Idleness and Passion: Hamlet's tragic character in the light of Stoicism and Medieval Christian Philosophy

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the character of Hamlet in Shakespeare's same-titled work in the light of certain aspects of stoicism and medieval Christian philosophy. Throughout the course of the play we see Hamlet struggling with his thoughts. At first he deliberates without taking action as a consequence of his reasoning, but in the later stages of the play he gives in to passion, which ultimately leads to his own demise. The thesis gives an account of certain aspects of both philosophies that are displayed in the play and shows how those ideas influence the character of Hamlet and contextualize his personal tragedy. Hamlet fails to follow the philosophies that he praises and to grow as a character by overcoming his passions over the course of the play.

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Why philosophy? After four years of discussing the whole spectrum of big questions in both, analytic and continental philosophy, my response would be: because it is part of every aspect in human life. Philosophy is the overarching discipline that shows itself in a wide variety of everyday situations. Studying philosophy has not only opened my mind and helped me becoming a better person, but also enabled me to understand a lot of questions I have been asking myself ever since.

This thesis reflects how different philosophies influence our characters and try to guide us through life. Yet sometimes we fail to translate into action the things we learnt. It is the final lesson I take away from what has been an incredible journey, for which I am utterly grateful.

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Introduction

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been performed, read and analysed countless times and in various fashions throughout the centuries without loosing its brilliance and profundity. The tragedy of Hamlet displays an entrenchment within the philosophies present in the time the play is set. Especially the character of Hamlet himself appears to have knowledge of philosophy, not only limited to the Christian ideas that were present and a matter of debate in Europe as a whole after the Reformation. Shakespeare also provides Hamlet with the knowledge of stoicism, a tradition of ancient philosophy rediscovered during the Renaissance, by aligning Hamlet with Horatio, a literate scholar, who has studied at multiple universities all around Europe.[1] In this thesis I want to analyse *Hamlet* as a play with its lead character trapped between stoicism and Christian thought, admiring both but failing to commit to either.

Hamlet, throughout the play, displays himself as a very multi-layered personality who spends more time dwelling in his thoughts than taking action, a fact that does seem to be in accordance with the philosophical nature of his character. In the course of this thesis, however, I will show that Hamlet is far from being a decisive, considered person who sticks with the values and virtues of the philosophies he is present as knowing. We will see throughout the course

1 Cf. J. H. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), 27.

of the play that at first, Hamlet struggles with his thoughts, appearing to deliberate without actually taking action as a consequence of his reasoning. This causes the other characters in the play to think that Hamlet is mad, a claim that I will contest as Hamlet does appear to be rational and calculating for most parts of the play.[2] While it is true that he changes his mindset and opinion about certain topics multiple times, he still shows a surprisingly profound understanding of the philosophies in which light his character will be analysed. Thus, the problem to be solved by this thesis: while Hamlet seems to think rationally about life and the things that happen to him, he fails to grow as a character throughout the play and take appropriate action. Instead, he allows his anger and wrath, rather than reason, to take control over his actions. In the light of both, stoicism and medieval Christian philosophy, this is a character flaw to be avoided, but yet Hamlet fails to overcome his passions and achieve happiness and a happy end to the events in Elsinore.

In order to analyse Hamlet's character in the light of stoicism and medieval Christian philosophy, I will at first look at certain concepts and ideas in both philosophies. Because the analysis of Hamlet is the focus of the thesis, I will limit myself to the aspects that play a part in *Hamlet* and can be applied to Hamlet's character and actions. I will start with stoicism and explain the stoic idea of the soul and its movements. To understand this concept of movement

2 See section 3.2.2.

there will be a definition of the (universal) nature and how it is connected to the individual human soul. Furthermore the distinction between the body and the soul will be examined, as it is an important distinction, not only for stoicism, but also for Christian philosophy, as the soul is said to be of higher value in both philosophies. The definition of the *good*, and the *bad* will be the next section of the first chapter, explaining what the differences are between *good*, *bad*, and the *indifferent*; the things that can either be good or bad, based on situation and personal choice, a concept that is directly touched on by Hamlet himself in a discussion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.[3] The good and the bad support or prevent one from achieving happiness. The highest good of stoicism will also be defined in this section, together with the virtues and the vices, which concepts are similar in the Christian tradition. The three Christian virtues of *faith*, *hope* and *love*, which play a major role not only in Christian philosophy, but also in *Hamlet* and for Hamlet's character, will also be explored. The virtues and vices are connected to the movements of the soul, defined by the stoics as *impulse*, *passion*, and *appropriate action*. In order to analyse Hamlet's actions in the play, I first have to distinguish between the different movements that cause actions according to stoic philosophy. Especially the passions will be important for the later parts of the thesis, as it will turn out that Hamlet, when finally choosing to act, gives in to passion

3 Cf. W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. S. Barnet (New York: New American Library, Signet Classics, 1998), 2.2.253f.

rather than acting appropriately. Furthermore, analysing Hamlet's character and judging him and his actions in the view of stoicism asks for a general definition of a good man, which will be provided in the last section of the first part. It will cover the distinction between the good man and the base man, how one obtains wisdom and why base men, among which Hamlet ultimately will be counted, fail to achieve both happiness and wisdom, because, while he knows the philosophy and rationally thinks about it, he fails “to carry it into action and to live by it.”[4]

The second chapter of the thesis will be about certain aspects of medieval Christian philosophy, pointing out the similarities and differences to stoicism. To set the framework for this thesis I want to limit myself to the early medieval philosopher St. Augustine and the later Thomas Aquinas. Their works address some of the same questions that the stoics cover, but also provide a lot of contrast, showing the differences in the way of thinking, which will help in the analysis of Hamlet's character. The first and foremost difference of course is the focus on God, who takes over the part of the universal nature, but is more 'personalized', especially as he acts as an active form of authority, a concept that is not present in this form in stoicism and influences Christian philosophy as a whole. In order to understand the core of Christian philosophy and the

4 John Stobaeus, “Anthology”, in *Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings*, trans. B. Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 11k. All further citations from this author are from this volume.

differences between it and stoicism, it is necessary to give a short break-down of the concept of God, limiting it to the core features that are important for the scope of this thesis. In the following section I will pick up the topic of the distinction between body and soul again, contrasting it to the stoic distinction, and explain how the soul plays a very important part in Christian philosophy, as it is seen as the part of the human closest to God and in this regard also the part that is immortal and can receive God's mercy and blessing, leading to eternal happiness. But on the other hand the soul is also the part exposed to evil and open to corruption, a notion that will be discussed further in the following section. This leads up to the Christian view on the *passions*, which are the root of corruption and result in the individual's undoing. This theoretical explanation of corruption and passion is of utter importance for the analysis of Hamlet's character, as Hamlet's failure as a virtuous character develops in accordance with the concept given by the Christian philosophers. The last section in this part will be a discussion of the three terms *faith*, *hope,* and *love*, which man needs in order to be called a *good* and *wise* man according to medieval Christian philosophy. Here again is a discrepancy with stoicism, as those three terms only have a minor role in stoicism as the latter is more self-centred, while Christianity needs those virtues that go beyond reason and grasp the supernatural and God, thereby achieving the allotted human end. Therefore those important Christian values are less important for the stoics. In the play we

can see how Hamlet fails to show faith and hope, as he is depressed and afraid of what comes after death.[5] Furthermore he changes his attitude towards the heavens and God and does not trust God to be the judge that brings justice to his uncle.

After the important aspects of both philosophies have been developed, I will discuss certain scenes of the play that show Hamlet's character transformation in the light of stoicism and Christian philosophy. To set the scenes up there will be a short introduction on how the philosophies influence the play and why it can be said that they play a major role for the characters in the play and Hamlet's character in particular. I want to put focus on the textual connections between the play and the philosophies, showing how they are intertwined, independent of Shakespeare's actual intend, which is not within the scope of this thesis. While it is expected that the reader is familiar with the content of the play itself, I will shortly lay out the struggle that Hamlet finds himself in: the conflict of interest between obeying his new king and his mother on the one side and fulfilling the wish of the ghost, who is apparently Hamlet's murdered father, on the other side. This struggle causes Hamlet to evolve from a reluctant melancholiac to the vengeful prince who kills several of his enemies before dying himself. The scenes I picked out will show what a difficult and inconsistent character Hamlet turns out to be, which is in total contrast to both

5 Cf. Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 3.1.76 – 82.

philosophies he is associated with and even praised through the course of the play. Having discussed both philosophies upfront it will be possible to analyse this character transformation and judge Hamlet by the principles he sets for himself throughout the work. Time and time again, Hamlet's insecurity in the early scenes foreshadows his ultimate failure to stay true to the stoic and Christian virtues.

This leads to the conclusion that *Hamlet* is not only a tragedy because of its events, but also a personal tragedy for Hamlet himself as he fails to grow as a character: while he gets his revenge, he sacrifices his virtues and values for it, without even noticing it in the end, causing him to appear as a person who has failed to live a good life and reach happiness according to both stoicism and Christian philosophy.

Chapter 1: The soul and its movements in stoicism

In this chapter I will discuss the stoic philosophy of the human soul and its movements in a narrow scope in order to build up to the question of what a good and wise man is and how he should act in general. The full spectrum of stoic thoughts on this topic will be narrowed down to what will be important for the analysis of Hamlet later on in the thesis.[6]

For the stoics the soul is the central element of the human that makes us part of the universal nature that penetrates everything in the universe.[7] It is by itself an individual living being, its health being of utter importance for the well-being of the human. A healthy soul for the stoics is a virtuous soul, which is a soul that embraces the *good* rather than the *bad*. The relation between the *good* and the choices that the individual makes in his life is key to achieving the ultimate goal in stoicism: *happiness*. For the stoics, *happiness* is independent of everything exterior and is only based on the actions that one chooses to take. This allows the stoics to pass a very strict judgement on those who fail to achieve happiness as they give in to passions. Their own choices lead to their failure and unhappiness, rendering pity for them inappropriate.

6 Of course the physics and ethics of the stoics are very broad topics, so I will limit myself to a very narrow scope, only touching on the themes that are of immanent importance in the context of this thesis and help build up to the arguments in the later sections.

7 With the metaphor of penetration the stoics want to explain that some things are more like and therefore closer to the universal nature than others, that is, they take part in this nature in fuller ways. For example, an animal is alive and therefore has an attribute that is also shared by the universal nature, while the stone is not a living thing and therefore lacks this attribute. It is not penetrated by the life of the universal nature.

1.1. What is the soul?

The stoics' view on the soul is based on their general physics and understanding of the universe as such. In their theory the soul and the body are two different things, which are yet connected, a concept that prevails in Christian philosophy, as will be shown in the second chapter. The concepts of nature and cosmos, however, differ a lot from the later Christian concept of *God*.[8]

1.1.1. The concept of cosmos and nature

For the stoics the *cosmos* is a godlike being who is

> "the individual quality consisting of the totality of substance, who is indestructible and ungenerated, being the craftsman of the organization, taking substance as a totality back into himself in certain fixed temporal cycles, and again generating it out of himself."[9]

This quotation explains the concept of the cosmos itself as "administered by mind and providence […] since mind penetrates every part of it just as soul does us."[10] This *universal nature*, also referred to as *god*, holds the whole universe together and is "a condition which moves itself."[11] Everything living in the universe tries to move towards this universal nature, as being in

8 In order to maintain a distinction between the stoic idea of an impersonal god as the highest principle and the Christian God, the former will always be uncapitalised and the latter capitalised.

9 Diogenes Laertius, in *Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings*, trans. B. Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 7.137. All further citations from this author are from this volume.

10 Diogenes Laertius, 7.138.

11 Ibid., 7.148.

accordance with it means fulfilment for the individual. The rational, living animal, however, can *actively* reach back to the *universal nature*, in the case of the human this means: actively trying to achieve *happiness*. For the stoics the goal of life is to be happy, and happiness is found in the perfection of oneself, the perfection of one's own nature.[12]

Everything within the cosmos and the universal nature itself is something *material*, yet the universal nature itself cannot be personalized.[13] So the universal nature is something bodily, a thing that has to be superior to everything else there is because of its attributes stated above. The difference between the *cosmos* and the *universal nature* is that everything is part of the *cosmos*, but not everything takes fully part in the cosmos' universal nature, as a thing has to meet certain conditions to be part of the latter.

In the stoic logic, the living, e.g. an animal, is more valuable and perfect than the non-living, e.g. a stone. As Inwood explains, "[t]he various level of nature are defined by their possession or lack of certain powers of the soul."[14] Therefore, the rational is superior to the non-rational, a conclusion that is based on the superiority of humans (rational beings) over non-rational beings.[15] This

12 Cf. G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy III. The Systems of the Hellenistic Age*, trans. J. R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 269.

13 Cf. Ibid., 247.

14 B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 19.

15 This hierarchy of things was introduced by Aristotle, who compared plants, animals, and human beings, coming to the conclusion that "living is apparently shared with plants, but what we are looking for is the special function of a human being; hence we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. The life next in order is some sort of life of sense-

is why for the stoics the cosmos itself has to be a living, rational being, and its universal nature reaches out for everything contained in the cosmos and penetrates it to a certain extent, but not everything is equally penetrated by it, which creates a certain order in the universe. This is because things have different natures, and the nature of a thing defines how much it is penetrated by the universal nature and its actual possibility to reach back to the universal nature through rationality. The stoics differentiate between four different natures. The most simple nature is the nature of plants, followed by the nature of animals. While plants only have sensation, but otherwise are normally bound to a place, animals have locomotion. Both are only guided by instincts, which means that they follow their sense of self-preservation and fulfilment of their own nature. But as they lack the component of rationality, they can never take part in the rationality of the universal nature and thereby never have a happy life, or produce a happy life, though they do have a relative perfection in perspective of their own nature.[16] For plants and animals neither the good nor the bad exists. They are perfect in their nature and self-fulfilment,[17] but still this

perception; but this too is apparently shared, with horse, ox and every animal. The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of acton of the [part of the soul] that has reason." Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1097b – 1098a.

16 Cf. Seneca, "Letters on Ethics", in: *Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings*, B. Inwood, trans. L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 124.14 – 15. All further citations from this author are from this volume.

17 Plants and animals can also never fail to move towards and fulfil their own nature, unlike the rational being. A cat will always follow its instincts, no matter what. It is a slave to its own nature, not able to make a choice by free will or to reason about choices in general. Therefore it will never do anything bad in the sense that a rational being can do something bad. The same goes for the good: an animal will never perform an act that will

perfection is lower than the incomplete nature of the rational being, who is always higher in the hierarchy of the stoics. The other two natures are those of men and the gods: both have access to reason and therefore to the universal nature. Unlike the non-rational, the rational animals (men), are born in a state of *not yet rational*, which means that they have the potency to become rational.[18] Infants are not yet rational in the view of the stoics. Insofar they have the capacity to eventually become rational they are nevertheless higher in the hierarchy in comparison with plants. As a human infant grows older he eventually reaches the state where he will achieves rationality, and this is the precondition for reaching the *good*. For the stoics, an infant cannot attain happiness. Much like the non-rational animal, a child is perfect in its own nature, but can not yet actively reach back to the universal nature. The process of growing up allows the child to reach its full rational capacity, and it eventually surpasses the point where it can reach back.

1.1.2. The concept of soul

When talking about the concept of the soul, I want to go back to Aristotle briefly, as his concept is the foundation for the later philosophers whose concepts will be of importance for this thesis. In his work *De Anima*, Aristotle distinguishes between *matter* and *form*. While an organic body is *matter*, the soul is the *form* of a living thing. *Form* here means *actuality*, "according to

be judged good.

18 Cf. Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, 124.14-15.

which, *this particular thing* is now predicated."[19] The incorporeal state of the soul is denied by the stoics. For them the soul is something long-living, but yet mortal and material.[20] The soul has to be something corporal, because otherwise "it could neither act nor be acted upon, while we can clearly see both these properties in the soul."[21]

The individual soul takes part in the universal nature. As such, it has to be something living, too. This also applies because the intellectual soul again is higher than something non-intellectual, non-living, and therefore has to be a living animal. For the stoics "every animal is congenial to itself and inclined to preserve itself and its constitution."[22] For example, an animal fears fire and will try to flee from it and not go near it, as its instincts tell it that it will get harmed if it gets too close. As the soul is also an animal, this applies to the soul as well. The soul has a movement of its own, which is directed towards its nature, which is in accordance with the universal nature. The soul is the connecting link to the universal nature as it shares the universal nature's rationality and is therefore part of the human that is closest to it. The strive to reach the universal nature is the purpose of the soul's existence, because in doing so, the soul fulfils its potential.

19 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. T. Taylor (Wiltshire: The Prometheus Trust, 2003), 412.8.
20 Cf. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy III*, 151.
21 Epicurus, "Letter to Herodotus", in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius, trans. R. D. Hicks (London-Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 10.67.
22 Cicero, "On Goals", n: *Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings*, B. Inwood, trans. L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 3.16. All further citations from this author are from this volume.

The soul is split into different parts that are classified as the five senses, the vocal part, the generative part and the thinking part, also called the *intellect.*[23] The wise man is led by this intellectual part, as it leads him towards the universal nature and therefore closer to the final goal of his individual nature: the agreement with the universal nature.[24] This agreement with nature entails the *good*, which is the essential term for the stoics and synonymous with *happiness.*[25] Reaching the good is reaching the state of *happiness.* Therefore it can be said that all humans strive for happiness in their lives, a statement that is agreed on in most ancient and medieval philosophical movements. The differences are in the ideas of how this happiness can be achieved by the individual. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* lays the foundation when he says that *happiness* "requires both complete virtue and a complete life."[26] We will see later on that this notion of *completeness* is within the boundaries of *reason* for the stoics, but for the Christians there are also things that go beyond reason and in order to achieve happiness, one has to also embrace the *supernatural*.[27]

Human beings can reach this *good* because it is in their nature. A human can

23 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.110.
24 Cf. John, Stobaeus, *Anthology,* 6a.
25 For the stoics the agreement with the universal nature is the purpose of human existence, and as soon as an individual reaches his full potential, he is part of this universal nature. That is also the highest good, which will be explained in further detail in section 1.2.2.
26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a.
27 See section 2.4.

reach rationality and therefore enable himself to reach the *good*.[28] Having reached that state, however, does not automatically imply that the good is achieved. It is only allowing the possibility for the good to exist, but it is still a long way to go to actually reach it. In fact not everybody reaches it, and the stoics in their philosophy try to explain why this is so and what the individual can do to actually achieve it.[29]

1.1.3. Soul and body

For the stoics the body and the soul are two different, living animals, yet they are connected. The soul is part of the universal nature that penetrates the body and gives it its life force. Both body and soul are subject to change, which allows them to *move*. They have their movement aimed "at both the advantageous and at pleasure."[30] The rational part of the soul should always be the leading part in those movements, because it is the one closest to the *universal nature,* as rationality is more perfect than simple life and brings one closer to happiness, as the use of reason helps us to fulfil our potentials.[31] In the later sections of this chapter it will be shown that the stoics rate the soul higher

28 When born, an infant is not considered to be fully rational yet. He is able to obtain rationality as he grows older, meaning he has the potential to become rational almost certainly.

29 The stoics also answer the question why one wants to achieve it: there is a hierarchy for the things one wants to achieve. The soul's movement is governed by instinct and reason. But as reason is closer to the universal nature and therefore superior to instinct, one should always choose reason over instinct. However, one can fail to do so which explains why some people are unhappy even though they appear to have reason. They just did not choose reason over instinct for some irrational 'reasoning'.

30 Diogenes Laertius, 7.149.

31 Cf. Ibid., 7.159.

than the body, because the living body needs a healthy soul in order to achieve *happiness*, the ultimate goal, but not necessarily a healthy body. An unhealthy man can still be happy, but bodily health alone does not guarantee happiness. So while the body and the soul have much in common in stoicism, such as their materiality, but the big difference shows itself in the hierarchal rating of both, whereby the rational soul again is seen superior to the body.[32]

In this section the concept of the soul in stoicism has been discussed. The soul is a rational animal that strives for the universal nature, because if the soul reaches accordance with the universal nature, it will also achieve happiness, the ultimate goal in the life of every human being. The soul is superior to the body and its rationality should guide all the decisions that a human makes. The importance of this concept will be shown in the following sections, where it will be explained how one can reach the happy life through the choice of the *good* and *appropriate actions*. Hamlet's character and actions will be judged in the light of this concept of the soul later in this thesis.

1.2. The good, the bad, and the indifferent

The *good* comprises all the things that one ought to strive for in stoicism. In this section the concept of the *good* in stoicism will be explained in relation to the *bad* and the *indifferent*, a distinction vital for stoic philosophy, and for the judgement of Hamlet's actions later in this thesis.

32 Cf. John Stobaeus *Anthology*, 7b.

1.2.1. The concept of good and the highest good

The *good* for the stoics is something that is perfect in its nature or something that helps an imperfect thing to achieve perfection in its nature. Therefore the *highest good*, which is located in mind and virtue, is agreement with the universal nature,[33] which is perfect reasoning in accordance with rationality for the human being and perfect action in accordance with this rationality. The *good* comes in different ways, yet the stoics emphasize that there is no good better or worse than another, as in the end they are all part of the ultimate *good.* In more detail, the good is something beneficial in one of these three senses:

> "[1] the good is that *from which* being benefitted is a characteristic result.
>
> [2] it is the *according to which* [being benefitted] is a characteristic result, for example, action according to virtue.
>
> [3] it is he *by whom* [being benefitted is a characteristic result]; and 'by whom' means, for example, the virtuous man who participates in virtue."[34]

The first refers to something that always brings benefits, and can never be used in a wrong way, for example, *justice*. One cannot misuse justice, and everybody benefits from justice, as a 'misuse' would be *injustice* and would therefore no longer fulfil the definition of the virtue of *justice*. The second one refers to the act that comes with the good of the first. *Acting justly* brings benefits as well as being in accordance with justice, and therefore also can

33 Cf. Cicero, *On Goals,* 3.33.
34 Diogenes Laertius, 7.94.

never be a bad thing. The third refers to the person who benefits as well through the action and the good, which in this example would be the *just man*, who chooses to act in accordance with justice. So the *good* not only comprises itself, but also the act in accordance with it and the person who acts according to it.

There is a difference between the things *worth choosing* and the things that *are to be chosen*. Every good, no matter if exterior or interior, is *worth choosing* by itself, as it directly leads to the ultimate *goal*, living in agreement with the universal nature and therefore living in happiness, as explained earlier on. One cannot choose what is worth choosing, but can only choose to have it.[35] This means that one cannot simply pick, for example, *justice*, and thereby achieve it. Like a target an archer is aiming for, I can choose a target and decide to aim for it: I choose to have it as my target.[36] But I cannot choose in the sense that I actually hit the target only by choice. Therefore, I should aim for *justice* and choose to have it as my target, but this does not mean I simply pick it up and actually hit it. The things *that are to be chosen* are those which actually help me to hit the target. These include every advantage that I can get that leads up to a good, meaning by acting justly in singular scenarios I eventually will become just.[37] This is a crucial point that we will see Hamlet

35 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology,* 6f.
36 Cf. Cicero, *On Goals,* 3.22.
37 There is a difference between acting justly in a singular instance and *being* just. But by acting justly over and over again one eventually will internalize the virtue of justice and thereby *become* just.

failing to actualize. Instead of aiming for virtuous action he chooses to take no action at all. During the play, his motive never seems to attain virtue, even though he often talks about virtues when criticizing others.[38]

There is also a difference between something *worth choosing* and *worth taking*. *That which is worth choosing* is only the *good*, which has value in itself according to the universal nature. That which is *worth taking* on the other hand are all things that have *value*. Value and good are not the same thing. For example, a gold coin has value, but yet it is not *good* in the stoic sense. To possess gold is not a requirement to achieve happiness, as even a poor man can be happy. Rather, the things that have value, like the coin, *can* contribute to happiness and therefore *are to be chosen,* even though they are not ends, as they all lead to something higher, the ultimate good: *happiness* in the life in agreement with the universal nature.[39]

1.2.2. The bad

For the stoics all things in the universe have counterparts. The opposite of life is death, there is movement and stasis, and so on. The *good* therefore also has to have a counterpart, which is the *bad.* In accordance with the good as the things in accordance with the universal nature, the bad is everything that is *unnatural*. In order to achieve the good, or happiness, which is the same thing

38 See section 3.2.4.
39 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 5o.

in the end, the individual has to choose the *good* and stay away from the *bad*. Just as the good has the bad as its general opposite, the *virtues*, which will be the focus in the next section, are opposed by the *vices*, that which belong to the *bad.*

1.2.3. The virtues and vices

The *good* contains the *virtues*, whereby the primary virtues are *prudence, courage, justice* and *temperance*. In the stoic view, those are forms of knowledge and can therefore be learned by the rational animal.[40] *Prudence* is considering and doing what has to be done, in the sense of what one should distribute, for the sake of doing what is to be done without error. *Temperance* is to stabilize the impulses of the soul, which are not always caused by reason (but rather by instinct), and considering them. Furthermore temperance also includes considering the other virtues so that one behaves without error. *Courage* is considering everything that one should endure in order to follow his goals and not give in to seemingly easier ways, which are in the end only misleading. Finally, *justice* is considering what is due to each person and the distribution of value to every person.[41] Other important virtues are *magnanimity, self-control, endurance, quick-wittedness* and *deliberative excellence*.[42] All the virtues are interior goods in the soul. The stoics claim that

40 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.91.
41 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 5b1 and 5b5.
42 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.92.

one cannot have one virtue without the other, because they all "have common theorems and the same goal […]; and consequently they are inseparable; for he who has one has them all, and he who acts with one virtue acts with all."[43] So once someone achieves one of the virtues, he has to have all the others as well, as they go hand in hand. One cannot be prudent at the same time as he is not just, because if one is truly prudent he would also be just, as it is within his prudent consideration of action to be just. The same goes for all the other virtues, as they exclude any form of bad behaviour once one has truly achieved them. If someone only acts justly from time to time he might as well only be prudent from time to time, but then he does not actually fully possess the virtues according to the stoics.

The virtues are, however, not the only goods in the soul. There are also the conditional practices and activities, as well as non-constant goods like *joy*, that are only temporal. Still, every good has in common that it is somehow advantageous, profitable, useful, well-used, honourable, beneficial, just and worth choosing.[44] The virtues are in themselves worth choosing and are always the highest and best option, which is why they ought to be chosen in every situation. Yet, more often than not, rational human beings seem to fail to make the right choice. The stoics explain that making a bad choice is a misleading of the movement of the soul, by letting the movement being guided by instinct

43 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 5b5.
44 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.98.

rather than by reason.[45] One gets misled or confused by external things or other human beings who also fail to make the right decisions.[46] This causes bad and evil things to happen, not only to the person him- or herself, but also to others, as it will be shown later on in the case of Hamlet when his decisions cause harm to others.

Beside the goods in the soul there are also exterior goods, like having a virtuous friend or virtuous fatherland.[47] Most of those goods are not final, but rather instrumental in order to achieve other goods with their help, as all goods lead to the one final good. A virtuous friend, for example, helps one to attain one's own virtues by taking him as an example. The virtues

> "are both instrumental and final goods. For in that they produce happiness they are instrumental goods, and in that they fulfil it, such that they are parts of it, they are final goods."[48]

The opposite of the *virtues*, the *vices,* also play a role in stoicism. They oppose the good and are defined and classified in the same way as are the virtues, just simply with the opposite attributes. Therefore the four primary *vices* are *imprudence, cowardice, injustice* and *wantonness.*[49] The good man,

45 Instincts are by no means a necessarily bad thing for the stoics, but they can be misleading as they are able to contradict reason. A soldier, for example, could have the natural instinct to flee from the battlefield as he faces possible harm and death, but the virtue of courage tells him to stay his ground together with all the other soldiers and keep fighting, especially when the odds are in their favour. For the stoics the latter is the reasonable decision that the soldier ought to take.

46 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.89. Going back to the example of the soldier: As soon as one soldier looses his courage and decides to flee a battle, soon others might follow as they are influenced by his decision and put reason aside.

47 Cf. Ibid., 7.95.

48 Cf. Ibid., 7.97.

49 Cf. Ibid., 7.93.

the concept of which will be defined in greater detail later on, avoids the vices and does not possess them, as one can only be, for the stoics, either virtuous or vicious, but not both at the same time.

1.2.4. The indifferent

The stoics acknowledged that there has to be something between the *good* and the *bad*, as there are things in the world that are neither good nor bad, like the fact that a person has an odd number of hairs on her head. Those things are called the *indifferent.* But yet the *indifferent* are not all the same. Of the indifferent things some are truly indifferent, which means they have no influence on the good or the bad. It does not matter at all if someone has an uneven or even number of hairs on his head; it has no influence on his life and he cannot use it to achieve something good or bad by it. On the other hand there are indifferent things that might contribute to the good or bad under certain circumstances and therefore cannot simply be assigned universally to either side. Those are such things as *life, health, pleasure, beauty* and their opposites.[50] They are not *worth to be chosen,* but rather can be things that are *preferred* if they contribute to the good, or *rejected* when they contribute to the bad. The preferred things are the ones that have *value*. They come in different forms, as they can be in the soul, in the body, or external. *Skill* is an example of an indifferent thing in the mind (=soul) that has value, as it can contribute to

50 Cf. Ibid., 7.104.

the good, but is no *good* as such.[51] So can health and strength (bodily) and wealth or reputation (external) be considered as things that contribute to the good.[52] There is also a difference as to why those indifferent things are preferred. The indifferent things of the soul are preferred for themselves. One wants to have skill for its own sake. External things such as wealth and reputation are preferred because they allow one to get other goods or things of value that lead to happiness. The bodily things contain both: one wants to be healthy for the sake of it and also to achieve other goods, though they are to be rejected if they were to make one less virtuous.[53]

The choice of those indifferent things can determine whether one succeeds in the striving for the good or fails, because picking the wrong indifferent things often causes one to be misled. For the stoics it is also a mistake to 'value' an indifferent thing higher than it should be valued, naming it a *good* even though it is not. For example, *wealth* is often said to be a *good* that is directly connected with happiness, because it can buy one external things of *desire*. In

51 Skill does not automatically result in something good. Even though skill can help a lot to make progress towards the good, it can also be used to do something bad. Yet a person would always prefer to have skill, whether or not he intends to use it in a good fashion. For example, the skill to read allows one to learn more about stoic philosophy, and might help one to become a better person, but the ability to read alone does not make one a good person. Those skills can of course also be used in a bad way, but overall it is still preferred to have them.

52 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.106. Yet again those things can contribute towards the good or the bad. A person can use his strength to protect the weak or to bully them, but every person would prefer strength over weakness, no matter what he intends to use it for.

53 Cf. Ibid., 7.107. Sometimes there might arise a conflict of interest between one's own health and a virtuous choice. Someone might discard his own health in order to save someone else's life, acting courageously and virtuously.

the stoic point of view this is wrong, and so are the people who strive for *wealth* as their goal instead of the true good. They are mislead by the passion of desire for external goods and miss true happiness because their focus is on the wrong thing. While *wealth* is to be chosen over poverty, as it has a selective value; a poor person can yet be happy and a rich person unhappy, which shows that, ultimately, wealth is no guarantee of happiness and does not even necessarily contribute towards it. In the end the inner state of the soul is the *ultimate good* to be achieved.

In this section the *good* and the *virtues* have been defined. It has been shown that there are goods in the soul, in the body, and external goods that ought to be valued above things that are called *indifferent* by the stoics. While the latter may contribute to the good, the true good in form of the virtues has always to be preferred. This setup will help in judging Hamlet's decisions later on, when it will be examined what things and actions he chooses and how those fit into this classification.

1.3. The movements of the soul

The choices and actions that the individual makes and takes in his life are what the stoics call movements of the soul. Those movements are decisions being made, like whether one uses his time for studying or whether he goes outside, spending his time in idleness. Those movements are subdivided into

impulses, passions, and *appropriate action*. In this section each of them will be explained in greater detail and it will be shown what influence they have on the individual and his striving for happiness.

1.3.1. Impulses and instincts

An *impulse* is a movement of the soul towards an action, that includes the decision-making process that results in an action.[54] Those movements can be towards good things, naturally, or bad and indifferent things, by mistake, which will be explained in greater detail below.

Some lower forms of impulse can be found in animals, as a cat will have an impulse that leads to hunting the prey it spots. This is a natural and good impulse, as it is a movement according to the cat's own nature which it strives to fulfil, and in doing so it preserves and fulfils its being. But there are also rational forms of impulse that contain planning, for example *purpose*, *effort*, or *choice*. Hereby purpose is defined as "an indication of accomplishment; effort is an impulse before an impulse […] [and] choice is a wish based on analogy."[55] All impulses are acts of assent that are usually followed by action. Therefore, impulses are "not just an instinct or an underlying drive in an animal."[56] Normally, all impulses are guided by the nature of the soul: in case of the human soul, that means the impulses are striving towards the good. Yet

54 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 9.
55 Ibid., *Anthology*, 9a.
56 Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 45.

the fact that human beings have *free will* and therefore are not restricted in their choices opens up the possibility for errors in the very movements of our soul.[57] Those errors cause man to strive towards something bad or indifferent. This does not mean that one strives for those because he wants to achieve something that in his perception is bad or indifferent, but rather, the person *mistakes* the bad or indifferent for something *good*, though it is not. For example, the person who chooses wealth as an end in itself does not necessarily despise truly good things, he just mistakes *wealth* to be one of them and directs his impulses in the wrong direction. For the stoics, a person would never choose something bad if he were aware of the true nature of the thing, as it will not contribute to his happiness.

I think one that of the major reasons for being misled in one's impulses is the influence of society and peers. That is why the stoic tradition is searching for happiness in an inward movement that limits the influence of exterior factors as far as possible. It can be quite distracting for the individual, especially when the person lives in an environment that promotes wrong impulses, like, for example, advertising beauty and youth nowadays. The individual is getting misled, following wrong impulses and setting herself wrong goals, like beauty, while she should instead strive for the real *good*, as

57 This is also a main theological argument. Because God gave the human being free will it is within man's choice to do good or bad things. Similarly, in the stoic tradition people seldom choose the bad over the good because of its own sake, and are rather misled or confused in their decision making, mistaking something bad for a good.

beauty alone will not make her happy, even though advertising promises otherwise. We have seen in this section that though impulses are not necessarily bad, they need to be directed by *reason*, as they can cause a drift towards good things as well as bad things and the rational human being has to differentiate between the things his impulses try to shift him. If an impulse is not governed by reason it can result in a *passion*, which is a movement of the soul that will be discussed next.

1.3.2. Passions

Passions are the unnatural movements of the soul, that "are impulses of a certain sort."[58] They are disobedient to reason and therefore it is irrational and unnatural to follow them, as they work against the striving for happiness and fulfilment of potential, even though it might appear on short sight that the passions contribute to it. But in the end passions will always lead away from the highest good.

The primary passions of the soul are *desire*, *fear, pain*, and *pleasure*. In some traditions *pleasure* is not an irrational passion but rather a natural impulse of the soul. The Epicureans, for example, said the first impulse of the soul is towards pleasure and the first avoidance is pain. Later this was rephrased and the first impulse is actually an avoidance of pain, which is not necessarily an impulse towards pleasure, because as long as the individual is without pain he

58 Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 129.

is happy.[59] The stoics moved away from *pleasure* and *pain* as primary movements and put the more generalized "things primary to nature"[60] as the first impulse; this means that man "chooses what helps his rational nature and avoids what harms it. So man brings himself to full completion by increasing his rationality."[61]

Therefore, for them *pleasure* is also a *passion*, which can lead to an irrational judgement about certain things. If we go back to the person who mistakes *wealth* for a good: he might be driven by *greed* in the supposition that money is an honourable thing that leads to happiness. I will give a more detailed explanation of the four primary passions below to set up an in-depth analysis of Hamlet's character later on:

1. *Pain* is an irrational contraction. *Pity, grudging, envy, resentment, heavy-heartedness, congestion, sorrow, anguish* and *confusion* are all forms of pain[62] and should be avoided according to the stoics as they, when given in to, blind the individual and hinder the movement of the soul. Pain is something that is actually in the soul, a state of mind caused by something that is happening or has already happened. The individual allows something that has happened to touch his soul and weigh it down, for example the death of a beloved friend. When the individual allows his sorrow to take control over his life, he moves

59 Cf. Cicero, *On Goals*, 5.18.
60 Ibid.
61 Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy III*, 264.
62 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.111.

away from happiness, as a person drowning in sorrow is by no means happy. The *pain* hinders the movement of the soul and prevents the individual from taking action. This is displayed in the first half of *Hamlet*, when Hamlet, grieving for his father, is reluctant to take any action at all, causing the people surrounding him to worry about his mental state.[63]

2. *Fear* is the expectation of something bad, and it shows itself in the form of *dread, hesitation, shame, shock, panic,* and *agony*.[64] Much like pain, it hinders the natural movement of the soul. In distinction from pain, fear is a state of mind that reacts to something that is happening or might happen in the future. In Hamlet's case fear of what comes after death is a major motive that will ultimately cause him to take action rather than remain idle.[65] But the action caused by passion is irrational, as it clouds the judgement of the individual. Rather than following the universal nature as motivator of the action, the individual tries to avoid the thing or event of which he is afraid. Its avoidance becomes the core of his motivation, leading to wrong decisions that in the end prevent rational choices from being made.

3. *Desire* is an irrational striving. Its forms are *want, hatred, quarrelsomeness, anger, sexual love, wrath,* and *spiritedness.*[66] In distinction from *pain* and *fear, desire* is an irrational impulse of the soul towards an

63 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.87 – 94 and 2.1.5 – 9.
64 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.112.
65 See section 3.2.2.
66 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.113.

irrational movement. Seeing something valuable that in truth is not causes a shift in an unnatural direction, as desire also causes all the negative aspects like *hatred* as soon as the desired thing is not achieved. A person who follows the natural impulses never does feel *desire* as a passion. He is calm about his decisions and not influenced by negative feelings if something does not work out the way he wanted it to. The stoics claim that

> "nothing happens to a wise man contrary to his expectations; [...] [he is not free] from the misfortunes but from the blunders of mankind, nor do all these things turn out as he has wished but as he has thought. But his first thought has been that something might obstruct his plans."[67]

The wise man is not surprised by misfortunes and does not get moved by them, even if he strives for something other than happiness, for example food, so he does not starve. He never lets this striving become his main purpose but subordinates it to his rationality. Therefore "the suffering that comes to the mind from the frustration of desire must necessarily be much lighter"[68] for the wise man.

4. *Pleasure* is an irrational elation over what seems to be worth choosing. With pleasure come *enchantment, mean-spirited satisfaction, enjoyment,* and *rapture.*[69] Much like *desire*, *pleasure* is a movement of the soul that sometimes appears to be *to be chosen* as it brings temporal happiness. This temporal

67 Seneca, *On Peace of Mind*, 13.3.
68 Ibid.
69 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.114.

happiness, however, has nothing to do with the *happiness* or the *good* that the stoics envision, as the happiness gained by pleasure is limited to a thing that has no value or only limited value. For example, a person might find pleasure in the company of another person, making decisions based on the fact that he wants to spend more time with this person even if it is rationally inadvisable. If an individual finds happiness in this way, the happiness is not guaranteed as the person might lose this other person and then also lose his happiness as it was bound to the other person. The highest good is not bound to anything but itself: it is interior and can never be lost once obtained in contrast to the exterior things that only bring *pleasure* and can be lost because they are not internalized by the individual.

Much like the virtues, the passions go hand in hand. As soon as one gives in to one of the passions, the others follow. Because from the moment someone *desires* something for *pleasure* onwards, he has the *fear* of loosing it, and as soon as he does, he feels *pain*.[70] One also feels a sort of pain if one does not get what he desires in the first place. Therefore, a person who once gives in to passions has a very hard time breaking free from them. This is exactly what will happen to Hamlet, as the grief about his father's death is fuelling his desire for revenge and out of his wrath he finally takes action, which is merely

70 Loosing the objects that bring *pleasure* will happen eventually, as all of those objects are *temporal*.

motivated by passion.[71]

1.3.3. Appropriate action

After discussing the passions and what one should not to do, we must now actually specify what a person ought to do, so that it will be possible to judge and classify Hamlet's actions later on. The stoics call the actions that lead to the *good* and happiness *appropriate action*. This concept will now be explained in greater detail.

Cicero says that for the stoics there is a sequence of *appropriate action* that one has to perform in order to achieve the *good* and thereby, happiness. The first step is the preservation of the natural constitution. This action can also be found in animals, as the animal is always striving to preserve its natural state by searching for food and shelter, etc. For example, a turtle put on her back will try to get back on her feet, as this is its natural state. But the rational being has a follow-up to this first appropriate action, which is the *appropriate selection*. This is the point where reason should guide the soul in order to achieve accordance with the universal nature by selecting those things that *are to be chosen* and rejecting those that are misleading, like the passions. The base man fails to perform this second appropriate action as he does not choose appropriately. The third step is to select constantly the appropriate actions and make it a habit to select them. This brings an *understanding* of the action as

71 See sections 3.2.5, 3.2.6., and Conclusion.

such. The person *knows* why he chooses, for example, *to be just* (in order to achieve justice as one of the virtues) and chooses to be just in every upcoming case. This leads eventually to a selection of action that is stable and in agreement with the universal nature as the person understands what can truly be called *good*.[72]

The appropriate actions are also always morally perfect, as they are "caused by virtue, that is, by wisdom."[73] An action is not appropriate if it has a moral flaw. As with things, there are as well intermediate actions that might be preferable, such as *getting married*, but those are by no means appropriate actions.[74] Other actions are normally morally indifferent, such as *speaking* and *walking*, but they can have a moral attachment. For example, it is inappropriate to speak while someone else is speaking and thereby interrupt the other person. But this is only an attachment in a certain context that cannot be applied all the time.

The stoics say that when a man makes a moral mistake it is his own doing and he should be punished for it by the virtuous law. Also, a moral mistake should never be forgiven by a virtuous man for the same reason.[75] The stoics

72 Cf. Cicero, *On Goals*, 20.
73 Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy III*, 277.
74 Actions like *getting married* are not necessarily contributing towards the good. Being married does not mean that a person gains stoic happiness through the marriage. It can, however, contribute to happiness, much like a person's health, or wealth, as was explained in section 1.2.4.
75 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology,* 11d.

base this argument on the idea that irrationality and wrong reasoning is always a decision that has been willingly made by a person. I think that this very strict approach lines up with their dichotomous view of the world and virtues and vices.[76] This also explains why "[t]hey say that all [moral] mistakes are equal, but not, however, similar."[77] There is no mistake that is more wrong than another, because as soon as one fails to pick the morally right action, it does not matter by how far he misses it, since it is always opposed to his ultimate happiness.

Life itself has to be lived in a certain manner. It can be compared to a dance that follows certain movements. The human soul strives after wisdom as the soul proceeds from the universal nature and thereby wisdom is the craft through which a person can reach this goal. The allegory of the crafts works insofar a craft contains acts of cognitions, something rational and methodical, as the impulses and appropriate actions of the soul do. Yet the stoics say that wisdom is the ultimate craft and therefore cannot really be compared to the other crafts, as it "embraces magnanimity and justice and an ability to judge that everything which happens to a [mere] human is beneath it."[78] Like the virtues, wisdom is chosen only for its own sake, as it is instrumental as well as

76 This means that something is either good, bad, or indifferent, but a thing is not to a certain percentage bad, like, for example lying to a stranger is 30% bad and lying to a friend is 40% bad. In the eyes of the stoics all moral failures are equally bad. Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 111.

77 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 111.

78 Cicero, *On Goals*, 3.25.

final. One chooses wisdom because he wants to possess wisdom, as it is the craft that leads to happiness and therefore the ultimate goal. Seneca adds the notion that a craft is born and not learned.[79] This again emphasizes that every human being has access to this universal nature and can choose to strive for it, as all humans are equal, and no one has a misfortunate disadvantage concerning his or her ability to achieve happiness. For the stoics, all those exterior factors like, for example, noble birth do not matter because they are not directly connected to the universal nature, and, as stated earlier on, do not necessarily contribute towards happiness and are by no means essential.[80]

In this section the movements of the soul, instinct, passion, and appropriate action, have been laid out. Because the soul can be misguided and wrong actions can prevent the individual from achieving happiness, it is important that one chooses appropriate actions and stays away from instinct and passion.[81] Later on this scheme will be applied to Hamlet's actions when it will be examined whether or not his actions are 'appropriate' in the stoics' view. For now I first want to look into the general view of the stoics on how they differentiate between the *wise man*, who achieves happiness, and the *base man*, who fails to do so.

79 Cf. Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, 121.23.
80 See section 1.2.4.
81 Though instincts can also be good. Still they ought to be critically reflected by reason.

1.4. The wise man and the base man

The stoics distinguish between *wise* men and *base* men. To know the differences between those two is crucial for judging people in stoicism. In this section what the wise man ought to do and why the base man fails at achieving what the wise man has will be explained. The classification of wise men and base men is the result of the choices that the individuals make, according to the setup that has been provided in the previous sections. Taking the *good* things themselves and the actions of the individual into account results into the separation that will now be explained.

1.4.1. What defines a wise man?

The stoics have very high praise for the *wise man*, as he "does everything well."[82] This means that in every possible situation in life the wise man will make the right choice because of the right reasons and act properly in accordance with virtue.[83] The wise man has achieved the *virtues* and thereby *happiness*. This does not only make wise men the sole ones fit to rule, judge, and speak publicly,[84] but it also means that they are free from harm.[85] This is because they have freed themselves from all exterior things, and the state of mind they have reached cannot be taken away from them because again, as the

82 Diogenes Laertius, 7.125.
83 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 5b10.
84 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7.122.
85 Cf. John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 11i.

ultimate good, once it is achieved, it stays with him who has achieved it. The wise man is therefore also free from passions and vanity, and with that freedom from pain, as pain is also just a passion in the eyes of the stoics.[86] The human soul is predisposed to failure, like the body is to an illness, and it takes effort to overcome this predisposition. But everyone is able to overcome this internal flaw, and once a person has reached happiness, no one can take it away from him again. The good things belong to the wise man because he is doing everything well, "since he continuously makes use of his experience of life in a prudent and self-controlled and orderly and organized fashion."[87] The stoics say that the virtuous man is uninvolved, which means that he does nothing that is inappropriate. This means that while a wise man might enjoy a drink or a good feast, he will not get drunk or overeat himself.[88]

1.4.2. Why does the base man fail?

The stoics make the strict distinction between the wise man and the base man much like they differ between the *virtues* and the *vices*. The base man is basically the opposite of the wise man and lives an unhappy life, doing everything badly due to his lack of experience and his failure to live in

86 The stoics mainly refer to psychological pain, as the body can still suffer physical pain and there is nothing to be done about it other than to endure it. The wise man therefore would endure the pain and maybe not be influenced by it as much as the base man is simply because he does not give in to it, which would be a form of self-pity and thereby a psychological pain. Also, *happiness* is indifferent to physical pain, as happiness is a state of the soul and not of the body.

87 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 11i.

88 See also Socrates in the *Symposium.*

accordance with the universal nature. Instead he is

> "acting in accordance with the disposition he has, being prone to change [his mind] and seized by the regret about each thing [he does]. And regret is [a feeling of] pain about actions which have been performed, because [of the belief that] they were [moral] mistakes made by oneself; and this is a passion of the soul which produces unhappiness and internal strife. And this is why base men are dishonoured."[89]

The base man is also not a lover of learning and listening. The stoics criticise the form of learning that we have up until today whereby students and apprentices only listen to a teacher. The students try to memorize facts rather than carrying their knowledge into action, which again is a movement of the soul leading towards the universal nature. The stoics say:

> "For it is not the man who listens eagerly and memorizes what philosophers say who is prepared for philosophizing, but the man who is prepared to carry into action what is pronounced in philosophy and to live by it."[90]

The base man fails to perform an *appropriate action*, which is necessary for the movement of the soul towards the ultimate goal. Without action there is no movement, and the movement is essential to the striving for happiness, as happiness does not come to the individual without him or her *actively* trying to achieve it.

The base man can also be 'free of passions' in the sense that he is cold-

89 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 11i.
90 Ibid., 11k.
I think that this is a notion worth thinking about when analysing Hamlet and his action, or better to say: non-action throughout the play.

hearted and has no movement and impulse whatsoever. The distinction between being removed from passion and being completely ignorant is important for the stoics, as the wise man would still choose what is to be chosen, while the base man, who is free from passion, does not choose anything over anything else because he is completely indifferent, which is also an unnatural impulse in the end.[91]

As stated earlier, in stoicism one is responsible for his own fate, because all the external factors that cannot be altered by the individual are supposed to have no influence on the individual. If something happens to a person that he cannot do anything about, this is misfortunate, but on the other hand, it is not important for this person's happiness. Yet this is the point where the base man fails. Letting something exterior take over the interior movements and decisions of the soul leads to an unnecessary unhappiness. Also, the passions easily trap people, as they might appear to be a short-term solution for happiness due to their nature, but in the end prove to be quite the opposite. It will be shown later on how this can be applied to Hamlet, as the prince at first is hesitant in his actions, which, according to the stoics, is necessary in order for the soul to reach out the universal nature by deliberating and using reason; and then later on he gets driven by passion. Not carrying out appropriate action is the base man's failure that leads to a person's demise.

91 The impulse of the base man leads to the action of not taking an action. I want to call this non-action an action as well.

This chapter has provided an overview of the elements in stoicism that will be important for the analysis of Hamlet's character in the third chapter of this thesis. The emphasis was set on the soul and its movements, mainly instincts, passions, and appropriate actions, and the things they move towards: the good, the bad, and the indifferent. Furthermore, the concept of the *universal nature* was put in focus, as it is what the individual ought to live in accordance with in order to achieve happiness. With this setup it will be possible to judge Hamlet's character according to these stoic ideas. But first, we will now look at some aspects of medieval Christian philosophy and how they relate to or oppose the ideas presented in this chapter in order to understand the problems of Hamlet and his inner disunity in the light of both philosophies in the third chapter.

Chapter 2: The soul and its movements in medieval Christian philosophy

This chapter explains some Christian thoughts on the matter of the soul and the virtues of a *good man* and will draw a comparison between them and the views that were covered in the previous chapter. To narrow down the scope, I will focus on two medieval Christian philosophers who wrote on topics of concern to the stoics and influenced the whole of medieval western philosophy with their works. The first is St. Augustine, one of the earliest Christian philosophers, whose works were crucial for the development of medieval Christian philosophy, as many later writers read his works and used them as the basis for their own writings. In his works *On the morals of the Catholic Church* and the *Enchiridion,* he picks up the questions about the soul, the virtues, and how one ought to life. The second thinker that will be examined is St. Thomas Aquinas, who, of course, was one of the most noted writers in the later Middle Ages. In the *Prima Secundae Partis* of the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas picks up the same topics as do Augustine and the stoics. Again the focus is set on the arguments that will help to explore Hamlet's character and decision making in light of this philosophy. It will be shown that the Christian philosophy adds the element of the *supernatural*, which exceeds reason and therefore the boundaries of stoicism. This calls for the supernatural Christian virtues of *faith, hope*, and *love*, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. They

add another layer of virtue that a man requires in order to achieve happiness and live in accordance with God. These additional virtues will be of importance when judging Hamlet as well, as we will see that the lack of these virtues causes him to fail achieving happiness.

2.1. God in contrast to the stoic nature

The first and most important difference between stoicism and Christian philosophy for our study is the presence of *God*, who, due to His nature, has a major influence on the structure of the philosophy itself and how certain things are seen in the light of an almighty authority. The Christian understanding of God differs crucially from the *universal nature* that the stoics had set as the core and goal of their philosophy. In order to understand the authority that *God* has for the Christian thinkers this section will explain God's attributes, His role as creator, and how there is a distinction between His authority and what can be achieved by reason, which will play an important part in the later sections of this chapter and beyond.

2.1.1. God's attributes

God in Christian theology "is the beginning of things and their last end, and especially of rational creatures."[92] For many Christian thinkers His existence is self-evident, as the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in the human

92 T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Volume One*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), First Part, Q. 2.

mind.[93] The reasoning behind this is explained by Anselm in the Proslogion, an argument that is cited and afterwards denied by Aquinas:

> "as soon as the signification of the word 'God' is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. Therefore, since as soon as the word 'God' is understood it exists mentally, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore the proposition 'God exists' is self evident."[94]

God Himself is "the First Mover, and is Himself unmoved."[95] As He is "pure act, without any potentiality",[96] God does not consist of matter, but has form, "because His acts resemble the acts of a soul; for that we will anything, is due to our soul. Hence what is pleasing to His will is said to be pleasing to His soul."[97] This is a parallel to the stoic idea of the soul, as Aquinas says that the will is connected to the soul, as is the resulting action as a form of movement of the soul.[98]

A difference between the stoic idea of the universal nature and God is that God Himself is the same as His *being* or nature,[99] because of the fact that he is not composed of matter in any way.[100] God instead is "to be identified with his

93 Cf. Ibid., First Part, Q. 2 Art.1.
94 Ibid., First Part, Q. 2 Art.1. The respective argument of Anselm can be found in the *Proslogion*: Anselm, *Proslogion*, in: *Anselm of Canterbury Volume One*, trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (Toronto & New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1975), chapter 1 – 3.
95 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 3 Art.1. This idea is not new and refers back to Aristotle, who had introduced the principle of the unmoved mover.
96 Ibid., First Part, Q. 3 Art.2.
97 Ibid., First Part, Q. 3 Art.2.
98 Will is a faculty or power of the rational soul.
99 See 1.1.1.
100 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 3 Art.3.

own essence or nature."[101] Other than everything else in the universe he does not have an *essence* that is dependent of something else; His form of *being* is *the act of being* itself (*esse)*.[102] Everything that has an *essence* is dependent on and only participates in *being*, therefore the existence of everything else is dependant on God. God as this first *cause* and *principle* is the *best* and *most perfect*,[103] while being infinite, a statement that is contradictory to the belief of some ancient philosophers, who saw the first principle as something materially infinite.[104] But God Himself has no matter, so this idea cannot be applied on Him.[105] God is not only infinite and therefore eternal and immortal, but also *unchangeable*,[106] a very important attribute that also explains God's justice and why one ought to trust in God alone.[107] God is all good, and everything good comes from God. Further, God never changes in the aspect of his goodness, and so he was, is, and always will be *just*. Aquinas writes:

> "To be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness. […] For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him."[108]

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101 D. B. Burrell, *Aquinas God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 21.
102 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 3 Art.4.
103 Cf. Ibid., First Part, Q. 4 Art.1.
104 Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.150.
105 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 7 Art.1.
106 Cf. Augustine, "Concerning the Nature of Good", trans. A. H. Newman, in: *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. W. J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), chapter 1.
107 This will be further addressed in section 2.4.
108 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 6 Art.1.

God is therefore not only good, but also the ultimate good, a statement that raises the problem about the evil in the world, a topic that will also be touched on in later sections of this chapter in connection to the human soul and how it is open to corruption through evil.

Another attribute of the *universal nature* that has been discussed in the first chapter was its penetration of all things, at least to a certain extent, and the idea that all beings are part of the *universal nature*. Christian philosophy treats this matter as well, with different answers. Thomas Aquinas says that

> "God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident; but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. […] Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being."[109]

This is in a certain manner similar to the concept of the *universal nature* of the stoics, as the human being is created by God and able to connect with God through the soul because it is the part of the human that is closest to God. God is *being* itself, and as it has been explained earlier on, the living individual has a dependent relation to God. God is responsible for all things in existence and for their *goodness*, much like the *universal nature*. Reaching self-fulfilment in stoicism required one to be in accordance with the universal nature.[110] For Christianity, God takes over this role, and reaching happiness is dependent on the individual's faith, hope and love for God, a notion that will be further

109 Ibid., First Part, Q. 8 Art.1.
110 See section 1.1.1.

investigated in the later sections of this chapter.[111]

2.1.2. Authority and reason

The main and most important difference between God and the universal nature is that God is as an actual being that has an acting mind and will of His own, whereas the stoic universal nature is more of a principle that does not take active action in the universe. In stoicism the focus is set on the individual, as it has been shown in the first chapter. Christian philosophy, on the other hand, has a different approach to the matter, as it introduces *faith* as a major part of the human life and well-being. In order to grasp everything there is in creation and the creator, God, Himself, man has to go beyond reason, and this can only be accomplished by *faith*. While in stoicism *reason* enables one to "naturally [be] in the finest state possible,"[112] the Christian has to reach beyond which is possible by nature alone.

God, due to His attributes, takes the role of an absolute *authority* that has much more power than the universal nature, as He is *judging* human behaviour and punishes or rewards the individual. The stoics' universal nature is indifferent to human behaviour and there is no further judgement when a person fails to achieve happiness. This new authority causes a different approach to the matter of the happy life, of course, as through the presence of

111 See section 2.4.
112 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1099b.

God, *faith, hope* and *love* become a necessary addition to the natural virtues man needs to possess in order to achieve happiness and fulfilment, as we will see in the last section of the chapter.

With *faith* comes also the question of *reason*, the highest instance for the stoics, but less so for the Christian thinkers. Augustine says:

> "[B]ecause the minds of men are obscured by familiarity with darkness, which covers them in the night of sins and evil habits, and cannot perceive in a way suitable to the clearness and purity of reason, there is most wholesome provision for bringing the dazzled eye into the light of truth under the congenial shade of authority."[113]

Reason is no longer the way to achieve the ultimate goal, but rather *faith*, alongside with *hope* and *love*, are necessary virtues for the individual to possess in order to succeed, as there are matters essential to satisfaction and fulfilment that go beyond the senses, beyond the understanding of reason, and only through faith can the mind grasp those things.[114] This does not mean that reason is not important, but rather that reason is insufficient, and the individual can only reach perfection and happiness through the grace of God.[115] This radical difference between stoicism and Christian philosophy will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter.

God as the primal cause of everything, perfect and self-sufficient is the

113 Augustine, "On the Morals of the Catholic Church", trans. R. Stothert, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. W. J. Oates (New York: Random House, Inc., 1948), Chapter II.

114 Cf. Augustine, "The Enchiridion", trans. J. F. Shaw, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. W. J. Oates (New York: Random House, Inc., 1948), Chapter IV.

115 See chapter 2.4.3.

foundation of Christian philosophy. In this section His attributes were shown in order to establish the Christian view of the human being itself in the light of an almighty God, who is the ultimate authority that no man can escape from, and to draw certain distinctions between stoicism and Christian philosophy.

2.2. The soul and the body

This section will analyse the distinction between soul and body in the Christian tradition. Similar to stoic doctrine, the soul and the body for the Christian are two different, in the end separable things. However the soul for the Christian is the part of the human that can come closest to God and actually is immortal, which the stoics denied. But like in stoicism the human soul is exposed to evil and can be misguided.

2.2.1. How the soul is superior to the body

According to Aquinas the soul is the first principle of life, which means that it is not a bodily thing, but rather the *act* of a body. This means that it is the principle that gives life to the body but is not the body itself. A body can either be a non-living object, like, for example, a rock, or an animated object like the heart in a living body, which in itself has a principle of life. But the first principle of life for the human being is the soul.[116]

The human is composed of body and soul, as they together act as the human

116 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 75 Art.1.

being.[117] The human being has different attributes, some of which are distributed to the soul and others to the body. For example the health of a human "is a form of the body, and knowledge is a form of the soul."[118] But as stated above, the soul is the first principle and therefore "the first thing by which the body lives."[119] On the other hand, the body is the part that senses the things around it. Therefore, the body is a vital part of the human being as well. Matthews writes about Augustine's body-soul dualism:

> "Given Augustine's own endorsement of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, the idea that a mind might need to be seated in a body to live and function in its own proper way need be no threat to belief in the afterlife."[120]

In the first chapter the hierarchy of the different beings was mentioned, how the rational and animated is superior to the animated alone, which again is superior to the inanimate, a doctrine that goes back to Aristotle.[121] The same concept is applied by Aquinas when he explains the superiority of the human soul and how it is yet distinct from the body:

> "the nobler a form is, the more it rises above corporeal matter, the less it is merged in matter, and the more it excels matter by its power and its operation; hence we find that the form of a mixed body has another operation not caused by its elemental qualities. And the higher we advance in the nobility of forms, the more we find that the power of the form excels the elementary matter, as the vegetative soul excels the form of the metal, and the sensitive soul excels the vegetative soul. Now the human soul is the

117 Cf. Ibid., First Part, Q. 75 Art.4.
118 Ibid., First Part, Q. 76 Art.1.
119 Ibid., First Part, Q. 76 Art.1.
120 G. B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 52.
121 See 1.1.1.

highest and noblest of forms."[122]

This goes hand in hand with the explanation that God Himself does not have a corporal body, as He is even superior to the human soul. The key distinction for both hierarchies is the *intellect.* Aquinas says that the soul

> "excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever. This power is called the intellect."[123]

For this very reason the soul is to be rated higher than the body, even though the human being consists of both. Augustine said the rational mind (=rational soul) perceives itself by intellect alone and therefore is the only thing that can know God, because God is beyond the things that our bodily senses can perceive, as was pointed out in the former section.[124] Yet the soul is not as perfect as it ought to be; instead it is exposed to evil, which is a crucial topic for Christian philosophers and important for Hamlet's characterization later on, as he, despite his intellect, fails to follow the virtues and becomes corrupted by the passions instead. The Christians have their own explanation why this can happen even though the human is a good creation by God. In the next section this exposure to evil of the soul will be discussed.

122 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q. 76 Art.1.

123 Ibid., First Part, Q. 76 Art.1. This differs from the stoics as for them the soul is corporeal matter, too.

124 Augustine *The Morals of the Catholic Church,* Chapter XII. Augustine is talking about the rational (human) soul here. While plants and animals also have a soul, they still lack the intellect that is necessary for this kind of self-perception.

2.2.2. Exposure to evil

One of the questions for Christian thinkers is why there is evil in the world when God is almighty and all good. This question will not be the main focus, and a lot could be discussed around it. Within the scope of this thesis the problem of evil will be cut down to a few major arguments that will allow us to understand the Christian view on the passions, as the bad passions are growing out of an evil corruption of the soul. Only by understanding what one ought to avoid and why we will be able to understand why Hamlet fails, from a Christian point of view, by giving in to passion.

The first important point is the origin of evil, as it certainly does not come from God, as he is, like stated earlier, all good. Furthermore, as will be shown later, all and only good things come from God. God does not create evil and

> "would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil."[125]

With God ruled out as the creator of evil,[126] the question as to the source of evil remains. Augustine and Aquinas both see evil not as something that exists; it is rather the absence of the good, much like a bodily disease means the absence of health.[127] And like the human body is exposed to disease, the human

125 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter XI.
126 Though God will cause suffering in the form of punishments for sinners, a fact that is based on the view that God is just and will reward or punish humans according to their behaviour. Cf. Ibid., Chapter CV.
127 Cf. Ibid., Chapter XI.

soul is exposed to evil, and the deprivation of the good can cause a human, who in himself was good at first as he was created by God, to become evil.[128] Why God allows this to happen in the first place is a question that will not be discussed in this thesis. A short answer would be that God in His goodness gave men free will and because of that "people [are] able not to choose well,"[129] ignore the good and perform a wicked, evil deed. Because man himself is lesser than God, he is also to a lesser degree good, which indicates the flaws of the human nature and its exposure to evil.

This section has shown that the human body and soul are different things that are yet connected, while the human soul is closer to God as it is the primal principle of life for the human being, incorporeal and rational. On the other hand, the soul can yet never fully reach the state of God, even when it reaches its full potential, as it is always open to evil and can be corrupted, a notion that will be discussed in the next section.

2.3. Good and evil

This section will elaborate on the notions of good and evil that have been raised so far throughout this chapter. The focus will be on the former-mentioned corruption of the soul through passions, which is what happens to Hamlet's character as the play progresses and he gives in to the wrath he

128 Cf. Ibid., Chapter XIII.
129 B. Davis, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72.

develops against Claudius, leading up to irrational and spontaneous acts of passion, such as the murder of Polonius.[130]

2.3.1. The chief good

In stoicism, the highest good that everybody ought to seek is a life in accordance with the universal nature, which on results in a life of happiness.[131] The Christian thinkers also adapt the notion that everybody desires to live happily.[132] Augustine says that "no one can be happy who does not enjoy what is man's chief good, nor is there any one who enjoys this who is not happy."[133] This *chief good* has to be something that is accessible by man and is better than anything else he can achieve, since otherwise it would not be the best possible good. Also it must be something that cannot be lost against the will, because how could one be happy when he has the fear of loosing the good that makes him happy?[134] Therefore, true *happiness* is something that can never be lost once obtained, and one cannot possibly think of something rated higher and thereby worth striving for instead of this happiness. As has been pointed out in the preceding section of this chapter, in Christian philosophy the soul is rated higher than the body, much like in stoicism. Therefore the chief good has to be

130 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.23 – 27.
131 See 1.2.1.
132 Cf. Augustine, *The Morals of the Catholic Church,* Chapter III and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a.
133 Augustine, *The Morals of the Catholic Church,* Chapter III.
134 Cf. Ibid., Chapter III.

something related to the soul. As the soul is not perfect in itself,[135] one's highest goal should be the perfection of the soul with the help of the virtues, which are the goods of the soul, since the soul is the highest part of the human being, and in perfection of this highest part and its capacities the human can reach fulfilment and happiness.[136]

Augustine concludes that, as the soul is not perfect in itself, it has to reach out to something else (as reaching out to itself itself would be foolish).[137] The soul therefore *follows* after something that already possesses virtue and wisdom, two concepts that go hand in hand for the Christian thinkers as well. If one possesses virtue and wisdom he is called a wise man, so one could follow after the example of a wise man and learn from him. The other option would be to strive after God, because God is, as already explained in the first section of this chapter, the most perfect being.[138] Therefore, a wise man is inferior to the eternal God, in all respect. For example, man is mortal, while God will always remain. In following God one will "live both well and happily."[139]

2.3.2. All good comes from God, yet there is evil

In the Christian belief, God created everything out of nothing, which is also called *creatio ex nihilo*, which means that everything there is comes from God

135 See 2.2.1.
136 Cf. Augustine *The Morals of the Catholic Church,* Chapter VI.
137 Cf. Ibid.
138 Cf. Ibid.
139 Ibid.

and "has its being in relation to God."[140] Furthermore, everything also "depends on God for existence."[141] Now this means, according to the attributes that have been associated with God earlier, that everything in creation has to be good, as it is a willed and good creation from God Himself. God is neither arbitrary in what He does nor evil in any possible sense, but yet the things of His creation "are not supremely and equally and unchangeably good."[142] While God Himself is unchangeably good, the good only translates to the things He created in limited degrees according to the hierarchy of beings. Everything by its nature is actually good in the first place, though limited in its goodness. Augustine even goes so far to say that

> "[f]or however small or of whatever kind the being may be, the good which makes it a being cannot be destroyed without destroying the being itself."[143]

The sentence above makes two crucial statements: first, things exist because they are good. Their goodness is essential for their existence, because, and this is the second statement, if everything that makes a thing good is taken away from it, it ceases to exist at all as being itself is a good. Existence itself is a good as it comes from the all good God, who Himself is incorruptible.[144] Therefore there are no pure evil things in the world, because they simply

140 J. Soskice, "Aquinas and Augustine on Creation and God as 'Eternal Being'" *New Blackfriars* 95 (2014), 202.
141 Ibid., 193.
142 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter X.
143 Ibid., Chapter XII.
144 Cf. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. J. G. Pinlkington (New York: Liveright Publishing Group 1943), Book 9, Chapter IV.

cannot exist, and also, a thing is at first good and then may turn evil through what Augustine calls *corruption*. We can see two kinds of privation of the good here: the first being a limit to the good within all of creation, as it and the things it comprises can never be as excellent and therefore good as God Himself is, but yet everything is as such *good* in itself. And second, through this formerly mentioned *corruption*, it is possible for something like the human soul to fall away from this original, built-in good.

In the first chapter the things of the world were shown to be divided in the stoic view into the good, the bad, and the indifferent: a thing can only be one of those three, but never ever be good and bad at the same time. A man is either good or bad in the stoic view, but he cannot be both at the same time, say, for example, that he is good in the sense that he is prudent and at the same time unjust.[145] Augustine also says that it is true for many things that "two contraries cannot be predicated at the same time of the same thing."[146] But there is an exception for the contrary attributes *good* and *evil*, because "not only can they exist at the same time, but evil cannot exist without good, or in anything that is not good. Good, however, can exist without evil."[147] This again emphasizes that there cannot be evil without good, but on the other hand there can be good without evil. It shows that there has not to be necessarily something evil, and

145 See 1.2.3.
146 Augustine *The Enchiridion,* Chapter XIV.
147 Ibid.

even if it is evil, it is also good at the same time, because if it were entirely evil, it could not exist at all since existence is a kind of goodness. For example, a human will always be good in the way that he is a human, created by God (again, all things created by God are intrinsically good in a limited way as they are not God), but as he performs wicked deeds he is also evil.[148] So how does one, initially created as something good, become evil? Augustine classifies the goods and says there are higher, more perfect goods, that cannot be corrupted, the highest of all of them being God, and lesser goods, that indeed can be corrupted by evil. This idea is in contrast to stoicism, according to which all goods are rated equal.[149] The Christian thinkers have to move away from this concept as in their logic of the almighty good God there cannot be something bad in creation from the start, as this would question the authority and goodness of God. Therefore, the good things are not all perfect and corruption can alter them into something bad, or even evil, though never entirely evil as discussed earlier on. The soul is the part of the human that can be corrupted. This will be the next point being discussed.

2.3.3. Evil as a corruption of the soul

In the first chapter I discussed the movement of the soul towards something, in the optimal case the universal nature.[150] Aquinas asks the question whether

148 Cf. Ibid. Chapter XIII.
149 See 1.2.1.
150 See 1.3.3.

or not the will that moves men is always good. Again this is a tricky question, because men receive their will from God, and God only creates good things. In similarity to stoicism Aquinas says that it is the "good in general, to which the will tends naturally, as does each power to its object."[151] But also like in stoicism, the soul can be mislead by things that appear to be, but are not truly good.[152] Aquinas explains this phenomenon with the example of an appetite:

> "The will is a rational appetite. Now every appetite is only of something good. The reason of this is that the appetite is nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing. […] But it must be noted that, since every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things: while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellective or rational appetite, which we call the will, follows from an apprehended form. Therefore, just as the natural appetite tends to good existing in a thing; so the animal or voluntary appetite tends to a good which is apprehended."[153]

With the choice made possible by free will[154] comes the chance of making a bad decision. And even though the human nature itself is good, from it "may spring either a good or an evil will."[155] The evil itself is a *mistake* in the choices that are made, and those choices are made either because one does not yet know what he ought to do or he does not perform the action that he already knows he is ought to do: "The former is the sin of ignorance, the latter of

151 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q. 10 Art.1.
152 See 1.3.1.
153 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q. 8 Art.1.
154 Cf. Ibid., First Part of the Second Part, Q. 13 Art 6. Aquinas makes it clear that the choices men make are free and are not out of necessity.
155 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter XV.

weakness."[156] This leads to the conclusion that evil only exists because the will of men is free and can be corrupted.[157] Because men have the choice between good and evil, the former can be rewarded while the latter will be punished.[158] This results in the fact that men need *faith*, *hope,* and *love* (as we shall see later on) alongside reason in order to achieve the ultimate goal. Furthermore, men have to rely on God's help to succeed in life. Augustine says:

> "[M]an, therefore, was thus made upright that, though unable to remain in his uprightness without divine help, he could of his own mere will depart from it."[159]

One of the reasons why one might depart from goodness is that one can make choices influenced by passion, which will now be elaborated on in further detail.

2.3.4. Corruption through passions

In stoicism, the passions were defined as unnatural movements of the soul. Following passions leads one astray from the end of true happiness.[160] Aquinas agrees that the passions are something *passive* in the soul, insofar they cause a different attitude within the soul through a corporeal transmutation.[161] A

156 Ibid., Chapter LXXXI.
157 For example, one might not know that it is morally wrong to steal from another person, so he steals while being unaware (ignorant) of his wrongdoing. But if he is aware that stealing is a bad thing to do and he still commits to his action, it is seen as a weakness: the thief gives in to his desire of the object he is stealing, meaning he gives in to a passion and thereby commits a sin.
158 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter CV.
159 Ibid., Chapter CVII.
160 See 1.3.2.
161 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.22 Art.1.

passion is understood as something that influences the human in the sense that he looses something, mainly his health and goodness, which are his primary state. The passions transform the human insofar they move him towards or away from something in an unnatural manner.[162] In the last section the *will* was titled as *rational appetite*. The passions are also an appetite of the soul, as the soul gets drawn towards the things it desires through passion; for example, the desire for an apple is for the object itself and for its possession. Therefore the "the nature of passion is consistent with the appetitive […] part"[163] of the soul, and particularly the sensitive rather than the intellectual appetite, as it is a corporeal transmutation through sensitive influences by other corporeal things.[164]

For the stoics, the passions were necessarily bad, as they only differed between the four passions: *pain*, *fear, desire* and *pleasure*. All of them had in common that they were bad and therefore to be avoided.[165] For Aquinas, however, the passions are divided into *concupiscible* and *irascible,* whereby the *concupiscible* passions are the ones that are sensible, like *pain* and *pleasure*,

162 A passion like, for example, desire, can cause a man to take an irrational action he would not commit to if he would take a rational approach. Going back to the example of stealing: a person might have a strong desire for an object that does not belong to him. His passion for this object will cause him to take actions in order to fulfil his desire for this object, meaning to bring it in his possession. Both, the passion and the resulting action are *evil*.

163 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.22 Art.2.

164 Cf. Ibid., First Part of the Second Part, Q.22 Art.3.

165 See 1.3.2.

and the *irascible* are the ones in the mind, like *daring* and *fear.*[166] But both sorts of passions also have positive ones among them, for example *joy (concupiscible)* and *hope (irascible)*.[167] Aquinas answers that one

> "may consider the passions of the soul in two ways: first, in themselves; secondly, as being subject to the command of the reason and will. - If then the passions be considered in themselves, to wit, as movements of the irrational appetite, thus there is no moral good and evil in them, since this depends on the reason […]. If, however, they be considered as subject to the command of the reason and will, then moral good and evil are in them. […] Much more, therefore, may the passions, in so far as they are voluntary, be called morally good or evil. And they are said to be voluntary, either from being commanded by the will, or from not being checked by the will."[168]

So the passions can be either good or bad, and it depends on the commandment of the *will* to which side they are counted. This is drastically different from the stoic approach, which results out of the different use of the term *passion* itself: for the stoics the *passions* are outside of reason. They comprise every movement that exceeds or contradicts reason, whereas the passions in Aquinas' sense can on the one hand result in corruption and sin, but can also be virtuous when they are controlled by the will.[169] For example, *hope* is the passion opposing the passion of *fear.* But in distinction from fear, hope is controlled by the will and has a positive influence on the individual.[170]

166 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.23 Art.1.

167 This of course leaves out the question of how the passions are considered as a whole, when there are also *desirable* passions, like hope. In the next section it will be shown that *hope* is a crucial necessity for the Christian believer to achieve happiness and therefore is even considered a *virtue*. See 2.4.2.

168 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.24 Art.1.

169 Cf. Ibid., First Part of the Second Part, Q.24 Art.2.

170 See more about *hope* in section 2.4.2.

As every passion is related to something, be it an object or an act, the ultimate answer whether a passion itself is good or evil rests within the thing it is directed towards, because if the thing that the passion is moving towards itself is in discord with reason, the passion also has to be contradictory to reason.[171] Let us look at *Hamlet* for a concrete example: The (passion of) wrath that Hamlet has against his uncle, which is born out of the desire of revenge, leads to Hamlet killing Claudius. Murdering a person is evil and goes against reason, therefore the passion that leads to the act of murder also has to be irrational and evil as its sole end is the evil act. As the passions are movements of the soul, they misguide the soul as soon as one departs from reason and follows the passions. This corruption can lead to a life of unhappiness, as one fails to follow the good and truly desirable.

In summary, it can be said that the stoics and the Christian philosophers agree on the *passions* being evil when they are contrary to *reason*. When analysing Hamlet's behaviour later, the focus will be on the *passions* that are considered *evil* in both philosophies. The major difference between the two philosophies is the chief good, given that it is related to the authorial God in Christian thinking in contrast to the stoic view, whereby the chief good can be achieved by reason of the human alone. This leads to the last section of this chapter, where the focus will be set on the life one ought to live. We will see

171 Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.24 Art.4.

that the approach that the Christian philosophers propose differs from what the stoics considered important and valuable. A Christian needs to posses *faith*, *hope* and *love,* virtues which are only of minor importance for the stoics, but indispensable in the eyes of Christian thinkers, as they allow one to surpass the boundaries set by reason and embrace the supernatural with the help of God's grace.

2.4. Faith, hope and love

During the course of this chapter the importance of God has been mentioned: While in stoicism striving for a life in accordance with the universal nature only requires reason, in Christian philosophy the key to the chief good is striving after God.[172] In his work *The Enchiridion*, Augustine says that "God is to be worshipped with faith, hope and love,"[173] three components that did not play any important role in stoicism whatsoever. For the Christian philosophers, on the other hand, they are inevitable for the good life as only through them one "becomes aware of the reality of the Divine Trinity in a way which transcends all natural awareness."[174]

2.4.1. Why one has to believe

The first question that has to be answered by Augustine is: why and what should one believe? *Faith* is the starting point, as there are things that one

172 See 2.3.1.
173 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter III.
174 J. Pieper, *The Christian Idea of Man* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2011), 38.

cannot perceive through the senses, as it has already been stated in the first section of this chapter.[175] Davis explains that

> "Faith, by which Aquinas roughly means 'belief without knowledge' (belief without what he calls *scientia*), is not, for him, automatically to be dismissed as intellectually unrespectable. On the contrary, there is a sense in which he takes it to be a virtue."[176]

Faith is a belief / virtue given by God that one could never deduce by one's own reasoning alone. Faith is the belief in the supernatural which involves truths that cannot be deduced by reason. Aquinas says that "inquiry is not part of the concept of faith."[177] This means that one cannot access knowledge about the supernatural without going beyond what can be known by inquiry. Other than worldly knowledge that has to be gained through inquiry and assent, belief is a simple knowledge of truth that "is not [discursive] thought, which means knowledge involving comparison",[178] though we can reason about these truths. Of course this goes against the approach of the stoics, and this is why we will see the stoic characters, Hamlet and Horatio, having a hard time committing to *faith.* As they value reason, having faith would mean they have to go beyond what is accessible by reason, a step to which they are opposed.

Without faith, *hope* and *love* cannot exist, as the latter two require faith. Without faith there is no hope, and without hope there is no love. Faith believes

175 See 2.1.2.; also sections 3.2.1., 3.2.2. and 3.2.5.
176 Davis, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil,* 40.
177 Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, trans. J. V. McGlynn (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), Q. 14 Art. 2.
178 Ibid., Q. 14 Art. 5.

and prays to God and only through praying as the foundation of the relationship with God there can be hope and love.[179] One can believe in both good and evil things, yet *faith* itself is good, not evil.[180] One ought to believe in the sense of *faith*, that "the only cause of all created things, whether heavenly or earthly, whether visible or invisible, is the goodness of the Creator, the one true God."[181] Faith is also unbound to time and character; one can believe in things that are located in the past, present or future, regardless of whether they are connected to himself or others. For example, one can believe that Christ died in the past, now sits by the side of God and will come to judge in the future, but there is no way to proof this or have an adequate reason to *believe* it.[182]

Faith does not play a major role in stoicism at all. The movement of the soul towards the universal nature is characterized as something *natural*, that every human possesses. One does not need a special belief of the supernatural in order to achieve the ultimate goal in stoicism, which is given by the fact that there is no need for the human to be saved by an all powerful God or to believe in things beyond rational capacities. In stoicism, human happiness is within human nature itself and the happy life can be reached naturally and rationally on one's own. For the Christians, however, the natural is not sufficient, as they see the stoic end as unsatisfying and unfulfilling. The salvation through *faith* is

179 Cf. Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter VII.
180 Cf. Ibid. Chapter VIII.
181 Ibid. Chapter IX.
182 Cf. Ibid., Chapter VIII.

necessary because there is more than the natural: the *supernatural*, the immortality of the soul, and God. But also *faith* alone is not enough, as one has to *hope* to be saved by the grace of God.

2.4.2. How hope connects man and God

With the foundation of *faith,* man is able to hope and love. Like one believes in the unseen, be it something in the future or out of sense-perception, one also hopes only for the unseen, because as soon as it is seen by the individual that had hoped for it, he no has to hope for it. The same goes if someone who knows for certain that something he hoped for is not going to happen. Yet, in distinction from faith, hope

> "has for its object only what is good, only what is future, and only what affects the man who entertains the hope."[183]

Also the difference between belief and hope is that evil beings can believe that something will happen, while on the other hand, hope in its *virtuous* form is something that can only apply to the good in the eyes of Augustine.[184] Hope exceeds faith in the sense that one has to hope for God's rewards and mercy:

> "Hope is the answer – given by God to the Christian in his inner existence – to the revealed fact that Christ, in the most real sense of the world, is the 'Way' to eternal life."[185]

In his prayers a good Christian is meant to pray for God's guidance, as man

183 Ibid. Chapter VIII.
184 Cf. Ibid.
185 Pieper, *The Christian Idea of Man*, 38.

cannot obtain the happy life without God's help. This is, of course, a major difference from the stoic idea that one can obtain the happy life by himself through the use of reason, following his own natural movement of the soul without being led astray. Augustine on the other hand says that one has to hope that God's grace will let man grow in the course of this mortal life on earth, but the perfect state of life is something "which is to be looked for in another life,"[186] the after-life in which a good soul might be granted eternal life. Just as *faith* is the perfection of *reason* as it goes beyond reason, *hope* is the perfection of the *will*. We hope for what we cannot achieve through will alone, but still desire as we strive for fulfilment. Those things we hope for are only known by *faith*, as they cannot be attained through our rational capacities. Yet this desire alone is not the end, as it needs the final virtue of *love*.

2.4.3. Love as a virtue of the good man

Love, the third component that one needs in order to achieve the happy life, is greater than faith and hope, because

> "the greater the measure in which it dwells in a man, the better is the man in whom it dwells."[187]

This is taken even a step further when Augustine says that if a man is good or not depends on the answer to the question of what he loves, because neither the beliefs nor the hopes of a man truly determine whether he is good or evil. In

186 Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* Chapter CXV.
187 Ibid., Chapter CXVII.

consequence, the one who loves the right thing, God, also believes and hopes rightly, whereas

> "the man who has not love believes in vain, even though his beliefs are true; and hopes in vain, even though the objects of his hope are a real part of true happiness."[188]

The gift of love is obtained through the help of God when a Christian passes through the four stages of life described by Augustine: At first a man "lives according to the flesh, undisturbed by any struggle of reason or conscience."[189] Eventually through learning the laws of God he comes to the knowledge of sin and that it is wrong to give in to the bodily pleasures without reasoning. This process of learning under the law is the second state. The third state is when a man starts to put his faith in God's help, and with the love of God man starts to struggle against the power of the flesh:

> "and although there is still in the man's own nature a power that fights against him (for his disease is not completely cured), yet he lives the life of the just by faith, and lives in righteousness so far as he does not yield to evil lust, but conquers it by the love of holiness."[190]

The final fourth state, however, cannot be reached in the mortal life. Only in the resurrection of the body after the General Judgement will man find perfection and peace, which makes it necessary to believe and hope for it as it is always in the future and something hidden from sense-perception as long as one lives. Love, as a virtue, is also the cure for passion, as with the growth of

188 Ibid.
189 Cf. Ibid., Chapter CXVIII.
190 Ibid.

love passion diminishes until love comes to a fullness that can be surpassed by nothing.[191] This means that love surpasses the passions and makes them obsolete, as *true* love in the sense of the Christian virtue fulfils a person. For example, if someone possesses the virtue of love, he will no longer desire anything else, as through love he has reached everything he has ever desired. This idea is in accordance with the statement that was made earlier on that faith, hope, and love surpass reason and will, which helps to overcome the passions in stoicism.

This chapter has addressed the notions the soul, the good, and the passions in Christian philosophy under the influence of an almighty, intervening God. This causes a different approach to the matter of the happy life overall as He takes the role of the chief good and His mercy is an essential requisite in order to overcome passion and live a good life. While there are good and evil passions in Christianity, the evil passions are treated in a similar way as they are by the stoics: the passions are irrational movements of the soul towards something outside oneself that lead one away from the good. Their avoidance is mandatory if one wants to be a good man.

With both philosophies laid out it is now possible to approach the character of Hamlet and put his character and actions to the test in the light of the points raised during the course of the first two chapters.

191 Cf. Ibid., Chapter CXXI.

Chapter 3: How do both philosophies relate to Hamlet's character?

In this chapter Hamlet's character will be discussed in the light of the elements of the two philosophical traditions introduced in the first two chapters. But before I touch on the character himself, I will to examine the world that surrounds the fictional character of Hamlet. Within the play, what does he actually know about those two traditions, and how do they relate to him? This is not an attempt to give a full historical account, but rather to provide an interpretation of the statements made within the play that allow for an analysis of Hamlet's knowledge and education as alluded to by Shakespeare within the play. Therefore the first section of this chapter will explore the influences of the two former mentioned philosophies on Hamlet and the resulting expectations on Hamlet as a character. Then it will be possible to analyse crucial scenes in the play and Hamlet's actions in them and tie those actions back to the two philosophies previously discussed. We will see that Hamlet, while at first apparently a through and through rational personality, fails to commit to action. He also fails to commit to *faith* even though he is facing the supernatural that exceeds his reasoning. Unlike his friend and teacher Horatio, he will not be able to overcome the internal struggles that plague him for the whole of the play. This struggles of passion against the former raised two proper ends will be analysed in this chapter to ultimately

help interpreting Hamlet's wavering depiction throughout the play. After a lot of back and forth swaying we will see Hamlet to give in to passion in the end, which, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, is a bad thing. This commitment to passion results in *unhappiness*, and in Hamlet's case in his own death.

3.1. The world of *Hamlet*

Hamlet is written at a time when Europe as a whole is living through a number of cultural and intellectual changes. Martin Luther's Reformation unsettles the Catholic Church and undermines its power. The structures that lasted for centuries are loosening, and society discovers ancient, classical antiquity and tries to recreate aspects of ancient times.[192] The pagan traditions that are being revived are in certain ways in conflict with the Christian culture that is well established. While in some ways the "classical and Christian culture can be harmonised,"[193] there are of course differences in lifestyle and philosophy, as we have seen in reference to the stoics and some aspects of Christian thought. In this section I will discuss the influences of ancient philosophy and Christianity on the characters within the play. This analysis includes the education of Hamlet and the characters who interact with him over the course of the play and influence him. At the end of the section I will draw

192 Cf. P. A. Cantor, *Shakespeare Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1 – 3.
193 Ibid., 2.

conclusions about the expectations that the world within the play has of a character in Hamlet's position: on the one hand he is expected to obey his new king, but on the other hand he also wants to fulfil the wish to avenge his father's ghost.[194]

3.1.1. Influences of stoicism: Hamlet's teacher and friend Horatio

The play appears to be set in the Renaissance period in Denmark, after the Lutheran Reformation in the early sixteenth century.[195] The classical period is rediscovered and the Greek and Roman traditions are revived. This movement is not only limited to philosophy, but can be seen in multiple fields such as architecture, art, and even forms of political structures.[196] In philosophy, the ancient virtues taught by the stoics, such as justice, courage, etc., that have been assimilated into Christianity are still valued, and especially people of noble birth and high education, like Hamlet, are expected to live according to them.

In the play, the ancient traditions are taught to Hamlet by his teacher and friend Horatio, who "is generally agreed to be a stoic personality."[197] His Greek name underlines his purpose within the story. Even though there is not much

194 This section will be limited to the world within the play, which is, of course, an imaginary portrayal created by Shakespeare, set in his own period of time. The goal of the section is to examine how both ancient philosophy and Christianity influence the play, particularly Hamlet's character, and are displayed within the play through the scope that Shakespeare provides.

195 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 3.

196 Cf. Cantor, *Shakespeare Hamlet*, 2.

197 L. K. Hoff, *Hamlet's Choice* (Lewiston & other: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 320.

information about Horatio contained in the play other than he is “a scholar who has returned from Wittenberg,”[198] Horatio plays a very important part, as he is present at the very beginning and end and acts as a narrator, telling other characters about the events.[199] In stoic tradition, Horatio is able to master his own soul and is ruled by reason.[200] Hamlet praises Horatio in the middle of the play, when he says:

> “As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,
> A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgement are so well commeddled”[201]

Hamlet speaks highly of Horatio's character and the philosophy he stands for. He further describes Horatio as one who “is not passion's slave”[202] and so are the stoics “not a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please.”[203] These are all traits of the *wise man* as he is described in stoicism.[204] Hamlet's speeches often indicate a knowledge of stoic doctrines, like for example when he says to Rosencrantz: “Why, then 'tis none to you, for there is nothing / either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”[205] This line, which is part of the discussion that Denmark feels like a prison to Hamlet, will be further analysed in section 3.2.2. Hamlet refers to the indifference of things which can be used

198 Blits, *Deadly Thought “Hamlet” and the Human Soul*, 27.
199 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.79 – 107 and 5.2.74 – 87.
200 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought “Hamlet” and the Human Soul*, 198.
201 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 3.2.68 – 71.
202 Ibid., 3.2.74.
203 Ibid., 3.2.72 – 73.
204 See section 1.4.1.
205 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*,, 2.2.53 – 54.

in a good or a bad way, and the reasoning of the individual causes them to be one or the other.[206] Even though the word *stoicism* is not mentioned once during the play, the citations above imply that stoic ideas play a part within it.

On the other hand, Hamlet also criticises those stoic ideas and points out their limitations in his opinion. Right in the first act, Hamlet tells Horatio that "[t]here are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."[207] This accusation appears to be due to the conflict between Christianity and ancient philosophy that has been touched on in the last chapter. Hamlet, a Christian, believes in things (and even sees them in the form of the ghost) that go beyond what can be explained by reason and stoic doctrine, as there is no *supernatural* in stoicism, but in Christianity.[208] The Christian thinkers tell men to put their trust in God as soon as reason fails to explain an experience like the appearance of the ghost, as the human being is unable to grasp the supernatural on his own.[209] This contrast will now be further elaborated with an indication of how Christianity influences Hamlet and the play.

206 See section 1.2.4.
207 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 1.5.166 – 167.
208 See section 2.4.1.
209 See section 2.4.1.

3.1.2. Influences of Christianity: Marcellus as a representative of Christian Culture in Denmark

Christianity permeates the culture in which the play is set. Every character within the play is, as far as we know, Christian, and takes Christian doctrines very seriously.[210] Furthermore, Hamlet is said to have studied in Wittenberg, the city where Martin Luther himself has started the Reformation. The university of Wittenberg "was famous in the early sixteenth century for its teaching of bot humanism […] and Luther's new doctrine of salvation."[211]

In the first act of the play, the contradiction between stoicism and Christianity is already being set up when the guards Marcellus and Barnardo discuss the appearance of the ghost together with Horatio. The guards ask for Horatio's opinion on the ghost and urge him to speak to it since he is a scholar.[212] After the exit of the ghost, Marcellus tries to explain its behaviour with a Christian tale:

> "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 that time."[213]

The language of Marcellus shows his faith in God. In contrast to Horatio, he

210 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 3.
211 Ibid., 4.
212 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.23 – 29 and 1.1.41.
213 Ibid., 1.1.157 – 164.

does not necessarily trust his own reasoning as neither of both can provide a scientific explanation for the event. The contrast between Christianity and stoicism in this scene is split between Horatio (stoicism) and the guards (Christianity). Hamlet himself, however, appears to combine both Christian and stoic doctrines in himself, which creates to several conflicting situations. When he meets the ghost he calls for heavenly assistance as he says: “Angels and ministers of grace defend us!”[214] As a well-educated member of the royal family, Hamlet of course has an in-depth knowledge of the bible and refers to it through the course of the play.[215] This apparent knowledge of both, stoic and Christian philosophy sets the foundation of the problems Hamlet finds himself in during the course of the play. Being exposed to both traditions, it is clear that there are set expectations for Hamlet's character, and also expectations he sets for himself over the course of the play according to those traditions. We will see later that Hamlet tends to pick whatever suits his needs from both philosophies while remaining unwilling to face the consequences of his own action.[216]

3.1.3. Expectations on Hamlet

Hamlet, as the son of the late king, is the heir to the throne of Denmark in troubling times.[217] As already mentioned before, he appears to be well educated

214 Ibid., 1.4.39.
215 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.13 – 14 and 4.2.6.
216 See section 3.2.4.
217 The conflict with Norway is mentioned several times throughout the play, and at the end

and intelligent, struggling with philosophical questions throughout the play in his soliloquises. As the lead character of the play, he has a relation to all the other characters who appear and have different expectations of the prince. For example, his uncle, King Claudius, expects Hamlet to stop his mourning for the old king and move on:

> "Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,
> A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
> To reason most absurd, whose common theme
> Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried
> From the first corse till he that died today,
> "This must be so.""[218]

It is in Claudius' own interest of course that Hamlet does not think further about and investigate the death of the old king as Claudius himself murdered him.[219] He also wants to keep Hamlet at court and prevent Hamlet's return to Wittenberg.[220] This wish is seconded by Hamlet's mother, and Hamlet himself is expected to obey the command of the King and his mother, which he does.[221] This results in a struggle for Hamlet as soon as he meets the ghost of his father, who asks Hamlet to avenge "his foul and most unnatural murder."[222] Throughout the play Hamlet struggles to take action and fulfil the commandment of his father, which means that he has to disobey and act against his King and his own mother, and also against the principles he appears to

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the prince of Norway claims the throne. Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.389 – 391.

218 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.101 – 106.

219 Cf. Ibid., 1.5.60 – 79.

220 Cf. Ibid., 1.2.106 – 117.

221 Cf. Ibid., 1.2.120.

222 Ibid., 1.5.25.

value. Revenge itself belongs to God according to Christian philosophy.[223] For a human, seeking vengeance, is something "hurtful, which bears the character of evil."[224] Revenge, or vengeance, are born out of the passion of *anger* according to Aquinas and of *desire* in stoicism.[225] While at first Hamlet is resistant to the passion, he gives in to it more and more. As the play progresses we will see throughout the scenes how his commitment to the passion of anger results in a spiral of violence that causes the murder of Polonius, later Laertes and Claudius and ultimately Hamlet himself.[226]

Hamlet, who thinks very highly of his father, at first struggles to commit to the demanded revenge. In secondary literature Hamlet's struggle is often explained by the contrast between the above stated evil character of vengeance in philosophy and the "heroic ethos which demands […] repay[ing] violence with violence, and ethos associated in the play with the world of classical antiquity, but also with the pagan past of Denmark."[227] So there are two possible takes on *revenge* for Hamlet. On the one hand it is a passion to be avoided, but it is also seen as something heroic, and Hamlet, who often compares his father with antique heroes, has to choose whether he wants revenge in the heroic way and abandon stoic philosophy and Christian

223 Cf. Romans 12:19.
224 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.46 Art.2.
225 See 1.3.2. and Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Q.46 Art.1 and 2.
226 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.26, 5.2.327 and 5.2.333.
227 Cantor, *Shakespeare Hamlet*, 32.

compassion, or leave the fate of the wrongdoers in God's hand, like Christianity demands.

So it is hardly surprising that it takes quite a while until Hamlet finally takes action within the play and no longer only dwells in thoughts. This transformation of Hamlet's character will be examined in the next section on the basis of several scenes throughout the play that display the change of Hamlet's character and allow an analysis of the very same in the light of stoic and Christian passions.

3.2. Hamlet's transformation: from thinking to action

Hamlet's character transformation will be analysed in six scenes that show Hamlet's tension between thinking and taking action and struggle to hold true to the philosophy he praises. The transformation starts with the dialogue that Hamlet has with the ghost of his father in act one scene five, wherein the ghost sets up Hamlet’s change of character with the demand for revenge. But it takes several scenes in which Hamlet continues to dwell in his thoughts, trying to find proof of Claudius' fault before he finally starts to take action in the second half of the play. Tragically, the first real action that he takes leads to the unintended murder of Polonius in act three scene four. From there on, Hamlet spirals down in consecutive actions that conclude with Hamlet fulfilling the ghost's demand at the cost of his own life in act five scene two.

The scenes will be analysed in the light of stoicism and Christian philosophy focusing on the themes presented earlier. In these scenes Hamlet's character transformation is displayed not only in the way he treats his own passions, as he gives in to *fear* and *wrath* (as a form of *desire*), but also in how he tries to hold true to the virtues of both philosophies, which is also shown in the parts of the play where he lectures others, especially his mother, about those virtues. While at first, Hamlet appears to be a very calm and collected character, he is ruled by his passions by the end of the play and therefore fails to achieve the goal of both philosophies: the happy life.

3.2.1. Hamlet's interaction with his father's ghost

The meeting between Hamlet and the ghost of his father sets up the later events of the play, as the ghost asks Hamlet to revenge him during their conversation.[228] Before the meeting actually occurs in scenes four and five of act one, Horatio tells to the depressed Hamlet that he has seen the old king "yesternight."[229] This raises Hamlet's curiosity and he asks Horatio to give him a detailed explanation of the appearance of the ghost.[230] Hamlet then decides to join the watchmen the following night to investigate this strange event, as he "doubt[s] some foul play."[231]

228 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.5.25.
229 Ibid., 1.2.189
230 Cf. Ibid., 1.2.195 – 241.
231 Ibid., 1.2.255.

When the guards, Horatio, and Hamlet engage the ghost in scene four, the shade is reluctant to speak to them even after Hamlet challenges him and calls him "King, father, royal Dane."[232] Instead, the ghost signals Hamlet to follow him, which sets up the final scene of the act wherein the ghost finally speaks to Hamlet. Hamlet is not afraid of the ghost after he thinks he recognizes his father in him. While the others are fearful and tell him not to follow the ghost, he says:

> "what should be the fear?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
> And for my soul, what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal as itself?"[233]

The passage shows that he does not care about his life, but only about his soul, which he thinks is immortal. This is a Christian rather than stoic belief, as has been pointed out in the second chapter. The soul is the vital part of the human being that can achieve eternal life. Hamlet has faith that his soul cannot be damaged by the ghost and thereby has the courage to follow him, while Horatio, the scholar, is reluctant to chase after Hamlet and the ghost. Horatio seems quite surprised that such a supernatural thing as a ghost exists. Its appearance transcends eludes the realm of reason to which the stoics cling. There is no rational explanation for the existence and behaviour of the ghost, causing the stoic Horatio to fall back to Christian faith (as he is also a

232 Ibid., 1.4.45.
233 Ibid., 1.4.64 – 67.

Christian), and proclaims that "Heaven will direct it."[234] Marcellus, the guard, however, contrasts Horatio's hesitation, and still jumps into action by saying: "Nay, let's follow him."[235] Horatio himself is "passive and wavering"[236] and willing to put his trust into the Heavens rather than in himself and his action. This is actually very uncharacteristic for a stoic and shows the limits of stoicism as soon as it encounters something supernatural that can apparently not be explained by reasoning. Marcellus shows courage and *faith* in this particular scene, a virtue that the stoic normally does not have to rely on, as his reasoning alone suffices. The conflict between stoic action and Christian faith starts right in this scene and not even Horatio is safe from the struggle.

Hamlet himself, however, is engaging the ghost right at the start of the next scene and willing to listen to him.[237] The ghost then explains that he is indeed Hamlet's father and gets right to the point that he wants revenge for "his foul and most unnatural murder."[238] Now Hamlet immediately responds:

> "Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love
> May sweep to my revenge."[239]

Hamlet proclaims that he will, without further thought, take the revenge that the ghost asks for. He does not question the ghost's reliability, but trusts in the

234 Ibid., 1.4.91.
235 Ibid., 1.4.92.
236 Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 95.
237 Cf. Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 1.5.7.
238 Ibid., 1.5.25.
239 Ibid., 1.5.29 – 31.

supernatural appearance that goes far beyond his rational understanding and experience. He follows the Christian motive of faith, even though he does not know where the ghost has come from and even wondered just one scene prior if the ghost's intentions were "wicked or charitable."[240] Hamlet regards the ghost's story as true and says that he is willing to act according to the ghost's wish. But even though his words promise immediate action, Hamlet fails to follow through with this action for the first two acts of the play. Instead, we will see him loosing himself in thought, even though he swears that

> "Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> Ass saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> unmixed with baser matters. Yes, by heaven!"[241]

He promises to limit his thoughts to the revenge alone and to be single-minded about it.[242] Hamlet concludes his oath with the very Christian phrase *by heaven*, which is interesting, as revenge is not for the human to take according to the bible, which states: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord."[243] Hamlet seems not to care about this fact, even though he only wants to take revenge on Claudius, but not on his mother, as his father said "Leave

240 Ibid., 1.4.42.
241 Ibid., 1.5.98 – 104.
242 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 105.
243 Romans 12:19.

her to heaven."[244] Still, Hamlet is also turned against his mother and calls her "pernicious woman."[245] With this promise the stage is set for the upcoming conflict between Hamlet and Claudius on the one hand, which will slowly unfold and end up with the death of both, and the conflict between Hamlet and his mother on the other, which will only be verbal, as he "speak[s] daggers to her, but use[es] none."[246]

In this scene it is already clear that Hamlet is a split character. Even more than Horatio, as shown earlier on, he is torn between the supernatural Christian virtues and reasoning, which shows the limits it has been attacked for by Christianity in this very event: There is no scientific or reasonable explanation for the supernatural, so the characters who encounter the ghost have to embrace the supernatural with the help of *faith.*[247] Hamlet has decided to take revenge on Claudius by himself, and not leave it to God as it is demanded by the bible. This element of ancient heroism is opposed to Christian virtues and stoicism in the sense that Hamlet never rationally thinks about the thoughts and action he will take later on based on this passion of revenge. Hamlet is torn between "the currents of attraction and repulsion which the polarities of heroism exercise upon him."[248] He is willing to leave his mother to God's justice, because his

244 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.5.86.
245 Ibid., 1.5.105.
246 Ibid., 3.3.404
247 See section 2.4.1.
248 G. K. Hunter, "The Heroism of Hamlet", in *Hamlet*, ed. E. Arnold (Frome & London: Butler & Tanner, 1963), 94.

father asked him to. Apparently, he sees his father as a higher authority than God. This view is supported by the fact that Hamlet praises his father in the play as a hero, and the hero's death at the hand of the villain Claudius asks for revenge according to the formerly mentioned heroic ethos.[249] Opposing this desire for revenge are the stoic and Christian philosophy. Even Horatio, the stoic scholar, has to fall back to Christian appeal of the possibility of the supernatural as he confronts the ghost.

But even if Hamlet's desire for revenge can be justified by the heroic ethos, his overall reaction appears to be without much reasoning about the given situation. Stoicism characterises the *anger* that Hamlet is experiencing as a passion that "is a desire for revenge on one who seems to have done an injustice inappropriately."[250] Hamlet is willing to jump right into action, at least he claims so in this scene (which will later on proven to be false). He wants to follow this irrational impulse, born out of the *pain* and *sorrow* over his father's murder, which will ultimately lead to him killing Claudius. So not only is the motive of revenge condemned by Christian virtue, but also by stoicism as it is characteristic of the passions. A wise man, according to the stoics, would never give in to this kind of *desire* and follow it for its own end.[251] Hamlet, however, is already blinded and not willing or able to think rationally about his impulse.

249 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.56 – 65.
250 Diogenes Laertius, 7.113.
251 See section 1.4.1.

He appears to be reckless about the conclusion he draws from the ghost's words. But it turns out that, other than expected from his strong words, Hamlet will not take immediate action. Instead he will start to question himself and try to find proof of Claudius' guilt. In the next section I will examine the part of the play in which Hamlet appears more thoughtful than in the scene just described, and it will be shown that he does not give in to passion just yet.

3.2.2. Hamlet loosing himself in thoughts

This section will analyse a couple of scenes throughout the second and the beginning of the third act where we can experience Hamlet as a very rational character, who is plotting the setup for his revenge. But as this part of the play comes to an end it will become clear that "the susceptibility of Hamlet's reason to emotion"[252] will lead to his own demise.

At first, however, the rational part is still dominating Hamlet's character, which is underlined right the first time he appears on stage in scene two of act two as he is reading a book.[253] He engages in a conversation with Polonius, who, in the earlier part of the scene, has questioned Hamlet's reasoning and whether he might have become mad.[254] This scene develops the relationship between Hamlet and Polonius, showing that Hamlet thinks Polonius a fool,

252 E. P. Levy, *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man* (Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 139.
253 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.68.
254 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.92.

which he will eventually call him later when Hamlet accidentally kills him.[255] When Polonius starts talking to Hamlet, the latter's answers are very confusing and partly offensive, which is due to the fact that Hamlet wants "to be judged insane, [and] intentionally misleads Polonius."[256] But for the reader, this proves quite the opposite: during the conversation

> "Hamlet speaks in apparent nonsequiturs and with sudden shifts of meaning, taking words in a sense different from the one meant. Sometimes he passes from a figurative to a literal sense of a word, other times from a literal to a figurative sense. […] Using various well-established techniques of repartee, he seems content merely with showing himself superior to Polonius in wit, while deflating, insulting, and taunting him."[257]

Hamlet's words are well thought out, as we will see in the following paragraphs, which indicates that he, in fact, is not mad, but very calculating and intelligent. This will be important later on when the question of Hamlet's madness is raised again, because in the following analysis Hamlet appears to know exactly what he is doing as he is outclassing Polonius with his responses. When judging Hamlet's character it is important to realize that he, at least at this stage of the play, is certainly not mad and can be held account for the words he is using.

Hamlet starts off calling Polonius a "fishmonger,"[258] which Polonius takes in the literal sense of the word. He is confused that Hamlet seems not to know

255 Cf. Ibid., 3.4.32.
256 Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 141.
257 Ibid., 141f.
258 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.174.

who he is, even though Hamlet showed interest in his daughter Ophelia.[259] Hamlet, however, was calling him a fishmonger in a figurative sense, as he is selling not only information (to the King and Queen earlier in the scene), but he also tries to 'sell' his daughter to Hamlet.[260] When Polonius, confused, points out that he is not the low tradesman Hamlet just called him, Hamlet answers: "Then I would you were so honest a man."[261] Hamlet is discussing honesty with Polonius and mourns that there are apparently not many people in this world that are honest.[262] Hamlet does not know that Polonius is working together with the King and the Queen and trying to find out more about Hamlet's state of mind, but Hamlet's behaviour suggests that he suspects Polonius of being involved somehow in the plot. But Hamlet is not willing to take any action other than duelling Polonius with words at this stage and outwitting him during their conversation. Hamlet, even though he is unhappy about his situation and is out for revenge, only pretends to be insane; his answers still are very calculated. Still, his "method to give a straightforward answer that only *appears* to be nonsense"[263] is interpreted as a sign of madness by Polonius, which shows that he indeed is not on par with Hamlet's intellect when he says to himself: "How / pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness / that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity / could not so prosperously be

259 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.175.
260 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.43 – 49 and cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 142.
261 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 2.2.176.
262 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.178f.
263 Hoff, *Hamlet's Choice*, 268.

delivered of."[264] Polonius makes a fool out of himself and Hamlet keeps calling him one, even after he kills Polonius by accident.[265] Polonius comes to the conclusion that Hamlet is mad because his replies are so intelligent. This is quite an odd conclusion after this brief dialogue between them and in fact only shows that Polonius is the foolish one who got tricked by Hamlet's intention to appear mad. We have learned from this scene that Hamlet is very articulate and deliberates his words. The following scene will flesh this facet of Hamlet's character even more.

After the exit of Polonius, Hamlet's friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter the stage, and Hamlet has a discussion with them that reveals his views on fortune and man. This section shows the sophisticated view Hamlet has of stoicism and proves once more that he is, in fact, a very rational and well educated character that is far from madness. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the other hand have a try at stoic positioning, but fail to interpret them correctly. When Hamlet asks them how they are, Rosencrantz answers: "As the indifferent children of the earth,"[266] and Guildenstern adds: "Happy in that we are not overhappy."[267] They both misuse the terms according to the stoic view here, though, because they think that one has to be indifferent and must not be overly happy. In stoic tradition, however, one cannot possibly be 'overhappy',

264 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 2.2.210 – 213.
265 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.221 and 3.4.32.
266 Ibid., 2.2.230.
267 Ibid., 2.2.231.

as “joy and goods spirits”[268] are the byproducts of a virtuous life in accordance with nature.[269] While Rosencrantz uses the term *indifferent* for their general condition rather than to rate the external goods, Guildenstern “confuses moderate happiness with moderation as happiness.”[270] It sounds like both of them make the mistake that the stoics have pointed out in the *base man*: they claim to be *indifferent*, which suggests that they do not follow the movement of happiness, which is also indicated by the saying that they are “not overhappy.” This is a failure according to stoicism, as happiness is not something one should be indifferent towards. Happiness is the highest good, and all movement should be directed towards it.[271] Even though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear to be stoic figures, it is clear that they fail to fully understand stoicism. It seems that for them a scholar has to be indifferent towards everything, so nothing controls him. They appear to be afraid of the possibility of falling into a trap of passion: being overly happy might lead them astray, so they have to moderate their happiness and control it. *Happiness* in the stoic sense, however, cannot result in something bad. The *good* is called 'good' because it can never cause bad. This has been shown in the first chapter by the example of the virtues: justice cannot result in something bad if it is *true* justice.[272] The same goes for happiness, as true happiness cannot cause harm.

268 Diogenes Laertius, 7.94.
269 See section 1.2.1.
270 Blits, *Deadly Thought “Hamlet” and the Human Soul*, 149.
271 See 1.2.1. and 1.4.2.
272 See section 1.2.1.

Hamlet, on the other hand, continues to have the upper hand in this stoic discussion when he asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern why they have come "to prison."[273] A question that confuses them and Hamlet has to explain that for him "Denmark's a prison."[274] Rosencrantz counters that him and Guildenstern "do not think so",[275] meaning that they do not agree with Hamlet. This urges him to elaborate his thinking with the famous quote: "for there is nothing / either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."[276] Hamlet here explains the stoic idea that external things are indifferent and can be used and seen as either good or bad, depending on how a person uses it.[277] For Hamlet, the state of Denmark feels like a prison and the judgement is personalized and is neither objectively right or wrong. Rosencrantz then accuses Hamlet that his "ambition makes it [Denmark] one. / 'Tis too narrow for your mind"[278], to which Hamlet counters: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and / count myself a king of infinite space, were it not / that I have bad dreams."[279] Rosencrantz thinks that Hamlet has wrong ambitions that cause his depression and bad mood, while Hamlet is indicating that he himself could be happy even living in "a nutshell" if it were not for his bad dreams. Those dreams, of course, refer back to the task of revenge that he has been given by his father's ghost. Instead of asking about the

273 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 2.2.245.
274 Ibid., 2.2.247.
275 Ibid., 2.2.252.
276 Ibid., 2.2.253f.
277 See section 1.2.4.
278 Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 2.2.256f.
279 Ibid., 2.2.258 – 260.

content of the dreams, both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern argue that a man's dreams only reflect his ambitions as “the very substance of the ambitious is merely the / shadow of a dream.”[280] Hamlet counters this accusation with the claim that “[t]hen are our beggars bodies, and our / monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows.”[281] Hamlet basically says that everybody is meant to have at least some ambition, which accords with the idea of stoicism that one ought to take appropriate action and not remain idle without any movement of the soul and resulting action whatsoever. Back in the first chapter, *appropriate action* was defined as “what is consistent in life, which when done admits of a reasonable defence.”[282] For Hamlet, investigating the circumstances of his father's death after speaking to the ghost is such an action. *Ambition*, or *motivation* in itself is neither good nor bad as it is *indifferent*, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern argue as if ambition was necessarily a bad thing. They have no answer to Hamlet's last argument, however, causing the discussion to be dropped and the three characters head off to court.[283] Over the course of this scene Hamlet has established himself as a very knowledgable and sophisticated person. This sets up a clear contrast to the side of Hamlet we will experience later on in the play. Right now it seems that Hamlet, beside his strong words in act one, has a very philosophical approach to the problems he has to deal with.

280 Ibid., 2.2.262f.
281 Ibid., 2.2.267f.
282 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 8.
283 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.269.

And while he has not found a solution just yet, he will – at least for another while – keep thinking about it.

Again, like in the dialogue with Polonius earlier on, Hamlet wins the argument and we see that even his fellow student friends cannot compete with his intellect. Hamlet states his discontent with the current situation and hints that he has still not yet come to a conclusion if and how he wants to take revenge on Claudius. Hamlet's internal struggle is displayed later in the same scene: after having a discussion with the players about the play within the play, Hamlet gives his third soliloquy in which he compares himself to the player to whom he has just spoken:

> "O, what a rouge and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wanned,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!"[284]

Hamlet mourns that the player, through passion, forces his soul to act according to this imagination of emotion, something that the stoic ought not to do.[285] The passions are the motivator for the player to act, and Hamlet sees himself as a slave of passion, too, which will in fact come true in the later stages of the play. But in the end, this movement of passion will lead to

284 Ibid., 2.2.560 – 267.
285 See section 1.3.2.

tragedy. Passion is “violent, since those who are in a state of passion often see that it is advantageous not to do this, but are swept away by the vehemence [of the passion].”[286] The player is a symbol for Hamlet's struggle, who yet has to take action against his uncle. After he compares himself to a whore, unable to act and only putting his revenge in words so far, he is now setting up his revenge with the play within the play.[287] But instead of confronting the King directly, Hamlet has set up the play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, to be preferred with adjustments that resemble the events of the death of Hamlet's father.[288] Hamlet does not directly transform from the idle character he is right now to the passionate aggressor he will be at the end of the play. In between, Shakespeare lets Hamlet take action through the actors of the play within the play. This builds the connection between the genius, plotting Hamlet we have seen over the course of this section and the transformed Hamlet we will experience in the last two sections of this chapter.

In the last part of his soliloquy at the end of act two Hamlet seems to have collected his thoughts after the encounter with the ghost, this time admitting that it might as well could have been “a devil,”[289] who wants to abuse Hamlet's weakness and melancholy and bring him to his downfall.[290] The Hamlet we see in the second act seems far more collected in his thoughts than the wrathful

286 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 10a.
287 Cf. Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 2.2.594 – 598.
288 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.547 – 553 and 2.2.606 – 608.
289 Ibid., 2.2.611.
290 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.612 – 615.

Hamlet of the end of act one, even though everybody surrounding him questions his sanity. As already pointed out, the observer, however, can see through Hamlet's disguise of madness and has the prince's intensions explained through the soliloquies: Hamlet wants to see the King's reaction with his own eyes and judge for himself whether he is guilty of the accusation made by the ghost.[291] Overall, Hamlet appears much more in accordance with stoic virtue than in the first scene analysed, as he deliberates first and not blindly calls for and action without reasoning about it. Yet fails to commit to action, which is a mistake as even in stoicism one cannot just remain in deliberation without ever committing to action.[292] In all the instances analysed in this section so far, Hamlet is philosophizing about his personal struggles and his attempt to escape them. He appears to know about his vexing situation and that hot-headed action might not be the ideal solution. This part of Hamlet's character is even further developed right before the play within the play takes place; there is another soliloquy by Hamlet, in which he philosophizes not about himself, but about some general questions. He starts of with the famous question: “To be, or not to be: That is the question.”[293] *To be* in the question means *being alive*, and *not to be* means *being dead*; there is nothing in between those states and *not to be* indicates that there is no existence after death. In this soliloquy Hamlet questions whether there is such a thing as an afterlife, and if so, what difference

291 Cf. Ibid., 2.2.615 – 617.
292 See section 1.3.
293 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.56.

it makes for one's present life. This is a very substantial Christian question, because in Christian belief one can only reach complete happiness in the afterlife – a strong contrast to stoicism according to which happiness can actually be achieved during life.[294] We can read the following lines as a comparison between stoicism and Christianity when Hamlet asks himself:

> "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them."[295]

Hamlet questions the virtues of both philosophies. Is it *nobler*, meaning more virtuous, to endure suffering, having faith in God and show patience? Not committing to a passionate action is what the Christian virtue asks for; one should rather show faith in God and trust in Him to save us from suffering. But, on the other hand, the stoic approach of taking action and opposing the things that trouble him means to *end them*: the movement of one's own soul as appropriate action in this case would be suicide: *not to be*. This would be the stoic action that "is consistent in life, which, when done admits of a reasonable defence."[296] While in Christianity suicide is a sin, stoicism allows it if certain circumstances are met. A virtuous individual might kill himself if he has reached happiness, as he then has reached everything there is in life, and there is no more to achieve for him, therefore "suicide is appropriate for virtuous

294 See section 2.4.3. (Christian belief) and section 1.4.1 (stoic view).
295 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.57 – 60.
296 John Stobaeus, *Anthology,* 8.

men."[297] For Hamlet, however, this is clearly not the case. Hamlet compares death to sleep and fears that death might evoke a dreaming state, meaning death would not be the end of him, even though it would be the end of his pain.[298] But this uncertainty about the state of the soul after death causes Hamlet to think more about what happens to the soul. In the end, he reaches the conclusion that the unknown is more frightening than the known evils of this world:

> "Who would fardels bear,
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of?"[299]

In this part of his speech Hamlet clearly lacks the Christian virtues of *hope* and *faith*. He does not trust in God and does not believe the afterlife will be something better than this life, as reason or experience cannot possibly explain to him what this potential afterlife looks like. Augustine, in his *City of God* says that one has to show *faith* that the afterlife exists in the form of paradise and one has to put his trust in God:

> "For, if a man disdains the divine will, he can only use his own to his own destruction, and, thus, he comes to the knowledge of the difference between obedience to the good common to all and indulgence in a good proper to oneself. For, anyone who loves himself is left to himself until, filled with fears and tears, he cries

297 Ibid., 11m.
298 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.60 – 69 and cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 183.
299 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.76 – 82.

> out, if he has any sensitivity to his own sufferings, like the psalmist: 'My soul is troubled with myself,' so that, when he has learned his lesson, he may cry: 'I will keep my strength to thee.'
>
> No one should object to such reflections and others even more appropriate that might be made concerning the allegorical interpretation of the Garden of Eden, so long as we believe in the historical truth manifest in the faithful narrative of these events."[300]

In Augustinian fashion, Hamlet's uncertainty causes him to be afraid and "lose the name of action."[301] Hamlet therefore apparently does not only shy away from Christian virtues, but from stoicism as well. He does not show any *hope* at all to support the necessary faith in God either. Instead, Hamlet's *fear*, a passion according to the stoics,[302] hinders his movement and prevents him from taking appropriate action. Again we see Hamlet giving in to a passion; even though he tries to reason about the question of the afterlife, he is not able to reason about the fear connected to it while rejecting faith in God. Hamlet fails to commit to the virtues of both philosophies and appears to be lost in between. He neither has the faith necessary to overcome the fear that paralyses him for the moment to take action, nor does he have the strength on his own to overcome this passion of fear through reason, as the stoic ought to. The stoic is not concerned about the afterlife, as he strives to reach happiness and fulfilment in this life. Being influenced by Christianity, Hamlet however cannot commit to this approach, nor can he end his own life, while at the same time,

300 Augustine, *The City of God – Books VIII-XVI*, trans. G. G. Walsh and G. Monahan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), XIII 21.
301 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.88.
302 See section 1.3.2.

he is not being willing to put his faith in God. This traps him in this dilemma of fear whereby reason can not provide a solution. Without faith, Hamlet is lost as long as he sticks with the Christian concept of the afterlife. Hamlet has to transform as he has reached a dead end in his personal philosophy that tried to combine both, stoicism and Christianity at a point where they are incompatible. Christianity demands him to have *faith* in the supernatural which existence is denied by the reason-based stoic philosophy. Much like Horatio found himself beyond the boundaries of stoicism in act one when he met the ghost, Hamlet in his thoughts about the afterlife exceeds the limit of the rational. But unlike Horatio, Hamlet fails to commit to faith and therefore appears to be at his wits' end.

This dilemma triggers Hamlet's character transformation, the first step of which will be made in the scene that will be analysed in the following section. Hamlet sets up a first indirect confrontation with the King and Queen through the plot of the play he fittingly titles *The Mousetrap.*[303]

3.2.3. The turning point: The play within the play

The second scene in act three contains the play that was set up by Hamlet in order to provoke a reaction from King Claudius. This section will again show the rational side of Hamlet's character, but this time, Hamlet chooses to 'act' through and with the help of the actors whom he hired. While this is yet not a

303 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.243.

direct action, it is the first step of Hamlet's character transformation.

Hamlet has manipulated the plot of the play in advance, so it features a plot very similar to the story that the ghost told Hamlet concerning his murder in act one. Again, Hamlet displays forethought and a deliberate approach to his plan of convicting Claudius. In front of Claudius and Hamlet's mother the two players *King* and *Queen* talk about their long marriage and whether the *Queen* would marry again after her husband's death, to which the *Queen* answers:

> "The instances that second marriage move
> Are base respects of thrift, but none of love
> A second time I kill my husband dead
> When second husband kisses me in bed."[304]

The attack on Hamlet's own mother in these lines is obvious: even Claudius himself notices it, so that he soon after asks: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no / offense in't?",[305] to which Hamlet counters: "No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no / offense i' th' world."[306] Hamlet denies the direct connection between him and the manipulated play. He wants his motive to stay hidden, for now. Admitting his involvement with the action of the players would force a direct confrontation with the King, which Hamlet is yet not willing to let happen. He is still wavering about his approach and "grants Claudius some distance from the drama"[307] as he explains the plot is set in the city of Vienna

304 Ibid., 3.2.188 -191.
305 Ibid., 3.2.238f.
306 Ibid., 3.2.240f.
307 Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 209.

and therefore has nothing to do with the happenings in Denmark.[308] Hamlet is still following through with his plan to catch the consciousness of the King as the play unfolds: the person who murders the king in the play is introduced as the nephew of the king.[309] This is Hamlet making an indirect threat to Claudius for the first time in the play. But again, during the whole scene of the play, Hamlet is not taking action himself. Instead, he lets the players *play* out the action on stage. Hamlet is still reluctant to take action until he finds a reason to believe that the King is guilty. This approach is again very rational and appears to be in accordance with stoic deliberation. Hamlet does not allow his passion of wrath to get the better of him, but instead waits for the King to react to the scene that is played in front of him.

After the King in the play is murdered in the same way that Hamlet's father was murdered, Claudius rises and exits, leaving a triumphant Hamlet behind.[310] Hamlet thinks that the King's reaction has proven the latter guilty, even though he still does not have any certain proof of it: “Hamlet catches the outrage, not the conscience, of the king.”[311] Now Hamlet seems finally willing to take action against the Queen and the King, whereby he wants to “speak daggers to her [the Queen], but use none.”[312] Even though Hamlet is angry with his mother, as we will see in the next section, and attacks her harshly with words, he does not

308 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.244 – 246.
309 Cf. Ibid., 3.2.250.
310 Cf. Ibid., 3.2.275 – 284.
311 Blits, *Deadly Thought “Hamlet” and the Human Soul*, 212.
312 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.404.

dare cross his father's authority as he told Hamlet to “leave her to heaven.”[313] On the King, however, he wants to take his revenge and “do this same villain send / To heaven.”[314] But Hamlet again hesitates when he finds the King praying. Hamlet is afraid that if he kills him now, in this sacred state, that the King might enter heaven because Hamlet's act of revenge might purge the king's soul.[315] Again, Hamlet remains idle, but if Claudius were not praying in the very moment Hamlet found him, it might have been a possibility that he could cut down the King, as Hamlet is already carrying a sword.[316] Hamlet's character transformation is already happening, but Shakespeare holds it off just for a little while longer. In the scene we see that Hamlet is willing to take action, but the circumstances in which he finds Claudius prevent him from taking action, since he is afraid of the possible consequences that murdering a praying man might have. Hamlet does not show faith in God earlier on when philosophizing about the afterlife.[317] His uncertainty prevails as he is wondering what will happen to Claudius if Hamlet slays him now. Hamlet does not have faith in God's justice; instead he thinks that the circumstance of Claudius death could redeem the King in the eyes of God. Hamlet does not only wish Claudius dead, but also wants to make sure that he is punished in the afterlife, though

313 Ibid., 1.5.86.
314 Ibid., 3.3.77f.
315 Cf. Ibid., 3.3.84 – 86. Calhoun states in his article that Hamlet “does not want worldly revenge”, but furthermore make sure that Claudius is punished in his afterlife as well. J. S. Calhoun, “'Hamlet' and the Circumference of Action.” *Renaissance News* 15, no. 4 (1962), p. 292.
316 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.3.88.
317 See section 3.2.2.

only a few scenes ago Hamlet himself has admitted that he had no idea what the afterlife is like.[318] The actions Hamlet decides to make are all based upon the wish of the ghost. He looses his rational approach by blindly following the orders of the supernatural being he has encountered in the first act. He has no rational reason to follow the wish of the ghost, and as we have learnt so far, Hamlet appears to have non of the supernatural Christian virtues like *faith*, so his approach now seems not only to be irrational in the view of the stoics, but also misguided by a Christian point of view, as he does not base himself upon said Christian virtues.

Because of Hamlet hesitating in this scene it will not be Claudius who falls as the first victim of Hamlet's revenge, but instead Polonius when he is hiding behind the curtains in the Queen's chamber. This scene, which will be analysed next, is the first in which Hamlet takes action himself and not with the help of someone else, like the players in the scene of the *Mousetrap* play.

3.2.4. Hamlet kills Polonius

In the following scene Hamlet takes action for the first time, and we see a very different side of Hamlet's character. While he was hesitant in the last scene in which he watched Claudius pray, he does not hesitate to take action this time when the opportunity arises: Hamlet was summoned by his mother

318 See section 3.2.2.

and meets her in her chambers in scene four of act three.[319] Polonius, who was discussing Hamlet's behaviour with her just before Hamlet arrives, hides behind the curtains and eavesdrops on the conversation between Hamlet and his mother.[320] Hamlet and the Queen start an argument, during which Hamlet goes so far as to state that he wished Gertrude were not his mother.[321] Hamlet wants to talk to her and show the Queen her sins and failures, which he phrases metaphorically:

> "Come come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the inmost part of you!"[322]

The Queen, however, takes these words literally, thinking that Hamlet is threatening her life and wants to kill her, causing her to scream: "Thou will not murder me? / Help, ho!"[323] This results in Polonius revealing himself behind the curtain, but before he can step forward, Hamlet kills him with his sword through the fabric, thinking Polonius is a spy or even the King himself.[324] Hamlet hopes that through chance he might have his revenge right then and there, as he does not even hesitate for a second to stab whomever might be hiding behind the curtain. This reaction and immanent action is something very uncharacteristic for the Hamlet introduced in the first half of the play. While he

319 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.382f. and 3.4.9.
320 Cf. Ibid., 3.4.1 – 8.
321 Cf. Ibid., 3.4.17.
322 Ibid., 3.4.19 – 21.
323 Ibid., 3.4.22f.
324 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.23 – 27.

seemed very eager during the dialogue with the ghost in act one, the prince has always been hesitant afterwards.[325] Now, all of a sudden, he jumps right into action without further reasoning and hesitation, causing the death of the only marginally-involved Polonius. It appears that Hamlet again acts out of the passion of wrath, but opposed to the first act when he was only speaking about action, he actually goes through with it this time. This character transformation comes all of a sudden and without explanation. The Hamlet that kills Polonius has not much in common with the Hamlet seen before this incident. The sudden nature of a passion as an impulsive, spontaneous movement comes into effect in this scene and proves it's bad consequence, not only for Polonius, but also for Hamlet later on.[326]

Following Polonius' death, Hamlet also appears much more blunt. No longer does he play with words and give metaphors for everything, but he directly speaks his mind. When the Queen exclaims: “O, what a rash and bloody deed is this?”[327] Hamlet answers: “A bloody deed – almost as bad, good Mother, / as kill a king, and marry with his brother.”[328] Hamlet sees his crime as inferior to the crimes that his mother and Claudius supposedly have committed. He no longer shies away from naming his mother's and uncle's crime, and after proclaiming it through the help of the player in the play, this time he makes the

325 See section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.
326 See section 3.2.5.
327 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.28.
328 Ibid., 3.4.29f.

accusation directly to her face, leaving the Queen puzzled, as apparently she is not involved in the plot to kill Hamlet's father.[329] This should get Hamlet second-guessing his approach, as he was wrongly convinced his mother was involved. Yet it does not influence his decision-making at all. By this point of the play he has left his deliberating and rational approach behind.

When Hamlet finally lifts the curtain and reveals Polonius, Hamlet does not show any remorse whatsoever. Instead, he accuses Polonius and calls him a "wretched, rash, intruding fool."[330] He does not say more about Polonius' death thereafter, but goes back to the argument with his mother as if the incident had never happened. If we recall how he called Polonius a fool after their brief conversation in act two and the way in which Hamlet had outsmarted him, it appears that Hamlet has not a very high opinion of Polonius. This culminates in Hamlet's disregard for Polonius' death as some misfortunate happening, that has no further consequences for him or his plans. We will see later that this assumption is false as Polonius' son Laertes challenges Hamlet to a duel to revenge his father. Only then is Hamlet forced to comment on his murder, and he will, in fact, claim that *madness*, which Polonius himself had attributed to him, was the cause of this action.[331]

The Queen herself, completely taken in by Hamlet's accusations, does not

329 Cf. Ibid., 3.4.31.
330 Ibid., 3.4.32.
331 See section 3.4.5.

comment further on Polonius' death. The rash action is over as abruptly as it had began, and Hamlet goes back to lecturing his mother about the virtues she should have as a woman and wife.[332] The accusation that Hamlet brings against his mother is based on Christian virtues, that she should stay true to her first husband and her marriage vows and that as she should show modesty.[333] Hamlet says that her deed "As from the body of contraction plucks / The very soul, and sweet religion makes / A rhapsody of words!"[334] Hamlet says that if people do not show respect to religion and agreements like marriage, they threaten religion itself as they take away the power of said religion.[335] Yet Hamlet himself does not necessarily obey the laws and display the supernatural Christian virtues, as he is seeking revenge even though it is not Christian to do so.[336] Right at the end of the scene Hamlet recalls to the murder of Polonius, stating:

> "I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister."[337]

Hamlet does not really repent his deed or ask forgiveness; rather he calls the incident a punishment and justifies the action as an act of heaven. Hamlet again picks out whatever suits his needs from Christian and stoic virtue. This time he

332 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.35 – 38.
333 Cf. Ibid., 3.4.41 – 47.
334 Ibid., 3.4.47 – 49.
335 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 235.
336 See section 3.2.1.
337 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.174 – 176.

pretends to have faith and sees himself merely as a servant of higher powers rather than taking responsibility for the action of his own doing and holding himself accountable for it. Hamlet now shows the first signs of incoherence in his character, a trend that will further flourish in the last two acts of the play. He is yet very thoughtful, but also more and more manipulative, without possessing a clear codex of virtues for himself. Revenge appears to be the motivator and goal of his actions, justifying every action he takes, even if this includes killing an innocent man. Hamlet knows that his actions are wrong, but he claims that it is the will of God for them to happen. The stoics explained this phenomenon as characteristic of the passions, for people who submit to passion often concede, "Nature compels me, though I am aware [of what I am doing]."[338] Hamlet's action is passionate, and he seems to realize it it, but is unwilling to condemn it or himself for it. Hamlet appears complacent throughout the whole play in the ways that he treats others and now this translates into his self-assessment in the light of passion. He does not feel that he is wrong, but i s only doing what he is compelled to do by authority, meaning his father, or in this case, strangely enough, God.[339]

In this section we have seen the ongoing character transformation of Hamlet that has led to an impulsive action out of passion, that will have further

338 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 10a.

339 It has been pointed out multiple times earlier on that Hamlet does not have faith in God, yet in this instance he appears to accept Him as an authority, as this legitimates his actions in his own opinion.

consequences down the line. One of the consequences of Polonius' murder is that Claudius sends Hamlet off to England, with the plan that the latter be killed there based on the instructions that Claudius sends in the form of letters, and the King can finally find joy.[340] Hamlet, however, returns to Denmark alive and will finally take his revenge on Claudius in the last scene of the final act.

3.2.5. Hamlet's revenge on Claudius

In the final scene of the play Hamlet has to deal with the consequences of his earlier actions. The murder of Polonius results in the duel with Laertes, the son of Polonius, followed by the murder of the King by Hamlet's hand. The fulfilment of his father's wish for revenge right before Hamlet's own death concludes the tragedy of the Danish prince. The last scene also finalizes Hamlet's transformation from the deliberate, rational character we have seen during the first half of the play to a person driven by passion that does no longer tarry himself with thoughts.

Even though Hamlet has mentioned his desire to kill the King multiple times throughout the play, he sounds more confident than ever about it when he talks to Horatio about the sealed letter that the King gave to him on his way to England. Hamlet expresses his inner struggles saying: “Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting / That would not let me sleep.”[341] This statement again is

340 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 4.3.64 – 68.
341 Ibid., 5.2.6f.

in contrast to his strong words in scene three of act three that he wants to kill the King (even though, again, he does not commit to it).[342] Hamlet always appears to get himself lost in thoughts instead of taking action in line with to his passionate words. The contradiction displays the struggle that Hamlet is in, most certainly aware of the dilemma between Christian virtue and his promise and desire for revenge. In the beginning of the final scene Hamlet seems to give up on overcoming this struggle and reaches the conclusion:

> "Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."[343]

Hamlet seems to surrender to fate, claiming that in the end everyone is just a figure directed by "divinity", a claim he also makes in connection with the death of Polonius in the scene analysed previously. Hamlet said much about stoic fate throughout the play, shifting from a more stoic point of view in the first act, in which he challenges fate, to a more humble, Christian view that allows him to make excuses for his actions, like killing Polonius, and the actions he fails to take, as seen in the quote above. Hamlet rejects taking responsibility for his actions and projects it on the authority of God and fate who are directing his actions according to his words.[344] Hamlet does not speak about virtue or the well-being of his soul at all. Everything he does or does not

342 See section 3.2.4.
343 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.8 – 11.
344 See section 3.2.5.

do is justified through this “divinity”, even though these words are contrary that seemingly do not fit together with his reluctance to show faith in act two of the play.[345] Hamlet seems unperturbed about his soul. He does not see himself as the pilot of his actions. In stoicism, one is responsible for the movements of one's soul and capable of overcoming the other forces, like the passions, that want to take over the direction of the movement.[346] Also, in Christianity, the human soul is not moved by God. While, according to Augustine, God's mercy is needed to make the final step towards happiness, it is the human's obligation to get to the point where he or she is worthy of God's grace through the actions taken priorly.[347]

Still, Hamlet sees need to explain his grudge against King Claudius, so he tells Horatio what he thinks about the King and why he must put an end to him:

> “Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon –
> He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
> Popped in between th' election and my hopes,
> Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
> And with such coz'nage – is't not perfect conscience
> To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damed
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?”[348]

Hamlet summarizes all the grudges that he holds against Claudius: that he has killed Hamlet's father, the old king and then married his mother. On top of that,

345 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought “Hamlet” and the Human Soul*, 355, also see section 3.2.2.
346 See section 1.3.2.
347 See section 2.4.3. It is debated in Christian thought to what extend God's mercy depends on human action or if it is granted without taking the action of the individual in account.
348 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.63 – 70.

and for the first time throughout the play, Hamlet states that Claudius also took the crown and prevented Hamlet from becoming king himself, and finally, of course, Claudius just tried to have Hamlet killed. As a result, Hamlet sees it now as necessary to kill the King, as he might as well be "damned" if he failed to do so and allow Claudius to spread "further evil." Hamlet sounds as decisive as he did in the end of the first act when he initially decided to take revenge, though he has still not gone through with it.

But before Hamlet can take on the King, he is willing to accept the challenge of Laertes, son of Polonius, who wants to duel him to avenge his own father, slain by Hamlet. Confronted by Laertes and the action he has committed earlier in the play, Hamlet again finds an excuse, claiming that it was his madness that killed Polonius and disassociates himself from the act:

> "Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged;
> His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy."[349]

Hamlet is not willing to take full responsibility for what he has done. On the contrary, he even says that he is the one "wronged" by his own madness. This contradicts the argument that Hamlet raised right after Polonius's death when he claimed that it was not madness, but an act of heaven that caused the

349 Ibid., 5.2.234 – 240.

action.[350] Also, just a few lines prior Hamlet argued that in the end all actions are shaped by divinity.[351] Hamlet's character dissolves more and more throughout the play, and it appears that he fails to follow one straight movement and action, loosing himself not only in thoughts but also in arguments and 'reasons' for his actions.[352] Laertes accepts his excuse, but says that he is an honourable character and the duel stands.[353] Hamlet again fails to make a clear stand for his own character and commit to a rational movement of the soul, showing that he looses his grip of rational thinking.

Hamlet is not aware that the King intends to kill him with poison, either with the poisonous blade that is handed to Laertes or the poisoned cup of wine from which the Queen accidentally takes a sip and dies.[354] Just when Hamlet's mother dies and the dying Laertes explains the plot to Hamlet, the latter finally takes action and first strikes Claudius with the poisoned blade, before handing him the cup, exclaiming: “Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damnèd Dane, / Drink off this potion.”[355] Just in his final moments Hamlet gets his revenge, before dying of the poison himself, following Laertes, his mother, and Claudius.[356] In his final moments Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his tragic story

350 See section 3.2.4.
351 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.10.
352 While deliberation is still important and good in both, stoic and Christian tradition, it is still important to act according to the deliberation, and Hamlet fails to do so.
353 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.245 -253.
354 Cf. Ibid., 5.2.293 and 5.2.310f.
355 Ibid., 5.2.326f.
356 Cf. Ibid., 5.2.359.

and gives his blessing to Fortinbras as future king of Denmark with all members of the royal family dead.[357] Hamlet does not mention revenge or his father again, seemingly forgetting why he was out to kill Claudius in the first place.[358] Hamlet does not appear to be afraid of death in the end, but embraces it, and does not ask for forgiveness or God's blessing either. Hamlet, during the play does not seem to be concerned about the well-being of his soul, like a good Christian should according to Christian virtue.[359] Horatio, however, shows his Christian side when he says: "flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."[360] While Hamlet fails to make a clear stand for himself, Horatio seems to have found a way to connect stoicism and the supernatural Christian virtues as he accepts the divine authority while still holding *reason* on a high account.

Hamlet's final act seems to be free from Christian and stoic virtue and is all about the revenge and wrath that he had built up over the course of the play. The thoughtful Hamlet appearing throughout the play is gone in this final scene, which emphasizes the tragedy of Hamlet's character in the light of the philosophies he always tried to grasp in his thoughts. He fails to commit to virtue and make a stand for himself outside of the movement of passion. He allows his wrath against his mother and Claudius to take over and is transformed to an object of his own passion, ultimately leading to his own

357 Cf. Ibid., 5.2.349f and 5.2.356 – 359.
358 Cf. Blits, *Deadly Thought "Hamlet" and the Human Soul*, 379.
359 Cf. Ibid., 384f.
360 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.361.

demise (and the demise of his whole family). Especially in the later scenes it appears that Hamlet is no longer fully rational about his decisions in the stoic sense, meaning that he gives in to passion as an unnatural movement and lets it direct his actions. Therefore it can be said that *Hamlet* is a tragedy not only because of the events, but also for the lead character himself, as he fails to meet his own expectations outside the passion of revenge. This passion takes over his motivations and is the only thing that causes him to overcome his idleness and take action in the scope of the play. Hamlet himself goes through this transformation without ever finding a balance between stoicism and Christian virtue like Horatio. He is rather picking out the values that suit his needs and lecturing others without ever questioning his own motivations and their justification. This results that Hamlet, in the end, follows neither stoicism nor Christian philosophy. He is a man "with his mind on the frontier of two worlds, [a] man unable either quite to reject or quite to admit the supernatural."[361] We see him at first failing to commit to action while having collected thoughts. Then he fails to act out of the motivation of virtue, but rather acts out of passion and in the end does not redeem himself either in a stoic or a Christian way.

361 C. S. Lewis, "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?", in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London: Oxford University Press), 1942, 152.

Conclusion

Shakespeare created such a rich and multi-layered character in Hamlet that it is hard to analyse him fully and pin down his motivations, which in the end always seem to remain somewhat mysterious and not fully reasonable to the outsider. One way to explain Hamlet's inconsistency, that is also raised by multiple characters throughout the play, is the claim that Hamlet is actually mad.[362] In the end, even Hamlet himself uses his potential madness as an excuse for his murder of Polonius.[363] But I do not think that this is consistent with the character displayed most of the time. While Hamlet is depressed, and surely his words are hard to follow for the ones surrounding him, his speech is clear and rational, and even though he fails to go through with action, it is not madness that holds him back. Madness in stoicism is defined as "being ignorant of [oneself] and [one's] own concerns."[364] In fact, I think it is quite the contrary. During the first half of the play, Hamlet appears to think far too much instead of taking action, because he wants to be reasonable and rational about his decisions. Hamlet walks right into the trap that the stoics explained the base man typically falls into: while Hamlet listens to his teacher Horatio and memorizes the teachings of the philosophies, he is *not* prepared to carry into action what they pronounce.[365] Hamlet seems lost in his ways, act in

362 Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.92 (Polonius), 4.1.7 (Queen) and 4.1.18f. (Claudius).
363 See section 3.2.6.
364 John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 5b13.
365 See section 1.4.2.

accordance with his deliberation and thereby uncertain of how to achieve happiness in his life, even though he appears to have knowledge about the two mentioned philosophies and how they state one should live as he expresses thoughts that align with the ideas and doctrines of those multiple times throughout the play.

Hamlet as a tragedy of course does not show us how one can achieve the happy life, be it according to stoic philosophy or Christianity, but it shows us how one can fail to achieve it even though it appears that he has the qualifications necessary to be a wise and good man. Hamlet does not discard one philosophy for the other, but fails according to both philosophies. If we take a look at the stoic view on happiness and the good, Hamlet never acts in a fashion that could be counted as appropriate action during the whole play, as nothing he does either seems to contribute to the relief of his depression or displays a virtuous act.[366]

Even when he takes revenge on Claudius, he does not step up and challenge the King to an honourable fight, but instead just stabs the defenceless Claudius to death. And when Laertes challenged him earlier, Hamlet was aiming for an excuse with the claim that he cannot be held responsible for his earlier actions.[367] So while it is true that Hamlet finds himself in a dilemma, and the question as to what would have been the appropriate actions for the given

366 See section 1.3.3.
367 See section 3.2.6.

instances is not to be answered easily, it can surly be said that they were not the actions that Hamlet chose in the end. Instead, he allows himself to be led astray by the passions of *fear* and *wrath*, a mistake that a wise man would never make according to the stoics.[368] Hamlet also fails to show self-control in the later parts of the play, especially in the scene in which he kills Polonius. His actions differ vastly from the thoughts that he shares with the reader during his soliloquises which shows that Hamlet is not able to overcome that predisposition of the human soul towards the passions and gets overwhelmed by them. Hamlet is in the end not strong enough a character to stay true to the stoic virtues, which is foreshadowed by the fact that he appears very insecure in the early stages of the play and does not manage to grow as a character throughout the events.

Also from the Christian point of view, Hamlet does not fulfil the criteria of a good man. Hamlet apparently does not recognize God as much of an authority as is expected from a character from this period of time. He only invokes God or *the heavens* when it suits his own purpose, and when he does so it is in order to lecture others, mainly his mother, about their failures.[369] Hamlet never seeks forgiveness from God, and it seems like he does not see it as something necessary to consider. He does not appear to be a very faithful man, which shows especially in his soliloquy at the beginning of act three, when he states

368 See section 1.4.1.
369 See section 3.2.5.

that he is afraid of the afterlife and will rather endure "those ills we have."[370] Without faith it is not possible to hope and love, according to Christian teaching, and this is true for Hamlet. He does not hope for anything good to happen and has basically given up, and as a result of this he is also not able to love. The whole sub-plot of the love story between Hamlet and Ophelia has been omitted in this thesis as it does not contribute to it in a major fashion, but it is worth noting that in the light of the three correlating virtues faith, hope, and love it appears only consequential that Hamlet fails to commit to his love for Ophelia.[371] The image of the corrupted soul in Christianity appears to be very fitting for Hamlet's character. Hamlet seems to be lost and misguided by his passions, and due to the earlier mentioned lack of faith there is no salvation for him possible according to Christian philosophy.[372]

In the end, Hamlet is of course a fictional character, written in a way to fit in the play that is set up as a tragedy. But that is precisely why an examination of Hamlet's character and his failure to be a good man in the light of those philosophies leaves open the rich critical and interpretive possibilities which have been shown over the course of this thesis. Hamlet himself serves as an example, and we, the readers, can learn from him how difficult those seemingly

370 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.81.

371 This notion does of course not cover and explain the sub-plot as a whole, but it provides one argument to explain the failure of the love between Hamlet and Ophelia. Further investigation of this topic would go beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore not be discussed.

372 See section 2.4.1-3.

easy prescription for leading to the good life can be to enact. While a vast majority of people, including Hamlet, are able to name the virtues of stoicism and Christian philosophy, it is hard to apply them to oneself and make this transition from thinking into action. Acting virtuously is not only the point where Hamlet fails as a character within a play, but also where many people, the ones who were called *base men* by the stoics, fail in everyday life. While the two philosophies have different approaches to the topic of the *happy life*, they both require a certain amount of commitment from the individual, a commitment that Hamlet failed to show. And while a failure in this commitment might not end in a dire tragedy like it did in *Hamlet*, giving in to passions yet prevents us from living a good life. The stoics said that the wise man makes the right choices according to virtue and reaches the happy life through acting in accordance with the universal nature. The Christians say that man reaches happiness through a virtuous life, faith, hope, and the love and grace from God. No matter which of the two paths one chooses to take, Hamlet can be seen as an example of how not to spend life in idleness until passion takes over and ultimately prevents a person from reaching happiness.

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