*Examine Angelo’s character based on Claudio’s and Isabella’s observations about human nature – that it is ‘rat-like’ (1.2.125-130) and that it is ‘ignorant of its glassy essence’ (2.2.122-129).*

Over the course of *Measure for Measure*, Angelo progresses from a hyper-virtuous and chaste figure, the presumed ‘savior’ of Vienna in a time of sexual promiscuousness, to a hypocritical character prone to lust and sin just as any other. Angelo evolves from embodying Isabella’s view of human nature to representing Claudio’s.

In Act 2, Scene 2 of *Measure for Measure*, while attempting to get Angelo to pardon her brother, Isabella states: “But man, proud man, / Dressed in a little brief authority / Most ignorant of what he’s most assured – / His glassy essence – like an angry ape / Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven / As makes the angels weep, who with our spleens / Would all themselves laugh mortal” (118-124). In other words, when humans are put in positions of power or authority, they become caught up in their own greatness in such a ridiculous manner that angels would laugh at them. These people forget their ‘glassy essence,’ the fragility and vulnerability, the allures of vice, that make them humans as opposed to gods. This description describes Angelo’s persona at the start of the play (which is likely why Isabella describes this view to him, attempting to prompt self-awareness.) The Duke initially brings Angelo to syphilis-strewn Vienna because of his strict standards of virtue and chastity for himself and others. Given this authority, Angelo immediately imposes his extreme standards upon all of Vienna. Angelo’s standards, when induced on a city that has become placid in its licentiousness, are absurd and unrealistic, the workings of a man trying to play God. Isabella’s reaction to Angelo is particularly telling, as she is in many ways Angelo’s counterpart in virtue and chastity. The fact that she argues for her brother’s life despite his wrongdoing, citing the inevitability of human sin, highlights the extremity of Angelo’s position and persona. Isabella’s perception of human nature also draws attention to the fact that even people in positions of authority are prone to human fallacy, no matter how hard they work to appear powerful. Her description becomes particularly relevant in foreshadowing Angelo’s ensuing fall.

Almost immediately following his initial encounter with Isabella, Angelo begins to contemplate his newfound desire for her, commencing his deviance from chastity. This trajectory parallels the view of human nature that Claudio describes in Act 1, Scene 2: “From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty. / As surfeit is the father of much fast, / So every scope by the immoderate use / Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue, / Like rats that raven down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die” (114-119). Human beings are drawn to precisely that which is worst for them. Like rats who consume poison, Angelo falls prey to the exact desire that he has vowed to eradicate from Vienna. The strict control he has hitherto attempted to exert upon himself evaporates in Isabella’s presence as he describes how he has never before felt such desire for a woman. Angelo’s very body betrays him, as he describes in Act 2, Scene 4: “Why does my blood thus muster to my heart, / Making both it unable for itself / And dispossessing all my other parts / Of necessary fitness?” (20-23). Upon Isabella’s approach, Angelo’s heart beats faster as he loses the self-restraint that he has not only held himself to, but all of Vienna. Angelo’s ensuing descent into lust as he baits Isabella to copulate with him exemplifies Claudio’s mindset. Lust is the sin that Angelo most passionately disavows, and becomes his most passionate pursuit.

These views of human nature beg the question of how society should operate as a whole. Angelo exemplifies how even the most prudish man, put in a position of authority that elevates his mindset beyond human folly, still falls prey to the same traps as entice the rest of humanity. In fact, the play concludes with not just Angelo but all of the major characters set up to be married. This conclusion suggests that perhaps marriage is the societal response to these views of human nature. Since lust cannot be resisted, it must be contained within marriage as an institution. Perhaps Angelo would do better to propagate the benefits of marriage rather than condemn all those who lapse, like himself, to be punished.