Mark A. McDonald

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“To Show the Very Age and Body of the Time His Form and Pressure”

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ISSN 0020-9635
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On Hamlet and the Reformation:
“To Show the Very Age and Body of the Time
His Form and Pressure”

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In Hamlet, there is an analogy between the action of the play and the crisis in the orders of the Western world surrounding what is called the Reformation. The analogy is the basis for the argument or meaning of the play. This analogical argument, while not entirely exposed or clear, shows a surprising theme present in many particular lines and features, and invites us to consider fundamental questions in attempting to work out the details of this most enigmatic play. In the argument carried by the action, the Wittenberg response to the crisis is considered as noble yet flawed, or tragic. The drama of the Globe Theater is suggested as an alternative response that is not tragic.

Preface: On Persecution and the Reformation

The esoteric treatment of matters of religion in the plays has recently begun to be considered anew by the readers of Shakespeare (Teti 2005; Asquith 2005). If Shakespeare were a Catholic dramatist living in Protestant England, it would be necessary to address these questions, if at all, through an art of writing that evades persecution. Leo Strauss and Jacob Klein remind us of a reading of drama and dialogue in which the words and the actions together are considered together, and a kind of careful reading that takes into account the perilous political circumstances of scholarship and writing in almost all times and places. This recovery of careful reading, along with the recovery of classical political philosophy, has had an immediate effect on the study of Shakespeare. In reading, the plays reveal what is like a new dimension, in light of the greatest books and the great questions posed to mankind. What was called literary criticism is transformed or replaced by something better termed commentary, or, interpretation. Rather than write as literary “critics,”
for example on whether and in what ways a work might be a “bad play,” a branch of the recent writers attempt to follow Shakespeare as a philosopher or guide in the pursuit of wisdom. Commentary is a collective effort to read the plays, seeing what their author intends to show us, and through this to philosophize. We seem just now, in the present and past generation, to notice that Shakespeare is a philosopher as well as a poet, and somehow wise. His works transcend the boundary of the English department, becoming a guide in politics, philosophy, psychology and all human study.

The relation of Shakespeare to the biblical tradition is itself unclear, or not directly presented. If Shakespeare did not follow the setting aside of religious questions by the new natural science, at the very least it would seem he has decided not to take up biblical themes or expressions of faith directly. As shown persuasively in a recent biography, Shakespeare himself might have been Catholic by tradition, though he lived in Protestant England (Wood 2003). His father, his social and economic connections, his baptism, library and schoolmaster seem to have been Catholic. Yet, if he is a Christian writer, he clearly does not work as Christian writers commonly would work. There are no plays woven out of biblical plots (Platt 1984, 1–2), nor stories of the lives of saints. There are not even stories of Christian knights and ladies, though his medieval and modern characters are frequently Christian. The Shakespearean presentation of churchmen, like the depiction of the Friar in Romeo and Juliet, is notoriously unflattering (ibid., 2). Wisdom is presented as embodied not in Church offices but in the highest kind of man, so that political wisdom is not presented in especially Christian garments.

Teti has outlined well the pressure of both Catholic and Protestant persecutions in England after Henry VIII (2006, 50–54, 57–58). Only seven years before Shakespeare’s writing of Hamlet, Thomas Kyd—whose earlier lost play Hamlet is thought to have added the ghost to the old story from Saxo—had been tortured into confessing things about the atheism of his roommate Marlowe (Merchant 1979, xi). Marlowe himself was charged with heresy, and apparently died in strange circumstances before answering the charge. Whether Shakespeare is a Christian writer or not, it can be assumed from his survival and prosperity that he took precautions suited to his circumstances. In such circumstances, drama provided Shakespeare a way to address the more important political and philosophic questions while avoiding either persecution or flattery.

Whatever constraints Elizabethan Protestantism imposed on the Catholicism of Shakespeare, the protection of England would allow him to
consider both Luther and Rome in some degree of liberty. That is, while bibli-
cal thought remained extremely dangerous, his circumstance would not
especially require the flattering of either. Paradoxically, as a Catholic,
Shakespeare may have shared certain aspects of the circumstance of Luther.
Luther saw himself as an Augustinian, appealing to an earlier usurped tradi-
tion, while rebelling against that usurpation. Shakespeare, like Erasmus, may
have been in basic agreement with the Lutheran criticism of the Church, even
while presenting the attempt from Wittenberg to meet that crisis as tragic.
Erasmus is cited as writing: “A fine defender of Evangelic liberty is Luther!” and
“By his fault the yoke which we bear shall become twice as heavy” (Trevor-
Roper 1989, 278). The argument carried by Hamlet, as will be shown, is at least
totally consistent with some such position, exemplified by one of the most
sensible of those then alive in Europe.

The fortunes of men like Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus,
if not Bruno and Galileo, demonstrate the necessity that genuine thought
remain at least partially hidden. Pico may have been the most advanced of
those involved in the Renaissance recovery of Plato. His writings were at one
time declared heretical (Kristeller 1948, 215), and seem not to have been pre-
served in their original form (Farmer 1998). Erasmus may be the foremost
advocate of the common ground or syncretism of philosophy and Christianity.
The “Philosophy of Christ” advocated by Erasmus was for a time widely well
received, and almost became dominant, before being crushed and dissolved
between Luther and the monks or Roman Church (Trevor-Roper 1989, 278).
Some of his followers were burned in France, and he was declared a heretic
posthumously, in 1559 (ibid., 277). Shakespeare appears along the line of this
recovery of Socratic philosophy within the Christian West, and if he is a
Christian writer, he would be the foremost example of the Renaissance attempt
to have both Christianity and philosophy.

The Reformation may be said to have begun long before
Luther, in the protest movements surrounding the attempt and the suppres-
sion of the attempt to translate the scriptures by John Wycliffe (1320-1384) in
England, if it did not begin in the separate movements of the Albigensians and
Waldenses in early thirteenth-century France. More than a century before
Luther, John Huss was a reformer in Bohemia, associated with universities in
Prague and, after 1409, Leipzig. He was burned at the stake in 1415, tricked into
appearing for a debate by the promise of safe passage. This sort of thing—the
extreme persecution of thought or doctrine—happened in England as well, as
the translators of the Bible, and the books, bones and followers of Wycliffe, the
Lollards, were burned (Kuiper 1978, 220–23). The Lollard John Oldcastle was hanged in 1417 while Henry V was on the throne, before Savonarola was hanged in Italy (1498). The writings and example of Huss deeply affected Luther. Luther rejects the death penalty for heresy, and teaches that heresy cannot be prevented by force (1960, 466–67), though his followers joined Catholics in the persecution of Anabaptists. Luther himself narrowly escapes execution, shielded by Frederick the Wise from the edict of the emperor Charles V that he be seized, after the Diet of Worms. Shakespeare is not mute on the issue. In King Lear, the prophecy of the Fool looks forward to a time when no heretics are burned (III,ii, 84), and Shakespeare wrote the lines of Paulina in A Winter’s Tale: “It is an heretic that makes the fire / Not she that burns in it” (II,iii, 113). The blood of martyrs seems to indicate that there is a problem. That the church, having long included and inspired martyrs, should begin to make martyrs ought indeed to make us wonder.

Denmark did not convert until 1536, the same year that Tyndale was hanged in Belgium. Germany was not yet the modern nation, though independent northern princes adopted the Lutheran teaching (King Henry VIII, V,iii, 30–31). England was the first nation to become Protestant, in 1534, through the events shown in Shakespeare’s King Henry VIII. There both the sorrow of the fall of Catherine and the glory of the baptism of Elizabeth are presented in one of Shakespeare’s latest plays, alternately titled “All is True.” The divorce of Catherine and marriage to Ann is a change from Rome to the Lutheran influence of Cranmer. Henry VIII once regarded Lutherans as heretics (Kuiper 1978, 223), and Thomas More is said to have caused many Lutherans to be sent to the stake before he was himself beheaded for refusing to assent to the Act of Supremacy making Henry the head of the church in England (ibid., 224). The Church of England remains separate from the Lutheran Reformed Church and nearer in doctrine to Catholicism by this supremacy (Teti 2005, 51).

The difficulty of the persecution of men for differences in doctrine is usually either ignored by Catholic thought or, as is shocking to contemporary opinion, excused, justified or given assent. Non-Catholics and Catholics alike might better ignore the question, in polite or prudential silence. If the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, it is thought, the Inquisition and the authorized persecutions must have been somehow justified in their own brutal age, and the doctrine and practices handed down seem on the whole to be more sound than the persecuted alternatives. The Catholic Catechism admits that cruel and unjust measures were taken against false doctrine, but notes that
the heretics were regarded as “spiritual forgers” and the “murderers of souls” (1984, 221). “Great and holy men,” like Aquinas, “did not raise their voice against such procedures,” and Aquinas is said to have approved of the Inquisition (ibid., 222). The Inquisition is said to show how entanglement with the State can harm the simplicity and gentleness of the gospel, and how “the Church is a very human thing” (ibid.). Conservative Catholicism has been slow to reject the Inquisition, less for any internal justification than for the inability to respond to the implications, or the contradiction of the supremacy of Rome that such a rejection seems to entail. Oaths of allegiance are required of Catholic teachers of philosophy. Such an oath—to obey a “human thing” in thought and action—might be difficult, even for those holding the Catholic Credo. In the context of five differences between his teaching and the Law of Moses, the teaching of Jesus is “do not swear at all” (Matthew 5:34). The issue might be ignored, except for the possibility that the error in question is an even greater difficulty than appears, precisely because of the true mission and significance of the Church. The medieval persecution pales in comparison to the horrors unleashed by the tyrannies of the twentieth century, and tradition in general stands as a safeguard against modern extremism. Yet there may be a connection between the two: The heresy of burning heretics may be related to the fundamental difficulty in the orders of the Western world that led to twentieth-century ideological tyranny. The development of the ideas of these new tyrannies appears as the development of the anti-Christian tendencies of modernity, fueled by the medieval examples. A branch of the enlightenment and the Reformation together led toward the development of Communism on the left and Fascism on the right, out of the atheistic branch of German philosophy. The crisis of the Reformation and the effect of Wittenberg prepared the ground for these later developments in German thought, even affecting our current predicament. It is this very difficulty, the trouble in the soul of the Western world, that we will try to show is the focus of the esoteric argument of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

I: THE OBJECT OF THE ARGUMENT OF *HAMLLET*

Shakespeare himself indicates how his works might be read. The purpose of the author is the most important clue to reading, and the play *Hamlet* has more to say directly about the purpose of drama than any other play. Together with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest*, *Hamlet* is a play in which the characters produce a play, giving us a window into a dramatist's workshop. Before producing his play, Hamlet presents his advice to the actors, in a famous scene (III, ii, 1–45) that should be read
by every Shakespearean company before setting out to produce a play. In addition to his comments on how to speak “my” lines, Hamlet also addresses the “purpose of playing.” The end or goal of drama was and is

…to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(III,ii, 22–24)

Shakespeare attempts to show the “age and body of the time” to itself, in what would be a kind of communal or political self-knowing. The purpose of drama in all times, according to Hamlet, includes what Harry Jaffa identifies as the Shakespearean project of a history of Western civilization (1981, 290). In writing Hamlet, Shakespeare seems to work as Hamlet himself works, reaching into the wealth of histories and plays to find one that reflects the fundamental circumstances by analogy (Alvarez 1990; II,ii, 590–93; III,ii, 76–77, 231–37). Hamlet’s own play is an attempt to show the vice of Denmark to itself, and by this to “catch the conscience of a King.” Hamlet’s drama is astonishingly successful, so much so that Horatio agrees that it is enough to gain him ownership of a company (III,ii, 270). Hence, it seems an error to dismiss the drama of Hamlet as a mere replacement for genuine action (Blits 2001, 7), or to consider Hamlet to be merely “histrionic,” as might fittingly be said of Laertes. By drama, Hamlet succeeds at verifying the story of the ghost. His drama succeeds at joining the revelations from beyond the grave with the visible political world in a way that makes it possible to confirm a report from a spirit, or, in a sense, to know. He also succeeds at stirring the conscience of the King, nearly to a genuine repentance of his crime. Hamlet has done this by reaching into the wealth of histories and plays to select a plot that reflects the fundamental circumstances in the orders of the Danish monarchy (II,ii, 590–93; III,ii, 76–77, 231–37). He presents an action on his stage that is like the action of Claudius in the kingdom, the murder revealed to Hamlet by the ghost. We must wonder whether the play Hamlet is not in some way like Hamlet’s play (Alvarez 1990). What does Hamlet show to the “age and body of the time” about itself? Is the argument of the play about English politics, as Hamlet’s play is about Danish politics? As may be shown, the suggestion of the opening scene is that we look higher and deeper, to fundamental questions of Being and political history. It is here that we will find the proper light for reading Hamlet.

As Leo Paul de Alvarez indicates, each play has a logos or argument (1990). The logos of the play is difficult, or requires working out. The plot and action are visible, while the meaning is hidden, and appears only
in part, or in glimpses. Hamlet himself uses the word “argument” as another word for “play” (II,ii, 363), and Ophelia uses the word as a synonym of “plot” (II,ii, 144). The logos or argument is distinct from the plot, so that “the play requires us to have a double vision” (Alvarez 1984, 158–59). Jan Blits applies the point to Hamlet in connection with the “mind’s eye” (2001, 14). This argument is, at least in some cases, related especially, in Shakespeare’s history of the West, to a reflection on “the time.” In Hamlet, “the time is out of joint,” and it is his fated mission, or that for which he was born, to set the time aright. We suspect that the double seeing called for by the play is consistent with what Aristotle writes in his Poetics regarding the original imitated by the action (1448b10–19), and the reason that poetry in general is “a thing more philosophical than history” (1451b4–10).

The plot of the play carries an argument, a “logos,” about the age, and in one reading “about modernity” (Alvarez 1990; James 1951, 35–36). “Hamlet…is,” with Lear, “one of the careful presentations of the issue of modernity. [It is] a very careful presentation” (Alvarez 1990). In one formulation, it is said that “the modern prince cannot ascend to his inheritance because he believes his father invisibly murdered” (ibid.). In the character of Hamlet, it is indeed a Renaissance prince that is placed in the circumstance of the Reformation. Modernity may refer to the period following the medieval, or it may have a more particular meaning. Modernity refers to one result of the revival of learning in the Renaissance, or even to the character given to our age by the supremacy of modern science and thought based on natural philosophy. Jaffa uses the word to refer to the teaching that is “devoted above everything to comfortable self-preservation” (1981, 288). One possible reading of the change represented by the usurpation of Claudius is the change following the thought of Machiavelli. Another possible reading might see the usurpation as being like the change of the ages from the classical to the Christian world; to earlier writers, “modernity” can refer to the Christian or medieval world in contrast to the ancient. A third analogous possibility might be that the usurpation is Protestantism, and Hamlet a reactionary. We will argue rather a fourth possibility, that the usurpation is like the circumstance that preceded the Reformation, in the orders of what had been the Western Roman Empire.

Since the early nineteenth century, following Jacob Burckhardt, the revival of learning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has been called the Renaissance, in order to distinguish it from the medieval, which seems clearly different. As B. K. Kuiper nicely states, “When this Renaissance movement” entered “into northern Europe it changed character.” It “took on a
religious aspect” (1978, 148–49). The concern for original languages became a concern for the biblical languages, and the publication and collection of books shifted emphasis to the Bible and the tradition of the writings of the church fathers. The rejection of the principle of the medieval world became distinct from the rejection of biblical religion, leaving a non-medieval form of biblical thought. The present essay will try to show that in Hamlet, the aspect of the age that is considered is specifically the Reformation. Hamlet in his kingdom is, in an analogy, like Luther in his, not literally in German politics, but facing the crisis in the orders or soul of Western Europe that led to the Reformation. The essay will attempt to show that in Hamlet, Shakespeare considers the tragic response of Luther to the circumstance or crisis that led to the Reformation, and indicates that his own drama of the Globe Theater is a potentially non-tragic response to this same crisis.

II: WITTENBERG AND CLAUDIUS

Hamlet is a student at Wittenberg (I,ii, 113, 119, 164, etc.). The association with the university at Wittenberg is apparently a Shakespearean addition to the story from Saxo Grammaticus, written about 1190. Shakespearean additions to the source stories often indicate something of the intention of the play (Jones 1954, 174). Demonstrating that “Shakespeare’s anachronisms are committed purposefully,” Schlegel writes that Wittenberg was suited to make Hamlet a “philosophical inquirer.” Because of Dr. Faustus and Martin Luther, “the very name must have immediately suggested the idea of freedom in thinking” (Schlegel 1964, 13). Cantor (1989, 11–16), and Blits (2001 3–4, 394) also consider the significance of Wittenberg and these two figures. Laurence Berns writes, “The theological predicaments” in which the “passion” to “punish souls” has involved Hamlet “must have been part of the daily fare at Luther’s Wittenberg” (1981, 45). Because of Hamlet’s view of natural virtue and human effort, Alvis writes, “Shakespeare seems to have had Luther in mind as he created the character Hamlet” (2004, 303). Elisabeth Gerkrath, in a 1918 German work Das dramatische Meisterwerk des Protestantismus, cited by Ernest Jones (1954, 28) sees in the play “an expression of the revolt emanating in Wittenberg against Roman Catholicism and feudalism.” The present essay is intended to further and explore this line of commentary.

The university itself at Wittenberg was not founded until 1502, subject to the Duchy of Saxony. In one sense, the most literal, the setting of the play is at just about this time, when Denmark had not yet separated from Rome. Luther tacked his theses on the door of the Church at Wittenberg in 1517. Denmark became Lutheran in 1536, just two years after the break of
England from Rome, when Henry VIII denied the authority of the Pope. Saxo writes about a legendary ruler of Jutland, not a king but a prince under the King of Denmark, King Roric (or Yoric). He ruled long before Denmark was united and made Christian by King Herald in 974. The story of Amelth and Feng is “historical,” or supposed to have actually occurred. As Vikings, the Danes conquered England about 1013, and ruled England until 1042, so that they would then have been paid tribute (III,i, 173). Freely mixing the elements of history, Shakespeare makes King Hamlet like one of the three Danish kings who were, then, technically kings over England. Because of this tribute, Hamlet, like Macbeth, can be classed on the fringes of the English history plays. As a Protestant nation, Shakespeare’s England would be influenced by Luther, especially in his view of Rome, and with its greatest minds the nation would be facing the crisis of the Reformation, much as Hamlet does his crisis, and Luther his.

In addition to being a student at Wittenberg, Hamlet is also something like the crown prince of the elective-hereditary monarchy of Denmark, “the son of a king,” and in one sense the rightful king of Denmark. His circumstance is astonishing. He comes home for the funeral of his father Hamlet the King, and within two months finds his uncle elected the new king (V,ii, 65, 366) and married to his mother the Queen. The coronation of Claudius would not be a usurpation unless he is guilty of the murder of the former king. Yet this is in fact the case, and the truth is hidden from the kingdom. Hamlet would be king if this were known, though he has been passed over in the election in favor of Claudius. The marriage of Claudius to the Queen makes Claudius electable, and it is sometimes argued that his statesmanship appears superior to what Denmark might expect from Hamlet. The parallel circumstance in Norway, where the uncle of Fortinbras is King, is emphasized by Claudius to legitimize the succession in Denmark. The display of sagacious statesmanship by Claudius in the second scene is intended to make Denmark glad that Claudius rather than Hamlet is dealing with the threat from Norway. If the threat is genuine, Norway advances because of the murder of King Hamlet by Claudius. The final conquest of Denmark is the result of the murder of King Hamlet by Claudius. The play is about the attempt of Hamlet to purge the throne, and his failure to prevent this conquest.

The name of Claudius is another Shakespearean addition, related to the theme of foreign rule over Britain. It is the name of the Roman emperor finally to conquer Britain (Muir 1984, 77; Blits 2001, 220). Claudius is the uncle of Nero, whom Hamlet prays not to become like, by murdering his mother. Nero’s mother is the one guilty of poisoning the historical Claudius
(Shakespeare 1982, 311). Ruling between Caligula and Nero, the Roman Claudius is not an especially terrible ruler, and the character in Hamlet does not seem to have much else to do with the emperor himself. In Hamlet, the leading possibility for what is represented in the analogy by this peculiar usurper is the corrupt Renaissance and late medieval papacy, the rule of Rome as this is seen from Wittenberg. A number of similarities suggest the analogy. Claudius is the opponent of the prince from Wittenberg. His watchmen are mercenary. His drinking parties bring a bad reputation to the nation. Like the Pope, he has a Swiss guard. That the monarchy in Denmark is an elective monarchy is another Shakespearean addition (Wilson 1935, 35), and another parallel with the Papacy. Though he admires Lamord (Blits 2001, 311–12), the rider whose name means “death” (IV,vii, 80–104), Claudius is not quite a Machiavellian. He is more like Pope Julius in the dialogue of Erasmus titled Julius Excluded from Heaven. He does not seek to acquire or expand, but is concerned to hold what he has seized. In his aborted penance, he recognizes that while one can seize the law on earth, this is not so “above.” There there is “no shuffling, there the action lies / In his true nature” (III,iii, 60–63). Claudius, indeed like the Papacy as seen by Luther, “cannot repent,” being unwilling to give up something that has been seized. Returning from the ghost with the account of what has occurred in Denmark, Hamlet exclaims to Horatio “By St. Patrick there is much offense.” St. Patrick is not only the keeper of the entrance to purgatory (Wilson 1935, 78) but the British founder of the Celtic church in Ireland. In his History of the Kings of Britain, Geoffrey of Monmouth punctuates his account of the ancient kings of Britain with parallel events in the Roman and biblical world, connecting the two timelines. The historical parallel to Claudius is the beginning of the Church, as after describing the reign of Claudius, he writes, “At that time Peter the Apostle founded the Church at Antioch. Later he came to Rome and held the bishopric there, sending Mark the Evangelist to Egypt to preach the gospel which he had written” (1966, 122; Acts 11:19–28). The identification of Claudius in analogy with Rome rather than Machiavellian modernity is the indication that the logos of Hamlet is about the Reformation, rather than modernity in general.

III: Act I, Scene I

The play as a whole might be worked out in these analogical terms. The question of the argument of Hamlet begins with the question of how to understand the opening scene in relation to the whole play. The play opens as two watchmen with Christian names await the “rivals” of Barnardo’s watch, Marcellus and Horatio, who have ancient Roman names (Blits 2001,
As Blits notes, the names of watchmen seem to be the Italian names of the Christian saints Bernard (1091-1153) and Francis (1182-1226), and Barnardo is a cognate of Bernardo (2001, 25). The characters appear in reverse of the chronological order of the lives of these saints, though their appearance on the watch seems to indicate a concern with this time, not in the plot but in the argument of the play. In the argument, the usurpation and the ghost seem to appear at about this time in the history of the West, when the Crusades turned inward, as is said, and large-scale persecutions for heresy began. This is also the time when Saxo Grammaticus wrote the original history of Hamlet. These saints, both prominent in the Paradise Cantos of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (XI, XXXI-XXXII), are associated with one of the brighter periods of medieval history, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, in which a “new insight into the simplicity of the gospels was attained, and men became more humane” (Bishops of the Netherlands 1984, 220). These bright figures emerged just before the outbreak of the Inquisition, around 1215, when the darkest pages of Church history began, leading up to the revolution at Wittenberg. Both formed orders dedicated to monastic reform, which restored the Christian faith by example. While Francis is not martial, Bernard wrote the rules for the Knights of the Temple. He pursued Peter Abelard and the Albigenses for heresy, and allowed imprisonment, though not the death penalty, for heresy. The ghost appears on his watch. Out of the mist of these centuries, the argument of the play, then, as distinct from the plot, seems to begin with these watchers, St. Francis and St. Bernard. They may be somehow like the lessons that are to be kept as watchmen to the heart (I, iii, 45–46).

Horatio describes the appearance of the ghost as “a mote to trouble the mind’s eye” (I.i, 115). The mind’s eye is usually related to a Socratic source (Alvis 1990, 128–31). Blits (2001, 14, 38) refers to Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Ethics* (1144b30). Platt writes that the English phrase was coined by Shakespeare, and has a Latin equivalent in Dante (1984, 3 and n. 2). The New Testament use of the eye and sight (Matthew 6:22, etc.) as a parable has generally been ignored in presenting Christianity as emphasizing hearing, in contrast with sight and philosophy. A mote is a speck of sand, and *mote* is the word used in the 1611 translation of the New Testament teaching of Jesus in St. Matthew’s Gospel: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thy own eye” (7:3–5, 6:22, etc.). The teaching would seem a perfect basis for a Christian theory of tragedy, as due to a blindness caused by inner faction in the usual human condition. The mote would impair self-knowledge and prevent the tragic figure from seeing and
doing the right thing in his difficult circumstance. In *King Lear*, Kent speaks from the position of the blind spot of the King (I,i, 158). The appearance of the ghost may be related to such a mote in the eye.

Horatio recalls the account of ghosts said to have appeared in Rome just before the assassination of Julius Caesar (I,i, 116–28). In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, these are things which Caesar’s wife Calpurnia tells Caesar were seen by watchmen, when she is trying to prevent him from going to the Capitol (II,ii). These include ghosts and walking dead, with warriors on the clouds and in the air who drizzle blood on the capitol. Some of the things seen at the death of Caesar are taken not from the history of Caesar, but from the New Testament prophecy. Horatio says the moon has been “sick almost to doomsday with eclipse” (I,i, 123). Both Shakespearean accounts, that in *Hamlet* and in *Julius Caesar*, combine apocalyptic images, from Matthew (24:29); and the Revelation (6:12); including the rising dead, which are not found in the account of Plutarch. The report of empty graves and walking dead occurs not in Plutarch, regarding the death of Caesar, but in Daniel (12:2; 7:18) and possibly Ezekiel (37:13), and in the New Testament, simultaneous with the crucifixion (Matt. 27:52). Immortality is written of in Daniel, Job (33:28–30) and in the Revelation (20:12–13). There are frequent references throughout the play to “doomsday” and to apocalyptic things. The word *doomsday* occurs more frequently in *Hamlet* than any other play (I,i, 120; II,i, 240, 579; and V,i, 60). Horatio also adds that the ghosts “gibber,” as do souls on their way to Hades in Homer’s *Odyssey* (24. 5–7), while in Caesar’s Rome the ghosts are said to “squeak and squeal” (II,ii, 24).

Regarding the meaning of the constant classical allusions in *Hamlet*, Alvarez suggests:

>[What] happened to Caesar may be happening now… Is as important a change portended by this ghost as [that portended by] the death of Caesar? …If [you] look at the play, [the] result of the death of Caesar [is] a completely new world. The ancient ends. [There is] what looks like a “new heaven and a new earth,” with all kinds of references to Biblical revelations. What kind of a change would that be? Something like that is going to have to be asked… That’s why I think [there are the] classical allusions. Something is going on which causes this analogy to be made… What is the really important thing that’s going on?—obvious—that brings about these omens? What are the great lines…center…to catch the conscience of whom? A king. What is a king? Think about what a king
is...ruler, sovereign, one around whom the order of things depends.
The play is the most serious thing.

Blits writes of Horatio: “The parallel with Caesar’s fall and the allusion to Matthew 24:29 might seem to suggest that he fears the combined effects of the Renaissance and the Reformation—a political and religious upheaval comparable to the fall of republican Rome and the rise of Christianity” (2001, 38).

It is strange that Horatio does not compare the appearance of the ghost of the murdered Caesar to Brutus at Philippi (Julius Caesar IV,iii, 275), not before but after Caesar fell. The comparison would be especially fitting because, according to Plutarch, in his Life of Caesar (n.d., 894; Bloom 1964, 75):

The great genius which attended him throughout his lifetime even after his death remained as the avenger of his murder, pursuing...all who were concerned in it.

If Horatio interprets the appearance of the ghost as a portent of a future crisis, it would portend the death of the present king, Claudius, and possibly the other deaths or the catastrophe that is about to occur in Denmark. Yet the ghost is caused by, or appears because of, a crime that is as if in the soul of the community, an event past rather than future (Plato, Phaedrus 224d 6–e). There is something like an attempt of the community to purge itself of the crime, as in Oedipus, which provides the setting for a tragic response from the protagonist. The future change and the passing of the present king are the result of the crime in the soul of the community.

The achievement of universal empire by Rome brings about the end of the ancient city and the end of antiquity. There occurs something like an imitation or aping of Christ in the story of Caesar. The similarities are evident even in Plutarch, in the use of clemency for self deification, and when, as he would have Rome imagine, he is killed and Rome is healed and fructified by his blood, and his ghost ascends to influence affairs after his death. This similarity of pattern is strange, because it is the political form of the universal imperium and apotheosis, over the earthly city, which appears first in history. Christianity, and the access of mankind generally to salvation (John 3: 10) is also the turning of an age, so that the truly great changes in the orders of men all occur from the death of Caesar (44 B.C.) to the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. The next great change is that the two universal reigns unite, when the empire becomes Christian under Constantine (313-335), and then the Western empire splits with the Eastern empire (395) and falls (410-476), though the
Western or Roman Church continues. The division between Eastern and Western churches grew until it was formalized in 1054. Constantinople, the last living part of Caesar’s empire, fell only a generation before Luther, its fortunes having “turned Turk” as Hamlet says his own fortunes might (III,ii, 270).

This changing of an age is similar to the change of an age portrayed by Homer when he shows the ending of the age of heroes around the fall of Troy. Rome is of course the new Troy, founded by Aeneas, just after he tells this story to Dido. Britain too is presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth as having been founded by Trojan exiles (1966, I). Geoffrey mentions an ancient quarrel between Lud and Nennius over Lud’s doing away with the name of Troy in his country, in changing the name of London, called Trinovantium or “New Troy,” to Lud’s city, or Lud-don (I.17). The change brought about by Rome may be the end of what began at the fall of Troy, in the age of the ancient polis or city. Hamlet has the visiting actors play a speech of Aeneas to Dido, telling the story of the fall of Troy, when Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles (Blits 2001, 165), slew Priam. Hamlet then compares the cause for the passion of the actor playing Aeneas pitying Hecuba, who saw her husband killed, to his own lack of passion regarding his murdered father, just before he hits upon the way to use a play to catch the conscience of a king, and test the spirit. Yet in his mission, he is like Pyrrhus as well as Hecuba, and Claudius like Priam (Platt 1992, 925–26). The sword of Pyrrhus hangs or “sticks” in the air as he hears the tower of Troy come crashing down (II,ii, 485–93). If there is a connection to Hamlet’s own mission of revenge, the suggestion is that in his uncertainty, he pauses because his action coincides with what is like the ending of an age.

IV: THE GHOST AND THE MISSION OF HAMLET

It is not especially the character of Hamlet but his circumstance that appears to be analogous not to the literal characters but the circumstance of the Reformation, as this is seen by the Reformers. For the character Luther, the immortality of the soul is a principle of faith. For Hamlet himself, the immortality of the soul is, notoriously, a question, as evident in his fourth soliloquy (III,i, 64–65). The poem of Hamlet to Ophelia (II,ii, 115) demonstrates some contact with the doubt raised by Copernican astronomy, before the writing of Galileo. The poem may say that this doubt is admissible, though the same as doubting truth itself. He then apologizes for his weak poetry, as Henry V does when attempting to court Catharine with poetry (King Henry V, V,ii, 132–66). Though not a great poet, Hamlet is more a scholar than a soldier. (Those who measure Hamlet by the standard of Roman political
virtue are correct to begin by noting that the nobility of Denmark are strangely not leading armies at a time of preparation for war. Nor do the nobles seem to have led armies under Hamlet Senior.) He does excel at the rapier, defeating the pirates and the world-class Laertes 3-0, with one point a draw (V.ii, 275–307). Hamlet is a thinker, a student of philosophy, yet of a sort different from Horatio’s skeptical Roman philosophy, a sort open to the wonder of the things beyond what is dreamt of in Horatio’s philosophy (I,v, 174–75). He is also a dramatist. In the first half of the play, he does not see the events in Denmark as the workings of Providence, but rather, speaks of “fortune,” whose assaults we suffer. He states the tragic opinion that fortune is a “strumpet” or prostitute (Alvis 1990, 67), attending those who have money, or conventional wealth. As a direct character portrait, he appears closer to Marlowe, or to Shakespeare himself, than to Luther. It is rather the filial circumstance of Hamlet that reflects the circumstance of the Reformation, not directly, but “tropically” (I,i, 232) or by analogy.

The circumstance of Hamlet and the tragic element of his action are like the circumstance and the action of Luther—not, of course, regarding the throne in Elsinore, but by analogy, in the orders of the Western world. A fratricidal usurpation has occurred at Elsinore in the setting of the play, when Claudius killed his brother Hamlet and usurped his throne and Queen. The suggestion is that something that is like a brother has replaced something that is like a father, a once upright medieval tradition. The replacement has occurred even in the affections of the people or the kingdom. The older tradition is replaced by the ruling opinion and corrupt orders in which heretics are burned and indulgences collected, even while the Renaissance Papacy enjoys itself, as Claudius does with drink and cannons, and Pope Alexander famously said he would. The libertine excesses are insignificant in comparison to the fratricide. The Inquisition might be compared to a fratricide in that it unjustly kills those that have a family resemblance, and if these killings were unjust, they are murders. The Inquisition would then be like the crime of Cain, to which Claudius himself compares his crime. Yet the murder is by means of poison poured in the ear, as would describe the transmission of false doctrine. The fundamental fratricide is analogous to the ascent of the doctrine that takes over in about the twelfth century as the cause and result of the Inquisition.

Hamlet contrasts his genuine mourning with the merely formal mourning of the court, as Luther and Protestantism generally contrasted the inner truths with the ceremonial or external forms of religion (Blits 2001,
6). Hamlet is concerned about what “is,” in contrast with the mourning of the
court, which is a customary appearance, or a lie. Hamlet holds honesty as a
principle. There is a difference of emphasis between the Protestants and Rome,
between the inward truth, the “heart’s ground” as Luther (1961, 21) calls it, and
the outward forms of religion. Faith is an inner thing of the soul or the “inner
man” (Ephesians 3:16). Kent, in King Lear, returns from being banished for
speaking in support of “plainness” (I,i, 48). His disguise, as one who speaks
plainly and will “eat no fish” (I,iv, 18) is related to the Protestant posture
regarding appearances.

The disgust of Hamlet with his mother leads to a disgust with
the world, evident in his first soliloquy (I,ii, 129–58), before he sees the ghost.
He is prevented from suicide by the canon law forbidding suicide as a form
of murder. Hamlet, though not a theologian from Wittenberg, is Catholic, and
more serious about the ethical things than most, in a Demark that has not yet
changed (Blits 2001, 3) but is changing, or about to change. Goethe character-
ized Hamlet as “of a most moral nature” with “a great anxiety to do right”
(Bradley 1955, 88; Goethe 1921, 148). Ophelia’s description of him as courtier,
soldier, scholar, the rose of Denmark and the glass of form and fashion (III,i,
152–55) is not to be forgotten in its contrasting appearance of the antic dispo-
sition, nor even in the proof of his tragic flaw. If he is excessive in his dark view
of the world, we also remember that he has just seen his mother marry his
uncle, and suspects the deeper truth beneath this, that he is a prince in a king-
dom governed by his father’s murderer. The hasty and incestuous marriage
seems to bother no one else in the kingdom, and he is right that there is some-
thing terribly wrong. Something is “rotten in the state of Denmark” (I,v, 90),
and Hamlet is the only one who notices. Hamlet and the ghost are the only
ones to mention this (Blits 2001, 46–47).

The marriage of Gertrude to her brother-in-law is incestuous
(Leviticus 18:6 ff.) or quasi-incestuous, because the law treats the affinity of the
sister-in-law as if she were the consanguine sister of a brother. Luther upholds
the prohibitions of Leviticus (1961, 333) despite rejecting many Roman
impediments to marriage as examples of foretold false teachings (1 Timothy
4:3). The understanding of the sister-in-law as forbidden is based wholly on the
soul rather than the body, and assumes that the wife of a brother is “your
brother’s nakedness” (18:16), or that the two have become one flesh (Genesis
2:24), and so she has become like a sister rather than an available spouse.
Hamlet himself refers to this principle, the meaning of “the two become one
flesh,” when he scornfully calls Claudius his mother (IV,iii, 51–52). Horatio
com m ents symp athetically on the speed with which the marriage followed the funeral (I,ii, 179). Hamlet seems to be the only one in Denmark to be troubled by the filial-ethical matters—everyone else seems willing to subordinate these things to political utility under the cloak of ceremony. It is as if the rest of the kingdom lived under a change of law, while Hamlet alone lives under the old king.

Jones notes that if the marriage to a brother-in-law is not incestuous, “Queen Elizabeth would have had no right to the throne; she would have been a bastard, Catherine of Aragon being still alive at her birth” (1954, 68; Wilson 1935, 335, citing W.F. Trench). Catherine had been married to Arthur, the brother of King Henry VIII. When Arthur died, Henry VII had her married to a young Henry VIII, preserving the Spanish alliance. A Papal dispensation was obtained to allow this marriage. The marriage was declared valid again in 1534, when the issue arose, so that the divorce of Henry and Catherine was not allowed, leading to the division of England from Rome.

John Alvis connects Hamlet’s deprecation of the flesh, the world and human action to Lutheran theology (1990, 74–79; 2004, 303–5). The explanation of Hamlet’s failure “lies in Hamlet’s version of Christian belief, a disparagement of merely human things which elevates authority above reason while severely deprecating human capacities for virtue” (1990, 74). The principle is the deficiency of the fallen or unredeemed nature, after the sin of Adam (2004, 303, 312 n.6).

Yet Hamlet’s own disgust with the world and the appearance of the world as a prison is not directly or literally based on a theological deprecation of human action from Wittenberg. Rather, the representation is by analogy: Hamlet’s disgust is based directly on his experience of the degradation of his mother and the throne of Denmark. The whole world appears rotten because the throne and crown, the image of royalty, has been degraded, and the Queen his mother has gone along with the degradation. The Lutheran deprecation of the world and human action may similarly be based on the experience of the degeneration of the holy orders. In the analogy, the comment might be that there is a connection between the view that emphasizes the fallen nature of the world and man, and the experience of the holy orders as degenerated or subject to the fallen nature.

That salvation is by faith rather than works of law is the fundamental Lutheran or Reformation teaching. In the chapter on Luther in The History of Political Philosophy, Duncan Forrester writes, “The break with
scholasticism on the issue of justification is the starting point of reformed theological thought” (1975, 296). The Church now explicitly agrees with the teaching of justification by faith, producing a joint declaration with the Reformed Church on the matter. It is revealed that humans cannot do Christian custom, or that the presence of the Spirit in the ceremonies does not imply something it was thought to imply. Luther may ignore the things that Jesus teaches we can do regarding salvation, such as to reveal ourselves to the light and turn (strephata, Matt. 18:3; metanoate, Mark 1:14, Luke 13:3; cf. Plato, Republic 518 c), granting that the Spirit intercedes for our deficiency (Romans 8:26). He does not address the more “Gnostic” possibility that what is begotten in man (John 1:13, 3:3–9; Republic 490 b4) is, as Aristotle writes, “what each most is” (Ethics 1178, 5–8), whether on earth or in heaven, asleep or awake. The begotten nous is distinct from reason in the created image of God that is man. For Luther, the righteousness of “the new man in a new world” is entirely passive, and the two worlds are “separate the one far from the other” (1961, Commentary on Galatians, 104–5). Luther intends not to reject or disparage all action or works, such as works of charity, but to deny that there are actions prescribed by law by which humans can earn salvation, beginning with indulgences, or money paid to benefit those in Purgatory, or for forgiveness of sins. Luther, in his preface to the New Testament, does reject the canonical letter of James, which looks for “doers of the word.” James may state the other half of the Christian koan of faith and works, that “faith apart from works is dead” (1:22, 2:26). In the Revelation the book of life is written according to what each has done (20:12) and the linen of the garments of the bride is the righteous deeds of the Saints (19:8). Yet the idea that the grace of the New Covenant is a “new law” (Galatians 6:2) like Hebrew law and custom (Hebrews 7:23–28), and the Christian religion a similar religion of law is explicitly rejected. Paul writes, “you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14–8:17). To speak of a “law of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:6; Romans 8:2) is a deliberately paradoxical way of speaking, and a Christian religion of law, Christian custom, or doctrine of faith established by law, appears to be filled with difficulty. The Protestants often apply the Christian rejection of a religion of law, as in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, to Christendom itself. The Lutheran appeal to conscience would be consistent with the application of the teaching of the dignity of the person, due to the image of God in man, to the rule of the Church over men (Abbott 1966, 677).

While Hamlet, in speech, reveres his deceased father as a saint, the playwright depicts the senior Hamlet as confined to Purgatory. Hamlet
calls the bones of his father “canonized” (I,iv, 47). The ghosts in Purgatory are not entirely exiled from light, but spend their days there having their sins “burnt and purged away” (I,v, 13). One wonders what the foul crimes of King Hamlet might be, since he did not commit either murder or adultery, and was a loving husband and father (I,v, 48–50). Levin (1959, 34) suggests the obvious, that it is because he died without the proper preparations, “Unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d (I,v, 77). It is interesting to see the severity of the heavenly by reference to the earthly standard, in the comparison of the standard of Hamlet—by which his father is a saint—to the cosmic standard, as this is presented. His father spent his life as most kings do, smiting sledded Polacks and answering challenges to single combat. Though he may have been no Achilles, he is a “man,” as advocates of the classical hero would have him, and the judgment (in apparent agreement with Socrates: Plato, Apology 28b–d) would seem to be that his soul is not in the best condition. He is a shadow of what some he mistook for beggars are (II,ii, 267–70). Hamlet contrasts his father and Claudius on the basis of appearance, as when he shows their portraits to his mother (III,iv, 54) and in extreme terms, as “Hyperion to a Satyr.” When the report of the ghost is confirmed, he tells Horatio “This realm dismantled was / Of Jove himself.” His tendency toward the deification of his father leads him to say something like what Nietzsche’s madman says in describing nineteenth-century faithlessness, that “God is dead” (1968, 95). (Nietzsche might have cited the Chorus of Sophocles’ Oedipus as well: 905–10.) The identification of the father or the conventional orders with the divine leads to confusion when their mortality becomes apparent.

As C. S. Lewis emphasizes, “The Hamlet formula is not ‘a man who has to avenge his father’ but ‘a man given a task by a ghost’…if the play did not begin with the ghost scenes, it would be a radically different play” (1960, 179). The ghost and the secrecy of the murder he comes to reveal is another significant addition, apparently retained from an earlier lost play by Kyd presenting Saxo’s story. Blits, reflecting on the humanism of Dr. Faustus, the Reformation thought of Luther, and the late form of scholasticism in the logic of the gravedigger, writes: “In more than the most obvious ways, the Middle Ages take the form of a ghost in Hamlet” (2001, 4). The experience of the ghost is like the experience of one who sees the spiritual circumstances of the late Middle Ages, or that something is indeed very wrong there. Because of the ghost, Hamlet’s difficulty is that of how to act on the basis of a private spiritual insight, in terms of an invisible crime that cannot be shown openly in the kingdom (Alvarez 1990).
In the presentation of John Dover Wilson, the ghost and Purgatory are a Catholic experience, while the doubt of Hamlet, or his questioning whether the ghost might not be a devil, is set in the terms of a then contemporary Protestant opinion according to which spirits or apparitions are likely to be devils (1967, 61–73). The vindication of the ghost would then be a vindication of Catholicism on this point. Protestants in England thought Purgatory itself to be a superstitious invention for collecting indulgences (Greenblatt 2001, 1–2, 16–18). Jenkins cites two classical references, including Plato’s *Phaedo* (Shakespeare 1982, 453). From the teaching of Socrates and the likely story of the *Phaedo*, it may at least be concluded that Socrates did not think it entirely wrong to characterize the world (and Denmark) as a prison (*Phaedo* 82e–83a), nor that the imaginations regarding heaven and purgatory are harmful for people to believe (ibid., 114a–c). The distinction between Acheron and Tartarus corresponds to the distinction between Hell and Purgatory. In the “likely story” of Socrates, Acheron is purgatorial (113d) and some who enter here are released to the pure earth above after being purified by paying the penalty for any injustice done. In cases of serious crimes such as murder, they rush into Tartarus for a year, and a purgatorial dipping into the fire occurs. These are permitted to enter the lake of Acheron if they are able to gain the forgiveness of those they have wronged (114b). The usual scriptural basis for Purgatory is 1 Peter 3:19–20, where Jesus is said to have preached to “the spirits in prison” after he was put to death, and before the resurrection. Purgatory is implied in the Revelation (20:12–13), where the souls of the dead are given up by (and hence were in) the sea, Death and Hades. These are distinguished from earth and sky, *and* from the lake of fire. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, so that Purgatory may exist, though it is not eternal. Purgatory might allow souls to see the crucial questions in the light of truth, rather than of worldly examples. The things of heaven may be more accurately described to the imagination in the three-part image. In the two-part image, those who would make purgatory slip into the “cellarage.” Hence the jest that one is a Catholic because if he is to make it, he’ll need purgatory. Yet it is at least arguable that the line of damnation is lower, like that crossed in the English history plays as the civil war descends into the inhuman cruelty of those like Clifford and Richard (II *King Henry VI*, V,ii, 32–65). If the soul is immortal, and what we do to others is in truth done to ourselves, the torment of the cruel would be self-inflicted.

The ghost tells Hamlet “Remember me.” Hamlet swears an oath and says he will remember the ghost so long as “memory holds a seat in
this distracted globe.” Spoken in the Globe Theater, the line would have an unmistakable ring. This is the first of two or three allusions to Shakespeare’s own Globe Theater, and introduces the theme of drama that dominates the first half of the play. It is possible that the Globe Theater and the mission of Wittenberg are based on a similar stunning insight, and attempt to address the same circumstance. Hamlet uses drama to confirm the story of the ghost, but then misses his opportunity to set the time aright, because of his tragic flaw. The drama of the Globe Theater is suggested as a non-tragic alternative to the tragic action of Hamlet. Here in response to the crisis of the Reformation, memory is given a seat. Hamlet says he will “wipe all trivial fond records, / All sows of books, all forms, all pressures past” that he has copied in his memory, devoting it exclusively to remembering the ghost. Blits writes that this is a wiping away of all biblical law (2001, 106). While this reading seems possible, the experience does not lead Hamlet to question the biblical commandments or reject scripture, but rather to reject the smiling appearance of the usurper, and it is this he writes in his tables to replace what has been erased—that one may smile and be a villain. Both the Globe and the response from Wittenberg may be based on something that is likened by Hamlet’s seeing through the mask of the king. Hamlet reveres his father as a saint. “Remember me” is similar to what Jesus says at the institution of the Eucharist, when he says “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This new beginning is not necessarily non-biblical, though, as will be shown, it may be philosophical. Ophelia later tells Gertrude “love, Remember,” and Horatio is asked “Do you remember” (IV,v, 174; V,ii, 2). By the unusual means of the appearance of the ghost, Hamlet is given the mission to set aright a time that is “out of joint” (I,v, 196). One is reminded of the disruption of the seasons in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (II,I, 88–116). Steven Greenblatt has noted the use of this very phrase to describe the reason for the rejection of Rome by England. In a famous letter of Simon Fish to King Henry VIII, the poverty and corruption of the English is blamed on the collections and seductions of the monks (2001, 10–11). The time that is “out of joint” is the circumstance preceding the Reformation. Hamlet was born to set aright this disjointed time, in which virtue must beg pardon of vice (III,iv, 154–57). As he tells his mother, “heaven has seen fit to punish me with this and this with me / That I must be their scourge and minister.” Something similar is a possible interpretation of the history of Luther regarding the Roman Church.

The intention of the dramatist is to show a tragic response to the insight and mission given through the experience of the ghost. That the story is a tragedy is also an addition: Saxo’s Amelth succeeds at his revenge, and
is exemplary for wit and bravery. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a classical tragedy, showing the action of a character that is noble though flawed (Aristotle, *Poetics* XIII). This classical tragedy stands in contrast to tragedy about villains, such as Macbeth or Richard III, characters that are fundamentally flawed, if they have some noble element subjected within them. The political question that guides the reading of tragedy is always: What is the one thing that might have been done to avoid the tragic conclusion, or turn circumstances that are potentially tragic toward a comic, or at least non-tragic result (Alvarez 1990; Jaffa 1981, 282)? It is usually thought that Hamlet ought have immediately done what his father commanded, and he “is generally diagnosed as having suffered from a fatal indecisiveness” (Anastaplo 1983, 18). Attempts to address the play usually proceed from this assumption. Yet, imprisoned at Elsinore, he may be right at first to wait, rather than pursue immediate revenge as Laertes does (as Loretta Wasserman, in her class on Shakespeare, has indicated). Anastaplo writes, “Perhaps a sound instinct was at work here” (1983, 18). He wonders whether he might have been deceived, or whether the spirit seen might be a devil (II.iii, 594–99). Anastaplo (1983, 18–19) asks, “Should he have done at all what his father commanded? …did the deceased King know what he was doing when he ordered his son to kill Claudius?” And “did the Ghost care what happened either to his son or to his country?” The ghost could be genuine, or not a devil, and still be wrong about what ought to be done. Is the purpose of the ghost a part of his Purgatory, or rather a kind of night walking or the meddling of a troubled spirit (*Phaedo* 81c–d)? Anastaplo questions whether Hamlet ought to have obeyed the ghost, and writes: Hamlet acts as if Claudius would live forever if he is not killed by prince Hamlet” (1983, 19). Given the tragic failure of the prince to prevent the deaths of innocents, and especially Ophelia, it appears that Hamlet ought to have returned to Wittenberg, as he at first intends to do.

Hamlet hides his secret—his knowledge of the murder—in two appearances, the appearance of madness and the appearance of ambition, or disappointment at not having been preferred in the election. Hamlet is neither mad nor immoderately ambitious. He uses those who spy on him, including Ophelia, in order to make these appearances. The two appearances hold the place in the Hamlet story that the folly of the first Roman Brutus and the madness of Amelth hold in these stories. Hamlet is often thought cruel to Ophelia and reckless in alerting Claudius. His treatment of Ophelia can in part be explained by his use of her, who is being used against him, to make the appearance of his “antic disposition.” The mad often ignore custom in vulgar speech, as Hamlet does while viewing the play with Ophelia. He resents the dis-
honoring of his intentions (III,i, 128–29), and may exaggerate her intentional involvement against him, as he at first exaggerates his mother’s involvement in the murder. Yet neither of these appearances seems to derail his mission. Once he hits on a way to test the spirit when the players arrive from Wittenberg, and has confirmed the story of the ghost, he is on the verge of success. Claudius is preparing to send him to England, but after the Mousetrap, Hamlet is strategically one move ahead. He could depose Claudius before Claudius sends him to England, in part because, as it appears, Claudius still does not know that Hamlet knows of the murder. If he did know, Claudius would have mentioned in his soliloquy that his crime was now known, or considered the future in light of the fact that his crime had somehow been revealed. The question then becomes that of the reason for the second delay.

V: The Subplot

Ophelia is the transliteration of the Greek “helper” or “helpful” (Alvis 1987), which is what Eve was to be (Genesis 2:18, 1:27), and what Ophelia would be to Hamlet were the play a successful action drama rather than a tragedy. The love of Ophelia is Hamlet’s “last hope” (Knight 1957, 20). Her place as a helper is, even, or especially, in Genesis, spiritual: she has a place regarding the proper ordering and function of the mind and soul of the prince, and it seems that he does not think right without her love. This courtship is an indication of how things ought to have gone in Denmark, and the measure of the tragedy of what actually occurs. Hamlet may have required the love of Ophelia, if not the hope of royal offspring, in order to focus on the good of his kingdom. Obeying her father, Ophelia abandons Hamlet, from about the time that he sees the ghost. In her obedience to her father, she fails Hamlet, falling short of the heroines in other Shakespearean plays. In similar circumstances, Miranda disobeys Prospero for the first time in her life to give her name to the prince (The Tempest III,i, 37–38). Similarly, Juliet, Hermia and Thisbe disobey their fathers to love their beloved, as do Desdemona, Jessica and Imogen. In her obedience to her father, Ophelia fails Hamlet, and falls short of the royalty of character she might have attained by assisting him, as a heroine would have. Nor does Hamlet rescue her, as a hero should. She is the daughter of Polonius, who we will argue is connected with scholasticism. Prospero and Miranda are a contrasting father-daughter pair, and here it can be seen how the offspring of the magician- duke is wed to the prince. In the autobiographical reading of The Tempest, Prospero has been compared to Shakespeare, and Miranda to his offspring the plays, to be joined to the most noble young princes in pursuit of virtue. Ophelia is in some sense the contrasting daughter of scholasticism or
late scholasticism. She is the beauty produced by the medieval thinkers for the completion of the prince, and her tragedy a grim comment on the failure of this education. The death of her father at the hands of her former courtier shatters her soul, and she is left in a madness less curable than that of Lear.

Polonius is Claudius’s secretary of state, though he does not take part in political deliberations. He is given to spying into the private matters of both Laertes and Hamlet, and this sort of meddling leads to his accidental death. Polonius seems loyal to Claudius personally, and not to have served King Hamlet. There is no indication that Polonius was involved in or knows about the murder. Polonius should have been the father-in-law of Hamlet, had Hamlet married Ophelia and become king, in place of the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius (V,ii, 65). Tragedy affects those near to one another (Poetics XIV), increasing the pity it inspires.

From Polonius, we learn that Hamlet has lately “Given private time” to Ophelia, and that she has been “most free and bounteous” with her audience (I,iii, 92–93). We learn from Ophelia that Hamlet has “made many tenders / Of his affection to me,” importuned her in honorable fashion, and added to his speech “almost all the holy vows of heaven” (I,iii, 110–14). He may be taking care to secure an heir, even as a responsibility, assuming that he might succeed to the throne. He may be in love, as he later claims, though he wants to return to Wittenberg. Both Laertes and Polonius warn Ophelia against his courtship, apparently fearing that Hamlet does not intend to marry her, and it ends when Polonius forbids it.

There is something strange and unmotivated about Polonius’s forbidding Ophelia to receive letters from or see Hamlet at all. Polonius tells Ophelia that the statements of the prince near to all the holy vows of heaven, or to the proposal of marriage, are only bird traps or “springes to catch woodcocks” (I,iii, 115; V,ii, 312). Polonius tells her directly from now on to spend no leisure time nor talk with Hamlet, and Ophelia promises to obey (I,iii, 136). It is strange that Polonius would tell his daughter to reject the courtship of the crown prince, the most eligible bachelor in the kingdom, though he makes a great show of not seeking to advance his heir to the throne.

If Polonius did not look, in this scene (I, iii), as if he were in the process of deciding his absolute measures, it would almost seem as if Claudius had directly indicated royal disfavor. It seems clear that Claudius did not tell Polonius to have Ophelia reject the letters from Hamlet (II,ii, 130–40). The disfavor shown Hamlet in the second scene may be what leads Polonius to
forbid the courtship on his own. Polonius may be responding to the royal disfavor shown in the second scene, and does not expect that Hamlet will be king. Polonius acts as he would if he were a part of a plot of Claudius to get rid of Hamlet. What is most likely is rather that his self-interest takes a cue from Hamlet’s disfavor, and he covers his self-interest in the appearance of being too humble to allow his daughter to be married to the crown prince.

Both Polonius and Laertes present the reason for forbidding Ophelia to receive Hamlet as being the height of his place, as prince of Denmark, and the consequent impossibility of their marriage. While Polonius is concerned as a father to protect his daughter by preventing illegitimate offspring, Laertes is more concerned to protect his sister from dishonor and heartache. Laertes also assumes that Hamlet cannot marry his sister. Yet the arguments that the marriage is impossible are not true, and we later see that Gertrude hoped for the marriage (III,i, 37–42; V,i, 237).

Bradley (1959, 109, 412–13), following Granville-Barker, notices a stunning point in the reading of the play that is crucial to the question of Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia. In the theater and in reading, it appears at first that Hamlet goes directly to Ophelia in her room, right after he meets with the ghost of his father, accounting for his disheveled appearance. As it turns out, some time, disjointed, has elapsed between Acts I and II, hidden by the continuity of the astonishing scene of the ghost’s appearance and the astonished appearance which so scares Ophelia. In this time of about two months, she has returned his letters without explanation, as she was told to do (I,iii, 133–34). It is some seven weeks later when he comes to her dressed in the customary appearance of a distracted lover, and she does not get him to speak, but lets him go, and turns over his poems to her father. Polonius brings these to the king, citing them as evidence for his hypothesis that Hamlet’s grief sprang from neglected love. Hamlet’s perusal of her face may be the farewell of disillusioned love, seeing that Claudius through Polonius uses her against him. It might also include a foreseeing of the fate of Ophelia. She rejects him, and, after some time, he uses her to make the appearance of his antic disposition.

Hamlet speaks to Polonius as Luther might speak to the late scholastics or the intellectual servants of Rome. He opens this exchange when he calls Polonius a “fishmonger” (II,ii, 174). In the essay “Concerning the Eating of Fish,” the fishmonger speaks in support of Catholic dietary laws, beginning from his economic interest. Though Polonius understands this literally, and so thinks it an irrational statement characteristic of madness, Hamlet means to accuse him of prostituting his daughter by using her in the service of
Claudius. Polonius denies he is a fishmonger, and Hamlet accuses him of being then less honest than a bawd. Hamlet compares the relation of Polonius and Ophelia to the biblical sacrifice by Jephtha of his daughter (Judges 11; Alvarez 1990). The immediate source is an English ballad, which Hamlet abridges to deny that Polonius loves her (II,ii, 408–9). Scholasticism may be accused of sacrificing its daughters.

There is a later suggestion, too, that the cause of Ophelia’s rejection of Hamlet is Claudius. Hamlet asks “Have you a daughter,” and tells Polonius to take care that Ophelia “not walk too much in the sun,” fearing how she might conceive, since the sun by spontaneous generation is held even to breed maggots in corpses (II,ii, 181–86). The difficult line refers to the royal presence (“in the sun,” I,ii, 67, rather than the “son”). There may be a connection with the worms later said to be at the body of Polonius (V,i, 89; IV,iii, 20–24). Luther writes of “all the crawling maggots of man-made laws and regulations, which by now have eaten into the whole world…and destroyed our faith” (Preface to Romans, Luther 1961, 34). What is suggested seriously is that Claudius has control of Ophelia, and Hamlet blames Claudius for her rejection of him.

The clearest allusion to the discussion between Luther and scholasticism may be in Hamlet’s statement regarding magnanimity. Just after explaining the power of drama over political men concerned with glory, he tells Polonius by “God’s Bodkin” or dagger, to use each man not according to his merit, but “after your own honor and dignity; the less they deserve, the more is your bounty” (II,ii, 524–27). By the sword of God, that is, his word (Ephesians 6:17), the imitation of God would be the imitation of justification or salvation not earned by works, but given by grace. What Hamlet says to Polonius is here again something like what a reformer might say to late scholasticism, or rather what the dramatist himself might say in place of the Reformation teaching. The statement may reflect the noble spirit of the director in the Globe Theater.

VI: Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Plato’s Republic

From the second act to the center of the play, Hamlet hides his knowledge of the crime according to the command of the ghost, while two different groups attempt to spy on him in order to learn whether it is love or ambition or something else that causes his transformation. The perception or sharp sight of Hamlet should not be underestimated. He knows “a hawk from a handsaw,” or a true actor from bad spy. A handsaw is one who saws the air too much with his hand (III,ii, 4–5), or an excessive actor. Directors are like falcon-
ers (II,ii, 426), the child actors young hawks or “eyases,” etc. Hamlet is false to everyone who spies on him, and is given to asking his spies directly “are you honest?” (III,i, 103); or “were you not sent for?” (II,ii, 237–74). To both Polonius and his associates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he mentions that the world is dishonest. If the world has grown honest, “then is doomsday near.” The intention to be false and the antic disposition of Hamlet leads him to say many wild things that may even be the opposite of what he thinks, and in these lines there are an unusual number of things said that seem to relate to the Reformation argument.

Just before the arrival of the actors, in a section of the greeting jests of Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, there occurs an exchange that, upon consideration depends on a reading of the Socratic allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic (514). The banter occurs between the statements that “Denmark is a prison” and “by my faith I cannot reason.” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern present an argument against ambition from Plato's Republic. Hamlet pretends to suggest that ambition for the crown is the cause of his recent transformation. He pretends to argue against Rosencrantz’s Platonic assertion that ambition is only the “shadow of a dream.” This formulation seems to come directly from Socrates in the allegory of the cave (Republic, 514a ff.). In Socrates’ allegory, our condition regarding education is compared to that of prisoners in a cave who are chained to viewing shadows of what are called phantoms, which are artifacts held up like puppets (Hamlet, III,ii, 253) between a fire and the wall of the cave. The prisoners take the likenesses of things to be the things themselves, and so are like those dreaming when they believe themselves to be awake (479a). Coming just before the activity of Hamlet as a dramatist, this section appears to address the Platonic basis of Shakespearean drama. The banter about fortune, in which Hamlet declares the tragic opinion that she is a prostitute, concludes in Hamlet asking what they have deserved at the hands of fortune that she has sent them to prison, “hither.” They continue:

Guild. Prison, my lord?
Ham. Denmark’s a prison.
Ros. Then is the world one.
Ham. A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o’ th’ worst.
(II,ii, 242–47)

Rosencrantz denies that Denmark or the world appears a prison, and says that ambition makes Denmark a prison to Hamlet. Hamlet exclaims that he could be bounded in a nutshell, “were it not that I have bad dreams.” Guildenstern
tells him that these dreams are ambition, because “the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.” This particular formulation or way of saying ‘the image of an image’ is traceable to the formulation of Socrates in the Republic, where the phrase “shadow of a phantom” fits the description of the relation between the artifacts of the legislators and the shadow paintings of the poets. The actual phrase occurs in describing the relation of the light in the cave to the sun outside, when Socrates says, “…rather than as before at shadows of phantoms cast by a light that, when judged in comparison with the sun, also has the quality of the shadow of a phantom” (532c). Hamlet answers that a dream is itself a shadow, and Rosencrantz states the thesis that ambition is a shadow of a shadow. Heroic ambition, guided by the poet or puppeteer’s artifact, aims at a shadow of virtue, or of the character held up and shaped by the legislator. Ambition for the crown is ambition for a shadow of an image of intellectual virtue or self-sufficiency. The pleasure of the tyrant is similarly described as a phantom of pleasure nine times removed from the true pleasure of learning (587d). Hamlet attempts to refute the thesis, or defend heroic ambition by showing an unwelcome implication—that kings and heroes, outstretched like evening shadows (Jenkins, Shakespeare 1982, 251) would then be the shadows of the men, including beggars, who, as men, would be the original or natural objects reflected by the artifacts in the cave. That Hamlet makes the argument facetiously is suggested by later comments on kings and beggars (IV,iii, 30–31). That man is in turn an image completes the allegorical line.

Hamlet presents an anti-Socratic argument, against the famous Socratic paradox that the best men, or those worthy of rule, do not desire rule (Republic 347a–e). He then concludes “Shall we to the court? / For by my fay, I cannot reason.” He pretends to be prevented from persuasion against ambition, or from philosophy, by his faith. Whatever can be made of its bearing on the questions of Hamlet, it is clear that in this rare example of the influence of a Platonic text directly on Shakespeare, the question of faith and reason is set in the context of the allegory of the cave.

The question of the relation of Hamlet to philosophy arises again when Hamlet quips that “there is something more than natural” in the change of the affections of the kingdom from Hamlet to Claudius, “if philosophy could find it out.” The two mentions of philosophy together are said to show that Hamlet rejects philosophy for its inability to explain the irrational (Blits 2001, 157). Yet in the first case, the ghost is genuine and his message is the truth, which means that Hamlet’s “philosophy” would be rational in a higher, if uncommon, sense. It is not Horatio’s Roman or Latin philosophy. The
Aristotelian or Latin based philosophy failed to understand the fundamental political circumstance, the “supernatural” occurrence of the usurpation in the medieval world.

In the *Republic*, the discussion of poetry in book 10 turns out to be a key to the reading of the allegorical line (Bloom 1968, 428, 403–5; Strauss 1964, 135–36). The reading of the line in terms of the cave, rather than the reverse, as is done at first, reveals an allegorical line and the place of political philosophy in the account of the four images that describe philosophy (books 5–7). The fraudulent account of the offspring of the good symbolically conveys an account of the true offspring, showing how the legislator looks to the image of God in man (*Republic* 507a3, 490b4, 500e2, 501b1). Hamlet’s account of the purpose of drama, “to hold as ’twere, the mirror up to nature” also appears to be based on book 10 of the *Republic*, where the poet is said to appear to make all things, like one who carries a mirror about “making” images of trees and men and such (596 d–e). The mirror metaphor is adapted from the Socratic criticism of poetry to Shakespeare’s poetry that is consistent with the best regime (Tovey 1983). In the “purpose of playing,” the mirror is used according to the purposes of a drama based on knowledge (*Republic* 598e), to show “virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (III,ii, 23–25). A king and the truth “about virtue” is the immediate original of the artifacts in the cave (597e6, 599d2).

Political circumstance is not the only reason that philosophy remains hidden. If Plato’s Socrates is right in his allegory of the cave, there is also a natural impediment. The natural impediment may be behind the political impediment. It should not surprise us that the height of Shakespeare is underestimated. He is concerned continually with the most fundamental theoretical and practical things, including questions we do not yet have, or do not yet hold in their proper light. Yet he does not address these questions directly, as is done in the tradition of metaphysics, nor does he address political-religious questions openly, as has been nearly possible only in the liberty of our age of free speech and the separation of church and state. He addresses some questions allegorically, or “tropically,” that is, by analogy, even as Hamlet says his play the Mousetrap works.
The most famous speech of Hamlet is spoken in soliloquy, yet in the presence of Claudius and Polonius, who are hiding and spying on Hamlet. If the speech is spoken aloud, it is not really a soliloquy, and it is not impossible that Hamlet knows or suspects their presence. This would make sense of why Hamlet says nothing about the ghost or his mission, and speaks in a way that is entirely consistent with the Hamlet of the first soliloquy, before he saw the ghost. He might even speak loudly the line “from whose bourn / No traveler returns,” as Rodney Bennett (Shakespeare 1980) has him later speak the lines that he is “proud” and “vengeful,” intending to assure that he is overheard. There are two reasons to think that Claudius and Polonius do not overhear the “To be or not to be” speech. First, the convention of the soliloquy allows that words spoken onstage are to be understood as being silently thought within the world of the play. Second, Hamlet speaks of the “pangs of disprised love,” and when he concludes his soliloquy, speaks the lines that seem to imply that he does love Ophelia. Yet Claudius and Polonius both conclude from the meeting of Hamlet and Ophelia that it is not love that is the trouble with him.

There is a surprising amount of disagreement regarding what Hamlet is saying in this central and most famous of the seven soliloquies, beginning with the first line “To be or not to be, that is the question” (Shakespeare 1982, 484–91). The statement itself occurs in Aristotle's *Poetics*, describing the thought of a tragedy: “Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated” (VI, 1450b12). The phrase also sounds like the Socratic contrast of being and non-being (Alvarez 1990, *Republic* 478e 1). The thought of Hamlet seems to follow the thought of Montaigne in his *Apology of Raymond Sebond* (Essays, II. 12). While writing about the subjection of the mind to the body evident in madness, age, and sleep, Montaigne, in the Florio translation, writes:

> Philosophers…have ever this dilemma in their mouth, to comfort our mortall condition. The soule is either mortall or immortall: if mortall, she shall be without paine: if immortall, she shall mend. They never touch the other branch: What, if she empaire and be worse? And leave the menaces of future paines to poets…

(Montaigne n.d., 496)

The alternatives “to be or not to be” seem to be explained by the two conclusions following from them, and so to mean that if the soul is immortal, it is nobler to suffer, but if not, it is nobler to take action to end our sea of troubles,
whether by suicide or great enterprises. Some readers reverse the implications, so that to be is to act, while not to be is patiently to suffer. Hamlet does seem to say that the reason that we do not commit suicide to escape the “whips and scorns of time” is the same as the reason that “enterprises of great pith and moment” are not followed through with all the “native hue of resolution,” or the courage of original nature. This same reason, he seems to say, is not exactly the fear of death itself, but “the dread of something after death”:

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
(III,i, 78–82)

Otherwise, no one would bear the burdens of self-preservation or the ills one might seek to remedy in great enterprises. This fear of the something after death both prevents suicide and inhibits action. Socrates in the center of the Apology (29a–b) says that the fear of death is based on thinking that we know what we do not, namely, that death might not be a blessing. The attainment of the knowledge of ignorance is then the same as the conquest of the fear of death. We should remember that Hamlet is in doubt about the ghost, and has just resolved on a way to test its story. This test will have something to do with the answer to the question of immortality, though it would seem then to imply that he ought not take arms against the sea of troubles in Denmark. It is also possible that he understands the ghost to be a ghost because he has not completely crossed over to that from which none are allowed to return, and so he can say “from whence no traveler returns.”

The best example of the contrast between Hamlet in soliloquy and Hamlet toward Ophelia is when, just before the most extreme instances of his misogynous speech at the performance of the Mousetrap, he sees her approaching to spy on him, yet says “nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered.” Orisons are prayers. This may show that Hamlet does love her. In Romeo and Juliet (I,v, 93–110), when they first dance, the two are like the hands of a praying saint. There is a mime, the taking of trespass from the lips, in their first kiss. In love, there occurs the clearing away of the shadow, which otherwise would impede the operation of the soul Jung calls “projection” of the “anima,” when the light in the eyes is seen and the two participate in the image of God. Jung writes, “Every real love-relationship consists ultimately in the girl finding her hero, and the hero his soul, not in dreams, but in palpable reality” (1956, 395; Platt 1992). The souls clear a way to be together, while the shadow
unrecognized inhibits love (*Republic* 382 a–c). It is possible that he does love her, as he says at her grave (V.i, 264). If he does love her, it may be for this very reason that he cannot allow Polonius to use her against him in his service to the king. It is imaginable that he confide in her, and her obedience lead to his execution. The king would have his soul, if not his secret.

Hamlet seems to discover that Ophelia is a spy when she gives him back things he gave her, at line 103. It may be that the poems turned over to the king are not present. It is from this point that he begins to speak harshly to her, beginning with his teaching on honesty and beauty. Her beauty is being used by her “fishmonger” father to spy on him in the service of Claudius. Polonius himself compared his placement of Ophelia reading to the use of “devotion’s visage / And pious action” to “sugar o’er / The devil himself,” first jarring the conscience of the king (III.i, 46–54). It is after seeing that Ophelia is a spy that Hamlet is confirmed in generalizing on women, denies he loved her, confirms Polonius’s assumption of his dishonorable intentions, and tells her to go to a nunnery, the literal sort where one might avoid being a “breeder of sinners.” He asks where her father is, and she lies. Ophelia, though she knows what is occurring, and must know she is spying and lying, does not understand the things he says, but thinks his reason “like sweet bells jangled.” Claudius concludes from what has been overheard that it is not love, and does not think that Hamlet is mad, but, accurately, that there is something his soul broods on, and the manifestation of this will be dangerous to him. The decision is made here, before the play, to send Hamlet to England. There is an underestimated injustice in the use of love and friendship in domestic spying that the perpetrators cannot realize. The soul of man is prior to government. Meanwhile, Hamlet has apparently been into the papers of the king, and already knows he is to be sent to England (III.iv, 202).

Hamlet sits by Ophelia rather than his mother in order to observe Claudius. In addition to his lewd comments, when she asks if he is “merry,” he replies, “What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within’s two hours.” This is the approximate time not in Denmark, but in the Globe Theater. Told that it has been “Twice two months,” he snaps that a great man’s memory may outlive him by six months: “But by’r lady a’ must build churches, then, or else shall a’ suffer not thinking on…” The building of churches, funded with collections and indulgences, is at the root of a principal objection of Luther. The theme of building churches will arise again in the commentary of the gravedigger. Answering Hamlet’s objection to the prologue that it is “brief,” Hamlet
responds “As woman’s love.” The circumstance of second marriage in the play is said to dramatize the question “Whether love lead fortune or fortune love” (III,ii, 198). These lines, as well as those in which the lady is thought to “protest too much” are good candidates for some of those twelve or sixteen lines added by Hamlet (II, ii; Alvis 1990, 67). The play is also designed to test whether his mother is an accessory to the murder (III,i, 175–80; III,iv, 28). Because of the sense in which fortune demonstrably leads love, the building of churches appears necessary to preserve a great man’s memory. The choice of the Globe Theater is to do something different from building or founding churches. The theater provides a seat for the preservation of the memory of great men that at the same time restrains or governs those whose aim is this lasting memory (II,ii, 520–22).

The last words of Ophelia to Hamlet are “The King rises,” at the center of Act III of the Arden edition, and there is meant to be no question of the success of Hamlet’s drama. When Claudius sees the murderer pour the poison, his reaction causes Polonius to say “Give o’er the play,” even before Claudius calls for light. Drama affects us in a way deeper than we know. The Mousetrap works tropically, or by analogy. Like the experience of the ghost, the effect is verified by another seeing also for himself. Charged by the success of his drama, Hamlet considers retiring from political life, if his fortunes in Denmark “turn Turk.” The Turks had only recently ended the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire. He considers an arrangement like that which Shakespeare had, of half a share, then exclaims that his successful drama is worth a whole share in a company. The reason:

Hamlet.  For thou dost know, O Damon dear,  
This realm dismantled was  
Of Jove himself, and now reigns here  
A very, very—Pajock.  
Horatio.  You might have rhymed.  
Hamlet.  Oh good Horatio, I’ll take the ghost’s word for a  
Thousand pound. Didst perceive? …  
Upon the talk of the poisoning?  
(III,ii, 287–95)

Thyris and Damon were shepherds and friends. When Thyris received news of the death of Damon, he wrote an epitaph in song, imitated in the 1639 poem Damon’s Epitaph of John Milton (1957, 132–33). Since Horatio will tell the story of Hamlet (V,ii, 352–54), the roles would be reversed. While the best answer to the riddle is “ass,” another, rhyming with “himself,” would be “Guelf.” There was once a well-known quarrel between the support-
ers of the Papacy and the supporters of the Holy Roman Empire, called Guelfs and Ghibellines respectively. The division between Protestant northern Europe and the Pope in Rome grew out of the contours of this earlier division. In the dedication to his work On the Imagination (1930, 17), Pico, a Ghibelline, addresses the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian as Caesar, occupying the throne of the Roman empire (Durant 1944-1957, 5:3–4).

VIII: The Tragic Flaw of Hamlet

The tragic flaw of Hamlet is indicated and foreshadowed when he says to Horatio of the wedding “Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven / Or ever I had seen that day” (I,i, 182–83; V,ii, 47; Battenhouse 1969, 244; Blits 2001, 66, 229). Battenhouse is the first to cite this revenge as Hamlet’s tragic flaw, and the early casual statement to Horatio as an indication of the fact. Hamlet fails to remove Claudius because Claudius, since he is praying, might then go to heaven (Bloom 1981, 56). Coleridge notes the reaction of Johnson pronouncing this sentiment “so atrocious and horrible, as to be unfit to be put into the mouth of a human being” (1951, 478). Coleridge and Bradley assume it is only a pretext or excuse for not acting. Alvis, taking Hamlet seriously, writes: “Shakespeare invites his audience to deplore Hamlet’s pious cruelty when passing over his opportunity for justice” (2004, 305). The lesson of the tragedy is the error of this strange revenge, beyond his mission from the ghost and concern with the good of Denmark.

This incident is the turning point or formal peripety of the tragedy, from which all the disastrous events follow (Bradley 1955, 114). Here, the trouble is not that he thinks of heaven at all, nor that thinking on heaven leads Hamlet to disparage worldly glory and achievements. Nor is it for him a fear of damnation, as Hamlet notes often leads the “Native hue of resolution” to be “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,” preventing both suicide and great actions (III,I, 84–85). He considers damnation if he were wrong (II,ii, 599), though he is nearer to thinking he might be damned for not killing Claudius (V,ii,67–69). It is rather a very particular combination of thought on the afterlife with the aim of revenge that leads him to miss the moment of action, by “thinking too precisely on the event” or outcome (IV,iv, 40–41). To the extent that Hamlet has a tragic anagorisis or recognition of his flaw, it would seem to be in these lines of the seventh soliloquy. According to Paul Cantor, “the heart of Hamlet’s tragic dilemma” is that he is “a modern Christian charged with the ancient pagan task of revenge” (1989, 33). The contradiction between the classical and Christian is shown in that “Achilles and
Jesus have diametrically opposed attitudes toward revenge” (ibid., 27). The classical and Christian teachings are “diametrically opposed,” as philosophy and theology are said to be. In Hamlet’s Denmark, there seem to be no courts of law or any system of justice other than the code of revenge, so that the avenging of crime is indistinguishable from the furies of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. The difficulty occurs when honor and revenge are mixed with the literalized images regarding preparations for death and the afterlife. Just as his difficulty is not the sanctity of the place, or even the crown of the king, his difficulty is not in holding, but rather in ignoring, the biblical and Socratic teaching regarding revenge. Though he speaks of being “revengeful” as a fault (III,i, 125), he does not hesitate in his mission of revenge by thinking of the biblical reservation of revenge to the Lord (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Blits 2001,109; Cantor 1989, 28), as he hesitates to commit suicide because of the (Catholic) canon forbidding self-murder. He hesitates because of revenge, strangely somewhat as a villain might hesitate to kill the hero in order to inflict some death worse than simple execution, and by this lose the opportunity when his captive escapes. Revenge may have been a part of his father’s purgatory, which Hamlet himself would have had to discern and accomplish if he were to succeed in his mission without destroying himself and his nation.

The peculiarity of combining the images of heaven with revenge is similar to what occurs in the anger of Luther toward Rome. Like Wycliffe before him, Luther in his *Appeal to the Ruling Class of Germany* called the Pope the Antichrist. He published the wish that the throne of the Pope be destroyed and damned (1961, 464). It might be argued that this anger is excessive, underestimates the diabolical, and is indeed tragic in the history of the West. While Claudius is not quite a devil, there is a connection evident when his conscience is moved at Polonius’s talk of sugaring over the devil with pious appearances. One commentator notes that the mousetrap is used by Augustine in Sermon 263 to refer to the incarnation as the mousetrap of the devil (Shakespeare 1982, 302). Luther defends his excessive denunciations by the example of Jesus and the Apostles. Yet for Jesus, as for Prospero and Socrates, there is only one place where they are angry or “vexed,” apparently showing what is especially their own concern (Matthew 21:12–17; Republic 536c; *The Tempest* IV,i, 145). In the action of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare shows a tragic error that is oddly similar to what may be the error of the great Martin Luther, based on a flaw that is alike oddly similar to what may be argued is a Lutheran flaw.

Like the Western Christian nations where there is the rule of law, Henry V is able to enforce justice without revenge. He forgives the souls of
the conspirators against his crown, yet delivers them up to the law for execution: He tells them:

    Touching our person, seek we no revenge,
    But we our Kingdom's safety must so tender,
    Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
    We do deliver you.

    (King Henry V, II,ii, 174–77.)

Henry adds that he wishes them true repentance and God’s mercy. Hamlet, by contrast, apparently sought to prevent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from having “shriving time,” or time to repent their sins before they die (Alvis 1986). Though shriving time may have allowed these two to raise doubts in the mind of England, who would then have sent an embassy to inquire into the matter, it does appear that the reason of Hamlet may simply be revenge. There is a bite to Hamlet’s hope to see his heels kick at heaven (III,iv, 93). The harshness of his action may in part be justified by his being, unknown to those opposed to him, the rightful king. Alvis (1990, 81) asks: “Do you not think there is something immoderate about sending three people to hell when all you have to do is get them out of Denmark?” Alvarez (1990) notes, “He suddenly wants to have salvation and damnation in his hands,” and asks, “Does his confusion of realms result in his acting as a transcendent king based on an invisible claim?” We will see if Luther can be characterized in similar terms. What is inconsistent with right action is not the eternal life of the soul or the belief in it, but this revenge. Crime is opposed by prudence as though it were an impersonal force of the body or of nature, apart from any personal reaction to diseased intention or malice—which may be the business of the Lord and the one diseased in any case. One takes precautions against the harm of evil as against a flood, or foul weather, even as Machiavelli advises (The Prince XXV). It may be that our own faction within makes it difficult for humans to mind their own business, even in great matters. Socrates dissolves revenge by the teaching that in the highest sense, no one does harm voluntarily (Meno 77e–78b) or corrupts others knowingly (Apology 25d–26a), and it is unjust to do harm in return for harm done (Crito 49 a–e). As Jaffa writes: “Jesus’ prayer to his father, to forgive his persecutors—for they knew not what they did—reminds us of the Platonic Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge, wrongdoing is ignorance, and hence involuntary” (1981, 279). A higher sense of volition is addressed, distinct from the sense of intention that distinguishes manslaughter from murder. The punishment for vice is unavoidable in any case, as we then become worse. If only we knew our true advantage, no one would do harm voluntarily (Republic 339c, Blits 2001, 228). The same may be implied by the reservation of vengeance to the
Lord. Though there are other teachings against revenge, it would be strange not to notice that it is especially Jesus who teaches that we should love, forgive and pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60), contrary to the native hue of human vengeance. He teaches that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and this would seem to imply that we should wish to see our “dearest foes” in heaven. If the Christian and classical teachings are “diametrically opposed” on the matter of revenge (Cantor 1989, 27), the Socratic teachings would seem to appear on the side of the Christians, as one of the list of points on which the teachings of the philosophers and Christianity are mutually confirming. Alvis (1990, 254) has noted the contrast between Prospero and Hamlet, evident in the statement of Prospero that “the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance” (The Tempest V,i, 27–30). Preparing his circle of penance, Prospero tells Ariel:

They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

Luther, then, is treated as a tragic figure, a great soul who fails in a great enterprise due to a flaw in his character (Aristotle, Poetics 1453a10–15). The play would seem to be written on something like the following question: what if England or English thought and drama followed the tragic course of Wittenberg? Shakespeare seems to advance in the direction taken by Pico and Erasmus. The suggestion may be that this strain of the Reformation fails to remove the problem in a way that avoids the tragic conclusion. It may have been possible to avoid tragedy had the Reformers set aside this sort of revenge. Half the solution to the crisis is to forgive, and hope for penance when Rome is wrong.

Hamlet might have either killed Claudius or completed the repentance begun by the play, forcing Claudius to abdicate. It may be that Hamlet should have spoke to Claudius instead of to his mother, pushing him to a public confession. Would the ghost, who seems to be nearby, have assisted? The penance of Claudius would further solve the difficulty that the regicide and fratricide is hidden from the kingdom. This course would have addressed the problem Hamlet noted in the action of Brutus, of killing Caesar in a place that would encourage his deification. The first Brutus deposed but did not kill Tarquin. The open repentance and abdication of Claudius would be the best way of providing the evidence needed for a public conviction, as Alvis notes regarding the neglect of Hamlet to gain a confession at the conclusion (1990, 89 n.25). Claudius would probably then be sentenced to death, after Hamlet
established the rule of law, yet Claudius might do this to save his soul. Claudius might be sent to England instead of Hamlet, the Queen retired to her penance, Ophelia forgiven, and all the tragic consequences avoided. It is possible, then, that Hamlet delays because he should not kill Claudius at all, and is prevented from thinking of the right solution because of his transcendent revenge.

This revenge is somehow the corollary of his excessive concern with showing his mother what she has done, the excess that leads to the appearance of the ghost to remind him of his purpose (III, iv, 103). The ghost had warned him to leave her to heaven in order to avoid tainting his mind. The analogous suggestion would be that Luther and Reformation thinkers should avoid concern with the vice of the Church, and address the thought that has taken the place of the upright father or tradition. The drama of the Globe Theater seems to accomplish this by addressing the most thoughtful regarding the time.

IX: Gertrude

The speech of Hamlet to his mother (III, iv) replaces the right action. It is like the speech of the Reformers to the Church or to the people of the Church. The ghost told Hamlet to leave her to heaven, in order to avoid tainting his mind, and the play suggests that this concern is a distraction. Yet his attempt to set her up a glass wherein she can see herself, begun in the play, is especially stunning when read in light of the analogy. In the Bible, adultery is like idolatry, or, when Israel goes after other gods, it is like the adultery of the bride of the Lord. The prophet Hosea is told to “take to yourself a wife of harlotry” (Hosea 1: 2) in order to provide a mirror of the age and body of the time to Israel. It may be that, like the churches addressed in the Revelation (2–3), no earthly institution can safely be in principle deaf to prophesy. The message of Fatima is “Penance,” and the vision of the third secret includes a mirror (Sister Lucia 2000, 11).

He at first accuses her of murder (III, iv, 28), but it becomes clear that she did not know the significance of her adultery. Having tested her, he seems to drop the murder charge. Hamlet seems similarly to exaggerate the fault of Ophelia, in fact as well as in his “antic disposition.” An analogous suggestion would be that Luther exaggerates the guilt of the people of the church or the West. Hamlet speaks with disdain of custom, even as Luther (1961, 8) writes of habit and custom supporting the errors of the Church (III, iv, 35). Gertrude is indeed like the Church, and may represent the worldly church. The speech of Hamlet to Gertrude in her closet, when read in light of the analogy, is
stunning. A director might have all go dim, still and silent while the actor of Hamlet speaks directly to the audience, or to us. Hamlet tells her that she has done

…such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words. Heaven’s face does glow
O’er this solidity and compound mass
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.
(III,iv, 47–51)

Her exchange of her husband for his brother corrupts the innocent appearance of virtue and modesty, makes marriage vows incredible and reduces the beauty of religion to a mere recitation of words. The wrathful heavens look on the earth as at the judgment. His words are not only exaggerated with these images, but also literal regarding the analogy. Her act is that of her taking “a slave that is not twentieth part the tithe / of your precedent Lord.” The unintended consequence of her adultery may have been the murder of King Hamlet, and even all the Danish bloodshed. This would be as the idolatry of manmade opinion leads, even logically, to the making of martyrs. The mysterious Babylon is she who says: “A Queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning shall I never see…” (Revelation 18:7). The precedence of theology and the enforcement of doctrinal orthodoxy may require not faith but the presumption of divine knowledge. Yet even if men have revealed truth, we would not understand or know these things for ourselves, as would be required of divine authority. The blood of martyrs is found in her (17:6, 18:24), and she holds a cup of her impurities (17:4). The angel explains that she is “the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth” (17:18). The true Church, a contrasting heavenly woman (Revelation 12, 19:7–9), is often compared to a widow in mourning for the Lamb, until the marriage to come, as is the reason for the “inky cloak” (I,ii, 77) of priests. Augustine writes that the two cities are “entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effects their separation” (City of God, I.35: 1950, 38). The suggestion is, then, that Luther was distracted in his truthful denunciations of the Church, who indeed ought not lay the flattering unction to her soul that not her trespass but his madness speaks (III,iv, 145–48).

Claudius calls Gertrude the “imperial jointress” or co-monarch of “our warlike state.” J. Dover Wilson (1935, 38) explains that the
phrase “signifies...a widow who retains the jointure or life interest in the crown, and so points to the legal argument or quibble by means of which Hamlet was supplanted.” This word is apparently unique to Shakespeare. It reminds one of a similar word “Imperial votress,” used to describe the “fair vestal” enthroned by the West (A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 158–63), sometimes thought to be Elizabeth. The Imperial votress enthroned by the West, though, would be the Virgin Mary, as a type or image of the Church. The futile attempt of Cupid to strike her with a potioned arrow is the cause of the herb used as a potion by Oberon to embarrass the Fairy Queen into giving up the changeling child, resolving the quarrel in the Fairy Kingdom for the Wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. He does this by showing her she loved an ass. It may be that the Shakespearean project somehow derives potion from the Lutheran attempt. The Church must allow philosophy. Gertrude may be something like a chthonic or earthly opposite of the Imperial Virgin. Gertrude almost seems repentant (III,iv, 90–92; IV,v, 16–20) raising the possibility of an unexpected success of Hamlet. He then would honor his mother as Edgar does his father, by leading him (Berns 1972, 27 n.1). The value of Hamlet’s success in this is difficult to estimate.

Hamlet at first fails in his mission, killing Polonius instead. Polonius, in our reading of the subplot, is like a certain strain of late scholasticism, a kind of scholarship in service to the usurping orders. Polonius may represent the scholasticism that served the Roman orders, and somehow ended with the Diet of Worms, along with the unity of Christian Europe. One of two mentions of Caesar after the introductory scene is where Polonius tells Hamlet about his having played Caesar in a play (III,ii, 105–8). Hamlet, attempting to kill Claudius, kills Polonius by accident, when he thinks he is killing the King (III,iv, 25), so that Hamlet is likened to the second Brutus (Alvarez, 1990). His name is an anagram of Amelth, which in Latin means fool or Brutus, and the story of Saxo is said to be based on the account in Livy of the first Brutus (Blits 2001, 15, 109). Hamlet himself reminds us that the assassination of Caesar is the avenging of Pompey (III,ii, 107–8), and that it was not very bright of Brutus to kill Caesar where he did, in the Capitol, at the base of the statue of Pompey. Rather than suggest that something similar might occur regarding Claudius, the allusion is an expression of opposition to Caesar’s empire. When Hamlet kills Polonius, he kills a likeness, and in some sense a likeness of Caesar.

The second obvious allusion to Luther, after Wittenberg, occurs when Hamlet says that a “convocation of politic worms” is at the body of Polonius, and “Your worm is your only emperor for diet,” being last in the
food chain (Shakespeare 1982, 340; Alvis 2004, 300). The Diet of Worms is the meeting, in 1521, of the Church and the Holy Roman Emperor with Luther, when Luther took his stand upon his conscience, refusing to recant his writings. The council at Worms is the point from which the founding of the Reformed Church, as well as the end of scholasticism, became inevitable. There is some connection to Hamlet’s comment on Yorick’s skull, “my Lady Worms, chopless” (V,i, 87). Against the background of the mortality of all things human, the suggestion may be that the Reformation here missed its mark, ending one who played Caesar, rather than what it is that Claudius represents: something like the ghost of Caesar, or the universal empires of Caesar and Alexander.

The rebellion of Laertes, as though antiquity were forgotten and custom not known (IV, v, 104), is like the peasant rebellion of 1524, inspired though not backed by Luther. The rebellion also suggests that Hamlet might have led a similar popular rebellion, since he is said to be loved by the people (IV, iii, 4; vii, 18). The success of a similar rebellion might have resulted in Luther becoming Pope, or the Reform movement becoming dominant within the Church, as actually occurred in part in the Counter-Reformation. Greenblatt notices that it is “a bit strange” for the Messenger “to invoke the antiquity of custom in defense of the regime of the upstart Claudius” (2001, 254). This is strange. Because the murder remains secret, the usurper has assumed the authority of custom. Both the theological or ecclesiastical protests of Wycliffe and Luther resulted in popular rebellions, when the anger of the people at the Church’s sanctioning of their oppression was released. The same occurred before the French Revolution, after the writers attacked the Church and the ruling opinions.

It is a characteristic of madness to be blind to the truth about the common-sense world, but to see a truth or true things about the soul. The songs of Ophelia in her madness are spoken pointedly to Gertrude about her failure to distinguish her true love, King Hamlet, and the effect of this failure (IV,v, 23–40; III,iv, 43–49; Shakespeare 1982, 531). It is Gertrude who is asked, “How shall I my true love know.” Claudius is neither a pilgrim nor a true love, and King Hamlet went to his grave unwept because of the adultery. Lines 41–66 are spoken about Claudius, who loves Gertrude as the valentine adventurer loves in her song. Ophelia, too, saw the hasty and incestuous marriage and the lines of the Gonzago play about mortality and love. In her obedience, she would not leave her father to cleave to her husband (Platt 1992, 927; Genesis 2:24). The death of her father at the hands of her love leaves her in madness. In
her return appearance, Ophelia gives out flowers fitting. It may be Gertrude who is given rosemary for remembrance, and, like the Church is told “love, remember” (IV,v, 174–75). That we love one another is said, by both Erasmus (1989, 97) and Luther (1961, 17), to be the one commandment given to the Church (John 13:35).

X: Horatio

One wonders why Horatio is not there to prevent the drowning of Ophelia (IV,v, 73; IV,vi, 197; IV,vii; Blits 2001, 19 n.24). He was explicitly told to watch over her. She enters and exits again alone, and Horatio is next seen receiving the letter from Hamlet returned from sea. It is as if she falls into the river through his absence. Horatio is a strange character. He is the elder friend and fellow student of Hamlet at Wittenberg, on whom Hamlet delivers his praise of men who are not passion’s slave (III,ii, 58–76). He is poor and without position, so that he need not be flattered. He has apparently been at Elsinore nearly two months without seeing Hamlet prior to the second scene (I,ii, 164; 176). He seems not to be a part of the court (Alvarez 1990), and Claudius employs other friends of Hamlet to help discover the trouble with him. He seems not to be “native to this land,” and asks Hamlet about Danish custom (I,iv, 13–15). Like the Fool in Lear, it is as if he does not quite exist in Elsinore. He seems to know or see everything, but to do nothing. Strangely, Horatio does not effect the historical action of the play, except to bring Hamlet to the ghost and to persuade Gertrude to see the mad Ophelia (IV, v). He does not do a single thing to help Hamlet in either his courtship or his mission, as a friend might, except to act as a confidant for Hamlet’s most revealing conversations, and provide an objective observer of the reaction of Claudius when Hamlet shows the Mousetrap. Hamlet has told Horatio of the ghost’s story of the murder (III,ii, 76). The rationality of Hamlet in his conversations with Horatio, and the lack of any misunderstanding of him on Horatio’s part, demonstrates the extent of the antic disposition or pretended madness of Hamlet. The self-critical ability of Hamlet, as in the cause of his first delay, distinguishes his near-prophetic mind from madness. The loss of this ability characterizes the mad, and its restoration for them is essential. Horatio advises Hamlet against fighting in the duel if his “mind dislikes anything” (V,ii, 218; Wilson 1935, 231, citing G. F. Bradley). Yet, except for this one instance, he never helps Hamlet think anything out regarding his mission or revenge. He tells him that to consider the matter of Alexander and Caesar may be to consider the matter too closely. Horatio gulps, in the production directed by Bennett (Shakespeare 1980), when Hamlet tells him of the deaths of
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but even here, when Hamlet asks (V,ii, 65–69), Horatio does not give advice or even an opinion. He is the only one of the principal characters left alive at the end of the play, and the one to whom Hamlet passes on not the Danish crown but the task of reporting the true story of the events to be shown in the play (V,ii, 340–49), again as if he did not really exist in Elsinore. One waits for him to touch something. It is as if Ophelia falls into the stream because there is nothing there to catch her.

XI: ON FREUD AND FREUD ON HAMLET

The Freudian line of the interpretation of Hamlet began in The Interpretation of Dreams (V, iii, D, b), and was continued in the solid study of Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus (1954). In Hamlet’s seventh soliloquy, he says himself that he does not know the reason that the act remains undone, when he has “cause and will and strength and means / To do it” (IV,iv, 43–45). Bradley, and others, read Hamlet’s scruple about the event as a rationalization for not killing Claudius at prayers. The explanation of Freud begins from this point, that Hamlet says himself that he is not conscious of the reason. Jones too seems to be on the track of something when he writes of Hamlet: “his moral fate is bound up with his uncle’s for good or ill. In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality, so that he cannot kill him without also killing himself” (1954, 98). The fates of Hamlet and Claudius seem strangely entangled, and we are pressed for an explanation as to why heaven should punish them with one another, or why it should require the death of Hamlet to depose Claudius.

According to Freud, the hesitation of Hamlet does not pertain to all action, as one who might be paralyzed due to an excessive intellectual activity, since he shows himself decisive in his two acts of killing. Rather, his hesitation pertains to the particular action of killing his stepfather. Freud writes that Hamlet and Oedipus Rex are “rooted in the same soil.” The difference is that “In Oedipus the basic wish-fantasy of the child is brought to light and realized as it is in dreams; in Hamlet it remains repressed, and we learn of its existence–as we discover the facts in a neurosis, only through the inhibitory effects which proceed from it” (1938, 309). Freud writes further:

Hamlet is able to do anything but take vengeance upon the man who did away with his father and has taken his father’s place with his mother—the man who shows him in realization the repressed desires of his own childhood. The loathing which should have driven him to revenge is thus replaced by self-reproach, by consci-
entious scruples, which tell him that he himself is no better than the murderer he is required to punish.

(Ibid., 310)

Jones agrees, writing, “The son really refuses to repudiate the murder wish. He cannot punish the man who carried it out” (1954, 153). Hamlet fails, then, because of an unconscious envy for Claudius based on what the Freudians call the Oedipus complex.

Freud seems to be on the track of something. The question of Oedipus or maternal incest is also involved in the source story, where the spy during the conversation of Amelth and Gerutha is hidden in the straw bedding, and Hamlet kills him there with his sword (Saxo 1963, 128). The contemporary director Bennett has chosen to emphasize or exaggerate this aspect of the scene. Michael Platt notes the theme of parricide that arises when one tries to follow out the implications of the double allusion involved for Hamlet in Dido’s tale to Aeneas (1992, 925–26). The eerie similarity of Hamlet’s mission to parricide and the archetypal crime, in response to what is worse than the crime of Cain, might in some way prevent the action. More to the point may be the danger that if he does not leave his mother to heaven but includes her in his revenge, he will taint his mind.

Freudian theory is based on a unique view of human nature, which depends in turn upon broad assumptions regarding principles of philosophy and political philosophy. He believes he discerns a conflict in every young male child of aggression toward the father and undifferentiated love for the mother. The conflict is repressed, and this repression is the very origin of conscience. Freud relates the complex or constellation of psychic contents to the pre-political experience of mankind. In one of the clearest statements of the fundamental thought on this matter, from Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud states:

We cannot get away from the assumption that man’s sense of guilt springs from the Oedipus complex and was acquired at the killing of the father by brothers banded together. On that occasion an act of aggression was not suppressed but carried out; but it was the same act of aggression whose suppression in the child is supposed to be the source of his sense of guilt.

(1961, 78)

In Totem and Taboo, Freud states, “...the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art meet in the Oedipus complex,” which is also the “nucleus of all neurosis” (1938, 927). In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud
quickly distinguishes guilt from *remorse*, the word he wants to use for the guilt a person feels when “he really has done something which cannot be justified” (ibid., 78). The standard of justification for the biologist Freud can only be the “normal.” Yet what if the health of the soul is rare? He apparently does not mean, or cannot consistently assert, that justice itself came to be in this way. While Freud does not think out the implications of these ethical and political things for psychology, it remains possible that he is on to something regarding the origins and the specifically human things. He cites Darwin regarding pre-political prohibition in the higher primates, and wants to understand the change to the civilized condition (1938, 903–4), much like Rousseau in his *Second Discourse*. The hint that he is on to something comes not from Genesis, in the possibility that Cain would slay Adam, but in the connection in the Oedipus myth to the hero’s discernment of the riddle of the sphinx, the answer to which is “man.”

Science has had a great deal of trouble reconciling the things that appear from the evolutionary study of man with both the older account of the origins and the nature of man as we find ourselves. We forget that the way a thing comes to be cannot explain the most important things about the form or *what* it is that has come to be. Man emerged within a cosmos that simply is a certain way, and from a seed and branch of the tree of life that grows a certain way, according to nature. The dawning conscience of man may therefore have begun to grasp, as in the story of Cain and Abel, *that* murder is wrong. We still cannot give a consistent non-symbolic account of *why* murder is wrong (Genesis 9:6). We do not know how it came to be, for example, that the soul is an image of God or that justice is better for the soul than injustice. A part of the biblical tradition, meanwhile, has found greatly objectionable the things revealed through science about just how man was formed from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7), disdaining the low or bodily origin if it is described as being from primates. Yet the fact of our having come to be or evolved, even by accidental variations, does not seem to imply that these things are not so, or cannot be as they are. If a thing comes to be inside a circle, is it strange it should be round?

If man is political by nature, and governs the appetites, the prohibitions may be natural, emerging as the fulfillment of an unfolding nature. The philosophers sometimes present them as conventional. The disturbance to the soul when they are violated is evidence that they are by nature, or that man lives according to his human nature inside of these most ancient laws. Prohibitions are required because humans are capable of reversion back to the
ways of pre-political or filial man, and this is not good for us. The prohibitions seem to coincide with the political nature. If so, and they are conventional, then man is political not by nature but by convention. An experiment could decide the question, if a group of children were to survive on an island without human education. If man is by nature political, these would be uncivilized but tribal, and if not, would remain as filial man.

Man once lived in scattered families, as Homer describes the Cyclopes (Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b13). Succession in these groups might often have involved usurpation. Filial man must often have suffered usurpations, as do other primate colonies, irrespective of filial relations, and it is something related to this experience of filial man that Freud believes to be the root of the Oedipus complex in modern man.

Our understanding of prehistory depends on reason and evidence prominent enough to be found by archeologists. The fundamental filial prohibitions seem related to two changes, possibly hundreds of thousands of years after the continuous rather than cyclical human estrus, fire, and even more language, that fundamentally distinguish all humans from all animals. Apparently, about 130,000 years ago one branch of hominid changed from being filial to tribal, and then, 10,000-35,000 years ago, from tribal to village man, with apparently corresponding changes in the soul regarding exogamy and endogamy in marriage. The fundamental human laws or ways may be what demarcated or separated our genus *sapiens*, characterized by a new and superior kind of genetic mixing, without incest, and with a corresponding new ability for families to live together without parricide and fratricide, in tribes, with multiple hearths, from which villages and cities later arise. The change seems to have occurred surprisingly late, and might have had a tremendous selective advantage—tribal man seems to have outhunted and killed off not only all the large animals, but also filial man. That the fate of Oedipus is the worst shame, leading him to blind himself, may indicate an ancient antipathy between our kind of man and any who were pre-tribal, or filial men. The worse term of disdain is for one to call another a pre-political man, and this is possibly a relic.

The new science uniting genetics with anthropology might easily find the markers indicating the estimated date of such a change. All humans now living have been traced to a single woman of the San tribe in northern Africa about 100,000-120,000 years ago, and all human races outside of Africa are traced to a single crossing into Yemen, about 70,000 years ago. The
domestication of animals seems to coincide with human self-government, or to follow shortly after. The domestication of dogs is traced to three instances, the earliest over 100,000 years ago (Wayne 2002, 5, 7). Tribal man on the American continent lived in a totem system to determine marriages and avoid fraternal incest. Cain and Abel already practice agriculture and herding, an offshoot of the work of Adam in the garden, over at the source of the two rivers in Babylon. Other humans apparently lived outside of Eden, though not yet in cities. Cain is marked so that these do not kill him (Genesis 4:14), and incest is not required when Cain takes a wife (4:17). Agriculture, villages and cities emerged in America too, indicating that the crucial changes are prior to the crossing from Asia. They arrived on the continent without the wheel, but with human marriage laws intact, since these are much older. Paternal and fraternal incest are different, the former prohibition being older, deeper, and more thorough and universal. Fraternal incest in royal marriages occurred in Egypt and Babylon, within the period of recorded history, though this prohibition is far older and its violation rarer than cannibalism and human sacrifice. Adultery leads to the possibility of fraternal incest in the following generation, because brother and sister are not otherwise identifiable, and so the fraternal prohibition implies marriage laws of one sort or another. For us, endogamy is extended to exclude cousins, and other extensions of the prohibition are noted among the tribes.

Jung understands the Oedipus complex symbolically, writing of the hero and the battle for liberation from the mother or the attachment to the mother, which is the same as the attachment to the earth or the cave (1956, 225–26, 419–20, 431–34). The love of a man for a woman is entangled in the attachment to the earth, and as this erotic love regresses toward the origin, it is diverted from the original undifferentiated love. Jung writes: “The symbolical truth...frees the libido from the channel of the incest tendency, offers it a new gradient, and canalizes it into a spiritual form” (ibid., 226). The sacrifice of the attachment to the earth, or conquest of the fear of death, frees the hero to the light above. In the myth of recollection, this is “requital for ancient doom,” similar to original sin, and this is the origin of the kings and heroes (Plato, Meno 82b). Aquinas writes, “The sacraments are ordered to certain special effects which are necessary in the Christian life; thus Baptism is ordered to a certain spiritual regeneration, by which a man dies to vice and becomes a member of Christ” (1952, 860). Augustine is admonished to return to himself, from considering evil in the world (Confessions VII.10: 1960, 170). The return is through our mortal origins and so is prepared by what is like a “regression of libido,” a
return toward the womb. The baptismal font is called the womb of the Church
(Jung 1980, 45), and the Church is somehow the community of those born out
of the world, the reborn, and those ordered toward this, through the images.
Some give the name *reborn* to the belief at the start, the attachment to the
example of the Redeemer, or the ordering toward the mystery. The rite of bap-
tism is at the least a shadow of this, and a symbol that can awaken and make
understandable the “effects.” These mysteries, as that of Noah’s flood (1 Peter
3:20–21) were known before Christianity. The story of Noah is an image of the
whispered secret of eternal life even in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Sanders 1972,
chap. 4–5, 106–8), a Babylonian teaching. The Egyptian teaching remembers
Atlantis but not the flood, and includes the immortality of the soul, along with
repentance, judgment according to truth, and the teaching that virtue is knowl-
edge, that wisdom or knowledge is recollection, and incarnation an
imprisonment (Seleem 2001, 13–19). Erasmus drew a character that calls
Socrates a saint. It is written that the spirit blows where it will, and we do not
know from where it comes or where it goes (John 3:8). This seems to imply that
those born of the spirit cannot be identified by the world or by convention. The
understanding of the specifically human things might as well be based on the
principle that the image of God sleeps in men, as on the principle of the
Oedipus complex from the origin of political man. The birth of the intellect is
the central mystery. It is not owned by, but is the measure of, the sects, who
believe otherwise, having hold of an image. Its cultivation is the measure of all
peoples and civilizations.

The suggestion of Freud is similar to that of Rosencrantz that
the trouble with Hamlet, or the reason that he has bad dreams, is ambition.
Claudius supposedly fulfills his unconscious desire, leading Hamlet to his
paralysis of self-doubt and intertwining their fates. The dream of maternal
incest occurs to Caesar just before he crosses the Rubicon to seize Rome
relates to the seizure of the maternal city, and can also refer to the tyrant’s soul.
For Caesar, the seizure of Rome coincides with the attainment of universal
empire. The imagination of world rule does strange things to those possessed
by it, and characterizes the goal of the atheistic utopias of the twentieth cen-
tury. The accomplishment of Caesar allowed a series of self-deifying, mad,
tyrannical emperors to emerge in Rome, beginning with Caligula. As world
empire has begun to be written of in the past two centuries, we would do well
to consider these things. Nero, the classical example of the worst tyrant ever,
was guilty of incest and matricide, and it is against temptation to the murder of
his mother that Hamlet mentions Nero in his fifth soliloquy. In Daniel, the empires of Alexander and Caesar may be the third and fourth world empires, the last of the four metals in the dream image of the king, and there is another that achieves world empire (7:23), in the part of the image that is iron mixed with clay. The messianic kingdom is not a world empire, but as a stone hewn by no human hand, smites the image on its feet of iron and clay (3:32). The leaves of the tree of life are given for the healing of the nations, which are plural, rather than one nation (Revelation 22:2).

The response of Hamlet to the suggestion of his ambition is here a sarcastic admission, “I lack advancement” (II, ii, 256–59), against the background of the ambition of his associates, and Claudius, who did not hesitate to murder an innocent brother. The similarity of his mission to a usurpation might give him pause. Claudius suggests there is a divinity that “hedges about” a king, and paralyzes treason. It would not be surprising if the similarity of his mission to the archetypal usurpation were disturbing or the cause of difficulty. Is Hamlet able to strike behind the arras because the visible appearance of the king is hidden? And does he fail to verify who it is he is killing because he avoids the visible appearance? Is it that he is no longer at the altar (IV, vii, 125)? Or does this not rather show that he was serious about waiting until Claudius was involved in some mischief rather than praying? Because the crime is hidden from the kingdom, his action would appear to the kingdom to be a step-parricide usurpation, and this effect, if anything, would be a rational reason to find a better course.

Freud probably does not mean that anyone, including the less scrupulous, would have the same difficulty in the same circumstances, but as Goethe (1921, 152) and Bradley (1959, 92–93) write, Hamlet in particular is not up to the task, whether temperamentally or in these particular circumstances. Laertes would have no difficulty avenging the killer of his father, even if the fact of his killing were his own private knowledge, though it might be responded that his mother, the missing spouse of Polonius, is not involved. Nor can he think of the conditions of souls in purgatory. Like Horatio the scholar, a man of action would not have been spoken to by the ghost in order to have the mission from the start. The failure of Hamlet is due to his revenge. This revenge persists because of the attachment to the earth, allowing for his mixed metaphor regarding the imagination of the afterlife. His self-critical abilities do not extend to this image.
Oedipus is said to be the “archetype of tragedy” (Bloom 1968, 386), the “paradigm of the tyrant,” and even the paradigm of man or the natural in man (Benardete 1964, 3, 7). In a word, Freud seems to be wrong not about there being a desire for usurpation deep in human nature, but about its being the true nature of man. Oedipus is not a tyrant because he does not do these things intentionally, but suffers the worst shame, as though he had, and this is his tragedy—his suffering does not balance his crime. The tyrant is one who does while waking the things which occur in dreams (Republic 571d, 574e), and the philosopher, similarly and oppositely, is involved in the actualization of dreams (Alvarez 1984, 178). Socrates, and not Sophocles, distinguishes the royal from the tyrannical nature, and it is the royal or philosophic nature, not the tyrant’s, that is the paradigm of man. As Jones notes, it makes a difference whether the father is tyrannical and the son a liberator (as in the story of Zeus in Hesiod’s Theogony, 453–500) or the father just and the son a usurper. Freud’s science cannot acknowledge the crucial distinction between the succession of kings and tyrants, though he presents the founding of political society as republican, by the brothers. Tyranny could not have brought man out of the pre-political condition. The succession of generations, or the ascent of children to the position of parents, has both a royal and a tyrannical form.

Images related to the pre-political nature of man, as homo rather than as sapiens, occur at the limits of the human, transcending the human things in the direction either of the bestial or the divine, with meanings as opposite as cannibalism and the Eucharist, and as similar. An example from Shakespeare is in his Pericles, in the similarity and contrast between the incest of Antiochus discovered by Pericles at the opening of the play and the rebirth of Pericles through his daughter through the course of the action. These things have common or similar forms, and it is not what is the same but what is opposite that characterizes the bestial or evil.

In an analogous relation, the suggestion of Freud might even be revealing. Founding churches would be like replacing the authority that has been deposed, after the realm had been dismantled of “Jove himself.” The splintering of the church is the repetition of the claim to authoritative doctrine. Hamlet is shocked by how quickly Claudius has replaced his father in the affection or attachment of his mother (I,ii, 143–57; III,ii, 134–38; 208–9). On a question similar to the question of love from the opening scene of Lear, the example is said to show decisively that fortune leads love. What can be made to stand is different from the life that is the mystical body, the true church. The problem of Christianity and custom, or here of Christianity and the worldly
part which rules through the ghost of the Roman empire, cannot be solved by building churches. It is said that Luther did not intend to found a new church, though it is also said that from the time of the Diet of Worms, the founding of a Reformed Church in the name of Luther became inevitable (Dillenberger 1961, xxiii). Luther does set up adherence to his doctrine of salvation by faith as the criteria of salvation and all doctrine (Luther 1961, 100, 106 [Commentary on Galatians], 493 [Thesis no. 32]), and claims the authority of the Spirit. This would imply a kind of universal rule, and a repetition of the difficulty. It may be too that the excessive denunciations made the new church inevitable and the division set at Wittenberg irreconcilable, or one to last for centuries. It may be that no humans, or none born—since Jesus is to come in the same way he ascended (Acts 1:11)—ought to found Christian churches, especially to avoid being forgotten after death (III, ii, 131–32). The problem is human authority itself, and the temptation of this to claim the authority of the Spirit. Shakespeare rather sets up the Globe, or drama, in part as a critical house for the memory of great men, to channel political ambition away from religious matters.

**XII: The Shakespearean Restoration of the Imagination**

Some account might be given as to why the play Hamlet is especially popular among the German readers of Shakespeare, and holds an unexplained fascination for our age. The reason may be similar to the reason that Germany and our age gave rise to Freudian psychology: these questions are somehow at the root of our fundamental difficulty. The images disappear in prosaic modernity because of both Christianity and modern science. The imagination is starved as if for lack of food, by both the iconoclasm of Christianity and the replacement of myth with science in the account of the first things. The function of the imagination is in mediating between intellect and desire, informing choice (Alvarez 1990). The intelligible things are communicated to desire through the images (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* V,i, 14–15).

The Shakespearean restoration of the imagination is contrasted with a German line, possibly foreseen by Goethe in the journey of his Faust, in Part II, to the “mothers ever active” and the principles of night (6275–92; 6427–38). One notes the absence of the father. Faust brings back Paris and Helen (II, iii), and then, like Romeo on the porch of the tomb, overcomes Paris. Faust and Helen have a child, Euphorion, who takes delight in gain only if it is by force (9783–84), and talks of raping a girl to show his
strength and will (9795–99). Soon the chorus sings “cloven hoofs trample down all morality” (10033). Soon Faust and Mephistopheles sit talking on the inverted pits of Hell, which have become the peaks (10075–99). The inversion of the German imagination demonstrates that there is indeed knowledge in the soul, when the void proves not to be nothing, but to have an intelligible aspect. The will emerges not as nothing, but the will to power (Strauss 1983, 181; Bloom 1964, 8). The inversions, and the political manifestations on the right and left, seem not to have been foreseen by Shakespeare, though he takes measures against the ominous development of the branch from which these spring.

The first and last scenes of the opening act of Hamlet conclude with the sunrise. The Shakespearean poetry of the sunrise, or the sunlit images, restores the imagination to its natural function. The disappearance of the spirits at the crowing of the rooster, heralding dawn, demonstrates a demonology or cosmology similar to Pico’s, in which intellect and light are superior to and contain the world of the spirits. Horatio notes that when the cock crowed, the ghost “started, like a guilty thing / Upon a fearful summons” (I,v, 11–13). While unable to command the ghost to speak, Horatio does seem to hit on why the ghost started away as the cock crowed, relating an account of which he has heard, and now seen an example:

...I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth, with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th’ extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine; and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.
(I,i, 153–61)

Marcellus then recalls:

Some say that ever ’gainst that season comes
Wherein our savior’s birth is celebrated
This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.
(I,i, 163–69)
John Milton, in his 1629 poem *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, writes of the ceasing of war, the silencing of the Oracle of Delphi, and the fleeing of the ancient gods like ghosts at sunrise (3–5, 19, 20–26; Alvis 1987). Horatio speaks of the gods in Roman terms. It may be that his god (I,i, 56) is Roman. He is not a Machiavellian, recovering Roman political examples without the gods. He believes Marcellus’s Christian image, though only “in part.” However, it may be that only a part of Horace is present. Horatio translates freely between the pagan and Christian images, referring to the same meanings with different images. “I” Keyser, in conversation, has related this scene to the rooster at the conclusion of Plato’s *Phaedo*. Pico della Mirandola, in his Oration (1948, 235–36) writes of the rooster as a Pythagorean symbol of “the divine part” of the soul that is feasted “on the knowledge of things divine as if on substantial food and heavenly ambrosia,” and writes:

> When this cock crows, erring man comes to his senses. This cock in the twilight of morning daily sings with the morning stars as they praise God. The dying Socrates, when he hoped to join the divinity of his spirit with the divinity of a greater world, said that he owed a cock to Asclepius, that is, to the physician of souls, now that he had passed beyond all danger of illness.

Pico, at age 24, published and proposed to defend 900 theses (ibid., 217), as Luther later posted his ninety-five. The turn of Hamlet’s thought from viewing the marvel of man to seeing man and the world as dust and vapor (II,ii, 295–310) is like the turn of Renaissance thought from the humanism of Pico and Erasmus to the view of man in the theology of Luther. An excellent recent study raises many questions concerning the texts of Pico that remain (Farmer 1998). Pico, and with him Platonic philosophy, was treated as is Edgar by Gloucester in *King Lear*. Platonic philosophy was cast adrift like Prospero. Machiavelli was comparatively well received. The extension of Roman law to doctrine seems to have advanced to the extent that a division between Platonists and Aristotelians could become a difference between heresy and orthodoxy.

The account of Marcellus beautifully mixes images from the British pagan imagination with Christian images. As he is more a Dane than an antique Roman, the God of Day is replaced by the Savior. The image describes the boundary between the spirit world and Being or what is, and the place of the spirit world within and in subordination to the realm of the spirits of light, evident in the ghost’s own description of where he goes during the day and how he walks the night (I,v, 10–13). The account is very similar to an account
of ghosts given by Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (III, ii, 379–87). Puck explains that on the approach of “Aurora’s harbinger,” the morning star or the first hint of dawn light in the sky, the ghosts “troop home to churchyards.” By contrast, the damned spirits have already gone to their beds for fear that the daylight should look upon their shames. This is because they have willfully exiled themselves from light, and now must forever “consort with black-browed night.” The opposite of this, not to willfully exile oneself from light, is repentance, that is, to reveal ourselves to the light and turn. The distinction of Puck between ghosts and damned spirits corresponds to the distinction between Purgatory and Hell, which is assumed in *Hamlet*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the comedy that is sister to the tragedy of *Hamlet*.

The spirits commented on by Puck and Horatio seem all to be erring or mischievous, or like the spirits spoken of by Edgar in his disguise as Poor Tom (*King Lear* III, iv, 118–19), all foul. Augustine identifies the good gods, in the Socratic purification of the stories of the poets (Plato, *Republic* III), with the angels, as blessed immortals, but doubts that there are any spirits between heaven and earth that are not wicked spirits (*City of God* VIII. 25). Augustine, reacting to the drama of the Empire, implicates the “demons of the air” in the production of plays, or the “obscenities of the theater.” He praises Plato for the expulsion of tragedy and comedy, depriving these demons of the pleasures they derived from plays (ibid.). However, in Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima presents Love as being not a god but a spirit, the nature of which is to ascend with our prayers and descend with answers (202c). In *Phaedrus*, too, the gods are mediators (250c). Oberon the Fairy King responds to the demonology of Augustine, Puck, Horatio and Poor Tom with an account of spirits that is consistent with what Barbara Tovey has called a Shakespearean apology for imitative poetry (1983, 278). Oberon distinguishes for Puck the fairy spirits, such as themselves, from the ghosts and the others:

> But we are spirits of another sort:  
> I with morning’s love have oft made sport;  
> And like a forester the groves may tread  
> Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,  
> Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,  
> Turns into yellow gold her salt green streams.  
> (III, ii, 388–93)

It is possible that the playwright here means Oberon to speak as Horatio and Pico speak, translating freely between pagan and Christian images and using local images for the things spoken of in the Christian images. This does not
mean that the pagan and Christian meanings are the same. Rather, the language of the images is based on the knowledge in the soul, and this knowledge is distinct from the particular images. The light is by Oberon called “the morning’s love.” The example of Hyperion is of especial interest in *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare may have written of Christian things in pagan images, because the knowledge on which the images are based is the same. The second reference to the Globe Theater in the play is to the emblem on the sign for Shakespeare’s theater, in which Hercules, Hamlet’s Greek hero, holds the world for Ajax while Ajax goes to fetch the apples of the Hesperides. Here, the tragedians of the city have been displaced by a group of child actors who are like a group who actually did displace Shakespeare’s own company, in about the years 1600-1601 (Shakespeare 1982, 257). Asked if the boy actors “carry it away,” Rosencrantz answers “Hercules and his load too.” (II,ii, 357), sweeping away the hero and the whole world. Hamlet answers that it is not strange, considering the change in the kingdom by which those who once disdained Claudius now pay for his picture.

The Hesperides are daughters of the West, the land of Hesperos, the evening star. The Oxford Dictionary (1971, 1297) cites *Pericles* (I,i, 27). Pericles at first calls the daughter of Antiochus a celestial tree whose fruit he longs to taste (I,i, 23). Antiochus calls his daughter a “Fair Hesperides / With golden fruit, dangerous to be touched.” Pericles says that to have risked death in this enterprise has taught his mortality to know itself. The nymphs who were the daughters of Hesperos guarded the garden of the golden apples on the Isles of the Blessed, at the Western extremity of the earth (ibid.). There is an obvious similarity, if amid obvious differences, to the guarded gate at the East of Eden, and the tree of life, in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:9, 3:24). If the allusion were Christian, after the manner of Horatio of transferring the meaning of classical and Christian images, it might suggest that Shakespeare sees the purpose of the Globe Theater as being to uphold the earth while the apples of immortality are fetched.

**XIII: The Gravedigger and the Gallows**

The conversation of the gravedigger directly, if comically, addresses questions of religion that have seemed essential to the argument of the play. The discussion takes place at the grave of Ophelia, who appears as something like the daughter of scholasticism. Together with the opening scene, the matters addressed by the gravedigger do not relate to the remainder of the play except by pointing to the argument addressed by the analogy. First, the
gravedigger questions the judgment of the coroner allowing Christian burial for Ophelia because it appears that she caused her own death. The assumption of such burial customs is that ground sanctified is relevant in the resurrection. In presenting the argument that the action was a suicide, because the water did not come to drown her, he parodies the scholastic reduction of philosophy to logic while missing the point, as occurs when the principles are settled ahead of thought, and “philosophy” is reduced to an instrument in service to the set principles. The gravedigger’s assistant suspects that if Ophelia had not been a gentlewoman, she would have been denied Christian burial. The priest at her funeral confirms that a “great command” overruled the order for her burial in unsanctified ground (V,i, 221). This would be from either Claudius, a bishop or the Pope, exercising the discretion allowed in doubtful cases (Shakespeare 1982, 388). The command is correct, and the gravedigger is wrong: the death is accidental. The gravedigger jokes that it is a pity that the great are given more leave to commit suicide than commoners. He adds that there are no ancient gentlemen except “gardeners, ditches and gravemakers,” who uphold the profession of Adam. The implication first appears to be the Protestant teaching of the equality of “your even Christian.” The Durants cite John Ball, the “mad priest of Kent,” excommunicated in 1366: “When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?” (1944-1957, 6:41). Yet, according to the gravedigger, Adam was a gentleman, “the first who ever bore arms.” When his assistant denies that Adam bore arms, the gravedigger rails:

What? Art a heathen? How dost thou understand the scripture?  
The scripture says Adam dug. Could he dig without arms?  
(V,i, 35–37)

There may be a connection to the argument that if philosophy is the best life, the origins were necessarily imperfect, since philosophy presupposes the arts, and the first age did not know the arts (Strauss 1953, 97). He appeals to the scripture according to which Adam was placed in the garden “to till” or “dress” or cultivate and “keep” it, or to tend the garden planted by the Lord. (Genesis 2:15, 8). This is the third direct connection of the play to the book of Genesis. Hamlet’s characterization of the world as an unweeded garden calls to mind this very passage which states that the purpose of Adam’s being placed in the Garden of the Lord—with or without arts and arms—is to “till and keep it” (Genesis 2:17; Revelation 22:2; Hamlet V,i, 38). The gardener in Richard II famously compares political action to gardening (III,iv, 29–107; Bloom 1981, 56–57). Adam digged. The purpose of human action is analogous to the tilling and keeping of the garden of the Lord, which also contains the tree
of life (Genesis 2: 9, Proverbs 3:18, Revelation 2:7, 22:2). Our expulsion from the garden is an estrangement from our proper work, which work is indeed a natural basis for a hierarchy of nobility, though it is not and cannot be the basis for conventional inequality. One wonders, with the gravedigger, how one who would deny that Adam bore arms reads the scripture, or how it would be possible to read the scriptures at all, if natural virtue and human effort are disparaged from the start. The standard of merit or measure of nobility is not ancestry, but cultivation of the garden of the Lord. This would not be if the garden were, without man, kept providentially.

In the final jest, the gravedigger threatens his assistant with hanging for speaking ill of the Church. His crime is implied by his guessing that the gallows maker is the answer to the riddle of who builds stronger than the mason, shipwright or carpenter. The answer is “a grave maker. The houses he makes lasts till doomsday.” Hamlet at the performance of the Mousetrap sneered “by'r lady a' must build churches then, or else shall a' suffer not thinking on…” (III,ii, 130–31). Blits notes that the grave of Yorick did not last long, being taken now by Ophelia (2001, 330). Yorick, the Jester, is named after the King of Denmark in Saxo. The dangerous implication is that churches, with Caesar and Alexander, are included among the things that are mortal. Graves last longer than churches.

As Luther notes, it was the way of the early fathers to suppress heresy “by argument, and not by fire.” The first judicial death sentence for heresy occurred some time just after 384. It was opposed by St. Ambrose and St. Martin, to the extent that neither would hold communion with Ithacius, the bishop of Ossanova because he urged the emperor Maximus to put the bishop of Avila, Priscillian, to death for his doctrines (Plassman 1954, 79–80). Martin wrote reproving Ithacius, saying that it was sufficient to brand Priscillian a heretic and excommunicate him. Such a solution would have limited the punishment—of spiritual and symbolic errors of opinion and ambition—to spiritual effects. Maximus turned the case over to a lower official, who “found Priscillian and some other guilty on several charges and had them beheaded.” The death penalty for heresy was not common in the first millennium, and there are no famous names of scientists or dissenters that were killed. As late as Pope Leo IX (1049–55), excommunication alone was occasionally upheld. It is especially in the second millennium that the burning of heretics, and then witches, becomes prominent.
Yet the difficulty seems to originate in the first millennium, with the joining of the Roman Empire with Christianity. Prior to the Edict of Milan in 313, the Christians had suffered in ten separate persecutions, from Nero to Diocletian. It is just after Diocletian that Constantius, the father of Constantine and a Christian, became co-emperor, about 307. Constantine was crowned at York, in Britain, where Constantius died. A Christian Roman British nobility descended from this family at York is related to the British nobility of Arthurian times, two centuries later. Because Britain was then on the fringes of the Empire, Roman Christians had migrated there throughout the first three centuries, beginning with Joseph of Arimathea. Constantius and Helen are responsible for the character given to early medieval Christendom, the conversion of Constantine and the Roman Empire. In one story Constantius orders his household to kiss an idol, a usual Roman test to discover Christians. Then, rather than executing those who do not, as was usual for Roman emperors, Constantius dismisses from his service those who did kiss the idol, retaining those who would have been martyrs (Eusebius, Church History, I. xvi). Eusebius presents the birthplace of Helen as Bithynia, in Asia Minor. In a story at least as reliable as Eusebius, and possibly consistent with the imperial account, Geoffrey presents Helen, the wife of Constantius, as the British daughter of (Old) King Cole (1966, V. 8). She would become the mother of Constantine, St. Helen.

Christian Rome from the beginning is characterized by difficulties like the Donatist schism, over the reinstatement of priests who turned over scriptures for fear of martyrdom, and the Arian heresy, over the divinity of Christ and the Trinity. Though Constantine did not persecute Pagans, the emperor soon forbade the meeting of heretical sects, and for a time deprived Donatists of property and the rights of Roman citizens. Arius was exiled after the council of Nicaea. His books were ordered burned and those hiding his books were punishable with death (Durant 1944-1957, 3:656–61). Constantine seems at one time to have considered doctrinal differences trifling, and the quarrels of the priests to be childish (Eusebius, Life of Constantine, letter to Alexander and Arius, II. 63, 70; cited by Durant 1944-1957, 3:659). By 331, Constantine asked that Arius be restored to his congregation, and Eusebius, who baptized Constantine near his death, is said to have been an Arian. Eusebius brought the accusation that led to the expulsion of Athanasius by Constantine. Under his son Constantine, the Church in the West continued to lean toward Arius, and then in 339 Athanasius and those supporting the Nicene creed were again expelled (Durant 1944-1957, 4:8), before Julian
attempted the restoration of the Roman Pagan religion. The Durants observe that within a two-year period, from 342-343, “probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians…than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome” (ibid.). If Christianity is bad for nations, and weakened or failed to revive Rome, it may be due to these doctrinal divisions and heretical practices, rather than the teaching that humans ought to look to heaven and love one another. Augustine takes up the question of the effect of Christianity on the empire in a section full of allusions from Hamlet (City of God, I.2, 4, 17, 19–22, 26). Augustine is cited in support of persecution, in an interpretation of a parable in the Gospel of Luke (14:23) in which, when there is a feast and those invited do not attend, it is said: “compel them to come in” (Kuiper 1978, 46). The Justinian Code, about 534, enacted the death penalty for “Manicheans or relapsed heretics” ( Durant 1944-1957, 4:112). The Durants report that the revival of the Justinian code at Bologne in the twelfth century provided the legal basis for the Inquisition. The canon law regarding heresy was copied verbatim from the fifth law of the Justinian code, entitled De haereticis. By the time of the Inquisition, Old Testament passages on the punishment of idolatry, such as Deuteronomy 17:2–6 and 13, and later, “suffer not a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18), were cited in support of these religious killings.

While Greece and Israel punished religious dissent with death, it is a different matter for Christianity, and this may be related to the persecution becoming so horrible and widespread, the worst of all known prior to the twentieth century. The Inquisition may be the single most harmful stain on the reputation of Christianity, leaving non-Christians to suspect that it somehow follows from the teaching of Jesus, and inhibiting the ministry. Revenge is central to Nietzsche’s presentation of the cause for the rise of Christianity. The will, rather than the light and the begotten nous, becomes the guiding principle of German philosophy, apparently from reading Rousseau and Luther. The emphasis on a “creed or set of dogmas” is presented by Strauss as the result of the emphasis on faith rather than law (1952, 9, 32). Persecution appears to be a different matter for Christianity because Christianity is trans-national or universal. The Christian teaching transcends law, teaching mercy and setting aside the severity of the Mosaic law (Alvarez 1990). The Law of Moses is not universal in the way that the law after Noah, forbidding murder, pertains to all mankind (Strauss 1952, 96–97). The suspension of the punishment of death for adultery (John 8:1–11) would seem to be the right example to follow regarding heresy.
It is possible that Constantine ought not to have made the empire Christian, as Irving Wasserman has suggested. If Constantine had had the foresight, seeing what Thomas Jefferson saw in hindsight, he might have stopped with the toleration of the Edict of Milan, separating church and state as far as this is done by the combination of the first two clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Instead of dividing the empire, he might have divided the functions, and re-established self-government. This might have saved Rome. The philosophic among the priests, too, might have realized, especially from the experience of the previous three centuries, that the scriptures could identify and fend for themselves, while liberty is at least as beneficial for understanding. The example of how John cared for the teaching among those who are taught by His anointing, and so need no other teacher, is the guiding example (1 John 2:26–27). The principles of the splintered churches in the West are each points worth noting, in a philosophic theology governed by the Socratic principle of human ignorance (Erasmus, Letter to Martin Dorp: 1989, 237). The dialogue, forbidden, occurred instead in the political realm, by the divisions of sects and the religious wars of Europe. A dialogue of theology, while bereft of the assumption of certainty of the Queen of Sciences, would be consistent with the widowed status of the bride. The unity of the church would not be made by the traditions, but recognized, as this already is. While distinct from divine authority, something like this may be the most solid basis for revered authority once philosophy has arisen. The possibility of the burning and torture of the Inquisition, let alone that the church herself would make martyrs, did not seem to occur to anyone.

XIV: Final Points of the Analogy

The fatalism of Hamlet present throughout the second half (III,iv, 175–77) and prominent toward the conclusion, after his escape and return from the ship to England (V,ii, 215), also has a possible Lutheran parallel in the teaching of fate and predestination. In contrast to a tradition emphasizing choice and free will and a work by Erasmus called The Freedom of the Will, Protestants following Luther emphasize predestination, or, as Luther titles his work, The Bondage of the Will. Nietzsche thought this fatalism central to the meaning of the character of Hamlet. His notes on Hamlet are included in his The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music (sections 5n, 7, 17). He writes that Hamlet delays, or action is inhibited for him, because he has gained “true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth.” This truth includes the supposed knowledge that his “action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things: “[He feels] it to be ridiculous or humiliating that [he] should
be asked to set right a world that is out of joint” (1967, 60). By contrast, C. S. Lewis finds the fatalism of Hamlet, or his renewed trust in Providence, to indicate that he has found his way (1960, 181; Alvis 1990, 82–83). Earlier, in light of the events at Elsinore, Hamlet had denied Providence, speaking rather of fortune. Where Edgar says “ripeness is all,” Hamlet says “readiness is all” (*King Lear* V,ii, 11; *Hamlet* V,ii, 220–25). Defying augury, he cites scripture on the Providence in the fall of a sparrow, or in every particular event. (The word “will” is added in the translation of the Greek, which reads more simply “without your father” [Matthew 10: 29].) The “readiness” of Hamlet is more Lutheran than the “ripeness” of Edgar (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; Blits 2001, 366 n.45). As a royal nature, Edgar in *King Lear* is a measure of Hamlet. His “ripeness” as an end goes with gardening, the work contrasted by the gravedigger with conventional nobility (V,i, 29–37). The fatalism of Hamlet allows him to proceed toward the conclusion of the play in which the mutual destruction of the mighty opposites is necessary to complete his mission. He does not seem to have a plan, as he did on his voyage to England (in the Quarto edition, III,iv, 206–12). He allows events to present an opportunity in the fencing match as with the pirates. His death seems to be inseparable from the death of Claudius, and so to complete his mission, he must himself face death. His fatalism is not inconsistent with the fulfillment of his mission, but only doing so in a way that preserves his life and the Danish monarchy. As Blits writes, “Hamlet’s trust in fate proves, literally, fatal. Setting aside a premonition and surrendering himself to fate, Hamlet walks passively into Claudius’ deadly trap” (2001, 17–18; V,ii, 208–20). It is neither revenge, then, nor intellectualism per se that is Hamlet’s trap in the end. He does finally succeed at ridding the throne of luxury and incest, and at killing Claudius, though in a way that leaves the stage scattered with four bodies, in addition to the four previously dead. Fatalism is one result of thinking about doomsday, and the suggestion may be that it becomes even more important to do the right thing in each particular.

Despite the image of the queen drinking the cup of poison, the catastrophe at the conclusion of Hamlet seems not to be an imitation of the battles and catastrophe surrounding doomsday. The question then remains of the connection between the canceling of these opponents and doomsday. Whatever it is that Norway represents, this takes over Denmark, with Hamlet’s blessing in the succession (V,ii, 359–61). As noted, the name Fortinbras means “strong of arms” (Alvis 2004, 310; Blits 2001, 35). He is in this more like Hamlet’s father than Hamlet himself is. It may be that the victory of Fortinbras over Denmark is anticipated, and Hamlet saves his weakened nation the trouble of a battle. The conquest of Denmark by Norway is the final balancing of
the victory of Hamlet Senior over Norway, reflected in the first appearance of the ghost to Horatio (I,i, 64–66). What may be portended is something like the arrival of modernity after the demise of Catholic and Protestant opposites.

XV: Conclusion

Hamlet, like The Tempest, is a play about a thinker or one who has spent time in study. It is, perhaps uniquely, a Shakespearean tragedy about a thinker. It seems autobiographical in the presentation of Hamlet as a dramatist, yet only in part. Ella Sharpe, cited by Jones, writes, “The poet is not Hamlet. Hamlet is what he might have been had he not written Hamlet” (1954, 117). It is an example of the writing of tragedy to provide an example of how to avoid a tragic alternative, for oneself and others. The other autobiographic possibility is Horatio, who is given the task of telling the world the story of Hamlet, and has some contact with the theater. In Hamlet, Shakespeare rejects the Lutheran response to the Reformation, in favor of a more remote, independent, and successful response. The autobiographical play is The Tempest, which shows how the drama of Shakespeare was used like magic to set aright the time in Italy after a similar fratricidal usurpation. In the Globe Theater, Shakespeare responds with philosophy and drama to the disturbance in the soul of the West caused by the degeneration of the medieval orders. All efforts are summoned to address a fundamental usurpation. The decision is to give memory a seat in the Globe Theater, and the story of Hamlet is a part of that memory.

Purgation of the passions in general, accomplished through the pity by which we identify with the tragic hero and then the fear that his fate inspires, may be what Aristotle describes as the proper effect of tragedy (Poetics VI.3, 1149b27–28). At the conclusion of Romeo and Juliet, the passions of filial rivalry are purged in awe at the spectacle of their result. The purgation intended by the play Hamlet is especially directed toward revenge and the emotions fueling the religious wars in England and throughout Europe. Because of the function of the images, the argument need not be intelligible to the spectators in order to effect this purgation. The play touches that in the spectator that is also touched by the difficult religious questions, through the filial analogy. It is intended for the mote and log in the eye of Europe, toward Roman penance and the renunciation of Protestant revenge. These passions had led to war in France and Germany, and were about to lead to the Thirty Years War. The work is intended to teach us to face the fundamental problem at the root of the crisis of the Reformation, if not to cultivate drama and philosophy in response to this. In these ways, too, the play might be intended to show the age and body of the time to itself, and catch the conscience of a king.
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This essay is especially indebted to Irving and Loretta Wasserman, and to the study of Hamlet at the University of Dallas, especially in the courses of Leo Paul de Alvarez and John Alvis.


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The title of this book, *John Locke's Moral Revolution*, misleads, for it suggests a purpose considerably grander than Samuel Zinaich intends. “Moral revolution” as he uses it refers not to some fundamental change Locke wrought, but something which happened to him, in the course of the development of his moral philosophy. Zinaich argues that we must understand Locke’s views of morality as developing over the course of his life, determined at different stages by different presuppositions. Zinaich opposes this thesis to the two more typical ways in which scholars account for the discrepancies between the early moral philosophy of the *Questions concerning the Law of Nature* (*QLN*) and the later, mature one of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (*ECHU*) and *Two Treatises* (*2T*). The first way is to argue that Locke’s views only seem to be inconsistent, but are consistent, just at a deeper level (the “reconciliation thesis,” represented chiefly by John Colman). The second consists in claiming that Locke’s views are fundamentally inconsistent, because he was incapable of resolving the contradictions in them (the “irreconcilability thesis” of Peter Laslett). Zinaich believes he has a better idea: Locke’s works are inconsistent, but not because Locke was confused, but because he changed his mind. “Locke’s views are not inconsistent because he has created problems for himself he could not solve…the incompatibility of his views stems from the different presuppositions from which he begins each work” (135). The most significant change in Locke’s presuppositions occurred when he embraced Robert Boyle’s corpuscularian natural philosophy. According to Zinaich, the best way to account for the differences between Locke’s early and mature moral philosophies and defend his reputation against charges of involuntary inconsistency is to see how “Locke begins [the *QLN* and *ECHU*] from completely different
standpoints. The QLN presuppose a Christian/Aristotelian outlook, and the ECHU begins from the assumption of corpuscles” (147). Locke scholars have agreed Boyle influenced Locke, but they have tended to restrict this influence to Locke’s natural philosophy or epistemology. Zinaich wants to go further and demonstrate the reach of Boyle’s influence into Locke’s moral philosophy as well. Everyone has agreed Boyle influenced Locke greatly and that Locke’s moral philosophy contains inconsistencies, so why might not the former explain the latter?

In order to identify the presuppositions underlying Locke’s thought at each stage and the differences between them, Zinaich approaches each of Locke’s works with the question “to what crisis was he responding?” Locke’s first two major works on moral and political philosophy, the Two Tracts (1660) and the QLN (1664) addressed political crises. The difference between the political theories espoused by these works (Two Tracts’ absolutism and QLN’s traditional natural law theory) may be best accounted for by the difference between the crises to which they responded (the English Civil War in the first case and Charles II’s post-Restoration aggrandizement of power in the second). The ECHU (1689) addressed a much different kind of crisis, namely “an epistemological crisis created by the new views of the universe of Sir Robert Boyle” (10). Somewhere in between 1664 and 1690, Locke’s philosophy underwent a change in focus and content. His main concerns became more natural than moral, and he broke completely with the traditional philosophy of the QLN. Locke did not write the ECHU “to formulate in greater detail the epistemological basis of the law of nature which Locke had begun in the QLN” (9), as most Locke scholars would have it, but rather “in order to follow out the implications that Boyle’s views had for moral and religious knowledge” (1). Because Boyle’s corpuscularist natural science denied all natural ends, Locke was forced to abandon traditional natural law theory for moral relativism. Therefore, Locke always was a perfectly consistent thinker; though his early and mature moral philosophies contradict each other, they are perfectly compatible with his early and mature natural philosophies, respectively.

Zinaich convincingly critiques the “irreconcilability” and “reconcilability” theses of Colman and Laslett. Through careful textual analysis, he shows that (contra Colman) the QLN and ECHU do diverge on major philosophical questions, and that (contra Laslett) these divergences were intentional, and not the result of some incapacity on Locke’s part. He also does a nice job documenting the many similarities between Locke’s and Boyle’s thinking, relying not just on historical details, but again on careful attention to their
texts. Finally, Zinaich deserves praise for the useful boldness with which he asserts Locke’s materialism and its significance for his moral and political philosophy.

But on the whole, Zinaich fails to convince. He never proves anything more than that Boyle influenced Locke, which, as he notes (13), Locke scholars have never doubted. Zinaich has little to offer readers who already doubted that the mature Locke was a traditional natural law theorist, for his argument about Locke’s moral relativism does not hold up. Nor is Zinaich any more successful in his attempt to read the *ECHU* as a series of conclusions drawn from the premise that all is corpuscles.

Before descending into particulars, generally speaking, Zinaich’s approach (which is clearly influenced a great deal by analytic philosophy) fails because it is too narrow. He focuses too single-mindedly on the question of the basic consistency between certain elements of Locke’s thought, which causes him to overstate the significance of those elements of Locke’s thought which seem to support his main thesis, and to omit those which do not. This narrowness distorts Locke and also diminishes him. According to Zinaich, Locke was a moral relativist whose most fundamental philosophic belief, corpuscularism, he more or less absorbed from Boyle, and whose mature philosophic ambition was limited to establishing the logical consistency between corpuscularism and moral relativism. Despite his stated intention to defend Locke’s reputation, Zinaich’s cramped approach yields but the fragment of a man: we hear nothing about Locke’s advocacy of the right to rebellion, his cautious yet intense partisanship on behalf of humanity, but just whether or not he could defend himself at any stage of his career against charges of inconsistency. It is one thing to argue Locke was concerned with logical consistency, it is quite another to give the impression that this was all he was concerned with or, more precisely, that he was concerned with it only within such a narrow, arbitrarily delimited range. In short, Zinaich overlooks and abstracts from far too much in Locke’s philosophy to prove that it was based in Boyle’s corpuscularism.

Three difficulties with Zinaich’s main argument are worth singling out. First of all, Zinaich fails to mention a number of passages (some of them quite famous) which belie his thesis about Locke’s moral relativism. How could a moral relativist draw the distinction between “the Industrious and Rational” and “the Quarrelsom and Contentious” (*2T II 34*)? If morality is simply arbitrary, why does Locke call it “*the proper Science and business of Mankind in general*” (*ECHU* IV xii 11; emphasis in original) and contend that
we are better suited for action, for practical life, than we are for theory (ECHU I i 5–6, II xxii 10, II xxiii 12)? What would be the justification for Locke’s inconsistent preference for those who shift and reason for themselves over those who do not (ECHU IV xvii 24, Reasonableness of Christianity 243, 2T II 60, for example)? What need for writing Some Thoughts Concerning Education (which Zinaich never even mentions) altogether? Zinaich’s overlooking these passages relates to his crude understanding of moral philosophy as an either/or between traditional natural law theory and moral relativism. Just because one does not agree with St. Thomas on every point does not make one a moral relativist. Denying natural ends does not necessarily lead to relativism, for some passions could still be superior to others, because they are more fundamental, easier to satisfy, and/or are more enlightening. Think of Hobbes, who grounded a new moral and political philosophy based on the insight that nature teaches us what to avoid, not what to pursue. Even though nature is silent about the Summum Bonum, we may yet draw a moral distinction between a war motivated by fear and one motivated by pride. Leaving aside the controversial question of Locke’s relation to Hobbes and the other anti-traditional early modern philosophers, clearly Locke, too, sought to justify a new morality, not deny the possibility of justifying moral claims. Locke’s morality is still “absolute” in the sense of being based in nature, but nature teaches us what goods are fundamental to human life, not which are greatest or highest. Life, liberty and property are the truly natural goods since they are the conditions for the pursuit of all other goods.

Second, regardless of the content of Locke’s mature moral philosophy (whether relativistic or not), it is unlikely Locke understood it to be grounded in corpuscularism. Zinaich’s argument to this effect runs directly counter to what Locke says about the relative degrees of certainty which can be expected in moral and natural science. In the ECHU, Locke takes a view entirely opposite to that of contemporary social science and the fact/value distinction, arguing that moral science has more potential for becoming a certain, demonstrable science like mathematics than physical science (III xi 16, IV iii 18, 29 and especially IV xii 8–11). Zinaich does address the passages about demonstrative certainty in moral science, but only in the context of discussing Locke’s relativism, not the corpuscularist presupposition underlying it. Zinaich not only fails to persuade that these passages do not call his relativism thesis into question (139–40), he fails even to notice their problematic implications for his main thesis. To argue that Locke’s moral science was based on a presupposition derived from natural science is to say that he based what is more certain on what is less certain. (Zinaich also does not address Locke’s division
of the sciences in the last chapter of *ECHU*, IV xxi, in which Natural Philosophy, Ethics and Logic are distinctly set apart from one another.)

These are hard questions; many difficulties beset Locke’s various discussions about the content and the basis of his moral philosophy, not least those about the possibility of a demonstrable moral science. However, Zinaich’s proposal of giving special emphasis to Locke’s corpuscularian sympathies will do little to remove them. A belief in corpuscularism or atomism clearly rules out some moral philosophies (such as those based on natural ends or the immortality of the soul) but it does not so clearly indicate what is the right one among those which remain. Many moral philosophies have been thought to be compatible with atomism, and many non-relativistic ones to boot. If all is atoms, should we always regard a cheerful temper as superior to a mournful one, as Democritus advised? Should we follow Lucretius’s example of *ataraxia*, serene contemplative happiness, or Hobbes’s, regarding the inevitable limitlessness of desire (see James Nichols’ *Epicurean Political Philosophy* [Cornell University Press, 1976], chap. 5)? They cannot all be right about “what’s the right thing to do,” and whatever disagreements these thinkers may hold about the atoms themselves, one suspects that the answer will not be found on the plane of the atoms.

Finally, the thesis that Locke’s entire mature philosophy rested on a corpuscularist presupposition fails to account for Locke’s intention to establish epistemology as fundamental to natural science. There is no denying Locke’s strong sympathies for corpuscularist materialism, which he invokes to explain such crucial elements of his theory as sense perception (*ECHU* II viii 12, IV ii 11) and the contingency of natural beings (IV vi 11). One can even speak of Locke as having left a materialist legacy, given how much discussion his suggestion about the possibility of thinking matter (IV iii 6) occasioned (see John Yolton’s *Thinking Matter Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* [University of Minnesota Press, 1983] and *Locke and French Materialism* [Oxford University Press, 1991]). Nonetheless, it remains the case that Locke’s assent to corpuscularism was far more provisional than Zinaich contends. After all, Locke only speaks of the “corpuscularian Hypothesis” (IV iii 16) not, as Zinaich puts it, a corpuscular “presupposition” (135, 143, 145, 153). There is even some evidence, in the correspondence with Stillingfleet and elsewhere, that Locke eventually distanced himself from the idea that “by impulse [is] the only way which we can conceive Bodies operate in” (II viii. 11), because he found the law of gravity and action at a distance too compelling to deny (see passages cited by Peter Myers in his *Our Only Star and Compass* [Rowman &
Zinaich overstates Locke’s confidence in corpuscularism because he does not appreciate that Locke is an epistemological skeptic before he is a corpuscularist-materialist. Yes, Boyle influenced Locke—conventional scholarly opinion and even Locke himself (see the ECHU’s “Epistle to the Reader”) amply support Zinaich on this point. But conventional scholarly opinion also holds that Locke’s achievement was ultimately greater than Boyle’s, especially if one concentrates (as Zinaich does) solely on Boyle’s philosopshic achievement, and leaves aside his achievements in experimental science, like Boyle’s Law, and his reputation as the father of modern chemistry. It would not be surprising if this was Locke’s view as well. Locke meant to establish epistemology as a court before which all theories, especially those regarding the nature of the world, must justify themselves by accounting for their ideas’ origin in experience. To the extent that Locke did believe in corpuscularism, he did so less strongly and for different reasons than Boyle. Boyle sought only experimental justification for corpuscularism (see Boyle’s Origin of Forms and Qualities). Locke is all for more experimental justification of corpuscularism (IV iii 25), but he also requires corpuscularism to pass an epistemological test, such as occurs in his considerations of the unintelligibility of the infinitely small (II xvii 12, II xxix 16) and the intelligibility of a vacuum (II xiii). Boyle’s experiments would be of questionable worth if the concepts they were marshaled to support could give no account of their origin in experience. Epistemology instructs experimental science about the basic intelligibility of its concepts, and also its limits. As mentioned above, prior to all experimental investigation, Locke believes epistemology can prove that the true nature, or substance, of bodies will always remain opaque to physical science. Epistemology teaches us how certain we can ever expect to be that bodies are all composed of corpuscles and, conversely, how much we can explain by virtue of our confidence that they are (II xxiii 23–27, II xxix 16, III iv 9, IV iii 11–16, IV vi 14, IV x 17). Hence, regardless of what came first chronologically, for Locke, Boylean experimental science owes more to epistemology than epistemology does to it.

At the conclusion of ECHU book I, Locke says of his epistemology, “All that I shall say for the Principles I proceed on, is, that I can only appeal to Mens own unprejudiced Experience, and Observation, whether they be true, or no” (I iv 25). Experience will teach us about the nature of the understanding, which will in turn teach us what we can know about the physical
world. Nothing could be more contrary to the method of the *ECHU*, then, than to take our knowledge of the physical world as our first principle, and yet this is exactly what Zinaich does when he claims “the *ECHU* begins from the assumption of corpuscles” (147).

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In *Eros Turannos* Aakash Singh, an associate professor of philosophy at Delhi University, interprets the Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève debate in *On Tyranny* around the “guiding concept of *eros***” (1). As Singh argues, what is of central importance for Strauss’s argument, namely *eros* or more precisely Plato’s *eros turannos*, has its counterpart in Kojève’s *désir*. However, to claim that these two concepts are the same or that they can be reduced to *eros* only would smack of a reductionism which the author does not commit in the body of his work. Singh’s categorization in the beginning and the end of the book might be related to a preference for what he claims to be the Straussian position. Having said this, I believe that Singh’s greatest contribution in *Eros Turannos* comes in those parts where he sketches a significantly different portrait of Alexandre Kojève than what would ordinarily be drawn upon reading *On Tyranny*. (In fact, Singh’s forceful reference to the contemporary thinker William Desmond gains its utmost value in this context.) From whichever perspective one approaches the debate, there appears to be a tyrannical element in the very essence of Kojève’s historicist understanding of truth and human nature.

From the start, Singh expresses his sympathy towards the Straussian critique of tyranny, although this becomes an openly declared preference only at the very end. The Platonic perspective is not just relevant but also crucial for a serious theoretical undertaking on the subject. In contrast, Kojève willingly succumbs to tyranny. Singh supports his claim by succinct intellectual and personal biographies of the two philosophers. The Russian-born Frenchman’s Stalinist sympathies and his alleged intelligence activity during the Cold War are exciting historical details lacking in *On Tyranny*. At the
same time, however, Singh is of two minds when it comes to evaluating philosophical arguments based on the lifetime experiences of their authors. The issue comes up in relation to the current debate on the intentions of “Straussians” in top U.S. administrative posts. Although Singh clears Strauss’s political philosophy from the charge of tyrannical tendencies, he adds that Strauss’s students’ alleged political activism cannot be reconciled with his preference for philosophical withdrawal in *On Tyranny*. Philosophers should not seek political involvement in the city beyond the elimination of obstacles on the way to their engagement in philosophy. This being so, Singh leaves some room for doubt in relation to the current public debate in America. “I do not intend to argue that because Strauss was a Platonist, he could resist the charm of tyrants to which Kojève succumbed” (2).

Following Strauss’s primary statement on Xenophon’s *Hiero* in *On Tyranny*, Singh argues that the dramatic structure of the dialogue calls for particular attention to erotic love. When, arguably, posing as a naive interlocutor, Simonides, the poet, inquires into the pleasant attractions of tyranny, his counterpart Hiero, the tyrant, is most emphatic in expressing his erotic dissatisfaction. It is highly probable that Hiero’s complaints are partially related to his desire to diminish the charms of absolute political power in order to make tyranny appear less attractive to a possible aspirant. Yet, it should be a painful truism that the tyrant cannot find true love but only self-interested obligers. “When the subject of sex is raised, all the subsequent pleasurable things that Simonides enumerated are forgotten” (27). It seems nothing matters more than erotic satisfaction for the tyrant.

Simonides’ almost foolish innocence is strategic. Not before the tyrant confesses to his loneliness and dissatisfaction shall Simonides be able to step in and advise Hiero on the art of government. However, another step must be taken before we reach the climax of the dialogue. The tyrant must express his lack of satisfaction in another respect. When Simonides refers to the honors which men of a higher nature aspire to despite the toils and the suffering involved, the tyrant is once again a bitter man. He says that it is better to hang oneself. However, Singh claims that when honor is discussed Hiero the tyrant is not as animated as when the issue was erotic satisfaction. At any event, the tyrant cannot get out of the situation which he has brought upon himself. Hence the ground has been prepared for Simonides to step in and give advice on the art of government. The dialogue ends there and we do not know how Hiero responds, if at all. Strauss argues that Xenophon did not want to take away from the dramatic effect of the moment. In contrast Kojève claims that Hiero is silent because he will not take heed of Simonides’ advice.
According to the classical perspective, a tyrant wants to be loved by everyone, be they just and virtuous or not. In contrast, the philosopher is concerned with a select audience. “That is, the philosopher is more self-sufficient, while the political man is slave to all the citizens” (31). At another level of analysis, eros, which is related to the human longing for the other, is the root motive behind the philosopher’s aspiration for the fine, noble, and beautiful. Interestingly, eros, the very motive that drives the philosopher to excellence, drives the tyrant into baseness and injustice. Later on, Singh elaborates on the affinity between the tyrant and the philosopher. The ordering of the city reflects the psyche of its rulers: “as the polis is the soul in large letters, tyranny is the regime of eros unleashed most unjustly, while the philosopher’s absolute rule would be most just” (4). This is, no doubt, because the philosopher’s soul is well ordered and the city ruled by the philosopher would be a well-ordered city not slave to base passions.

Strauss’s eros finds its equivalent in the désir, or the desire for recognition, of Kojève’s left-wing Hegelianism. Indeed Singh refers to désir and honor synonymously. Instead of erotic satisfaction, Kojève attributes principal importance to the discussion of honor in Xenophon’s dialogue. According to him, “Hiero agrees with Simonides’ Master perspective that honor is everything, but he rejects that the tyrant achieves it” (39). The tyrant shall not attain satisfaction because he has reduced the people to slavery, and he cannot be honored by the admiration of his inferiors. One might well argue that the rulers of other cities who are the master’s equals can honor him, but this does nothing to relieve him of the inevitable consequences of his absolute and final triumph: world domination. Later on, Singh points out Kojève’s ingenious solution to the problem.

Strauss and Kojève disagree on the role which the philosopher, or the wise man, should assume in relation to politics. In contrast to Strauss who promotes a contemplative life, Kojève argues that the wise man should actively participate in politics and shape history in order to hasten the advent of the perfect order. The resolution of the debate depends on how one conceives of the nature of truth and being. If being is eternal, then a life of contemplation would be the most secure path in the quest for truth. If, however, being is becoming, that is if being creates itself in history, then Kojève’s advice would gain the upper hand.

Although Singh pursues his discussion of Strauss and Kojève in the remaining sections of his work, roughly in the middle he brings in the
contemporary thinker William Desmond as an arbiter between the two. Desmond is sensitive to the ancients’ connection between ethics and politics, yet he also speaks the language of historicism. In this way, Singh attempts “to link the classical perspective on tyranny to current thinking” (70). According to Desmond, “the ‘between’ is essentially the condition of man” (70). However, Desmond is not a moral relativist and he relates the universal aspiration for ethics and morality to the erotic nature of humanity. Following Socrates, he argues that as erotic beings humans are inherently directed towards the good. The difficulty lies in the fact that nature and the ethical are not perfectly accessible to humanity; rather they are obscure and equivocal. According to Singh, the moderns, beginning with Francis Bacon, sought to conquer rather than reveal nature. In the realm of moral philosophy this meant freeing themselves from the ambiguity of ethos and natural reality; consequently, their quest became a struggle for autonomy. The same applies to Kojève’s teaching, which is one of “radical autonomy where man seeks through his power to stamp his rational scheme onto the inchoate other of nature” (71). What lies beneath “both autonomy and will to power is the ethos as valueless and a devalued soil of otherness” (71). Once this sort of domineering attitude towards nature is adopted, Desmond sees political tyranny as a close possibility.

It is precisely in their sensitivity to the elusiveness of nature that the ancients are superior to the moderns. At the same time, Desmond points towards an insufficiency in the Platonic position. Plato equates eros to longing for the other which must perish once the self and the other are united. In contrast, Desmond conceives eros to be more than a response to a distinct lack: instead, erotic longing is a character trait of the human species and the root source of its openness to self-transcendence. It is, quoting Desmond, “a restlessness for the ultimate” (73; italics in the original). Singh himself argues that both Plato and Strauss tend to collapse the other into the self in the process of self-transcendence.

In what remains, Singh examines other works by Strauss and Kojève. As distinguished from Kojève’s apparently individualist struggle for mastery and recognition in On Tyranny, his Introduction à la lecture de Hegel is dominated by an element of class conflict. This struggle for mastery ultimately culminates in the emancipation of the working class. In other words, Kojève sought to overcome the master and slave dichotomy and its inevitable consequence, which is the dissatisfaction of the warrior master after the moment of his ultimate triumph. This calls for a more elaborate explanation.
According to Kojève, man becomes an “I,” or acquires a sense of self-awareness, through desire. However, the humanizing desire must surpass self-satisfying desire directed at natural objects and it must be directed towards objects that fall outside given reality, that is towards non-natural and non-real objects. After all, animals have desire too. In fact, humanizing desire must specifically be directed towards another desire, or another self-consciousness. To take a step further, humanizing desire overcomes the primal natural instinct for self-preservation and strives for recognition. He who is “willing to sacrifice life for a non-vital end, recognition, establishes that he is master over himself, and master over the other. Thus while the master will be recognized by the slave, the slave will not be recognized by the master” (102). What the warrior master achieves through overcoming the fear of death for an artificial desire, the slave achieves through self-denial and catering for another self-consciousness. “Through work, however, the slave overcomes nature, and overcomes his own nature as well” (103). It might very well be argued that Kojève’s equating the warrior and the working class in terms of their mastery over themselves has a reductionist character which seems to have passed unnoticed in Singh’s account. In other words, there is a substantial qualitative difference between the existence of a warrior and a worker, albeit that both have attained self-mastery.

Kojève argues that, in terms of self-satisfaction, the slave triumphs over the warrior master. “The master’s action was destructive simply, while the slave’s action, work, destroys in order to create—he does not destroy but rather he sublimates” (103). In this way, the slave shall “become the ‘absolute master,’ satisfied by a universal recognition” (103). In contrast, the “first-moment master” is doomed to remain unsatisfied (103). But, what is it to be satisfied?

The wise man, Kojève explains, is satisfied and he neither wants anything nor desires change: “he is and does not become” (105). History, however, ends when all men are satisfied. The warrior master derives satisfaction through the recognition of his slaves. The slaves, who are transformed into the proletariat, achieve satisfaction through their mastery over nature and the ensuing recognition of the master whom they produce for—in this connection, Kojève refers to the biblical argument that work must always be forced upon man. In effect, the slave-master dichotomy is overcome in history. The resulting condition of autonomy, however, is a substitute for an attempt to discover nature. This appears to be the fundamental tyrannical element in Kojève’s philosophy.
Singh’s concluding remarks on Strauss argue the point that *eros* gradually evolved into a fundamental tenet of Strauss’s political philosophy. To begin with, Singh ponders as to why Strauss taught Plato’s *Symposium* in a political science class in 1959 at the University of Chicago. Yet this is merely a prologue to Singh’s ambitious claim that, according to Strauss, “*eros* is somehow nature, perhaps even natural right” (112). Originally Strauss had tied reason to natural right, but this presented a problem: “Obviously, while savages may not possess reason, no one would refuse them *eros*” (112). Therefore, Strauss altered his conception of natural right. In the preface to the seventh edition of *Natural Right and History*, he wrote, “Since the time when I wrote the book, I have, I believe, deepened my understanding of ‘natural right and history’” (quoted at 113). However, Singh does not bring in additional evidence in support. Possibly in recognition of the weakness of his position, he shifts his focus to Plato who identified *eros* with the essence of nature because *eros* “is the heart of coming into being and perishing” (114). In addition, Singh refers to Plato in order to support his earlier claim that the philosopher and the tyrant are related by their erotic nature. This sets them apart from the statesman who is characterized by spiritedness (*thumos*). In fact, Socrates’ complete absence or relative silence in political dialogues including the *Laws, Timaeus, Critias, Sophist*, and *Statesman* should be understood within this framework. In contrast, the tyrant who is a political man is *eros* incarnate. “Convention is in opposition to nature, and nature is *eros*” (121). The tyrant despises convention or the law (*nomos*), but unlike the philosopher he knows neither justice nor moderation.

In the end, *Eros Tuarannos* covers an impressive range of material and introduces a wide array of arguments; however, it suffers from a certain degree of organizational in clarity. Above all, it is not apparent why the author inserts William Desmond’s philosophy as an arbiter between Strauss and Kojève before he concludes his discussion of the latter thinkers. In addition, even the greatest strength of Singh’s essay turns out to be a possible source of criticism: not all of the ideas discussed in it are followed through to a satisfying conclusion, nor are the connections between them always made self-evident. Most of his arguments are, however, intriguing, and collectively they justify the kind of effort and commitment that Singh demands from his readership.

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John Dunn, best known as a Locke scholar but a prolific author of other works on political theory, is described on the dust jacket of *Democracy* as “England’s leading political theorist.” In this book he takes as his theme the questions of why the term “democracy” has come to denote the sole legitimate, worldwide basis of political authority, in contrast to its previously negative connotation (15); and why representative democracy in particular has triumphed. The book comes impressively blurbed—“exhilarating, gripping,” “marvelously rich” and “heroic” according to the reviewer in the *New Statesman*; a “signal, beautifully written book” that is not only “important” but “a joy to read” according to the review in *The Times* of London; “a masterly performance” making it the book to “reach for” “the next time you hear the word democracy,” in the view of *The Economist*; a book that “asks questions about politics and the political process that few other scholars have thought of asking (or dared to ask)” according to Yale historian Paul Kennedy; and its author “one of the most original and important thinkers of his generation,” in the eyes of the *Financial Times*.

Regrettably, this is one book that should definitely not be judged by its cover. In seeking to account for the improved status of democracy in the eyes of the world, Dunn downplays the obvious—the manifest superiority from the standpoint of individual liberty, security, and prosperity of modern constitutional, representative democracy over the direct, unstable, and often lawless rule of the multitude that the Greek *demokratia* signified. Indeed, he states at the outset his intent to show that the reason for the triumph of representative democracy “cannot be either of the two conclusions which we are endlessly urged to draw,” that it is “evidently just” and that “it works reliably in
practice” (20–21). “When any modern state claims to be a democracy, it misdescribes itself” according to Dunn’s preface (18). The pretense is just an attempt to paper over the fact that “all government, however necessary and expeditious, is also a presumption and an offence.” Indeed, in calling themselves democracies, modern governments implicitly acknowledge the “effrontery” of their command of citizen obedience. In its current usage the term “democracy” does not signify self-government at all, but only the claim that government “draws its legitimacy from us,” and that we have “a reasonable chance of being able to compel” it to serve us (19). The inference that the people therefore rule in modern democracy is “thumping falsehood, a bare-faced lie” (51).

The title of Dunn’s first chapter, “Democracy’s First Coming,” refers to the origins of democracy in sixth- and fifth-century (BCE) Athens. Following a brief account of the democratic institutions established by Cleisthenes, Dunn devotes six pages to an interpretation of Plato’s Republic as expressing its author’s loathing or detestation of democracy (41, 47). Dunn’s reading is wholly un-ironic, giving no thought to the fact that the Republic is a dialogue, in which Socrates adapts his speech to the orientation and needs of his interlocutors (e.g. by sometimes catering to the young Adeimantus’s anti-democratic passion, in a passage cited by Dunn to express Plato’s own view [45; Republic 562d–563d]). He mentions, but attributes no significance to, Socrates’ countervailing description of the life of democratic man as free, sweet, and blessed (45; Republic 561d). He does not allude to Socrates’ account of democracy as the actual regime most conducive to philosophizing (557d, 561d). Of the possibility of another sort of reading of the Republic, Dunn can say only that the dialogue was sufficiently ambiguous “to provide the main intellectual stock in trade for an entire school of political thought, the extended clientele of Leo Strauss,” which Dunn reports (on the authority of Anne Norton) has been “an important element in American (and hence in world) politics over the last three decades” (198n).

In the remainder of chapter 1 Dunn moves somewhat confusingly back and forth between summarizing the substantive objections to democracy made by such thinkers as Aristotle, Polybius, and Hobbes (along with Spinoza’s advocacy of that regime) and describing the significance of the word “democracy” (49–54). Rather than taking Aristotle’s distinction between democracy and politeia (mixed government) seriously, Dunn summarizes his view by paraphrasing Hobbes to the effect that politeia simply meant “democracy liked,” and demokratia “democracy keenly disliked.” He curiously adds that it was the latter term that signified “democracy to you and me,” as if mod-
ern representative democracy were closer in spirit to the unmoderated rule by poor majorities that Aristotle criticized rather than to the moderated democracy that he favored (49).

Dunn’s second chapter, “Democracy’s Second Coming,” addresses the two great experiments in popular government of the eighteenth century, the establishment of the American Constitution and the French Revolution (along with the failed popular uprising against the House of Orange in the Dutch Republic). Although the former “gave the Americans, and in due course the world, a great deal,” Dunn laments that it also gave the democratic impulse “a distinctive cast, rendering it far less vital, insistent, or prominent an element within the American imagination than it has proved in most other societies across the globe over the following two centuries” (82). Doubtless this judgment would surprise the many millions in the former Soviet bloc, today’s China, and elsewhere in the world who regard the American regime as the exemplar of democracy and freedom—just as it would have surprised Tocqueville. But in Dunn’s judgment “democracy’s unsteady dispersion across the world,” at least until the aftermath of the Second World War, owed little to “the force of American example,” as compared with that of the “awesome” French Revolution (91).

For Dunn it was not the American Constitution, embodying what Publius termed the “inventions of modern political science” in such a manner as to reconcile popular government with the security of individual rights, but rather the events in France “between 1788 and 1794” that “changed the structure of political possibilities for human communities across the world almost beyond recognition” (92). Even while acknowledging that the Revolution was “often nightmarish in its consequences, and as cruel, hypocritical, muddled, and disorientating [sic] as the very worst abysses of the ancien regime,” Dunn contends that it “defined a new universe of political and legal practices for every other human society across the globe, with the single and glaring exception of the United States” (101–2).

Surveying the Abbé Sieyes’ three revolution-provoking 1788 pamphlets and Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man, Dunn observes that neither author was a partisan of democracy in its literal sense, because both acknowledged the need in a large, modern nation for representative government rather than direct rule by the demos (110, 112–13). It was left to Robespierre “for the first time in modern history” to espouse democracy “not merely as a passing expression of political taste but as an organizing conception of an entire vision of politics…identifying himself ineffaceably with some of [the Revolution’s]
greatest achievements,” albeit with “many of its most odious political techniques” as well (114). Yet since Robespierre himself acknowledged the necessity of representation, it is not clear why Dunn regards him as a more authentic democrat than Sieyes or Paine. Apparently he merits identification as the founder of modern democracy because in the report on “the principles of public morality” that he drafted a few months before his death, he “inscribed” the “old, battle-scarred, but for so long also oddly scholastic term” “democracy” on the Revolution’s “standard.” That Robespierre in the same report stressed the need for a revolutionary democratic government to “rely simultaneously on virtue and terror” does not stain his democratic credentials in Dunn’s eyes: after all, he did use the word. In fact, employing one of his favorite adjectives, Dunn terms the speech in which Robespierre espoused the cause of democratic terror “awesome” (118–19).

It is curious that, while seeing in Robespierre an answer to the question of political legitimacy posed in Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (120), Dunn never takes up Rousseau’s thought—surely a more profound source of modern democratic theory. Instead, Dunn next fixes his attention (in a chapter titled “The Long Shadow of Thermidor”) on the “spoiled and intemperate Tuscan aristocrat, Filippo Michele Buonarroti,” whose chronicle of the 1796 “Conspiracy of Equals” led by “Gracchus” Babeuf, a last effort to “save” the Revolution, reportedly exercised a profound influence on Karl Marx. What Dunn singles out in Buonarroti’s manifesto is his opposition between the “order of equality” for which the Conspiracy stood and the “order of egoism,” conforming to the doctrine of British-influenced economists, who aimed at “national prosperity” based on stimulating and satisfying the people’s “insatiable cupidity.” To insure the triumph of the order of equality, the self-styled “democrats” of the Babeuvist conspiracy would have eliminated from the governing assembly all individuals who didn’t agree with them (123-25).

Dunn himself acknowledges the link between Babeuvism and the totalitarian terror of “the Bolshevik Revolution, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, and the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge” (142). Indeed, he observes that “wherever the opportunity to vote freely has been extended across the entire adult population, the majority has found it unattractive to vote explicitly for the establishment of equality” in the Babeuvist, or Marxian, sense (130). Yet he repeatedly employs Buonarroti’s term “the order of egoism” to describe the sort of constitutional democracy exemplified by the United States, as if the only motivating principle of such regimes were a contemptible greed rather than a concern for human freedom and opportunity (144, 155, 158). And as the chapter approaches its end, he espouses (perhaps only half-seriously, it is hard to
tell) a shallow relativism: “on a democratic view, everywhere’s political history must be equally valuable and equally significant,” and “terrorism and tyranny lie in the eye of the beholder” (140).

What has Dunn’s survey of democracy’s first and second “comings” taught him? He represents as the decisive aspect of the question posed in the title of his concluding chapter “Why Democracy?” the issue of why modern representative governments, so different from the “Greek originals, and from Robespierre’s or Babeuf’s dreams” of democracy, have nonetheless chosen the term “democracy” to describe themselves. An easy answer would be that representative governments based on a universal franchise are democratic in an important sense, and that in a nation in which the people ultimately rule, they like to assert (and be told that) they rule. But for Dunn a more sophisticated explanation must be sought, since he regards the claim of modern liberal regimes to be democratic as only a cover for “the unruffled hegemony of the order of egoism” (155–56).

In Dunn’s account, the Cold War was a struggle not between the advocates and opponents of freedom, but “between defenders of the order of egoism and those who openly wished it ill” (158). It was “the sheer potency of the order of egoism” that enabled its partisans to claim the mantle of democracy (160). Dunn does grant that it is not “plainly illegitimate” to use the term to denote “a system of rule in which, in the end, a steady and substantial majority... holds the power to dismiss rulers it has come to loathe” (164). But such a system is “scarcely... an occasion for intense pride” (167).

On this last point, one should contrast Dunn’s position with Madison’s claim in Federalist no. 39 that the American Constitution is properly an occasion for pride, since it rests on a “honorable determination” to rely on the people’s capacity for self-government—albeit in a manner so structured (as Hamilton explains in no. 9) as to rescue popular government from the opprobrium from which it has previously suffered. For Dunn, Madison’s subsequent acknowledgment that what distinguishes the Constitution from the forms of ancient republics is its total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity from any direct share in the government (Federalist no. 63) elicits “shock” (79): how could the people ever have voted to ratify such a document, thus explained? But is it not a legitimate source of pride to Americans—an indirect reflection of the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence that all human beings are created equal, and may not be justly governed without their consent—that our governors (termed our “representatives” rather than our rulers) must solicit our support in order to achieve and hold their offices?
Dunn himself acknowledges Tocqueville’s account of Americans’ prideful resistance to any sort of condescension from their governors. But he complains that modern democracy fails to give all citizens “equal power to defend their own interests” (174). (He does not explain which interests are being neglected, or how aspirants to public office in a representative regime can afford to neglect widely felt popular interests.) According to Dunn, “the formidable scale, cost, and elaboration of a modern American presidential campaign…could rouse a sense of personal freedom in most individual citizens only through sheer delusion” (168). Even though “in most modern democracies…ordinary citizens are almost certainly freer to speak or think than the Athenians ever were,” he laments that they “have little chance to make themselves at all widely audible,” let alone having “an effective right of direct access to legislative deliberation” as participants in the Athenian assembly did (174–75). Even the terms of popular referenda, Dunn maintains, “are always decided by a ruling group of career politicians,” making them vehicles of the politicians’ own interests rather than “real surrenders of power back to the citizens” (176). (He does not allude to the opportunity that citizens of nations with relatively decentralized administrative systems like the United States still enjoy to make themselves heard and their influence felt at the local level, a point emphasized by Tocqueville. And given Thucydides’ description of Pericles’ governance of Athens in the heyday of its democracy as effectually monarchical [Peloponnesian War II.65.8–9], just how much more influence did the average Athenian have on his government’s policies than the average American does today?)

“Any coherent complaint” against the representative system, Dunn judges, must “once again be made on behalf of the order of equality, and against the order of egoism,” a challenge that is apparently not forthcoming given the people’s “clear verdict” on behalf of the latter (168). (Apparently they suffer from what the Marxists used to call “false consciousness”: they don’t realize how oppressed they are, and even suffer from the delusion that they rule themselves.) Still, Dunn consoles himself with the thought that “democracy as a political value constantly subverts the legitimacy of democracy as an already existing form of government” (171). After implausibly asserting that “the world in which we all live is…principally structured by the radicalization and intensification of inequalities” (170), Dunn concludes that unless we overcome our failure thus far to identify and establish “a compelling or a reliable recipe for organizing political life,” we must continue “paying the price for the scale of our failure to do so” (188), whatever that may mean.
As the foregoing summary should have made apparent, *Democracy* is far from an adequate treatment of its subject. Instead of addressing the serious case against the dominance of commerce that was advanced by Rousseau, or considering Aristotle’s reasons for holding the *polis* to be more truly in harmony with the needs of human nature than some larger form of political organization, Dunn provides only a half-baked glimpse of Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza, preferring to derive his criteria of “true” democracy from the terroristic Robespierre and the eccentric Buonarroti, along with a somewhat rose-colored vision of Periclean Athens. Notably missing as well is any reference to Montesquieu, whose critique of ancient democracy, and eulogizing account of the modern British regime as “a republic in the guise of a monarchy” that provided better for individual liberty than any previous form of government, had much to do with the transformation of republicanism. It should be added that Dunn’s prose—contrary to what one typically expects from a Cambridge don—is riddled with repetitions, clichés, and circumlocutions, along with often-superfluous citations of secondary literature, especially that written by Dunn himself.

How, then, can one explain the glowing judgments of *Democracy* printed on the dust jacket? Such praise must be attributed to the fact that numerous writers for the prestige media, along with the occasional Yale professor, share Dunn’s discomfort at the triumph of the modern commercial republic, despite the demonstrated linkage between economic and political freedom (and despite their own professional dependence on the market economy). They have no serious intention of renouncing representative institutions—they just like to think themselves possessed of nobler aspirations than the money-grubbing public. Hence some of them must be attracted by Dunn’s nostalgia for a vision of “genuine” democracy that has proved in practice (by his own account) to be a recipe for totalitarianism, and that has been thoroughly rejected by the people themselves.

Given the disappointing character of this book, it is fortunate that the description of its author as “England’s leading political theorist” is mistaken. Kenneth Minogue, for one, is far more thoughtful, witty, and erudite. One hopes that there are other examples as well.

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To even the staunchest defenders of political philosophy, it may appear that tyranny is the dirty big secret of the century just passed. The meta-tyrannies of the twentieth century, we are sometimes told, are shrouded in the realities of modern technology, with even their ideological aspects grounded in the new science of mass psychology. Modern tyranny thus appears inexorable, far removed from capture by political philosophy, as traditionally understood. Alternately, modern tyranny might be thought to be irrelevant, a by-way along an unfortunate detour. Its claim to our attention abruptly ended with the collapse of Communism and the spread of free ideas and markets. And as tyranny ended, so too did the social purpose of its arch nemesis—philosophy. Such, at least, is the alternative view.

*Confronting Tyranny: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics* sets about the task of assembling a formidable team of contemporary political theorists as essayist-combatants engaged in the two-front war against these contentions. At various turns, *Confronting Tyranny* counters the alternate claims that political philosophy is helpless and irrelevant in the face of modern tyranny. Yet the book does so in an unexpected way. Despite its subtitle, *Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, only nine of its sixteen essays might lay claim to extended substantive treatment of the ancient perspective.

What the book does in rather remarkable fashion, however, is place the contemporary reader in the ancient frame of mind while frankly and boldly considering the contemporary phenomenon of modern tyranny, as it manifests above all in totalitarianism.

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A thoughtful and conscientious introductory essay by Catherine Zuckert gives a good synopsis of the stand-alone impact of each of the fifteen essays that follow. However, in addition, Zuckert means to present a framework for analysis. It is that tyranny as understood by the ancients carries messages for today’s world condition. Zuckert is fair to the complexities of both sides of the equation. The introductory essay allows that ancient perspectives vary and that the recent feature of genocide might mark a watershed in philosophy’s accountings of tyrannical misdoings. As Zuckert has it, the framework is whether Hitler’s death factories and Pol Pot’s dangerous crimson countryside are beyond mere “tactic” and, rather, reflect “distinctively modern factors and conditions” that philosophy must consider (5). Presumably this would mean that philosophy would have to be more elastic than the ancient perspective allows or, perhaps, that we are not fully aware of the elasticity of the ancients.

But then, the subjects of the book, tyrants, assert their presence, and properly so. The Zuckert framework offers the possibility for the confrontation of tyranny, even modern tyranny, by ancient philosophy. Within about 25 pages of leaving Zuckert, however, mayhem seems to reign. Of the first eight essays comprising the first half of the book, only three explicitly deal at length with the ancient perspective. These three are by Mark Blitz, David Edward Tabachnick, and Roger Boesche. The first two of these essayists, to varying degrees, express a confidence not only in the ancient perspective, as relayed particularly and ultimately by Aristotle, but in its vitality as applied to matters of the present day. Both Blitz and Tabachnick hold out the possibility that ancient philosophy, with its emphasis on tyrannical manipulation of public resources for private aggrandizement, holds lessons for modern life.

Boesche poses a challenge to Zuckert. This is by virtue of extrapolating her fingering of genocide as a significant modern event giving rise to consideration by philosophy. Boesche goes so far as to refer to “genocidal tyranny.” This is something that surely would ring strange in the ears of the ancients, for whom aberrations lie within the souls of tyrants rather than in their deeds. Boesche refers to the “novel ways to communicate with people, manipulate people, transport people, and kill people” (42). As a result, Boesche leaves the less than comforting suggestion that even Zuckert’s ancients might concede that we have crossed the line from the slaughter of millions as mere “tactic” and have proceeded into the creation of entire systems, networks of oppression and power for this purpose.

Enter Foucault, and his interpreter in Confronting Tyranny, Simon Tormey—almost. Before presenting essays on two of modernity’s big
guns, Nietzsche and Foucault, *Confronting Tyranny* seems intent not only upon questioning the relevance of tyranny, but the ability of philosophy, any philosophy, to capture it.

At this point, *Confronting Tyranny* shows an admirable determination in giving voice to critics of philosophy, as chapters/essays five and six demonstrate. These argue, in various ways, that philosophy has difficulty drawing a bead on tyranny. This is because philosophy is either too elusive as an integral part of the development of the modern state and mass markets (Douglas Moggach on Bruno Bauer’s reading of Hegel) and less than relevant compared to sociology and historical analysis (Daniel Chirot).

Against the tide, what Zuckert seems to muster is the observation that Foucault and his agent, Simon Tormey, challenge the continued viability of “tyranny” in the lexicon; Zuckert maintains that Nietzsche through his presenter, Tracy Strong, advocates a kind of “internal tyranny” that is in “exercise of a kind of tyrannical power over oneself and one’s own thought” (6–7). Yet, something more unsettling seems in the works as the first half of *Confronting Tyranny* draws to a close. Tormey never defines tyranny, instead arguing that power is so diffuse, the delicate circuitry of surveillance so pervasive, that it can only lodge in the faceless force of the state. The focus is on the visibility of power, not its legitimacy relative to the body politic. Philosophy and tyranny thus take leave at the same time, rather than confronting each other.

As if things could be worse for the originally posited tyranny-philosophy dichotomy, Strong’s Nietzsche posits the reason: philosophy is itself a “tyrannical impulse” for its exercise of power to create worlds. The internal turn in tyrants that Zuckert notes thus reveals something deeper, a self-devouring impulse that removes the philosopher as tyrant from the *polis*, a characteristic emphasized at the conclusion of the Strong piece.

The first half of *Confronting Tyranny* ends less in stalemate than in a double default by both would-be combatants, tyrants and philosophers. The tables, it seems, have been turned on the ancients. Philosophy, that which would have held tyrants to account, seems in full rout.

Yet, as one approaches the second half of *Confronting Tyranny*, the likes of Moggach and Tormey would have us question whether tyranny has not also left the field of battle with philosophy in favor of a more elusive, yet contentious, opponent of philosophy, the modern state.
By the second half of *Confronting Tyranny*, one has the feeling that philosophy must collect itself to be worthy of the book’s title, for, as the end of Zuckert’s essay reminds us, the primary resistance to tyranny is intellectual and lies in understanding it. And, indeed, reinforcements are on the way. Nathan Tarcov provides the fulcrum, advancing the proposition that not only recounts the ancient position that philosophy’s proper quarrel is with tyranny, but that no *polis* is big enough for both philosophy—concerned with the well-being of the soul—and tyranny—representing its corruption. Tarcov musters Plato, Aristotle, and Leo Strauss in the posse to chase tyranny’s influence from the *polis*. To hold the ground Tarcov has just gained, Waller Newell, Leah Bradshaw, and Ronald Beiner succeed in cementing philosophy as the integrating force for dealing with tyranny by showing how the ancients linked tyranny to the soul and nature and thereby even fashioned a psychology of tyrannical aberration. These essays thus manage to reclaim the book’s subtitle.

Of these last three pieces, it is Newell who seems most spoiling for a fight. His quarrel, however, is not primarily with tyrants, but rather with modern philosophy. Newell maintains that a genuine ontology of tyrants, which is to say a philosophic understanding of them, lies in how *thumos*, for Newell a primordial passion and the basis for tyranny, can be understood and mastered only in the context of the transcendental, by “objective satisfaction guided by eros—union with the beautiful” (150). Effectively, Newell grants a monopoly to the ancients in understanding tyrants. Yet, the deliberately haunting conclusion of his essay refers to the disappearance of *thumos*, that which Newell’s ancients succeeded in mastering. In its place is “the machine of modernization” with Foucault on the horizon. And we are at the modern state. Has Newell gotten the “right man” in the tyrant or has he concluded where his analysis should begin?

Interestingly, this question is most poignant in the face of essays by two of Newell’s allies, Ronald Beiner and Toivo Koivukoski. Beiner starts in promising fashion, with a classical description of regimes, the public throne of *thumos*. However, Beiner concludes with a downsizing of tyranny to the status of a psychic problem, lodged in the inner recesses of the soul. Koivukoski continues with the theme of ancient philosophy’s ultimate inability to deal with tyranny, reminding us of Plato’s view of the incorrigibility of tyrants.

As if on cue, Thomas Smith and Barry Strauss seek to call into question the convenient and expected conclusion that ancient teachings pro-
vide the final word on this subject. Respectively, they appeal to use of Tolkien's fantasy and to Spartan austerity as a foil to the appeal of tyranny. These essays summon collective imagination or civic effort, rather than philosophy, to challenge tyranny. Both question the ancient perspective of philosophy as an essentially private exercise that provides unique access to the soul. Smith holds fantasy as a superior tableau from which to project the soul's inner recesses. Fantasy, not *logos* or reason, would “dramatize the workings of the human heart…to uncover…psychic attractions to power” (217). Barry Strauss, in comparison, ventures into the public realm to find a cure for philosophy’s shortcomings. His ancient solution is the steadfast commitment to the state represented by Sparta as the antidote to tyranny. Tyranny compromises philosophy by making it a public luxury and a contrivance of tyrants.

The abandonment of the ancient philosophic perspective for magic, sorcery and Sparta points to yet another possibility in considering tyranny: that of modern philosophy as it understands itself.

But, true to the character of most of the book, why not a modern using the ancients? The Mark Lilla concluding essay is a fine statement of the argument come full circle. On reading Lilla, one might consider a rework of the book’s subtitle, from *Ancient Lessons for Global Politics* to something like *Global Lessons as to Ancient Politics*. *Confronting Tyranny* had begun with the Zuckert premise that philosophy, particularly ancient philosophy, could account for and intellectually challenge tyranny by describing it for what it is. Lilla similarly desires to summon the ancients to the cause. But he does so in a most modern way, arguing that time, that corrosive dreadnought of the ancient eternal, has dispensed with the dated, indeed antiquated twentieth-century notion of totalitarianism. Neither democracy nor totalitarianism, Lilla observes, accurately characterizes the political status of today’s Third World backwaters. The ancients are once again summoned to the rescue. But for Lilla this is true by process of elimination. It is a delicious irony that Lilla summons ancient standards, resting on excellence and the eternal truths, not for their own merits but simply because the modern philosophic experience has nothing better to offer.

Nonetheless, the simultaneous meltdown and recast of the ancient position at the end of *Confronting Tyranny* prompts the following question: might not modernity be best left to the moderns? Indeed, the pairing of the modern state and modern political philosophy is the match the reader never quite gets on a sustained basis in *Confronting Tyranny*. Moggach, in
recounting interpretations of Hegel, sees tyranny as the self-absorption of a would-be citizenry in private matters, a collective failure. No sooner has tyranny become a collective phenomenon than it becomes an impersonal one. Tormey, following Moggach, suggests that tyranny is a pervasive system, the web of which leads everywhere and yet nowhere, a dynamic that feeds upon itself. We are suddenly flush up against the Nuremberg defense: the system explains and exculpates all.

But just how extensive is that system, understood in the terms Zuckert seems to understand it, with tyranny particularly controlling in the intellectual sense?

It is a fitting that Nietzsche, as presented by Strong, is the last modern in the book to express a view on the relation of philosophy to tyranny. It is not so much that the presented Nietzsche identifies tyranny with philosophy and undoes the dichotomy initially presented by Zuckert. It is that Nietzsche does so as a modern. The philosopher as tyrant not only controls knowledge, but conceals its origins. To control a sense of time is thus to control knowledge and make it temporal, not eternal. It is not just that the Socratic ancients of Strauss, Leo, hold sway over the Spartan ancients of Strauss, Barry. It is that the former, as interpreters, control our view of the latter. Even as Strong’s Nietzsche sees the soul as a vessel, he sees it as one to be transported, shaped through the experience of time. It would not be the first time that Nietzsche serves as a guide back to the ancients, only to find in the ancients modernity after all.

Wily characters these are, tyrants and modernity, to say nothing of the combination of the two. They force us to jump from one period of thought, and one way of thinking, to another.

But then, that is the principal virtue of Confronting Tyranny. Precisely because of the quality of the essays, the reader is left with much of a “do-it-yourself” obligation—in the most positive and constructive sense—to make connections. Tyrants, it seems, have a way of keeping us students all. The twists and turns of Confronting Tyranny at first make us curious and, if we are careful students, occasionally enthralled.
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