When, in Disgrace with Fortune and Men’s Eyes
by William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least,
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven’s gate;
For thy sweet love rememb’red such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.
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The capitalization of Fortune creates the definition of Fate or Luck although it carries the connotation of wealth as well.

Possessed: to have or to be controlled by? Do we collect friends, what controls who and why we are friends?

Paradox – can you be discontent with what you enjoy most? Where do we place our treasures and do they really bring us joy?

Personification of heaven turning a deaf ear pares with the word outcast creating a lonely feeling.
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When I am wallowing in self pity, wishing I was as talented, rich, and respected as others I admire, I remember my maker and the love he has for me, and I realize that I am one of the richest persons on earth.
This poem addresses a mental trap that nearly every man can relate to, the feeling of self-worth.

We are warned against the perils of comparing ourselves to others. Too often we compare the worst we see in ourselves against the best we see in everyone else.

“Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope” We wish we were as talented as that person, or as popular as another, or frequently the saying refers to the attempt to ‘keep up with the Jones’.”

“Haply I think on thee...” If we will instead look on Christ and his love for us as a child of God, we recognize that we have been blessed with individual talents and gifts for our own benefit and that of others.

Even in our worst state we have been richly blessed with the opportunity to come to this earth. And if we have been blessed with the gospel, “I scorn to change my state with kings.” There is no treasure that would be worth trading our ‘state’ for.

My Personal Interpretation:
The meaning of the word "state," which appears three times, metamorphoses with each new occurrence: in line 2, the significance of "my outcast state," is defined for us—it is the condition the speaker sees himself in: deprived of both luck and social status. As a repetition of the same rhymeword, in line 10, the singing "state" refers to the speaker's mindset. The third time "my state" acts as a parallel to a monarch's state or kingdom. The poet's outcast state, within this royal image, comes to signify exile, which he nevertheless prefers. . . .

If we identify the speaker in this sonnet (as we do in all the others) with Shakespeare himself, we must wonder whether he was presenting us with a case history of manic depression, or had perhaps suffered from it himself. At any rate, his depiction of the malady goes a long way toward explaining the bard's grasp of the volatile, self-destructive natures of his tragic heroes and heroines.”