Which entertained, limbs are his instruments,/ In no less working than are swords and bows/ Directive by the limbs.” Elton notes that these lines accord with Aristotle’s definition of the voluntary as “that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself” (1111a 23-24). (Elton, “Ethics and Troilus and Cressida,” 332-33).
the deliberative process by which the Greeks will choose a man to fight Hector. Election, i.e., choice, is described by Case as “a free and self-determined activity… the approval of the means which seems best for achieving an end, accomplished by the means of a preceding deliberation. And albeit it is wholly voluntary, the voluntary is something with a broader scope than is election” (3.2). In describing choice as a “mutual act of all our souls,” Nestor follows the standard Aristotelian position that “There are three capacities in the soul—sense perception, understanding, desire—that control action and truth” (1139a18-19). Nestor and Ulysses will base their choice on “merit,” which is determined through the capacity of understanding, which itself is achieved through reason—the special human function. The result will be the choice of a man to fight Hector, and because choice is the result of activity of the soul in accord with reason, Nestor concludes that the chosen man is “distilled out of our virtues.” Here Nestor has done no more than recite the standard Aristotelian positions that (a) choice is a particular kind of voluntary action in which desire is congruent with understanding, and that (b) desire and understanding originate in man. Elton, however, reads Nestor’s speech as an “upside-down summary” of Aristotle, one which “garblingly inverts” Aristotle’s position; Elton argues that Aristotle believes “choice’s action is in origin a man, whereas Nestor speaks of its result as a man.”217 Such a reading is untenable, for Nestor follows rather than inverts the Aristotelian position when he explicitly states that the Greeks’ choice originates in man: choice, Nestor says, is an “act of all our souls” that issues “from forth us all.” Nestor does also speak of man as the result of choice, but that is only because the object of choice is, in this particular instance, a man who shall fight Hector. Here Shakespeare has followed the articulated the standard Aristotelian conceptions, but he has also made the relationship between “choice” and “man” more complex in that choice has both its origin in man, i.e. Nestor and Ulysses, and its result is a man, i.e.,

Achilles or perhaps another warrior. Against Nestor’s conclusion, Ulysses recommends that the Greeks choose Ajax instead of Achilles, for “If the dull brainless Ajax come safe off,/ We’ll dress him up in voices; if he fail,/ Yet go we under our opinion still/ That we have better men. But, hit or miss,/ Our project’s life this shape of sense assumes:/ Ajax employed plucks down Achilles’ plumes” (1.3.382-7). Nestor accepts Ulysses’ strategy because if Ajax is successful in battle, then Hector will be defeated and Achilles’ arrogance will be put in check. If Ajax is unsuccessful, then the Greeks still have Achilles in reserve.

In act 2, scene 1, Shakespeare uses a conversation between Ajax, Thersites, Achilles, and Patroclus to make a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary action.

ACHILLES: What’s the quarrel?
AJAX: I bade the vile owl go learn me the tenor of the proclamation, and he rails upon me.
THERSITES: I serve thee not.
AJAX: Well, go to, go to.
THERSITES: I serve here voluntary.
ACHILLES: Your last service was sufferance,218 ’twas not voluntary; no man is beaten voluntary. Ajax was here the voluntary, and you as under an impress. (2.1.87-95)

Here, again, Shakespeare’s characters articulate standard Aristotelian definitions. Case defines an involuntary act as one “whose extrinsic first principle is such that the doer or sufferer cannot withstand it by resisting” (3.1). Achilles argues that Thersites’ service was involuntary because he was beaten by Ajax, and “no man is beaten voluntary.” When Case asks if any one voluntarily suffers an injury, his answer is unequivocal: “As if there is any mortal who gladly and cheerfully suffers an injury!” (5.9). Achilles’ claim that Thersites has involuntarily endured an injury imposed upon him follows Case’s definition of an injury as “nothing else than the voluntary and

218 Barton glosses sufferance as “the endurance of something imposed (with play on the sense ‘suffering pain’)” (Barton, Riverside, 494, 95n.).
malicious harming of someone… a loss which someone is said to be inflicting of his own free will… and which the sufferer is also said to be receiving against his will…. an injury is a voluntary harming with respect to him who does the inflicting, but with respect to the sufferer it is a violent visitation of loss and, as it were, an assault…. so it is contrary to human will that it suffer the violence and onslaught of injury” (5.9). Thersites’ “sufferance” cannot be voluntary, for a voluntary act is, according to Case, “that which is conceived by the intellect and brought to completion by the government of the will, or, if you please, which has the will itself for its first principle and cause” (3.1). Achilles therefore correctly concludes that “Ajax was here the voluntary,” for it is Ajax who, of his own free will, inflicted injury upon Thersites, who involuntarily suffered the injury.

Questions 5-8

What is election?

Is election will, anger, or desire?

Is there a distinction between election and deliberation?

Is every voluntary act elective?

In act 2, scene 2, the setting for ethical deliberations shifts from the Greek camp to the Trojan palace. King Priam, the magnanimous Hector, the youthful Troilus and Paris, and the priestly son Helenus discuss what should be done with Helen—the source of the conflict between the Greeks and Trojans. Their entire discussion is couched in Aristotelian language. King Priam first asks for Hector’s opinion on the matter. Hector recommends that the Trojans “Let Helen go./ Since the first sword was drawn about the question,/ Every tithe soul ’mongst many thousand dismes/ Hath been as dear as Helen – I mean, of ours./ If we have lost so many tenths
of ours/ To guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us/ (Had it our name) the value of one ten./ What merit’s in that reason which denies/ The yielding of her up?” (2.2.17-24). Here Hector is the voice of reason: first, the Trojans unjustly possess Helen; and second, the value of possessing Helen is outweighed by the value of those Trojans who have been lost in the effort to retain her. Troilus provides an objection to Hector’s reliance upon reason and his valuation of Helen: “Will you with counters sum/ The past-proportion of his infinite/ And buckle in a waist most fathomless/ With spans and inches so diminutive/ As fears and reasons? Fie, for godly shame!” (2.2.28-32). Helenus, who sides with Hector, then provides the response, identifying the deficiency in Troilus’ position: “No marvel though you bite so sharp at reasons,/ You are so empty of them. Should not our father/ Bear the great sway of his affairs with reason./ Because your speech hath none that tell him so?” (2.2.33-36). In his second objection, Troilus continues his attack against reason: “You are for dreams and slumbers, brother priest;/ You fur your gloves with reason. Here are your reasons:/ You know an enemy intends you harm;/ You know a sword employed is perilous,/ And reason flies the object of all harm…./ Nay, if we talk of reason,/ Let’s shut our gates and sleep. Manhood and honour/ Should have hare hearts, would they but fat their thoughts/ With this crammed reason; reason and respect/ Make livers pale and lustihood deject” (2.2.37-50). Shakespeare has up to this point gone to great lengths to clearly establish the youthful Troilus’ opposition to reason. The frustrated Hector replies with a terse reiteration of his previous argument related to valuation: “Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost/ The holding” (2.2.51-52). Yet Troilus persists and shifts his line of argumentation from opposition to reason to advocacy of relativism, asking, “What’s aught but as ’tis valued?” (2.2.53), to which Hector responds:
But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer. 'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the god;
And the will dotes that is inclinable
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of th'affected merit. (2.2.53-60)

Against Troilus’ relativistic conception of value, Hector has argued that value is determined not simply by an individual’s arbitrary preference or desire, but rather by the demonstrable, intrinsic merit of the object itself. He argues that the will is ill-affected when it “dotes”, i.e., speaks irrationally; and that it speaks irrationally when it is favorably disposed to a thing that lacks demonstrable merit. Hector’s remarks accord with Case’s assertion that “the quality of every action is readily perceived, whether it arises from a well-affected or ill-affected will” (3.1).

Whereas the well-affected will speaks rationally, Troilus’ ill-affected will speaks irrationally, and Shakespeare has gone to great lengths to emphasize Troilus’ strong opposition to reason.

Troilus responds to Hector’s argument by attempting to employ Aristotelian moral philosophy in a hypothetical situation in which he marries:

I take today a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will,
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
Two traded pilots ’twixt the dangerous shores
Of will and judgement. How may I avoid,
Although my will distaste what it elected,

219 Here read “will” as the faculty of the mind by which we desire, the opposite of rational faculty, i.e., judgement.
The wife I chose? There can be no evasion
To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour. (2.2.25-68)

In the first two lines, in which he says “my election is led on in the conduct of my will,” the youthful Troilus correctly follows Aristotle, whom Case quotes when he defines the will as “the progenitor and cause of its own actions” (3.5). Election, according to Case, is “a certain activity of the will itself” (3.2). Elton, however, argues Troilus inverts “the relation of ‘election’ and ‘will’” by subjugating the former to the latter. Elton argues, “Aristotelian commentators insisted on the distinctive superiority of election (or discriminating, rational choice) to will.”

To support his claim that Aristotelians believed that election is superior to will, Elton cites Case, who, in the Speculum, asks if election is will, and determines that it is not. But Case’s determination does not in fact support Elton’s argument, as Case simply states that election and will are not the same—he does not claim that election is superior to will. In fact, the relationship between election and the will is twice made clear when Case defines election as “a certain activity of the will itself” and “an act of the will” (3.2-3). Therefore, Troilus’ claim that his election is led on by his will is perfectly compatible with Case’s view, and not an inversion of the Aristotelian view, as Elton suggests. The problems that arise from Elton’s reading of the first two lines of Troilus’ speech are exacerbated when he argues, “If Troilus’s ‘election is led on’ by his will… he lacks the reasoned deliberation Aristotelians attributed to ‘election,’” However, Aristotelians such as Case did not attribute reasoned deliberation to election. To the contrary, Case notes “a certain distinction arises between [election and deliberation], since election is an act of the will, but deliberation an act of the mind; election is certain, consultation doubtful;

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221 Elton, “Ethics and Troilus and Cressida,” 335.
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
election follows counsel, consultation transpires before election” (3.3). Case expands upon the distinction as he describes election as “the approval of the means which seems best for achieving an end, accomplished by the means of a preceding deliberation”; and whereas election is “inchoative in the mind but perfective in the will, so by contrast deliberation is inchoative in the will but perfective in the mind” (3.2-3). Elton is therefore incorrect in arguing that Aristotelians attributed reasoned deliberation to election. Instead, Aristotelians attributed deliberation to the mind and defined it as an activity that precedes election, which itself is an activity of the will that follows deliberation.

While Troilus correctly follows Aristotle in describing election as an act of the will, his deviation from the standard Aristotelian positions soon becomes clear. Case states the will may be either “subject to reason, whose object is the true good” or “overcome by the senses, whose object is called an apparent and specious good” (3.4). Troilus admits the latter when he describes his will as being “enkindled by mine eyes and ears,” i.e., overcome by the senses and therefore not subject to reason. In such a state Troilus will invariably choose a specious good rather than a true good. In this way Troilus has strayed from Aristotle’s position regarding choice or decision: “If, then, the decision is excellent, the reason must be true and the desire correct, so that what reason asserts is what desire pursues” (1139a23-26). Troilus has voiced his opposition to reason; and he has admitted that his will is overcome by senses; therefore, Troilus is choosing a specious good due to the fact that his desire pursues that which is contrary to what reason asserts. In the next two lines, Troilus expands upon his claim that his choice is an act of the will, which in this instance is, contrary to Aristotle, guided not by reason but rather by his senses. Having admitted that his eyes and ears have overcome his will, Troilus describes these senses as “Two traded
pilots ’twixt the dangerous shores/ Of will and judgement.” Shakespeare’s nautical metaphor may derive from Case, who argues that the will (not the senses, as Troilus claims), “seated as it were on the quarterdeck, steers us into harbor if it is righteous; otherwise, it steers towards ruination and destruction” (3.1). Troilus has stated that his will is overcome by the senses, and Case argues that this invariably leads to ruin and destruction; therefore, Case would also argue that Troilus’ choice arises from an ill-affected will. Troilus then asks, “How may I avoid, / Although my will distaste what it elected,/ The wife I chose? There can be no evasion/ To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour” (2.2.65-68). By admitting that he might come to regret his choice—a specious good based on desire rather than reason—Troilus has recognized the deficiency in his own argument. Despite his opposition to reason, through his attempt to employ Aristotelian moral philosophy the youthful Troilus has unintentionally arrived at the same conclusion as Hector, the advocate of reason. Acknowledging this, Troilus then argues that even if his will did come to regret the choice and recognize it as a specious good, he could not go back on his decision without sacrificing his honor.

Questions 9-10

Is a youth a fit student of moral philosophy?

Is moral law correctly defined into two species?

Predictably, the youthful Paris joins the debate on the side of Troilus, exclaiming, “Were I alone to pass the difficulties/ And had as ample power as I have will, Paris should ne’er retract

225 Here Shakespeare uses “will” as a monosyllabic synonym of desire or passion, which is juxtaposed with the antonymous judgement, i.e., reason.
226 Hector does indeed make this very argument in the passage preceding Troilus’ speech, when he said, “the will dotes that is inclinable/ To what infectiously itself affects/ Without some image of th’affected merit” (2.2.53-60).
227 Here again we have a character who, contra Elton’s reading, recognizes the superiority of the will over election, for Troilus gives the will agency in suggesting that his will could come to “distaste what it elected.”
what he hath done/ Nor faint in the pursuit” (2.2.139-42). Priam’s reply establishes the deficiency of Paris’ argument: “Paris, you speak/ Like one besotted on your sweet delights./ You have the honey still, but these the gall; So to be valiant is no praise at all” (2.2.142-45). Hector argues that despite their use of fine words, Troilus and Paris’ arguments for keeping Helen are without merit:

Paris and Troilus, you have both said well
And on the cause and question now in hand
Have glozed – but superficially, not much
Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
Unfit to hear moral philosophy.
The reasons you allege do more conduce
To the hot passion of distempered blood
Than to make up a free determination
'Twixt right and wrong; for pleasure and revenge
Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice
Of any true decision. (2.2.163-73)

Acknowledging the deficiencies in the youths’ argument, Hector does admit Troilus and Paris “Have glozed – but superficially, not much/ Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought/ Unfit to hear moral philosophy” (2.2.165-67). Hector’s reference to Aristotle is anachronistic yet accurate, for in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that an immature youth “tends to follow his feelings,” as opposed to “those who accord with reason in forming their desires and in their actions” (1095a3-11). John Case, the moral educator of young Elizabethan men, reluctantly agrees with Aristotle and acknowledges that maturity is a prerequisite for the study of the moral sciences, for “within the circle of so many years a man can suppress his passions, acquire experience, perfect his intellect, and get a correct grip on the government of reason and virtue”
Hector’s criticism of Troilus and Paris is therefore the standard Aristotelian criticism that young men cannot suppress their passions and do not have the correct grip on the government of reason and virtue. Hector then proceeds to expand upon this point. Troilus and Paris have argued against returning Helen, but Hector insists “The reasons you allege do more conduce/ To the hot passion of distempered blood/ Than to make up a free determination/ ’Twixt right and wrong.” Hector states that the youths’ passions have taken the place of deliberation, and without deliberation an act may be voluntary but it is not a “free determination”, i.e., election. Case writes, “every voluntary act is not an act of election, unless deliberation has preceded it,” and Hector’s use of the phrase “free determination” follows Case’s definition of election as “a free and self-determined activity” (3.2). Having shown that desire prevents one from making a free determination between right and wrong, Hector further develops his argument by stating that anger and desire, the two motivating forces behind Troilus and Paris’ position, are anathema to election: “for pleasure and revenge/ Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice/ Of any true decision.” Case makes these very distinctions in stating that election, i.e., Hector’s “true decision,” “is also denied to be either anger or desire, since beasts ungoverned by election and counsel often seethe with those passions. Furthermore, since nothing is more hostile to election than desire, nothing more repugnant to counsel than anger and rashness, it would be absurd to call election either anger or desire” (3.2).

Having employed Aristotelian moral philosophy to show that the arguments of Troilus and Paris are fallacious and typical of youth, Hector then argues that keeping Helen is an injustice. Hector bases his argument upon moral law—both natural and civil. He first appeals to natural law generally, arguing that “Nature craves/ All dues be rende red to their owners. Now,/ What nearer debt in all humanity/ Than wife is to the husband?” (2.2.173-76). He then appeals to
civil law generally, which, when necessary, supplements and enforces natural law: “If this law/
Of nature be corrupted through affection./ And that great minds, of partial indulgence/ To their
benumbed wills, resist the same./ There is a law in each well-ordered nation/ To curb those
raging appetites that are/ Most disobedient and refractory” (2.2.177-82). Hector’s definitions of
natural and civil (legal) law, and his understanding of the relationship between the two, are
Aristotelian. Case writes, “Natural law is defined by the Philosopher as that which is valid
everywhere and among all peoples…. Therefore it is to be understood among philosophers that
right possesses its force prior to the establishment of law and custom, and that its force derives
from law and custom: in the first way it is simply and absolutely called natural, in the second
way it is called legal” (5.7). Hector then moves from the general to the particular, arguing that “If
Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,/ As it is known she is, these moral laws/ Of nature and of
nations speak aloud/ To have her back returned.” Through appeals to natural and civil law,
Hector has shown that the position of Troilus and Paris is unjust, and “Thus to persist/ In doing
wrong extenuates not wrong,/ But makes it much more heavy. Hector’s opinion/ Is this in way of
truth” (2.2.173-89).

Hector’s argument against keeping Helen is based upon the unassailable merits of moral
law. And like the Greek Ulysses’ advocacy for degree and order, the Trojan Hector’s appeal to
natural and moral law appears true and decisive—both he and Ulysses recognize and articulate
just standards of conduct and courses of action. Rowse sees the respective speeches of Ulysses
and Hector as evidence that

Shakespeare retained a conviction of moral law, imbibed in youth and which his
dubious experience had not undermined, but rather fortified. He retained his
belief in sense and reason, in prudence and loyalty, in accepting the obligations of
society. Therefore his comment was not merely a destructive one on people’s
criminal folly, but a constructive one, pointing out the sensible, reasonable course it was always possible to follow.\textsuperscript{228}

It is therefore all the more disappointing that Hector, the eloquent advocate of reason and moral law, should then in defiance of reason and justice inexplicably reverse his position and side with Troilus and Paris, saying “yet ne’ertheless,/ My sprightly brethren, I propend to you/ In resolution to keep Helen still;/ For ’tis a cause that hath no mean dependence/ Upon our joint and several dignities” (2.2.189-93). This reversal speaks to what Rowse considers to be the general purpose of the play: to depict war as “mere folly, made and kept going by idiots on both sides.”\textsuperscript{229} Through a sophisticated articulation of Aristotle’s preconditions of virtue, Shakespeare effectively highlights what Spencer describes as “the difference between man as he ought to be and man as he is. He ought to be part of an ordered state in an ordered universe; he ought to act according to reason and not according to passion. But these ideals are expounded only to be refuted by example after example.”\textsuperscript{230}

5

Aristotelian Justice in \textit{Measure for Measure}

In \textit{Measure for Measure} (1604),\textsuperscript{231} Shakespeare recounts the story of a kind-hearted Duke whose failure to enforce Viennese law has led to justice being overrun by licentiousness. To reestablish justice in Vienna, the Duke places Angelo in charge, while he remains in Vienna disguised as a friar and initiates a series of plots that will eventually lead to resolution and the

\textsuperscript{228} Rowse, \textit{Shakespeare}, 341.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 343.
\textsuperscript{230} Spencer, \textit{Nature of Man}, 121.
establishment of equitable justice in Vienna. The play concentrates on the case of Claudio, who according to the law is condemned to death for having a child out of wedlock with his fiancée, Julietta. Angelo intends upon ruling according to the letter of the law, but when Claudio’s sister, Isabella, begs Angelo to pardon Claudio, the severe deputy is overcome by his lust for Isabella. He agrees to pardon Claudio if Isabella will sleep with him. In act 5, the Duke returns as himself and, relieving Angelo of his charge, administers justice through a series of judgments upon the play’s major and minor characters.

As with all of Shakespeare’s plays, critical responses to Measure for Measure reflect changes in literary fashions and tastes over the centuries. Reading Measure for Measure against the standards of classical dramatic theory, Johnson finds “the light or comic part is very natural and pleasing, but the grave scenes, if a few passages be excepted, have more labor than elegance. The plot is rather intricate than artful…. The unities of action and place are sufficiently preserved.”232 While the sensitive Coleridge finds Measure for Measure “the most painful—say rather, the only painful—part of [Shakespeare’s] genuine works. The comic and tragic parts equally border on the μισητον—the one being disgusting, the other horrible.”233 Hazlitt describes the play being “as full of genius as it is wisdom,”234 and Pater thinks “in its ethics it is an epitome of Shakespeare’s moral judgments.”235 Fluchère argues, “Measure for Measure passes for a comedy but it is the arch-problem play. … the moral preoccupation is evident from one end of the play to the other, but serious though it may be, it seems ill defined and gives rise to divergent interpretations. It was long considered a failure as a play—as lacking internal unity, expressing the blackest pessimism and showing how little interest Shakespeare took in his

232 In Halliday, Shakespeare Critics, 238.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid., 239.
235 Ibid., 241.
subject.” In his criticism of the play, Fluchère also testifies to the fact that *Measure for Measure* can, and has been, read in the opposite way: “Modern critics take the opposite view. Wilson Knight has not hesitation in comparing the Duke with Christ. C.J. Sisson declares that the spirit of the play is ‘profoundly Christian’. It is ardently admired for similar reasons by D.A. Traversi, F.R. Lewis and Miss M.C. Bradbrook. Finally, Roy M. Battenhouse has gone so far as to base his interpretation of *Measure for Measure* on the Christian doctrine of the Atonement.” Fluchère’s remarks capture the two predominant views of *Measure for Measure*: a problem play or a Christian allegory. Fluchère argues this double interpretation of the play “enlarges the scope of *Measure for Measure* considerably.” As Lever explains, “These conflicting assessments may be taken to reflect changes in literary taste and intellectual orientation; but they are also—and more significantly—related to a distinctive quality of the play itself. Each interpretation has its limited validity; each amounts to an abstraction from the composite whole.” Recognizing that one can, through a partial and selective reading of the text, view *Measure for Measure* as either a problem play or a Christian allegory, Lever posits a third way of viewing the play. Reviving the view of nineteenth-century critic, Gervinus, Lever argues that the play is primarily concerned with “the idea of moderation as applied to all human relationships.” Although Lever does not explicitly describe the play’s design as Aristotelian, the affinities are obvious. Lever argues in *Measure for Measure*, virtue should—and eventually does—act as the moderator between strict restraint and immoderate use. The validity of Lever’s view of the play is not,

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236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid., 243.
239 Lever, *Troilus*, lviii.
240 Ibid., lix.
241 Ibid., lxxiv.
like the two more common views of the play, limited; the entire work is comfortably accommodated into this view of the play as concerned with the idea of moderation.

In an excellent article,²⁴² Wasson shows that in writing Measure for Measure Shakespeare was strongly influenced by Aristotelian moral philosophy, particularly in the play’s treatment of justice, incontinence, and temperance. Wasson’s study of the play convincingly shows, first, “a definite connection between Shakespeare’s view of justice and that given by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics,” especially regarding the precept that justice must be administered impersonally; and second, that in the natures, habits, and passions of the major and minor characters, Shakespeare’s conceptions of the virtues of continence and temperance, and their respective vices, are Aristotelian.²⁴³ Wasson has therefore identified Aristotelian ethics as the source of both the standard of conduct and the various characters’ inner motivations. With all of his plays, to varying degrees, Shakespeare borrowed from source material and then made his own original additions. Lever distinguishes the derivative from the original material in Measure for Measure: “The primary story of Claudio’s offence, Angelo’s infamous bargain and breach of pledge, and Isabel’s appeal to the Duke has its direct antecedents in Giraldi Cinthio’s Hecatommithi (1565), Part II, Década 8, Novella 5; Cinthio’s posthumous drama Epitia (1583); George Whetstone’s two-part play The Right Excellent and Famous Historye of Promos and Cassandra (1578); and Whetstone’s story in his Heptameron of Civil Discourses (1582), republished as Aurelia (1592).”²⁴⁴ Lever observes that “While the political issues of Measure for Measure were latent in all earlier versions of the story, the inner motivations of the main

²⁴⁴ Lever, Troilus, xxxv.
characters show striking departures from the source material.” Wasson’s work thus complements Lever’s understanding of the play and its sources by showing that the inner motivations of the characters as well as the idea of moderation come from Aristotelian moral philosophy.

When one synthesizes Lever’s view of the play as a discourse on the idea of virtue as the moderator of excess and defect, and Wasson’s view of the play as being influenced by Aristotelian ethics, one comes very close to what were Shakespeare’s intentions in writing Measure for Measure. I believe Shakespeare was principally interested in exploring the virtue of clemency and its respective extremes. Clemency, according to Case, is the virtue concerned with the lessening of punishment, and its deficient and excessive extremes are severity and overindulgence, respectively (4.5). Throughout the course of the play, the way in which unlawful activities are punished in Vienna passes through three distinct phases—deficient, excessive, and moderate—that constitute the Aristotelian extremes and mean related to the virtue of clemency. First, under the Duke, unlawful activities have gone unpunished; this deficient extreme related to punishment is overindulgence. Case writes, “the rose without the thorn, which is overindulgence without the rod of severity, ought not to flourish in a well-regulated republic” (4.5). Second, when the strict Angelo assumes power in the Duke’s absence, all unlawful activity is punished according to the letter to the law and without consideration of the actor’s intentions; this excessive extreme is severity. Case writes, “In justice, the sword-edge is often whetted too sharp, so there is need for the equity of a good man which may moderate the law’s severity. It’s an old saying, ‘Supreme law is supreme injury’” (5.10). From this Aristotelian perspective, both the Duke’s overindulgence and Angelo’s severity miss the mean related to punishment, “For just as

245 Ibid., lxxii.
in the one there is a torch kindled for a blaze, so in the other is an open highway to ruin, and just as the commonwealth is endangered by excessive severity, so it is at length undone by excessive indifference” (4.5). Third, and most importantly, upon returning to Vienna the Duke locates the mean as it relates to the lessening of punishment and becomes the ideal magistrate.

Wasson adheres to the common critical view of Measure for Measure as both a problem play and “a study of the relative merits of Greek justice and Christian mercy and that it is mercy which is shown to be more ‘heavenly.”’246 Lever, too, writes of the “polarity of justice and mercy.”247 In their ahistorical, abstracted forms, Greek justice and Christian mercy may be viewed as polarities, but in the works of Christian Aristotelians such as John Case, Aristotelian and Christian concepts are incorporated into a single, unified moral philosophy. For example, clemency plays a much larger role in the Christian Case’s Speculum than in the pagan Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Sutton notes even the “Christian idea of sin had been imported into Aristotle long before Case’s time (the noun peccatum and the verb peccare, taken together, occur 82 times in the Speculum).”248 As I discussed in Chapter 3, Hamlet is an Aristotelian who believes in divine providence. So while Wasson believes that it is not important whether Shakespeare read Aristotle directly or through a secondary source, there are substantive differences between Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics and commentaries such as John Case’s Speculum, and these differences profoundly affect how one interprets Shakespeare’s intentions.249 Only by reading Measure for Measure as an articulation of Elizabethan Aristotelianism do the play’s apparent classical and Christian dichotomies dissolve.

247 Lever, Troilus, lxiii.
248 Sutton, Introduction to Case’s Speculum.
Questions 1-2

*In moral philosophy is it enough to simply know virtue’s precepts?*

*May a magistrate consult for his own welfare?*

Vienna has for some time now been plagued by moral licentiousness among its citizens, which is the result not of an absence of laws but rather of the kind hearted Duke’s inability to enforce the existing laws. The Duke, “A gentleman of all temperance” (3.2.231), says in Vienna “We have strict statutes and most biting laws,/ The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,/ Which for this fourteen years we have let slip…. For terror, not to use, in time the rod/ Becomes more mock’d than fear’d: so our decrees,/ Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,/ And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose” (1.3.19-29). If justice is to be restored to Vienna, corrective measures will be needed; but given his propensity toward overindulgence, it would be improper for the Duke to now become a severe ruler: “Sith ’twas my fault to give the people scope,/ ’Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them/ For what I bid them do; for we bid this be done,/ When evil deeds have their permissive pass,/ And not the punishment” (1.3.35-39). Justice must be restored by one of the Duke’s two deputies, either Escalus or Angelo. Escalus’ character and understanding of government administration are beyond reproach, as the Duke assures him, “The nature of our people,/ Our city’s institutions, and the terms/ For common justice, y’are as pregnant in/ As art and practice hath enriched any/ That we remember” (1.1.9-13). Yet Escalus, like the Duke, is naturally inclined toward leniency. Angelo, on the other hand, is the perfect candidate for the task of correcting the dissolute morals of Vienna. The Duke describes him as “A man of stricture and firm abstinence” (1.3.12). Lucio describes Angelo as “a man whose
blood/ Is very snow-broth; one who never feels/ The wanton stings and motions of the sense; But
doth rebate and blunt his natural edge/ With profits of the mind, study and fast” (1.4.57-61).

Escalus describes Angelo as “most strait in virtue” (2.1.9). And the Justice says “Lord Angelo is
severe” (2.1.278). The Duke informs Escalus that he has chosen Angelo to be the magistrate of
Vienna in the Duke’s absence (1.1.17-21), and Escalus fully supports the Duke’s decision,
saying, “If any in Vienna be of worth/ To undergo such ample grace and honour,/ It is Lord
Angelo” (1.1.22-23). The Duke then invests Angelo with all of his powers, saying, “In our
remove, be thou at full ourself./ Mortality and mercy in Vienna/ Live in thy tongue, and heart”
(1.1.43-45), and “Your scope is as mine own,/ So to enforce or qualify the laws/ As to your soul
seems good” (1.1.65-66).

The only objection to Angelo’s appointment comes from Angelo himself, who points out
his lack of experience: “Now, good my lord, Let there be some more test made of my metal,/ Before so noble and so great a figure/ Be stamp’d upon it” (1.1.47-49). The Duke quickly
dissmisses Angelo’s protest, saying, “We have with leaven’d and prepared choice/ Proceeded to
you” (1.1.51-52). In the opening scene Shakespeare depicts Angelo as a character who has
knowledge and understanding of justice and virtue. Angelo seems to be virtuous yet remains
untested. Aristotelians like John Case praise “that life which displays in deed what it professes in
word,” because the end of moral philosophy “is not located in understanding but rather in the
activity of individual men: for it does not suffice to possess virtue only as something understood,
as if it were a sword kept in its sheath or a fruit kept in its seed; rather, we must exert ourselves
that it come to light” (10.9). To support his claim, Case first cites the ancient Greek poet,
Theognis, “who was wont to say that there is little if any power for virtue in words, for depraved
men are capable of speaking about virtue, men who shun the power and splendor of virtue as the
purblind do the sun.” Case then cites the Renaissance humanist, Baptista Mantuanus, who “rightly informs us, ‘To speak of virtue is a trifle, but to employ the virtues—this is the task, this is the work’” (10.9). The Duke says this very same thing to Angelo, telling his deputy “if our virtues/ Did not go forth of us, ’twere all alike/ As if we had them not” (1.1.33-35). With the matter settled, one question remains: As he takes over the magistracy, will the untested Angelo be as virtuous in deed as he is in word? Just as Case reminds his readers of Bias’ famous saying, “the magistracy reveals the man,” the Duke says, “Hence we shall see/ If power changes purposes, what our seemers be” (5.1 and 1.3.53-54).

Upon assuming the powers of the magistracy, the severe Angelo shows that he means to rule over Vienna in strict accordance with the letter of the law. In order to curb licentious behavior, he issues a proclamation that would shut down the brothel quarters (1.2.86-95). He then turns his attention to the case of Claudio, a Viennese youth who has impregnated his fiancée, Julietta. Claudio, speaking with Lucio, summarizes his predicament: “upon a true contract/ I got possession of Julietta’s bed./ You know the lady; she is fast my wife,/ Save that we do the denunciation lack/ Of outward order” (1.2.134-38). According to the strict letter of the law, Claudio is guilty of premarital intercourse and having a child out of wedlock; but his actions do not violate the spirit of the law, if that spirit be to deter licentious behavior, for Claudio’s intentions have always been to marry Julietta, who at the time of their sleeping together would have been considered Claudio’s common-law wife. The Provost, who throughout the play serves as a voice of reason and understanding, describes Claudio as “a young man/ More fit to do another such offence,/ Than die for this” (2.3.13-15). Claudio has no doubt that Angelo, for one reason or another, is making an example of him:

And the new deputy now for the Duke—
Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,
Of whether that the body public be
A horse whereon the governor doth ride,
Who, newly in the seat, that it may know
He can command, lets it straight feel the spur;
Whether the tyranny be in his place,
Or in his eminence that fills it up,
I stagger in.  (1.2.146-54)

Under the Duke, Claudio’s actions, and much worse actions for that matter, would have and did
go unpunished, but now “this new governor/ Awakes me all the enrolled penalties/ Which have,
like unscour’d armour, hung by th’wall/ So long, that nineteen zodiacs have gone round./ And
none of them been worn” (1.2.154-58). Claudio is to be made an example of, and Angelo “for a
name/ Now puts the drowsy and neglected act/ Freshly on me: ’tis surely for a name” (1.2.158-
60). Lucio later implores Isabella to seek out Angelo and avail upon him to soften Claudio’s
punishment (1.4.67-70). However, the severe Angelo has no intention of deviating from the letter
of the law. As he explains to Escalus, “We must not make a scarecrow of the law,/ Setting it up
to fear the birds of prey,/ And let it keep on shape till custom make it/ Their perch, and not their
terror” (2.1.1-4). The naturally lenient Escalus replies, “Ay. But yet/ Let us be keen, and rather
cut a little,/ Than fall, and bruise to death” (2.1.5-6).²⁵⁰ Escalus, although inclined toward mercy,
does recognize the need for some punishments and corrections: “It is but needful./ Mercy is not
itself, that oft looks so;/ Pardon is still the nurse of second woe” (2.1.278-81). The disguised
Duke tells Escalus that Angelo’s strict adherence to the law is just, as long as Angelo lives in
accordance with the laws he enforces: “If his own life answer the straitness of his proceeding, it
shall become him well: wherein if he chance to fail, he hath sentenced himself” (3.2.249-51).

²⁵⁰ Lever notes that in the first two acts “Angelo and Escalus demonstrate respectively the extremes of severity and
‘vain pity’” (Lever, Troilus, lxvi).
The Duke’s conception of a virtuous judge and magistrate accords with Case’s, who writes “The magistrate should consult for others more than for himself, since all men look to his example and life, according to the proverb ‘the whole world follows the king’s example’” (5.6).

When Isabella meets with Angelo, she pleads for her brother’s life by employing a series of arguments, most of which are based upon the idea of Christian mercy. It is important to note that while the standard Aristotelian extremes of overindulgence and severity frame the play’s conception of justice as a mean, Shakespeare also allows for the possibility that Christian mercy might restore justice to Vienna. This argument, exclusively advanced by Isabella, is roundly refuted. Isabella asks that Angelo condemn Claudio’s fault but forgive Claudio himself. With devastating precision, Angelo shows the deficiency of Isabella’s argument: “Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?/ Why, every fault’s condemn’d ere it be done:/ Mine was the very cipher of a function/ To fine the faults, whose fine stands in record,/ And let go by the actor” (2.2.37-40). Isabella’s plea for universal forgiveness would, according to Angelo, make a mockery of the law. Isabella has no choice but to concede to Angelo on this point, exclaiming, “O just but severe law!” (2.2.41). Isabella does however make another Christian appeal to Angelo. She reminds the magistrate

all souls that were, were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be
If He, which is the top of judgement, should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made. (2.2.73-78)
Angelo rejects Isabella’s argument by articulating one of the principle precepts of Aristotelian justice—that it must be administered impersonally. Against Isabella’s claim that it is Angelo who judges Claudio, Angelo retorts, “It is the law, not I, condemn your brother;/Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son,/It should be thus with him. He must die tomorrow” (2.2.80-82). Case, who advocates the impersonal administering of justice, acknowledges that “it is an arduous task to neglect our own affairs and promote those of others” in the name of justice (5.1). Isabella next makes an appeal based upon precedent, asking, “Who is it that hath died for this offence?/There’s many have committed it” (2.2.88-89). Angelo quickly dismisses this argument, saying, “The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept:/Those many had not dar’d to do that evil/If the first that did th’edict infringe/Had answered for his deed. Now ’tis awake/Takes note of what is done” (2.2.91-95). Finally, Isabella returns to her Christian faith and asks Angelo to “show some pity” (2.2.100). In response, Angelo returns to the principle of impersonal justice: “I show it most of all when I show justice:/For then I pity those I do not know,/Which a dismiss’d offence would after gall,/And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,/Lives not to act another” (2.2.100-105). While Angelo’s severity could be considered excessive and potentially dangerous to the duchy, Isabella’s call for universal tolerance is, like the Duke’s overindulgence, a deficient extreme related to punishment—utterly unviable as a means of administering justice.251

Questions 3-5

What is incontinence?

Does the incontinent man know what he is doing is evil?

Is impulsive incontinence less evil than weak incontinence?

251 Levers notes, “If Angelo’s zeal for the eradication of sin was potentially a threat to human survival, Isabella’s scorn for authority struck at the bases of order on which human society rested” (Lever, Troilus, lxix).
In the first part of the play, Angelo is the model of a just but severe magistrate who administers justice impersonally and lives his life in accordance with the laws. His encounters with Isabella have, however, affected this seemingly cold and strict character. Angelo has been tempted by Isabella: “O heavens,/ Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,/ Making both it unable for itself/ And dispossessing all my other parts/ Of necessary fitness?” (1.4.19-23). Angelo’s longing for Isabella causes him to knowingly violate the principle of impersonal justice by telling Isabella that if she sleeps with him then he will pardon Claudio. Isabella is forced to choose between her chastity and her brother’s life (2.4.50-120). Because Angelo knows right from wrong yet is driven by passions, from an Aristotelian perspective Angelo is the model of the incontinent man. According to Case, “incontinent men yield to pleasure and pain,” whereas “continent men resist them” (7.4). The incontinent man, “lacking in self-control has intelligence and choice, but does not heed the former nor obey the latter as he should” (7.10). Consequently, “the incontinent are not vicious, if you consider habit, but live viciously, if you consider passion” (7.8). When Escalus later learns of Angelo’s scheme to sleep with Isabella, he recognizes Angelo’s behavior as an example of incontinence: “I am sorry one so learned and so wise/ As you, Lord Angelo, have still appear’d/ Should slip so grossly, both in the heat of blood/ And lack of temper’d judgement afterward” (5.1.468-71). Upon learning of Angelo’s clandestine plans, the Duke privately admonishes Angelo’s failure to live up to the standards of the ideal magistrate:

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe:
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue, go:
More nor less to others paying
Than by self-offences weighing.
Shame to him whose cruel striking
Kills for faults of his own liking!
Twice treble shame on Angelo,
To weed my vice, and let his grow!
O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side! (3.2.254-65)

The Duke later speaks with the Provost and, feigning ignorance of Angelo’s planned
indiscretions, reiterates the necessity for impersonal rule:

[Claudio’s] life is parallel’d
Even with the stroke and line of his great justice.
[Angelo] doth with holy abstinence subdue
That in himself which he spurs on his power
To qualify in others: were he meal’d with that
Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;
But this being so, he’s just. (4.2.77-83)

The Duke’s remarks, his juxtaposing impersonal justice and personal tyranny, are strikingly
similar to Case’s, who asserts that the magistrate “ought to consult for the welfare, not of himself
and his own kind, but of the common good. If he should do otherwise (as the Philosopher says in
the text) he should be deemed an impious tyrant rather than a just magistrate” (5.6). The Duke
saves Isabella by orchestrating a bed-trick in which Angelo unwittingly sleeps not with Isabella
but Mariana, a woman to whom he was some years ago engaged but never married.

Angelo, unaware of the bed-trick but knowing right from wrong, recognizes that his
incontinence has led him to consult for his own welfare, which thus has prevented him from
administering justice impersonally: “This deed unshapes me quite; makes me unpregnant/ And dull to all proceedings. A deflower’d maid;/ And by an eminent body, that enforc’d/ The law against it!” (4.4.19-21). Case makes the following distinction between impulsive incontinence and weak incontinence: “the impulsively incontinent are less evil than those who sin out of weakness. The reason is that the former sin unadvisedly, but the latter do so with deliberation. For there exist weaklings who often make up their minds to live chastely and honestly, but as soon as pleasure is thrust under their noses, are drawn to the contrary opinion, like leaves in the wind” (7.8). Angelo perfectly fits the description of weak incontinence. First, his initial professions of virtue are nullified in the face of temptation; and second, he deliberates upon the matter before propositioning and then ostensibly sleeping with Isabella. Angelo is not the only incontinent character in the play, but the other incontinent characters are impulsively incontinent. Case writes that the impulsively incontinent “are easier recalled to repentance for their deed” (7.8), and Shakespeare provides an example of this when the disguised Duke meets with Claudio’s fiancée, Julietta, and she admits her sin and repents:

**Duke:** Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?
**JULIETTA:** I do; and bear the same most patiently….
**DUKE:** Love you the man that wrong’d you?
**JULIETTA:** Yes, as I love the woman that wrong’d him.
**DUKE:** So then it seems your most offenceful act

    Was mutually committed?
**JULIETTA:** Mutually.
**DUKE:** Then was your sin of heavier kind than his.
**JULIETTA:** I do confess it, and repent it, father. (2.3.19-29)
Questions 6-8

What is intemperance?

Is the same man incontinent and intemperate?

Is intemperance worse than incontinence?

In the natures, habits, and passions of several characters, Shakespeare clearly distinguishes between incontinence and intemperance. According to Case, the intemperate man, who is “always breathing crime” (7.8), is worse than the incontinent man, since “Intemperance is a habit, but incontinence a passion; intemperance is always voluntary, but incontinence often unwilling; and intemperance is conjoined malice and lack of repentance, but incontinence is not the same” (7.7). Three characters in Measure for Measure display the characteristics of intemperance: Mistress Overdone, Pompey, and Lucio. Mistress Overdone, the procuress, has for many years been plying her trade—it is a habit with her, wholly voluntary, and she shows a complete lack of repentance. Even the lenient Escalus has no choice but to send Mistress Overdone to prison. When she asks Escalus to be merciful, he exclaims, “Double and treble admonition, and still forfeit in the same kind! This would make mercy swear and play the tyrant.” And the Provost agrees, describing Mistress Overdone as “A bawd of eleven years’ continuance” (3.2.187-90). So too does the procurer, Pompey, display the characteristics of intemperance. He is anything but repentant, for as Lever notes Pompey “consistently champions his own trade of bawd against all legal restraints on the grounds that it ministers to a natural function.”

Pompey firsts defends his trade against the admonitions of Escalus:

ESCALUS: How would you live, Pompey? By being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a lawful trade?

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252 Lever, Troilus, lxxiv.
POMPEY: If the law would allow it, sir.

ESCALUS: But the law will not allow it, Pompey; nor it shall not be allowed in Vienna. (2.1.221-226)

Pompey is unreceptive to Escalus chastisement: “I thank you for your good counsel; [aside] but I shall follow it as the flesh and fortune shall better determine. (2.1.249-51). The disguised Duke also shows contempt for the intemperate Pompey:

    Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd;
The evil that thou causest to be done,
That is thy means to live. Do thou think
What ’tis to cram a maw or clothe a back
From such a filthy vice. Say to thyself,
From their abominable and beastly touches
I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.
Canst thou believe thy living is a life,
So stinkingly depending? Go mend, go mend (3.2.18-26)

Pompey, again, is immune to instruction: “Indeed it does stink in some sort, sir. But yet, sir, I would prove—” (3.2.27-28). Consequently, he is at once sent to prison by the disguised Duke (3.2.30-32), and for comedic purposes Shakespeare later has the Provost moderate Pompey’s punishment by providing the bawd with proper employment: “Here is in our prison a common executioner, who in his office lacks a helper; if you will take it on you to assist him, it shall redeem you from your gyves: if not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment, and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping; for you have been a notorious bawd” (4.2.7-13).

Finally, there is Lucio, described in the Dramatis Personae as a “Fantastic.” He frequents the public houses, habitually participates in licentious behavior, and makes no apologies for it.
Out of wedlock, he has made a child with Mistress Kate Keep-down. He did not make good on his promise to marry her, and he has played no part in the child’s upbringing (3.2.192-97). Lucio is therefore the model of intemperance, yet in many respects he is also one of the play’s most sensible characters. He sees the futility in Angelo’s goal to legislate morality and rid Vienna of lechery: “it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down” (3.2.98-99). And he recognizes that in the name of morality, Angelo “will unpeople the province with continency” (3.2.168-69).

Questions 9-10

What is clemency?

What is equity?

In the long final act of Measure for Measure, the Duke reveals his true identity and resumes his role as magistrate. At the outset of the play, overindulgence predominated. It is hardly surprising that in writing Measure for Measure Shakespeare coupled the Aristotelian concepts of justice and incontinence, for in the Speculum Case recalls that “The satiric poet Anaxandrides rightly compared the incontinent man to a commonwealth which establishes good laws but obeys none” (7.10). In act 5, the Duke makes this very point upon returning to Vienna, noting that for too long Vienna had “laws for all faults,/ But faults so countenanc’d that the strong statutes/ Stand like the forfeits in a barber’s shop,/ As much in mock as mark” (5.1.316-19). On the other hand, in the Duke’s absence Angelo sought to enforce the laws without any consideration of their purposes, and if left unchecked Angelo may well have, as Lucio predicted, unpeopled the province with continency. Upon his return to Vienna, the Duke employs the Aristotelian virtue of clemency to restore equity to the duchy. Clemency, according to Case, is
the virtue concerned with the lessening of punishment, and the magistrate “who lessens a punishment is clement and gentle” (4.5).  

In act 5, the relationships between incontinence and intemperance and punishment become clear. The incontinent and intemperate characters’ punishments depend upon their respective natures, habits, and passions. The Duke chooses to lessen the punishments of the incontinent characters. Rather than being executed, Claudio is pardoned and he and Julietta are to be married. Angelo admits his own guilt, is pardoned by the Duke, and is to marry Mariana, with whom he had unwittingly slept. Two of the intemperate characters, Mistress Overdone and Pompey, are now in prison and no longer plying their filthy trade. The Duke tells Lucio that he must marry Kate Keep-down and, having been found guilty of slandering the Duke, will also be whipped and hanged. Knowing Lucio’s nature, the Duke agrees to remit Lucio’s corporal punishments, but insists that he still marry Kate Keep-down. The intemperate Lucio would have preferred corporal punishment to marriage: “Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death,/Whipping, and hanging” (5.1.520-21). The ideal magistrate not only discourages improper behavior, he also rewards proper behavior. The Duke therefore praises Escalus and the Provost for their loyal services (5.1.525-28). The Duke also affords Christian forgiveness its proper place as he allows the characters to personally forgive those who have trespassed against them (5.1.448-52, 529).

What one finds in the Duke’s final judgments is not Christian mercy, i.e., forgiveness of sins, nor overindulgence, nor severity, but rather Aristotelian clemency. The intemperate characters in need of punishment and correction receive it. The Duke lessens the punishments of

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253 Case makes a distinction between the virtues of mildness and clemency: the former is private and moderates anger, while the later is public and moderates punishment (4.5). Both virtues are eventually exercised at the conclusion of *Measure for Measure*. 

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the incontinent characters that have acted viciously but have done so somewhat unwillingly and with regret. Clemency therefore has been more effective than severity or overindulgence or Christian forgiveness, for clemency alone restores equity—which is the ultimate goal of the ideal magistrate. Case writes, “The power of justice is wonderful, that of equity is great,” and he defines equity as “the virtue whereby a man corrects and moderates the law, which in many instances is deficient…. For equity sets aside the word and looks at the intent of the law, justly and moderately correcting its defect according to circumstances” (5.10). In Vienna, the letter of the law states that sexual intercourse out of wedlock is to be punished by death, but surely the intent of the law is to discourage and reduce lechery, and not depopulate the duchy. Therefore, the moderating influence of equity makes it “superior to and more excellent than the law” because it corrects a defect in the law (5.10). As critics have consistently noted, *Measure for Measure* is a comedy that concludes with the requisite happy ending; it is a problem play on the subject of justice; and it contains elements of Greek justice and Christian mercy. To these characterizations of the play, we may now add that in its structure and ethical conceptions the play is a sophisticated articulation of Elizabethan Aristotelianism.
Aristotelian Liberality and Friendship in Timon of Athens

Introduction

In the unfinished Timon of Athens (1607-8), Shakespeare explores the related Aristotelian virtues of liberality and friendship. The play recounts the story of a wealthy Athenian whose generosity towards false friends leads to his financial ruin. Greedy flatterers cultivate Timon’s largesse in order to benefit themselves. Timon’s immoderate generosity leads to the dissipation of his estate, and he mistakenly believes that his friends will come to aid him in his time of need. Predictably, however, Timon’s friends abandon him, which causes Timon to invert his view of mankind as he moves from complete philanthropy to complete misanthropy. Just as the subject matter of Troilus and Cressida reflects Shakespeare’s view of the wars and factionalism that plagued the reign of Elizabeth, the subject matter of Timon reflects Shakespeare’s observations of the early-seventeenth-century English court, whose conspicuous consumption had steadily increased throughout the Tudor reign. In the early 1600s, under the Stuarts, all the stops were out. Stone writes, “The accession of the open-handed James saw a flood of peers and squires to Court, and at least three-quarters of the aristocracy were permanent or occasional courtiers between 1603 and 1615.”

254 The play was entered in the Stationers’ Register by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount on 8 November 1623, and it is one of eighteen plays by Shakespeare that was first printed in the 1623 Folio edition of the Complete Works. There is no record of the play having been performed on stage during Shakespeare’s lifetime. William Shakespeare, Timon of Athens. The Arden Shakespeare. Edited by H. J. Oliver (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), xiii.

As with *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) and *Coriolanus* (1607-8), Shakespeare turned for his source material to North’s *Plutarch*. There the story of Timon is briefly recounted in the *Life of Marcus Antonius*. Antonius decides “that he would lead Timons life, because he had the like wrong offered him, that was before offered unto Timon: and that for the unthankfulness of those he had done good unto, and who he took to be his friends, he was angry with all men, and would trust no man.”

This rather bare account of Timon’s life provided the basic outline of Shakespeare’s play. The play also contains an unfinished sub-plot about Alcibiades. The combining of the two men’s stories is natural enough, for, in the source material Shakespeare would have read that Timon chose “to shun all other mens companies, but the company of young Alcibiades, a bold and insolent youth, whom he would greatly feast and make much of, and kissed him very gladly,” and in North’s collection of ancient biographies the *Life of Alcibiades* stands beside that of Coriolanus, Shakespeare’s most recent play.

Although *Timon* is an unfinished work, Shakespeare’s intentions and intellectual interests are made clear in the design of the play and its extended treatments of liberality and friendship. Kermode acknowledges the influence of Aristotelianism on *Timon*: “The play was evidently designed to consist of two halves illustrating contrasting modes of excess. Timon knows no mean, only extremes; and this has rightly been called the most Aristotelian of Shakespeare’s plots.” The phrase “contrasting modes of excess” does however require some qualification. In the first half of the play, Timon is a friend to everyone, which is an excessive extreme; but in the second half of the play, Timon becomes a friend to no one, which is a defective extreme. It is

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256 In *Timon*, Appendix A, 141.
257 Ibid.
258 In *Timon*, Appendix B, 142-43.
therefore perhaps more accurate to say that the two halves of the play show in Timon opposing extremes, or, as the plain-speaking Apemantus says to Timon: “The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends” (4.3.301). In Timon, Shakespeare also explores the opposing extremes of liberality—the mean of the virtue concerning wealth. In the first half of the play, Timon is excessively generous and therefore prodigal, whereas defective generosity, i.e., greediness, is displayed throughout the play by the many flatterers.

The process by which Shakespeare designed and wrote Timon is a matter of conjecture, but Oliver provides a plausible reconstruction: “Shakespeare must, I think, have started from the ‘fact’ of Timon’s misanthropy, a misanthropy for which he was proverbial and, incidentally, not admired; and to the question ‘What might conceivably have reduced a man to this condition?’ he offered the answer ‘the shock that betrayal might give to a noble but not profound mind’… the shock must come from a situation for which Timon himself was partly responsible, in however worthy a way, namely the gradual dissipation of his estate.” It should be noted, however, that “the answer” to the question of why Timon became misanthropic was not offered by Shakespeare; instead, the source material offered the answer to Shakespeare, as all of the essential elements of the Timon story are there in the source material: Timon’s generosity, and his false friendships that drove him to misanthropy. It was left to Shakespeare to create an ethical framework within which to develop these elements of the story; to that end, Shakespeare employed Aristotelian moral philosophy in an exploration of the virtues and opposing vices of liberality and friendship. In John Case’s Speculum, one finds the detailed descriptions of the virtues and vices that receive extensive treatment in Timon. Case’s work also contains the frequent reproofs of man and society and the apposite admonitions about greed, prodigality,

260 Oliver, Timon, xlvii.
flattery, and false friendship manifest throughout *Timon*. At times, Case’s view of mankind is as
dim as Timon’s: “True friendship does not exist, it indeed does not exist in the commonwealth,
since, if I am not mistaken, once upon a time it went a-flying off from the hand of Pandora to the
bosom of Jove. It has been replaced by ill-will, which has everywhere spewed forth from its
black maw so many snakes, so many serpents that, as the proverb teaches, you can’t live safely
anywhere” (8.1). While one cannot be certain that Shakespeare turned to Case’s *Speculum* when
he wrote *Timon*, a comparative analysis of the two works will show their kindred nature, which
ultimately derives from their shared Elizabethan worldview and commitment to the principles of
Aristotelian moral philosophy.

While *Timon* has received less critical attention than have Shakespeare’s more popular
plays, there have been a great variety of approaches to the play. The highly sensible Dr. Johnson
writes, “The catastrophe [of Timon] affords a very powerful warning against that ostentatious
liberality, which scatters bounty, but confers no benefits, and buys flattery, but not friendship.”
Knight, who is alone in giving *Timon* a central position in the Shakespeare canon, argues that the
play “is *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, become self-conscious and universal;
it includes and transcends them all.” Some more recent critics have used *Timon* as a staging
ground for their employment of particular, fashionable literary theories. Kahn’s work, for
example, is inspired by “feminist criticism that employs psychoanalytic theory toward a critique
of male subjectivity and social norms of masculinity, and new historicism.” Kahn discusses
“the play’s core fantasy” in which “a male self is precipitated out of a profound and empowering
oneness with the mother into a treacherous group of men in which he is powerless. It is the

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mother who betrays him, the whorish mother who singles him out and then spurns him.”

Jackson revives Knight’s approach to Timon and incorporates it into a Derridean reading of the play, thus producing the theory “that Timon seeks what Derrida calls ‘the gift, the impossible’ and that a religious passion motivates the search.” Other critics read Timon through a medieval Christian lens. Walker, for example, argues that Timon is a seventeenth century version of the traditional morality play. Lancashire, on the other hand, argues that Shakespeare’s Timon is akin to Dr. Faustus, Marlowe’s anti-traditional morality play. In comparing the concepts present in Timon with those in Seneca’s De beneficiis, Wallace argues for the influence of classical social philosophy on Shakespeare’s work. He argues that when writing Timon Shakespeare relied heavily upon Seneca’s discussions of the giving and receiving of benefits, and of gratitude and ingratitude.

Timon Philanthropos

In the opening scene of Timon, Shakespeare follows his familiar pattern of establishing the atmosphere and basic outline of the play through a dialogue between secondary characters. The atmosphere is one of courtly refinement and sensuousness, but also hypocrisy, feigned modesty, and flattery. The Poet, Painter, Jeweller, and Merchant have come seeking Timon’s patronage and its attendant prizes. The Poet establishes the character of Timon and the

264 Ibid., 35.
265 Ken Jackson, “‘One Wish’ or the Possibility of the Impossible: Derrida, the Gift, and God in Timon of Athens” Shakespeare Quarterly 52.1 (2001): 34.
269 Ibid., 350-53.
270 See, for example, the opening scenes of Hamlet and King Lear. Of Timon, Knight writes, “In no play of Shakespeare is the opening more significant” (Knight, Wheel, 236).
relationship between Timon and his followers: “his large fortune/ Upon his good and gracious
to his love and tendance/ All sorts of hearts; yea, from
the glass-fac’d flatterer/ To Apemantus, that few things loves better/ Than to abhor himself—
even he drops down/ The knee before him, and returns in peace/ Most rich in Timon’s nod”
(1.1.56-63). Here the Poet highlights Timon’s wealth, good nature, and generosity; and he
correctly observes that nearly everyone in Timon’s company is a flatterer of some sort, from the
greedy courtiers who seek gifts and favors, to Apemantus, whose cynicism and misanthropy are
nourished by his seat at Timon’s sumptuous table—a vantage point from which he can observe
and revile mankind. The Poet then describes a recent work of his, an allegorical poem in which
“One do I personate of Lord Timon’s frame” (1.1.71). The Poet clearly distinguishes flattery
from friendship, telling the audience that the hangers-on of the noble Timon “Follow his strides,
his lobbies fill with tendance,/ Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,/ Make sacred even his
stirrup, and through him/ Drink the free air” (1.1.82-84). The Poet’s allegorical work also
foreshadows Timon’s financial misfortune and subsequent abandonment by those to whom so
much was generously given in the spirit of friendship: “When Fortune in her shift and change of
mood/ Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependants/ Which labour’d after him to the
mountain’s top/ Even on their knees and hands, let him sit down,/ Not one accompanying his
decreasing foot” (1.1.86-90). This opening dialogue accurately and effectively establishes the
mood and atmosphere of the play, while also serving a choric function by summarizing the story
that is about to unfold.271

271 Jackson writes, “Even though the poet's work does accurately portray Timon's fortune changing, all his friends
forsaking him, the poet's character and his sly and slimy dismissal of spontaneous creation make him a less-than-
reliable guide to the play's major themes. While the poet's work has literal accuracy, Timon's is no simple story of a
fall from great heights. Indeed, by giving the poet such foresight, the playwright seems to be cautioning his
audience: do not read the play this way: Timon is something more” (Jackson, “Wish,” 48-49).
Questions 1-2

What is liberality?

Is liberality concerned more with giving than receiving?

The first half of *Timon* is almost exclusively concerned with the Aristotelian virtues of liberality and friendship; indeed, the two virtues are inextricably linked because giving and receiving, the two common offices of liberality, are interpersonal and communicative. Case describes liberality as the virtue “which guides the hand in wealth” and counsels that it should be used “like a golden rule of reason” to regulate giving and receiving (4.1). Case defines liberality as the mean between the opposing vices of prodigality and avarice—which in *Timon* are depicted by the protagonist and his false friends respectively (4.1). While giving and receiving are the two common offices of the liberal man, the proper offices are several:

1. to give often but to receive rarely
2. to ask of others even more rarely
3. to use kindness and generosity to oblige people to oneself
4. to keep a prudent account of one’s estate
5. to gain greater praise in giving than in receiving
6. to value wealth and fortune only insomuch as they are useful for benefitting others (4.1)

Throughout act 1, Timon demonstrates almost all of the proper offices of the liberal man. In the first scene, Shakespeare establishes Timon’s propensity to give often and freely to others. For example, Timon gives to his friend Ventidius, whose imprisonment has resulted from an unpaid debt. Timon not only pays the debt to free Ventidius, but also promises to further support his friend upon his release from prison, for “‘Tis not enough to help the feeble up,/ But to support

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272 Jackson sees Timon’s words and deeds not as expressions of liberality but rather a “desire for the Derridean gift, the impossible” (Ibid., 49).
him after” (1.1.110-11). Timon’s second act of giving immediately follows his first, as he helps Lucilius, who unfortunately lacks sufficient wealth to marry his beloved. The father of the beloved has come with Lucilius to see Timon on this matter, and Timon tells the father that Lucilius “hath serv’d me long./ To build his fortune I will strain a little, For ’tis a bond in men. Give him thy daughter;/ What you bestow, in him I’ll counterpoise,/ And make him weigh with her” (1.1.145-49). These two acts of giving are then immediately followed by Timon’s patronage to the Poet, Painter, Jeweller, and Merchant (1.1.155-75).

In the second scene, Shakespeare next establishes Timon’s reluctantance to receive. Ventidius, now free and having recently come into wealth following his father’s passing, now returns to see Timon. Recognizing Timon’s reluctance to receive, Ventidius eagerly offers to repay Timon’s generosity; of course, Timon flatly denies Ventidius’ disingenuous offer: “O by no means,/ Honest Ventidius. You mistake my love;/ I gave it freely ever, and there’s none/ Can truly say he gives, if he receives” (1.2.8-11). Here Shakespeare effectively articulates the two essential characteristics of Timon that will shape the action of the play: first, in describing Ventidius as “honest,” Timon shows a lack of judgment regarding the nature of his so-called friends; and second, Timon clearly expresses the doctrinal Aristotelian view of giving and receiving as it relates to the virtue of liberality.273 Case provides two reasons why “liberality is more concerned with giving than receiving.” First, liberality “is more discerned in acting than in suffering. Giving is acting, receiving is suffering. Therefore the splendor of liberality is more discerned in giving than in receiving” (4.1). Second, “Greater praise accrues to a giver than a receiver…. So rightly Ovid sang, ‘Trust me, it is a noble thing to give’” (4.1). Timon also

273 In explaining why Timon refuses to receive Ventidius’ repayment, Jackson writes, “the playwright creates a character who truly seeks the pure gift without exchange. Timon struggles to identify the true nature of his efforts in this world of exchanges. When Ventidius seeks to repay his debt, Timon refuses, not out of unconscious aggressiveness but because he seeks something other than exchange” (Ibid.).
subscribes to the liberal view that affluent fortune is only useful for benefitting others. Timon says to his friends, “more welcome are ye to my fortunes/ Than my fortunes to me” (1.2.19-20). Furthermore, Timon believes that through his generosity he has obliged many people to himself: “O no doubt, my good friends, but the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you: how had you been friends else?” (1.2.86-88). Timon soon after reiterates the liberal views that giving is superior to receiving and that wealth and fortune should be used to benefit others: “We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends? O what a precious comfort ’tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another’s fortunes” (1.2.99-103). Shakespeare has therefore created in the character of Timon an individual who subscribes to and practices almost all of the proper offices of liberality. In doing so, Shakespeare effectively endows Timon with a noble nature appropriate to a tragic hero.274

Questions 3-4

What is prodigality?

What is avarice?

In act 1, Timon demonstrates the proper and praiseworthy offices of liberality, save one notable exception: he does not keep a prudent account of his estate. When in his words and deeds

274 Most critics follow the evidence in the play and recognize that Shakespeare was intent upon depicting Timon’s worldliness and generosity as noble. Knight, for example, writes that in Timon there are “certain persons who appear both good and rational: all these emphasize Timon’s nobility. It is noticeable, indeed, that references to Timon’s nobility are continual throughout” (Knight, Wheel, 245). According to Kaufmann, Timon exhibits “a classical, non-Christian love in action…. Timon loves wealth and luxury and sensuous pleasures…. loves his bounty because he can use it to purchase delights for others as well as himself: he loves wealth and pleasures because he can share them. He reminds us of the celebrated Aristotelian dictum that property should be private, but the use of it common” (Kaufmann, Existentialism, 12). Among critics Kaufmann therefore comes closest to arguing that Shakespeare ennobled Timon by fashioning him after Aristotle’s liberal man. Other critics, however, read Timon’s generosity in a negative light. In reading Timon as a medieval morality play, Walker rejects the idea that Shakespeare sought to show the nobility of Timon’s worldliness, because “these early [morality] plays make the point that any attempt to live in the world ineluctably involves one in sin” (Walker, “Morality,” 159).
he imitates Aristotle’s liberal man, Timon is praised, whereas he is openly criticized when his words and deeds are incongruent with the proper offices of liberality; there is not a single instance in the play when an honest character criticizes Timon’s liberality or praises his prodigality. Timon’s immoderate generosity and failure to keep a prudent account of his estate make him prodigal—vice worthy of criticism. Shakespeare’s incorporation of both liberal and prodigal qualities into the character of Timon makes tragedy possible, for just as Timon’s liberal qualities make him noble, his prodigality precipitates his ruin. From an Aristotelian perspective, the distinction between the prodigal and liberal man lies primarily in the liberal man’s ability to give correctly.\textsuperscript{275} Timon’s failure to give to the right people, for the right reasons, and in the right amount makes him prodigal. Case writes that prodigality, the excessive extreme opposed to liberality, “is a great vessel with no bottom, a great coffer with no lock. For it spills everything and restores nothing. If you deal more plainly, prodigality is the foolish and thoughtless squandering of things, usually followed by empty glory, egregious folly, great poverty, and over-late regret” (4.1). Throughout the first half of the play, Shakespeare repeatedly employs testimonies and demonstrations to depict Timon as prodigal. The honest, plain-speaking Steward often testifies to Timon’s immoderate generosity and his failure to keep a prudent account of his estate:

\begin{quote}
There is no crossing him in’s humour,
Else I should tell him well, i’ faith, I should,
When all’s spent, he’d be cross’d then, and he could.
'Tis pity bounty had not eyes behind,
That man might ne’er be wretched for his mind. (1.2.156-60)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{275} See Aristotle on the liberal man and correct giving: one will give “to the right people, the right amounts, at the right time, and all other things that are implied by correct giving” (1120a26-27).
He commands us to provide, and give great gifts,
And all out of an empty coffer;
Nor will he know his purse, or yield me this,
To show him what a beggar his heart is,
Being of no power to make his wishes good.
His promises fly so beyond his state
That what he speaks is all in debt; he owes for ev’ry word:
He is so kind that he now pays interest for ’t;
His land’s put to their books. (1.2.198-202)

Apemantus, the other voice of reason in the play, warns “Thou giv’st so long, Timon, I fear me thou wilt give away thyself in paper shortly” (1.2.242-43).276 Even those flatterers who benefit most from Timon’s prodigality cannot help but wonder at such immoderate generosity:

FIRST LORD: He out-goes
The very heart of kindness.

SECOND LORD: He pours it out. Plutus the god of gold277
Is but his steward. No meed but he repays
Seven-fold above itself: no gift to him
But breeds the giver a return exceeding
All use of quittance. (1.1.272-78)

These testimonies, which are qualitatively identical to Case’s description of the prodigal man, are then reinforced as Timon demonstrates his prodigality by giving the Third Lord a stallion for no other reason than “you gave good words the other day of a bay courser I rode on. ’Tis yours, because you lik’d it” (1.2.208-10). And Shakespeare puts the matter beyond all doubt by taking

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276 Regarding the reliability of Apemantus’ observations, Oliver writes, “Apemantus’ cynical judgments of the Painter and Poet and then of the Athenian Lords are all later to be proved right and to be accepted by Timon himself” (Oliver, Timon, xliii).
277 References to Plutus are not uncommon in works of the period. See, for example, Case’s Speculum: “So adieu to the old men who are enslaved to Plutus for wealth’s sake” (8.3).
Timon’s generous impulse to its most exhaustive extreme: “’tis not enough to give:/ Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,/ And ne’er be weary” (1.2.218-20). Therefore, whereas Timon is admirable in so far as he approximates the liberal man’s eagerness to give to and benefit others, his prodigality is clearly and repeatedly portrayed as a vice.278

In the beginning of act 2, the Steward and Apemantus’ warnings about the danger of prodigality and flattery are proved right. A Senator enumerates Timon’s various debts and then reiterates Timon’s central struggles—immoderate generosity and his false-friends’ greed.

**SENATOR:** If I want gold, steal but a beggar’s dog
   And give it to Timon—why, the dog coins gold;
   If I would sell my horse and buy twenty moe
   Better than he—why, give my horse to Timon;
   Ask nothing, give it him, it foals me straight
   And able horses. No porter at his gate,
   But rather one that smiles and still invites
   All that pass by. It cannot hold… (2.1.5-12)

In act 2, scene 2, Timon’s failures to heed wise counsel and keep a prudent account of his estate are again treated:

**STEWARD:** No care, no stop; so senseless of expense,
   That he will neither know how to maintain it,
   Nor cease his flow of riot. Takes no accompt
   How things go from him, nor resumes no care
   Of what is to continue. Never mind
   Was to be so unwise, to be so kind. (2.2.1-5)

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278 Cf. Jackson: “Shakespeare offers very little opportunity to condemn Timon's giving and much more opportunity to praise it” (Jackson, “Wish,” 50).
Here, following the now-familiar pattern, the Steward balances his criticism of Timon’s prodigality by amending it to an acknowledgement of Timon’s kind and noble nature. The Steward’s assertion that Timon has not kept a prudent account of his estate is proved true when, after being told of his debts, the incredulous Timon asks the Steward, “How goes the world, that I am thus encounter’d/ With clamorous demands of debt, broken bonds,/ And the detention of long since due debts/ Against my honour?” (2.2.42-44). Timon asks why the Steward has “not fully laid my state before me,/ That I might so have rated my expense/ As I had leave of means. (2.2.129-31). The Steward however insists “I did endure/ Not seldom, nor no slight checks, when I have/ Prompted you in the ebb of your estate/ And your great flow of debts (2.2.143-46). The Steward’s remarks remind the audience of Apemantus’ earlier lamentation: “O that men’s ears should be/ To counsel deaf, but not to flattery” (1.2.250-51).

In the first two acts, then, Shakespeare clearly and repeatedly depicts Timon as kind and generous, which makes the protagonist a noble, sympathetic character; at the same time, Shakespeare clearly and repeatedly depicts Timon as immoderately generous and unable to keep a prudent account of his estate, which makes the protagonist prodigal. It is also clear, from the opening scene onwards, that nearly all of the characters with whom Timon associates, save the Steward, are driven by greed and/or self-interest. These flatterers profess their love for Timon so that they may indulge their basest desires. From an Aristotelian perspective, Timon’s prodigality and his friends’ avarice constitute the opposing extremes of liberality. In his discussion of avarice, the defective extreme of liberality, Case describes it as “the Pandora of all the vices.” He cites Aristotle and Cicero, who respectively describe avarice as “an incurable ailment, an unquenchable thirst for money,” and “an inordinate love of possession, which is concerned with endless seeking, limitless acquisition, lawless possession.” Case then identifies the means by
which greedy men seek to achieve their ends: “theft, usury, plunder, fraud, perjury, lying, and six hundred other ways” (4.1). The flatterers who surround Timon are such men who throughout both halves of the play employ such means in an effort to satisfy their greed. They are dishonest and incapable of true friendship. As Draper observes, the glass-faced flatterers “pretend to share [Timon’s] idealism, but Shakespeare leaves the audience of the play in little doubt as to their sincerity.”279 The language of flattery was established in the play’s opening dialogue, and it is later exemplified in the First Lord’s fallacious espousal of true friendship: “Might we but have the happiness, my lord, that you would once use our hearts, whereby we might express some part of our zeals, we should think ourselves for ever perfect” (1.2.82-85). The time will come when Timon will ask to use their hearts, and when these flatterers have an opportunity to express their zeals, they turn their backs on Timon and drive him into misanthropy.

Question 5

Is the avaricious man worse than the prodigal man?

By depicting Timon as generous, Shakespeare created a noble character; and Timon’s prodigality, especially his failure to give correctly, makes dramatic conflict possible. A liberal man would give often yet never allow the dissipation of his estate, and a greedy man would give never and thus secure his estate. Therefore, the liberal man cannot be a tragic figure because he avoids ruin by giving correctly, and the greedy man cannot be a tragic figure because he does not earn the adoration of the audience. Prodigality alone is capable of being met with a mix of adoration and disapproval. According to Case,

Aristotle regards the prodigal as far better than the miser, since in scattering his money about the prodigal helps many men, but the miser nobody. Sometimes the prodigal is wise by counsel, sometimes out of necessity, but the miser never; in his giving the prodigal imitates the kind and liberal man, but the miser shuts door and hand; many men adore the prodigal, everybody loathes the miser as a monster (4.1).

From an Aristotelian perspective, there is something good and noble about the prodigal Timon: he helps many people and in many ways imitates the kind and liberal man, yet his immoderate generosity leads to the dissipation of his estate. These sentiments favoring prodigality over avarice echo throughout the first half of the play; indeed, Timon himself expresses them when he assures the Steward that “No villainous bounty yet hath pass’d my heart;/ Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given” (2.2.177-78). One who gives generously but incorrectly can become a sympathetic character while at the same time can be viewed as partly responsible for his own misfortune.

Question 6

Is friendship correctly defined into three species?

Shakespeare’s treatment of liberality and its opposing vices is inextricably linked to his treatment of friendship. Indeed, it is Timon’s misunderstanding of the nature of his friendships, and not his prodigality, that ultimately leads to his ruin. Timon mistakes false friendship for true friendship and mistakenly believes that he gives to the right people, and therefore assumes that they would, if called upon, reciprocate his generosity. Case describes true friendship as a “reciprocal and mutual love which should ebb and flow between the lover and the loved,” and “a mutual and unconcealed good will between those who strive and attempt to do good things for each other back and forth” (8.2). True friendship is the virtue “whereby another man is made a second self because of his similarity of morals in a consensus of virtue. For what is a friend if not
an alter ego? What is friendship if not, so to speak, the transformation of one friend into the nature of another?” (8.3). In the first half of the play, Timon sees his relationships with his followers as examples of true friendship:

O no doubt, my good friends, but the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you: how had you been friends else? .... what need we have any friends, if we should ne’er have need of ’em? .... We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends? O what a precious comfort ’tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another’s fortunes. (1.2.86-103)

If Timon had been correct in his estimation of his friendships, then his prodigality would have been a relatively harmless vice, for his estate would have been replenished by his friends, who in the past benefitted greatly from Timon’s generosity. Without true friendship, however, prodigality leads to ruin. Therefore, it is Timon’s misunderstanding of friendship that ultimately drives him into misanthropic oblivion.

From an Aristotelian perspective, Timon has failed to properly distinguish between the three species of friendship. Case writes that the object of friendship is threefold: a useful good, or a pleasant good, or an honorable good, but only honorable friendship “should truly and simply be deemed a virtue” (8.1). Friendship is accordingly divided into three species, “namely that it is one thing per se, but another per accidens: the former is called earnest and firm, the latter useful or pleasurable. So, just as there is a threefold object of friendship, the honorable, the useful and the pleasant, so three species of friendship are assigned, whereof the first flows from the honorable, the second from the useful, and the third from the pleasant” (8.3). Timon has mistaken friendship per accidens, which is solely based on either the useful or the pleasant, for friendship per se. Between the two types of friendship per accidens, Case argues for the superiority of pleasant friendship, which is “more like true friendship than that profit-hunting one
which is destroyed and ended the moment hope of obtaining it is removed” (8.6). However, neither useful nor pleasant friendships are virtuous, for they possess nothing of firmness, nothing of constancy. For those who pursue friendships for usefulness’ sake measure affection in terms of personal advantage, and those who do so for the sake of delight do their measuring in terms of their own pleasure, since they do not cultivate others because they are good, but because they are useful or enjoyable. Friends of that ilk are found everywhere, who dance attendance as long as wealth and delights are flowing, but when they begin to ebb they go flitting off, quickly and to a great distance, these gentlemen who spin their spider’s web to catch their prey and, as they say, take to the lifeboats during a shipwreck, while their friends are imperiled. (8.3)

The Steward describes Timon’s friendships in just this manner:

How many prodigal bits have slaves and peasants
This night englutted! Who is not Timon’s?
What heart, head, sword, force, means, but is Lord Timon’s,
Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon?
Ah, when the means are gone that buy this praise,
The breath is gone whereof this praise is made.
Feast-won, fast-lost; one cloud of winter show’rs,
These flies are couch’d. (2.2.170-76)

Similar warnings against friendship per accidens in general, and useful friendship in particular, recur throughout the first half of Timon. For example, Apemantus warns Timon that “Men shut their doors against a setting sun” (1.2.141). The Steward and Apemantus both recognize the true nature of Timon’s friendships, whereas Timon errs by failing to distinguish between the three species of friendship. This explains why Timon can learn of his financial misfortune and yet ask the Steward, “Why dost thou weep? Canst thou the conscience lack,/ To think I shall lack friends? (2.2.179-80). It also explains why Timon can go so far as to embrace “these wants of mine” and “account them blessings; for by these/ Shall I try friends. You shall perceive how you/
Mistake my fortunes; I am wealthy in my friends” (2.2.185-88). Timon’s lack of concern for his lost fortune is based upon his erroneous assessment of his friendships.

Of course not all friendships can or should be honorable, and there is nothing inherently wrong with friendships based upon the useful or the pleasant. Case writes that:

Aristotle teaches that in friendship for the sake of the useful few are to be acquired, both because it is harmful to bestow it on many and since it is a chore to be at the service of a number of men. He shows the selfsame thing to be true in friendship for pleasure’s sake, since pleasant friends should be employed rarely, not otherwise than sweetmeats at a banquet. Finally, in friendship for virtue’s sake he says that it is impossible to cultivate several friends at once. For it is difficult to rejoice with many in prosperity and to suffer with them in adversity. Experience proves this, since if a friendship is great and excellent, it needs be that it befalls only a few. For virtue’s excellence excludes a throng of friends. (9.10)

Timon, therefore, has violated nearly all of Aristotle’s precepts regarding friendship, for his many friendships are almost exclusively based on the useful and the pleasant. By clearly depicting Timon’s world as one filled with opportunistic flatterers and deceivers, Shakespeare effectively creates an air of inevitability about Timon’s demise. When Timon’s servants are dispatched to recoup their master’s fortune from his so-called friends, they return empty-handed. The Steward and Apemantus’ predictions come true as Timon’s friends abandon him, and the excusive lies and bribes employed to avoid repayment serve to underscore the flatterers’ avarice nature. We first hear that the Senate has denied Timon’s request for assistance (2.2.209-17). Timon however persists in his belief that his friendships are honorable and based upon reciprocal and mutual love, saying “Ne’er speak or think/ That Timon’s fortunes ’mong his friends can sink” (2.2.234-35). Yet one after another of Timon’s requests is denied. Ventidius, who earlier offered to repay Timon when he knew Timon would not accept the repayment, will deny Timon’s earnest request (3.3.8-9). Others do the same, but Shakespeare breaks up the
redundancy of Timon’s friends’ denials by varying their excuses. Lucullus first takes a didactic approach that is laced with irony: “Many a time and often I ha’ din’d with him, and told him on’t, and come again to supper to him of purpose to have him spend less; and yet he would embrace no counsel, take no warning by my coming” (3.1.23-27). Lucullus then points out that “…this is no time to lend money, especially upon bare friendship, without security.” Finally he says to Flaminius, “Here’s three solidaires for thee; good boy, wink at me, and say thou saw’st me not” (3.1.41-44). In the next scene, Lucius feigns disappointment in Lucullus’ ingratitude: “Now before the gods, I am ash’m’d on ’t. Denied that honourable man? For my own part… I should ne’er have denied his occasion so many talents” (3.2.16-23). But as Timon’s servant Servilius arrives to ask Lucius for money, Lucius is quick to employ his own excuse: “How unluckily it happen’d, that I should purchase the day before for a little part, and undo a great deal of honour!... I have no power to be kind” (3.2.45-47, 53-54). Sempronius refuses to help Timon because he feels personally offended that Timon did not come first to him for assistance: “Must I be his last refuge? … H’ad sent to me first, but for my mind’s sake;/ I’d such courage t’ do him good” (3.3.13, 25-26). The point is clear enough: most men are greedy liars and flatterers. Case, commenting upon Elizabethan society, writes that truth is rare and cultivated by few men nowadays. How many forged wills! How much false witness! How many deceitful sophisms! Indeed, how many cheating merchants, how many perjured liars, how many cloaked hypocrites go a-flitting about the forum of conscience and truth, weaving, unweaving, affirming, denying, concealing, revealing! Why waste many words? They lie about all things, they greet you sweetly, they often return your greetings, but they have a smooth face and a deceiving mind. (4.7)
The turning point of the play occurs in act 3, scene 4, after Timon’s requests for aid have been denied by his so-called friends. At this time we learn that these men have all along been acting as both recipients of and creditors for Timon’s prodigality. Now that Timon is no longer capable of spreading his bounty, the greedy flatterers become debt collectors and dispatch their servants to submit their respective bills to Timon (3.4.78-88). By piling usury upon lying flattery, it is as if Shakespeare was working from Case’s list of the means by which greedy men seek to achieve their ends: “theft, usury, plunder, fraud, perjury, lying, and six hundred other ways” (4.1).^{280} The Steward, who is appalled by the treachery of Timon’s so-called friends, asks their servants, “Why then preferr’d you not your sums and bills/ When your false masters eat of my lord’s meat?/ Then they could smile, and fawn upon his debts,/ And take down th’ int’rest into their glutt’nous maws” (3.4.49-52). The Steward’s condemnation of flattery and friendship per accidens is not unlike the one expressed by the Elizabethan Case and his ancient sources:

Oh how many there are nowadays who smear their lips with love’s nectar! How many who deceive and ensnare others in affection’s name! The face always has a rose, the mind a thorn. Indeed such friends and such [pleasant] friendships (as the Philosopher teaches here) are most easily sundered. Ovid wrote rightly about the first kind of such fellows: ‘As long as you are well-off you will count many a friend, but if the times grow stormy, you will be alone.’ And he also wisely complained about the second kind [useful friendships] in Book I of the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, ‘That once-venerable word friendship is up for sale, and sits out hunting for gain, like a whore.’ (8.3)

^{280} As Shakespeare does in *Timon*, Case in the *Speculum* selects lying and usury for extended treatment. In his discussion of liberality, prodigality, and avarice, Case addresses the practice of usury and categorizes it under avarice per se. He argues that usury violates the laws of nature and justice, and it is therefore “impermissible to receive money for the use of money, inasmuch as money is being spent and paid out for its own use” (4.1). The legality of usury does not, according to Case, make it worthy of sanction and approval, for “The laws often permit an evil lest a greater danger ensue in the commonwealth, but they do not approve it, nay, they deter and discourage us from it” (4.1).
Only now, in act 3, scene 4, does Timon realize that he has all along been mistaken about his friendships with the men who surrounded him. Timon’s kindness, generosity, and love of man are replaced by the bitter railings and misanthropy that characterize the second half of the play. Before withdrawing from this world of false friends, Timon decides to “once more feast the rascals” (3.5.108). The rascals know that Timon is bankrupt, yet they cannot decline Timon’s invitation if it carries with it even the slightest possibility of rewards. The Second Lord has actually convinced himself that Timon is not in fact bankrupt: “I think this honourable lord did but try us this other day” (3.6.3). If that is the case, then all the more reason to flatter the noble Timon so as to remain in his good graces. Timon’s friends arrive and greet him, each with their own lies and excuses for having recently denied him aid. The Second Lord, for example, assures Timon, “If you had sent but two hours before…” (3.6.44). Nevertheless, here they are, eager to flatter Timon in great expectation of some return. This time, however, they receive nothing from Timon but dishes of warm water and curses, both of which are thrown in their faces: “Live loath’d, and long,/ Most smiling, smooth, detested parasites,/ Courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears,/ You fools of fortune, trencher-friends, time’s flies/… Henceforth hated be/ Of Timon, man and all humanity” (3.6.89-101).

In some respects, the second half of the play stands in stark contrast to the first. Timon’s kindness and generosity, and his civilized world of sensuous pleasures, give way to misanthropic invectives in the wilderness. On the other hand, the general purpose of the second half of the play complements the first: the initial argument against complete philanthropy is followed in the second half of the play by an argument against complete misanthropy. If Shakespeare did indeed design the play to show in Timon contrasting extremes related to the virtue of friendship, then the second half of the play should show that Timon’s complete misanthropy is as excessive and
misguided as was his earlier complete philanthropy. This design is in fact explicitly stated by Apemantus, when he says to Timon, “The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends” (4.3.301). The play is therefore divided into two halves in which Timon is a friend to everyone and then a friend to no one. Timon’s prodigality provided Shakespeare with a means by which friendships could be tested and would ultimately fail, and it is Timon’s realization of false friendship, not the dissipation of his estate, that drives him to the misanthropy for which he was proverbially known.\[281\] So it appears that the virtue of friendship was of greater interest to Shakespeare than was the vice of prodigality, which was simply a means to an end.

Questions 7-9

What is friendship per se?

Do friendships per se differ in species?

Are friends more required in adversity than in prosperity?

In order for Shakespeare to show that complete misanthropy is as excessive as complete philanthropy, the play requires characters that represent true and honorable friendship. Against the cast of flatterers, Apemantus and the Steward have proven themselves to be honest—perhaps they are capable of representing friendship per se.\[282\] Apemantus, however, is not a true friend to Timon. He is a hanger-on of a different sort, one whose life of poverty compels him to justify and embrace his station by reviling those above him. The flatterers banqueted at Timon’s expense and greedily pursued Timon’s gifts; likewise, Apemantus’ cynicism and misanthropy

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\[281\] Kaufmann makes an important observation about the cause of Timon’s misanthropy: “what galls Timon is not the loss of his wealth and sensuous delights, only man’s ingratitude, man’s meanness, man’s lack of nobility elicits those resounding curses that fill all his later speeches, of which there are many” (Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, 13).

\[282\] Oliver observes that Apemantus and the Steward are “the only characters in the second half of the play as in the first who cannot be bribed in any way with Timon’s gold” (Oliver, *Timon*, 1).
were nourished by his presence at Timon’s sensuous banquets. In act 4, Timon explicitly rejects Apemantus as a true friend and categorizes him as just another flatterer:

TIMON: Hadst thou like us from our first swath proceeded
   The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
   To such as may the passive drugs of it
   Freely command, thou wouldst have plung’d thyself
   In general riot….
   If thou hadst not been born the worst of men,
   Thou hadst been a knave and flatterer. (4.3.254-58, 277-78).

The Steward, on the other hand, is clearly portrayed as a representation of honorable friendship and he constitutes the argument against complete misanthropy.²⁸³ He exemplifies the species of friendship *per se*, in stark contrast to the several useful and pleasant friendships that dissolved along with Timon’s estate. The Steward recognizes Timon’s noble nature, provides his master with good counsel, resents Timon’s false friends, and thinks of Timon’s welfare in both good and bad times. His sympathy for Timon is genuine: “Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart,/ Undone by goodness; strange, unusual blood:/ When man’s worst sin is he does too much good!/ Who then dares to be half so kind again?” (4.2.37-40). He understands that Timon’s bitterness is not caused by his dissipated estate but rather the betrayal of his false friends: “He’s flung in rage from this ingrateful seat/ Of monstrous friends.” He also understands the effects of Timon’s misfortune: “Nor has he with him to supply his life,/ Or that which can command it.” And unlike so many others, the Steward will not abandon Timon now that the money has run out: “I’ll follow and enquire him out./ I’ll ever serve his mind, with my best will;/ Whilst I have

²⁸³ Oliver writes, “The presence of the Steward among the characters, then, so far from being the puzzle or contradiction that Chambers found it, is essential to the meaning of the play and expressly forbids us from identifying our judgment (or Shakespeare’s) with Timon’s” (Ibid., I-li).
gold I’ll be his steward still” (4.2.45-51). This exact point he later reiterates: “I will present/
My honest grief unto him; and, as my lord,/ Still serve him with my life” (4.3.472-74). The
Steward’s words and deeds throughout the play, but especially here in act 4, scene 2, are
expressions of friendship per se, which according to Case is

so enduring, so firm and excellent that it shines like gold in a fire…. exists
between good and morally earnest men…. makes one out of two in a consensus of
virtues and minds…. ignores reproaches, it knows no insult; it only exists between
good men. For it shuns the wicked, it cultivates virtue, it aims at constancy and
steadfastness in action, it refers all it says, does and thinks to the welfare of the
friend. It does not swell with pride, it does not wither out of dislike, it does not
burn with anger, unless the friend errs and sins, whom it then corrects with
counsels rather than reproaches, examples of virtue and not insults. (8.4)

Unfortunately, at this point in the play Timon’s misanthropy is absolute: “I never had honest man
about me, I; all/ I kept were knaves, to serve in meat to villains” (4.3.481-82). Timon’s position
is extreme and as demonstrably false as was his complete philanthropy exhibited in the earlier
acts. The Steward assures him, “Ne’er did poor steward wear a truer grief/ For his undone lord
than mine eyes for you” (4.3.484-85). The Steward’s genuine concern and dedication compel
Timon to moderate his complete misanthropy: “I do proclaim/ One honest man. Mistake me not,
but one./ No more, I pray—and he’s steward./ How fain would I have hated all mankind,/ And
thou redeem’st thyself. But all, save thee,/ I fell with curses” (4.3.500-505). Here Timon’s
rejection of complete misanthropy is tempered by that qualifying phrase—“and he’s steward.”
This is a clear acknowledgement of inequality between Timon and his faithful servant and
recognition of the Aristotelian distinction between friendship of equals of equal birth and
friendship of unequal of unequal birth; according to Case, the former is superior to the latter

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284 Not coincidentally, the Steward and Alcibiades are the only characters who are willing to offer gold to Timon.
because “a great distance between persons, for example between sovereign and citizen, impedes friendship” (8.7).

Timon remains skeptical of the Steward’s professions of friendship, for experience has taught him to trust no one: “Is not thy kindness subtle, covetous,/ A usurping kindness, and as rich men deal gifts,/ Expecting in return twenty for one?” (4.3.512-14). Only now, after having earlier and for so long ignored the counsels of the Steward and Apemantus, does Timon understand the motivation of his false friends who in the first two acts would give to Timon in order to receive more in return, and who, incidentally, have heard a rumor that Timon is again with gold, which prompts their return toward the end of act 4. The Steward remarks that such counsel and understanding would have better served Timon at the height of his fortune: “You should have fear’d false times when you did feast” (4.3.517). The Steward’s remark accords with Case’s discussion of whether true friends and counsel are more required in adversity than in prosperity:

I indeed do realize that a wretched and downcast man’s condition is in need of friends. And yet I am unsure whether a man set amidst a kingdom of pleasures does not need them more urgently. For lofty towers collapse with a heavier fall, high things tumble down more rapidly. … So, as it seems to me, friends are more wanted in fortune’s pleasant time rather than in her gale and storm. For when a golden Nile flows, when the sun shines, the human mind is all too often perilously asleep. Then indeed there is need for loyalty, there is need for counsel, lest by means of sweet slumber you perish by self-forgetfulness. (9.11)

285 In acts 4 and 5, Shakespeare sets friendship per se directly against friendship per accidens by counterpointing the Steward’s demonstrations of honorable friendship with scenes depicting Timon’s interaction with several unsavory characters and false friends who, having recently heard that Timon is again with gold, come calling. For example, Timon is approached by two whores, Phrynia and Timandra, who are honest enough: “Believe ’t we’ll do anything for gold” (4.3.152). The Poet and Painter, on the other hand, are habitual flatterers. Believing Timon has gold, they agree to “tender our loves to him,” for “it will show honestly in us, and is very likely to load our purposes with what they travail for” (5.1.13-15). The Steward’s honesty is contrasted with the courtiers’ flattery. The Painter observes that “Promising is the very air o’ th’ time; it opens the eyes of expectation. Performance is ever the duller for his act; and, but in the plainer and simpler kind of people, the deed of saying is quite out of use. To promise is most courtly and fashionable; performance is a kind of will or testament which argues a great sickness in his judgment that makes it” (5.1.22-29).
How Timon needed loyalty and counsel amidst his kingdom of pleasures! And how unaware he was of the dangers of prodigality and false friendship!

**Question 10**

Is Alcibiades correctly defined?

There remains the problem of Alcibiades’ role in the play. Shakespeare’s treatment of liberality and its opposing extremes of prodigality and avarice are fully developed, almost to the point of redundancy; so too is his treatment of friendship *per accidens*. Friendship *per se* between unequals is represented in the relationship between the Steward and Timon. Friendship *per se* between equals is, however, underdeveloped in the play; it is perhaps telling that the connection between Timon and Alcibiades is likewise left in the air. Shakespeare left the sub-plot of Alcibiades unfinished, but critics generally agree that it was Shakespeare’s intention to use the story of Alcibiades as a counterpoint to the story of Timon.\(^{286}\) Alcibiades is the only character in the play capable of entering into an equal friendship between equals with Timon. In the source material, Alcibiades is indeed Timon’s only friend, yet their friendship appears to be useful rather than honorable, for Timon kept company with Alcibiades only because he believed that one day Alcibiades would “do great mischief unto the Athenians.”\(^{287}\) There are, however, several passages in *Timon* that suggest Shakespeare sought to establish an honorable friendship between Timon and Alcibiades. The design of the play, which combines the stories of Timon and Alcibiades, connects the two characters in a meaningful way. Timon and Alcibiades have much

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\(^{286}\) Rowse finds that the story of Alcibiades “underlines and counterpoints Timon’s, though the connection is left in the air” (Rowse, *Shakespeare*, 403). Oliver sees the relationship between the stories of Timon and Alcibiades as a particular example of the more general “dramatic principle upon which *Timon of Athens* is constructed—that of counterpoint” (Oliver, *Timon*, xlviii).

\(^{287}\) *Timon*, Appendix A, 141.
in common and they live somewhat parallel lives, for just as Timon withdraws from society, Alcibiades is banished by the Athenian senate (3.5.98). Both Timon and Alcibiades therefore have what Oliver describes as “justifiable reason for resentment against an ungrateful and corrupt state.”

In act 4, scene 3, Shakespeare seems to be making a concerted effort to establish an honorable friendship between Timon and Alcibiades—a well-nigh impossible task given Timon’s near-complete misanthropy. Alcibiades asks, “Noble Timon, what friendship may I do thee?” (4.3.71). He attempts to sympathize with Timon, first saying, “I have heard in some sort of thy miseries,” and then saying, “I am thy friend, and pity thee, dear Timon” (4.3.78, 97). In the spirit of reciprocity, Alcibiades offers Timon some gold, “Here is some gold for thee,” and Timon in turn offers gold to Alcibiades so that he might raise an army to subdue Athens (4.3.101, 109). Alcibiades continues to articulate the several characteristics of friendship _per se_ as he tells Timon, “I never did thee harm” (4.3.173). After Alcibiades successfully subdues Athens, he tells the senators that “Those enemies of Timon’s and mine own” will be brought to justice (5.4.56). And, finally, the play closes with Alcibiades’ eulogy of “noble Timon, of whose memory/ Hereafter more” (5.4.80-81).

Had Shakespeare completed _Timon_, the role of Alcibiades and his relationship with Timon would have been made clear. Shakespeare’s reason or reasons for leaving the play unfinished will forever remain a mystery, but perhaps the difficulty of establishing a true friendship between Timon and Alcibiades proved too difficult in this, Shakespeare’s most bitter

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288 Oliver, _Timon_, xlix.
289 Again, the Steward and Alcibiades are the only characters who offer gold to Timon.
290 Alcibiades seems to serve more than one function in the play. He and Timon have some sort of relationship, although its precise nature remains unclear. Oliver notes that Alcibiades “is the Fortinbras who restores order only after the tragic hero is dead; still more, he is the Octavius, the Aufidius—the man who survives partly because he has a clearer view of things and is more efficient, but partly because (it is the thought that recurs most often in Shakespeare) efficiency has been bought at the price of a certain loss of sensitivity” (Oliver, _Timon_, xlix).
play. With *Timon*, Shakespeare gave up on tragedy and Aristotelian moral philosophy; in fact, through his comprehensive explorations of Aristotelian moral philosophy in *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon*, it is perhaps more accurate to say that Shakespeare had exhausted his Aristotelian source. In Shakespeare’s late period, one of increasing withdrawal and reflection, his romances are tales of redemption and reunion, infused not with ethical discourses but rather magic and fantasy.

**Conclusion**

Only the discovery of Shakespeare’s signed copy of Case’s *Speculum* would put the matter of direct indebtedness beyond all doubt. One can, however, be certain of the following: that Shakespeare’s life and career as a playwright coincided with a revival of interest in Aristotelianism in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England; that John Case was a leading figure in this revival; that in several of his plays Shakespeare demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of Aristotelian moral philosophy; that these Aristotelian structures and passages are all Shakespeare’s additions to the source material; and that in its form, style, and content Shakespeare’s Aristotelianism much more closely follows Case’s Aristotelianism than it does Aristotle’s as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This study has suggested that William Shakespeare, the man who over the centuries has become all things to all people, is the most famous yet least recognized proponent of Elizabethan Aristotelianism.

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291 Critics generally recognize a structural problem. Oliver writes, “In the second half of *Timon*, indeed, there is no true dramatic conflict” (Ibid., li). Rowse expands upon this observation: “Timon passes at one bound from a too trustful confidence in human beings and their profession of friendship—and this is difficult to respect—to a too complete misanthropy, equally difficult to respect. Though his situation is a sad one, and we can sympathise with his disillusionment better than we can with his original illusions, it is not tragic” (Rowse, *Shakespeare*, 404-5).
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