

Jeff Wilson

Dr. Wilson

Expos 20.043

21 September 2020

Response Paper 1.3:
A Basic Outline

“To thine own self be true”:
What Shakespeare Says About Sending Our Children Off to College

Thesis: If we understand meaning as intent, then “To thine own self be true” means, paradoxically, that “the self” does not exist. Or, more accurately, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* suggests that “the self” only exists as a rhetorical, philosophical, and psychological construct that we use to make sense of our experiences and actions in the world.

Introduction

- I. Problem Paragraph
 - a. Evidence: “To thine own self be true”
 - b. Problem: What does “To thine own self be true” mean?
- II. Terms Paragraph
 - a. Self
 - b. True
 - c. Meaning
- III. Thesis Paragraph
 - a. Thesis
 - b. Stakes: Shakespeare as a moral philosopher

Body

- I. Hypocrisy in Laertes to Ophelia (1.3.44-50)
- II. Polonius to Laertes
 - a. Polonius’s Precepts (1.3.56-79)
 - b. Contradiction in Polonius’s Precepts
- III. “The self” in Polonius to Ophelia (1.3.95, 104)

Conclusion

- I. Counter: Shakespeare says we are not true to ourselves
- II. Response: Shakespeare says we have no selves to be true to
- III. Argument: With Polonius’s proverbs, Shakespeare rejected the concept of “the self” and satirized those who use it.
- IV. Implications: Shakespeare was a moral philosopher

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The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*:
Divine Providence and Social Determinism

Introduction

- I. Question Paragraph
 - a. Orientation: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, play-within-the-play...
 - b. Evidence: "Our wills and fates do so contrary run" (3.2)
 - c. Evidence: "A man that fortune's buffets and rewards has taken with equal thanks" (3.2)
 - d. Terms: Fate vs. fortune vs. will
 - e. Question: Is there a version of fate at work in *Hamlet*?
- II. Thesis Paragraph
 - a. Thesis: I contend that the world of *Hamlet* is governed by neither fate nor fortune, nor even the Christianized version of fate called providence. Yet there is a modern, secular, disenchanted version of fate at work in *Hamlet* – what is sometimes called social determinism – which calls into question the freedom of the individual will.
 - b. Stakes: Pagan fate into Christian providence, Christian providence into social determinism

Body

- I. *Hamlet* as Critique of Divine Providence
 - a. Characters who believe in divine providence (Horatio [1.4], Hamlet [3.4], Claudius [4.5])
 - b. Hamlet's providentialism as madness ("There's a divinity that shapes our ends"; "In that was heaven ordinaunt"; "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" [all 5.2])
- II. *Hamlet* as Endorsement of Social Determinism
 - a. Hamlet's "will is not his own" (1.3)
 - b. Hamlet's birthday ("I was born to set it right" [1.5]; "Of all the days of the year" [5.1])
 - c. The cause-and-effect leading from Claudius's ambition to the play's catastrophe

Conclusion

- I. Argument Paragraph
 - a. Argument: What we do is determined by what others have done, Shakespeare seems to say. Individual human agency remains just as illusionary as ever, but not because it has been replaced by some more powerful divine agency. Situation and circumstance dictate both understanding and action.
 - b. Implications: Providence is the “fate” of theology and determinism the “fate” of sociology.
- II. Implications
 - a. Counter: The purpose of this essay is not to historicize the invention of social determinism.
 - b. Response: Instead, I want to theorize the transformation of fate.
 - c. Implications: The fate of fate seems to be that it will cycle through various historically specific discourses as the venue for expressing frustration over our inability to control the world.