NOTE TO USERS

Page(s) not included in the original manuscript and are unavailable from the author or university. The manuscript was scanned as received.

76 - 82

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI®

Knowing is not enough:
Akrasia and self-deception in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Seth Shugar
Department Of English
McGill University
Montreal, Canada
July 2006

Advised by: Professor Michael D. Bristol

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28576-3
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28576-3

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, *Macbeth* has been read as a morality tale about the perils of ambition. The question that has implicitly animated most treatments of the play is, "Why does Macbeth kill Duncan?" By shifting the emphasis away from Macbeth's motives for killing Duncan onto his inability to *refrain* from killing him, I draw attention to the striking fact that, in killing King Duncan, Macbeth acts against a fully considered better judgment not to. This suggests the possibility that Macbeth's much-discussed ambition can be understood as a subset of the broader theme of *akrasia*, the condition in which an agent is unable to perform an action he knows to be right. After identifying and exploring the theme of akrasia in several of Shakespeare's plays, I go on to situate Macbeth's murder of Duncan in the context of the long literary and philosophical debate on incontinence. I then suggest four interrelated explanations of Macbeth's akrasia. First, Macbeth's connection to the motivational conditions of his knowledge is shallow; he does not feel what he knows. Second, Macbeth's lack of self-control is habitual because his weak connection to the conative dimension of his knowledge prohibits him from appealing to techniques of skilled resistance. Third, his habitual lack of self-control renders him vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's taunts, which not only deplete the motivation supporting his better judgment but also prevent him from giving full deliberative weight to his better judgment. Finally, Macbeth also engages in a consistent pattern of self-deception that not only facilitates his akratic slaughter of King Duncan but also enables him to murder Banquo and MacDuff's family. My explanation of how Macbeth is able to act self-deceptively against his better evidence echoes my account of how he is able to act akratically against his better judgment: he does not feel what he knows.

Traditionnellement, Macbeth est lu comme une histoire de moralité portant sur les périls de l'ambition. La question qui anime implicitement la plupart des traitements de cette pièce de théâtre est, « Pourquoi Macbeth tue Duncan? » En mettant plus d'emphase sur l'incapacité de Macbeth de *ne pas* tuer Duncan plutôt que son raisonnement en le tuant, je porte attention au fait frappant, qu'en tuant le roi Duncan, Macbeth agit contre un jugement complètement pondéré de ne pas le tuer. Ceci suggère la possibilité que l'ambition de Macbeth qui est souvent discutée peut-être comprise comme faisant partie du thème plus étendu de l'*akrasia* : la condition dans laquelle un agent est incapable de performer une action qu'il reconnaît dèjà comme étant la bonne. Une fois ce thème d'akrasia identifié et exploré dans quelques pièces de Shakespeare, ce mémoire progressera en situant le meurtre de Duncan par Macbeth dans le contexte du long débat litéraire et philosophique sur l'incontinence. Par la suite, je suggèrerai quatre explications interreliées sur l'akrasia de Macbeth. En premier lieu, la connection de Macbeth aux conditions motivationnelles de sa connaissance est peu profonde; il ne sent pas ce qu'il sait. Deuxièment, Macbeth manque habituellement une maîtrise de soi parce que sa connection faible à la dimension conative de sa connaissance lui interdit de faire appel à des techniques de résistance habile. Troisièmement, sa manque habituelle d'une maîtrise de soi le rend vulnérable aux railleries de Lady Macbeth, qui nonseulement diminuent la motivation qui supporterai son meilleur jugement, mais l'empêchent de délibérer pleinement. Finalement, Macbeth s'engage aussi dans des habitudes de déception de soi qui nonseulement facilitent le meurtre akratique du roi Duncan mais lui permettent aussi de tuer la famille de Banquo et MacDuff. Mon explication de comment Macbeth est capable d'agir dans cette déception de soi et contre son meilleur jugement fait echo de ma discussion du fait qu'il est capable d'agir akratiquement contre son meilleur jugement : il ne sent pas ce qu'il sait.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Michael Bristol, or "Bristotle" as he has come to be known, for providing genuine guidance on this project rather than mere supervision. He is that rare thing amongst professors: a teacher whose insights into literature carry far beyond the classroom walls. I also want to thank my sweetheart Frances Adair for, among other things, the laughter and the propinquity. My family has been an unfailing source of support and encouragement over the years. If my dad gave me the pen to write with, my mom gave me the ink. This thesis is for them. I also want to express my deep gratitude to my late granny Sarah for all the love and food and silent wisdom. My brother Jude and my sister-in-law Sarah graciously accommodated me at an especially challenging time in the writing process. Susan Clark was an enormous help with that *other* thesis, as were Jack Einheiber, Everest Reynolds and Professor Brian Trehearne. Thanks go to Andrew Gibson for coming through in the clutch with some key comments on an earlier draft of this thesis. My friends have also been an invaluable source of inspiration and insight over the course of the writing process, especially Josh and Jeremiah Hart, Luke Hart-Weller, Paul Watt, Wiley Conner, Winston Stanley, Aaron Chase, Tommy Hay, Frankie Lepanto, Ilan Saragosti and Jackie Celemencki. Finally, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of a generous F.C.A.R. scholarship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The first and by far the most influential interpretation of Macbeth's motives for killing King Duncan is advanced by Macbeth himself. At the end of his first major soliloquy, he identifies his desire to kill Duncan as "vaulting ambition" (1.7.27). The vast majority of critics since Macbeth have accepted his account of his own motives and read the play as a cautionary tale on the hazards of ambition. William Richardson, for example, identifies ambition as Macbeth's "ruling passion." Likewise, A.C. Bradley suggests that Macbeth is "exceedingly ambitious" and speculates, "He must have been so by temper" (351). In the twentieth century, the approach is exemplified by the likes of Lily Campbell and L.C. Knights, but Kenneth Muir also argues, "Macbeth has not a predisposition to murder; he has merely an inordinate ambition that makes murder itself seem to be a lesser evil than failure to achieve the crown" (260). Summarized briefly, one could say that on this reading the play reduces to a moral and political fable, the message of which is "beware of ambition!"

There are, however, a number of reasons why we ought to be suspicious of both Macbeth's account of his own motives and the related interpretations of those critics who have fallen under his influence. For one thing, Macbeth's reference to his own ambition arises almost as an afterthought, conveniently offering a pat resolution to an intricate conflict. What's more, if ambition is indeed the only spur pricking the sides of Macbeth's intent, we might expect a more involved account of this ambition, either here or in the retrospective passages near the end of the play. His reference to "vaulting ambition" is, however, the only time in the play he actually mentions ambition, a word which arises only two other times in the entire play, once when Lady Macbeth remarks

that Macbeth is "not without ambition" (1.5.17) and the other when Ross dismisses as "thriftless ambition" (3.1.29-30) the suggestion that Malcolm and Donalbain might be responsible for their father's murder.

For these and other reasons, over the past few decades a number of critics have taken issue with the standard reading of Macbeth's motives for killing Duncan. Amongst the strongest of these are the accounts advanced by Wilbur Sanders and Harry Berger. In his masterful essay "What's Done Is Done," Sanders argues that, "It is not ambition that demands the murder, but... some primal disquality of [Macbeth's] being" (70). Sanders' Macbeth is a man who simply "cannot put his energy of being into felt subjugation to [Duncan's] meekness" (70). But this disquality of Macbeth's being is not unique to him alone; it is "primal" in the sense that it is an epiphenomenon of the barbaric, warrior society in which both Macbeth and Duncan live. In this half-civilized world, where the overturning of kingdoms has become routine and the sanctions against insurrection weak, Sanders argues, "We should not be surprised that Macbeth is able to contemplate murdering Duncan. We should be surprised with what horror his mind recoils from the thought. It makes him, at once, a man apart" (66). Given the socio-political conditions that have already produced a Sueno, a Macdonwald and a Cawdor, it is not Macbeth's ambition that strikes Sanders as anomalous, but Duncan's virtue: "His subjects hardly know what to make of him, except as some inexplicably blessed hiatus in the long tale of rebellion, murder and mistrust" (69). Indeed, in a milieu where ambition is so common that it almost goes without saying, Duncan's naiveté is egregious enough to be "a standing provocation to everything that is murderous in Macbeth's nature" (70).

In "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," Harry Berger picks up on Sanders' interpretation (to which he admits being "heavily indebted") and also minimizes Macbeth's ambition by contextualizing it within the wider social conditions of Scottish society. Preferring to probe the "structural" reasons underlying the regicide, Berger downplays Macbeth's ambition by associating it with the "pietistic restoration view" of orthodox critics who read the play as a morality tale in which evil naturally destroys itself (2). On Berger's reading, "there is something rotten in Scotland" that precedes the personal motives of the Macbeths: "something intrinsic to the structure of Scottish society, something deeper than the melodramatic wickedness of one or two individuals, generates these tendencies toward instability, conflict, sedition, and murder" (5). Whatever that something is, Berger agrees with Sanders that it is not unique to Macbeth. Not only does he argue that all of the characters in the play "must be aware of (even if all do not feel) the temptation to kill the golden goose," but he also says of the secondary characters in the play, "though they have not murdered [Duncan] they may be responsible for his death" (28). Like Sanders then, Berger argues that Macbeth's ambition, to the extent that it can be isolated at all, is a manifestation of a socio-political condition that also affects the rest of the characters in the play.

Taken together, these readings represent an interpretive shift away from the orthodox account of Macbeth's motives for killing Duncan.[1] While illuminating,

[1] Bernard McElroy, among others, also argues that Macbeth "is not ambitious in the usual sense of the word" (219). Drawing attention to the fact that Macbeth never really considers the spoils that might proceed from the murder but keeps his attention unwaveringly fixed on the act itself., he argues that Macbeth "dares to kill his king not so much to become king himself as to become the man who dared to do it" (220). Jan Blitts, in *The Insufficiency of Virtue*, has also suggested that one of the reasons Macbeth may kill Duncan is because by appointing Malcolm as heir to the throne, Duncan establishes a hereditary succession that constricts feudal Scotland's already rigid political order by closing a major path to legitimate political aspirations (40).

however, the suggestion that Macbeth kills Duncan for reasons other than ambition is ultimately as incomplete and unsatisfying as the suggestion that he kills him out of ambition. For one thing, while compelling, the argument that Macbeth's regicide is a symptom of structural conditions does not refute the orthodox claim that Macbeth is ambitious so much as it *standardizes* it. In effect, what the argument does is replace the claim that Macbeth is ambitious with claim that *everyone* in the play is ambitious. Berger, for instance, insinuates, "the specter of Macbeth as regicide threatens the others with the guilt of self-recognition" (28). Similarly, Sanders argues, "in common with most of the Scots, [Macbeth] finds it difficult to believe that any act is truly heinous" (82). By both overstating and over-generalizing their claims in this way, their readings trivialize the significant moral distance that separates Macbeth from the rest of his peers, no small part of which is the fact that Macbeth alone is unable to restrain his ambition.

However, the principal reason these counter-readings are unsatisfying is because they are, for all their insightfulness, answers to the traditional question, "Why does Macbeth kill Duncan?" By absorbing all of our critical attention into what Coleridge, in another context, called a "motive hunt," this question simultaneously obscures from us the significance of the fact that, prior to killing King Duncan, Macbeth decides unequivocally not to. As his first major soliloquy unambiguously demonstrates, Macbeth knows that he ought not kill King Duncan, and he also knows why. Remarkably, however, his full knowledge of the overwhelming pragmatic, ethical and religious arguments against the regicide does nothing to prevent him from following through with it. Taken fully into account, this striking fact urges a reformulation of the standard question regarding Macbeth's motives. The question is not, "Why does Macbeth kill

Duncan?" The question is, "Why does Macbeth *fail to refrain* from killing Duncan?" Reframed in this manner, our attention is led away from Macbeth's motives, whether personal or "structural," toward an explanation of why he is unable to restrain those motives. This shift of focus in turn raises the immediate possibility that it is not the strength of Macbeth's ambition that causes him to murder Duncan, but the weakness of his will.

Incontinence, or weakness of will, is the English translation of the Greek term *akrasia*, which signifies the condition in which an agent is unable to perform an action that he or she has resolved upon. Etymologically, akrasia denotes a lack or deficiency in a certain kind of power or strength (*kratos*), namely the power of self-control (*enkrateia*). Technically, however, akrasia is defined as free, intentional action contrary to an agent's better judgment. Without explicitly stating that Macbeth suffers from akrasia, a number of critics have nonetheless observed that one of the defining features of Macbeth's character is that his will is weak. In *The Invention of the Human*, for instance, Harold Bloom follows Wilbur Sanders in giving us "a Macbeth who pragmatically lacks any will, in contrast to Lady Macbeth, who is a pure will until she breaks apart" (522). In a similar vein, Bloom also suggests that "Nietzsche's insight may be the clue to the different ways in which the Macbeths desire the crown: she wills it, he wills nothing" (522). On Bloom's characteristically hyperbolic reading, in short, Macbeth does not just have a *weak* will, he has *no* will at all. Even more explicitly, Bernard McElroy seems to draw overtly on the technical definition of akrasia when he argues that Macbeth "willfully disregards his own better judgment, pushing to the back of his mind all his best perceptions and most passionately held beliefs" (224). McElroy also emphasizes that

Macbeth knowingly acts against his own better judgment when, commenting specifically on Macbeth's murder of King Duncan, he states, "The most terrible thing about [Macbeth's] tragedy is that he goes to it with his eyes wide open, his vision unclouded, his moral judgment still in perfect working order" (218). Taken together, McElroy's observations come very close to explicitly characterizing Macbeth's murder of King Duncan as an instance of akrasia. Moreover, as Wilbur Sanders observes, far from diminishing as the play progresses, Macbeth's awareness of the values he is consciously defying only increases: "His grasp on the humane values he is violating becomes fiercer with every violation" (85). The implicit suggestion that Macbeth's knowledge fails to prevent him from following through with his misdeeds suggests, once again, that his tragedy can be comprehended in terms of akrasia.

However, because these critics are more interested in exploring why Macbeth kills King Duncan than why he fails to act on his better judgment to refrain from killing him, they decline to follow-up their observations concerning both the status of Macbeth's will and the ineffectual nature of his knowledge. Stephen Greenblatt's reading of the play is a case in point. Like the critics just discussed, he too stresses the extent to which Macbeth knowingly acts against his own better judgment: "Endowed with a clear-eyed grasp of the difference between good and evil, [Macbeth] chooses evil, even though the choice horrifies and sickens him" (2557). By emphasizing that Macbeth is appalled by the choice of evil itself rather than the repercussions of that choice, Greenblatt also gives us a Macbeth whose actions consciously violate his better judgement. Indeed, Greenblatt specifically goes on to note that Macbeth kills Duncan "without adequate motivation," and observes that this "deepens the mystery" as to why he kills him (2558). When it

comes to suggesting a provisional solution to this mystery, however, rather than highlight the fact that Macbeth lacks the self-control to adhere to his better judgement, Greenblatt follows a well-worn path and argues that this mystery "links *Macbeth* to a long line of theological and philosophical speculation on the nature of evil" (2558).

Alternatively, what I intend to suggest is that the mystery of evil in *Macbeth* is more banal, that its links are to philosophical and theological speculation not on the nature of evil but on the nature of akrasia and self-deception. [2] From this perspective, the tragic dimension of the play is situated neither in the motives underlying Macbeth's choice of evil nor in the many grisly crimes he perpetrates, but in the fact that his self-destructive tendencies are acted out knowingly.

Focusing on the themes of akrasia and self-deception, my approach to the play will implicitly align itself with a philosophical methodology that has a number of precedents in the long history of Shakespeare studies. William Richardson, for example, advertises the philosophical nature of his version of character criticism in the title of his most famous book, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*. By separating ethical content from psychological effect, Richardson performs what Christy Desmet calls "moral criticism" (43).[3] While

---

[2] For example, Robert Miola claims that Shakespeare's engagement with the theme of free will versus determinism in *Macbeth* draws on Erasmus, whose *De Liberio Arbitrio* defends the notion of free will against Luther's deterministic stance in *Assertio omnium articulorum* (64). However, to provide an example of an interpretation of the play that understands Macbeth's actions less in light of evil and more in terms of akrasia, it might be noted that Erasmus also participates in the philosophical debate on incontinence. In fact, in his *Paraphrases*, which according to R.A.B. Mynors was "widely read and had a considerable influence on religious thought in sixteenth-century England," (xxxiv) Erasmus provides an extensive commentary on Saint Paul's *Letters to the Romans*, the seventh of which is preoccupied with the problem of akrasia. Erasmus glosses a crucial line from Saint Paul as follows: "For I do not do that which mind and reason keep telling me is good. Although I long for the good by mind and reason, nevertheless, conquered as I am by desire, I do instead what is shameful – though I hate it for its shamefulness" (48).

[3] Desmet describes the guiding assumption of Richardson's approach as follows: "By reflecting on the motivation of fictional characters, we can gain better knowledge of human nature and thereby improve both the 'heart and understanding'" (44).

my approach will be similarly preoccupied with the ethical content of *Macbeth*, the subtitle of Richard Moulton's *The Moral System of Shakespeare: A Popular Illustration of Fiction as the Experimental Side of Philosophy* comes closer to describing my guiding methodological assumption. Moulton's readings are based on the insight that literary and philosophical texts share a concern for the same fundamental questions. In this respect, his basic methodology resembles Stanley Cavell's, which of course operates on the intuition that the skepticism that found its philosophical refinement in Descartes is already at work in Shakespeare's plays, and that both the philosophical and the literary modes are proper expressions of it. My approach to *Macbeth* will be guided by the related intuition that the play grapples with, among other things, two specific philosophical problems – akrasia and self-deception – that are, and have long been, the object of both philosophical and literary concern. More specifically, I will be suggesting that the play contains a critique of a particular form of knowledge, knowledge that is devoid of motivational content. [4] In this sense, I treat the play an example of what Stein Olsen and Peter Lamarque call "philosophy in literature" (144). In their book *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, Olsen and Lamarque use this term to describe texts in which "a theme that is also the object of philosophical deliberation is given literary interpretation in terms of an imaginative world artistically constructed" (146).

My argument proceeds as follows. In the first chapter, I identify and explore the theme of akrasia in several of Shakespeare's plays, offering a brief overview of the

[4] In her comments on "ethical criticism," Martha Nussbaum also points out that this sort of approach to literature is the best way of shedding light on the complexity of ethical problems, and their relation to the particular situations in which the problems are situated. For instance, after performing a philosophical analysis of Aristotle's "insistence on the cognitive role of the emotions," she immediately goes on to argue that, "in order to investigate this Aristotelian ethical view fully and fairly, we need to turn to texts in which the case for that sort of rationality is made out in a powerful and convincing way" (347). Contemporary moral philosophy, in her view, is simply not adequate to the purpose: "this cannot be done if we confine ourselves to works written in the abstract style of most contemporary moral theory" (347-8).

relevant literary and philosophical intertexts. After situating Macbeth's murder of Duncan in the historical and philosophical debate on incontinence, in the second chapter I offer a detailed analysis of the theme of akrasia in the first act of *Macbeth*, arguing that Macbeth's action meets all six of the defining criteria of incontinence. Drawing on insights from a large body of moral and analytic philosophy, I then proceed, in the next two chapters, to offer a multi-faceted explanation of the key factors contributing to Macbeth's weakness of will. In the third chapter, I argue that Macbeth's connection to the motivational conditions of his better judgment is shallow; although he both knows and feels that he ought not kill Duncan, he does not know that he feels that he ought not kill him. I follow this claim up, in the fourth chapter, by arguing that Macbeth's lack of self-control is habitual because the weakness of his connection to the motivational conditions of his better judgment precludes him from appealing to useful measures of self-control. His habitual lack of self-control, in turn, renders him vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's relentless attempt to deplete the motivation underpinning his better judgment. In the fifth chapter, I go on to make the more substantial claim that Macbeth's akratic murder of Duncan is facilitated by a phenomenon that is closely related to incontinence, namely self-deception. After defining the term and exploring its relationship to akrasia, I argue that Macbeth engages in a consistent pattern of self-deception that not only eases the way for his akratic murder of King Duncan but also contributes to his later murders of Banquo and MacDuff's family. My account of self-deception as the simultaneous holding of contradictory beliefs grounds my reading, in the sixth chapter, of a variety of key passages in the remainder of the play. Ultimately, I argue that the reason Macbeth is

able to act self-deceptively against his better evidence is identical to the reason he is able to act akratically against his better judgment: he does not feel what he knows.

CHAPTER 1

Shakespeare and Akrasia

> Shakespeare could not be who he is – the burden of the name of the greatest writer in the language, the creature of the greatest ordering of English – unless his writing is engaging with the depth of the philosophical preoccupations of his culture.
>
> - Stanley Cavell[5]

There is a profusion of evidence suggesting that Shakespeare was interested in the problem of *akrasia*. While the bulk of this study will be devoted to exploring the theme of incontinence in *Macbeth*, Macbeth himself is certainly not the only Shakespearean character who suffers from incontinence; both Hamlet and Angelo, among others, also grapple with the problem.[6] To take *Hamlet* first, it is certainly possible to interpret Hamlet's infamous delay in light of either his reluctance to participate in the old-fashioned way of blood and vengeance or his desire to seek proof of the Ghost's trustworthiness regarding Claudius' guilt. Nevertheless, a strong case can also be made for the claim that he suffers from weakness of will.[7] As Hamlet himself repeatedly reminds us, he both knows that he ought to revenge himself upon Claudius and wants to, but is unable to act upon either his knowledge or his desire. While Macbeth, as we will see below, formulates a decisive better judgment not to kill King Duncan but acts against it, Hamlet formulates a decisive judgment to kill King Claudius but fails to act on it.

---

[5] Cavell *Disowning Knowledge* 3.

[6] In *The Necessity of Affections*, Torsten Kehler suggests that "Macbeth, along with some of the characters in *Troilus and Cressida* and possibly Hamlet are *akratic* – weak-willed because they know the better course of action without taking that course" (238).

[7] In "The Problematic Relation Between Reason and Emotion in *Hamlet*" Eric Levy goes so far as to claim that Hamlet himself alludes to Aristotle's analysis of incontinence: "Referring to Claudius' incontinence Hamlet even seems (though this cannot be proven) to allude to a passage from the *Nichomachean Ethics*: "When he is *drunk asleep*, or in his rage" (3.3.89, emphasis mine). For here the words, "drunk asleep" echo those with which Aristotle designates the incontinent man who, by acting without reference to reason, is "'ike the man who is asleep or drunk'" (1415).

Whereas Macbeth appears to lack the motivational charge to perform his preferred course of action, however, Hamlet's decision seems to be motivated. He reports that he is "prompted to [his] revenge by heaven and hell" (2.2.562), observes that he has both "the motive and the cue for passion" (2.2.570-72), and admits that he has "excitements of [his] reason and [his] blood" (4.4.56). These remarks suggest that although Hamlet has both reason and motivation to act, they are not enough. In this sense, Hamlet's delay can also be understood as a case of akrasia. After all, the puzzle of akrasia arises not just where there is a contest between reason and passion but where the contrast between reason and something else is difficult to make out. Hamlet seems to favor a course of action which he fails to take, without apparently ceasing to favor it. In contrast to Macbeth who decides not to kill Duncan but goes ahead and kills him anyway, Hamlet decides to kill Claudius yet cannot.

An even better case can be made for the claim that Angelo, in *Measure for Measure*, is prone to akrasia. As Charlotte Lennox observed in 1753, "[W]hen [Angelo] finds himself struck with the Beauty of Isabella, he starts at the Temptation; reasons on his Frailty; asks assistance from Heaven to overcome it; resolves against it, and seems carried away by the Violence of his Passion, to commit what his better Judgment abhors" (17). In arguing that Angelo resolves against temptation and attempts to exercise self-control but is carried away by his passion to act against his better judgment Lennox not only invokes the vocabulary of incontinence but comes very close to explicitly characterizing Angelo as an *akrates*. Her claim is certainly well founded. Only minutes into his first meeting with Isabella, Angelo cannot help but bear witness to his irrepressible desire for her: "She speaks, and 'tis such sense / That my sense breeds with

it" (2.2.144-45). The shift in the meaning of the word "sense" here, from something like "sound advice" in the first instance to "appetite" or "sensuality" in the second, marks the pivotal swing from reason to passion, a transition that the word "breeds" accelerates with its obvious allusion to copulation. Like Saint Paul who, in his classic statement on akrasia in *Romans* 7:14-24 laments, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate," Angelo expresses a sense of bewildered self-estrangement: "What's this? What's this?" he asks himself; and then again, "What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?" (2.2.167-77).[8] Moreover, in misinterpreting Isabella's cordial gesture of respect ("Heaven keep your honor safe") as a statement on his own imperiled virtue, Angelo makes it clear that he is fully aware of the fact that he is falling: "I am that way going to temptation, / Where prayer is crossed" (2.2.163-64). His awareness that he is falling, however, does nothing to prevent or even slow the fall. On the contrary, as Katharine Maus observes, "the lucidity with which Angelo analyzes his own motives leads not to penitence but to an increasing moral recklessness" (2024).

That Angelo's moral recklessness flies in the face of his better judgment is evident from the repugnant images of death and decay with which he describes his own blossoming passion.[9] His comparison of his surging desire to carrion rotting under the sun once again recalls Saint Paul's extended discussion of *akrasia*, which crescendos in the bleak lament: "What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (7.24). Angelo also explicitly describes his desire for Isabella as "foul," and depicts himself as a saintly figure tempted by the devil: "O cunning enemy, that, to catch

---

[8] The connection between Shakespeare and St. Paul's statements on *akrasia* will be fleshed out more fully below.

[9] In fact, Angelo acts against not one decisive better judgment but two. In addition to succumbing to his desire for Isabella, he also acts against his decisive refusal to pardon Claudio,(cf. 2.2.52; 2.2.84, etc.).

a saint, / With saints doth bait thy hook" (2.2.184-85). Stronger still, he unambiguously identifies his idea of bribing Isabella as "evil," and simultaneously associates it with original sin: "the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception" (2.4.6-7). The hopeless sense of self-division he gives voice to also intimates a painful awareness of the fact that he is acting contrary to his preferred course of action: "When I would pray and think, I think and pray / To several subjects: heaven hath my empty words, / Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue, / Anchors on Isabel" (2.4.1-4). Here again there is a parallel with Paul, who ends his statement on *akrasia* in *Romans* with the sentence: "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (7.25). In fact, Angelo's later remark, "when once our grace we have forgot, / Nothing goes right; we would and we would not" (4.4.32-32), seems to directly echo St. Paul's anguished remark: "the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (7.19). Furthermore, in the face of flesh-and-blood temptation, Angelo specifically reflects on the impotence of his rational powers: "The state whereon I studied / Is like a good thing, being often read, / Grown seared and tedious" (2.4.7-9). Such statements on the ineffectual nature of intellectual knowledge are one of the defining features of akrasia. As Martha Nussbaum observes, "The person who acts akratically against his or her own knowledge of the good is frequently quite capable of performing correctly in all the intellectual ways; what she lacks is the heart's confrontation with concrete ethical reality" (81). When Angelo's heart does confront concrete ethical reality, it concludes not just that his rational faculties are powerless but, tautologically, that basic passions are ineradicable: "Blood, thou art blood" (2.4.15).

What's more, when it comes to explaining his loss of self-control, Angelo appeals to the same Platonic metaphor the Duke invokes to underscore the necessity of self-control. Referring to Vienna's sex laws as "needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds" (1.3.20), the Duke recalls the celebrated passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* where the desiring part of the soul is compared to a useful but refractory horse which the rational part of the soul needs to keep strictly bridled and under firm control.[10] Angelo uses a similar metaphor, first when he states, "I have begun, / And now I give my sensual race the rein" (2.4.159-60), and then again when he alludes to "the affection that now guides me most" (2.4.168). As we will see below, the metaphor is closely related to Socrates' seminal account of *akrasia* in Plato's *Protagoras*. But Galen also appeals to the same Platonic metaphor in *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* when he advances the following account of Medea's infamous incontinence: "her passion has not been brought into subjection and does not obey and follow reason as if it were master, but throws off the reins and bolts and disobeys the command" (4.244.6-8). The same Platonic metaphor invoked by Angelo, the Duke and Galen also, of course, brings to mind, and possibly grounds, the equestrian metaphor Macbeth draws on at the end of his "If it were done" soliloquy: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th'other" (1.7.25-28).

In addition to the fact that the phenomenon of *akrasia* is explored in both *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* the actual word "incontinence," which is the standard English translation of the Greek *akrasia*, also surfaces a number of times in the plays. In *Othello*, for example, it appears twice. After Roderigo and Iago fail to disrupt the marriage of

[10] As Katharine Maus points out in a footnote on this line, "Since 'bits and curbs' are parts of bridles, many editors emend 'weeds' to 'jades' or 'steeds,' but the Oxford English Dictionary records several instances of 'weed' as a slang term for a worthless horse" (2035).

Othello and Desdemona, Roderigo tells Iago, "I will incontinently drown myself" (1.3.304). Desdemona also uses the word in the fourth act when she tells Emilia that Othello "will return incontinent" (4.3.11). In both places, the word is commonly glossed as "immediately," but as Edward Pechter remarks, "the modern meaning, 'without control' is secondary but available" (95). Pechter's observation concerning the secondary meaning of incontinence is presumably based on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but in fact, according to the *OED*, it is "straightway," "at once," or "immediately" that are the *secondary* meanings of the word, while the *primary* meaning refers to a lack of self-control: "Want of continence or self-restraint; inability to contain or retain: a) with reference to the bodily appetites, esp. the sexual passion; b) in general sense." With respect to Desdemona's use of the term, the appeal of what Pechter erroneously calls "the secondary meaning" increases when we note that Othello does not, in fact, return immediately, and when he does it is to murder Desdemona in the heat of passion. While it is, of course, difficult to support the claim that, Othello's murder of Desdemona runs contrary to his better judgment, it is worth noting that Stanley Cavell, for one, has argued that Othello is in fact aware of Desdemona's innocence. As Cavell writes, "However far [Othello] believes Iago's tidings, he cannot just believe them; somewhere he also knows them to be false" (133). In fact, when Cavell urges us to understand Othello "to want to believe Iago, to be trying, against his knowledge, to believe him," he comes very close to explicitly characterizing Othello as an *akrates* (133).

Roderigo's use of the word "incontinently" in connection to his sudden impulse to kill himself also seems to draw primarily on the definition of incontinence as "want of self-restraint." Indeed, in the context of Roderigo's characteristically histrionic reaction

to Desdemona's betrothal, the gloss "immediately" simply does not do justice to his character or his claim. Moreover, it is in direct response to Roderigo's melodramatic quip that Iago goes on to produce a definition of love that specifically associates it with both of the meanings of incontinence referred to above: one, as "a lust of the blood," and two, as a "permission of the will" (1.3.329). It is, in turn, Iago's equation of love with incontinence, in tandem with Roderigo's remark that it is not in his power to curb his passion, that subsequently occasions Iago's celebrated analogy: "Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners" (1.3.317). This pseudo-sententious pronouncement, with its magisterial emphasis on self-control and the absolute power of the will, in other words, appears to arise as an explicit rebuke to Roderigo's self-proclaimed incontinence.

The word "continent" also appears in *Macbeth*. In the course of testing Macduff's trustworthiness and loyalty, Malcolm depicts his boundless lust in the following terms: "my desire / All continent impediments would o'erbear / That did oppose my will" (4.3.64-6). In this context, where "continent" refers unambiguously to what the OED records as its primary definition, editors almost invariably do gloss the word as "containing" or "restraining." Given that Malcolm is essentially pretending to be another Macbeth in this scene, his duplicitous self-characterization can also be read as a commentary on Macbeth's behavior. Indeed, his use of the word "o'erbear" recalls the prominent o'erleaping imagery that is, as we will see, associated with Macbeth in the first act of the play. Conspicuously, Macduff also picks up on this "bounding" imagery in his reaction to Malcolm's lies, specifically associating it with both intemperance and tyranny: "Boundless intemperance in nature / Is a tyranny" (4.3.67-68). While Macduff

falls short of characterizing Malcolm (and, indirectly, Macbeth) as incontinent, his allusion to intemperance does recall Aristotle's many comparisons between the incontinent and the intemperate man in his extended discussion of *akrasia* in book seven of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[11] Caithness invokes the same vocabulary when describing Macbeth's behavior: "He cannot buckle his distempered cause / Within the belt of rule" (5.2.15-16). While the word "rule" here is almost invariably taken to mean "restraint," "distempered" is often read as "disease-swollen." As we will see below, however, Shakespeare specifically uses "distempered" to mean intemperate in a passage of *Troilus and Cressida* where he explicitly alludes to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*[12] Caithness' metaphor can also be read, more simply, as a reference to a glutton with an enormous belly, and as Socrates points out in Plato's *Protragoras*, want of self-restraint in eating is amongst the most common instances of akrasia.[13]

Closer to home, Macbeth himself comes close to portraying his murder of Duncan's guards as an akratic act when, referring specifically to his inability to remain "temp'rate," he offers the following account of his actions: "Th'expedition of my violent love / Outran the pauser, reason" (2.3.105-108). Given the spatial and temporal proximity of his remark to both the primal scene of the regicide and his "If it were done" soliloquy, Macbeth's personification of practical reason as a mere "pauser" that is easily

---

[11]As we will see below, Shakespeare alludes specifically to Aristotle's *Ethics* in *Troilus and Cressida*, a fact that suggests he may have been aware of the similarities between intemperance and incontinence. To cite just one example, Aristotle writes that "both the continent man and the temperate man do nothing contrary to the rule for the sake of the bodily pleasures, but the former has while the latter has not bad appetites, and the latter does not feel pleasure contrary to the rule, while the former feels pleasure but is not led by it" (817a12).

[12]The allusion to Aristotle's *Ethics* will be discussed below, but the use of "distempered" to mean intemperate occurs in the following passage: "The reasons you allege do more conduce / To the hot passion of distempered blood / Than to make up a free determination / Twixt right and wrong (2.2.170-172)

[13]The first homely example of incontinence Socrates gives Protagoras is contained in his question, "Don't you maintain that it happens that in some circumstances, often for instance when you are conquered by the pleasures of food and drink and sex, you do things though you know them to be wrong?" (353c).

outpaced by passion reverberates beyond its context to offer a commentary on his assassination of King Duncan as well. In fact, for Francis Fergusson, the line contains an account not just of Macbeth's murder of Duncan, but of the motive behind the entire tragedy: "It is the phrase 'to outrun the pauser reason," which seems to me to describe the action, or motive, of the play as a whole" (225).

Lady Macbeth also provides several cues for interpreting Macbeth's character in terms of incontinence. It is, after all, the very fact that Macbeth shies away from performing a deed he has ostensibly "sworn" to do that raises her ire in the seventh scene of the first act. While her outrage is clearly related to the fact that Macbeth has broken a promise, the broken promise itself can be understood as a subset of Macbeth's inability to execute a judgment he has, according to her, unequivocally committed himself to: "Nor time nor place / Did then adhere, and yet you would make both. / They have made themselves, and that their fitness now / Does unmake you" (1.7.51-54). What's more, Lady Macbeth explicitly characterizes Macbeth's wavering will in images of weakness, as when, after the murder, she chides, "You do unbend your noble strength / To think so brain-sickly of things" (2.2.42-43). When Macbeth refuses to return the attendants' daggers, moreover, Lady Macbeth specifically scolds him for being "Infirm of purpose!" (2.2.50). Finally, she makes the pith of her accusation explicit when she tells him, "Your constancy hath left you unattended," (2.2.66-7) a sentence that Greenblatt glosses unambiguously as "your resolve has deserted you" (2579). In the context of a scene in which Macbeth is incapable of following through on his preferred course of action, these images of slackened strength, weakened purpose and abandoned resolution are

all suggestive of a reading along the lines of weakness of will.[14]

While it is, of course, impossible to establish whether or not Shakespeare was consciously writing with the concept of weakness of will in mind, given both the breadth and longevity of the historical discussion of akrasia, it is certainly possible that he was aware of the problem. From a remark made by Hector in *Troilus and Cressida* we know for certain that Shakespeare was aware of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* the entire seventh book of which is devoted to the problem of akrasia. In this play, Hector tells Paris and Troilus that they are "not much / Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought / Unfit to hear moral philosophy" (2.2.168-70). The allusion is specifically to *Ethics* 1.3 and is all the more conspicuous because it is anachronistic.[15] Furthermore, we know that the concept of *akrasia* was circulating in Shakespeare's intellectual milieu from the fact that the twelfth book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, published in 1590, features an enchantress named Akrasia who threatens the heroes with intemperance or excess (2.12.362ff.).

The concept of akrasia has also been closely associated with tragedy ever since Euripides' *Medea,* a play that is often cited as an intertext for Macbeth. Robert Miola, for instance, has isolated Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" soliloquy as well as her allusion to infanticide and compared them to the way the witch Medea rouses herself to take revenge on her unfaithful husband by murdering their children (94). But I would suggest that an even more striking parallel lies in the fact that both Medea and Macbeth are morally repelled by the gruesome actions they contemplate, yet follow through with

[14] We might also interpret the awesome increase in the strength of Macbeth's will in the wake of his akratic butchery of King Duncan as a determined repudiation of his earlier incontinence.

[15] That the reference is more than merely casual is suggested by the remarks with which Hector follows up his allusion: "The reasons you allege do more conduce / To the hot passion of distempered blood / Than to make up a free determination / Twixt right and wrong" (2.2.164-172).

them nonetheless. Medea's most celebrated line is, of course, also a succinct definition of akrasia: "I am well aware how terrible a crime I am about to commit, but my passion is stronger than my reason, passion that causes the greatest suffering in the world" (1078-1080). As I will argue below, the high point of *Macbeth* is a related instance of akrasia. What's more, just as I will claim that Macbeth's incontinent murder of King Duncan is the defining moment of the play, so as Richard Rutherford writes, "[T]he most striking feature of [*Medea*] is the clarity with which Medea sees the full horror of her revenge, yet proceeds to execute it" (47).[16]

Incontinence is also a prominent theme in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Phaedra knows what she wants, and tries to act in accordance with her knowledge, but fails. Addressing the Ladies of Trozen, she says:

> [A]lready in the long hours of the night I have given thought to human lives that end in ruin. And my view is that it's not the way they think that makes them go wrong, for they are intelligent enough in most cases. No, this is how we should look at it: we know what is right and understand it, but we don't put it into practice...
>
> (376-388).

While Phaedra, like both Medea and Macbeth, may know what is right, she also knows that knowledge is insufficient for right action. In this respect, she explicitly challenges the earliest philosophical account of *akrasia* in Plato's *Protagoras*,[17] where Socrates defines the problem in the following terms: "many people who know what is best to do

---

[16] It is also worth noting that one of the principle implications T.H. Irwin draws from the fact that Euripides criticizes the Socratic account of akrasia via the characters of Medea and Phaedrus is this: "We learn that [Euripides] can contribute to theoretical disputes without taking time off from being a dramatist" (197). The same, I would argue, is true of Shakespeare's treatment of incontinence in *Macbeth*, which is another parallel between the two plays.

[17] After treating the subject in depth, T.H. Irwin concludes : "It is reasonable to infer that Euripides not only presents characters talking about incontinence, but also thinks incontinence really happens, and that Socrates is wrong to deny its existence" (195). Although it has been suggested that examples of akrasia are to be found in Homer, as T.H. Irwin writes, "This sort of belief is likely to result from fairly reflective consideration and deliberation; the less of this someone engages in, the less likely he is to have the beliefs and desires of an incontinent" (186). As a result, he concludes, "In other literary sources before the time of Socrates and Euripides clear recognition of incontinence is hard to find" (189).

are not willing to do it, though it is in their power, but do something else" (352d). While Socrates and Euripides define the problem in common terms, however, contrary to Euripides Socrates takes issue with the views of Medea, Phaedra and "the many," all of whom argue that people fail to act in accordance with the good as a result of being overcome by pleasure or other appetitive forces. In fact, Socrates denies the existence of akrasia altogether and defends the thesis that "no one willingly does wrong," arguing that true knowledge cannot be "pushed around or dragged about like a slave" (352 b-c). If one knows what is the right thing to do, according to Socrates, one necessarily does it, and he argues that the common man's hedonistic assumptions oblige him to admit that the man whom he describes as overcome by such forces is in fact led astray by error in his calculation of the consequences of his actions. Through both Medea and Phaedra, however, Euripides challenges the Socratic position and in aligning Macbeth with Medea, I am claiming that *Macbeth* contains a critique of Socratic rationalism that has more in common with the famous metaphor from Plato's Phaedrus than it does with Plato's Socrates.

Yet even if Shakespeare was not aware of Euripides's Medea, he almost certainly would have been familiar with Seneca's *Medea*, which was based on Euripides' play[18] and was translated into English in London in 1581 by Thomas Newton under the title *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, translated into Englysh.* What's more, Shakespeare draws heavily on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,[19] and Ovid's Medea also articulates a succinct version of the akrasia problem: "If I could, I would be more reasonable. But some strange power holds me back against my will. Desire impels me one way, my mind another. I see

[18] See Stanley Stowers's sketch of the legacy of Euripides' *Medea*, esp. 262.
[19] See, for example, Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor's *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

which is the better course, and I approve it: but still I follow the worse" (7.13-23). Another major influence on Shakespeare is, of course, the New Testament, and in his seventh letter to the *Romans,* as we have seen, Saint Paul also rejects the already-ancient Greek view that knowledge of the good leads to doing the good: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (7.19).[20]

Taken together, all of these points make a strong case for the claim that Shakespeare was interested in the problem of akrasia. To review briefly, I have argued that, like Macbeth, both Hamlet and Angelo suffer from weakness of will. I have also pointed out that the words incontinence and continence surface repeatedly in the plays, often in situations directly related to failures of the will. What's more, in *Macbeth* itself a number of the characters, both minor and major, provide cues for interpreting Macbeth's actions in terms of incontinence. I have also noted that one of the intertexts for *Macbeth* is Euripides' *Medea,* a play that is also famously preoccupied with the theme of weakness of will. Furthermore, we know that the concept of akrasia was circulating in Shakespeare's intellectual milieu, and that he was aware of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* the entire seventh book of which is devoted to incontinence. Finally, we also know that Shakespeare draws heavily on both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the New Testament, both of which contain influential treatments of our theme. Given that weakness of will features prominently in the plays in all of these ways, it should come as no surprise that *Macbeth* engages with the theme.

---

[20] For Euripides' influence on Saint Paul see Stanley Stowers's argument that "7:15 and 19 contain a ubiquitous Greek saying that is central to the Greco-Roman ethic of self-mastery.... The text remembered as the starting point for this tradition is Euripides *Medea*" (260).

CHAPTER 2

'How Profitless to Know': Macbeth as an *Akrates*

> I know both what I want and what might gain,
> And yet, how profitless to know.
> - Robert Browing, "Andrea del Sarto"

Akratic action involves knowing the better course of action but failing to take it. In seeking to establish whether Macbeth's murder of King Duncan is in fact akratic, therefore, it is essential to determine what Macbeth considers his best course of action. On the one hand, Macbeth clearly has a strong desire to kill Duncan. When the witches prophesy that Macbeth will become king, Banquo immediately remarks that he "seems rapt withal" (1.3.58-9). The fact that he "starts and seems to fear" the witches' prophecy has led many critics, including Coleridge, Bradley and others, to suggest that Macbeth has in fact considered killing Duncan prior to his encounter with the witches.[21] Moreover, when Ross proclaims Macbeth Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth exclaims, in eager anticipation of becoming king, "The greatest is behind" (1.3.115). Just a little later he takes pause to remark on "that suggestion," whose "horrid image" unfixes his hair and makes his heart pound at his ribs (1.3.135-36). Just what "that suggestion" involves is made clear a few lines below when, for the first time, Macbeth explicitly identifies his intention as "murder" (1.3.138). Again, when Duncan appoints Malcolm as the heir apparent, Macbeth exclaims, "that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap / For in my way it lies" (1.4.49-50). He then alludes once more to the thought of regicide: "Stars, hide your fires / Let not light see my black and deep desires" (1.4.49-53). Finally,

[21] See, for example, Coleridge's "On *Macbeth*" and Bradley's appendix, "When was the murder of Duncan first plotted?"

after returning to Inverness and informing his wife that Duncan's arrival is imminent, the regicide becomes a distinct possibility and Macbeth takes pause to consider whether he ought to go through with it.

Before considering Macbeth's first soliloquy, I would like to draw attention to the fact that in several productions of the play Macbeth's deliberations are pictured as taking place in a room that is not only away from the banquet hall but also spatially elevated. In Roman Polanski's film, for example, Macbeth reflects on the deed high up in his bedroom, and in Trevor Nunn's 1982 BBC version Macbeth is once again shown in his bedroom high up in the castle. The idea here, it seems to me, is that Macbeth is removing himself from his company and playing philosopher, a point I will return to shortly.

At the beginning of Macbeth's first soliloquy, he makes it clear that if he could avoid the consequences of killing Duncan, or even postpone them until his death, he would not hesitate to kill him:

> If th'assasination
> Could trammel up the consequences, and catch
> With his surcease success: that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and end-all, here,
> But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come.
>
> (1.7.2-7)

The appeal here is to what in contemporary ethical terms might be called "ethical egoism," or more specifically "short-term hedonistic egoism." The injunction to the agent under the sway of this moral perspective is: act in such a way as to promote your own immediate pleasure. Macbeth's immediate desire to kill Duncan is in fact so fervent that he claims he would be willing to risk the possibility of suffering the consequences of the crime so long as it occurred in the afterlife, a proclamation that corroborates Georges Bataille's epigram, "What is substantially rejected in evil is a concern with the time to

come" (28). Up to this point, then, the only factor keeping Macbeth from his strong desire to kill Duncan is prudence, the instrumental nature of which is underscored in his repeated references to the murder as a "business" (1.5.7; 2.1.48-9; 2.1.23).

There is indeed reason to believe that Macbeth's desire to kill King Duncan is so strong that it may actually precede his much-discussed ambition. As we have seen, Sanders, Berger and McElroy, among others, have all argued against the conventional view that the murder of Duncan is simply a means to Macbeth's ambitious end of becoming king. Another way of getting at this distinction is through Nietzsche's "On The Pale Criminal," which can be read as a direct commentary on *Macbeth*.[22] In this section of *Zarathustra* Nietzsche draws a distinction between "madness after the deed" and "madness before the deed." Examining the motives of the pale criminal who suffers from "madness after the deed," Zarathustra remarks simply, "he wanted to rob." Zarathustra then goes on to rehearse the conventional interpretation of how robbers like Macbeth grow pale: "An image made this pale man pale. He was equal to his deed when he did it; but he could not bear its image after it was done. Now he always saw himself as the doer of one deed. Madness I call this: the exception now became the essence for him." (150). This summary parallels the orthodox interpretation of Macbeth as an ambitious man whose conscience punishes him for his transgressions. But against this interpretation, Nietzsche advances an alternate account: "I say unto you: his soul wanted blood, not robbery; he thirsted after the bliss of the knife. His poor reason, however, did not comprehend his madness and persuaded him: 'what matters blood'? it asked; 'don't

[22] In addition to thematic similarities, there is also the ubiquitous imagery of paleness in *Macbeth*. After Macbeth murders Duncan, Lady Macbeth scolds him to "look not so pale," and tells him "My hands are of your color, but I shame / To wear a heart so white." Macbeth also refers to refers to "pale-hearted fear" and calls the witches' prophecy regarding Banquo's issue "the great bond which keeps me pale." Late in the play, Macbeth also calls his fear-stricken servant "cream-faced loon," "linen-cheeks" "whey face."

you want at least to commit a robbery with it?" (150). Applied to *Macbeth*, this second interpretation suggests that Macbeth does not kill Duncan in order to rob the crown from him, but that he robs the crown from him in order to rationalize his prior desire to kill Duncan. In other words, on Nietzsche's view, Macbeth does not want to kill Duncan to satisfy his ambition to be the king so much as his ambition to be king furnishes him with an excuse to kill Duncan.[23]

Either way, it is clear from the potency of the many passages leading up to the regicide that, at least in certain moods, Macbeth has a strong desire to slay Duncan. Yet in spite of this pronounced desire, it is equally clear that Macbeth is of two minds. As we have seen, he has a number of striking physical reactions to the thought of killing Duncan that indicate not just that he is considering killing him but that he has some irrepressible misgivings about doing so. The thought of murdering Duncan presents images to Macbeth's mind that are, in his view, so "horrid" that they "unfix" his hair, makes his seated heart "knock" at his ribs, "shake" his "single state of man" and "smother" his capacity to act (1.3.134-41). The sheer physical intensity of these reactions intimates that they are symptoms of what Stuart Hampshire might call "moral intuitions:" immediate, unreflective moral judgments that contain the compressed reasoning of preconscious inference (15).

If these moral reflexes are indeed "unreflective" or "preconscious," however, they do not remain so for long. In the "If it were done" soliloquy Macbeth spells out in great

[23]Interestingly, Freud explores a related phenomenon in his essay, "Criminals From a Sense of Guilt," which was written shortly after his reflections on *Macbeth* in "Characters Wrecked by Success." Discussing a handful of cases in which there was a "preexistence of the feeling of guilt and utilization of a deed in order to rationalize this feeling," Freud argues, "Paradoxical as it may sound, I must maintain that the sense of guilt was present before the misdeed, that it did not arise from it, but conversely – the misdeed arose from the sense of guilt" (333). He ends his essay with a rare allusion to Nietzsche, acknowledging that the same phenomenon "was known to Nietzsche too" and "glimmers before us in Zarathustra's sayings 'On the Pale Criminal'" (333).

detail exactly why he should refrain from killing Duncan. From his initial position of psychological hedonism, Macbeth shifts quickly to the perspective of long-term rational egoism. Whereas from the former perspective, the murder is evaluated from a position of self-interest with regard to immediate personal pleasure, from the latter perspective the act is again evaluated from a position of self-interest but this time with regard to what will promote personal self-interest in the long term. Considering the deed from this perspective, Macbeth quickly determines that if there were nothing but a short run it might be fine to kill Duncan, but because consequences are inevitable in this lifetime, it is not in his own self-interest to kill Duncan.

> But in these cases
> We still have judgment here, that we but teach
> Bloody instructions which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips.
>
> (1.7.7-12)

Macbeth's response to the seduction of ethical egoism reveals his belief that action is a continuum, an ongoing process of cause and effect, of act and consequence. More, it unearths his commitment to a worldview in which retributive justice is not merely possible but certain: Macbeth is convinced that what he does unto Duncan will be done unto him, or as Seneca puts it in *Hercules Furens*, "crime returns to its own author" (735). Given the depth of Macbeth's conviction in "even-handed justice," then, it would, to say the least, be imprudent of Macbeth to go through with the murder.

After refuting his own short-term hedonism, however, Macbeth proceeds to advance a number of overwhelming ethical arguments against the murder as well.

> He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,

Who should against his murderers shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.

(1.7.13-16)

The trust to which Macbeth refers here goes right to the heart of the Scottish feudal order. Without it, the whole fabric of Scottish society would collapse, for beyond the immediate family, men are tied together by the bonds of sworn fealty and protection.[24] Moreover, as Duncan's earlier address to his subjects as "Sons, kinsmen, thanes" suggests, the individual's sense of self, status and role in this society are structured by his position in the socio-political order. That said, as inviolable as Macbeth seems to find his obligation as kinsman and subject, he gives even greater scope to his obligation as host; while the duty of a kinsman and subject is to refrain from inflicting harm, the duty of a host is to prevent others from doing harm.

It seems clear, however, that the most lively reaction Macbeth has to the prospect of regicide is bound up with his conviction that if he commits the murder, Duncan's

virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off,
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the wind in every eye
That tears shall drown the wind.

(1.7.18-25)

On one interpretation, Macbeth's appeal here is once again to consequences; he is simply reiterating his prior fear that he will be found out. Indeed, Burton Raffel, among others, has suggested that Macbeth's worries in this passage amount to little more than a concern

[24]Referring to a completely unrelated culture, in his essay "Sentiments of Honour in Kabyl Society," Pierre Bordieu makes the related claim that such sentiments of honor "have their roots in the system of the most fundamental cultural categories" and are "felt and experienced so deeply that they do not need to be formulated" (232).

for "public relations" (35). Yet there is clearly something that differentiates this reason for refraining from killing King Duncan from the various reasons that have preceded it. The sentence structure lengthens considerably, vivid and kinetic images begin to arise and shift spontaneously, and the emotions of both pity and fear begin to dominate. This reason, I would suggest, is not just a reason; its importance lies less in *what* Macbeth fears than *how*. Intensely expressive, this passage exemplifies the sort of "passional response" that Martha Nussbaum situates at "the heart of rational deliberation" (309). For the first time in the soliloquy, Macbeth is here confronting the situation not with instrumental reason alone but, in Nussbaum's terms, with "deliberations informed by desires" (308). What's more, the apocalyptic imagery, with its invocation of "deep damnation," as well as its images of angels, trumpets, horses, a newborn babe, and cherubim, give the passage a markedly religious tone. So much so that L.C. Knights considers the passage "an appalling vision of judgment" and suggests that the lines "have of course behind them the traditional conception of the Day of Judgment" (101). F.R. Leavis makes a similar claim, arguing that while Macbeth begins the soliloquy by denying that moral scruples have anything to do with what is preventing him from killing Duncan, as he proceeds the speech reaches a "self-confutation." On Leavis's view, "What we have in this passage, is a conscience-tormented imagination, quick with terror of the supernatural, proclaiming a certitude that 'murder will out,' a certitude appalling to Macbeth not because of consequences on 'this bank and shoal of time,' but by reason of a sense of sin – the radical hold on him of religious sanctions" (80-1). Commenting on the same passage, Kenneth Muir suggests that the discrepancy between the argument of the speech and the imagery employed is deliberate: "On the surface Macbeth appears to be

giving merely prudential reasons for not murdering Duncan; but Shakespeare makes him reveal by the imagery he employs that he, or his unconscious mind, is horrified by the thought of the deed to which he is being driven" (256). Whatever the case may be, the passage leaves Macbeth unequivocally committed to refraining from killing King Duncan: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent," he concludes (1.7.25-6). And to Lady Macbeth he firmly repeats his decision: "We will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.31).

Nevertheless, as we know, Macbeth's decisive better judgment falls by the wayside within a few short minutes of Lady Macbeth's arrival back on the scene and, after a brief protest, he reverts to his initial overriding preoccupation – consequences. "If we should fail?" he asks (1.7.59), and again, "Will it not be received?" (1.7.74). Just what it is that accounts for Macbeth's about-face will be explored in greater depth below, but for now it is sufficient to note how quickly Macbeth abandons the conclusions of his sophisticated deliberative powers and consents to go through with the deed. His decisive better judgment slips away in a matter of mere seconds, and Macbeth does precisely what he has just decided, resolutely, not to do. Even after he has grimly proclaimed himself "settled," moreover, Macbeth continues to consider the feat "terrible" and remarks that he will have to strain every nerve and muscle, every "corporal agent," to go through with it (1.7.79-80). The fact that the "corporal agents" must be "bent up" at all suggests that they are still slack at the moment Macbeth proclaims himself settled, and his added emphasis that "*each* corporal agent" must be bent up, by its very plurality, amplifies the degree of exertion that will be required for him to draw the bowstring of his arrow-like intention. What's more, insofar as the expression literally gives agency to his resistant

bodily agents it also recalls the several previous instances where Macbeth's corporal agents have flared up to warn him away from the murder – the hair standing on end, his heart knocking at his ribs. Not only does Macbeth act against his decisive better judgment, then, but it would seem that he murders Duncan without ceasing to know that he ought not to.

Keeping in mind this summary of the events leading up to Macbeth's murder of King Duncan, we are now in a position to evaluate whether or not the murder can be characterized as an akratic act. Strictly speaking, akratic actions, to qualify as such, must meet six criteria:

> 1) one must act against one's fully considered judgment
> 2) one's action must be intentional
> 3) one's action must be free
> 4) one's judgment about what is best must be made from the perspective of one's own values, moral principles, beliefs and objectives
> 5) after one acts, one must regret having done so
> 6) one must recognize, at the moment the action is performed, that it is contrary to what one judges best [25]

Beginning with the first of the six criteria, it is clear from what we have seen above that in murdering Duncan Macbeth acts against his better judgment. No other single action in this or any of Shakespeare's other plays is as fully considered as Macbeth's sustained deliberation on his intention to kill Duncan. As we have seen, he considers the act from a wide range of moral perspectives and concludes decisively with the words, "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent." Furthermore, he re-states the conclusion of his considered judgment when he tells Lady Macbeth, unequivocally, "We will proceed no further with this business."

---

[25] These criteria, which are as comprehensive as possible, are drawn from a variety of sources, including Mele 1996, Mele 1987 and Thero 2002.

As for the second criteria, it is equally clear that Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan is intentional rather than accidental. At the moment he makes his decision, he is aware of what he is doing and chooses in favor of it, proclaiming, "I am settled."

The third criterion, the freedom of Macbeth's action, is a much more complex issue. This stipulation is intended to capture the important distinction between action that is free and action that is compelled. For example, the behavior of the heroin addict who injects the drug against his better judgment is understood differently from the thrill seeker who experiments with the drug contrary to what he judges best. Whereas the latter action is free and akratic, the former is compelled and therefore cannot be considered akratic. Applied to Macbeth, this distinction raises the thorny issue of the freedom of Macbeth's will. Naturally, it has been argued that the witches exercise a determining influence on Macbeth's behavior. [26] It has also been suggested that Lady Macbeth's influence on Macbeth amounts to a form of demonic possession, as though she literally pours her spirit in his ear and inhabits his mind.[27] Of course, the opposite views have also been argued. And to further complicate matters, Wilbur Sanders makes the astute point in *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* that, "There is a danger of resolving things in *Macbeth* which Shakespeare deliberately left unresolved – one of them being the question of Macbeth's freedom" (285). Ultimately, however, with regards to Macbeth's murder of Duncan, the issue of responsibility decides the matter. The witches tell Macbeth only that he will be king; they say nothing about murdering Duncan. As a result, it is entirely

[26] However, Thomas Wheeler's *Macbeth: An Annotated Bibliography*, which runs to 1009 pages and covers scholarship and criticism of *Macbeth* from 1940 to 1987 lists fifty entries on "Macbeth as a free agent" and only fourteen on "Macbeth as not a free agent."
[27] See Greenblatt's introduction to the play, 2560.

up to Macbeth to decide *how* to respond. In this restricted sense, his freedom is unambiguous.

Moving on to the fourth criteria, there can be little doubt that Macbeth's decisive better judgment is made from the perspective of his own values, morals and beliefs. As we have seen, after acknowledging that there is no hope of practical success, Macbeth's thoughts turn to the overwhelming ethical arguments against the murder, and from these to the highly idiosyncratic, almost visionary outpouring of his reasons for deciding against the regicide. His judgment in the "If it were done" soliloquy is purely his own.

Macbeth's action also meets the fifth criteria inasmuch as he immediately regrets his action after it is done and promptly returns to being guided by the values and beliefs of his better judgment. To cite just a few supporting examples, he laments, "I am afraid to think what I have done" (2.2.49). He also, of course, exclaims, "What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes" (2.2.57). Finally, he also states, "To know my deed 'twere best not know myself" (2.2.71).

The final criteria is, in some respects, the most difficult to determine. At the moment he murders Duncan, does Macbeth recognize that he is acting contrary to what he judges best? The issue of recognition is intended to differentiate instances of weak akrasia from instances of strict akrasia. If at the moment Macbeth kills Duncan he honestly feels he should not be doing what he is about to do, condition six is met and Macbeth's is a case of strict akrasia. If, however, in the act of murdering Duncan Macbeth believes that murder is in fact the best course to follow, criterion six is not met and Macbeth's murder is an instance of weak akrasia. All things considered, I would argue that a good case can be made for the claim that the murder is a case of strict

akrasia. When, just prior to entering Duncan's chamber, Macbeth hallucinates the sight of a dagger leading him on, he seems to be filled with a sense of horror at what he is about to do and appears to be aware that what he is doing is wrong. It is as if he is being *pulled* toward the murder against his will rather than being *pushed* into it by some inner passion. Moreover, in the second half of the soliloquy, Macbeth animates the elements themselves and endows them with a disapproving perspective on his actions. Nature itself is atrophied by the enormity of what he is about to do, the night seems full of sinister beings watching him, and the very stones he walks on are ready to cry out against him. Macbeth's vision here is, in my view, linked to the fearful flourish that ends his first major soliloquy. But even if this suggestsions fail to convince, there is still Macbeth's reaction, just seconds before he performs the murder to Duncan's guards. Momentarily awakening one another, one of the guards says, "God bless us" and the other says, "Amen." In response, Macbeth tries to say "Amen," because, as he explains later, "I had most need of blessing" (2.2.29-31). The fact that Macbeth feels he has need of blessing just prior to killing Duncan strongly suggests that he feels he should not be doing what he is about to do. What's more, right before he kills Duncan, he imagines he hears a voice cry "Macbeth does murder sleep" (2.2.34).[28] Coupled with the more ambiguous "Is this a dagger" soliloquy, these two occurrences suggest that en route to killing Duncan, Macbeth is aware that he is acting contrary to his better judgment.

Insofar as Macbeth's act of murdering Duncan meets all six of these criteria, therefore, there can be little doubt that his action is in fact akratic. Just how his incontinence is to be explained, however, is another question.

---

[28] That Macbeth hears this refrain before rather than after killing Duncan is evident from the shift in tense between his first hallucination, "'Macbeth does murder sleep'" and his second, "'Glamis hath murdered sleep'" (2.2.40).

CHAPTER THREE

The Unfelt Known: An Account of Macbeth's Akrasia

> While literature may not allow us to adjudicate on philosophical claims, there is every reason to think that the possibilities of imaginative description offered by literature can help us to grasp what, in practice, certain philosophical claims might come to.
> - David Wood[29]

To get a preliminary grasp on the various ways the phenomenon of akrasia has been resolved, it will be helpful to begin by invoking a fairly rudimentary model of practical reasoning. In its traditional context, the problem of weakness of will presupposes a threefold division of the psyche into the faculties of passion, reason and will. While passion includes the totality of the so-called irrational impulses associated with the body (including instincts, drives, emotions, and sensual pleasures or pains), reason includes the various intellectual abilities associated with the mind (such as thought, cognition, memory, imagination and self-consciousness). Finally, will refers to a separate volitional agency that is responsible for translating the results of rational decisions into personal actions. Thus, the phenomenon of akrasia presupposes both the view that reason naturally directs the individual's pursuit of the good and the view that the will naturally conforms its volitional allegiance to reason's evaluative assessments. The problem, of course, is that things do not always work out this way.

The view that the will is subservient to rational evaluation is commonly referred to as "the intellectual perspective" on akrasia, where the word "intellectual" refers to the efficacy its proponents attribute to rational evaluation. In her enquiry into the cause of action, that is to say, the proponent of the intellectual perspective concentrates on the way

---

[29] Wood *Philosophers' Poets* 2.

reason evaluates and ranks the various motives for action and then bids the will to execute, or in the case of akratic action *fail* to execute, that which is, rationally-speaking, the strongest reason. Implicit in this approach is a commitment to "the causal theory of action," which Alfred Mele defines formally as follows: "For all actions *A*, *A* is an intentional action only if *A*'s agent had a reason for *A*-ing and (his having) that reason was the cause of his *A*-ing" (32). The causal theory of action, in turn, contains an additional presupposition that Donald Davidson states clearly, "If reasons are causes, it is natural to suppose that the strongest reasons are the strongest causes" (xii).

The general problem is that sometimes, as in Macbeth's case, the strongest reasons do not usher forth in actions. Macbeth, for instance, reasons that he ought not kill Duncan but, against his own better judgment, he kills him anyway. The best reasons, therefore, are not acted upon and this raises "logical difficulties" for those, like Davidson, who are committed to the intellectual perspective and its causal theory of action. Because Davidson believes that the strongest reasons are the strongest causes he argues that in the case of akratic action, where the strongest reasons are not acted upon, the causes of action must not be reasonable. Hence, at the end of his article, "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?" Davidson writes, "If one asks what is the agent's reasons for doing *a* when he believes it would be better, all things considered, to do another thing, then the answer must be: for this, the agent has no reason" (42).

The view that it is reasons that cause action and that the strongest reasons are the strongest causes is, however, anything but self-evident. Indeed, one could argue that part of the complexity of the akrasia problem is related to the fact that most philosophical models for the explanation of action are designed specifically for rational behavior. When

irrational behaviors cannot be manipulated to fit a preconceived model, either their existence is denied or they are accommodated in such a way as to make them appear more rational than they intuitively appear. [30] As Alfred Mele points out in *Irrationality*, causal theories of action have a long and distinguished history, including proponents such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Spinoza, Locke, Kant and William James (31). But of course there is also a long and distinguished history of thinkers who are opposed to this view. Mele mentions Ryle and Wittgenstein, but to this list we might add a host of other philosophers, among whom Nietzsche is perhaps the most eloquent. Interestingly, in the contemporary scholarship on akrasia, Amelie Rorty takes a position similar to Nietzsche's. To offer a very rough sketch of an alternative to the intellectual perspective on akrasia, then, I would like to turn briefly to Rorty and Nietzsche.

In her article, "Self-deception, Akrasia and Irrationality," Amelie Rorty uses the metaphor of a city to challenge the view that the will is governed by reason. She urges us to think of the psyche not as a city built on a regular grid but more as a city like Paris in the Middle Ages, with many semi-independent neighborhoods, indirect ways of access from one point or another and no strong central municipal administration (i.e. reason). "We can," she says, "regard the agent self as a loose configuration of habits of thought and perception and motivation and action, acquired at different stages, in the service of

[30] As Mele points out elsewhere, "A major source of the interest [in akrasia] is obvious: strict akratic action raises difficult questions about the connection between evaluative judgement and action, a connection of paramount importance for any theory of the explanation of intentional behavior that accords evaluative judgments an explanatory role... In threatening the intellectual perspective while leaving the motivational perspective unchallenged, akratic action poses apparent difficulties for the project of combining the two perspectives into a unified outlook on the explanation of intentional human action. That is a primary source of perennial philosophical interest in akratic action" (242).

different ends" (83).[31] In a similar vein, Nietzsche also fights vehemently against the conviction that reason is the only or even the dominant cause of action. In *The Will to Power*, he writes,

> The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of 'cells' in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command. (490)

To imagine the self in this way as multiple and de-centralized with an unstable leadership, is to say not only that different and even incompatible habits and character traits coexist in the same person, but that different patterns assume the role of regent at different times. And of course, this is precisely what Nietzsche envisages – different habits and character traits competing for the domination of a single person. The consequence of this view of the subject for Nietzsche's understanding of incontinence are summarized by Alexander Nehemas in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*: "The particular traits that dominate on one occasion can sometimes simply disregard their competitors and even refuse to acknowledge their existence: this is the case of self-deception. Or they may acknowledge them, try to bring them into line with their own evaluations, and fail: this is the case of akrasia" (183).

Nevertheless, there are a number of compelling reasons for holding onto elements of both the causal theory of action and the intellectual perspective on akrasia more generally. Reasons clearly do have a major, if not exclusive, bearing on action and any picture of practical reasoning that denies a significant role to rational evaluation runs the

[31] This view of the subject is also echoed by, among others, Herbert Fingarette in his book *Self-Deception*. Like both Rorty and Nietzsche, Fingarette champions a vision of the self as a community of subselves each of which can be conceptualized as organized clusters of desires, beliefs and purposes. Because each of these subselves is, in his view, capable of expressing itself in semi-independence from the other clusters, self-deception occurs when a wider community of selves simply shuns a subself unacceptable to it (27). The similarities to Nietzsche's perspective is striking.

risk of violating a fundamental philosophical intuition. Moreover, as Mele argues, the philosophical project involved in explaining akrasia does not require challenging the intellectual perspective so much as it requires combining it with another complementary perspective to form a more expansive outlook on the explanation of intentional human action.

In pursuit of this end, Mele retains the causal theory of action, but argues that, "reasons for action have two importantly different dimensions: the agent's evaluation of his or her reasons for acting, and their motivational force or valence" (95). This is a significant distinction and applied to *Macbeth* it has a lot of explanatory power. Mele acknowledges that "Better judgments are often formed on the basis of the agent's evaluation of the objects of his wants," but he argues, "one's evaluation need not match the motivational force of the want" (84). That is to say, just because reason bids the will to enact a given better judgment, it does not mean that the better judgment will have enough motivational force to compete with other, rationally-speaking, less desirable wants. As Mele argues, "An agent's evaluation of his reasons and the motivational force of those reasons need not always be in mutual alignment" (95). When we act akratically then, according to Mele, our problem is in part that at the time of the action, the balance of our motivations lies on the side of the akratic action rather than on the side of the decisive better judgment. And it is this disparity between an agent's decisive better judgment and what she is most motivated to do that makes it perfectly understandable how someone might judge it best, all things considered, to do A, and yet be more motivated to do B.

In Macbeth's case for instance, after evaluating his situation, his better judgment clearly counsels him not to kill Duncan. And yet, as we know, his better judgment falls away in a matter of mere seconds. Bearing in mind Mele's important distinction between the two different dimensions of reasons for action – "decisive better judgments" and "motivational conditions" – we may be in a position to comment not only on a potential explanation of Macbeth's *akratic* behavior in the play, but on a more general critique of unmotivated reason. For it is, to say the least, interesting that Shakespeare has Macbeth retire from the banquet hall and, like a moral philosopher, go through a very sophisticated process of deliberation that has absolutely no effect on his actions. Can we not read into this play a critique of the efficacy of deliberative reason?

To broaden this claim and give some flesh to it, I would like to quote a few passages from David Hume, a moral skeptic whose views seem to me very much in line with the approach to knowledge at work in *Macbeth*. In considering these passages, it may help to keep in mind the image of Macbeth as having removed himself from the banquet hall, and retired to a room in the castle that is, in many productions, both elevated and dimly lit. In his essay, "On the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," Hume argues, "The reflections of [abstruse] philosophy are too subtile and distant to take place in common life, or eradicate any affection. The air is too fine to breathe in, where it is above the winds and clouds of the atmosphere" (42). In *The Enquiry*, commenting once more on abstruse philosophy, he echoes this claim, and adds, "Nor can (the) principles (of abstruse philosophy) easily retain any influence on conduct and behavior" (6). For "to excite or moderate passions," he claims, "there are no direct arguments or reasons, which can be employed with any force or influence" (6). Indeed, whatever influence

theoretical reflection may have on the individual in the privacy of his or her study, Hume claims, "vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade, and comes into the open day" (6). Thus for Hume, as for Macbeth, "the empire of philosophy extends over a few; and with regards to these too, her authority is weak and limited" (222). Indeed, in a passage that may be read as a direct comment on Macbeth's incontinence, Hume questions:

> What is more capricious than human actions? What more inconstant than the desires of man? And what creature departs more widely, not only from right reason, but from his own character and disposition? An hour, a moment is sufficient to make him change from one extreme to another, and overturn what cost the greatest pain and labor to establish. (272)

Translated into Mele's terms, we might say that, for Hume, evaluative reason is unable to either excite or moderate passions because it lacks the motivational valence. One of the general claims I am making about this play then is that, as Emily Dickinson might say, "Philosophy don't know." For if, as Brecht says, "Literature is the laboratory of philosophy," it seems clear, based on what we have seen of Macbeth's ineffectual better judgment, that the experiment of rational philosophy fails, and fails miserably. But even if Dickinson is wrong and philosophy *do* know, the play makes at least this much clear: knowing is not enough.

Indeed, I would suggest that it is precisely because Shakespeare understood that knowing is not enough that he chose to depict the dominant themes of this bloody play in such relentlessly visceral terms.[32] In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus makes a powerful claim about the limitations of appealing to "explanatory principles" in literature, and in doing so suggests a way of getting around the problem that speaks directly to the mode of understanding appealed to in *Macbeth*. He writes, "The fact that certain great

[32]The play contains 46 direct references to blood.

writers have chosen to work in terms of images rather than arguments reveals a great deal about a certain kind of thinking common to them all, a conviction of the futility of explanatory principles and of the instructive message of sensory impressions" (35). The distinction drawn here between "explanatory principles" and "sensory impressions" parallels, in a curious way, not only the general claim that I have suggested Mele makes concerning unmotivated rational evaluations, but also the approach to knowledge Shakespeare applies to his audience in *Macbeth.* In his reading of the play, L.C. Knights brilliantly observes, "The logic is not formal but experiential, and demands from us, if we are to test its validity and feel its force, a fullness of imaginative response and a closeness of realization, in which both sensation and feeling become modes of understanding" (110). For Knights, as for Camus and Mele, the experiential logic of the play deliberately bypasses mere rational evaluation by appealing to sensation and feeling as modes of understanding. In effect, what Knights is claiming is that readers or viewers of this play are maneuvered into responding to it in the same way that Macbeth himself responds (or fails to respond) to the stirrings of his better judgment.

Significantly, the claim that both Knights and Camus make regarding the superiority of sensory impressions over explanatory principles has a lot in common with A.C. Bradley's insightful interpretation of how Shakespeare has written in Macbeth's moral sense. Bradley points out that, "Macbeth's better nature... instead of speaking to him in the overt language of moral ideas, commands and prohibitions, incorporates itself in images which alarm and horrify" (308). Bradley, in effect, is claiming that the images of Macbeth's moral sense, the sense that he of course does not act upon, *are* motivationally charged. And of course he is right. As we have seen, the initial thought

of killing Duncan presents to Macbeth's mind "horrid images" that are evidently so charged they "unfix" his hair, make his heart "knock" at his ribs, and "smother" his capacity to act (1.3.131-142). What's more at the end of his first soliloquy Macbeth's vision of the "naked new-born babe" and heaven's cherubim also contain a good deal of motivational valence. Thus, it seems clear that if Macbeth had paused to take seriously his relationship to his own motivationally charged moral convictions, he would not have killed Duncan. The question, then, becomes: if Macbeth's moral intuitions are in fact motivationally charged, why does he fail to act on them?

Again, Bradley points us in a helpful direction. He writes of Macbeth that through his imagination "come to him the intimations of conscience and honor" (308). But he also argues that Macbeth "has never... accepted as a principle of his conduct the morality which takes shape in his imaginative fears" (308). Macbeth knows what he thinks. Indeed, as we have seen, he knows what he thinks well enough to deliberate on the act of regicide from a wide range of moral perspectives. However, it is not so clear that he knows what he feels. Significantly, his self-reflexive commentaries always center on his sensations. When his heart knocks at his ribs and his hair stands on end the focus is, as ever, on sensation rather than feeling. Near the end of the play, when Macbeth hears the screams that signify his wife's suicide, he reverts once again to sensational imagery, recalling how his "fell of hair / Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir / As life were in't" (5.5.10-12). Here again the life is in his hair, his sensations, his physical reactions. Indeed, this same passage begins with an explicit emphasis on sensation: "The time has been my *senses* would have cooled / To hear a night-shriek" (italics mine, 5.5.10-11). And just a bit further on, Macbeth again specifically emphasizes the

sensational nature of his sensibility: "I have almost forgot the *taste* of fears" (italics mine; 5.5.12). Mentieth also remarks on this characteristic of Macbeth's moral sense: "Who then shall blame / His pestered senses to recoil and start, / When all that is within him does condemn itself for being there?" (5.2.22-24)

To say that Macbeth's moral reactions are more sensational than they are emotional, however, is not to say that Macbeth is incapable of articulating his reactions to his sensations or his feelings; clearly, he is. But Macbeth does not seem to recognize that his moral intuitions are his own in some unique and important way, or that a special relationship obtains between him and his own feelings and deeply held moral convictions. [33] Macbeth's imaginative reaction to the prospect of killing Duncan is, I have said, clearly motivationally charged. What I want to claim is that Macbeth is not moved by it in any durable way because he is not aware of the fact that he feels as strongly as he does.

To articulate this point, I would like to turn briefly to Aristotle's *Ethics*. One of Aristotle's "suggested solutions" to the problem of incontinence is the possibility that, as he puts it, "One may have knowledge without using it" (1146b33). Aristotle

---

[33] This claim also applies to Macbeth's homicidal intentions. In the "supernatural soliciting" aside, for instance, Macbeth refuses to identify his thought of murdering Duncan as having come from him. He describes himself as simply "yielding," to a "suggestion," and even then the suggestion is not his but "*that* suggestion." To avoid ownership of his fantasy of murder, moreover, he displaces it onto his thought: "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical" (1.3.138). While the thought may be his own, he attributes the fantasy itself to his thought. He also speaks as though his homicidal intentions are foreign to him and, like an external power, affect what is truly his: "my hair," "my seated heart," "my ribs." Moreover, as we will see, even when he does acknowledge that his black and deep desires are his own, he refuses to see them: "The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see" (1.4.53-4). And here again he refers to the murder of Duncan only as "that," conspicuously declining to mention just what is to be done, whom it is to be done by, and to whom it will be done. He also repeatedly uses both the passive voice and the pronoun "it" ("when it is done"), a circumlocution he repeats again just before the murder ("I go and it is done") as well as after ("Look on't again I dare not"). Finally, while he does identify his intention to murder Duncan as "th'assasination," not only does he distance himself from the act with the word "the" but even his reference to assassination is equivocal in the sense that the act is not really an assassination so much as it is a slaughter. Ultimately, Macbeth's moral naivety is directly connected to this terrified unacquaintedness with his own desires.

distinguishes between two ways in which the word 'know' is conventionally used. He says, "a person who has knowledge but does not use it is said to know, as well as the person who does use it" (1146b33). Now it is obvious from the many passages we have considered that, for a multitude of pragmatic, ethical and religious reasons, Macbeth knows that killing Duncan is wrong. However, it is just as clear that Macbeth does not use this knowledge. What I would like to suggest is that Macbeth does not use this knowledge because he fails to connect to its motivational charge, because he does not feel what he knows. Of course, he does describe the way Duncan's virtues will "plead like angels against the deep damnation of his taking off" and this makes it sound as though he feels his moral conviction. But in his discussion of incontinent agents Aristotle makes the following extremely important point: "The fact of their using language that implies knowledge is no evidence" (1147a16). For, as Aristotle argues in a subsequent analogy, "those who have just started learning a subject reel off a string of propositions which they do not yet understand; because knowledge has to be assimilated and that takes time. So we must suppose that incontinent persons utter their sentiments as actors do;" which is to say, "Not as expressing their own *feelings* at the time" (emphasis mine; 1147a16-35).

This strikes me as an accurate description of Macbeth's relation to his own motivationally charged evaluations. He comments reflexively on a string of feelings and sensations and rational evaluations, but he does so like someone who is barely aware of what he is saying.[34] Like a second-rate actor, or a "poor player," he has only the most superficial relationship to the feelings he is articulating. And it is for this reason that

[34] R.A. Foakes has also observed this point: "Another common assumption about Macbeth is that because he has great poetry to speak he must be an 'intellectual giant', when a very important question the text raises is *how far Macbeth understands his own words*" (italics mine; 11).

Macbeth can know what he feels well enough to appreciate the evidence for his feelings, and yet still fail to be moved by that knowledge. Drawing on the terms laid out by Martha Nussbaum in *The Therapy of Desire* we might say that Macbeth's assent to the emotional reactions he articulates so eloquently is not "full" but "bare." For Nussbaum, "full assent" to an evaluation is an unequivocal commitment to it, a commitment that moves one metaphorically by "resonating cognitively within" (382). To fully assent to an evaluative proposition is to acknowledge it, as Nussbaum says, "with the core of my being" or "to realize in one's being its full significance" (381). By contrast, "bare assent" to an evaluation is merely an acceptance of it, marked by the absence of any emotion. In this sense, bare assent is similar to the psychoanalytic term "isolation," which Nancy McWilliams defines in her classic text *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* as "the relegation to unconsciousness of the personal gut-level implications of any situation or idea or occurrence" (122). Like an "isolated" idea or occurrence, an experience given bare assent is not obliterated from conscious experience; rather, its affective aspect is cut off or sequestered from its cognitive dimension (123). In a situation where emotion is clearly warranted, as for instance in the case of a judgment against committing regicide, merely to give bare assent to the evaluation is to fail properly to appreciate the judgment and so, for Nussbaum, to fail unequivocally to commit oneself to it. Ultimately, then, while Macbeth does assent to his better judgment and its motivational underpinnings, we might say that his assent is not full but bare. [35]

---

[35] In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas also draws a distinction between assent and consent that is relevant to understanding Macbeth's incontinence. While, in Aquinas' view, the intellect "is said to assent," consent, for him, is the province of the will (S.T., IaIIae. 15, 1). The distinction between assent and consent is ably brought out by Judith Barad, who interprets Aquinas as holding that "assent is a judgment as motivated by an apprehension of evidence and as committing a person to a certain conception," while consent, on the other hand, "is an act of will which is immediately directed to action" (103;107). Consequently, we might say that while assent is a necessary condition for action, consent is merely sufficient (106-7). Reason may

To cull a word from *Othello* we could say that Macbeth lacks "self-charity," or care of himself (2.3.185). Or, alternatively, we could appeal to an Aristotelian term, and say that he lacks "self-love." For he has no connection to, and therefore no affection for, the fundamental values that are central to his identity as a person. Macbeth knows that he ought not kill Duncan. And he also feels that he ought not kill Duncan. But he does not know that he feels that he ought not kill Duncan.

---

make a judgment and assent to the proposition that some object is worthy of pursuit, but as Aquinas writes, "consent is accomplished when the will fixes itself" (A, S.T. IaIIae 74,7). Because the assent of reason is necessary in order for will to act, one could say, with Thomas Stegman, that "consent is an act of will which carries intellectual elements along with it" (121). Aquinas' distinction between assent and consent is relevant to Macbeth's *akrasia* because fully considered judgments represent intellectual assent to a proposition, but while such assent is necessary if the correct course of action is to be followed, it falls far short of guaranteeing that one will act in either a virtuous or morally strong manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

Unskilled Resistance: Self-Control, Habit and Motivation

> When an agent is conflicted, without a taste for conflicts and without approved strategies for resolving them, then akrasia sometimes provides a way out. It at least settles *what to do*.
>
> - Amelie Rorty[36]

Ultimately, Macbeth's inability to fully avow the conative dimension of his moral convictions is the underlying cause not only of his akratic butchery of King Duncan, but of his more general inability to exercise self-control. Macbeth could conceivably have noticed that his level of motivation to refrain from killing Duncan was not, when he formed his better judgment, sufficiently high as to render unnecessary an effort of self-control in support of it. Indeed, in claiming that Macbeth's better judgment *is* motivated it was not my intention to suggest that it is necessarily *as* motivated as his desire to go ahead and kill Duncan. Clearly, it is not. In contrast to the depth and intensity of his "black and deep desires," Macbeth's remark, "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent," appears relatively flat. On the one side, after all, lies the immediate prospect of becoming king while on the other lies the alternative of remaining merely who and what he is. Such discrepancies in motivation are, however, the defining feature of temptation. As Bigelow, Doods and Pargetter point out, "To be tempted is to have a desire which you want *not* to be your strongest desire" (44). In this sense, the self-controlled individual is precisely the sort of person who, in the face of temptation, is able to act in accord with their *weaker* desire. But to do so one must, of course, first realize (consciously or pre-consciously) that one's weaker desire is in fact weaker, and then actively employ an

---

[36] Rorty "Self-deception, Akrasia and Irrationality" 914.

effort of self-control to boost that weaker desire. Macbeth's estrangement from the motivational conditions of his knowledge, however, precludes him from precisely this sort of process.

While Macbeth, like most people, may have more control over his rational evaluations than he does over the relative motivational force of his desires, he unquestionably could have manipulated his motivational conditions by adopting strategies that either increased his motivation for performing the action he judged best, or decreased his motivation for performing contrary actions. Alfred Mele, for example, describes a number of basic, pragmatic techniques that are commonly used to shift the bulk of motivation to the side of one's better judgment. What Mele calls the "attentional strategy," for instance, refers to the technique of "distracting one's attention from the consummatory qualities of relevant rewards" (90). The logic of the "attentional" tactic, like Mele's strategy for responding to it, is based on the observation that the immediate presence of rewards increases the magnitude of "the frustration effect" and therefore decreases delay of gratification by making the waiting period more difficult (88). Spinoza makes a similar point in his reflections on *akrasia* in book four of his *Ethics,*[37] where he writes, "We are affected more intensely by a future thing which we imagine will be quickly present, than if we imagined the time when it will exist to be further from the present" (4.10). Because the intensity of desire increases in direct proportion to the imagined proximity of the object of desire, it follows, in Spinoza's view, that, "A desire which arises from a knowledge of good and evil, insofar as this knowledge concerns the

[37] Incidentally, Spinoza's reflections on akrasia in book four of his *Ethics* also contain the following direct quotation from Ovid's *Medea* "I see which is the better course, and I approve it: but still I follow the worse" (7.13-23). Spinoza's use of the quotation is to be found at 4P17S: 15-16.

future, can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment" (4.16). The longer we expect to wait for a good, that is, the greater the likelihood that the motivational power of our rational desire for it will be defeated by a more proximate good. Thus, as Mele suggests, turning one's attention away from rewards attendant upon performance of an akratic action is one way of effectively bolstering self-control. In a similar vein, he discusses related techniques like making "a private side-bet" with oneself by "piling up rewards contingent upon one's waiting for the preferred reward" (90).

Because Macbeth is estranged from the affective dimension of his rational evaluations, however, the idea of appealing to a technique of self-control barely occurs to him. Describing the decisive role that habit plays in contributing to akratic balances of motivation, Amelie Rorty emphasizes that it effects both the agent's "built-in motivation for the habitual action" and the agent's "cognitive behavior" (911). In other words, habit not only bolsters the attractiveness of the akratic alternative, but it also shifts one's attention away from the action judged best as well as one's reasons for performing it and useful measures of self-control (914). We find all of these habitual factors in play during both the lead up to Macbeth's murder of Duncan and in his ultimate decision to kill Duncan.

He is immediately "rapt" by the predictions of the witches, and not only implores them to, "Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more," (1.3.67) but admits in his letter to Lady Macbeth that he "burned in desire to question them further" (1.5.4). Later, when Ross proclaims him Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth does not so much as hesitate before exclaiming, "The greatest is behind" (1.3.115). Nor does he actively resist his thoughts

of regicide, even when they shake his "single state of man" and make "present fears less than horrible imaginings" (1.3.136-7). To be fair, concerning the witches' predictions, he does comment, "this cannot be good," but even then it is only after he remarks, "this cannot be ill" (1.3.27). Moreover, in asking himself, "why do I yield to that suggestion," he makes it clear that he already has yielded, and that he is passively bewildered by his own submission (1.3.30). Again, when Malcolm is proclaimed heir to the throne, far from exercising self-control, Macbeth immediately seethes, "that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap" (1.4.48-9). Finally, when Lady Macbeth actually proposes the regicide, the most Macbeth can say in opposition is, "We will speak further" (1.5.88).

Indeed, in comparison to Lady Macbeth and her adamantine self-control (in the early stages of the play) Macbeth appears, by contrast, almost devoid of self-control. Unlike her husband, Lady Macbeth repeatedly takes pains to shore up her resolve and fortify her preferred course of action. In fact, the primary purpose of her most famous soliloquy is to ensure that she remains constant in the face of anticipated competing motivation. What she implores the "murd'ring ministers" to do, after all, is, "Stop up th'access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th'effect and it" (1.5.42-45). Because she is able to foresee the possible arrival of contrary impulses that might interfere with her chosen course of action, she pauses and deliberately attempts to pre-empt their intervention. What's more, although her imperious will does falter after the murder, unlike Macbeth, she tries to regain her self-control with an armory of steely quips.

Ultimately, however, it is not Lady Macbeth but Banquo who is Macbeth's true double in this respect. In direct contrast to Macbeth, Banquo solicits information from the witches only with the pointed remark, "Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear / Your favors nor your hate" (1.3.58-9). In response to Macbeth's question as to whether he hopes his children will become kings, Banquo responds with the poised warning: "oftentimes to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths" (1.3.121-2). We see Banquo's efforts at self-restraint once again when he asks for protection against undesirable fantasies; "Merciful powers," he implores, "Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose" (2.1.6-8). When Macbeth tries to tempt him into allegiance, moreover, Banquo resists Macbeth's offer by explicitly invoking his commitments to honor, clear conscience and allegiance to the king (2.1.25-28). Macbeth himself is aware of the distance that separates he and Banquo in this regard. Not only does he recognize Banquo's "royalty of nature" and the "dauntless temper of his mind," but he specifically acknowledges that Banquo is cognizant of precisely the sorts of limits that he himself is not; as Macbeth observes, "He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour / To act in safety" (3.1.51-55). What all of these contrasts reveal is that Macbeth is, to say the least, not in the habit of exercising self-control. In fact, his resources of self-control are so wanting that he does not just appear habitually akratic, but chronically so.

Macbeth's chronic lack of self-control, in turn, renders him vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's relentless attempt to deplete the motivational power supporting his decision to refrain from killing Duncan. This becomes especially clear at the two junctures in his heated exchange with Lady Macbeth where he does in fact attempt to assert self-control.

After his first major soliloquy, as we have seen, Macbeth tells her firmly, "We will proceed no further with this business." Conspicuously, however, the reasons he gives her for his about-face are very different from the ones he elaborates upon in his soliloquy. Rather than recounting his real reasons for deciding against killing Duncan – fear, his belief in the certainty of retribution, his commitment to honor and the bonds of obligation – he tells her that he is satisfied with his new title and eager to bask in the freshly won accolades of his peers (1.7.32-34). This evasive swerve is the first indication that Macbeth's actual reasons for opting against killing Duncan may be a source of discomfort, or embarrassment, to him. The fact that Lady Macbeth, without even acknowledging his explanation, launches an assault specifically on his masculinity reinforces this point. As T.E. Wilkerson explains in his book *Irrational Action*, instances of akrasia often involve some kind of failure to fully identify, appreciate and understand one's own desires, beliefs and attitudes (92). But defective self-knowledge is, for Wilkerson, not simply a brute, irreducible fact; it too has its causes. When agents act akratically, he argues, it is often the case that they are aware of certain desires and beliefs, but "are not giving them their full deliberative weight because the desires and beliefs in question are in some way worrying or embarrassing or distressing" (128).

It is just this tension within Macbeth's psyche that Lady Macbeth picks up on and ruthlessly exploits. By attacking his masculinity, and awakening in him a felt sense of shame, Lady Macbeth accomplishes two things: first, she indirectly undermines the motivation propping up his better judgment, and second, she prevents Macbeth from giving full deliberative weight to his moral beliefs. Indeed, no sooner than Macbeth informs her that he has decided against the regicide, she reverts to a strategy connected to

the interpretation of Macbeth's character she articulates in just her second sentence of the play, namely that Macbeth is, in spite of his prodigious military courage, "too full o' the milk of human kindness" (1.5.15). Just what this image suggests is fleshed out in her subsequent description of Macbeth as sorely lacking in depravity and ruthlessness (1.5.15-20). The 'feminine' image of milk is thus linked to Macbeth's 'feminine' qualities of honesty and fair-mindedness, which Lady Macbeth, for her part, soon implores the "murd'ring ministers" to come to her woman's breasts and exchange for gall (1.5.46). In adopting the male role, which she explicitly associates with "direst cruelty," Lady Macbeth is then in a position to contrast her own diabolical caricature of masculinity with the ostensibly 'feminine' motives that underlie Macbeth's better judgment (1.5.41). The contrast is, of course, based on the dubious principle that if a woman can abandon pity and compassion, then a man, having a less developed moral faculty, ought to find it that much easier. Her intention, clearly, is to heighten the embarrassment Macbeth already feels in connection to his reasons for deciding against killing Duncan.

In the diatribe that follows, therefore, Lady Macbeth continues to equate manliness with murder, which she in turn associates with virility, courage and decisiveness. To be a man, in Lady Macbeth's terms, is to be able to kill without compunction and the singular purpose of her onslaught is, of course, to convince Macbeth to go through with the regicide. Her opening salvo, "Was the hope drunk wherein you dress'd yourself?" (1.7.35) rests on the insinuation that Macbeth's intent to kill Duncan was merely a whim of empty drunken bravado. Referring to his now-sober hope as "green and pale," moreover, she implies that he is exhibiting the symptoms not

only of a hangover but also, as Janet Adelman points out, of "greensickness, which is the typical disease of timid young virgin women" (101). By proceeding to make a direct link between the ostensible fickleness of Macbeth's intent to kill Duncan and his love for her, Lady Macbeth also implies not just that he is as false in love as he is in word but that his love is as unmanly as his resolve. The logic of her entire argument to murder is also couched in sexual terms. By accusing Macbeth of arousing her expectations and then failing to follow through with action, she implies that the murder is also a test of Macbeth's virility. All of this withering rhetoric is clearly designed to sap the motivation underlying Macbeth's decision to refrain from killing Duncan.

It is at this point that Macbeth's confronts her with his second major effort at self-control. Interpreting Lady Macbeth's onslaught as a direct attack on his masculinity, he responds emphatically, "Prithee, peace / I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (1.7.45-7). In doing so, he is defending not just his masculinity but, more specifically, the manliness of the worldview that underpins his decision not to kill Duncan. For Lady Macbeth's response – "What beast was't then" – makes it clear that the conception of masculinity he is giving voice to is precisely that of a being whose moral nature distinguishes him from a beast. Macbeth's argument that beyond a certain point acts of daring become inhuman also implicitly suggests that moral considerations like pity are human rather than feminine and that pitilessness is subhuman rather than masculine. At the same time, his rejoinder suggests that masculinity is related to a proper respect for limits and boundaries, and more specifically to a respect for limits to courage and daring. In this respect, his response recalls his own earlier, bathetic comparison of his "vaulting ambition" to a horseman who "o'erleaps" an obstacle but falls on the other

side (1.7.27-28). This image in turn recollects and repudiates two of Macbeth's prior "o'erleaping" metaphors, both of which are related to overstepping moral boundaries: the first, "that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap" (1.5.48-9); and the second, "we'd jump the life to come" (1.7.7)

But the brevity of Macbeth's response suggests that whatever motivation he does have has already sustained a major blow. Relentlessly, Lady Macbeth rejects his appeal to limits, counters with the claim that true manhood knows no bounds, and proceeds to argue on behalf of a conception of manliness in which the moral sense has absolutely no place: "When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man" (1.7.49-51). To demonstrate the amoral beastliness that she equates with masculinity, Lady Macbeth claims that she would pluck her nursing son's mouth from her nipple and dash its brains out. The boast is more than just an illustration of her fierce determination to act like a man; it is also a vivid representation of what she equates with masculine action: murder. The image of the murdered child also, of course, recalls one of the most charged symbols of Macbeth's decisive better judgment, the "naked newborn babe." Thus, when Lady Macbeth pictures herself dashing the child's brains out she is simultaneously dashing, within Macbeth's mind, the symbol that, more than any other, embodies the motivational charge of his decision not to kill Duncan.

Ultimately, Lady Macbeth's barbs and jibes manage to reach back and gradually deplete the motivation underpinning Macbeth's decision to refrain from killing Duncan. Indeed, returning to the motivationally charged passage at the end of the "If it were done" passage, we notice that the prevailing themes and images are all, in the terms laid out by

Lady Macbeth, shamefully unmanly. To begin with, the mere fact that Macbeth has paused to deliberate on the murder is, in her view, a childish sign of cowardice. As we have seen, Lady Macbeth's version of masculinity is decisive, swift and single-minded, just the opposite of Macbeth's tendency to let "'I dare not' wait upon 'I would', / Like the poor cat i'th' adage" (1.7.44-45). Moreover, in Lady Macbeth's estimation, manliness is not just heedless of the religious compunctions that underpin Macbeth's better judgement,[38] it is the complete antithesis of them.[39] Finally, the emotions of fear and pity that dominate the passage are, like the tears that the passage ends with, also embarrassingly effeminate.

In summary, then, Macbeth's habitual lack of self-control is not only intrinsically conducive to akrasia, but it also makes his better judgment vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's attack. Thus, while Lady Macbeth's assault on Macbeth's masculinity effectively depletes his motivation to perform the continent alternative, it simultaneously drives a

---

[38] The opposition between religion and manliness is also underscored by Lady Macduff's characterization of religion as a "womanly defense" (4.2.75).. Warned of approaching danger she protests, "Whither should I fly? / I have done no harm" (4.2.71-2). Her view is an expression of the belief that only sinners should suffer, that only those who have done wrong need fear being wronged themselves. Yet, almost as soon as she says this, Lady Macduff realizes her mistake: "But I remember now / I am in this earthly world, where to do harm / Is often laudable; to do good, sometime / Accounted dangerous folly" (4.2.73-76). Because foul and fair are often reversed, innocence is therefore no protection against harm or injustice. The expectation of justice in the face of evil is a "womanly defence:" "Why then, alas, / Do I put up that womanly defense, / To say I have done no harm?" (4.2.75-77).

[39] The antithesis between manliness and religion becomes particularly clear when Macbeth tries to convince the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance. Of all the ways to taunt them, Macbeth says, "Are you so gospelled / to pray for this good man and for his issue whose heavy hand hath / bowed you to the grave?"(3.1.91-192). The murderers understand Macbeth's rhetorical question as an attack on their manhood, responding, "We are men" (3.1.93). Macbeth agrees that "in the catalogue ye go for men" (3.1.91) yet he makes a distinction between the catalogue of men and the "valu'd file," insinuating that there is no basis for identity as a man merely in declaring one's male gender. Rather, masculinity must continually be proven by manly deeds. Consequently, he asks them to define themselves further: "Now if you have a station in the file / Not i'th'worst rank of manhood, say't" (3.1.101-2). To which they answer, for their respective reasons, that they are ready to kill. It is only when the murderers dare to take the course of their lives into their own hands and prove their manhood in violently self-assertive action that Macbeth accepts . Conspicuously, in urging his hired assassins to the murder of Banquo, Macbeth echoes his wife, contrasting patience and piety with the manhood necessary to perform the bloody deed (3.1). Yet the appearance of Banquo's ghost shows that it is Macbeth who is gospelled. When Macbeth is being assailed by Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth upbraids him, "Are you a man?" and repeats herself, "Quite unmanned in folly" (3.4.72).

wedge between him and his own beliefs and desires. As Amelie Rorty observes, akratic actions often occur when the akratic alternative is allowed to "dominate attention," giving it more salience than the better judgment (913). The relentlessness of Lady Macbeth's attack, coupled with the vividness of its imagery, has just this effect. "By filling the experiental field," as Rorty asserts, "[the akratic action] drowns out the preferred alternative" (913).[40]

[40] Lady Macbeth seems instinctively to understand this, as her earlier grandiose depiction of Duncan's murder as "This night's great business" and "our great quell" suggest (1.5.66; 1.7.72). Her reference to the crown as "the ornament of life" works on a similar principle, as does her emphasis that the crown will, "to all our nights and days to come / Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom" (1.7.42; 1.6.66-67).

CHAPTER FIVE

Willful Ignorance and Other Strategies of Self-Deception

> If weakness of will is to be understood as failure to live up to one's values in a situation where one is able to do so, and if previous to the occasion for acting, one can persuade oneself that one's values are not really violated in such a situation, then the akratic action or inaction is relatively smooth and easy.
>
> - Bela Szabados[41]

Thus far, I have argued that Macbeth's butchery of King Duncan is an akratic act, that in killing King Duncan Macbeth acts against his own better judgment. My explanation of his incontinence has centered on three main points. First, his connection to the motivational dimension of his better judgment is weak; while Macbeth both knows and feels that he ought not kill Duncan, he does not know that he feels that he ought not kill him. Second, his lack of self-control is habitual because his poor connection to the motivational conditions of his better judgment precludes him from appealing to techniques of skilled resistance. Third, because of his estrangement from the motivational conditions of his knowledge and his habitual lack of self-control, Macbeth is vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's sustained onslaught on his masculinity, which both depletes his motivation to do what he knows is right and prevents him from giving full deliberative weight to his better judgment. Finally, I would now like to suggest that Macbeth's akratic murder of Duncan, as well as his subsequent murders of Banquo and Macduff's family, are facilitated by a phenomenon that is closely related to akrasia, namely self-deception.

Self-deception is commonly considered a kin concept to weakness of will. In fact, in his book *Brainstorms*, Daniel Dennet goes so far as to argue that incontinence and

---

[41] Szabados "The Self, its Passions, and Self-Deception" 151.

self-deception are actually "just one affliction in the end" (307). Like akratic actions, beliefs that agents are self-deceived in holding are motivated. However, whereas the person who acts incontinently acts against his better judgment due to a contrary desire, the self-deceived person, again due to desire, typically believes against his "better evidence," or against better evidence he would have had, or could easily have gathered, if it were not for the desire in question. What bothers philosophers about self-deception, then, is roughly what bothers them about akrasia: both phenomena display desire-influenced irrationality. In Mele's terms, as we have seen, because the evaluations that give rise to decisive better judgments need neither fix nor precisely record motivational strength, an agent's overall motivation can be at odds with his better judgment, with the result that he acts incontinently. Similarly, the assessments or evaluations that ground decisive better judgments about matters of belief need neither fully determine nor exactly gauge the causal power of belief-inducing items. This opens the door to the possibility of a mismatch between the determinants of belief and the relevant evidence, with the result that one believes self-deceptively.

Given that self-deceiving beliefs are, like akratic acts, fueled by strong desires, it should come as no surprise that the same desires that inform akratic actions also often contribute to self-deceptive beliefs. Indeed, it is for this very reason that self-deception is often said to grease the wheels of incontinent action. As Mike Martin observes, "The notion of self-deception is often invoked to explain how we fail to implement our values and our better judgment by blurring our awareness of relevant facts" (13). Clearly, the individual who persuades himself to *believe* against the evidence will find it that much easier to *act* against his better judgment. As Bela Szabados points out in the epigraph to

this chapter, "[I]f previous to the occasion for acting, one can persuade oneself that one's values are not really violated in such a situation, then the akratic action or inaction is relatively smooth and easy" (151). As I will argue below, it is only after Macbeth persuades himself against the evidence that his belief in the certainty of retribution is dispensable that he is able to act akratically against his better judgment.

Before exploring how Macbeth's self-deception contributes to his incontinence, however, it will be helpful to establish a definition of self-deception and explore some concrete examples of it. While self-deception has been defined in a multitude of ways, perhaps the most widespread interpretation of the concept is based on the idea that it involves lying to oneself. In an influential article entitled "Lying to Oneself," Raphael Demos advances the following description of the phenomenon: "Self-deception exists, I will say, when a person lies to himself, that is to say, persuades himself to believe what he knows is not so" (588). Demos' understanding of self-deception is based on the model of interpersonal deception; just as deceiving another person entails convincing him or her to believe something that one knows is false, so self-deception involves persuading oneself to believe something that one knows is false. Conceptualized in these terms, however, an obvious epistemological paradox arises: self-deception appears to involve the simultaneous holding of contradictory beliefs. As Demos puts it, "Self-deception entails that B believes both *p* and not-*p* at the same time" (588).

Othello provides an eloquent articulation of the paradoxical nature of self-deception. Mid-way through the temptation scene, half-deceived by Iago into believing that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio and half a victim of his own self-deceiving jealousies and self-doubts, Othello tells Iago:

By the world
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think thou art just, and think thou art not:
I'll have some proof.
(3.3.388-391)

On one interpretation of this passage, Othello does not believe any of his claims; he is merely expressing conflicting inclinations to believe two sets of contradictory propositions. Yet his subsequently inconsistent behavior suggests that he may be caught in an even more desperate epistemological conflict. Unable to abandon his deeply entrenched beliefs in both Desdemona's fidelity and Iago's honesty, he simultaneously accepts evidence that he thinks justifies denying one of each of these sets of contradictory beliefs. In this sense, the passage can be read as an explicit articulation of Othello's broader, self-deceiving tendency to believe propositions that he knows are false. In this connection, it is worth noting, that Stanley Cavell's reading of the play is based on just such a claim. Cavell argues that "however far [Othello] believes Iago's tidings, he cannot just believe them; somewhere he also knows them to be false" (133).[42] Although he does not actually invoke the term self-deception, his claim corresponds perfectly to the definition.

In pushing his claim further, moreover, Cavell's description of Othello's torturous conundrum also alludes to an alternate definition of self-deception that has been advanced to purge the phenomenon of its paradoxical air. Cavell writes, "I am claiming,

[42] F.R. Leavis's reading of *Othello* in "Diabolical Intellect and the Noble Hero" is also based on an argument from self-deception. On his view, the alacrity with which Othello yields to Iago's lies suggests that it is not Iago's mind that undoes him, but his own; as Leavis puts it, "the essential traitor is within the gates" (128). This point is, in turn, related to Leavis's argument that Othello is self-deceived in believing that he is noble when he is not: "self-pride becomes stupidity, ferocious stupidity, an insane and self-deceiving passion. The habitual 'nobility' is seen to make self-deception invincible" (135). He also argues that, in the final act, "the concern for justice, the self-bracing to noble sacrifice, appears as self-deception" (139). For a philosophical account of self-deception based on a reading of *Othello*, see Robert Audi's "Self-Deception and Rationality" in Mike Martin's *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, especially 169-178.

that we must understand Othello... to *want* to believe Iago, to be *trying*, against his knowledge, to believe him" (italics mine; 133). In emphasizing that Othello "wants" and "tries" to believe Iago "against his knowledge" Cavell appeals to the same basic insight that animates Alfred Mele's simple definition of self-deception as "believing something we want to be true" (125).[43] Making no distinction between a want and a desire,[44] Mele argues, "[T]he common notion of self-deception makes essential reference to a desiderative element. Self-deception is commonly conceived of as something that occurs because in part the agent-patient wants something to be the case" (125). In Mele's terms, then, it is Othello's *desire* to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful that enables him to believe she is unfaithful even when, on some level, he knows that she is not. Desire reinforces self-deception by prompting what Mele calls a "desire-influenced inappropriate treatment of data" (94). More specifically, his desire facilitates self-deception by encouraging what Mele calls "selective focusing:" "S's desiring that *p* may lead him both to fail to focus his attention on evidence that counts against *p* and to focus instead on evidence suggestive of *p*" (95).

Although Othello is in some straight-forward sense deceived by Iago, Cavell's suggestion that Othello seizes upon Iago's lies as "covers for something Othello already believes," allows us to explore Othello's complicity in Iago's strategies. Bracketing the fraught question of *why* Othello might want to distrust Desdemona, we notice that he actively follows Iago in engaging in a pattern of selective focusing that, in Iago's words,

---

[43] The pith of Mele's point is made as early as Demosthenes' *Olynthiaca:* "The easiest thing of all is to deceive one's own self; for what a man wishes he generally believes to be true" (3.19). It is also captured in Daniel Defoe *Roxana*: "In things we wish 'tis easy to deceive; / What we would have, we willingly believe" (69). Notice that the emphasis in both quotations is placed on the determining power of "what a man wishes" and "what he would have."

[44] See Mele's qualification, "I construe 'want' broadly and make no distinction between wanting and desiring" (Ch.9, n.5). See also his remark, "As I shall use these terms, to say that *S* has a desire or a want to *A* is to say that he has some motivation to *A*" (Ch.1, n.11).

"shapes faults that are not" (3.3.152-3). Iago repeatedly encourages Othello to focus selectively on evidence suggestive of Desdemona's infidelity: "Look to your wife: observe her well with Cassio. / Wear your eyes thus: not jealous nor secure" (3.3.203). Claiming that women in Venice let heaven "see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands," (3.3.222-3) Iago also encourages Othello to "look to't" if he wants to discover his wife's indiscretions. He encourages selective focusing once again when he reminds Othello that by holding off on reinstating Cassio, he can "perceive him and his means," adding, "Much will be seen in that" (3.3.249-52). Far from seeking out evidence to disprove Iago's claims, however, Othello seems almost to solicit support for them: "Give me the ocular proof," he demands (3.3.365). Again, in a sentence that implicitly links his desire to selective focusing, he also commands Iago, "Make me to see't" (3.3.369). In addition to seeking evidence supportive of Desdemona's infidelity, Othello also averts his attention from evidence that might count against his desire. Emilia assures him that she has seen "Each syllable that breath made up" between Desdemona and Cassio, and tells him, "I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest, / Lay down my soul at stake" (4.2.15). Othello, however, swiftly dismisses Emilia's testimony – "she's a simple bawd / That cannot say as much" – and concentrates on his conviction that Desdemona is a "subtle whore" (4.2.22). Othello also, of course, repeatedly dismisses Desdemona's own testimony (4.2.84-94).

But an even more clear-cut example of how strong desires facilitate self-deception by means of selective focusing is to be found in Malvolio's behavior in *Twelfth Night*. When Malvolio finds Maria's forged letter, he is in the midst of a self-gratifying fantasy that he has married Olivia, a dream that is fueled more by his desire for social domination

than erotic bliss. It is Malvolio's ardent desire "To be Count Malvolio!" that leads him to engage in the activity that Mele refers to as "selective evidence gathering." As Samir Nagarajan points out, "In *Twelfth Night*, the act of self-deception consists in imposing on oneself a vision that does not really belong to oneself" (61). To support the credibility of his fantasy, Malvolio produces two dubious pieces of evidence: "Maria once told me / [Olivia] did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, / that should she fancy it should be one of my complexion" (2.5.20-22). And again: "There is example for't: the Lady of Strachey / married the yeoman of the wardrobe" (2.5.34-35). Puffed-up by such slender evidence, and "sick" as Olivia remarks earlier "of self-love," when Malvolio finds Maria's forged letter he does not doubt for a second that it is written in Olivia's hand. Stephen Greenblatt catches the causal connection between Malvolio's social-climbing imagination and his misinterpretation of the letter: "The dream of rising above his station fuels his credulous eagerness to interpret the letter according to his fondest wishes" (1764). After reading just two sentences of the letter he wonders, "If this should be thee, Malvolio" (2.5.92). The suggestion that it is a "desire-influenced inappropriate treatment of evidence" that leads Malvolio to see his own name in the mystery initials M.O.A.I. is confirmed by the wishful persistence of Malvolio's stubborn refrain, "let me see, let me see, let me see" (2.5.100-101). The extent to which Malvolio purposefully tortures the contents of the letter to conform to his desires is also explicitly highlighted in his remark, "If I could make that resemble something in me" (2.5.108). Even more pointedly, he adds, "And yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me / For every one of these letters are in my name" (2.5.122-23). Fueled by his desire, Malvolio's selective focusing supports his false belief against the evidence. For him, as for Othello, it is a

potent want that steers attention away from the belief for which there is better evidence and therefore makes it possible to believe against the evidence.

With these examples in mind, we are now in a position to return to the circumstances leading up to Macbeth's akratic murder of King Duncan and explore the relationship between his self-deception and his incontinence. As we have seen, Macbeth is faced with a choice between two contradictory worldviews. On the one hand, there is the worldview of what I have called his decisive better judgment. It is a world where consequences are inevitable, where retributive justice is in the long run not just possible but certain, and where the bonds of honor and obligation are binding because social relatedness is inescapable.[45] On the other hand, there is the worldview lionized by Lady Macbeth. It is a world in which action is not an open-ended continuum but is final and conclusive, and in which the essence of humanity lies not in living within the limits imposed by social relatedness but in daring to do anything. Hers is also a world wherein the chalk-lines of conscience can be overstepped without peril, where the passages and accesses to remorse can simply be stopped up, and where power is a safeguard against suspicion and justice. Lady Macbeth, we might say, embodies the weltanschauung of a vulgar Nietzschean, a worldview Nietzsche himself exemplifies in passages such as those of *The Genealogy of Morals* where he celebrates "uncaged beasts of prey" who not only "savor a freedom from all social constraints" but who "go back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey, as triumphant monsters who perhaps emerge from a

[45] Macbeth's concern for social relatedness surfaces several times in the play. As we have seen, one of the reasons he gives Lady Macbeth for changing his mind about killing Duncan is: "He hath honored me of late, and I have bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people, / Which would be worn now in their newest gloss, / Not cast aside so soon" (1.7.32-24). He also expresses concern for the views of others when he worries that pity "Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye / That tears shall drown the wind" (1.7.25). Late in the play he also bemoans the fact that "that which should accompany old age, / As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, / I must not look to have, but in their stead / Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour" (5.3.25-29).

disgusting procession of murder, arson, rape, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it were no more than a students' prank" (1.11).

But Lady Macbeth's worldview is not just hers; it is also, in part, Macbeth's. As the beginning of his "If it were done" soliloquy reminds us, Lady Macbeth is not telling Macbeth anything he has not already told himself; the two worldviews already co-exist simultaneously in his psyche. *What* she tells Macbeth, however, may be less important than *how* she tells it. Elaborating on the "attentional strategy" of self-deception, Mele points out that, "Vivid data are more likely to be recognized, attended to and recalled than more pallid data" (116).[46] Presented in vivid, imagery-provoking terms, items that an individual like Macbeth might otherwise take to provide only meager evidence for a belief may have a great deal of salience at the time he forms or acquires a belief. And because of the attractiveness of what the vivid data suggest, the bulk of his attention may be drawn to these items, while his apprehension of competing items may appear quite pale by comparison (115). With these insights in mind, we notice that Lady Macbeth presents herself to Macbeth as a vivid embodiment of the alternate morality he has only received council from in his imagination. She paints the regicide in grand, heroic strokes as "this night's great business" and "our great quell." She also presents the deed itself as an exuberant act of bestial sexual pleasure, of prolific virility: "What cannot you and I perform upon / Th'unguarded Duncan?" (1.7.69-70).[47] A power-drunk paragon of sheer, unswerving determination, she exclaims, "who dares receive it other?" (2.1.78). And the terrible force of her determination is packaged in just the sort of graphic and visceral

[46] As Mele also suggests, the vividness of a datum is often a function of its "imagery-provoking power," or its sensory or spatial proximity (116).
[47] The sexual undertones of the murder are picked up again by Macbeth when he compares his approach to Duncan's chamber to "Tarquin's ravishing strides" (2.1.55).

images so irresistible to a sensibility like Macbeth's. Shifting his attention away from the evidence that counts against his view that he will be able to get away with killing Duncan, Macbeth's concentrates his attention exclusively on evidence that he will in fact be able to get away with it. Neglecting his own moral reservations, he concentrates on Lady Macbeth's fantasy of omnipotent malevolence and her assurances of success.

Why? Because, like both Othello and Malvolio, Macbeth is in the grip of an immense, self-deceiving want. He wants, wants deeply, to live up to Lady Macbeth's idealized image of him as a conquering warrior-king who fully deserves to rule. He wants to be the sort of manly beast of prey who is untroubled by details like even-handed justice. And his wants are so strong that it is easy to imagine how his attention could be diverted from the already remote and relatively pallid memories of his seated heart knocking at his ribs or the newborn babe striding the blast. As David Kipp notes, self-deception is "bound up with attaching undue importance to other people's opinions about us" (278). "In the case of self-deception," he argues, "one secretly knows (or suspects) oneself to lack some quality that one wants other people to believe one possesses; hence, one shams beliefs consistent with one's possessing that quality in the hope of deceiving the others into thinking that one possesses it" (278). As I have said, Macbeth wants to be the kind of man Lady Macbeth prods him to be, but as I have also suggested he knows that he is not that sort of man. As a consequence, he shams beliefs consistent with the fact that he is. In committing himself to the murder, in other words, Macbeth does not really succeed in convincing himself that action is final and conclusive, or that the accomplishment of the deed will be tantamount to success, or that the consequences of his action can be circumvented. Instead, he retains his belief in even-handed justice right

alongside his belief that he will be able to get away with the murder. Yet as at several other junctures in the play, he diverts his attention away from his own gut-level moral intuitions long enough to become absorbed in evidence concurrent with his desires.[48] And it is, finally, this moment of self-deception, of believing against the evidence, that allows him, in conjunction with the other factors I have already mentioned, to act akratically against his better judgment.

There are at least two precedents for this incident, both of which are connected to a pattern of images and metaphors that precede and facilitate every significant murder in the play. The earliest instance occurs after Duncan appoints Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland, when Macbeth seethes bitterly:

> Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
> (1.4.52-54)

As ardently as Macbeth wants to do the deed, he also deliberately wants it to be concealed, and not just from others but, more importantly, from himself.[49] Of course, taken literally, these lines suggest that Macbeth is simply imagining himself standing in darkness and intentionally closing his eyes while he stabs Duncan to death. But the winking of the eye at the hand here clearly operates on a metaphorical level as well. As Herbert Fingarette points out in *Self-Deception*, "Such terms as 'know', 'be aware of', and 'be conscious of' are readily linked by the metaphor of *seeing*" (35). When Macbeth

---

[48] In *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, Wilbur Sanders also briefly comments on Macbeth's "manifest will to self-deception" (284). Likewise, in *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies*, Bernard McElroy remarks on Macbeth's "patent self-deception" and suggests that "at several junctures in the play, [Macbeth] willfully disregards his own better judgment" (224).

[49] The first two lines of the aside rely on the imagery of concealment which is a mainstay of descriptions of self-deception. As Mike Martin points out, "Using concealment terms, we say [self-deceivers] hide, conceal, and camouflage the truth from themselves" (11).

speaks of the eye winking at the hand, then, he is speaking of his knowledge of his murderous intention, as well as his deliberate avoidance of that knowledge. The metaphorical language he invokes is precisely the language commonly used to describe self-deception. As Mike Martin points out in *Self-deception and Morality,* "In visual imagery, we describe [self-deceivers] as preventing themselves from seeing the facts, obscuring their own vision, blinding themselves, and intentionally overlooking what is before their eyes" (11). This, I would suggest, is exactly what is going on in these lines. Because Macbeth wants to kill Duncan without having to *see*, or consciously acknowledge, what he is doing he deliberately overlooks what is before his eyes, appealing to the strategy of self-deception known as willful ignorance. The same strategy is described in very similar terms by Joseph Butler in *Upon Self-Deceit:* "It is as easy to close the eyes of the mind, as those of the body: and the former is more frequently done with willfulness, and yet not attended to, than the latter" (179). Just as Butler describes, Macbeth wants to shut the eye of his mind without being any more conscious of it than he is of blinking.

At the same time, however, Macbeth fully realizes what "the eye fears to see," and as we know, his fears are well founded. Immediately after murdering Duncan he really will fear to look on what he has done: "Look on't again I dare not" (2.2.49). Indeed, so deeply will his eye be offended by the sight of his bloody hands that his hands will turn on his eyes and winking will give way to plucking: "What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes" (2.2.57). Not only do these lines speak to Macbeth's unique ability to foresee both the practical and ethical outcome of his actions, but they also confirm Sartre's seemingly counter-intuitive observation in *Being and Nothingness* that

"I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it from myself" (87). Indeed, if Macbeth did not know the truth of his fears so exactly he would have no need to close his eyes to them; it is precisely because he has grounds to believe that his fearful eye will interfere with his murderous intentions that his shutting of it must be deliberate.[50] As Bela Szabados writes, "[I]n self-deception there is a deliberate attempt to subvert one's own understanding; there is knowledge of the facts, coupled with an attempt to obscure that knowledge or its import" (150). Macbeth's attempt to obscure his own knowledge is undoubtedly deliberate, just as it is undoubtedly fueled by the intensity of his black and deep desires, the very same desires that will later divert his attention away from his own better judgment and enable him to murder Duncan.

Lady Macbeth also engages in self-deception. In the final sentence of her magisterial "unsex me here" soliloquy, she expresses a desire very similar to Macbeth's in terms very similar to his own.

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry 'Hold, hold!'
> (1.5.48-50)

Like Macbeth, who wants night to conceal his murderous desires and deliberately wills his eye to wink at his hand, Lady Macbeth purposefully wants to conceal her deed from

[50] Greenblatt specifically glosses the last two lines of the passage in question as, "Let the eye *deliberately* ignore what the hand does" (italics mine; 2571). The centrality of purposefulness to self-deception is underlined in David Nyberg's *The Varnished Truth*, where he describes self-deception as "voluntary blindness, numbness, dull-mindedness, and ignorance" (81). According to Nyberg self-deception is an active, purposeful process, for "remaining ignorant on purpose requires effort" (82). The voluntary nature of self-deception is also underlined in Herbert Fingarette's book *Self-Deception*, where he notes that "the element of internal purposefulness is reflected in such phrases as 'persuades himself to believe', 'makes it appear to himself', 'lies to himself'" (28). Likewise, Mike Martin's *Self-Deception and Morality* describes self-deception as "the purposeful or intentional evasion of fully acknowledging something to oneself" (7).

herself.[51] Her self-deception is also, like Macbeth's, driven by the fierce intensity of her desire. The images of "pall" and "blanket" again draw overtly on the imagery of concealment, while the visual imagery so common to self-deception is once again invoked in her wish that her "keen knife see not the wound it makes / Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark." Fearful of witnessing her own actions, and aware of it, Lady Macbeth appears to resort to the same strategy as her husband: willful ignorance.

In spite of the similarities, however, I would suggest that there is a subtle difference between the two varieties of self-deception. In a paper devoted to locating the distinction between wishful thinking and self-deception, Bela Szabados argues that both the self-deceiver and the wishful thinker hold false beliefs and both are influenced by desires or motives of some sort, but whereas the self-deceiver has good grounds for believing that the believed proposition is false, the wishful thinker does not (149). According to Szabados then, what separates wishful thinking from self-deception is that the wishful thinker actually believes in the truth of the believed proposition whereas the self-deceiver has reason to believe that the same proposition is false. Essentially, the differences between the two phenomena can be considered a matter of degree, rather than kind. Indeed, Mele argues, "If there is a distinction between wishful thinking and self-deception, it may simply be that wishful thinking is a species of a genus denoted by the term 'self-deception'" (135). If Macbeth's strategy of self-deception is willful ignorance, then Lady Macbeth's is wishful thinking. For although Lady Macbeth does acknowledge the possibility that Heaven may intervene, she sincerely believes that, screwed to its

[51] While Macbeth distances himself from his intent to murder by referring both to "the eye" and "the hand" rather than his eye and his hand, Lady Macbeth further distances herself from the murder by displacing her murderous intentions onto her knife.

sticking place, courage will pre-empt the possibility of retribution. Macbeth, on the other hand, knows better, but willfully ignores that knowledge.

Nevertheless, whether Lady Macbeth is aware of it or not, she understands the mechanics of self-deception well enough to know how to convince Macbeth to deceive himself. Besides, as I have tried to show, Macbeth himself is already familiar enough with the ways and means of self-deception that it does not take too much convincing on Lady Macbeth's part. For the root cause of Macbeth's self-deception is, ultimately, identical to the root cause of his akrasia: he does not feel what he knows. The self-deceiver, writes John Heil, "is typified by the psychoanalytic patient who has acquired what might be termed an intellectual grasp of his plight, but whose outlook evidently remains unaffected" (69). Just as Aristotle emphasizes that the knowledge of the akrates is ineffectual because "knowledge has to be assimilated and that takes time," so Heil contends that the self-deceiver's knowledge remains impotent because he "has failed somehow to integrate his appreciation of certain facts into his overall psychological state" (69). And it is because the self-deceiver's knowledge remains unintegrated that he is able to continue to harbor beliefs, desires and fears that he explicitly recognizes to be at odds with his better epistemic judgment. [52] For as Heil writes, "It is one thing to appreciate evidence, another thing to be moved by one's appreciation of it" (70).

Just as Macbeth appreciates his better judgment yet acts against it, so he appreciates the evidence against his desire to murder with impunity yet believes against the evidence – for in neither case is he moved by his knowledge. The anguished sense of

[52] Like Aquinas and Nussbaum, Heil also uses the term "assent" to make this point. He writes, for example, that the self-deceiver "remains divided against himself so long as his apprehension of his situation fails to engage with the mechanism of assent" (70).

self-division produced by Macbeth's ineffectual knowledge is captured neatly in the definition of self-deception as the simultaneous holding of contradictory beliefs. It is this definition, I would argue, that characterizes Macbeth's tragic predicament for the remainder of the play. For as Heil also argues, to be moved by one's appreciation of evidence, the self-deceiver "must again and again be reminded of what he already knows, he must be led repeatedly through the process of tracing connections among his beliefs and desires until at last the import of what he has all along recognized begins to take hold" (69). Through all the murders that follow, Macbeth does indeed remind himself over and over again of what he already knows, yet while it may appear that he is also obliquely seeking to make a connection between his beliefs and his desires, the import of that connection never takes hold. Because Macbeth's knowledge, for all its terrible lucidity, remains unfelt his self-division continues along with his self-deception to the last syllable of his recorded time.

CONCLUSION

Traditionally, *Macbeth* has been read as a morality tale about the perils of ambition. The question that has implicitly animated most treatments of the play is, "Why does Macbeth kill Duncan?" By shifting the emphasis away from Macbeth's motives for killing Duncan onto his inability to *refrain* from killing Duncan I have been able to explore the full significance of the fact that, in killing King Duncan, Macbeth acts against the pragmatic, ethical and religious considerations that constitute his decisive better judgment. My account of this striking fact has evolved out of the fundamental intuition that it is not the strength of Macbeth's ambition that causes him to murder Duncan, but the weakness of his will. By situating Macbeth's behavior in the context of the long philosophical and literary debate on akrasia, I have argued that the tragic dimension of the play lies not in the ambition that propels Macbeth into actions that are both evil and criminal, but in the fact that his self-destructive tendencies are acted out knowingly.

A substantial portion of the dissertation has been devoted to explaining both why and how Macbeth acts against his better judgment. I have suggested four main reasons. First, Macbeth's connection to the motivational conditions of his knowledge is shallow; while Macbeth both knows and feels that he ought not kill Duncan, he does not know that he feels that he ought not kill Duncan. Second, Macbeth's lack of self-control is habitual because the weakness of his connection to the conative dimension of his knowledge prohibits him from appealing to techniques of skilled resistance. Third, his habitual lack of self-control, in turn, renders him vulnerable to Lady Macbeth's derision, which not only depletes the motivation supporting his better judgment but also prevents him from giving full deliberative weight to his better judgment. Fourth, I have also suggested that

Macbeth's murder of Duncan is facilitated by a deeply entrenched pattern of willful ignorance that not only eases the way for his akratic butchery of King Duncan but also allows him to believe, against his better evidence, that he will be able to get away with slaughtering Banquo and MacDuff's family. My account of self-deception then grounded my reading, in the sixth chapter, of a variety of key passages in the remainder of the play, all of which speak to the anguished existential predicament of simultaneously holding two contradictory beliefs. Ultimately, my explanation of how Macbeth is able to act self-deceptively against his better evidence was identical to my earlier account of how he is able to act against his better judgment: he does not feel what he knows. It is in this restricted sense that I have argued that a prominent yet underexplored theme of *Macbeth* is that knowing is not enough.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adleman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Adelman, Janet. "'Born of Woman': Fantasies of Maternal Power in Macbeth." *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce*. Ed. Marjorie Garber. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica.* Cambridge: Blackfriers, 1972.

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics.* Trans. W.D. Ross. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Asp, Carolyn. "'Be bloody, bold and resolute': Tragic Action and Sexual Stereotyping in *Macbeth.*" *Studies in Philology* 78.2 (1982): 153-169.

Audi, Robert. "Self-Deception and Rationality." *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding: New Essays in Philosophy and Psychology*. Ed. Mike Martin. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985.

Barad, Judith. "Aquinas' Assent/Consent Distinction and the Problem of A*krasia.*" *The New Scholasticism* 62 (1998): 98-111.

Bataille, Georges. *On Nietzsche*. New York: Paragon House, 1992.

Berger, Harry. "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation." *ELH* 47 (1980): 1-31.

---. "Text Against Performance: The Example of *Macbeth.*" *Genre* 15 (1982): 49-79.

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Macmillan Press, 1992.

Bradshaw, Graham. *Shakespeare's Scepticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Breitenberg, Mark. *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Brooks, Cleanth. "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Macbeth: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Terence Hawkes. Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey, 1977.

Blitts, Jan. *The Insufficiency of Virtue: Macbeth and the Natural Order*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human.* New York: Fourth Estate Limited, 1998.

Booth, Stephen. King Lear, Macbeth, *Indefinition and Tragedy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Bristol, Michael D. "How many children did she have?" *Philosophical Shakespeares.* Ed. John J. Joughin. London: Routledge, 2000.

---. "Vernacular Criticism and the Scenes Shakespeare Never Wrote." *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000): 89-102.

---. "Charivari and the Comedy of Abjection in *Othello.*" Othello: *Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism.* Ed. Edward Pechter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Calderwood, James. *If It Were Done:* Macbeth *and Tragic Action.* Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.

Campbell, Lily B. *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930.

Cavell, Stanley. *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Conway, Daniel, ed. *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments, Volume II 'The World as Will to Power – And Nothing Else?' Metaphysics and Epistemology.* London: Routledge, 1998.

---. *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments, Volume III: On Morality and the Order of Rank.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Craig, Leon Harold. *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Davidson, Donald. "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?" *Essays on Actions and Events.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

Desmet, Christy and Robert Sawyer. *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare.* New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Desmet, Christy. *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics and Identity.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Dupuy, Jean-Pierre, ed. *Self-deception and the Paradoxes of Irrationality.* Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1998.

Elster, Jon. *Nuts and Bolts For the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Erasmus, Desiderius. *Paraphrases on Romans and Galatians*. Ed. Robert. D. Sider. Trans. John Payne, Albert Rabil Jr., and Warren Smith Jr.. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Euripides. *Medea and Other Plays*. Trans. John Davie. Introduction and notes, Richard Rutherford. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Foyster, Elizabeth. *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*. London: Longman Press, 1999.

Freud, Sigmund. "Some Character-Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Vol. 14. London: Hogarth Press, 1959.

Frosh, Stephen. *Afterwords: The Personal in Gender, Culture and Psychotherapy*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Galen. *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. Trans. Phillip De Lacy. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980.

Garber, Marjorie, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. *The Turn to Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Gill, Christopher. "Did Chrysippus understand *Medea*?" *Phronesis* 28 (1983): 136-149.

Gilmore, David. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Conceptions of Masculinity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Goldberg, Johnathon. *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Greenblatt, Stephen. Introduction. *Macbeth*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

---. Introduction. *Twelfth Night*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

---. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

---. "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, Henry IV and Henry V." *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism 1945-2000.* Ed. Russ McDonald. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Haight, M.R. *A Study of Self-Deception.* Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980.

Hampshire, Stuart. *Innocence and Experience.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

---. *Morality and Conflict.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Harding, D.W. "Women's Fantasy of Manhood: A Shakespearian Theme" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20:3 (1969): 245-53.

Hawkes, Terence, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Macbeth*: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1977.

Heil, John. "Doxastic Incontinence." *Mind* 93 (1984): 56-70.

Helm, Bennett W. *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, motivation, and the nature of value.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Horwich, Richard. "Integrity in *Macbeth*: The Search for the 'Single State of Man'." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36:4 (1978): 365-73.

Hume, David. *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary.* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985.

---. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1777.

Irwin, T.H.. "Euripides and Socrates." *Classical Philology* 78 (1983): 183-197.

Joughin, John J. ed. *Philosophical Shakespeares.* London: Routledge. 2000.

Kahn, Coppelia. *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Keck, Leander K. *Romans.* Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2005.

Kehler, Torsten. *The Necessity of Affections: Shakespeare and the Politics of the Passions.* PhD Dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, Canada. 2001.

Kinney, Arthur e. *Lies Like Truth: Shakespeare,* Macbeth *and the Cultural Moment.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001.

Kipp, David. "Self-Deception, Inauthenticity, and Weakness of Will." *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding: New Essays in Philosophy and Psychology*. Ed. Mike Martin. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985.

Kliman, Bernice W. Macbeth: *Shakespeare in Performance*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Knights, L.C. *Some Shakespearean Themes and an Approach to* Hamlet. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960.

Leavis, F.R. "Diabolical Intellect and the Noble Hero." *Othello: A Casebook*. Ed. John Wain. London: MacMillan Press, 1971.

Lennox, Charlotte. *Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories on which the Plays of Shakespear are Founded.* In *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism.* Eds. Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Lowenthal, David. *Shakespeare and the Good Life: Ethics and Politics in Dramatic Form*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.

Martin, Graham. "William Shakespeare: *Macbeth* Act I, Scene vii, Lines 1 to 28." *Interpretations*. Ed. John Wain. London: Routledge, 1955.

Martin, Mike W. *Self-deception and Morality.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986.

---. *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding: New Essays in Philosophy and Psychology.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985.

Martindale, Charles and A.B. Taylor, eds. *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Maus, Katharine. Introduction. *Measure for Measure*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

McCurdy Mead, J.A. *Aquinas, Aristotle, and Akrasia*. PhD Dissertation. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. 2000.

McDonald, Russ, ed. *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004.

Mele, Alfred. *Self-Deception Unmasked.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

---. *Autonomous Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

---. "Socratic Akratic Action." *Philosophical Papers* 25 (149-159): 1996.

---. *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-deception and Self-control.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

McLaughlin, Brian and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. *Perspectives on Self-deception.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Miola, Robert, ed. *Macbeth: An Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Moulton, Richard G. *The Moral System of Shakespeare: A Popular Illustration of Fiction as the Experimental Side of Philosophy.* London: Macmillian & Co., 1903.

Muir, Kenneth. "Image and Symbol in Macbeth." *Macbeth: An Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism.* Ed. Robert Miola. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Myslobodsky, Michael ed. *The Mythomanias: The Nature of Deception and Self-Deception.* Mahwah: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1997.

Nagarajan, Samir. "'What You Will': A Suggestion." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10:1 (1959): 61-7.

Nehemas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Newell, Walter Randy. *The Code of Man: Love, Courage, Pride, Family, Country.* New York: Regan Books, 2003.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche.* Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1968.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

---. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

---. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Pasternak, Boris. *I Remember.* Trans. Manya Harari. New York: Meridian Books, Inc. 1960

Pears, David. *Motivated Irrationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Pechter, Edward. *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Plato. *Cratylus* Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

---. *Laws*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

---. *Protagoras*. Trans. C.C.W. Taylor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Prescott, Paul. "Doing All That Becomes a Man: The Reception and Afterlife of the Macbeth Actor, 1744-1889." *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004): 81-95.

Ramsey, Jarold. "The Perversion of Manliness in Macbeth." *Studies in English Literature* 13:2 (1973): 285-300.

Raffel, Burton. Introduction. *Macbeth*. By William Shakespeare. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Richardson, William. *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* [1780]. New York: AMS Press, 1966.

Riebling, B. "Virtue's Sacrifice: A Machiavellian Reading of *Macbeth.*" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 31:2 (1991): 273-86.

Rickert, Gail Ann. "Akrasia and Euripides' *Medea*." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987): 91-117.

Rorty, Amelie. "Self-deception, Akrasia and Irrationality." *Social Science Information*, 19:6 (1980): 905-922.

---. "Akratic Believers." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 175-83.

---. "Akrasia and Conflict." *Inquiry* 22 (1980): 193-212.

Rutherford Richard. Introduction. *Medea and Other Plays*. By Euripides. Trans. John Davie. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Sanders, Wilbur. *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Sanders, Wilbur and Howard Jacobson. *Shakespeare's Magnanimity: Four Tragic Heroes, Their Friends and Families*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Santoni, Ronald E. *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early* Philosophy. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology.* Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1966.

Seidler, V. *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Shaheen, Naseeb. *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays.* Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999.

Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

---. *Macbeth.* Ed. Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

---. *Macbeth: An Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism.* Ed. Robert S. Miola. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

---. *Othello: Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism,* ed. Edward Pechter. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Skilleas, Ole Martin. *Philosophy and Literature: An Introduction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

Smith Bruce R. *Shakespeare and Masculinity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Stegman, Thomas. "Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of *Akrasia.*" *The Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 117-128.

Szabados, Bela. "The Self, its Passions, and Self-Deception." *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding.*" Ed. Mike Martin. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 143-168.

---. "Wishful Thinking and Self-Deception." *Analysis* 33 (1973): 201-205.

Thero, Daniel. *Understanding Moral Weakness.* PhD Dissertation. SUNY, Albany, New York. 2002.

Ullmann-Margalit, Edna, ed. *Reasoning Practically.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Van Den Beld, A. "Romans 7: 14-25 and the Problem of Akrasia." *Religious Studies* 21 (1985): 495-515.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Othello: A Contextual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Via, Dan Otto. *Self-Deception and Wholeness in Paul and Matthew.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Watson, Curtis. *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

Waith, Eugene M. *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

---. "Manhood and Valor in *Macbeth* in Two Shakespearean Tragedies" *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Macbeth: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Terence Hawkes. Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey, 1977.

Wells, Robin Headlam. *Shakespeare On Masculinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Williams, Bernard. *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Wine, Martin L. *Othello: Text and Performance*. London: MacMillan Publishers, 1984.

Wood, David, ed. *Philosophers' Poets*. London: Routledge, 1990.