Shakespeare, Renan and Weber: an interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to law and the nation-state

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8 *The tragedy of Julius Caesar*: analysis

8.1 Introduction

Thematically, *Julius Caesar*[1] is in many ways the sequel to the play *Hamlet*, it being a following step in the life cycle of a nation-state. In the previous plays we saw, in succession, how both the will to form a nation and values[2] emerged from the violence paradigm; then the nation-state itself sprang into being as a logical corollary of Hamlet's wishes concerning the separation of powers. In unity of will and purpose, his wishes are honored. We might say that the entire community is thus affected by the powerful effect of the violence paradigm, undergoing the same change in attitude and outlook, working in unison for the benefit of the community as long as this influence lasts.

We now enter the stage in which, in effect, we witness this influence wane and wear down. How do the protagonists in this tragedy deal with the correlation between values and (state-monopolized) violence? Do they understand that values are not in the same league as consumer goods: to be used at their pleasure?

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1 For summary and main characters of the play: see Appendices.
2 Of course, further down this chapter I will elaborate on how this takes shape.

In this chapter, I will focus on these questions as well as on the following issues:

- Do Renan's and Weber's concepts of nation and state adequately cover the reality of the nation-state?
- How does Cicero's rule of law relate to the violence paradigm?
- In what ways is the proper functioning of the public construct related to the violence paradigm?

These aspects of the topic in hand will be evaluated conclusively in the next chapter.

8.2 Setting off on a journey

Rome was a nation based on territorial expansion through military successes and victories. This becomes especially apparent in the values the Romans upheld. This society has absorbed that much violence that violence itself has turned into a socially accepted value, it seems. Well now, is it wise to simply incorporate a type of violence (any type, but in this case, the aftereffect of many wars of conquest; war being of the radical non-tragic type) into a state construct without the mediation of the violence paradigm? Is such a construct able to withstand the stress test of the next crisis?

Cicero's commentary in the previous chapter, on the (eroding) state of affairs in the republic, is lucid and completely unambiguous. It is against this background that the play starts. In act 1 we meet a society in turmoil, having just lived through the most terrible of wars: the civil war variety. The danger not coming from without, but from within. Julius at that time is at the height of his power; being loved, hated and feared.

8.3 Opening of the play

In scene I, we meet two tribunes,[3] Flavius and Murellus, who confront two common citizens with their public behavior. In spite of the fact that these functionaries were the chosen representatives of the plebeians in the Senate (and may therefore be expected to promote and guard their interests), a sense of tension and conflict can be detected in their words. "Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home! Is this a holiday?"[4] In an interrogative tone, they ask the two laborers why they are out on a working day and why they are celebrating. Their answers are sharp and cheeky, quick-witted with a touch

3 Tribunes in Republican Rome were elected in the Senate by the plebeians. They were, in the true sense of the word, representatives of the common people.

4 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, l. 1 – 2.

of rebuff. They are holidaying to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons. Murellus is outraged and gives them a severe scolding:

> Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
> What tributaries follow him to Rome
> To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?
> You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things,
> O you hard hearts, you cruèl men of Rome,
> Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
> Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,
> To towers and windows, yea, to chimney tops,
> Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
> The livelong day with patient expectation
> To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.[5]

Murellus understands that the end of a civil war should never be a valid reason for celebration since half the nation is in grief for the loss of fathers, sons, or other casualties. Festivities at this point would be the ultimate affront for those who had lost and are, after all, still fellow citizens. In this case, he's talking about those in favor of Pompey. He also reminds the revelers of the fickleness of their preferences. Only a short while ago, they hailed Pompey as the victor of battles. In other words, Flavius and Murellus warn for the wrong attitude towards violence. Both the negating and venerating of violence are unwise strategies to follow. From this perspective, Julius' triumphant parade is bizarre and foolish.

Flavius adds that the merrymakers should hurry home, and pray for forgiveness; when they are gone, he urges Murellus to divest all statues and images in the streets of their festive ornaments. He remarks:

> I'll about
> And drive away the vulgar from the streets.
> So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
> These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness.[6]

In this scene, Shakespeare paints Rome's crisis in rough but sure brushstrokes. Effectively and explicitly, he depicts the internal differences among citizens as well as the loss of coherence and interdependence within and between the classes. A united will to overcome and heal the wounds of civil war is totally absent. There is a tension between the general public and its representatives.

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5 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, ll. 31 – 41.
6 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, I, ll. 69 – 74.

Not only between the tribune-senators[7] and the populace trust is gone; these representatives, in their turn, anxiously observe how consul Julius Caesar concentrates power in his person by his continued consulship; the above quote also shows their apprehension and fear of Julius' growing power.[8] Note that there is no trace of the relaxation and appeasement that a newly made peace might bring after a devastating civil war. Shakespeare communicates minutely that at any moment, violence could flare up again.

The subtle gossamer of Roman's social fabric is badly torn. Relationships are built on mutual distrust, fear and expediency. No trace of Renan's explicit condition of unity in will and purpose can be detected. Nationhood, as defined by Renan, is totally absent here. Shakespeare characterizes the citizens as consumers of pleasures. They want a holiday and seek an occasion to get one. Paul Cantor remarks that in *Julius Caesar* we witness the transformation of citizens into consumers and spectators.[9] I recall Renan's words in the second chapter on nations and self-interest: no nation that is based on self-interest can stand, giving Rome as an example. Hostility looms directly below the surface. Tensions and mistrust that are widely spread and, as always, these are harbingers of violence to come.

In the second scene, we witness yet another festivity: the procession to celebrate Lupercal.[10] Caesar enters with his train of followers and friends. In a short intermezzo, Shakespeare sketches important aspects of Caesar's character and attitude. He exhibits his superstitions when he asks Antony to touch Calpurnia to relieve her from her barrenness,[11] for it was commonly believed that the touch of someone taking part in a holy procession could remedy this condition. Yet, somewhat later in the same scene, he condescendingly rebukes a soothsayer who warns him of the Ides of March.[12] Caesar calls the man but "a dreamer".[13] This scene, filled with cheering crowds pressing round Caesar, tells us that he is venerated and that, because he realizes this, he feels he can play men at will. But then again, he is subject to that same superstition when he asks Antony the above favour. His volatile behaviour has a touch of decadence and instability. The short intermezzo

7 It should be remembered that by the power of their office they were important strongholds on which the republic rested. However, they did not have the same amount of influence and power our modern members of parliament have.

8 As we have seen above, during the republic a consulship lasted only one year; Julius held this office much longer and was thus able to transfer power to his position and to himself.

9 Paul Cantor, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s

10 Lupercal was a Roman festival held on the 15th of February. Originally it was a farming festival to ward wolves off the lambs. Later on it was adopted by the city of Rome to chase away evil spirits. Source: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Cambridge School Shakespeare, ed. by Timothy Seward and Rob Smith, p. 172.

11 There is the possible suggestion that her barrenness, might also be his impotence; witness his faltering masculinity, his deafness and epileptic fits. Julius is clearly past his prime.

12 The fifteenth of March, still to come at that point.

13 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. II, l. 24.

hardly sketches a picture of the wished-for mentality of the empire's leader and guardian. An empire in dire need of stability after a period of civil war and administrative crisis. The cracks begin to appear in the basis of the realm and amongst those in charge of it, soiling the very fabric of society.

Of course, historically speaking (I remind the reader of the fact that here we are discussing a play, not history and here I digress a bit into history), these cracks had long since been there. Julius had just come back from a ten-year campaign in Gaul. Today, we would say a decade packed with war crimes. It had been to the greater glory of Rome. Again, the question can be raised as to how Rome copes with a person who had caused so much radical non tragic violence? Pompey had made an effort by ordering Julius Caesar to leave his troops north of the river Rubicon and summoning him to the Senate. This is, by far, not enough for a person who has gone through 10 years of war and is hardened to the bone. Most of his soldiers must have been damaged either mentally or physically or both and, of course, in the Rome of the first century BCE, no one had a clue as to this issue. We can safely assume that in the mind of Julius Caesar, his military exploits in Gaul seamlessly merge into the civil war in Rome (lasting four years). For now, it may suffice to conclude that Julius Caesar brought a huge amount of violence with him into a society with an already weak and decrepit state construct.

In the play we find a Julius Caesar who is volatile and superstitious. He knows very well how to wield violence and how to wield success, but does he know how to wield a nation-state, an empire?

8.4 Cassius and Brutus: who are they and how do they perceive Julius Caesar

Two of Julius' associates, Brutus and Cassius, had joined Julius in the procession, however, they remained behind in the street as the parade continued. Who are Cassius and Brutus? Brutus was a senator and had previously fought alongside Pompey in the civil war. After the battle of Pharsalus (48 BCE), lost by Pompey, Julius Caesar had pardoned Brutus for fighting on the 'wrong side'; they even became intimates. This developed into an even closer relationship when Julius adopted Brutus as his son. Brutus descended from an aristocratic lineage, in which he took much pride. Cassius was married to Brutus' sister, he had an excellent reputation as a commanding officer in the field. He too, initially fought on Pompey's side, and he too, was pardoned by Julius. However, Cassius remained hostile towards Julius. Both were praetors[14] at one point. Between these two, the following conversation unfolds.

14 A kind of judge.

Cassius asks Brutus whether he will "go see the order of the course".[15] Shakespeare here plays with the meaning of the word course (in modern English: the race), which in middle and early modern English also could mean *curs* or *curse*: threat, curse or doom.[16]

Cassius remarks that Brutus is not as good-natured and affectionate towards him as he used to be. Brutus reacts that he had been troubled of late; "vexed I am/of late with passions of some difference,/Conceptions only proper to myself."

He keeps them to himself and won't trouble his friends: "But let not therefore my good friends be grieved/(Among which number, Cassius, be you one)/Nor construe any further my neglect/Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war/Forgets the shows of love to other men."[17]

Here, Brutus defines his friendship with Cassius as a genuine heartfelt relationship; one in which friends can be themselves and freely show their feelings and voice their opinions. It is precisely that aspect that Cassius addresses in his question. Cassius, however, does not use this bond with Brutus to reinforce its sincerity. He has a different objective. He starts to play Brutus to manipulate him and prime him for his own purposes. An interesting conversation ensues, cautiously guided by Cassius. He tells Brutus that the latter needs an interpreter for a better understanding of himself. Of course, this is not his private opinion, Cassius hastens to add, but that of many Romans.

> And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
> That you have no such mirrors as will turn
> Your hidden worthiness into your eye
> That you might see your shadow. I have heard
> Where many of the best respect in Rome,
> (Except immortal Caesar), speaking of Brutus
> And groaning underneath this age's yoke,
> Have wished that noble Brutus had his eyes.[18]

Cassius has packed a few messages in his words: you lack proper feedback to come to a better self-knowledge. He also implies: this is not my private opinion, but the *opinio communis.* Cassius here plays on an important primeval need[19] in man (and therefore, of course, also in Brutus): his need to be embedded and secured within his community. Cassius continues: many are

15 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. II, l. 25.
16 *Curs*: Old English and *Cours*: Old French. Source: F.H. Stratman, *A Middle-English Dictionary*, lemma *Curs*, p. 146.
17 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 43 – 47.
18 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 56 – 62.
19 I will extensively come back to man's primeval existential needs and the difference with modish and consumptive needs later on in the play.

dissatisfied with the current time-juncture in Rome. Brutus feels uncomfortable, but cannot precisely pinpoint the essence of it. He responds:

> Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
> That you would have me seek into myself
> For that which is not in me?[20]

Thereupon Cassius offers himself to be Brutus' sparring partner to give his self-knowledge the boost Cassius deems necessary. In this terse scene we see a perversion of friendship and trust on the part of Cassius. After this conversation it is no longer (if it ever was) a friendship between equals, but a vertical one: Cassius leading on Brutus.

Brutus describes his general attitude towards the important Roman value of honor within the polis.

> If it be aught toward the general good,
> Set honour in one eye and death i' th' other,
> And I will look on both indifferently,
> For let the gods so speed me as I love
> The name of honor more than I fear death.[21]

For Brutus, honour is of greater importance than his death. Cassius responds to it, going specifically into the honour aspect.

Honour has several connotations. 1) Honour in the battlefield (this aspect is first and foremost in the Roman mind since Rome had been a highly militarized culture, bent on conquest). 2) To distinguish oneself in battle or suffering an honorable death by a worthy opponent.[22] 3) This is in line with the Roman concept of honourable suicide.[23] 4) Next, there is the association with honour revenge; revenge in order to restore one's honor.[24] 5) Lastly, there is the virtue honour of an individual: a person of integrity.

Well now, there is a subtle difference between a value and a virtue: a value is commonly shared within a community and a virtue is a personal characteristic. A value could be personified as an individual asset, but an individual characteristic can never be a common value (i.e., the other way around). Cassius uses the concept as a personal virtue: the upright code of conduct. "I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus."[25] But Brutus was talking about the honourable death in the battlefield (being a value shared by many: Act 1, II, l. 89). In other words, Cassius implies that a commonly shared value is a

20 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar,* act 1, II, ll. 63 – 65.
21 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act1, II, ll. 85 – 89.
22 Cif. chapter on *Macbeth*.
23 See further down: act 5.
24 See *Macbeth* on revenge.
25 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, l. 90.

virtue of Brutus: burdening Brutus thus with the responsibility for upholding single-handedly a communal value. The question is whether Brutus can live up to this.

Cassius goes on to tell a story of how he had to rescue Caesar from drowning by carrying him on his back. He compares this to the story of Aeneas (by Vergil), who carried his old father Anchises on his back, fleeing from Troy. The implications are crystal clear: Cassius = Aeneas and Anchises = Caesar. The coming young man and the waning old man. The Roman value of *pietas* is implied here: the obligational cohesiveness, especially from the younger towards the older and elderly, was an important value[26] even more so when the older one was higher in rank. Here we touch upon an important notion also mentioned by Renan: the unity in will and purpose that transforms a group into a nation; in other words, the necessary cohesiveness within a nation. Here, this takes shape in the form of mutual obligation. However, Cassius perverts this by telling the story with contempt for the older person, depicting him as weak and needy. Herewith, he completely peels the concept of its customary meaning, distorting and twisting it.

Cassius casually mentions that "this man" (meaning Julius Caesar) is now a god: "And this man/Is now a god, and Cassius is/A wretched creature and must bend his body/If Caesar carelessly but nod on him."[27] Cassius's spite sputters from his lips. "Ye gods, it doth amaze me/A man of such feeble temper should/So get the start of the majestic world/And bear the palm alone."[28]

Cassius cries out: "Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed/That he is grown so great? Age, thou art shamed!/Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods."[29] Cassius, however, is part of this degeneration himself, abusing his friendship with Brutus, playing him, becoming the consumer of their friendship. After Brutus has left him, Cassius rummages, assessing Brutus' character:

> Well, Brutus, thou art noble. Yet I see
> Thy honourable mettle may be wrought
> From that it is disposed. Therefore it is meet
> That noble minds keep ever with their likes,
> For who so firm that cannot be seduced?[30]

The crucial question here is whether Brutus will be able to singly uphold not only his honour, but also his constancy. Cassius' observations, realistic as they are, bode little good.

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26 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 85.
27 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, sc. 2, ll. 116 – 118.
28 Ibid. ll. 129 – 131.
29 Ibid. ll. 149 – 151.
30 Ibid. ll. 297 – 301.

8.5 Recapitulation and assessment of values discussed so far

So far, several values have been reviewed, all of them more or less degenerated. Allow me to, at this point, elaborate briefly upon them for a moment:

- The relationship and reciprocity between the classes of a soundly operating hierarchical system are abating, if not outright hostile.
- The democratic[31] organization of the state (the Roman Republic) is heavily under pressure. This, of course, had not appeared out of thin air. Unrest and upheavals had weakened the internal social structure for a considerable time (this is also referenced in the previous chapter: the paragraph on the history of Rome).
- A perversion of culture in the sense that active citizenship seems to be replaced by passive consumerism of democratic achievements. In fact, the play starts with the "consummation" of a day off after Julius Caesar's victory.
- The Roman values of integrity and loyal friendship. The true variety is only apparent in Brutus's friendship towards Cassius. The other way around, it is professed only in words.
- In the above quote: "Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed": ll. 149, Cassius talks about *our* Caesar. The use of this pronoun could be a sign of familiarity and proximity (and indeed Caesar had always been in close and informal contact with his troops), but here his name is no longer a proper name, but the acknowledgment of Julius' sway over his fellow Romans: his name has become the recognition of his function: he is their *caesar* (emperor, ruler). With this accreditation, Cassius himself becomes a function of Caesar's power and subject to it. A different kind of power: Cassius' acknowledgement of Julius as (autocratic) emperor, tying in with the fact that now the democratic organization is in real danger.

Apart from these points of serious concern, there were yet other inherent weaknesses potentially dangerous for the well-being of the nation-state construct. Above was noted that Rome's raison d'être had been defined for the most part by her conquests and territorial expansions. Julius had, to a large extent, been the personification of this drive. "Caesar is the peak and the end of that old order. Republican Rome had existed and flourished on two conditions: – external warfare [I dare to supplement: wars of conquest] and domestic faction"[32] as Bloom characterizes this. This had resulted in two things, which now began to work against the Roman nation-state. Firstly, the army itself. I already pointed out above that Julius' enormous army (consisting

31 It has to be born in mind, though, that the Roman notion of democracy (the tribunes that were elected into the Senate by the plebeians) is a far cry from our definition of democracy.

32 Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*, p, 79.

of troops having a devoted loyalty to their leader) began to form – in the terminology central in this dissertation – an independently operating entity; a nation in a nation. Apart from the one mentioned above (being the importation of violence into a social structure), this was an additional reason for the fact that this army (the military nation) began to constitute a threat to the nation of Rome. "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."[33] Mary Beard muses in her work on the Romans:

> The pressing question was what would happen when Caesar left Gaul and how after almost ten years […], he was to be reintegrated into the ordinary mainstream of politics. […] on the one hand were those who […] wanted to bring Caesar back down to size; on the other, Caesar and his supporters insisted that this treatment was humiliating, that his *dignitas* – a distinctively Roman combination of clout, prestige and right to respect – was being attacked. The underlying issue: […] would Caesar, with more than 40,000 troops at his disposal only a few days from Italy, follow the example of Sulla[34] or of Pompey?[35]

In his lecture on the play Paul Cantor[36] points at a second aspect constituting a possible weakness of the Roman empire: the enormous distances to be travelled from one side of the empire to the other: it took almost a year to walk from Rome to Madrid. How can one attain and maintain unity in a nation-state of this proportions with the means of communication then available.

It would be a nearly impossible task for Rome to maintain the monopoly on violence (type 2 violence). The danger of a monopoly on violence becoming a multiplicity of violence (i.e., radical non-tragic violence) loomed. It takes a judicial and knowledgeable leader to be able to handle this, preferably one who has gone successfully through his tragic crisis, as I will emphasize once again. And again, the question of whether Roman society would be able to successfully mitigate Julius Caesar's radical violence of the non-tragic variant (i.e., civil war) into a state-controlled one presents itself in a more pressing way.

Our Cassius, for one, tries to remove the violence Julius Caesar represented by murdering him. But will this end well? Does Cassius grasp the essence of non-tragic violence and is he able to turn it into tragic-violence? How *does* he handle violence, and, equally important, does he have a clear vision of the future as e.g. Hamlet and his heirs had?

Cassius continues his story, recalling to memory another Brutus (ll. 159 ff.). In fact, this had been the historical Lucius Junius Brutus who, 450 years before, had deposed the then last king/tyrant Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. The implication is clear. Brutus reacts that he will think over the issue as indeed the times are hard.

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33 Mark 3:24.
34 Sulla (138–78 BC), general, wan the first civil war and came to power by force.
35 Mary Beard, SPQR, p. 285.
36 Paul Cantor, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s

> Brutus had rather be a villager
> Than to repute himself a son of Rome
> Under these hard conditions as this time
> Is like to lay upon us.[37]

It is as if we hear Hamlet complain about the state of Denmark. Brutus is right: there is something fundamentally amiss at the core of the nation-state construct of Rome.

8.6 The other protagonist: Julius Caesar

After the games are over, Caesar and his train pass by again. Caesar notices Cassius and he comments on his appearance:

> Let me have men about me that are fat,
> Sleek-headed men and such as sleep a-nights.
> Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
> He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.[38]

He wants easy-going men around him, preferably saturated and satisfied; lazy and slack consumers of the good things in life and, above all, of Caesar's goodness and thus satisfied with life in general. Hungry men are angry and angry men more often than not crave power and therefore they are flat-out dangerous. This is irony at its best and very Shakespearean when he pictures Julius Caesar as a well-satiated man, but he is perceived by Brutus and Cassius as a power-hungry man and therefore a danger to the state construct. Who actually considers whom to be a security liability? Shakespeare seems to raise this question here, since he continues to extensively describe Julius' shortcomings in what follows: physical as well as psychological.[39] Then the following scene ensues.

As Caesar's parade passes, Brutus pulls one of the revelers, Casca, by the cloak. The latter leaves the festive procession and, staying behind, he is asked by Brutus what had happened just before and why Caesar looks so sad. Upon this, Casca recounts what befell Julius. Antony offered the crown to Caesar and the latter refused. We learn that the crown was offered to Caesar thrice. Casca reports: three times in a row, Caesar refused the crown. However, as Casca states emphatically, Caesar's refusal was but a show. He was greedy for it and nearly couldn't keep his hands from grabbing it ("but to my thinking he was very loath to lay his fingers off it."[40]).

37 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 172 – 175.
38 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 192 – 196.
39 In medieval and early modern plays physical characteristics often mirror psychological particulars.
40 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, II, ll. 237 – 238.

A third time of crown-grabbing and Caesar fell down in a fit. Brutus assumes it was his falling sickness. Cassius wittily replies that they themselves have the falling sickness – subjected as they are to Caesar.

Our reporter Casca ends with the casual remark: "I could tell you more news too. Murellus and Flavius, for pulling scarves off Caesar's images, are put to silence. Fare you well."[41] The ominous part of this report is not just the facts: the prioritization spells a murky dark perspective: evidently, Caesar's show of highhanded refusal is deemed far more important than the fact that this same Caesar puts two tribunes (members of the Senate and buttresses of the republic) to death for their opinions. This, in itself, is an outrage. For in 58 BCE, the Senate had decreed that no Roman citizen could be executed without a proper trial.[42]

8.7 Julius and violence: the reaction of the bystanders

What legal values there were in Rome are now quenched by the killing of the last two tribunes who had (some points of) criticism of Julius Caesar. It is telling that Julius kills off the representatives of those very commoners who venerated him and helped him come to power[43] in the first place. Indeed, when an overlord destroys his own stronghold, the power base from which he operates, it is in ultimo an act of self-destruction (and as we know now, radical violence has this characteristic). Moreover, although Julius operates like an autocrat, he has to take due account of those popular power currents that had raised him to power in the complicated and corrupted political landscape that Rome was. Severing this bond of reciprocity and loyalty, he unknowingly throws himself at the mercy of the shifting political powers[44] in a fermenting society. In the end, what Julius does here in terms of his own needs is that he separates himself from his embeddedness in his community.

The conspirators will meet that night. They have to go through a terrible storm to meet. At this point in the play, Shakespeare introduces Cicero, who chances upon Casca on his way to the secret gathering. They exchange a few remarks on the weather (Cicero debunking Casca's superstitions on bad

41 Ibid., ll. 273 – 275.

42 Mary Beard, *SPQR*, p. 36.

43 For instance by serving long contract terms (of ten years on end) as legionary in his army. The reciprocity of this contract lies in the fact that after the ten years of service, land was granted to the legionnaires by Julius.

44 As we shall see, the revulsion for the murder only came after Mark Antony's speech. After the first speech by Brutus the populace cheered.

weather being a bad omen[45]) after which both go their separate ways, disappearing into the night.[46]

After having bumped into Cicero, Casca meets Cassius in the same terrible storm. Cassius totally reverses the customary superstitious reaction to the unusual and dangerous natural events; it is not a frightening thing. No, quite the opposite, it is pleasing: "A very pleasing night to honest men."[47] Here we see, again, a total reversal of meaning. He embarks on an elucidation of his views: the heavens do not react to present ills and current governmental mismanagement (as was customarily believed), but they are potent portents of what is to come if we do not intervene (viz, if we do not kill the tyrant-to-be: Julius).[48] He correlates his new interpretation to some customary Roman modes of being, blending and blurring their meanings in a way that he deems conducive to his purposes. He mentions the honoured Roman tradition of virtuous suicide,[49] and sets it off against dishonourable slave suicide. He tells Casca that, when he becomes a slave under Julius, he will commit the act of valorous slave suicide.

We see, in the reactions of the three men, a proportional mystification of values, culminating in a total reversal of their significance.

- Casca displays the orthodox reaction,
- Cicero represents the rational reaction and points out that man makes the interpretation. Indeed, in this, the words of the other early student of the Humaniores echo: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."[50]
- Cassius uses custom and tradition to further his interests, blurring their meaning at will.

The latter's devitalisation of values inevitably results in moral confusion. The importance of this scene lies in the fact that accepted values are no longer the

45 Elizabethan English were, on the whole, wholehearted believers of bad omens; and in Rome bad omens, augury etc. were generally accepted as true. In this respect Shakespeare had an easy task synchronising both superstition-systems.

46 Why does Shakespeare introduce Cicero at this point? I refuse to accept textual weakness on Shakespeare's part as an excuse. The most plausible reason would be that he wants to pointedly contrast Julius' handling of the law (who had, in the previous scene, just murdered two tribunes without form of trial) and Cicero's (the man of law, justice and concord within the state).

47 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, III, l. 43.

48 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1. III, ll. 66 – 72.

49 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 1, III, ll. 89 – 99.
The Romans approved of "patriotic suicide"; death as an alternative to dishonor. A 'virtuous death', one guided by reason and conscience, was also accepted (e.g. the one by Cato the Younger after Pompey's defeat). After military defeat suicide was considered honorable. The suicide of slaves however was uneconomic and therefore seen as dishonorable and forbidden. Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_in_antiquity

50 *Hamlet*, act 2, II, ll. 251 – 253.

guiding principle for the actions of the community. The habitual common ground in understanding each other falls away. Shakespeare needs but a mere 50 lines to sketch the meltdown of a traditional system of beliefs and values; economy of words and linguistic agility are the very hallmarks Shakespeare's excellence.

What impact does the confusion have; what does this mean for the status of violence introduced into society by Julius Caesar and what does this mean for the status of the nation-state? The story continues.

8.8 Brutus

In act 2, scene I, we find Brutus in his orchard by night, awaiting the conspirators. He ponders on the decision he is about to make, trying to find justified or rational reasons for killing Caesar:

> I know no personal cause to spurn at him
> But for the general. He would be crowned:
> How that might change his nature, there's the question.[51]

After this he extensively embroiders upon the likelihood of a perversion of Caesar's character might he get complete autocracy. This line of reasoning lacks every legal basis; it is a flagrant breach of sound justice. In this monologue Caesar is convicted for flaws of character and misdemeanors that he may commit in future. Why? Because power corrupts as Brutus reasons and he is anxious that Caesar just might abuse this power.

In act 1 (during his talk with Cassius – see above), we have already observed that Brutus is the only one upholding the Roman standards for nobility. Miola remarks[52] that Cassius realizes he needs Brutus to give purpose, coherence and above all legitimacy to his conspiracy, the latter being the last of "the breed of noble bloods." This is an important remark, as this quality in Brutus is innate. It is not of the polished and perverted quality we witnessed before: the ethics of expediency. Brutus just needs to be himself: the archetypal conscientious Roman. It is precisely this inborn quality in Brutus that makes him irreplaceable for Cassius. However, Brutus is alone, he lacks a healthy reinforcing context as Rome has become perverted. The nature of his deliberations shows that Brutus has lost his anchorage. And therefore, by the faltering of the sole upholder of innate nobility, the city itself is in peril. Thus, this tragedy is not so much the tragedy of individuals as of Rome, its

51 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 11 – 13.
52 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 92.

nationhood and its values that go through a crisis, or, as Miola puts it: "Rome is the central protagonist of the play."[53]

It should be noted that Brutus does not use the two arguments that would have made sense, viz., the fact that Julius had centered all power in his consulship and the murder of the two tribunes.

The old republicans were egalitarians.[54] This is shown in the next scene,[55] where all conspirators profess their equality to each other. As explained in the previous chapter, during the system of republicanism, the city used to be ruled by two consuls, each chosen for a year. Julius was now dictator for an indefinite number of years. Moreover, he had procured for himself a senate filled with yes-men, as he had just done away with the last two independent and critical tribunes. (act 1, scene 2, ll. 274 -275). He had a temple built in his honour and a statue erected; Julius not only flirted with kingship, he had nearly become a god and with this, Rome got theocratic characteristics.

8.9 Theocracy and Legal primitivism

Thus, Rome was in real danger of becoming a theocracy. What is a theocracy? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives us: "a government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law. Theocratic rule was typical of early civilizations. The Enlightenment marked the end of theocracy in most Western countries. Contemporary examples of theocracies include Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Vatican."[56]

As the above description indicates, a distinction can be made between the concept of leaders being divine (as Julius Caesar aspired at), being divinely guided or chosen, and religious law per se. The notion of being divinely chosen can be traced back to the divine right of kings (on which the Tudor and Stuart thrones were based – and indeed to this day we see a customary connection between throne and religion in that Charles III was anointed king by the archbishop of Canterbury and also heads the Anglican Church). The idea of religious law is much more drastic and far-reaching: the obligation to conform to religious laws (and customs). It is now seen in some Eastern/Islamic traditions.

A theocracy might be called a nation or even a state, but it is certainly not a democracy or a republic, as Cicero had characterized Rome up to that point.

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53 Ibid., p. 92.

54 That is to say egalitarian in the Roman way: all patricians were equal, however society as a whole certainly was not.

55 William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 2, I, ll. 112 – 113.

56 https://www.britannica.com/topic/theocracy

How does theocracy relate to a nation-state (with a democratic construct)? Renan's nation-state ideal is based on the premise that it cannot be based on an a state-religion, however, what happens now is precisely that.

We witness the first signs of degeneration of the nation-state by the looming danger of being regulated by a power that characterizes itself as being transcendent. This type of dominance has the aura of the absolute supremacy of the warlord-rule (a warlord having as much sway over people as the deified dictator) we met in *Macbeth*. Of course, this goes hand in hand with the weakening and eventual disappearance of the sway regulations and restraints had over power and violence. In republican Rome, this was safeguarded by both the corrective influence of social values and the Senate. However, Rome's social values were perverted and the Senate was now filled with yes-men. We may conclude that in Rome we see the combination of the two elements described above (the divine right of kings and religious law) united in the person of the emperor. He is not divinely chosen, but a god himself and thus he has the power to implement what law he chooses.

Ideally, a separation of powers should be implemented. To cite Cliteur and Ellian[57] on this:

> [i]n wielding power, which it must by necessity, the state must be constrained by certain norms. For a start, it must be constrained by its own laws. This is called the *legality principle*. But in order to prevent abuse of power [or e.g. the degeneration of state controlled type 2 violence into radical violence of either sub division], the power of the state also needs to be *divided* among three separate bodies: a legislative body (the legislature), an executive body (the government), and a judiciary body (the courts). This is the separation of powers.

In this quotation, Cliteur and Ellian describe the state of affairs after the Enlightenment. The situation in republican Rome could be described as a type of pre-Montesquieuan situation, safeguarding the balance of powers to restrain state violence. Cicero is also aware of the importance of this balancing of power in his writing, as described in the previous chapter.

In his definition of state and state power, Weber seems not to have taken into account that state power – if unchecked – can easily get out of control. Julius Caesar, at this point, causes a development inverse to that of the Enlightenment (so well-described by both authors above). What control there was on the state is now in danger of being nullified by Julius Caesar.

In the terminology here used, it can be formulated as follows: radical non-tragic violence takes over from state violence in a graduated way. State violence is no longer based on the justice born out of the violence paradigm as we saw it emerge in *Hamlet*. If law and justice no longer spring from the tragic process but from a transcendental principle (as in a theocracy), there

57 Paul Cliteur and Afshin Ellian, *A New Introduction to Legal Method*, p. 170.

is no guarantee whatsoever that law will be righteous because an – irate – deity is by definition unfamiliar with the human mundanity of checks and balances for power and violence. The odds are that both justice and violence change in character (as we saw happen in *Macbeth*): the violence becomes radical and non-tragic.

Indeed, we are back to square 1 of violence: the legal primitivism[58] of the warlord (who in this case also declares himself god), including the accompanying violence of the radical non-tragic type. The question is whether Brutus (like Hamlet) has an adequate answer to this. I will leave it to the following chapter to return to the internal dynamics between the two types of radical violence, state violence and values.

Some modern jurists, chiefly in the US, endeavor to reevaluate legal primitivism in an effort to give it a place in the modern legal system.[59] One of the advocates of this reassessment is Professor Steven Wilf, who specializes in intellectual property law and who also has an interest in the history of law. He wrote an article on the legal heritage of Native American tribes focused on traditional Indian law and customs in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans and consequently also before the Enlightenment and modernity in law. In brief, his reasoning amounts to the following: he professes to "address[..] a different sort of legal transplant – one in which outside legal doctrines are imported in order to be cabined, treated as normative counterpoints, and identified as the legal other. Legal primitivism is a kind of anti-transplant. It heightens the persistent differences between a dominant legal system and its understanding of primitive rules."[60] Wilf wants to compare. He continues to describe legal primitivism as *other*. He concludes, in rather Levinasian terms, that legal primitivism, because it is *other*, would be a useful tool against which formal law can be set off: "Law might very well need a law of the *other* to define itself."[61] I could not disagree more. First of all, *otherness* in itself is not an inherent quality but a comparative one. Moreover, it does not seem to occur to Mr. Wilf that thorough self-definition (or redefinition) does not ensue constructively from the comparison with the *other*. Indeed, the self-definition would change in direct proportion to the change of the object of comparison. It seems to me to be an extremely volatile and dangerous strategy to follow. The only reliable way to come to self-definition is by going through a tragic existential crisis successfully. Perhaps it seems

58 Legal primitivism has many definitions and as many aspects: ranging from forms of natural law, via the ten commandments in the Bible to the concerns of some modernist culturalists. This makes a discussion of the concept multifarious and convoluted. I will sidetrack this discussion here since this thesis is solely concerned with the types of legal primitivism coming with and from the radical non-tragic type of violence.

59 In my opinion and to my knowledge this occurred primarily and mainly within the framework of an overall reassessment of native American culture, art and (oral) customary law.

60 Steven Wilf, " The Invention of Legal Primitivism", p 485.

61 Steven Wilf, " The Invention of Legal Primitivism", p 508.

outlandish to Wilf, but what happens in these Shakespearean tragedies just might occur any time in our civil society when the subtly interwoven fabric of values, justice and nationhood falters and tears in the way it is about to do in this play.

8.10 The plot

We pick up our story and rejoin Brutus pondering on the legality of Julius Caesar's murder.[62] With his decision to play along with the plot, Brutus – and with him the old Roman values[63] he embodies – plunges Rome headlong into a tragic crisis. This ill-advised decision will turn out to be Brutus's first big mistake. Why? Surely, Julius Caesar had turned into a deified dictator, courting kingship and killing off all opposition. In this respect, a decision of such magnitude is certainly defensible. However, as mentioned in the note just above, his arguments for going forward are legally invalid and generally absurd. Moreover, Brutus is morally confused and off anchor; he no longer has the ethical compass or tools at his disposal to make the payoff of such a murder into a success. In short: Brutus has no clue.[64] The conspirators arrive at Brutus's house and the plot is concluded. After this has been done, Cassius proposes a binding oath.[65] Brutus, however, rejects the proposal.

> No, not an oath. If not the face of men,
> The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse–
> If these be motives weak, break off betimes,
> And every man hence to his idle bed.
> So let high-sighted tyranny range on
> Till each man drop by lottery.[66]

62 I have sufficiently discussed tyrannicide – a term that also might come to mind in this context – in the chapter on *Macbeth*. I will therefore pass the discussion here.

63 As we have seen above the following values are at risk:
- the relationship and reciprocity between the classes of a sound hierarchal system,
- the republican organization of the state (plus the democracy the Roman way),
- Rome's culture in the sense that active citizenship seems to be replaced by passive consumerism,
- the Roman value of integrity,
- the important value of loyal friendship.
To these is now added: the innate integrity of Brutus' Roman blend of nobleness.

64 Cf. for instance Hamlet who is in a comparable position, but whose reaction contrasts sharply with Brutus': Hamlet first looks for evidence, then eliminates probable opposition, then comes up with a resolution and a plan and realizing he will die executing this plan, he pronounces his will and testament.

65 In Roman culture the oath had an almost holy status. Once bound by oath it was well-nigh impossible to break or ignore it. The oath ritual was intertwined with the republican Roman values of loyalty, friendship and mutual responsibilities.

66 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 114 – 119.

This is the second mistake Brutus makes.[67] The oath would have been an unbreakable bond between the men,[68] however, this mistaken appraisal makes this undertaking rather noncommittal. Brutus's attitude echoes the old Roman and republican idea of equality among men. In the old system, the city was ruled by equals. An oath was binding and sacred. Brutus adds:

> Swear priests and cowards and men cautelous,
> Old feeble carrions and such suffering souls
> That welcome wrongs. Unto bad causes swear
> Such creatures as men doubt. But do not stain
> The even virtue of our enterprise[69]

Here again: a total reversal of values is depicted (instead of representing the oath as noble and socially unbreakable bond, it is now for cowards and untrustworthy doubters). It illustrates the tragic mental turmoil Brutus is in; also conducing his fellow-conspirators into this scenario.

Cassius suggests asking Cicero to join them. All agree, except Brutus. "For he [Cicero] will never follow anything/that other men begin."[70] Cicero certainly would have added credibility and status to the plan. Indeed, Brutus's refusal, perhaps prompted by his fear of being intellectually outshone, constitutes the third big mistake by Brutus. Above, I already mentioned in one of the notes that one reason why Shakespeare might have inserted this short scene was to set Julius Caesar's attitude against Cicero's, which makes for a strong theatrical plot opposition. Likewise, it might have been inserted principally to emphasize not only the petty unpleasantries and discord of men of state amongst themselves, but even more so to underpin Brutus' utter lack of vision on statecraft by setting it off against Cicero's political accomplishments.[71]

Brutus is plainly afraid to lose his leading position to Cicero, as the latter "will stand very strong with them."[72] Brutus doesn't realize that here he acts exactly in the same way as absolute ruler Julius Caesar, overruling the initial majority of the vote.

Cicero's accomplishments in statecraft were not insignificant. Previously, I touched upon Cicero's thoughts on the state and its relationship with law and justice. Brutus has, up till now, given no evidence of having a clearly defined conception of these issues.

Immediately after Brutus's third mistake, he makes a fourth by deciding, in advance, to spare the lives of other potentially dangerous men in Caesar's

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67 The first being his faulty argumentative foundation to join the conspiracy. See just above.
68 Here also, we see the social embedding – and therewith security – being absent.
69 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 129 – 133.
70 Ibid., ll. 151 – 152.
71 Well bearing in mind that Shakespeare relied on his audience's knowledge of Roman history and philosophy and familiarity with Cicero's convictions and political mastery.
72 With the conspirators. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, sc. 1, l. 143.

entourage. I cannot help but note that this is opposite to what Hamlet did (see also note just above). It is a mistake of a totally different order than the previous ones. It hints towards fatality; the enterprise will become much more perilous. Not only is it perilous from the perspective of a success/failure calculus, but first and foremost, from a tragic point of view. I will enlarge on this important issue in the evaluation in the next chapter. Especially Mark Antony would constitute a danger, as Cassius argues. Brutus retorts: "Our cause will seem too bloody […] for Antony is but a limb of Caesar."[73] Sadly enough, his circle is incapable of offering the necessary counterpoise and therewith a sound basis. Herein, he hardly differs from his former friend, now foe, Caesar. Decius (one of the conspirators) adequately describes Caesar's favorite inner circle:

> [H]e loves to hear
> That unicorns may be betrayed with trees,
> And bears with glasses, elephants with holes,
> Lions with toils, and men with flatterers.
> But when I tell him he hates flatterers,
> He says he does, being then most flatterèd.[74]

In this scene, Shakespeare shows a veritable house of mirrors full of reversals and double imagery. As a result of which the protagonists' perceptions are utterly blurred and confused. Brutus compares the companionship with actors, hardly aware of all the implications of his metaphor:

> Let not our looks put on our purposes,
> But bear it as our Roman actors do,
> With untired spirits and formal constancy.[75]

After the men have left, Brutus's wife Portia, appears, voicing her anxiousness about Brutus's strange behavior of late. She asks what the matter is. Without any hesitation, she sizes him up at a glance, looking right through his excuses that he is ill. "No my Brutus,/You have some sick offence within your mind,/ Which by the right and virtue of my place/I ought to know of."[76]

Portia kneels and pleads with Brutus to confide in her. Brutus is moved and shaken out of his comfort zone: "Oh ye Gods,/Render me worthy of this noble wife!"[77] Still, he tells her nothing, but he promises to explain everything at a later point in time.

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73 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, l. 163.
74 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 203 – 209.
75 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 225 – 227.
76 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 267 – 270.
77 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, I, ll. 303 – 304.

Up till now, Brutus has posed as the constant factor for his surroundings. Miola remarks that both the conspirators and the victim claim to have this virtue.[78] Brutus, in the quotation above, exhorts his fellows to display "formal constancy". And Caesar will boast that he is constant as the northern star (act 3, I, l. 60).[79] In Brutus's case, this constancy is part of his self-image, as Paul Cantor[80] argues. But in the above dialogue, we see him break under Portia's honesty and anxiety.

8.11 Philosophical Rome

In his lecture on *Julius Caesar*, Cantor embroiders on the phenomenon of philosophy[81] in this play: ever since Rome had become a world empire, new cultural inspirations from conquered peoples had become part and parcel of the Roman culture. Since Rome had also vanquished Greece, this was also the case with Grecian cultural features. Greece had been conquered between 146 and 27 BC and although it had physically and geographically lost, culturally it had far outshone Roman culture in that Greek philosophy had become fashionable for the well-educated and cultured Roman. "Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit"[82] (once defeated, Greece conquered its savage captor).[83] We cannot know whether Shakespeare was aware of this social phenomenon.[84] In the play, Cicero is featured as a Sceptic, whereas the historical Cicero was influenced by the later Roman Stoics.[85] To stick to the Cicero in the play: scepticism boiled down to the methodical and formal inquiry into the verity (or otherwise) of every occurrence. For some, it has come to mean: to doubt everything. "Accordingly, textbooks usually treat scepticism as a phenomenon that belongs to decline and therefore occurs rather late: after the peak of Greek philosophy. The question is whether this is correct and whether scepticism, well understood, may be called a paralyzing phenomenon. Philosophers such

78 The virtue of constancy.
79 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 99.
80 Paul Cantor, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llHxxnJge5s
81 He explains that Shakespeare hardly ever features philosophical currents in his plays, *Julius Caesar* being a marked exception. In this play four different philosophical schools are mentioned, either implicitly or explicitly.
82 https://www.lingq.com/en/learn-latin-online/translate/la/23911745/graecia-capta-ferum-victorem-cepit
83 A conquering or colonizing country being, in its turn, overtaken by the vanquished culture is an extremely interesting and relevant topic. It is however, not the theme of this dissertation.
84 However, Shakespeare here shows very convincingly that he was aware of the common human reaction to fashions (be it robes, gloves or philosophy) and the mere snobbery that might go hand in hand with it.
85 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stoicism/Later-Roman-Stoicism. See also previous chapter.

as Plato and Aristotle certainly interpreted the word 'scepticism' differently from 'doubting everything'; to them, it was the equivalent of contemplation."[86]

Next, there is the unnamed poet who is defined as a cynic (act 4, III, l. 133).

> Cynic, member of a Greek philosophical sect that flourished from the 4th century BCE to well into the Common Era, distinguished as much for its unconventional way of life as for its rejection of traditional social and political arrangements, professing instead a cosmopolitan utopia and communal anarchism;[87]

and completely in line with this anarchistic inclination, he was duly ripped to pieces by the mob in the play.

The two philosophies most prominently present in the play are those of Brutus and Cassius: Brutus had adopted (as the historical Cicero had – see above) a Stoic attitude. Cassius poses as an Epicurean. In this play, Shakespeare depicts the respective philosophies as much sought-after accessories, not as deeply felt convictions. In the first few acts (e.g., in the above example), Shakespeare merely alludes to some of their most superficial characteristics, without fully grasping their quintessence. Only later in the play are these philosophies either explicitly or indirectly named: Cassius (in act 4, sc. 3, ll. 145 -146) tells Brutus that he (Brutus) doesn't make use of his philosophy, "If you give place to accidental evils". One act later (act 5, sc. 1, ll. 76 – 77) Cassius altogether abandons his own fashionable beliefs to half-return to good old superstitions and reading omens: "I held Epicurus strong/And his opinion. Now I change my mind/And partly credit things that do presage." As does Brutus when he expresses his insecurity with his Stoic philosophy: I don't know, but somehow I feel…. "Even by the rule of that philosophy/By which I did blame Cato for the death/Which he did give himself, I know not how,/ But I do find it cowardly and vile,/For fear of what might fall."[88] These "persuasions" aren't any help in times of anxiety or distress. It is quite clear that they are not internalized and are readily shaken off in times of tragic crisis. In other words, philosophy here is not of an existential quality.

If not of existential quality, then why does Shakespeare emphasize their respective philosophical persuasions? Epicureans and Stoics held opposing political views. Stoic philosophy emphasised the control of emotion by reason. The concepts of *autarkeia* (being independent of coincidences) and *apatheia*[89] (being uninfluenced by changes occurring beyond the conscious will) are important for Stoics. Moreover,

> [i]t was […] their turning of doctrine to themes in moral philosophy and natural science that appealed to the intensely practical Romans. The times perhaps

86 Bor and Petersma, *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 45.
87 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cynic-ancient-Greek-philosophy.
88 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 102 – 105.
89 Bor and Petersma, *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 43.

> demanded such interests, and with them Stoicism was to become predominantly a philosophy for the individual, showing how – given the vicissitudes of life – one might be stoical. Law, world citizenship, nature, [were] the principal areas of interest of Stoicism at this time.[90]

Important Stoic statesmen were Seneca (Nero's tutor and governor of the empire during the latter's minority) and the emperor Marcus Aurelius. As these two examples show, Stoics were actively involved in politics and statesmanship.

In this, they can be defined in opposition to the Epicureans. For the latter, the greatest good to be obtained was to seek *ataraxia*: a state of total calm of mind; preferably to be obtained through seeking a minimum of desires; discouraging involvement in the tribulations of political life. The Epicureans became so important that Cicero attacked them, accusing them of licentious hedonism and a lack of virtue and duty and keeping away from public service. According to Plutarch, Julius Caesar[91] leaned towards Epicureanism.[92] By emphasizing their respective adherence to these different persuasions, Shakespeare deliberately magnifies their principal difference of opinion on polity and governance. Certainly, one would expect accomplices, entering a conspiracy of this momentousness, to have at least the same notions as to their strategy, policy and ultimate goal. This is the mainstay of the success of any undertaking. As Renan would have put it, there has to be unity in will and purpose to build a nation. Yet, with Brutus and Cassius, this seems to be no issue. Shakespeare here pictures the fundamental instability of the venture, which does not meet one single requirement for success.

8.12 The escalation of the crisis

In the last scene of act 2, we find Caesar in his family circle. Being at home, he lets his hair down, and we can have a closer look at who Caesar really is. We learn that, like Portia, Calpurnia too, is concerned about her husband's welfare. Yet, the cause of her concern is a different one. Whereas Portia[93] sees right through her husband and confronts him, Calpurnia's nightmarish dreams and her experiences through the day are omen-ridden; she is frightened and therefore she pleads with her husband not to go to the Capitol. We are served a kaleidoscopic palette of portents and prejudices that would have given the shivers to the average Shakespearean audience.[94] We learn that Caesar,

90 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stoicism/Later-Roman-Stoicism
91 https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julius-Caesar-Roman-ruler
92 K. Tebo, "Cicero as a Source for Epicurus", p. 2
93 See scene above on p. 311.
94 As mentioned before, late medieval and early Renaissance audiences were, on the whole, staunch believers in omen, ghosts and portents.

too, is superstitious as he sends for a priest to have him foretell his success. At first, he protests with a nimble-minded response:

> Cowards die many times before their deaths
> The valiant never taste of death but once.[95]

But then he gives in to both Calpurnia's apprehension and the auguries' negative advice. His assumed friends arrive, who are in fact the conspirators, to persuade him to come to the Capitol that morning. He receives them very jovially, inviting all in and offering them some wine (act 2, I, ll. 126 – 127). This is the Caesar who knows how to win friends and treat them kind-heartedly. Under the sway of their arguments – they explain the omens in a diametrically different way – he again changes his mind.[96] He will come with them.[97]

In this scene, Caesar is depicted as a witty, good-natured gentleman, courteous and generous to his friends. Yet he is prejudiced and susceptible to omens. In act 1, we saw him whimsical and wavering in attitude and opinion; also as languid and inert, having physical disabilities.[98] By casually mentioning these characteristics, Shakespeare makes clear that there is something wrong with Julius. He is no longer on top of things. He is influenced by soothsayers, by his wife and by his enemies. We should bear in mind that in Elizabethan times, ruler and state were coinciding variables.[99]

Caesar is toppling and in danger. And therefore, the world he stands for is in danger. How and in what way? Shakespeare, the master of suspense, takes us to the streets of Rome for the last two very short scenes. At breakneck speed, tension and suspense are augmented. First, we meet Artemidorus rereading a note of warning he had written for Caesar. He intends to press

95 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, II, ll. 32 – 33.

96 Showing his lack of self-knowledge; for just a little later, in act 3, he boasts that he is as "constant as the northern star" (act 3, I, l. 60).

97 Here an interesting division between private and public display of ethics is shown. From the point of view of ethics in the private area, their conduct is blameworthy since they violate Julius' trust. On the other hand, they are about to commit murder for the good of the Republic; which can be seen as laudable in the light of the public spirit and ethics; trying to protect the Republic and its values. After all, Julius in his turn had breached its contract (both ethically and legally) in that he had killed the last two tribunes – therewith also undermining his power base. The question could be posed whether this murder was justified; in my view this issue could be reversed: why did Julius undermine his own power base thus rigorously. As experienced power player he must have known the consequences. See what immediately follows in the text above: Julius is no longer (completely) in charge of the course of events. As early as in act 1 Shakespeare had made clear that Julius was in his descent.

98 In contrast to Plutarch's *Lives* in which Julius is depicted as a great man.

99 See e.g. my remarks on the concurrence of king with country in *Hamlet*.

it unto Julius's attention, on his way to the Capitol. "Caesar, beware of Brutus, take heed of Cassius […]".[100] Anxiously, he ponders:

> My heart laments that virtue cannot live
> Out of the teeth of emulation.
> If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayst live;
> If not, the fates with traitors do contrive.[101]

In the second scene, we see a highly uneasy Portia who sends her slave to the Capitol to see if Brutus is well. In the street, she meets a soothsayer who tells her that "much that I fear may chance".[102] These words all but reassure her and full of vague but anxious premonition, she enters the house again.

8.13 Violence, values, the nation-state and their reciprocity

The fundamentals of what this tragedy is about become clear in these first two acts. As stated above, Miola[103] suggested that *Julius Caesar* staged the tragedy of Rome, more specifically, the construct of the nation-state. What we are about to witness now is the tragic crisis of nearly all the aspects that make a nation-state tick. Its social structure, its values and how violence is reined in by them (to function as state monopolized violence) will come to naught.

There is always an interplay between individuals, their values and the nation-state construct. What Shakespeare paints here is a totally perverted society with, as a result, perverted personal behavior[104] and vice versa. What constructs/values specifically are portrayed as perverted and enter into a tragic crisis in these first two acts?

1) The social codes of behaviour:
   a. Individually: the friendship between Cassius and Brutus is unashamedly (mis)used by Cassius and thus perverted.
   b. Collectively: the relations between the different social echelons are decrepit. No longer is a system of mutual care and respect collectively cherished. The populace has, from democratically active citizens within the republic, become subjects and consumers (noted above). Their

100 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, III, l. 1.
101 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, III, l. 10 – 13.
102 William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 2, III, l. 32.
103 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*. See above.
104 Brutus is effectively the only one escaping from the general degeneration, precisely because of the detachment and constancy characteristic for Stoics. Yet he has his own fallibilities. He is not the person to, all alone, bear the brunt and succeed as will be seen in the next acts.
We see here the source of perversion lying in values and social structures instead of in one (or a few) persons as e.g. in *Macbeth*.

demands are for food, play and more days off. The rich are busy with their careers, their play and their positions in society. The last two tribunes to represent the plebeians are silenced: the system has become one of vertical relationships *without* reciprocity and such a relationship is prone to radical violence. I paraphrase Renan here:[105] a nation focused on self-interest only cannot be a nation in the true sense of the word.

2) Philosophy has become *the* fashionable accessory of the well-to-do and educated Roman. Thus, externalized, it loses its intrinsic value. In this play, four types of philosophy can be perceived:
   a. Brutus the Stoic,
   b. Cassius poses as the Epicurean,
   c. Cicero is a Sceptic.
   d. An unnamed poet: a Cynic (act 4, III, l. 133).
3) The political and governmental crises take shape in these acts. The republic is on the verge of collapse. It loses ground rapidly to absolute theocracy.[106] Also, a profound legal crisis (the murder of two officially elected members of the Senate) becomes apparent. With this, justice itself is in jeopardy.
4) The Roman values, its moral code, are subject to an ever-increasing crisis. Together they constitute the greater proportion of Rome's ways and habits, in short, its culture. In particular, the following values can be discerned:
   1. Virtue or nobility of mind; that state of mind that can flawlessly determine which honourable choice to make for the commonwealth.
   2. *Pietas:* respect and obligation to offer help; being fully aware of mutual dependencies.
   3. Friendship: already mentioned above as cementing individual loyalties and dependencies.
   4. The indubitable character of the Roman oath.
   5. Constancy or permanence.

These latter are the precise values with which the Romans initially cemented their Republic. It is remarkable that, among these, religion is absent. This is in accordance with the ideas of Renan on the nation-state, as noted above. However, Julius Caesar wants to create a theocracy which completely counter-

105 See chapter on Renan.
106 See above: theocracy.

acts the idea of the secular state.[107] Furthermore, as I argued above, theocracy as to *content* and *use of violence* can be typified as legal primitivism.

It seems a rather Sisyphean labor to try and challenge an entire social system to this extent. Therefore, let us take a closer look at the above list to see if we can shed some clarity on it. When viewing it, we cannot help but notice a huge difference in quality between the listed concepts. Let us go into the nature of each of them, scrutinizing the list item by item.

Point 1: The social code of behaviour. This is a custom-weathered cultural construct. But then, friendship can model itself along the lines of social codes of behaviour, however, the underlying emotion upon which friendship is based just *is* or *is not*. Therefore, friendship itself is of an existential[108] quality: it belongs to man's set of primeval needs. The social code is a construct. The existential quality of friendship is embedded, as it were, within the social code. Both construct and existentiality should reinforce each other to form a healthy unity. Thus, there is a reciprocity between the two: constructed code (the norm) and existence (the existential quality of friendship) touch and influence each other (so also here, on a micro level, we see the reciprocity between components that together bind a society). In the two acts we have seen thus far, this mutual reinforcement is broken and/or perverted. The friendship has become a vertical construct only, used for the profit of the one above: Cassius. Vertical (social) constructs without reciprocity tend to use violence, as it is needed to maintain the verticality of the construct.

Point 2: The difference between construct and existentiality holds for philosophy as well. The need to understand oneself, the phenomenal world and everything transcending it is an intrinsic human desire. This existential and primary need takes shape in the diverse philosophical schools, and norms and values. As we have seen above, the innate existential need should be

107 Of course, one could argue that Rome was a polytheistic society where gods were state supported and promoted. However, I very much question the state component of this religion. In my view the Romans of this particular period treated religion much the same as their Greek counterparts in the Periclean age: see my Tragedy chapter on the subject. See also Mary Beard, *SPQR*, pp. 102 -103. Religion in Rome was "mainly focused on the performance of rituals that were intended to keep the relationship between Rome and the gods in good order." The emphasis laying mainly on correctly performing rituals to engineer prosperity, rather than on the actual belief in gods. This attitude towards the gods gravitates towards self-interest rather than towards deference and offering. In this same context, the theocracy Julius pursued can possibly be characterized as a theocracy of expedience; Julius aspiring it from an opportunistic point of view; he allows it to happen, slickly adapting and turning it to his advantage. Mary Beard, of course, writes about the classical Rome. Shakespeare, however, had a keen eye on his own period; perhaps he saw the parallels with his own time.

108 Existentiality; existential: pertaining to the quintessence of life (and decease) of the individual human being; this essence being devoid of (constructed) normative hierarchy of whatever nature. In this sense and within the realm of Shakespearean tragedy it is the opposite concept of reality construct. It should be noted that this type of existentiality is unrelated to whatever philosophical school or movement.

embedded in a constructed form. In this tragedy, it is the other way around. The philosophical fashion creates the (in this case existential) needs (as modern fashions still do today) and thus styles them. Ay, there's the rub;[109] the existential need is in grave danger of not being able to fully identify and pronounce itself as it is robbed of its social space to grow and develop naturally. Cassius, in his reply to Brutus,[110] voices this concern (perhaps subconsciously and within a slightly different register, however, the underlying format is identical) when he says that they suffer from the falling sickness. This systematic will give occasion to existential shallowness and poverty.

Point 3: The tragic crisis of the political and governmental system. These go hand in hand with a legal crisis here. These constructs differ somewhat from the previous ones in that their correlation with existentiality is of a complex nature.

In this play, the nation-state (i.e., both nation and its political and governmental constructs), originally mediated by the culture from which both nation and state developed,[111] has evolved away from the existential or primeval human needs.[112] Up till now, we have seen that these needs are: the need for protection from violence (external as well as internal violence), the need for a safe and secure embedding in a supportive community (the aforesaid reciprocity between individual and group). The fact that primeval human needs and political/legal constructs have grown apart is precisely the reason why both construct and primeval need cannot reinforce and sustain each other and grow estranged; the result is the state of affairs in Rome as we meet it here.

Behind (and disguised as) the points itemized above, an important feature may be recognized also figuring in the previous chapters; to be summarized as the just mentioned universal cry for fairness and justice. And it is exactly this concept that has been an important spin-off of the violence paradigm: the primeval existential need for a just and fair treatment: i.e. the need for justice.

It is this existential need that lies at the basis of the concept of natural law. Accordingly, and quite obviously, Shakespeare's existential primeval need for justice aligns with Cicero's natural law[113]; herein, both authors are related. As explained above, Cicero was specifically influenced by the Platonic version of the ideal of natural law. However, the state of affairs outlined above is a far cry from Cicero's conceptions of justice. The same applies to the emphasis he placed on the importance of well-constructed democratic law, his support

109 To use a Hamletian Shakespeareanism.

110 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 2, II, ll. 249 – 250.

111 Of course, this strongly reminds us of Renan and his nation of values.

112 Existential primeval needs are not to be confused with physical needs like the need for sleep, food, or housing. Existential primeval needs are to be satisfied by culture, society and the nation-state. Physical needs are the concern of the individual. The difficulty in discerning between these two types of needs is that there is an overlap within the sphere of culture. In this thesis, I strictly limit myself to the existential primeval needs.

113 See the previous chapter

for senatorial independence, and his Platonic analogies regarding the requisite concord and harmony in the city. All of this is jeopardized. Throughout history, a wide range of scholars have contemplated the inherent characteristics of natural law, which they perceived as an existential need.[114] Let me just give one example: Augustine and his remark on (the need for) justice: "Remota iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia."[115]

In this tragedy, construct and values are embodied by the diverse protagonists. By following them throughout the play, we follow the tragic process of the construct, violence and values and their interrelationships with our primeval existential needs.

I cannot but notice that another important existential primeval need is conspicuously absent here: the need for liberty, freedom. Up to now, Shakespeare has not put this up for discussion; we will meet these concepts later in the play.

Shakespeare sets himself an extremely difficult task here. As already indicated earlier, in this play, the author does not depict the tragic crisis of a hero (as, e.g., Macbeth or Hamlet) but of the concepts described above. The difficulty here is how to avoid sinking away into the sterile discipline of allegorical characters with their didactic and sermonic twists.[116] How to make his protagonists real living human beings, caught up in social/political turmoil, who seek deliverance from their plight, acting like swimmers in the mist. Brutus, of course, plays a major role here. Shakespeare resolves this by emphasizing Brutus' stoical attitude as well as his emotional state of being. By detaching himself philosophically from his immediate surroundings – inspired by Stoicism – Brutus becomes a secluded figure; however, in spite of this aloofness, Shakespeare succeeds in depicting him not as a wooden and unrealistic character, but as a living human being. An additional point is that, with his stoicism, Brutus becomes the embodiment of what once was a coherent and stable society that made sense to its occupants.

I will now continue with some clarification of the last item in the above list.

Point 4: These values are an odd lot. Partly belonging to the moral code (so to constructed ethics), they are partly of an existential nature (friendship being a case in point: see above); and, as stated before, together forming part and parcel of Roman's customary ways and habits.

- 4.1 Virtue or nobility of mind. This is the characteristic that is explicitly present in Brutus and which makes him the sought-after candidate to serve

114 Of course, their search for bases of justice is as variegated as the scholars searching. I will sidetrack this discussion here, for the sake of focus and brevity.

115 "Kingdoms without justice are like criminal gangs". Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4, p. 139.

116 E.g. the medieval plays *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*; in these plays all characters are stiff and impersonal allegorical models.

as the flagship for the conspiracy. It gives legitimacy to it as stated. What does this imply? This characteristic is an auxiliary attribute for the constructs in point 3. We will still see whether this characteristic survives its tragic process and, if so, in what way.

- 4.2 *Pietas.* This can also be regarded as an auxiliary value to the stability of the political construct, government and justice, especially in a highly hierarchical society.
- 4.3 Friendship: see above.
- 4.4 Roman oath. Auxiliary to point 3 as it makes society dependable and therewith stable.
- Of course, the same holds for the last point: 4.5.: constancy or permanence.

This play is teeming with this type of auxiliary values, originally having buttressed the Roman nation-state. Does that make this play an ethical one? I hold it is not, for it is precisely the moral (reality) construct itself that is put to the test. In other words, these values are deconstructed by the tragic process. In act five we will see what will become of them.

With these observations in mind, we pick up the course of events at the beginning of act three. Caesar and his train stride towards the Capitol. In one single brilliant line, Caesar's mood is sketched. Flippantly, he remarks to the soothsayer who had previously warned him for the Ides of March (act 1, II. l. 23): "The Ides of March are come."[117] The soothsayer can only reply that the day hasn't gone yet. Caesar is surrounded by suitors with petitions, including Artemidorus with his letter about the plot. He urges Caesar to read his letter, telling him it concerns Caesar's own person. However, Caesar, with condescending regality, deems it fitting to his status to treat other suits first.[118]

8.14 The assassination and its aftermath

Meanwhile, Cassius is nearing a hysterical breakdown, seeing counter-plotters where there are none (act 3, sc., ll. 16 – 17). Brutus, using his Stoic trademark, urges him to be constant. Caesar denies Metellus' suit to lift his brother's ban. In his last speech[119] alive Julius emphasizes his constancy; immediately after that, he is stabbed.

117 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, l. 1.

118 I agree with Paul Cantor when he remarks that this is exactly how a tyrant thinks and acts. I note that these short but brilliant and very effective scenes are the true hallmark of Shakespeare's genius.

119 This is his last speech. Of course his famous last *words* are: Et tu, Brute? – Then fall Caesar". Act 3, I, l. 77.

Caesar's death cuts through all aspects of Roman life. It means the end of everything that seemed, up till then, self-evident. The tragic crisis for Rome's polity has hit home. The conspirators cry out:

> Cinna:
> Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!
> Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets.
> Cassius:
> Some to the common pulpits, and cry out,
> 'Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!'[120]

A bit later, Brutus and Cassius cry out in their excitement:

> Let'all cry, 'Peace, freedom and liberty!'
> […]
> So oft as that shall be,
> So often shall the knot of us be called
> The men that gave their country liberty!'[121]

Here at last we encounter the other primeval existential needs: yelled in excitement as slogans; to be cried out from pulpits. These outcries pose some fundamental questions. The terms liberty and freedom are most remarkable and strikingly modern, even though they are directly translated from Plutarch into 1599 early modern English.

What do these concepts, these indispensable existential needs, represent for Brutus and Cassius and what do they mean for Shakespeare? As I posited above, Brutus and Cassius represent the values of the old Republic at this point. And it is these two who will have to successfully go through the tragic crisis in order to defend these values and (re)introduce them as living and vital in the community by undergoing and bringing about an existential change in outlook and emotions. These are the hallmarks of successfully coming through tragic slaughter. Are they capable of doing this? For now, they are exultant as they seem to have achieved their immediate goal: saving the republic.

Mark Antony hadn't been present at the assassination. Prudently, he sends a scout to see how the land lies. When the scout reports back that the coast appears to be clear, Mark Antony himself enters the scene, still cautious. Sounding the general sentiment among those present, he invites them:

> Fulfill your pleasure. Live a thousand years,
> I shall not find myself so apt to die.
> No place will please me so, no mean of death,
> As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,
> The choice and master spirits of this age.[122]

120 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 78 – 81.
121 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 110 – 117.
122 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 159 – 163.

These remarks are a perversion of the old Roman notion of patriotic suicide or honorable death.[123] They are notably insincere. Brutus, however, takes him at his word and replies that they have no intention to kill him.[124] Cassius, the ever practical one, asks Mark Antony whether he is friend or foe. He answers: "Friends am I with you all, and love you all,/Upon this hope, that you shall give me reasons/Why and wherein Caesar was dangerous."[125] Brutus ensures him he will be satisfied; he decides there and then that he will go to the pulpit "and show the reason of our Caesar's death."[126]

It totally escapes Brutus that here Antony craftily manipulates him into a certain tone of speech: the reasonable explanation. After that, Brutus will leave the pulpit (and the marketplace) to Antony. These will turn out to be his fifth and sixth mistakes.[127] Antony knows that he has carried the day, while it still has to begin:

> A curse shall light upon the limbs of men:
> Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
> Shall cumber all the parts of Italy.
> […]
> All pity choked with custom of fell deeds,
> And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,
> That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
> With carrion men, groaning for burial.[128]

Sparing the life of an adversary of this magnitude is indeed cataclysmic. It means a fatal blow to the concepts of freedom and liberty since Antony is clear about his purposes: revenge, not for honor but for power.

The loss of state controlled violence – and at this point, the faltering and isolated Brutus is the only one embodying this concept – means that the democratic laws of the state, as formulated by Cicero, are nullified. Effectively, the nation-state ceases to exist and society relapses into chaos. The result of such a collapse is a rebound into the legal primitivism of the warlord wielding the radical violence of the non-tragic type, as was described earlier in this chapter. From Antony's monologue above, it becomes clear that Brutus and

123 See note above.
124 I will discuss this issue in the next chapter.
125 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 220 – 222.
126 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, l. 237.
127 Note that Brutus, after killing Caesar, urges all conspirators to "bathe their hands in Caesar's blood" (act 3, I, l. 106). This makes them look like butchers and is therefore bad publicity. It could be seen as another mistake of Brutus'. His idea was to emphasize the Roman idea of cementing individual loyalties and interdependencies (points 4.3 and 4.4 above).
128 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, I, ll. 262 – 275.

Cassius have, up to this point, not been able to vitalize their concepts of freedom and liberty.

Antony tells Octavius's servant to report to his master that Antony will send him word when to come to Rome with his army. The dogs of war, awakened, have to wait a while, till after Antony's speech.

Brutus mounts the platform. His speech is a veritable lesson in Roman and Renaissance rhetoric. It is a brief yet effective address, grounded in reasonable argument (gently nudged in that direction by Antony). The plebeians receive it positively, even shouting for him to become the next Caesar.[129]

Brutus leaves the scene, introducing Antony. The latter carries Julius's body. No argument is more telling and persuasive than the blood-smeared body of a ruler who gave the plebeians free days, food and games.

Initially still under the spell of Brutus's speech, the spectators are slowly reeled in by Antony, who uses the same rhetorical tools as Brutus, but far outdoes him in number of lines, emotional intensity and persuasiveness. Mark Antony starts to undermine the one argument Brutus used to justify his act: Julius's ambition. He repeats it four times. At first stating it is a grievous fault (act 3, sc. 2, l. 72), continuing to give clear-cut examples of the opposite: *Julius had been a faithful and just friend to him* (l. 77), *Julius filled the coffers of Rome with his spoils of war* (l. 81). *Three times he refused the crown, when offered* (ll. 88 – 89). *You all did love him once, so why not mourn him now* (l. 95). These remarks are accompanied by emphatic statements that Brutus is indeed an honorable man.

His powerfully used *repetitio* bashes his point into the heads of his audience. The combination of the demonstrated defectiveness of Brutus' reasoning with the statement that he is honorable makes him look naïve, ridiculous, and his argumentation spurious. The plebeians respond duly: "There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony."[130] This type of nobility is far removed from the nobility Cassius meant in act 1, sc. 2, l. 151.[131] In this first act Cassius referred to nobility as being able to put oneself into the service of the polity, mastering the art of the right choice for the common good; the nobility that had *pietas*, and constancy of mind as its twin values. Now the word is hurled by the plebeians towards Mark Antony, the double-faced manipulator, intending to set the dogs of war at Rome. This is a total reversal and therewith (again) an erosion and undermining of old Roman values. Antony goes on after an intermezzo of the plebeians. He doesn't shun downright provocation, working the crowd:

> O masters, if I were disposed to stir
> Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
> I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong

129 Note that the name now has become a title.
130 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, l. 108.
131 "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods."

> Who (you all know) are honourable men.
> I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
> To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
> Than I will wrong such honourable men,
> But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar,
> I found it in his closet, 'tis his will.[132]

His remark about the will that he has at hand is most probably a trick.[133] Shortly after, in act 4, sc. 1l. 7 – 9, he asks Lepidus to run to Caesar's house and fetch him the will: he wants to have it to see if he can tamper with Caesar's legacies to the people, doctoring them down or away. As a true demagogue, he stirs up the crowd, showing Caesar's wounds.

> Were I Brutus
> And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
> Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
> In every wound of Caesar, that should move
> The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.[134]

When Mark Antony informs them of the contents of Caesar's will, the popular fury rises to a fever pitch. They decide to burn Brutus's house: violence thus spreads like wildfire. Brutus and Cassius flee the city in a hurry.

After Caesar's death, Brutus and Cassius have no idea of what more is needed to consolidate the new situation and change the course of history. They apparently think their one deed suffices to establish freedom; which is nowhere near what a tragic crisis should entail.

Mark Antony sees his chance to take over. Unsuspectingly, the two friends lose their game to Antony, the master mind of ill-intent. Forcing them into a reactive role, Antony orchestrates the final and total downfall of the republic.[135]

As he takes over, it is now Mark Antony who has to answer the question of what liberty and freedom from tyranny have to look like. Or will he? Nothing of the sort; he draws up a death list:[136]

> MA: These many then shall die, their names are pricked.
> Octavius: Your brother too must die; consent you, Lepidus?
> Lepidus: I do consent.[137]

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132 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, ll. 113 – 121.
133 Note that with his manipulation of the crowd and his lie about the will, Mark Antony revives the power base Julius himself had lost by the killing of the two tribunes.
134 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, II, ll. 216 – 220.
135 I again point to the fact that there is a discrepancy between history and the play. In reality, a year lapsed between Brutus' departure from Rome and the battle at Philippi.
136 In the historical version, Cicero was also on the death list.
137 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, I, ll. 1 – 3.

The implications of these short remarks are chilling to the bone; what exactly are they? The bond that makes a family a unity is broken; family loyalties no longer seem to matter. Lepidus doesn't object to the killing of his brother. This is the characteristic of a totalitarian state: everything had to be subjected to state and dictator, including the bond between family members.[138]

Although Caesar is now dead, the spirit of arbitrariness that he represented is more alive than ever. Brutus wanted to erase perversity, tyranny and random favoritism from the system. Yet, these seem to be invigorated. It certainly proved a vital mistake not to murder the new embodiment of these concepts: Mark Antony. In other words, Caesar is dead, but his spirit looms over the scene. On Lepidus, Mark Antony remarks:

> He [is…]
> A barren-spirited fellow, one that feeds
> On objects, arts, and imitations,
> Which, out of use and staled by other men,
> Begin his fashion. Do not talk of him
> But as a property.[139]

In just a few sentences, Mark Antony here outlines the nutrient soil on which Caesarism can thrive, resulting in tyranny. This violent society has spawned a violent universe, escalating in death-listing would-be enemies. Not even a hint of attitudinal change or horizontalization can be perceived.

In act 2, scene 1, lines 167 170, Brutus had said: "We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,/And in the spirit of men there is no blood./O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit/And not dismember Caesar!". We may now conclude that he has achieved the opposite. The murder of Julius had solved nothing, save leading up to a series of tragic crises in the fields of politics, society and Roman values.[140] Miola[141] has it that after the murder Brutus' behavior starts to mirror Caesar's; Antony's role imitates that of Brutus – but only in assuming a leading role.

8.15 A PERSONAL SHOWDOWN

After his flight, Brutus had pitched his tents in the fields near Sardis. We find him there in act 4, scene 2, waiting for Cassius and his train. From the circumlocutory way in which Brutus inquires after Cassius' treatment of the servants, it becomes clear that the matter-of-course friendship (old Roman style)

138 As during the Stalinist period in Russia where children had to betray their parents – also practiced in Nazi Germany.
139 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, I, ll. 35 – 40.
140 See list itemized above.
141 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 102.

that Brutus has always shown Cassius now shows cracks. Brutus seems distrustful of his old friend.

Cassius arrives. His first words to Brutus are: "Most noble brother, you have done me wrong."[142] Indeed, a nice way to greet an old friend and – moreover – a confederate in conspiracy and war. Of course, their differences are magnified and intensified because both men have to live under enormous stress and threat. When they make a wrong move or lose the coming battle, they will have to pay with their lives and they know it. This gives their altercation an apprehensive quality.

Brutus, even more piqued than he already was, reacts to Cassius' remark: "Wrong I mine enemies? / And if not so, how should I wrong a brother." They enter Brutus's tent to speak of their grievances in private. Once they are inside, the argument erupts. Cassius accuses Brutus of partiality.[143] Brutus points to the fact that they had killed Julius to end such favouritism. Cassius explodes – he asserts that he is the better and older soldier and therefore should not be lectured like this. What follows is an 'Is too!'-' Is not!' discussion that wouldn't have been out of place in a nursery for four-year-olds. Cassius spits fire. Brutus blazes.

Brutus' self-conceit and (self)-image as a noble Roman is mercilessly torn to pieces by Shakespeare as Brutus furiously gallops through all breaks and reservations. *In fact, he accuses Cassius of those imperfections which he himself possesses in abundance.* His argument boils down to the following:[144] You, Cassius, have withheld gold intended for me. I needed it to pay the army. And, by the way, you acquired this very gold by dishonest means – I cannot dirty my hands with foul money – but still I need it.

> For I can raise no money by vile means.
> By heaven, I had rather coin my heart
> And drop my blood for drachmas than to wring
> From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash
> By any indirection. I did send
> To you for gold to pay my legions,
> Which you denied me.[145]

Bloom[146] has the following on the moral standards of the two friends:

> "To this point [i.e. the point where the discussion about money starts] in the play, Brutus has, in spite of subterranean flaws, been the distinctly superior person, and

142 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, II, l. 37.
143 Brutus had condemned one Lucius Pella for taking bribes, while Cassius, on the other hand, had tried to speak in his favour. act 4, III, ll. 2 – 5.
144 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 65 – 82.
145 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 71 – 77.
146 Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*, p, 100.

> Cassius has appeared as a rather low figure, even comparable in some respects to Iago [*Othello*]. But the roles suddenly begin to be reversed. Brutus, after castigating Cassius' "itching palm", in a turnabout accuses him of not having provided money when asked. Brutus himself is too good to squeeze the poor peasants. But he still needs the money, and he is perfectly willing to use Cassius ' vice for his needs. He is unwilling to face the implications of his own situation and is forced into a rather ugly form of hypocrisy. Brutus remains pure by allowing others to perform the immoral acts which are the conditions of his purity. Then he can attack Cassius for being immoral. Wars need money, and, if a man starts a war, he is responsible for the acts which provide the money to pursue it, whether or not he performs them himself. Money is the sign of the material, or of what satisfies the needs of the body. Again Brutus refuses to recognize the existence of the body; in this instance, however, we are made privy to the casuistry, the falseness, into which such a man is forced. He does not really live on his virtue alone, he just acts as though he does."

This quarrel is the tragic crisis of a friendship. The reproaches are meant to bring the other down, or at any rate, lower than the speaker himself. It is a showdown in verticality.[147] The two men are brought back to their impulses and essential vices; masks down. As Bloom rightfully remarks, Brutus, denying "the material, the body", is forced to acknowledge that he needs base matter such as money. The Stoic Brutus is brought back to essential physical life by Cassius the Epicurean, who grabs gold. Alongside the tragic crisis of their friendship, also their fashionable philosophies tumble into the existential abyss. After this outburst, cracks appear in both characters and their tone changes. Through the fissures of their bruised egos, emotions come out and the tone of their conversation changes. Instead of pointing to each other for some arcane kind of guilt or supposed faults, they speak of their own feelings and the effect these have in assessing each other.

> Cassius: Oh, I could weep
> My spirit from mine eyes.
> [offers Brutus his bared dagger] There is my dagger.
> And here my naked breast. Within, a heart
> Dearer than Plutus' mine, richer than gold.
> If that thou beest a Roman, take it forth.
> I, that denied thee gold, will give my heart.
> […]
> Brutus: O Cassius, you are yokèd with a lamb
> That carries anger as the flint bears fire,
> Who, much enforcèd, shows a hasty spark
> And straight is cold again.
> […]
> Cassius: Hath Cassius lived

147 As are all quarrels in which no holds are barred.

To be but mirth and laughter to his Brutus,
When grief and blood ill-tempered vexeth him?
Brutus: When I spoke that, I was ill-tempered too.
Cassius: Do you confess so much? Give me your hand.
Brutus: And my heart too.[148]

Instead of hurling reproaches at one another, genuine feelings are expressed. They timidly inquire whether the other still loves him, despite past mistakes. Cassius: "Have you not love enough to bear with me.." and Brutus promptly answers: "Yes."[149]

Shakespeare's message is a clear and intense one: the quintessence of every true friendship should be to love each other despite all shortcomings and also in adverse situations – it being easy to love someone while going with the wind under an all-blue sky. True friendship means acceptance of fallibility within the other. This gives their relationship a new balance and procures them human dignity. The friendship is thus renewed, now based on mutual understanding. It is also devoid of any social code of behaviour. It has become a friendship as it should be: a trusting relationship between equals. The important value of true friendship has come successfully through a tragic crisis, but is this enough to save the sanity of an entire nation-state?

Brutus tells Cassius that he hadn't been himself as his wife Portia is dead. Cassius is full of understanding and sympathy. Especially when he learns that Portia has committed suicide.

After this intermezzo, Messala and Titinius arrive. They bring alarming news: Octavius, Mark Antony, and Lepidus have raised an enormous army; moreover, they have killed a large number of senators. Some accounts speak of seventy deaths, while others mention one hundred: violence and social disruption are rampant. Following this, the news reaches Brutus that his wife, Portia, has died. We know he was already aware. Still, Brutus reacts as if he were not. This time, we see him respond as a true Stoic:

Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala.
With meditating that she must die once,
I have the patience to endure it now.[150]

Some critics argue that the second scene announcing Portia's death originates from a flawed quarto and should have been excluded from the First Folio. However, Paul Cantor, with whom I concur, believes that Shakespeare has intentionally included the second announcement of her death. During the first

148 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 99 – 117.
149 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 118 – 122.
I would say that Shakespeare here paints us a picture that has become mainstream only as recently as the 20th century among psychotherapists and in self-help circles.
150 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 190 – 192.

announcement, Brutus has the opportunity to absorb the news privately–simultaneously reinforcing his friendship with Cassius and truly bonding with him. The second announcement serves to publicly display Brutus' composure. Cassius immediately recognizes the importance of maintaining a positive public image and goes along with it, without hesitation. Effectively, Cassius bolsters Brutus' reputation by claiming that he himself could not bear such news with the same composure: "I have as much of this in art as you,/But yet my nature could not bear it so."[151] It does not seem to concern Cassius that this remark elevates Brutus above him in terms of endurance and composure, which is striking considering Cassius' earlier portrayal of Brutus (act 1) and the context of Rome's masculine and hierarchical society.

In the last part of act 4, scene 3 Brutus has retired to his tent and at night, the ghost of Julius Caesar visits him. For sixteenth-century Elizabethans, ghosts were by no means fantastical and most people genuinely believed in ghosts. As we see in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* it was thought that ghosts could be either benevolent or deluding and evil. They could predict the future but also beguile a mortal. Talking to a ghost was seen as a special competence. Only seasoned philosophers and alchemists could do this well. Luckily, the ghost itself tells Brutus he is his evil spirit or conscience.[152] The spirit tells Brutus he will meet him again in Philippi, then disappears. Brutus is completely undone and doesn't know what to say. His philosophy has been of little avail to him. He reproaches himself for not having been able to converse with the spirit more:

> Now I have taken heart thou vanishes.
> Ill spirit, I would hold more talk with thee.[153]

This short scene is crucial as it shows that, despite Caesar being dead, his spirit (Caesarism) is more alive than ever. This (new) spirit of Caesarism permeates the rest of the play. Yet, there is another, much more important and deeply tragic meaning to this scene. Brutus here, in the most literal sense of the word, faces the results of his actions up to that point. It "mak'st [his] blood cold and [his] hair to stare."[154] He meets his ghost in the literal sense of the word; his ultimate fears. He cries for help from his comrades and even from his servant Lucius. He also has to confront the fact that he is the murderer of Caesar, and this fact will stay with him. In other words, he realizes that he is the author of violence. It remains unclear from the text whether he understands that violence, once unleashed, becomes – as the tragic process unfolds – indiscriminate regarding its goal; it might just turn against its initial author

151 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 194 – 195.
152 As always in Shakespeare, his words are charged with a maximum of double meanings and connotations.
153 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, ll. 287 – 288.
154 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, III, l. 280.

(as radical violence always does). However, here he must undergo the existential experience of violence as suffering. In this and the next act, we will see how Brutus processes this realization and how his surroundings react to it.

8.16 The final battle

In act 5, the actual battle takes place. Beforehand, Octavius and Antony talk about strategy. Antony orders Octavius to move to the left side of the line of battle, which the latter refuses; he insists on standing to the right. This place in battle was important as the superior and more experienced general customarily was situated on the right side of the battle line.[155] The tension between the two generals is clearly perceptible.

Meanwhile, Cassius has his own worries. He cries out:

> Why now blow wind, swell billow, and swim bark!
> The storm is up, and all is on the hazard.[156]

This is not the average macho bragging sometimes heard before a fight. On the contrary, Cassius is anxious and in his bewilderment, he reverts to what he feels is his anchorage in life. He continues:

> This is my birthday, as this very day
> Was Cassius born. Give me thy hand, Messala.
> Be thou my witness that against my will,
> As Pompey was, am I compelled to set
> Upon one battle all our liberties.
> You know that I held Epicurus strong
> And his opinion. Now I change my mind,
> And partly credit things that do presage.
> Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
> Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perched,
> Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands,
> Who to Philippi here consorted us.
> This morning are they fled away and gone,
> And in their steads do ravens, crows, and kites
> Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us
> As we were sickly prey. Their shadows seem
> A canopy most fatal, under which
> Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.[157]

155 Source: William Shakespeare, ed. Timothy Seward and Rob Smith, *Julius Caesar*, p. 140.
156 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 67 – 68.
157 William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 5, I, ll. 70 – 87.

He begins by identifying himself with his date of birth.[158] Next, he presents a highly individual opinion: this battle, in its current form, is against his will. After that, he discards his (fashionable) paraphernalia, such as philosophy, which is of no avail whatsoever in this time of existential crisis. He partially returns to the old ways and superstitions. Cassius' tragic crisis hits hard. In fact, what occurs here mirrors what happened to Brutus in act 4, scene 3, when Caesar's ghost revealed itself to him. Cassius is confronted by his innermost fears, his ghosts; the speech exudes a spirit of existential anxiety.[159]

Cassius then falls back on Brutus, specifically his friendship with him, seeking advice, encouragement, and support. He asks the customary what-if question often used in intimate friendships to gain new footing and perspective with the only other person who is trusted blindly: "If we do lose the battle[…]/ What are you then determined to do?"[160]

Brutus's answer is unexpected: he will not revert to an honourable death by suicide. But neither will he be dragged through the streets of Rome in chains. In other words, he doesn't yet know how to react to a lost battle. Here is proof of Brutus being at a loss. Also, for him, their newly forged friendship is the only anchorage. From this new perspective, they say their goodbyes:

> And whether we shall meet again I know not.
> Therefore our everlasting farewell take.
> Forever and forever farewell, Cassius.
> If we do meet again, why, we shall smile.
> If not, why then this parting was well made.[161]

It is striking (and heartrending) that Brutus and Cassius, just before the battle starts, speak of losing it as a genuine option. In this manner, Shakespeare weaves foreboding into this conversation.

It is of importance to emphasize that, despite inflated machismo, the men are capable of emotionally reaching out to each other. Their heartfelt affection and loyalty are almost tangible. Their impressive bond (seasoned by their earlier dispute: act 4, III) gets them through this difficult time; they feel they are facing the ultimate. This type of experience belongs to the realm of existentiality. Brutus's words "O that a man might know/The end of this day's business ere it come!/But it sufficeth that the day will end,/And then the end is known"[162] seem to tell us that Brutus already knows the outcome, polysemic as these words are.

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158 The Romans are known as the first civilization that generally celebrated birthdays. Thus, it became part and parcel of one's identity. Source: https://isgeschiedenis.nl/nieuws/de-geschiedenis-van-het-verjaardagsfeest

159 Carrion eaters, such as ravens and kites, were seen in medieval times as foreboding death.

160 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 98 – 100.

161 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 115 – 119.

162 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, I, ll. 122 – 125.

The battle begins. The course is messy and chaotic. In act 5, scene III, we find out that the battle doesn't go well for Cassius and Brutus. Cassius' soldiers have fled; he slays his fleeing standard bearer (act 5, III, ll. 1 – 4) and has to retreat. His tents are on fire. Brutus, having advanced too soon, is surrounded by Mark Antony's men. Cassius has lost a broad overview of the chaotic situation and asks Titinius, one of his officers, to ride across the field to have a look. He asks his slave Pindarus to climb a nearby hill to see how Titinius fares. Cassius muses: "This day I breathèd first, time is come round,/ And where I did begin, there shall I end./My life is run his compass."[163] This is the mood of a stupefied man who is resigned to his defeat.

Dutifully, Pindarus, from his hilltop, communicates what he sees. With great precision, he reports: Titinius is surrounded by men. They make him dismount; they are on to him ("He's ta'en […and then shouting] And hark they shout for joy"[164]). However, Cassius hardly lets Pindarus finish and it is to be doubted whether he heard the last sentence at all (the soldiers didn't take Titinius prisoner, but they cheer him); he has already formed his opinion: Titinius is taken for real. Totally despondent, he calls Pindarus down. He has made up his mind to kill himself. His last two orders to Pindarus are to kill him with his own sword and thereafter be a free man. Cassius' last words are: "Caesar, thou art revenged/Even with the sword that killed thee."[165]

Pindarus, having been a slave before, now has his freedom, but can hardly rejoice; he has come to love his master and, therefore, does his bidding. With this small scene – the trust of Cassius that Pindarus will do as he bids and the loyalty of Pindarus – Shakespeare paints us pietas (see above: point 4.3), the respect and obligation to offer help, fully aware of any mutual dependencies. A deep friendship and trust also permeate the scene. Messala, entering the scene, aptly observes:

> Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.
> O hateful error, melancholy's child,
> Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
> The things that are not? O error, soon conceived,
> Thou never comest unto a happy birth
> But kill'st the mother that engendered thee![166]

Messala continues to tell us that Brutus had won the battle against Octavius. Together with Titinius, he had come to tell Cassius this news, but Cassius was already dead. Titinius is undone to such a degree (he realizes that – with the

163 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 23 – 25.
164 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 31 – 32.
165 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 45 – 46.
166 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 66 – 71.
Some 300 years later, this phenomenon was described as intentionalism by Husserl.

most experienced general gone – the battle will be lost) that he also commits honourable suicide.

Brutus enters the scene and, seeing both Cassius's and Titinius's bodies, cries out: "Oh Caesar, thou art mighty yet,/ Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords/ in our own proper entrails."[167] Here, Brutus voices some important observations:

- Caesar's ghost still seems alive; that is, Caesarism is alive. This means that the politics Caesar intended to implant (that of an autocratic kingdom) will prevail.
- On a deeper level, it means that here Brutus finally realizes to the full that radical violence ultimately turns itself against its author(s). Brutus continues:

> Are yet two Romans living such as these?
> The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
> It is impossible that ever Rome
> Should breed thy fellow.[168]

The last representatives of the old Rome have died. Here, Brutus forgets that he himself is seen as the last living symbol of the values of old Rome.[169] Brutus here tells us that

- his attempt to preserve the old values of the Republic seems nullified: these men were the last true Romans,
- Moreover, his mission in the name of Liberty, Freedom has failed (flip siding the same coin, for these were among the shared values of the Republic). The only concept that has successfully gone through its tragic crisis is the friendship between Brutus and Cassius. This friendship, however, is of a personal nature and does not affect its social embedding (see above). Therefore it is incapable of carrying an entire construct into renewal.

It can also be argued that Brutus' innate nobility weathered the tragic crisis well. However, this is a questionable argument since Brutus' disposition remains static throughout the crisis: he does not give evidence of a significant attitude change. He even resorts to traditional "honorable" suicide. I would argue that he has come quite some way down the road of the violence paradigm in realizing that violence (whether committed by himself or someone else) means suffering for all and that the radical variant is not goal-oriented. He, however, stops there and does not make the inference that – for these very

167 William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 5, III, ll. 94 – 96.
168 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, ll. 98 – 101.
169 Even Antony and Octavius will refer to this in the last scene of the play: act 5, V, ll. 69 – 82.

reasons – he will have to make some attitudinal full turns (with respect to socio/political issues and as to the content of the concept of liberty).

Brutus decides to once more fight the army of Antony and Octavius: "We shall try our fortune in a second fight."[170] This fight is lost and leaves Brutus dismayed. He takes several of his confidants aside, asking them to help him with an honourable suicide. They are aghast and refuse. Brutus asks Volumnius, telling him that Caesar's ghost had visited him the night before. Therefore, he knows it is his time. It is the time of his physical death as the enemy is pressing on. All present at the scene have to flee as Brutus insists. He asks Strato, his servant, to hold his sword. Strato does so and Brutus runs into it and dies. Just before he dies, he speaks:

> My heart doth joy that yet in all my life
> I found no man but he was true to me.
> I shall have glory by this losing day
> More than Octavius and Mark Antony
> By this vile conquest shall attain unto.
> So fare you well at once, for Brutus' tongue
> Hath almost ended his life's history.
> Night hangs upon mine eyes. My bones would rest,
> That have but labored to attain this hour.[171]

What does Brutus allude to here? Brutus here reverts to the Roman custom of honourable suicide. This behaviour seems to be fuelled by fear of being taken prisoner[172]; when being fearful, one is bound to fall back on coping mechanisms of the familiar social codes of behaviour. But it is precisely these codes of behaviour that Shakespeare has painted as being eroded and perverted in acts 1 and 2. Earlier, we have seen that the concept of honour is a questionable one: it has some uncanny connotations, making it especially prone to perversion. The falling back on old coping mechanisms is telling. It means that no change in attitude is taking place in Brutus: even up to his death, he compares himself (in a rather competitive way, placing himself in a vertical relationship of excellence with Octavius and Antony) to his opponents. In his last words, we cannot find a shimmer of thought or behaviour that indicates a renewed rapport to or involvement with his community. Brutus, standing on the self-created debris of the old constructs, shows no bold dash into the new unknown, as we have witnessed in the other tragedies. As argued just above, he, however, did acknowledge the terrible consequences and essential qualities of radical violence (once released into the world). This makes him, from a tragic perspective, a halfway case. On the other hand, like a true

170 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, III, l. 110.

171 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, V, ll. 34 – 42.

172 Which was a fate not to be envied. Being paraded through the streets of Rome, possible torture or being sold as a slave were not bright prospects. Brutus most certainly would have been held indefinitely for ransom or been dishonored and exiled.

Shakespearean hero, not a single shadow of self-pity or guilt darkens his brow. In this, he is a veritable son of Shakespeare's imagination.

I may now conclude that the requirements for the successful closure of the violence paradigm have not been met. What does this entail? Mark Antony articulates it in his eulogy for Brutus:

> This was the noblest Roman of them all.
> All the conspirators save only he
> Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
> He only in a general honest thought
> And common good to all, made one of them.
> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, "This was a man!"[173]

Brutus was the noblest of the insurgents. And yet, from our point of view, he did not succeed. In fact, throughout the play, he begins to increasingly resemble Julius Caesar:

- Brutus mentions certain physical inconveniences addressed by Cassius in act 1; Julius also has physical problems, as we saw in the same act.
- Both men have an autocratic style of decision-making. They do not listen to the good advice of trusted friends.
- Neither of them has a clear vision of statesmanship and governance: Brutus cries freedom and liberty, but this turns out to be empty sloganeering.
- They created an inner circle of yes-men to applaud them.
- Julius and Brutus have the same self-image of constancy (Julius Caesar: Act 3, I l.60 and Brutus acting the Stoic throughout) while in fact being mercurial.

The substitution of Julius Caesar by Brutus would not have produced the necessary construct renewal. Brutus had not been able to successfully complete the violence paradigm. With him, the values of virtue and nobility of mind (4.1 in the above list) perish in this play. And with this important value buttressing the old republic (point 3 in the above list), the latter concept will perish.

And as to Julius, in spite of all his achievements in the European theatres of war, he would neither have pulled this off; for now we know that victory in this register is not a criterion for the proper completion of a violence paradigm. Rather, it is a hindrance because war itself is preeminently a radical and vertical affair.

173 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 5, V, ll. 68 – 75.

Rome will now enter the era of Caesarism. Concerning content, the system will remain the same; just different dignitaries will populate the stage. They will give themselves new titles and, of course, the territory they wield will be name-embellished as the Roman Empire.[174]

In my next and one but last chapter I will go some more into the clarification of some knotty problems posed in this complex play; and of course, I will also answer the questions put forward in the beginning of this chapter.

174 And of course this is a perfect example not of Nietzsche's *Umwertung*, but of Shakespearean *Umdrehung*.