



PROCRASTINATION – A PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER IN HAMLET’S CHARACTER?

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ABSTRACT

Procrastination is the practice of carrying out less urgent tasks in preference to more urgent ones, or doing more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones, and thus putting off impending tasks to a later time, sometimes to the "last minute" before the deadline. The greatest problem in 'Hamlet' is the problem of Hamlet's delay in avenging the murder of his father. What makes Hamlet delay the execution of the orders of the ghost, has always baffled the critics. It is the reason that even today there is no unanimity about the cause of the delay. We have only to content ourselves with various speculations about it.

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INTRODUCTION

Procrastination may result in stress, anxiety, a sense of guilt and crisis, health problems, and severe loss of personal productivity, as well as social disapproval for not meeting responsibilities or commitments. These feelings combined may promote further procrastination. While it is regarded as normal for people to procrastinate to some degree, it becomes a problem when it impedes normal functioning. Chronic procrastination may be a sign of an underlying psychological disorder. Such procrastinators may have difficulty seeking support due to social stigma and the belief that task-aversion is caused by laziness, low willpower, or low ambition.

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of his father. What makes Hamlet delay the execution of the orders of the ghost, has always baffled the critics. It is the reason that even today there is no unanimity about the cause of the delay. We have only to content ourselves with various speculations about it.

The Most Widely Accepted Theory about Hamlet's Delay

It is generally accepted that the delay was caused by Hamlet's tendency to reflection and speculation. According to this view, the play 'Hamlet' is the tragedy of thought and reflection. Two eminent critics namely Coleridge and Schlegel have subscribed to this view. According to Schlegel, the play depicts the calculating consideration of all the relations and possible consequences of a deed.

This prolonged and exhaustive consideration cripples the hero's capacity for action.

The result is –

The native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of
thought.
And Hamlet loses himself in the labyrinth of
thought.

Coleridge finds in Hamlet 'an almost amorous-intellectual activity and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it.' This view of Hamlet's character given to irresolution and procrastination is revealed in one of his soliloquies. He himself feels ashamed of being a coward who can only 'unpack his heart' with words and can start cursing like a kitchen menial. The majority of critics attribute the cause of delay to this philosophic outlook of Hamlet that unnerves him at the moment when he should plunge into action and execute the deed.

Hamlet's Philosophical Speculation

Hamlet has been one of the most philosophical character. He was essentially preoccupied with existential problems. He says in the mood of utter disgust:

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

He is more lost in contemplating over the nature of human behavior than devising means of revenge. His resolution for revenge is lost in the contemplation of the meanness of the ways of the world. This tendency to think too much and his constitutional incapacity for premeditated action explain the delay in taking revenge. This view is supported by Hazlitt who says 'the character of Hamlet is not marked by strength of will but by refinement of thought and sentiment.' Hamlet seems to be incapable of deliberate action, he is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion when he has no time to reflect as in the scene where he kills Polonius. At other times, when it is most important for him to act he remains puzzled, undecided and skeptical. He dallies with his purpose till the occasion is lost and then he finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness. Thus he is dilatory. It is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon

the enormity of his uncle's crime than to plunge into immediate action.

Bradley's View: Hamlet's Profound Melancholy

There are some critics who do not find the above theory quite adequate. For them it is good enough but not thoroughly convincing. The most prominent among these critics is A.C. Bradley. According to Bradley, Hamlet's irresolution is not directly or mainly due to a habitual excess of thought or reflection. The direct cause, according to Bradley, is a state of mind quite abnormal and induced by special circumstances - an excess of reflection is not a direct cause of irresolution. Bradley finds no support to this indecisiveness in the text. Nobody regards him a mere scholar, incapable of forming a resolution. Ophelia refers to him as a soldier and he is really fond of fencing. He could fearlessly run after a ghost and kill Polonius, can board the pirate ship and leap into a grave. Bradley attributes Hamlet's irresolution partly to his melancholy and partly to his moral idealism. Hamlet is a man of exquisite sensibility. This may be described as a moral idealism. He shows an unlimited delight and faith in everything that is good and beautiful. For him the ideal man is most noble in reason and infinite in faculties. It is with this eager enthusiasm that he turns to men around him and is utterly disgusted. He sustains a rude-shock in drunken lustfulness that prevails in the world and is rendered inactive. It is this melancholy caused by the disgusting behavior of man that is responsible for the delay of Hamlet. This melancholy is the product of his exquisite moral idealism.

Goethe's Opinion

Goethe advances a different theory. According to him 'Hamlet is a beautiful, pure and most moral nature without the strength of nerve which makes the hero' who therefore sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off. Hamlet, he holds himself and expresses this feeling in the following words:

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

But this theory cannot be accepted as it reduces Hamlet to a weak nerveless creature unfit to be the hero of a tragedy.

Summing Up

The various theories advanced by critics bear only the part of the truth. Each of these critics has described his theory but not Hamlet. The fact is that Prince of Denmark is a very complex personality and his action or inaction is the resultant of a number of causes acting and reacting on each other. As Verity points out "If Hamlet thinks too much, he also feels too much. The tragic hero of Shakespeare is always passionate. Hamlet's actions are always passionate; when he begins to reflect, he procrastinates and the more he thinks the harder all actions grow. His equilibrium is disturbed both by thought and feeling. Feeling less Hamlet would have less inclination to act; thinking less, he would have more power to act."

Through the concept of these antagonistic tendencies his whole soul is tossed about in a restless ecstasy of self-torture. And this irresolution becomes the root cause of torture on him and secondly in a spasmodic fit, it makes him cause several deaths and his own end, thus the delay is mainly due to something very deep and inner in the psyche of Hamlet himself. There is no external cause for this delay.

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