SHAKESPEARE'S EXHORTATION TO USE REASON

.....What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed: a beast, no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us un'used.

APPENDIX

Hamlet, Act I, Sc. 3:

THIS ABOVE ALL: TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE,
AND IT MUST FOLLOW, AS THE NIGHT THE DAY,
THOU CANST NOT THEN BE FALSE TO ANY MAN.

A PROEMIUM TO THE EXHORTATION

Shakespeare has written the best short exhortation to use reason that we have. In less than fifty words (forty-nine to be exact), he teaches us so many things that are most necessary and useful to know. Shakespeare's *Exhortation to Use Reason* is thus a supreme example of what he teaches us elsewhere in *Hamlet:* "brevity is the soul of wit". (*wit* here means wisdom). Shortness is the soul of wisdom because the wise man says more than others in fewer words (while "the fool multiplieth his words"). The words of the wise man are like seeds, which are small in size, but great in their power, in what they extend to and illuminate. As loquacity kills thought, so seeds are the beginning of life. Shakespeare gives us more to think about and to understand in these forty-nine words than most authors do in a book.

They enable us to understand what is order and the parts of order, to understand the act of reason and what it is to use reason, to understand what reason is, to understand what man is, to understand what a beast is, and to define each of these five things.

They also help us to see the necessary connections between good and end and between the chief good of man and what man is and between the chief good of man and the use of reason, and to begin to define the chief good and end of man.

They also help us to understand that the natures of things are like numbers and to begin to understand something about God by the likeness and opposition of reason to God.

Last, but not least, they touch upon five most powerful reasons why we should use our reason or use it more than we do.

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Shakespeare's *Exhortation* is found on seven lines of blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) in Act IV, Sc. 4 of *Hamlet*. Since the thought of the *Exhortation* begins on the seventh syllable of the first line and ends on the sixth syllable of the seventh line, the length of the whole *Exhortation* amounts to six lines of blank verse.

The *Exhortation* naturally falls into two parts, the first three lines and the last four lines. The first three lines are in the form of a question (What is a man?) based on a hypothesis (if his chief good is no more than that of the beast) and the answer that would follow (that man is no more than a beast) which is false and absurd. The second part of the exhortation confirms the absurdity of the answer to the question with that hypothesis and brings out what many things are.

Both the question and the answer in the first part are based on a wonderful proportion: man is to beast as the chief good of man is to the chief good of a beast ("to sleep and feed"). One can reason about the chief good of man in more than one way from this proportion. Indeed, this proportion is the beginning of most rigorous reasoning about what is the chief good of man. Shakespeare also suggests in the first part the necessary connection between the chief good of man and the end of man and between the chief good of man and what man is. We can also begin to see they're how the natures of things (or what they are) are like numbers.

From the second part, we can understand what is order and what is the act of reason and what it is to use reason and what reason is. We can also begin to think about God by the likeness and opposition of reason to God.

By bringing together the first and second parts, we can understand what man is and what a beast is. And we can see the necessary connection between the chief good of man and the use of reason and begin to understand what is the chief good of man.

From the second part, we can also see two most powerful reasons (in comparison to what is above man) why man should use his reason or use it more than he does. From the first part, we can see a powerful reason from what is below man why man should use his reason or use it more than he does.

And from bringing together the first and second parts, we can see two other most powerful reasons (in comparison to man himself) why man should use his reason or use it more than he does.

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Shakespeare's *Exhortation* is difficult because he says so much in so few words. Furness, who was familiar with what had been written up to his time on the words of Hamlet, wrote in a celebrated passage that only the words of the Bible and especially those of Christ had been pondered more. William J. Rolfe, in the Preface to his 1894 edition of *Hamlet,* has given us this passage of Furness and said that it is not an exaggeration:

> No one of mortal mould (save Him "whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross") ever trod this earth, commanding such absorbing interest as this Hamlet, this mere creation of a poet's brain. No syllable that he whispers, no word let fall by anyone near him, but is caught and pondered as no words ever have been, except of holy Writ. Upon no throne built by mortal hands has ever "beat so fierce a light" as upon that airy fabric reared at Elsinore.

Without judging the before and after here, this passage encourages us to read the words of the exhortation (spoken by Hamlet) "carefully, frequently and with reverence."

The words *before and after* are equivocal by reason. Hence, to understand more fully Shakespeare's definition, it is necessary to understand the central senses of *before* as thought out by Aristotle in the following text.

ARISTOTLE, *CATEGORIES*, CHAPTER 12

One thing is said to be *before* another in four ways. First and most strictly according to time, by which one thing is older and more ancient than another. For something is said to be older or more ancient in that its time has been longer.

Second, that whose existence does not follow reversibly, as one is before two. If two exists, it follows right away that one exists; but if one exists, it is not necessary that two exist; so that the existence of the other does not follow reversibly from the one. Thus the *before* is such that from it, existence does not follow reversibly.

In a third way, *before* is said according to a certain order, as in the sciences and speeches. The order of before and after belongs to the demonstrative sciences: the elements are in order before the diagrams; and in grammar, the letters are before the syllables. Likewise, in speeches, the proemium comes in order before the narration.

Further, besides the aforesaid, the better and more honorable seems to be before by nature. For even the many say that those honored or loved by them come *before* with them. But this is perhaps the strangest of the ways.

Before would seem to be said in that many ways.

There would seem to be another way *before* is said in addition to the above. Of those things whose existence follows reversibly, the cause in whatever manner of existence to the other would reasonably be said to be before by nature. That there are such things is clear. The existence of a man follows reversibly in existence to the true statement about him. For if a man exists, the statement by which we say the man exists is true. But the true statement is in no way a cause of the thing being, but the thing being would seem to be a cause in some way of the

statement being true. For the statement is said to be true or false as the thing is or is not. Thus, one thing is said to be *before* another in five ways.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S EXHORTATION

What words in the exhortation define *order?*
How do these same words define *beginning, middle and end?*
How do these same words define *first, second, third* (and so on) and *last?*
What are the central and chief senses of *before?*
In what sense of *before* does one meaning of a word come before another?
In what sense of *before* does one sense of *before* come before another sense of *before*?
Why do *order; beginning, middle & end; first, second & last* have many meanings?

What is *a definition of a thing?*
What word is the genus and first part of the definition of reason?
What words complete the definition of reason?
Why in general are these used to complete the definition?
How does Shakespeare define reason?

What is the origin of the word *discourse?*
What is the *discourse* of reason?
Why is discourse the act of reason most known to us?
Distinguish the discourses of reason.

What is meant by *large* in the phrase *large discourse?*
Why does Shakespeare define reason by *large* rather than *small* discourse?

How is *looking* defined by seeing?
What is meant by *seeing* and hence by *looking* in the definition?

In which of the central and chief senses of *before* does reason look before and after?

Which sense perfects the others in reason's looking?
Why does the ability to look before and after include, or presuppose, the ability to distinguish things?
Does *looking before and after* also pertain to what is most known to us about reason?
How does the definition of reason bring out what it is to use reason?

Why is *large discourse* put before *looking before and after* in the definition?
Why is it necessary to add *looking before and after* to *large discourse?*

In what way is reason *god-like?*
Why is reason *god-like?*
In what way is reason not like God?

What do man and the beast have in common?
What does man have in addition to what the beast has?
What difference separates man and beast?
What is a man?
What is a beast?
Why is a man without reason said to be *no more* than a beast?

What is the *chief good* of a thing?
What is meant by the phrase *market of his time?*
Why is the chief good of man and the market of his time the same?
What is the connection between the chief good of man (or market of his time) and what a man is?
What proportion does Shakespeare see between man and beast and their chief goods?
How does Shakespeare reason (like a mathematician) to some understanding of the chief good of man from this proportion?
What does the chief good of man involve or include that the chief good of the beast does not have?

What reasons does Shakespeare touch upon why man should use his reason or use it more than he does:

In comparison to what is below man?
in comparison to what is above man?
in comparison to man himself?

Why is the philosopher (in the original sense of the word) above all others interested in an exhortation to use reason?
How does the definition of reason give us a beginning for dividing the knowledge of reason?

What can be learned about wisdom (the highest or greatest perfection of reason) from Shakespeare's Exhortation?

In the following text, Thomas points out that before and after define order in the strict sense and that distinction is presupposed to order because nothing is before or after itself. The latter is the reason why in both logic and in wisdom, Aristotle considers the basis of formal distinction, which is opposition, before the word *before*.

Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Lib. I Sent*, Dist. XX, Q. I, Art. III, Sol. I:

> Order in its definition includes...the notion of before and after. Hence there can be said to be an order of things in all those ways in which something is said to be *before* another, according to place and according to time and according to all things of this sort. It also includes distinction because there is not an order of things unless they are distinct. But the name *order* more presupposes this than signifies it

In the following text, Thomas brings out that it is proper to reason to consider and know order, and, hence, that reasoned out knowledge can be distinguished by the order it considers.

THOMAS AQUINAS: PROEMIUM TO THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

> As the Philosopher says in the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, it belongs to the wise to order. The reason for this is that wisdom is the greatest perfection of reason whose property it is to know order. For, although the sense powers know some things absolutely, to know the order of one thing to another belongs only to understanding or reason.
>
> But a twofold order is found in things. One is of the parts of some whole or some multitude to each other, as the parts of a house are ordered to each other. The other is the order of things to their end. And this order is more the chief one than the first. For, as the Philosopher says in book XII of the *Metaphysics*, the

order of the parts of an army to each other is because of the order of the whole army to its leader.

Order however is compared to reason in four ways:

There is an order which reason does not make, but only considers, as is the order of natural things.

There is also an order which reason by considering makes in its own act, as when it orders its thoughts to each other, and the signs of thoughts which are signifying vocal sounds.

There is moreover a third order which reason by considering makes in the acts of the will.

And there is a fourth order which reason by considering makes in exterior things of which it is the cause, such as a box or a house.

And because the consideration of reason is perfected by the firm disposition of knowledge, there are diverse forms of knowledge according to the diverse orders which reason properly considers.

For the consideration of the order of things which human reason considers but does not make belongs to natural philosophy; thus that with natural philosophy, we also include metaphysics.

The order however which reason by considering makes in its own act belongs to rational philosophy which considers the order of the parts of a speech to each other and the order of beginnings to conclusions.

But the order of voluntary acts belongs to the consideration of moral philosophy

And the order which reason by considering makes in exterior things constructed by human reason belongs to the mechanical arts.

Thus therefore it belongs to moral philosophy, about which turns the present intention, to consider human acts as they are

ordered to each other and to the end. I call acts *human* which proceed from the will of man according to the order of reason. For if there are some acts in man which are not subject to the will and reason, they are not properly called human, but natural, just as is clear about the acts of the plant soul which in no way come under the consideration of moral philosophy. Therefore just as the subject of natural philosophy is motion or a movable thing, so also the subject of moral philosophy is human act ordered to an end, or also man insofar as he is voluntarily acting for an end.

It should be known however that, because man is naturally a social animal, since he needs many things for his life which he cannot himself alone prepare for himself, it follows that man is naturally a part of some multitude through which he is given help to live well. This help he needs for two things.

First for those things necessary for life without which the present life is not able to be gone through. And the domestic household, of which he is a part, aids man in this. For every man has from his parents generation and nourishment and discipline and likewise also the individuals who are parts of the domestic family aid each other in the necessities of life.

In another way man is aided by the multitude of which he is a part for a complete sufficiency of life, so that man not only lives, but lives well, having all the things which suffice for his life. And thus the civil multitude, of which he is a part, helps him not only as far as bodily things (as regards many artificial things for which one household is not sufficient), but also as regards moral things insofar as insolent youth, whom paternal admonition is not able to correct, are forced through public power by the threat of punishment.

It should de known however that this whole which is a multitude of citizens or the domestic family has only a unity of order by which something is not simply one. And therefore a part of this whole can have an act which is not an act of the whole, as the soldier in the army has an act which is not that of the whole army.

Nevertheless the whole itself has some act which is not private to some part, but of the whole, as the striking together of the whole army. And the drawing of the ship is an act of the

multitude drawing the ship. There is however another whole, which has a unity not only in order, but in composition or binding together, or even in continuity by which unity something is one simply; and therefore there is no act of the part which is not of the whole. For there is the same motion of the whole and the part in continuous things. And likewise in things composed or bound together, the act of the part is chiefly of the whole. And therefore it is necessary that the consideration of such a whole and its part belong to the same knowledge. However it does not belong to the same knowledge to consider the whole which has only a unity of order and its parts. And hence it is that moral philosophy [we call this practical philosophy, the philosophy of doing] is divided into three parts.

The first of these considers the acts of one man ordered to an end and is called *monastic*. [We call this part *ethics.*]

The second however considers the acts of the domestic multitude and is called *domestics.*

But the third considers the acts of the civil multitude and is called *politics.*

Duane H. Berquist